

Hastings International and Comparative Law Review

Volume 10
Number 1 *Fall 1986*

Article 1

1-1-1986

Professor William J. Riegger

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Recommended Citation

Francis Richard Walsh, *Professor William J. Riegger*, 10 HASTINGS INT'L & COMP.L. Rev. 1 (1986).

Available at: https://repository.uchastings.edu/hastings_international_comparative_law_review/vol10/iss1/1

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In Memoriam

Professor William J. Riegger

On October 19, 1986 Professor William J. (Bill) Riegger died. His death brought an end to the very full life of a remarkable man and sorrow to his close friends and admirers. Shortly after Bill's return from the Soviet Union where he had led a tour of American lawyers and judges, Bill suffered a heart attack. He was hospitalized, but remained conscious and still full of good humor until the hour of his death. Even then Bill exhibited many of the same qualities which had endeared him to his colleagues, students, lawyers, judges, and close friends: a concern for others and their welfare, a marvelous and understated sense of humor, and a kind and unselfish nature.

Bill was born on March 24, 1924, in Benson, Minnesota. The county seat of Swift County, Benson was a small town located 150 miles west of Minneapolis in the heart of the grain and wheat belt. Bill's geographical roots are similar to those described in Garrison Keillor's book, *Lake Wobegon Days*, or Mr. Keillor's program, on National Public Radio, *The Prairie Home Companion*.

Bill attended the local public schools. In 1942 almost immediately after graduating from high school, he enlisted in the United States Navy. Although Bill had no training or interest in photography, the Navy decided he would become an expert photographer. This prediction proved to be an accurate one.

After studying at several service schools, Bill was assigned to Pearl Harbor and later to Guam. Armed only with his camera, he flew in planes from aircraft carriers during the heat of battles. He rode as a "passenger" (as he called it), taking pictures under conditions made dangerous by not only enemy aircraft and surface vessels, but often by the weather as well. On one occasion many years later, I heard a young boy ask Bill if he had been nervous or afraid. In typical Bill Riegger fashion, he replied: "Afraid? Of course not. I was too busy watching the beautiful scenery . . . the sky, the clouds, and water. I was getting a free ride and getting paid for it."

Upon the cessation of hostilities he was assigned to the occupation forces in Japan. Bill came to know, understand, admire, and like the

Japanese people. This period was to play an important part later in both his professional and personal life.

After his discharge from the service, Bill entered the University of Minnesota, where he was to receive both his undergraduate and law degrees. Shortly after being admitted to the Minnesota Bar he decided to practice law in Arizona. Bill moved to Tucson, gained admission to the Arizona Bar, and entered private practice. During part of this period, in addition to the private practice of law, Bill served as a part-time assistant city attorney. His experience in representing clients gave him a background of practical experience, which helped him later to be a good teacher and administrator.

Interested in a teaching career, Bill became a faculty member of the the University of San Francisco's School of Law in 1958. Thereafter, in addition to teaching, he also became the School's Associate Dean. Bill served with distinction both in the classroom and in his administrative capacity, and earned the respect and affection of his colleagues and students.

In 1971 Bill came to Hastings as Vice Dean and Professor of Law. In his administrative role he was in daily contact with a large number of students. Bill treated all of them with respect and understanding, even if he had to deny their petitions or requests. When petitions or requests were denied, however, I doubt any student believed he or she had not had a fair hearing.

Bill preferred teaching on a full-time basis. After several years as Hastings Vice Dean, he relinquished that position and returned to the classroom full-time. He was a master of the subjects he taught, as well as many others. Bill had earned his students' respect because of his knowledge of the law and his kind but firm pedagogical manner. His office door was always open to them; students were aware of this and took advantage of it.

Beginning in 1958 when he first came to San Francisco, Bill served with distinction on many committees and task forces of the State Bar of California, the Bar Association of San Francisco, the American Bar Association, and other professional groups. His participation contributed greatly to the success of these organizations' missions. Many quickly came to recognize Bill's ability, including members of these committees, lawyers, judges, and civic leaders, even though they had not known him previously or had never had any contact with Hastings or the University of San Francisco. Like his colleagues at Hastings, they also respected him and liked him as a person.

What kind of a person was Bill Riegger? Some might call him "A

Man For All Seasons," "A Diamond With Many Facets," "A Diamond from the Wheat Fields," or perhaps "A True Renaissance Man." He was all of these. In addition to his professional attainments, I will mention just some of his other interests and accomplishments: he possessed a wide knowledge of opera and other music; during his stay in Tucson, he studied music to improve his fine baritone voice; he was a member of a well known Tucson choir; he was a voracious reader in many areas including art, music, history, and current world problems; he was an expert bridge player, earning master points, and competing in many tournaments; while a student at the University of Minnesota, he was a member of the school's golf team; and, later in life, when he could play regularly, Bill was a low handicap golfer.

People liked Bill Riegger, and they liked to be with him. His background and his wide variety of interests and experiences enabled him to converse on many subjects. In addition, Bill was a good listener. He was a warm and wonderful human being. His sense of humor and ability to tell stories lightened many of our days and nights. He never complained, although because of his relatively poor health over the past few years, he had ample reasons to do so.

It is fitting that this Review pay tribute to Professor Riegger, a long time advisor to the publication. After serving with the allied occupation in Japan, interest in that great country and its people never ended. While on a sabbatical leave from the the University of San Francisco, Bill was determined to visit Japan again. Prior to leaving he enrolled at the United States Army Language School in Monterey, California. He studied diligently there for three months. He then traveled extensively in Japan for three months and became acquainted with many judges, lawyers, and law professors. He was to be a guest lecturer at Nihon University beginning in November 1986. He was well prepared for this role, having lectured there several times before.

During the ensuing years he visited Japan on several other occasions, lecturing, meeting with old friends, and making new ones.

His office and his home were always open to visitors from Japan, Korea, China, and other countries in the Far East. He not only had a knowledge of those countries' laws, but he also had an understanding and appreciation of their cultures. Judges, lawyers, government officials, and students from these countries who visited the United States found a knowledgeable and good friend in Bill Riegger. Like their American counterparts, they respected him, liked him, and they enjoyed being with him.

I am certain that the high regard in which this Review is held is due

in no small part to the good advice and effort given to the editors and writers over the years by this fine man. The Review shall miss him, as shall all the Hastings community and his friends all over the world. We are fortunate to have known him and wise if we learn from the example of his splendid life.

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