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Francis Richard Walsh

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In Memoriam

Tribute to 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 his 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. Approaching the end of his stay on earth he continued to exhibit many of those same qualities which had endeared him to colleagues, present and past, students, lawyers and judges, and a legion of close friends—kindness, concern for others and their welfare, a marvelous and understated sense of humor, and complete unselfishness.

Bill was born on March 24, 1924, in Benson, Minnesota, the county seat of Swift County, a small town located one hundred fifty miles west of Minneapolis, in the heart of the grain and wheat belt. His geographical roots are familiar to those of you who have read Garrison Keillor's book, "Lake Wobegon Days," or have heard Mr. Keillor's program, "The Prairie Home Companion" on National Public Radio.

He attended the local public schools and, almost immediately after graduating from high school, he enlisted in the United States Navy in 1942.

Though he had no training in photography, nor any great interest in it, the Navy decided he would become an expert photographer. This prediction proved to be an accurate one.

After study at several service schools, he was assigned to Pearl Harbor and later to Guam. From those bases, he rode as a "passenger," as he called it, taking pictures under conditions made dangerous both by weather and enemy aircraft and surface vessels. Armed only with his camera, he flew in aircraft from carriers during the heat of battle. On one occasion many years later, I heard a young boy ask him if he was 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. He came to know, to understand, to admire, and to 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, he entered the University of Minnesota, where he did both his undergraduate and law studies. Shortly after being admitted to the Minnesota Bar he decided to practice law in Arizona. He moved to Tucson, was admitted to the Arizona bar, and entered private practice. During part of this period, in addition to the private practice of law, he served as a part time assistant city attorney. His experience in representing clients gave him a background of practical experience which helped him to be the good teacher and administrator he was.

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

In 1971 Bill came to Hastings as Vice Dean and Professor of Law. In his administrative role he was in daily contact with large numbers of students. All of them were treated with respect and understanding, though obviously at times it became necessary for him to deny their petitions or requests. Even when the latter occurred however, I doubt if any student believed he or she had not received a fair hearing. Bill's preference was to teach on a full time basis; after several years as Vice Dean he relinquished that position and returned to the classroom. He was a master of the subjects he taught, and many others. His students respected him for his knowledge of the law and because of his kindly, but firm, pedagogical manner. His office door was always open to students; they were aware of this, and took advantage of it.

From 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 in the work of these organizations contributed greatly to the success of their missions. Members of these committees, lawyers, judges and civic leaders, who had not known him previously, quickly came to recognize his ability. Like his faculty colleagues, 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," others "A Diamond With Many Facets," maybe "A Diamond From the Wheat Fields," 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 good music: during his stay in Tucson, he studied music to improve his fine baritone voice and sang with a well known choir in that city. He was a voracious reader in many areas: art, music, current world problems. He was an expert bridge player; he competed in many tournaments and earned master points. While a student at the University of Minnesota, he was a member of the school's golf team: later in life, when he could play regularly, he was a low handicap golfer.

People liked Bill Riegger, and they liked to be with him. Why? Because of his background, his wide variety of interests and experiences, he could converse on many subjects and he 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, though because of his relatively poor health over the past few years, he had ample reason for doing so.

I alluded above to the fact that he served in the United States Navy as a member of the allied occupation forces in Japan. His interest in that great country and its people continued to the time of his death. He had been scheduled to be a guest lecturer at Nihon University beginning in November, 1986. He was well prepared for this role, one which was not unfamiliar to him. He had lectured there several times before.

While on the faculty on the University of San Francisco, he took a sabbatical leave, determined to again visit Japan. Prior to leaving he enrolled at the United States Army Language School in Monterey, California, where for three months prior to leaving for Japan he studied diligently. He then traveled extensively in that country for three months, and became acquainted with many judges, lawyers, and law professors.

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 of the Far East. He had not only a knowledge of the law of those countries, but an understanding and appreciation of the cultures of the peoples of that region. Judges, lawyers, government officials, and students from those countries who visited the United States found a knowledgeable and good friend in Bill Riegger. Like their American counterparts, they respected him and liked him, and they liked to be with him.

It is fitting that *The Hastings Law Journal* pay tribute to Professor Riegger, a long time advisor to the publication. I am certain that the

high regard in which your *Journal* is held is due in no small part to the good advice and effort given your editors and writers over the years by this fine man. You 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 by the example of his splendid life.

*Francis Richard Walsh**

* Professor of Law, University of California, Hastings College of the Law. B.S. 1943, Seton Hall University; J.D. 1948, Georgetown University Law Center.