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BILL BISHOP: A PERSONAL NOTE

*Eric Stein**

ONE may or may not agree with George Santayana that privacy and dignity are the two qualities most conspicuously lacking among Americans, yet these are the qualities that come most readily to mind when I think of Bill Bishop. And, as much as I value and respect these qualities in a colleague and friend, they make it exceedingly difficult to compose a meaningful personal comment.

Contrary to what one might expect of an intensely private person, the touch of detachment has never impaired Bill's relationships with his students. Rather, his warmth, boundless patience, gentleness, and compassion, and his all-pervasive sense of responsibility as a teacher, have earned him the respect and admiration of several generations of students. In a class setting, when he ventured upon a student who had not read the assigned material, he would not react in anger or with impatience, but would in effect apologize and quickly pass on to another. Unlike so many of us, Bill has been particularly accessible to the less gifted students who, he has felt, are in greater need of his assistance and encouragement than the pampered elite. Yet, despite the countless hours spent with students in the intimacy of his office, his relationships with them have never been colored by an affected familiarity, nor has he participated in the casual banter and jocular disputations so common among the faculty. His office, it should be noted in passing, is a sight to behold. Mountains of books, pamphlets and papers from all four corners of the world rise from floor to ceiling in what appears an unmanageable chaos. Yet the inhabitant, hardly visible behind his desk, has never failed to locate in an instant a letter to be answered or a treaty to be consulted—a testimony to his remarkable memory, which has been so helpful in imparting knowledge.

I can confirm from personal experience that Bill has been ready to give generously of his time to his colleagues as well as to his students. When some two decades ago I turned from diplomacy to teaching and experienced the trauma so familiar to any new teacher, he taught me what amounted to a private course in international law.

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And, throughout the years of our association, I have continued to draw on his inexhaustible reservoir of knowledge.

One is inclined to think of Bill as a conservative, impervious to fashion of any sort. From year to year, he can be seen dressed in the never-changing baggy suit of the same gray-blue, the same red tie, and the ankle high laced shoes purchased from Sears, Roebuck. When in residence on the campus, he has never failed to attend a University of Michigan football match nor has he been absent from a single concert of the University Musical Society series. At times, he has been inclined to view the Washington scene in terms reminiscent of the Apostle Paul's characterization of contemporary Athens: "For all the Athenians and strangers which were there spent their time in nothing else, but either to tell, or to hear some new thing." Yet, in his professional attitudes, he has always been open to new ideas and new solutions; moreover, his innovative casebook has given a new direction to the teaching of international law in American law schools.

In his youth, Bill was an ardent Boy Scout, and with undiminished ardor he has maintained a deep sense of duty toward the community and toward mankind. His profound sympathy and tolerance for his fellow man brings to mind Miguel de Unamuno's paraphrase of a Latin playwright: "Nullum hominem a me alienum puto"—"I am a man; no other man do I mean a stranger."