

BILL CONGER: MENTOR

Daniel J. Morgan*

Sometimes friendships can be summarized by recurring themes. After over twenty years of hanging out with Bill Conger on a professional level, but most importantly on a personal one, I can tell you that mentorship was at the core of the Bill I knew.

My first recollections of Bill go to the 1980s. We met through Oklahoma County Bar and Holloway Inn activities. I became involved with the County Bar (a relatively unusual pursuit for an academic type) because of Bill's desire to involve the law school, and especially our students, with Bar activities. In the Holloway Inn, which has its antecedents in the English Inns of Court, in which senior lawyers and judges mentor law students, Bill was in his element. Walking into an Inn gathering, Bill could always be located by the laughter and smiles of students surrounding him as he spun another one of his stories.

My daughter, Sarah Balbás, an OCU Law alumna, had a summer internship with Conger Cason, and her fondest memories of that time were conversations with Bill about the law, homespun practical advice, and a few stories about her Dad that she had not yet heard. Sarah's experience was typical for students involved with the firm. All had Bill's interest, his ear, and his advice. All were special to him, and they knew it. Bill began teaching and mentoring young lawyers a long time before he came to OCU.

Bill's arrival at OCU was a natural fit for his ultimate ambition. His official titles were things like General Counsel and Professor of Law, but his true calling was Mentor in Chief to a legion of fledgling attorneys. From the beginning, Bill's office door, first on the top north floor, was always open. Nine out of ten times, a peek into the office would reveal a student in the easy chair before Bill's desk. Sometimes there would be laughter, sometimes a glint of tears, and often the intent posture of a

* Professor of Law, Oklahoma City University.

student enthralled by yet another Conger story. All were special in Bill's eyes, and he was never more complete in himself than in those times of communion with those students.

My running joke was always that the only "face time" I could achieve with Bill was through email. He didn't deny it. The exception was the cold Saturday mornings in January in the Sarkeys building where Bill and I would visit briefly on our way to trial competition practices with our respective teams. I would: 1) be attempting to wake up and/or thaw out, 2) be feeling a little sorry for myself as I thought of colleagues tucked snugly in their beds, and 3) praying that the team captain had remembered the coffee this time. Bill would be ebullient, often slapping me on the back and exclaiming, "Hell, Morgan, another three hours with just us and a group of crazy young trial lawyers! What could be better than this?" For me, those moments were the essential Bill Conger. How could you not love him?

Bill continued to commit serial acts of empathy right to the end. My last email from Bill was a message to the faculty extolling the virtues of student mentorship and encouraging increased sign-ups for mentorship during the spring semester; just the sort of thing you would expect from Conger.

From beginning to end, his lifelong theme of mentorship remains intact, inspiring a new generation of young lawyers. What greater example and legacy can one leave? Rest well, old friend.