

## REMEMBERING BILL CONGER

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Bill Conger was already a legend in the Oklahoma legal community by the time I arrived at OCU. Along with partners Larry Hartzog and Len Cason, he had founded and built the Oklahoma City law firm of Hartzog Conger & Cason (later Hartzog Conger Cason & Neville) into a major presence in the Oklahoma legal community. Many contributing to this issue in tribute to Professor Conger have covered at length his many years of service to the Oklahoma County and Oklahoma Bar Associations, his wisdom and guidance provided to the Oklahoma City University community, and the gifted leadership he provided to many civic and community organizations. He was loved by the Oklahoma City University faculty who had the great fortune to know him, many of whom have remembered him eloquently in these pages.

As a non-traditional law student returning to study law after several careers, my relationship with Bill Conger was a little different. During the mid-1980s, I was working as an investment banker in New York City at Donaldson, Lufkin & Jenrette and as a corporate director of several oil and gas companies. Many years later, Bill and I would reminisce about our representations of many of the same individuals and corporate clients during that difficult time of petroleum boom and bust in Oklahoma economic history; he as legal counsel and I as their investment banker. In later years, these discussions often took place at an ad hoc Friday lunch at a sandwich shop near campus, brief conversations that would prove to be, for me, among the most enjoyable I have had in life.

I remember Bill Conger as uniquely gregarious and likeable. He attracted people like a magnet, and it was just fun to be in his presence. My first recollection of him was at student orientation my first day at the law school campus. I remember him as never at a loss for words, and I recall Bill pausing in the middle of his presentation about “what a lawyer

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does” to observe, “Hell, I’m a trial lawyer... I’ll talk to a post for an hour.” My guess is that many who knew Bill would pause, as I did, to reflect about exactly what aspect of his personality contributed to his singular ability to “brighten the day” of almost all those he encountered. I’m sure opposing counsel would prove an exception to this otherwise universal truth.

Bill was a natural born teacher. My classroom experience with Bill was limited but rewarding. My personal interest at the time was in transaction law, corporate governance, securities, and mergers and acquisitions. Accordingly, not wanting to practice as a trial lawyer myself, I didn’t take either Bill’s “trial practice” or “complex litigation” courses, maybe the most popular and difficult classes to take due to limited capacity and huge student demand. I was able to enroll in his class “introduction to legal practice,” co-taught with Melanie Jester. This course proved to be of great practical importance, providing an insight to the daily challenges of legal practice. The practice of law is a highly stressful career choice. Bill’s distinguished legal career over many years provided him with valuable life experiences that he was able to share with students. His exceptional perspectives about real daily challenges facing attorneys represent an asset that will be sorely missed at OCU Law.

I think it was the discussion of ethical legal issues in the Introduction to Legal Practice course that is responsible for my greatest appreciation of who Bill Conger was and his lasting legacy to the legal profession. Bill was scrupulously honest and his moral compass was helpful to all aspiring young lawyers who were about to embark on navigating a career in the practice of law. As a young lawyer, the hours can be long, the stress and anxiety unbearable, and the human ethical issues among the most perplexing imaginable. Bill provided his students with the benefit of his many experiences and offered a roadmap for navigating the future.

Not surprisingly, Bill’s memorial service at OCU’s Bishop W. Angie Smith Chapel was filled to overflowing capacity. Tributes by his friends, the Reverend Margaret A. Ball, Tom McDaniel, Dean Valerie Couch, and Bill King all contributed eloquently to the loving celebration of Bill’s life.

It is an appropriate tribute that the courtroom at the new law school downtown campus will be named in his honor. It was important to him that he skillfully and diligently teach, mentor, and inspire a whole new generation of young lawyers. Bill is reported to have said that “the best

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years of his life have been at Oklahoma City University School of Law.” For those of us fortunate enough to have considered Bill Conger a friend and mentor, his leadership and influence will be felt for many years to come.

