

BILL CHRISTIAN MEMORIAL SERVICE

THANK YOU, BARBARA AND FAMILY, FOR LETTING ME BE A PART OF THIS TRIBUTE TO BILL. I'M HONORED.

MY NAME IS CHRIS COOKE. I'M AN ATTORNEY AND JUDGE, RETIRED NOW, FROM ANCHORAGE, ALASKA.

BILL AND I MET 1961 WHEN WE WERE FRESHMEN AT YALE. OUR ROOMS WERE NEARBY, WE QUICKLY BECAME FRIENDS AND STAYED IN THE SAME ROOMING GROUP THROUGH OUR COLLEGE YEARS.

WITH HIS WARM SMILE, GOOD HUMOR AND CASUAL MANNER BILL WAS AN EASY PERSON TO BECOME FRIENDS WITH. AND FROM BILL I LEARNED MORE THAN I EVER WANTED TO KNOW ABOUT LIFE IN HELLERTOWN, PENNSYLVANIA.

HE WAS JUST A LOT OF FUN TO BE WITH, AND I CAN'T THINK OF ANYONE IN THOSE YEARS WHO DIDN'T LIKE HIM.

BILL WAS REALLY SMART. ONE YEAR WE BOTH TOOK AN ENGLISH LITERATURE CLASS IN WHICH WE HAD TO

READ AND WRITE PAPERS ABOUT BIG, DULL VICTORIAN NOVELS. I STRUGGLED FOR HOURS AND HOURS EACH WEEK ON THESE ASSIGNMENTS, BUT NOT BILL. HE WOULD BREEZE INTO THE LIBRARY A DAY OR TWO BEFORE THE PAPER WAS DUE, SEEMED TO SKIM THE BOOK AND WROTE HIS PAPER. AND, OF COURSE, HE ALWAYS GOT A BETTER GRADE THAN ME.

AND BILL WAS ALWAYS CHANGING MAJORS, TOO. NOT LITTLE CHANGES, LIKE ME, MOVING FROM POLITICAL SCIENCE TO HISTORY. NO. WHEN BILL CHANGED MAJORS, HE WENT TO ENTIRELY DIFFERENT FIELDS. HE WENT FROM HISTORY TO GEOLOGY. THEN TO ENGLISH. THEN TO ECONOMICS. I THINK THE REASON FOR THAT WAS BILL WAS JUST INTERESTED IN, AND GOOD AT, EVERYTHING.

AFTER COLLEGE WE BOTH WENT TO LAW SCHOOL - BILL TO HARVARD, AND ME TO MICHIGAN. WE GRADUATED IN THE SAME YEAR, 1968.

IN THOSE DAYS, WHEN THINKING ABOUT WHAT TO DO AFTER LAW SCHOOL, WE WORRIED ABOUT THREE THINGS: 1) THE MILITARY DRAFT; 2) THE VIETNAM WAR; AND 3) HOW TO NOT GO TO VIETNAM.

IN MY FINAL YEAR AT MICHIGAN, I LEARNED THAT THE **VISTA** PROGRAM – SOMETIMES CALLED THE DOMESTIC PEACE CORPS - WAS LOOKING FOR LAWYERS TO GO TO ALASKA AND WORK WITH THE ALASKA LEGAL SERVICES CORPORATION. I ALSO LEARNED THAT PEOPLE WHO DID THAT GOT A DRAFT DEFERMENT. I DIDN'T KNOW ANYTHING ABOUT ALASKA, BUT THEY HAD ME AT "DRAFT DEFERMENT." I APPLIED.

VISTA TOLD ME TO REPORT IN MID-AUGUST, 1968, FOR TRAINING AT THE UNIVERSITY OF OREGON IN EUGENE. I WENT TO OREGON, FOUND THE TRAINING SITE, WALKED IN, AND – THIS IS A TRUE STORY - THE FIRST PERSON I SAW THERE, SITTING ON A COUCH WEARING THAT GREAT BIG SMILE, WAS BILL CHRISTIAN, WHO I HADN'T SEEN FOR OVER THREE YEARS.

SURPRISED, I ASKED, "WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE?"

HE SAID, "I'M GOING TO ALASKA TO BE A VISTA
LAWYER,"

I SAID, "SO AM I"

AND THAT'S HOW OUR ADVENTURES IN ALASKA
BEGAN. BILL WENT TO A SMALL TOWN CALLED BETHEL,
400 MILES WEST OF ANCHORAGE, AND I WENT TO
KOTZEBUE, 30 MILES ABOVE THE ARCTIC CIRCLE.

AFTER VISTA, BILL HELD SEVERAL OTHER LEGAL
JOBS IN ALASKA. WHEN HE LIVED IN FAIRBANKS, HE
OFTEN PLAYED TENNIS WITH ALASKA'S CHIEF JUSTICE,
JAY RABINOWITZ. STRICTLY RECREATIONAL, I'M SURE.
NO SHOP TALK.

AND WHAT I SAID EARLIER ABOUT EVERYONE LIKING
BILL? THAT TURNED OUT NOT TO BE TRUE IN KETCHIKAN,
ALASKA. BILL ONCE HELD A HEARING THERE FOR THE
E.P.A. AND ORDERED THE KETCHIKAN PULP MILL TO SHUT

DOWN. TRUE, THE MILL WAS DOING SOME POLLUTING, BUT IT WAS ALSO THE TOWN'S LARGEST EMPLOYER.

PERHAPS, BILL SHOULD HAVE TAKEN THE CASE UNDER ADVISEMENT AND MAILED HIS DECISION AFTER HE GOT BACK TO SEATTLE INSTEAD OF ANNOUNCING IT AT THE END OF THE HEARING.

AS YOU KNOW, BILL LEFT ALASKA AND WORKED AND LIVED ALL OVER THE COUNTRY. I STAYED, AND, IN FACT, MARRIED A BEAUTIFUL ESKIMO WOMAN WHO HAD BEEN BILL'S SECRETARY IN BETHEL. BUT BILL AND I KEPT UP OUR FRIENDSHIP THROUGH THE DECADES.

I SAW BILL ABOUT TWO YEARS AGO. I HAPPENED TO BE IN PALM SPRINGS AND CAME OVER TO PASADENA TO VISIT. BILL TOOK ME TO THE HUNTINGTON GARDENS NOT FAR FROM HERE WHICH IS A LOVELY PLACE, I GUESS; BUT I DON'T REMEMBER MUCH ABOUT IT BECAUSE WE JUST TALKED AND TALKED. ABOUT MUTUAL FRIENDS FROM COLLEGE AND IN ALASKA. ABOUT WHAT WE HAD BEEN DOING AND ABOUT THE STATE OF THE WORLD. ABOUT

OUR FAMILIES AND OUR HOPES, DREAMS AND PLANS FOR THE FUTURE. BILL WAS STILL HIS POSITIVE, UPBEAT AND OPTOMISTIC SELF, AS HE UNDOUBTEDLY WAS TO THE END.

THERE'S A SONG I'VE BEEN THINKING ABOUT SINCE BILL LEFT US WRITTEN IN THE 1960s BY THAT NOBEL PRIZE GUY, BOB DYLAN ---

While riding on a train goin' west
I fell asleep for to take my rest
I dreamed a dream that made me sad
Concerning myself and the first few friends I had

With half-damp eyes I stared to the room
Where my friends and I spent many an afternoon
Where we together weathered many a storm
Laughin' and singin' till the early hours of the morn

By the old wooden stove our hats was hung
Our words was told, our songs was sung
Where we longed for nothin' and were satisfied
Jokin' and talkin' about the world outside

With hungry hearts through the heat and cold
We never much thought we could get very old
We thought we could sit forever in fun
And our chances really was a million to one

As easy it was to tell black from white
It was all that easy to tell wrong from right
And our choices there was few
 So the thought never hit
That the one road we traveled would shatter or split

Now many a year has passed and gone
Many a gamble has been lost and won
And many a road taken by many a first friend
And each one I've never seen again

I wish, I wish, I wish in vain
That we could sit simply in that room again
Ten thousand dollars at the drop of a hat
I'd give it all gladly if our lives could be like that.