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Volume 26 | Number 2

Article 7

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1-1-1993

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### Recommended Citation

Judith E. Retchin, *Bill Landers: An Inspiration to All of Us*, 26 Loy. L.A. L. Rev. 278 (1993).

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.lmu.edu/llr/vol26/iss2/7>

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## BILL LANDERS: AN INSPIRATION TO ALL OF US

*Judith E. Retchin\**

Bill Landers and I met in 1989 when he became the Chief of the Public Corruption Section in the U.S. Attorney's Office for the District of Columbia. Bill came from outside the U.S. Attorney's Office to head the section; so everyone was skeptical about who he was. It did not take long before Bill won the hearts and minds of all those who worked for and with him. As a manager, Bill struck the perfect balance between allowing independence and providing guidance. He inspired his staff to strive for excellence. As the Chief of the Section that handled some of the most sensitive matters in the Office, Bill brought wisdom beyond his years and exceptional sensitivity and savvy. In short, Bill was a lawyer's lawyer. He possessed a great legal mind, and was able to analyze and effectively use legal precedents, with the ability to assess accurately the practical consequences of different strategies.

Most importantly, Bill recognized the boundaries of law enforcement and maintained the highest ethical standards. He believed that investigative tools must be used in a responsible way; he recognized the rights of the person under investigation. He believed and demonstrated that as a prosecutor, the ultimate goal is not to win a case at all costs, but to be fair and to strive for justice.

Bill's talents shone most clearly during the investigation and prosecution of the former Mayor of the District of Columbia, Marion S. Barry, Jr. The intense level of media and public interest made it of paramount importance that the matter be handled with the utmost sensitivity. Bill's remarkable legal talents as well as his dignity and grace infused the government's prosecution with the highest degree of professionalism. As the immediate supervisor of the trial team, Bill made certain that the government's position was stated in a way that spoke to both the court and the community while diffusing tensions. In a very difficult prosecution during a very difficult time in the history of the District of Columbia, Bill Landers's talents, insights and wisdom assured that the government's case was presented fairly and with as much sensitivity as

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\* Associate Judge, Superior Court for the District of Columbia. Ms. Retchin was an Assistant U.S. Attorney from 1984-1992 and a member of the trial team in the prosecution of Marion S. Barry, Jr.

possible to the many delicate issues raised by the controversial prosecution.

Bill and I worked closely on many cases, but it was not until Bill had his first AIDS-related hospitalization that he and I became very close friends. The life and death nature of the illness enabled us to get to things that really matter—friends, family, choices and time. I learned Bill had an intense interest in the arts, music, politics, gourmet cooking, mountain climbing and hiking. Bill became one of my dearest and most cherished friends. There was no one more encouraging than Bill when I was agonizing over whether to seek an appointment to the local bench. He insisted my “strengths” were only enhanced by my self-doubt. I am reminded daily of his confidence in me when I look at the beautiful photograph of him I now keep in my chambers. Bill’s dedication to his friends was matched by his devotion to his church and family. Bill had a passion for life that inspired everyone who knew him. His truly unique qualities made him a rare treasure, and his memory will live forever in those of us who were privileged to have had him as a friend.