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BILL LANDERS: A SPECIAL PERSON

*Stephen S. Trott**

I met Bill in December of 1981. Thereafter, I worked with him almost daily until early 1988. I never saw him without a smile on his face nor talked to him without enjoying his laughter. He was a special person.

In 1983, I asked Bill to go to Washington, D.C., with me to be my Special Counsel in the Criminal Division of the United States Department of Justice. Later, he became my Deputy when I was elevated to the position of Associate Attorney General. I chose Bill not just because of his extraordinary mind and keen legal talent, but because he could work with people as well as anyone I had ever known. He was an effective problem solver. He listened, he made sense, and he treated everyone with courtesy and respect. Everyone ended up wanting to do what he suggested.

I discovered Bill's unique talents when we worked together in the United States Attorney's Office in Los Angeles. A huge demonstration was planned to protest the presence of missiles at Vandenberg Air Force Base in our district. We were told thousands of protestors would storm the base and try to enter the missile silos. The Air Force was worried, as were state and local law enforcement agencies. It promised to be a mess with the potential for violence.

I called in Bill, talked it over, and asked him to handle it. Overnight he pulled together a team of military officials, sheriffs, state and local police, federal magistrate judges, U.S. Marshal personnel, prosecutors, public defenders and federal prison officials. Bill briefed them on the law, the rights of the protestors, arrest procedures, prompt arraignment requirements and the right to counsel. The next day, thousands of protestors faced-off against well-prepared state, local and federal officers. It was tense. Disaster was in the air. But, in the admiring words of one of his colleagues on the scene, "Bill took over, and with the sheer power of his personality, he convinced people to sit down and talk. He kept matters from becoming confrontational, and the threat of violence evaporated."

More than one thousand protestors were arrested, housed, charged, arraigned and successfully processed through a makeshift judicial system hundreds of miles from our courthouse. Bill coordinated everything. No

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one was assaulted or injured during the protest. The rights of the protestors were honored, but those who broke the law were arrested and given their day in court. Only one case went to trial. The protestor was convicted and the conviction affirmed on appeal. The rest pled guilty and took their medicine. What might have been a disaster turned into a triumph for the rule of law.

My most enduring memory of this adventure captures Bill's great capacity to prepare for his assignments. During one of our planning sessions, the general in charge of Vandenberg Air Force Base looked at Bill and said with amazement, "You know my base better than I do." Bill made the whole thing look easy! When I decided to move east to the Justice Department, the first thing I did was ask him to go with me.

In Washington, I threw at Bill every tough challenge that came my way. He never dropped a pass and continued to make it look easy. He was my contact with defense attorneys on sensitive criminal justice issues, such as the forfeiture of fees that were the fruit of drug trafficking. They knew if they wanted to get my ear, or Ed Meese's for that matter, all they had to do was call Bill. He always found a way to work things out. When I left, he went to work in the White House as one of President Reagan's lawyers. The White House also saw in Bill the qualities he always brought to work: excellent judgment, unflagging loyalty and integrity.

Albert Krieger, one of our nation's foremost defense attorneys, sent me a letter when he heard of Bill's untimely death. He wrote:

Although my contact with Bill Landers was almost exclusively professional, I feel as if I have lost a friend. Therefore, I share your grief at his passing. His contributions to the criminal justice system were large indeed. It may be little consolation, but he will be long remembered by many of us as a warm, friendly, intelligent man who made us all look beyond our private shells.

In 1934, Supreme Court Justice Sutherland established in *Berger v. United States*,¹ the standard for federal prosecutors. He stated:

The United States Attorney is the representative not of an ordinary party to a controversy, but of a sovereignty whose obligation to govern impartially is as compelling as its obligation to govern at all; and whose interest, therefore, in a criminal prosecution is not that it shall win a case, but that justice shall be done. . . . He may prosecute with earnestness and vigor—

1. 295 U.S. 78, 88 (1935).

indeed, he should do so. But, while he may strike hard blows, he is not at liberty to strike foul ones. It is as much his duty to refrain from improper methods calculated to produce a wrongful conviction as it is to use every legitimate means to bring about a just one.²

William J. Landers was the personification of this standard. He breathed life into it, and we loved him. In a world where many virtues are uncommon, he is missed.

2. *Id.* at 88.