

Bob Heggie remarks for Willie Grieve's memorial service

December 16, 2018

Betty Andrews Recital Hall, Allard Hall, Grant MacEwan University

Willie lived life fully and although we all feel unfairness that his life was cut short – let's celebrate through the tears.

I am honoured that Barb asked me to speak today. I have had the gift of Willie's friendship for 11 years, and for a decade of that, he was my boss. We spoke virtually every day.

Many of you have known him longer through his professional career or his many other interests. Professional musician and band leader; accomplished golfer (he would talk about the (PGA) Seniors Tour after a few scotches).

I know him as chair of the AUC and colleague, lover of music and sports, (particularly hockey and the bedevilling Edmonton Oilers) and as a man with a passion for politics, scholarship, his family and simply life itself.

He was always curious about new ideas, new world developments, and new people. He never stopped learning and asking questions. He had a passion and energy for life that was timeless and infectious.

Above all, I came to love his ability to make, and keep, friends.

There is no brief way to summarize his contributions and impact. I struggled with how to approach my message and I recalled Willie's advice that he offered on writing. Write in your own voice, do your best draft, then do it again, and again...

Willie had a passion for simple, clear language. I think we were both equally surprised that he learned his writing technique from an engineer who Willie worked with at the Saskatchewan Rate Review Panel, no disrespect to engineers.

He used to say to our staff when they were working on a case that "I want our reasons for this decision to 'sing'". For a decade we struggled with what that meant. I think writing for Willie was like composing a music score. There was a rhythm and cadence that he was searching for – having the phrasing, commas and semi-colons falling in just the right place – just like the notes of a musical composition.

You all knew Willie from different perspectives, from different walks of life. So my remarks to you today will focus on a personal remembrance that will not do justice to the breadth of his legacy. That legacy lives in each of you. My hope is something I say today will speak to you in particular as you think about the impact Willie had on your life.

I'm going to start with the "mug." This mug. (Bob held up a coffee mug from the University of Saskatchewan.)

Willie understood the power of symbolism and this mug symbolizes many things for me; Willie's love of Saskatoon, where he changed careers, where he attended law school, where he met and married Barb, where they welcomed Sarah and Rob into the world and where he made enormous community contributions. Willie had a foot in both Saskatchewan and Alberta, but his heart was in Saskatoon.

Willie would often invoke symbols or references in his conversations. There was always a purpose – the Magna Carta to remind us of the importance of the rule of law – quotes from Fred Kahn to remind us that we should regulate only when markets cannot be competitive - and Adam Smith from *Wealth of Nations* and *The Prince* by Machiavelli – just because those quotes were cool.

This mug was purchased by my daughter, Kelsey.

Kelsey was deciding where to go to university. She picked U of S against her Dad's seemingly better judgment. Willie, on the other hand was convinced her decision was sound.

My wife and I dropped Kelsey off in Saskatoon. I was completely taken by the campus. I phoned Willie and described the Greystone, the late-August sunshine and the green grass on the campus and told him I had immediately fallen in love with the town. He was delighted for us, but I think, secretly delighted that both he and my daughter had proven me wrong.

Willie's love of Saskatoon was born over an early morning breakfast with his band. They were playing a gig in Saskatoon and he turned to his bandmate and said I'm going to settle down here. He loved the colours of the Prairie grasses and crops and the wide-open spaces – he often phoned me when he was in Jasper or Banff just to say that the scenery was nice – if only the mountains would get out of the way.

Our head office is in Calgary, so although Willie lived in Edmonton he worked the majority of his time in Calgary. Not too many weeks ago we were trying to figure out how many times he made the drive between cities during the decade he was our chair; conservatively, we landed on 400 trips. As many of you know, he would often pass the time catching up with friends on Bluetooth.

So Monday morning he would arrive in our Calgary office pulling his travel case with clothes for the week. He'd grab a coffee in this mug, sit down in my office and we'd go over his "list" of things he wanted to advance. He typically had, at least, 10 things he wanted to discuss.

But before we discussed work, we'd talk about all sorts of other things – family, politics, the latest Oilers game – always with the mug.

Willie brought this mug into every hearing he chaired. Our hearing room is like a courtroom. There is a raised dais where the panel sits and Willie would place the mug where all could see it. He did it whether he was chairing a facility hearing in rural Alberta or a complex rate hearing in downtown Calgary. He was proud of his roots, of his education, and how those experiences had shaped him.

The mug reminds me of many aspects of Willie's remarkable life that I will touch on today – his work, his friends and community, and his family.

Being chair of the AUC was Willie's dream job.

Willie loved to recount the story of comparing career aspirations with his law school classmates. They disclosed dreams of being top litigators, corporate dealmakers or judges. When it came to Willie's turn he said he wanted to be a "public utility regulator" to which they replied "what's that?"

His career path to us provided the ideal experience and background and he came to us at the right time. He served in all cardinal points in the hearing room; board counsel, company counsel, policy witness and ultimately, chair of a newly minted commission.

He was unlike any other regulator we had known. Six-foot-four with long(ish) hair and stylish glasses; he wore a suit and tie every day – and what a tie! Handmade from his favorite tailor – from Saskatoon of course.

Willie's idea of casual business attire was taking his tie off.

While he had left his professional music career behind, he was, at his heart, a performer – a true original. The hair, ties and glasses were a nod to that legacy. He carried it well.

Willie simply loved the work. I'll use his words on the occasion of our 100th anniversary – this is what he said to our staff:

"We have undertaken a great deal and have tackled some very complex issues. The issues will be no less complex as technology, society and the industries we regulate evolve and grow. But we have the privilege to be right in the middle and have the joy in the intellectual challenge it presents.

As you all know, I believe there is no higher calling than public service. It continues to be my honour and privilege to serve Albertans with you."

One of his first cases, if not his first, was a division of powers case. It was as if he had won the lottery!

He relished the challenge. There was a commercial imperative, so Willie pushed the hearing late into the night. He was scouring the record, pushing counsel to uncover all of the intricacies and complexities that might provide a key to the case. In the end, he landed on a novel approach that was upheld on appeal.

He was so enthusiastic about the experience – most of all I recall him saying what a pleasure it was to debate, challenge and question the counsel on the case well into the night. He said "it was fantastic – they were all right there with me exploring ideas and debating the law."

I said Willie came to us at the right time. Let me give you two examples.

When the AUC was created in 2008, the regulatory world was changing. The effort required to build facilities in the province was considerably greater than it had been even a decade prior. Landowners were commanding more attention than ever before and were, frankly, distrustful of the system.

Willie inherently understood that challenge. He knew that we had to listen to landowners affected by projects, not just to understand their positions, but to deeply understand the concerns underlying those positions.

Building the organization was easy for Willie – he had built bands, planned elaborate opening ceremonies and he knew the regulatory issues cold.

The hard part was to rebuild trust in the regulatory institution. He did that systematically and case by case.

He chaired all of the required hearings, ensuring everyone would be heard by holding town hall evening sessions after long hearing days to accommodate landowners who could not get time off work.

Earnestly, patiently and empathetically Willie would invite all of them to “tell me your story.”

Willie’s calm, commanding presence in the hearing room was critical to the proceedings. It is a unique skill to provide a judicial air while ensuring all in the hearing room feel welcome and heard.

Willie would commiserate with farmers about how pole placements would make harrowing tougher. He would get to the heart of their concerns and, slowly, trust and confidence in the process and the institution returned.

The second example is PBR – performance-based ratemaking.

I asked Willie what AUC accomplishment he was most proud of and, reflecting his humility, he refused to answer. When I pressed, he grudgingly volunteered, with a bit of a grin, that PBR was harder and took more time than he thought it would.

Of course, the introduction of PBR was an ambitious and enduring achievement.

Influenced by the scholarship of his mentor and dear friend Fred Kahn, Willie believed that competition and incentives would produce better outcomes for consumers than the existing framework.

Willie’s new approach ended 100 years of the status quo – an amazing accomplishment.

We are now on the second generation of PBR in the province and it has been a brilliant innovation.

Willie was a scholar at heart and he purposefully set out to intellectualize our work. That scared some and invigorated others. That was his objective. He wanted to change how everyone involved in our files approached cases.

He did not hide what he was thinking. Willie told participants exactly what he was thinking and invited those contrary to convince him otherwise. If they were unsuccessful, he offered clear, cogent reasons in his decisions. You knew exactly why you lost, and while some disagreed with his reasons, no one could argue that they did not have a full opportunity or a full understanding of why they lost.

While he was gentle and kind; when required, he did not shy away from making a tough decision or standing up for what he thought was right. He could be formidable – sharp intellect and a street-fighter streak.

He thought about things deeply, understood all sides and once his mind was made up, he had the courage to make a tough call. He based his decisions on principles and by doing so, was comfortable that he had taken the right path.

Willie got his dream job and he did it exceptionally well. How many of us can say that?

Now a few words about friends and community.

Willie loved to talk. I think he was happiest when he was engaged in conversations. Whether answering questions, discussing ideas, arguing, reviewing work or passing along his wisdom – almost everyone learned something from Willie and almost all who engaged him became his friend.

There is a quote I like – “Show me who your friends are and I’ll tell you who you are.”

This quote is attributed to Lenin – not the Beatle.

I can imagine Willie saying - “Really Bob – did you have to quote Lenin?”

Willie attracted people from all walks of life to him because of his incredible generosity of spirit. He engaged with you, he cared about what you were saying, he remembered you, and he followed up on his promises, no matter how busy.

He talked to everyone – he even remembered the names of our cleaning staff in both our Calgary and Edmonton offices.

If you were a new staff member, Willie would make a point of seeking you out, sitting down with you and engaging in a chat – just to get to know you.

You knew you mattered. We all had the sense there was a bigger purpose and we could each make a difference.

I have spent a considerable time here speaking of my own personal experience with Willie. But I also want to touch on a few other aspects of his life that many of you here today will relate to more directly.

It’s hard to imagine that his regulatory responsibilities would have left Willie with much free time for other endeavours, much less the energy for them, but it is amazing how involved and dedicated Willie was to bettering his community, his province and his country.

His love of the community was reflected in so many endeavours here in Alberta and in Saskatchewan; Special Olympics ceremonies, a lacrosse league, junior hockey championships, the World Masters Games, and the list goes on but I have time to highlight just two.

First, having the service in this hall is fitting and symbolic of his dedication to community. Willie was intensely engaged in his role as a member of the Grant MacEwan board of directors. He contributed immensely to ensuring that MacEwan kept pace with building the facilities that it needed to do a first-class job of serving and educating Albertans. It is not an exaggeration to say that Allard Hall would not be here today without Willie's effort and dedication.

Second, Willie never lost his love of music. Music was a true passion and explains his tireless support for the arts and his tenure on the board of Edmonton's Fringe Festival.

All I have spoken about so far, for me, serves to highlight just how deeply Willie valued the opportunity to engage in public service.

However, he never lost sight of something even more important.

I mentioned at the beginning of my remarks that Willie and I spoke every day for a decade. We talked about many things and I learned something new almost every time we spoke. But his favourite topic was always family.

He delighted in recounting Rob's musical and academic accomplishments, Sarah's academic and lacrosse prowess, their growing independence and love of Toronto, Barb's triathlon training, her hockey successes and their collective love of cross-country skiing that Willie came to late in life.

He absolutely loved watching sports with Barb – particularly Saskatchewan Roughrider games.

You'd call him when he was driving to Saskatoon, with his family, and of course he would pick up. What's that in the background Willie? Oh, it's Rob and Sarah playing, we're going to do "Birdland" for my mom.

Willie's commitment to public service could not have been made without the support of Barb. Willie affectionately referred to Barb as "Santa Barbara" – Saint Barbara. He knew and fundamentally appreciated the depth of what he asked of you. Thank you for sharing him with us.

He was so proud of you Barb, Rob and Sarah. And he would be proud of how you have come together to support each other in this difficult time. I can bear witness to your remarkable strength, grace and resilience.

What a wonderful man – it was an honour to know him.

Thanks Willie.