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Eulogy for L. William Seidman
By Arend D. Lubbers
September 11, 2009

On a June morning in 1968 Bill Seidman walked into my office at Central College and my life changed forever. I think that experience was shared by many. Bill was a person of vision and action, and when his life touched yours, things changed. He had a way of engaging, encompassing, and setting the agenda. Some of us here remember the Sundays when Bill and Sally gathered their families, friends, and business associates for an afternoon of paddle tennis that inevitably extended into dinner at their Buttrick Street home, a sauna, followed by a dip in the enclosed swimming pool. The Seidmans were always engaging people and providing everyone a good time. It was easy to be caught up in Bill’s orbit. He was always doing something that was important to the landscape in which he was working and there was always a quotient of fun in the doing for those associated with him.

Bill kept moving through the society. He was a 20th century renaissance man. Being an accountant was a natural first. Being in politics was inevitable for a public spirited activist like Bill. Creating art and bringing one of the world’s most noted artists to his home town was done with an intensity that might make someone who didn’t know him think art and art patronage was his main endeavor. He learned the thrust and parry of White House infighting, and carried that knowledge with him to the FDIC chairmanship where his service to the nation is noteworthy in the annals of American finance. He served corporate America briefly as a tycoon of copper. He helped save New York City financially. He became an academic Dean. I was not close to his daily operations at the time, but I speculate on how the faculty dealt with this rapidly-moving, objectives driven,
man. He liked to cook for friends. From steaks to clam bakes he excelled. He played
tennis from childhood beyond the time when his shoulders and knees felt comfortable
with the game. He was not much for long periods of quiet introspection or convoluted
discussions, but he was capable of brilliant intellectual insight into any issue or situation
that claimed his attention. In any task or time of relaxation his mind and his hands
worked well. He was an author. He loved Dixieland music. He was peripatetic, carrying
his economic and financial knowledge and counsel throughout the world. He became the
wise voice on CNBC to all Americans seeking to know and understand the economy.
What a man! Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote, “He is great who is what he is from nature
and who never reminds us of others.” Bill was one of a kind; exceeding others in so
many ways.

He often said that founding Grand Valley was his greatest accomplishment. I, of
course, was pleased and the right person to hear that from him. He lived and achieved on
a national and international stage, so such a statement could be considered a compliment
without really holding him to it. But, I have concluded that he really meant it. He was a
man known for speaking directly and honestly so I believe what he directly said to me.

With Bill as leader, he, Sally, and their friends worked as a team to start a college.
The synergy and success of their efforts, the nurturing of personal relationships during
the process, likely gave Bill as rewarding a public and personal journey as he ever had
even though in the future what he did and said rose to national significance. It is,
however, in the product, not the process where his true satisfaction lies.

What a fine institution the Seidman’s College has become. In so many ways it
surpasses its competition, and Bill enjoyed that. He liked to win, as all smart, ambitious
people do, and he wanted his friends to be winners. He was a mentor to many, a good influence on more and was committed to the “win-win” philosophy. Yet you cannot live where he lived or played where he played without knowing how high the stakes, and sometimes how bitterly fought after the positions of favor and dominance.

I come from a tradition where funeral sermons were often used to “shape up” the living more than honor the dead. As Thomas Mann wrote, “a man’s dying is more the survivors’ affair than his own.” In suggesting to those who work and educate at Grand Valley that they keep their founder’s vision always before them, I come close to that tradition. High academic quality, belief in the liberal arts core, innovation and creativity, service to the community, and commitment to a broad program from science, arts, humanities, professional studies to athletics are the substance of Bill’s vision for Grand Valley. Few people remember that in the constitutional convention of 1963, Bill was an advocate and the leader of the move to give Michigan’s universities constitutional autonomy. Once it was determined that no centralized bureaucracy would control the universities, the stage was set for the creative and independent development of the institution he founded. The legacy of constitutional autonomy was his greatest gift to higher education in Michigan.

I am thrilled by Rich’s announcement. Here where Bill helped build a community and a university the litany of his good deeds will always be with us. The L. William Seidman Center will remind us of what he contributed. But more important, it will be home to a fast moving, always innovative, constantly improving Seidman College of Business. Just like its namesake it will be in perpetual motion.
Bill was the best of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century. His accomplishments and personal characteristics were significant enough for his life to be a symbol for the events in what is called the American Century. He fought in the world war, he was educated in the 20\textsuperscript{th} century tradition, he helped shape a 20\textsuperscript{th} century city, and he participated in the education, economy, and politics that characterized the century. He was transforming into a 21\textsuperscript{st} century man, but mortality has its way.

These are times when memories predominate. Family members have the most, and the most important, but all of us have them. It is time for us to select a memory and savor it. I remember that no one, except my father, gave me better advice in times of stress than Bill. It may seem unusual to think about the words of a poet who lived in both the 17\textsuperscript{th} and 18\textsuperscript{th} centuries, Alexander Pope, in an attempt to find a fitting epitaph for such a 20\textsuperscript{th} century man. Yet, this well known verse does it for me. “Honor and shame from no condition rise. Act well your part, there all the honor lies.” Bill acted well on life’s stage, and lived and died an honorable man.