Remarks, delivered at the Memorial Service for Bill Reamon on January 17, 2001

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Grand Valley State University
Bill Reamon was a force. I did not know Bill as a boy or young adult. I don’t know where that strong presence came from or when it made itself manifest. I know when Nancy and I became Bill and Phyllis’ friends it was there. Bill did not engage in the ritual of superfluous pleasantries -- conversation so many of us use to get started with one another. “Good morning,” “How are you?,” Oh, I’m fine, and you?,” and “Just Great.” He didn’t need to do that. We never discussed it, but I know he didn’t tolerate inaccuracy or meaningless chatter graciously. Inquiring about health or feelings that have nothing to do with the business at hand or an interesting conversation was foreign to his nature.

If he was really concerned about a friend or a family member’s condition he demonstrated it in ways that showed he really cared. Cutting through to the real issue, moving directly to the matters on his mind, responding intelligently to another’s thought or inquiry or filling the void with silence rather than meaningless talk contributed to his large presence in the relationships he had with all of us. His role on the stage of life was dominant--caring, and as we, his family and his friends, were drawn to him he provided us experiences, ideas, engagement and loyalty in a large measure.

He embraced us in his own way. We responded. We knew we had a good friend, and for some a highly capable mentor as well, and all of us were touched for the better by the force of his friendship.

One of my first memories of Bill is a compliment he paid me on the selection of wine for dinner at our house. He mentioned the quality and asked me what it was. As I recall it was a modestly priced Cabernet from the Fetzer vineyards, but as occasionally happens, it turned out to be especially good harvest the year it was produced. He was the only guest that evening who
remarked on it, and I was pleased because I was proud of myself for discovering that special
vintage. He wanted to see if Camille, his favorite purveyor of fine wines, had some for him to
buy.

That exchange, as I remember, took place about the same time that we experienced our
first Reamon feast, and confirmed for me what all of us know that Bill and good food and wines
were close friends. Though Bill and Clark Afendoulis' friendship is multifaceted the mutual
interest in the culinary arts is a strong commonality. It was through conversations about food
and wine that Bill and I found our common enjoyment of France. From there to World War II
events was a short step and that shared interest carried us to an unlimited number of topics for
discussions and enjoyment.

The Reamon dinners at poolside, in the lower level, in the dining room, and their
planning and preparation gave us our first insight into Bill and Phyllis' relationship. Many of
you had an earlier and different window through which to observe. If you can collaborate in the
kitchen, no matter how stormy at times, you will make it together. This collaboration of theirs
was not so much a test of their commitment as an example of it. The time expended, the
working together with intensity, the attention to detail, the care in preparation, and the savory
outcome were a metaphor for what they were for each other. Sometimes they played the roles of
the Bickersons, but make no mistake, that was a personality aspect of their relationship, not its
defining character. Because they were into so much together, we enjoyed them so much
together.

Bill was a Democrat. In his time and in our place that is like being a Yankee in King
Arthur’s Court. Running for Congress three times against Jerry Ford, knowing that he will not
win, is another illustration of the force and size of Bill’s persona. Little men don’t do that. Bill
never did anything solely for public display. I don’t think he did anything solely from a sense of
doing his public duty. He usually acted out of belief, and like a good lawyer, his beliefs and
values were well reasoned. I don’t know what part of him was formed in the deep subconscious
and what as a result of personal learning and experience, but I know that he used his mind to
effectively shape and express his views. Intelligence he had, and he used it to bring competency
and respect to the practice of law. In an area of law that is often cited for its excessiveness, there
was never a hint of that from him. He was an unusually fair-minded person. He balanced that
well with his advocacy for a client. In those qualities he brought to the practice of law we may
find to the clue to his political candidacy. We should not ignore the excitement of the public
platform and the race itself. Yet, well thought out positions on public life and policy -- deeply
held -- combined with the habit of advocacy might have led him to his course of political action.
Then, three efforts in a losing cause are also consistent for a person who may have some
familiarity with stubbornness.

There is an interesting coda to the Bill and Jerry races. When Bill was advancing in the
hierarchy of the Michigan Bar Association, for a week he occupied a cottage on Mackinaw
Island. That time coincided with Jerry Ford becoming President of the United States and a
meeting of some political importance on the Island. As the President and Governor Milliken
passed by, Bill from the porch of his cottage spotted their carriage and shouted, “Jerry,
congratulations! You made it and are now a prisoner in the White House while I get to relax and
enjoy this beautiful view.”

Another fallout from Bill’s political affiliation and activities was his appointment to the
Grand Valley University Board of Control when a Democrat occupied the Governor’s chair. He
brought his intelligence and fair-mindedness to that position as he did in his law practice. That
was fortuitous for me for it brought us close together and nurtured the friendship that Nancy and I shared with the Reamons.

Bill enjoyed travel, especially to France. He gave us good advice about seeing Paris. He really cased the place. But I’ll wager that he never traveled from early September to late November except to Ann Arbor. There may have been an exception if he found an unusual bargain in price to a place he wanted to see. I did not learn about Bill’s undaunted enthusiasm for Michigan football until sometime after becoming acquainted with him. When I did I was surprised. In retrospect, that should not have been my reaction. Most of his interests were intensely pursued; gourmet cooking and dining, taping of TV programs and movies, travel, history, the law, and friendships. Why not Michigan football?

Many of us enjoyed his sharing the ritual trips to the great Wolverine temple on autumn Saturdays. Phyllis, I’m sure, might easily have forgone at times -- those days of either ecstasy or agony depending on whether there was victory or defeat.

She was indispensable, however, for on the parking site she uncovered baskets of food and fruit that made the trip worthwhile even, if by some circumstance, there had not been a football game.

The pilgrimage to Ann Arbor began at the Reamon residence. I cannot separate Bill from his house and his gardens. It was his house and it was Phyllis’ house. Planning what to do and how to do it was another intertwining of the two. I associate them, more than most, with their dwelling. Perhaps because we saw them there so often. Perhaps because we observed and discussed with them changes, plans, and new art on many occasions. The love of Paris was reflected in the paintings they bought. The house that had the stamp of their personalities and interests was not always wrought in peace and harmony. I remember when Phyllis wanted a redo for the dining room and Bill would have none of it. Nancy and I took Phyllis’ side as some
of you may have done, but to no avail. Her victory came only as a result of the fire, but he didn’t pay for it. The insurance company did. We all know Bill’s propensity for a good deal.

Bill defined his world and understood it. His home was an important part and along with his law practice, was the foundation of it. Again, wherever he chose to be his imprint was there. In his house I saw his personality, his interests, his place for emotional security writ large.

Samuel Johnson said, “A man should keep his friendship in constant repair.” Bill did that. A telephone call, a book or tape he thought might interest you, a dinner and conversation together, a constant tending of his friendships was part of him. He preferred to escape the large, less personal social event. He went occasionally under protest or because he thought he must. That was often a time to remain silent unless a friend could be found. But his significant circle of family and friends were his stimulation, his motivation for action and engagement beyond his profession, his place for enjoyment and fulfillment, and certainly his comfort zone.

His house was the center for his ritual of friendship tending, a shared ritual. When Bill engaged he shared. He and Phyllis brought people together that they liked. They did this enough so their friends began to share amongst themselves. Many of us know each other because of the Reamons. I feel the richer for it.

Today I am disappointed because Bill, whose presence in my life was large and important to me, will no longer meet me in a favorite Parisian haunt. We will never be together at the Tattoo in Edinburg as we had so often discussed. There will be no more shared books and tapes and the conversations that followed. I will miss sitting down to dinner with him and commenting on the wine. I can imagine the void those of you who lived with him, who practiced law with him on a daily basis, must experience. His dying was a process with strain, and we
have thought of you as you bore it. We think of you, too, as you adjust to life without the presence and force that heretofore has been so important in your lives.

For me, I have laced him in the Pantheon of my mind with other friends I have lost too soon. There in peace, quiet, and joy I can summon memories of him from time to time, and my life can continue to take benefit from the times we had together.
A Service in Memory of
William G. Reamon
1927-2001

Welcome and Prayer

Hymn # 4 "How Great Thou Art"

Scripture Reading: Psalm 23, I Thess. 4:13-18

"Amazing Grace"

Tributes by family and friends

Hymn # 186 "The Old Rugged Cross"

Meditation Dr. Jim Carlson

Benediction

Following the service: Each guest is invited to join the family for a luncheon on the lower level. Please follow the signs.

Wednesday, January 17, 2001
12:00 Noon