

## **William Edward Atkinson Jr.**

Died: November 12, 1992

Bill died at the relatively young age of 53, at home, on Thursday, November 12, 1992.

He came to Dartmouth from Shaker Heights, Ohio, where he went to high school and graduated with honors, and where his involvements included the student council, the paper, dramatics, golf and riflery. At Dartmouth he majored in philosophy-literature, played hockey and golf his freshman year, and was in the R.O.T.C.

He graduated Phi Beta Kappa, went to Harvard Law School, practiced with the same Cleveland law firm (Baker & Hostetler) from 1966 to his death, and married three times, becoming a father later in life ("I still marvel at tucking in a six and a five year old," he wrote at age 47.)

But at the risk of some repetition, let Bill and three of his friends tell you how it was for him.

First, Bill, reflecting on life in 1986 for our 25<sup>th</sup> Reunion, writing, it seems, the day after the night of his 47th birthday. "I'll say that where we are now is largely a function of what we've done and where we've done it (from the Hanover Plain, three years at Harvard Law, two years with the Army Military Police in France, and since 1966 with the same law firm in Cleveland), and of who we've done it with (Bette for two years in France, Dianne for five of the early years in Cleveland and Sandy for the last eight." He remained married to Sandy until he died six years later.

Bill referred to his marriages as a "wifely trilogy," and said of his ex-spouses that, "I delight in calling both of them on our anniversaries and talking about what was, with what might have been, but more importantly what IS."

Our classmate Charlie Buffon offers his own remembrance.

"Like his father, for whom he was named," Charlie writes, "Bill Atkinson died of a heart attack when barely 50. He had always been haunted by his father's early death and burned his candle unsparingly during the time he had. After graduating from Dartmouth, where he was a member of Sigma Chi/Tabard and Phi Beta Kappa, he attended Harvard Law School. In Cambridge he shared an apartment with [me] and Dick Field and drove the only bright red Mercury convertible with chrome continental kit registered to any Harvard student. After law school, Bill spent two years as an MP officer in France, married and divorced, returned to his home town of Cleveland, became a partner of a leading law firm, married two more times, had two children (whom he loved dearly), and suffered being a fan of both Cleveland and Dartmouth athletics. He was a voracious reader, a savvy card player, loved conversation (the later at night the better), expanded

his horizons through travel (Machu Picchu being a highlight), and had a gift for friendship. At Dartmouth and throughout his life, Bill worked and lived hard -- his heart attack coming after he had been up all night closing a deal. He sensed it was coming, but he lived his life his way anyway."

Brett McEntagart, another classmate, came to Dartmouth from Ireland, and encountered Bill, as a roommate.

"My first two years in college I roomed with Bill Atkinson and David Ranney, two young lads from Ohio," Brett recalls in an e-mail. "They were fun years. Bill was a fun character with a cheeky grin and a twinkle in his eye. He seemed endlessly cheerful. He was great friends with Jack Houser whom he knew from high school. I remember days spent shooting the breeze in Houser's room with Jack and Bill blowing endless smoke rings! I was fascinated thinking they were really cool. I regret not having taken up photography at that time, as it would have provided some really interesting visual material. Bill later tried to teach me how to smoke. He said it would help me to concentrate and keep me alert late at night when typing term papers or studying for exams. However I found it only made me light-headed and rather dizzy. I never smoked since."

Our classmate Roger McArt, who knew him back in elementary school in the late 1940's, was perhaps Bill's oldest friend. "Bill and I first met playing pond hockey in Shaker Heights, Ohio when we were in elementary school, and our relationship continued through junior and senior high school and then on to Dartmouth," Roger wrote in November 2010.

"In senior high we participated together in the only organized hockey program in the Cleveland area at the Cleveland Arena, where they invited all hockey players from around the city to come for tryouts and then divided everyone into eight teams, and gave us shirts and socks and a schedule of games," Roger wrote. "No practices, just eight games."

"So when we came to Dartmouth together," Roger said, "we were impressed by the high school hockey teams represented in our class from Minnesota and the Boston area. However, there were no scholarships and open tryouts were held for the freshman hockey team. I remember Bill saying 'hey, Roger, lets go down and tryout. We'll be able to skate for a week!' I don't think either of us would have done it on our own, but together we went to the rink. At the end of the first week we were still on the list and got to skate for a second week. In the end we were retained on the 'practice line' and skated in every practice, five days a week. We even ended up dressing for a couple games at the end when some of the 'dressing team' guys went on academic probation. This hockey experience really made freshman year for both of us."

"I saw Bill only at high school and college reunions after graduation, but I will always remember our ice hockey connection," Roger wrote.

The closing words go to Bill, again in 1986 for our 25<sup>th</sup> reunion, six years before his death:

“I’m avoiding with difficulty the notion of the clear limitations on one’s own mortality. Maybe in part because it’s written about so much, or maybe because I just don’t want to address it. But it’s there, as we all know, and I suppose the way we address or avoid it says a lot about us. I guess my point is that although I know it’s there, I just don’t care — that is somebody else’s damn problem!”

Bill left behind two children, a daughter Kimberly and a son Eddie.