



Attorney William J. Doyle

December 3, 1936 - April 18, 2020

Attorney William J. Doyle, former head of the litigation practice at Wiggin and Dana and principal trial lawyer for Yale University for over 25 years, died on April 18, 2020. Bill was born in Boston in 1936, the second of five children of the late Ellen and William I. Doyle. His mother was born in Ireland, as were his father's parents. His family moved to Meriden, Connecticut, when Bill was in grammar school. He attended Meriden High School, where he happily concentrated on his social life, not his studies, and as a result graduated in 1954 near the bottom of his class. In high school, in addition to other jobs, he sang for hire at church weddings and funerals and in a local band. Despite his poor academic performance in high school, Fairfield University, a young school at the time, obviously in need of students, decided to take a chance on him and gave him a glee club scholarship. He was a glee club soloist his four years there. He also sang on weekends with a nightclub band in Waterbury. The Jesuits at Fairfield changed the direction of his life. Under their influence, he became a serious student and leader. He was President of his class as a sophomore, President of the student body as a senior, and graduated with honors in 1958. He then attended St. John's University School of Law as a Thomas More Scholar on a full tuition academic scholarship. He became Managing Editor of the law review, Vice-President of his class, and graduated in 1961 with high honors, ranked second in his class of over 200. He began his legal career at the Manhattan firm Paul, Weiss, Rifkind, Wharton & Garrison. He returned to Connecticut in 1963 to join the 18 lawyer Wiggin and Dana in New Haven. He became a partner in 1969, and three years later, at age 36, head of the firm's litigation practice. Over the next 30 years, he helped the practice grow into a highly respected and successful one, with trials and clients not only in Connecticut but throughout the United States. When he retired in 2005, Wiggin and Dana had grown to 150 lawyers and five offices in three states. His partner Robert F. Cavanagh, the firm's historian, wrote this about Bill in his "History of Wiggin and Dana": "William J. Doyle, an Irish kid who grew up in Meriden, Connecticut...was really the first lawyer hired by Wiggin and Dana without Ivy League or equivalent college and law school degrees. His hiring was one of the wisest and significant decisions ever made at Wiggin and Dana. Doyle was developed into an extraordinarily gifted trial lawyer and brought the firm to a new level of excellence in litigation." At a partner's retreat, the late Jack Dunham, former

Chair of the firm, noted Bill's unique contribution to Wiggin and Dana, and especially his contribution to the firm's change from its traditional Ivy League hiring practices: "Bill turned out to be one of the truly great trial lawyers in the United States. Not just really good, but authentically great...If we'd just continued this Ivy League thing...the firm would have become stale and inbred, and it would have become difficult to look past the veneer of fancy schools to be sure that lawyers had the stuff that actually mattered. That is one reason why Bill Doyle is and always will be one of the most important partners in our history, because he cemented Wiggin and Dana's commitment to genuine meritocracy." When Bill retired in 2005, Wiggin and Dana lawyers came from 91 different colleges and 42 different law schools. Bill contributed to that change, and he was proud of it. Bill's specialty was high stakes complex civil litigation, and he was good at it. When other lawyers knew he was on trial, they came to his courtroom to watch and learn. He had a real presence in the courtroom, extraordinary cross-examination skills, and a rare ability to make even the most complicated matters understandable to jurors, who more often than not rewarded him with a favorable verdict. He was well liked and had the admiration and respect of clients, judges, and lawyers. The New Haven County Bar Association honored him with its Lifetime Achievement Award. For more than 20 years, since the inception of the publication until his retirement, he had the distinction of being selected by his peers to be included in each annual edition of "Best Lawyers in America." He was also singled out for inclusion in each edition of the London publication "Chambers USA America's Leading Business Lawyers," which described him as being "much admired" by his clients and other lawyers. He was elected a Fellow of The American College of Trial Lawyers in 1978, the youngest Connecticut lawyer to have received that honor at the time. He later served as state chair of that organization, as well as chair of the Federal Practice Committee and chair of the Lawyer to Lawyer Arbitration Committee of the Connecticut Bar Association. He was appointed by the federal judges in Connecticut to serve as a Special Master and by the Chief Justice of the Connecticut Supreme Court to sit as a Special Trial Referee. For many years, he taught a course in Trial Practice at the Yale Law School as a member of the adjunct faculty, after having first started teaching at the University of Connecticut Law School. He also trained and mentored many young lawyers at Wiggin and Dana who went on to become successful trial lawyers at the firm and elsewhere. Even after he retired, Bill returned to the firm to help train its young lawyers. He also returned after retirement to Yale Law School to help train students to compete in national moot court competitions. Bill loved being a trial lawyer, but he also had a full and productive life outside the courtroom. He served as President of the Board of the New Haven Public Library, as a member of the Board of the Children's Center in Hamden, as a member of the Executive Committee of the Board of Albertus Magnus College, and as President of the Board of the New Haven Lawn Club. Bill was addicted to tennis and spend a lot of time on the court, although truth be told his skill seldom matched his passion for the game.

He was unpretentious and fun to be around. He loved a good time, and he enjoyed socializing with a wide and diverse circle of friends representing every walk of life, from judges and lawyers, to professors and deans, to the Lawn Club crowd, to his drinking buddies at the Eel Pot and Dubel's Cafe. He will be missed. Bill was predeceased by his parents, by his first wife Margaret O'Keeffe, their infant daughter Murette, their son Attorney William J. Doyle, Jr. and by his sister Eileen Rosen and her husband John. He is survived by his love Leslie Cummings, his daughter Elizabeth Doyle Lima, and his grandchildren Brendan and Katherine. He is also survived by his sister Margaret McNally, his brother Roger, and his brother John and their children and grandchildren.

Due to the Pandemic, a service will be held at a later date. Sisk Brothers Funeral Home 3105 Whitney Ave. Hamden in care of arrangements. In lieu of flowers memorial contributions may be made to Albertus Magnus College or to a charity of one's choice. To leave an online condolence please visit www.siskbrothers.com

Comments



“ Over the past year or so the Trial Bar here in Connecticut has witnessed the passing of several giants in the field. Bill was clearly one of them. For years whenever the call went out for an all star litigator to try a complicated case Bill was, in the words of Claude Rains, always "one of the usual suspects". He could connect with and persuade juries, a skill which many will argue cannot be taught. Bill wasn't just smart, dynamic and tough, he was honest, decent and a straight shooter, qualities that all lawyers and people in general should aspire to. You will be missed by many. I hope you're up there telling stories and tipping a few pints with some of your old compatriots and adversaries along with your beloved Willie. Rest in Peace.

Carl A. Secola Jr.

Carl Secola - April 29 at 05:10 PM



“ Beth,
Please accept my sincerest condolences. I was heartbroken to hear that your dad had passed away. Bill was one of the finest people I worked with at Wiggin and Dana. I recall so clearly the early days when your dad would bring you and Willie into the office on weekends. He was so proud of the two of you and would walk around the office holding your hands and chatting with all of us. Beth, you and Willie were so cute! I was your dad's receptionist so it was always fun to be there to greet you. Your visit always ended up in the coffee room where Mr. Schenck always brought in dozens of donuts for all of us to share. Those were the good old days!

Everyone knows that Bill was brilliant. But, I hope everyone knows that he was just a great guy. A good person with a beautiful personality and compassion for all around him. He had that little bit of a "devilish Irish twinkle" in his eyes and always made the time to be kind to all of us. I will miss him very much. But, my memories of this wonderful man will live on. Beth, one of the last conversations I had with your dad was when he came into the office after he retired. He had just returned from a trip and was telling me about it. I told him I was so happy he was enjoying his retirement. His response was "Betty, this isn't a dress rehearsal...enjoy everyday as if it is your last." That says it all.

Elizabeth Pepe

Elizabeth Pepe - April 24 at 04:51 PM



“ I didn't know Mr. Doyle, but after reading the account of his life in The Day newspaper, I sure wish I did, not in court if he were on the other side, of course, but perhaps in one of the pubs he is said to have visited. My condolences to his family, associates and his drinking buddies.

--Bruce MacDonald
New London

Bruce MacDonald - April 24 at 01:51 PM



“ Bill and I practiced law together, as partners at Wiggin and Dana, for 34 years. But my fondest memory is his leading the singing on John Clark's sailboat, Orion, as we raced and cruised her, during many of those years.
William Baskin

William C. Baskin, Jr. - April 23 at 01:41 PM



“ Bill was my favorite attorney at at Wiggin and Dana! He never failed to have a kind word whenever we passed each other and occasionally an interesting comment! Not long ago we reconnected at the “gym” and it was a pleasure to see him again! My sincere condolences to his lovely wife and family! “Bill, you will truly be missed! God bless you!

Linda Abbott - April 23 at 10:37 AM



“ There are moments in your life when you work with people who are extraordinary in every facet of their lives. To me Bill was one of those people with whom I had the pleasure of working with at W&D. Many admired his lawyerly skills, but I think what I liked most about him was when he had that look of either just hearing an amusing story or being witness to an amazing prank. Our lives are better for having Bill in them for whatever amount of time. He certainly was extraordinary. My condolences to the Doyle family. May you find comfort in the memories of happier times.

Barbara Corcoran - April 22 at 01:21 PM



“ Oops, I meant your larger than life presence

jerry hesse - April 21 at 04:13 PM



“ Bill was a dynamic competitor on the tennis courts, never passing up the opportunity to laugh at himself and with others. I will miss the twinkle in your eye and your than life presence at the Lawn Club. You will be sorely missed. God rest your soul. Jerry Hesse and Bob Levine

jerry hesse - April 21 at 04:11 PM



“ Bill sat on the Board interview committee when I was hired as V.P.A.A. at Albertus. It was the first time that we had interacted in any significant way, and I was bowled over by his combination of insightful questions and sly humor. That marked all of our exchanges to follow, and I always felt a little self-conscious wondering what was going on behind those sparkling eyes. I feel privileged to have known him, grateful for all that he did for Albertus, and sorry that he will no longer be with us to share his wit and wisdom. I am sorry for your loss.

Sean O'Connell

Sean O'Connell - April 21 at 03:54 PM



“ My sincerest sympathies. Bill was truly a legend, an extraordinary trial attorney. He was always smiling at the office, had great stories and told them with flair. He was kind to everyone and will be truly missed.
Linda Esposito.

Linda Esposito - April 21 at 02:38 PM



“ Bill was a "legend of the law" in New Haven legal circles. He was a great trial lawyer and an even greater guy. Unpretentious and genuine, Bill was a pleasure to be around. I always enjoyed our conversations at Lenny's. We had a common interest in New Haven legal history, and the old war stories never seemed old when Bill told them. He and my dad were both proud graduates of St. John's Law School. May God hold Bill in the palm of his hand. Rest in peace Bill. John Wynne, Jr.

John Wynne - April 21 at 11:51 AM



“ Growing up, Bill was always so kind to me. I baby sat for his step sons occasionally and (of course) he was friends with my Dad Cheever, and we always saw him at the Lawn Club. I loved the obituary - Bill would have loved it, funny honest and direct. I will always remember him with a twinkle in his eye and bounce in his step. - Haven

Tyler

Haven Tyler - April 21 at 10:41 AM



“ Bill had become a regular attendee at our once a month luncheons with some old New Haven friends, some lawyers, some judges & some not. His stories, his wonderful demeanor & his humor, will be sorely missed. God rest my friend.
Paul Higgins

Paul Higgins - April 20 at 06:55 PM