AL WILLIAMS: A EULOGY

Michael D. Rich
PREFACE

This Paper contains the eulogy delivered by Michael Rich, Executive Vice President of RAND, at a memorial service in honor of Albert P. Williams, held at RAND, on November 19, 2000.
I want to begin by thanking Corki, and Albert, Robert, John, and the rest of the Williamses for the chance to have this service here today. Al will always be an important part of the RAND family and my colleagues and I feel privileged to be included this afternoon.

Jim Thomson, who is RAND’s president, is in Moscow today on business, but if he could have been here, I can guarantee you that he would have spoken for RAND in my place. Just before he left Santa Monica, Jim sent a message to everyone at RAND in which he called Al a “towering figure in RAND’s history.” It was the best we could think of on short notice. We both knew at the time that it was an understatement.

Al did quite a lot before he even came to RAND.

His first big leap was from his hometown—known then and now as the sausage capital of Texas—to the Naval Academy. 1953. At Annapolis, he was a member of the varsity crew, graduating with the customary engineering degree and a minor in international affairs. He then spent five years on active duty with the U.S. Navy as an engineering officer, first on a destroyer and then on a submarine. From the Navy, he went to the Fletcher School at Tufts, earning Master’s Degrees in Law and Diplomacy and International Relations and then a PhD in Developmental Economics. His dissertation was on the role of public policy in the industrialization of Venezuela.

His first job, right after his Master’s Degrees was with the Bureau of the Budget in Washington, where he oversaw foreign aid and international lending programs. He developed considerable expertise on the Far East in that job and that earned him a transfer to the White House where he worked for the President’s special assistant on Vietnam. He did all this before he came to RAND and before he turned 33.

RAND hired him in 1968, initially to work on international economics, which he did—Indonesia with Charlie Wolf, Vietnam with John Kochler, Thailand with Hans Heymann. But, in the early 1970s, he made a switch that would help change RAND—and I would argue the nation—for the better. This switch began when he took the lead on a series of innovative studies of medical-school economics with such colleagues as Grace Carter, David Chu, and Emmett Keeler. It wasn’t long before our international economics research had to make do without Al. (Explaining for me why Charlie Wolf and Abe Becker have had to work so hard ever since.) Al quickly established
himself as one of the leaders of RAND’s new health sciences program, becoming its director in 1976.

Al headed RAND Health, as it is known today, for 14 years. He helped it develop into the world’s foremost source of research and analysis on how health services are used, delivered, and financed, on where the system is falling short and how it can be improved. The reach of the program that Al developed was truly breathtaking. It extended from broad systemic issues to sophisticated methodological advances, from experimental medical procedures to the intricacies of Medicare reimbursement rules, from care in urban teaching hospitals to care in rural clinics, from heart surgery to dentistry, from the training of physicians to the performance of hospital administrators. It is impossible to convey the full breadth of the work, just as it is impossible to overstate how powerfully influential the research during Al’s tenure was and continues to be.

In the 1990s, after he turned the RAND Health reins over to Bob Brook, his unofficial title was director of the toughest and most important initiatives at RAND. There were half-a-dozen such assignments, including directing RAND Europe in the Netherlands, helping launch our private fundraising program with the RAND Summer Institutes, designing a new cost structure to enable RAND to diversify further, and leading our efforts to develop research work in the private sector. If the job was important, complicated, and unusually difficult, Al was our first choice. Always.

Along the way, he did many, many other things. His participation in the RAND Graduate School was particularly noteworthy. He was a charter member of the faculty and over the years he taught or co-taught seven different courses. He also chaired 12 dissertation committees and served on five others.

I am quite certain that Al would be the first to say that this record of achievement—in RAND Health, for instance—was due not to him in any significant way, but first and foremost to the hundreds of colleagues at RAND and dozens of partner organizations with whom he worked. He would be sincere in believing this, but he would be wrong.

Al was complex. I know that most of the time, that word is a euphemism for something or other, but I mean it here in the best way possible. His complexity did not reflect a contradiction and was not a sign of indecision or inconsistency. Instead, to me, it was the blend that made him so special and so effective here at RAND.
• He was brilliant, but he had an uncanny ability to put people at ease.
• His mind was lightning quick, but no one was more patient.
• He had broad, even global, interests, but he appreciated the importance of small details.
• He had deep respect for tradition and custom, but embraced and advocated change.
• He carried heavy burdens and worked very hard, but he always seemed to be having fun.
• He was fiercely loyal to RAND, but never lacking in irreverence.

On this last point, Al was notable for his personal tolerance for bureaucracy and rules—tolerance that I would describe generously as microscopic. Al and I had many frank exchanges on this general topic. They’d usually begin with Al proposing a sensible, logical approach that would accomplish something with half the usual effort and half the usual hassle. He was most often right; he was always determined. In one case I remember well, he ended a note to me by asking, “any problem with this idea?” I wrote back, “Al, we’d be breaking a federal law.” To which he replied, “Well, you’re going to have to come up with a better reason than that!”

But, the most important and wonderful result of what I’ve called Al’s complexity was that he not only cared deeply for people, he did so in a way that made them—us—know it. As a result, we trusted him, we respected him, and we were inspired by him. We were encouraged by him and we were comforted by him. These special combinations of Al’s, this unique blend of seemingly orthogonal perspectives, what I think of as his complexity, made him in my mind unsurpassed at RAND as a leader, as a colleague, and as a friend.

It is fitting, therefore, that we should honor his memory in a special way. That is why I am pleased to announce formally today the establishment of the Albert P. Williams Health Lectureship series at RAND, dedicated to continuing Al’s tradition of creative, objective research and analysis aimed at improving the health of people everywhere. For those of us who knew him, the series will remind us of his achievements; for those who will follow us, the series will provide a window onto Al’s remarkable career and personal qualities so that they will continue to serve as inspirations, just as they do for all of us.

In closing, let me say that although Al was taken away from us much too soon, I am confident that everyone at RAND will remember and cherish how much he gave of himself to us and to our institution.
A Memorial Service

with family and friends

to celebrate the life of

*Albert Paine Williams, Jr.*

*1935 — 2000*

November 19, 2000
2:00 P.M.

RAND
Music and Memories

Schubert Quartet in A minor, Op. 29

Allegro ma non troppo

Welcome
Rae Archibald

Message from RAND
Michael Rich

Andante

Memories

Menuetto: Allegretto

Memories

Allegro moderato

Music by the
New Hollywood String Quartet
Clayton Haslop, Rafael Rishik, Paul Cohen, David Walther

Please join family and friends on Patio I for refreshments.

Contributions in Al's memory may be made to the Albert Williams Memorial Fund. Please make checks payable to RAND, 1700 Main Street, Santa Monica, CA 90407-2138. Attn: Leigh Ann Cardenas; note that the contribution is for the The Albert Williams Memorial Health Policy Lecture Series.
A Parable
by
Sr. Kathleen Deignan, C.N.D.

"To what shall I compare the 'Realm of God,' and how shall I describe it?"

"It is like a woman whose best friend died, and journeying far to be with her grieving husband, discovered that he too was very ill, and she opened her heart to him as deeply as she could. Soon the consoling friendship turned itself to deep passion and unconditional love, and she vowed her days to him until his days were no more. Theirs was a love conceived in the Realm of God, a pearl of great price, a treasure hidden in a field, and when she discovered the treasure, she traded her whole life to embrace it.

"Togetherness they became partners exploring the frontiers of dying, and lived each precious day under a golden sun and each night under a silver moon, and the stars of deathless light made patterns of hope above them through all the seasons. From healer to healer they made pilgrimage, praying for time to live long into this love, and time was given: all the time they needed.

"The pilgrimage led from healing hill to holy well, and at last to the great encircling cocoon. And with each step, each breath they moved closer to the horizon of transformation. And then they came to its verge, and the man was very tired. And he lay on her arms to begin the dream of awakening. So the woman gathered him, she cradled him, midwife of his eternity that she had become.

"And he for her the same: The one who led her to the edge (her orienteer, her guide, who he leads her still). Still to the Edge of paradise, Still to the Edge of heaven—where he goes he make a place for her.

"So on now to the Wedding Feast—and she ever after the Bride—where all lovers marry the One."

Sweet dreams, dearest Al. Deep peace, dearest Corki.