In Memoriam: Silas Robert Lyman

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IN MEMORIAM: SILAS ROBERT LYMAN I

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When I first came to OCU from Boston in 1975, Bob Lyman was an unmistakable indication that I had really come to the West. Bob, a two-time University of Wyoming graduate with an LL.M. from Wisconsin, was a rugged, square-jawed, Marlboro Man prototype who'd been a Wyoming practitioner, a Wyoming district attorney, a law professor at Nebraska, and who had mounted a bighorn sheep head above the door to his office at OCU. He was a breath of fresh air after my time with the New England aesthetes.

We soon became fast friends. I discovered that we shared a love of the outdoors, an affinity for libertarian-Republican politics, a love of fine wine and good fellowship, an appreciation for life in San Diego (where he and I had both lived), and a commitment to going the extra mile to build the OCU School of Law. The fact that Bob was utterly devoted to the family that he and his beloved Darlene were raising, while I was a then-enthusiastic bachelor, somehow brought us closer together rather than driving us further apart.

Bob was one of my closest mentors, though he mentored me without realizing it and would have no doubt recoiled from the word. Bob’s primary academic interests were in teaching and administrative leadership, but he recognized in me what he thought to be an undeveloped talent for writing. Though he didn’t do as much of it as is fashionable today, writing was a pursuit that he genuinely respected. He tagged me with the "Bill Walton of OCU" moniker, he said, in light of my care-free lifestyle, my physical size, and what he thought was unlimited talent (in my case, for writing, not basketball). I could actualize that talent, he said, if only I’d apply myself a bit more. So with his occasional good-natured goading, I took up writing (an endeavor rarely pursued here in the 1970s), and my first article was published by the Harvard Journal of International Law. Bob, I owe that one to you.

Bob Lyman stories abound within the folklore of OCU. How he took over as Interim Dean during the Law School’s darkest days in the...
late-1970s, and how he helped steer us through the rocky shoals. How he physically saved the Law School from collapsing by showing up, on call, in the middle of one freezing winter night to break a broken-pipe-caused ice jam on top of the Law School’s World War II barracks (its home until 1981), when the ice threatened to bring down the roof. How his supportive mentorship and shared experiences helped train a generation of Oklahoma lawyers in the law of evidence, courtroom practice, and more.

But to me, Bob (and Darlene) will always be best remembered as friends. Bob was the guy into whose office I could always pop for some good conversation and (though I’ve long-since quit) a smoke. Bob was one of the few colleagues on whose faculty governance instincts I could always rely. Many were the times when we productively did faculty hiring together. And Bob and Darlene were two friends whose company my wife Ju-Chuan and I always enjoyed, at gatherings at our house, their house, or anywhere else. We’ll miss you, Bob. Godspeed.