

Addendum

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WILLIAM H. MILLS: THIS IS HOW IT'S DONE

Passing on a little bit of himself to a new admittee keeps the practice of law a profession

Intimidated by a new profession, barely two months after passing the bar exam, I cowered in my office at **Redden, Mills & Clark**, hoping no one would notice me. Then, **Bill Mills** appeared at my door with a file in his hand.

Tall, with broad shoulders and a quiet demeanor, he had a keen intellect and he'd practiced law as long as I had been alive. I wasn't sure what to expect.

"Here." He tossed the file on my desk. "Go to court. You can't win unless they fumble. Make them fumble."

It was a district court case, a bank suing to collect a credit card bill. It was a green lawyer's first try. You should have seen his smile when I won.

Not long after that, he showed up again.

"Are you a probate lawyer?"

"I'm not much of any kind of lawyer," I replied.

He tossed another file on my desk.

"Go to probate court. You're a probate lawyer."

My first federal trial was also my first jury trial. I had hoped no one would see my bungling effort, but he slipped in unannounced to watch. I was sure I was on the way out, but he tossed another file on my desk.

"Draft an answer."

I used one from another firm as a pattern. He scowled at me as he read my first effort.

"This kind of thing is why they made Rule 11 sanctions."

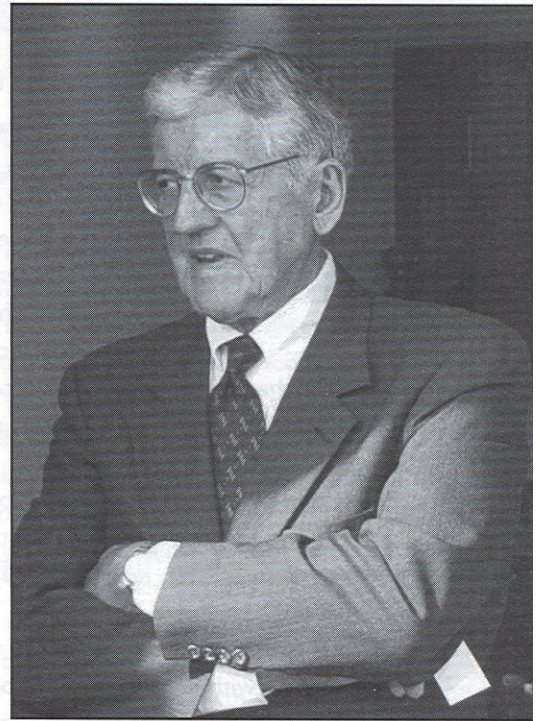
After my second try, we sat in my office and parsed my draft line by line.

In the years we practiced together, he taught me there

is no shortcut to hard, disciplined work, and no substitute for reasoned, concise draftsmanship backed by careful, exhaustive research. I learned from him that every complaint, motion, petition and demand has but two possible answers: Either the benign, "Life is not without risk," or the more direct, "Go to hell." The art of practicing law, he suggested, was knowing which answer to give and how to say it.

Transforming a law school graduate into a practicing attorney, one who understands the profession as an art, isn't a comfortable process. It can't be accomplished by mere instruction alone. Someone has to hand you a file and point you toward the courthouse; allow you to make a mistake, but not tragically; critique your work without judging you. It requires a personal investment, an investment of one life in another. Bill Mills didn't just give me a file, or litigation advice, or help with pleadings. He gave me himself.

—Joseph H. Hilley, *Fairhope*



William H. Mills, attorney, mentor, friend