



Robert Wellington Beck

July 3, 1943 - July 9, 2011

Bloomington Attorney Robert Wellington Beck, defender of the public, prosecutor of criminals, died at his home on July 9, 2011. He was 68. The cause of death was a failing body brought on by an active life, coupled with his choice of lineage--or nature and nurture, as Beck often said.

Bob worked for the Monroe County legal system for most of his professional life. Initially working in the public defenders' office, he later worked for a succession of five Monroe County prosecutors, and liked to say he had been fired by each of them.

The reality was that he had left each time of his own volition, often with notable abruptness. It is said by many that during his working life, Bob managed to infuriate every single member of the Monroe County legal community at least once, and yet he remained widely respected as a brilliant mind and a tireless proponent of an effective legal system.

Bob was born in Cambridge, Massachusetts to Carl and Helen Beck. His father was finishing his academic work there towards ultimate employment as a professor of geology at Indiana University. Bob's own academic career included Bloomington University High School (1961), University of New Mexico

(B.A, 1970), and Indiana University School of Law (J.D, 1973). These degrees defined his formal academic education, but his persistent curiosity about all things led to a lifetime of reading, and Bob was expertly informed in subjects as widely varied as cosmology and sprint car racing, religious history and mystery writing. Entering into a discussion or argument with Mr. Beck led many to quickly realize that he was likely the smartest person in the house, yet he seemed unaffected and uncaring of this fact.

Bob Beck possessed a large body, and a bigger brain, but he was the first to admit that he was a prime example of the imperfectability of man. Famously private, Bob could be by turns stubborn, irascible, reclusive, and more than slightly cranky. More notably, however, he was charming and caring and funny, and a wonderful dinner and drinking companion. He enjoyed conversation with a wealth of widely disparate friends, but longtime acquaintances knew the conversation could pause at times, an imperceptible shift bringing a lingering silence, until the welcome snort of Bob's laughter signaled a return to the story and the friendship.

Bob was a mentor to a generation of young Bloomington lawyers who gravitated to him for his knowledge and easy accessibility that was always tempered with humor.

His legal expertise and his courtroom demeanor were legend, and those working with him invariably recalled his repeated, basic admonition for their profession--"Do the right thing."

Another side surfaced often, however, and one local attorney recalled his first day working with Bob at the public defenders' office, when in a characteristic display of spontaneity, Beck climbed through an open window of the prosecutors' office, clambered onto a desk, and proclaimed to all, "I've got bargaining position," which led to prosecutors climbing atop nearby objects, seeking higher ground. The young attorney following Mr. Beck was left pondering the nature of his chosen profession.

Bob's liberal political views were forged by civil rights freedom marches during the 1960's, and by a tour in the army during the war in Vietnam. He had no patience with bigotry of any kind, or with the current spate of dogmatic conservatives--viewing them as uninformed and selfish, and the likely cause of the downfall of civilization as he knew it. When critiquing the current political situation he would offer succinct analysis, and then, sighing and ponderously shaking his head, would declare-- "It's hopeless."

A sportsman and adventurer as well as an intellectual, Bob played high school football at University High in Bloomington, and was a member of the IU rugby club in college, earning the sobriquet "Rhino" for his direct and indelicate style of play. At various times he rode his Vespa scooter from Santa Fe to Bloomington, and motorcycled and bicycled cross-country. In later life he calmed to sailing and kayaking, annually escaping to ocean kayak voyages in the Pacific San Juan Islands with a group of

similarly crazed friends. Their survival was always in doubt, as their tide-reading abilities and physical conditioning appeared suspect.

Bob was found by friends at his home, after he had failed to appear punctually for a meal, an occurrence so rare that the worst was immediately feared by his dinner dates. Friends are recalling Bob's oft-repeated phrase as he departed--

"I'm dumping you guys." One of a kind, the cherished memory of his friendship remains.

A Memorial Service will be held Thursday, July 28, from 5-7pm, in the Grand Hall of the Neal-Marshall Black Culture Center on the IU campus, 275 N. Jordan, Bloomington, Indiana.

Allen Funeral Home is handling arrangements. Friends can send condolences to www.allenfuneralhome.org

Tribute Wall

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“ I was so very sorry to hear of Bob's death. I live far away now, in Orange County, California, and I was just informed of his death today, Aug. 18, by our IU Law School classmate, Alice Craft.

I had not seen Bob in many years although I do occasionally make it back to Bloomington for several days in the Fall. But i remember him so well; he was a wonderful one-of-a-kind. As one of the first "older" students (age 39) at the Law School, when the Law School in 1970 had just begun to take in other than the usual applicants, I felt somewhat nervous and ill-at-ease, wondering how i could fit in. Bob was one of the people who made me feel welcome via his gruff kindness and ironic sense of humor which I truly appreciated. And after graduation when I took a job with the U.S. Department of Interior's Office of Surface Mining regulating the coal industry, Bob remarked: "Hey, what do WE know about coal mining." He meant to gather me in as one of the gang -- and he always treated me that way. And I always appreciated it. I am sad today. Many condolences to the family.

Myra (Myke) Spicker - October 26, 2015 at 04:24 PM

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“ Bob Beck was my favorite person. He was brilliant to a degree I could never comprehend and simultaneously able to connect with me on my own personal level, while never patronizing or insulting me. He was the first person I've ever met who could relate to my cynical views of humanity while inspiring me with his own negativity, if that makes any sense. I miss him affirming that "It's all completely hopeless" (to the tune of "Let It Snow") while wandering about, trying to remember what he was doing in my section of the office. Chances are he was simply stopping by to get some coffee before proceeding to "do what's right" for the next fire that needed snuffing. I'm very fortunate to have stumbled into a position that crossed his path, as he's one of a very few number of people who have had a major impact on my life. Flying Spaghetti Monster bless ya, Beck.

Rob Shollenberger - October 26, 2015 at 04:24 PM

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“ Thinking about Bob makes me either think or smile. Mostly smile. I remember Bob asking me to sew some padding into his riding shorts, which I did. But as an extra I embroidered his name in red just about butt high so everyone would know who was on the bike in front of them. When he was running for judge, I asked him how he was. He answered, "Does this suit make me look fat?" So many smiles.

I hope the wonderful memories of Bob provide strength and comfort for his family and friends in the days ahead.

Sue Haverstock - October 26, 2015 at 04:24 PM

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“ *I suppose boys will be boys and men will be men but...Bob did manage both, at the same time, quite nicely. His humor, toughness, wisdom and integrity were signature of his work applications. I am sorry for his passing and hope his friends and colleagues find condolence in joyful memories.*

nancy rinehart - October 26, 2015 at 04:24 PM