MEMORIES OF WILL HUMPHREYS

I only taught with Will one year, the third year I was here (1974-75). When I approached him with the idea for On Knowing, he was enthusiastic, because epistemology was one of his specialties. It turned out to be a terrible program in some ways--it was Will and me with Jack Webb and Carol Olexa, two almost-forgotten names from the Evergreen past. Intellectually, it was often Will and me, the rational, scientific types, against Jack and Carol, since she, especially, was given to mysticism and humbug. Also, that year Jack's wife was dying of a brain tumor, my marriage was breaking up, and Carol was being haunted by someone who might have been trying to kill her and who might have been (but probably wasn't) Ted Bundy. (It was the year that all those young women on local campuses were disappearing.) That year, I think Will was in better shape personally than the rest of us.

The only really good thing about that year, for me, was working with Will. We talked a lot of philosophy that year, and I learned a great deal from him as we worked our way through the history of epistemology, philosophical analysis, and logic. I've forgotten now just how we came to use Hanson's Perception and Discovery, the book that Will edited after Hanson's death, but it was a central book in the program for a while. I remember holding it up in front of a program meeting one day and saying, "This is a wonderful book," and Will, behind me, trying to pull his shirt over his face in mock embarrassment. But it is a wonderful book, and it is one of the things for which we must all be most grateful to Will; I've used it in several programs since, and I'm always delighted with it. It is basically Hanson, of course, but it is also Will. (He was delightedly proud of having invented the chapter title "Hypotheses Facta Fingunt.") Will's philosophical integrity also became obvious when we were discussing the book and someone asked Will if he believed in its ideas. He said, "No," and explained that he wasn't convinced that one's perception of the world can really be changed significantly by preconceptions, experience, or language. Nevertheless, as an editor he did he job, finishing the book as Hanson would have finished it. I cherish it.

One of the things that made Will so interesting was his varied experiences; there always seemed to be something from those past experiences that he could bring into his teaching. One day we were talking about speed reading and comprehension, and he recalled his years as an editor, when he would be the editor in charge during the night. The pressmen would come to him with proofs to get his final approval before a press run, and he said he acquired the ability to run his eyes down a column and take the whole thing in in a single scan. But, he said, when he applied this ability to other reading, especially fiction, he found that he didn't like it--he didn't enjoy the reading, and he had to go back his more usual ways.

Several years ago, when I started to write down some of my thoughts about the philosophy of biology, Will became a valued critic. He read through my manuscript, several chapters, carefully and with the eyes of a friendly critic, and he gave me important advice and insights. That manuscript is still in limbo, and is likely to remain in limbo for a few years more, but it is much improved because of Will's criticism.

I also encountered Will from time to time as we participated in local theatre productions, he in the orchestra and me behind the scenes building sets. At first, I was at these productions primarily because my daughter Erica, then in her teens, got into most of the local musical theatre productions

in the chorus or in small parts. I remember when she was in Guys and Dolls, playing one of the mission girls, and Will was in the orchestra; I forget just how we got into this conversation, but at one point I said to Will, "I don't know if I can trust you musician types--you just better stay away from my daughter," and Will said, "Hey, you think I'd fool around with a mission doll?"

I had an underlying feeling of sadness for Will, because his life had been so tough, yet he was always very Stoic and never seemed to feel sorry for himself. He believed in doing what had to be done, and he did it. The year we were teaching together, Jack Webb calmly announced one day that he wasn't going to be coming to faculty seminars any more, and Will just as calmly got up and walked out. He was mad as hell, and he didn't come back. As coordinator, I went to talk to him, and it was clear that he simply had no patience with people who couldn't live up to their obligations, regardless of excuses. He said that when was much younger he had been playing in a band and one day he told the leader that he had to miss some sessions, for some reason. The leader said, "You want to get paid?" and Will said, "Yes." "Then you better show up." Will always did show up, and he had high standards for himself and others. A couple of years later, when Will was an Academic Dean and Jack was leaving the College, Will shook his head and commented on Jack's behavior--"Just shameful!" He had no patience with excuses and goofing off. The only time I ever saw him give in to a little self-pity, just briefly, was when he was in the hospital, I think at the time he developed diabetes. Erica and I went to visit him one day. We chatted about various things, and for just a minute he became very sad and talked about how hard it was to be sick and to have to endure so much. It was the only time I ever saw a hint of feeling that life might sometimes be too hard to bear. Every other time we talked, he was cheerful and even enthusiastic; even at the beginning of this quarter, when he came back from leave, he was in good spirits. He was meeting some students in the Faculty-Staff Lounge, and he told me, with his typical enthusiasm, about the work he had started to do while on leave.

There is something terribly wrong with the structure of the world when someone so bright, so decent, so capable, has to endure so much. Well, he won't have to endure any more. But, oh god, I'll miss him.

Burt Guttman