

# THE JACKSON LEGACY IN ACTION

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## Farewell to President Emeritus of the Foundation Bill Van Ness

The Jackson Foundation and the extended Jackson family recently lost its founder and rock with the passing of Bill Van Ness. Bill served as the Foundation's President of the Board for 20 years. But Bill made his mark upon this world in many ways. As a devoted family man, Bill and Pat, his wife of 58 years, had four children, who invariably could be found visiting him at his cabin on the Olympic Peninsula along with their broods of kids. And he founded a successful law firm, Van Ness Feldman, which continues on two coasts doing important, policy-relevant law.

I always found the scene a bit incongruous when I visited Bill at his beach cabin—the brilliant lawyer, one of the sharpest legal minds, the staffer who worked with Senator Jackson to draft the ground-breaking National Environmental Policy Act—in his work overalls, bossing around the grandchildren as they dug for clams or dragged their little wooden boat across the grass. In that setting, Bill was relaxed, focused on being a good host, getting his guests a beer or a coke, showing off his freshly varnished teak tables, offering clams or salmon fresh from Puget Sound.

But that was Bill—a country boy, who grew up in Montana and Washington State and raised himself into a professional career by his bootstraps and with a mind like a steel trap. University of Washington Law School led him to work for Senator Jackson, a partnership that lasted Jackson's life time, even after Bill left to found his own law firm with his close colleague, Howard Feldman.

I came to know Bill as my boss and mentor and as a father figure. Bill was tough—schooled before the days of giving prizes



and praise no matter what you did – but if you performed, you knew it. One “you did good” from him meant the world. He could be gruff but you knew he had heart—he couldn't hide it.

Bill taught me how to write and edit (if only from reading his scrawled notes in the margin), how to anticipate questions from



Bill in his classic mode – grilling salmon at a Scoop's Troops event



Bill with Senator Jackson

readers and audiences (“never ask a question you don’t know the answer to”), how to provide sufficient background to set the stage for an argument (preferably a fat briefing book of memos and research), how to be political and ensure that you had your ducks in a row before a big, important meeting. He also taught me by example about integrity. Rigorous in everything he did, he never cut corners. It was a key lesson.

Because he was dedicated to Scoop Jackson and all that he stood for, Bill couched much of his world view in Jackson’s values: “good judgment” was the ultimate compliment he could pay you. He valued balanced reporting, scholarship, and



A look backward - over 20 years ago, Lara and Bill



Bill and his law partner and friend, Howard Feldman

loyalty. He was a big picture thinker—one of his law partners once said that Bill might have ten ideas at once and one of them would be brilliant – yet he sweated the details too.

Bill dedicated himself to the Jackson Foundation in ways large and small, taking on the role of president as more of a day-to-day task, calling me 5-6 times a day with an idea, an edit, or to tell me to fax him something. He loved that fax machine. As the ultimate staffer, he taught me how to staff. I could imagine how well he had staffed Senator Jackson in the way that he modeled being prepared, being thorough, vetting everything, thinking ahead. After Jackson’s death he staffed Helen Jackson, Scoop’s widow, by conceiving of and creating the Jackson Foundation to carry on Scoop’s work as well as we could. The man behind the scenes, Bill wanted the Foundation to succeed and happily gave the credit to others for those successes.

We will miss Bill, for his contributions to the Jackson Foundation and to the Jackson legacy. And we will miss his close attention to what matters most in life: family, loyalty, friends, colleagues, and good values.

You did good, Bill.

Lara Iglitzin, Executive Director



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