



A Tribute to the late William "Z" Zeltonoga California and St. Edmund Hall 1962

Born: May 13, 1941

Died: December 4, 2011

By: Senator Larry Pressler (Ret.) St Edmund Hall 1964

William "Z" Zeltonoga was one of the most fascinating wonderful people I have ever known. When I matriculated at St Edmund Hall at Oxford in 1964 he was already a "larger-than-life" personality throughout Oxford University.

"Z" died of cancer on December 4, 2011. "Z" and I had four overlapping experiences. The first at St. Edmund Hall at Oxford as fellow Rhodes Scholars; the second as soldiers in the U.S. Army in Vietnam; the third at Harvard Law School; and finally as lawyers and political compatriots.

"Z" was a most unusual Rhodes Scholar (Matriculation 1962) in that he received three "blues" at Oxford for boxing. Bill was the Captain of the Oxford Boxing Team in 1965, the first American to be so honored. "Z" was a member of the exclusive "Vincent's", an elite sporting's club made up primarily of Oxford blues.

The three "blues" Bill received in boxing is the Oxford analogue to an American varsity letter and was awarded for selection to represent Oxford against Cambridge in the annual boxing match.

"Z" had previously been a four-year letterman on the wrestling team at the University of California Los Angeles (UCLA). He had worked his way through UCLA and had also supported his mother and his brother. He was an example of a state university Rhodes Scholar without very much money – and that cemented my identification with him.

His dear friend Roland Oliver of St. Edmund Hall (Matriculation date 1962) recently sent me an email describing Bill's colorful boxing career at Oxford. Roland wrote as follows, "Bill took up boxing when he came to Oxford and, in each of his three years, represented the university in its annual match with Cambridge, fighting the same opponent each time. The first year he lost on a cut eye and Oxford also lost. The second year, he pursued his opponent with relentless aggression all-round the ring and won convincingly on points. Oxford won. In his final year, he was captain and desperate to lead his team to victory. Realizing that his bout was key to the outcome, he stormed after the Cambridge man for every second of the three rounds . . . and lost . . . narrowly on points. Bill, of course, accepted his and Oxford's defeat in sportsmanlike fashion, but could not understand why similar tactics to the previous years had not led to a win. He idly debated, if only in theory, whether a submission to the Supreme Court would bring any redress until I bravely pointed out that, despite his undoubted attacking zeal, he had consistently omitted to actually hit his opponent. Well, they say Oxford is the home of lost causes."

His roommate Canadian Rhodes Scholar Bill Megill at St. Edmund Hall (Matriculation date 1962) was kind enough to send me an email describing Bill's boxing career at Oxford as follows, "Z's real spirit, though, was best demonstrated when he decided that he wanted to represent the university in some sport or another. He was a wrestler, as I recall, but didn't want to do the same thing in Oxford as he had done in the States, so he decided to take up boxing. He tried out for the team, was

strong enough to get on, and proved he could take a punch as well as give them out. However, the team wanted him to box at a weight that was about a stone less than he normally weighed, and about twenty pounds less than he weighed after a couple of months on our study routine. He only had a month to lose the weight, and he didn't want to lose strength with it, so there was no question of starvation dieting. His solution was to get a couple of boxes of green garbage bags, and when he went out for his daily run he would cut the appropriate holes in the garbage bags and go for five miles or so. It wasn't pretty, it wasn't even sensible in my book, but it worked. I reckon it worked only because once Z had decided to do something, he just kept at it until it was done. He made the weight, but I seem to remember that he lost the fight at Cambridge to a better boxer. That's the kind of spirit I remember, and we could certainly use more of it."

Other activities that Bill participated in Oxford were the Experimental Theatre Club, Essay Society, Poetry Club, and the Oxford Union. Long time St. Edmund Hall Don John Dunbabin sent me a wonderful statement upon hearing of Bill Zeltanoga's death. It reminded me that Bill was also famous as a gourmet cook at Oxford and he organized a dinning club called Amici Aulae Santci Edmundi. Professor Dunbabin, now retired from St. Edmund Hall, sent me the following:

"Dear Larry -- I was sorry to hear of Bill Zeltanoga's death. As you say, he was a larger-than-life figure, and I remember him well. Herewith one of the memories: Towards the end of my first year as Politics tutor at St. Edmund Hall, Bill (and a number of my other pupils) kindly invited my wife and myself to dinner at his flat. We went expecting a pleasant conversational, but not culinary, time. The first course turned out to be rather tasty, and we ate a lot, believing it was the whole meal. To our surprise, it was then followed by a main dish - remarkably good, with a creative use of honey. For, Bill said, he had learnt to cook, obviously very well, from his mother. We went home feeling distinctly full. But nearly fifty years later we still remember the evening with much pleasure."

Upon graduating from Oxford in P.P.E., "Z" went to Harvard Law School and took the California Bar in 1968, "Z" became associated with the firm of Wyman, Bautzer where he got his feet wet in litigation, corporate law and other areas.

Taking a two-year leave of absence during 1969 and 1970, "Z" fulfilled his military commitment as an armor officer with the U.S. Army. I shall always recall the conversation I had with Bill just before he went to Vietnam with the U.S. Army. In those days our draft laws were so loosely constructed that a skilled lawyer could have gotten himself assigned to the Pentagon and totally avoided being drafted to Vietnam. Bill felt that since his brother was already in Vietnam and that if he didn't go someone poorer than he would have to go, that he would just "bite the bullet" and go to Vietnam. Bill's concern that he did not force someone less fortunate to go in his place reflected his great character.

"Z" spent the year of 1970 in the Republic of Vietnam. During the first quarter he was a "New Life Development" officer in the Go Cong Province in the Mekong Delta. His activities included economic and refugee relief, education advising, local construction and self-development and defense.

At the end of his tour, Bill's awards included the American bronze Star and Joint Staff Commendation Medal and the Vietnamese Rural Development Medal. Upon mustering out the army he returned to the Wyman firm where he remained until the middle of 1972 when he started his own practice in Beverly Hills.

As a general practitioner, Bill's professional activities include litigation, corporate, probate, family law, business and tax, personal injury, and immigration matters."

His law and business partner Richard Ross said, "Having worked many cases with Z, it is clear to me that he was as good a lawyer as one can be, but more than that, he was also a counselor. His range of advice exceeded that of just winning a lawsuit. His decency was even greater. Often he provided *pro bono* services and would devote time to concerns or to friends, even if not compensated. What made him unique in his profession was that his integrity was never compromised by his advocacy, however zealous it might be."

Bill served on the Selection Committee of the California Rhodes Scholars Committee twice.

Later in his career his professional colleague and good friend Gary Storer summed up "Z" with this quote, "The man touched many lives and what was frequently said is that Bill was always there if you needed him."

"Z" was first a philosopher, and he helped me so much with our at least twice a year in-depth talks about the meaning of life and I will miss him so much.

I had the privilege of seeing "Z" at least twice a year throughout his life. He contributed to every political campaign I entered and helped me with Senate floor speeches on three or four occasions. He was a dear friend. Cecil Rhodes and Oxford should be so proud of him.

"Z" we miss you so.