



The Cramdown

Newsletter for the Tampa Bay Bankruptcy Association

Editor-in-Chief, Angelina Lim

Johnson, Pope, Bokor, Ruppel & Burns, LLP

Special Edition
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In Memoriam

Judge

Michael G. Williamson

February 22, 1951 - November 3, 2022



President's Message

In this special issue of The Cramdown, we will remember and celebrate the life and legacy of Judge Michael G. Williamson. The news of his passing was both stunning and heartbreaking. For more than two decades, Judge Williamson served as a Bankruptcy Judge in the Middle District of Florida and as its Chief Judge from 2015 to 2019. As a bankruptcy practitioner and as a judge, he distinguished himself as an expert in both the law and the business of law.

During his career, Judge Williamson was responsible for some of the most impactful contributions to our legal community, including the View from the Bench seminar and the ruthlessly-efficient 3-3-3 Rule (and, in rare cases, the 10-10-10 Rule!). He was a huge presence in this bar organization and made a real difference in the lives of those impacted by his cases. He was a gifted lawyer and jurist and inspired all of us to be better. While always

congenial and respectful to those who appeared before him, he also asked the tough questions and suffered no fools. He generously shared his expertise with us and with developing commercial and insolvency law in countries redeveloping their economic infrastructure. Bankruptcy law, and those who practice it, are all the better for his enduring commitment.

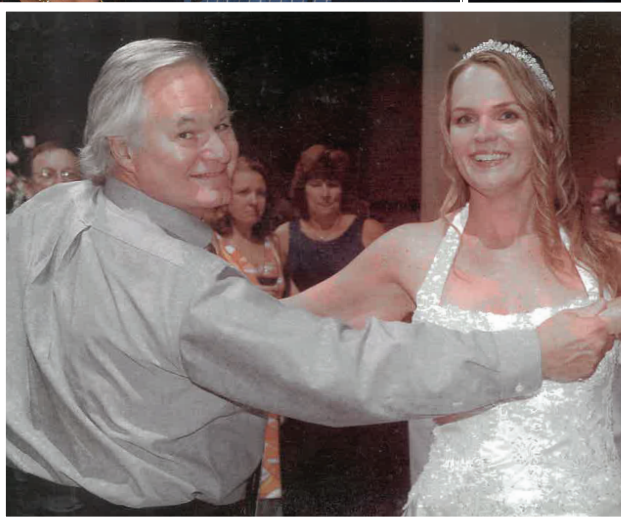
Judge Williamson also possessed a bit of rock-star swagger. He had a fondness for cigars, motorcycles, sailing, cocktail parties, and for his best girl, his wife, Linda, who he often referred to as the love of his life. Judge Williamson will be missed and fondly remembered by all the members of the Tampa Bay Bankruptcy Bar Association and it is our honor to dedicate this issue of The Cramdown to his memory.

- Barbara Hart

On behalf of the Williamson and Cappelli families, we thank you for the outpouring of support we have received as we grieve our loss.

We appreciate everyone who was able to attend the Celebration of Life – and we know many of you traveled from afar to be with us on that day - or to view it online. We have found comfort in the many beautiful notes and cards we have received as well. Mike had great affection for the bankruptcy community locally, state-wide, throughout the country, and internationally, and we can certainly see that affection was returned. We thank all of you for your kindness during this difficult time.

- Linda Williamson



Memories of

Judge

Michael G. Williamson





Things Mike Loved

1. His family.
2. His Tilley hat.
3. Surfing and lifeguarding in Melbourne Beach.
4. Dark chocolate and ice cream.
5. Boating/sailing. His favorite sailing trip was to charter a sailboat in the BVI. Mike was the captain.
6. Reading, learning, and teaching.
7. Organization. Spreadsheets. To-Do Lists. Packing guides. Indexed binders.
8. Doing dishes because it reminded him of when he was young. He and his mother did dishes together, and that was their bonding time.
9. Reading about WWII and watching WWII series in color. He was an avid World War II history buff.
10. Favorite movie: "Patton."
11. Scuba diving in caves as a high school student.
12. Being a swim instructor at Duke. Knowing how to swim was a requirement to graduate from Duke.
13. Dinner. No matter what was served, after dinner he always said, "good dinner, honey."
14. Music of all types, from Bocelli to Billie Eilish. He had 663 songs on his Spotify playlist. And he loved to watch American Idol!



Mike's Favorite Quotes

1. Winston Churchill: "Success is the ability to go from one failure to another with no loss of enthusiasm."
2. "Even a broken watch is right twice a day."
3. J. Paul Getty: "If you owe the bank \$100, that is your problem. If you owe the bank \$100 million, that is the bank's problem."
4. Al Capone: "You can get much further with a kind word and a gun than with a kind word alone."
5. "Gossip and lies takes the elevator, and truth takes the stairs."
6. Publilius Syrus: "Anyone can hold the helm when the sea is calm."
7. Mark Twain: "Never argue with stupid people. They will drag you down to their level and beat you with experience."
8. Gene Wilder: "I want to thank you from the heart of my bottom."
9. "Sometimes you're the windshield and sometimes you're the bug."
10. Bill Levens, state court judge: "I am the referee, not the coach."
11. "I was born in the morning, but not this morning."
12. Alexander Hamilton: "The first duty of society is justice."
13. John Adams, Boston Massacre Trials (in defense of the British soldiers): "Facts are stubborn things and whatever may be our wishes, our inclinations, or dictates of our passions, they cannot alter the state of the facts or evidence."
14. Jimmy Dean: "I can't change the direction of the wind. But I can adjust my sails to always reach my destinations."



Eulogy Of Judge Michael G. Williamson

By: Paul Steven Singerman¹

I am Paul Singerman. I have had the distinct honor of knowing Mike Williamson for nearly my entire legal career. I met Mike in 1984 as a second-year lawyer in connection with the business law section of the Florida Bar. Over the years, we served together in the business law section, we worked together on many matters, and I worked with Mike for over 15 years on the View from the Bench program in which Mike deservedly took great pride.

After Mike became Judge Williamson, I had the pleasure of appearing before him many times, and I can say that I had the pleasure of appearing before Mike - even though - he ruled against me in one of the most challenging cases of his judicial career in which he issued 29 published opinions and countless unpublished opinions, including one which resulted in our firm not being involved in the case in which the lawyers have been paid millions and millions of dollars!

Most importantly, I treasured my friendship with Mike.

I am honored to be able to share a few thoughts and memories and lessons I have learned from Mike and ways in which Mike has and forever will continue to inspire me.

Like each of you, I wish we were not here together today to celebrate Mike's life. Instead, I wish we were gathered together to celebrate life with Mike.

I confess that Judge Williamson's "3-3-3 rule" that Russ described is haunting me. It has been since Linda asked if I would offer remarks today. Of course, I knew of the rule and I had read it many times, and I confess that I violated the rule more often than I observed it, but I will endeavor to abide by the message of the rule and keep this short.

Let's get right to this 3-3-3 rule! Why did Mike formulate it? I think many lawyers who appeared before him thought that the goal of the 3-3-3 rule limiting lawyers to 3 pages, 3 cases and 3 minutes was to make ruling on motions easier for him and his colleagues on the bench. That would be a perfectly reasonable explanation.

But, upon reflection and viewing this rule in the context of Mike's life, I think there is a different explanation for his formulation of the rule.

I think Mike may have been using this pithy rule as a teaching point with much broader application than routine motions in a case.

I think the rule is encouraging us to be thoughtful in all we do: to understand our mission in a disciplined way, and to organize our thoughts and present them cogently and efficiently: to do the hard work of knowing the facts, thoughtfully surveying the law and

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¹ Eulogy by Mr. Singerman, presented at Judge Williamson's Celebration of Life, November 20, 2022 at the Tampa Yacht & Country Club and published with Mr. Singerman's permission.



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plainly making our points. Perhaps the real goal of the 3-3-3 rule was not to make it easier for Mike, but instead to make us better lawyers and advocates. The rule forced lawyers to think and prepare in advance and was designed to make us better.

And when I think about Mike, this notion of being better and making things better powerfully comes to mind.

By his actions, not just words, Mike tried to make all he touched in his professional life better. Always.

As a lawyer, he set a high bar for his oral advocacy, his pleadings and his negotiation skills -- and in the way he interacted with co-advisors and counter-parties. He mastered disagreeing without being disagreeable, and almost always he made at least one new friend in each case or matter. He did so purposefully and intentionally.

As a judge, he was driven by his intellectual curiosity and his desire to get it right.

Before Mike took the bench, he did not have much experience in consumer bankruptcy issues. When I asked him early on in his judgeship how in the world he was spending so much of his time on consumer issues, he was incredulous at my question. He said in response that in his view, many of the legal issues presented in the consumer cases were every bit as intellectually challenging as the issues presented in chapter 11 cases -- and that very often they had a greater and more immediate impact on people's lives. I will never forget that conversation and how embarrassed I was for the way in which I asked the question. And to be sure, Mike cared a great deal for the honest, less fortunate debtors who came before him, and he treated them all with great respect.

Mike's consistent pattern of trying to make things better was not limited to bankruptcy law. For nearly 40 years, Mike was a driving force in the Business Law Section of the Florida Bar and he contributed significantly to the development and improvement of commercial laws in a wide variety of subjects.

Russ spoke about the View from the Bench program that Mike created and guided for 38 years. The View from the Bench program is among Mike's greatest contributions to bar. It was the single most popular and profitable CLE program produced by the Business Law Section for decades. The funds generated from that program financed a great deal of the important work the Section has done. Mike, with the extraordinary assistance of Mary Maddox during her time working with him, spent countless hours year after year making the View from the Bench so special. It combined great educational content in a lively and entertaining format and showcased collegiality and good humor among the judges and between judges and bankruptcy lawyers that make the practice of bankruptcy law so very special in this state. Many jurisdictions throughout the country have flattered Mike by copying the View from the Bench model. I know it will continue to bring judges and lawyers together for a very long time, and I expect that each and every year those involved in the program will pay tribute to Mike. In fact, Judge McEwen shared with me that shortly before Mike passed, she told him that our steering committee for the program voted unanimously to re-name the program the Michael G. Williamson Memorial View from the Bench to honor him, and that he reacted to that news with a big smile.

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And his efforts to make better bankruptcy and commercial laws were not limited to Florida or the United States. Mike's efforts to help developing nations craft better commercial laws are truly legendary.

And while doing all of this, Mike also gave selflessly of his time and energy teaching other lawyers and judges with over 380 presentations throughout the country over his career and he authored scores of articles on a variety of subjects in addition to his Treatise on Evidence.

As a lawyer, Mike was among a small group of highly-respected bankruptcy lawyers in Florida who helped to put Florida on the map as a venue for large and complex chapter 11 cases. He helped to show "real lawyers" from New York and other money center markets, that bankruptcy lawyers in Florida were not unsophisticated slackers and beach bums. And just 2 years into his judicial career, he deployed his uncanny sense of humor—which he used masterfully as both a lawyer and a judge to diffuse tension—to instruct out of state lawyers regarding how Florida bankruptcy judges wish to be treated.

In his 2002 article entitled "10 bankruptcy practice pointers for out-of-town counsel," he offered the following suggestions to visiting lawyers:

One: "Tell us how you do it in your jurisdiction. Remember that our court is in a sleepy provincial city. Keep in mind that we rarely deal with complicated commercial cases. Point out that while you do not have much experience appearing in our jurisdiction, you do have considerable experience in moving cases along in the S.D. of N.Y. and Delaware. Any helpful suggestions on how we might run our courts, particularly from experienced out-of-town-counsel, are always appreciated.

And another: "Don't worry about being on time. Like the region in which we live, our court is a casual, friendly place. If you are a few minutes late, we have plenty of other things to do."

And my favorite from the article, "Be casual in the courtroom. This applies to clients as well. For example, we understand that out-of-state clients like to combine a golf outing with a trip to our jurisdiction. We also understand that business attire is simply not realistic on the fairway. Most importantly, while we like to keep things casual and friendly to our out-of-town guests, we do have one rule we never compromise. Remember it well: no shirt, no shoes, no justice!"

Mike's sense of humor fit wonderfully with his slightly mischievous smile and his utterly disarming and joyful laugh. I will miss them both.

And no tribute to Mike would be complete without a reflection on how much he enjoyed life. Think of the images of Mike on his Harley in his motorcycle days, or driving his BMW or his red Tesla, or sailing somewhere in the world or water skiing or snow skiing. And don't we all smile thinking of Mike enjoying a great meal and a glass or two of wine? Mike lived life with gusto; Mike lived large.

Mike Williamson was very often the smartest guy in the room, and he never flaunted it.

I was the beneficiary of Mike's wisdom and advice in my personal and professional life. Mike offered Marte and me guidance in parenting challenges we faced with our daughters when they were young, and he gave us hope. I sought Mike's advice when I was deciding whether to leave a large international law firm and

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cast my lot with a then small firm with no bankruptcy practice. He listened carefully and asked thoughtful questions and he encouraged me. And after I moved, we had immensely helpful discussions about law firm management. I am forever indebted to Mike for taking the time to speak with me and for all he taught me and the example he set for me in all he did.

I am Jewish. In the Jewish faith when reflecting on the loss of a friend or loved one, we commonly say “may her or his memory be a blessing.” To be sure, my and our memories of Mike will be a blessing.

But for those of us touched or helped or inspired by Mike, I hope and pray that we take Mike’s memory as more than a blessing. I hope and pray that we take Mike’s memory and the example he set by the way he lived his life and honor him by striving to do better at whatever it is that we do, whether it is practicing law, serving as a judge, or endeavors unrelated to the law. And Mike’s memory would be so much more than a blessing if we all committed to trying to make a friend in all of our encounters with others while at the same time zealously and honestly and ethically doing our jobs—whatever they may be.

Finally, I offer this thought from General George S. Patton:

General Patton said: “it is foolish to mourn the men who died. Rather we should thank God that such men lived.”

I thank God for having had the opportunity to know Mike Williamson, and to have learned from him and to have had fun with him.

Thank you.



Judge Williamson



Judge Williamson and I are contemporaries and we have known each other since the early 1980's. Several years ago I had a health issue and became so exhausted I could "nod off" without much warning. I was in Judge Williamson's courtroom one day and while standing at the podium, I fell asleep. When Judge Williamson asked me a question I did not immediately respond as I was in the middle of a dream in which my father was speaking to me. Judge Williamson asked me the same question a second time, to which I responded: "Yes Dad." Needless to say Judge Williamson was astonished by my response and said: "YES DAD?" I immediately woke up and in a panic, realized what had just happened, and apologized. Judge Williamson was good natured about my "yes dad" response and accepted my apology.

The next week was the cocktail reception for the "View From the Bench." As I was getting some food, Judge Williamson entered the room and looked at me and without skipping a beat said "How are you doing, Son."

I will always remember Judge Williamson for his intelligence and for his humor.

-Larry Foyle



*Judge Michael G. Williamson
Signing Oath of Office*

As a young lawyer, I had the sincere pleasure of drawing Judge Mike as my adversary. He would try to dissuade me of my legal position and foresee what would happen to my client at the next hearing. Yes, he was right regarding the outcome. I lost those hearings and HE remained a gentleman, a "lawyers lawyer" nevertheless. I will miss his humor and kindness.

Back in 1999, we organized an Orlando based CLE program to teach evidence via a mock trial format. Michael Williamson volunteered and wrote our entire script. With his clever wit he would occasionally go "off script" to keep us on my toes, all while educating and entertaining the Orlando Bar.

-Roy Kobert

I was Judge Williamson's first law clerk. I knew instantly when I first met him during my interview that he would be a great judge. He asked very thoughtful and pointed questions about my background – much like he did in his many years on the bench. He had performed his due diligence on me before our first meeting.

When we discussed caselaw and matters on his court calendar, he quickly identified the nuances and distilled the issues that had to be resolved to make a quick decision. He was not one to waiver when he made a call. He also had a great sense of humor and constantly poked fun at me for my different New York City practice perspective.

He told me early in his judgeship that he had goals as a judge – to be chief judge, to be on the committee of the National Conference of Bankruptcy Judges, to publish, to teach and to be a mentor. He reached every single one of his goals and more. As he acknowledged to Marti Malone during her last visit with him, he had a great ride.

-Angelina Lim

Mike Williamson, A Great Man Who Did It His Way

Good afternoon, I'm Mike's friend and colleague Cathy McEwen. It is my honor to have been invited to speak about Mike, mostly as a judicial colleague, but I will overlap a bit with others. You've heard the phrase "it takes a village," and that would be true of today. It took a village to appropriately celebrate here the life of a great man such as Mike. And I thank those who contributed to this celebration as well as to my message.

My challenge today is to sum up the greatness of Mike as a judge in ten minutes, and I just can't do that [pause] — sorry, Linda, I'll try not to go too much past your limit. Just a simple reading of a list of all Mike's accomplishments and awards and firsts as either a lawyer or judge would take all of ten minutes and more, so I will commend his obit to you, the longer, online version at the funeral website — so beautifully written by his law clerk, Ed Comey.

Mike, here goes [look up].

On very few occasions, three precisely, Mike told me, in a hushed and reverent tone, "He's a great man," nodding his head toward one of these men he was singling out for that honor. I should have responded back to Mike, "well, you are a great man yourself, you know." I didn't say it then then, but I'm gonna do it now [look up and point].

Mike Williamson is a great man — because he did it his way, and by doing so he got what he aimed for or where he wanted to go pretty much 100 percent of the time. He is, without doubt, the epitome of the Frank Sinatra song My Way.

So, what was Mike's way? Mike's way was doing everything . . . with . . . excellence. And his secret to achieving excellence? To become an expert at everything he did — by preparing and researching and learning and forging strong relationships.

Follow me through some of the My Way lyrics — and no, I'm not going to sing them — to bracket how many ways Mike was an expert, especially when it came to being a judge:

I've lived a life that's full Travelled each and every highway

Well, Mike certainly was an expert in living life fully, yet simply, as you will hear.

He was "one of a kind," said one judge. Another said, "my new motto is 'Be Like Mike.' In other words, live the life you want to live and spend your time the way you want to spend it. Mike loved his work, his travels, being with family and friends, and he focused on what he was doing at the moment."

Mike's judicial career was capped off last month by his very recent and last award, the prestigious American Bankruptcy Institute's William L. Norton, Jr. Award. Our Chief Judge Caryl Delano introduced the award by reading from the extensive nomination letter she compiled on behalf of all the Middle Florida bankruptcy judges. The video is worth the watch. I think it may be on the ABI website. In Mike's acceptance speech,

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he wrote that he was “humbled to be recognized for helping contribute to the insolvency system in the United States.”

And contribute he did. His body of case law, in a word, is magnificent. One judge said, “I am thankful that his legacy of well-reasoned and well-written opinions will stay with us to help guide us.” Some of my personal favorites are his Grubbs decision on what is or is not a true lease versus a disguised, unperfected security agreement, LeBeau on when a reaffirmation agreement is made, and Rasmussen, one of the first ones on section 522(p)’s clawback. (Sorry for that detour into bankruptcy-speak.)

Many of the messages we Middle Florida colleagues received about Mike’s passing included the word “brilliant.” More than one talked of his wit, charm, and wisdom. Other descriptions were truly accomplished, great leader, creative, pragmatic, a strong presence in any room. And one person simply said, “one easily runs out of superlatives to describe Mike, as a person and as a jurist. He was one of the most special individuals I have ever encountered.”

One of the best testaments to Mike as a judge from the lawyer community is what consumer lawyer Chuck Stohlman wrote:

When one considers many of the qualities of being a Good Judge:

Judicial Temperament, Intelligence, Ethics, Courage and Integrity, Experience and Education, Suitability to Workload, Continuing Legal Education, Ability to Communicate, Civic and Professional Responsibility, and Character, Judge Williamson set the bar.

All judges should aspire to be so described. Mike is role model for us judges on how to do it with excellence. Mike contributed more than to just the U.S. insolvency system, though. He was an expert in travelling the world to assist other countries, too. If you’ve read even a little about Mike’s life in these past weeks, you should be aware of his significant dedication to bringing the rule of law, especially in commercial systems, to developing countries. He did this in Azerbaijan — twice, Macedonia, Rwanda, Uganda, Zimbabwe, and Afghanistan. Afghanistan was his favorite: He went nine times, creating a land registry, hyping microfinance, and creating a bankruptcy code out of an old version he dug up from the early 1940s. He taught insolvency law to lawyers and judges in Bosnia-Herzegovina, the Republic of Georgia, Bahrain, and Ukraine.

He absolutely thrived on those trips, as pal Judge Chuck Case could tell you — dog tired but not too tired to enjoy a beer and cigar in some dusty digs, to create extensive reports in real time, and to read books on his ever-present Kindle. Mike loved to share how he rode in armored vehicles through the craggy, hilly areas of Afghanistan wearing body armor and being protected by armed guards riding shotgun with, yes, a shotgun, an AK 47, or sleeping in sandy hooches within a military compound, or enjoying an impromptu burger barbecue with ex-pat Aussie roadbuilders out in the desolate countryside, or drinking at the Embassy bar called Duck and Cover.

I planned each chartered course Each careful step along the by-way

Mike was an expert planner, preparer, and he followed his own compass to achieve his goal of excellence in all things: He looked down the road, plotted a course, whether captaining a boat, going on a trip (down to how many pairs of socks and underwear to bring), riding a motorcycle, creating a case strategy, mapping out a ruling, learning a new electronic gizmo, or checking off a life aspiration. Sometimes the course he set

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out on might have to change in some way, but then there he was, re-plotting and planning for that turn.

He created, truly out of whole cloth, a thriving bankruptcy practice that rivals those we see in mega cases elsewhere. Right out of Georgetown law school, some friend asked him if he could file a bankruptcy for him, and Mike said sure. Mike didn't even take bankruptcy in law school! He got some mentoring from Jules Cohen, studied, and learned, and the rest is history. He became a chapter 7 trustee. And when the Bankruptcy Code went effective in 1979, Mike wanted to be the first to file a chapter 13 in Orlando, and he was. He became Orlando's big dog in chapter 11s and one of the first to create a statewide reputation for committee representation with the GDC and Gardner cases. He was invited into the American College of Bankruptcy Fellows in class no IV. This is the premiere designation for a bankruptcy professional. This planning and preparing led him to become a bankruptcy judge with a career unparalleled by any in our state (sorry, colleagues) and even most in the nation.

The course he charted as an insolvency lawyer and judge had a trajectory rivaling a rocket ship. By design, he wrote articles and participated in seminars so that he could drill down in an area to learn it better and become the go-to guy in his field. He spoke at nearly 400 seminars. He wrote more than 200 reported opinions.

In the National Conference of Bankruptcy Judges, he made many friends and sought out many significant leadership roles, such as a member of the Board of Governors, business manager of NCBJ's renowned American Bankruptcy Law Journal, and Editor in Chief of the Conference News.

I'd be remiss if I didn't mention the outward manifestations of Mike's expertise in planning and preparedness and organization: his constant reading, his binders, and personally created instructions for dummies concerning all manner of endeavors.

Mike loved reading and learning. He was never without a book. He even read grammar books while sitting in the bathroom! It is fitting that we are at this yacht club because nearly every day after work, you could find him at the dock master's shack with a beer and a book or his Kindle.

The Williamson binders, these things are legendary. Here is an example of his many, many, many binders [raise binder]. This one's on witness sequestration. How can anyone have a full notebook on witness sequestration?! Given the transition of most everyone and everything to digital content, now that Mike's not here, I really fear for the binder company's ability to survive.

He documented what he learned as he prepared to tackle some subject and created checklists. His "fill-in-the-blank here" for Dummies instruction sheets or checklists covered the waterfront, such as what and how many items to pack for a trip (down to the number of socks), bridge, new technology, Dragon Naturally Speaking, building a website showcasing his dog Lizzie when the Internet first came out, new devices, or how to tie nautical knots.

I've loved, I've laughed and cried

Mike was an expert at relationships, friendships, loving, and having fun. He was easy to get to know and even easier to like. The friendship he offered was natural, open, and unforced.

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You will hear Scott tell of his idyllic family love life. And of Mike's bond with wife Linda. Mike revered his brothers and sister and spoke proudly of them to his friends. And Scott, I think most of his close friends know your entire backstory — how you keep climbing the ladder in your own career — because he bragged on you so. He also was proud of daughter Michelle for being such a wonderful mother to his and Linda's five grandkids.

He loved his friends, Linda's tennis pals, lawyer, non-lawyer, judges alike. The outpouring of solace to our judges from the bankruptcy judge community from, literally, across the country is evidence of the solid friendships he developed.

One lawyer wrote me, "He was a teacher and mentor to anyone he met. It didn't matter if you were a law student, an unexperienced lawyer, pro se litigant or if you were an experienced lawyer who frequented his courtroom." Yes, Mike was an expert at sharing his vast knowledge of just about anything, but especially insolvency law. He so enjoyed his treks to Jeff Davis's advanced class at the University of Florida with Mike Moecker, the best part to our Mike being dinner with the students afterwards. He enjoyed his frequent lectures to the Tampa Bay Bankruptcy Bar Association. On his mentorship, there are more than a few people in this audience here or online who can speak firsthand on how he assisted with their careers, judges included. Some of us wouldn't have the job we have without his assistance [raise my hand]. Any others want to raise a hand? For my part, when I was pondering a thorny issue, I'd go visit Mike down the hall. If he was just as perplexed as I, then I knew I was in good company. I can't go down the hall to him anymore, so now I just must think, WWMD?

He did have his feminine side, as I like to call it; he teared up at movies, and he communicated extraordinarily well with his female colleagues, like his work wife Mary Maddox and his courtroom deputy Marti Malone, and Caryl [Delano], Robbie Colton, and me.

You've heard and will hear from others of some fun outings he enjoyed with friends. He was pretty limitless in the things he enjoyed doing with his friends, whether that be skiing with folks like the Moodys; dancing; playing card games with the Levenses; playing bridge; boating, boating, . . . and more boating, with his Tampa colleagues or folks like Ben Pethe, Judge Fr. Tim Corcoran, and Judge Mary Walrath and her husband; motorcycle trips with folks like Judge Greg Holder [raise your hand if you are part of the motorcycle group]; Four Green Fields Fridays with guys like Jimmy Cusack, Chuck Hudson, and Bobby O'Neil [raise your hand if you are part of the Four Green crowd]; the Galloway Breakfast Club [who's here from the Breakfast Club?]; dressing up in costume; kicking back and enjoying the company of besties Dart and Cynthia McCarty; chatting over fine wine or other adult beverages with [pause] . . . really, anyone!; or singing, yes, his signature song My Way at karaoke.

**To think I did all that
And may I say, not in a shy way,
"Oh no, no, not me
I did it my way"**

No, Mike wasn't shy about doing things his way.

As a judge, Mike was an expert at getting out in front of an issue and writing a significant opinion on it. Even when the issue wasn't squarely before him, he'd share his decision on the issue in dicta so that he could

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weigh in and shape others' thinking on it. One lawyer called Mike's decisions "groundbreaking."

Mike was an expert at being comfortable in his own skin. One friend said what you saw is what you got, whether with his family, his friends, at parties, or running by himself: Energetic, polite, and straightforward. That's what you saw on the bench, too.

He was a creature of habit and had simple tastes; he was a no-frills kind of guy, except maybe when it came to new toys, such as hand-held devices, boats, and Teslas.

His self-discipline and adherence to routine was to be admired. He got up early, had the exact same breakfast every morning at First Watch, got to the office before anyone else, had the exact same lunch everyday — some milkshake concoction, and was off the clock precisely at 5 p.m. This was a carryover from his time as a lawyer; he was able to get his billable hours in from 8 – 5 because, as one former associate put it, "he was focused on work all day, was not much for the water cooler talk."

Regarding his simplicity in taste, he was okay with Cheap Red Wine [hold up the bottle] — he gave me this on my first day in office, albeit he wouldn't turn down the good stuff the Yadleys would bring to the table. He was ambivalent about clothes. Here he was a nationally known judge, and he told me once that all he needed was a couple pair of navy pants and one navy blazer, as they gave the appearance of being a real suit, and he'd just get a new one when the blazer or pants would become threadbare. It didn't bother him to wear ratty, sweat-stained t-shirts to run in and then just rinsing them out in the courthouse shower.

Mike was an expert even in his playfulness. He had sense of humor, sometimes nuanced, sometimes slapstick. Here are some outtakes from his letters home from Afghanistan:

And this . . .

While I have been issued the requisite body armor for my torso (I called up the guy who gave it to me and asked, "Where are the pants?"), I think it is best to just keep a low profile. Kabul is a safe city and the incredibly low number of incidents does not justify barricading oneself into . . .

And here's a good one from a local lawyer who sponsored the open bar at the TBBBA golf tournaments: The cocktail napkins stated Open Bar Courtesy of [the lawyer's name]. When Mike saw that, he announced that he would consider that lawyer's fee applications more quickly after seeing how he spent his money. I'll leave you with a couple of his less nuanced bits. Did you know that Mike can hang a spoon off his nose? And his chin? Actually, one on each side of his butt chin? And all at the same time? It's a sight to behold. Some know that Mike and I share a wall between our bathrooms at work. We take our breaks from the bench around the same time, so we frequently were in our respective bathrooms at the same time. When we'd hear a flush, one of us would initiate the shave-and-a-hair-cut knock [demonstrate] and the other would return it with the two-bits knock [demonstrate]. I told Mike in his last days at home that my going to the bathroom at work just isn't the same without him.

The record shows I took the blows And I did it my way—

Mike was even an expert in overcoming the rare occasions of adversity. Except for this last challenge with cancer, he didn't really have much of any real disappointments in life — and that's because he adapted and

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Eulogy of Judge Williamson

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overcame them or changed his chartered course as necessary. His stoic flexibility was amazing. One of his former associates commented on Mike's "sheer bravery," saying, "Mike was never daunted by a case that seemed impossible to solve and he was immune to intimidation by creditor counsel." I think nine trips to Afghanistan is proof positive of that bravery. Another example is when he had a detached retina. To fix that, the doc injects a bubble to press the retina into place. Well, bubbles float up, correct? What if the detachment is on the lower quadrant of the eye? You must keep your head almost upside down. For Mike, no problem. He simply put one end of his couch on a big stack of law books so that it was on a 45-degree angle and stayed there the requisite number of days. See, even in distress, he did it his way. He never showed any self-pity.

At the end of his life, Mike never cried, he was resolute, gutted it out, lips set in steeled determination, almost non-plussed by it all. Cancer may have broken his body, but not his spirit. I told him a few days before he died, "whatever your Dad, Jack, faced on that beachhead on D-Day, what you're going through is just as tough." Mike nodded his head in agreement, gravely, stoically. About three times that week, I was compelled to tell him that he's the bravest man I ever saw.

This last disappointment of his was, really, that he was unable sail off into the sunset, literally, with his devoted and fun wife, Linda, upon retirement. And yet, I think that expert planner, that expert preparer in him knew that all he was doing was changing course — that the sailing off into the sunset is still part of the plan, after all. I say this because hanging on the wall in his chamber, straight ahead when he walks out of his office door is an original watercolor of a beautiful trawler. It rests in a peaceful inlet with calm blue water and a bright sky. Now close your eyes so that you can visualize it as I provide the last piece of information about this boat. On the back of the trawler is its name [pause]: Next Life.

Now, hold that thought as you hear from the great man himself: [Play video/audio of Mike singing My Way.]

Thank you, Mike for doing it your way and letting us all enjoy you as you did so.

Cheers to Judge Williamson



Memories of Judge Williamson



I had an amusing experience before the Judge. I found him to be serious, smart as hell, somewhat scholarly, but he had a good sense of humor, but typically not while on the bench.

I appeared before the judge in a few cases as a restructuring professional and a court appointed trustee.

In the Earthfirst case, I was serving as a trustee in a complex business case. At confirmation my counsel Noel Boeke, from Holland & Knight, was arguing for a broad release and the US trustee objected.

The judge asked Noel why he felt a release of this nature was appropriate and Noel told him that 5 of my clients in 4 different cases were in prison in orange jump suits.

I thought the judge was going to fall off his chair laughing. He asked Noel to tell him the cases and the principals involved, he granted me the release I sought.

-Bill Maloney

Years ago I was involved in a sizeable Ch. 11 (Tropical Sportswear) that involved a number of big NYC law firms. On a number of occasions, lawyers from those firms commented to me about how impressed they were of Judge Williamson and his management of the case. Those comments made me quite proud of our bench and bar. Judge Williamson elevated Tampa's reputation and I am forever grateful for that.

-Donald Kirk

I have many memories of Mike. We were involved in a number of matters and we also were both active in professional organizations together, such as, the American College of Bankruptcy and the Business Law Section of The Florida Bar, where we spent the most time together with the General Development Corporation Chapter 11 in the Southern District of Florida, Miami. It was a very complex case, particularly in its financing and the criminal proceedings which preceded the filing. The US Trustees appointed several creditors' committees--maybe 5 or 6--to which the Debtor and the Banks objected. Judge Cristol changed that to a combined committee made up of one representative of each group, plus non-voting members of the Banks and bond trustees. The committee interviewed several law firms from around the country for counsel and selected Mike's firm. Mike and Sam Zussman handled the matter. I represented the bank group of 10 US and foreign banks. The Debtor was represented by Bill Perlstein of Washington, DC and Mark Bloom of Miami.

The offices of the Debtor were in Coconut Grove. Mike and I stayed in that area. There were frequent hearings and meetings at the company, as well as in Washington. We spent a lot of time together and often had dinner together. Our dealings helped set the framework for what became a successful reorganization. Mike was not only very creative but had the right personality that helped win over the dissident creditor groups and keep the Creditors Committee focused on the end result. He was very wise counsel.

-Leonard Gilbert



Remarks of the Memorial Service of Judge Michael G. Williamson

By Russ Blain (printed with permission)



Honorable members of the judiciary, members of the Bar, neighbors, friends: Good Sunday afternoon to you. I'm Russ Blain. It is my task and honor, on behalf of the Williamson and Cappelli families, to welcome you and to thank you for being here to join in celebrating the life of one of the most outstanding people any of us has ever known. Humbly, graciously, and as respectfully as we know how—but also in keeping with how we know he would have liked—we honor Judge Michael G. Williamson as husband, family man, lawyer, judge—legal scholar—and friend. Your presence means so much to Linda—and to Mike and Linda's family. Thank you.

If you're jolted, shocked to the core, numbed, maybe more than a little bit angry, and grief-stricken—well, you're in good company. There's no denying that Mike Williamson was taken away from us decades sooner than we could have anticipated—and scores sooner than we would have liked. Every one of us will deal with the grief you feel in our own way, and it's not easy.

But let me tell you something—there's strength in numbers. There are this clubhouse and this beautiful room in which to gather, cry a bit, laugh a bit, come out of our pandemic shells a bit—and most of all, to celebrate the life of Mike Williamson, our friendships with him, the legacy he left us, our love for him, and his love for us.

In putting together this memorial service, a lot of ideas coalesced. But to decide? Where to start? Well, we had to answer the simple question: What would Judge Williamson do? Anyone who worked with him or appeared before him can tell you what he came next. Working with Judge Williamson on a bar project such as View from the Bench, learning Excel spreadsheet tips and techniques from him, or a bar trip across the ocean, you turned to Judge Williamson to get ideas. First, you have judicial assistant Mary Maddox create a detailed to-do list that you would follow to the tee. Then you start a binder—not just any binder, but a specially order Williamson binder like the ones that line the shelves of his chambers. Then you go to law clerk Ed Comey for up-to-day research. Then you have courtroom deputy Marti Malone find room on the calendar.

Then you would assign responsibilities. Always thoughtful, always organized, always direct, always informed. Usually, you'd preview the salient points. When it came time to make the final decisions, you'd know where we were headed. Then you would assess all the information—much like evidence in a trial—and announce what we were going to do. And you would think—wow, how perfect was that!

Everyone gathered here has a connection with Mike Williamson—family member, judicial colleague, fellow lawyer, former client, neighbor, friend. We all treasure those connections, and he treasured them in return.

I—and more than a few of you—are old enough to have had the good fortune to have known Mike Williamson before the 11th Circuit tapped him to become a federal bankruptcy judge in 2000. By then, Judge Williamson had become a distinguished and accomplished lawyer, had handled big cases, and had achieved a national reputation as a bankruptcy lawyer and scholar. Hardly a single significant case that crossed the courthouse threshold without Mike Williamson becoming involved. Cases found him; he didn't have to chase them down. And to have a case with Mike Williamson meant that the practice level would always be at the pinnacle. There would be no messing around or delay.

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Memorial Service Remarks

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Judge Williamson took to the bench his penchant for cutting to the chase. Lawyers tend to blather on endlessly. Judge Williamson dealt with this phenomenon by laying down his 3-3-3 rule—three pages, three citations, three arguments.

Judge Williamson never had to raise his voice or his volume level to get attention. He spoke—and clients, opponents, opposing counsel, and judges listened. That was also a trait that came with him to the bench, where his calm, measured manner commanded attention.

My most excellent professional experience with Judge Williamson was being invited to serve as a steering committee member and moderators on his View from the Bench panel. The lawyers pummel the judges with questions over a two-day period. He created the program 38 years ago and served as steering committee of one for a number of years. He ran the program with his exemplary attention to detail firmly in place. His ideas and directions define the program to this day. The program is presented with Northern and Middle District bankruptcy judges one day and Northern and Southern District judges the next.

Two weeks ago, a number of us participated in the Tampa program, jumped in a large hired car, drove to Miami, and arrived in time for the time-honored judicial reception and dinner on Miami Beach. After that experience, let me read to you a few words penned by Chief Middle District Bankruptcy Judge Caryl Delano:

Judge Delano said:

The View from the Bench Seminar was so important to Judge Williamson.

Whether it was by coincidence, psychic power, or the hand of God, I am finding some comfort in the fact that Judge Williamson passed away after the Tampa presentation and the night before the Miami presentation, while so many of his friends were enjoying a wonderful dinner at his favorite restaurant, Joe's Stone Crab.

Judge Delano added:

I think this would have made him happy.

Somewhat unbelievably, in a way I'm still trying to assess, what Judge Delano described is the way it happened. Coincidence you say? I'm not so sure about that.

Today in this Celebration of Life we've tried to capture various aspects and roles of Judge Williamson's life and personality—"Your Honor" to the legions of lawyers and people the Court serves, "Congratulations Sir" to the Judge as NCBJ president and Norton Distinguished Jurist and his legion of distinctions, "Judge" to scores of bankruptcy court staff. "Husband" to Linda, "Dad" to Scott and Michelle, and "Brother" and Uncle." Add to that, "teacher," "mentor," "speaker," "scholar." And as if that weren't enough, "Captain" to his boating friends.

That's hard to do in one celebration of life like this. Each of us, in his or her own way, is dealing with grief in a unique way that honors the tower of a man that was Mike Williamson. We have come together today to comfort and gather around the Williamsons and Cappellis to show our love and devotion. But we're also taking care of each other. Men like Mike Williamson don't come around every day. We've lost a good one.

But, more importantly, we're here to celebrate a life well-lived and a friend forever. We are all the better for having been touched and loved by Mike Williamson.



In Memoriam

Judge

Michael G. Williamson

February 22, 1951 - November 3, 2022

