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I Thought You Might Want to Know a Few Things About Eugene Evans Williams A/K/A "Mean Gene"

by Mark L. Zientz

I was Gene's law partner for 15 years from 1979 to 1994. In that entire period of time we had no disagreements either in the operation of the firm or the interpretation of the law.

I joined Gene in 1979 when his former partner, John G. Tomlinson Jr. became a compensation judge. The office was in the gables then, 2801 Ponce De Leon, where all the Compensation judges had their offices. We moved to Datran II on Jan. 1, 1988, suite 1100 as the first tenants. I suggested that I should have the Northeast corner office and he the office facing the Dadeland Marriott. He didn't argue. It was not until much later that I stood behind Gene, seated in his chair and I looked out his window to see the Marriott's pool deck, loaded with bathing beauties in skimpy attire.

Something else about Gene Williams. He instructed everyone in a very stern "mean Gene" tone of voice not to call him "Mr. Williams". He was Gene to everyone, young or old, male or female as long as those females didn't mind being called "Missy" in return.

Back in 79, Gene was already an accomplished and well known workers' compensation defense attorney. Together we represented Greyhound Bus Lines, Jefferson Stores, Bituminous Casualty Company and a few other now defunct organizations. We had nothing to do with their demise. We represented the State of Florida, Hartford Insurance Company, Maryland Casualty Company, and Publix Supermarkets. We also represented Baptist Hospital whose chairman, Emmitt Ray, himself recently deceased, was Gene's best friend. They attended virtually all of the Hurricane home games together, and they traveled to a number of Southern Baptist Conventions together. That's not to say that Gene was a very religious man. He was known to take a sip every now and then. He was pious in his own way, taking in those newly arrived in our country and giving them a home and an education. It was his home. And I am sure living with him provided quite an education. They also got to see all of his pajama bottoms which were specially altered for him to add a back pocket for his hankie.

While on the subject of traveling, Gene was a great traveler of these United States. He was a history buff with a sub-specialty in The Civil War. He took his family to great battle sites and Civil War cemeteries. He ran into trouble only when he ventured far afield of the Civil War and entered the era of the Indian Wars. He spent a week on an Indian reserva-

tion. He didn't know until he got to the hotel, situated hours from the nearest non-Indian civilization, that the entire reservation was "dry".

Gene always got his way. In that regard he was spoiled. When he traveled by air he insisted on having the meal they served "his way". It goes to show you how long ago Gene and I parted, they even had meals on planes then. But Gene refused to eat anything that hadn't started out standing on 4 legs. Chickens only had 2 legs and therefore did not fit into the Williams diet, "all carbs, all the time". No tomato shall be eaten unless sliced and each slice covered with three packets of sugar. No coffee is palatable unless it is served poured into a partially full jar of sugar. No Key lime pie is fit for man unless it was impossible to see the pie under all the whipped cream on top. So Gene decided that he would solve his airline meal problem. He didn't want to be a pig about it (pigs stand on 4 legs so Gene considered them edible), so he had Bob Gilbert, M.D. write a "to whom it may concern" letter on the doctor's stationery, which Gene sent to the airlines via his travel agent to request a special meal. The letter read: Please provide Mr. Eugene Williams with a medically necessary meal of Meat Loaf, Peas and Mashed Potatoes with Gravy" Williams never ate 'sauce', only 'gravy'. On that flight the stewardess (I know the PC term is "Flight Attendant" but in Gene's memory, I will use the term "stewardess"), after take-off, asked the passenger with the special meal to press the call button. Gene did and was served exactly what he had asked for. The rest of the passengers got filet mignon, poor things.

Gene did suffer with his teeth. Pictures of him smiling are almost as hard to find as pictures of George Washington smiling. Come to think of it, did you ever notice the resemblance? Anyway, I have to admit blame for those problems. For a short period of time my wife, Suzanne, worked for the M&M Mars company. Gene loved Snickers. M&M Mars made Snickers. Gene got a lifetime supply. Each week. Sorry, Gene.

As many of you know, Gene smoked cigarettes. Not one or two per day. One or two packs maybe. As more and more places became smoke free, Gene had problems. I'll never forget when Hughlan Long, one of our compensation judges who also smoked, asked Gene not to smoke in his hearing room. It seems one of Gene's adversaries, Al Beily, may he rest in peace, on a day when he and Gene were to try a case, had brought in a note from his doctor advising the Judge

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that Mr. Beily's doctor requested that no one smoke in the hearing room. Mr. Beily had a lung problem. The Judge indicated he would stop smoking during the hearings. Gene reluctantly complied, that day. Then he met with his own doctor, at the 700 club. It seems Gene had a nervous condition which, his doctor asserted on medical stationery, medically required him to smoke during hearings. Gene brought his note to the next hearing. Beily went bananas. Gene's doctor was Bob Gilbert M.D. and a specialist in neurology, orthopedics, general surgery, gynecology and now psychiatry.

Gene married 3 times but had only two great loves, outside of his parents. Suzee and Kristyl were his true loves. He adored both of them. Neither could ever do anything wrong in his eyes. I think he was a very good father. Not that he didn't spoil his daughter. He and Suzee let their daughter watch late night TV from their bed. Of the three, Kristyl was the one likely to fall asleep last. Hence, no brothers or sisters.

There is no one to carry on the great Williams name. Gene described himself as the only 'white' Williams in the phone book. But he will be remembered. He represented Gail Beyer, whose benefits he got increased because her employer gave her free birdseed. Associated Industries of Florida has never let him forget the 'birdseed case'. He represented Paul Barragan. On Paul's behalf and on behalf of many other City of Miami Police and Firefighters, he claimed the City was illegally offsetting their pensions because they were collecting workers' compensation benefits. He didn't care that 13 years of

litigation in the circuit courts was unsuccessful on the same issue. He thought the cops and firefighters were being shortchanged, he was right and he fought the battle and won.

Gene was a true renaissance man. Not because he enjoyed fine wine or fine art or music. He was a renaissance man in the nature of one who couldn't operate any device invented since the renaissance. He also couldn't (or maybe wouldn't) change a fluorescent light bulb. As a joke one Christmas I gave him a set of tools. He got a VCR and the number '12' flashed on it for years. Each year at his annual Christmas party I checked the VCR- the time never changed. He was also uncomfortable using the telephone. Even though our office system wasn't that complicated he could always be heard to say, "Edna, get me Suzee on the phone".

Gene had a favorite cocktail. It was a perfect CC (Canadien Club) manhattan, on the rocks with a twist (of Lemon, not Lime), equal amounts of sweet and dry vermouth. Sometimes it took him forever to get the drink mixed exactly as he wanted it. He would even send them back if the color was off. So I had a rubber stamp made up the size of his business card and stamped on the back of each card the exact recipe for his drink. The results were great. He got his drink right the first time and the firm got to represent quite a few injured bartenders who kept his card.

I am grateful to Gene for his generosity, his compassion and for the things he taught me about life and the law and people. He was the perfect law partner. But above all, I thank him for giving me the best excuse I have for not exercising regularly. Gene always said, "Sex, if done properly, is all the exercise you need".

I'm going to miss Mean Gene.

Calendar

Workers' Compensation Section Annual Meeting
held in conjunction with the FWCI convention at
the Orlando World Center Marriott.

WC Section Judicial Luncheon
Tuesday, 8/23/2005, 12:30 pm to 1:30 pm
Hall of Cities - Miami
invitation only

WC Section Executive Council
Tuesday, 8/23/2005, 1:45 pm to 4:15 pm
Grand Ballroom - I

WC Section Elections and Reception
Tuesday, 8/23/2005, 4:30 pm to 6:30 pm
Grand Ballroom - VII

must be current member of section and
present ID to receive ballot

Course Title TBA
November 4, 2005 - Orlando Airport Hyatt

Executive Council Midyear Meeting
January 20, 2006 - Joe's Stone Crab

Winter Ski Meeting and Seminar
February 26 - March 3, 2006 - Beaver Creek, CO