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PROFESSIONALISM

Paul O.H. Pigman, 1922-2002: An Exemplary Professional¹

By Anthony M. DiLeo

I am honored to be asked to write a few words about a remarkable lawyer and remarkable friend, Paul Pigman, and to comment in particular upon his professionalism.

Most of the superlatives that we use to describe people apply to Paul Pigman. He was a consummate gentleman, an incisive and brilliant lawyer, a dedicated legal scholar, an admired teacher, a gracious opposing counsel, a considerate, patient, and courteous partner, a principled citizen, a rare mentor to those privileged to have his company, an incessant reader interested in everything, but at the same time affable, un-



Paul O. Pigman, 1922-2002

derstated, charitable, warm, and willing at any moment to give you the benefit of his time, attention, judgment, intellect, and incomparable skill. A person who lived by his standards and who led by example.

It was especially my great good fortune to have the opportunity not to just know Paul Pigman, but to be a lawyer under his tutelage. I met Paul Pigman on July 2, 1973, my first day of work. When I joined the firm, there were only 9 lawyers, and there could have been no better atmosphere for a young lawyer to be taught how to be a lawyer.

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For an introduction to values as a professional, Paul was an extraordinary teacher. The personal accumulation of wealth was not one of Paul's priorities; however, dedicated service to clients and a genuine respect for others were.

A few of the vignettes about his life best demonstrate the kind of individual he was. Paul did me the favor of asking me to assist him for a hearing in the United States Tax

Court. He checked us into a suite at the Hay Adams across from the White House. The evening before the hearing, at about 8 p.m., he entered the living room that we shared wearing a long, silk, paisley robe with a white ascot in pristine elegance, like a figure from a Cary Grant film and said to me, "Mr. DiLeo, is there anything I can get for you before I retire?" I was 28 years old and he was 52. I was quite a contrast, disheveled, eating pretzels, in blue jeans, in a T-shirt and drinking a beer out of the

bottle. I was ashamed. I thanked him for his courtesy after which he informed me with a mild injunctive, "Breakfast will be delivered at 7."

As young lawyers, when we consistently worked late, if the phone at the office rang at 7 p.m., there was a dash to be the first to answer it because inevitably it would be Paul Pigman asking if you could please bring him a file that he left on his desk that he would like to work on that evening from home. After a short drive to his uptown residence, he answered the door in the same attire as I described at the Hay Adams and he would say, "I apologize for interrupting your evening, and to show my appreciation, I would like you and your wife to be my guests at Chris' Steak House. I have called ahead and they are waiting for you." This made him popular amongst the youngsters. And this proved what we all knew, that Paul enjoyed spending money on others as much as he enjoyed spending it on himself.

While sitting next to Mr. Pigman at an annual Louisiana State Bar Association meeting, he saw a nearby table of 14 lawyers from another New Orleans firm and told the waiter to please send them their finest champagne to have with their dessert. The waiter quickly returned and said that the other table had declined the offer of champagne because they had already finished their dessert. Greatly disappointed at his gracious offer being declined, Paul paused only a moment and said to their waiter, "Well, then bring me their check."

On one particular trip to the Tax Court in 1975, we flew up at 7:00 a.m., attended a hearing, had lunch and returned on an afternoon plane. Driving back to the office at about 8:00 p.m. that night, Paul looked at me and asked, "Did you have any expenses while you were in Washington?" This was a confusing question because I was with him all day. I remembered buying a bag of potato chips at the news stand at the Tax Court and I said, "yes." At which point he extended his hand toward me like a stop sign, preventing me from continuing my explanation, opened his wallet, handed me a \$100 bill and said, "If it's less than \$100, I would really rather not discuss it." Though Paul always negotiated hard when a client's dollars were involved, he cared less for his own.

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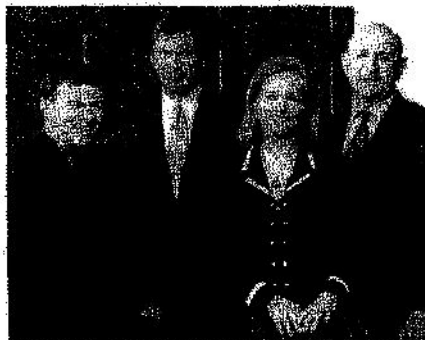
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Once in those early years, in about 1974, Mr. Pigman called me into his office, handed me a file, and said in his usual simple terms: "Mr. DiLeo, there is only one thing I want you to do with this file." There was then a long pause and my attention was concentrated on his final words. He continued, "I never want you to speak to me about this file ever again."

A remarkable testament to his memory and intellect is that each year for more than 10 years in succession, I drove him to the law firm weekend. For law firm meetings, he followed the LIFO inventory method of accounting, "last in, first out," and each year I spent 3 hours driving each way listening to unique, marvelous, intriguing, exciting, fascinating, and astounding stories, all of them true to the final detail. He never told me the same story twice and I have no idea how he could remember in those 10 years or more of automobile trips which ones I had already heard. Importantly, too, these stories were told with understatement and

not hyperbole and were not stories that were self-congratulatory of himself, merely remarkable lessons in law and human behavior.

To demonstrate the type of lawyer Paul Pigman was, I remember an event in about 1975 when the Whitney Bank telephoned his office and explained what they perceived to be a serious problem. Paul's client was out of communication in Europe for 3 weeks, a promissory note had come due and the bank was unhappily holding an overdue note. These were days where Teletype was the highest form of technology. A long distance call was itself a challenge. The client was beyond communication and the bank wanted immediate resolution. Paul asked how much the note was for and was told it was for \$250,000. He offered gently, "Would you accept my signature?" The bank officer said yes and Paul said, "I'll be right down."

Then there is the story which I have heard repeated of Paul's days in the Navy when the ship he was on collided with another ship. He and the Captain promptly

retreated to the Captain's quarters. They emerged hours later with a lengthy written explanation of the event, resulting in a Navy commendation to the Captain of his ship. This explanation of the unpleasant event undoubtedly was written in what we affectionately refer to as Pigmanese, an exotic and mesmerizing amalgam of something between Oliver Wendell Holmes and James Joyce, leaving its magical effect on the listener, simultaneously profound and vaporous. I once asked Paul to come sailing on a Sunday and he said, "Thank you, young man, but I've spent enough time on the water," referring obliquely to his experience in the Pacific during WWII.

And then there was the time that the Captain of another ship in the Pacific for some bizarre reason decided he did not like Pigman. Who could not like Pigman? But, in any event, the Captain ordered Pigman off the ship at the next port. They stopped briefly at an island where the Marines were taking incoming artillery from the Japanese

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and Paul was pitched into that conflict. The ship departed without him. Two weeks later that same ship was sunk by torpedoes with everyone aboard dying. Paul explained the principal of this lesson is that, when you may think something bad is happening, it may in fact be good, and when you think something good is happening, it may in fact be bad. And finally, it is important to be disliked by the right people.

Another story told to me by Paul was about when he completed a complex tax plan for a religious charitable organization saving them some 7 million dollars. They were so delighted they asked him to come to a special meeting to give him a special blessing and referred to him as Brother Pigman and laid on hands. He left the meeting with the clients and retreated immediately to the Louisiana Club where he played cards all day without losing a single hand, followed by other marvelous fortuities throughout his weekend.

His billing was unique and idiosyncratic. To his partners, his billing was both frustrating and delightful. Frustrating because Paul would perform substantial and significant services and sometimes never send a bill at all, simply because he was not completely satisfied with the result. Saul Stone once bellowed, "You know Paul, I've been a lawyer for 50 years and I've never had a client send me a check unless I sent them a bill." On the other hand, if Paul achieved a striking and remarkable result, he could, at times, present you with a bill that, when

you opened it, it was recommended you be sitting in a chair and not standing. Knowing his penchant for not billing even affluent clients if the result were not quite what he hoped for, I once asked him on a Sunday afternoon at the office whether the firm would be compensated for my services and wondering if I would rather be playing tennis. His advice was gentle and precise: "Mr. DiLeo, it is entirely your decision whether or not you perform the services and it is entirely mine whether or not I send a bill."

One of the many wonderful skills Paul taught me was how to buy a car. He explained that you ask for the list of options, search for the item "boat hitch," strike through boat hitch and say, "I'll take the rest." This purchasing behavior led him to own the most fully optioned Oldsmobile Toronado in the history of General Motors. A car, which he proudly boasted, was the single car that achieved the lowest miles per gallon of all American made automobiles in history — likely due to its many redundant systems.

In another one of his automobile purchasing events, he acquired a Mercedes station wagon and paid \$29,000. A month later, a client of his liked the car and wanted to purchase one just like it. Paul courteously offered to handle the transaction and telephoned the dealership. "I want another one just like mine." The dealership answered that they would be happy to provide one just like Paul's car but it would be \$32,000. He paused thoughtfully, and his pointed response was, "What did you leave off of my car?" Not that his relationship

with automobiles was that intimate. While driving him in his car to a distant firm meeting, the gas tank showed empty. Curiously, he did not know where the gas cap was or how to open it to add fuel.

These details of the life of a remarkable individual tell us so much about him. Addressing his secretary by the full name of "Mrs. Ernest" for 42 years, a man who wore shirts hand made by an Athenian tailor of Egyptian cotton bearing all 4 of his initials in Greek, a person whose life reflected integrity, judgment, fidelity, service, erudition, sensitivity, culture and professionalism. A person who took law practice and the duties of lawyering as the highest form of discipline.

In the 29 years I knew him, I never heard him say a single unkind word about another person. I never saw him angry. If every lawyer were a Paul Pigman, we would need no professionalism code for lawyers. It was an unequalled privilege to have known Paul Pigman and to have worked with him and to have had the benefit of some of his influence. He was a great gentleman, a great lawyer, a great friend, and a great person. A man for whom I had the greatest admiration and the greatest affection and who I miss enormously.

FOOTNOTE

1. This article is based upon a eulogy delivered at the funeral of Paul Pigman, Esq. on April 27, 2002.

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