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Dudley Warner Woodbridge: Professor and Humanitarian

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Dudley Warner

By Julia Oxrieder

Any reasonable man, woman, or child would readily concede to the scientific fact that there are twenty four hours to a day. However, reasonable people are often prejudiced by their own experiences and emotions. There are people who would practically swear on a stack of Bibles that Professor Dudley Warner Woodbridge somehow did have a day of more than twenty four hours. For how else could he have led such a full life, affecting the lives of so many others?

The first to attest to such an astronomical impossibility would be the children. They took him into their world of fun and fantasy as they would no other adult. One lady recalls that he did so much for her and her peers that it seemed he existed solely for their convenience and entertainment. To be sure, the young people all knew he was an important person at the Law School, but, at least while they were still of grade school age, they had the idea that he performed those duties only when he wasn't busy with them.

The good Dean felt that every child should know the joy of riding a bicycle. Even though the professor lived in Williamsburg during the days of legalized school and housing segregation, he never accepted such views and when he said "every child" he did not limit himself to "every white child." During those years poor Black families lived on the west side of South Henry Street, directly opposite the Eastern State Hospital grounds and Cedar Grove Cemetery. Guiding as many bicycles as he could, Mr. Woodbridge would walk to the circular driveway in front of the old Brown Building. Not knowing how they knew he was coming but knowing all the same, the children would be there, waiting a turn to gain confidence and balance on a two wheeler.

On one such occasion a nurse watched for a while, telling herself there just had to be something wrong with a white man who spent his time teaching black children to ride bicycles. Convinced that he was undoubtedly a patient from one of the other buildings, she began to question him. Where did he live? Where did he work? He finally persuaded her that he was sane and sober, and he returned to the social group completely alien to her world.

Professor and

The cycling, as well as hiking and tennis, were usually confined to warm weather, but Mr. Woodbridge was a man of all seasons in his associations with children. He was never heard to complain of the cold or heat, the rain or snow. On the coldest of days, he would be found at the College Pond (now called Crim Dell) or on Lake Matoaka assisting the young people in the art of ice skating. Mr. Woodbridge didn't skate himself. Nevertheless, he was the master teacher and overseer. Parents knew their children were having a safe and exhilarating experience with him.

One woman remembers the ice skating. "Of course, by the time I learned how to skate (this was after he taught me to tell time and ride a bike) I just assumed that Dean Woodbridge would have anything we wanted, anything that was necessary for our recreation. But I was just amazed! I went into his basement one time to get ice skates, and he had boxes of ice skates up to the ceiling. He even had skates to fit me, and I had big feet then. He had skates in every size for men and women. There wasn't a child in the neighborhood that he didn't lend skates to. And he would go down to Lake Matoaka and take a large walking stick out onto the middle of the lake before he'd let any of the children go out onto the lake. He'd stomp around on the lake and pound the lake with that stick. And then he'd build a fire over on the side of the lake so that the children could come off the lake and warm up. I guess he just generally supervised what went on down there. A lot of the neighborhood children would spend all day down there. I don't know what happened at the college while Dean Woodbridge was down supervising all the children ice skating."

Actually, young people came from all over the town to go ice skating. Mr. Woodbridge's daugh-

Woodbridge

Humanitarian



ter is greeted every once in a while by someone who says, "I'll never forget ice skating with your father at Lake Matoaka."

It is easy enough to think of recreational activities for nice weather, for cold weather, for snowy weather. But for rainy weather? Mr. Woodbridge's imagination and fantasy were equal to the task. The woman quoted above remembers well. "I must have been about six or seven. The top of the bike shed attached to his house was shingles, and the way the shingles were laid, there'd be a slot between each shingle that's like an elongated 'u'. It's really like a coin slot in a coin belt. And he told me once that when it rained, it always rained pennies onto that roof. Of course, I believed him, because it was Dean Woodbridge telling me this, and if anybody in the neighborhood was going to have a magic roof, it might as well be Dean Woodbridge. And so I went over across the street one day after it had rained, and I reminded him that he had told me this outrageous tale about it raining pennies on his roof. He lifted me onto that bike roof and said, 'Yes, surely, there must be some pennies, because there had been a recent rain.' And sure enough, I looked around on that roof and stuck into those elongated 'u' slots were little pennies just as if they had been stuck into a coin purse. And I probably collected five or ten cents that day. And, of course, every time it rained, I just zipped over to his house."

This person went on to mention receiving her first Dr. Seuss book from the Dean and playing ping pong in his bomb shelter. She said, "I remember when he built the fall-out shelter, how special it made us feel to know he'd built it for the children. Of course, I wasn't aware of any nuclear threat at that time. It was just another neat thing

Dean Woodbridge had done, as far as I was concerned."

Finally, she summed up her experience by saying, "Well, we must have spent hours and hours together, total, the two of us. I was too young to realize that I was making demands on a busy man's time. He was just like any other playmate we had, you know."

This same girl commented, "When you consider all the other children he was also spending time with, it's a wonder he got anything done at work." But Mr. Woodbridge did get something done at work. In fact, he did his job so well that he was nominated as one of the country's outstanding professors in 1950. His students described him in such a way to reporters that the opening line of the caption in "Life" (international edition, Oct. 23, 1950, p. 47) is "A normal work-day for William and Mary's Woodbridge is 15 or 16 hours." These students never knew about Mr. Woodbridge's interest in younger children, and yet their own experience must have demonstrated time and time again that somehow his day did extend for more than twenty-four hours.

Every week had seven days, and Mr. Woodbridge never hesitated to do even more teaching on Saturday and Sunday. One alumnus, now a Baptist minister, recalls, "When I faced my last term in law school I needed a two hour course that was offered only alternate years, and that was the wrong year! I had gone to summer school at the University of Tennessee Law School the summer before and both semesters that school year carried an overload of classes in an effort to accelerate my graduation because of financial difficulties. Dr. Woodbridge, who already carried a full load of class work, volunteered to devote his Saturday mornings to help me out. I went to his home each Saturday of that term for two hours, and he taught me as carefully and fully as if I had been multiplied in number."

At another time there was a crippled Negro man in Richmond who wanted to review for the Bar Examination, and he was recommended to Mr. Woodbridge by the Department of Rehabilitation. Since the segregation laws of the state prohibited the man's presence in the professor's coach class, Mr. Woodbridge taught him privately on many Saturdays.

During his first years in Williamsburg, Mr. Woodbridge regularly tutored a Jewish shopkeeper on Sunday mornings. In return, the merchant taught German to the oldest Woodbridge child, Hensley. The professor was a great believer in the barter system and he taught others on much the same terms. He instructed the lady who became the city attorney, and in exchange she taught his daughter to type.

Professor Woodbridge's students held him in high esteem for his knowledge of the law. His last class engraved on a radio they gave him these words from "The Deserted Village:"

"And still they gazed, and still the wonder grew
That one small head held all he knew."

That knowledge came from diligent pursuit of the jealous mistress, a lesson continually preached and modeled to his students.

One former student recalls an instance that not only illustrates the Dean's devotion to the law, but also his expectations of his students. "One example that comes to mind is the review session following the Virginia Bar Examination. I had the misfortune of missing a question on Negotiable Instruments, and I realized my error shortly after having turned in my paper. At the session in the Dean's office, he asked me how I'd answered that question, and I rather cavalierly stated that I had missed the answer, but that the proper answer was —. At that point a somewhat annoyed Dean stopped me short. 'You missed that question?!? How could you miss it? It was number one in the notes!' He, of course, was right. One of his students should not have missed that question. He demanded more."

Mr. Woodbridge had a set of index cards for each class. Each student's name was written on a card. The professor called on students in the order they appeared in that deck of cards, and since he shuffled them before each class meeting, no one ever knew when he might be called upon to recite. Nor did one ever know when there would be a 'pop' quiz. So, one can well believe that "if in each semester a student decided that he was going to devote himself to being well prepared in one course, you may be assured that one course was taught by Dean Woodbridge."

One student who was caught unprepared still remembered the occasion years later. "During that same semester I came to class unprepared because of a weekend spent as a reserve naval aviator at the Norfolk Naval Air Station. Hoping that my luck would hold out and that I not be called upon, I found the opposite situation as

Doctor Woodbridge asked me to recite. After indicating I was unprepared I noted the Doctor marking something in a little book on his desk. Thinking I should at least attempt to explain the reason for my non-preparation, I approached Doctor Woodbridge after class and explained that I had been flying for the Navy over the weekend and did not get home in time the night before to prepare myself for class. He looked me in the eye and stated, 'That's all right, Mr. H—. You are entitled to be not prepared one time in my class.' His admonition made a very strong impression on me, and I always managed to be prepared for all of his subsequent classes."

The Dean did not leave the law in the classroom; he was constantly conscious of it and applied it to his daily life. This point is made so well by the alumnus who wrote:

During the summer of 1953, while a law student, I worked for Dr. Woodbridge, helping him revise his bar notes and also hoping in the process to absorb some knowledge through summer-long exposure to that great mind.

Dr. Woodbridge had to go to Richmond one day and had planned to go by bus. Since I had a car, I insisted on taking him, and he reluctantly agreed. When I stopped to buy gasoline at a filling station on Richmond Road, he offered to pay for the purchase and seemed quite dismayed when I repeatedly refused to accept his offer.

"We had driven about a mile in complete silence when Dr. Woodbridge observed in all seriousness and in his finest professional tone: 'You realize, of course, that this means you owe me a duty of only slight care.'

Mr. Woodbridge's students respected him for his knowledge of the law, his devotion to the law, and his application of the law in his daily life. But, over and above all this, they respected him as a man of wisdom and integrity. While many have groped for just the right words, one former student expressed those feelings so well when he wrote: "The best testimonial that one can give another is to say, 'I want my children to be like him.' None of my children have ever met Dr. Woodbridge, but they know Dr. Woodbridge."

Another alumnus wrote, "I regard him as the most ethical and moral person I have ever met, and I take pleasure in submitting the following incident. His extremely demanding moral code is revealed in the legendary visit to the drugstore. Dean Woodbridge and Mr. J— were in the local pharmacy on their way to the law school. Mr. J— stopped on the way out to glimpse at the headlines of a newspaper on the stand. Immediately, Dean Woodbridge saw the moral ramifications. 'Well,' he said, 'you've used the man's newspaper, so you are obligated to buy it.' The legend continues that Mr. J— bought the newspaper without noting an appeal."

The writer of another letter in Mr. Wood-

bridge's album attests to his honesty in this story: "I remember an occasion in front of the Coca-Cola machine in the basement of Bryan Hall. Dean Woodbridge was accustomed to having a Coke at the conclusion of his 9:00 a.m. class. The Coca-Cola machine we had at the time was a noted short-changer, although apparently it had the good sense never to shortchange Dean Woodbridge. On this occasion, I walked past Dean Woodbridge, standing in front of the machine with a half finished Coca-Cola in one hand, a nickel in the other, and his text book under an arm. I could see he was in a dilemma. He asked me if I had a solution to his problem. He told me that he had deposited a nickel in the machine and had received a Coca-Cola and a nickel in change. His first reaction was, he said, to return the misdelivered nickel to the machine, but it had occurred to him that in doing so he would receive another bottle of Coca-Cola. (Nothing was said about this, but we both realized that this would be compounding a felony, because the Dean shouldn't have been even drinking the first Coke.) I told Dean Woodbridge that that machine had robbed me so often that if I were in his position I would feel justice was being served. After a moment of quick reflection, the good Dean allowed as how he had never been shortchanged. Then the solution appeared to him. He would keep an eye peeled out his office window for the agent of the Coca-Cola company and would return the nickel at the first opportunity. I never felt it necessary to ask him if he had remembered to return the nickel."

As the alumni searched their subconscious to write letters for Mr. Woodbridge's album to be presented at his retirement party, they remembered not only his stature as a teacher, a man of character, but also a man of wit. The following story serves as an excellent example.

"During my stay at the law school at the College of William and Mary Mr. A—, also a student in the law school, unfortunately was blind and required assistance in the reading of assignments. For almost two years I read the cases to Mr. A— in preparation for the daily work and he and I studied together for the examinations and actually studied together for the bar exam and took the bar exam together which we both passed in the summer of 1942.

"My recollection as to the wit of Dean Woodbridge involves the fact that on one particular day he inquired of me as to certain facets of the factual situation involved in a case assigned to us for study that particular day. I had to admit to Dean Woodbridge that I did not remember the particular facets and, therefore, was unable to answer the question. Having thereupon turned to Mr. A— and asking the same question and Mr. A— having come up with the correct answer Dean Woodbridge, knowing that Mr. A—'s complete knowledge of the case came as a result of my

reading the case to him, commented, 'There is an example of water rising higher than its source.'"

No account of Mr. Woodbridge's activities on behalf of his students would be complete without mentioning his authorship of the bar review notes. The esteem for this study aid is best expressed in the editorial written when the Dean became the first William and Mary recipient of the Thomas Jefferson Award.

"Once upon a time, a young law student sat in one of the classrooms of the venerable College of William and Mary, preparing for the state bar examinations in a special session of coaching aimed at those exams.

"Not long afterward, the young student, now a fledgling lawyer, stood before the bar of one of Virginia's courts, arguing his first case. Asked for a reference for his legal point, he said, 'Virginia Bar Notes,' and the Judge nodded, accepting the authority for the point under discussion."

However much the law students felt the name of Dudley Warner Woodbridge to be synonymous with the Marshall-Wythe School of Law, the Dean loved the College as a whole and supported it well with his time, talents, and monetary contributions. He served on the Publications Committee for many years. He stayed up late countless nights advising the Discipline Committee and the Honor Council. Even though he was not a member of any church, he was chosen to be the advisor to the Student Religious Union. During the war years he assisted those students who were preparing for certain Army and Navy programs. During the thirty-nine years of his career, there were undoubtedly times when he disagreed with certain administrative policies. Yet, not only did he remain loyal but he counseled those whose actions might have been interpreted as being detrimental to the college.

If one peruses the correspondence file of those years when Dr. Woodbridge served as dean, one is impressed with the courteous manner in which he replied to all letters. Above all else, the letters show a respect for human dignity whether they were addressed to an alumnus, the concerned mother of a student seeking financial aid, a man serving a prison term, or someone whose thinking did not coincide with his own.

When the schools were closed in Prince Edward County in 1959 and public education was denied the black students, the Dean published his views in the Richmond Times-Dispatch. One reader wrote the Dean: ". . . Your remarks against the people of Prince Edward County show your abysmal ignorance of the freedom of choice the integrationists have spawned upon the public school system of Virginia to bring about its destruction. . . . As badly as William and Mary needs additional funds to carry on its program as a better institution, it is a dismal shame the Administration is shackled with your calibre to hinder it in its efforts. As a taxpayer I hate to see my funds go in support of an institution with faculty members

eager to forment trouble in the guise of personal expression. We have reached the place in Virginia, when those high and low who would consort with the enemy and permit themselves to be duped into support of alien ideology, should be taken off the taxpayers' shoulders. Such a viewpoint I intend to express to the numerous members of the General Assembly (personally known) until our State supported colleges are rid of those who would end Virginia's wonderful traditions, ways, customs and mores of the white race." Mr. Woodbridge replied: "I was glad to have your views as expressed in your letter of September 25th even if they are quite different from mine. With best wishes, I am, Sincerely yours, D. W. Woodbridge (signed)"

Dean Woodbridge was known as well in the greater Williamsburg community as in the College. If a child broke her leg, it was he who wrote stories for her amusement and visited her daily so she wouldn't get behind in school. When young people were experiencing difficulty in algebra or Latin, they turned to him for tutoring. If a poor farmer wanted assistance with his income tax, he called on Mr. Woodbridge; payment was nominal, consisting perhaps of a coathanger fancied up a bit with crocheting by the man's wife. If an elderly neighbor had snow on her steps and sidewalk, again it was Mr. Woodbridge who did the shoveling.

Both Mr. and Mrs. Woodbridge worked hard to earn money. Mrs. Woodbridge took in tourists and servicemen. She typed Mr. Woodbridge's famous **Bar Review Notes**. Yet, for all the effort put on earning it, money had almost no value to the Woodbridges. They didn't own a car. Their home furnishing, their clothing, their meals were inexpensive but adequate. Anything more was deemed an extravagance and a waste. They felt that once the essential necessities were provided, some money was to be saved so that one would not be a burden in his old age and the rest was to be used in assisting those less fortunate than themselves. They believed that the best investments, those that paid the highest rate of interest in personal satisfaction, were those investments made in people. They, singly and together, performed acts of kindness for the poor in such number that it would not be believable to anyone who did not know them personally.

During World War II Mr. Woodbridge served as an air raid warden and as the Home Service Chairman of the Red Cross.

Dean Woodbridge did everything he could to improve race relations in Williamsburg. Dr. Trudier Harris, the English professor who won the most recent Thomas Jefferson Teaching Award, has said that he was one of the first people she heard about from the Black community when she moved to Williamsburg several years ago.

There is a prevalent notion that those who have demanding professions neglect their own families. It is only natural to raise the question: After

spending so much time with the law students and the children of the community, did Mr. Woodbridge have any time, energy, and enthusiasm for his own wife and children? The answer would be an unqualified yes. The late Dean Landrum once remarked that she had never seen a man who enjoyed his children any more than did Dr. Woodbridge.

The dean taught his children that their waking hours should be divided into three parts: one third for work, one third for study, and one third for recreation. He himself directed the activities in each of these areas. His children carried newspapers. Not only did Mr. Woodbridge teach them the elements of good service, but he pitched into help in bad weather, if a child was sick, or if the papers were late. Today when the oldtimers complain about turnover among their paper carriers, they are heard to say, "Oh, for the good old days when the Woodbridge children carried the paper."

If Mr. Woodbridge loved teaching law students, he loved teaching his own children even more. First and always, he taught them the love of learning. He read them **Carpenter's Geographical Readers** and drilled them in multiplication tables, fractions, algebra, English grammar, Latin, French, even wills. His broad classical education in the natural and social sciences, ancient and modern languages, and literature, coupled with his retentive mind enabled him to assist his children, no matter what they were studying. He read to them, beginning with fairy tales and progressing through the great English poets and authors. He shared Shakespeare with his son when he was only seven or eight. Later he read Uncle Tom's Cabin to his family. He loved "The Pied Piper of Hamelin", and particularly enjoyed the contractual principles of the poem. When his eyesight failed him, Mr. Woodbridge memorized this poem and his other favorites such as "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" so that he could have them at instant recall.

Mr. Woodbridge taught his children that care of the body was just as important as care of the spirit and intellect. He taught them the elements of track and field sports as well as tennis and ping pong. When the weather permitted, he took his children bicycling or hiking through Matoaka woods on Sunday afternoons. He went to see home football games and interpreted the game for professors from other countries. Recreation was a vital part of his life, and he enjoyed it to the fullest.

Life was truly rich for Mr. Woodbridge, and whenever there was an opportunity to make life a little bit richer for someone else, he seized it. He always had the time. Perhaps, just perhaps, his day did consist of more than the prescribed number of hours. After all, as the lady might have said, if anybody was going to have a magic day, it might as well be Dean Woodbridge.