

Bill Ruddy

Fifteen minutes into my interview of Bill Ruddy, I thought, "This is a gentleman." Reclining on a hospital bed, in a room offering a favored view of Portland Island, he summarized his history as a lawyer in Alaska and the Russian Far East. We talked about music, and how he formed the Juneau Marching Band, because a town like Juneau should have band music during its Forth of July parades. He was kind, respectful to me, showing no fear of his impending death. Here is a thumbnail of his Alaska life:

Bill graduated from Yale Law School in 1962 then served his country in a military reserve intelligence unit. His first legal job was with the Federal Maritime Commission. It regulates shipping rates and practices for vessels coming into contact with American shores. He enjoyed the work and had no plans of quitting until in 1964, Alaska Attorney General George Hayes offered him an assistant attorney general position in Juneau. He wanted Bill to represent the new state in maritime law matters. Mr. Ruddy didn't accept the offer before checking with his fiancé, Susan Ruddy, who now lives in Anchorage. She had already expressed interest in moving to Alaska to work on a newspaper and was delighted with General Hayes's offer. She was working as a cub reporter for the Washington Star at the time. Bill accepted the offer, thinking that he and Susan would return to mainland Alaska in two years.

At that time, the Attorney General Office in Juneau had eight civil and two criminal attorneys. It had one lawyer stationed in Anchorage and another in Fairbanks who handled criminal and civil case. Dorothy Oz Holland held that position in Anchorage. The future Alaska Supreme Court Justice Jay Rabinowitz represented the

state in Fairbanks. The Juneau office was located on the fourth floor of the Capital Building, right above Governor Bill Egan's Office. Mr. Ruddy believed that the governor knew everyone in their office. Once, while concentrating on a project at his desk, he felt a shadow over him. Looking up he saw Bill Egan. They introduced themselves. The governor remembered Mr. Ruddy's name for the rest of his life. He had the ability to put names and faces together and even remember the names of the person's wife and children. He even took the time to write the odd letter to them. But the state was a lot smaller and poorer then, before the discovery of oil.

Bill Ruddy's initial job at the Attorney General's Office was to monitor the fairness of the rates and practices of waterborne common carriers. Senator Ernest Gruening had publicly expressed concern that the Alaska Steamship Company was overcharging Alaska canneries for moving their product to the Lower 18. After reviewing the company's records, Bill determined that rather than making exorbitant profits, the company was actually losing money. Because their ships had to use the bulk freight method, which required the use of expensive longshoremen services for loading and unloading, the Alaska Steamship Company could not compete in Alaska with carriers using the less expensive container shipping method. They relied instead, upon earnings from shipping material to Viet Nam. The company had ceased their passenger service by this time. In days before regular air services to Southeast Alaska, the company operated elegant vessels on the run between Seattle and Juneau. Mr. Ruddy's career didn't suffer as the result of his work on the Alaska Steamship matter and eventually he and Senator Gruening became good friends. Bill described the senator as a wonderful man and admired him for being one of only two senators to oppose the United States' entry into

the Viet Nam War even though Alaska had such a large military presence at the time. Mr. Ruddy thought that this stand might have resulted in the senator's loss to Mike Gravel in the next election. Bill was also impressed with the Senator's command of the English language and public speaking ability.

Later, Bill worked with the Department of Commerce to establish the Alaska Public Utilities Commission.

Mr. Ruddy left the Attorney General Office after private attorney Fred Eastaugh invited him to go sailing so he could offer him a job with his firm. When Mr. Eastaugh retired, Mr. Ruddy, his wife Cathy Kolkhorst and Jim Bradley set up their own firm. He said he currently is an active member of the Bar Association, but is, "just out here at Mile 15 (Glacier Highway)...not doing anything too serious."

During his career, Mr. Ruddy practiced law in Russia with the help of a law school friend named Jonathan Ruskin. After he graduated from law school, Mr. Ruskin went around the world starting law offices in places where the big firms did not practice. After the Soviet Union fell, he opened an office in Moscow. When Alaska Airlines began offering service between Alaska to the Russian Far East, it was possible for Bill to commute from Juneau to Vladivostok, a town of 700,000 people. In 1997, he helped Mr. Ruskin put together a law firm there with four Russian attorneys. It is still a successful office, now staffed with English speaking Russians, working under the American canons of legal ethics. This gives the firm an advantage over the other law firms in the area. At the time he worked there, lawyers in the firm had to police themselves as there was no local bar association strong enough to enforce ethics rules legal licensing requirements. Anyone could walk into a court and plead a case, whether educated in the law or not.

The Russian judges wanted to rule honestly but there was a lot of pressure on them to please the local governor who appointed them. Some governors left their appointed judges alone, while others forced their judges to come out with politically driven rulings. Mr. Ruddy found the rules and laws for the arbitration (civil commercial) courts were very good. The Russian Courts followed the same contract law concepts applied in the U.S., which allowed for fair resolutions of cases unless the court was constricted by political pressure. While Russian court decisions were not published as they are in America, each judge maintained a library of her own decisions. If the judge liked you, she permitted access to them, allowing you to know how she would decide the case. It was important to maintain good relationships with the judges.

One of Bill's Russian cases involved a corporate shareholder's dispute. He and his clients, representatives of the majority shareholders in a brewery, arrived at the site of a shareholders' meeting in plenty of time to attend. They joined a long line to get into the meeting. When they reached the front of the slow moving line, they were told that they were too late to register and therefore could not attend the meeting. This prevented them from voting at their shares. Bill filed a court challenge that succeeded in the trial court. An appellate court reversed and remanded. Bill won again at the trial but lost the appeal. This went on like that for six months. In another case, Bill represented the US Counsel General in a tort case that turned on diplomatic immunity.

In Russia cases start, like here, with the filing of a complaint. However, the matter is resolved with motions supported by affidavits. There is no trial or discovery.

Bill had a varied caseload while in his Alaskan practice. In one case, *Katz v. State of Alaska*, the court adopted the principle of comparative negligence. He also worked on

a criminal case, where the appellate court limited the scope of warrantless searches during a police investigation. He had at least seven more reported Supreme Court decisions.

Mr. Ruddy felt lucky to have been an Alaska attorney during the first years of statehood when lawyers had to practice, "by the seat of their pants." He said people like Bob Robertson and Burt Faulkner were creating Alaska law by arguing positions before judges who had very little precedent to guide them. I asked Bill if he ever wanted to work in another profession. He said that once he outgrew the child's goal of being a fireman, he wanted to be a lawyer. During my November 16 interview, he told me, "I was very happy in the law."

William G. Ruddy, at age 76 died in Juneau on November 26, 2013, a gentleman.