

Reflections of William "Bill" H. Stone

An early cold front arrived in Baton Rouge just before I stepped off the train in mid-September 1961. The cold wind blew through my thread worn pants and chilled my short-sleeved arms. As I trudged up the natural levee to catch the bus to the LSU campus carrying my cardboard suitcase and my father's army duffel bag, I wondered if I had made a mistake transferring to LSU from the University of Florida, which was near my home.

After finding my dorm room in the north stadium, I walked to the geology building and met Professor Bennie Craft. That moment was the turning point in my life. After he thoroughly interviewed me and enthusiastically explained what petroleum engineering was all about, he introduced me to Professor Murray Hawkins. From that day forth, I was Bill to them, an individual, not a number.

During the spring semester I took the introductory petroleum engineering course under Professor Craft. The first thing we learned the very first day of class was how to shake

hands and then the ABC's of getting along with people. We learned the importance of good social skills. Professor Craft's enthusiasm for the oil industry was very contagious, and his dedication to his student was obvious.

However, as the year progressed, I began to realize that I probably would not have adequate money to be able to attend LSU the next year. So I decided to return to the University of Florida and be a football manager once again. But just prior to the end of the semester, Professor Craft told me he had recommended me to Standard Oil Company of Texas as a summer engineer. That summer I earned more than my father made. But because I had committed to be a football manager at Florida, I went back there for a year although I now could afford to go to LSU (barely). An added benefit of that year was being close to my mother and father before they passed away.

Professors Craft and Hawkins warmly welcomed me back in the fall of 1963. That fall I had a course taught by Professor Bill Holden whose passionate teaching, which continued long

after the bell had rung, taught me that petroleum engineering was art as well as science. But all was not well. I had a little more money as a result of my oilfield work and since I had bought an old car, my social life was more active and I had a disastrous semester grade-wise. When I was registering for the spring semester, one of the courses I need to take had only 1 slot open. I overheard Bill Holden's whispered comment to Murray Hawkins that they needed to save that slot for someone who was going to make it. The truth hurts, but that moment was an epiphany. I began studying and although I didn't really know how, I got better at it gradually and did better in school.

Professor Craft had been head of the Petroleum Engineering Department since the early 30's. But he passed away in early 1964. Holden was leaving in the fall for the University of Texas to do doctoral work. Murray Hawkins became the department head and the only faculty member. But Murray hired two outstanding and enthusiastic professors: Oscar Kimbler and Bill Hise. They were excellent teachers and continued the department's tradition of concern for the students. They followed in Craft, Hawkins and Holden's footsteps by providing their students with a complete education. My life's successes result from the educational foundation and philosophy they provided to me. And these teachers did the same to so many others. That's why this program has such extraordinarily strong support from the department's alumni.

It was not an ill wind blowing that September day so many years ago, but a wind that billowed my sails to a very delightful life.