
J. RICHARDSON DILWORTH



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ONE MEASURE of a person's contribution to his times, his nation, his community and his family is the length and substance of his obituary notice in the *New York Times*. The one that appeared on the last day of 1997 to chronicle the life of J. Richardson Dilworth was a remarkable litany of positions held, responsibilities fulfilled, honors received, and good deeds performed.

But it didn't scratch the surface of Dick Dilworth. A better three-dimensional portrait of this remarkable, complicated, generous, humorous, and lovable man would be a compilation of the collective memories of those of us gathered here in his memory. As we leave this chapel today, each one of us having spent these few moments thinking together of our good friend, such a rich and warm compilation will surely leave with us.

Not one of us who is speaking today has touched Dick's life in all of his many-faceted roles and careers. It was my great luck, over a period of more than five decades, to have been with him mostly when he was "at leisure"—and if you could peek at my notes you would see that "at leisure" is in quotes. I think we would all agree that "leisure" is a condition that does not easily fit his image.

A sharper image of Dick at leisure, once he unburdened himself of his many responsibilities, was a vision all his friends were anticipating. A chance for him to deepen his many friendships, to indulge in his many intellectual interests in art, in history, more time with his children and grandchildren, an opportunity for travel. But this was not to be. Leisure without the challenge and the satisfaction of constructive activity was for Dick a martini without an olive.

Most who knew him but slightly usually saw a sharply-focused individual who was all business, even when playing a game, riding a horse, or sailing a boat. And indeed that was so. Whatever he did, he did it with full concentration, exerting the best of his abilities (which were truly awesome).

Yet we who have seen him perform in any of his many activities, even those that would be ranked at the top echelon of serious affairs, have experienced his incandescent flash of humor, often accompanied by a high-decibel and very contagious blast of laughter, always timed with great precision, to lubricate his leadership toward a wise and acceptable solution.

Those of us cut from coarser cloth than Dick who are among his friends (and I dare say that includes most of us) found being with him not only a pleasure but a pleasant challenge—one that left us feeling taller, wittier, and wiser. He had an aura about him that implausibly blended the appearance and authority of a true aristocrat with an open and democratic receptivity to new (and—if I may use the word within

these hallowed walls—liberal) ideas. And most surprising of all, he seemed to have a very incomplete understanding of his own worth! He was modest almost to the point—perhaps even beyond—of insecurity.

For the next few minutes, let me indulge myself by sharing with you some happy memories.

Now, Bunny dear, I hope this won't embarrass you! A little earlier I spoke of leisure without responsibility being to Dick like a martini without an olive. But at least that is an understandable image.

To think of Dick without Bunny is more like conjuring up a martini without gin—impossible! Theirs was a picture-book partnership. The flame of their love, unlike that of Dorothy Parker's candle, was infinite. If Dick had qualities of an aristocrat, Bunny is a queen to match. But this marriage, like Dick's character, was multifaceted, and contained a warmth we don't often associate with royalty.

For example, whenever they spent any time apart, no matter how brief, its ending was always punctuated with a genuine kiss of love—no way like a formal peck of habit—accompanied with a sound that Beth and I soon characterized as that of Bird Noises. It was a sound to make Cinderella blush with both joy and embarrassment!

Many years ago Bunny and Dick cruised with us in the Grenadines on a lovely schooner, the *Mollihawk*. There is a passage between the Islands called Kick 'em Jenny that is notorious for its high winds and tricky seas. Dick had the wheel as we made that passage with the wind behind us, and there was considerable danger of a disastrous jibe. But Dick was up to the challenge—with both his characteristic ingenuity and originality. He chose—much to our paid skipper's deep concern—to steer while facing backward—watching the waves and skillfully avoiding their power to push us into a jibe. That was seamanship of a kind never practiced before, and, I feel certain, never again. I am sure that there are many here today who could match stories of this behavior of Dick under a wide variety of totally different circumstances—and all with an equally surprising and creative result.

Not all of my stories are about a hero without blemishes. Dick suffered from vertigo that was often uncontrollable. While in the Caribbean we once anchored off the Pitons—very steep islands off the coast of St. Lucia—and decided to climb them. With great courage almost suppressed by apprehension, Dick joined us in a climb to the top. But when we started down, vertigo won over courage. However, Dick always had a reserve backup system. In this case, sheer guts replaced courage as we helped to guide him down (again facing backward toward the enemy, this time the cliff of the Pitons rather than the waves of Kick 'em Jenny).

The Dilworths spent many summer vacations with us on Naushon,

the island home of the Forbes family. Just to mention that location conjures for Beth and me many happy memories of long days hiking, sailing, riding, and picnicking together, and lovely cocktail hours in what we called our “Compression Chamber,” a widow’s-walk tower on top of the house into which we could retire, closing a trap door behind us, and keeping a parental eye on whatever mischief our clutch of children might get into as they played around the house below us.

I will end with just one of these stories, which I think captures Dick’s unique ability for mixing humor, determination, and a bulldog’s drive to get the job done—whether on Wall Street or Broadway. (Broadway, incidentally, is the location of this story—not the one near Wall Street, but a very treacherous passage in Woods Hole, within sight of our Naushon home.)

One evening, while we were just beginning our cocktails in the Compression Chamber, we could see a rather large and plush yacht go on the rocks in the Broadway passage—not an unusual event, but this time of some excitement because of the size of the yacht. With immediate twin reactions, Dick and I started down to our small power boat to get closer to the action and, in Walter Mitty fashion, possibly help in a “rescue.”

As luck would have it, we were the only rescue boat on the scene. As we edged close, we could see a group of fashionably-dressed people in the stern, calmly drinking tea while a very distraught captain was trying to survey the extent of his predicament.

With local knowledge, we quickly diagnosed the problem and could see that an easy fix would be a line tossed to the stern of the yacht, allowing us to pull it off the rocks. We communicated this to the captain, who agreed. The only problem was that the passengers and their tea tray were directly in the way of where the tow line should be hitched.

Quickly sizing up the situation, Dick pulled out an old, familiar, and rather greasy line that we kept in the lazarette, coiled it neatly, and poised to make the throw. But first, with impeccable pronunciation and diction, he called out to the passengers, “I don’t mean to be rude, but I think you will find this useful.”

Then, with perfect control, he heaved the dirty coil right on top of their tea service, where the captain quickly retrieved it and made it fast to a cleat. The rest of the rescue was carried out efficiently and seriously.

Just a few of Dick’s many talents—irresistible determination to get the job done, an instinct for being useful, rapid decision-making in a crisis, impeccable good manners, a quick and appropriately timed sense of humor—all these were displayed in that one tightly-compressed incident.

This is an accurate—if inadequate—summation of my memories of a true friend whom I will always miss and never forget.

DONALD B. STRAUS

Trustee Emeritus
Institute for Advanced Study

IN 1975, while I was chairman of the Chase Manhattan Bank, Dick Dilworth came to see me in his capacity as a director of the Bank. Chase, like other banks at the time, was experiencing significant problems with real estate loans, both domestic and foreign.

Dick had been my friend for two decades. I knew him well, trusted him completely, and liked him immensely.

That's why I was shocked when he began the conversation by saying, "David, in my judgment you have one year to turn the bank around before the board asks you to leave." He was speaking on his own and as a friend, but I knew that he had accurately gauged the board's attitude toward me. I had not faced the fact that my leadership of the bank might be in jeopardy. It was a unique and unsettling experience.

Fortunately, I am happy to say, we were able to turn things around at Chase before the year was up. And I was not asked to leave!

But that was Dick Dilworth. Always straightforward. Always honest. Always sincere. When he felt it was his duty to bring me bad news, he did it, uncomfortable as it might be for both of us.

In a world where mediocrity, greed, dishonesty, and lack of vision abound, a few individuals stand out as a shining light and inspiration to the rest of us. Dick Dilworth was one of those individuals. Though a man of great modesty who shunned public recognition, Dick was a doer who brought strength, integrity, and success to everything he touched.

At school, in college, and in law school, good grades and athletic prowess came naturally to him. He was popular and respected by all. He never sought leadership positions to enhance his image. What he cared about was excellence and quality.

As a young investment banker with Kuhn, Loeb, he quickly moved up to a senior position because of his analytical skills and financial ingenuity. Early on he became a close friend of Sigmund Warburg, who was one of a half-dozen giants of finance in the post-World War II era. Within his own firm and on Wall Street, he was seen as a comer.

My brothers and I quickly thought of Dick when we were looking for a senior financial adviser to run the Rockefeller Family Office. And in 1958, we were able to persuade him to take the job.

His impact on our family over the years was incalculable. It goes

without saying that his financial advice was the best, but beyond that he worked with our entire family on a broad range of activities. Dick counseled all of us on matters great and small alike.

This was not always a simple or easy task, as Dick occasionally admitted, but only under duress. In 1984, Dick and Bunny accompanied Peggy and me on a visit to Morocco. We drove over the Atlas Mountains to the edge of the Sahara, where Dick ventured into the desert on a camel. The camel became excited, bucked, and gave Dick quite a ride. The camel driver reined in the beast with great difficulty and brought him back. When Dick slid off the hump, he was ashen white and was heard to say, "That ride was like managing the Rockefeller Office."

Dick worked closely with me and my brothers on all aspects of our very different careers. He was particularly helpful to Nelson during much of his political career—not always an easy task. But all of us could count on receiving advice that was based on Dick's strong sense of integrity. He did not believe in cutting corners when questions of right or wrong were involved.

Dick managed the financial affairs of my family with superb ability and impressive results for more than a quarter-century.

During his chairmanship of Rockefeller Center from 1966 to 1982, he transformed that critical family asset into a more viable financial vehicle that provided the basis for the dramatic events of the 1980s. Without Dick's guidance none of this would have been possible.

Dick also played a critical role in strengthening many of my family's philanthropic institutions. He served for many years on boards of the Rockefeller University, Colonial Williamsburg, and Winrock International Institute for Agricultural Development.

Beyond our family's interests, Dick had many other important business and philanthropic associations. For example, his involvement with the Straus family and R. H. Macy dated back many years, and he served on the board of the Chrysler Corporation during a critical time in its history.

Dick had a special love and respect for his alma mater, Yale University—although, as a Harvard man, I sometimes found this difficult to comprehend. He served the Yale Corporation for two and a half decades and was its Corporation's Senior Fellow for the last thirteen years of his service. Here is how Yale president Richard Levin described Dick's contribution: "No trustee of the past half century had a deeper respect for Yale's past, nor a clearer vision of Yale's future, than Dick Dilworth."

When Dick retired, friends and associates established the J. Richardson Dilworth Professorship in British History in his honor. The Dilworth Chair is currently held by Professor Paul M. Kennedy. Professor

Kennedy captured the essence of this extraordinary man when he said, “Dick Dilworth was one of the most humane, gentle, and perceptive leaders of his generation. His gentle manner disguised a truly independent spirit. The range of his interests, all genuinely held, was extraordinary.”

Dick took immense pride in the work of the Institute for Advanced Study, right here in Princeton. He served as its chairman and president for more than a decade. During that time, the Institute’s international renown grew exponentially, and the work of its faculty continued in the great tradition of such earlier luminaries as Albert Einstein, John von Neumann, J. Robert Oppenheimer, and George F. Kennan. Here is what James D. Wolfensohn, the Institute’s current chairman, had to say about Dick: “Dick Dilworth made unique contributions to the development of the Institute. He had a remarkable ability to cross the boundaries of business to an understanding of academic life and research at its highest level.”

I would only add that Dick did everything “at the highest level.” Dick’s longstanding involvement with and leadership of the Metropolitan Museum of Art—an institution he first visited as a young boy—was marked by his characteristic thoroughness and passion. As chairman from 1983 to 1987, he consolidated the impressive changes that had been introduced by his predecessor, Douglas Dillon, and handed over a much strengthened institution to his successor, Punch Sulzberger.

Dick was a prodigious worker, a very fast reader, and a person of immense intellectual curiosity. For example, he had a deep scholarly interest in English naval history and the natural history of Antarctica, interests he always enjoyed sharing with others.

He was a devoted family man whose deep love for the beautiful and ever-scintillating Bunny Cushing never flagged over the fifty-seven wonderful years of their marriage. Their devotion to four remarkable children was a joy to behold. Anyone who was lucky enough to have been their friend was fortunate. My family was particularly blessed by Dick’s loyal friendship over so many years—as indeed were all of us gathered here today, in this beautiful chapel, and many others as well.

Elected 1984; Development/Campaign Steering Committee 1990–93

DAVID ROCKEFELLER

Former Chairman

The Chase Manhattan Bank

[These remarks were delivered at a memorial service at the Princeton University Chapel on 10 January 1998.]