

It is often said of teachers that their contributions might best be calculated generationally. After all, as a teacher, one never knows where one's influence ends – as one teaches a few student souls, who then go on to teach others, who in turn go on to become parents of still more, and on and on and on. In the field of gambling studies, our generational growth can be easily traced: all of us link, via citation or, even more commonly, in person, with the great Dr. William Eadington and what most of us call “the Eadington Conference.”

As is the case for so many in our field, Bill built the road that I have traveled, and his conference epitomizes the spirit of his contributions better than any of his other efforts (which is really saying something, when one reviews his CV). When I was an undergraduate in the early 1990s, I discovered that there was one giant on every gambling scholar's bibliography page: William R. Eadington. As I buried myself in the bowels of my university's library system, I remember the weight that that name carried. It seemed magisterial, almost, though today that original sense of majesty is almost unrecognizable when I think of “my Bill.” (And as these pages attest, each of us has our own Bill!)

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As an undergraduate, I had been encouraged by a professor to pursue an honors thesis that examined gambling in my hometown of Las Vegas, and in doing so, of course, I came across Bill's work. Again, and again, and yet again. I remember being struck that the University of Nevada, Reno had the foresight and good fortune to host Dr. Eadington's stunning array of exploits. The most impressive among them was this massive conference, whose published proceedings seemed to leap from my college library's bookshelf. Inside this publication, there were contributions from mathematicians, theorists, clinicians, historians, economists,

sociologists – virtually every academic sensibility that one could use to interpret what many of my college friends deemed a frivolous act. Even though it happened nearly twenty years ago, I have a vivid memory of being seated amidst the smells of an old library, inhaling these published proceedings, as they provided a foundation for an honors thesis that in turn provided a foundation for an academic career.

Several years later, I presented my first paper at an Eadington Conference, and while I like to think that I always prepare for public presentations, in truth nothing inspires you to want to be a better academic quite like an Eadington conference. I remember pulling all-nighters that saw a.m. hours with which I had grown unfamiliar. Another contributor to this volume, Don Feeney, happened to be a program chair for the National Council on Problem Gambling's annual conference, and happened to be in the audience on that conference day. Don's enthusiasm for ideas is much like Bill's: it's infectious, it's connective, and above all else, it is kind. Self-indulgent story shorter, Don's presence and enthusiasm that day led to a keynote at that year's NCPG conference, after which many more kind souls invited me to their own gatherings, and my academic world began to grow, to invoke the over-used but apt phrase, exponentially.

Here's another thing that's remarkable about Bill's conferences: it seems as if Bill attends every single session himself (an impossibility with five or six sessions going on at the same time, but there he always is, it seems). Bill typically takes a seat in the middle

of a middling row, and with his head-taller silhouette standing out from the crowd, he has a “conference pose” that anyone who has seen will recognize: he leans forward, head tilted slightly upward, intent on what is being said and no doubt connecting it to terabytes of data stored in his mind. In contrast to so many of us, who see conferences as opportunities to mingle outside as much as we learn inside, Bill is the very best session attendee I’ve ever seen.

Which is not to say that Bill does not indulge in “outside the lines” play at these conferences – quite the contrary! In fact, I would wager that a very slight majority of Bill’s knowledge has been obtained in conversation rather than from books, with friends who span the globe – and nearly always over wine. I am so fortunate to have joined these wine conversations with Bill and friends on both U.S. coasts (and often in the middle) -- and several times in Canada, in Asia, and in Europe (where it always feels like Bill’s wide-ranging, dignified, and classically well-read academic temperament fits perfectly). And in each conversation, Bill does that thing that is so, so rare among academics: he listens. Way more than he should (indeed, way more than I should *let* him, given how much he knows), Bill listens. And this is why, I’m convinced, Bill is so smart and his conferences are so fun.

Today and forever, Bill’s knowledge becomes my students’ knowledge, and his sensibilities (to the degree I am able to mimic them) are communicated to generations to come. As this field grows in stature and size, and as we approach the 15th gathering of the “Eadington Conference,” it seems a perfect moment to celebrate generations past, and generations future – and all of us linked through “our Bill.”

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