



SOCIETY OF ACTUARIES

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A Tribute to Andy Webster

By Ardian C. Gill

Our profession lost one of its brightest ornaments when Andy Webster died on May 7th. His obituary will surely chronicle his career, his textbooks, his editorship and his work founding the Academy. I would like to speak of the warmth and high regard in which his colleagues held him and of his importance as a mentor to young professionals, including this one.

It was a delight knowing Andy. He could rattle off Chesterton (The great Gaels of Ireland are the men whom God made mad), Sir William Gilbert (You must 'prentice yourself at sixteen, and practice from morning to e'en), Hobbes (Without law...life is solitary, nasty, brutish and short), Shakespeare, Shelly, Pinter, More, Becket (Thomas à, but also Samuel Beckett), Shaw, Wilde, Eliot and those incomprehensible Scots, like Burns. His head was so crammed with literature, you wondered how there was room for underwriting. But he managed to make them coalesce: In my first business encounter of any consequence with Andy, the difficulty of an underwriting decision was expressed by Hamlet, "...or that the Everlastin' had not fixed his canon 'gainst self-slaughter."

He always had an apt and funny story (The colleen who didn't know

she'd married a drunk until he came home sober one day. The Irish were frequent butts of his humor, but he admired them and was proud of having seen O'Casey at the Abbey theatre in Dublin.)

He was a great favorite of the field force and would enliven agents' conventions by dancing Scottish reels and singing harmony with the hardier managers into the wee hours. He conversed in good French with one of our agents, although with the Scottish burr he never quite lost and, some say, carefully nurtured.

I "prenticed" myself to Andy when I was a near Fellow and learned underwriting from him. He taught by what today we would call the holistic method; premiums, medicine, law and judgment were all brought to bear. He had the quality of availability which, in executives, is as rare as Ben Jonson, and it was much valued by green actuaries and aspiring underwriters. He always had time to discuss a case, except, of course, when he was having afternoon tea made on a hotplate in his office. These discussions usually segued into talk about the current Broadway theatre, which he and his wife, Kathleen, attended frequently; they were great fans of Harold Pinter and other British playwrights.

He advised our doctors on the medical aspects of underwriting, "counseled" the lawyers on the finer points of contracts and claims and lectured the actuaries on rate-making. When he retired, the Medical Department gave him an honorary M.D. degree and a jar of "Jewish Penicillin," i.e., chicken soup. The Law Department presented him with a barrister's peruke and robe, and I, now representing the actuaries, created the Webster Crest, an underwriter's coat of arms. He was more proud to be an actuary than anyone I knew, and he inspired many of us to hold ourselves debtors to our profession.

He and Kathleen loved to travel and returned often to their native Aberdeen, a habit I now confess I once used to my advantage: I was writing my last exam and asked Andy for a leave of absence so that I could travel in Europe for the ensuing three months to celebrate. He told me that the company had never granted more than six weeks but that "Perhaps we could get ye two months." I replied, "Well, that cuts Scotland right out of the itinerary." The next day he informed me, "We've decided to accede to yoor request."

He drove a Jaguar and sailed a catamaran with his sons. He was a great gourmet and knew all the best restaurants, the good clarets and, of course, the better scotch whisky ("No 'e', that's Irish," he would lecture.)

We all know that he caused *The Actuary* to blossom from the seedling planted by Ralph Edwards, but you may not know that he conceived the idea of a humorous Competitions column and dragooned me into editing it (he was good at that); I did it anonymously as "C.E.," but he supplied most of the ideas.

In short, he was a man of parts (he could tell you the source of that phrase) who is best portrayed by lines from his favorite work, *Hamlet*. "Take him all in all, he was a man. We shall not look upon his like again."

I think I'll go and toast Andy with his own drink, a little whisky, no ice and a splash of water. I think he'd like it if you did the same.

Ardian C. Gill is Chairman of Gill & Roeser, Inc. He is a former Vice President of the SOA.

Society Committees Need New Members

Fall is the time of the year when many Society of Actuaries committees change chairpersons and recruit new members. These volunteer committees, the backbone of the Society, keep our organization strong as they study and examine the issues our profession faces.

If you would like to participate in our committee structure, we need to hear from you. The 1987 *Yearbook* includes a yellow index card called "Indication of Interest in Serving on Committees." If you are an FSA or an ASA who is no longer taking exams, you can complete this form to indicate your interest in serving on Society of Actuaries committees. Then simply send it to the Society office.

The information you give us will be retained for a few years on a Society computer file. It will be made available to committee chairpersons looking for additional members. Of course, if you wish, you may contact a committee chairperson directly to indicate your interest.

In Memoriam

Alton O. Groth F.S.A. 1930
Myron H. Margolin F.S.A. 1963
Juan B. Rael, Jr. F.S.A. 1959
James R. Tyler F.S.A. 1976
George R. Wallace F.S.A. 1955
Andrew C. Webster F.S.A. 1933
Cyril J. Woods F.S.A. 1949