

Mary Carskadon's personal memories and reflections of William C. Dement, MD, PhD

I met Dr. Dement when my cousin Pat brought her dashing new husband (a Dustin Hoffman look alike) to visit our family in Pennsylvania in the late 1950's. From the first, Bill's charisma and approachability won over me and my brothers. One evening, he shared his curiosity about sleep by challenging us to do his sleep problem-solving experiment on ourselves. The task before we went to bed was: OTTFS starts an infinite sequence, figure out the next two letters and explain why. We were to try to work the problem that evening and again in the morning. Poor little Mary spent hours trying to use logical approaches to the answer, filling pages and pages of a small notebook. No joy that evening or in the morning when Bill gave us the aha solution...I was a very frustrated fifth grader.

At that time, Pat and Bill lived in New York City in a penthouse apartment on Riverside Drive, which they could afford because half of the flat was a sleep laboratory with rent supported by an NIH grant. When I visited them for a few days in 1962, my sleep was spent all hooked up in the guest bedroom/sleep lab. I was among the first adolescents whose sleep Bill had studied. It wasn't, as I recall, a comfortable experience getting electrodes on and so forth, but I paid him back by hitting my adolescent sleep with a vengeance, playing out—as Mary Gordon aptly described in her novel, *Final Payment*: my adolescent sleep was “long, deep, and sullen.” The poor long-suffering night tech (Bill) had a wretched assignment, since I slept upward of 12 hours. I have a vivid memory of my little cousin, Cathy, riding her tricycle around and around over a large black and white checked floor. She'd had her sleep tested, too, as had Pat and probably every visitor to the building. Bill often shared an anecdote about measuring the sleep of Rockettes, who caused quite a stir leaving the apartment building in the morning. Sleep research was a constant in Bill's life.

Pat and Bill and Cathy and their second daughter, Elizabeth, moved to California in 1965 when David Hamburg recruited Bill to the Stanford Psychiatry department. That same year, my family was very impressed to read about our very famous cousin-in-law in an in-depth article by Calvin Trillin in the *New Yorker*. Wow, what a thrill for small-town relatives. Our paths didn't cross again until the summer of 1970, when another cousin, Barbara Elden, had her wedding in Charleston, West Virginia. Much of the extended family, including my parents and brothers and Pat and Bill, assembled for this joyful occasion. At that time, I was a year out of college and a bit at sea with my future plans, working that summer in a kids' camp. About a week after the wedding, I was summoned to the camp director's office to take a phone call (no cell phones back then). It was Bill telling me how good it was to have seen me and offering me a job in his group, which was about to set up a sleep clinic! That was the start of Bill's mentoring of me.

When I arrived at Stanford, Pat and Bill had just started serving as faculty residence advisors for a freshman dormitory, a role that fit them perfectly though the small cottage allotted to faculty was a tight fit for them and now 3 kids, Cathy, Liz, and Nick. Meanwhile, I was living in a converted garage in Menlo Park and driving a VW bug that I'd bought from Christian Guilleminault, a postdoc fellow who had just moved back to France. If you read the first sentence of acknowledgements in my dissertation you'll discover a bit about my earliest California experience: “On my first day in California, Bill Dement sat me behind the wheel of his old blue Dodge pickup, pointed me in the direction of the refuse center, and instructed me to return with an empty truck.”

Coincident with my first week at Stanford, aka “The Farm,” an article came out on the front page of the San Francisco *Chronicle* with the headline, “How They Do It Down on the Farm.” What a kerfuffle ensued! Bill had given an interview in which he discussed the benefits of the entire family sleeping together in one bed, and the University's public relations people were not in the least pleased with that headline.

As faculty advisors, Pat and Bill played a strong role with Stanford students during those turbulent times and had a lasting impact on the lives of the talented and dynamic students who were organizing protests and engaging with social issues. Though both Pat (WVA) and Bill (Walla Walla, WA) were from what we now call privileged backgrounds, they really “got” the issues and helped their students advance the causes. Bill’s commitment to public service was apparent to me from the first.

As I settled into the lab serving as office help in the new clinic, Bill made available training opportunities for me. These are some of things I learned from the knee of the “master”:

- Applying EEG electrodes with cotton balls soaked in collodion
- Applying EOG, A1, and A2 electrodes with small pieces of Elastoplast tape
- Applying chin EMGs with *huge straps* of elastoplast
- Assembling mercury-filled strain gauges
- Staging sleep—imagine, Bill Dement taught me how to score sleep stages!
- And more...

My memory banks from my days at the Stanford lab are so full of Bill and his love of science, people, and life. His humor and whimsy were legendary, and it was impossible not to feel comfortable in his presence. He’d organize pick-up basketball games at his kids’ elementary school. The animal lab was in the basement of the old anatomy building, beneath the anatomy labs. We’d store all of our records and old equipment in Molend, an excavated (but unfinished) section of the building. Bill, I’m told (it was before I’d arrived), had worked the backhoe for some of the excavation.

My work in the sleep clinic morphed from office person to research assistant. Bill was endlessly curious about all his patients’ complaints and concerns. I remember one woman specifically who simply wasn’t able to lie still at night and her sleep suffered greatly even in the face of taking mega-doses of a barbiturate. Bill came in during the night to watch her sleep and could not contain his astonishment at her impressively restless limbs.

Back in those days, Bill and Anthony Kales were great friends. Kales was at UCLA. He and Bill would visit one another on alternate years for the Stanford-UCLA football game. What a thrill one year to join Bill and the family on a trip to the 1971 Rose Bowl—Stanford upset Ohio State...Plunkett to Vataha!! We’d slept on the sidewalk on the parade route the night before; I had never done anything remotely like this and enjoyed every minute. How Bill loved the Stanford sports, all of them but mostly football. The coaches would bring recruits to the Dement house for the opportunity to meet this gregarious, famous Stanford professor. Pat and Bill loved it! One year, Bill “coached” for the Stanford team, which was scheduled to play a game in Japan. For years, he proudly displayed the souvenir football he was given to commemorate that win. The Dements had prime seats for Stanford’s home basketball games, too. It was such fun to go along sometimes and cheer alongside Bill.

Bridge was another diversion for Pat and Bill, and when Dr. Kleitman was in town, he often needed a partner. What a thrill to be partnered with Nathaniel Kleitman! But it was scary. As usual, Bill’s comfortable way with Dr. Kleitman and with me helped to smooth the way and calm my nerves; Dr. Kleitman and I even won a few rubbers.

The first winter I was at Stanford, Bill started teaching Sleep and Dreams, a favorite course of Stanford undergrads, second only in popularity as I recall to Human Sexuality. Stiff competition indeed. That first year, the class size was too large for any available classroom, so Bill convinced the university to let him

lecture in the sanctuary of Memorial Church (MemChu). Bill was passionate for teaching anyone and everyone about sleep, and the Sleep and Dream students (and I, the TA) were enthralled not only by the content but also by his charismatic teaching style. Bill would start the quarter telling students that he only expected them to remember one thing, based on the book, "1066 and All That..." which noted that most English people only remembered one piece of the history of the country: 1066 (and all that). Bill challenged students to remember for the rest of their lives even just one thing from their experience with Sleep and Dreams. Over the years, Bill would often tell of crowded events—games, concerts—when someone would tap him on the shoulder and hand him a passed note on which was written "1066."

I remember one time when Bill had been teaching about psychic phenomena and sleep, and he decided to do an experiment with the students. One student was to sleep in the lab and the others to assemble in the auditorium of the elementary school. The night tech in the lab was tasked with calling Bill when the student went into REM sleep; Bill gave the other students a simple stimulus for them all to picture "sending" to their sleeping classmate! No one was really surprised or disappointed when the dream recall did not include the "message." One other memory from TA-ing Sleep and Dreams – at the last class of the quarter, Bill would hold a celebration for the students bringing in Kentucky Fried Chicken or pizza and just chatting with them and forming a personal connection. In no small measure, I think my love of teaching and the joy I take in it is a direct connection from Bill's spectacular example.

In 2001, Bill received the National Sleep Foundation's Lifetime Achievement award. I took advantage of that occasion to present Bill with a much less ornate certificate that named my summer research apprenticeship in his honor. Every year since then, my summer students are known as Dement Fellows. I cannot overstate the wonderful engagement Bill had with these fellows. We have now had generations of trainees and nearly all of them have had the opportunity to meet Bill and experience his enthusiasm in person. Bill would meet the trainees at our receptions at APSS, always trying to learn their names and always succeeding in engaging them in lively conversations. Bill would come to our retreat at the end of the summers when he could, and he would give a talk; sometimes his talk was virtual. Either way, great back and forth conversations occurred. Bill loved listening to my trainees' presentations, too. He was always so enthusiastic in responding to their talks, taking copious notes and always asking them thoughtful questions. He was so demonstrably interested in what they had to say. Bill would also show his fun side at the retreat. One year, he sent ahead of his arrival about a dozen enormous super soaker water guns; we had the best water battle that year, with Bill in full engagement having as much fun and getting as soaked as everyone.

A few more quick images and vignettes...

- Bill setting up a sleep lab in the basement of the freshman dormitory and having his class do an experiment of recording a student sleeping on a 90-minute day. Seriously, in the basement of the dorm...a sleep study!
- Bill sitting by the swimming pool in his yard dictating on his little Dictaphone the text of his book, *Some Must Watch While Some Must Sleep*, and me sitting nearby editing yesterday's dictation. What a team!
- Bill walking into the lab in his khaki pants, white sneakers, white shirt, with Bic felt-tip pen stains on at least the shirt pocket and often also the pants pockets.
- Bill hanging out at the sleep meetings with the cool sleep researchers (Rechtschaffen, McCarley, Hobson) all wearing the many-pocketed khaki safari shirts...irresistibly cool (and intimidating).
- Bill and I fretting together over the uncertainties of the safety of sleep depriving 10-year olds and Bill recruiting his son and a friend to help us test the feasibility. Nick and Joey were all stars!

- Bill playing a rowdy game of ping pong with a tiny Sleep Camper who'd been up all night. Could the kid manage it?
- Bill coming at my behest to Sleep Camp to rescue me from an untenable situation with one of Stanford's very first sleep apnea patients. This was a very ill man, and here we were recording him in a dormitory with no medical supervision or equipment but with experience doing MSLTs...Bill wanted to measure his sleepiness. I made a panicked call to Bill early in the morning because the patient had not only fallen out of bed but then fell asleep sitting on the toilet. I needed help! Bill decided we should run the first nap of the MSLT, and the gentleman fell asleep practically before the lights were out and door closed. With his typical curiosity, Bill snuck into the bedroom to see what the man looked like (we couldn't miss the snoring). Bill was ashen when he emerged and gasped: "His lips are blue! His nail beds are blue!" That was an early experience with OSA, and Bill immediately took the man to Stanford Hospital for treatment...in those days, tracheostomy. The intervention was a huge success.
- Bill convincing me on more than one occasion not to leave the lab and return to Pennsylvania but to stay and "run this study" or "do this analysis" or "write this paper." He was very convincing, always challenging me to do more.
- Bill was instrumental in my staying at Stanford for graduate school, but his presence at my doctoral defense caused me no little trauma. Bill is a gesturer, and that day he was wearing a pair of those Mickey Mouse-like large white gardening gloves. Seriously, Bill. When I asked him why, Bill, why? His response was that his hands were chafed from washing dishes the night before. Oh my.
- Bill writing in large letters on the chalk board "ass u me" as he carefully explained to the lab team the errors of making assumptions.
- Bill and Pat hosting a huge graduation party in 1979 for his PhD students: me, Chuck Czeisler, and Lloyd Glenn. The party was a terrific event in the Dement's backyard with its dramatic oak tree, with family (including my parents) and friends. Earlier that day Chuck Czeisler standing about 6'4" and I at about 5'2" had marched side by side in the graduation procession. We three were only a few of Bill's many graduate and postgraduate trainees, and we were all privileged to have Bill as our mentor.
- Bill inviting me to serve on the National Sleep Disorders Research Commission. We traveled around the country taking testimony from patients and sleep clinicians. The visit to Charleston, WV, was understandably a highlight for me. Uncle Henry had helped Bill connect with state political leaders, including a US senator. Bill's tireless energy, commitment, and advocacy for sleep disorders patients and sleep medicine was never better captured than in his work with the Commission and subsequent success lobbying Congress to pass a bill to support the National Sleep Disorders Research Center, which continues to provide strong support for the field from NIH.
- Bill uttering yet again one of his many go-to aphorisms: if it is not necessary to do X, it is necessary NOT to do it.
- Bill jamming on his string bass along with Stan Getz—whom he'd help bring to Stanford as artist in residence—on sax.
- Bill walking around the lab with a towel aka huge tissue around his neck as he struggled with a cold while dictating sections of a grant proposal. I attribute his major gaffe in that dictation to his being under the weather. One of the transcribers—a friend of mine and solid member of the office staff—closed her typewriter and walked out as she heard the phrase, "from our most brilliant scientists to the lowliest secretary...". Oh, my.
- Bill flying to Pennsylvania with me in the middle of writing a grant proposal when my mother died.
- Bill glowing with elation at the party celebrating installation of a plaque in the lobby of the Lamba Nu/Jerry House dormitory commemorating 10 years of Summer Sleep Camp research.

I have written these memories in part to ease the pain of losing my mentor, colleague, and dear friend and to share with others some of the less public parts of his life that helped to define him for his trainees and to bring his humanity to light. I have so many additional very special memories, and I wish I could share them all.

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