

William H. Kaven

September 25, 1922 – December 27, 2008

William H. Kaven, Professor Emeritus of Economics and Marketing in the School of Hotel Administration, died on December 27, 2008, at Cayuga Medical Center in Ithaca. Bill was born in Canton, Ohio, where his father ran a successful wholesale distributing business supplying hotels, restaurants, industrial caterers, and food and drug stores. The years in which he observed the family business, then managed and owned it, colored Bill's entire career teaching management.

He attended the local Canton public schools, earned his Bachelor's degree from Ohio State University in 1946, his Master's in Business Administration from Kent State University in 1962, and a doctorate from Cornell in business and public administration in 1965. While a graduate student at Cornell, Bill lectured part-time at Ithaca College (1963-65) before taking faculty positions at the University of Virginia (1965-68) and Sir George Williams University (now Concordia University) in Montreal (1968-70). He returned to Cornell in 1970 as an Associate Professor and was promoted to professor with tenure in 1980. Initially, Bill taught undergraduate economics courses but he quickly grew into the head of the School's marketing department. One former student, who later was involved in the School's alliances in the Caribbean, remembers Bill "as a tall, distinguished gentleman, smoking cigars in his office" conversing in an intense, but fatherly, manner.

In 1944, Bill married Frederica Kraft and they briefly lived in Monroe, Louisiana, while Bill underwent military training in the Army Air Corps. He served as an aerial navigator in the Second World War flying support missions behind enemy lines, dropping supplies and personnel and evacuating the wounded (particularly in Yugoslavia); another duty was to fly such generals as Dwight Eisenhower to their official meetings. After peace was declared in Europe, Bill was stationed in Belem, at the mouth of the Amazon River, and flew relay legs transporting troops and officers to Asia, where the war continued. Frederica and other wives joined their husbands for several months in Belem.

After the war, Bill completed his Bachelor's degree at Ohio State. The Kavens then moved to Canton where he worked again for the family distributing business, buying it in 1952 and greatly expanding it. He was active in Canton business and community organizations, serving on many boards, charity and civic, including six years on the Canton City Planning Commission. Their three children—Robert, Mary, and Luke—were born in Canton. The very evening after attending a presentation by an Ohio State professor, Bill announced to Frederica that he

wanted to take up an academic career. Acting on that decision immediately, he commuted an hour each way to his master's classes at Kent State University while continuing to work full-time to manage his business. M.B.A. degree in hand, the family moved to Ithaca where Bill undertook his doctoral studies in Business and Public Administration at the Johnson Graduate School of Management.

After earning his doctorate, Bill first taught organizational theory and behavior, marketing, and economics at the McIntire School at the University of Virginia, then moved to Sir George Williams University in Montreal for two years. In Canada, both Kavens were sympathetic to the anti-war movement and provided substantial assistance to conscientious objectors. Still, they felt too removed from American culture and sought a position back in the States. Thus Bill joined the Hotel School faculty in 1970 and the couple moved into a lovely historic home on Wyckoff Road, which they furnished with the antiques for which they shared a passion. Throughout many decades of attending auctions and house sales, they amassed an exceptional collection of distinctive Americana. At their Wyckoff home and the house overlooking Cayuga Lake to which they subsequently moved, they entertained colleagues and friends from Ithaca and around the world with wonderful food, warm humor, and lively dinner conversation ranging over every conceivable topic.

Bill introduced the first required marketing course for hotel undergraduates and established among students a strong specialty interest in international marketing. During his first sabbatical, in 1977, he and Frederica traveled throughout Europe and South America during which Bill taught and conducted research at schools in The Hague, Helsinki, and Rio de Janeiro. In fact, his career at the Hotel School was marked by a number of international responsibilities and initiatives. After former dean Robert Beck appointed him Director of International Programs at the School, Bill established and helped oversee hospitality curricula in Aruba, Brazil, the Dominican Republic, Mexico, Puerto Rico, and Venezuela. Some of these programs that Bill helped seed are still flourishing today.

Students whose lives he enriched recall Bill as an arresting figure. Dr. Bonnie Farber Canziani, Director of the Hospitality Program at UNC, Greensboro describes Bill as the single most influential person in her career. While an undergraduate Spanish major, Bonnie took several business elective courses in the Hotel School and remembers that while she was reading hallway flyers about teaching in Mexico and Brazil, a tall man came by and asked if she was interested. After she admitted that she was not a hotelier, Bill "hurrumphed" and invited her downstairs for coffee. Next thing Bonnie realized, she was taking three masters courses her senior year and applying for the M.P.S. program. She then taught in Venezuela and Puerto Rico on behalf of the international alliances. Bonnie says,

“Without that chance meeting, I would probably never have had the opportunities I have had, including coming back to Cornell for the doctorate. All thanks to Bill Kaven.”

Daniel Sternfels, whom Bill recruited to be the first director of the program in the Dominican Republic, also remembers Bill fondly. He reports that when fluctuations in the exchange rate seriously affected the D. R. Hotel School’s operating budget, Bill first backed the young Cornell team’s compensation 100%, then negotiated a reduction in Cornell’s fees. Dan recalls Bill, as do so many other students, as “a true friend and gentleman.” Another student, Italian Roberto Wirth, who has a serious hearing impairment, remembers how Bill went out of his way to provide individual tutoring which helped stimulate his understanding of marketing. Later Bill developed a case study around the Hassler Hotel in Rome, which Roberto manages, and twice invited Roberto to guest lecture in his courses. Roberto, who for thirty years maintained a strong personal relationship with his mentor, says,

“I owe him a lot because his patience in sharing his knowledge allowed me to base my business on his principles and his overall generosity contributed to make me what I am today.”

Bill was heavily engaged in executive education programs around the world, especially in Japan and India, many for the Hotel Sales Management Association (HSMA) but others for national hotel associations, government tourism agencies, and international hotel or restaurant companies. Similarly, his consulting was largely in international marketing involving trade associations but dealing more broadly with tourism development for such clients as the Puerto Rico Tourism Development Corporation and the Indian Institute for Tourism and Development. In the 1970s, he was appointed to the advisory board of the Brazilian Cultural Foundation in New York.

His professional interests were reflected in his scholarship as well. Bill authored one book, *Managing the Major Sale*, published by the American Management Association, and numerous case studies, book chapters, and articles about international hospitality marketing and the management of distribution channels, many for the *Cornell Hotel & Restaurant Administration Quarterly*.

Bill served the University in a number of assignments, as a member of the University Senate and the Faculty Council of Representatives, the University Unions Board of Governors, and as chair of the Campus Store Advisory Board for eight years. At the Hotel School, in addition to so ably leading the international initiatives for many years, Bill served on the Scholarship Committee, Graduate Admissions Committee, and countless search and tenure committees. When Bill retired in June 1993, he was appointed Professor Emeritus.

Bill Kaven is survived by his wife, Frederica; three children—Rob, Mary, and Luke; grandsons Daniel and Trevor; two great-grandchildren; and numerous nieces and nephews. He touched the lives of countless students at Cornell and elsewhere including participants in professional seminars in all corners of the world. His colleagues and friends miss him greatly.

Richard H. Penner, Chairperson; A. Neal Geller, Leo Renaghan