LYLE S. SHELMDINE

Dr. Shelmidine's full name was Lyle Stanton Shelmidine and everyone called him "Stan." He was one of the most respected professors in the history of the University of Puget Sound. He came in 1936 as an assistant professor in history and became associate in 1940 and ultimately became a full professor. He graduated from Cornell College in Iowa in 1930. He received his Master's Degree in 1935 from the University of Iowa and there received his Ph.D.

Stan Shelmidine was very popular with the students and young people around the community, people in the first Methodist Church, and he was considered an excellent teacher.

He had as his close friends, the Haley family. Mr. J. C. Haley was a member of Brown and Haley Candy Company. He had four boys and one girl and they were all very close. Stan Shelmidine was taken in by the Haley family and Mrs. Haley often called him one of her sons. This was to play a rather interesting part in the history of the University of Puget Sound later on.

Dr. Shelmidine never married. He traveled a great deal - particularly to the Far East and he often brought back Oriental rugs. He had his apartment full of Oriental rugs. As a matter of fact, he checked them out to friends as one would check out books from a library. His close association with Fred Haley was very interesting because they
both represented rather liberal points of view although Mr. Haley was more liberal than Dr. Shelmidine. Dr. Shelmidine was very popular as a teacher in the Methodist Sunday School, as a lecturer in the community and in the various churches.

He was a most interesting person with whom to visit and he and I quite often had lunch together talking about the educational system in England, in Turkey, and in the United States. He was an intelligent conversationalist and one to whose associations I always looked forward. In World War II he served in the Navy and was commended for his excellent service. It was an interesting experience to me when one of the outstanding people in the Pacific Northwest called me one day and said that he would like to take me to lunch. It was Dr. A. H. Meadowcroft, who had two sons, Howarth and Tom, both students with us. Dr. Meadowcroft said, "Dr. Thompson, how can I bring my young men to maturity? They seem to be slow in maturing and I would like to feel that there was some way that I might help them without being a burden." I strongly suggested that he buy three tickets to Europe. One for Dr. Shelmidine to act as chaparone and one for each of the boys, and let them spend three months in Europe in any way that Dr. Shelmidine would recommend. Dr. Meadowcroft liked the idea. He approached Dr. Shelmidine with the suggestion and he was very pleased with the opportunity. He took Howarth and
Tom to Europe. He was in some sense a mentor for them but on the other hand, they had a great deal of freedom and responsibility. I shall never forget after they came back, Dr. Meadowcroft took me to lunch again and said, "Well, I sent two boys to Europe and two men came back." This was typical of the influence of Dr. Shelmidine. He was not only an excellent professor but he was also a fine counselor and he sent many students into graduate school and into careers which were most meaningful to them.

He grew through the years in stature and high regard on the part of the Alumni Association and students. I began to hear, however, that Dr. Shelmidine had a weakness. That weakness, of course, was alcohol. In my inquiries I shall never forget when one alumnus said, "Even if he has this problem, he is a far better professor than many others. You ought not to be too critical of him." I began to wonder why he had such a problem. One day he came in my office and sat down. We started to talk and he said, "How do you face death?" It was a rather blunt question, out of the blue and I was amazed to have him ask. I said, "Why do you ask this?" He said, "Well, some time ago I lost a brother-in-law and I had never faced death before and I did not know how to face it and I still do not know. It depresses me all the time - every time I think of it." This lead to other discussions and finally led to a rather frank discussion of his alcohol problem. I strongly suggested he have some counseling for it. At first
he said, "No." He had been counselor to people and he didn't need counseling himself. I told him that the Boeing Company had an excellent psychologist who did nothing but counsel with the Boeing executives and other people concerning alcoholism and I would like to have him meet the man. I literally took him by the hand as one would a child and we went to Seattle to the man's office. I had called ahead of time for an appointment. I told the man what the problem was and I said, "I shall leave you with Dr. Shelmidine." I told Dr. Shelmidine he knew where the car was and I would meet him there in two hours. On the way home we discussed the situation and he decided he would take a series of sessions with the Alcoholic Counselor. This was most productive and helpful. Dr. Shelmidine was not involved with alcohol for about three years. At that time another brother-in-law died and it opened the whole situation again as to what is death and how does one prepare for it, what is immortality, and the questions which are so deep and meaningful for the whole human family. This time he became a very difficult alcoholic and was in deep depression. He would call Mrs. Thompson and talk to her for an hour or more when he was very much in his "cups". I found later that he had a list by his telephone of some thirty people and he would call from one to the other. I strongly suggested that he renew counseling and he said he would think about it.

One evening, Dick Smith, who was vice-president and certainly my most able assistant, called me and said,
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"Dr. T, we have a very grave problem on our hands with Stan."
I said, "Yes, I know that." He said, "It is even graver than
you think. I think Dr. Shelmidine has just drank himself to
death." It was true. One of the students whom he had called
was talking with him when suddenly he just faded away. The
student went to the apartment, got in, and found Dr. Shelmidine
with the phone off the hook, on the floor where he had collapsed
and died.

Stan Shelmidine was one of the great professors,
held in high regard, affection and esteem. Considered an
outstanding professor on the Far Eastern history and a man to
whom many people looked for counseling, guidance, and excellent
scholarship. His impact and impression on the history of the
College of Puget Sound was most profound and greatly appreciated.

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