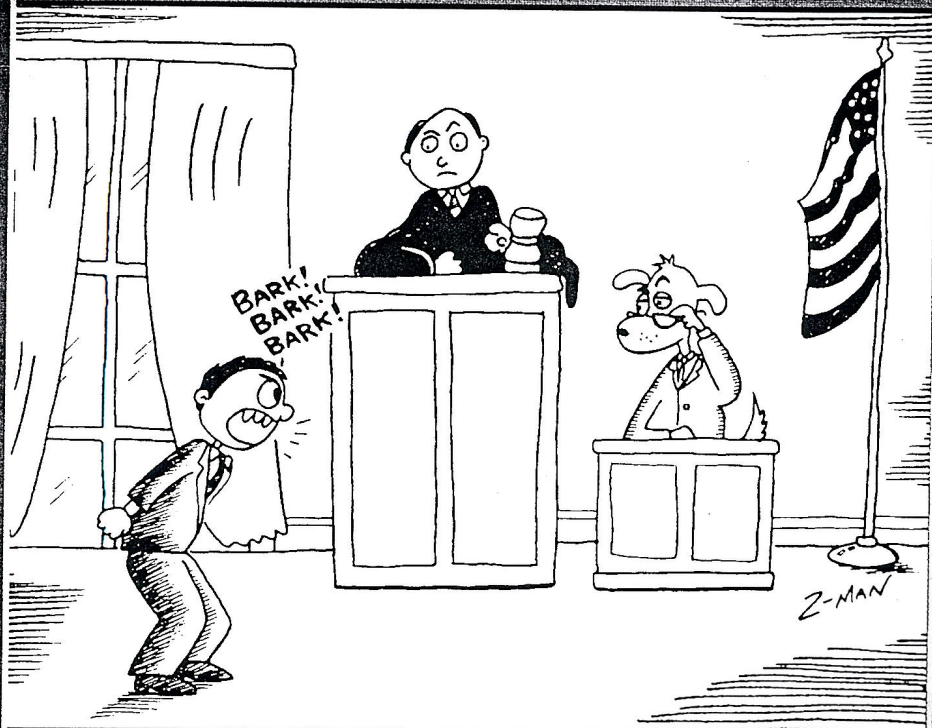


William W. Bedsworth



**a criminal WASTE
of time**

Foreword by Judge Alex Kozinski

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foreword

It was a bench trial in a government contract case involving some newfangled conveyor-driven equipment for sorting mail in a cavernous facility of the United States Postal Service. The witness was droning on about how the equipment would fail on a regular basis, apparently because too much hydraulic pressure caused pipes to burst, resulting in leaks.

Suddenly the lawyer at the opposing counsel's table sprang to his feet. "Oh darn," I thought to myself. "He's going to make an objection. Now I'll have to figure out what the witness was actually trying to tell me so I don't look like an idiot."

"Your honor," the lawyer said, clearing his throat, "talking about too much hydraulic pressure and the risk of leaks, could we have a short recess?"

I had heard such requests dozens of times, but never in such picturesque form. I granted the recess and eventually went on with the trial, still shaking my head. It was only years later, when I tried to tell the story to a friend, that it dawned on me I should have gotten a transcript; it's the kind of story that is much better told if you can quote the actual words — and provide a transcript as proof that it really happened just as you described it. But by then I had moved to another court and it was much too late.

Quaint incidents like this happen in the law — and in life — all the time. But most of us, judges especially, are dolts when it comes to noticing such gems and preserving them for posterity. It takes a keen eye, and a sharp wit, to identify those little absurdities that crop up in all human endeavors. And it takes real talent and skill — and an affinity for the preposterous — to present the incident in just the right light so the reader or listener will immediately see the silliness of it and surrender a laugh.

Making people laugh is hard, and getting much harder in a world where every new joke — are there really any new jokes left? — circumnavigates the globe seven times before those of us in the Pacific time zone have read our morning e-mail.

What people actually do in their daily lives turns out to be the last reliable supply of mirth left to us. Stories that would get only a nervous titter if invented, become knee-slappers if you are con-

vinced that they really happened; verisimilitude exponentially increases to the humor value of any anecdote.

No one I know is better than William Bedsworth — Beds, as everyone calls him — at finding the humorous, the absurd, the odd, the bizarre or the just plain screwy among the incidents of daily life. And no one quite has his knack for stripping them of all pretense and exposing their essential funniness. He's been doing just that for the past two decades and now some of his best columns have been collected in this book. If you are holding it in your hand — as you no doubt must be — just start turning pages and get ready for a treat.

Oh, and don't forget the footnotes; they're often the best part.

— *Alex Kozinski*