If there is a heaven, today there is much more laughter and joy there. But there is immeasurable sadness in our world. For those who believe in heaven, it is a bit of a comfort to think of Charlie spending eternity educating and regaling large audiences. It is also some solace to remember that, as much as any human being that I have known, Charlie truly enjoyed his life, that he lived it with great passion and joy, and that he lived it on his terms.

We all aspire to be the best at what we do. Charlie was the best. He devoted his life to teaching, and there was no finer classroom teacher at any university in the United States. He was the best lecturer that BAR/BRI ever had or ever will have. Judges and lawyers groups never will have a better speaker. USC will find someone else to teach Criminal Procedure and Gifts, Wills, and Trusts. BAR/BRI will find someone else to fill its podiums. But no one will come close to Charlie, and the students will be so deprived for never having known him.

I have spent a good deal of time thinking about what made Charlie such an exceptional teacher. Most of all, he truly enjoyed it and deeply cared about it. He had a dazzling intellect. He had the ability to capture concepts in such powerful and memorable ways.

I first heard of Charlie in the mid-1970s, when a college friend of mine had Charlie as a professor at the University of Virginia Law School. In one phone conversation, my friend told me that he had this amazing professor named Whitebread. He said that Whitebread came into Criminal Procedure and began the class by saying, “I know that most you will never practice criminal law, so I want to accelerate things. There are two things you need to know about criminal procedure. There is a major difference
between what the police are allowed to do under the Constitution and what they actually do. That is because they carry guns. And above all remember, when that big green door slams shut, remember which side you want to be on.” The former captures the essential reality of the difference between the law as articulated by the Supreme Court and the law as it exists in the streets.

The latter—the image of the big green door slamming shut—so captures the essence of being a professional. It is a vivid reminder that a lawyer must not make the client’s problems his or her own. I never have heard a more powerful way of reminding students that there are simply lines that they must not cross, no matter how much they want to help their clients.

I know of no teacher who managed to so well combine entertainment with substance. Charlie was riotously funny, but it always was in service of his communicating ideas. That, of course, is what made him the best bar review lecturer who ever lived. He could communicate an enormous amount of material with great clarity while keeping the students entertained and presenting it all in a manner that was easy to remember.

Charlie taught large numbers of students at USC. Every year, he’d teach Criminal Procedure and Gifts, Wills, and Trusts to rooms filled beyond capacity. He would also teach large undergraduate classes. But he also did a tremendous amount of teaching outside of the Law School. Every summer, he’d lecture to students across the country, usually in seventeen different cities, who were preparing for the bar exam. Every fall, he would go to dozens of law schools to deliver a lecture on how to take law school exams. In between, he would speak at dozens of conferences of lawyers and judges. The reality is that no one in the country spoke to more law students, lawyers, and judges over the last quarter century than Charlie Whitebread. Doing this, of course, required a person with phenomenal energy. But even more, it required a person who truly loves teaching.

He had a penetrating intellect. Early each July, he and I would have a long conversation about the recently completed Supreme Court term as we were each preparing to speak and write about it. His insights from those conversations were invaluable, and always the best I heard anywhere.

Charlie was not just the best in his professional life. In his personal life, too, he was a model for all of us. His love and devotion to John Golden and Michael Kelly, his kindness and love for Katie Waitman, his dedication to the Jeff Griffith Youth Center—all are an inspiration.

I can speak personally that he also was the best as a friend. So many
of us received his cards and notes. Any kindness was the cause for a sweet note. His phone calls were even better, because they brought the warmth and vibrancy of his voice. In the years when I was doing seventeen city BAR/BRI tours, like Charlie was, several times in the month of June I would receive a call from him to see how I was doing, and always to tell me some hilarious story of his life on the road. When I was going through a hard time, the calls would increase. He would call just to say hi, to see how I was doing, to let me know that he cared.

Charlie always made me feel better about myself. He was my biggest cheerleader. He always inspired me to be my best self.

Charlie was taken from us much too soon. It is so hard to believe that he is gone, and that if I go to the fourth floor of the Law School, I won’t hear his booming voice. There won’t be any more cards or any more phone messages filled with Charlie’s warmth and wit. But he lives on through all of the students he taught and all of the lives he touched.

In the play A Man for All Seasons, there is a scene where Sir Thomas More encourages someone to be a teacher. The person responds, “If I were, who would know?” Sir Thomas More replies, “You, your students, God. Not a bad public that.” No one taught a larger public than Charlie Whitebread. No one did a better job of teaching about law and about life.

All who knew Charlie mourn our loss. But we all celebrate the life of a person who lived with such passion and such joy. We celebrate a truly unique, extraordinary, and wonderful person. I loved Charlie Whitebread, and I will miss him as long as I live.