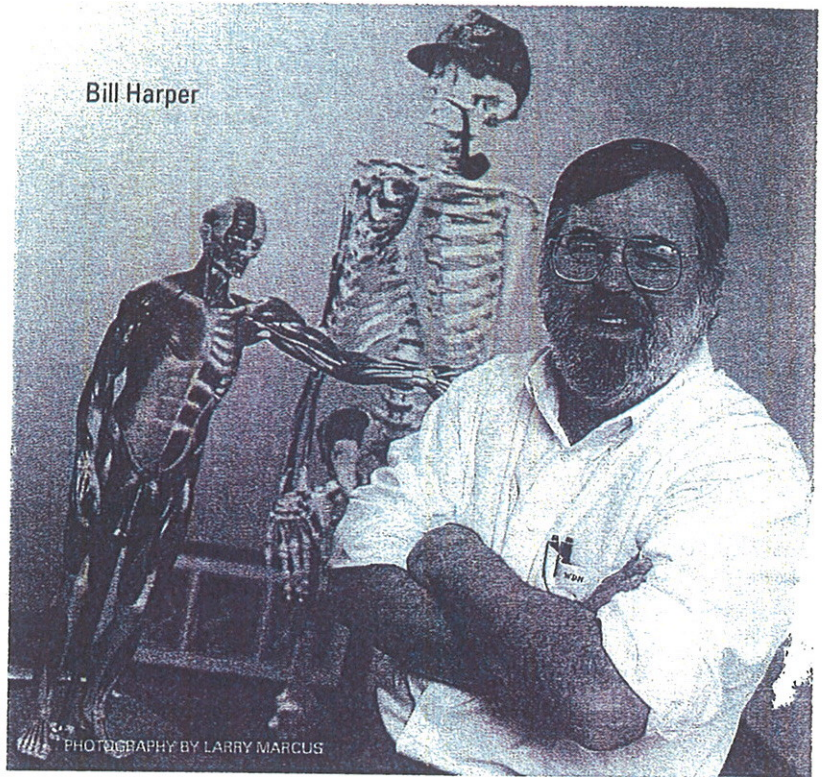


The Prizefighter

Alone in a locked cell with lots of books, writing pads and time to think. Some would consider such a fate to be maddening. But not Bill Harper. He often imagines that time spent in a jail cell would offer a peaceful respite from the hustle-and-bustle world of law. In fact, he wouldn't mind experiencing it just once. Not that he would do what it takes to get thrown into the clink; it's just a fantasy. But it's one that explains a lot about the plaintiff's attorney; namely that he does things a little differently from others.

Harper is a partner at the cozy firm Harper & Peterson in Woodbury, where he and his sole partner, Paul Peterson, practice personal injury law. It's an existence that is as close to his solitary fantasy as a law office could get. Harper isn't a hermit or a social misfit; he just likes to do things his own way. And a large firm would most likely impede on that wish.



Bill Harper

"I try to be as comfortable as I can," says Harper from behind his desk on a recent Friday, wearing a button-down shirt, sweatpants and slippers. "That's the advantage of being in a smaller firm; the firm politics in terms of the dress code aren't omnipresent."

Born and raised in Duluth, Harper spent much of his life doing things a little differently. He has worked on the waterfront, been a garbage collector, run an insurance agency, worked as a commercial sailor and been a prizefighter. At the age of 23, Harper graduated from the University of Minnesota with a bachelor of arts degree in English, the humanities and studio arts, before attending Hamline University School of Law. This colorful past is a testament to his adaptability to difficult situations, Harper says, and has helped him gain common ground with clients from various backgrounds.

"I think that the ability to adapt to a different environment or a different circumstance is a part that plaintiffs' lawyers bring to what they do," he says. "From all

those different life experiences, I bring a little of each to the trial work that I do."

Most of that trial work consists of individual cases involving wrongful death, personal injury, product liability and professional malpractice. When it comes time to argue those cases, Harper draws from a specific life experience.

"You are very alone when you walk into a courtroom, and the closest parallel for me was crawling through the ropes at a prizefight," he says. "I knew that there was nobody there to catch me, and doing trial work creates the same emotion in that you know you're walking in there and facing an adversary."

But, despite his lone-wolf veneer, Harper says the client is always his top priority.

"I don't think you can fraudulently go into court and represent your client as a plaintiff's lawyer, because that leaks out into the process," he says. "If you care about them and appreciate them, at the very least, you will communicate their plight more effectively." **L&P**

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