

Memorial for Judge William S. Cahill

Before the Iowa Judges Association

June 19, 2012

William "Bill" S. Cahill, 86, of Burlington, died at Great River Hospice House October 6, 2011. Bill, the son of William E. and Marie V. Mackey Cahill, was born October 17, 1924, in West Branch, Iowa. He grew up on a farm in Johnson County near West Branch with his two brothers and two sisters. In describing what a thoughtful sibling he was, one of his sisters recounted how Bill once walked all the way to Iowa City when the family had purchased a horse for her, then rode it home to the farm. She also commented, as it turned out, it was not a very nice horse.

Bill attended elementary school in a one-room schoolhouse. He used to boast he was the number one student in his class every year, but then confessed he was also the only student in that particular class every year. He graduated from West Branch High School in 1942. Bill served in the U. S. Navy during World War II and saw action in the Pacific Theatre. After the war, Bill enrolled at the University of Iowa and earned his B.A. Degree in 1949. During undergraduate years, he married Jane E. Engelke, on June 15, 1948, in Sutherland, Iowa. They were married 56 years, until her death February 25, 2005.

Bill earned his Juris Doctorate degree from the University of Iowa in 1951. He and Jane then moved to Burlington, where they raised three daughters and two sons. Bill practiced law with attorney John Calhoun. After John Calhoun passed away, Bill practiced law with Fred Cromwell. Bill was Assistant Des Moines County Attorney from

1951 to 1954. He was then elected to the Office of Des Moines County Attorney and served from 1955 to 1959. Bill was also Burlington City Attorney from 1962 to 1965. He was active in the community, the Catholic church, and the Des Moines County Bar Association.

Bill was appointed to the District Court June 10, 1966, and served until his retirement October 23, 1989. He served as a Senior Judge until June 30, 2001.

Bill, a superb storyteller, told me of his experience when he was a finalist for the position of District Court Judge. He and the other finalist rode together to the State Capitol in Des Moines to be interviewed by Governor Harold Hughes. On the ride back to Burlington, the other finalist talked profusely about how well the interview had gone and how confident he felt about being appointed the next District Court Judge from Southeast Iowa. Bill did not talk about his interview because he had become rather flustered after being ushered into Governor Hughes' office. Apparently, Governor Hughes sat down, leaned back in this chair, put his feet upon the corner of his desk, lit a cigar, and said "You know, being governor is a pretty good job, if it just weren't for dealing with all of the people I have to meet." The interview must have gone well, however, because Bill was appointed to the bench shortly after.

As a Judge, Bill was respected and admired. He was patient, courteous, and collegial. He was always happy to share his time with new attorneys and guide them as they learned how to practice law. I would describe him as being an old-fashioned gentleman. Everyone treated him with the utmost respect because he was just such a decent person.

As I mentioned earlier, Bill was a great storyteller. People are often described this way, but Bill was in a class by himself when telling a story. At Bill's funeral I sat next to a long time, now retired, attorney who had been a practitioner in Burlington during the time Bill had also been in private practice. There was a particularly good story Bill used to tell about a case he had in which the other litigant was represented by the attorney I was sitting next to. I repeated to that attorney the story Bill used to tell about the case, and a veiled threat to bring into Burlington a "Chicago lawyer", to help try the case and some eavesdropping that occurred outside the county law library, adjacent to the courtroom, when a phone call was ostensibly being made to Chicago. When I finished repeating the story, the elderly attorney paused for a rather long period of time, and then said "Well, that is reasonably accurate, but here is how it really happened." That version was not nearly as entertaining as Bill's version. I suppose embellishment is the best friend of a good storyteller.

I am not embellishing when I say that Bill was well-liked, respected, and admired by all those who knew him, especially the attorneys, fellow judges, and court staff of Southeast Iowa.

Bill is survived by two brothers, Ralph Cahill of Santa Maria, California, and Kevin Cahill of Pennsylvania; two sisters, Sr. Georgianna Cahill of San Bernadino, California, and Sr. Maureen Cahill of St. Catherine's by the Sea, Ventura, California; three daughters, Susan J. Cahill of Burlington, Laura C. Rees and her husband Michael of Mequon, Wisconsin, and Maureen V. Cahill and her husband Paul of Burlington; two sons, William J. Cahill and his wife Karen of Burlington, and John M. Cahill and his wife Deb, also of Burlington; 10 grandchildren and three great-grandchildren.

Mr. President, I move that this Memorial of Judge William S. Cahill be made a part of the permanent record of the Iowa Judges Association and that a copy of the Memorial be provided to the Cahill family.