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Memories of a Second Father

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Memories of a Second Father

Cover Page Footnote

Wilkinson Professor of Law at Fordham University School of Law

MEMORIES OF A "SECOND" FATHER

*Constantine N. Katsoris**

Over forty years ago I entered Fordham Law School uncertain if I was making the right decision, because I had no one to guide me in the law; but, like so many that had proceeded me, was nourished by a loving and supportive family. At Fordham, I met many of my closest friends—one of whom was William Hughes Mulligan.

My friendship with Bill Mulligan and his family was instantaneous and lasting, even though our professional relationships kept changing. I remember as his student in Criminal Law I asked him a question that was answered in the next assigned case. After politely dropping me on my head, he proceeded to publicly counsel me on the evils of being unprepared.

Just before I was to start my last year of Law School, my best friend, my father, unexpectedly passed away. Circumstances required that I take a year's leave of absence, not really knowing if I would ever return. It was Bill Mulligan who stayed in touch, offering sage advice and encouragement. He never let me despair. It was at this point that Bill Mulligan became my "second" father. Indeed, upon reflection, I suspect he was a second father to many others as well.

Graduating in 1957 was not exactly an ideal period for employment for a son of Spartan parents with a 1A draft classification. But, Dean Mulligan kept trying, putting me in touch with James B. Donovan to assist him in his role of assigned trial counsel to defend the Russian spy, Rudolph Abel. As things worked out, however, I entered active duty and, upon discharge was hired at Cahill, Gordon, Reindel & Ohl—again with Mulligan's recommendation.

After six years at Cahill, Dean Mulligan invited me to come up to be interviewed for a tax position that had just opened up on the faculty. My interview was definitely not one of today's formal and hi-tech interviews by a large faculty committee. My interview consisted of going to an old fashioned lunch on St. Patrick's Day with two Gaelic giants—then Dean Mulligan and then Professor Joseph McLaughlin. The mere thought of such an interview might unsettle most faculty applicants; but, thank God for my Jesuit High School, Jesuit College and Jesuit Law School training, I was not about to be intimidated.

The first thing I did was to borrow a lucky green tie for the occasion from my classmate and good friend Jim Gill. That was easy, because in those days Gill only wore green ties—even on Jewish holidays.

* Wilkinson Professor of Law at Fordham University School of Law. The previous holders of the Wilkinson Chair were the Hon. William Hughes Mulligan and Professor John D. Calamari.

Armed with my green tie, I set out for the interview confident I could convince Mulligan and McLaughlin—two noted tax authorities—that I could handle the intricacies of the Internal Revenue Code.

When we went to the restaurant and sat down, the waiter asked a rhetorical question. "Will you have anything to drink?" he asked. Before he even finished the question Dean Mulligan bellowed, "a dry Beefeater Martini, straight-up with no garbage." Before Dean Mulligan finished his sentence, Professor McLaughlin bellowed, "Bourbon Manhattan, straight-up with no garbage." At this point I was thoroughly confused. Although Gill had loaned me his green tie, he had not prepared me for all this "no garbage" talk. Nonetheless, without fully understanding what I was ordering, I instructed the waiter, "Give me the same as Dean Mulligan—only on the rocks with an olive."

When the waiter returned with the drinks, Dean Mulligan, being the great teacher that he was, taught me the two most important lessons I ever learned in law school. *First*, you get more martini in a stand up glass than one on the rocks. *Second*, putting an olive *in the drink* merely displaces the gin. As the lunch went on, we ordered a second round, in honor of the holy day we were celebrating. This time I ordered my martini "straight up with the olive on the side." McLaughlin handed out cigars to celebrate the coming of Spring. Mulligan started singing Irish songs. Soon the whole restaurant began singing "Danny Boy."

I remember the day as if it was yesterday. Somehow, we never got around to talk about taxes that day; yet, as I sang the words of "Danny Boy," as I sported Gill's lucky green tie, as I puffed on McLaughlin's cigar, and as I sipped my stand-up martini with the olive on the side, somehow I knew I would be offered the job. As fate would have it I later had the good fortune to have taught Bill's two sons, Billy, Jr., and Stevie.

After I joined the faculty, Bill would continue to counsel me, and occasionally we disagreed. In the overwhelming number of instances he would be right. On a couple of occasions, however, after consulting with the *Almighty*, he would concede that perhaps I was right, more or less, in words to that effect. It was for his fierce sense of honesty and fairness that I most admired and loved Bill Mulligan. There was never any doubt where he stood on an issue. He told it like it was.

To Fordham Law School, Bill Mulligan was its father. Admittedly, he was not its *first* dean, but he was the one that moved us from a first rate regional school to the national scene. His accomplishments are so many and are eloquently described by others in this Issue, so I will not attempt to repeat them. The many thousands he taught as a teacher, or who appeared before him while on the bench will attest to his great intellect and integrity. Time, however, will dull some of those recollections. What will never be dimmed, however, was his wit

and humor. No matter how serious or difficult an issue, he would find a way to ease the tension. He was aptly described at his funeral mass as one who walked among kings and queens, yet treated *everyone* like his next door neighbor.¹

He was a master of the written and spoken word, and could turn a phrase until it sang. As if this were not enough, his delivery ranked among the greatest orators in history. I will always remember Bill Mulligan for his wonderful traits that he selflessly shared with the world. To this day, whenever I have a message I am seeking to communicate to a group or audience I ask myself—how would Bill Mulligan have done it?

We are all the richer for having known him; and, I would like to thank his lovely wife Rose, and his wonderful children, Ann, Billy, and Steve, for sharing him with us.

1. So described by His Eminence John Cardinal O'Connor, Archbishop of New York, on May 17, 1996.

