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## Eulogy, William B. Spong Jr., United States Senator (1966-1973), Dean of the College of William and Mary School of Law (1976-1985)

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## **TRIBUTE**

EULOGY, WILLIAM B. SPONG, JR., UNITED STATES SENATOR (1966-1973), DEAN OF THE COLLEGE OF WILLIAM AND MARY SCHOOL OF LAW (1976-1985)

BY

TIMOTHY J. SULLIVAN  
PRESIDENT, THE COLLEGE OF WILLIAM AND MARY IN VIRGINIA

It all began with bourbon and tuna salad. Now a few of you must be wondering what I could possibly mean. How could Bill Spong's triumphant William and Mary years have anything at all to do with bourbon and tuna salad? But that is the way they *did* begin, and you should know the story.

On a brilliant, autumn Saturday sometime in October of 1975, I drove from Williamsburg to Portsmouth. I was the very young chair of the William and Mary Law School Dean Search Committee. My job—and it seemed to me mission impossible—was to convince Senator Spong that he really, really did want to become

dean of a law school facing severe adversity.

Bill invited me to meet him at his home. We sat down to lunch at the kitchen table. His beloved wife Virginia provided the tuna salad, which was very good; Bill supplied the bourbon—which was also very good. His daughter Martha hovered—so it seemed to me—skeptically on the fringes of the room. Tommy would occasionally catapult through the room in pursuit of an errant soccer ball.

Bill and I talked, he was interested, and the rest is happy history. Bill Spong did come to William and Mary and his leadership first healed a crippled institution and then raised it to a level of national distinction that none of us dared to dream. He built a place of genuine intellectual excellence—but he did more. He built a law school of which George Wythe would have approved. And that is not a casual compliment. George Wythe's approval mattered a great deal to Bill. Bill's inspiration shaped a place where would-be lawyers learned not only their duty to their clients, but duty to humanity. The Law School became a place where professional success was, and is, defined not only by hours billed, but by a client's burdens lifted, and by a client's anguish eased.

During much of Bill's deanship, I served as one of his associate deans. We became friends—more than friends really. Our association deepened in ways that made our relationship one of the great treasures of my life.

He was also my teacher. I learned life lessons that I have never forgotten and for which I have never failed to be grateful. As a teacher, Bill was almost magical. He taught without seeming to teach. We learned without realizing that we were being taught, until afterwards, when we were left to discover—with manifest joy—the power of the lessons he had lodged deep within our hearts.

As some of you know, Bill did not drive. When he was here, I was one of those who shared with Virginia the responsibility of getting him where he needed to go. That led to not a few adventures.

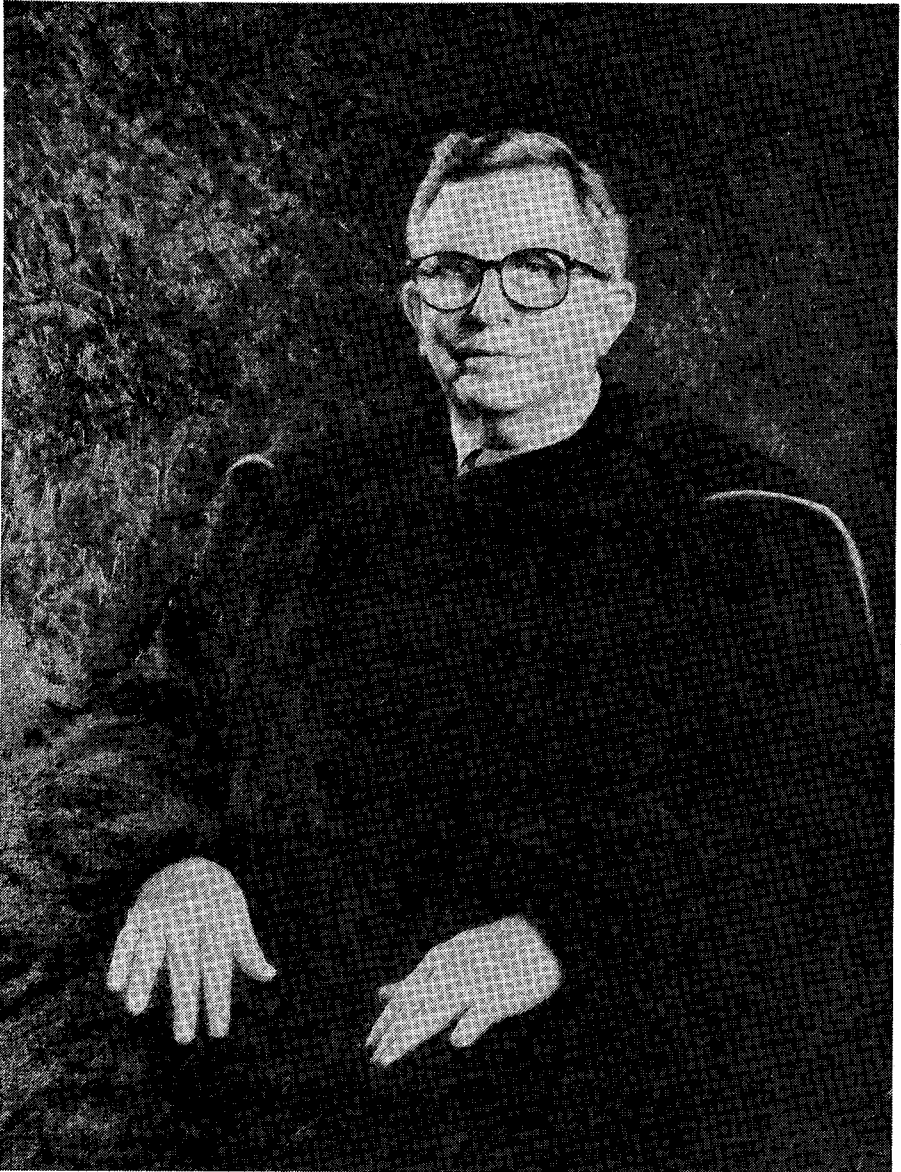
One day he asked if I would like to visit Hampden-Sydney. I said yes. I had never been there and was anxious to see a place that Bill believed was some kind of collegiate paradise. I asked him when I should pick him up. He said, "Don't worry, just be here in the morning." When I arrived the next day, I discovered that he had engaged Mr. Albert Durant—a loquacious and long-

time chauffeur for hire and something of a local institution. Mr. Durant's vehicle was a great, long, black limousine. Its vintage would have given it a place of pride in President Eisenhower's first inaugural parade. We bought sandwiches from the Cheese Shop and rolled up the road to Farmville—fully occupied by Mr. Durant's nonstop commentary while eating our lunch out of paper sacks in the back seat.

When we approached the limits of that collegiate paradise, Bill leaned forward and said, "Mr. Durant . . . Mr. Durant . . . see that alley up there on the right, turn in there. I can't let them see me coming in a car like this." Now it's not accurate to say that we snuck onto the campus in camouflage, but it would be accurate to say that we did not make a point of being seen until we were a safe distance from any possible connection with Mr. Durant's gleaming, but antique, limousine.

On the way home, we stopped to get gas in what was then the wilderness of Chesterfield. I got out with Mr. Durant to stretch my legs. Bill stayed in the car. As he serviced the car, the attendant peered into the back window, turned to me, and asked with some awe in his voice, "Would that be the Governor in there?" "No," I said, "but he should have been." I still think that. He should have been. But now, all is memory—the life is complete. What he should have been does not matter. What does matter is what he was. He was the most thoughtful public servant of his generation—a great man who loved the Commonwealth of Virginia, not uncritically, but loved it still—the beauty of the land, the decency of its people, and the glory of its history. He was a teacher and builder who believed profoundly in the power of education and struck many a powerful blow for civility and civilization. He was a friend whose friendship made us laugh for the sheer joy of it, whose love gave us strength, and whose example gave us courage. All that, we must now consign to memory, and at the moment, it is a memory that wounds—and deeply.

But we all know in God's good time the wound will mostly heal, the pain will largely disappear, and we will be left with the wonder and the warming glory of having been numbered among that special band who loved, and were loved, by our eternal friend—Bill Spong.



**William B. Spong, Jr.**  
**Dean, William and Mary School of Law**