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C. WILLIAM O'NEILL

*Chalmers P. Wylie**

Chief Justice-Governor-Speaker-Attorney General C. William O'Neill was my friend. It seems only yesterday that I met Bill O'Neill for the first time in the Deshler-Wallick Hotel, a former Columbus landmark now only a parking lot. He had wanted help in his campaign for the office of Ohio Attorney General.

Bill was not an imposing man physically, but he impressed me from the moment he spoke, and I became an active supporter in his campaign. I made speeches and passed out literature for him. Thousands of others he inspired did the same. Bill O'Neill was elected the youngest Attorney General in the history of Ohio.

Soon after the election Bill asked me to serve as supervisor of the Industrial Commission section. Ironically, Robert Leach, the man who was appointed to fill the vacancy created by Bill's death and who has acquired a reputation for judicial excellence in his own right, was hired at about the same time. In fact, a list of the individuals whom Bill O'Neill started in public life would read like a Who's Who of Ohio.

For the young people he brought to his office, he provided both opportunity and encouragement for success. One day when I was an Assistant Attorney General, Bill called me into his office. He asked about a workmen's compensation case that I was handling and informed me that some influential people on the other side of the case had been "making some inquiries." Bill asked me the details of the case which I outlined for him. He listened without comment until I had finished. Then he asked, "Can you win it?" I answered, "I think so." Bill's only comment was, "Do the best you can." Never in the three years I served under him in the Attorney General's office did he try to influence me on a case that I was handling. Bill was loyal to his staff; that loyalty and his example often inspired superhuman effort.

When Bill O'Neill was elected Governor, he asked me to join him, initially as Administrator of the Bureau of Workmen's Compensation and later as First Assistant. Few days went by during

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those years when we were not in contact. But after I left the Governor's office, we saw each other only occasionally since our own busy schedules took us down separate paths.

One day I took a Boy Scout troop, of which my son was a member, to visit the Ohio Supreme Court chambers to fulfill a requirement for their "Citizenship in the Nation" merit badge. I had not told Bill we were coming, but when he learned that we were there, he came out to meet the boys. Bill gave an impromptu talk that was one of the most stirring speeches I have ever heard. When we left, each one of those young men took a unique gift with him.

Almost any person who was touched by Bill O'Neill's life—and there were many—has a tale to tell about him. He was a man to be remembered. To tell his story is to reflect on the history of Ohio during his lifetime, and I cannot do justice to even those parts of it I know within the confines of these pages. Bill O'Neill was my friend. But more than that, he was one of the most completely decent public men I have ever known.