

The Honourable H.L. Cantor, Q.C.

Eulogy delivered by his Honour Judge Shillington Q.C. at the memorial service held for the late The Honourable H.L. Cantor Q.C. at St. James Church on 8th October 1986

Henry Lawrence Cantor was born on the 20th April 1919 the son of Mr. Justice M.E. Cantor, a Justice of the Industrial Commission of New South Wales. He and his sister Jill lost their mother at an early age and it fell to their father's lot to guide their lives through the formative years. His background no doubt led him to the law and after war service in the A.I.F. and later the R.A.A.F. and graduating from Sydney University Law School in 1948 he was called to the Bar in 1949.

Before going to the Bar he spent a period as a clerk with Messrs. McLachlan Chilton & Co. This was invaluable experience since he was supervised by a solicitor of great drive and capacity, Dick Parker.

He married Margaret McNiven in 1948 and there were born to the marriage three children Libby, Jane and James.

Our paths first crossed when as a young barrister, I joined those on the ground floor of the old University Chambers and we later became the nucleus of the 10th Floor in the new Wentworth Chambers. There his practice expanded; it was a varied one with many solicitors anxious to brief him. He was always generous with advice sought by his juniors on the Floor such as myself. With the taking of silk in 1971 came success as a leader of the Bar, with a busy and varied practice.

When the Attorney offered him the appointment as the first Master of the Common Law Division of the Supreme Court in 1972, he hesitated long but finally accepted. He loved the Bar which he served on the Bar Council for eleven years including three as Treasurer, Counsels Chambers Limited and Barristers Superannuation Limited and in many other ways. He established the role of Common Law Master in the life of the Supreme Court. The new rules of Court owed much to his work and advice.

He was appointed a Justice of the Supreme Court in 1975. His temperament well suited him to this new role. As a judge he displayed courtesy to counsel, but was impatient of cant and humbug. He instinctively isolated the issues. He was a shrewd judge of character with the ability to put issues to a jury in a commonsense and practical way.

In more recent years his natural concern for those less fortunate than himself led to his interest in the Child Abuse Prevention Service. He became a Director of the Service and worked hard for its recognition by Government and subsequent funding.

He was really a very emotional man — not always displayed. To his friends he was affectionate and generous — his keen sense of humour often showed itself in

infectious laughter and the wry phrase. The false, the pompous and self-opinionated did not find in him a sympathetic response.

He took the news of his fatal illness in typical fashion, he told me later of the fear of the unknown which first struck him — but his natural courage then took over with the positive approach — “the rest of my life whether it be short or long must be led as fully as my health will allow.” He bore the pain and humiliation of dependance without complaint.

Bill loved the physical world, His skiing — which found him at Perisher Valley each year; his squash and later sailing with Don McLachlan and Algie Smith on Pittwater. He was a most popular member of the Avalon Sailing Club and the club burgee draped his coffin at the funeral service.

Bill loved his family. I know all present, by their presence express their love and sympathy to Margaret, to Libby and her husband Steve and their sons Brendan and Lindsay and to Jane and Jim.

We remember also Maureen Vaughan his dear friend, Doris Barnfield — his secretary and later his associate through all his years on the Bench — a loyal friend to the end. Edward McMurtrie (“Mac”) his tipstaff over ten years.

Bill Cantor was a man of great realism about the meaning of life. A measure of that realism was that in his last days the proposal to hold this memorial service and its form was freely discussed with him. He died at his home at 5.45 p.m. on Thursday, 18th September, 1986.

Those of us who knew him well have lost a true friend, and one who we find it hard to realise is no longer with us, such was the strength of his personality, and his feeling for others. We are grateful for that friendship.

“How often are we to die before we go quite off this stage? In every friend we lost part of ourselves, and the best part.” — Pope