ROBERT M. SPIRE: A LOVING MEMORY

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Bob Spire, a good man, died while in the midst of yet another consuming challenge.

This man, courageous in illness as he was in life, was a lawyer's lawyer, a respected leader of the bar, a thoughtful public servant. He was so much more than most and is deserving of our tribute, not because he moved graciously among the great of his time; but because he moved graciously among the humble.

Justice Felix Frankfurter, responding to a boy who had asked how to prepare to be a lawyer, replied that no one can be a truly competent lawyer unless he is a cultivated man. Among the challenges for such a person, the great jurist declared, is the cultivation of the imaginative faculties by reading poetry, seeing great paintings and listening to great music.

Bob Spire was a cultivated man, modestly but marvelously sharing his talent in music, his depth of knowledge of literature, and his vision of a lovely world with each of us, his friends. He spoke of the law with awe, of lawyers with the zest of a proud ally, of the promise of a free society with the eloquence of a Martin Luther King. Planted firmly in my memories of him are the ragtime keyboard tunes he so effortlessly played to entertain. Just as deeply rooted are the simple, clear words of wisdom he offered in his role of moral and civic educator.

Among my treasured memories of my friend is a collection of hand-written notes he wrote to me sharing good wishes, pondering issues of the day, or musing about people near to each of us. Letter writing is a dying art. Bob Spire kept it alive, perfecting it, fine-tuning it as one might a delicate instrument, just as he kept alive the art of decent living. Those notes, in his unique slant, on that crisp, white paper, will always remind me of how good a man can be, how tireless and how warm.

Learned Hand wrote that we can live without dishonor, and to live without dishonor is to live with a high heart, and in such fashion that we shall not wince when we look back upon our past. Such a life was Bob's.

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Here was a man of privilege who shared his good fortune, his talent and his optimism with the poor and disheartened alike. He was at once at home with the wealthy and with street musicians, with scholars and fledgling students. The humanness of others was precious to him.

They say of Bob Spire that he left us, most of all, good example. He cared for the weak. He believed in justice. He epitomized decency.

This gentle man had so many passions in his life: His family, his faith, his profession, the world of politics, the fine arts, seeing to it that the place he left behind was better for his digging in the earth and making goodness grow.

Bob Spire was a man who never sighed with exasperation when called upon to handle yet another tough job. He brimmed over with enthusiasm, excitement, and even glee when a new challenge faced him. Surely Thomas More, the sainted chancellor, would welcome him into the company of the good and the brave who gave full measure in the service of the Lord, the law, and their home.