

William McWhorter Cochrane '39

Devotion to the University took root in Bill Cochrane from the first day he set eyes on Chapel Hill—September 12, 1933, barely six months past his 16th birthday. He fell under its spell and it holds him to this day. And other than his family and the University there is just one other love in Bill's life—the United States Senate. He is a loyal son of the University, resident sage of the Senate, and tireless servant of them both.

Bill Cochrane, with his trademark bow tie, his pipe, and his southern-gentleman style, is so effective at cutting through federal red tape that he's affectionately known as North Carolina's third Senator. He went to Washington in the fall of '54 as an aide to the newly-elected Senator W. Kerr Scott. Bill told Senator Scott that he would help out for one year, then return to Chapel Hill to the Institute of Government or to practice law. Three years later, when Senator Scott died, Bill went to work for his successor, B. Everett Jordan. Today, Bill's still in Washington where he serves as the senior advisor to the Senate Rules Committee.

Bill's mission in life is public service, not celebrity. When the North Caroliniana Award was conferred upon him in 1988, H. G. Jones said, "We are honoring Bill Cochrane because he's never done anything that some politician hasn't taken credit for."

He is one of those rare North Carolinians who is on a first-name basis with at least one UNC alumnus in every county in the state. In most counties Bill knows many of the local leaders because at one time or another he's done them a favor. He's a long-time insider who knows how to get things done.

A wonderful thing about Bill Cochrane has been his enthusiasm for helping young people who wish to find jobs in Washington. Every summer a new crop of college grads, many of them with their UNC sheepskins packed in their suitcases, stops by his office to ask for advice about where to go and whom to see to begin a career in government.

Bill Green, who was assistant to Terry Sanford when he arrived as a newly-installed Senator, recalls that when Senator Sanford arrived in the capital, the first person he called upon was his former Chapel Hill roommate (Bill and Terry shared a loft over Sutton's Drug Store). "Bill Cochrane's influence is pervasive," Green says. "He knows every rule and every person on the Hill, including all the police officers and waiters. Everyone recognizes him immediately."

Bill's big heart has never left this college town where he maintains a home, votes, banks, and serves the University. In 1988 he gave a year as president of the Alumni Association and then as before served as a loyal member of the board.

Of his feelings about the University, Bill once said, "My love for the University grows stronger with the years. The influence of Dr. Frank lives on—he taught us all to give freely of what had been given us."

The spirit of Frank Porter Graham indeed continues here—expressed in the lives and service of his followers, Bill Cochrane chief among them.