

The Media and Me

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Did you ever wake up at 2:30 in the morning, heart beating a mile a minute, worrying about a United States Senator or a governor who has decided that you are not a friend and should be punished? Have you ever picked up a phone and heard the invectives and curses of a powerful newspaper editor who indicated that you had regular intercourse with a duck? Have you ever picked up your phone messages and received thinly veiled death threats? I have, many times and that takes me away from the beautiful, quiet, serene academy where, I am told, all is peaceful and your summers are your own and Fulbrights and sabbaticals are the rule. By the time you're done with this you can be the judge. You make the call. Have I been rational or irrational? Can and should life at the state university be lived at the edge?

We have tenure at the academy for a reason: to protect our freedom of thought. And yet there are plenty of forces that would have folks intellectually succumb to the corporate sources of funding or to the governors who run a state and would punish academic transgressors. In the box, safe, out of the box, slap him down to make sure that he doesn't do it again. When the academy protects this First Amendment cherished right, overcoming academic jealousy and competitiveness, it's at its best. I've always had that protection, although for my "own sake," I've been warned to cool it a few times, especially in the earlier years.

I have no real idea why I've been asked to write this chapter. Perhaps it's because I'm more like most other academics than some of the academic superstars who are represented in this book. It's true that I work hard, very hard. There are others who do that although I know many who do not. Maybe my personal work ethic sets me apart. All I can do is to try to tell the truth and to be as hard on myself as I am on others.

As I write this, I am fifty seven years old and most of my adult life as a political science Ph.D. has been spent in communication, running a newspaper that deals with state government, appearing on television every night of the work week, running ten public radio stations in the Northeast Public Radio Network, functioning as executive producer of twelve nationally syndicated public radio shows, hosting several others and writing two newspaper columns a week. Mario Cuomo and I have a program, *Me and Mario*, that is nationally syndicated and can be heard in places like New York City, Boston, and Chicago. I wrote a book about my relationship with Cuomo that has the same name as the program. That, and a bit more that I haven't mentioned, is on top of my academic responsibility as professor of communication at the State University at Albany and, for twenty-eight years before that, as Professor of Political Science at the State University of New York at New Paltz. While I truly love the academy and all that it's done for me, I also understand its limitations. A bit of my thinking on this seems necessary at this point.

Critiquing the Academy

I am convinced that because of our societal investment in the expertise of Ph.D.'s and academics, we should, as a society, be getting more for our money. We need more of us who are unafraid to involve ourselves directly in the very subjects that we are studying; more of us who can affect the way in which decisions are made in society. I

believe there are reasons why things turn out the way they do. We live in a corporate culture and we pay those at the top of the ladder vast amounts of money. In this society, it is they who count. Our so-called academic experts, for the most part, do not. Sociologists can map the inequities of society, but who cares? We have assigned our academics a role in a parallel world; a world where we teach our students, some of whom will be corporate leaders, some of whom will be academics. Considering all their knowledge and training, college faculty are not particularly well paid and certainly not perceived to be major forces in the society.

Part of the problem is that our credibility as academics is often questioned by people suggesting that many of us wouldn't last long if we were actually doing what we were teaching our students to do. Let's face it, there are a lot of people who see us as phonies. Certainly many of the students have their doubts. Sadly, many of our genuine experts rarely connect to a world that could use their expertise. No question about it, society often fails to collect what it can from those it has intensively trained to understand phenomena ranging from politics to the hard sciences.

We know why it has developed this way. For example, the way the academy operates allows it to escape responsibility for having to prove that it can practice what it preaches. For the most part, we have too little in common with our brothers and sisters in the medical academy or schools of business who often have to run clinical practices at the same time that they are teaching. If doctors are teaching how to remove a gall bladder, they must show that they can do it. As a result, many people believe that the money we put into our public and private university is largely wasted since so many of us don't give all we can to the larger communities and world in which we function.

Because of our self-protective cocoon, we are shielded from having to put up or shut up. Perhaps that's the safest way for many of us. As a result, academic disciplines invent languages and codes that are comprehensible only to their own members. All professions, be they doctors, lawyers, or academics, have such self-serving mechanisms. This has meant that all the sanctions that can be brought to bear by the academic disciplines encourage those who play by the self-protective rules. All too often, we are rewarded for staying within the lines rather than venturing beyond what could be called academic research or teaching. An article that only a few will ever read, couched in obscure language, counts a great deal toward promotion and a lifetime sinecure. But a newspaper column, read by millions, often counts not a whit, unless there are extraordinary circumstances. Professional association meetings and conferences are called where the self-protective language of the profession is often the official language of the subset. But speeches to the general public are not given the same rewards as those to the smaller academic groups.

The self-protection doesn't stop there. Often, the university can be mired in mediocrity because inevitably, some members of the academy are sinfully jealous of their colleagues who have achieved success in outside settings. I'm sure that everyone represented in this book will have their share of stories to buttress that assertion. Whether they tell them or not is just one more piece of proof about the way the system works. With that said, for the most part, my departmental colleagues have been extraordinarily supportive of what I've done.

A number of problems have, for years, pervaded our academic disciplines. One is that many of those who do such good work in their disciplines are afraid to test their

knowledge in a real world setting. I have always believed that those statistically oriented, self-styled behavioralist political scientists who took over the profession in the late 1960's did so because they would never have to demonstrate that they could put into practice what they had supposedly become experts in. It is always easy to study what you have hard data on. You can keep crunching the numbers on the election of 1948 and write yet another article to be read by less than a hundred people.

But try subjects like "Why war?" or a host of practitioner-oriented psychology questions like why do people take drugs or hit their kids and academics will ridicule the undertaking and revert to looking at rats in cages, suggesting that answering questions of the type just mentioned is "premature." It's not that some don't try and succeed, but most don't. Some of those who do are too often wrong and most don't want to risk the barbs of their colleagues for taking the kind of chances that Viennese physician Freud did so many years ago.

Students and Academics

Time and again, I have found that students who are interested in making their way in the world will respond best to those who have proven that they can do what they are teaching. Most teachers know that most, but not all, students are always willing to sit still and listen to anyone as long as they get the three credits. Nevertheless, talk to any of these students, particularly the "non traditional" or returning students, and they will tell you about the course work that is most applicable to their own lives. They will tell you who taught them something. They will tell you who has done something in the real world that proves they know what they're doing. The reverse is also true. Ask a student about all those journalism Ph.D.'s or professors of education who have never served or who have, even worse, failed in the trenches. But you can also ask them about the education and journalism professors who have done it well. The students know the score. Find teacher practitioners who can tell them what they face and how they can make a personal contribution to the world and students pass the word that this is a course worth taking.

My world is that of the media. Luckily, I teach in a department that specializes in formal communication theory but practices tolerance, at least in a limited manner. Perhaps because of my having been honored with the Chancellor's Award for Excellence in Teaching early in my career and my limited media notoriety and because I have worked hard to establish some of the best internships in the country, I have been recruited and rewarded. This shouldn't be too surprising, as the academic world and the rest of the world have much in common. They are both bottom line enterprises. More and more, the truth emerges that a university's secret for success involves the bringing in of money. Departments are told that he or she who brings in the dollars in the forms of grants is desirable. Bring in money and you get extra faculty, promotions and rewards. So, too, the bottom line for media — all media in a society which is structured in and around capitalism — is money.

Newspaper publishers working for themselves or, increasingly, for media groups which also own conglomerate television and radio stations are held accountable for bottom line profit. While it may be less so for public radio and television, the boards that run these not-for-profit enterprises also understand bottom lines. They may not need as much money but they need money. The more money, the more success. Perhaps that's

why National Public Radio now takes underwriting money from indicted and convicted firms like Archer Daniels Midland (ADM) or why Public Radio International's *Marketplace* series takes money from the well known polluter, General Electric. All of this has everything to do with what I do and how I am allowed to do it.

Nothing could exemplify all of this more than a call that I received from a producer of the NBC Nightly News just before Labor Day, 1997. They were preparing a story on PCB pollution in the Hudson River and had come across an article I had written in the *Legislative Gazette*, castigating General Electric and its chairman for irresponsible corporate behavior. The producer asked if I would be willing to come to Albany to "add balance" to his piece. He told me that somebody had handed him my article and that he had exclaimed, "This is terrific. This is just what we need."

I didn't much want to make the drive but that was offset by the importance of offering commentary on one of the major nightly news shows. I did suggest to the producer that my comments would never find their way to the piece since, "You guys are owned by General Electric." The producer vehemently denied that such connections existed. Guess what? After I had driven to Albany and said much of what I had said in my column, I was conspicuous by my absence on that particular edition of the NBC Nightly News. One can only ask whether the young producer was really that naive.

Unlike some of my colleagues who have written chapters in this book or whom chapters have been written about, I am hardly a superstar. I am an academic who has been successful in one area of the country, seven northeastern states, in particular that area surrounding the Capital District of New York State. I am nothing more than an college teacher who got charged up by the possibility of extending my teaching to a wider audience. I've done it on a number of stages — television, radio, newspapers, even rock and roll radio and each has its advantage and its down sides.

Risks

There are substantial risks for all academics who involve themselves in related work outside the cloistered walls of the university. One such risk involves charges of some sort of intellectual prostitution leveled at academics who want to make their way in the world; ironically the very type of thing that pervades universities that take money from industries and the foundations they spin off. Nevertheless, my limited success might be instructive to other academics and to the departments and universities who must decide what they should be doing when an academic achieves any kind of celebrity.

There are things we all must understand about the institutions that bestow notoriety. Unfortunately, the very variables that will insure our success on one stage might well open us to charges of being intellectually dishonest on another. In the same way that a grant from a pharmaceutical house to a biologist might offer certain ethical dilemmas, so too will the academic who appears nightly on a television show have to exercise caution.

My Life In Television

I offer some examples from my own life. My longstanding employment in television is fairly easy to explain. It really isn't any different than the demand at our universities to hear from some of the academic superstars. The people who manage the commercial media are interested in making other people watch. The more people who

watch television (particularly those in the right demographic groups), the more likely it is that the people who sell advertising can sell “the numbers.” Each additional ratings point is worth additional dollars.

There’s no secret in how it works — the bottom line is the bottom line. As controversial as it may sound, news is often tailored to achieve higher ratings. If women’s demographics are desirable because women are the greatest spenders, the news director will say “more women’s stories.” If the people who crunch the numbers discover that the numbers are “skewing old,” they will attempt to attract a younger audience with more news stories about rock bands. Even the much touted National Public Radio isn’t immune. They solicit underwriting which may sound different from advertising but increasingly isn’t. The underwriting patrons use the same ad agencies to buy underwriting from public radio stations as they use to buy advertising on commercial radio stations to spread their messages. What will build audience is what constitutes the news. Just look at the last story on *All Things Considered*, the award-winning national news program from NPR which quite often features segments about emerging rock band that will garner the network more young listeners.

Years ago, many television stations had what could only be called “talking head professors.” These boring fellows were part of a stable of analysts who could be called upon to explain to viewers, from a professor’s viewpoint, what was happening. These commentaries would be filled with “on the one hand” and “on the other hand,” equivocations. Luckily for those folks, we are talking about a time before clickers were invented and viewers would actually have to get up from the couch to change the station. Add to that the fact that there were usually only a few choices in each market and you had a captive audience where anything was regarded as better than nothing. There are still some of us in our fifties and sixties who remember watching “test patterns” rather than watching nothing. Naturally, with the development of focus groups and other ways of measuring such things as “Q-Ratings” (personal popularity of individual “talent,”) it was soon decided that academics and other serious commentators do not work well on television every night.

As a result, it was tough for me to get into the game. But I did have a fairly basic understanding of what makes it all work. As a young academic in my first job at The Eagleton Institute of Politics, our boss, the late Donald G. Herzberg, sent my colleague John Blydenburgh (now chairman of political science at Clark University and a top television consultant at ABC) and me to audition for the evening news at Channel 11, WPIX in New York. We got up there under the lights and had a wonderful time arguing with each other and predicting election outcomes. We were pretty funny, at least the floor crew thought so. But it was too early and, we were too young. TV news had not yet evolved to the point that they were going to take any substantial risks. But I fell in love with the medium and from that point on, I always had the idea of doing nightly television analysis in the back of my mind. I know the business. I understand that people have to watch and listen; it’s my job to energize them, hopefully positively. They pretty much have to enjoy watching me. I certainly know that the moment enough people reach for the clicker, the people who run the station will find out by means of hard empirical evidence and I can kiss my television career goodbye.

Some Biography

I guess you could trace it back to childhood. I was the managing editor of my high school newspaper, I was a minor functionary on the Hunter College *Arrow* and in the summer of 1964, I was asked to become publisher of one of the two Fire Island (Long Island, New York) newspapers, *The Fire Island Sun*. I was very young, having just completed an MA at American University and I had no idea what I was in for. It turned out to be a major lesson in responsibility, telling the people who worked for me what they could and couldn't do and most of all, making sure that there was enough money in the till to keep paying our bills. That came down to selling the advertising for the paper, all the advertising, and that's when my eyes were opened to how it all really works.

I had to work with both staff and a non-profit board of directors and I can remember to this day the humiliation of attending a dinner party and being attacked by a woman whose social event received no notice in the paper. She had been a contributor to the newspaper. Those lessons were to come back again and again and that summer was probably the most fundamental building block in my understanding of the media.

By the time I first appeared on television in 1984, I had already started the *Legislative Gazette*, a practicum newspaper project that brought young people up to Albany to cover the Legislature. I still serve as publisher and project director of the *Gazette* and teach the students the political science part of the program. Also, for years I had been writing a column called *Salty Dog* in my local weekly paper. Sometimes the column was about serious national and local political problems, sometimes it was about whatever diet I was on at the time.

I loved doing the columns, got lots of affirming comments about them and believed that I was making a contribution to my community. Frankly, I got hooked. Years later, I switched from the local newspaper to the much touted daily *Berkshire Eagle* under the name *I Publius*. In addition to the local column, I started writing a self-syndicated statewide column which has been going ever since and which serves as the Publisher's Corner column in the *Legislative Gazette*. One night as I was driving home from teaching, I heard the local NPR affiliate, WAMC, and decided that it might be a good idea to bring the students from the *Legislative Gazette* onto the radio. I called the radio station general manager who was delighted with the idea, assuming that it wouldn't cost him anything, and we were off.

To put it mildly, the show was awful. The students had no experience on the radio and read everything in very unnatural, stilted voices. But it was relatively early public radio and a lot of people said they liked it.

By the second year, the students had disappeared because the then news director had decided to overhaul the program, developing a regular news magazine with me as the host, doing interviews and commentary. That was soon extended to my offering nearly daily commentary. Then, with the imminent financial collapse of the radio station, one of the most powerful in the country, I accepted the rather daunting, and eventually successful, task of leading a rescue operation after the owners of the station, the Albany Medical College, fell on hard times and were faced with major cost cutting.

Enter Television

Since I was offering daily commentary on the radio and writing a syndicated column on New York politics, I thought I'd like to try television. I asked some of the TV people at SUNY at Albany whether they would help me prepare some commentary tapes.

They agreed and I took the tapes to all three of the major network affiliates and asked them to consider me. Two of the three said “no.” The third, was the then NBC affiliate, WRGB-TV, the first television station in America, headed by an extraordinary news director, Don Decker. Decker’s claim to fame was that he was a developer of talent. Several of his proteges ended up in the major leagues of television but one in particular, was most instructive. Dr. Timothy Johnson literally invented health care commentary, first for WRGB and then for ABC national news. When I sent Decker the tape and called him, he went to his “political bulldog,” the late Bill Duffy. Duffy, a legendary Capital District political reporter, liked the idea and called me. He said that he was willing to give it a try but that it would be two nights a week and there would be no pay. I was happy to do it.

The year was 1984. Mondale was running for President against Reagan and I was supposed to offer commentary on national and local races. However, something happened. Soon after I arrived, the anchor, Ernie Tetrault, unexpectedly turned to me and mentioned that since I was a native New York City resident, he wanted my views on a breaking story. It seemed that a man named Bernard Goetz had taken out two pearl handle revolvers in the New York City subway and shot the men he described as his attackers. Goetz considered the men to be thugs and said they were not “borrowing” money but extorting money from him, shot them and left them in terrible shape. Knowing that he was in real trouble, Goetz fled both the scene and the state, a wanted man, and Tetrault wanted to know what I thought about what had happened.

When you’re doing this kind of thing you’ve got to think fast. I answered that I had taken the D train on the IND line to the Bronx every day when I attended Hunter College, that I had been menaced several times, and that I didn’t care what anyone else was going to do but that I was going to send fifty dollars to the Bernie Goetz defense fund. The reaction was instantaneous. Every phone lit up. People were screaming into the phone, mostly in appreciation for what they said was my honesty, the news director moved me from twice a week to every night and my television career took off.

We can take some lessons from this story. As I have said, in order for academics to do well on television they must meet the needs of the television. This is one of the rationales offered by some academics about why they don’t go into television. They say it prostitutes them; forces them to change their message; forces them to comment on things they’d rather not talk about; forces them to use the weight of their authority to make statements that are not substantiated by scientific investigation. Some of these would be fair objections. It has been my choice to appear on television and radio every day for twenty something years and to apply my knowledge of communication and politics to anything they might throw me, much as a batter in the major leagues knows that his opposition will be firing hard balls at him. But it is my hope and belief that no one will ever find me changing my approach because of public opinion. Once you do that, you start to get confused about what you said at any given moment and lose your base. You lose credibility and in the end you lose it all.. I’ve seen it happen.

It is a fact that station news directors have decided “talking head professors” are dinosaurs on television. When asked to explain how I’ve lasted for years doing commentary every night, I explain that it has to do with “accessibility.” I may be a professor but I have to speak the people’s language. If I hide behind academic jargon, I fail. People have to feel that they know you, that you are of good character, that you can

make them laugh, that they trust you and relate to you as a person. It is important that they know you are smart and equally important that they understand you. It then follows that if they understand you, they are smart too. If you use language they don't understand, you make them feel dumb or they just hate you for being a phony. Many of them will tell me that they don't like professors but they do like me. The research that has been conducted by the television stations I've worked for tends to bear this out. You talk down to people, you lose. You speak their language, you win.

You've got to be accessible and you've got to be credentialed at the same time. To illustrate the mix, let me point out one phenomenon. While the TV stations that I've worked for have always chosen to introduce me as "Dr. Alan Chartock," I have never referred to myself that way. When I go through the toll booths, the toll collectors always say "Hi, Doctor." I try to get them to stop it. I say, "Call me Alan." No matter how many times I insist, they still call me "Doctor." This led me to the conclusion that the viewers were stakeholders in my doctorate and my academic position. They felt better because they knew a person with a doctorate who spoke their language. If I was "Doctor" and they understood me, that made them feel intellectually empowered. This is not unlike the lady who hates dogs. One day a dog runs out, rubs against her leg and jumps up and licks the lady's face." The lady looks up and says, "Well, I hate dogs, but this dog, I like." Precisely the point.

In order to survive and do well, one must develop the ability to put things simply and effectively, in a manner that everyone can understand. You have maybe a minute and a half to two minutes to explain a complex subject. If you think that can't be done, you're wrong. However, so many academics are steeped in academic jargon that they can't pull it off. A senior academic colleague who I greatly respect was asked to appear on a local TV station. She showed up with six or seven books with little pieces of paper stuck in the books for purposes of quotation. The whole interview was over in less than two minutes and she was frustrated that she just couldn't make her points. She didn't understand that if you're going to play, you have to play by their rules, not your own.

It is also necessary to understand the compromises that one has to make in order to play in related professional jobs outside the classroom. At one point it occurred to me to try getting my brand of political analysis out on top-40 radio. When Mason and Sheehan, two of the most popular disc jockeys in the Albany region, met me at the local sushi joint, I reminded them of the times they'd used me as a guest on their radio shows and suggested that I'd be willing to do it weekly. I figured that the people who would be listening to that programming would be among the least likely to hear me in the other places. The result was extremely gratifying. I kept meeting people on the street who neither watched TV news, listened to public radio nor read newspapers but who listen to rock and roll on their way to work on Thursday mornings at 7:30 AM. The point here is that we are talking about a whole new audience. Many of the younger people I've met on the street were astounded to know that I appeared every evening on the most listened to news program in the Capitol Region or that I wrote a column in their local paper.

While I didn't change the substance of what I said, the style had to be different. These guys were always scatological, and while I wasn't, I had to hold my own with them. This was their "schtick" and the last thing they wanted was what Mario Cuomo has often called a "borer." Sometimes the talk got quite serious, as it did with the so-called Clinton scandal. I thought Kenneth Starr was off the reservation from the very

beginning, when even the President's friends were running for cover. My position from day one was that the Starr attack was reminiscent of the work of the late Senator Joe McCarthy; the sex police could now come into any American's life, haul them before a grand jury and give them the choice of lying about matters as personal as masturbation or philandering or telling the truth and losing friends, families, and reputations. While I could write that in my columns or even say it on TV, it had to be even more down to earth with the "rock and roll kings." There I would put a face on what I was saying, conceptually, by asking if either of them would like to be forced to tell all their most personal secrets and fantasies before a grand jury under pain of perjury and going to jail. By kidding around with them and by arguing with them, the point was made. A lot of people tell me they enjoy the back and forth and the spirit of the whole banter.

Students particularly enjoyed the rock and roll connection, but some of them spoke of what they described as jealous professors in affiliated departments putting me down in their classes. Interestingly, at no time did I ever hear directly from any academic colleague that I was belittling myself or that I shouldn't have been appearing on the show. It didn't stop with students. One day I was speaking with the wife of an academic psychiatrist who swore to me that her husband heard me on Thursday mornings on Mason and Sheehan. When I first approached the board of the public radio stations I run about crossing over to the new genre, some of them advised against it, saying that it would be demeaning. It was only when Mason and Sheehan, the aging rock and rollers, finally met their demise did I retire from the hit radio business. This despite the fact that I knew I could make the same deal with any of the numerous competing morning drive time shows. But that weekly 7:30 spot, on top of an hour of compulsory morning exercise was coming close to being the straw that might just break this camel's back.

The Legislative Internship Program

The founding and nurturing of the *Legislative Gazette* newspaper and the establishment of a major series of internship programs in the New York State Legislature have brought me immense satisfaction. This is the place where what I have done on the outside — consulting, managing, and journalism — most comes together with my work in the academy. The *Legislative Gazette* project involves taking students who want to be journalists and bringing them to the Legislature, where they function as staff on a professional newspaper.

The idea was a natural outgrowth from an internship that I established in the New York Legislature in the early seventies. Seeing no place at the time for our students to get involved in that body, I started a program in legislators' offices. In the beginning the students received nothing. As time went on they received a few thousand dollars a year.

The program was so successful that the Legislature followed suit and established its own programs. I was summoned by legislative bureaucrats on more than one occasion and told to get out. My Department at SUNY New Paltz courageously took the view that having the University run the program that was studying the Legislature was a lot healthier than having the Legislature study itself. Astoundingly, members of the Legislature continued to dip into their staff allotments to pay my students rather than, or in addition to using the free students supplied by the Legislature.

As established, the program is demanding. It involves a series of projects designed to get students to think critically about the institution they are studying. To that

end they are asked to write several five to eight page book reports each semester, comparing a book about the Legislature or the work that they are doing in the Legislature to what they are actually seeing. They also attend a weekly seminar and write a weekly seminar paper in which they develop a single concept. It might be a theory of representation, it might be greed or sexism. Then they have to keep a daily journal of one to two pages. It all adds up to a huge work product. Because they are being paid by the members, I believe they are held to more professional standards than the free interns supplied by the Legislature. While the students may complain about the very light intellectual work load carried by their peers from other programs, they proudly speak of the meaningfulness of what they did, even years later.

Inventing the Legislative Gazette

I got the idea in the shower one morning in 1976. “Why couldn’t we do with our journalism students what we had done with our Legislative interns?” If we did that, I reasoned, the students would have a hands-on experience covering the Legislature, they would meet all kinds of people including other journalists, they would have lots of their own newspaper articles or “clips” covering such people as the governor and they would get jobs. Dripping wet, I went to the phone by my bed and called Professor Arthur Cash, Chair of the New Paltz English department. Cash was enthusiastic and immediately said yes but not before negotiating the allocation of power and academic credits between the English and Political Science departments. I would be the publisher and project director, they would choose the editor.

We had to convince the college administration, who were pretty good about the whole thing but who had some real concerns. Some of them were worried that we would anger the very state legislative politicians upon whom they were dependent for resources. They were worried that the students would be as irresponsible in writing for the newspaper as they often were in writing for the college newspaper. I argued that since I was already on site running their legislative internship program in addition to my other teaching responsibilities ninety miles away at the college, running *The Gazette* would be no trouble. It stood to reason, I argued, that instead of working on a college newspaper and competing for jobs with similar students from all over the country, our people could sit in press conferences, do one-on-one interviews with prominent decision makers and amass “clips” that would knock the socks off of any potential employers. To the consternation of some at the initial planning meeting, the President of the College, Stanley Coffman, supported the idea.

The naysayers did, in fact, have a point. The project turned out to be replete with danger. The politicians didn’t particularly like it, the press — particularly the younger press corps members — didn’t like it, and some of the journalism teachers at the University weren’t crazy about it, either. Anything new will have its detractors and this was no exception. The attacks have abated but they’ve never really stopped. Nonetheless, the paper is still going strong twenty years after its inception and is now largely self-sufficient.

Despite the fact that we had no real planning, no real preparation, no real right to start the program, we did it anyway. We did it because we believed in it and because we had the will to make it work. We virtually didn’t have a place to set up shop. We had no computers, no typewriters (the students had to bring their own) we were a good distance

away from the Legislature and the students had to walk or pay their own bus fare. I have always believed that if we had gotten a huge grant from Ford or Carnegie to plan the thing, it never would have happened. The foundation reviewers would have perceived that we couldn't do it because there would have been too many obstacles.

Once the paper got going, the resistance was fierce. To a politician, information is power. If they have a monopoly on information, even trivial information, they are stronger than if they have to share that power. There will always be a symbiotic relationship between politicians and the press — one needs positive “ink” and the other needs information.

I tried to do it right. I went to a few of the power brokers I knew, like the late Senator Norman Levy, a Republican State Senator who had always taken students on the internship. He agreed to serve as an advisor. But no sooner did the first edition of the newspaper come out than I got a call from an angry Levy. He told me that he had not believed that the paper would contain substantive articles about politics, that his colleagues were furious and that he hoped that I would cool it down. Since the paper was hardly doing anything other than some basic reporting of press conferences, it was a shocker to me. It turns out that unbeknownst to me, Levy had the courage to stand up in his conference (legislative caucus) and suggest that the plan they had for killing the newspaper wasn't appropriate. He never told me that, although before he died of a brain tumor, I did have the chance to tell him that I knew the truth and that I was deeply appreciative.

Arthur Cash and the English Department's choice of editor for the project was a very old man, long into retirement, named Mason Rossiter Smith who many years before had worked covering state politics. To say the least, the man showed up, took one look at the situation and virtually disappeared but not before suggesting that we had none of the tools in place to make a success of the project. He was right. We had begged a small room from SUNY at Albany. We had no money to pay the first student stipends and we didn't have money for carfare or supplies. But the few students who showed up that year were motivated, if nothing else, and one of them was a young woman named Anne Erickson, now one of the top not-for-profit lobbyists in New York State.

One day Professor Cash walked into the Gazette with man named Glenn Doty in tow. Doty had separated from the *Middletown Record*, quite a big newspaper in New York's Hudson Valley. He needed a college degree, which he didn't have. He was registered at Empire State College and he needed an internship to complete his degree at that University Without Walls. The deal was that if I would supervise his internship and become his mentor (the official term for the person who guided your progress) he would become the managing editor of the *Gazette*. I accepted that deal very quickly, Doty took off his jacket, sat down and started barking out orders to the students. “You do this. This will be your beat” and pretty soon he had that little newspaper humming like a top. I have no idea what happened to Mason Rossiter Smith. The following year, Smith was gone and Doty was running the day to day operation of the *Gazette* as he continues to do, some 22 plus years later.

No sooner did we arrive at the Capitol than word came down that the senior politicians didn't like the *Gazette* and would find a way to kill it. I had been doing some consulting for the then Senate Democratic minority leader, Manfred Ohrenstein. Ohrenstein told me one day, soon after the first few editions of the paper had come out,

that he had been told by his Republican colleagues that the “paper was dead.” I was told that a senior bureaucratic official in the Republican Senate organization had said of the newspaper, “We never had it, why should we?” Shortly after that, I got a call from the business agent at New Paltz College. The then Comptroller of the State of New York, Arthur Levitt, had called to say that the contract for the publishing of the paper had been “irregularly let” and that we were to cease and desist with the paper and to go home. I was pretty young at the time and had virtually no experience with this kind of thing and was ready to figure out how to get the kids other internships when young Anne Erickson got fired up and went to visit two reporters she knew, one at the Associated Press and the other at the *New York Times*. They called the Comptroller to ask why the student newspaper was being killed. The next day, we heard from the Comptroller’s office by way of the New Paltz business agent that we could stay.

The woman on the other end of phone was belligerent, to say the least. What she told me was that the order to leave had been reversed; that we could stay but that I should “...call the little bastards off” and “...never go to the press again.” The *Gazette* was saved, at least for now and I learned lessons that I was to use many times again.

The future of the *Gazette* was still much in doubt. One student came into my office one day with tears in her eyes and announced that she had just been in the elevator and had spotted the tough, gruff Speaker of the Assembly, Stanley Fink.

“Oh, Mr. Fink,” said the student, probably in her internship for a week. “Would you mind if I took your picture?”

“Sure,” said the now passed on Speaker, “I don’t mind if you don’t mind eating the &*)@\$& camera after you take the picture.” There are a lot of people who will tell you how sainted the late Speaker was, how he had fought for the common man, how he led the way on cleaning up the environment. I’m sure all of that is true but I never forgot the way that he acted with that student, and I acknowledge that it influenced the way I wrote about him and spoke about him while he was alive. Of course, he didn’t appear to like me very much, either.

We knew that there was no love for the paper either from the top Republican leadership or from the Democratic leadership in the Assembly where the Democrats had the majority. The same young woman, Anne Erickson, decided to put on a fund raiser for the newspaper to raise some money so the students could get things like photography supplies. She was moonlighting at a small tavern in Albany near the Legislature and invited all of the Legislative leaders to show up. I was quite sure that her efforts were in vain. The evening came. The students had planned entertainment and I had even agreed to play the banjo. But what we didn’t know was that it was the night of the Senate Dinner, the major social event of the year that all the players attended. The doors to our fund raiser opened at 8:00 PM and a few minority Senate Democrats showed up before the big event and left early. They loved the project since they were pretty much out of the informational loop and had virtually no power in the way things were done in the Legislature.

Then, about 8:30, in walked the Lieutenant Governor and President of the Senate, the man who was the presiding officer of that body and who would one day be the three term governor of the state of New York, Mario M. Cuomo. He took a seat at the bar and stayed there most of the night, regaling the students and all comers with his natural abilities as a teacher. Of course, we’ll never really know why he did it. He once told me,

“I did it for the girl (Anne Erickson.)” But maybe he knew that he’d do better nurturing the young men and women of the press than he would attending some stuffy, back slapping Senate dinner. Another lesson about politician-press symbiosis.

At 12 AM the doors opened again and all of the major leaders of both houses and of both political parties sat down and announced their support for the *Gazette*. Could it be that they were shamed into it by Cuomo who hadn’t even bothered to attend their dinner? The *Gazette* never looked back after that night. Its success was assured and there are a lot of *Gazette* graduates who will never forget that magic night.

Politicians and the Press.

Politicians are scared of the press. Frankly, the fear is unwarranted. The politicians usually have the upper hand. Most of what the government and its politicians do is secret. Most reporters are either too busy or too lazy to get the information that would make a difference in politics. We all know that people give their money to politicians to get more money and power back. But speak to most people in the street and they don’t have the slightest idea who their representatives are. If they don’t know who they are, they don’t have the slightest idea what bills they voted on. They have no idea about their relationships with lobbyists. So for the most part, most politicians will never be held accountable by the press. For the most part, the reporters and their editors really don’t care because the members of public they write for really don’t care. Often the information is available with a little digging but there is little reach. So what happens is that when anyone even breathes their names, politicians get antsy. They don’t like to be held accountable. I try to hold their feet to the fire and they don’t like it. I do it on the radio, on television, and through a newspaper column that appears all over the state with widespread publication in New York City weeklies. Naturally, I hear some terrible things back as a result. My twin brother, Lewis, was once told that he was always welcome in an Assemblyman’s office, “...but your brother is not.”

Me and Mario

I met Mario Cuomo first when he was lieutenant governor. I liked him and was grateful for the role he played in getting the *Legislative Gazette* newspaper off the ground. Unfortunately I got into trouble with him during his first election campaign in 1981. He and his staff were convinced that I had hurt them by telling of the unwise remarks that one of his campaign staff had made about Ed Koch and homosexuals. As a result, I was told that if Mario Cuomo was elected governor I would never see the inside of the governor’s “second floor” in the Capitol.

I was pretty depressed about the state of affairs, especially since I admired Cuomo so much. As Cuomo beat both Koch in the primary and Lew Leherman in the general election, my fate appeared to be sealed. I would be treated as an outsider for the new governor’s time in office. Mind, this status sometimes has its advantages. I had been an outsider looking in during the entire Carey administration, preceding Cuomo’s. I felt free to criticize that administration as I often did.

Then one day I had a call from one of Cuomo’s press people who asked me to come over to speak with him. No sooner did I get there and have a few words with the press secretary than the phone rang and the guy said, “Guess who’s here with me now? Alan Chartock.” He was speaking with the new governor who instructed the press person

to bring me down to his office. I went and we had some nice words which indicated to me that I was off the bad list. I was pretty exhilarated.

Unlike George Pataki and Alfonse D'Amato twelve years later, Cuomo always tried to bring the media folks into his circle. He flattered them, he always made himself accessible and no matter how angry he was at any member of the press, he never gave up on trying to get them to see things his way. This was in direct opposition to the next governor, Pataki, and his mentor, Alfonse D'Amato. Once they believed that someone had written something bad about them or had ties to a political enemy, even a vanquished political enemy, they were put on the "punishment" list for long periods of time.

His reaching out to me came to characterize Cuomo's relationship with the press. He was almost always accessible. At this first meeting he invited me to do a single taping for public radio. Of course, I took him up on the idea and brought another reporter with me. At the end, I asked him whether he'd like to do it every week. He immediately said yes and in so doing, managed to anger the entire press corps, some of whom became insanely jealous of this "professor" who was to have this unheard of access to the governor. It is important to remember that at the time Cuomo was among the hottest political commodities in America. Most people fully expected that he would make a run for the Presidency. Thus, the radio show that was to last for the next twelve years, *The Capitol Connection*, was born.

All of this is chronicled in my history of that radio show, *Me and Mario*, published by Barricade Books, Inc. ©1995 . The show aired on most of the public radio stations in the state every week for about twelve years, leading to a lot of speaking engagements and a lot of angry people both in the press corps and in political circles. Despite the contentious nature of many of our conversations and fact that we disagreed on everything from the death penalty to welfare reform, there were those who spread the word that I was too close to Cuomo. Many of his political enemies were outraged that the show was phenomenally successful and that we received hundreds of letters about it. It turned out that public radio, with its high income and intellectual demographics was the perfect metier for Cuomo. Years later, he tried his hand at commercial radio and that proved not nearly as successful. He then returned to public radio with our current, nationally syndicated program, *Me and Mario*.

This has infuriated some in the Pataki administration, who despite Pataki's having been asked to appear on his own show, are quite open in their dismay that Cuomo, one of the best speakers and thinkers in the United States, would continue to be syndicated by a public radio station (that receives public money) throughout the United States. This is precisely the reason why I continue to have real problems with the government giving money to public radio stations. I would have no problem if the spirit of the first law assigning money to stations with no strings attached was scrupulously adhered to. Unfortunately, there are real signs that many national and local stations are all too aware that what the government gives, it can take away.

Pataki has picked his spots very carefully and his staff has made it clear to me that he would never go on a weekly show. Most politicians would not and for good reason. Cuomo was consistently saying things that got him into trouble because of his playfulness on the radio.

Here Come the Pigs

Perhaps the worst episode with the legislature happened in the 1980's. The legislature was attempting to pass a budget. But the machinations between the Democratic Assembly and the Republican Senate got so bad that a game of adolescent "chicken" inevitably took place as the Constitutional budget deadline of April 1st approached each year. Someone gave me a present of a "pig tie" replete with three giant pig faces with massive snouts. I went on TV and announced that the legislators were behaving like pigs at the trough. The result was astounding. People got interested and I began to expand the concept, asking for the viewers to send me representations of pigs if they thought that their legislators were behaving like pigs. I got pig potholders and pig underwear and thousands of post cards with pigs on them. Kids drew pig pictures and sent them to the station. I got ceramic pigs, and whole calendars filled with pigs. I got one stuffed pig after another. But the apex came when I was taping a Sunday morning talk show. Just as the program was about to begin, a woman and her children came running into the studio with a huge silver tray covered with tin foil. She said, "Look at this!" I took off the covering and there was a full severed pig's head. The woman explained that she was a farmer and that she thought that I'd like to use the head on the show as a representation of what I thought of the politicians. I demurred. Almost fifteen years later I'm still receiving pigs in the mail. And every year, at budget time, out comes the pig tie. It has become an institution.

The politicians went wild. They were really ticked off. The word kept coming back to me from their emissaries. They were infuriated that Alan Chartock who "we employ," who was getting a pay check from the state university, could be so crude to insult the lofty legislature. One politician, the Republican Chairman of the Senate Higher Education Committee, called me into his office and proceeded to bawl me out. He suggested that I wasn't being called on the carpet because of his sensibilities but that I had demoralized his staff and that couldn't be tolerated.

Naturally, I told him exactly what I thought of the yearly shenanigans of the legislature. I laid out all my arguments and he didn't have a lot to say in response. On the way out of the office he said that he was glad we had spoken and that the conversation would constitute the end of the problem. However, no sooner did I return to my office than I got a call from the *Legislative Gazette's* editor who told me that a group of "investigators" from the Senate Higher Education Committee had arrived, unannounced, at the *Gazette* offices in a search for material relating to the administration of the *Gazette*.

Furiously, I picked up the phone, got the Senator and asked what was going on. I was told to "cool it," that everything would be alright. I told him that I had changed my mind about not talking about what had happened in my office, and then I called the TV station where I worked. Channel 6 sent a TV camera and put it in the face of one of the Higher Ed Chairman's colleagues, who announced, "We can do anything we like. We're the State Senate."

The newspapers had a field day, replete with cartoons showing the legislators as various forms of animals. I got several columns out of the experience. One year, my class of *Legislative Gazette* students took the cartoon depicting the legislators as animals, and worked assiduously at the copy machine, magnifying and exploding small sections of the picture until it became a full length wall mural that still adorns the wall of the classroom we have at the *Legislative Gazette*. I feel more honored by what the students did there than by any award that has ever been given me.

Zenia Mucha

For the most part, politicians have always treated me well. Institutionally they can band together to fight an insult but as individuals, they have been pretty friendly. But when they can, politicians, some because they've been held accountable and some, because they just can, will take their revenge. Perhaps the most prominent example in my history involved Governor George Pataki and his director of communications, Zenia Mucha, perhaps the most feared woman in Albany during the Pataki years. Mucha worked in the same job for Senator Alfonse D'Amato and she clearly believed that the press is not the friend of the politician, that you use them when you can, you never trust them and you keep the people you're working for away from places where they can make mistakes.

When Cuomo was governor of New York, he appeared on my show, *The Capitol Connection*, every week. When Pataki was the underdog running for governor, he was delighted to appear both on my Sunday morning television program and my statewide radio show. But once he became governor, he became immediately inaccessible. It is true that this inaccessibility, a hallmark of Mucha's brand of client protection, was hardly reserved for me.

It would be understandable if it were only me. I had written a book about Cuomo and was a known admirer. But even the sycophant Republican commentators, those who had done their best to help him win his office, were cut off from the type of communication that Cuomo had given them, no matter what their philosophy.

Punishment, D'Amato Style

The Pataki-D'Amato folks have tried over and over to punish me. Among their most notable failures was an attempt to take away the modest amount of money the state gave to its public radio stations from one station alone, WAMC, the station that I head. Once the deed was discovered and conveyed to the public just before an on-air fund drive, people contributed money to the station at an incredible rate. I explained to them that in order to protect the station from the hands of the politicians, they would have to give so that we weren't dependent on the government. I explained that the problem with the government paying to help support public radio was that sooner or later, they would not like what they were hearing and they would move to take the money away. I meant every word of it, too.

Of course, Pataki's people took some exception to my pointing out that when the Nazis and the Communists had taken over countries, the first thing they had tried to do was to take over the radio and television stations. I asked the WAMC membership if they wanted that to happen to their stations, and the response was an overwhelming \$350,000 in a few short days of fund raising. The local papers' cartoonists had a field day with the issue. One portrayed Pataki with steam coming out of his head and his advisor saying that they'd have to go to plan B, "earplugs."

When I recently saw one of his top advisors who told me how much he personally loved the radio station, I asked him if he could do me a favor and ask Pataki to pull the same stunt again. Such are the perils of taking a hard nosed approach toward those who run the government. There is always the possibility that they will act to hurt you.

For years, Al D'Amato was a take-no-prisoners Senator and I have been very tough on him. Every once in a while I will hear from one of his associates or subordinates

that D'Amato has been using my name in vain.

Once at the height of D'Amato's failed 1998 senatorial election when the *Legislative Gazette* ran an ad that the New York State Teachers had bought as an insert in the paper, I had a call from a D'Amato subordinate accusing me, as the publisher, of giving away the ad for free. Of course it wasn't true. Another time, we had D'Amato on our afternoon call in show, the last time he ever appeared. A student called in asking what medical companies had given him money so that she would know how to judge his position on health care and I never saw the man become so publically enraged. He called the young woman a "NYPIRG (New York Public Interest Research Group) brat" and it didn't stop here. He started berating me for keeping the "nuts" off the show and said he'd never come back "...if you can't screen your calls better."

The Police

It doesn't stop with Pataki or D'Amato. I have questioned some of the actions of the police force in my home town in the Berkshire County newspapers I write for. This may be the most courageous thing I have ever done. It may also be the craziest. At one point it got so bad that as soon as I got home, the phone would start ringing and ring and ring for hours. The police "investigated" but could never figure out who the perpetrators were. Months later, when the phone began to ring again, I saw one of the senior police officers who had investigated the earlier complaint. He was walking on the street and I was so frustrated that I told him that this time I was going to the FBI. His response was, "Why? You haven't been writing anything bad lately." Judging by the timing of the calls, someone had to know when I came in and went out. Police cars would circle our house every so often ("for our protection") and when the television station I now work for, News Channel 13, would show up to do a story in town, the cops would go out of their way to tell the folks there how much they hated me.

Print and the Electronic Media

I write two columns every week. One is *I Publius*, written for the *Berkshire Eagle*, and the other is a column syndicated across New York State. Because I'm fairly visible in the area, some politicians have the impression that I've got some clout. After all, my column is the single regular column devoted to politics in Berkshire County. The ten radio stations I run cover Berkshire County and are the single media outlet to do so. They also reach at least halfway across the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

When I call politicians, they are usually responsive. Every once in a while that proves not to be the case. The problem for me is that there is some potential conflict of interest in my roles. It is extremely important that I remain cognizant of which role I am functioning in. For example, at one point the Director of Environmental Management of the Commonwealth, Peter Weber, decided at the urging of a group of environmentalists to take down the communications tower that housed the WAMC transmitter. As the head of the station, it fell to me to protect our signal. I wrote about it and I opined about it on the radio. I even devoted my monthly front page column in our station's Program Guide to the issue. The responsible people, including Governor William Weld, received a ton of mail about the issue. Finally, Weld announced, tongue in cheek, that he would satisfy the environmentalists by painting the tower green and tying a bow around it. Everyone knew who I was, why I was protecting the station and the potential conflict was fully disclosed.

Was my role as a journalist to achieve a stated end conflictive? I don't think so, as long as everyone knew what was to be gained and lost.

In order to sell my other column, *The Capitol Connection*, to newspapers around the state of New York, I have found that publishers tend to shop for columns that are both interesting and quite often, for those that are reflective of their own personal predilections. For an academic, this can be dangerous territory. The answer is that you have to be prepared to lose a client if they don't like what you are saying or doing. I have in fact faced that situation in the years I have been writing the column. There are some conservative publishers who believed that I was too close to Governor Cuomo and told me so. However, part of the game of political commentary is to be able to forcefully express an opinion and provide argumentation that can sustain your position.

Over the years I have found that the print media, for the most part, is the agenda setter for the electronic media. There are a lot of reasons for this. One of them is that the print media has been around longer. Another is that they have many more reporters and staff than those at radio and television stations. Still another is that there is a general arrogance that permeates the print media that almost never works the other way. Then, too, since most Americans get their news through the electronic media there is an attendant jealousy on the part of the print media toward the television that is both obvious and palpable. As a fairly outspoken electronic media personality, I'm regular fodder at the Legislative Correspondents' annual roast. It is clear that their barbs are not sent lovingly.

The print media has, for example, always critiqued the electronic media. Regular columns in every newspaper discuss the radio and television stations in the area. Sometimes, depending on the personalities of those running the radio and television stations, this critiquing can become savage in its nature. Early on, in my career in Albany, an editor of the Albany *Times Union* unleashed a long, so-called investigative report on me and my many roles as a teacher, writer, television commentator, radio station executive, radio commentator and host. One insider after another at the paper reported to me that the editor was working on a hit piece. For nine weeks, two reporters worked on the story. His reporters asked me for proof that I was a good teacher. When I handed them all my teaching evaluations, they refused to take them. When I told them of the Chancellor's Award for Excellence in Teaching which I had received, they seemed not to care. Pure and simple, the piece was to be a hit job.

Having failed to get what they came for, they finally printed their article on one of the least read Sundays of the year. It was replete with negative references about things like my radio style, "...his nasal voice rises and falls..." It contained a cartoon, a guy with an elongated nose, with arrows pointing to each of the things I do for a living. The only reference to my teaching came from a student who was applying for a job at the newspaper at the time and was quoted as saying, "He thinks too much of himself." With the replacement of the editor of the *Times Union* and the hiring of a new publisher, things calmed down and there has been a good deal of cooperation between my public radio station and the newspaper. I have even received several informal apologies for the way the paper behaved.

Perhaps one of the reasons that I have received so much attention from the newspapers is that I am far more visible than anyone who works for any of them. The public is interested in people they know. Another is that I have been uncompromising in

my public criticism of the newspapers when they have seen fit to attack the public radio stations I head. I have done this both in print and on our three annual fund drives.

Frankly, the original war promulgated by the *Times Union* led me to think up another program for WAMC. *The Media Project* would bring together academics, media practitioners and others who would discuss ethical dilemmas and the exercise of power as well as conflict of interest. Most of all, it put the electronic media on par with the print media because the show is replete with stories of print media malfeasance and conflict of interest. Needless to say, this has left many of those print media people who had unrestricted rights of criticism scratching their heads and not a little resentful. I have often advanced the thesis on that show that there is “bleed” between the editorial page policy of the paper and what appears in the news columns. This has been met with disdain, belittling and fury by those both on and off the program. But taking such things as the *New York Times*’ front page as it reflected the Clinton scandal (the *Times* had been an uncompromising critic of the President) and showing news placement, loading of stories, so-called “news analysis” which was nothing more than front page editorial writing, the case continues to be made.

Since both a newspaper publisher and a managing editor appear on the show each week, it is not exactly shooting fish in a barrel. The general advice given to those who have problems with the media consists of old truisms like, “never get into a war with those who buy ink by the barrel” or “never get into a pissing match with a skunk.”

In addition to finding a level of personal and institutional parity with the print media, I have tried to find ways to assure that same parity with those who make the rules for society; its politicians. Again, the symbiosis that exists between politicians and the media is extraordinary. The media need access and the politicians need exposure. Unfortunately, the way the system has become corrupted assures that the media will attempt to get to those in power and expose them, making for an explosive relationship. This is all complicated by the fact that the corruption of the political system is almost complete with money playing an indisputable role in who gets what. Since most people who contribute vast sums to campaigns believe that they will get something back in return, neither they nor the politicians they are giving the money to have any great desire to see the media exploiting that relationship. Things have gotten so bad that some politicians, including governor George Pataki in New York, have gone to great lengths to hide their relationships with donors. In New York, for example, the law requires alphabetized disclosure of contributions. In an effort to obfuscate the names of donors, Pataki’s campaign alphabetized contributors by their first names, instead of the more traditional last names. It was arrogance of the first order which I spoke about on television and radio at great length.

There is a trap for politicians which is complicated by the arrogance that comes with winning. Once they have won, some politicians become punitive toward those they perceive as too close to their political enemies. Since I was Cuomo’s biographer and spoke with him once a week for twelve years, there were some in the D’Amato-Pataki camp that decided that I should be punished. I have had first-hand reports from commissioners who work for the governor that they have been told not appear on my weekly show with the state’s politicians. One commissioner said that when she wanted to appear, she simply wouldn’t ask permission which was a prerequisite for any commissioner or member of the government.

So with a few rare exceptions, Pataki would not appear on my program unless there was something like a major environmental bond issue that he wanted passed. In fact, for the first four years of the Pataki administration it was difficult to get those in the administration to answer phone calls. While we would often send “return receipt requested letters” to the governor and Senator D’Amato, asking them to appear, there wasn’t even the courtesy of a reply.

College Administrations

I must say that what has impressed me the most is the way in which my college Presidents have stuck up for me over the years. They didn’t have to. They could have given me a word to the wise and told me to cool it. But in each case where even subtle pressure was exerted, they were fabulously supportive. When I decided to move my tenure from New Paltz to the University at Albany, I was admittedly concerned that the administration would not want to alienate the Pataki people who had taken over the various boards that govern the University. But there wasn’t a hint of that concern and these people, who faced with all kinds of fiscal exigencies, could have easily found an excuse not to appoint me. All of this served to convince me, once again, that my instincts about the way universities have been run are correct. I have always trusted the administrators and have been deeply suspicious of some small minded, jealous academics who make blood sport out of academic politics. All of this is compounded at every university at which I have ever taught (Rutgers, John Jay at CUNY, SUNY New Paltz and SUNY Albany) by the fact that the myth of faculty consultation is just that, myth. Frankly, I’ll take my chances with college administrators any time rather than be dependent on jealous academic colleagues.

Roger Bowen, The President of the College at New Paltz where I was professor for twenty eight years, figured prominently in perhaps the most obvious of the “get even” attempts on the part of the Republican operatives. He was doing what a President is supposed to do, meeting with Peter J. Savego, the powerful vice-chair of the State Republican Party, an intimate of Al D’Amato and an incredibly powerful player in the decisional apparatus of Ulster County, New York where the college was located. In the room was the President, Chairman Savego, an anonymous lay member of the College Council (responsible for picking the President) and the State Senator representing parts of the district, Senator William Larkin. The purpose of the meeting was to get the help of these powerful men in the building of a field house for the college, a project which the school administration had always coveted.

Soon after the meeting, I learned from a very good source that immediately after entering the room, the President was told graphically how important Savego was. Among other boasts was the fact that Savego “...could pick up the phone and have the governor on the other end...” any time that he wanted to. Then came a disputed part of the conversation. I was told that they demanded that I should be fired. They said they didn’t like what I had been writing about them. According to the original message that I got, the President said that I was a tenured faculty member and could not be fired for expressing my opinion in newspaper columns, in the classroom or in on radio and television.

I was so outraged that I leaked that material to several newspapers that followed up and all participants agreed that I had been a topic of discussion but the President, obviously under fierce pressure, said that he didn’t remember the part about my being fired. All of

this was reported by the news media. When I talked to one of the top Republican policy makers in the state, he just sighed and said, “I don’t know who was stupider, Savego for saying what he said, or (Senator) Larkin for being in the room when it was said.”

It was clear to me that no one wanted any more of that embarrassment and the not another word was heard about the situation. However, a year later, after I transferred my tenure to SUNY at Albany, I got this Christmas card from my courageous President that simply said, “We miss you down here in the South. Senator Larkin and I have nothing to discuss any longer! (Signed) Roger.”

If anyone thinks for a second that these clowns wouldn’t fire any professor who took a different view, I’m here to tell you differently.

None of this helps the academic entrepreneur who works outside the box. To me, none of what I have done would have really been possible had not the various academics who headed my institutions been there for me.

It’s been a good ride, so far. I know it is trite to say it but I often scratch my head, wondering why anyone is paying me to have so much fun.. There isn’t a day that I’m not in trouble with someone for something I’ve done or said and yet it seems like such a natural extension of what we do at the University. I’m frequently asked what, out of all the things I do, is my favorite. The safe answer is “teaching.” You can’t get into trouble for that “Mr. Chips” answer. But, the real truth is that it’s all part of a package. It’s all teaching and it’s all fun. That is, until you make a mistake and it isn’t. After all, that’s what makes it such fun.