

2/23/90

Seeing Victor Lasky's obit, a full column and a half of it yet !!, in this morning's Washington Post reminded me that unintendedly he was my benefactor. He and his associates were antagonistic and obviously expected to do me in and with it ~~and~~ spoil what little chance there appeared to be for Whitewash, my first book. *Just in then.*

My good friend Sammie Abbott, artist, designer of the covers of all my books and a progressive Arab, wrote a letter in elaborate German Script to what was then a top-rated, east-coast radio talk show. Summer, 1966. It was the long John Nebel Show, WNBC, and that clear channel station covered from the antilles to close to the north pole. (I got a letter from a man who said the closest bookstore was about 500 miles south of him, so he could not have been all that far from that pole.) Sammie figured correctly that such an appearance would grab attention.

I think that recently I made some reference to this but to commemorate Lasky's passing I'll recall a bit more. *And my debt to him.*

I had no funds so I drove to New York the early morning of the show. ^{during that day.} It began at midnight and lasted five hours. I made efforts I do not now recall to promote the book. A friend of Bill's and mine who ran a book-and-author radio show, Dorothy Attimore, said she'd like to be with me so she was. Aside from the control-room staff, she was the only studio audience. I was, I'm sure, a bit tired when the show began. *about 20 hours after I got up.*

To the best of my recollection, until then I'd done only one talk show, in Washington, with a people-eater host. I then learned the advantage of letting someone else behave badly because that delivers the audience to me.

That particular NBC studio had a long and narrow table, sort of kidney shaped. On the long side away from the control room Nebel sat. I was on his right, facing Kerin O'Dougherty, then New York State Conservative Party chairman and a lawyer. He was rather far away from the other three of us. Lasky was close by me on my right. The three of us were at the wider end of that very narrow table. The control room had a large glass window. This enabled the staff to catch signal from Nebel and give him signals.

For that era, those three were of the far right. And, predicably, they began jumping on me as soon as the show started. I was polite and did not lose my temper or misbehave in any way. They were, as we soon learned, delivering the audience to me. And meanwhile, I was getting a chance to size them up. There were five scheduled hours. The gangup alone could have gotten me the audience, three loud and impolite ones against one.

The impression I formed of Lasky is that he was not as bright as he thought he was, was self-important and had assumed a pedagogical air. He also spoke rather slowly and he was as subtle as a clap of thunder. (which he just had in February.) I don't now recall whether I decided to make my move with him or whether it just happened.

He had no such thing as a simple question or a simple formulation of any question. He started his windup in the sub-basement and I had plenty of time to anticipate what he was going to pull that he so obviously thought was brilliant. After one such prolonged message he asked me if I had even been in Dallas. Supposedly some kind of killer question.

I looked at him and said, approximate after all these years but I'm sure close, "I've been sitting here wondering whether you've read my book. (He had a copy in front of him.) Now I know that you haven't. Or haven't understood it. Whichever it is, your questions reflect ignorance of my book. My book, Mr. Lasky, is about the Warren Commission. The Warren Commission was in Washington. Not Dallas, Washington. Now if you ask me if I have ever been in Washington, Mr. Lasky, the answer is "yes" because I've spent most of my adult life there."

He did not know what to say and he said nothing. After a pause one of the others started asking questions but from that time on I ridiculed them, whenever I could with

references to Dallas or being in Dallas. It got to where Long John could not read his commercials straight. As soon as he fluffed I'd make a crack about Dallas, about his being there, or sounding like it. (The audience loved it.)

Whenever I looked at Lasky I automatically saw the control room and they were loving it. As was Dottie Lattimore, who was sitting against the opposite wall facing me.

Soon I was really enjoying myself and as we soon learned, betting quite an audience reaction.

Half way into the show they took a break, at least 15 minutes and maybe more, while an announcer read the news. We all went into the control room where we stood and had excellent kosher sandwiches sent up for every show for the publicity of the mention by I think the Gayety delicatessen. Every conceivable kind of delicious sandwich. Plus beverages including cream soda and Dr. Brown's celery tonic.

We had no soon started eating when Lasky started complaining about his bad luck in the stock market. I turned to him and said he could get rich from it. How, he asked and I said to turn out a weekly tip sheet on the market and tell his subscribers the way to win in the market was to do the opposite of what he said.

For the most part these three ignored my presence and ^{Dottie's} ~~Dottie's~~ in the control room, though. But we didn't mind a bit.

When the show resumed it was more of the same. I made them look like the boors and jackasses they were, with no more impoliteness than I've indicated. But I think before the show resumed it had the practise of reading telegrams received from listeners. There wasn't one that was not for me and against them. Sammie's son, a doctor then in New York, demanded that they stop abusing me and give me a chance to talk - I knew what I was talking about and he didn't. I'd never met George then but did later, after he'd done the same thing on the Alan Burke show on NY Channel 5, the largest independent station in the US.) The audience was really against them all and complained about their mistreating me. As you can imagine, it was not to Nebel's liking and he did not take it well. In any event, after I was smiting them mightily again, there came a time when, with someone else questioning me, Nebel went into the control room briefly. Soon after he came back he said good night to each one of his panel and ostentaciously ignored me. He signed the show off with the announcement it would resume with the tape of an earlier show he identified.

It was a big help in opening the subject up and introducing me to the New York audience and that book market. It got me on other shows that did more.

When the tape was being played O'Daugherty, at the opposite end of the table, by then in his shirt-sleeves in the air-conditioned studio, with sweat showing (He had not done his reputation as a lawyer any good at all!), put his hands on his hips and looked at me and said, "You are the damndest ^{most} self-contained man I've ever met." (He was wrong. I was and had been nervous but I guess hadn't shown it. Although when I was making sport of them I guess I wasn't.) As we were all putting our things away Dottie gave me a sign and I went over to her and she said to stall a moment longer until they'd all left and then to go into the control room with her. The control room had somehow communicated with her. They'd packed up all the extra sandwiches and soda water for me to take with me. She apparently had told them that I'd be driven back to Maryland when I left the studios.

She then lived in Fort Hamilton and that being the weest of small hours I drove her there. We laughed much, relived part of it and enjoyed that trip. But after she got out I had to find the Varanzano bridge and figure my way back to the Jersey Turnpike without much possibility of asking for instructions. It turned out to be little trouble but concern kept me awake. It was not as easy to stay away for the next five hours but thinking about the show and what happened helped, particularly when I thought of something that made me laugh.

We then lived in Hyattstown, where the post office was in the general store. We

had to go there for the mail, so I stopped off for it, I remember that. I don't remember whether or not I then took a nap but I do remember that because I was identified on the show as from Hyattstown mail addressed to me at Hyattstown did reach me and it did include orders, like from near the North Pole and the antilles.

While I can't now be sure, I believe this show is what drew Channel 5's attention to me and led to the invitation to be on the Burke show. That was a real zinger, for which I do not now take time, and it really opened the subject up and sold Whitewash out so fast it was for the week after the show the best-selling book in NYU. Aside from direct orders I shipped to one wholesaler threethimes that one week. (And had to fight like hell later to get paid, even though he was a relative of my dear friend Sidney Kaufman. They still owe me for 200 copies of the third of the Whitewash series.)

The main Brentano's store, then big, since sold to another chain, sold as many as 300 copies a day and the book began its dubious career as the most stolen of all books. People bought the book at lunchtime and had it stolen before they left for home. This also happened at the NY Times. After 12 freebies I made them pay for copies. But they never mentioned the book in their daily listing of "books received." Those who'd had books stolen, rather some of them, having seen the Hyattstown address, ordered them from me, giving me my first knowledge of this unenviable distinction.

But I freely acknowledge my debt to the unsubtle asky, who at the very least made a major contribution to the beginning of the success of that book. Nebel later had me back for a daytime show on which he behaved so I also did. I later encountered O'Dougherty on another show, I think Barry Farber's, and when he behaved, I also did. I never saw asky again but I did hear about him and his commercialism with his hired pen.

He'd reminded me of George Sokolsky, famous in an earlier era and one of the more successful of the earlier professional journalist red-baiters. Sokolsky was exposed by the Senate Civil Liberties, as the result of an investigation I'd made without authorization in Akron, Ohio, of the Greater Akron Association. It was an antilabor outfit and from its records, which I got, we learned that Sokosky, while writing his column, was in the pay of the National Association of Manufacturerers or the American Iron and Steel Institute. I was out there investigating a labor-spy outfit and to investigate Goodyear Tire & Rubber. I did serve the subpoena on the Goodyear president before I was yanked. And while awaiting arrival of the subpoena I went to the Greater Akron Association to investigate. It was run by a man, I think a lawyer, named Edgar A. Brou(or w)se. When I told him I wanted to see his records and make copies, which then required retyping them, he protested that that was the Russian way. I asked him if he preferred the American way in which I'd return with a duces tecum subpoena and he'd send all his files to Washington. (A subpoena requires appearance, duces tecum with records.) Mr. B. decided to have the records I indicated typed to avoid appearing in public and having the hell embarrassed out of him and that led to our committee's expose of phony civic groups as anti-labor. For which I'd almost been fired. Instead I was put to work as soon as I got back to Washington to write the brief, which means prepare the hearing, for the committee's first hearing. And I do mean the minute I got there while my firing was being considered. So fast I could not get to my apartment for washing and clean clothes. I'd not have found it anyway because the fellows I lived with had moved us to a different apartment. I got to DC on a Saturday morning and worked in the office until after the Tuesday hearing I had to prepare for.

I was escorted back to Washington by the then general counsel of the United Rubber Workers Union, Garnett Patterson. He later was exposed as a fink when he became an anti-labor lawyer. I don't recall for whom he'd finked. (The word "fink" is in the language as a result of that committee's hearings.) Also a fink about whom I'd reported my suspicions immediately was the regional director of the National Relations Board in nearby Cleveland, where I'd begun that trip. That report contributed to what some on the committee considered a basis for firing me. I was saved, however, by a fine Mormon, Heber Blankenhorn, who had considerable influence on the committee. He was at the NLRB but had had much to do with getting the committee established. (Although I had nothing to do with exposing still another fink, Philip Phillips, regional NLRB director in Cincinnati, he was one and when we were

both patients at Walter Reed hospital, in the convalescing section, he with emotional/psychiatric problems, he killed himself. We'd been friends, even going fishing together at Norris Lake. I think I've made mention of this in the past but without keeping that memo. I had had no reason to suspect him. And didn't,

Before wandering back to Lasky as a hired pen, I feared that Brien McMahon, then head of the DJ criminal division and in charge of the prosecution of the Harlan County Coal Operators Association and about three dozen of their deputized gun-thugs, was about to make an unconstitutional argument in federal district court in London, Ky. I asked Phil to come down and he brought Bob Cowdrill, regional director in Indianapolis, with him. They convinced McMahon not to argue as he planned but instead to take the approach I recommended. The three of us, along with a local lawyer who'd become my friend, Homer Clay, the drove to Norris Lake and a weekend of fishing. Homer was of the Clay family and the first Clay family lawyer not to be an operators' lawyer. He was a people's lawyer. At least then. The judge agreed with my way of arguing what was admissible from labor-board testimony, by the way.

Lasky was a hired pen for Nixon in the Watergate period and I think about Watergate. He accepted CREEP money, as I now recall, for his writing, probably a pro-Nixon book. He had a conservative following, I think including the radical right. To the best of my recollection, his work appealed to only the captive audience of that political spectrum. But that is where the money was for writers. Especially beginning with a commissioned book, which meant barrelhead money plus royalties.

The obit identifies this book as "It Didn't Start With Watergate." It also says Lasky's friendship with Nixon began with the book he coauthored with another of the far right, Ralph deToledano on the Hiss case, "Seeds of Treason." He went after all the Democrats he could going back to ex FDR, with anti-books on Robert Kennedy, Arthur Goldberg. Jimmy Carter and others and worked for "Radio Liberty," which was CIA. His book against Goldberg was financed by Laurence Rockefeller as part of Nelson's campaign for New York governor.

Although I do not doubt my unintended benefactor's genuineness, he went for a kind of whoring that was profitable and coincided with his beliefs.

HW 2/24/90

The obit is in my thin file on him which contains otherwise only a few clippings.