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Authors: Covering the Sofa

By Judith Martin

A corner is set aside for the flash display of authors at the American Booksellers Association convention in the Shoreham Hotel. As many as can be squeezed on one sofa are collected, and given an hour to explain themselves and summarize their books to whatever reporters are hanging around between covering panel discussions and luncheon speeches.

Yesterday morning, the sofa contained Louis Nizer, the famous lawyer who has written a history about the Rosenberg trial called "The Implosion Chain;" Abigail McCarthy, whose "Private Faces, Public Places" is about her life in politics as the wife of former Sen. Eugene McCarthy; and Rep. Don Riegle (R-Mich.), whose diary of his fifth year in Congress is called "Oh Congress."

They ran pretty much true to form. Nizer brought a star witness—film producer Otto Preminger, who

had suggested that Nizer write him the film script on the Rosenbergs from which he then developed his book—and refused to yield until he had stated his case. It took most of the hour.

"This is not only the most thrilling spy story ever written, but it is the most extraordinary love story, and the story of a brother who sent his sister to be executed, and much, much more than that," he said.

Mrs. McCarthy, who had been sitting perfectly poised, with her hands folded in her lap and the expression of rapt attention that the best political wives have on platforms while their husbands speak, was then asked about her book. It is, she said, the story of the idealism of the '30s and '40s, the pressures of the '50s—"when you're accused of aiding the Communist conspiracy and your children are ostracized in kindergarten, you never forget it"—and "what it really means to be a political wife."

It means, for one thing, that as soon as she was getting into the interesting part—how she reconciles her feelings as a feminist with the idea of playing a supportive role to a man's career—the male politician took over.

Rep. Riegle started giving anecdotes from his book—"those of us who dissent aren't invited to the White House any more, and that's not the worst: the cystic fibrosis poster child couldn't be photographed with the President as long as my name was associated with the request"—and predicting that his colleagues in Congress will be so outraged by his book that "I may find myself volunteering for the next moonshot to escape."

By then, it was lunchtime, and two of the authors of "The Almanac of American Politics," Mike Barone and Grant Ujifusa, who were brought in to replace Nizer and Riegle on the sofa, got up again and left.