

What Makes Skolnick Tick?

DATELINE:
CALUMET

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7/19/69

Southeast Chicago law researcher went to jail Thursday for the sole purpose of making a point. He didn't have to go to jail. He spent only four hours behind bars—but it was a course he had chosen some weeks before and he did not deviate from it.

This columnist has been closely associated with Skolnick for more than three years now. The Daily Calumet was reporting his numerous court suits and charges a long time before they came into national prominence. We reported what Skolnick had to say because in most cases the man was able to prove by documentation that what he was saying was truthful—and we concurred in quite a few of the points he raised.

A great many of Skolnick's projects have involved the courts and specific judges, and was topped off in this past week with the public hearings into alleged improprieties by Illinois Supreme Court justices.

It all started for Skolnick some years ago upon his first involvement with the courts. It was a case concerning an inheritance to him.

Skolnick is a paraplegic. He does not have use of his legs, and his face is somewhat distorted from the illness. Beyond that, the man is quite sound physically and he gets around in his wheelchair and is so attuned to operating from the mobile unit that at times one forgets that

he is quite restricted.

The man is self-taught in the legal profession, but is not a lawyer. His law library is as extensive as probably any in any law office in Chicago. He makes his living by writing legal briefs for major Chicago law firms—a kind of ghost writer. He definitely is not an amateur in legal circles, though the oft-used descriptions such as "legal gadfly," "law researcher," and "student of the law" might leave that impression. Over the years, Skolnick has brought more cases before the U. S. Supreme Court than any other living attorney. His demands through legal channels for redrawing of political boundaries—Chicago wards, sanitary district, Cook County, as well as state wide—were well founded in law and still are pending.

Some regard Skolnick to have a very fertile legal mind. We've even heard him described as being brilliant on the subject of the law.

Some others simply regard the man, more out of irritation and maybe even jealousy than anything else, as a crank, even a maniac, obviously very uninformed evaluations.

This columnist believes that these latter views of Sherman Skolnick are a direct result of exposure to the man's tenacity—the intenseness of the inner drive which propels him. There are very few of us, for example, who do not have some degree of variety in our interests. Certainly some more than others. But we have families, our work, our homes, our hobbies, our various other forms of leisure, and in general we tend to divide up our time as it suits us in developing our active lives.

This is not so with Skolnick. For nearly a decade now, Sherman Skolnick, confined by a crippling disease as he has been, has

zeroed not just some, but all of his energies and talents—among them an extremely active mind—on one course. All legal research and vast minutes into all avenues of this intricate complex subject have absorbed him. It and all of its facets are his work and his pleasure. Frankly, Skolnick has no other outlets.

This columnist believes that this background has guided him along to the point in these recent weeks where the principle involved has almost obscured the objective.

Make no mistake about it. Skolnick has no personal axe to grind in this case he has raised against the Supreme Court. However, that is precisely what some actually believe. The fruit of his decade of hard labor on this single goal are fanatical goodness, cleaning up of the courts he believes are tainted. The task has literally devoured all his time, but this columnist knows of no one shred of evidence to support a contention that Skolnick is motivated by the desire for personal aggrandisement.

Along the way, however, he has locked into pursuing this single goal as he is. Sherman Skolnick has developed a deep suspicion of the courts in general—of virtually all judges—and we would have to include many lawyers as well. In that there may be genuine animosity.

It has come to the point where Skolnick, so honestly dedicated to ridding the courts of what he believes have sold out their lives and their high positions of public trust, absolutely demands freedom to choose as he sees fit those he believes to be dishonest. This is. It would probably be too unkind to suspect someone even very close to him if that person indicated some question about where this is all

going -- or maybe that a person he himself suspects of wrongdoing might really be above board. And he might be right, for we have never found Skolnick to deal in personalities. It all has to be down in black and white.

But just as Skolnick will not waver from his suspicions of those he regards as enemies, he likewise has never to our knowledge deviated from intense loyalty to those who have aided him and supported his cause. The man is generous to a fault, and his word is unimpeachable -- but, once again, it is always within the confines of his goal. This man thinks 24 hours per day and seven days per week on one subject.

In this atmosphere then, Sherman Skolnick knew full well weeks ago what his course would be if the investigation of the Supreme Court required him to expose the many individuals who have worked anonymously with him, or if he was required to swerve from his own view of how such an investigation should develop.

As the matter stands now, Skolnick has defied the procedures set down for this particular phase of the investigation. It was his prerogative in any event, and he accepted the contempt citation fully intending to pursue that verdict through legal channels.

But that is only one aspect of the overall affair, a personal determination, since as it develops, Skolnick is not only concerned with the affairs of the individual judges, but of the rules -- the very structure of the courts -- themselves. It must above all be remembered that Skolnick is not burning down courthouses, he is merely testing laws which he questions through legal channels. In so doing, he is fully aware that it is a mighty big order. But he wouldn't have it any other way.