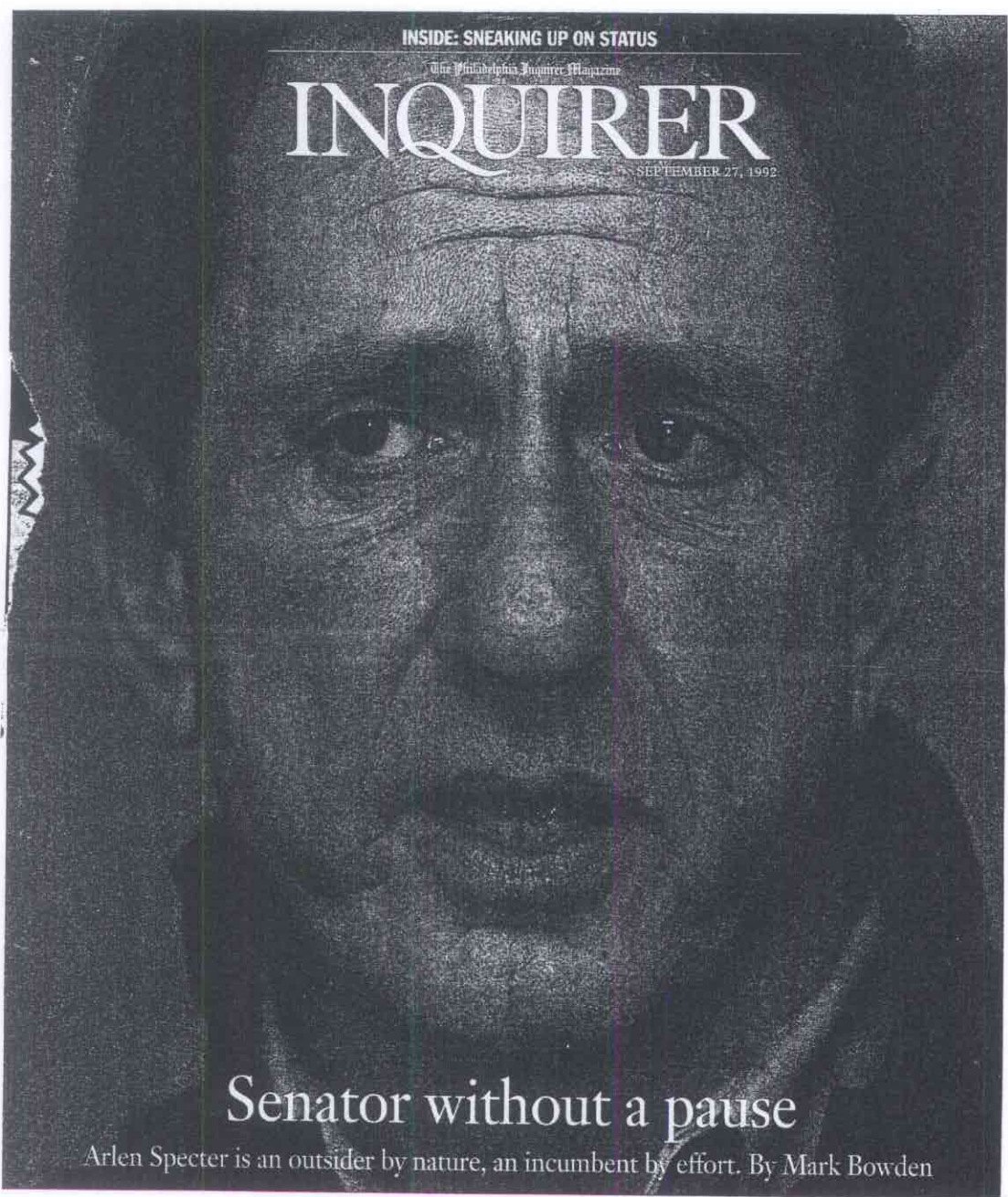


INSIDE: SNEAKING UP ON STATUS

The Philadelphia Inquirer Magazine

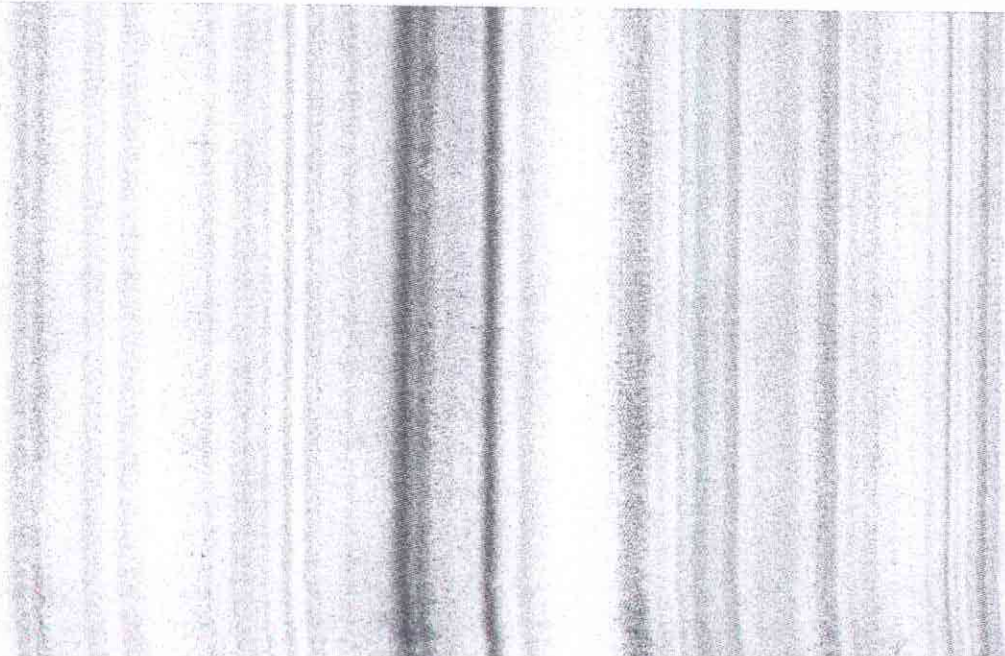
INQUIRER

SEPTEMBER 27, 1992



Senator without a pause

Arlen Specter is an outsider by nature, an incumbent by effort. By Mark Bowden



INQUIRER

September 27, 1992

Wide range

MARK BOWDEN IS ONE OF THOSE reporters who is endlessly curious about people.

It shows in the many lively tales he has reported for *The Inquirer*: general manager Bill Stead's short, turbulent days with SEPTA, the disappearance of the rhinoceros in Africa, a gang rape at a Penn fraternity, corruption in the Police Department and the bittersweet, even funny, saga of Joey Coyle and some bags of money.

Mark holds a fond place in our hearts (he used to be a staff writer for this magazine) for his robust skills as a reporter, his love of a good yarn, his exuberant use of the language and his boundless enthusiasm. (More than one friend calls him "the SS Bowden" for his ability to ride calmly over troubled waters.)

For all these reasons, when Mark takes a break from covering the Eagles, we do what we can to keep him busy. Earlier this summer, you may remember, he wrote for us on the activist group Act Up. Mark was with Scott Tucker and Kiyoshi Kuromiya and their friends when they were protesting the Republican Party in general and Sen. Arlen Specter in particular. Mark watched Specter cross Market Street as the demonstrators closed in on their quarry and was struck by the senator's incongruous expression: He was grinning.

When we offered Mark the chance to profile Specter, he was fascinated by the chance to "walk right around to the other side of the barricade and join Arlen with that grin pasted on his face and find out what's going on there."

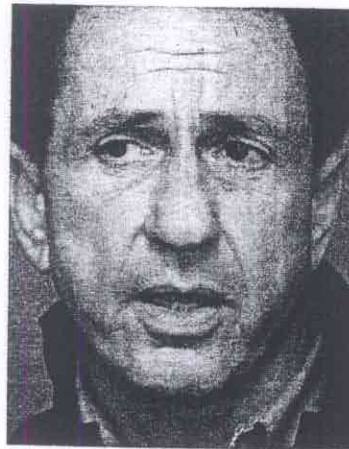
Over three decades in public service, Specter has left an extensive record. The library of *The Inquirer* and *Daily News* contains thousands of stories about Specter himself and many thousand others that refer to him.

"Arlen is taken with the trappings of the Senate," says Mark. "He's still excited to be a member." During a C-Span interview, Arlen showed the reporter the system of lights that signal a call to the Senate floor. "It was pretty clear the guy knew all this," says Mark, "but Arlen showed him anyway because he thinks it's neat."

That delight belies the senator's hard work in Pennsylvania's 67 counties. "Specter knows who his constituents are. He can be despised by the rest of world, but if he pleases those people who pull the levers here in Pennsylvania, he's going back.

"And he wants to go back."

Away Rome



On the cover

Sen. Arlen Specter (R., Pa.)
Photography by Todd Buchanan

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The hard way

HO!

... Look out!

... Here comes the barrel!

Don't let the trappings fool you — marbled walls rise to a high white ceiling sketched with gold inlay, from which is suspended an intricate and enormous Colonial chandelier with a cascade of dazzling prisms and frosted glass bowls to soften the glare from its flame-shaped bulbs, which illuminate three long gleaming mahogany tables arranged in a U on a rich blue rug flecked with tiny tan diamonds, all framed and reflected by a mirror the size of Montana in a baroque bronzed frame, large enough to reflect the egos of the 11 assembled members of Congress, aging white men all, well-tanned, tailored and tonsorially top-notch United States senators, members of the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee, who are posing for their annual portrait — what we have here is a trough.

Once the photo session is finished and business begins, a faint aroma of pork pervades the chamber, and Sen. Arlen Specter, sharp-elbowed two-term Pennsylvania pro and ranking Republican member of this crew, is — where else! — in the front row for the feed.

Here comes the barrel! Senate Bill 2575 (the blue-ribbon stud hog of the annual show, the Veterans Health Care Budget for 1992) is rolling through, and Specter has his slice all picked out — a \$1 million pilot program to

state? Veterans — stolid, conservative, organized, focused and determined, from the pudgy, red-faced, aging but still proud battalions of Operation Normandy, Iwo Jima and Inchon to the angry young survivors of Tet to the pink-faced local heroes of Grenada and Kuwait. And most of these upstanding citizens have never heard of Lynn Yeakel, that upstart women's lib candidate the Democrats have trotted out against Specter this election year.

Figure their knock on Specter's door in D.C. gets answered? And fast?

And when the senator's subsequent knock on the door of VA bureaucracy wasn't answered fast enough... well, check it out.

"You don't screw the ranking member of the committee who has oversight over your department," sums up Specter aide Susan LaMontagne, who is savoring this morning hearing in which Specter and co-sponsor Sen. Dennis DeConcini of Arizona (*gotta have wanna them \$1 million pilot bedside phone projects in the Tucson hospital, too*) already have the votes in hand.

"What are we going to learn from a demonstration project?" asks Bob Graham of Florida (which is going to have to wait for bedside phones until 1994, like everybody else).

California's Alan Cranston, the Democratic committee chairman, complains that the veterans budget has gone up more than any other portion of the ever-ballooning, deficit-laden federal pie... but the thing is a done deal and he and the other pious (*why didn't we think of*

That's what Arlen Specter knows. And prefers.

install bedside telephones in Philadelphia's Veterans Administration Hospital. See, a group of Pennsylvania veterans came to Specter with this complaint... patients having to limp down hallways hunting up coins for the pay phone, nurses running messages back and forth day and night... clearly a nontherapeutic environment.

But Secretary of Veterans Affairs Edward J. Derwinsky — who favors the phones, makes no mistake — works with a pretty tight budget, and bedside telephones weren't terribly high on his list of departmental priorities... about two years away, in fact.

Which misses Specter's 1992 appointment with the Pennsylvania electorate by a mile. Now, Specter is nothing if not polite. There was no nastiness over this thing. But get one thing straight, Ed. The VA's budget is part of the federal budget which is crafted in Congress, which, as far as the VA is concerned, leans pretty heavily on the House and Senate Veterans Committees... you get the picture. When a group of Pennsylvania veterans pays a visit to Arlen Specter, they get his attention. Pennsylvania has 87 counties, dozens of little ones nobody in Philadelphia or Pittsburgh ever heard of, but Specter's not only heard of 'em, he's visited them again and again and again — he can probably even hum the local high school fight songs! And what's one thing even the smallest bear-country backwater in Pennsylvania has in common with every other political subdivision, including the two 20-ton demographic weights at either end of the

this? committee opponents know they're outgunned.

"We all know what we have to do, and we never do it," laments the GOP's ever-frugal (when it comes to spending federal dollars outside of Wyoming) Sen. Alan K. Simpson, as the ayes are tallied in favor of Specter and DeConcini's hand-carved slice of bacon.

Simpson passes when his name is called. "Present," he harrumphs. And with a resounding metaphysical *thump*, the barrel rumbles on through.

"We have a great country," announces a very cheerful Arlen Specter as he strides briskly, six esger aides in tow, back out into a hazy Washington morning, steering back to his office. His distinctive nasal, Midwestern accent draws out each vowel, "It's an ingenious system... The way it works! It's really phenomenal."

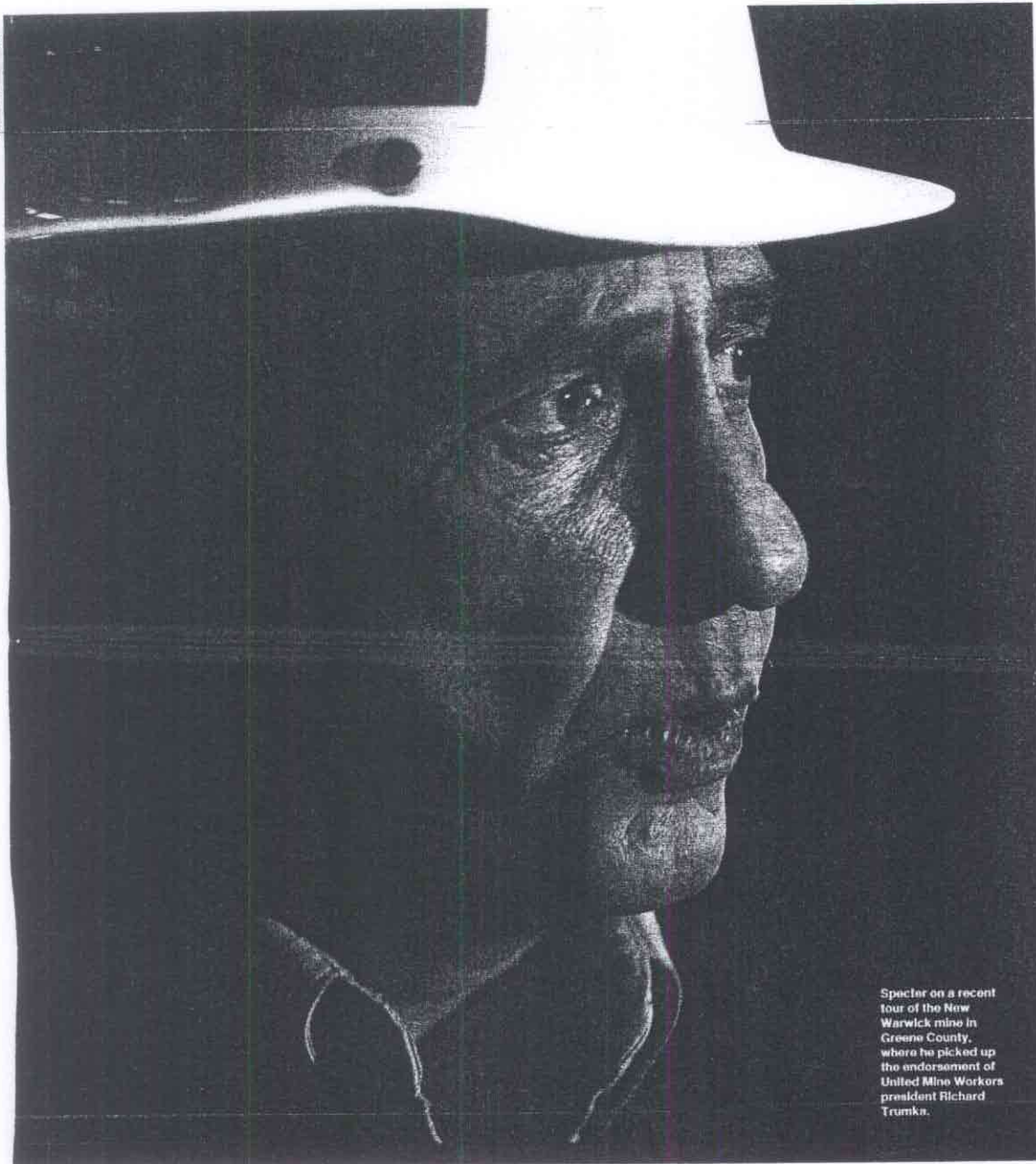
But, wait. A question brings the senator up short: "How do you answer Sen. Simpson's philosophical objection to, in light of the growing deficit, continuing to grab for your own slice of the pork?"

Specter trains a baleful, brown-eyed stare on his questioner. "The philosophical answer to that is, How do you define pork?"

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MARK BOWDEN, an Inquirer staff writer, last wrote for the magazine about the activist group Act Up.

By Mark Bowden

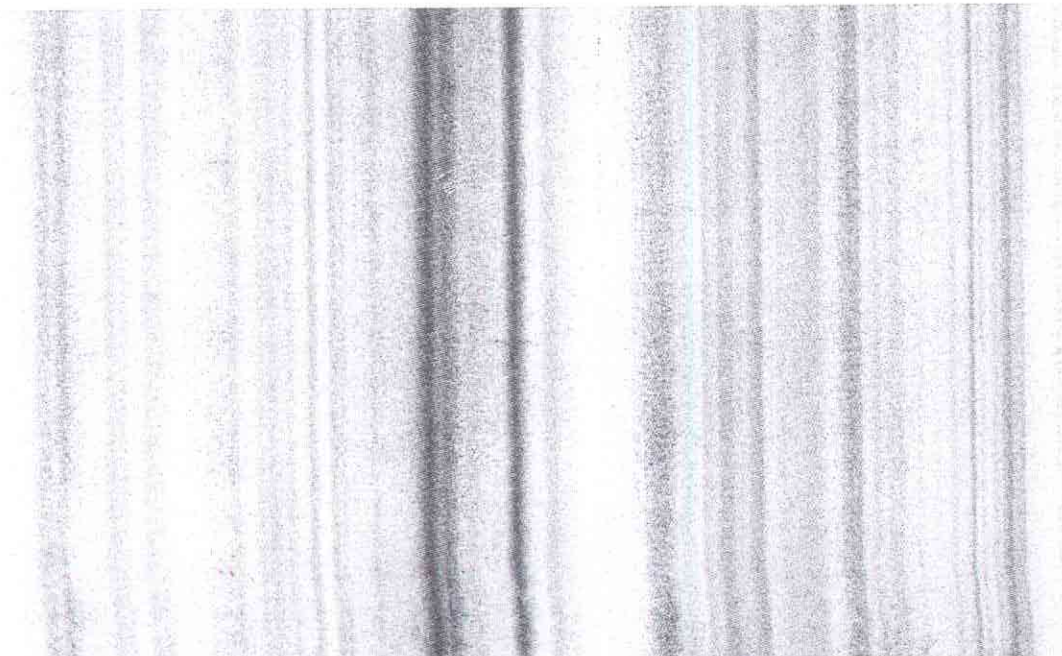


Specter on a recent tour of the New Warwick mine in Greene County, where he picked up the endorsement of United Mine Workers president Richard Trumka.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY TODD BUCHANAN

INQUIRER

13



WE'LL GET BACK TO THE PORK QUESTION. It's important. It gets to the heart of what Arlen Specter has been doing down in D.C. for the last 11½ years, and it throws some light on what is likely to send him back ... even though, face it, a lot of people dislike this guy.

You all know Arlen, right? You should. He has been a big-time Philadelphia politician for three decades. For bigness and time, only Frank Rizzo compares. But Rizzo's appeal was obvious. People noticed the Riz. And, like him or not, you knew where he stood, where his constituency lived.

But try to summon up a clear image of Arlen Specter. Even after all these years, there's something spectral about him.

The basics of his story are clear. He started out as a prosecutorial wonderboy, a crusading reformer, locking up corrupt magistrates and Teamsters. After a nine-month tour with the Warren Commission in Washington, he switched parties and was elected district attorney twice. Then the wonder waned, he lost one campaign after another, four in all, until he defied all his eulogists in 1980 by grasping one of America's fattest plums, a six-year tour in the U.S. Senate. He was re-elected in 1986. And he's fixing to go back.

Ask him what he's proudest of in his two terms and what you get is his Career Criminal Bill, which made it a federal crime for somebody with a long rap sheet to commit a crime with a gun. What it accomplished (much to the chagrin of some federal jurists) was to get the federal courts busy locking up local hoods. That bill dates back to 1984. So what's he been up to for the last eight years, you ask? He's got a thick, single-spaced booklet jammed with staff, everything from highway projects to national defense. He's not the sort of senator to be out in front on the high-impact issues; his style is to build conditions, painstakingly, behind the scenes. Lately, he's been trying to assemble an economic development plan both parties can embrace in this partisan political year. So far he's almost single-handedly kept the Philadelphia Naval Shipyard afloat, saved the surgical units at VA hospitals in Erie and Pottstown and sprinkled countless federal benefactions on every corner of this great commonwealth, endearing himself to millions, one or two at a time.

Little of such work grabs headlines — which seriously perturbs his hard-working staff. Arlen could use good pub. In fact, he survives *despite* the attention he gets. Despite his many accomplishments, his decades of dedicated public toil, Arlen Specter is best remembered for three things — any one of which would have ruined an ordinary politician:

- The "magic bullet theory." As an assistant D.A. appointed to help investigate the Kennedy assassination in 1963, Specter authored the theory that propped up the Warren Commission's finding of a lone assassin. Boy, did Arlen catch hell over that. He's still catching hell. Try getting re-elected with Kevin Costner and Oliver Stone ridiculing you by name in one of the top grossing films of 1991, *JFK* (now available for home rental).

- The Bork vote. It was Arlen's vote on the Senate Judiciary Committee in 1987 that sank Reagan Supreme Court nominee Robert Bork, whose view of the Constitution threatened Arlen's fine-tuned appreciation of personal liberties. His vote was seen as an act of arch-betrayal that assured Specter would remain *persona non grata* forever in his adoptive GOP.

- The Hill hearings. Ostensibly the confirmation proceedings of now Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas, but forever famous for the sensational testimony of law school professor Anita Hill, in which experienced interrogator Specter came off as Pit Bull for President Bush.

That last still might kill him, because his role in the

hearings spawned the candidacy of Lynn Yeskel, who hopes to ride into Specter's Washington office on a tidal wave of indignation.

Political hazards are, of course, nothing new to the man who ran unsuccessfully for the offices of district attorney, mayor, governor and U.S. senator. In 1980 he made it into the Senate on a margin of 4 percent of the votes cast, and all through the 1980s he stayed just GOP enough to adhere to the ascendant party without alienating his liberal Democratic base in Philadelphia. It was, and is, a high-wire act with no net.

How does he do it?

TWO QUICK IMPRESSIONS:

One. My first encounter with Arlen Specter was at a Philadelphia health club, about two years ago. I had just come out of the shower and on replacing my glasses was startled to find that the man sitting about two feet down from me on a wooden bench was his distinguished eminence, Specter himself ... buck naked.

His squash racket was leaning up against a locker and his sweaty gear was heaped at his feet. A bit round at the



Specter greets some of his supporters in Pittsburgh.

edges and a little loose-skinned around the joints at age 60, but clearly fit. He glowed with well-being. He has three deep lines in his forehead and his eyebrows arch toward the middle, pinching the slender top of a nose that grows round and lumpy as it descends, shaped like a late summer gourd. Strong creases frame his lips, and he's working on formidable jowls — it's a full-fledged hound-dog face, sad and quizzical. His unkempt brown curls, while thin on top, looked gilded, flecked with silver. He was the picture of a prosperous and vital elder.

I nodded. Noting, no doubt, my involuntary double take, he winced, disturbed in a precious private moment.

Two. I saw him again earlier this year. Arlen was dressed this time, dark blue suit, white shirt, red tie, and he was running — fleeing, in fact — making good time in his dress shoes, too, high-stepping across Market Street on a sunny, cold afternoon with angry Act Up demonstrators closing in, chanting, spitting, accusing. Specter's role in the Hill-Thomas hearings had joined him at the hip with Act Up's arch-fiend George Bush. One of the protesters, only two feet off the senator's right ear, was nonetheless amplifying his message with a bullhorn:

"SHAME!

SHAME!

SHAME!"

Specter kept his head down, right arm up, and his face frozen in The Grin.

See, he'd spotted photographers, pros — can't miss 'em, scuttling along like crabs on the fringes of the crowd, heavy canvas vests stuffed with accessories, furiously juggling lenses, strobes, kit bags, light meters wildly bobbing from their necks, pointing their unblinking glass eyes — and Specter knew, just *knew* (half his life in public office, after all), that the split second The Grin cracked and *anything* real showed, anger, fear, discomfort, annoyance, it would be a Page One shot in Philadelphia newspapers the next morning. Hell, it

would probably make the wires. So as the protesters yapped him right up to the glass courthouse doors, and as Arlen was pushed inside, waving gamely, he maintained this surreal pose, grinning with all his might, as though Philadelphia were Shangri-la, and instead of insults and saliva, grateful citizens were strewn flowers in his path, shouting praise — *Hail, Arlen! Hail! Hail!*

The Grin says it all. It isn't really a smile. It's the rictus Arlen makes whenever a camera is shoved at him — a couple dozen times a day. He stretches his lips wide and clenches his teeth — a face someone would make when having a toenail removed.

The Grin suggests that this man finds much of what it takes to be in public life vexing ... but he's not about to let that show — it's not helpful, you see. In a world where we demand political candidates who look great, never sweat and serve up delicious sound bites, Specter is a hard-working, unglamorous *mench*. He has mastered the public face (in photos, The Grin looks great), but in real life he's straining; he's ruffled, mused, hurried, bothered, overbooked, underpaid, intellectual, fiercely independent and determined — *determined* — not to give an inch.

CAN DISCOMFORT BE A PERSONALITY TRAIT?

There's this expression Arlen Specter repeats a lot. His father used to say it in Yiddish. It means *Hard to make a living*.

Arlen doesn't expect anything to be easy. It was hard being the only Jewish boy in Russell, Kan. Most boys in his position might have preferred to quietly fit in. Not Arlen. Sure it was uncomfortable at times, like when the Christian prayers were recited before class. He felt different, apart. But that didn't make him want to fit in. No. He strove to stand out, to draw attention to himself, to pull himself to dead center of the spotlight ... the harder, the better.

So he played the lead in high school plays. He was star of the debating team. He ran for president in his senior year against a popular classmate named Jean Balloun, and he nearly won. If he hadn't graduated that spring, he'd have taken her on again and won ... count on it.

"When you're Jewish, you're different ...," he says. "But I was always fiercely Jewish. I was proud to be Jewish. It was what I was. It was me."

Here's where you start to understand Arlen Specter. Start with a misty Kansas morning. Arlen is 7 years old. His father, Harry, has the boy up before dawn. Arlen rides in the front seat to the market, where together they load the car with cantaloupes. Then they head out into the flat expanse of Kansas prairie.

From town to town, Harry Specter would peddle the fruit — "three for a quarter for the largest ones," his son recalls, "six for a quarter for the smallest ones." They moved quickly, because local grocers didn't appreciate the Jew who stole their customers, traveling door-to-door, undercutting their prices. Specter and son would keep at it until the local sheriff, summoned by the angry merchants, would kick them out of town. Then it was on to the next town.

Hard to make a living.

There is a Biblical quality to Arlen's storytelling; in the three generations of Specters — his father, himself and his two sons — he sees the American dream distilled.

"Compared to my father, my life has been a fast toboggan ride downhill."

Harry Specter was 18 when he walked across Russia and Europe to board a vessel for the New World. He arrived in Manhattan in 1911, looking for his older brother, Joseph, whom he had not seen in seven years.

"There were about five million people in New York City then," Specter says. "He spoke no English. All he knew was the name of a bank where his brother had written a check. So he found the bank, took a seat outside

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Specter

Continued from Page 14

on the corner, and waited. Several hours later, his brother came by. 'Yassel, Yassel, Ich bin dein Bruder, Aaron,' which is Yid-

dish for, 'Joseph, I am your brother, Aaron.' When they had last seen each other, my father was just a boy. 'Oyb du bist mein Bruder Aaron, kam mit mir,' Joseph said — 'If you are my brother Aaron, come with me.'

In America Aaron became Harry. He worked in a tailor shop before striking out West again. His salesmanship led to ownership of a junk yard in Russell, and ultimately to enough financial success to send all four of his children to college. If

the father's task had been to establish his family in the New World, the son's task was to master it. Arlen wasn't going to win by acclaim. Fistfights over ethnic slurs taught him that. When it came time for high school star Arlen to attend college, he had to leave the state. University of Kansas fraternities accepted no Jews. Arlen was still getting run out of town.

Hard to make a living.

So he started at the University of Oklahoma, where there was a Jewish fraternity. They weren't popular, mind you, but they were there. Growing up like this helps explain why Arlen takes a grim pride in pressing on. The harder things get, the better.

"There's something about him that just is that way," says his 33-year-old son Shanin, a Center City lawyer. "He sometimes seems to enjoy doing things the hard way. When he was a law student at Yale, everyone competed to belong to the Order of the Coif, which just went to the top students in each class. Dad was one of the best students, but he was right on the edge because he had gotten a B, not an A, from a professor who was a notoriously hard grader. So in his final year, he went out of his way to sign up for another course from the same professor. It was, like, if he couldn't get it the hard way, it wasn't worth it. He got an A."

Specter fought his way into political prominence in Philadelphia. During his famous series of Teamster trials in the 1960s, his next-door neighbor in East Falls moved out — "He was afraid a bomb might end up on the wrong porch," Specter explains.

When the Democratic Party wouldn't open its arms to the wonderboy prosecutor, he adopted the city's anemic Republican Party. But he didn't switch his voter registration until after he was elected D.A. Arlen wasn't joining anything; the Republican Party had just given him an opportunity to climb into the ring.

Specter is not out to win people over, he's just out to win. After almost 12 years on The Hill, he's reportedly disliked by many Senate colleagues. In a world defined by party affiliation and personal loyalty, he's defiantly unpredictable. He wants success — he *will have* success — but only on his own terms.

When, in a burst of ecumenical brotherhood, his colleagues invited him to a Christian prayer meeting, he chose particular passages from the New Testament — "you know," he says, "passages that are critical of the Jews for killing Jesus Christ." It was vintage Specter. Instead of seizing an opportunity to fit in, he used it to make a point, to remind his colleagues that public Christianity is a threat, to underscore his objection to the idea of a national religion, to haul his very personal discomfort to center stage.

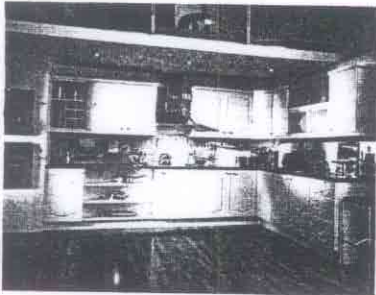
Take that!

Specter lacks all of the supposed prerequisites for political success in this image-conscious age. There isn't a charismatic bone in the man's body. He may lack his father's charm, but he inherited his toughness. Only now, when opponents pop up to throw him out, Arlen isn't moving on. He's built his own political base, one layer of bacon at a time, county

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by county, town by town, doggedly, unobtrusively, irrevocably. He doesn't expect to be popular. He hates to see himself on TV ("I don't like the way I look, the way I talk, the way I stutter, the questions I ask... it makes me very uncomfortable"). His approach to getting elected, and to being a successful senator, has been perfected through repeated trial and error. He says he learned something from each of his four big electoral defeats, and benefited from each.

"If you take my course in politics, and it's a highly independent one, the only way to get elected is to work hard directly with the people," he says. "Constituent service is indispensable for a public servant like I am, because there are so many people who don't like my votes. There's a hint of anti-Semitism in the charge often leveled at me, that I'm supposedly 'shrewd and calculating.' Well, I am thoughtful. I built statewide support by touching people. With no political bosses, no organizations anywhere, I looked at the 1980 campaign in a very 'thoughtful' way — which others might call calculating and shrewd. I decided I was going to go to all 67 counties. And after I got elected, I kept on going back, because I didn't want people to complain to me that they only see me in an election year."

He won with just 51 percent of the vote in the general election of 1980. In 1986, running against a stronger candidate, Democratic U.S. Rep. Robert W. Edgar, Specter upped that percentage to 56 percent, an edge he accumulated with a few hundred votes in Mifflin County, a few thousand more in Wyoming. For him it wasn't a state election, it was 67 separate county elections.

Specter's solid base has made fundraising a snap. "People talk about the money I have in the bank," Specter says, "but what I really have in the bank are all those contacts, all those people. I know what's going on in all those counties. I just went out and learned it."
Hard to make a living.

BUT JUST WHEN THINGS START looking easy for Specter... look out!

Late last year, in a lengthy interview on C-Span, he was asked to explain what the Warren Commission was.

"It was the presidential commission to assassinate the investigation of President Kennedy," he said.

Oops.
You all know what Specter meant. And you can, perhaps, forgive the apparent Freudian slip, considering that questions about his role on the commission have followed him every week for 29 years. The interview with C-Span came amid a new eruption of doubt and — something new — ridicule and suspicion.

Phones started ringing like some end-of-the-world drill in Specter's offices last fall, when Oliver Stone's movie *JFK* opened across America.

A dangerous blend of fantasy and fact, the movie sets forth the thesis that John F. Kennedy was murdered in 1963 by a vague "establishment" cabal — you know, FBI, CIA, Joint Chiefs of Staff, U.S. Supreme Court, the usual suspects.

continued on next page

ROLLBACK

'92!



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THE PHILADELPHIA INQUIRER, SEP. 27, 1992

Specter

continued from previous page

As so many conspiracy theories have held, the film's argument turns on what it makes out to be patent absurdities in the official Warren Commission report. Chief among them, Stone contends, was its conclusion that Lee Harvey Oswald acted alone. That finding hinges on what the film's star, Kevin Costner (portraying a heroic vision of former New Orleans D.A. Jim Garrison), outlines as the "the grossest lie ever foisted on the American people."

This is how Specter recently reiterated the theory set forth in the Warren Commission report:

"The 'single-bullet theory' is the tracing of the first shot — not the subsequent shot, which hit

the President in the back of the head and killed him, but the first shot — which passed through the President's neck. It entered between two large strap muscles, hit nothing solid, came out of his throat, nicked his tie — his tie was intact, we had the nick available. The bullet had a little yaw in it, the deviation wasn't pristine; it entered the governor's back slightly to the left of his right armpit, grazed a rib, which we knew from the X-rays, tumbled out backwards, left a hole 4 inches in diameter on the governor's chest, and then tumbled through his wrist and lodged in his thigh."

The problem, as Specter well knows, is the part about the "little yaw ... the deviation wasn't pristine." Critics jumped on the "yaw" part right away, and they're mugging it still.

"No," says the senator, "it doesn't bother me. I'm really proud to have been a part of the Warren Commission. There I was, 33 years old, and I'm asked to do this, and I did it. ... I'm glad to have the questions. I like to talk about it. It's interesting."

It got more interesting when Costner, in the film, paints a whimsical picture of a cartoon bullet defying all laws of physics and then lays the invention at the feet of "an ambitious junior counselor, Arlen Specter."

At best, Specter was made to look like a fool; at worst, a traitor. Initially, he tried to laugh it off. "I plan to see the movie," he said, "because I enjoy fiction."

In truth, the "single-bullet theory" is not as preposterous as the movie makes out. A Philadelphia

Magazine article 20 years ago made much of the fact, for instance, that the bullet hole in Kennedy's suit coat was too low for it to have exited through his throat, since Oswald would have been shooting down at the President's motorcade. But anyone who has ever sat down wearing a suit coat knows that the fabric in back rides up around the neck, especially when you raise your hand, as Kennedy did to wave. So the hole in the suit coat offers little clue of where the bullet actually entered Kennedy's body, nor does it account for whether the President was leaning forward or any one of a number of variables that could explain the bullet's path.

What does seem utterly preposterous is the movie's idea that some conspirators could have foreseen this dispute with such clarity that they arranged to have an operative in the emergency room just minutes after Kennedy and Connally were rushed to Parkland Hospital, so they could plant a bullet (pre-fired from Oswald's rifle) on Connally's stretcher to help frame Oswald.

Arguments over the assassination fade in a blizzard of detail. So when Specter did publish a serious response, he stuck to a general defense of the commission. He didn't even address Costner's sarcastic presentation.

"I wasn't going to dignify that goddamn movie by refuting it," he says.

"But," he is asked, "by not refuting it, you don't really answer whether you yourself, 29 years later, remain convinced the commission's version is true."

"Are you asking me?"

"Yes."

"I am."

MEANWHILE, THE ECONOMY is pooping out, the electorate is eyeing incumbency like a fatal virus ... and this other thing happens.

Specter's first hint that he was in trouble over the Anita Hill episode came when he walked out of the hearing room and a well-dressed woman in the Capitol hallway sneered, "God should strike you dead."

Then a female top staff aide to another senator made an obscene gesture at him.

When he got back to his office, there were too many phone calls to answer. New lines had to be installed. Forty people had to be brought in to answer them.

The senator was flabbergasted. What had he done wrong?

When Anita Hill sat down to testify on the Supreme Court nomination of Clarence Thomas and started talking about pubic hairs and penis length, she got

America's attention. TV jumped in, and Hill's account of her encounters with the nominee 10 years earlier became an instant national event.

Arlen, who was just doing his laser-guided, cross-examination number on Hill, didn't know the whole world was watching.

It might have made a difference. Later, mulling over his performance, walking Hill back through every detail, then flatly accusing her of perjury, he told a Washington Post reporter, "I think I was legally correct, emotionally perhaps too hard and, as it turns out, politically unwise."

Inside the Judiciary Committee chamber, why, folks could appreciate that Arlen was just doing his job, maybe even admire his legendary tenacity. But to the untold millions out yonder, Hill's accusations connected with anyone who has ever felt pushed around by someone in power. America saw a poised, articulate, pretty young African American woman making a painful disclosure with unwavering resolve, on live television, before a panel of skeptical white men. It was a tableau that rang symbolic alarms on just about every level of American experience, with the future of the Supreme Court in the balance.

Talk about great TV.

But look at things through Arlen's eyes. Ranking members of the committee had asked him to train his skills on Hill's story. He saw himself as an impartial, probing finder of fact. Nothing personal.

And parts of Hill's story ... well, he found rather odd. While millions were reeling, Specter was concluding that Hill wasn't telling the truth.

"I had a real problem with Professor Hill's version every step of the way," he says. "I was very troubled by her account of moving with him from the DOE [Department of Education] to the EEOC [Equal Employment Opportunity Commission]. She said that she didn't know she could stay in the DOE; that was in the face of written regulations that said she could. Now, she's a lawyer, and she never even talked to Thomas' successor about her status, about staying on."

"I had real problems with her saying that [in subsequent years] she never called him, and then when the logs contradicted her, made the claim that she had called his secretary ... and then finally conceded that she had called him. I had real problems with her socializing with him, volunteering to drive him to the airport, if something that awful had happened between them. ...

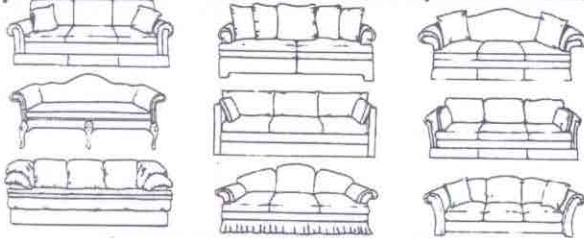
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Specter

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"I concluded that the weight of the evidence did not support the conclusion that something so reprehensible happened between them 10 years earlier as to disqualify Thomas from the Supreme Court — when it hadn't even ended their professional and personal relationship."

All of which is very logical, one point follows neatly after the other. And Sen. Specter had been, as the New York Times put it, "painfully polite" . . . except that something larger than logic was at work.

"He's an affront to women," announced Janet Mason, secretary of the Philadelphia chapter of the National Organization for Women. "He's not fit to represent this state." Betty Freind pronounced Arlen Specter, "Public Enemy Number Two," right behind George Bush. This about a man who has been one of the most consistently pro-choice representatives in Congress, and who has always been supportive of women's rights.

Arlen is still trying to sort it out. He knows something happened, but he's not sure what.

"The tremendous feelings that came out after those hearings, none of us were prepared for it," he said in the C-Span interview. "Many people identified with Anita Hill. There's a lot of sexual harassment in this country that goes undetected and unpunished. Add to that, there you had 14 men with one woman, it was sort of overwhelming. We were the establishment . . . It unleashed a torrent . . . I don't think we've begun to understand it all yet. Some of my best friends are very, very angry with me. The feelings are overpowering. The feelings cannot be dealt with by the facts."

BY JUNE, SPECTER HAD managed something very few politicians could pull off; he had made enemies on both sides of the great abortion divide. Since October he had handled the feminist backlash by wading into one ugly confrontation after another.

"Head-on is the only way to meet something like that," he says. "It's when the discussion gets hot that your mind has to move, you have to think fast, you have to grapple with the hard facts. The only way to learn how to respond to an attack is to meet the attack and try to answer it. That's what I do."

But during the spring Republican primary campaign, the attack was coming from the other side, and again Specter waded right in.

On stage behind matching lecterns, Specter and his challenger, State Rep. Stephen Freind, took questions by journalists. Freind, who was desperately trailing in the polls, brushed aside virtually every question to launch unrelated and personal attacks on Specter, including calling him a "senator from Israel." The state's most prominent right-to-life zealot concluded with a personal testimony that many interpreted as a bald appeal to anti-Semitism:

"I'll never apologize for accepting Jesus Christ as my Lord and savior," Freind volunteered. "And I'll never apologize for saying that my first priority isn't to get re-elected and join the club, but to spend eternity with God." God's verdict will have to wait, but after that night Pennsylvania voters deserted Freind in droves. Specter, cast so recently in the role of villain, now got to play the noble victim, absorbing abuse with pained dignity as his opponent went down in flames.

WE RETURN, AT LAST, TO the barrel.

"How do you define pork?" Arlen Specter asks. Truth is, one man's pork is another man's vitally important and responsible allocation of public funds.

The definition doesn't interest Rich Montgomery. He's a Vietnam veteran who was badly injured in 1966, when every other member of his rifle company was killed at Trung Luong. Montgomery recently spent some time in the Philadelphia VA Hospital, where doctors were still patching his left leg back together.

"When I got out of the hospital, I found out all these friends and family had been trying to phone me, but I had no idea because I didn't have a phone," he says. "Then I was at a slide show out in Lansdale, where they showed us this beautiful new \$100 million hospital addition out there. I asked if they were going to give the patients telephones, and they said no, they didn't have the money. I wanted to know why veterans could not have that basic service, which is so important to people trying to recover, when patients at other hospitals routinely have telephones."

Specter's bedside-phone amendment, with the rest of S.B. 2575, was reported to the full Senate in August and is expected to pass by acclamation soon. The VA is not too happy about having its priorities forcibly rearranged, but if all goes according to plan, the phones should be in place before election day.

"Thank God we have Arlen Specter to come through for us,"

says Montgomery, who serves as an officer in the statewide Vietnam veterans organization.

Arlen Specter is still traveling the back roads, peddling quality products at a reasonable price. So what if the other merchants don't like it? This is America!

"We have such a wonderful representative system in this country," Specter says. "A project like the bedside-phones program doesn't have anything to do with this being an election year. This is the kinda thing we're doing down here all the time!"

At 62, with his boys grown, with his wife, City Councilwoman Joan Specter, well-established in her own political career, Specter isn't interested in slowing down. What? Ease? Comfort? Distinguished retirement? What would a week of this life be like

without somebody shouting an insult, demanding an explanation, misrepresenting his record, begging for a favor, throwing something, spitting at him? Hard in the middle of his ninth major Pennsylvania campaign, Arlen Specter still relishes the rough-and-tumble of public life. He's out there working The Grin, delivering the goods. He wears his discomfort like a badge of honor. He will prevail. The harder things get, the better!

Arlen says he sometimes envies senators from small states — "Take a look at Connecticut," he says wistfully. "If you lay it in Pennsylvania, it only stretches as far west as Lancaster. Imagine." But one senses that Connecticut wouldn't be nearly hard enough to interest him. He spends four days out of every week in Penn-

sylvania. On his countless trips back and forth from D.C. and crisscrossing the state he reads and reflects. He prefers books about American history, but also spends time studying the Torah, boning up for the free-form ecumenical Old Testament study group he holds weekly in his office.

What he said about his Jewish identity as a boy in Kansas can express Specter's identity as a politician today: *It's what I am. It's me.*

In the C-Span interview, Specter was asked what he would do if he were turned out of office.

"I'd practice law," he said. "I'd teach, write, read . . . I'd relax." And then, after a short pause, he offered his stiff smile and, like a man confessing an addiction, added, "Run again." □

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