

The Old Cop As Bagman: Fun Is Over

By William Greider
Washington Post Staff Writer

Tony Ulasewicz, a wise-cracking ex-cop who played bagman for the Watergate coverup, performed yesterday as though someone at Central Casting had made a big mistake.

The audience laughed heartily. So did the senators. A Damon Runyon character barging around in a science-fiction thriller.

"Who thought you up?" asked Sen. Howard Baker, consumed by mirth.

"I don't know," deadpanned Tony U. "But maybe my parents."

Even Ulasewicz' lawyer broke up. The comic touch was welcome relief from the

Commentary

heavy and sometimes tedious daily dialogue of the Senate Watergate hearings.

Such as Ulasewicz' life in and out of Washington phone booths, where he dropped the cookies. That means money—totaling \$219,000 in 100-dollar bills destined for the original Watergate Seven. Tony would scotch-tape a key under the phone, usually at National Airport, then lurk nearby waiting for the Writer or the Writer's Wife to show. That's code for Watergate co-conspirator E. Howard Hunt and his late wife. When one of them picked up the key, it would unlock a nearby locker where they could grab the cookies, which completed the drop.

"What if someone had come in and found that [key] while you were watching?" a Senate investigator asked.

"Well," said Ulasewicz, in his sidewalks-of-New York

See SCENE, A15, Col. 1

SCENE, From A1

accent, "he would be very quickly relieved of that key. I think that is the best I can answer."

Once, he added, things got sticky because an airport cleaning man came along dusting out the phone booths.

"I sweated a little bit,"

Ulasewicz said drolly, "I'm not finking on the fellow, but actually his cleaning process was not that thorough."

He played strictly for laughs like that. His language was police-blotter lingo from 27 years with the New York P.D. The accent was Brooklyn, maybe

Queens or the Bronx. His droopy face, with the slicked-back hair and elfin ears, resembled one of those innocent animal expressions from Walt Disney, maybe a woodchuck.

Behind the laughter, it seemed, Ulasewicz was giving a New Yorker's version of a disarming routine which some of the senators occasionally play themselves—"I'm just a simple country boy, but . . ."

For Tony Ulasewicz, it was a just-folks cop who wandered unwittingly into the mysterious world of Washington politics, the intrigue of secret money and surreptitious envoys. Who could get sore at a guy who

emphasized the absurd aspects of his own behavior?

Like the confusion of code names. He was Rivers, and Herbert Kalmbach, the President's personal attorney who hired and directed him, was Novak. But sometimes they were Tom Kane and John Ferguson and Tommy Smith. When Ulasewicz called up, sometimes he forgot who was who.

"There was a little confusion once in a while," he confessed.

The delivery business, which stretched from June to September last year, was complicated. Ulasewicz had to keep popping in and out of public phone booths whenever he wanted to talk to Kalmbach or any of the other players. It was a pain, he said, carrying all those dimes. Finally, he got one of those bus driver's changers.

Ulasewicz would call up the intended recipient and, on Kalmbach's instructions, ask something about "the cost of a script, of a play, plus the salaries of the players." But some people, including two wary lawyers, wouldn't touch the script. That meant Tony had to call back Kalmbach for new instructions.

"I had to call and wait for a 'come-back,'" he remembered. "I began to call them Kalmbach come-back calls."

Naturally, it was awkward

toting around all that cash, even when he found people who would accept it. Ulasewicz commended to the senators his own simple approach: a brown paper bag, wrapped in string.

"You know," he said, "sometimes carrying what is most obvious doesn't raise any suspicion. Carrying an armed box would ask for trouble."

"You were just carrying your lunch?" asked Watergate assistant counsel Terry Lenzner.

"Carrying my lunch," said the bagman.

Ulasewicz recounted only one close moment in his travels with the Watergate thousands. He was waiting in line to board the New York-to-Washington shuttle flight, carrying \$50,000 in cash. When a man in front was stopped by the anti-hijacking screen because of

cigarettes, Ulasewicz got nervous about his own passage through the airport metal detector.

"So I went into a coughing fit," he explained, "and I went down to the Pennsylvania Railroad and took the train home."

Ulasewicz and Kalmbach had some trouble communicating with one another, even beyond the code names and the complicated phone routine. They were separated by class as well as distance, a New York ex-cop running errands for a high-priced corporate lawyer from Southern California.

"We were poles apart and I'm a Pole," cracked Ulasewicz.

When Tony reported once that the "laundry was in the ice box," Kalmbach needed a translation—the cash was in a safe deposit box for the night. In August, when Ulasewicz finally announced that he wanted out, he expressed his fears in standard Gotham English: "Everything here is not exactly kosher."

"I'm not sure what you mean by that, Tony," Kalmbach replied. Ulasewicz explained it all to him, but the message apparently didn't get through because Kalmbach called again the next month, ordered another Washington "drop." And Ulasewicz did it, despite his reservations.

"I am not contaminated in any way," Ulasewicz said proudly, "because anything I did, I went into it seeking to do it. I went into it with my eyes wide open. And I think I did a good job."

But one senator was not

laughing. Through Tony U's recital of one-line gags, Sen. Lowell Weicker, the Connecticut Republican, did not often join in the general hilarity. When his turn came, he abruptly switched the mood to somber.

Weicker developed that before his Watergate money assignment, Ulasewicz was a secret investigator working for the White House, but paid through the Kalmbach law firm in California. He investigated individuals, both political and corporate, for their sexual habits, drinking problems, family problems.

"Would it be fair to say that you dealt in dirt for the White House?" Weicker asked evenly.

"Allegations of it, yessir,"

Ulasewicz replied.

That took the fun out of it. Weicker asked what has happened to the Writer and the Writer's Wife and Mr.

George and all of the others who picked up Tony's bundles of cash. She is dead, Ulasewicz replied quietly. The others are in prison.

"I think what we see here is not a joke," said the senator, "but a great tragedy."

Nobody laughed, including Tony's lawyer.