

It Was Mostly Just Plain Folks

By Henry Mitchell

A reception yesterday at the National Press Club marking the publication of Sen. Sam Ervin's biography, "Just A Country Lawyer," couldn't have been planned better by Ervin himself. It was mostly just plain folks.

There were, for example, the two young daughters of the author, 34-year-old Paul R. Clancy of the Charlotte Observer: 9-year-old Beth asking her father, "Is Nixon going to come?" ("No, I don't think Nixon is going to come") and 6-year-old Jenny pulling on the senator's coattail and inquiring, "Did you read my father's book?"

"I liked it very much," said the man who represents truth, bending in reply, "because your father stretched the truth sort of further beyond what it should have been stretched." Ervin concluded, "It made all my warts seem like beauty spots."

Author Clancy might have winced at that summation—rather, he smiled politely—because what he did, he said, was write an "objective" account. Off to one side, Clancy, a member of the Charlotte paper's Washington bureau, rather self-consciously told of the personal anguish he endured in the writing.

Generally, he got up-tight trying to meet the deadline of his first book. "Worries, nervous tension, lack of sleep," even dreams of Senator Sam. He got physically out of shape, tried to compensate with a little touch football, wrenched his back and spent three sorry days in bed. "I even saw a doctor," he confessed. "He told me all my troubles would be gone the day it was finished. And they were." But he'd do it all again, of course.

Clancy's wife, who called

See ERVIN, B9, Col. 4

ERVIN, From B1

the writing days "a beautiful hell," and mother were there, as was Ervin's wife, Margaret, who said, "There's nothing nicer than being Mrs. Sam." Senate Watergate committee chief counsel Sam Dash got his copy autographed, and former North Carolina governors Terry Sanford and Robert Scott told some home-state stories.

It might also be added, stretching things somewhat, that there was backwoods charm in evidence right down to the publishers, Indiana University Press. "I sent some letters to some big publishers," said Clancy. "They said Sam Ervin was an interesting guy and all that but quite frankly they didn't think it would sell." That was all before Ervin became a matinee idol.

So a friend put Clancy in touch with Indiana University Press and the rest is another pleasant tale for Ervin to recount at some future date. Lanky John Gallman,

the company's editorial director, shifting from one foot to the other, said, "This is a very special occasion for us." They printed 20,000 copies, their largest first printing, and hope the next two years will give them reason to print more.

Ervin poured on the charm while sipping a bourbon and ginger ale and autographing books, especially when Clancy introduced his mother. "She looks like your younger sister to me," said Ervin, in what surely would pass for genuine amazement.

Just then came a woman pointing to a photograph in the book of Ervin reenacting his oath-taking with then-Vice President Nixon, and asking the senator, "What do you think of him now?"

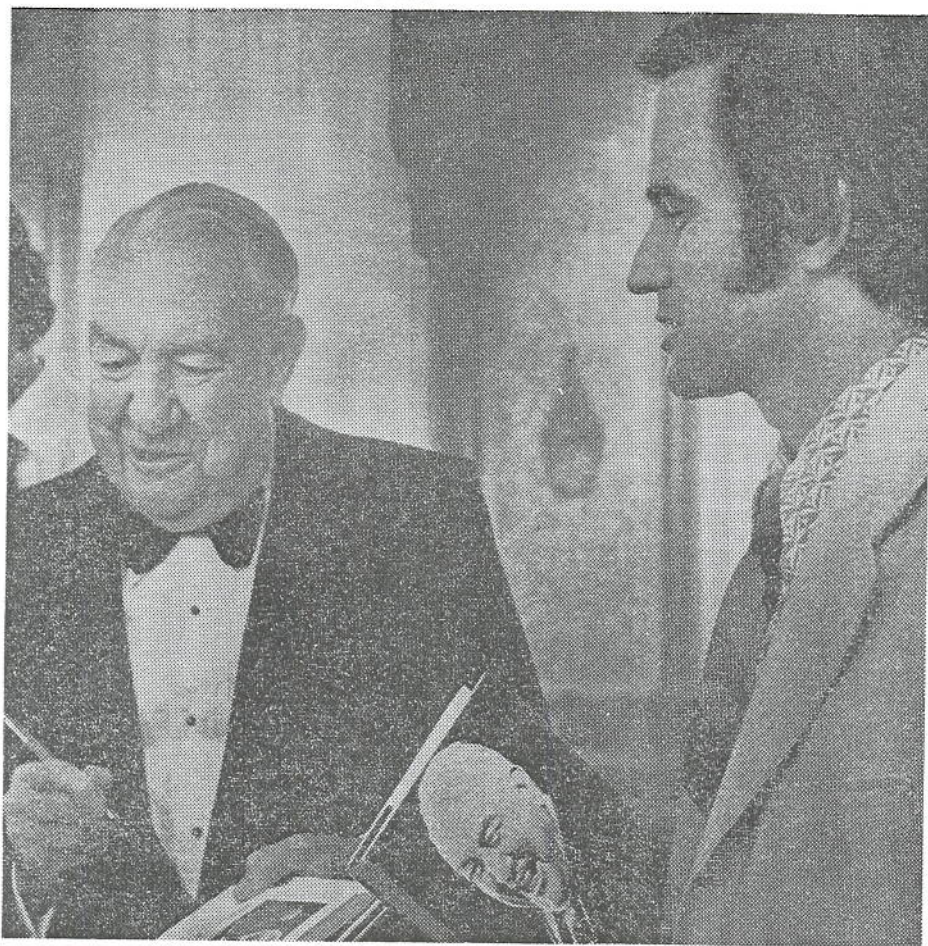
"He was swearin' me in then, Ervin said, "but I suppose he's cussin' me out now."

And what of the President's Monday night speech? "I might say I find myself in substantial disagreement with many of the facts he presented."

After that, Gallman got up and told the group of about 100 that part of the profits would go to a Sam Ervin scholarship in constitutional law at Indiana, and then gave the subject a leatherbound copy.

The subject accepted it, told a story about a brick mason, further quipped that the book was filled with "eloquent prevarications," and said he enjoyed reading it "more than anything I ever read, including the Constitution of the United States."

WXPost



By Margaret Thomas—The Washington Post

Paul Clancy, right, author of "Just a Country Lawyer," watches as the subject of his biography, Sen. Sam Ervin, autographs a copy.