THE LIFE OF AN INSIDE AGITATOR

An Autobiography

Martin Hittelman

1940 – Present

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Chapter 1 Preface: My Upbringing

I was born in 1940. World War II was just beginning. I came of age hearing about the war, living through the McCarthy era, and experiencing the end of the House UnAmerican Activities Committee. I grew up, found my voice, and then came into my own during the 1960s. And for the decades since, I have spent my life as what I call an "inside agitator" — working from within institutions to push them toward justice, fairness, and democratic values. I contrast this with the claims about "outside agitators" coming in to cause trouble. A few times in my life I was honored to be called an "outside agitator."

Ontario

I have lived through almost a century of change. My life in Ontario California began when my father got a job at Kaiser Steel in 1943. Life in Ontario was pretty idyllic. I was a good athlete and a good student and enjoyed school. I played little league baseball in the stadium that the Pittsburgh Pirates held during their spring training. The games were broadcast on local radio. I made the all-star team as a second baseman. I also played on our school flag football team. The elementary schools in Ontario were the participants in the league. By the time I got to Junior High School I was a well-known athlete among the other city elementary school athletes.
I had a meeting with reality when, as a 5th grader, I was asked to perform in a minstrel show. My parents forbid my participation. I had to go to my teacher and explain that I could not perform in a racist event. The school seemed to understand, and the show went on without any blackface or racist humor. My friend and I sang the song "I've got a lovely bunch of coconuts." I found that I was still popular after standing up for what was right. This event taught me that I could stand up for unpopular ideas and still have friends.

1950s and 1960s

The 1950s introduced me to the red baiting and related repression of dissent. I was president of the Civics Club in Junior High. We worked on getting a Black Man freed in Louisiana and other political issues. I also attended a hearing of the House UnAmerican Activities Committee with my grandpa Lazar. I sat behind a man that kept cheering on the assault on the unfriendly witness and his lawyer. The man had placed his hat under his seat and each time he cheered, I stomped

down on his hat. By the end of the hearing, his hat was flat. As we walked out, he asked me about the hat. The reply of this cocky teenager was: “that’s life in a big city.”
I lived through the political and cultural awakening and “changing times” of the 60s and 70s and then into the computer world of instant information, the opening up of social alternatives such as gay marriage and “free sex” and the simultaneous corporate interest funded think tank assault on the value of government services.

Teaching and Union

I have lived a life close to many events that shaped the last century. Most of my adult life has been spent teaching at the community college level and as an activist with and officer of the California Federation of Teachers. I never thought I would become a union pie card before I started teaching but that has consumed much of my working life. I avoided the draft by becoming a math teacher and later by getting married and having children. I did not know how long I would teach but it was far better than being sent to Viet Nam to kill and maim and possibly lose my life. The move to teaching and marriage and family turned out to be a choice that determined my life path. It was the correct decision.
I prepared for the union activity through learning my family’s history and involvement with the student and anti-war movements of the 1960s. My life is one reflection on the effect of the social and political movements of these times. I was lucky to have been present at the times and in the places that history was made.
This autobiography is assembled from a lifetime of stories, writings, speeches, union campaigns, academic battles, and political conviction.

mlhittel.com

I have established the website mlhittel.com as a repository of this history — a compilation of student, union, faculty, politics, and progressive events spanning my lifetime. Mlhittel.com contains my life timeline, family stories, the Hittelman Papers, editorials and speeches reaching back to the early 1990s, community college reports, analyses of accreditation battles, and the ongoing political commentary I continue to publish.

This autobiography is meant for my family, my friends, my past colleagues, and co-conspirators. It is also for anyone curious about what it has meant to live a progressive, activist life across eight decades of American history — from the Cold War to the present assault on democracy. I hope you find it interesting, useful, and educational. You can reach me at martinhittelman@gmail.com. My current writing on progressive issues continues at www.oldmanreporting.com and TrumpGoingWildAgain.com..

Chapter 2 My Immediate Family

My Grandparents:

My grandparents on my mother's side were Liza and Lazar Henkin. On my father's side were Max and Lena Hittelman. They all immigrated from Russia escaping the tyranny of Czarist Russia. They were part of the large wave of Ukrainian Jewish immigrants that came to American cities in the early twentieth century from the oppressive Russian Czarist society in which they were confined, subjected to periodic pogroms, and restricted from most professions.
My grandparents were either communists or in the case of Grandpa Max, communist sympathizers. Max ended up owning a gas station, selling "rags," and building houses. He was thus not eligible for membership in the Communist Party.

My grandparents, parents, and relatives were not religious. We saw religion as myths invented to help enslave the masses. My brother Gene is the only family member that became a somewhat religious Jew.

Grandma Liza (and my mother) were skilled knitters and earned money doing this work at home. Grandpa Lazar worked as an unskilled employee for all of his working life. After having been blacklisted in New York for going out on strike, Lazar moved to Los Angeles where he sold oranges from a horse cart on the street, delivered ice to homes, and worked in sweatshops alongside mostly Mexican American workers. Unlike Grandpa Max, Liza and Lazar were both worker bees in communist party fronts.

In the late forties and into the fifties my grandparents were very involved in the Los Angeles Committee for Protection of Foreign Born (LACPFB). Family history suggests that the Committee itself was established at my mother's parents' house in 1950. It was organized to defend the rights and liberties of the foreign born especially in light of the red-baiting by Senator McCarthy and others. The Committee's worked for the repeal of the Walter-McCarran Law (1952) and in defense of many who fell under its assault on rights. Other regional committees were organized in high immigrant areas such as Detroit, Philadelphia, Chicago, and Los Angeles.

The Walter-McCarran law was passed during an orchestrated anti-Communist panic. It was used much more broadly. In particular, it targeted labor leaders such as Harry Bridges of the International Longshoremen's Union to weaken the most militant unions.

Rose Chernin was the executive director of the LACPFB. She was threatened with deportation to Russia on the charge of alleged membership in the Young Communist League. This was considered a violation of the Smith Act, and she was found guilty in 1952. The Committee worked hard to have her conviction reversed. In 1957 the United States Supreme Court reversed her conviction as well as her denaturalization order.

The LACPFB set up a Bail Fund Committee for which my Grandpa Max was one of the chief fundraisers. He was often called on to provide bail for some leftist that had been jailed and always had cash stashed at his house for that purpose. I learned a lot from watching Max on stage making a pitch for contributions. He was direct in asking particular people to contribute. He knew which people had been financially successful and didn't hesitate to press them for contributions. He believed that people had a responsibility to stand up for what they believed in both physically and fiscally.

From archives of the Southern California Library for Social Studies and Research: "The Committee's first high-profile case known as the "Terminal Island Four" case (1951) became the focal point of the Committee's activity and set a precedent for the Committee's future involvements and activities. The case involved Harry Carlisle, David Hyun, Frank Carlson, and Miriam Stevenson, who were the first victims of the McCarran Law. The four were seized from their homes and work without warrant and held in the Terminal Island Detention Camp for six weeks without bail. In response, LACPFB set up special committees to raise financial support, picket in front of courts and Immigration Service headquarters, organize demonstrations and protests, and circulate literature to raise awareness and participation in the community. The Committee's political and legal activism was also heard in Washington with several of the Committee's cases going before the Supreme Court. Well-known civil rights attorneys like Joseph Forer, Ben Margolis, Seymour Mandel, and John Porter played an instrumental role in the Committee's defense activities."

As the fight for civil rights moved away from the foreign born, the Committee redirected its effort toward fighting for the rights of African-Americans. The Committee changed its name to

the Los Angeles Committee for Defense of the Bill of Rights and Protection of Foreign Born in 1967.

Grandpa Max was a charismatic speaker and prolific fund raiser. I learned a lot about public speaking by observing him perform. I even got the chance to see him introduce Paul Robeson at a large rally. Grandpa Lazar was helping park cars for the event.

Max was a wrestling fan, and we would tease him concerning the fake violence. I now think he was probably baiting us.

Grandpa Max standing at left at House Unamerican Activities Committee

My grandparents and uncles and aunts taught us to resist corporate power. They fought for the rights of marginalized peoples. They remembered that they too had been strangers in a strange land. You organized, because alone you were nothing and together you had a chance.

My Parents

My father, Nate Hittelman, and my mother, Mary Hittelman — born Mary Henkin — were the central figures of my early life and the people who, more than anyone else, shaped the person I became. They were honest, talented, thoughtful people dedicated to making the world a better place to live.

They both were politically active during their teen years. My father was not allowed to graduate from high school because of leaflets he was found to be handing out. He was a designated driver for visiting left-wing leaders who needed to avoid the grasp of the Los Angeles police red squad. As a teenager, he also prepared the payoffs on bets for his uncles who were bookies.

Even though my father did not receive a high school diploma, he ended up with a bachelor's degree in engineering from the University of California at Berkeley after attending Los Angeles City College and UCLA.

In 1942 we moved to Ontario California where my father went to work as an engineer on a pig farm that had been converted to support Kaiser Steel — building big ships for the Navy. He lit the first furnace at Kaiser.

My mother was active in street theater

My mother was involved as a young woman in street guerilla theater activities. Her group was coached by Will Geer who later became known as "Grandpa" in the Walton family television program. My mother was injured in an auto accident while returning from Chicago where she had traveled to perform street theatre. She was put on a train and, much to the disappointment of her parents, chose to travel to stay with her boyfriend (my father) in Berkeley. She continued to live in San Francisco while my father studied in Berkeley. In 1935, after graduation from Cal, my father worked at June Lake in California and called my mother to tell her to get ethe marriage license and he would drive down to meet her in Los Angeles. They got married and drove back to June Lake to spend the winter. In 2010 they celebrated their 75th wedding anniversary.

My parents lived through the great depression, supported the New Deal, and witnessed the rise of fascism in Europe, and World War II. They understood what was at stake in the great political struggles of the twentieth century.

My father was very intelligent and spoke with knowledge and authority. Even though he was raised in a communist household, he never joined the party. He did not like following a party line. After ten years working to build Kaiser Steel in Fontana California my father got a job working for a friend at American Metal Products inventing uses of air to drive machinery. I worked on the production line for two summers at union wage (sheet metal workers union). The money was used to partially pay for my college education.

American Metals workers and families picnic in 1957, My father in dark glasses.

My father was very smart and a good athlete. He and a friend once won the Los Angeles bowling doubles championship. He taught me to understand how to intelligently play basketball.

My mother was an artist. She spun wool, wove, painted, taught sewing and pattern making. She informed us that she had designed the first two-piece bathing suit while working for Catalina swimsuits around 1940. I later confirmed (in talking with an instructor at Los Angeles Trade Tech College) that this legend was actually true.

My mother raised four children while the we experienced the McCarthy era, and the early Cold War years, and she did so while still attempting to find time to study and practice her art.

My parents always loved to drive from Ontario to Boyle Heights in East Los Angeles to see their friends and party. This gave my brothers, sister, and me a chance to hang out with our cousins and to spend time with my grandparents. We always looked forward to hearing my Grandpa Lazar's stories of his younger days in Russia and in the United States. Every story had a lesson attached to it.

The stories he told were about his rowdy days as an elementary school student (he stopped going to school at age 11 to become an apprentice shoemaker). He once tied a kite to the tails of one of the teachers. He used to poke the non-Jewish boys who would sing anti-Jewish remarks while singing in the chorus. We loved to hear of his antics and disrespect for authority.

Of course, we were all very obedient and respectful students back in Ontario.

Grandpa Lazar told us the story of how he came to America. He was living in Odessa and his parents arranged for smugglers to get him out of the country. The problem was that he had not served in the military and his family could have been punished if had not served. So, as a 17-year-old he sought to join the military. The person who signed him up said he had to be 18. He still insisted on joining. He explained that although he was a Jew, he still wanted to fight for the Czar. They let him in and then he was put on the train to Siberia. At every town that the train stopped, the new recruits would run wild. When they got to the town where he was to meet the smugglers, no one was being allowed to leave the train. He asked to be allowed to meet his grandmother who he claimed was dying. They told him that since he was the Jew that wanted to fight for the homeland, they would let him off to visit his grandmother. He got off and was smuggled out of the country. He landed in Germany and then traveled to Paris. From Paris, he and his brother took a ship to New York City. His brother had come to Paris to escape punishment for participating in the revolt on the Potemkin. They basically had no money and did not speak very good English, but they had made it to America, learned English, and helped to bring other members of the family to America. Liza came to America to marry Lazar, and her sister came to marry Lazar's brother.

My parents and grandparents provided me with an understanding of what it meant to live by progressive values in the real world, under real pressure, at real cost. They did not lecture me

about the importance of standing up. They stood up. They taught me, as my Grandma Liza used to say, to “be good for nothing.”

My parents lived to be 100 years old. My Uncle Joe and Aunt Celia both lived for 100 years. My grandpa Lazar also lived to be 100. I inherited good genes.

1889 Lucretia Ave: The Ground Beneath My Feet

In June 2009, a small neighborhood newsletter called the Echo Park Information Association Bulletin ran a column called "Meet Your Neighbors." The subject was Nathan and Mary Hittelman, ages 94 and 92.

They had been in Echo Park since 1952. My father first hung around the neighborhood in the 1920s. He had watched the trolley cars on Echo Park Avenue, riding them down to Temple Street

My father was born in Rochester, New York. By 1920, seven-year-old Nathan was in Los Angeles, living on Temple Street between Glendale and Beaudry, just west of downtown and Bunker Hill.

By 1928, his family had moved to Boyle Heights in East Los Angeles, which in those years had a large Jewish population. My father remembered visiting his friend Gene Drogan on Baxter Street, just up the steep hill from Echo Park Avenue, and he remembered Gene's girlfriend Brodea Most, whose father seemed to own half the property on Baxter Street Hill.

My mother grew up in Boyle Heights too, and the story of how she and Nathan came together is the story of two people who had grown up together. They had known each other since childhood, gone to the same schools, lived in the same neighborhood. My mom was good friends with my dad’s sister. In their early childhood my father thought of my mother as a pest. By the time that they married in 1935, it felt, as Mom put it, “like an arranged marriage."

They raised those four children in Echo Park — my brothers Eugene, Walter, Lena, and me. Walter and Lena went to Elysian Heights Elementary School at Echo Park and Baxter where they received a good early education. Walter learned how to study. This served him well through high school and college. I did not learn what studying meant until after I flunked out of Cal.

What I think about most, looking back, is the neighborhood itself and what it meant that my parents chose it over living (although they could afford to buy there) in the more exclusive area of Los Feliz.

Echo Park in the postwar years was what urban planners today would call "transitional" and what my father simply called "mixed." Koreans lived next to Mexicans, Chinese next to Jews but tolerance was not universal. African Americans were prohibited by local property covenants to live in Echo Park at that time. Brodea Most's father broke that arrangement by renting to my friend Carolyn Widener and her African American husband. It wasn't until the 1960s that the covenants on the properties were declared illegal.

My father remembered the two spring water bottling companies on Morton Street and Baxter. He remembered coming in to bowl at Jensen's — the historically preserved building on Sunset just west of Echo Park Avenue. One day in 1952, my father dropped my mother off at the top of Lucretia Avenue in Echo Park so he could go to a USC football game. When he came back, she had found a house across the street from their friends the Rappaport's house. Three bedrooms. Wooden. For sale. They bought it that week for $13,500 and paid it off in two years. My family still owns the house.

My mother took up painting and sculpture and produced paintings that capture the classic scenery right outside our back door — Alvarado and Tom Mix Hills, the Griffith Observatory, and on clear days, all the way to the Pacific.

The Trules article mentioned, almost in passing, that one of their sons (me) still lived nearby in Silverlake, and that he had become president of the California Federation of Teachers. I guess I was more important to Trules than my brother Gene with his doctorate and teaching at NYU, or my brother Walter with his PhD and doing cancer research at MD Anderson in Houston, or my sister Lena who was working at the Chicago Botanic Garden because I lived in nearby Silverlake.

Eugene, Walter, and Lena: My Siblings

I grew up with three siblings: my brothers Eugene and Walter, and my sister Lena. Gene was 2 years older than me, Walter was 4 years younger, and Lena was nine years younger. We got along well with only minor disagreements. Gene fought many battles with my father over a

variety of issues including when he should come home at night. Walter and I learned how to use the approach of not forcing a no answer but rather just doing things without asking if we could. We could apologize later. Lena didn't learn our lesson and confronted my father. In the end, we all pretty much got our way.

Gene, Walter, Lena, and I all attended the
University of California at Berkeley. They all graduated from Cal. I flunked out after two wonderful years. I was in Engineering but was not a very good student of physics, chemistry, or engineering. By my second semester, I was enrolled in honors Calculus and on academic probation. I had no idea how much I should have been studying while enrolled in 18 units of physics, chemistry, and engineering classes. I thought that 20 hours of study a week was plenty. It wasn't. I competed in too many intramural sports. In my second year, I was named intramural athlete of the year. Instead of studying, I competed in basketball, softball, football, volleyball, bowling, tennis, track, and ping-pong.

Just as my father went to Los Angeles City College after not graduating from high school, I attended LACC after flunking out of Cal. The college offerings helped put me on a more successful academic path. I now thought I needed to know everything to succeed. I no longer had the attitude that I could get by with not knowing something in the content of a course. For the

first time in my life, I began earning almost all As. I must admit, despite my new resolve to concentrate on studying, I still played basketball and tennis for the college teams.

Sandra Lepore: My Partner and My Anchor

No account of my personal life would be complete — or honest — without acknowledging the central role that my wife Sandra Lepore has played in my union and personal life.

We were introduced by a mutual friend in the 1980s. Sandra was organizing for the California Federation of Teachers at Cal State Dominguez Hills. She had done such a good job that she was hired to serve as Executive Secretary at AFT 1521A. I was serving as Vice President of AFT 1521 and Sandra convinced the President of the joint union to appoint me as the chief negotiator

for their first contract. We worked together to achieve an excellent contract and Sandra agreed to go out with me. The rest is history.

Sandra Lepore brought to our partnership qualities that complement my own. She is friendly and outgoing. She is a great organizer and built the local into a powerhouse organization. She has been a genuine intellectual partner, someone whose judgment I trust and whose perspective challenges and sharpens my own.

Together we have 5 children and 8 grandchildren. Our children are intelligent thoughtful people. Our grandchildren are becoming the same.

Together we have built a life that reflects the values I have tried to live by: a commitment to each other, to our family, to our community, and to the larger project of working toward a more just and democratic society. The family that my parents built, and that Liza and Lazar Henkin and Max and Lena Hittelman made possible by crossing an ocean with no English to a “promised land.” The continuity of honesty, sense of social and political responsibility, and courage under

fire have helped make my life work achievable. That continuity — across generations, across struggles, across all the years — is something that I am very proud of.

Chapter 3 Early Formative History (1940–1957)

The World I Was Born Into

I was born in 1940, right at the start of World War II. The Depression had scarred previous generations of Americans. The labor movement was surging — the CIO, the sit-down strikes, the great organizing drives of the 1930s had created a new sense of working-class power and possibility. Into this world I arrived, and from the very beginning the forces of politics, economics, and social struggle a part of my family's daily life.

Growing up in the postwar years meant growing up in the shadow of two great fears: the fear of the bomb, and the fear of political persecution. The atomic age had arrived with horror at Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and the Cold War settled over American life with a chill that reached into schools, workplaces, and living rooms. Anti-communism became the national religion, and those who questioned its orthodoxies did so at great personal risk.

Family and Its Influence

My family experience helped to shape my earliest political and social consciousness. My parents understood the stakes of the McCarthy era personally and viscerally. They knew people whose careers had been destroyed, whose friendships had been severed by fear and suspicion, whose names had been dragged through hearings designed not to find the truth but to terrorize dissenters into silence.

As a "red diaper baby" I absorbed a set of values that lasted a lifetime: that solidarity matters, that working people deserve dignity and a fair share of what they produce, that the powerful must be held accountable, and that those who refuse to speak out in the face of injustice are complicit in it. These were lessons that came through conversations at the dinner table, through the music that played in our home, through the newspapers my parents read and discussed, and through the example of how my family conducted themselves in the world.

The McCarthy Era: Fear and Resistance

Senator Joseph McCarthy and the network of congressional committees, FBI informers, and political opportunists who sustained his crusade inflicted enormous damage on American political and cultural life during my formative years. Unions were purged of their most militant leaders. Educators we knew were fired for their political views. Artists, writers, doctors, and filmmakers were blacklisted (including my Uncle Joe who was a doctor). The entire spectrum of the American left — from democratic socialists to communists to liberals who had worked with communists in the New Deal coalition — was placed under suspicion.

I was old enough to understand what was happening and young enough to be shaped permanently by it. The McCarthy period taught me several things that I have never forgotten. First, that civil liberties must be defended actively. Second, that anti-communism has historically been used in America primarily as a weapon against labor organizing and social reform, Third, that fear, when deliberately cultivated by those in power, can make people do terrible things to one another.

These lessons would influence everything I did for the rest of my life: my union work, my writing, my teaching, my political analysis. Understanding the McCarthy era is essential to understanding me.

Chapter 4 Chapter Girls

My first ten years of life were easy. I had very supportive and loving parents and I got along with my brothers and sister. I was good at school and good at sports. I had several close friends and most of my classmates seemed to like me. I was not a bully and was not bullied. In short, I was a very happy child with total confidence in my abilities - and then came interactions with girls.

Fifth Grade Rejection

In the fifth grade some of my classmates would go roller-skating at a skating rink. People would "free skate" and then skate in couples. I decided I would ask one of the girls from my class on a date to go roller-skating. She agreed but then changed her mind and went with a boy named Greg Babs. I felt that I had been rejected but was not sure why. This rejection marked the beginning of a lack of confidence in my appeal to girls (and later to women). As I got older, I learned how to overcome my lack of confidence – but not always with success.

In the sixth grade I had a crush on a girl named Julie. She was tall, pretty, athletic, and very smart. One day I walked her home from school (past the turn off to my house). When we got to her house, her mother called her and said she needed to take a bath. I didn't hit on Julie again.

Junior High

When I got to Junior High School in Los Angeles, my peers were way ahead of me in terms of boy-girl relations. I was invited to a kissing party in the 8th grade. We played a game called "flash-light." Couples sat together and kissed, and one person (the odd one out) would shine a light on couples and if they were not kissing, the person would exchange places with the appropriate kisser. It was my first time at kissing and I liked it. In the summer of the 8th grade, I went "steady" with two or three different girls for a couple of weeks at a time. We never got passed kissing. I went out on a date to a movie with a girl whose sister later went out with my

brother Walter. I also went to a DeMolay dance that she invited me to. I still have no idea what DeMolay is or why she was involved.

By the ninth grade I did not have a girlfriend or any dates. I went to some parties, and I did get hugged by a girl I liked after we lost a basketball game but that was about it. I knew of one other girl who liked me, but I never asked her out. She turned out to be a very beautiful woman who became an actress.

High School

I had a set of very good friends in Junior High School (Huck Rorick, Glen Drogin, Ned Levine, Bob Matlow, Stefan Gerber, Don Treiman, Dave Treiman, Jared Gordon) and we formed a club through the Jewish Community Center. I don't remember much of what we did except that we once went on a camping trip to the Kern river. We were told by the ranger that the river was moving too fast and it was not safe to swim in it. After we had laid out our sleeping bags on the bank of the river, a wind came up and blew some of our stuff into the river. We raced out and into the water and recovered all our stuff that had blown away. After that we were unafraid to swim in the river. At one point we jumped on our twenty-seven-year-old counselor and tied him up. He was furious. He was a great guy, and we really liked him and respected him, but we were teenagers out of control. I am not sure that he ever forgave us.

We had dances at the Jewish Community Center (the center was not restricted to only Jewish kids, and I invited my cousin (Michael Frimkess) and his band to play at a dance. They played progressive jazz and my friends were not happy. My friend Glen was very shy with girls, but he did ask this one girl that he knew from school to dance. They danced a number of dances and ten years later they were married.

My brother Gene was interested in Jewish culture and even attended some holiday events at a synagogue (I think to meet girls). He became the president of the Los Angeles Grand Order of the Aleph Zadik Aleph (AZA). It was a fraternal organization for Jewish teenagers (although we had non-Jewish kids like Huck as a member of our local chapter). Its sister organization was the

B'nai B'rith Girls (BBG). They had parties and Gene appointed me social director. I did nothing but attend some parties. At one of these parties, my friends and I met some girls from Tujunga. At the end of the tenth grade, three of us would go up to Tujunga and pick up three of the girls we had met and go make out. I only did this a few times, but I did get to second base. This was a first for me. Strangely enough, I ran into these girls again when I attended LACC.

My high school years were filled with playing basketball and tennis, attending class, and socializing at school. I attended some parties but never connected with any girls. I had dates for the Junior and Senior prom with girls I had not gone out with before. The evenings ended without even a kiss. The girl I took to the senior prom was a 10th grader and I don't think her parents were thrilled that she was going out with a senior. I really liked her and tried to woo her while I was in college, and she was in high school. We exchanged letters but I really never got anywhere. I did connect with her briefly years later.

One of my friend Glen's friend, who dated a lot, said you ask out 100 girls and one of them will go out with you. I could not even contemplate being rejected once. I had a happy high school life even though I was without a girl-friend. A few of my friends and I would go to basketball gyms around the city and play 3-on-3 basketball on Saturdays. Sometimes we would cruise Hollywood Boulevard and try unsuccessfully to pick up girls. I had a lot of friends and was pretty well liked by the other kids at school. In short, I was a happy high school student.

Chapter 4: SLATE and the rise of a student movement

The first time I set foot on the Berkeley campus, in late February 1958, I knew I had found my world. My brother Gene and I had made the trip together — he was transferring to Cal from UCLA, and I would be arriving in the fall as a freshman. Gene and I arrived at a time of the SLATE organizing convention, held over the last two days of February and the first of March. SLATE was forming a new Cal political party.

SLATE was unlike anything I had imagined student government could be. Its founders were explicit on that point: they were not there to manage the sandbox of campus life. SLATE ran candidates for college office committed to a genuine social/political platform. It called for engagement with the world outside its gates. A fair minimum wage for student workers. Affordable housing. An end to nuclear testing. An end to racial discrimination.

SLATE published a four-page newspaper called the Cal Reporter, circulated pamphlets, and brought outside speakers whose names I recognized from family discussions.

Impressive Student Speakers

The Coordinating Committee that had built SLATE was a collection of great thinkers. Charleen Rains, Owen Hill, Peter Franck, Michael Tigar, and Fritjof Thygeson - these were not ordinary college students. They argued philosophy and labor history with the ease of people who had been doing it since childhood, which, in many cases, they had. Among them were the Hallinan brothers, sons of Vincent Hallinan, the San Francisco attorney who had run for President in 1952 on the Progressive Party ticket while simultaneously serving a prison sentence for contempt of court — a biographical detail that struck me then, and strikes me still, as one of the more perfect emblems of what American dissent looked like in those years. There was also Carey McWilliams Jr., debate coach and son of the great editor of The Nation, carrying reputation of his father. I found them both inspiring and intimidating. Many of SLATE's most formidable members were graduate students, and the level of political discussion at those early meetings was, I will admit without shame, way over my head. I went. I listened. I learned.

Gene threw himself into SLATE fully from the start; I moved more slowly, attending meetings and the parties that followed them, absorbing the atmosphere. Mike Myerson, whom I had known from Marshall High, was already involved The new student left emerging at the end of the fifties drew heavily from families like ours: red diaper babies like me, sons and daughters who had grown up watching their elders hounded and blacklisted and who had drawn from that experience not defeat but a determination to help change the world.

Into the Streets

By the spring of 1960, SLATE had moved well beyond campus issues and into the streets —it helped bring students to protest HUAC on the steps of and surrounding San Francisco City Hall. The House Un-American Activities Committee, the engine of so much of the repression that had scarred my family and the families of so many people I knew, had scheduled a new round of hearings. HUAC was a familiar presence in our household: my grandfather and my uncle had both appeared before it as unfriendly witnesses, and the damage that committee could do to a life — a career, a marriage, a name — was not abstract to me. It was part of our family story.

When word spread that SLATE and other student groups were organizing a protest at City Hall, I did not hesitate. Gene, my new college friend Tim Barnekov, and I made our way across the Bay on May 13th for the second day of the hearings. Mike Myerson had managed to obtain white cards — duplicates of the passes distributed to the committee's invited supporters — and with them we slipped into the hearing room itself. What we found inside was a ritual of intimidation dressed in parliamentary procedure, solemn men in suits asking questions designed not to discover truth but to destroy reputations. Outside, students and community members had gathered in large numbers, chanting, pressing against the doors. Then the fire hoses came out. The police turned them on the crowd and washed sixty-four people — more than thirty of them Cal students — down the thirty-six marble steps of City Hall.

The footage and the news traveled fast. The outrage that followed was immediate and enormous. The next day, a Saturday, thousands descended on City Hall — students and longshoremen standing together, surrounding the building in a demonstration of solidarity that I felt, at nineteen years old, as something close to historic.

HUAC made a film entitled “Operation Abolition” that purported to be an honest depiction of the anti-HUAC demonstration. They showed it across the nation. A local television station showed the film and invited Mike Myerson and me to discuss it. Young people across the country saw the film and sided with the protestors. Many decided to enroll at Berkeley in order to be part of the action. Many of them helped form the Free Speech movement.

HUAC packed up and left San Francisco in disgrace. The days of unchallenged red baiting, we told each other, were over. The committee never recovered its authority in the same way, and the broader culture of intimidation it had enforced began, slowly but unmistakably, to recede.

I walked away from those two days feeling something I have rarely felt as purely since: the physical sensation of history shifting under your feet. We had not been mere spectators. We had protested. And something had moved.

Berkeley gave me two years of extraordinary political education and two years of intermural sports involvement. I loved living on campus, but my poor academic record required me to grow up. I arrived at Cal with the progressive values of my family and learned to articulate them by observing how the SLATE leaders spoke out to the campus students. I left knowing, in my bones rather than merely my head, that movements are made by people willing to show up — willing to stand outside City Hall in the rain, willing to stay in the game past the point of comfort, willing to keep arguing about what kind of world we wanted to build and then to go build it. The curriculum that mattered most to me at Berkeley came outside of the classroom. It was in the streets, in the meeting rooms, in the battles that did not end until something was changed.

Later when I arrived at San Francisco State, I joined a student political group SCOPE and within a few months, was convinced to be its president. SCOPE fought with the administration and foreshadowed the student revolt at San Francisco State a few years later.

Chapter 5: My Sense of Humor

A strong sense of humor has been an important part of my being. I absorbed my grandmother's unconventional one-liners, I memorized the routines of comedians who conveyed the absurdity of modern life, and made people laugh at my quick comic retorts based on my keeper lists of great comebacks.

Grandma Liza and the Heart of Jewish Humor

My grandmother Liza was my first comedy teacher. Her humor was dry, deadpan, and irreverent.

When we children were underfoot and driving her nuts, she did not ask us nicely to leave. She would look up from whatever she was doing and say, with perfect calm: "Go play in the traffic." We knew she did not mean it literally — at least, we were fairly sure she did not — but the audacity of the line, its cheerful disregard for sentimentality, made us laugh every time. She was equally fond of advising us to "be good for nothing," a phrase that landed somewhere between insult and encouragement, depending on how you chose to hear it.

Her finest construction, though, the one I still quote to this day, came whenever someone complained of a cold: "You are all mixed up," she would announce. "Your feet are smelling and your nose is running." It was perfect. It was the platonic ideal of the Jewish grandmother's comic logic — observational, slightly cutting, and utterly unanswerable. I did not know it at the time, but she was teaching me that humor lives in the gap between what we expect and what actually is. The best jokes are just truth told sideways.

Tom Lehrer

Tom Lehrer was a mathematician and a songwriter who was popular in the 1950s and 60s. His songs pretended to be sentimental but actually were an assault on normal civility. I learned the words of a host of his ditties including: “I hold your hand in mine” (the hand of a dead person), “I Wanna Go Back to Dixie”, “Lobachevsky” (discusses plagiarism involved in the recognition of the invention of non-Euclidean Geometry), “The Wild West Is Where I Want To Be” (about nuclear fallout in Nevada), “The Vatican Rag” (first you get down on your knees), “Poisoning Pigeons In The Dark”, “The Old Dope Peddler”, “Be Prepared” (don’t solicit for your sister,

that's not nice), and "The Elements" (which listed the items in the Periodic Chart). His was the irreverent humor I learned to duplicate.

Woody Allen and the Comedy of the Unexpected conclusion

If Grandma Liza provided my first introduction to Jewish humor, Woody Allen was my graduate school. I came to him at exactly the right age — young enough to be dazzled, old enough to catch the references — and I memorized his lines the way other teenagers memorized song lyrics. There was something wonderful about a comedy that took ideas seriously, that could make you laugh and think at the same moment.

His line about if he had to live his life over again, he would live it over a delicatessen illustrates how he switched an ending in order to get a laugh. The unexpected absurdity is key to his humor. In Play It Again Sam, after years of wanting to say the memorable and dramatic ending line in Casablanca, his character finally gets the moment — and the reaction is simply, "I have wanted to say that my whole life." The laugh is in the recognition: we are all waiting for the moments to deliver the lines we practiced delivering.

And then there is the story of going to a psychiatrist because his brother thinks he is a chicken. The psychiatrist asks him why he doesn't say something to his brother. His response was "We need the eggs." The line comes at the end of a long meditation on why people stay in crazy, impossible relationships: because, in some sense, we all need the eggs, whatever our particular eggs happen to be. It is the punchline that turns into a philosophy. I have found myself returning to it throughout my life — in arguments, in committee meetings, in the middle of any situation that defied rational explanation. We can't afford to tell someone that they can't produce eggs- instead we confess that we need the eggs. Of course we do. We also should not believe everything we think.

One of my great moments came at the Harbor College Folk Festival when I was at the mic and it began lowering itself. I was ready with a line I had put away as a keeper: "Either I am growing or it is losing interest." The line received a tremendous laugh from the audience.

Utah Phillips and the Tall Tale Tradition

My political education and my comic education ran together for many years, and nowhere more naturally than in the work of Utah Phillips. He was a labor organizer, a storyteller, an anarchist, and one of the funniest men I ever heard. His humor came out of the American folk tradition — the tall tale, the yarn, the story that keeps expanding until the quick conclusion brings the laughs.

His piece "Moose Turd Pie" is a master tall tale. As an appointed railroad cook who had complained about the food, Utah makes a pie out of a moose turd (“a steaming meadow wafer”) he finds near the cook car, just waiting for someone to complain and be forced to become the cook. The verdict from a “fool on a stool” was: “my God that’s moose turd pie – it’s good though.”

Equally beloved was his routine about watching a column of ants working. The ants roll some collected turd down to the ant hill, eventually losing control. Utah had learned to read their antennas. He said that the ants were madly shouting “Stop that shit.” Utah concludes by telling his audience of young people that whenever they need to confront such a situation, they should just imitate the antenna of the ants by wiggling their fingers. The humor is funny and subversive at the same time. A perfect combination.

Mort Sahl and the Politics of the Punchline

From watching Mort Sahl perform, I learned that humor could be used as a weapon against a suppression of ideas. He walked onto the stage with a rolled-up newspaper and proceeded to make the headlines funny —funny in a way that exposed their absurdity, their hypocrisy, their terrible logic. He was doing something genuinely subversive: using laughter to create critical distance from power.

Sahl was irreverent but never cynical. Sahl occupied a different comedic position. He was engaged. He cared. The jokes were never easy or empty; they demanded something from the audience. You had to know what was going on. I took from him the idea that the comedian who takes politics seriously is performing a civic function — that laughter can be a form of resistance, and that making someone laugh at the powerful is one of the more powerful ways to deflate their power.

Kurt Vonnegut and the Humor of the Inevitable

Kurt Vonnegut wrote seriously with humor. He wrote about catastrophe — war, industrialism, and the human capacity for cruelty — and he kept making you laugh. His was an honest rejection of the common denominators. For Vonnegut, laughter served to respond to the strange world around us.

Billy Pilgrim, his great hero of Slaughterhouse-Five, is "unstuck in time," which is Vonnegut's way of describing trauma while also generating absurdist comedy. Billy has the serenity prayer placed above his counter at the drug store. Vonnegut notes that the only things Billy could not change were the past, the present, and the future. The serenity prayer is destroyed.

His line about continually jumping off cliffs and developing wings on the way down has become something like a personal mantra. It is funny, but it is also genuinely useful advice. It describes exactly what creative and political life feels like — the leap first, the figuring-out second. "So it goes," his refrain whenever death is mentioned in Slaughterhouse-Five, is perhaps the most efficient piece of black humor in American literature. Three words. Every time. No matter how terrible. So it goes. I used the line to conclude many of my writings.

Mel Brooks, Carl Reiner, and Two Thousand Years of Jokes

If Vonnegut was the literature, Mel Brooks and Carl Reiner were the performance. I memorized large stretches of The 2000-Year-Old Man. Reiner plays the straight interviewer, and Brooks plays a man who has been alive for two thousand years, with all the opinions and memories intact.

The interview about Jesus is typical of the humor. Reiner asks whether the old man knew Jesus. "Thin lad," Brooks replies, with the casual familiarity of someone recalling a neighbor. "Wore sandals. Always walked around with twelve other guys." The humor is subversive — the “greatest story ever told”, reduced to a social observation about a fellow who liked company. And the detail about the sandals is perfect. It anchors the divine in the mundane, which is exactly where Jewish humor has often preferred to do its work.

The practical wisdom of the two-thousand-year-old man is equally memorable. "Never run for a bus," he advises with absolute conviction. "There will always be another." Two millennia of experience, distilled into transit philosophy. And when asked if he ever met Joan of Arc, he announces without hesitation: "I went with her, dummy." Reiner, stunned, presses further: How did you feel when she was burned? A pause. "Terrible."

The bit about man's greatest invention being Saran Wrap has never failed to make me laugh, partly because it is so defiantly unimpressive, and partly because — when you think about it — Saran Wrap actually was a great invention. And the lament about having two thousand children, not one of whom comes to visit, is an example of traditional Jewish comedy. at its most distilled: the guilt, the love, the complaint, and the absurdity of even having this problem, all compressed into a single grievance.

The Jewish Literary Tradition: Tension as Comedy

Before Brooks and Reiner led me deeper into the broader Jewish literary tradition, I had already found writers who understood that comedy and tragedy were often roommates. Philip Roth, Saul Bellow, Joseph Heller, Bernard Malamud — each of them working the fault line between the old world and the new, between the inherited self and the assimilated self, between what the tradition demanded and what America offered.

Heller's Catch-22 is a very funny novel. It is also one of the darkest. An example of Catch 22: you can only be grounded for insanity if you ask to be, but asking proves you are sane and must keep flying missions — is a joke about bureaucracy, about war, about the systems human beings create that then devour them.

Roth's comedies of desire and guilt, Bellow's tragicomic intellectuals stumbling through Chicago, Malamud's characters caught between dignity and circumstance — all of them are working a specifically Jewish vein of humor that takes suffering seriously without surrendering to it.

What these writers taught me, collectively, is that the best humor does not deny the hard parts. It names them. It looks them in the eye. And then it exposes their absurdity.

The Great Practitioners: Timing, Delivery, and the Joke as Art

Alongside the writers, I absorbed the comedians. Henny Youngman, the master of the one liner - entire philosophy was contained in "Take my wife — please," which somehow manages to be a joke about marriage, a joke about comedy conventions, and a genuine request all at once. George Burns and Jack Benny had timing so perfectly that the pauses themselves were funny. Al Franken brought the Sahl tradition into the Reagan era and later into the Senate.

Gilbert Gottfried's voice alone was a joke — an assault on the idea that comedy should be comfortable. George Carlin evolved from nightclub into something like a prophet of democratic rage, tearing into language and authority with equal ferocity. Norm MacDonald, whose humor was so deliberately unfunny that it looped back around into something profound — a man doing a bit about the mechanics of joke-telling while telling you a joke that wasn't quite landing, except that it absolutely was. Buck Henry, whose deadpan left audiences perpetually uncertain whether they were supposed to laugh. George Gobel, whose persona of the perpetually overwhelmed little man was a comedy of quiet desperation.

Each of these performers taught me something about delivery — about the difference between the joke on the page and the joke in the air. Stand-up comedy, at its best, is a physical art. The pause is as important as the word. The raised eyebrow can be the punchline. The body commits to the absurdity so completely that the audience has no choice but to follow.

Saturday Night Live: The Comedy of Now

Saturday Night Live arrived in my life at the right moment, and it changed what TV could produce. The original cast — Belushi, Aykroyd, Murray, Radner, Chase, and the others — were doing something that felt genuinely dangerous, genuinely alive. Gilda Radner's characters had a quality of joyful dissolution, as though she was always on the verge of laughing at herself. Belushi brought a physical intensity that made comedy feel like contact sport. Murray had a cool that somehow made the warmth more affecting when it showed. Chase's Ford impressions, Aykroyd's manic precision — it was a company of genuine comic artists working at the top of their game.

Later generations brought Tina Fey, whose Palin impression was the finest piece of political satire the show had ever produced, and Will Ferrell, whose commitment to a bit — any bit, however long, however far past the point of reason — became a kind of philosophical statement about the nature of comedy itself. These performers kept alive the SNL tradition of finding the cultural pressure points, the places where the age was most anxious, and pressing on them until they yielded a laugh.

What Humor Has Given Me

Looking back across these influences — my grandmother, the comedians, the novelists, the satirists — I can see a consistent thread. The humor I have loved most is humor that does not flinch. It looks at difficulty, at contradiction, at the gap between how things are and how they should be, and it refuses to be crushed by what it sees. It laughs instead.

This is not the same as cynicism. The comedians I have described — most of them — were deeply engaged with the world. They cared about it. The jokes were a way of honestly checking in. Humor has given me a way to survive numerous meetings. It also allowed me to laugh at the absurdity of teenage behavior.

Chapter 6 A Decade to Remember

The 1960s were, for many Americans, a decade of awakening. For me, they were the years in which my political and social philosophy was forged. The civil rights movement, the Vietnam War, the student rebellions, the renewed labor struggles, the counterculture, the folk music revival, the women's movement, the emergence of the New Left — all of it converged to create an atmosphere of promise. Young people of my generation genuinely believed we might change the world. Many of us have spent our lives finding out how hard that is but still persevering.

I got married in 1963 to Keila Pratt and quickly we had two children. I started teaching in high school, took a year off to get an M.A. in mathematics from the University of Illinois, and then returned to high school teaching and finally in 1969, to community college education.. At the University of Illinois (Urbana), I joined Students for a Democratic Society and demonstrated against the Vietnam War. Back in California, I helped collect names to create a new party in California – the Peace and Freedom Party and attended the founding convention representing Topanga Canyon

By the beginning of the 1970s, our marriage had ended.

The Student Movement

The student movement of the 1960s was a part of my daily life in the 1960s. We challenged segregation, the Vietnam War, university complicity with the military-industrial complex. We asked: who gets to make decisions? Who bears the costs? Who benefits?

The Port Huron Statement of 1962 — the founding document of Students for a Democratic Society — described a vision of "participatory democracy" that I found compelling. The idea that we the people should have genuine power over the decisions that affect our lives, that institutions should be accountable to those they serve, that apathy and cynicism are not wisdom but surrender — these principles went to the heart of what I believed. I kept a copy of the Port Huron Statement in my papers for decades. It remains a document worth reading.

I was part of the generation that believed students had the responsibility to engage with the great issues of the day. Across college campuses we were organizing, marching, sitting in, and demanding that America live up to its stated ideals. I was active in progressive student

organizations at Berkeley, LACC, San Francisco State, and the University of Illinois. I believe that being alive and aware obliges you to act.

The movements of the 1960s achieved real change: the Civil Rights Act, the Voting Rights Act, the end of the Vietnam War, the democratization of universities, the expansion of rights for gays, women, and minorities. These were hard-won victories that were achieved when people organized, sacrificed, and refused to accept the world as it was.

We need to continue to organize. The Trump regime is attempting to erase all of the gains that we helped spawn. I once thought that, as time went on, the world would become a better place to live. I can no longer hold that view.

My mother, in her 80s, once told me that the current political situation was “shitty”. I replied that she had told us not to use that word. Her answer was that things were never this shitty.

Music, Books, and the Life of the Mind

Music can be a political and emotional language, a way of understanding the world and one’s place in it. The folk music tradition I grew up with — rooted in the labor movement, in the blues and spirituals of Black America, in the ballads of working people and dissidents spoke directly to me. I have documented, at my website www.mlhittel.com, the music that was and remains important to me. Bob Dylan, Joan Baez, Pete Seeger, Phil Ochs, Joni Mitchell, Buffy Sainte-Marie, and even Peter, Paul, and Mary all gave voice to my inner feelings. In my teens I had heard, in person, Cisco Houston, the Weavers, Josh White, and Brownie McGee and Sonny Terry. They were perhaps more authentic folk performers than the 60s group but the 60s performers had a larger audience and probably more social and political influence. The new folk singers were a part of a continuum of social and political culture.

Books were a way for me to become more politically mature. From my junior high school to my early college years, I read voraciously in the literature of political fiction, social analysis, and political philosophy. Works by labor theorists, economists, historians of the left, and philosophers of education helped to shape the analytical framework through which I approach issues of the day.

Strategy for Labor

In 1964, the French economist-philosopher Andre Gorz, published his "radical proposal" to address the issues that face workers and their representatives: "we have no power over what to produce, how to produce it, or for what market to produce." He then goes on to develop a system for deciding what to fight for that influenced my thinking as an inside agitator.

Gorz wrote that "It is no longer enough to reason as if socialism were a self-evident necessity. This necessity will no longer be recognized unless the socialist movement specifies what socialism can bring, which problems it alone is capable of solving, and how. Now more than ever it is necessary to present not only an overall alternative but also those 'intermediate objectives (mediations) which lead to and for shadow it in the present."

"The movement behaves as though the question of power were resolved. The whole question is precisely to get there, to create the means and the will to get there." "Is it possible from within—that is to say, without having previously destroyed capitalism—to impose anti-capitalist solutions which will not immediately be incorporated into and subordinated to the system? This is. the old question of "reform or revolution." This continues to be a paramount question when we have the choice between a struggle for reforms and armed insurrection. The question here revolves around the possibility of "revolutionary reforms," that is to say, of reforms which advance toward a radical transformation of society.

Is this possible?" "Straight off we must rule out the nominalist objection. All struggle for reform is not necessarily reformist. The not always very clear dividing line between reformist reforms and non-reformist reforms can be defined as follows: A reformist reform is one which subordinates its objectives to the criteria of rationality and practicability of a given system and policy. Reformism rejects those objectives and demands however deep the need for them – which are incompatible with the preservation of the system.

On the other hand, a not necessarily reformist reform is one which is conceived not in terms of what is possible within the framework of a given system and administration, but in view what should be made possible in terms of human needs and demands. In other words, a struggle for non-reformist reforms—for anti-capitalist reforms—is one which does not base its validity and its right to exist on capitalist needs, criteria, and rationales. A non-reformist reform is determined

not in terms what can be, but what should be. And finally, it bases the possibility of attaining its objective on the implementation of fundamental political and economic changes.
In short, what policies can we get implemented that contradict the very essence of modern capitalism? I believe that collective bargaining, if done right, can lead to non-reformist reforms. That was really central to the thinking of SDA – it was called "participatory democracy."
Gorz discussed how to look at the difference between reforms and real change in the power dynamic: "Is it reformist, for example, to demand the construction of 500,000 new housing units a year, or a real democratization of secondary and higher education? It is impossible to know beforehand. One would have to decide first whether the proposed housing program would mean the expropriation of those who own the required land, and whether the construction would be a socialized public service, thus destroying an important center of the accumulation of private capital; or if, on the contrary, this would mean subsidizing private enterprise with taxpayers' money to guarantee its profits.
"One must also know whether the intention is to build workers housing anywhere that land and materials can be cheaply bought, or if it is to construct lodgings as well as new industry according to optimum human and social criteria." "Depending on the case, the proposal of 500,000 housing units will be either neo-capitalist or anti-capitalist. "And the same goes for democratization of education.

Books in the 60s

I read books by Henry Miller, Philip Roth, C. Wright Mills, and Kurt Vonnegut. I loved it in Slaughterhouse Five when it is noted that above Billy Pilgrim's pharmacy door was hung the words from the Serenity Prayer by Reinhold Niebuhr (1892-1971) God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change; courage to change the things I can; and wisdom to know the difference. It was noted that among the things Billy could not change were the past, the present, and the future. And so it goes.
My educational philosophy was informed by such books as Education the Way Its Spozed to Be by James Hardon, Death at an Early Age by Jonathon Kozol, and everything by John Holt. They taught me that in teaching it is important to learn from your students, and it was your job to help

them to become the most that they can become. Others that influenced my thinking were Ralph Nader, Hunter Thompson, and Noam Chomsky.
It was a time of growth and liberation.

New University Conference

The New University Conference (NUC)was a national organization of radical graduate students (many of whom had belonged to SDS as students), staff, and faculty that opened a chapter on the University of Chicago campus in the spring of 1968. The group was intended to serve as a collective organizing body to support and promote leftist movements. During its five years of activity, it worked with groups on and off campus to sponsor events, protests, teach-ins, lectures, and publications. Its members and caucuses were particularly active in the anti-war, women's liberation, black power, labor, third world, and student autonomy movements. I immediately joined the NUC.
NUC was founded on principles of collectivity and radicalism in an era when SDS began to break up into splinter groups calling for various approaches to change (and revolution) in the United States. That it was successful at all was a result of its participants' abilities to negotiate the complexities of both academia and activism. The initial meeting of the New University Conference in the city of Chicago included about 350 radical academics from campuses in the region, and produced the following as a statement of the radical community's expectations and needs:
The formation of a radical community of action and discourse which will relieve the isolation experienced by many faculty and graduate students on campuses and in departments which are not presently hubs of the new radical activity # The need for sustained self-critical discussion which scholars and intellectuals on the left need to orient their intellectual as well as their political activity # The organization and leadership of local coalitions and campaigns to confront the university issues which sear the conscience and touch the interests of students and faculty alike—the growing influence of military priorities and national security rhetoric in both natural and social science, the increase of power accruing to administrative structures with "multiversity" orientations, the lack of democratic procedure and humane content in all spheres of university life

The need for self-protection through collective action and/or public exposure against politically inspired dismissals or harassment which many radicals viewed as increasing and increasingly likely.

One avenue used to influence the thinking of students was the use of booklets explaining to them how colleges really work. We call these booklets “Disorientation” because we are not trying to orient you towards our conception of what the university is and should be; we are trying to show some of the fallacies and myths in the picture of the University usually presented by those who rule here.

Struggle by humanist and radical white youth to end the complicity of the university with war and imperialism, with racism and domestic suppression of black and other minorities, with bureaucratic values and corporate interests.

The struggle by black students for full cultural recognition and autonomy on white campuses, for an end to paternalistic control at black colleges, and for full community control at community colleges

The struggle by large groups of students for full citizenship in the university as a just end in itself, for recognition of their adult status, and for a curriculum which is useful to their search for personal meaning ad social relevance rather than one which is oriented toward the needs of the corporation and the state for trained manpower.

These motivations call for: The right of protest of all members of the university; Full citizenship for students in the government of the university; Opposition to military and corporate intrusion on the campus; and opposing the class biases of the university

From Student to Educator

The transition from student activist to educator was the beginning of seeing myself as an inside agitator. Teaching became an arena in which I could apply what I had learned from the movements of the 1960s. It offered the possibility of passing on not just the beauty of mathematics, but an appreciation of the value of critical logical thinking - a way of asking the fundamental questions of power, justice, and democracy.

Chapter 7: The Making of an Educator (1970s–1980s)

The Collective Unconscious and the Road Back to Echo Park

Building a Collective

In 1971, in the wake of my marriage ending, I found myself at a crossroads — not just personally, but politically. The question I kept returning to was a simple one: how do you live in a way that reflects what you believe? I wanted my daily life to be an expression of my values. The answer came through a network of friends I'd made in the New University Conference, an organization that had grown out of the wreckage of SDS after the movement splintered. A group of us decided we would do something concrete: we would move in together into a large house in Santa Monica and try to build something — a commune, a collective, a little outpost of the world we were trying to create. We called it the Collective Unconscious, which felt like the right blend of the earnest and the absurd.

After a number of local meetings in Los Angeles of the New University Conference, a few of us decided to live collectively. We found a large house in Santa Monica and moved in. Bob and Mauna, Don, Tris, and me began a political collective life. Our meals were planned together, and

we ate together almost every night, housework was divided up, rent was shared on the basis of ability to pay, and room assignments were made on the basis of need. We tried to live in a way that reflected our politics.

On August 29, 1970, we drove across town to take part in a demonstration that was called “The Chicano Moratorium.” Even though there was a march to Laguna Park in East Los Angeles, we just went to the rally. Just after we got there the police attacked the crowd of approximately twenty thousand people. We were driven out of the park and ran to our car and escaped before any roadblocks were set up to capture those escaping. Later we read that the police had killed the reporter Ruben Salazar at the Silver Dollar café. It was another example of the police breaking up a peaceful rally.

Over the 1970s, Bob, Mauna, Don, and Tris moved out and Nancy, Peter and Claudia, Dan, Maggie, and Debbie moved in and then out, but the same basic arrangements continued. We were all connected to a university or community college.

The Georgina House became a center of intellectual thought and political action. We were involved in film collectives, food cooperatives, men’s and women’s groups, and union activities. We had great parties and several Easter egg hunts that drew 40 or more kids. My invisible dog spot and I would instruct the kids how to look for eggs while people hid the eggs around back. I would then let the kids hunt by age group. We helped develop a community of activists from Santa Monica and other parts of the west side of Los Angeles.

The women who anchored the Collective were serious activists, every one of them engaged in the hard work of building women's studies programs at colleges and universities across the region. They were carving out intellectual and institutional space for a curriculum that barely existed yet. Living alongside that energy day after day was its own kind of education. The years in the Collective were filled with active politics: coordinating with progressive organizations throughout the area, hosting meetings, building coalitions, getting stoned, and simply being present in one another's lives in a way that sustained our work. The house had a life to it. One evening that has stayed with me all these years, Anaïs Nin came to dinner. She was every bit as striking a presence as you'd expect — luminous, deliberate, a woman who seemed to exist at a slightly different frequency than the rest of us. It turned out that she was married to a shop teacher from my old junior high school. So it goes.

Life in the Collective

The Collective was also, I will freely admit, a wonderful place to meet intelligent, politically engaged, and attractive women, and I made the most of that opportunity. Our annual Easter egg hunt became something of a legendary event — a gathering of the tribes, drawing activists, writers, and organizers from all over the Westside. It had the feel of a village festival – a picture of bread and roses.

By 1977, the Collective had turned over entirely. All of the original members had moved on, replaced by a new generation of younger activists, and I could feel that my own chapter there was complete. Six years was not a long time to live communally, but long enough for me to move on. I was ready for a change of neighborhood and a change of pace. I moved back to Echo Park.

Easter Egg Hunt – I am giving instructions how to hunt for Easter eggs. Look up and look down. Approach them backwards so that they don't try to get away. Spin in order to make the eggs dizzy.

Back to Echo Park

I moved back to Echo Park and bought a house on Liberty Street. Echo Park is where I spent my teenage years. Echo Park was a different world than the elite Santa Monica neighborhood where I had been recently living. Echo Park was certainly more ethnically diverse than the area of Santa Monica I was moving from. I connected with the Food Conspiracy, a cooperative food distribution network seeded by veterans of the Berkeley Free Speech Movement including Art

and Jackie Goldberg, Sandor Fuchs, and a few others. It became a major player in the progressive movement of Los Angeles. Through the Food Conspiracy I found my way into a whole new arena of political and social activism, including the campaign that put Jackie Goldberg (a gay woman) on the Los Angeles School Board — a victory that felt, at the time, like proof that neighborhood-level organizing could still change things. The Food Conspiracy and the friends I made through it became an integral part of my life. Life in Echo Park was a new beginning, and I was ready for it.

Joining the California Community College System

I joined the California community college system in 1969 as a mathematics instructor after having taught high school for five years. I moved from teaching high school to community college for various reasons – less emphasis on discipline, teaching working class students, and helping students to rediscover how smart they were. The community colleges are one of the most important democratic experiments in American higher education. The California community college system — 112 colleges serving millions of students, the largest system of higher education in the world — was built on a simple but radical premise: that access to higher education should not depend on wealth, geography, or prior academic achievement. Community colleges, at their best, are open-access, free, and dedicated to serving working people, immigrants, returning adults, and students who had not done well in the past. The community colleges embody a vision of education as a public good and a democratic right. My mother, my father, and I all attended Los Angeles City College at important times is our lives.

I believed in that vision completely, and I still do. But believing in it also meant fighting for it, because the forces arrayed against genuine open-access education — budget cutters, privatizers, those who wanted to redirect community college resources toward workforce training for business rather than genuine liberal education for citizens — were present and often organized.

Teaching and Learning as Political Acts

My approach to teaching was rooted in a conviction that education is itself a political act. Who has access to higher education, what they are taught, how they are taught, who is deemed capable of learning — all of these reflect underlying choices about power, worth, and the purposes of

education in a democratic society. I wrote and spoke extensively about the emphasis on learning rather than test-taking, about the difference between genuine education and the kind of narrow credentialing that serves employers rather than students.

My first day at Los Angeles Harbor College was spent at an orientation meeting. The college president ran the meeting, but the union leaders spoke as well. Hal Garvin, the union chapter chair, spoke out without restraint. This was a big departure from what I had experienced at the high school level. I observed that dissent was possible and acceptable at the college level. Hal was very good at knowing just when to chime in during a meeting and I learned the technique of waiting to comment for maximum influence. I have often said that I had majored in meetings. Hal and Raoul Teilhet were two of my instructors.

Non-Parliamentary Procedure

As I look back at all the meetings I have attended and all of those I have chaired, these proposed rules illustrate some of the frustrations inherent in running a meeting.

PROPOSED RULES OF NON-PARLIAMENTARY PROCEDURE

1. **POINT OF PERSONAL OUTRAGE:** At any time during a meeting when a member becomes extremely upset the member shall have the right to interrupt any other speaker, will not be required to wait for recognition from the Chair, and shall have the obligation to speak at a volume considerably higher than required for normal conversation.
2. **POINT OF IRRELEVANT INTERJECTION:** Irrespective of the motion on the floor, a member shall have the right to monopolize the meeting for not more than five minutes by speaking on a point the relevance of which escapes all other participants.
3. **POINT OF PERSONAL ATTACK:** In response to a point raised by another speaker, a member shall have the right to reply by launching a personal attack. At no time shall the point itself have to be addressed.
4. **POINT OF ASSOCIATIVE GUILT:** A member shall have the right to impugn the integrity of any other members by alleging that they are, were, might be, have a third cousin who is, or may have great-grandchildren who will belong to any and all

organizations designated by the member as dedicated to the destruction of the organization.

5. **POINT OF CONTEMPT:** A member shall have the right to grunt, throw papers down on the table, shake his or her head vigorously, or otherwise demonstrate contempt for the proceedings.

6. **POINT OF HARASSMENT:** A member shall the right to introduce irrelevant motions for the sole purpose of delaying the meeting. It is only permissible to resort to a point of harassment when the outcome of any imminent vote is obvious.

7. **POINT OF REDUNDANT INFORMATION:** This is not to be confused with the more familiar "point of information." Whereas a point of information is a request for information from the chair, a point of redundant information entitles the participant to tell those in the meeting something they already know.

8. **POINT OF REDUNDANCY:** This is a motion that entitles the participant to make a point made by another participant no more than five speakers earlier.

9. **POINT OF PIOUS POSTURING:** This motion entitles a member to make reference to any Local, Regional Area, National or International Bylaw that allegedly supports his or her point of view. A correct quotation, however, immediately disqualifies the point.

10. **POINT OF GRUDGE:** Entitles the participant to raise an issue debated by the organization not less than five years earlier, for which the participant has not yet forgiven those involved.

11. **POINT OF PERSONAL CONFUSION:** To be called when a member has lost complete track of where the discussion is going due to the extreme tangent that it has taken. At this point, the confused member then calls, "Point of personal confusion, what in the world are we talking about?"

12. **POINT OF PERSONAL STRANGENESS:** This is to be called when a member feels that the subject being discussed is of an extremely strange nature. Example: A discussion as to whether the chapter president would look better covered in Spam or grape jelly is going on. At this point, the member calls: "Point of personal strangeness, this is really strange."

Note by M Hittelman: The actual author of these procedures is purported to be Howard P. Wolf. If this is true, he must have been spying on a number of meetings that I regularly attended.

Teach to Test

In mathematics, as in every subject, the question of pedagogy is inseparable from the question of purpose. Are we teaching students to think mathematically — to reason, to question, to solve unfamiliar problems — or are we teaching them to perform on standardized tests? Are we treating every student as capable of genuine intellectual development, or are we sorting students into tracks that reproduce existing inequalities? These were not only pedagogical questions for me. They were questions about democracy and justice.

Teaching Mathematics: The New Math Experiment

Max Beberman was household name to many mathematics educators of the 1950s and 1960s. He was something close to a legend. Born in Brooklyn in 1925, he ended up at the University of Illinois, where he split his time between the School of Education and the University High School. It was said he could teach mathematics to a stone wall. In his classroom, he engaged the entire class in what he called “discovery learning.” The idea was not simply Socratic dialogue. It was a conviction that students who were well led could figure out what to do next. I found that students who were used to using memorized rules often lost the moment the problem changed a little.

Beberman’s principal collaborator at Illinois was Herbert Vaughan, a professor of mathematical logic, and together they built a curriculum grounded in the precision of sets and formal language. The logic behind this was straightforward enough: the old high school textbooks were not merely dull, they were mathematically wrong, or at least deeply imprecise, and that imprecision was what left students unable to handle calculus when they arrived at university. If you taught children to speak mathematics accurately from the start — to understand what a variable actually was, what a function actually involved — then later mathematics would have somewhere to land. A key was to introduce many of the basic ideas using sets.

This was the New Math, and I believed in it. I learned about the New Math from Dr. Pitts at Cal State University, Los Angeles. After I received my teaching credential, Dr. Pitts offered me a job in Lompoc California where he headed the math project. Instead I took a teaching job at Grant High School. I taught at Grant for three years. At the same time I was pursuing a PhD in Mathematics at UCLA. I decided to go for an MA and just was missing a language. The National Science Foundation offered a one-year program at the University of Illinois Urbana where I could see for myself what Beberman's program looked like up close. What I found confirmed what I had already suspected about teaching: that the goal was not to hand students a collection of magical tricks, but to help them build up enough understanding that they could discover for themselves what to do when they encountered a new problem. I was more advanced than most of the other 30 high school math teachers chosen for the program. I took a combination of courses in the program as well as other courses open to Math graduate students. I did well and received all A's for 40 units of work.

Beberman himself was candid about the limits of his approach. He worried openly that New Math, as it spread through the country's school systems, was being implemented by elementary teachers who did not understand it well enough to teach it honestly. Instead of using sets as a tool to make mathematical language more precise, many teachers treated sets as simply another topic to memorize — just a new layer of rote learning dressed up in unfamiliar notation. "The old system was deadly — drill, drill, drill," Beberman said, but he also saw that badly taught New Math was its own kind of disaster, planting confused concepts in place of merely empty ones.

After Illinois I returned to Los Angeles and taught another year at Chatsworth High School before making the move to Los Angeles Harbor College, where I would spend the next twenty years before transferring to Los Angeles Valley College.

The shift from high school to community college was an education in itself. I enjoyed the relief of not having to concern myself with student discipline issues. My high school students had often been strong learners across the board — the kind of young people trying to decide whether mathematics was something they wanted to pursue further, and my job was in large part to help them figure that out. The community college was different. Many of my students were working through prerequisites, not because they loved mathematics, but because a degree required it. Getting through the course was the goal, not understanding it. Teaching at the community

college level gave me the opportunity to raise student ambitions concerning their future careers. My high school students often knew what they wanted to do next. Many of my college students were the first member of their family who attended college. I felt I might make a real change in their future goals.

Nowhere was the issue of past memorizing a more apparent obstacle to understanding than in my courses for future elementary school teachers. These students were planning to on to teach mathematics to children, which made their resistance to understanding the "why" behind operations particularly consequential. Why does dividing by a fraction mean multiplying by its reciprocal? Why does moving a decimal point work the way it does? For students with a feel for mathematics, questions like these were interesting — building up from concepts and understanding rather than following rote rules was actually more satisfying once you got the hang of it. But for others, the questions themselves felt like an obstacle. They had learned to cancel, to invert and multiply, to carry the one, and those procedures had always produced correct answers. The idea that correct answers were not the whole story struck some of them as a kind of academic hazing.

I was not interested in canceling and other magical tricks. A student who could cancel without knowing why was a student who would eventually hit a problem where the trick did not apply and then have nothing to fall back on. More urgently, a future teacher who did not understand why the operations worked would pass that incomprehension on to her students, and they in turn would grow up unable to reason mathematically even when they needed to. In fact, most of the teachers that go into elementary school teaching do not do so because they were good at mathematics. They often let their uncertainty and inabilities infect their students. Beberman had seen exactly this dynamic play out on a national scale with New Math: the method was sound, but the teachers were not prepared to teach it, and so the children got the vocabulary without the understanding.

Teaching over more than fifty years, I came to make my peace with the fact that not every student would come around. Some found genuine satisfaction in understanding the structure beneath the arithmetic; others completed the course, passed the exam, and moved on, and their relationship to math essentially unchanged.

What mattered to me was trying to reach the ones who were reachable — to leave the door open rather than close it with a wall of memorized procedures. That, in the end, was what Beberman had been after too: not a generation of mathematical prodigies, but students who knew what they were doing and why, and who could think their way forward from there.

I always tried to see teaching as a subversive activity. I wanted students see that mathematics was a man-made attempt to develop its intricacies. The rules that they learned were not handed down from some God. They were intelligently discovered and invented by humans. Mathematics was not just a bunch of rules to be memorized.

Looking back, I see that the mathematics classroom was where my politics and my pedagogy became the same thing. The student who understood *why* the operation worked was a student who had been treated as someone capable of reasoning — someone whose mind was worth engaging rather than merely filling. That was not a neutral act. Every time I refused to just give the trick, every time I pushed a future teacher to understand what she would be passing on to her own students, I was making a claim about who deserves a real education. The answer, I believed then and believe now, was everybody.

Academic Senate

The Academic Senate became one of the arenas in which I worked on these questions systematically. As early as 1972, I was engaged in Faculty Senate work — meeting with new college presidents, passing resolutions, articulating the faculty's role in educational governance. My 1973 letter as Faculty Senate Chair to fellow faculty members set out a vision of shared governance: the principle that faculty, as the people closest to the educational enterprise, must have genuine authority over curriculum, academic standards, and educational philosophy, not merely advisory roles that administrators could ignore.

One of the battles with the LACCD was the continuation of free parking for faculty and staff. In my letter to the faculty, I quoted Bob Dylan ("Don't follow leaders, watch out for parking meters."

Shared Governance: The Senate and the Union

Throughout my career I addressed the relationship between the academic senate and the union — two distinct but complementary instruments of faculty power. The senate works through academic governance: it has jurisdiction over curriculum, educational standards, and educational policy. The union works through a collective bargaining agreement and regular input on the policies of the colleges. The union bargained over wages, working conditions, and the terms of employment. Both the Senate and the unions offered opinions to the local Board of Trustees and the state Board of Governors. I was active at both levels.

I was involved in developing the roles of senates and unions in shared governance, and about how shared governance provisions could and should be embedded in union contracts. The goal was to ensure that faculty had genuine, enforceable power — not just the polite fiction of consultation, but real decision-making authority over the educational mission of their institutions.

The Part-Time Faculty Crisis

From early in my career, I recognized a profound and growing injustice at the heart of California's community college system: the systematic exploitation of part-time and non-tenure-track faculty. This was not a minor problem. By the time I became deeply engaged with it, part-time instructors were teaching the majority of courses in many community colleges, often receiving less than half the per-course pay of full-time faculty, with no job security, no benefits, no offices, no professional development support, and no voice in institutional governance.

The consequences for students were real. When instructors are paid poverty wages, given no job security, and treated as interchangeable and disposable, the quality of instruction suffers. Instructors who are scrambling to survive — commuting between multiple campuses, unable to afford health insurance, uncertain whether they will have work next semester — cannot give students the time, attention, and mentorship that education requires. The exploitation of part-time faculty is not just an injustice to those instructors; it is a betrayal of the students they serve. "Working conditions are student learning conditions" continues to be a needed slogan against the attack on the rights of faculty.

I dedicated much of my professional life to documenting this inequity and fighting to change it. My website mlhittel.com included extensive materials on full-time and part-time faculty in

California community colleges — research, analysis, and advocacy that I produced over many years. The struggle for part-time faculty equity was never separate from my broader commitments to labor justice and educational quality. It was an expression of both.

I served as a local academic senate president, a state academic senate Executive Board member, a national member of AFT's higher education program and policy committee, and as an officer in the California Federation of Teachers. I helped develop advocacy positions and papers in each of these venues.

Chapter 8: The Harbor Folk Festivals

Sometimes you make your breaks.

In 1976, I did something that I'm still proud of:

While teaching at Harbor College, I created the L.A. Harbor Folk Festival. For four years, the festival brought a variety of musicians in American folk music to Harbor College — free of charge — for audiences that swelled into the hundreds from across the greater Los Angeles area. Each festival ran five to six hours, funded through the college's Community Services Fund. I hired the performers, chose the sound crew, emceed every set, and the college handled payment. Every artist or group received the same fee, and no one was billed as a headliner. The message I hoped to send was that everyone on that stage was a star in their own right. Each of the performers played at festivals all over the country.

The funding for the free festival ultimately ended with the passage of Proposition 13, which gutted community college programming statewide. But while it lasted, it was extraordinary.

My approach to booking was straightforward but required planning: I scheduled each festival on a date when artists could also pick up other gigs in the area, making the trip to Wilmington California financially worthwhile. That logistical thinking is what allowed me to attract nationally known names on a community services budget.

May 1, 1976: The First Festival

The inaugural L.A. Harbor Folk Festival on May Day 1976 set the tone for everything that followed. It opened with Sam Chatmon, one of the original Mississippi Sheiks, and that alone told the audience this was no ordinary local event.

I introduce Sam Chatmon at the Harbor Folk Festival

Sam Chatmon (1897–1983) was a living legend from Hollandale, Mississippi — a Delta blues guitarist and singer whose family had defined the sound of early American string band music. His brothers Lonnie Chatmon and Bo Carter (born Armenter Chatmon) performed with guitarist Walter Vinson as the Mississippi Sheiks, the most prominent African American string band of the 1930s. Their 1930 recording "Sitting on Top of the World" became a blues standard covered by artists from Howlin' Wolf and Cream to the Grateful Dead. Sam himself played guitar, banjo, mandolin, and harmonica. After the Sheiks disbanded in the mid-1930s and after Sam worked for decades on plantations in the Delta, he was rediscovered in 1960 and launched a new career as a folk-blues artist, recording for Arhoolie Records and touring the country's festival circuit. He played the Smithsonian Folklife Festival, the Mariposa Folk Festival in Toronto, and the New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival. He was the kind of performer who made you feel like you were receiving a gift from history.

Also on the bill were Jim Ringer, a gifted songwriter and singer; Glen Ohrlin, the Arkansas-born cowboy singer and story teller who had spent his life ranching and collecting western songs; Ray and Ina Patterson, whose mountain folk music in close harmony had roots going back to live

radio broadcasts in the late 1940s; Jon Wilcox, a singer-songwriter from Santa Barbara; the Old Hat Band, a fiddle, banjo, and guitar string band from the Pacific Northwest (Ellen Bush, Jeff Thom, and John Burke); the All Nite Long String Band, a bluegrass band from Philo, California made up of Kate Brislin, Sue Draheim, Genny Haley, Valerie Mindel, and Susan Rothfield; and the duo of Janet Smith and Mike Meuser, who blended folk, country/western, jazz, guitar, autoharp, and singing. It was a great introduction to the breadth of what is generally called “folk music.”

May 1, 1977: The Second Festival

The second festival, again on May Day, brought back several favorites and introduced artists whose names would grow considerably in the years that followed. Sam Chatmon returned, now in his eightieth year, still charming audiences and still playing with full command of his art. Jon Wilcox, the balladeer-songwriter from Santa Barbara, returned as well, as did the All Nite Long bluegrass band.

New to the festival was Kate Wolf (1942–1986), a singer-songwriter from Sebastopol, California who was in the early stages of what would become one of the most beloved careers in West Coast folk music. She had moved to Sonoma County in the early 1970s, formed her first band, the Wildwood Flower, started her own record label (Owl Records), and was just beginning the relentless touring that would make her a household name in the folk world. Nanci Griffith and Emmylou Harris later recorded her songs. She was, sadly, taken by leukemia in 1986 at the age of forty-four, before her full stature could be appreciated by a mass audience. Standing on that Harbor College stage in 1977, she was a rising star.

Bruce "Utah" Phillips (1935–2008) also appeared that day, and no one who saw Utah perform ever forgot it. Born in Cleveland to labor-organizer parents, he had ridden the rails, served in Korea, worked at the Joe Hill House of hospitality in Salt Lake City, and spent years organizing for the Industrial Workers of the World before turning his gifts full-time to music. He called himself the "Golden Voice of the Great Southwest.” Utah was a fantastic performer— part singer, part storyteller, part labor historian — whose songs drew on the traditions of the

American hobo, the railroad, and the working class. His song "Green Rolling Hills" was later recorded as a country hit by Emmylou Harris; "Rock Salt and Nails" became a folk standard recorded by Joan Baez and many others. He was also a mentor to Kate Wolf, and the two were close friends throughout their careers. Utah's politics were my politics and having him at the festival — and later hosting him in my home — was one of the great pleasures of this whole chapter of my life.

Rounding out the 1977 lineup were Rick and Sandy Epping, all-Ireland champion musicians; and Bodie Wagner, a singer-songwriter from Spokane.

April 30, 1979: The Third Festival

The 1979 festival may have been the richest of them all. Sam Chatmon was back for his third appearance — he was eighty-one now, still touring, still playing, still making audiences fall in love with the blues. By this point he had become a kind of anchor for the festival, a living connection to the deepest roots of American music.

Rosalie Sorrels (a good friend of Utah Phillips) was on the bill, and her presence alone elevated any gathering. Born in Boise, Idaho, in 1933, she had begun collecting traditional folksongs in the late 1950s and had gone on to become one of the great figures of the American folk revival — a singer, storyteller, and tireless traveler who had loaded her five children into a Ford Econoline van and toured the country for decades. She had performed at the Newport Folk Festival in 1966 alongside Jerry Garcia at Woodstock and was a “Traveling Lady.” Hunter S. Thompson, Studs Terkel, and Robert Creeley all wrote liner notes for her albums. Her long friendship with Utah Phillips was one of the defining partnerships of the folk revival; they had collaborated for fifty years. Rosalie Sorrels died in 2017, leaving behind twenty-five albums and a legacy of extraordinary courage and commitment to the oral tradition.

Also appearing were Jane Voss and Hoyle Osborne, a duo whose music ranged across folk, blues, ragtime, old-country, and swing; Glen Ohrlin returning with his cowboy songs and stories; Flying Cloud, a traditional music ensemble playing music from Ireland, England, and Scotland

(Brian Brooks, Dan Milner, Snesar Pacific, Tony DeMarco); Kenny Hall, a mandolin player from Fresno with his band — a Sweet's Mill regular whose California connections ran deep; and Eric Thompson with Marty Somberg, outstanding performers of mountain ballads, Irish and Appalachian fiddling, Cajun, country blues, and other root music styles.

May 4, 1980: The Last Festival

The fourth and final festival, held in May 1980, closed out the run with characteristic ambition. Sam Hinton opened the proceedings, and his presence on the bill was itself a statement about the breadth of folk music. Sam Hinton (1917–2009) was a marine biologist who curated the aquarium at Scripps Institution of Oceanography in La Jolla, a professor at UC San Diego, a calligrapher, an artist, a herpetologist, and a folk singer with a repertoire of more than two thousand songs. He had recorded for the Library of Congress in 1947, appeared at the Newport Folk Festival, and in 1957 founded the San Diego Folk Song Society. He played harmonica, guitar, banjo, dulcimer, and a dozen other instruments. When Sam Hinton performed, you were in the presence of American music as a total, living tradition.

The most extraordinary booking of the 1980 festival — and one of the most historically significant moments of all four years — was the appearance of Los Lobos del Este de Los Angeles. They were, at that moment, a band of young Mexican-American musicians from East L.A.— David Hidalgo, Louie Pérez, Cesar Rosas, and Conrad Lozano — and had turned away from rock and roll to rediscover the traditional music of their parents and grandparents: norteño, boleros, cumbia, son jarocho. As I noted in my program notes, they had been playing together for four years. They played mostly Mexican and South American music but added a few rock and roll numbers. What no one in Wilmington (except the other musicians that heard their set) that day could fully predict what was coming: within a decade, Los Lobos would win Grammy Awards, perform in the Obama White House, and become one of the most critically acclaimed American bands in history. Their 1987 version of "La Bamba" topped the charts on both sides of the Atlantic. They still proudly carrying the spirit of Chicano identity into spaces where it had never been before. The festival attendees were lucky enough to catch them when they were still the best-kept secret in Los Angeles.

Guy and Candie Carawan were also on the bill, and their appearance carried a weight that went beyond music. Guy Carawan (1927–2015), born in Los Angeles and educated at Occidental College and UCLA, had in 1959 become the musical director of the Highlander Research and Education Center in Tennessee — the legendary training ground for civil rights organizers that had nurtured Rosa Parks, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Fannie Lou Hamer. It was at Highlander that Guy, in 1960, taught "We Shall Overcome" to the students leading the Nashville sit-in movement and then to the founding convention of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee. Guy's own musical reworking of the traditional hymn became the anthem of the civil rights movement — sung at Selma, at anti-apartheid rallies in South Africa, at the fall of the Berlin Wall. Their music was southern Appalachian tradition: hammer dulcimer, fiddle, tin whistle, banjo, Jew's harp, and guitar. Having them at the festival was something of a personal political responsibility, and I was honored.

Jim Ringer and Mary McCaslin rounded out the bill — a couple whose individual songwriting voices had earned them devoted followings throughout the country, and whose partnership on stage had a special resonance. Also performing was the Any Old Time string band from San Francisco: Ron Tinkler, Jim Borsdorf, Tony Marcus, and A.J. Soares. And I was especially glad to have given a stage to Brendan Smith, a singer-songwriter from Occidental, California whom I had seen perform at the Sweets Mill Folk encampment — one of those moments when a festival organizer gets to do the most satisfying thing possible, which is to introduce a new voice to a wider audience.

After the Festival: Friends, House Concerts, and a Community Built

The festivals were more than concerts. They were the beginning of friendships that have lasted my whole life, and they connected me to the larger community of folk music presenters in Los Angeles including KPFK’s Howard and Roz Larman. I began hosting concerts at my Echo Park home, including an intimate performance by autoharp master Bryan Bowers. I organized single performances at Harbor College, most memorably an unforgettable evening with Utah Phillips. And I was able to offer my home as a place to stay to artists passing through —Utah Phillips,

whose politics and humor made him feel like family; and the great Irish musician and scholar Mick Moloney and his bands.

Mick Moloney (1944–2022) was, at the time, building what would become one of the most distinguished careers in the history of Irish music in America. Born in Limerick, he had been a leading figure in the ballad-group movement of the 1960s with the Johnstons (alongside a young Paul Brady), before emigrating to the United States in 1973 to pursue a doctorate in folklore at the University of Pennsylvania. He would go on to co-found Green Fields of America in 1977, teach for decades at NYU as Global Distinguished Professor of Music and Irish Studies, receive the National Heritage Fellowship from the National Endowment for the Arts, and produce or perform on over seventy albums. He was named best tenor banjo player in America four times by Frets magazine. Sitting in my living room listening to Mick, Robbie O'Connell (a great singer who performs individually and with the Clancy brothers), the great accordion player Jimmy Keane, and the prize-winning fiddler Liz Carroll rehearse — Irish traditional music filling the house with wonderful music. It was the kind of greatness that can happen when great musicians are performing purely for each other — was one of those experiences that reminds you why you got involved in folk music in the first place. Mick died in 2022. He is greatly missed by the traditional music family worldwide.

I think about those four festivals often. I think about Sam Chatmon sitting in my living room, a man who had been born less than three decades after the Civil War, carrying in his hands and his memory a thread of musical tradition that ran back further than most people can imagine. I think about Utah Phillips holding a Harbor College audience rapt with stories about the Wobblies and the railroad men and the hobos who built this country and got nothing for it. I think about a young Los Lobos, years before the world knew their name, playing norteño music for an audience in Wilmington that understood exactly what they were doing. I think about Candie Carawan singing harmony while Guy's hammer dulcimer rang out songs that had once been sung in the jails of Birmingham and the march routes of Selma.

Life doesn't get better than that.

Chapter 9: The Union Years — Building Power for Working Faculty

Why Unions Matter

I came to union work with a deep conviction, rooted in family history of supporting unions and never crossing a picket line. and political education, that working people cannot rely on the goodwill of employers to protect their interests. Wages, working conditions, job security, benefits, the right to be treated with dignity —these are the products of organized struggle. The history of the American labor movement is the history of working people winning, through collective action, a share of the prosperity that they create.

In the California community colleges, as in every sector of the economy, the union gave faculty a voice in their own working conditions. Union membership meant a reasonable wage rather than the total exploitation, job security rather than the constant anxiety of contingent employment, and professional respect rather than being treated as interchangeable inputs in an educational environment.

The Hittelman Papers

The Hittelman Papers represent years of my analysis of union and labor issues in California's community colleges and beyond. These papers addressed the specific legal and strategic challenges facing California union members: the intricacies of collective bargaining under the Educational Employment Relations Act, the relationship between union contracts and academic governance, the politics of state budget negotiations, the tactics of union-busting and how to counter them, and the broader political economy of public employee unionism in California.

I believed — and still believe — that effective union advocacy requires intellectual rigor as well as organizational energy. You need to understand the law, understand the budget, understand the political dynamics, and understand the employer's strategy while developing an effective counter strategy. The Hittelman Papers was an attempt to provide that analytical foundation to union activists across the state and nation.

Rising to State Leadership

The staff at CFT help strengthen the union. I was lucky to have excellent staff including Margaret Shelleda, Fred Glass, Ken Burt, Jeff Freitas, Jim Araby, Josie Gloria, and many more. Ken was great at helping me meet leaders like Jerry Brown at conventions and other political events.

Meeting with Jerry Brown

My union work carried me to state-level leadership in the California Federation of Teachers, the AFT affiliate representing educational workers from pre-K to the University of California. State-level union leadership means navigating the complex politics of a large, diverse organization, managing relationships with legislators, governor's office staff, and other unions, and making strategic decisions with real consequences for thousands of working people.

I served as president of the California Federation of Teachers, a position I sought because I believed the organization needed to be more aggressive in defending public education, more committed to part-time faculty equity, and more willing to take on the political forces driving austerity and privatization. In my 2007 CFT convention speech I laid out the case for my presidential candidacy. I argued that unions in education must be advocates for their members'

wages and working conditions, for the quality of public education itself, for the students we serve, and for the democratic values that public education is supposed to embody.

Ken Burt introduced me to Dolores Huerta

As president I fought budget cuts at every opportunity, opposed student fee increases that priced working-class students out of community college, pushed back against what I called "lockstepped" thinking in education reform that imposed business models on educational institutions. I argued consistently for adequate public investment in higher education through progressive tax choices. Taxes are how we address issues together what we cannot address Individually: health care, public education, roads, parks, swimming pools, social security, mail service, and other public services. My editorials and speeches from this period — preserved on mlhittel.com — reflect those battles in real time.

Sandra and I meet with Secretary of Labor Hilda Solis in Washington

Fighting Union-Busting

Throughout my union career I also tracked and analyzed the ongoing campaign by employers and their political allies to weaken, undermine, and destroy unions. Union-busting tactics evolved over the decades — from outright coercion to sophisticated psychological manipulation, from illegal retaliation against organizers to the cultivation of a "willingness to be persuaded" by management. I compiled extensive documentation of these tactics and developed counterstrategies for organizers facing them.

I also wrote about the broader economic dimensions of union decline: the relationship between falling union density and rising inequality, the impact of minimum wage levels on working families, the situation of guest workers and farm workers whose organizing rights were systematically denied. The labor issues page of mlhittel.com reflects this wide-ranging engagement with a spectrum of workers' rights questions, from the community college faculty outward.

Social Security and Retirement Justice

One issue that I pursued with particular intensity in the later stages of my career was the fight against provisions that penalized public employees who had also worked in the private sector. The Windfall Elimination Provision and the Government Pension Offset — obscure but deeply unfair provisions of Social Security law — reduced or eliminated Social Security benefits for millions of public-school teachers, community college faculty, and other government workers who had earned state retirement benefits in addition to some Social Security benefits. I helped document this injustice and advocated for its repeal, a battle that ultimately achieved a significant victory with the passage of the Social Security Fairness Act. That victory was a long time coming, and it mattered to educators across the country.

Chapter 10: Shared Governance, the Academic Senate, and Educational Philosophy

What Shared Governance Really Means

The concept of shared governance in higher education sounds simple enough: faculty, classified staff, administrators, students, and trustees each have significant roles and authorities, and major decisions are made through processes that give each group real input. The reality of shared governance is one of contesting parties. Not all administrators and Board of Trustee members agree that the concept of shared governance is a good one.

I spent decades defending genuine shared governance.Real shared governance involves faculty who have enforceable authority over curriculum and educational standards — not merely the opportunity to advise, which administrators can accept or ignore at will.

The Academic Senate resolutions I helped pass — including the resolutions of Fall 1973 that addressed fundamental questions of governance structure — were attempts to codify and protect these principles in institutional rules. Our attempts were somewhat successful but embedding shared governance provisions in union contracts was an important step toward guaranteed enforcement. We were able to make practices and protections legally enforceable rather than merely aspirational.

The Emphasis on Learning, Not Test-Taking

One of the persistent struggles in my academic life was the fight against the reduction of education to measurable outcomes and standardized test scores. This battle intensified as politicians and foundation-funded "reformers" pushed "accountability" systems that defined educational quality primarily in terms of test performance and completion metrics.

I believe — and argued extensively — that genuine learning is not adequately measured by tests, that the obsession with metrics distorts teaching and learning in destructive ways, and that the real purposes of education — the development of critical thinking, civic capacity, creativity, and the ability to engage with the full complexity of human knowledge — are systematically undervalued in accountability schemes designed by people who have never taught. Education

that prepares students to take tests is not education that prepares students for life, citizenship, or meaningful work.

Opposing Misguided Education Reform

The so-called education "reform movement" that gained momentum in the 1990s and accelerated after 2000 was, in my mind, not really about improving education. It was about breaking teacher unions, opening public education to private profit, imposing business management practices on educational institutions, and shifting the costs of education to individual students and families while reducing public investment. I wrote editorials and speeches on these themes throughout my career, opposing the assault on higher education and arguing for what I called "real education reform": adequate funding, well-supported educators, genuine shared governance, and respect for the professional expertise of teachers.

Chapter11: The ACCJC Battle — Defending City College of San Francisco

Accreditation as a Weapon

In 2012, the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges took the extraordinary step of moving to terminate the accreditation of City College of San Francisco — the largest community college in California, serving more than 80,000 students, located in one of the most progressive cities in America. This was an unusual accreditation action. It was a political assault on an institution that had long been a center of labor union activism, progressive education, and open-access learning.

Many faculty were afraid to confront ACCJC for fear of possible revenge by ACCJC. At a critical meeting at CCSF to discuss what should be done, I raised the choice: “It is better to die on your feet than live on your knees.” As a result, many in attendance grew new backbones.

I had been tracking ACCJC for years before the City College crisis. The accrediting commission was using accreditation proceedings to impose a particular ideological vision of what community colleges should be: lean, focused on workforce training, governed by administrators rather than faculty, and measured primarily by metrics like completion rates that told us very little about educational quality. Colleges that embodied a different vision — broader educational missions, stronger faculty governance, more robust unions —received disproportionate accreditation actions.

The Fight to Save City College

When ACCJC moved against City College in 2012, I joined a coalition that we mobilized to fight back. This included faculty unions, the Academic Senate, student organizations, community groups, a few elected officials, and thousands of individual educators and citizens who understood what was at stake. The case against City College, as I documented carefully in my analysis of ACCJC, rested on shaky foundations. The evaluation team’s report was deeply flawed. The process violated the commission’s own procedures. And the ultimate sanction — termination of accreditation — was wildly disproportionate to any genuine educational concerns.

I wrote to ACCJC directly. I produced analyses of the commission's actions. I was engaged with legislators and community leaders. My document "ACCJC Gone Wild" catalogued the commission's overreach in detail, providing a systematic critique of both its processes and its substantive judgments. The fight was long and expensive, and we were eventually triumphant. The commission's president was removed. Federal oversight of the accreditation process was strengthened. And the broader question of how accrediting bodies exercise power over community colleges — and who holds them accountable — received serious public attention for the first time.

I consider my contribution to the defeat of the ACCJC as central to that effort. I am proud of my work in that area.

The Continuing Threat

The ACCJC fight did not end the threat to City College or to other community colleges. In January 2024, ACCJC placed City College on warning status again, demonstrating that the commission's appetite for disciplinary action had not been permanently curtailed. I continued to document these developments, to analyze commission actions across the system, and to advocate for accreditation processes that genuinely serve educational quality rather than political agendas.

The lesson I drew from the ACCJC battle was one I had learned many times before in different contexts: that institutions which are supposed to serve the public interest are vulnerable to capture by people who use them to serve narrower interests. The response to that capture is not to give in. It is organized, informed, persistent resistance.

Chapter 12: The March for California's Future

By the time I had been elected CFT president in 2007, a recession had hit California. Education funding was slashed to the bone. School and college districts sent layoff notices by the thousands. Colleagues who had given decades to their students were suddenly wondering whether they would have a classroom to return to in the fall. Part-time faculty — the majority of community college instructors and among the most economically vulnerable people in higher education — faced even starker uncertainty.

Underneath the immediate crisis was something older and more structural: California's broken budget process. A two-thirds supermajority requirement to pass a state budget had given a small Republican legislative minority an effective veto over the public good for decades. Year after year, budget deadlines passed while school districts issued pink slips and waiting lists for community college classes grew longer. The California Dream — the promise of affordable, quality public education from kindergarten through the university — was being dismantled by a series of deliberate legislative choices that protected the wealthy.

I always believed it was important to negotiate, litigate, and tell the truth — loudly, persistently, and in ways that cut through the noise. The March was an important part of my CFT presidency. We needed people across the Central Valley and beyond to understand that their children's overcrowded classrooms and their neighbors' layoffs were acts of political will, and that political choices could be changed.

The Idea of the March

The march from Bakersfield to Sacramento had a powerful historical history. In 1966, farm workers led by Cesar Chavez had marched from Delano to Sacramento to bring national attention to the plight of agricultural laborers in California's fields. The CFT decided to honor that tradition. The San Joaquin Valley — one of the richest agricultural regions on earth and one of the most economically distressed in the state — was ground zero for the budget crisis. It seemed right to start there, in Bakersfield, and walk north toward the state capitol.

The CFT organized what we called the March for California's Future in partnership with AFSCME, AFT National, and a growing coalition of labor, community, and civic organizations.

The idea was presented by Dean Murakami to the CFT Executive Board. I quickly supported the idea. Josh Pechthalt agreed to oversee the march. A core team of six people committed to walking the entire route: San Diego City College professor Jim Miller, Los Angeles probation officer and AFSCME member Irene Gonzalez, retired Southern California teacher Gavin Riley, adult educator Anna Graves, Watsonville community organizer Manny Ballesteros, Pajaro Valley teacher Jenn Laskin, and Los Angeles substitute teacher David Lyell.

I did not believe that the march alone would transform California politics. When Labor Notes asked what we hoped to accomplish, I was honest: "We don't have any illusion that the march by itself will accomplish its ultimate goals. But sometimes the right action at the right time can light a symbolic flame for people and help get a movement going." We were planting seeds. We were telling a story.

Forty-Eight Days on the Road

The march began in Bakersfield in early March 2010 and wound north through the heart of California over forty-eight days. The core marchers walked more than 300 miles. Along the way, they stopped at schools, community colleges, union halls, churches, and community centers. They held town halls and rallies. They carried the message that the budget crisis was not inevitable, and that fair taxation of the wealthy and corporations — combined with eliminating the undemocratic two-thirds budget requirement — could restore the promise of public education and public services.

What struck me, hearing from the marchers when I joined the March for a few days at a time and following their progress, was the emotional depth of the response they encountered. People had seen them on the news, read about them in local papers, and come out to the roadside to offer food and encouragement. The United Food and Commercial Workers supplied food for an entire week and ran radio ads urging listeners to come to Sacramento. CSEA members in Galt cooked dinner for the group in a Grange Hall, and when the chapter chair welcomed them, she wept. The marchers heard from farm workers who had marched with Chavez in 1966.

As they walked, the marchers gathered signatures for the Majority Vote Budget Act — an initiative to replace the two-thirds legislative requirement with a simple majority vote. This signature drive was central to the march. We were raising consciousness and building the infrastructure for concrete political change at the same time.

Sacramento

The marchers arrived in front of the State Capitol on schedule at 3 pm on April 21, 2010. By then, roughly 7,500 people had gathered in Sacramento — arriving on 80 buses from as far south as San Diego and as far north as Eureka. SEIU locals from the valley had contributed a dozen busloads of their own. It rained for much of the day. No one left early.

Speakers included union leaders, students, pastors, and parents. Not one legislator addressed the crowd, although many had asked to do so. We had made a deliberate choice: this rally belonged to the members, to the people who had walked the miles and ridden the buses and believed that California's future was worth fighting for. Only their voices would be heard.

When I spoke that day, I tried to capture what I believed to be true: what we had built over those forty-eight days was a foundation. The march itself was ending. The fight was not.

What the March Became: Proposition 25

The signature-gathering that the march had powered helped put what became Proposition 25 on the November 2010 ballot. The CFT was the key sponsor. Proposition 25 would change California's constitution to allow a simple majority of the legislature to pass a state budget — ending the minority veto that had paralyzed Sacramento for years.

On election night in November 2010, Proposition 25 passed. It was a genuine, structural victory — the kind that doesn't just affect one budget cycle but changes the rules of the game. The California's legislature would no longer have an easy excuse for passing a late budget that cut education and public services. The work of years, and the miles of marching, had produced a revolutionary reform.

The march was part of the story — part of the sustained public campaign that put the two-thirds requirement in front of California voters as a problem with a democratic solution. The coalition we built along the highway through the valley helped make that campaign credible and broad.

What I Carry From Those Days

I think often about what the march taught me about organizing. The most important lesson was one I already believed intellectually but saw confirmed in practice: people respond to authenticity and to sacrifice. The core marchers — Jim, Irene, Gavin, Anna, Manny, Jenn, David — were educators and public workers who had chosen to put their bodies on the road for something they believed in. That choice moved people. The CSEA chapter chair who cried in the Grange Hall in Galt was responding to the sight of people who cared as much as she did.

I also learned, or relearned, the importance of connecting immediate grievances to structural analysis. Saying 'budget cuts are hurting our schools' did not seem to be enough. We had to explain why the cuts kept happening, year after year, and what would have to change politically for them to stop.

We changed the political landscape' of California

There are moments in a life of activism when you feel the pieces come together: the right issue, the right form, the right coalition, the right moment. April 21, 2010, standing in front of the Capitol in the Sacramento rain while seven thousand people listened and children sang, was one of those moments. It was, as I said that day, a beginning.

Political Commentary Across Three Decades

Beginning in the early 1990s and continuing to the present, I have maintained a running commentary on American political life — editorials, analyses, speeches, and reports. This body of work, archived on mlhittel.com and continued at oldmanreporting.com, reflects a consistent set of analytical commitments: skepticism toward corporate power, defense of working people and their organizations, support for genuine democracy, and a willingness to name what is actually happening in the United States rather than providing the usual comfortable fictions of bipartisan good faith and the greatness of America's past.

I believed that our movement would help to change the mood in the United States to one that supported the fight for civil, economic, and human rights. By the time I reached the height of my career, the landscape had begun to shift dramatically to the right, and defending what had once been mainstream liberal positions — adequate public investment in education, healthcare as a right, strong unions, progressive taxation — required fighting against a consensus that these positions were somehow radical. My political writing has been, in part, an effort to hold the line on those basic commitments in the face of that rightward shift.

Taxes – The Way We Solve Problems Together

The debate over government services is always about values — about whether we see ourselves as isolated individuals competing for survival, or as citizens with obligations to one another.

My family and I have benefited enormously from what our government has provided. Public education gave me the foundation for a career in mathematics and a life in ideas. The public parks were my backyard growing up. The public roads connected our working-class neighborhood to the rest of the city, city workers picked up our trash, and public libraries gave me books I loved to read. Social Security and Medicare help support Sandra and me in our retirement years. These were not gifts handed down from above — they were the product of collective decisions made by citizens who understood that some things could only be accomplished together. These are the ways that taxes are used to solve problems together instead of just leaving them to the "market."

A core insight I kept returning to, in CFT speeches, in testimony before the legislature, and in my writing, is the one that the cognitive linguist George Lakoff captured so precisely: in a democracy, the private depends on the public. Businesses depend on the roads, bridges, and sewers that government built. They depend on the airports and air traffic control systems, the Federal Reserve, the patent office, and the public schools that educated their workforce. Every entrepreneur who claims to have built something entirely on their own is ignoring the enormous public infrastructure that help support their success. Without those public resources, individuals are not truly free — they are at the mercy of whoever controls the private alternatives.

The students who sat in my mathematics classrooms were there because California had decided that community college education should be affordable and accessible. When budget cuts raised fees and cut class sections, many of those students disappeared — not because they lacked the desire to learn, but because the public commitment had been weakened. The market did not step in to fill that gap. It rarely does.

Throughout my years as CFT president I made it a point to say plainly what I believed: the union movement needs to be a major force in the creation of a civilized society. Our members' lives do not begin and end at the worksite. The issues of war, health care, poverty, racism, the environment, public safety, reproductive freedom, the freedom to marry directly affect our members’ lives. To be effective, a union should not limit its behavior to working solely on wages and working conditions.

That wider vision put me squarely at odds with a strain of conservative commentary that runs regularly in the Los Angeles Times. Creators Syndicate is a conservative organization that has authors provide opinion pieces that run regularly in the Times. These Times editorial pages return again and again to a single theme: government intervention distorts markets, stifles freedom, and produces worse outcomes than letting prices and private choices sort things out. They are wrong in ways that are not merely technical but morally revealing. They never mention that government can raise money. Some states own banks, utilities, local broadband, electricity production, and trash collection that can make money that can be used to supplement taxes. Public owned utilities that do not have shareholders to satisfy and do not hand their executives million-dollar bonuses. This approach is inconvenient for people who profit from the alternative.

Take health care, the market-is-better argument insists that competition among private insurers will drive down costs and improve quality. The United States spends vastly more on health care than any other developed nation and achieves worse outcomes — lower life expectancy, higher infant mortality, higher maternal mortality — than countries with universal systems. The United States had 500,000 medical bankruptcies every year, a phenomenon that simply does not exist in nations with single-payer coverage. The overhead on Medicare runs two to three percent; the overhead on private for-profit insurance runs twenty percent, plus whatever the market will bear on prescription drugs. These are not the results of a well-functioning market. They are the results of an industry that profits from denying care.

CFT worked for years to advance single-payer universal health care, and we were direct about why: only the elimination of the insurance industry as intermediary could produce a system that delivered both quality care and affordable cost. Samuel Gompers put it plainly back in 1893: labor wants more schoolhouses and less jails, more books and less arsenals, more learning and less vice, more justice and less revenge.

The tax debate was the same story. When the California legislature was wrestling with budget deficits in the years that I was most active in Sacramento, the free-market columnists argued for cutting services rather than raising revenue on those best able to pay. They also argue that an equal percentage of salary increase for the rich and not so rich represents equal salary increases.

I explain in my mathematics classes that a flat percentage increase in income sounds neutral, but it is anything but. A ten percent increase on a lower-income family's income is not equivalent to a ten percent increase on a wealthy family's income. Ten percent of two million dollars is two hundred thousand dollars, while ten percent of eighty thousand dollars is eight thousand dollars. This does not represent an “equal” increase in income.

What I noticed, over years of tracking this debate, was that the market-first arguments were not really arguments about efficiency. They were arguments about who deserves what. The underlying premise — articulated clearly by the conservative theorists if rarely by the newspaper columnists who popularized their ideas — was that the market measures moral worth. If you prosper, you have demonstrated discipline and deserve your prosperity. If you struggle, that reflects your own failures, and society owes you nothing. This is not economics. It is theology.

It is also wrong about how economies actually work. The small business owner did not build her business without the streets that bring customers to her door, the schools that taught her employees to read, the fire department that protects her inventory, or the public health system that prevents her neighborhood from being periodically devastated by epidemic disease. Conservative columnists liked to quote Ronald Reagan's formulation that government is the problem. But government addresses the state of the roads, the courts that enforce contracts, the currency that makes exchange possible, and the social stability without which no private enterprise can function. The private depends on the public. That is how civilization works.

When I think back on the long argument — the speeches, the legislative testimony, the CFT newsletters, the conversations across picket lines and bargaining tables — what strikes me most is how consistent the other side's playbook was. The specific issue changed: health care, minimum wage, environmental regulation, public education funding, labor law. The argument was always the same. Legislation distorts markets. Government programs breed dependency. Competition produces better outcomes than collective action. Trust the market.

And always the same evidence that the argument was wrong: the people on the other end of the market's decisions suffer. The adjunct instructor working three campuses without health insurance. The student who dropped out when fees went up. The worker whose employer cut safety corners because the penalty for violations was cheaper than compliance. The retiree whose pension was gone because a private fund manager had made bad bets. These were people I knew, colleagues and students and union members, and their situations are the direct consequence of policy choices made on the premise that the market would take care of them.

The market did not take care of them. Legislation — when we could pass it, when we could hold it against the constant pressure to erode it — did.

Franklin Roosevelt understood this clearly. In a 1936 fireside chat he said that workers deserve more than respect for their labor — they deserve practical protection in the opportunity to use their labor at a return adequate to support them at a decent and constantly rising standard of living, and to accumulate a margin of security against the inevitable vicissitudes of life. This is the language of government as a tool of collective self-protection, which is precisely what it should be.

I tried to carry that understanding through every negotiation, every demonstration, every campaign. The union movement, at its best, is the organized expression of the insight that working people do better when they act together than when they face the market alone. Government, at its best, is the expression of the same insight at the scale of a whole society. The conservative pundits wanted us to forget that. The inside agitator's job was to make sure we remembered.

The California Budget Wars

For decades I was on the front lines of California's budget battles. The fiscal crises of the early 1990s, the recurring budget shortfalls of the 2000s, the catastrophic cuts of the Great Recession — each of these moments saw the same pattern play out: the most vulnerable public services were cut first and deepest, while those with the most political power protected their interests. Community colleges — serving working-class students who had little access to power - absorbed cuts that impacted our ability to serve students.

I sought to document the human cost of these cuts: the classes eliminated, the student fees raised, the counselors laid off, the doors effectively closed to students who had no other educational option. I argued for the need to change the 2/3rds rule to pass a budget in the legislature to a majority vote in each house. CFT sponsored Proposition 25 in 2010. We gained support from other unions, collected the needed signatures, and succeeded in getting it passed. The days of the Republicans holding up a budget in order to include one of their draconian proposals is now just history. The passage of Proposition 25 is my proudest success. It changed the way the legislature worked.

Media Bias and Political Reality

One of the recurring themes of my political writing has been the systematic bias of corporate media. This is not just a claim about individual journalists being corrupt or ideologically motivated (although most are). It is a structural argument: that media organizations owned by large corporations, dependent on corporate advertising, staffed by professionals who share the class perspectives and social networks of the professional-managerial elite, will systematically underrepresent the perspectives and interests of working people, systematically frame economic

debates in ways that favor capital over labor, and systematically treat as “extreme” positions that are mainstream in most wealthy democracies – such as universal health care.

I have documented specific instances of media bias over the years — the framing of budget debates, the coverage of labor disputes, the treatment of progressive candidates and policies. But more than the specific cases, I am interested in the structural patterns: the ways in which the range of permissible debate in American media systematically excludes perspectives that would challenge the fundamental distribution of power and wealth. Understanding media bias is about understanding how institutions work and whose interests they serve.

The Trump Era and Democratic Backsliding

The rise of Donald Trump and the transformation of the Republican Party that followed represented, in my analysis, the culmination of decades of political decay: the hollowing out of democratic institutions, the triumph of corporate money (helped by the rulings of the Supreme Court) in politics, the deliberate cultivation of white racial resentment as a political tool, and the abandonment of any pretense that the Republican Party stood for anything other than the interests of the wealthy. The Republican Party, under Trump, is lockstepped into abnormal madness.

I continue to cover Trump’s first and second terms — about the graft, the incompetence, the assault on norms and institutions, the mockery of checks and balances, the cruelty toward immigrants and the poor. These are attacks on the democratic values and institutional structures that make self-government possible. I continue to resist the Trump regime outrages.

Chapter 14: Mario and Raoul Two Men Who Showed Me What Was Possible

We can find our teachers in classrooms and in union halls, on picket lines, at microphones in crowded auditoriums, and sometimes simply in the memory of a voice that spoke to us. I have been fortunate enough to have known such people. Two of them were especially important: one a labor leader whose career became the template for everything I tried to do as a unionist, the other a student activist whose galvanizing speech on the steps of the University of California Berkeley helped ignite a generation of activists. Their names were Raoul Teilhet and Mario Savio.

Raoul Teilhet: The Mirror Test

If you wanted to understand what a labor organizer could be at his absolute best, you needed only to meet Raoul Teilhet. He was the president of the California Federation of Teachers from 1967 to 1985, and in that span he built the union from six thousand members to nearly forty thousand, helped push through the landmark Educational Employment Relations Act of 1975, and became a vice president of the California Federation of Labor while maintaining the kind of irreverent, earthy wit that made rank-and-file teachers feel that here was a leader I could follow.

I remember the question someone once posed to him: what personal qualities should we look for in deciding whom to ask to join the union? Many leaders in that position would have offered a careful answer — commitment to the cause, willingness to organize, and an understanding of collective bargaining. Raoul's answer was immediate and perfectly deadpan: "That they can fog up a mirror." The room burst out laughing, and then, as happened so often with Raoul, you realized that he had actually given you the deepest possible answer. The union is for everyone who works. No ideological test.

When he encountered the California Teachers Association in the Pasadena school district, run in part by administrators and implacably opposed to collective bargaining, his instincts from earlier union experience in the Teamsters and Machinists kicked in. If your boss is signing you up to Association membership, he reasoned, this must be a company union. He then organized a chapter of the rival California Federation of Teachers that did not allow administrators to be members.

What I admired most about Raoul was that he combined humor with great intellect in a way that made the combination seem effortless. He ran a meeting fairly. At his conventions, you knew — really knew — that you would get a chance to put your point of view on the floor. I tried to mirror that when I chaired meetings.

Raoul would always articulate a broad social justice agenda that placed teachers at the center while also emphasizing the connections that radiated outward to the rest of society. He spoke out against the Vietnam War when few labor leaders were willing to do so. He debated the anti-gay Briggs Initiative across the state, at a time when anti-gay prejudice kept many of his fellow union leaders silent. He was a socialist in the Michael Harrington mold, a member of the Democratic Socialist Organizing Committee, and he never tried to hide it.

I was heartbroken when I learned he had been diagnosed with Parkinson's disease in 1985, the year he stepped down from the CFT presidency. The illness slowly took away what had been his greatest gift: his voice. Late in his life, when Parkinson's had made it impossible for him to speak for himself at our conventions, I convinced him to write a speech that someone else could read on his behalf. He agreed. And so another generation of CFT members got to encounter Raoul Teilhet's mind — his clarity, his wit, his moral seriousness — even if the voice that delivered the words was someone else's. He died in Los Angeles on June 5, 2013, at the age of seventy-nine. There will never be another one like him.

When my own presidency of the CFT ended in 2011, we represented more than a hundred thousand educational employees. The growth in those years, most of it in community college locals, owed an enormous debt to the foundation Raoul built — the organizing infrastructure, the political relationships, the culture of fighting for something larger than a pay raise. Those of us who carried the CFT forward after his departure walked in a path he had cleared.

Mario Savio: Putting Your Body on the Gears

In December 1964, when the most important student uprising in American postwar history was reaching its climax on the Berkeley campus, I was living in Los Angeles. My brother Walter was there — an active participant in the Free Speech Movement, close with many of its leaders —

and he kept me informed about what was unfolding. So, I knew about Mario Savio before I knew Mario Savio. Walter's dispatches from the front had the character of something historic being recorded in real time.

What Mario said on the steps of Sproul Hall on December 2nd of that year has never been lost. He described a university administration — and by extension a society — operating as a machine that demanded total submission from those trapped inside it. And then he said: that “there are moments when the machine becomes so odious, makes you so sick at heart, that you have to put your body upon the gears and the wheels and the levers and all the apparatus, and make it stop.” The crowd around him erupted. Hundreds of students poured into Sproul Hall in one of the most dramatic acts of civil disobedience in American academic history.

I met Mario when he was invited to stay at the Collective Unconscious. He was having a hard time, and we set out to help him. He stayed for a few months and then moved on. Eventually he was hired to teach at Cal State University Sonoma. From then on, until his death in 1996, we worked together on several joint projects. Mario had become something of a mythological figure — a man who had changed history and then, somewhat bewilderingly to him, found himself living inside that legend.

The participants of the Free Speech Movement had spread out across the country after Berkeley, carrying the organizing spirit of the FSM into the student movements of the later sixties, into the anti-war campaigns, into the feminist and labor movements that followed. I worked with a number of former FSM veterans when I attended the University of Illinois at Urbana and joined SDS.

What struck me about Mario when I came to know him was that he was absolutely brilliant — analytically precise, deeply read, capable of following an argument into unexpected territory and emerging with something you hadn't seen before — and yet he was genuinely bewildered by his own importance. He had no vanity about what he had done. He didn't understand, in any immediate or personal way, how much he meant to students and activists around the world, how far his words had traveled, how many people had found in the Berkeley speech a permission slip to resist what previously was thought to be unchangeable. That gap between his stature in history and his own self-perception was part of what made him so extraordinary to be around.

Both Raoul and Mario embodied something I have tried to carry through my own life in the labor movement and in political organizing: the idea that ordinary people, in the right moment with an analysis and the beliefs that have political impact, can move history. Raoul built his movement, local by local, through a relentless organizing campaign. Mario said one thing, once, in public, and the reverberations are still being felt. The methods were utterly different. The courage was the same.

I have been lucky enough to have known people like this. Lucky enough to have watched them work, to have absorbed something of how they thought and what they believed, to have carried those lessons into my own life. If in my years as a union leader I ever said something true in a way that mattered or ran a meeting so that people felt genuinely heard or stood up in a room where it would have been easier to sit down — much of the credit belongs to them. That is the gift that great leaders give, even after they are gone. They teach you how to make your dreams become possible.

Chapter 15 Travel

Visiting Europe

In the summer of 1971, I took my first trip outside the United States — a journey that would permanently alter how I understood the world. Armed with a Eurail, I made my way through London, Paris, Rome, Venice, Florence, Yugoslavia, Copenhagen, and Amsterdam. I was thirty-one years old, recently divorced and had a work free summer.

I was introduced to new food and a variety of languages. I found that students in other countries learned a second and even third language in school. Most people I met spoke some English. I found that there were ways of living unlike those that occur in the United States.

Ordinary working people in these countries had access to health care. Higher education was not a luxury reserved for those who could afford it. The basic material conditions of life — the things Americans are taught to regard as privileges — were treated in much of Europe as rights, as unremarkable features of a civilized society. As senator Bernie Sanders says: “Health care is a right, not a privilege.”

To this day, most Americans don’t travel outside the United States. They have little idea how good life can actually be — not because the evidence is hidden, but because the various ways of living are not explored in our schools and colleges.

Lenin, Mao, Karen, and Greg at Wax Museum

A few years later, I brought Karen and Greg along on a version of the same trip. Karen was ten and Greg was twelve. We traveled on rail passes, moving freely from city to city as the spirit moved us — no rigid itineraries, no tour buses, just the open network of trains and whatever lay at the end of the line. The kids turned out to be extraordinary travel companions. We navigated foreign train stations together, puzzled out menus in languages none of us spoke, and found our way through streets that bore no resemblance to anything back home. To this day, both of them still speak of that trip as one of the great adventures of their lives. I am glad I did not wait until they were older.

In the years since, Sandra and I have continued to travel wherever the chance has presented itself. The list has grown long: Italy, France, Belgium, Germany, Austria, Hungary, England, Ireland, Scotland, Japan, Canada, Mexico, Cuba, Chile, Peru, Nicaragua, the Netherlands, Russia, Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Switzerland, and Monaco. Every country has added something to the education that began in 1971 — a deepened sense that the American way of organizing society is not the only way, and often not the best way, and that the rest of the world has much to teach us if only we are willing to listen.

China and Vietnam: Solidarity in Practice

Kent Wong was one of the most consequential labor educators I have known. As director of UCLA's Labor Center, he had spent years making the case for something the mainstream labor movement was slow to accept that the future of organized labor in California depended on its willingness to embrace immigrant workers, to confront racism within its own ranks, and to shed the legacy of Cold War nationalism that had for decades constrained the AFL-CIO's view of the world. Kent's opposition to the Cold War did not endear him to the Shanker leadership at the AFT, but Kent pressed it anyway, and history has vindicated him. I was glad when I was able to encourage his participation on the CFT Executive Board, where his perspective helped push our thinking in directions it needed to go.

In 2007, Kent invited Sandra and me to join a delegation from the Los Angeles County Federation of Labor traveling to China. The purpose was concrete: to establish sister-city relationships between the Federation and labor councils in Shanghai and Beijing — the kind of formal, ongoing connection that turns goodwill into actual solidarity. We met with Chinese union officials. We visited factories and colleges. We tried to understand, without romanticizing, how the labor movement functioned within a communist state — what it provided for workers, where its power lay and where it was constrained. Sandra and a handful of others in the delegation made the climb up to the Great Wall. Every evening ended with a banquet hosted by Chinese labor leaders, long tables of unfamiliar dishes, toasts in languages we were just beginning to learn the cadence of.

The following year, 2008, Kent invited us again — this time to Vietnam. We met with miners and garment workers, public employees and machinists, railroad workers and maritime workers and hospitality workers. We sat across the table from national officers and regional labor council leaders. We spent time with faculty and researchers at Vietnam's National Labor College. These were not ceremonial visits. The conversations were substantive, sometimes blunt, about wages and conditions and the relationship between unions and the state. Once again, the evenings brought banquets — elaborate, generous, with lots of liquor.

For Kent, these trips were never tourism dressed up as politics. They were international solidarity made tangible — the belief, which he had been articulating for years, that workers' power is not diminished by being shared across borders but enlarged by it. What we learned in Shanghai and Beijing and Hanoi was not just about Chinese or Vietnamese unions. I came home from both delegations changed, as I had come home from Europe thirty-six years earlier: with more questions than I had started with, and a sense that those questions were worth asking.

Chapter 16: An Inside Agitator Reflects

The Philosophy of the Inside Agitator

The phrase “inside agitator” is one I have worn with pride throughout my life. It captures something essential about my approach to social and political change: I have worked within institutions as well as outside them. I think that for change to occur, we must be willing to actively push from inside those organizations that we live in. By accepting positions of responsibility, we can use these positions to organize collective action. We should never accept injustice as inevitable even when working within systems that perpetuate it. It is often a difficult task to live as a progressive in a capitalist society.

Working within institutions involves not accepting constraints that exist in their bureaucracy. It involves making some compromises, navigating arcane bureaucratic processes, building coalitions with people you don’t always agree with, and often finally settling for less than was desired. I tried to support “radical reforms”- reforms that contradict the basic tenants of capitalism. One such reform is universal health care.

But it also can mean achieving real, lasting, tangible change which contradicts the system’s fundamentals. The contracts won, the policies changed, the institutions reformed, the students served: they often represented radical reforms. They are the measure of what organized people working within institutions can accomplish. The inside agitator sometimes must accept the long game because the alternative — giving up on institutions entirely — means abandoning the field to those who would use those same institutions against working people and democratic values.

What I Learned from a Lifetime of Activism

Looking back across more than eight decades, certain lessons stand out.

First: power concedes nothing without a demand. This truth, articulated by Frederick Douglass more than a century and a half ago, has been confirmed by everything I have observed and experienced. Employers do not raise wages out of generosity. Institutions do not share governance out of enlightenment. Politicians do not stand up to powerful interests out of courage

and ideals alone. Change happens when organized people make it impossible for those with power to ignore the cost of maintaining the status quo.

Second: the inside agitator must take ideas seriously. Effective advocacy requires intellectual rigor — understanding the law, the budget, the political dynamics, the employer's strategy, the historical precedents. The Hittelman Papers were an expression of this conviction: that union members and community college educators needed solidarity and courage as well as analysis and information. You cannot negotiate what you do not understand.

Third: solidarity must be real. The exploitation of part-time faculty affects full-time faculty. The underfunding of community colleges affects universities. Strong public employee unions strengthen all workers. The assault on public education affects every family. These connections are real, and building coalitions across them is both morally right and strategically necessary. Unions should define their interests broadly, and activists should recognize the value of linking their struggles to other movements.

Fourth: the work is never done. I have lived through McCarthyism, the upheavals of the 1960s, Reagan's attacks on unions and public programs, the compromises of the Clinton years, the wars under Bush, Obama's reluctance to pursue deeper change, the neoliberalism of the Biden years, and the Trump years, which upended long-standing liberal norms.

In every period, the central struggles remain the same: who benefits from economic growth, who holds real political power, what education is for, and who has access to it. Over time, history has shown that when we organize, we can win.

Still Fighting: The 2020s and Beyond

I continue to write, to analyze, and to speak out — at oldmanreporting.com, through the archived materials at mlhittel.com, in Trumpgoingwildagain.com, and in conversations with family, friends, and colleagues. The struggles of the 2020s have, if anything, confirmed the lessons of a lifetime. The threats to democratic governance, the ongoing assaults on workers' rights, the continuing battles over education funding and public services, the failures of corporate media to tell the truth about power — these are not new phenomena. They represent the same forces,

sometimes wearing new clothes, deploying new technologies, but ultimately driven by the same interests that have always opposed genuine democracy.

I don't believe that fighting for a better future represents naïve optimism. It is the historical record that radical reforms can be achieved with collective effort. The McCarthyites were eventually defeated. The civil rights movement won real victories. The labor movement, at its best, transformed working-class life in America. Organized resistance has pushed the country forward. The inside and outside agitators of each generation have found their footing, done their work, and handed a somewhat better world to the generation that came after them – until now. The Trump regime, however, is attempting to destroy all I hold dear. The daily actions of Trump represent unprecedented evil, incompetence, and meanness.

I still believe that the battle for decent lives is worth the fight. Persevere.

Chapter 17: The Athlete

My father – the athlete

Growing up I saw myself as an athlete and as a good student. I knew that I was a good athlete. The gift of athletic ability came from my father. Nathan Hittelman was a naturally gifted, all-around athlete — a good golfer, a serious bowler who one year won the Los Angeles doubles bowling championship and was adept in softball and basketball. He had what coaches call body intelligence: the coordination, the timing, the instinct for where to be and what to do with the ball once it arrived. I was lucky enough to have inherited those skills.

Elementary School

By the time I reached elementary school I was already the kid other kids wanted on their team. I was the quarterback on my elementary school football team — a distinction that, in a schoolyard context, meant you were trusted to make decisions under pressure, which suited me fine. The pattern held through junior high. In ninth grade I was the quarterback on the football team, the pitcher on the softball team, and a starter on the basketball team. Three sports, three leadership positions. I did not find it surprising.

High School

By the time I got to high school I was just over 6 feet tall. I lettered in varsity basketball and varsity tennis. In basketball, I played the full game in each of the last five games of my junior varsity season and went on to be a two-year starter on the varsity team. I was a very good tennis doubles player. In fact, the day before the top two players on our team won the Los Angeles city high school double championship, my doubles partner and I beat them. My partner and I even got to play in an exhibition with Pancho Gonzales and Lew Hoad – both top ranked tennis professionals. In basketball, I got to scrimmage at Belmont High School along with my good friend Glen Drogin against two Laker players (Hot Rod Hundley and Rudy LaRusso).

LACC

At Los Angeles City College I was sixth man on the LACC basketball team — the first player off the bench, That team took third place in the California Community College state tournament. On top of that, I was part of a doubles team in tennis that took third place in Southern California. I probably should have been studying more.

UC Berkeley

Earlier, at UC Berkeley, I won the university's intramural sports award. I played basketball, tennis, softball, volleyball, bowling, ping-pong, and football. I should have been studying more.

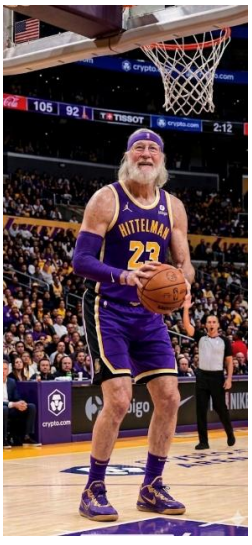
I was at Cal — one of the great research universities in the world — with a head full of political ideas and a body that wanted to be on a court or a field every afternoon. The athlete in me and the student in me were not always pulling in the same direction. Berkeley demanded serious academic engagement, and while I gave it some effort, I also gave considerable time and energy to sports. Whether the tradeoff was wise is a question I have turned over many times. What I can say is that I loved to play, plus it gave me something genuine: confidence, discipline, the experience of working within a team toward a shared goal. Those were not small things, even if they helped me to flunk out of Cal.

I saw myself as an athlete. That identity mattered to me. It taught me something about competition that would later inform my approach to union organizing you have to be in the game, you have to know how to expose the opponent’s weaknesses, anticipate the other side's moves, and then develop — concretely, not abstractly — a path to success.

Now

After college, life took over. Teaching, organizing, building the California Federation of Teachers — there was simply not enough time for much beyond the occasional round of golf when I attended the University of Illinois, a tennis match here and there, and a pickup basketball game when one materialized. The body that had once been a reliable instrument slowly became something I barely maintained. I do not mourn that exactly. The years of early competition left me with good health and a useful physical self-knowledge that has served me well into old age.

I still have a basket in my backyard, just as we had one in Ontario. When I walk past a basketball court and hear the squeak of basketball shoes on hardwood, some part of me still wants to call for the ball. I am still waiting for the Lakers to call for me out of the stands to replace one of their injured players. After all, I played against Gail Goodrich and Billy the Hill McGill and Hot Rod Hundley and Rudy LaRusso in high school.



Chapter 18: Trump Going Wild Again — Chronicling an Authoritarian Regime (2025–2026)

Why I Built the Site

So. Donald Trump won again.

This time the universe is not feeling merciful.

I had been writing political commentary for years — at trumpgoingwild.com, at mlhittel.com, at oldmanreporting.com.

In December of 2024 I launched trumpgoingwildagain.com. The name is designed to be amusing to those who recall the girls going wild content.

The site is organized around the major dimensions of the Trump regime's assault on American democracy and decency: corruption, chaos, civil liberties, labor, education, foreign affairs, immigration, the cabinet, the legislature, the economy, and plans to fight back. I do not think we

are watching a political party with ugly policies. We are watching an authoritarian movement fronting for oligarchic interests, willing to dismantle democratic governance itself.

So it goes.

Day One and the First Week: Shock and Awe

The lies began immediately. This should not have surprised anyone. The man had been lying his entire adult life, and there is no particular reason to believe that Trump taking an oath of office would interrupt that.

Trump's first public statements as president were riddled with falsehoods, just as his first term had been. Then I wrote about the first day. Then the first week. The volume of executive orders and proclamations and outright cock and bull stories in those early days are designed to be overwhelming. The regime attempted to move faster than organized resistance could respond.

This was not an accident. His lies continue to be believed by less than 35% of the United States population.

The immigration raids began almost immediately.

The U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) thugs descended on workplaces and homes and churches. The message is deliberate: no one is safe, no space is sanctuary, resistance is futile. It is a military strategy — overwhelming force designed to terrorize a population into submission — applied to human beings who had come to the United States of America to work and raise their children and live their lives.

So it goes.

The Cabinet: Nominees Are Not Just a Joke

Trump's cabinet picks were announced in December of 2024. They were the most dangerous and incompetent collection of appointments in American history.

My early posts carried titles that captured my assessment: "Trump Nominees Are Not Just A Joke." "How To Make Sense of the Trump Appointees." "The American Oligarchy Is Back." "He Will Make America Sick."

These are accurate descriptions of what is being installed at the top of the United States government.

Each cabinet pick represented: a wrecking ball aimed at the agency being led, a reward for a donor or personal ally, or a test of the Senate's willingness to confirm anyone Trump named regardless of relevant qualifications. In most cases the Senate passed the test with flying colors. They would confirm a houseplant if it wore a red tie and expressed personal loyalty to the man.

Pete Hegseth at Defense is among the most alarming. He is a white Christian nationalist. He now controls the arsenal of the United States military.

And then there is the revolving door. When Kristi Noem became too embarrassing even for this regime, she was replaced with Senator Markwayne Mullin. Governor Gavin Newsom noted that Mullin could not remember whether the United States is at war, that his state had a murder rate

forty percent higher than California's, that he had literally tried to fight union workers during a Senate hearing, and that he had said at a Senate hearing on race that he did not want reality.

Trump's reason for choosing him, as reported by CNN's Kaitlan Collins: he loves watching Mullin on TV.

From worst to even more terrible. That is the trajectory.

Musk: Lies, Conflicts, and the Gutting of Government

Elon Musk became the wealthiest person in the world by selling electric cars and rockets and a social media platform that he proceeded to run into the ground with enthusiasm.

Then he bought a presidency. Or something very close to one.

His role in the second Trump regime is unlike anything in American political history. He is a private citizen exercising what amounted to executive authority over the federal government while simultaneously running a business empire whose interests were directly served by that authority. He is accountable to no one. He is constrained by nothing. He had the run of the building.

I tracked Musk obsessively on trumpgoingwildagain.com because the Musk story is, in microcosm, the story of the entire regime merger of private wealth and public power, and the transformation of democratic government into an instrument of oligarchic accumulation.

My posts on him tracked his escalating audacity: "Musk Lies and Lies Again and Again." "Musk Personal Profit." "Musk Cuts Federal Workforce." "Muskrat Messing with Social Security."

Each documented a different dimension of the same fundamental corruption: a man using a government position to destroy the regulatory and institutional constraints on his own businesses, fire workers who might hold him accountable, and raid programs like Social Security that working people had paid into their entire lives.

This is not government efficiency. It is the systematic dismantlement of the public sector by a man who stood to profit from its destruction. This is clearly a conflict of interest. In a functioning democracy, it would normally be called that by people in positions of authority who would then do something about it.

We were not, at the time, in a fully functioning democracy.

Corruption: Graft Here, Graft There, Graft Everywhere

The corruption of the Trump regime is not subtle. It is not hidden. It is not even particularly creative.

My March 2026 post — "Graft Here, Graft There, Graft Everywhere" — cataloged five ways Trump is using the presidency as a personal revenue stream. Five. There were more, but five felt like a manageable number for a single sitting.

Trump paused enforcement of the Foreign Corrupt Practices Act, the law prohibiting American companies from bribing foreign officials. This benefited his own international business dealings. He seemed unbothered by the appearance of impropriety.

The White House has openly failed to comply with court orders. The regime defies constitutional limits as a matter of routine governance. Trump has made clear that he considers himself king of America. As king, he is unrestrained by legal and moral constraints.

I also wrote about the American Princelings — Trump's children, their spouses, and their associated business interests, enriching themselves through proximity to executive power in ways that would have triggered massive congressional investigations in any previous administration.

The selling of the United States to the highest bidder is now policy. There is a price list. It is not posted publicly, but it is understood by everyone who desires to receive benefit from Trump’s corruption.

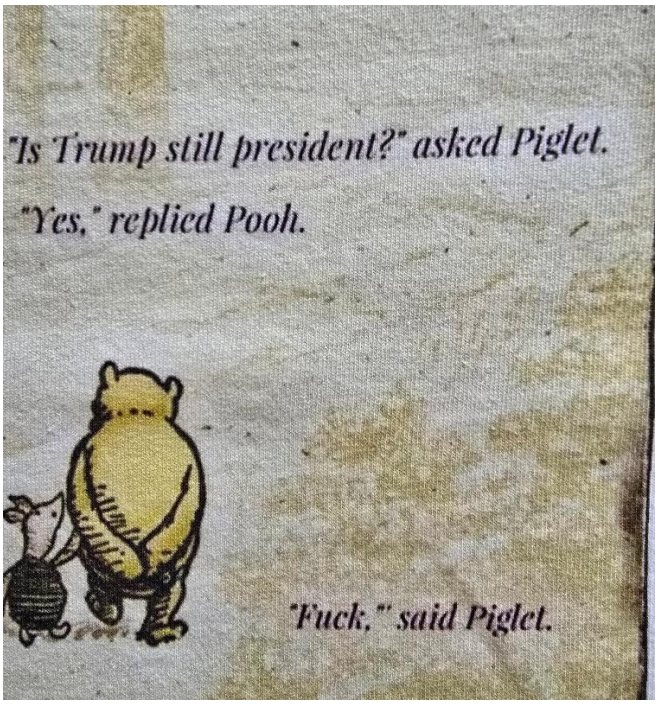
The Economy Under the Regime

The tariff policy is a particular focus of Trump's ignorance.

Several prominent media outlets have falsely reported that the Trade Act gave Trump legal authority to impose sweeping tariffs in response to trade deficits. The actual legal basis does not exist. The tariffs are legally dubious, economically destructive, and implemented with a chaos that reflected the broader character of the regime: decisions made on impulse, announced without preparation, reversed and reimposed and reversed again without any coherent rationale.

When Trump has morning meltdowns over bad economic numbers. The instability of the person making economic policy for the largest economy in the world is itself an economic risk.

Attacks on unions. Tax cuts for the rich. Increased oil and gas drilling. Attacks on wind turbines and other sources of alternative energy. Increased government waste and corruption. The results are disastrous for ordinary Americans and very good for a small number of very wealthy ones. This is simply an illegal transfer of wealth.



ICE and the Terror Campaign Against Immigrants

Of all the outrages of the second Trump term, the treatment of immigrants is the most viscerally brutal. ICE has shown itself to be a collection of marauding, fascist thugs who enjoyed terrorizing people. They raid churches. They abduct people. They use children to abduct other people. They shot a woman in the face. They tear-gassed a car full of children. They grabbed an elderly man from his house and dragged him outside in his underwear in the freezing cold simply because he is not white.

They detained a five-year-old, used him to bait his parents, and then took them all away.

ICE has murdered more than thirty people in custody.

So it goes.

The regime's response to its unlawful actions is to expand ICE's authority and budget. Someone proposed retraining ICE agents. This is a stupid idea. The problem is not inadequate training. The problem is deeply ingrained institutional corruption.

The case of Mahmoud Khalil — a legal resident facing deportation for his political speech in support of Palestinian rights — illustrates how immigration enforcement has become a tool of political repression. A judge blocked that deportation. The administration continued to seek to deport him somewhere. Somewhere.

The Assault on Civil Liberties, Education, and Truth

The civil liberties assault is comprehensive and deliberate. The regime has frankly announced its desire to punish enemies, label civil rights groups as terrorist fronts, eliminate historical teaching about American racism and slavery, ban books, and impose new restraints on voting rights.

The Trump Regime approach to education in alarming. Using public tax dollars to subsidize private schools is a Trojan horse for the destruction of public education. The attack on honest history is an attempt to prevent the next generation from understanding how the country got to where it is.

You cannot fight for democracy if you have been systematically denied the knowledge of what democracy requires and what threatens it. That is why the regime went after history curricula and diversity programs and university independence.

And then there is the lying.

For most of American history, lying in politics carried a real and immediate cost. Get caught and you could lose credibility, maybe get voted out, sometimes face criminal consequences — like the roughly forty people around Richard Nixon who went to prison.

That enforcement mechanism depends on a shared understanding that truth matters and that the law applies equally to everyone. Five corrupt, on-the-take Republicans on the Supreme Court shattered that understanding when they handed down Citizens United. Once unlimited money could flow into politics anonymously, the consequences for lying evaporated.

Trump did not create the post-truth political environment. He is just without shame. He is a lifelong liar. Some people are natural athletes. Some people are natural musicians. Trump is a natural liar in an era that has made lying profitable.

Foreign Affairs: The Pirate in Chief

The foreign policy of the second Trump administration is an extension of its domestic character: bullying, transactional, contemptuous of alliances and international law, and driven more by the personal financial interests of those in power than by any coherent strategic vision.

The essential quality of Trump's approach to the world is this: treat international relations as a shakedown operation. Demand tribute from allies. Cozy up to autocrats. Use tariffs as a weapon against countries that refuse to submit to his demands.

The Colombia tariff episode is illustrative. Trump hit Colombia with tariffs in a dispute over his attempt at military deportation flights — using the economic power of the United States not as an instrument of foreign policy in any meaningful sense but as a personal bludgeon delivered during a temper tantrum.

Trump also confused Iceland and Greenland. I mention this not merely because it is embarrassing, though it is, but because it is instructive. A president whose grasp of basic geography is making decisions that affect the entire world.

So it goes.

Tracking the First Hundred Days: Ineptitude and Escalation

At the hundred-day mark I published two comprehensive assessments: "Tracking Trump's First 100 Days" and "100 Days of Ineptitude."

Together they constitute a detailed record of what the regime had done. The executive orders signed. The agencies gutted. The workers fired. The long-time policies reversed. The court orders defied. The lies told. The corruption enabled.

The picture that emerged is not of an administration pursuing a coherent agenda, even a terrible one. It is of a regime whose defining characteristic is the destruction of existing institutions and norms, with no serious plan for what would replace them.

The destruction is the point. A government too chaotic and demoralized to enforce regulations, protect workers, or hold the powerful accountable. It is exactly what the oligarchs funding the regime want.

The Fight Back: Grounds for Modest Optimism

I have built my websites to document resistance, and to sustain the case for hope. Hope grounded not in wishful thinking but in the historical record and the evidence of the current organized resistance actually underway.

The courts have been a source of optimism. Judges — including many appointed by Republican presidents — have blocked many of the regime's most blatant overreaches. The funding freeze. The attempted deportation of legal residents for political speech. The reversal of birthright citizenship. The mass firing of federal workers. The judicial resistance is imperfect and incomplete, but it has demonstrated that our constitutional framework had not yet completely collapsed.

The 2026 elections presents an opportunity to impose some democratic accountability on a regime that has been operating without any meaningful legislative checks. Democratic gains in the House appear somewhat likely. The broader political environment — with Trump's approval ratings falling as the economic consequences of his policies became tangible — suggest that the bare majority that had returned him to power is beginning to fray.

The fight is on. Fired federal workers have filed suit. The state attorneys general have challenged unconstitutional executive orders. University administrators have refused to capitulate to political demands. Civic organizations are mobilizing their members. Citizens are showing up at town halls, writing letters, marching, donating to liberal campaigns, and becoming more and more organized.

Every republic that has faced this kind of assault has had to find these people. The people who showed up. The people who said: not this. Not here. Not us.

The fight is simply not over.

Chaos as Strategy: Scapegoating, Game Theory, and the King Who Would Be

One of the central analytical questions I wrestle with is whether the constant chaos of the regime is accidental or deliberate.

My answer: both. Which is a more disturbing answer than either option alone.

Some of the chaos is genuine incompetence — a cabinet and staff selected for loyalty rather than ability to perform. People who had been hired to break things were breaking things, but not always the intended things.

But much of the chaos is also purposeful. Chaos serves authoritarian ends. It overwhelms the opposition, which has difficulty mounting an effective response to a hundred outrages simultaneously. It exhausts journalists, who cannot sustain coverage of any single scandal before the next one arrives. It demoralizes everyday citizens into believing that resistance is futile.

Scapegoating is basic to Trump's approach to governing. The deliberate targeting of immigrants, minorities, and other vulnerable groups redirects popular anger away from the oligarchs who are responsible for economic insecurity. The scapegoat absorbs the rage. The billionaires bank the tax cuts.

The regime fired nearly 25,000 federal workers, then was forced by the courts to reinstate many of them. A chaotic cycle that has served no coherent policy purpose but to keep the opposition off-balanced and demoralized.

And then there is Trump's most revealing claim of all: that he is not bound by the normal constraints of democratic governance. I wrote about this in a post titled "Trump Declares Himself King." This is a description of what Trump actually asserted. Executive authority is unlimited. Courts could be defied. The separation of powers is an inconvenience.

Every republic that has fallen to authoritarianism has passed through this exact moment. The moment when a man in power decides the rules do not apply to him. Usually there is someone nearby who agrees with him. Usually that person has a lot of money.

So it goes.

The Legislature: Will They Kiss the Monarch's Ring?

I devoted a full section of trumpgoingwildagain.com to the legislature because the central question of the Trump second term — whether American democracy would survive — depended in significant part on whether Congress would do its constitutional job.

The question to ask is: will the Senate and the House of Representatives do their job, or will they simply cave to Trump's worst instincts? Will they kiss the monarch's ring?

The Republican Party in Congress has by this point largely completed its transformation into a vehicle for Trump's personal power. There have been occasional dissenters who made noise. They rarely voted against the regime when it counted. Making noise is not the same thing as making a stand. Politicians understand this distinction perfectly well. They are simply hoping that their constituents do not.

I have also reported on the dangerous nonprofit bill that Republicans pushed through Congress — a measure that would strip tax-exempt status from organizations deemed to support terrorism, defined in ways that could encompass mainstream civil liberties and civil rights groups. It is a direct attack on the organizational infrastructure of progressive America, designed to defund and delegitimize the very groups mounting legal and political resistance to the regime.

Bernie Sanders's response to the Republican budget vote is another document I shared. Sanders has an unfailing ability to name what is happening: the largest upward transfer of wealth in American history, dressed up as fiscal responsibility, passed by a Congress that had become an instrument of oligarchic consolidation.

The Historical Consciousness Behind the Chronicle

Everything I write on trumpgoingwildagain.com and my other websites is informed by a historical consciousness that comes from having lived through eighty-plus years of American political life.

I have seen McCarthyism. I have seen the civil rights movement and the backlash against it. I have seen the Reagan reaction to the sixties, the Gingrich revolution, the Bush wars, and the slow erosion of democratic norms over decades. What is happening now did not come from nowhere.

It is the culmination of long-running processes, accelerated and brought to crisis by the combination of conditions that produced Trump's second term.

The parallels to McCarthyism are real and instructive. Then as now, a demagogue exploited fear, targeted vulnerable populations, demanded loyalty over competence, used the machinery of government to punish political enemies, and built a coalition of true believers and opportunists who enabled the assault on democratic norms. Then as now, the mainstream media fails to cover the corruption and lack of competence adequately.

Robert Reich has written that perhaps after the end of the Trump presidency the tide may turn. “I’m old enough to have witnessed the great sleeping giant of America awaken before. Joe McCarthy’s communist witch hunt destroyed countless careers before the giant roared: “Have you no sense of decency?”

McCarthy melted almost as quickly as the Wicked Witch of the West. His national popularity evaporated. Three years later, censored by his Senate colleagues, ostracized by his party, and ignored by the press, McCarthy drank himself to death, a broken man at the age of 48.

The giant roared again a decade later, after television showed civil rights marchers getting clobbered by white supremacists. Congress passed the Civil Rights Act. It roared again after tens of thousands of young Americans were killed in the jungles of Vietnam, finally bringing to an end one of the nation’s costliest, deadliest, and stupidest wars.

It roared again at Richard Nixon after Nixon was heard on tape plotting the cover-up of Watergate — then being forced to exit the White House by helicopter on his way back to California.

It is starting to roar again now — at the sociopathic occupant of the Oval Office who won’t tolerate criticism, who in one wild week revealed his utter contempt for the freedom of Americans to criticize him, to write or speak negatively about him, even to joke about him.

Maybe I’m being too optimistic, but I’ve seen a lot. I know the signs. The sleeping giant always remains asleep until some venality becomes so noxious, some action so disrespectful of the common good, some brutality so noisy, that he has no choice but to awaken.

And when he does, the good sense of the American people causes him to put an end to whatever it was that awakened him. “

I am, at this point, unable to predict what will happen in the 2026 and 2028 November elections. I am unable to predict whether the Supreme Court will push back against the Trump excesses.

I am 86-year-old man. I have seen this before. Not exactly this. But something like this.

And I am still here.

So it goes.

Chapter 19: Timeline of My Life

- I was born Martin Louis Hittelman in Los Angeles, California on March 23, 1940.
- In 1942 my family moved to Ontario California for my father's job as an engineer at Kaiser Steel in Fontana, California.
- September 1945 - June 1952 – I attended San Antonio Street School in Ontario, California
- October 1952 - June 1955 – I attended Thomas Starr King Junior High in Los Angeles, California
- September 1955 - June 1958 – I attended John Marshall High School in Los Angeles, California
- September 1958 - June 1960 – I attended the University of California Berkeley
- 1960 – I took part in the historic demonstration against the House Un-American Activities Committee in San Francisco, California
- September 1960 - June 1961 – I attended Los Angeles City College
- September 1961 - December 1962 – I attended San Francisco State College (BA Mathematics)
- 1962 - President of Student Activist Group (SLATE) at San Francisco State College
- 1962 – Joined the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) as a student member
- January 1963 - December 1963 – I attended Los Angeles State College (General Secondary Credential)
- June 1963 - 1972 - Married to Keila Pratt
- January 1964 - June 1967 – I taught at Grant High School in Los Angeles (teaching mathematics)
- 1964 – Joined AFT Local 1021 and was elected as a member of its executive board.
- July 1964 – my son Gregory Hittelman was born.
- December 1965 – my daughter Karen Hittelman was born.
- June 1967 - June 1968 – I attended the University of Illinois Urbana (MA Mathematics) on a National Science Foundation sponsored program for high school teachers of mathematics and was active in the Students for a Democratic Society.

- September 1968 - June 1969 – taught at Chatsworth High School in Los Angeles (teaching mathematics)
- 1967 - worked on the formation of the California Peace and Freedom Party and attended its founding convention
- June 1970 - Keila and I separated.
- April 1971 - moved into 525 Georgina Ave Santa Monica collective with 4 other members of the New University Conference
- Summer 1971 - trip to Europe
- 1969-1989 – taught at Los Angeles Harbor College (mathematics)
- 1972-73 – served as Academic Senate President at Harbor College
- September 1974 - Keila, Greg, and Karen move to Healdsburg, California
- 1976-1980 – ran the Harbor Folk Festival
- February 1977 - bought house in Echo Park
- 1983-84 -served as Chief Negotiator for LACCD Technical-Clerical Unit Collective Bargaining Agreement
- 1984 – served as President of AFT Local 1521 (AFT College Guild)
- 1985 – served as member of Fresno and Peralta district Negotiations Fact Finding Committees
- 1987 – began a lasting relationship with Sandra Lepore
- 1989-1991 - elected to State Academic Senate Executive Committee
- September 1990 - January 2007 – taught at Los Angeles Valley College in Van Nuys California (teaching math)
- March 1991 - March 1997 President Community College Council, CFT
- 1991-2007 – served as Senior Vice President of the California Federation of Teachers (CFT)
- 1996 - worked on the formation of the Labor Party in the United States and attended the founding convention as a representative of the California Federation of Teachers
- September 1999 – moved to the Silver Lake area of Los Angeles.
- December 1999 - present - Married to Sandra Lepore and integrated her three children (and their 4 grandchildren) with my two children (and Karen’s daughter)

- March 2001 - March 2007 President Community College Council, CFT
- June 21, 2003 – grand-daughter Ava Odessa Hittelman born.
- 2004 - Began fighting ACCJC via www.accreditationwatch.com
- March 2007 - March 2011 – served as the President of the California Federation of Teachers representing over 100,000 California educational employees.
- 2007 – 2011 – served as a Vice President of the California Federation of Labor
- 2010 - Successfully led the fight to pass California Proposition 25 (majority vote for the Legislature to Pass the Budget Act)
- 2012- - Labor consultant to a number of locals working on community college budgets and negotiations issues as well as helping to produce newsletters.
- 2016 -2019– Managed a number of websites against Trump Regime: www.trumpgoingwild.com, www.trumpgoingwild.org, and www.DonOut.com.
- 2020-present – new websites: oldmanreporting.com, mlhittel.com, and Trumpgoingwildagain.com.
- 2022-2026 – served as an AFT 1521 Executive Board member representing the Emeritus chapter.
- 2025-2026 – served as a member of AFT 1521 COPE Committee representing the Emeritus chapter.

Professor of Mathematics, Los Angeles Harbor College

Professor of Mathematics, Los Angeles Valley College

President, California Federation of Teachers

President, Community College Council/CFT/AFT

Senior Vice President, California Federation of Teachers

Member, AFT Higher Education Planning and Policy Council

Delegate – U.S. Labor Against the War

President, Los Angeles Harbor College Faculty Academic Senate

Member – California Community College State Academic Senate Executive Committee

Chair, LACCD District Budget Committee

Executive Board Member, AFT Faculty Guild Local 1521

Delegate, Los Angeles County Federation of Labor

California Community College Consultation Committee

California Community College Task Forces

- 2001-02 Budget Change Proposal
- 2002-03 Budget Change Proposal
- Fifty Percent Law Technical Task Force
- Finance Task Force

Member, California Master Plan Finance Working Group

Member, AFT Higher Education Part-Time Standards Task Force

Member, AFT Contingency Work Task Force

Community College Council/CFT/AFT: President, Southern Vice President, Secretary

Member, California Community College Academic Senate Executive Committee (1990-1992)

AFT Local 1521: President, Vice President, Secretary, Executive Secretary/Treasurer, Executive Secretary for Grievance, Chapter Chair, Grievance Representative, COPE Committee, Grievance Review Committee

Representative of State Academic Senate at Intersegmental Coordinating Council (Mathematics) (1992)

Chairperson, LACCD Non-Traditional Instruction Committee

President, Californians for Community Colleges

Member, California Community College Ed>Net Executive Committee

Chair, Los Angeles Valley College Budget Committee

California Community College State Task Force Member

- AB 3938 Task Force on Contract Education
- AB 1725 Accountability Task Force
- AB 1725 Personnel Issues Review Group (SB 2298 - Davis)
- Education Code Review Advisory Committee (SB 1854 - Morgan)
- Commission on Innovation, Educational Issues
- Incentive Program Task Force (1994-95)
- Distance Education Task Force (1994-95)
- California Community Colleges Affirmative Action Writing Team
- California Community College Distance Education Technical Advisory Committee

Member, California Education Roundtable Assessment Task Force on Mathematics

Member, State Academic Senate Educational Policies Committee

CFT Representative, Coalition for a Brighter California (1995)

Director, Los Angeles Harbor College Folk Festivals (1978-80)

Chapter 21: Notes on the Archive

This autobiography primarily draws on the materials I have compiled across three websites: mlhittel.com — the primary archive of my life timeline, family stories, the Hittelman Papers, editorials and speeches spanning decades, community college reports, writings on the student movement, and analyses of accreditation battles; oldmanreporting.com — my ongoing progressive commentary on current events; and trumpgoingwildagain.com — my dedicated chronicle of the second Trump regime, since December 2024. Together they constitute the living archive of my life in activism, and I invite those who want the full record to explore all three.

To my family, friends, colleagues, and co-conspirators: the record is here. I am grateful to every one of you. None of what I accomplished was accomplished alone.

— Martin Hittelman

martinhittelman@gmail.com

mlhittel.com · oldmanreporting.com · trumpgoingwildagain.com

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