

# A Heart for PEOPLE— Even in Negotiation

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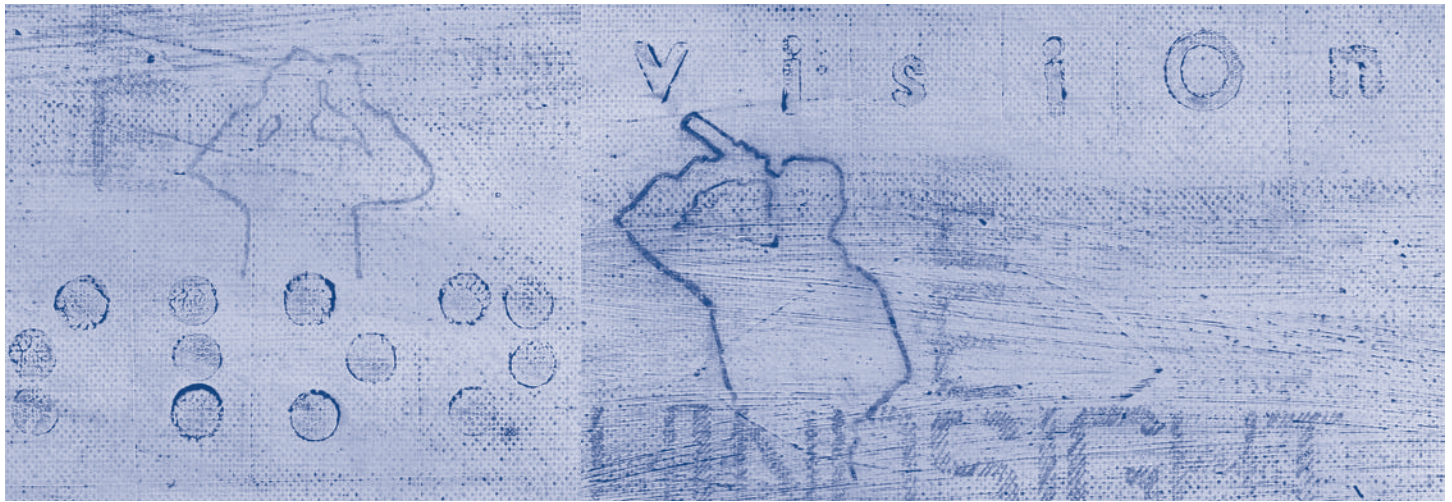
**A**dmittedly, never an exceptional student academically, I did excel in the areas that sparked my interest as a child. I was always interested in people, and I liked to study them. Most of the lessons that prepared me for my life's work in labor-management relations were not taught in any classroom. My true education came from the front seat of a 1929 Model A Ford.

My mother would always make my father drive into town (Milledgeville, Georgia) on Saturday because Saturday night was the biggest night of the week. Everyone in town and those in the country gathered in town, including my father. So, while he was busy getting supplies and catching up on the local gossip, my mother and I would start out walking in a different direction from my father. When we weren't walking, we would sit and wait in the car, watching and learning. As people passed by, we would study them—the way they walked, the way they dressed, the way they laughed in a crowd. We would notice when a lady paused in front of a dress shop that displayed a pretty dress, as she passed it for the second time. "She'll go in this time," my mother would venture, "but she won't buy it." When my father returned to the car, my mother would practically pick him to death about what was said and by whom. My mother, with her

special insight into people, would comment, "Well, he's a man of character." "You can rely on him." Or, it might be an opposite response, such as, "Well, you know he doesn't always tell the truth." "You have to take some things he says with a grain of salt." Even as a young boy, I remember being impressed with what seemed to be my mother's unique ability to see what was real about people and what was phony.

My mother never had much formal education, but she was astute when it came to people. She taught me that there was much more to be said by a person's actions than by his/her words. It was these quiet reflections on human nature and sociology that served me well throughout my career. I would later use what I learned sitting in that car when I was sitting at the bargaining table. At the outset of even the most vicious negotiations, I would first sit back and observe the players. Initially, I would talk about anything except the issues on the table. I just needed to get them talking so I could ascertain their personalities, predict what positions they would likely take, and, most importantly, see who would be the most sincere and constructive.

Federal Judge Larry Silberman wrote: "Observing Bill closely a long time ago, I had the strange sense that he had super-human abilities to peer into the minds of negotiators to discover, perhaps even



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before it was apparent to them, their bottom line. I once explained to another colleague that it reminded me of a dolphin's sonar.”

But there was nothing superhuman about it. It was simply an innate and genuine interest in people—a fundamental trait for a successful negotiator or mediator. Once I generally understood both sides of the table, I could relate to their issues. Then I would become better able to hear what they were really saying. My perception of people and issues in the workplace is what, I believe, set me apart in the world of labor-management relations. I give so much credit to my mother for the lessons I learned about people while sitting in that car.

I would like to share with you three memorable negotiations (there were hundreds of them). The General Dynamics (Convair) negotiation took place during my formative years, and the other two occurred later in my career.

### **General Dynamics (Convair) Negotiations**

As a Special Representative with the International Association of Machinists (IAM) in the 1950s, I was sent to a little-

known place called Cape Canaveral. My original assignment was to spend three days surveying the area and to report back on its growth potential. The Vice President of the IAM in Atlanta and other leaders with the Machinists Union had a keen interest in what was taking place at the Cape. They were well aware that national aerospace companies, like Boeing, Lockheed, Douglas, and Convair, were shifting their attention to the

Cape. New research and development facilities would create hundreds of new jobs and, of course, this would mean hundreds of new workers. These prospective new workers caught the attention of unions. And it would be a natural fit for the IAM since it was already representing these workers on the West Coast and had brought aerospace

workers into its fold in 1954. But there would inevitably be an all-out race to organize this relatively new breed of workers and technicians and to prevent comparable unions from “raiding their memberships.”

The Machinists already had a small presence at the Cape, and raiding had already begun. The IAM senior representative at the Cape was the man I was supposed to meet when I first arrived. But

he was not the man who would take me under his wing. The senior representative made it clear that first day, to anyone within earshot, that he did not have time to be a nursemaid to “a kid” who he felt had been sent down to check up on him. I was stung by this biting remark, but then I overheard another man speak up. “I don’t have anything to do this evening,” he said. “I wouldn’t mind taking ‘The Kid’ to dinner and showing him around.” That man was Frank E’dalگو, a national representative of the AFL. It was Frank E’dalگو who went on to be my trusted advisor, invaluable colleague and loyal friend until his death.

Although he was only about ten years older than I was, and certainly not old enough to keep calling me “The Kid,” E’dalگو looked wise and distinguished. His father came from Mexico and owned a farm in Forsyth, Georgia. E’dalگو had spent his early life as a migrant worker, following the growing seasons up and down the East Coast from Florida to Maine. His innate passion and concern for migrant workers had led him naturally into a prime position as an organizer for the American Federation of Labor. E’dalگو, with his two brothers, was responsible for organizing the first citrus plant in Florida, among his many other accomplishments.

E’dalگو took me to dinner that night and drove me around the desolate but de-

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veloping area. Cocoa, next to its seaside sister community Cocoa Beach, was still a sleepy little fishing village at the time. Its only claim to fame, up to that point, was its self-proclaimed standing as the “Salt Water Trout Capital of the World.” But because of its close proximity to Cape Canaveral, just over ten miles north, Cocoa was on the cusp of a population explosion. It already was beginning to see an influx of technicians, mechanics, scientists, and construction workers moving in alongside fishermen neighbors.

It didn't take me long to see that the Cape was an exciting and growing place. E'dalgo and I discussed its growth and the role unions would play there, the onslaught of automated technology and its inevitable effect on union membership. By the time I left, I had enough to make my survey. And it was enough to send me back to the Cape permanently. My three-day assignment turned into a thirteen-year career spent at one of the most exciting places in the country, during one of the most captivating times in history.

About a year after I arrived at the Cape, I was brought in for my first big negotiation and my first experience in the big leagues. It involved negotiations regarding wages and working conditions between IAM workers and management at Convair, a division of the large aerospace company, General Dynamics. Negotiations had been going on for quite some time, and I was brought in during the last few days.

I found myself at the El Cortez Hotel, set high on a hill, in San Diego, California. A strike at midnight seemed inevitable. I took my place at the table at the end of a long line of delegates from throughout the country, delegates representing the highest levels of union and management. They were down to one issue—the seniority clause. I had hardly gotten caught up on everything before it was announced they would break for dinner. I thought to myself, why are we breaking for dinner? We've got a strike at midnight!

When talks resumed, the Vice President of the company took the floor. His grey hair was tousled, while his tie was crooked and pulled away from his collar. He seemed weary as he began speaking.

“Negotiations have broken down,” he began. “We've tried to bargain in good faith to reach an agreement, but we're not going to settle without three little words: *skill, ability, and efficiency*. All you have to do is put those *three little words* in the seniority clause, and we will honor seniority, as you have demanded. But, instead, you're going to shut down this company and put your people on strike over those *three little words*.”

Great, we're down to the crux of it, I thought. Why don't we start talking about those *three little words*? But I certainly couldn't say it aloud from down at my end of the table, especially on my first negotiation.

In a few minutes, the company Vice President began again, pointing to the clock at the far end of the board room. “We're down to minutes before this strike occurs. It's ridiculous that you guys won't sign. This company pays your members well. But in just a few short minutes, they won't be getting a paycheck anymore, all because of *three little words*.”

Nobody moved.

“In twelve minutes, you guys are going to strike, and 30,000 people are going to be out of work. What's worse is that each of your members probably has a wife or someone who is depending on them keeping that job. So, we're talking about 60,000 people you're going to put on the street.”

The Vice President kept going, laying it on thicker and thicker as he went.

“The saddest thing about all of this is that most of these families probably have at least two kids, and, in just eight minutes, their daddies will be on strike without a paycheck.”

I was deeply concerned about the workers, their families, and the company. I just could not see myself returning to

the Cape to report that a strike would take place with so much at stake. This country was desperately attempting to lose no further ground in keeping up and passing Russia in the space program.

I was almost crying, keeping a close eye on the clock!

By the time it got down to five minutes, there were 150,000 people suffering from the Vice President's hypothetical strike. “All because of *three little words*!,” he thundered, throwing up his hands.

Finally the union spokesman threw back his chair, jumped to his feet, and shouted back: “I'll give you *three little words*!” He climbed onto his chair and put one foot up on the table. “*Kiss my ass!*”

The faces around the table were frozen in shock, waiting for the Vice President's reaction. He broke into a wide grin and started laughing uncontrollably with the union spokesman. It caught on like wildfire around the table, and pretty soon everyone was having a good laugh—everyone except the green kid from the Cape trembling down at the other end of the table.

What in the hell just happened? I thought to myself.

What I later learned was that during that dinner break, the Vice President of Convair and the Union Chairman had found a middle ground. The rest was just a show, put on to make their point and to make sure their committees voted to back their decision. The company had agreed not to put those three little words in, and the seniority language remained unchanged.

The kid was growing up fast! Little did I know that the Cape was being used as a bargaining chip by the union.

## US Sugar Company

My assignment at Cape Canaveral was not limited to the aerospace industry. As a result of the AFL-CIO merger in 1955, many independent unions now had to affiliate with a national union. There-

fore, there were great organizing opportunities now to pick up local unions that would no longer be affiliated with the AFL. While working with the AFL, E'dalgo had represented a local lodge at US Sugar, one of the largest domestic producers of sugar.

I was able to reconnect with Frank E'dalgo almost immediately after taking my post at the Cape. I was never able to shake "The Kid" with E'dalgo, even though I eventually outranked him after he exchanged his position with the AFL for one with the Machinists.

For twelve years, he and I had worked together for the IAM, growing and expanding the membership, handling its grievances and representing it at the bargaining table. By the time I left, there were 4,600 members and I was coordinating eight local lodges.

But for E'dalgo and me, our most significant achievements came, not by bringing union and management together, but by bringing blacks and whites together.

The Executive Orders issued by President Harry Truman to integrate all Federal defense operations were still in effect and were accepted by the IAM. Integration efforts weren't very popular in 1950s Florida, but, for us, it was an issue of *personal* significance.

It hurt me all the time that blacks didn't have the same opportunity as whites did. Even when I was a child, I felt the injustice of segregation. And as a young man returning home from fighting for the freedom of this country, I always felt a moral obligation to do what I could do to right that wrong. I believed that every American deserved an equal opportunity.

At US Sugar in Clewiston, Florida, in the 1950s, the black workers paid their union dues through windows in the back of union halls they weren't even allowed to enter. Black workers had to abide by a curfew and be out of "white town" by 6:00 p.m. So, not only did E'dalgo and

I have to convince the union to allow black workers to enter the union hall, but we also had to convince City Hall to even allow them to enter the town.

It was slow going and never easy. We had to walk a fine line between being too aggressive and losing support and not being aggressive enough to move things forward. We tried to insist that our members understand that if a black man was paying to be a member of an organization, he was entitled to be represented by this organization.

Most people didn't like what we were doing, but, for the most part, they did like us. Both of us had a good reputation around town for being honest and fair. People smiled and spoke on the streets and bought us coffee at the diners, but there were often rumblings under the surface about us stirring up trouble.

We were constantly told by our colleagues not to push too hard—just leave things the way they were and leave the blacks to themselves. Even my most compassionate of friends were nervous about too much change too quickly.

In Cocoa Beach, at the height of the Civil Rights movement, I had to convince the manager of the local Holiday Inn, where I held regular luncheons for area union leaders and management officials, to allow a black man to attend one of my meetings. I used these meetings to get the leaders together to work on ways to prevent strikes and work stoppages—to solidify good relations in which to work together for the good of the emerging Space program. But on the day I invited a black union official to the hotel, the desk clerk refused his entry. I told him to get the manager on the phone. I knew I could appeal to him, and I did. I was determined that segregation could never work.

Although it didn't happen overnight, E'dalgo and I peacefully integrated locals in Cocoa. But one of our most memorable episodes took us further south to South Bay, close to Clewiston,

Florida, and into the cane fields of the US Sugar Company.

Clewiston was in a world far removed from the one I had become accustomed to at the Cape. Much like my hometown of Hardwick, Clewiston was a "company town," largely reliant on US Sugar for its everyday survival. Its residents worked for the company, and many lived in homes owned by the company. Most were poor, unskilled workers, but good, hard-working people. Many were migrant workers who would come in from the islands to work during the cutting season. The agricultural workers had been left behind as far as unionizing was concerned, and that was the reason my friend Frank E'dalgo wanted me to get involved with US Sugar. There was an all-out race to get new members, and US Sugar was fair game. With five hundred or six hundred employees, a union could pick up a powerful bargaining unit if they signed with US Sugar, and I wanted them for the Machinists. E'dalgo and I began making frequent visits to speak at meetings on the white side of town, the black side of town, and even at the migrant worker camp on the outskirts of town.

One night, we invited an IAM official to go with us to a meeting at the migrant farm camp, isolated deep in the cane fields. We met in a run-down recreation room, hot and dusty, with cobwebs hanging from the lights. In true Southern Baptist style, I delivered an almost evangelical speech, reminiscent of the backyard tent revivals I had attended as a boy with my grandparents. My message incited much enthusiasm at the prospect of union protection and equality.

I drove back that night, picking my way carefully on the muddy road snaking through the darkened cane fields. E'dalgo was in the passenger seat, quiet, reflecting on the night's events. But the union official in the backseat was excited and was leaning forward between us doing most of the talking. Just as the lights

from the migrant camp were fading from sight, he said, “Well, I’ll tell you what. I’ve lived forty-three years, and tonight was the first time I ever shook a black man’s hand.”

E’dalgo never took his eyes off the fields in front of him. “Kid, put on the brakes,” he said firmly. “Stop the car.”

“What is it? What’s the matter?” I asked, bringing the car to an abrupt halt and nearly putting the union official into the front seat.

“Where’s the flashlight?” was all E’dalgo said before he ordered us both out of the car. He slammed his door and came quickly around to where we stood next to the rows of cane. He grabbed the union official’s hand and shone the light on it.

“See? It doesn’t come off, does it?”

It was quite a message—one that would always remain clear in my mind.

There would be many more trips through the cane fields and, eventually, workers did vote to join the Machinists. Now that US Sugar was part of the Machinists, there would be an installation of a new charter, and I wanted *every* member of the union there for the event.

The union hall was not big enough to seat everyone, but, just across town, the company had built a new facility called Sugarland Auditorium. I asked the company for permission to use its auditorium for the installation ceremony, and it was about to be granted until I mentioned that every member—black or white—was invited. They would have a riot on their hands, the company told me, if they agreed to that.

Unfortunately, I knew it was a valid fear, but I also felt strongly that I could pull it off with no problems. I went to the sheriff to explain my plan and asked for his support and cooperation. Reluctantly, he agreed to provide security for the event, and I had enough to persuade the company to let me have the auditorium.

Since I had promised both the sheriff and the company a peaceful event, I had

to make sure of it. I first consulted with the black leaders to discuss the best way to handle the uneasy situation. They too were not interested in causing any problems. They agreed it would be better if they all sat together on one side of the auditorium and took their food and drinks from a separate table. I then approached the white members and asked them to do the same thing.

When it came time for the meeting, the sheriff had his cars patrolling the auditorium. People were nervous as they entered and talked in hushed tones while they fixed plates of food from the two different tables. Everything was going smoothly, exactly as planned. But I began noticing that the stragglers who came in late were getting their food off the wrong tables. Some were even sitting on the wrong side, and nobody even cared or noticed. Tensions had eased, and by the time the ceremony got under way, I was looking out at a relatively comfortably mixed membership. I knew then that our event had become the successful first step that would allow us to move toward holding regular mixed meetings in the future.

But it was not going to be as easy as I thought that night. Not long after the installation ceremony, E’dalgo and I faced the strongest opposition yet in our integration efforts. We were stopped on the way home one night by four cars on a deserted road. A group of men filed out and circled our car, their faces covered. I was sure I recognized the shoes of a couple of them. Finally, one man spoke up and said they were all just wondering if there was going to be a mixed union meeting the next night. I had to bite my tongue to keep from saying, “Damn right, there’s going to be a mixed meeting!” I knew that answer would only bring trouble, and E’dalgo and I were outnumbered. “We were planning to,” I said, choosing my words. “If I was you, I’d change my plans,” one of the men threatened. A few seconds seemed like an

eternity before he turned on his heel and the circle disbanded, disappearing behind the headlights of their waiting cars.

E’dalgo and I drove home in silence, unnerved by the encounter, angry at being caught helpless and determined not to let this event run us out of town. Two weeks later, we came back to Clewiston and held our mixed meeting in the nice new union hall on the white side of town.

We were heroes that first year of negotiations with US Sugar. We worked like hell to get two dollars an hour—big wages at that time—and we did. I especially enjoyed working on this agreement because it was so appreciated by the workers.

This was so different from the Cape. I was accustomed to technicians fighting over seniority, promotions, and overtime. So it felt good at US Sugar to win even the most basic concessions for their employees, who previously were given only one holiday—Christmas Day—and it was unpaid. I liked getting away from the petty stuff and going down to help people who really didn’t have anything. You could feel your heart set right and feel good about the things you’d done.

Even now I have such fond memories of Clewiston. I liked going back there occasionally for personal reasons, especially to the migrant camp. It cleansed my soul, and it reminded me of what unions were really all about—helping and supporting those who really needed it.

### **Philadelphia Teachers Strike**

In 1972, when Jim Hodgson was replaced as US Secretary of Labor, I found myself between jobs, dealing with my own inner disputes, and wondering if I even wanted to stay in the Labor Department. I wanted to take a few days to mull all this over, so I headed for Bal Harbour, Florida, as was a tradition every year, to attend the AFL-CIO annual winter meeting, as a representative of the Federal government, to talk with labor and management officials. I even brought along my golf clubs

for the first time, thinking I could get in a few holes, something I hadn't been able to do in the past. I checked into the Americana Hotel late at night. Early the next morning, I heard a voice calling me. It was George Meany. We made the perfunctory small talk, and I told him I planned to get in some golf this year. Taking his cigar from his lips, he said, "Brother Bill, I don't think you're going to get a chance to play any golf. I just got off the phone with President Nixon, and I've asked him if he would send you up to Philadelphia. Seems like a bunch of people have gotten themselves locked up over the teachers' strike, and everybody's worried it's going to go citywide."

I knew the teachers had been on strike for almost two months, but I hadn't paid close attention because it was a state and city matter, not something in which the Federal government would ordinarily get involved. I had just sat down to breakfast when I got the call from the White House. President Nixon got right to the point. "Bill, I had a conversation with George Meany this morning," he said, and began explaining what Meany had already told me about the strike. "I know we wouldn't normally get involved in a state issue like this, but, you know, we need to help George and the city as much as we can." The President knew how unusual it was for Meany to come to him for help, and he was desperately seeking to satisfy Meany. It was clearly a favor for him. And President Nixon, of course, understood the unique camaraderie that existed between George and me. I really didn't feel like I needed another dispute at this particular time in my life, but when the head of Labor calls the President of the United States and asks for help, you respond.

I called my Regional Director in Philadelphia, as well as my office in Wash-

ington, and asked them to gather all the information and intelligence they could, including newspaper clippings. I asked my Regional Director to come to Washington, and he and I together would travel to Philadelphia by train, and I would be fully briefed on the train. The fact was the confrontation in Philadelphia was a complex one involving several key parties. The Philadelphia Federation of Teachers Local No. 3, one of the oldest and largest teachers unions in the nation, was clearly in crisis, with its leadership in jail and massive fines assessed for defying court-imposed back-to-work orders. The labor movement was powerful in Philadelphia, and as tension surrounding the strike reached a fever pitch, the city's unions threatened to call a general strike, calling on all workers to leave their jobs. If successful, a general strike would paralyze the Philadelphia economy and

would have a strong negative impact on the entire regional financial system.

To be a good mediator, you must always think ahead, imagining all possible scenarios and perceptions. On the train to Philadelphia, I spent much of that time trying to decide whom I should go see

first—the Mayor, the school board, the union, or the judge? Even though I was aware that the news was already out that I was coming into town, and the press would be waiting and watching to see with whom I would touch base first, I did want to arrive inconspicuously. If I went to the Mayor, the unions would fly off the handle—and think I'm working for him—get discouraged and be harder to work with. If I went to see the strikers first, I would be judged as a former labor goon taking care of his people—undermining my authority as a government official.

I decided I must first see the judge who had locked up the leaders of the

union committee. Seeing the judge first might help me maintain my status as a neutral, plus I would have to have them out of jail to get any work done. But when I got off the train in Philadelphia, I found, waiting at the top of the escalator, two big cops sent by Mayor Rizzo to bring me to his office immediately. "Are you Mr. Usery?" they asked. "We're under orders to take you immediately to the Mayor's office and provide you protection." I stated that I did not need any protection. However, we got into the police cars and went racing off, with the sirens blasting, to the Mayor's office. So much for my inconspicuous arrival!

Mayor Rizzo greeted me at his offices, welcomed me to the city, and then proceeded to tell me what I could and could not do, or what I wasn't going to do. So he and I had quite a discussion. There was an extreme amount of distrust surrounding Rizzo, I soon discovered. When negotiations started later, the union refused to go into the meeting hall that Rizzo had arranged for us to use, certain that it was bugged. One day, a street vendor came up and said he wanted to give us some doughnuts and coffee—anything he could do to help settle the dispute. The union refused to even let him step foot inside, saying he was a spy sent by Rizzo.

Rizzo was almost too helpful, and I hadn't just fallen off the turnip truck. He wanted to assign the two police officers to me for protection (I knew these two policemen were going to report back to Rizzo on my every move). I respectfully declined. He let me know he had made arrangements for my hotel suite. I told him I had already reserved a room at another hotel.

I went straight from the Mayor's office to see the judge. He was upset, and rightfully so. He had tried his hand at mediation and failed. You thumb a judge, and you're in hot water already. He had sent the two labor leaders to jail, lots of other people were in contempt

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of court, and several others had been arrested. I respectfully asked the judge to release these people, and he said no. I was appealing to him—how can you negotiate with them in jail? I wasn't going to give up. How would you propose a settlement if you're locked up? Finally, he and I agreed to make my hotel suite an extension of the jail. Bailiffs would be posted outside my door, and no prisoner could leave my suite. I went immediately to the jail to see Warren Sullivan, President of the Union, and John Ryan, Chairman of the Negotiating Committee. I delivered the good news to them: I had spoken to the judge, he had agreed to release John Ryan into my custody, we were doing our best to resume negotiations and, hopefully, it would all be over soon. Two days had passed since I first arrived in Philadelphia.

Once this news had been delivered, I only wanted to talk to John Ryan. As Chairman, he was the primary person to talk to. Ryan was brought out again at the jail, and we talked through the glass. It was difficult. Finally, they let me use a little room off to the side—probably where attorneys meet with clients—and Ryan almost fell apart. "I apologize, Mr. Usery, but this is the first time I've shaken hands with anybody since I've been in here," he said. "My wife comes to see me, and they won't let me touch her. She puts her hand up to the glass, and they won't even let me put my hand up against hers." He was practically in tears—hell, he almost had me in tears! He had never been in jail before in his life. He wasn't some hardened criminal, and I'm sure he was sitting there wondering if it was really worth it all.

My mother had taught me well about people. She never taught me to maliciously manipulate people or take advantage of a desperate situation. In fact, she warned me on several occasions against such behavior. But I knew from my mediation that, if you find a hole, you

jump in. And I saw an opening. A good mediator knows how to play strengths and weaknesses—not to take advantage of weaknesses but know when people are ready to make a decision and know what to say to them to help them see things differently. This was my shot with Ryan.

Ryan was escorted to my "extension of the jail" that evening. Thankful, no doubt, to be out of jail. He was probably ready to start seriously talking about resolving the dispute, but I wanted to solidify it. Instead of bringing up the situation, I shocked him by asking him a simple question: "What's your wife's phone number?" He was confused. "But, Mr. Usery, they won't let me talk to her!" "I know they won't let you talk to her but they didn't say I couldn't." I called his wife and shocked her with a question. "How long would it take you to get down to my suite?" She was on the next train. The bailiffs didn't know what was going on. "Now, the only thing the judge said you had to do was to make sure the prisoner never left my room," I told them. "That's all you have to do. Nobody leaves my room."

Ryan couldn't believe it. "What are you going to do?" he asked. "I'm going to dinner," I said. "I want you to look over the menu and order dinner for you and your wife and charge it to my room. I'll be back in exactly three hours." Ryan never forgot my kindness. I later joked with him that I never had any problems out of him after that night.

The next day we hit negotiations hard. I kept them there all day and night, giving them little rest. We were down to the wire. If we didn't come up with something, the whole city threatened to shut down in three days. Every opportunity I got, I would slip out and go across town to meet with other labor leaders of the city to try to convince them that an agreement was coming and we desperately needed to avert a citywide strike, which could only complicate things fur-

ther. They really wanted to be talked out of a citywide strike, and the pressure was on to get an agreement.

It was very difficult bargaining on many issues—classroom size, wages, hours, lack of materials needed to teach. The school board was in a bind because they didn't have the money. To make matters worse, the good Mayor would call me every hour to see what we were doing to stop a citywide strike. I kept telling the Mayor that I would keep him informed. He wanted to be there when we announced any settlement to the press—obviously, a political move on his part. And I kept my word. We reached an agreement in the wee hours of the morning—3:30 or so. I called to tell him we would hold a 6:00 a.m. press conference at the hotel in time to make the 7:00 a.m. news so he could be there. I asked that he keep it confidential until the announcement because I had the school board and the union with me and it was important that we show unity. By the time we got to the press conference, however, Rizzo had already gotten the jump on everybody. He had called the TV stations and newspapers himself, allowing news of the settlement to come from the good Mayor.

The committee was furious, but I found the humor in it. Every dog has its day. I went to breakfast after the press conference. Just like several days before, shortly after sitting down, the maitre d' came to me with a call from the White House. President Nixon congratulated me and thanked me for successfully achieving the goal that Mr. Meany had wanted so badly.

Because of the Philadelphia Teachers strike, I decided to stay in government. With all humility, I knew the new Secretary of Labor could not have handled this strike—getting into a strike that the Federal government had no business being in. It had to be someone who truly believed in collective bargaining and

understood the government's role. And, again with all humility, I felt that with my experience in the world of negotiation, I understood the major characters and the roles each one played on the bargaining stage. On the phone that morning, President Nixon had told me to get back to Washington as soon as I could. I obeyed—my decision made and ready to stay in the government. I was asked to accept the position of National Director of the Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service.

### Some Final Thoughts

Now at age 87, as I think about these early negotiations, I also think back to my youth, sitting in that 1929 Model A Ford and all the things my mother taught me about people. I think that whatever success I gained in my career and in my life, I owe to my mother's simple act of love and commitment, to sit with me in town Saturday nights to watch and learn about people. For years and years, I didn't recognize all we were doing at that time—my mother and I—watching people. Now I know for sure it was not

a waste of time. All through life, I've continued to hear the quiet voice of my mother telling me to laugh with the one who is pulling my funny bone; to cry or pray with the one who is pulling my heart strings, and to honor and respect the one of a different color and nationality, because "all men are created equal."

My mother also made it possible for me to enroll in and wear the uniform of Georgia Military College, which disciplined and structured me for a life of service to my country. As a nurse at Central State Hospital in Milledgeville, Georgia, she took a lower-paying job to work in the laundry in order to ensure that I had clean, pressed, and mended uniforms.

I have devoted my life to serving the American workplace and its people in both labor and management. Upon reflection, I hope that my contributions to the welfare of people I have served have also served my mother well.

#### NOTE

Mr. Usery appreciates the assistance of Judy Archer, Andrea Gable, and Barry Hirsch.



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