



Zaslavsky and Frumkin in Reagan's Century City office.

The last time I met Reagan

The current uproar about the canceled Reagan miniseries reminded me of the last time I met the president. I had first met him when he ran for president and I supported him as a member of Democrats for Reagan (Yes, believe it or not, I used to be a Democrat. I didn't change – the

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Party did and I said goodbye when it left me. But that's another story). I met him again a few years later when I was invited to have dinner at the White House. It was an event honoring one of the African presidents – I don't remember who it was – but I do remember that my wife decided to change her hairdo just before we left the hotel and we were late getting to the White House, something that apparently happens very seldom. It caused a flurry of phone calls from Washington to my office in Los Angeles with the Secret Service wanting to know

B Y S I F R U M K I N

where we were and why weren't we at the dinner. In the end it all turned out just fine – we enjoyed the dinner, my wife danced with the president who complimented her on her hairdo, and we chatted about the beautiful white horse he had just been given by the president of Mexico. Reagan insisted that the horse wasn't a gift. "That would be illegal," he chuckled, "it was a loan, just a loan until I give it back ..."

The last time I met Reagan was after he had left office – in the early '90s. I got a call from someone in Washington who told me that a member of the Russian Duma was coming to Los Angeles to see President Reagan and would I be willing to interpret during the visit, just in case the Russian didn't speak any English.

As it turned out, my services were not really needed. Ilya Zaslavsky, the young Russian parliamentarian, was quite fluent in English. We met in the lobby of the Century City office building where Reagan's office was on the top floor. Secret Service accompanied us into the elevator that didn't even have the top floor marked on its control panel. Our escort used a special key to go up and President Reagan came out, smiling, to greet us.

DISABLED RIGHTS PLATFORM

Our meeting lasted less than twenty minutes. Mr. Zaslavsky, who is handicapped and uses crutches to walk, had been elected to the Duma in 1989 on a disabled rights platform. In 1990, still in his early 30s, he was elected to head the Oktyabrsky district in Moscow, a ward of 230,000 people. (I got this information off the Internet. Mr. Zaslavsky never mentioned how important or clever



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er or powerful he was – he just sat there, awed, listening to Reagan).

He and the president complimented one another, Mr. Reagan told a few jokes and we had our pictures taken. Eventually the ex-president presented Mr. Zaslavsky with an autographed copy of his book, we all smiled, shook hands and the visit was over.

We took the elevator down and when we walked into the Century City sunshine I had a brief farewell conversation with Mr. Zaslavsky. I then understood much that hadn't been clear to me before and probably isn't yet clear to the CBS executives who approved the Reagan miniseries. It will never be clear to the show business attack mongrels whose salaries exceed their I.Qs by a million to one.

I asked Zaslavsky what his plans were for Los Angeles and offered

to drive him around and show him the city.

He seemed surprised. "I am not staying in L.A.," he said. "I am on my way to the airport. I am catching a plane back to Washington."

"Oh?" I said smiling. "It doesn't seem that it was worth a trip from D.C. to L.A. and back again just for twenty minutes with Reagan. Was it?"

HONEST AMAZEMENT

He looked at me in honest amazement. I had a distinct feeling that he thought me surprisingly stupid.

"Not worth it?" he said in disbelief. "What are you talking about? This is a man who saved our country. He saved Europe. He probably saved the world – and America as well. Are you kidding? I would travel a week, a month, just to shake his hand..."

He slowly turned and limped away. I stood there, embarrassed. Zaslavsky's contempt for my ignorance was well deserved.

He was right. Ronald Reagan did win the most important battle of the 20th century. He recognized the Evil Empire for the evil that it was, he took it on, and he won. He — and some of his successors, including the current president — recognized and believed that America's destiny and America's duty is to fight evil. If it weren't for President Reagan the Soviet Union might still be a superpower and the U.S. might be isolated, alone, and facing a hostile Soviet-dominated world. The mental midgets and historical illiterates who denigrate his accomplishments will be forgotten but the generations of those who will live in freedom, as free men and women, will honor his name.

CFR

The Tree and I



William R. Allen

In the center of my backyard, there is an old orange tree. It was there when my wife and I moved to the house in 1961. It has been an ornament of nature, nicely shaped and highly productive of excellent fruit. A few years ago, it began to show its age; the orange crops became ever smaller and then ended. The tree obviously is now dead — no fruit, no leaves, peeling bark. But it still stands, seemingly in unpretentious pride. Its period of production is over, but it sustains its stance of serenity.

As long as I am here, it will be permitted to remain until it falls of its own accord. My relation with the tree is partly sentimental: It has been a friend, not only to me, but to my wife, two daughters, and three dogs.

Further, while it is stark with its bare limbs, it is still beautiful to me. Old age and the dignity, if not the infirmity, of maturity, in both people and trees, can exhibit a particular attractiveness — even if the attractiveness is discerned only by the elderly.

Most important, the tree reminds me of me: Dead but still standing.

I have not yet fully expired, to be sure. Although decrepit, senile, and virtually braindead, I still perform a required variety of life's mundane chores. And I continue to teach part-time — or at least to conduct classes — at UCLA, even if the very young customers seem not prepared intellectually or psychologically fully to appreciate my erudition, wisdom, and insightfulness.

But much of life has drained away during the past three and one-half years, as my wife had to leave in June 2000, and the last of my noble dogs followed in January 2002.

I will eventually join them and others who have preceded in the innumerable caravan. The old tree and I will finally fall — and the greater loss may be deemed to be the tree.

Meanwhile, the tree and I can seek consolation, comfort, and courage in the assurance of the blind Milton that “they also serve who only stand and wait.”

CFR

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