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Introduction of Daniel Schorr

by
BETTY MEDSGER*

I am honored to have been asked to introduce Dan Schorr, this year's Mathew O. Tobriner Memorial lecturer. I have regarded knowing these two people, Mathew Tobriner and Dan Schorr, as a privilege. So, it is a special honor to introduce one of them at this event that honors and perpetuates the memory and values of the other.

Justice Tobriner was a jurist of extraordinary brilliance, a person committed to fairness and justice in his professional and personal life, and a person of great courage. Dan Schorr possesses these same qualities. Just as Justice Tobriner was one of the leading jurists of his era, Daniel Schorr is one of the leading journalists of his era. What an era that has been, and what a role he has played in it. He has covered or provided commentary on virtually *every* major national and international event of the last fifty years.

Like Justice Tobriner, Dan Schorr stands out as a brilliant member of his profession. In a profession that is sometimes known for being a mile wide and an inch deep, Dan is intellectually wide *and* deep. He not only has covered an extraordinary number of important events in the last half of the 20th century, but he has covered them with depth and understanding. Though he has always been quick and agile and able to beat most of the other reporters covering just about any given story, he has also been reflective and searching throughout his career, looking for the context, the connections, the roots that might help today's events make a little more sense to the public. Or, if not make sense, he at least tries to raise a few questions about the good, bad, and ugly daily events of the world and does this in a much more thoughtful way than much of the superficial reporting we see and hear. When you listen to Dan Schorr's reporting and commentary, you are likely to be left thinking, not just shocked.

Dan describes himself as the last of the Edward R. Murrow legendary CBS team still fully active in journalism. That means that

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there are a lot of events about which Dan can say, "Been there. Done that." McCarthy's 1953 hearings? He was there. The 1955 Eisenhower-Khrushchev summit in Geneva? He was there. The famous Khrushchev tour of the United States in 1959? He was there. The 1988 Reagan-Gorbachev conference in Moscow? He was there. He has interviewed, often exclusively, dozens of heads of state, including Fidel Castro.

But lest this man be seen as one who specializes only in talking with the most powerful people on earth, it is important to note that his reporting also has included some of the best reporting done on the major social issues of our society and how these issues affect the least powerful people. I refer to his reporting on civil rights, racism, urban affairs, poverty, injustice, children, and education. He reported on these issues in his day-to-day CBS reporting as well as on network documentaries, and later on PBS and NPR. His work on such issues also includes coauthorship with his wife, Lisbeth Bamberger Schorr, of the book *Within Our Reach*, discussing programs for the disadvantaged.¹

Dan's career as a journalist began in Europe during 1946. From there, he reported for the *Christian Science Monitor* and later *The New York Times* on postwar reconstruction, the Marshall Plan, and the creation of the NATO alliance.² Murrow had the good judgment to hire him at CBS as a diplomatic correspondent.³ In 1955, he opened the CBS bureau in Moscow.⁴ While there, he interviewed Nikita Khrushchev in his Kremlin office.⁵ It was the first television interview ever given by a Soviet leader.

After two and a half years in Moscow, Schorr was not welcome to conduct exclusive interviews, or to do much of anything. After repeated defiance of Soviet censorship, he was investigated by the KGB. He was arrested on trumped up charges and expelled from the Soviet Union at the end of 1957.

During the next two years, Schorr reported for CBS from Washington and the United Nations. During this phase of his career, he traveled throughout the world on assignment. In 1960, he was assigned to Bonn as CBS bureau chief for Germany and Eastern Europe. He covered the Berlin crisis and the building of the Berlin Wall.

1. DANIEL SCHORR & LISBETH BAMBERGER SCHORR, *WITHIN OUR REACH: BREAKING THE CYCLE OF THE DISADVANTAGED* (1988).

2. Roxanne Roberts, *The Schorr Thing*, WASH. POST, Oct. 4, 1991, at B1.

3. *Id.*

4. *Id.*

5. *Id.*

He was reassigned to Washington in 1966 and became “re-Americanized,” as he puts it. He covered various crucial domestic issues from then until 1972, when Watergate became his middle name. His exclusive investigative reporting and his exceptionally good day-to-day coverage of the Senate Watergate hearings earned him three Emmies.⁶

As it turned out, President Nixon also had been watching Dan’s coverage and, in his own way, found it distinctive, even if not distinguished. Nixon placed Dan’s name on what later was revealed to be his famous “enemies” list.⁷ That distinction, in some circles, was somewhat of an award. However, Nixon went farther and did something to Dan that was more ominous, and less joke-inspiring, than being on his enemies’ list. He ordered that Dan be investigated by the FBI.⁸ For those in the audience too young to remember, that’s what Nixon often did to journalists and others whose words about him or whose political activities he did not like. By the way, this “abuse of a Federal agency,” Nixon’s action against Dan, was one count in the Bill of Impeachment on which Nixon would have been tried had he not resigned in August 1974. All of this probably made Dan Schorr the only journalist who was scorned by top officials of both the Soviet Union *and* the United States and who has been investigated by both the KGB *and* the FBI.

With Nixon out of office in 1974, our intrepid reporter moved on that fall to cover the historic investigations of the FBI and CIA that were taking place in Congress. This was the first time that Congress had investigated either of these powerful intelligence agencies. What Congress would learn about past illegal activity by these agencies and what oversight it would conclude was needed of these agencies by Congress would have been important stories at any time. But in the aftermath of Watergate and the Vietnam War, they were extremely important.

A rather extraordinary development occurred at the end of the hearings that led to Dan’s once again demonstrating his tenacity *and* his courage. Despite the fact that only two years earlier a President had left office in disgrace that resulted from criminal actions and massive government secrecy, the House of Representatives voted in February 1976 to suppress the long-awaited and very important report of its intelligence investigating committee.⁹

6. Susan Heller Anderson, *Chronicle*, N.Y. TIMES, Apr. 13, 1991, at 24.

7. *Id.*

8. *Id.*

9. *The Press*, ECONOMIST, Sept. 25, 1976, at 52.

Despite congressional efforts to keep this report buried, Dan Schorr got a copy of that report and arranged for its publication.¹⁰ This constituted an act that might be called double jeopardy disobedience: civil disobedience, against Congress, whose House Ethics Committee immediately began an investigation of Dan, and corporate disobedience, against CBS, which reacted by suspending its then most widely respected reporter for this action.¹¹

Embarrassed and angry, Congress went after the messenger. It threatened Dan with jail for contempt of Congress if he would not disclose his source. By this time, it was clear that the information in the report was, indeed, knowledge the public needed to know and that Congress, as Nixon had earlier, was using secrecy not to protect national security but to keep the public uninformed about the questionable behavior of its officials and its agencies. Nevertheless, Congress persisted, and held a public hearing. Dan's response at that hearing remains one of the historic acts of bravery by a journalist on behalf of the First Amendment, on behalf of the journalist's responsibility to serve the public's interest. Seated in the witness chair, not his usual place, and with cameras focused on him as subject rather than as reporter, Dan told the assembled members of Congress that he would not reveal his source on First Amendment grounds. "To betray a source," he told them, "would mean to dry up many future sources for many future reporters. . . . It would mean betraying myself, my career and my life."

Consequently, Congress did not issue a contempt citation. And, instead of going to jail, Dan went to Berkeley for a semester as a Regents professor, wrote a newspaper column for two years, and wrote *Clearing the Air*, a book about his experience.¹² Though CBS asked him to return, Dan said no, thanks. He returned to broadcasting in 1979, when he helped then little known Ted Turner create a then little known news organization called Cable News Network.¹³ Dan was CNN's senior correspondent in Washington until 1985, when he left in a dispute over his editorial independence.¹⁴

Since then he has been working for National Public Radio as the senior news analyst.¹⁵ His deep and wide skills as a journalist show up in many parts of NPR's news operation. Though he has regular spots

10. Lois Romano, *Schorr: Connecting on Cable*, WASH. POST, March 29, 1984, at D1.

11. *Id.*

12. DANIEL SCHORR, *CLEARING THE AIR* (1977).

13. John Freeman, *Real News No Match for "Reality-Based" T.V. Fare, Says Schorr*, SAN DIEGO UNION-TRIBUNE, Apr. 20, 1983, at E8.

14. *Id.*

15. *Id.*

as commentator on daily and weekend programs, he also may pop up at any time when news breaks on a subject on which Dan's amazing personal data base, his well stocked brain, has important information and insights not available on any computer database in the NPR newsroom and perhaps not in any newsroom in the country.

His awards say a lot. First, Dan has three Emmies for his Watergate coverage.¹⁶ For his defense of the First Amendment, he has been honored by professional organizations, civil liberties groups,¹⁷ and European heads of state. He has received virtually every high honor available to a journalist: the Alfred I. duPont-Columbia University award,¹⁸ admission to the Hall of Fame of the Society of Professional Journalists,¹⁹ the Distinguished Service Award of the National Association of Journalism Education Administrators, the George Polk radio commentary award,²⁰ and the Theodore White Lectureship at Harvard.²¹

These awards, though, only begin to tell the story of journalist Dan Schorr. The main part of the story of who our speaker is has to do with the keenness of his mind, his generosity of spirit toward humankind and what its members need to know in order to understand and serve each other better, and, again, like Justice Tobriner, his willingness *not only to know* the meaning of courage but to *be* courageous when the need arises.

It is my pleasure, and, indeed, an honor, to present to you a journalist who has continuously demonstrated his commitment to using and protecting the First Amendment in order to serve *not* the interests of government, *not* the interests of his corporate employers, *not* his own ambitions but, rather, to serve *first* the interests and needs of a democratic society—Daniel Schorr.

16. Anderson, *supra* note 6.

17. *ACLU to Honor Schorr, Irving*, SAN DIEGO UNION-TRIBUNE, May 3, 1991, at B10.

18. *Schorr Takes Top Honors at du-Pont-Columbia Awards*, L.A. TIMES, Jan. 27, 1996, at F20.

19. *NPR News Analyst Daniel Schorr to Speak in San Francisco on March 13*, BUS. WIRE, Mar. 10, 1995.

20. *Polk Awards Honor Schorr, Dudman, Amanpour*, MEDIA DAILY, Mar. 8, 1994.

21. Daniel Schorr, *The Evolution of the Political Leak*, CHRISTIAN SCI. MONITOR, Jan. 3, 1994, at 19.

