

A SPECIAL 48-PAGE TRIBUTE

ColdType

WRITING WORTH READING

ISSUE 96

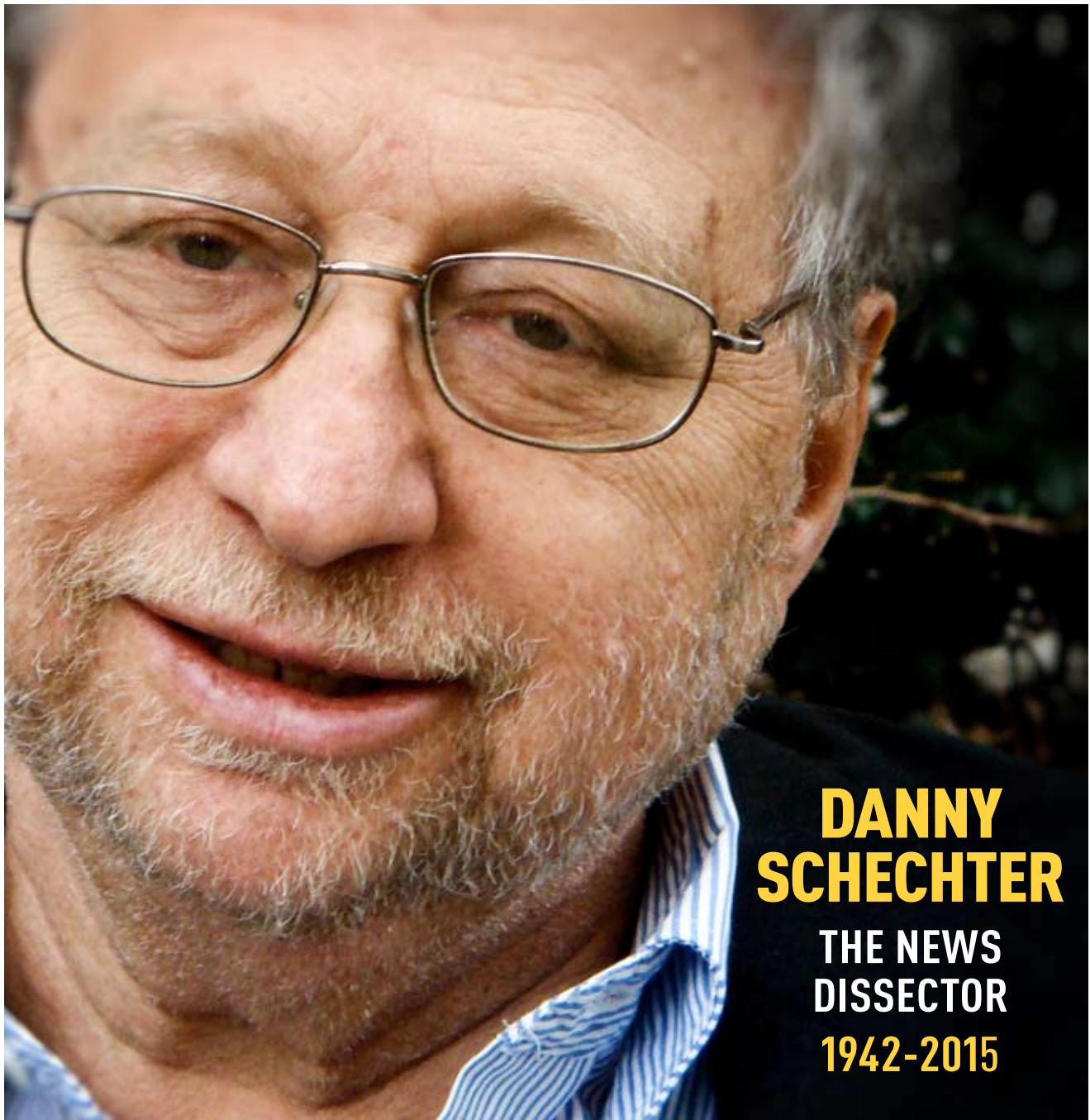


Photo: Joyce Ravid

**DANNY
SCHECHTER**

**THE NEWS
DISSECTOR**

1942-2015

Go Higher

At the end of a year there's a sigh
welling from within
What was done, undone?
How have we changed?
Save the ravages of age?
When you see too much,
You think you know too much
My challenge: Can I feel more
Think less?
What next to work for
And become
Open to change within?
Is the die cast?
Has the journey become
The destination?
Tick, tick, tick...
Is it over before it's over?
I feel estranged in two countries
with only dreams to remember
A moment for reflection erupts
Staring off, I stare within
There is a pause
A silence too
As days grown shorter
And nights darker
Only to say,
unexpectedly
Light smiled into my
world and helped me
Go higher

Danny Schechter

31 December 2012



News Dissector at work, WBCN.

Hamba Kahle, Comrade

By Tony Sutton, ColdType editor

I've worked on many projects with Danny Schechter during the past 12 years, producing seven of his books and publishing his essays and columns in *ColdType*. However, unlike everything before, this special edition of *ColdType* is one I've been dreading over the too-short six months since he told me he had cancer.

I spluttered several platitudes of disbelief when he told me of his illness, but he softly confirmed the diagnosis before saying we had another book to publish together, one he'd already titled – *Topic Of Cancer* – a journal of his struggle with his illness.

The first pages of the manuscript arrived in my in-box a couple of weeks later, followed by additions every week or so. Each time we spoke, he asked what I thought of his writing and how the book was progressing. Fine, I'd reply, not wanting him to know that, other

than reading his words, I just couldn't start editing until . . . well, you know when.

Sadly, work on *Topic* is now under way, and it's like everything Danny and I have worked on before: precise, meticulous, funny, serious. Indispensable. *Topic of Cancer* will initially be produced as an ebook at ColdType.net, while awaiting a publisher for the printed paperback version. Until then, I hope you'll enjoy this 48-page souvenir, packed with loving memories from colleagues and friends, beginning with a wonderful essay from his daughter, Sarah.

Many thanks to everyone who contributed to this special tribute. Danny has been, and will always be, a source of inspiration and a fine example to us all.

Hamba Kahle, Comrade. As the tears dry, our memories will blossom. ●



Their first of many adventures. Cape Cod 1977.

My father. Our Hero

Sarah Schechter pays tribute to the father she shared with the world

Danny Schechter had many job titles, from “The News Dissector” to Human Rights Activist, from Journalist to Filmmaker, from Media Critic to Mentor, but I am the only one lucky enough to know him by the most important title he ever held, Dad. He always made sure I knew it, even as he juggled five lifetime’s worth of work. He made it seem easy.

There are wonderful words throughout this issue which will give you a taste (just a taste!) of his genius, the reach of his work, and the difference he made in the world. I don’t need to rehash that. What I can uniquely testify to is what he was like as a father. He was incredible. He loved me so deeply and clearly. I am so blessed to have him as my first and most important teacher. He taught me that every-

one is equal and everyone deserves respect. He showed me that one man can make a difference on multiple continents. Not only is there always time to help a person in need, it is our responsibility to help. It is easy to do if you just try.

It wasn’t always easy sharing my dad with the world. I remember one summer vacation on Cape Cod coincided with the Iran Contra Hearings. He dragged a TV to a window overlooking the deck and spent every day glued to the TV. He thought if he was outside, it counted as vacation. My childhood was spent at protests, in offices, at shoots, at events, and holding his hand through various airports. I was surrounded by ANC exiles, musicians, filmmakers, political leaders, journalists, and the like. There were always PILES of newspa-

Remembering Danny Schechter

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Above: The family smile. Below: Danny recruited Sarah to help with interviews at an early age.



pers, always people to be met, always movies to see, things to do.

He was electric and alive every minute. He once took me on assignment with him to a Navajo reservation for a 20/20 story. He always wanted me to understand how big the world was. I just remember how he talked his way out of a ticket for driving 88 miles an hour through the desert. It is particularly impressive because I was sitting next to him repeatedly saying “Dad! 88 miles?” I loved the Red Sox so he managed to get one ticket to the 1986 world series through a friend. He sat me in my seat and waited just outside the gate to make sure I was okay. He always found a way. I would get emails and calls from him from all over the world. I couldn’t even keep up. “With love from the Congo...” “in Chicago...” “back in

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Remembering Danny Schechter



Above: New Hampshire, February 1983 Photo by Jerry Bernt. Below: Always comfortable in his arms, 1976

South Africa...” he was everywhere. I hope he still is. One year I was the first to wish him a happy birthday. He wrote back, “You were the first. And always are.” Loving him was easy.

He was hilarious. He could always make me laugh and make me think. I have heard many stories about his temper but I never saw that. When I was 12 and had to do a school report on an important woman in history, he suggested Tina Turner. Of course I did it. In high school I had to do a research report on American History, most kids picked presidents. I picked Abbie Hoffman. What can I say? I am proudly my father’s daughter. He was so incredibly supportive and loving and always made sure I knew how proud he was of me. I did the same. It was easy with him.

A few other things you should know. He was an incredible dancer. He loved music. He loved Mel Brooks. He loved the show Luther.



Remembering Danny Schechter

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At Barbara Kopple's House, NY 1986 or 1987. Liberal T-Shirts are a family uniform

He took me with him into the voting booth to vote for Jesse Jackson. He would tuck me in at night and clean between my toes. He could not throw anything out. We didn't really know how to enjoy "the country" so we would go to the mall and watch three movies in a row. We would only pay for one. He was cheap. He loved his friends. He loved Mandela. He made sure my initials were SDS. He was always trying to help a former intern. He was proud of being from the Bronx. He was ALWAYS that energetic and busy.

I can't believe he is gone. I was lucky enough to hold his hand while he died and tell him over and over how much I loved him, how many people loved him, and what a difference he made in the world. It was easy to say this.

Bob Dylan said, "He not busy being born is busy dying." That is just not true when it

comes to my dad. He was always busy being born. Shortly before his death (which came way too quickly . . . I guess he was never one for long goodbyes as he always had somewhere else to be), he said, "I don't know how much time I have." I said, "Dad, no one does." He took a deep breath and said, "Yeah. And I guess 72 years is a long time and I certainly lived it to the max." We laughed. Nothing could have been more true. He insisted on bringing his computer to the hospital because he had two articles to finish. Shortly after he died I found out he had completed not one, but two more books . . . while he was fighting cancer. Of the many things to learn from my dad, one irrefutable lesson is there are absolutely no excuses for not DOING and therefore being born. He really made it look easy.

Living without him. Now that is hard. ●

To Danny, as always, Rory O'Connor

Danny Schechter's long-time business partner and friend, has a fascinating story that spans more than 30 years

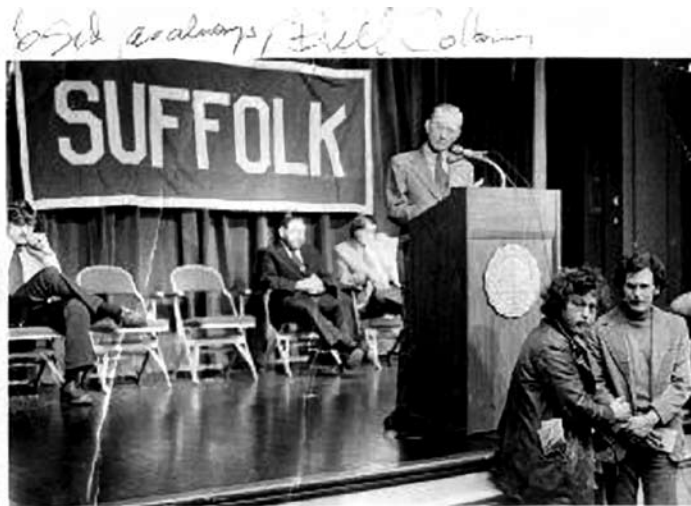
By the time we met, in the end part of “The Sixties” that was actually the mid-Seventies, Danny Schechter was already a local legend as “The News Dissector” on WBCN, then one of the most powerful and influential radio stations in New England. Like literally hundreds of thousands of other Baby Boomers, I had come to Massachusetts to attend university – as well as to join the growing youth “counter-culture” in such far-flung outposts as Boston/Cambridge and San Francisco/Berkeley. “Underground” FM stations like WBCN and its West Coast counterpart KSAN provided the soundtracks to our lives – along with news and views we couldn't find elsewhere, all delivered in a new way to a new audience desperate for alternatives to the established, straight media. Danny's distinctive on-air style of delivering news – a unique blend of popular music, actualities, reports and commentary whipped into a seamless whole – made for a tasty spoonful of sugar that helped the often bleak news go down in an entertaining, informative and yes, most delightful way. It was serious stuff about weighty matters of war and peace, racism and nukes, which directly affected our lives. It was also great fun.

I graduated in 1972 and immediately set out to become a card-carrying member of the “alternative press.” In addition to WBCN, the area also boasted two excellent weekly newspapers, the Boston-based, arts-oriented *Phoenix* and its more progressive and political Cambridge com-

petition, the *Real Paper*. I began freelancing for both while driving a taxi to pay most of the rent. After two and half long years, the *Real Paper* finally hired me as a reporter and news editor, and I gratefully left one hack business behind to join another.

My first memories of time spent with Danny involve various reporting expeditions. Often he and I were among the only journalists in attendance, along with Sidney Blumenthal, (with whom I had shared a *Phoenix* freelance desk and who became, decades later, a senior adviser to President Clinton.) The first Danny sighting – at a 1976 appearance at a local university by ex-CIA head William Colby – is still etched in mind. After finishing his speech, Colby called for questions. Danny's hand immediately shot up. Apparently mistaking the scruffy Schechter for a student, Colby called on him first.

Danny's “question” to Colby concerned the Chilean folksinger Victor Jara, who had been arrested, tortured and shot dead shortly after a CIA-backed coup on September 11, 1973. Instead of asking anything, however, Danny turned, faced the audience, and delivered his own lecture speech – a harangue, really – about Jara's life and death. He concluded by turning back to Colby and bluntly accusing the now-apoplectic super spook of complicity in the affair. Somehow he also managed to squeeze in time to persuade a photographer to snap a still of him and Blumenthal with Colby in the background, and signed it, “To Sid, as always, Bill Colby.” As



"To Sid, as always, Bill Colby," wrote Danny at the top of Sidney Blumenthal's photograph.

Blumenthal notes, "Danny may have been descended from a lineage of Harpo Marx and Karl Marx."

I remember reacting with a mixture of amusement and trepidation at Danny's boldness. Still a rookie reporter, I frankly hadn't realized that you could stand up in public and say or do those kind of things – at least not without being thrown out or perhaps arrested! It was a bracing early lesson in "speaking truth to power," as the hoary expression goes. Another early joint encounter with an unindicted war criminal provided a further education in "participatory journalism," as Schechter dubbed it.

Henry Kissinger, already the recipient of the 1973 Nobel Peace Prize, was chosen to receive yet another "peace medal" from something called the World Affairs Council. Naturally we found the notion of his being further lauded for his efforts in fostering "peace" to be outrageous and alarming, and we resolved to attend the event in hopes of confronting Dr. K.

Armed with press passes, we managed to make it all the way to the front door of the room where Kissinger was speaking. But given the tenor of the times, security was extremely tight, and along with other members of the Fourth Estate, we were unable to enter or even hear any

of his remarks. Discouraged, we left the press gaggle waiting at the front and migrated instead to the back door, where a group of very tan Secret Service agents were clustered, just back from guarding Kissinger during a diplomatic visit to Jamaica. As huge fans of Bob Marley and all things reggae-related, Danny and I had been to the island several times, and we began to chat with the agents about their stay.

Suddenly Kissinger – anxious as ever to avoid the press gathered at the front – popped out the back door just three feet

from us. I was speechless, an affliction to which Danny was always immune. He instantly spread his arms wide and bellowed in a welcoming voice, "Doctor Kissinger!" To my amazement, Kissinger then bear-hugged Danny, whom he apparently had mistaken for an ardent fan.

While still holding Dr. K in his arms, Danny asked, "Sir, tell me – do you have any regrets?"

Puzzled, Kissinger responded quizzically, "Regrets? For vat?"

"Chile?" Danny responded. Kissinger, finally realizing what was happening, looked over Danny's shoulder for a way out – directly at me. "Vietnam?" I asked with a smile.

Kissinger quickly withdrew from Danny's embrace. "Regrets? From someone as culpable as I?" he responded with his own surly smile, hugged Danny again and then whispered in his ear, "You're such a sweet boy!" before the Secret Service whisked him away.

Coda: unbeknownst to anyone but me, Danny was carrying a tape recorder in his pocket and had turned it on and miked himself and before we saw Kissinger. The whole interchange had been recorded. We immediately called WBCN and interrupted DJ Charles Laquidara's morning show with an "exclusive interview" with Henry Kissinger . . .

Like many of our crowd, Danny initially “got into the media” because he wanted to do something about the problems of the world. “It was only later,” he would joke, “That I learned the media was one of the problems of the world!” He was always supportive of other journalists and eager to act in solidarity with them. Although we in the alternative press were often hamstrung by lack of access, funding and other important reporting needs, we were also blessed with great freedom to choose what to cover and how to cover it.

Our friends and colleagues in the straight press – what would years later come to be known as the “mainstream” or “corporate” media – were not so lucky, and Danny was instrumental in reaching out and trying to form bridges among the media workers in both camps. One early effort was dubbed the “Shanghai Press Club.” Every week we would convene with other working journalists at a cavernous Chinese restaurant near Harvard Square to discuss issues and concerns in both the alternative and mainstream press and to support one another as fellow workers in the media minefield.

Meanwhile the counter-culture was beginning to rise from the underground, driven as much by music, film and other popular art forms as by politics. Pop music in particular was at the core of what mattered to the audiences of both WBCN and the *Real Paper*, and Danny and I specialized in trying to merge coverage of the two different but complementary impulses into a seamless whole. Soon we began co-writing a column called “News You Can Use” for *Rock Around the World*, a monthly publication about the music’s growing global stature. As Bob Marley became the first Third World superstar, we began to glimpse the beginnings of a new, more international world, as first music, then film and soon other cultural products became increasingly globalized. We wondered if television, a medium in which Danny and I had both just begun to work, might soon follow. Maybe, we dreamed, it would soon be time for the world’s first global television program.

Our earliest broadcast efforts came as producers and on-air reporters for a nightly news program on WGBH-TV, one of public television’s flagship stations. One of the first segments Danny produced there involved a gruesome gangland-style execution of five at a pub in downtown Boston. As a result of his reporting about the massacre, and despite his inexperience, a local attorney hired Danny to run a TV chat show – the Joe Oteri Show – and an entirely new career was launched.

No longer a radio newscaster but now a television show-runner, Danny was later recruited by WCVB-TV, the ABC affiliate in Boston, to create a raucous, freeform, low budget, multi-hour live late night program called *Five All Night Live All Night*, beginning in March 1980. Despite its less than-princely budget of \$400 per show, and with only one camera and microphone, the program became an unlikely hit, as Schechter used his connections and clout to convince the likes of Timothy Leary, Abbie Hoffman, Allen Ginsberg and Howard Zinn to appear, along with top local and visiting rock bands that had just finished concerts and were still looking for something to do at 2 am.

Alas, Danny’s run as a ‘CVB show-runner was short-lived. As the program’s Wikipedia page notes, “A few weeks into the show’s run, as the closing credits rolled, Boston band Human Sexual Response performed their song ‘Butt Fuck’ accompanied by a nude female dancer. The song aired uncensored, due to the fact that the director was preoccupied with the presence of the nude woman, and the station received some complaints the next day.” Danny later told me that three of the five “complaints” were from viewers who wanted to see more – but the other two were from people who vowed not to rest until the FCC lifted the station’s license. In any event, he was fired on June 13, 1980, after just four months, due to what both sides agreed to call “irreversible philosophical differences.”

The firing proved fortuitous, however; it meant that Danny was unemployed when he received a call from Atlanta asking if he would



Schechter and O'Connor try to look respectable and global in a 1992 Globalvision publicity still

move there to produce a nightly version of *The Freeman Report*, a Nightline-like program for a then-nascent cable news startup called CNN. Soon I began receiving daily telephone calls from all over America, as Danny took the show on the road, originated each night's cablecast from a different city, while keeping up on the Boston scene. Ever-energetic and driven beyond most human capacity, he supplemented this grueling schedule with regular weekend visits back 'home,' so we still managed to stay in close touch and begin work on detailed plans to one day launch a global news-and-views magazine program. We modeled what we simply called *The Global Show* in part after *Evening Magazine*, a successful national format pioneered by Westinghouse (Group W) Broadcasting,

which shared locally produced segments and then "bicycled" or shared them among editions for use in several markets. Our plan was to do much the same, only with national editions of a global program, which would appear in markets all over the world.

From CNN, Danny moved up the news food chain to a prime perch as a producer at ABC News' 20/20 program, where he won two National News Emmys and a slew of other awards. The consummate outsider had somehow become an insider – but that didn't change his style or substance much. Once again, he mixed hard news and politics with cutting edge cultural reportage on subjects such as Bruce Springsteen, Bob Dylan and a then-little known musical style known as rap, or hip-hop.

Meanwhile, back in Boston, I felt increasingly like the proverbial big fish in a small pond. Like Danny, I had become a show-runner, briefly at the nightly news program we had started with at WGBH, and then as creator and executive producer of the hyper-local Neighborhood Network News on Boston cable. I was also writing regularly for *Boston* magazine and national publications such as *Rolling Stone* and the *Atlantic*, finishing a book, and squeezing in regular, Dissector-inspired 'rock-commentaries' on WBCN. Still, I couldn't escape the feeling that even as I aged, most of the population somehow seemed to remain between 18 and 24 years old. It was time to return home to my native New York. After all, if you can make it there . . .

By the time I moved back in the mid-Eighties, Danny was in full swing at ABC. In addition to producing twice as many segments as his counterparts at 20/20, he was also running a major anti-apartheid effort out of his crammed

office cubicle on West 66th Street. He was working with a group called Artists United Against Apartheid, led by Bruce Springsteen sideman Steven Van Zandt. When Van Zandt suggested writing a song about Sun City, a whites-only resort that they thought should be boycotted by entertainers, Danny suggested turning the song into a different kind of *We Are the World*, or as he explained, “a song about change not charity, freedom not famine.” Eventually, they persuaded a wide array of top artists to participate, including Springsteen, Miles Davis, Bob Dylan, Ringo Starr, U2 and literally dozens of others, all of whom vowed never to perform at Sun City.

In addition to the *Sun City* single, a number of other songs were recorded and an album released. In all, more than a million dollars was raised for anti-apartheid projects. Danny documented the musical sessions, conducted interviews, and helped create a feature-length documentary film. In a harbinger of what was to come, however, the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) refused to broadcast *The Making of Sun City*, claiming the featured artists were also involved in making the film and were therefore “self-promoting.”

Danny had managed the entire enterprise while working full-time for ABC. “I couldn’t tell them what I was doing,” he later told me. “And I couldn’t pitch a 20/20 *Sun City* segment either, because I had become part of the story. I was terrified they would dump me if they knew what I was doing, so I just worked even harder, producing more stories so I couldn’t be accused of slacking off.”

I had happily obtained a staff producer position at CBS News after moving to New York. But soon the constraints of network news proved too great for both of us. I began prodding Danny about our long-planned global show; with both of us finally in the same city again, it was time to either put up or shut up. So we quit our jobs to become what Danny immediately dubbed “network refugees,” and began working out of a small borrowed office in Soho at the startup company we called Globalvision -- a contrac-

tion of ‘global television.’

Almost immediately, we changed course. Launching the “world’s first global show,” it turned out, was a daunting venture, especially for a new production company with no cameras, little capital and a borrowed office in a Soho loft. As we continued to formulate global plans, we were approached by a group of producers and filmmakers from South Africa who had compelling footage of the struggle against apartheid in their country. They were unable to get their story told on American television; moreover, the major networks, including as our old employers at ABC and CBS, were neglecting to report on it either. We were experienced American producers; couldn’t we take their footage and package it in a way that would be acceptable to the inscrutable American media system?

We resolved to use their material as the spine of a couple of programs we would create in hopes of spurring the networks to provide more coverage. As ex-insiders, we knew that mainstream media were impervious to criticism – but that the threat of competition could motivate them to react. Long story short: those “couple of programs” turned into three years of a weekly broadcast newsmagazine we named *South Africa Now*. We produced 156 consecutive episodes of the non-profit series on a shoestring, operating from what *Variety* aptly termed “a loft-hovel,” funding it with grants and donations, and producing it despite the fact that we were “whitelisted” – banned by the white-minority regime even from entering South Africa.

We also had to distribute the program ourselves. When we approached PBS for assistance, executives there refused, citing as justification the fact that the program was avowedly anti-apartheid and claiming that we were therefore advocates and not journalists – a charge we then had to spend years refuting. Our first breakthrough came when one of the few African-American programmers in the public broadcast system agreed to air SAN in New York on the secondary channel of WNYC. (WNET, the premier station, initially turned it down.) As a re-

sult of being on the air in prime time in New York – the media capital of the world – we soon were the subjects of a major feature article in the *New York Times*. The next day our phones were ringing off their hooks as reporters from all over the country, all of whom seemed to take their news cues from the *Times*, suddenly expressed interest in what the newspaper dubbed “the little show that could.”

In the end – and despite PBS – we managed to get *South Africa Now* carried on nearly 150 individual public television stations in the US, and 16 other countries, including many of the so-called “frontline states” bordering South Africa. The program won a prestigious George Polk Award and many other honors – and gradual, grudging acceptance from the mainstream. Finally even PBS softened its stance and asked us to create a nationally televised prime time special, which aired on February 11, 1990—the day that Nelson Mandela, free at last after 27 years, walked out of Victor Verster prison.

The fact that Mandela was on a path from prisoner to president meant that for once we had friends in high places. We followed the PBS special *Nelson Mandela: Free At Last* with a string of other documentaries about Mandela and his movement, including *Mandela in America*, which chronicled his triumphant tour of the US in 1991, and *Countdown to Freedom*, about his successful bid to become president of South Africa. Each time we had exclusive insider access, thanks to our efforts with SAN.

At the same time we began to hatch plans for a second series, one that would examine human rights concerns not just in southern Africa, but all over the world. We also did our best to ingratiate ourselves with PBS . . . but to no avail. Even after we produced two different pilots and attached Charlayne Hunter-Gault, the system’s most prominent woman and African-American presenter, PBS still wouldn’t support *Rights & Wrongs: Human Rights Television*. Instead, its top executive told us point-blank that human rights was “an insufficient organizing principle” for a regular television program.

“Unlike cooking, stock tips and purple dinosaurs!” we exclaimed in frustrated press releases and interviews. Once again we were forced to self-distribute; once again we succeeded in convincing more than 100 public television stations to carry the program weekly for four years between 1992-96. We were also able to place it in more than 60 other countries – perhaps another step on the road to “the world’s first global television program.”

By the end of 1996, when we ceased production, we had been in business for eight years –and spent seven of them producing weekly non-profit television programs. It was a curiously counter-intuitive but ultimately successful path for a media startup. We were elated, exhausted – and almost broke. But we had put our little company on the map literally all over the world – and done our small part in service of human rights and freedom along the way.

Since PBS officials had always used the fact that we were producing series as a way to say no, we decided to focus on making more documentaries, such as the Mandela films and three investigative films I had made for their *Frontline* strand. Although they finally did air our forward-looking film *Globalization and Human Rights* in 1998, however, our long and tortured relationship with “the public” broadcast system never really improved much. Although we had first created television for WGBH and had long considered the pubcaster our natural ally, it was clear that the feeling wasn’t mutual.

The growing realization that the media we thought we were part of, or at least allied to, was actually “one of the problems of the world” led us to explore new ways to reach audiences directly by bypassing gatekeepers like PBS execs. Enter the World Wide Web – and a pioneering site we created called the Media Channel. Begun in 1999 (an eternity ago in Internet years,) Mediachannel.org was an early, pre-Google aggregator of global media news and perspectives, as well as a voice for reform of the entire media system.

It was also a channel for Danny’s unearthly

energy and many enthusiasms. An early adopter, he saw the potential of the Net and embraced it before most. When blogging software became available, he jumped in with both feet, resurrecting the News Dissector brand, writing thousands of words daily while linking to sources all over the world. Media Channel, which continued to his death, is given some credit – but not nearly enough – for laying the groundwork for an entire media reform movement in the US, one that recently achieved a major success in convincing the FCC to keep “net neutrality” and ensure equal access to all.

Along the way we continued to work on our plans for *The Global Show* – and sometimes came close to realizing it. Once we managed to interest a top executive at Coca-Cola, then the world’s most global company. He enthusiastically told us to send him a short proposal, took it with him on vacation – and promptly had a heart attack. We also reached Steve Ross, the powerful head of Time Warner. After interviewing him at an investment conference, we were called to his office high above Manhattan’s midtown. “From the streets to the suites,” indeed! Ross, too, waxed enthusiastic, took the proposal and promised to get back to us promptly. The next we heard from Time Warner, however, was that Ross was taking a leave to battle cancer. He never returned.

We did manage to form an alliance with Leonardo Mondadori, the head of the billion-dollar Italian publishing firm Mondadori. How it happened was echt-Schechter: *Harper’s* editor Lewis Lapham suggested Danny meet with Leonardo. On the way over, Danny searched for a connection. “Who do I know in Italy?” he remembered asking himself.

Only one person: Marialina Marcucci, a millionaire heiress to a pharmaceutical fortune, who had been an admirer of our *Rights & Wrongs* series and ordered the executives of Superchannel, a pan-European satellite network that appeared in 52 countries, to carry the program in prime time. As luck would have it, Marcucci and Mondadori were extremely close,

and she immediately counseled him to go into business with us.

Together, beginning in the post-9/11, “Why do they hate us?” world, we created the Globalvision News Network, a pre-Google News effort to create an Internet-based wire service of news from outlets all over the world. Within six months, we had signed up hundreds of partners from six continents.

We were hard at work developing the service and creating new products such as *News Not in the News* when we learned that Leonardo had also become ill. Sadly, and ironically, he had been diagnosed with pancreatic cancer, the ailment that later felled Schechter. In both cases the end came quickly; by the end of 2002 we attended Mondadori’s funeral in Milan, along with thousands of Italians including then-Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi. His children fell to squabbling and suing one another over the rich estate – and told us to simply fold the still-developing global news wire. Once again, we had come close . . .

As the century turned and progressed, Danny didn’t age so much as accelerate. In addition to blogging and making films such as *In Debt We Trust: America Before the Bubble Bursts*, a prescient, pre-Recession 2006 analysis of America’s tottering economic system, he also regularly turned out multi-part television series such as *Who Rules America?* and, most recently, *America’s Surveillance State* (now playing on Free Speech TV.) Bored, I suppose, and with too much time on his hands, he returned to radio and began a weekly Internet-based show. And always, incessantly, he churned out books at an astonishing rate – 17 in all, at last count. One of the earliest is perhaps the best: *The More You Watch, The Less You Know* – his “candid insider’s tale of how the media really works and why it doesn’t work the way it should.” (The book recounts in greater detail many of the media adventures referred to here.) And to my surprise I just learned that, following the recently issued *When South Africa Called, We Answered*, we can expect not one, but at least two posthumous publications.

Protean, prolific, but far from perfect, Danny Schechter has been variously and well-described: the “Duke Ellington of chaos;” “cherubic;” a “hero of downward mobility;” a “shameless self-promoter;” a “human rights activist;” a “royal pain in the ass.” All are true in part, as all captured parts of his multi-faceted identity. He could be equally inspirational and infuriating; impatient and intense; caring and self-centered; scattered yet somehow perfectly on point. He was at once cursed and blessed with a roaring case of ADD that simultaneously fueled and frustrated him. He was legendarily messy and retentive, never throwing anything out, holding crowded court in an office that literally grew smaller every year as the walls moved in and an accretion of memorabilia, letters, scripts, awards, notes, videotapes and other jetsam accumulated like sleazy sediment in some coastal mangrove. Sometimes in mid-conversation he would pause, reach down distractedly to pick something off the floor, and show it to me. Several times it was a check to Globalvision he had shamelessly forgotten to hand over; once it was a 1962 letter from Malcolm X. With Danny, you just never knew.

That was the beauty of the man – or part of it at least. Add in the fact that, unlike most journalists, Danny operated from a basic worldview and overall analysis that informed all his work, no matter the medium or topic. Although it sometimes tripped him up – despite what I considered ample evidence of wrongdoing, for example, he would never countenance any criticism of, say, Winnie Mandela – it also enabled him to provide all too-rare context along with his content. He also had – dare we say it? – a pronounced class consciousness that provided a firm foundation for everything he created.

Looking back, I see clearly that Danny’s class identity was one of the major things that united us and kept us working together through the decades, despite the many inevitable conflicts and crises that sometimes threatened our relationship. In many ways we were quite different – he a Bronx Jew, a decade older than his

Queens Catholic partner – but we shared a fundamentally working class, outer-borough, anti-authority attitude. And though we learned to move easily “from the streets to the suites,” we were more comfortable as outsiders and more at home with “friends in low places,” and it often redounded to our benefit in surprising ways.

One final anecdote will illustrate: it was during dark days for South Africa and even darker ones for South Africa Now. Mandela was still in prison with no sign of much change; we were down to our last hundred dollars to produce the show.

The good news was that we had received a large grant from the MacArthur Foundation; the bad news was that the check was way overdue. Finally we called to see where it was, only to hear that it had been sent weeks earlier to the wrong address. I was distraught, but Danny was adamant. “We have to go find it,” he insisted.

When we got to the location where the check had been erroneously sent, however, we were confronted by a 12-story building. How could we possibly find our money? Undaunted, we went in to look around. The first person we saw was a janitor, so we explained our situation to him. It turned out he was an African immigrant – and an ardent fan. “*South Africa Now?* I love that show!” he exclaimed to our mutual amazement. “Come with me – we must find your check!”

Office by office, we proceeded, floor by floor. Just as we were about to give up, we found a woman who recalled receiving the check. She had given it back to the mail carrier – maybe it was still at the post office? So it was, and the show was saved for another season.

I could go on . . . but knowing Danny as I did (it’s still hard to think of him in the past tense!) I know he would insist on having the final word. So here it is, straight from the News Dissector’s mouth, as he wrote on *Common Dreams* less than a year ago:

“I am compelled to make media, compelled to do what I can, thinking modestly that perhaps somewhere, in hearts I don’t know, words or images can still stir souls to rise.” ●

How Danny became the Postperson from Pluto

Ronnie Kasrils tells how he recruited Danny for a secret mission to apartheid South Africa

Danny Schechter, my friend of 48 years, was a mensch who proudly referred to his 1942 birthplace as “The People’s Republic of the Bronx” – that part of New York City populated then by many class-conscious Jewish immigrants.

His family, like mine, hailed from Lithuania and their radicalism and wit gave shape to his life. He gained fame as a media activist and commentator of note. His was a combative, witty, irrepressible, guerrilla fighter style of mosquito against elephant. It derived from his passionate involvement in just causes from the American civil rights movement, through Vietnam’s liberation struggle, anti-apartheid solidarity, freedom for Mandela, labour, race and gender issues, rampant capitalism, electronic surveillance, environmental catastrophe and so much more.

I met Danny at the London School of Economics, in 1967, where he was extremely popular. From the start we got on so well that I referred to him as “Danny Boy”. He was a post-graduate student studying for an honours degree and had become friends with Ruth First with whom he pretended to flirt. I asked her what she thought of him and remember her remarking: “Bright and irreverent, although for him Marxism is not the crust of the earth.”

Danny was that species of unconventional American leftist who had cut his teeth in student protests, studied Marx, Lenin, Trotsky, Mao and Malcolm X and sought creative, con-

temporary answers though activism. He had close contact with leading figures and foot soldiers alike from those turbulent times. I met Stokely Carmichael in Danny’s shabby bedsit in London’s Islington (well before it became trendy) and talked about race and revolution and narrow shaves with the Ku Klux Klan. His involvement in protests against his country’s invasion of Vietnam epitomised the courageous revolt of American youth.

He was one of many self-exiled Americans who took to foreign shores to avoid the draft which is why I originally assumed he opted for further studies in Britain. But study in isolation from social upheaval was not in his book. He was eclectic and abuzz with radical ideas and practical action. We participated in the first ever British university occupation over the LSE rector’s pig-headed handling of protests against Ian Smith’s Rhodesia and UDI declaration. The fact that the rector’s background was Rhodesia-linked added fuel to the fire. I had some connection with Bertrand Russell, the philosopher, and first lecturer at the LSE when it was established in the 1920s. Danny encouraged me to seek Russell’s support and together we presented his solidarity message to the student body to rousing applause. We were instrumental in establishing an association of third world students – Africa, Asia, Latin America – and campaigned on issues ranging from Cuba to Vietnam to Palestine. We marched on the Israeli embassy, protested American aggression



At a Soweto music festival during the lead-up to South Africa's first non-racial election in 1994: Ronnie Kasrils (right) with South African musician Johnny Clegg (second left), who performed at the event, and Danny Schechter. Andrew 'The Admiral' Kasrils (Ronnie's son) is at far left. Photo: Eleanor Kasrils

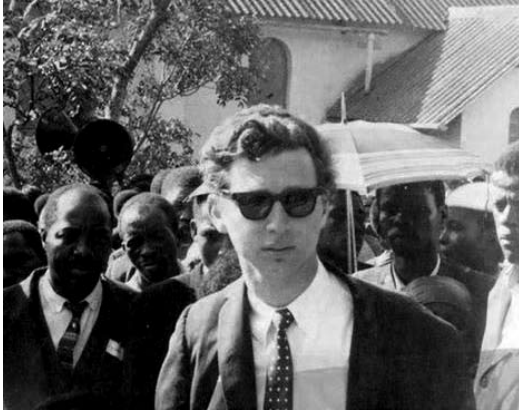
against Vietnam, held a memorial meeting for Che Guevara after his assassination in Bolivia, debated Regis Debray and Frans Fannon, showed films like "Battle for Algiers", donated blood for Vietnam and threw wild fund-raising parties.

I was part of the underground structures of the then-outlawed African National Congress (ANC) in enforced exile following the crushing by apartheid of all democratic resistance. I soon recruited him for a secret mission to South Africa. He accepted with alacrity despite the dangers which I was at pains to point out. This was the beginning of an episode that has come to be known as "the London recruits", involving workers from Britain's Young Communist League (YCL) and socialist activists from the LSE like Danny. They were radicals of pale pigmentation who could travel to South Africa as tourists, smuggling leaflets, forged documents and funds to an oppressed people whose leadership and movement had virtually been eliminated in arrests, round-ups and killings.

What the exiled ANC and SACP (Communist Party) alliance desperately needed was to get the message of resistance and hope across to a battered people. The literature was crammed into false-bottomed suitcases, and the mission of the likes of Danny was essentially to post the subversive material we provided to South African addresses. This might sound easy and humdrum. But courage and nerve was required to pass through customs, hole up in a scruffy hotel room, purchase envelopes and postage stamps, copy out the addresses from lists we provided, and finally foray into the night to surreptitiously post the material over as wide an area as possible.

It could be nerve wracking, with paranoia playing its haunting role, eyes of hotel staff and postal clerks seemingly glued to your every move, and the lonely toil lasting several days.

These couriers were instructed to behave like typical white tourists and avoid any contact with black South Africans. Later, with cursory training, recruits smuggled in components for



Intrepid gatecrasher: Danny Schechter at the funeral of Chief Albert Luthuli in Groutville, Natal, South Africa, on July 30, 1967.

the assembly of simple “bucket bombs”. These harmless devices propelled the leaflets into the air. Ingenuity led to the use of street broadcast equipment relaying ANC speeches in public places.

So staggered were these recruits encountering the bizarreness of apartheid in practise that according to Danny it was “like visiting Pluto”. Joe Slovo, privy to Danny’s involvement, liked the quip and would ask me “How are your Plutonic postmen?”

Danny’s mission was a success. However, in debriefing him, I came to realise that there was no way that his effervescence could be restrained even in the face of danger. There was clearly nothing of the lone-wolf, dispassionate secret agent about this guy.

He recounted how in the cut-price Durban hotel I had directed him to, owing to a tight budget, he had ambled down the corridor to run a bath and wandered back to his room for something or other. In his absent-minded way he lost track of time, forgetting the running bath until a clamour arose. The bath had overflowed and Danny was soon apologising to the hotel manager. “No problem, the boys will clean up,” he was told. The “boys” turned out to be a couple of elderly Zulu cleaners. Guilt-ridden Danny rolled up his trousers, got down on his knees, and to the amazement of the

workers, this supposedly typical white tourist joined in the mopping-up. I must have rolled my eyes as he recounted his story, grateful that the manager had not seen such unconventional behaviour. “Gee,” Danny exclaimed “I could hardly stand by after the mess I had made . . . could I?” He suddenly appeared guilty. I cannot forget the cherubic smile and mop of curly unkempt hair. No damage was done so we laughed it off.

That, however, was not half of it. The banned President of the ANC, Albert Luthuli, died while Danny was in Durban that July of 1967. The funeral was held in Luthuli’s Groutville village, a couple of hour’s drive from Durban, in those days off the beaten track.

Our intrepid courier, having completed his propaganda mission, and now feeling safe and at ease, considered it his internationalist duty to pay his respects to the Nobel Peace Prize winner and great man of Africa. The challenge was how to get to the venue? Only untouchables such as churchmen, diplomats and foreign journalists, would be prepared to brave the police cordon and travel through check points to a funeral the security police would do their level best to keep as limited in size as possible.

Undeterred, Danny persuaded an Indian waiter from his hotel to drive him by a circuitous route to the venue. Fearful of getting too close, his driver dropped him off in a sugar cane field, and told him that if he was not back within two hours he would have gone.

As Danny made his way to the church he came across a crowd of ANC supporters holding aloft banners, flags and a portrait of Luthuli. He simply joined them and marched into the venue, surrounded by sullen police who must have been puzzled, to say the least, by the sight of a young white person in a crowd of militant black men and women singing freedom songs with gusto. The presence of the diplomatic corps and cameras would have restrained the police for Danny managed to safely disappear after the event. I was gobsmacked by his chutz-

pah then and still am to this day.

This latter operation had a life changing impact on him. He forged strong personal links with many South African comrades such as Joe Slovo, Ruth First, Pallo Jordan (whom he already knew from USA student days), Zanele Mbeki, Sue Rabkin, and Nelson Mandela himself. Danny was at the forefront of welcoming events in the USA when Madiba visited after his release, and central to the many pre- and post-release solidarity concerts and films about the iconic figure which included Anant Singh's movie *Long Walk to Freedom*. Danny made several documentaries about Madiba and interviewed him numerous times. When the great man first visited New York he stopped by a group of organisers, noticed Danny and famously enquired to everyone's amusement, "Danny do you remember me?"

Danny Schechter, unforgettable mensch, born 27 June, 1942, died March 17, 2015, at the age of 72 in his New York home after a brave battle with cancer. He will be sorely missed by so many friends world-wide, who offer solace to his talented daughter Sarah Schechter and immediate family.

He lived an eventful and meaningful life, inspiring a legion of activists. He opened the eyes and ears of countless more. He was an inspirational voice in contemporary rebellions including the Anti-War and Occupy Wall Street movements coming full circle from the civil rights era of his student days to the Ferguson uprising of African-Americans against police brutality, exposing the surveillance state and the USA's aggressive imperialist wars.

There was no denying the continuity in his life. Best known for his vanguard career as "media dissector" up to the time of his death – evolved from his ground-breaking *South Africa Now* programmes of the 1980s and other media forays – he came a long way from the clandestine distributor of leaflets in South Africa. His was a vibrant engaging witty and uncompromising alternative media voice. His skills stretched to a brilliant penchant for pub-

lic speaking. His oratory was complimented by a sharp pen, as prolific author and writer, crossing swords with Pax America and the insidious threat to people and planet posed by finance capital and global corporate power. Danny kept pace with the most current critical issues, so eloquently attested in many tributes from across the globe.

He made one laugh, think, cry and move to act – whether you were a comrade-in-arms or part of his vast electronic audience. One cannot say that he was uncritical of what South Africa has become. In fact he was saddened by the corruption and lack of principles. But he never regretted his lifelong involvement. The LSE student for whom "Marxism was not the crust of the earth" remained the combative social activist to the very end where others had become self-satisfied, smug, defensive, opportunistic and complacent. In the face of adversity he would never say "no way" and his motto was "never say die". He remained an activist and thinker, human being of moral courage and internationalist to the very end. The boy from the Bronx travelled a long way from his roots and that 1967 episode as "Postperson from Pluto".

For the many South Africans who knew him, and the thousands whose lives he touched anonymously or digitally, it is perhaps fitting that the last of his published books, *When South Africa Called, We Answered*, dealt with a country whose struggle for democracy and equality he dedicated so much of his eventful life to.

Hamba Kahle (go well) Danny Boy! ●

Ronnie Kasrils served in the South African government from 1994-2008; His last portfolio was Minister of Intelligence under President Thabo Mbeki. He is a former member of the ANC's national executive committee (its highest elected body), and of the South African Communist Party politburo. He was a founding member of the ANC's underground army, *Umkhonto weSizwe*, and rose through the ranks to become its head of intelligence.

Vinho verde, chicken, fries, and political analysis

Beneath the wild hair was a sharply-tuned intellect, writes Sidney Blumenthal

When, during the summer of 1975, I landed in Lisbon with my girlfriend, Jackie, to cover the unfolding Portuguese Revolution for the *Boston Phoenix*, the first thing we did was have dinner with Danny Schechter, who had already scoped out the scene. Over bottles of vinho verde, Danny swept the plates of grilled chicken and fries to the side as he sketched the political state of play on the paper tablecloth. Drawing boxes that he filled in with the names of political parties, aligned on the left, right and center of the table, he literally connected the dots. Upon making each point, he would punctuate it with a laugh. Danny almost always accompanied his insights or observations with laughter. His laugh was bemused, knowing and infectious. It was a rumbling laugh that built to a crescendo with a head nod. He meant for you to know that when you smiled or laughed in response to him you knew, too. Laughter was part of Danny's language and epistemology. Having equipped me with his complete knowledge of the revolution he left the next day to return to Boston. I folded up the diagramed tablecloth to keep as a sure guide. A few days later, I went to the U.S. Embassy to interview a political attaché, but Danny's briefing was far more informative.

I met Danny sometime near the beginning of time, perhaps in 1969 or 1970, after I graduated from college. I found myself instantly

recruited doing work for the Africa Research Group on apartheid South Africa, Danny's great crusade. I soon drifted into journalism writing for *Boston After Dark*, then the *Phoenix* and the *Real Paper*. The Boston of that era, now a lost world, was a crucible for redefining journalism. Danny was the star and impresario of WBCN, which was more than a breakthrough progressive rock radio station unbound by constricted industry playlists, but also one of the most innovative news organizations in the country, featuring the broadcasts of Danny Schechter "The News Dissector." Danny's six o'clock reports were essential listening. He had a thrilling way of combining fact and analysis, in a stream of information about the most important events that could be heard no place else.

The boundaries between the *Phoenix*, the *Real Paper* and WBCN were fluid. Danny brought me in to participate in some of the editing of his reports and documentaries, and even put me in for a week to fill in on news broadcasts. Observing Danny at work was like being a hurricane chaser; but in the whirlwind of this hurricane, order miraculously emerged. Danny would race into the studio atop the Prudential Center clutching handfuls of crumpled papers with notebooks bulging out of his pockets. He had scrawled his reports in bits and pieces across dozens of pages. He alone could decipher what he had written. Rushing on the air he interspersed

his broadcasts with snatches of music that he seemed to have located out of the ether. He managed to synthesize it all in a kind of performance art. It was breathless, compelling and frequently hilarious.

Danny may have been descended from a lineage of Harpo Marx and Karl Marx, Walter Lippmann and Walter Winchell. Beneath the wild hair was a sharply-tuned intellect. He could deliver the smartest analysis if he had to in the staccato style of a wire service report. He uniquely mixed a thousand influences and 8,000 albums, constantly open to new sources and sounds.

Danny was educated at Cornell and the London School of Economics, but he was determined to investigate reality from the street level up. Just as he effortlessly participated in seminars at Harvard, where he was a Nieman Fellow, he wandered without hesitation through Boston's working class neighborhoods and the Combat Zone – and Soweto. He was equally at ease with the great, near great and not so great. His mind could meld with John Lennon or someone he happened to strike up a conversation with in a bar.

I would be remiss not to mention here our mutual friend Jerry Berndt, one of the great photographers of our generation, who died at the age of 69 two years ago in Paris. Jerry was with us on our Portuguese escapade, and on many others. His series of photographs of prostitutes and the homeless captured not simply their plight, that was easy enough, but also their humanity. Jerry, who was from a working class background in Milwaukee, had an unusual empathy for the down and out. He provided a wry counterpoint to Danny, with whom he often ventured out into the urban wilderness. Jerry had the eye to match Danny's ear. Their journalism was unified through their compassion for their subjects.

Danny could be chaotic, utterly immersed in whatever his latest project might be and distracted by shiny objects. But self-absorbed

was the very last thing he was. He cared deeply and profoundly for social justice, and for people, not in the abstract, but the living people around him. His eye was on the prize. He was generous to a fault. Whatever he was capable of doing, he would do on his own. In a small example, when I wrote a number of political articles in the *Real Paper* he arranged for Beacon Press to publish them. The book was *The Permanent Campaign*, and I was on my way. Decades later, Danny encountered my son, Max, launching himself in journalism, and encouraged him, too. Danny couldn't help but help. He had an expansive mind but a bigger heart. You could almost hear it beating when he spoke.

Danny loved journalism, not the business of journalism, but the actual practice of it. He loved covering events, interviewing, learning the story and what was behind it, and the antic camaraderie of other journalists. It wasn't a profession so much as a way of life, a passport to places near and far, and always a means to higher ends.

One day in 1976 we covered a speech at Suffolk University delivered by recently fired CIA director William Colby. In the middle of his talk Danny suggested that we pose together for a portrait with Colby. We stood in front of the podium while a photographer snapped our picture and gave us copies. Danny autographed mine: "*To Sid, as always, Bill Colby.*" ●

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Sidney Blumenthal is former Assistant and Senior Adviser to President Bill Clinton, and Senior Adviser to Hillary Clinton. He began his journalistic career writing for the *Boston Phoenix* and *The Real Paper* and has been a staff writer for *The Washington Post*; senior editor for *The New Republic*; Washington editor and staff writer for *The New Yorker*; columnist for *The Guardian of London*; Washington editor and columnist for *Salon*; and political editor for *The Daily Beast*. He is the author many books.

Wild and Yippie-infused determination

Schechter was fierce and fun, unrelenting, yet optimistic about what might be made of media

It is impossible to fully explain media criticism – and media understanding – as it exists today without recognizing the remarkable contribution of Danny Schechter.

Two years before Ben Bagdikian took apart the fantasy that American media was liberal, with *The Elite Conspiracy and Other Crimes by the Press* (Harper & Row), more than a decade before Bagdikian exposed the corporate infrastructure of news-gathering with *The Media Monopoly* (Beacon Press), more than 15 years before Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting (FAIR) began its ongoing exploration of the abuses and excesses of that corporate media, and almost twenty years before Edward Herman and Noam Chomsky put it all together with *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of Mass Media* (Pantheon), there was this news director on the coolest radio station in Boston, WBCN-FM, who started his daily show with the announcement, “This is Danny Schechter, your News Dissector.”

Dissecting the news was Schechter’s thing. He reported to listeners what was happening, then he explained why it was happening, and then he revealed why other media outlets did not tell the whole story. It was bold and daring, and the word of what Danny Schechter was doing on one progressive-rock station in Boston spread far and wide. “As ‘News Dissector’ on Boston radio,” recalled Chomsky, “Danny Schechter literally educated a generation.”

What distinguished Schechter, who has died too young at age 72, was his merging of a stark and serious old-school I.F. Stone-style understanding of media power and manipulation with a wild and joyous Yippie-infused determination to rip it up and start again.

Schechter was of his times. He marched for civil rights and against wars. He made common cause with hippies and Yuppies. He danced and sang and inhaled. He was, he recalled, “a participatory journalist, a down-with-the-movement reporter, a manic media maven.”

But Schechter also came to recognize “how naive we were, how arrogant, how out-manuevered” the movements of the 1960s and early 1970s were. And he made it his purpose over the ensuing decades to tell the whole story of the real stories of protest and power, and of how media and political and economic elites manipulate democracy.

Schechter did not always do so as an outsider. After his gig at WBCN, he went national, as a producer for the ABC newsmagazine *20/20*, where he won two Emmy Awards. He helped to get CNN started, served as an executive producer for Globalvision and as executive editor for MediaChannel.org. He developed and served as executive producer for the remarkable *South Africa Now* news magazine, which played a critical role in revealing the true story of apartheid and of the global anti-apartheid movement. He used television



Walking across the Harvard Athletic Fields during an early 70's demonstration with Danny (left), Paul Breines (center), and brother Bill Schechter (right)

and film and books and the Internet – where he was a pioneering blogger on media issues – to reveal and challenge the failure of major media to expose human rights abuses abroad and corporate abuses at home.

Schechter always recognized that he had antecedents as a critic of corporate and stenographic media – George Seldes and I.F. Stone, among them – and he was always there to counsel, to cheer on, to poke and prod those who carried the critique forward.

He could do so because he had stood at the pivot point where the mediasphere was getting more consolidated and less courageous, and he had recognized this as an affront to cherished premises of a free press and democracy itself. He finished his career as he began, fierce and fun, unrelenting in his critique yet optimistic about what might be made of media.

One of Schechter's great fights was to maintain local public-access television programming and new-media interventions by citi-

zen journalists. That wasn't a fight that many Emmy Award winners took on. But the guy who used to dissect the news on rock station out of Boston understood why it mattered.

"A growing segment of the public wants to be involved with new media. The boom in on-line computer networks and even radio talk shows demonstrates the demand and the need – which the media giants are unlikely to satisfy," he wrote for *Newsday* in 1993. "Let's hope that the Congressional watchdogs who are questioning the anti-trust implications of these new monopolies-in-the-making will speak out to preserve public access. In commercial television, everything is slick, but little matters. Its edges may be rough, but public access should matter to us – not only for what it is, but for what it can become." ●

John Nichols is Washington correspondent for *The Nation* magazine and associate editor of the *Capital Times* at Madison, Wisconsin.

Memorable moments with Mandela

Film director Anant Singh looks back on the man who influenced America about South Africa's apartheid

Our friendship began when I met Danny in New York in the early 1980's, just before I produced my first anti-apartheid movie. He played such an important role in informing America about apartheid and South Africa's harsh laws. He did this through his writings, through his films and through the many campaigns that he led.

We did many films together, starting with *Mandela In America*, six documentaries on Madiba and several other struggle heroes. Most recently, I brought Danny for South Africa to be with us for the entire shoot of *Mandela: Long Walk To Freedom*. He was the Behind the Scenes Director, putting together the documentary that became *Beyond Long Walk To Freedom*.

I have fond memories of being with Danny in many places. I remember sitting with him at the Church of Saint John in New York City where Madiba was being honoured. As Madiba left, he walked by, greeted me and then turned and said "Danny do you remember me" and everyone around us laughed. We had memorable moments at Madiba's inauguration where we met Yasser Arafat, Fidel Castro, most of the American delegation and others. He was popular with almost all of the anti-apartheid activists in exile and those who remained in South Africa, all of whom he knew well and developed lasting friendships. He was so proud of the important role he played in our liberation, yet remained modest about it.

Until the very end, he remained diligently committed to his career and on March 4, he gave me a copy of his latest book, *When South Africa Called We Answered*. It is in many ways his autobiography and I'm so glad that he wrote this book. In the closing lines he says:

"The struggle for freedom in South Africa also made us all better people and world citizens as well as members of a community of change who learned from the solidarity that this work inspired.

It gave us all a sense that activists from many lands and traditions can work together in a spirit of internationalism for social justice.

Those who fought against apartheid then having to keep fighting against its reincarnations.

I was against apartheid then – and I still am! Yet the struggle did show that "the people" can win – at least for a while. South Africa today is no utopia, but it sure as hell is better than what it was.

And, it didn't change all by itself."

A quote from his 90 year old father "that his generation had failed to create a 'better world' will the same be said of mine...." Probably yes, but Danny has done his father proud and has done so much more than we can expect from any one person. ●

*Anant Singh is CEO of Durban-based Videovision Entertainment and was the producer of the film *Mandela: Long Walk To Freedom*.*



Hair-raising: Danny could make anyone laugh. With Don King in 1988

Our friend, Danny

Stories, memories and photographs

Flying with Jesse

I had a number of adventures with Danny. Here are some snapshots.

We are in the press section of a large airplane covering for ABC 20/20 Jesse Jackson's peace mission to the African Frontline States during the early 80's. Danny is entertaining the press corps with his take off of Jackson's stump speech "We are having a summit. We got aid, We got trade. We've gone from slave ship to championship," he said, unaware that one of the Reverend's aides was behind him. The laughter stopped, Danny turned around and was directed to the front of the plane to meet Jackson. I figured that the subject of the meeting was our being fired and kicked off the plane. However, Rev. Jackson came back to the

press section with Danny and announced that he was not just meeting with the leaders of the Frontline States but was holding a "Summit." He then let Danny brief the press corps on our next stop because Danny was the most knowledgeable about African politics.

Later, we arrived at the Chevron oil complex in Angola on the day African commandos were apprehended attempting to blow it up. Instead of getting blown up, we got the first interview with the commandos. Traveling with Danny could be risky business.

Several years later, Danny and I were in Costa Rica during Reagan's covert contra war against the Sandinistas in Nicaragua. We had helped Peter Gabriel organize a benefit for the University of Peace, whose head was the former Costa Rican president. He had supported

the revolution in Nicaragua and planned a trip for us there.

We flew into Managua. Daniel Ortega must not have been too busy as president, for he met us at the airport and drove us around as our tour guide, showing us the volcano where Somoza had thrown his brother into the crater. He drove us back to the airport and we flew back to San Jose. When we arrived, we were treated as ghosts, for a plane just like ours had been shot down by the contras and everybody assumed that we were dead in the jungle.

Just about every time I ran into Danny, he had some sort of project we could do together, and these were not small projects. Ending Apartheid was one.

Having a full time job as a 20/20 producer did not get in the way of his undertaking other full time projects. One was producing a musicians' boycott of South Africa with Little Steven van Zandt. He helped Steven produce the anti-apartheid song *Sun City*, and enlisted me to document it, produce the video and TV



Sun City days. Schechter (front row, far left) working on the "Sun City" video with director Jonathan Demme and producer Hart Perry, along with (back row, L-R) Big Youth, Lou Reed, Reuben Blades, John Oates, and Little Steven. Photograph by David Seelig for The Solidarity Foundation

show/home video. When PBS first refused to air the program because it was one-sided, his response was that there was only one side to being anti-apartheid. It was aired.

Later when the South African government censored news and the networks no longer ran stories on anti-apartheid protest in South Africa, Danny decided to break the boycott, although he still had a full time job at 20/20. He started Globalvision, an international news company, taking some space in my Soho loft with journalist Rory O'Connor and producer Daphne Pinkerson. From *Sun City* and his friendship with a college friend who was head of public relations for the ANC, Danny embarked on smuggling news stories from South Africa and started the TV show *South Africa Now* to break the news boycott.

As usual, there was no funding, but my Dad had a satellite distribution company that would pay \$350 for each show and get it on the outer channels of TV. Since Danny never seemed to sleep, he would finish his workday at 20/20, come down to the loft and write a script with Daphne, who had collected footage from South Africa. Then they would edit throughout the night with student interns who operated my gear. I would be up at 8:30 am to meet FedEx so the tape could go up on the satellite.

Somehow Danny and Rory found the time to write proposals and get funding so that *South Africa Now* became a PBS program hosted by Charlayne Hunter-Gault.

Danny, as the News Dissector, was passionate about revealing the truth about media manipulation and lies that exploited people. — *Hart Perry is an award-winning film producer and director and co-founder of South Africa Now.*

Laughs and bagels

In 2012 I decided to drop everything and move to the big city. At the age of 27. I was lost, confused, and desperate to find someone



Danny: Laughs, fights, coffee and bagels.

or some place that would give me a sign as to what I should do with my life. Eventually, I stumbled across an online ad for an associate producer role for an opportunity to work with an Emmy Award winning journalist on a six-part doc-series.

Next thing I know it, I'm getting yelled at in the middle of the hallways of the Left Forum: "THIS IS RUN-AND-GUN, NIZAR . . . LET'S GO!". And yes, run and gun it was, raging through Pace University with a crappy camera, grabbing Danny's favorites, who would give us some worthy soundbites. I was blown away at how precise, and intellectually sound Danny suddenly became once the camera was rolling – like nothing I had ever seen. I knew then that, despite the unconventional wackiness, I was in the presence of someone special. Three years later, we rebooted Media-Channel.org and produced another six-part series for RT America/Press TV on the NSA surveillance revelations.

Danny was a genuine soul like no other; he didn't care what degree you had, what religion you practiced, or what color your skin was – he just wanted to share his life's work, or make some random reference just to make you laugh. Never in my wildest dreams did I

imagine working with some of the brightest intellectuals in politics, media, journalism, and government – but I did, and it was all thanks to the News Dissector.

Throughout the work, we developed a close friendship. Danny opened his doors physically and emotionally. If work ever became sparse on my end, he offered to help. If Danny needed help with an out of reach errand, I ran. It only lasted three years, but I will always miss our laughs, our fights, and our coffees at Murray's Bagels. – *Nizar Assad is an independent producer/production manager based in NYC. He has helped create numerous investigative documentary programs for Danny Schechter's Glovalvision Inc, VICE Media, and Bad Babies Films.*

Come dancing

I was 22, he was 28. One day he called me and asked, "How'd ya like to go out dancing Saturday night?"

Oh, Sure I would. I would!

So, Friday afternoon I dragged the poor kids through the Goodwill store until I found some finery, which consisted of a dilapidated sheer black chiffon scarf embossed with large orange roses and a mid-calf length old, old, black crepe dress. Then, at the drug store, I splurged on a pair of sheer black hose.

Friday night, eight inches came off the hem of the dress, the collar and front came down as far as I dared, and the scarf was inserted daintily,. Sleeves? Hmmm . . . slit up the side and curved so that they flowed. I pulled and tugged and hiked on the miserable tights, stepped into my teetering platform sandals, did up the straps, and was ready to go!

Saturday, 7 pm. It's time. Kiss the kids goodnight, hasty instructions to the baby sitter, "Don't forget, your mother is right down stairs if you need anything." Wink, wink, goodbye.

Down and down and down the tenement stairs. Out into the street with my date, Dan-

ny. I was startled to see a tall, handsome dark man with Elvis-like black hair and an Abe Lincoln beard unfold himself from the car. “Hi, I’m Charles. I work with Danny.” I must have looked blank, because he said, “You know, at the radio station?”

Ok . . . Charles, aka Chuck, got into the back seat and I plopped down beside Danny, who was driving. We drove, and drove and drove, but got nowhere near Boston. This would have been the right place to drive to go dancing. Throughout, Chuck regaled me with tales of the radio studio where they both worked, he as a DJ, Danny as . . . New, no . . . News Dissector! Hours passed and still we were driving. A couple of bones got lit up and burned down. More relaxed, I finally asked, “Where are we going?” “Oh, you’ll see. You’ll see,” said Danny and he and Chuck howled with laughter.

Down a dark county road, we drove up toward a forbidding looking building. Little lights winked outside some kind of giant door, “Well, we’re here.”

A few minutes later we were being processed to enter a medium security prison. Down and down a tall long, cold hallway we walked until it unfolded into an enormous ugly hall with immensely high ceilings. There was a stage at the front, I noticed. We had arrived at the site of our dance.

The noise was deafening from hundreds of men, whose eyes I assiduously tried to avoid, while winding my way through. I plucked at Danny’s sleeve. “Where the hell are we,” I bellowed, thinking HELL was the best word for this place. “Norfolk County Prison,” he screamed back. “Don’t worry,” he screamed again, “It’s a medium security joint.” And then, “Wait right here. I’ll be back soon.”

Oh, just wait right here while he toddled off with Chuck towards the little stage. Wait right here with at least 600 men and NO FUCKING WOMEN?

Yeah, here.

But nobody paid me any attention. I looked down at my skinny legs and wondered.



Ready to dance? Danny on campus, 1969,

By that time, both of them were 200 men away, shouldering their way toward the stairs that led to the stage. I shrank from following them, acutely aware that there were NO OTHER WOMEN and many of these guys had been locked up for a long time.

Big, big speakers were being dragged onto the stage. I saw Danny futzing with some wires and Chuck talking with some dude in countryish clothes and a beard, next to the stage, I was just standing around in the hall.

“Mic check. Mic check.” Then . . . A HUGE BLAST OF SOUND echoing around those stone walls. Band fuddling around . . . “One Two Three Four . . .” FEETS DON’T FAIL ME NOW . . .

And the whole joint was rockin’. I was rockin’ too, with a roomful of men, just thriving on the beat. And, a few of ‘em danced with me, for a time, here and there, but mostly they danced with each other. I wasn’t sure if I

should be mad or relieved.

Pretty soon I forgot about me and just enjoyed the event.

Then Chuck came back on over and somehow managed to look urbane while shouting at the top of his lungs that he and Danny and the radio station were sponsoring a whole series of rock concerts for these guys.

Man in Black, eat out your heart.

I didn't see Danny again that night, until we got back to the car, after the 600 men had dispersed and gone back to their cells.

But we were dancing in the parlor later on, you'd better believe, and the sun came up and the sun went down. – **Naomi Ruth Pinson, human rights activist and human rights worker in community mental health services, Cambridge, MA**

Force of nature

I worked with Danny a lot during my stint at the American Committee On Africa - on the *Sun City* music video project and his hugely important *South Africa Now* program. Less a producer and activist than a force of nature, Danny was instrumental in keeping the South African liberation struggle in the public eye during some of the most critical years of the resistance. He also drove me crazy, of course. Hell, he drove everybody crazy but we loved him for it. Years later, in the middle of things as usual, he talked me into donating photos for his book – *Occupy* – about Occupy Wall Street, dammit, but waddayagonna do?

Danny didn't know the word "No", but he did know how to fight for what's right. He lived and breathed it and the world is a better place because he did. Hamba Kahle Danny. Thanks for everything. – **Mike Fleshman, New York.**

A swarm of plastic bags

I first met Danny shortly after Mandela's release in 1990, and saw him for the last time

on the set of *Mandela: Long Walk to Freedom* 12 years later, for which he was making a *The Making of* reel.

I'd worked for Ronnie Kasrils in the underground years and – having just emerged from a period in hiding, weeks of it spent in my home – Ronnie invited Danny to stay at my house during his first open visit to South Africa. Danny arrived to take up residence, covering the dining table with paper, spending hours on my phone and spending many more patient hours entertaining my two sons.

Danny spent at least one night at our home during almost every visit to Johannesburg during those years, inevitably arriving (or, more usually, waiting for me to collect him), with his tiny luggage bag dwarfed by the swarm of plastic bags overflowing with notes and the flotsam that seemed to rally to him even when he was in motion.

I can't recall a visit when, within a week of him leaving, I didn't receive a call asking if we'd found some scraps of paper with vital notes, and could we forward them or read them to him over the phone.

So much has been said about Danny, his



Feeling bullish: Danny visits Wall Street for a photo for his book, *Occupy*.



With former *South Africa Now* reporter Phillip Tomlinson at the launch of the book, *Madiba A to Z* in 2013.

courage, his unquestioning, unflinching, commitment to justice and to journalism that it is difficult to say anything new about him.

Certainly my pre-teen sons never forgot him, although they experienced him (“met” is too passive a word for any introduction to Danny) in a period when they also met some of the country’s most famous figures. On his last visit, to have lunch during the Mandela movie filming, my son told him that his girlfriend was interested in the movie. Danny piled half-dozen young people into my car, directed me to the set and harassed various acting and production luminaries to stop what they were doing and chat to his young guests.

The stationary whirlwind of untidy enthusiasm that was Danny – scrawled notes, stray currency, keys, business cards, shedding even when he was dozing in front of the TV – hardly seems to provide the image of a hero. But his inability to recognise the impossibility of doing anything other than what he believed was right, irrespective of danger or consequences, and the unexpected personal kindness I witnessed in him make him just that, an unlikely but undeniable hero. – *David Niddrie, Johannesburg, South Africa*

Beating the hecklers

As with so many others, listening to Danny Schechter, the “News Dissector” changed my life. I’m quite sure I would never have become a journalist if not for tuning in to 104.1 FM while attending college in Boston.

I met him in 1976, when he came to speak at Boston State College, where I was a student. He asked who had written an opinion piece in the school paper on the need to support the MPLA revolutionary movement in Angola (the school paper was obviously a leftist rag!), and took an immediate shine to me after learning I was the writer.

Knowing very little about how real journalism worked, I said I’d just finished a story about political surveillance at the campus, and how the FBI and other law enforcement agencies had targeted student radicals and the Black Student Union.

He immediately said I should go to his radio show later that day to break the story. I hesitated, because I had promised a freelancer from the alternative weekly the *Real Paper* that I wouldn’t preempt the story she was doing. She was, it turned out, also a friend of Danny’s. So, with Danny’s assurance, I went to the studio and he created a dramatic piece that led the news. Then he told listeners they could read more about it later that week in the *Real Paper*.

Several months later, I was invited to speak at a conference on “The CIA, the Media and Repression” at Boston University, where I also introduced Danny for a talk. He did something that day that was absolutely brilliant.

A group of Lyndon LaRouche followers began heckling him, claiming he was in the CIA. Trying to get them to stop proved beyond my ability, but Danny told me not to worry, he’d handle it. He proceeded to tell them that they were right, he was in the CIA, and that he knew it and they knew it. But no one else did, and they should explain to everyone in the room how it was so. He kept pressing them

when they veered off course, leaving them to repeat the same empty charges until, buried by the crowd's jeers, they ran out. Quite a move by our Danny.

I was later a news reporter at WBCN years after he left and, as manager of the Orson Welles Cinema in Cambridge, screened the East Coast premiere of *Sun City* in 1985 at Danny's urging, with both he and Little Steven in attendance.

I've long thought of Danny as the Bob Dylan of alternative media, on his own Never-Ending Tour. Unlike Dylan, however, it was always clear just how much Danny loved what he did. And how we loved him.

Mark Sommer, Buffalo, NY

Moral commander

We have just lost a journalist's journalist, the moral commander of investigative reporters from New York to Johannesburg.

Known for bringing the world the story of Nelson Mandela, Danny gave up cushy jobs at ABC and CNN, the big bucks and a steady flow of mainstream awards to blow the whistle on the degradation of American news. Danny exposed what he called the "news goo" of talking hair-dos – denouncing them as repeaters, not reporters. One of his searing books told it all in the title, *The More You Watch, the Less You Know*.

It was Danny Schechter who, two decades ago, hectored and harassed me until I gave up a darn good job as an investigator, pushing me to become an investigative reporter. (He did demand I wear a wig so I could get on the US boob tube. No way. Instead I went into journalistic exile at BBC London.)

And it was Danny Schechter who first brought my investigations back to our benighted America in his film, *Counting on Democracy*.

Once, in Bosnia, when I ran into some reporters from Kazakhstan, and I told them I was from New York, they asked me, "Do you



With John Lennon and Yoko Ono at Harvard University.

know Danny Schechter?" When I said yes, they were dazzled. But in America, Danny was, sadly, a prophet outcast in his own land. The hair-sprayed pseudo-news puppets, with their phony tales of derring-do, exiled Danny's clarion reports to the confined pool of dissenting websites and DVDs.

It had been my plan to surprise Danny by dedicating our current film to him. I will do that still, and, as well, dedicate myself to the Sisyphean task he demanded of me and the many others he mentored: to tell the stories of the brutalized, cheated, hurt and silenced; to be a voice for the voiceless. – **Greg Palast, author, filmmaker, and journalist, New York.**

No stopping

I have read countless tributes to Danny Schechter these last few days – you might say that the Dissector has been dissected as much as eulogized by his plethora of friends and associates also sharing countless anecdotes.

Yet there is more: beyond his enlightened upbringing, his early passion for journalism and human rights; his assistance in organizing the 1964 March on Washington where MLK delivered his "I Have a Dream" speech; his ac-

tivism at Cornell; his work with Congressman John Conyers in Detroit – I’m running out of breath and he’s still in his twenties – his job at WBCN as News Dissector that reached the ears of Chomsky, who acknowledged him as a teacher; the birth of his beloved Sarah and his pride in her accomplishments; his Emmy-award-winning decade with *Sixty Minutes*; his lifelong involvement in helping to lift the Apartheid in South Africa, and he was rewarded with its fruition; his work producing *South Africa Now* and other TV productions in the early nineties that reached so many and should have reached countless others; his reviving his News Dissector persona online and work with Globalvision, his countless blogs, books, and films and books that went with films, his enormous collections of the work of others in various media . . . and I’m sure I’ve



The world his oyster. A younger, slimmer, Danny Schechter in 1973. Photo by Paul Semonin, San Francisco

missed a lot . . .

Don’t forget how he traveled the world to accomplish his contributions to other conflicted areas such as Bosnia and as close to home as Occupy and to attend conferences, speak, and participate in panels: journalist, activist, organizer, speaker, prolific author and blogger, filmmaker, director, TV producer, radio News Dissector, poet, teacher, mentor . . . but there’s this:

He wanted more. He was never satisfied, never rested on his laurels, even after he became ill and shelved all of his publications in proud display. He dreamed of returning to South Africa when he recovered. He dreamed of recovering even as he knew he wouldn’t, danced in the throes of chemo, and reveled in his friendships, having more time for them at the end when he could no longer work.

And there is more. He would drop his work when needed by friends. I was lucky to have known him for almost 15 years. He was a friend in need – quirky, temperamental, exasperating, and full of love. I sent him a Christmas card one year depicting Atlas, whom I believe he dwarfed. His mind was the world.

His anger and the love that inflamed it will live forever. That’s what happens when you do too much and are too much and plan never to stop. You don’t. – **Marta Steele is an author and editor. She lives in Washington, DC.**

Agents meet their match

Danny and I shared a house in Somerville between 1971 and 1974. This is my funniest memory of him, one that shows not only his sense of humor but his audaciousness, his ultra quick wit, and his over-the-top dedication to his craft. It’s from my memoir, *Troublemaker*.

. . . Shortly before 8:00 the next morning, I awoke to simultaneous pounding on the front and rear doors of the house I shared with friends in Somerville. It sounded like an arrest just from the way they knocked. Three



Never judge a genius by the state of his office. Danny at Globalvision.

agents flashed badges and guns on the other side of the front door. I asked for their warrant. They said it was downtown and that if I did not open the door, they would break it down. It was a beautiful old wooden door so I let them in. As soon as I did, they slapped me in handcuffs. One of my housemates then appeared on the stairs in his pajamas. He was waving a tape recorder. The agents asked him to identify himself. He said that he was Danny Schechter, the News Dissector, and that he was covering the arrest for WBCN-FM.

Danny started to mock interview the agents, turning the tense scene into a farce. His matter-of-fact questions and valid press card confused them. He persisted until one of the agents threatened to arrest him for obstructing justice. Meanwhile, three other agents who had been “covering the back” joined the three already in the house. Two of them started up the stairs to our second floor. Linda Gordon and Ann Froines, also in pajamas, blocked their way and refused to let them pass until a search warrant was produced. The agents tried to shove them aside, but Linda and Ann shoved back. The women were very deter-

mined, and they had the advantage of being higher up. The agents retreated back to the first floor. To the delight of thousands in the Boston area, the entire incident was broadcast that evening on Danny’s news program. – **Bill Zimmerman, Topanga, California**

Voice for reform

In the late 1990s I edited *Free Press* for the UK-based Campaign for Press and Broadcasting Freedom and enthusiastically reviewed Danny’s *The More You Watch, The Less You Know*, published by Seven Stories Press. That was in May 1998. In late August that year Danny popped up at the Edinburgh Television Festival, once a forum for passionate debates about the purpose of broadcasting but then sadly changing into one which talked more about how to make money from broadcasting.

Danny’s witty and informative comments embarrassed the bigwigs there but they were music to my ears and we hit it off. Danny wrote a piece for *Free Press* about the Edinburgh experience and warned “Look out Britain: please take a close look at television’s impact on

America's democracy before you rush head-long into emulating it here.”

Our paths crossed often after that. I made sure he was a keynote speaker, along with John Pilger, at a conference we organised on the New Labour government's dire Communications White Paper in February 2001. Two things I remember about Danny's contribution: there were a lot of young people in the audience and you could see how attentive they were - their rapport which was shown by the way they clustered around him to ask questions afterwards.

Danny projected a dishevelled tousled-haired persona but I am looking at the photograph of him, arm up as he speaks at the conference, and he is wearing a suit and tie! He may not have been bothered about his appearance but he could write and speak powerfully and cogently on big issues like the subservient role of the US media in the drive to war with Iraq or its role in the financial crisis of 2008.

It was Jeff Cohen who sent me the sad news of Danny's death, along with the link to the beautiful song by Phil Ochs, *When I'm Gone*. Play it and remember fondly the talented, committed, witty voice for media reform that is now silent. - **Granville Williams, Pontefract, West Yorkshire, England.**

My second father

I worked with Danny on *South Africa Now*. I did work for him while I worked as a Cadet Journalist in South Africa's troubled townships. I applied to Columbia School of Journalism. I was accepted. Danny fetched me to live with him

and his ex-wife. I did not have two pennies to Rub together!! He gave me my first introduction to broadcasting. He enabled me to get a Master's Degree from Columbia J. School. He then gave me a job at PBS doing odds and ends and then I became an anchor Mweli Mzizi and I and Joe Dischoe. It is the money I made working there, that enabled me to pay for my accommodation in New York. Danny would gather us together whenever he was in South Africa!

On hearing the news I cried like a BABY! I loved my scruffy Dad, Danny!!!!

Today, I am the Economics Editor of the SABC - The South African Broadcasting Corporation! I am responsible for All Economics news on All our 20 radio stations reaching 24 million people every day. I am also responsible for All economics news on TV - all our TV stations including Channel 404 with a footprint in 10 African countries. I owe it all to Danny Schechter and Prof Anton Harber, of Wits University. - **Thandeka Gqubule; Johannesburg, South Africa** ●

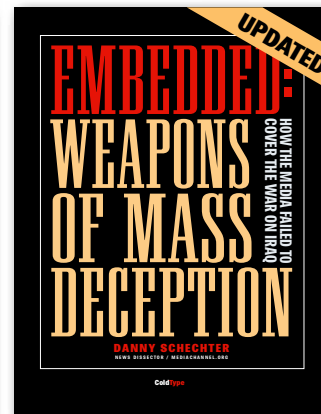
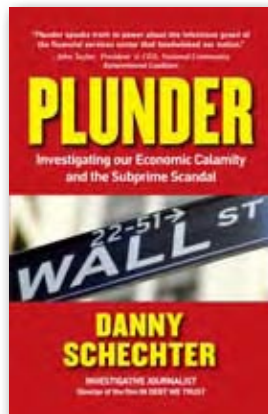
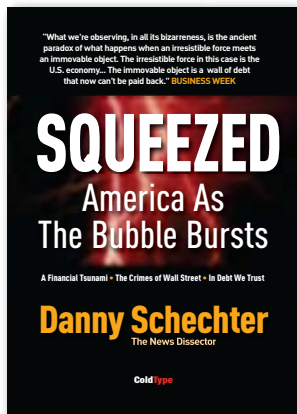
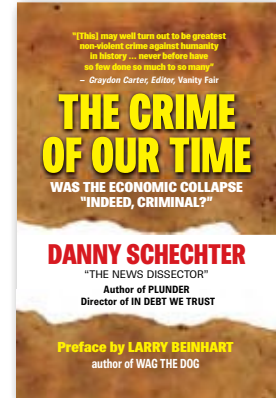
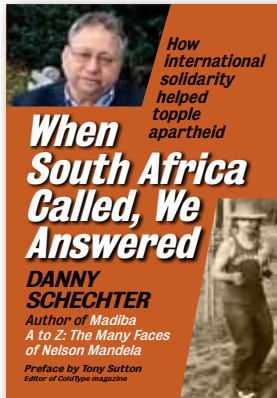


Making new friends: Danny holds court at an event held during 1994's first post-apartheid election in South Africa.

Find many more tributes on the Facebook Danny Schechter Memorial Page

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/1420905851554067/>

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As an appreciation of Danny Schechter's work with ColdType, we are giving away free downloads of these seven books, all published in association with ColdType.net – Download them at:

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Media. Hype. Dissected.

ColdType has published the work of Danny Schechter for the past 12 years. Here are the first and final pieces that we presented to our readers

The First Column

May 12, 2003

THE SHREDDING OF MEDIA CREDIBILITY

Official journalism in America is still reeling this morning as the mighty *New York Times* continues genuflecting on the significance of its admission that it has been carrying all the fiction fit to print. *Times* watchers on the right are ecstatic about the gray lady's bloody news, the revelation that one of its reporters, Jayson Blair, had been making it up and phoning it in, freely borrowing from other media outlets and not covering stories that he was writing about.

RACE BAITING ON MSNBC

Don Imus this morning chortled about the *Times* "Blair Witch Project" although one of his gang of wide-guy acolytes couldn't resist banging on the race card to blame it all on diversity gone bad, since Blair is black. The *New York Post* calls Blair the "*Times* trickster" and reports that he is now in the hospital with per-

sonal problems. No doubt affected by the ton of bricks that fell on him yesterday when the newspaper of record devoted SEVEN THOUSAND words to his disgrace and their shame,

This is the latest in a growing round of media scandals. Alex Jones, the director of a Harvard Center on the press and the author of a book on the *Times*, said on NBC that he believes there are Blair-type scandals lurking in every major newspaper. It was not just Blair that has been disgraced but the so-called system of checks and balances in place in the news room, according to Bob Steele who teaches ethics at the Poynter Institute of Journalism.



The essays in Danny's Media Diary for 2003 are at <http://coldtype.net/danny.html>

DIVERSITY IS NOT ISSUE, SAYS MANAGING EDITOR

The *New York Daily News* quotes managing editor Gerald Boyd on the race baiting that seems to be surfacing (or lurking just beneath the surface.) "Boyd bristled when asked if Blair, who is black, figured in a bid by the *Times* to diversify its mostly white staff of national correspondents, saying, "It's not an issue about diversity, but about a reporter who had issues that allowed him to deceive." Blair, who

apologized in a letter to Boyd and executive editor Howell Raines for a “lapse in journalistic integrity” and said he was “seeking appropriate counseling,” did not return a call to his cell phone yesterday.

“He vacated his last registered address – an apartment in Brooklyn – several months ago, leaving behind what was described as structural damage and extensive filth that cost several thousand dollars to undo.” Clearly, Blair had problems. Painful.

MEA MEA CULPAS

IN all of my years as a *NY Times* reader and media watcher, I have never seen the newspaper of record go into such overdrive to protest its innocence and “correct” the errors of a single journalist. Four and half pages were devoted to *Times* reputation management in Sunday’s paper, which devoted a two-column front page story, an editor’s notes and acres of print on the inside to tracking down and exposing the lies of young Jayson Blair, 27, who is said to have filed misleading reports 36 times (out of 76 stories) since getting national reporting assignments,

Editors apparently urged that he be fired, but nothing was done. “It’s Janet Cooke all over again,” said my downstairs neighbor” who compared this to the incident at the *Washington Post* where another young journalist who happened to be black was exposed for filing contrived or invented stories. He [Blair] was one of those “affirmative action” hires, my neighbor sneered. And so race raises its ugly head close to home.

Why did the *Times* go so over the top beating its breast on this story? Embarrassment, no doubt, especially since Editor Howell Raines was recently being targeted by the *NY Post* and Fox News Channel for reports critical of the war. Also, perhaps because the mighty media elite was exposed in this instance by the *City Paper*, a lowly alternative paper in Washington.

Says the *Times* about its massive investiga-

tion: “The newspaper organized it in the belief that the appropriate corrective for flawed journalism is better journalism – accurate journalism.”

Oh really?

In an editor’s note the paper does a mea culpa of historic proportions, regretting its failure to detect the “journalistic deceptions” earlier and apologized to its readers, to those whose work was “purloined” and to all conscientious journalists whose professional trust has been betrayed by this episode.

Catch your breath, Danny. I can’t believe I am reading this. I would like to think of myself as conscientious, but I must say there is something smarmy about this since it does not reveal what the newspaper’s “separate internal” inquiry has found. (This suggest that some heads will roll.) For years scholars of every description and leaning have been critiquing *Times* coverage. Noam Chomsky has packed books with long lists of well footnoted errors and omissions. Tuli Kupferberg, the ex-Fug, once published an imaginary Editor’s Note that apologized for the *Times* support for the cold war and American interventions for decades.

This apology is like Al Capone getting busted for not filing taxes. It is a misdemeanor in a sea of journalistic felonies. For more on the *Times*, see Daniel Forbes story on Mediachannel about *Times* reporter Judith Miller who, he reports, violated other *Times* guidelines limiting reporters involvement in groups lobbying on issues being covered. See: “*Pulitzer Prize-Winning Reporter Crosses The New York Times’ Line of ‘Strict Neutrality.’*”

MEDIA SYSTEM STRAINED

The media system today is showing signs of the institutionalized corruption now associated with Wall Street firms. Last week CNN’s Aaron Brown and Walter Cronkite pulled out of deals that would have put them in the position of endorsing pharmaceutical goods. Cronkite’s office said he never did endorse-

ments, so I don't want to tarnish him in any way here, BUT none of this is helping.

CONCERN IN JAPAN

AND, of course, the issue that others in the world see but that the American media has yet to confront, the way in which virtually the whole media caved in and became an accessory to the Bush White House in its war on Iraq. This point was driven home to me today by a letter from a journalist at NHK in Japan, which is making a film on this – even if most US media institutions just move on. She raises precisely the types of questions that are being avoided:

“Today, I am writing to ask if you are planning any research, seminar, public discussion, or discussions with reporters or TV producers regarding how the US media covered the war in Iraq. Especially, concentrating on the subject of fairness in the reports. NHK is planning to produce a program on this subject and would like to see how the US media itself is evaluating the war coverage in Iraq.

We would also like to see if the reporters or producers are beginning to ask more tough questions like, “Was this war necessary?” “Was it legal for US to attack Iraq without international support?”

SWINTON'S SPEECH RECALLED

Final thought. I have been skimming Uri Dowbenkos' book called *Bushwhacked: Inside stories of True Conspiracy*, published by conspiracy digest. Usually I avoid tracts like this but there was at least one relevant quote to pass on that relates to the *New York Times*, the subject of so much hand wringing today.

The remarks are attributed to John Swinton, former Chief of Staff for the *Times*, and according to this book, once dubbed “the dean of his profession.” He made these remarks before the New York Press Club early in the last century. (Perhaps a reader has more details.)

“There is no such thing as an independent press in America. You know it and I know it.

There is not one of you who dares to write his honest opinion, and if you did, you know before hand it would never appear in print.

“The business of journalists is to destroy the truth; to lie outright; to pervert; to vilify, to fawn at the feet of the mammon and to sell his country and his race for the daily bread. You know it and I know and what folly this is – toasting an independent press. We are tools and vassals of rich men behind the scenes; we are the marionettes. They pull the strings and we dance. Our time, our talent, our capacities are all property of these men. We are intellectual prostitutes.”

OTHER DEANS AT WORK

And so was born the idea of media whores, This is strong stuff. As for the role of Deans, Dan Fost of the *San Francisco Chronicle* reports: “The deans of the nation's journalism schools, led by Orville Schell of UC Berkeley, are coming together in an effort to improve the quality of television news.

“The effort, launched last year, is getting some traction, as the Carnegie Corp. of New York – a major foundation that helped launch the Public Broadcasting System in 1967 – said it will consider helping.

“The bitter truth is most Americans get most of what they know about the world from broadcast news,” Schell said. “Whatever you think of broadcast or cable news, you'd have to say it's not as good as it could be.”

WHERE O WHERE CAN THE WEAPONS BE?

Now back to the hunt, the hunt for Weapons of Mass Destruction, the issue that consumed hours and days of TV speculation and government assurances. Barton Gellman reported in the *Washington Post* yesterday: “The group directing all known U.S. search efforts for weapons of mass destruction in Iraq is winding down operations without finding proof that President Saddam Hussein kept clandestine stocks of outlawed arms, according to participant.”

“Leaders of Task Force 75’s diverse staff – biologists, chemists, arms treaty enforcers, nuclear operators, computer and document experts, and special forces troops – arrived with high hopes of early success. They said they expected to find what Secretary of State Colin L. Powell described at the U.N. Security Council on Feb. 5 – hundreds of tons of biological and chemical agents, missiles and rockets to deliver the agents, and evidence of an ongoing program to build a nuclear bomb.

“Scores of fruitless missions broke that confidence, many task force members said in interviews. “

OBSERVER: “A PLATFORM OF LIES?”

Over in England Paul Harris Martin Bright and Ed Helmore ask in the *Observer*, “Where are Saddam’s weapons of mass destruction? Was the war fought on a platform of lies? Taji was the only specific location singled out by Secretary of State Colin Powell in his address to the UN when he argued that evidence compiled by US intelligence proved the existence of an illegal weapons programme. ‘This is one of 65 such facilities in Iraq,’ Powell said. ‘We know this one has housed chemical weapons.’

“But the *Observer* has learnt that Taji has drawn a blank. US sources say no such weapons were found when a search party scoured the base in late April. By then it had already been looted by local villagers. If Taji ever had any secrets, they are long gone. That is bad news for Britain and the United States. The pressure is building to find Saddam’s hidden arsenal and time is running out.

A major shakeup is occurring in US occupation plans. Jay Garner the general in plain clothes is out; Mr. Bremer, the counter-terrorism expert is in. And the country is festering. Tomdispatch notes, “Over a month after Saddam Hussein’s regime dissolved and his military was either destroyed or simply dissolved, the simplest aspects of life under the American occupation have not returned to anything like “normal,” and normal – that is, the normal-

ity that just preceded the war – was already teetering at the edge of catastrophic. Where to start? The phone system still doesn’t work; electricity isn’t yet up; people are out of work; potable water is often not available; stipends are not being paid; a population which relied heavily on state aid simply to get through the day has been largely abandoned; the only organized forces in parts of the country seem to be the Shia clergy; the Americans were so woefully unprepared for this occupation that, in many cases, they can hardly communicate with the Iraqis; hostility is widespread; small numbers of American troops are dying – and that’s just a beginning.”

CENSORSHIP THREATENS

AS the US tries to replace Iraqi broadcasting with its own shows, there is already talk of censoring a TV station in the new Iraq. US Lieutenant General Petraeus says he doesn’t like the content and is considering doing something about it. “Yes, what we are looking at is censorship, but you can censor something that is intended to inflame passions.” ●

The Final Column

January, 2015

THE GHOSTS OF VIETNAM

It’s been nearly 40 years since what the American media called the “Fall of Saigon” and the Vietnamese referred to as the “Liberation”. I saw it then as the “Fall of Washington.”

The ghosts of Vietnam are back, thanks to two filmmakers with very different takes. The first is Tiana of South Vietnamese origin, and the second is Rory Kennedy, Bobby Kennedy’s youngest daughter.

Tiana is finishing a movie called “The

General and Me”, on her unlikely conversations (for someone from a virulently anti-communist family) with North Vietnam’s legendary General Giap, aka the “Red Napoleon,” aka the man whose military doctrines defeated the French Army and later the Americans.

Giap created the Vietnamese Army at Ho Chi Minh’s request, and without training became a military genius. Tiana has two other self-promoted US “geniuses” in her movie, too: pathetic walk-ons by US General William Westmoreland and Defense Secretary Robert MacNamara, who cannot conceal his contempt for her.

Kennedy’s highly-hyped *Last Days in Vietnam* depicts the hurried evacuation of US soldiers and as many of their Vietnamese conscripts in a long and bloody war that was lost almost from its earliest days. Rather than look at the reasons for that loss, she has, with support from HBO and PBS’s American Experience series, tried to present a heroic picture of Americans in their last days in Saigon, coping with a mad ambassador and in some cases rebelling against US policy.

Divides of the times

These two films, all these years later, mirror the cultural and political divides of the time. One film, in effect, rationalises the war, portraying the American military as compassionate, while the other, for one of the first times, offers the side that Americans never hear.

Even if her Uncle JFK did escalate the war, despite his back and forth doubts, a member of the Kennedy family is still treated as a cultural icon in a culture that can’t remember detail of what happened yesterday much less forty years. Rory’s work has been acclaimed; Tiana’s has not yet been seen. She calls this forgetting deliberate, “Namnesia.”

Gerald Perry writes in *Arts Fuse*: “The mushy reviews of *Last Days in Vietnam*” (a 94% Rotten Tomatoes approval rating) are extraordinarily similar. They praise filmmaker

Rory Kennedy for documenting a forgotten moment of American history, the chaotic days in 1975 when the US raced to leave Saigon and South Vietnam steps ahead of the advancing North Vietnamese Army. And the critics are pumped up with pride at the stories Kennedy has uncovered of brave and noble American soldiers and a few anti-establishment American diplomats who helped evacuate many South Vietnamese – by boat, plane, and helicopter – who presumably would be enslaved or murdered by the Communist North Vietnamese.

Flag-waving whitewash

What hardly anyone observed is that Kennedy, daughter of peacenik Robert Kennedy, is offering a flag-waving whitewash of the war in Vietnam. The North Vietnamese are characterized, with no exceptions, as Isis-like warriors murdering all their opposition on the way from Hanoi to Saigon. And, after entering Saigon, annihilating those who oppose them or sending their enemies to re-education camps.

The South Vietnamese? This amazed me: there is not any mention of the much-documented corruption of the various puppet governments, and of the South Vietnamese army as a coercive instrument of torture and killings. Each South Vietnamese ex-soldier, including a high-ranking officer, who is interviewed is allowed to tell his shiny story. There’s no blood attached to any of them.

“This did not surprise me. In 1976, the anniversary of the American Revolution, I published a small book featuring the views of Vietnam’s top military strategists including General Vo Nguyen Giap called *How We Won The War*.

Surely, that story is historically more significant than how we cut tail and ran.

I wrote then: “The American press was never much help in our efforts to find out more about those remarkable Vietnamese people who have now managed to out-orga-

nize, out fight, and defeat a succession of US backed regimes. When the US media did recognize the other side's existence, they did so with disdain, distortion and denigration...the US never came to terms the fact it was defending a government which had no support and attempting to crush one that did."

A group of LA-based film critics later wrote to PBS: "Rory Kennedy's egregiously unbalanced, out-of-context, dubiously propagandistic *"Last Days in Vietnam"* is currently in theatrical release, a production of the PBS series, *An American Experience*. We are appalled by the extraordinarily one-sided nature of Kennedy's rewrite of history that only shows the US government's and the Republic of Vietnam's side of the story, and never offers the points of view of the millions of Americans who opposed the war and of those who fought on the side of the National Liberation Front and North Vietnam."

So much for "balance!"

The protest was all for nought. Public Television retreated into its files of knee-jerk form letters and responded to criticisms of one program with a defense that cited all the programs they did, most decades old, while announcing that a new multi-million dollar series on Vietnam by Ken Burns is in the works. Typical! They avoided details like these:

Rory focused on the story of efforts to save allied officers and their families in a Saigon ("Arvin") Army known for its corruption and brutality.

It cited atrocities allegedly committed by the Communists like the "Hue Massacre," an event thoroughly investigated and exposed as false by US Vietnam Scholar Gareth Porter.

It cited violations of the Paris Peace agreement by the North without mentioning the many more egregious and concealed violations by the US-backed South Vietnamese forces.

It showed the madness and mania of US Ambassador Graham Martin as if he was an exception to a history of earlier US officials

who escalated the war with massive casualties, It offered no historical context or background.

It implied that all the people of Saigon would be butchered or imprisoned; that was not the case.

It referenced escaping ships racing to Con-Son Island without mentioning that that Island off the coast of Saigon hosted, like Guantanamo today, was a brutal prison camps filled with "tiger cages" where Vietnamese opponents of the military regime were kept, killed and tortured.

Where are the anti-war voices?

Perry asks: "Where in this documentary are the anti-war voices of those who were American soldiers in Vietnam and became disillusioned by the terrible things we did there? Who in this film speaks of our random bombing of North Vietnam? Of the massacre at My Lai? And for the CIA, where is mention of the heinous tortures of South Vietnamese under CIA director William Colby? As for Kissinger, it's madly frustrating to see his self-serving rhetoric go completely unchallenged. Where are you, Errol Morris, when needed? Instead, the world's number one war criminal at large (Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, Chile, etc.) is a welcome and honored guest to this documentary commissioned by PBS's *American Experience*."

And, on and on.

Its been 40 years. What have we learned? The Obama Administration, aided by its Secretary of State, a Vietnamese speaker no less, named John Kerry, once the leader of Vietnam Veterans Against the War, had turned into an apologist for the American role in the war, and an arms salesman to Vietnam which fears the Chinese today more than the Americans.

Whose voice should we listen to? Rory Kennedy with her slick well funded mockumentary of history or Tiana who is struggling to bring Vietnamese voices and a deliberately buried history to life? ●

A country we both call our second home

In the Foreword to Danny's book, *When South Africa Called, We Answered*, Tony Sutton speaks of shared experiences and a shared love for a country they both adopted

Look back at the major events in South Africa during the final decades of the apartheid era and you'll keep coming across the name of Danny Schechter – organizing, cajoling, pulling strings, and reporting the truth that an evil regime would have preferred to hide from an often ignorant and uncomprehending outside world.

His fight began in the sixties when, as a student at the London School of Economics, he became a close friend of three of the South Africans at the heart of the ANC in exile: Ruth First, later assassinated by the bomb of an Apartheid agent; her husband, Joe Slovo, considered the revolutionary group's intellectual brain; and

Ronnie Kasrils, a leader of Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK), the armed underground and, later, Minister of Intelligence in the ANC's second post-Apartheid government under Thabo Mbeki.

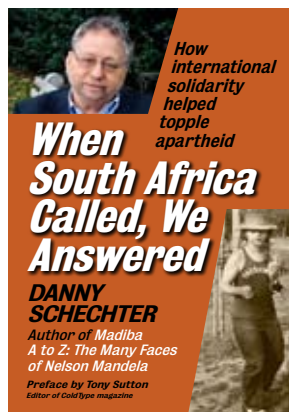
Schechter became one of the organization's London Recruits, a cadre of young non-South African idealists who flew into South Africa to detonate clandestine pamphlet 'bombs' in the heart of the nation's biggest cities. Their aim was

not to kill people, but to make everyone aware that the ANC, although banned and exiled, was still a key part of the struggle.

"Scared shitless," he set off his bomb and then decided, on impulse, to attend the funeral of Nobel Prize-winner Albert Luthuli in Natal, hitching a lift to the grave site, then strolling nonchalantly through a frightening crowd of stoked-up ANC militants surrounded by a phalanx of equally-fearsome and notoriously trigger-happy white policemen.

I first heard of Schechter's exploits at a party thrown by a gang of bemused and boozed-up foreign correspondents nine years later, weeks after the Soweto students riots of 1976. I'd been a journalist in Johannesburg for a year, and editor of *Drum*, the renowned magazine aimed at black readers, for just three months, when the revolution began. My only photographer had been detained on bomb charges (he was released a year later uncharged), my staff was harassed by cops and security police wherever they tried to work, and the first issue of *Drum* that I edited after the riots was declared so dangerous that the government made it an offence to possess a copy (a ban that lasted until the fall of Apartheid many years later). So, it was a good time to have a few beers and laugh at the exploits of a long-haired and impossibly-naive American radical. Brothers under the skin, I thought: bemused, bewildered, and over our heads – yet committed to a worthy cause.

I didn't hear the name Danny Schechter



The cover of the first edition of Danny's latest book, *When South Africa Called, We Answered*.



Coffee with Mandela?

Danny came to visit us at our home just outside Toronto a few years back. Tony and I had promised to entertain him by showing off the local sights over the weekend. But he was suffering from gout so we spent the time looking around secondhand bookstores, drinking lots of wine, and watching the movies that he ‘just happened to have’ in his bag. Halfway through one of his Nelson Mandela tributes, I went into the kitchen to make coffee. Danny shuffled after me. “But you’re missing the movie!” he declared, ushering me back towards the viewing room, “Coffee can wait!” It did. So did dinner! – Julia Sutton

again for another 25 years, although I was a witness to the consternation caused by a campaign, fronted by Bruce Springsteen’s guitarist Little Steven Van Zandt, to shame musicians into boycotting the Sun City casino/hotel complex in Bophuthatswana, one of South Africa’s racial homelands, where many top US entertainers including Frank Sinatra and Linda Ronstadt had appeared. The music boycott was a morale-shattering blow to the Afrikaner government, which had banked on using showbiz to maintain the semblance of a normal society as it battled to control dissent, particularly from the younger generation who, unlike their parents, realised that the maintenance of the status quo was both unattainable and undesirable. Schechter, I learned years later, was the prime mover of the Sun City campaign. After that, he launched the TV program South Africa Now, which worked tirelessly to show Americans a picture of apartheid ignored by their mainstream TV stations, after deciding that, as a journalist, he ought to do something to fight the media war in his own “field.”

Schechter and I next crossed paths a dozen years ago when, now resident in Canada, I began to use his News Dissector columns on my web site, ColdType.net. We became partners in publishing when I produced his book, “Em-

bedded: Weapons of Mass Deception”, a year later. Never again, I vowed, after the massive task of sorting out an unedited manuscript and a never-ending set of rewrites on endless page proofs. Then, a year later, another phone call: Would I help him do another book, this time on the financial crisis which later led to the 2008 stock market crash. “No re-writing, no piles of page proofs. Promise.” Of course, I agreed. Now, what was that about re-writes? Hmm, some things don’t change, but friendship survives all adversity. *When South Africa Called, We Answered* is the seventh book we’ve worked on together – we’re partners. Danny provides the words. I sort them out. He does a bit of editing, I do a lot of moaning.

This is my favourite of his books. It’s more personal, full of shared acquaintances, similar memories, and experiences of a country and continent that, despite their many faults, are etched deep into our hearts. Read it and you will understand our affection for South Africa, a troubled land we both call our second home. ●

Tony Sutton is the editor of coldtype magazine at www.coldtype.net - ColdType has produced and published seven of Schechter’s books, all available free of charge at www.coldtype.net/SchechterBooks.html

Memory matters

Danny Schechter shares his feelings about the importance of a 'people's' history as an effective counterbalance to 'official' history in this introduction to his book, *Dissecting The News & Lighting The Fuse*

As he aged, Nelson Mandela turned his principal foundation into a Center of Memory, not only to share the achievements of his phenomenal life but also to keep the story of the South African freedom struggle alive for new generations. Many, in just 20 years, had forgotten, or never learned about its sacrifices.

Memory is not just the preserve of the iconic and important, but something that all of us lose with the passage of time, especially because we live in societies oriented towards living in the present, in the here and the now, with little sense of a collective past beyond what most of us learn in school and then promptly forget.

In Uganda, women facing an early death from AIDS, or diseases of poverty, came up with the idea of creating "memory boxes" to collect photos, heirlooms, and family histories to share with the children who will survive them. The boxes quickly became a popular way to pass on their history, values, and reminiscences to the next generation.

In more "developed" societies, we have vast professional archives to collect and preserve documents and artifacts, even though many are dependent

on funding or university support. The state of Georgia just announced that is cutting the staff that maintains its archive, while in many states and cities, funding for public libraries is disappearing. Few of these places still have bookstores, with publishers increasingly relying on on-line sales. In some towns, newspapers face extinction and Local TV news may be next.

Already, the media outlets that most of us rely on minimize context and background in reporting, often recycling stenographic accounts missing in interpretation. Even as we have more technology than ever to connect us with a changing world, it tends to be used more for entertainment than information. The

most popular websites are the best-marketed ones. The superficial still trumps the substantive.

A recent study of Monterey, California, showed how what we remember is often influenced by the powers that be. John Herbst wrote, "many people will find the elements of the Monterey experience familiar: a history represented by upper class homes; socially elite governing boards and societies; outdated and non-inclusive interpretive exhibits; the tour guide who is a local history 'gatekeeper,' emphasis on decorative arts and furnishings



This book may be downloaded, free of charge, from ColdType at <http://coldtype.net/SchechterBooks.html>



Proud moments:
The arrival of a new daughter, Sarah; and the publication of a new book.

on a historic house tour; the lack of emphasis on industrial history; the commercial exploitation of adaptively used industrial buildings.”

This is the conflict the late Howard Zinn addressed years ago in his writing on the tension between official history and “people’s history.” It surfaces time and time again, when we think about whom we remember, and what to remember.

There is a personal component in this conflict for me as a long time social activist, journalist, filmmaker, and sometime troublemaker. As a storyteller and journalist, I have often used my own experiences as a prism to explore the past. As my mom, the poet Ruth Lisa Schechter quipped, “He knows what it is because he was there when it was.”

History is still being made and remade and I am hardly the only one with tales to tell.

As a relatively experienced observer who has lived through decades of tumultuous change and traveled to some 70 countries, I have developed my own reporting style and framework for analysis that informs my writing and media work. It is grounded in a personal

family history as well. As the child of working class parents with an immigrant background, I grew up in a culture that worshipped great writers and a history of labor struggles.

I was introduced early on to a rich history replete with leaders who battled for social justice. That shaped my own orientation. Later, my immersion in the social movements of my time – student activism, civil rights, the anti-war, and anti-apartheid battles brought me into contact with well-known activists and important leaders.

In this book, you will find an essay on a “secret” I have kept since the 60’s, my small role in the underground inside South Africa that assisted the armed struggle, that decades later, helped liberate that country. I helped organize unions and rent strikes. I marched in many protests in New York and Washington. I taught in freedom schools and reported on demonstrations. I wrote for and then edited a high school newspaper and college magazine.

In my twenties, I began traveling the world witnessing South African apartheid in its darkest days and then the protests that rocked Lon-

don, Berlin, and Paris in the late 60's. I came back to America to pursue a career in journalism ending up as a News Dissector and the "News Dissector" at rock and roll radio, local TV news, talk programs, CNN, ABC News and later my own production company, Globalvision, where my colleagues and I made TV series and many documentaries. In my case, six were with Nelson Mandela.

I realized that there was a media war underway over what to report and how to do it. I realized that media omission was as bad as commission in the slanting of news. What we don't know is often more important than what we think we do. Hence, my calling this collection, "Dispatches" from an ongoing conflict.

In my own work, I had gone from being an outsider to an insider, and then an outsider again, always independent in spirit and critical in outlook. I went from the underground press to the mainstream media, from print to radio and TV, and back to print. Today I am often on the air around the world, commenting for BBC, Al Jazeera, Press TV, Russia Today, Saudi Arabia TV, and even Austrian radio, but rarely, if ever, for the networks I used to work for. I do appear weekly on Reverend Jesse Jackson's *Keep Hope Alive Radio* show, and contribute to websites worldwide.

As the digital age dawned, I went online in 1986 and never came back. I was part of teams that launched various websites, and have written a daily blog for almost 12 years.

I wrote my first book on what it was like to work in the trenches of mainstream media in 1997. It was called *The More You Watch the Less You Know*. Afterwards, I seem to have written a new one every year for a small following, often – alas – poorly promoted by small independent publishers. They tried, but the big houses get more attention for their books because they have advertising budgets that smaller imprints lack. I have written about media, war, politics and activism. My last two books are, *Blogothon*, a collection of some of my online work, and *Occupy: Dissecting Oc-*

cupy Wall Street, a report on the contemporary fight for economic justice.

This book is #15, probably the last one because it became clear that while I had the energy to write and churn them out, I didn't have the wherewithal or connections to get them distributed as widely as I would have liked. I would like to think that it is not due to their quality.

It may be that all these multimedia interests, flitting from blogging, to movie making, all my globetrotting, and a blend of activism and journalism ensured that I had no one "field" to be associated with or remembered for. It seems axiomatic that to develop a public profile, you have to do "one thing well." That advice never fit well with my more hyperactive personality. We live in the age of the brand, and among the many who compete for attention in the highly commercialized "media space," the notion of a "News Dissector" may be regarded more as a catchy phrase, but not for a serious body of work, despite an Emmy and other media awards.

A media careerist might see me as my own worst enemy for trying to do too many projects and too quickly. It is a criticism I hear frequently and there is some truth to it. We are told that people who act as their own lawyers "have a fool for a client," so the writer and filmmaker who tries to do his own PR invites charges of being self-promotional, and then, can be ignored. However, I don't feel ignored. I have been blessed by being associated with teams of colleagues who work with me, put up with me, and encourage my pursuits. I am proud of what I have accomplished and I am hardly the only dissenter and critic whose work is ignored by the guardians of the status quo.

What a long and sometimes strange trip it has been and continues to be. I am always dancing on the edge of the contradictions, somehow managing to find the funding and audiences to keep going. I can still drop names with the best of them, but none of it matters when you are working in what people on the

inside consider the “wilderness,” a place reserved for marginalized voices and gadflies. How I hate that putdown!

I have dipped my fingers in many oceans, traveled up the Yangtze and down the Ho Chi Minh trail. I organized rent strikes in Harlem and taught at a civil rights Freedom School in Mississippi. I have been underground in the secret war against apartheid and over ground up on the mountaintop with the economic elite in Davos, Switzerland. I traveled with the Dalai Lama, marched with Martin Luther King, rallied with SDS, dined with Malcolm X, met Jean-Paul Sartre, connected with Fela, Amilcar Cabral, Oliver Tambo, and Samora Machel in Africa. Visited the home of Patrice Lumumba in Kinshasa, and more recently, ran with Occupy Wall Street on, where else, Wall Street. I also met Yasser Arafat, Le Duc Tho, and later, yuck, Henry Kissinger and Spiro T. Agnew.

I yipped with Abbie Hoffman, helped produce the all-star *Sun City* anti-apartheid album with Little Steven, Bruce Springsteen, Bono and Miles Davis et al. Profiled Tina Turner and Bob Dylan, did one of the first national TV reports on hip-hop, visited John and Yoko at home, shook hands with Jimmy Carter, Bill Clinton, Teddy Kennedy and Tip O’Neil, and had lunch with George Soros. I have been more fulfilled by what I have been able to produce, than by connecting briefly with the “good and the great.”

I have been to many political conferences, media conferences and TV award ceremonies. I have been to China and many Chinatowns. Sometimes I felt like Woody Allen’s Zelig.

I like to think my investigations were ahead of their time, including a film warning of the financial crisis in 2006 and another explaining why it was a crime story, not just an economic miscalculation. I did a film exposing election fraud in 2000, another calling for tolerance in the aftermath of 9/11, and yet another, explaining how Barack Obama won in 2008.

I wrote the first book published on the Iraq

War along with a film exposing the role of our own TV industry as propagandists called *WMD: Weapons of Mass Deception*. At points, I have been widely published, and at other points ignored, or spied upon by the CIA and FBI. I know because I have seen my files. In one of my most wannabe revolutionary moments, one of their informants praised me as likeable if “funky” for wearing my hair in the “bouffant style of a woman.” So, even as I saw myself as a feared militant, they saw me as a teddy bear. Some activists even considered me an agent because I knew too much about the covert world, or because of the paranoia and suspicion that festers in the left political culture.

Smile.

I know of only a few friends, comrades, and colleagues who have been as immersed, and learned so much, in the course of so many adventures, doing so many things, going so many places, over so many decades, from the 1940’s through 2012 and still counting.

This book and my earlier work is one way of giving back, sharing what I care about and hoping you will care too.

Like so many of those comrades, I learned humility in the course of overreaching or moving too fast. I am not proud of making the mistakes I’ve made, or, at points, exercising bad judgment, depending on the wrong people, which often led to avoidable unhappiness. Not everything I attempted was successful, and I have lost friends by disappointing them, and even attracted some enemies, who for their own reasons and delusions consider me the devil incarnate. I regret not always being there enough for my daughter, and putting too much time and energy into work and not enough into family. I haven’t always lived a balanced life, maybe because I don’t know how.

In the end, you, the reader, will have to determine if this work is informative, insightful, or worth reading and passing on. As that cynically misused slogan says, “I report, you decide.” ●

Journalist, Filmmaker, Author, Activist, Father, Brother, Friend, Troublemaker



Danny always made his family smile. A Schechter Family Reunion at his New York loft. December 2014.



One of the final photographs of Danny, taken in his apartment by health adviser Jessica Zambelli.