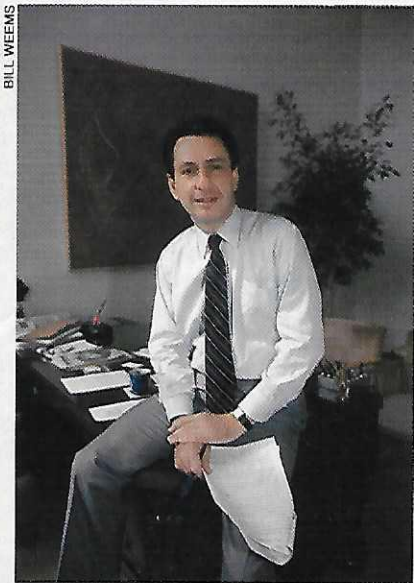


* In his first term on Capitol Hill, Arlen Specter, the Republican Senator from Pennsylvania, has charted a highly independent game plan. And followed it.

THE WASHINGTON SENATOR WHO DOESN'T ALWAYS PLAY BALL



BILL WEEMS

By Michael Levin

A

RLEN SPECTER, '51 C, will never win any beauty contests. His suits are drab and ill-fitting, bunched at the collar, tight across an incipient paunch that refuses to yield to determined rounds of squash. They flap at thin wrists and ankles, a sartorial gaffe most evident as he hurries down Capitol halls between appointments (he has learned to fold his hands behind him when he stands still). His sallow face, tending to jowls now that he is 54 years old, is broader at the jaw than the high forehead; his nose is ski and spatulate—a combination that has led observers to compare him to a

“pocket Nixon” in profile. His limp, kinky hair recalls the stuffing of a Victorian sofa. And though his dark eyes can flash humor and fierce intelligence, they seem dour and doleful in repose, sunk behind pouches so heavy they might flunk the baggage test on an international airline.

Nor, for a long time, did Specter seem likely to win any political beauty contests. Pennsylvania's junior senator has been a public figure for so many years it is difficult to remember that this is only his second elective position. Nineteen years ago, he came from nowhere to buck the Democratic machine in Philadelphia and capture the district attorney's slot in a stunning upset, one that made him the first Republican voted to citywide office in a generation. He became “Darlin’ Arlen,” an

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instant national celebrity, who, along with John Lindsay, was the bright new hope of the Grand Old Party, its answer to Kennedys and Camelot and feckless Republican politics that, after Eisenhower, drew far more zzz's than zows.

Yet, even before he took office, he was labeled a "calculating calculator," cold, ruthless, ambitious, and opportunistic—charges that should have been forgotten, coming from those he had trounced. But the young Specter's style was dogged and tenacious, stiff in public, workaholic and demanding behind his desk. He was unable to defuse attacks with easy humor. The labels stuck, and Specter began to lose. And lose and lose—"to some of the most unpopular people on the face of the earth," as one state politician puts it. To Jim Tate for mayor of Philadelphia in 1967, barely a year into Specter's first term as D.A., though the polls said he would win in a landslide. To dourer-and-drier Emmett Fitzpatrick in 1973, turned out of office by Watergate and his role as Pennsylvania chairman of Nixon's CREEP (Committee to Re-Elect the President). To John Heinz in the 1976 senatorial primary, swamped by ketchup-and-pickle dollars. To the current governor of Pennsylvania, Dick Thornburgh, in the 1978 gubernatorial primary.

By 1979, Specter was happily ensconced in the Philadelphia law firm of Dechert, Price, and Rhoads, making big money, readying an Atlantic City office to cash in on booming casino business, determined "not to put my family through the mill" or

give opponents another chance to kick Specter around again. Then Richard Schweiker announced his retirement, and a vacant Senate seat beckoned. Specter called in his IOUs from years of Republican campaigning, crossed and recrossed the state with characteristic, tireless intensity, meeting with party leaders in Harrisburg and Hershey, mossbacked regulars in Scranton and Erie, moderates in Squirrel Hill, pounding away at his name recognition, his electability, the economic issues that mired Pennsylvania in the collapse of smokestack America, seeking to neutralize the three hurdles that spell sudden death for such candidates: the state's huge Bible Belt; the phobia of western and rural Pennsylvanians, the sort who would vote for Attila the Hun over a Philadelphian and who have been known to write their representatives that funds for the city mean "me and my family will break both your legs"; and pressures to move right for Republican primaries, taking stands that prove suicidal in a general election.

Specter capitalized on some lucky breaks to squeak past Thornburgh's hand-picked primary candidate, who had unwisely been cutting state patronage jobs. Then he ran the same kind of meticulous, exhausting campaign against Pete Flaherty, the former mayor of Pittsburgh. "These guys are both good at blowing it," said *Time*. "I'm a brand-new radial," not a retreat, Specter shot back. Buttressed by dozens of issue papers, he walked the streets of Strawberry Mansion and Wilkes-Barre, spoke

out, at open houses in dozens of counties, on crime, jobs, industrial renewal, and restored military strength, while repeating, "the Federal Government can't solve all our problems," walking a careful line between his liberal background and a resurgent Right. He "popped up at every toxic waste dump, got union and black support unusual for a Republican, . . . outspent Flaherty 2 to 1," and dominated the airwaves with articulate, well-timed announcements, recalls one longtime Specter-watcher. He "knew he was going to win it," adds a reporter who covered him, "because Flaherty didn't want it enough. He wasn't willing to take that extra flight to Altoona, to shave a second time each day."

When the smoke cleared on November 5, 1980, Specter had ridden the Reagan Revolution to a narrow 3% victory, based on grit, pluck, and, yes, political calculation that won thousands of disaffected Democrats, capping what *The Philadelphia Inquirer* called a "remarkable renaissance by a remarkably complex politician." He had managed to replay that 1965 stunner, becoming the first Philadelphian voted to the Senate since the Sixties, Pennsylvania's first Jewish senator ever. He was Senator-elect Specter, and the world changed for him.

So the Arlen Specter who landed in Ronald Reagan's Washington and the first Republican Senate since the Fifties seemed very different from the controversial acid-tongued Philadelphia D.A.—more mellow and assured, less aggressive if not less

Arlen Specter, who will have no national coattails when he faces reelection in two years, is understandably obliging to visitors from his home state. Here, he meets a delegation of Pennsylvania representatives to the Rural Electric Legislation Conference, on the Capitol steps.



driven, capable of such self-deprecating remarks as "I've made so many mistakes, I don't know where to start" when asked to list some. Gone are the high profile, twice-weekly news conferences, replaced by a newcomer building bridges, quietly learning the ropes of the hemisphere's most exclusive club. Gone, too, are the extravagant claims of accomplishment, submerged by a willingness to let others take credit.

In their place is a Specter intense and perfectionist as ever, a "pile-driving" employer who runs his staff ragged, working 15-hour days that begin with squash at 7:00 a.m. and race through a packed, dizzying schedule of committee briefings, constituent meetings, speeches, interviews, negotiations, and legislative strategy sessions, sandwiched between dozens of phone calls and weekly trips home to touch base. "I stay thin because I worry a lot," remarks Paul Michel, the graying assistant who was hired by Specter in 1966 and is now his top Senate aide. "He stays thin because he's incredibly active." He still has "frightening self-discipline," adds Jim Wagner, a former psychologist who runs Specter's Harrisburg office and drives him around the state. "He's not a nonsmoker," Wagner sighs, glancing regretfully at an overflowing ashtray. "He has one cigarette with breakfast but doesn't touch another the whole day. . . . If I could do that, I could do *anything*."

And he still terrorizes junior aides with occasionally brutal interrogations on analyses they have prepared. "Everyone up there runs through staff like water," notes Bruce Cohen, who came with Specter from Philadelphia and is now with Dechert, Price's Washington office. "Heinz turns over his staff every 18 months, whether he needs to or not. These are people in important positions, they *should* be demanding. Besides, [Specter] pushes himself harder than anyone. And a lot of it is follow-up to evaluate your recommendations by understanding how deep you've gone. The difficulty new staff have is not because they don't know the answer, but because they don't listen to the question. . . . People just aren't used to disciplined talking," Cohen opines firmly.

But this Specter's perfectionism seems limited to his office rather than the state of the world, which it often appeared to cover when he was a Republican D.A. fighting with Democratic judges, Democratic mayors, "everybody in sight. . . . And there was a lot of blood on the floor, mostly mine."

Specter plainly enjoys the frenetic legislative swings from topic to topic, exhilaration to despair. In fact, he's having the time of his life. And despite the pace, he is loose and funny, introducing a press aide as The

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THE SENATOR SPECTER WHO LANDED IN PRESIDENT REAGAN'S WASHINGTON AND THE FIRST REPUBLICAN SENATE SINCE THE FIFTIES SEEMED VERY DIFFERENT FROM THE CONTROVERSIAL, ACID-TONGUED D.A. FROM PHILADELPHIA WHO HAD CHANGED POLITICAL HORSES IN MIDSTREAM.

Senator, giving a group of Arizonans a lift in the Senate's private elevator, doing raspy impersonations of Earl Warren, dredging anecdote after anecdote from that photographic politician's memory of old rivalries, elections, and vote counts.

"Oops," he might say, striding through the bowels of the Capitol to jerk open a door that faces a blank brick wall instead of the hearing room. "Another effect of Reaganomics." "Ha," he has intoned, recalling how the Warren Commission was examining the still-knotted necktie cut from J.F.K.'s body in Dallas, when Allen Dulles, a member of the commission, awoke to unconsciously sum up Establishment America: "By Jove—President Kennedy wore ready-made ties!"

He will toss off Henry Cabot Lodge's definition of a statesman—"a dead politician"—and quote Everett Dirksen to explain the power of the Appropriations Committee: "A billion here, a billion there . . . soon it adds up to real money." He can stage-whisper to an assistant who bursts into the Senate Dining Room, calling *Senator; Senator*; only to see half the room rise: "Next time, call out 'Mr. President'—they'll all stand." Informed that five angry Syrians who attacked his Mideast stance at a town meeting all had rolled newspapers under their arms, he quips no, he never thinks about getting shot, "but sometimes I think about shooting people." He is fond of breaking Senate tensions by giving an outrageous straight-faced order—"Get the President and see if he's free for lunch today"—then cracking up when the respondent comes

back, puzzled, phone in hand. And in a development that would astonish former assistant D.A.s who found him "aloof and unapproachable," he has taken to inviting aides, opposing staff, and even lobbyists to his Washington apartment for beer and pizza, giving a new twist to New Dealer Harold Ickes's dictum that "If you can't take their money and drink their booze and screw their women, and then vote against 'em, you don't belong here."

"I don't know about that," says one state Democrat. "When someone who straight-armed people all his life suddenly seems to change, you have to wonder a little. . . . Arlen was always a little dangerous—more likely to be a persecutor than a prosecutor. You see him visiting prisons or wrapping his arms around disadvantaged children, you wonder when he goes home at night any more." "He *has* changed," insists Paul Michel. "He was always a loner in many respects—all business. Now he makes small talk, and he's much more relaxed and wry. . . . He talks about his feelings; he never used to do that. He's genuinely ready to be a friend." No, he hasn't changed, says Arthur Mackedon, an assistant in the Seventies, in tones reminiscent of debates about the new Nixon. "Life doesn't reduce itself to clichés. He's not a light guy. He didn't serve on a PT boat and rescue his shipmates. . . . But he'll never be pompous. And he always was self-effacing."

"Everybody is more than one person," adds Bob Moss, who's been with Specter from the beginning. In 1965, he clocked 14,000 miles driving the then unknown candidate around Philadelphia. He recalls how Specter would draw three citizens to street-corner rallies and stand behind them heckling ("Who's this Specter guy?") while he (Moss) did the introductions. "The serious, intense side is also Arlen," says Moss, noting, "but that guy with the great sense of humor, that has to be the real person, too. At 2:00 in the morning, over and over, you can't fake that."

Perhaps the new Specter has been chastened by political realities, the difficulty of dealing with a Republican President while representing a Pennsylvania that is "really six states." Perhaps he's been chastened by the Senate seniority system, described by the late Senator Paul Douglas as "the South's revenge on the North for the Civil War." That system chewed Specter up his first day in Washington, alphabetically assigning him—as "S" in a freshman class of 16 Republicans—two exceedingly minor subcommittee chairmanships. Perhaps he's simply been tempered by experience, has learned the ex-whiz kid's hardest lesson—that in politics, as in life, sheer intellect doesn't get you there.

But whether Specter the Machine has become Specter the Human, or is merely "softening his image," as a potential opponent puts it, or has reached the point where he can let more of himself hang out in public, four things have plainly not changed:

He still loves issues, the cut and thrust of facts and analysis. Indeed, issues have become his life preserver; allowing use of his lawyer's skills to create room to maneuver as a politician, to craft effective compromises and differ with the White House while supporting President and Party. He supports the New Right's constitutional amendment requiring a balanced budget, for example—but partly because that amendment can be used to reach defense spending and Reagan deficits. And his stand opposing the explosive amendment authorizing vocal school prayer blends law and political judgment, attempting to create "a balance for unpressurized prayer and a middle ground most Americans can support," as he puts it. "I believe silent prayer is constitutional now," he tells a hostile town meeting in the crisp, deep public voice that retains a twang of Kansas prairies. "And religious groups should have access to school buildings before and after classes. . . . But requiring prayer means someone else has to pick the prayer; you may not like what gets picked. And if we required prayer today, we'll be taxing churches tomorrow. . . . I think government should keep religion out of the schools!" Applause.

He is still absolutely fearless, taking on colleagues, committee chairmen, and anyone else when he thinks issues are poorly resolved or procedures have been short-cut. Some would say "reckless," and Specter has also been called a loose cannon in this regard. But in his first months, he tangled with John Tower, powerful chairman of Armed Services, on arms control—and prevailed. His cross-examination on ethics conflicts made mincemeat of a Reagan judicial nominee no one else laid a glove on. He's repeatedly challenged Judiciary Committee Chairman Strom Thurmond "when Thurmond wants to push something through and everyone else would go along," notes a veteran assistant. "Then Arlen says, 'What's going on here? What happens if . . . ?' He keeps boring in, he won't let people get away with easy answers. He's great at saying the emperor has no clothes, or let's see if he does. . . . He'll say, 'I hate to hold things up, but didn't we agree last week . . . ?' insisting square corners be turned." He "has a lot of spunk," adds another assistant. "He's not scared of anyone. That's rare in first-term—or any—senators, though he's not a good tactician yet. . . . But tactics can be learned." And "he's just

SPECTER VOTED FOR THE FIRST OF THE REAGAN BUDGETS BECAUSE 'IT WAS TIME TO CHANGE THE DIRECTION OF FEDERAL SPENDING.' BUT HE ALSO OPPOSED THE WHITE HOUSE NEARLY 40 PER CENT OF THE TIME. HE INSISTS THAT HE HAS TO DIFFER WITH REAGAN ON MATTERS OF CONSCIENCE.

tenacious as hell," they agree. "He pretty much votes his principles, the way he thinks he should as the Senator from Pennsylvania. . . . He'll hang in forever to do what has to be done."

He still believes public service is the highest calling, a chance to return more than you get. Long before he became a public figure, he took a huge pay cut—from \$7,700 to \$4,400 a year—to leave Dechert, Price for a position as assistant district attorney. He is fond of telling hecklers who accuse him of ambition, "You should see the difference in my tax returns before and after I became senator." He's plainly not starving: senators make \$70,000 plus speech fees, he socked away chunks of legal income, and wife Joan is a Philadelphia councilwoman who owns a thriving pastry business. But he's not in this for the money. As D.A., he was "the most honest politician I've ever seen," says Dave Racher of *The Philadelphia Daily News*, who covered city justice affairs for 23 years. "He went after a lot of bigwigs—lawyers, developers, big contributors—and it was always criticized as political. But those were real targets . . . and corruption made him literally sick. You never worried about Specter. He was always clean."

He is still passionate about the rule of law, perhaps his truest religion. In a wink, he can deliver short, charged soliloquies on the genius of the Constitution, the Supreme Court as the moral conscience of the nation. He says over and over that the thread linking his actions, from Meese to El Salvador, "is the legal issues . . . that this coun-

try should be as law-abiding as it expects its citizens to be . . . shouldn't attempt to overthrow other governments . . . should put back the power to declare war where the Constitution placed it, in the Congress, since you can't wage war anyway without public support." And though he understands political compromise, he dislikes and mistrusts it where individual rights or livelihoods are concerned. He used to attack judges for laxness and timidity, but he puts his faith in the courts. "Open up the courts!" he tells workers worried about subsidized British steel. "Open 'em up for suits to stop foreign dumping. Trade agencies in every administration sell American industry down the river on the altar of foreign policy. The only place you get justice is the courts. In the Executive [branch] and Congress, they look for political tradeoffs. But judges have life tenure—it's the courts that gave civil rights, voting rights, that will guarantee economic rights." There's no doubt he means this. But like many Specter positions, it's also an artful compromise—a protectionism that will not precipitate trade wars.

And one thing about Specter seems clear: halfway through his first term, he's a smash hit, in the Senate and for Pennsylvania. This, after all, is the *Senate*, which Gouverneur Morris hoped would "show the might of aristocracy," which for over a hundred years was elected by state legislatures rather than voters, which held secret, unrecorded sessions into the nineteenth century because it was not meant to be accountable, which has no germaneness limits, no limit on debate, and an iron rule that freshmen should neither be seen nor heard. "I understand the Senate's changed a lot since you came here," a newcomer once remarked to his seat-mate, courtly Senator Walter George, after hesitating six months. "Yes," George replied. "Freshmen didn't talk so much."

Arlen Specter did not enter this institution as a pussycat. As in his D.A. days, he's still feared and respected more than liked. He's still impatient, seeking "overnight hosannas," instant results. He still has a stubborn intellectual vanity which enjoys scoring debaters' points "on things that are not a big deal," says one observer. "When a senator can't answer, he fires two more questions instead of asking through his staff—for the triumph of asking himself, forgetting he'll ask them to do something for him next week. That interferes with his ideas, which are good ones." He's not "able to proping," agrees another. "When he first came, I thought, 'Wow, here's another Javits. . . . But he doesn't suffer fools, and lets you know it. He's better at questions. The political skills should transcend the lawyer skills—he should see where the

compromise lies, like a fault line. . . . Instead, there's this brooding presence . . . like a man with a microscope on a conveyor belt, looking over the details and turning the issue inside out while political forces carry him to where he should be anyway."

"That's ridiculous!" explodes a Specter aide who, like several others in the office, once worked for Javits. "You don't blaze a trail across the Senate overnight. It took Javits 15 years and a lot of luck, and Presidents he could stand with against his own party. . . . And the gut issues aren't clear any more—McCarthy, civil rights. Today, you're a white liberal, you don't know what the f— to do on Affirmative Action. . . . Here's this freshman, trying like hell, with the crappiest committee assignments in the Senate, outspoken on a lot of issues, always looking over his right shoulder, voting his conscience at potentially great cost. . . . He needs a reelection under his belt—he's still rubbing his eyes about where he is."

But the eyes are open, and Specter knows exactly where he is: charting an independent course. His first month in Washington, he was named spokesman for Republican freshmen, their main link to the White House. His first six months, he cofounded a Senate Children's Caucus, which helped pass provisions addressing child pornography, child abuse, and runaways. His first year, he helped increase Federal business in Pennsylvania and negotiated deliveries of surplus food to hard-hit steel communities, became a major actor on criminal mat-

ters, turned those crappy committees into powerful platforms to save juvenile justice programs and start model prisoner-rehabilitation efforts. A year later, he had an impact on foreign affairs and nuclear disarmament, helping secure a 30% cut in military aid to El Salvador and two Senate resolutions calling for summit meetings to end the arms race.

By 1984, he was in the thick of the Meese nomination, as well as some others, and had helped craft a compromise preserving the Civil Rights Commission. He voted for the first Reagan budget because "it was time to change the direction of Federal spending"—then voted to defer supply-side tax cuts, since "you must pay for what you spend." He showed up at 4:00 a.m. to successfully sponsor a measure favoring use of Pennsylvania coal. He voted for extended unemployment benefits, health care, and Social Security, and against his President on education, food stamps, AWACs, nerve gas, E.R.A., busing, abortion, and school prayer. He missed only 11 of 1,400 ballots, compiling a rating from the liberal Americans for Democratic Action higher than any other Republican and three Democratic Presidential candidates, opposing the White House nearly 40% of the time.

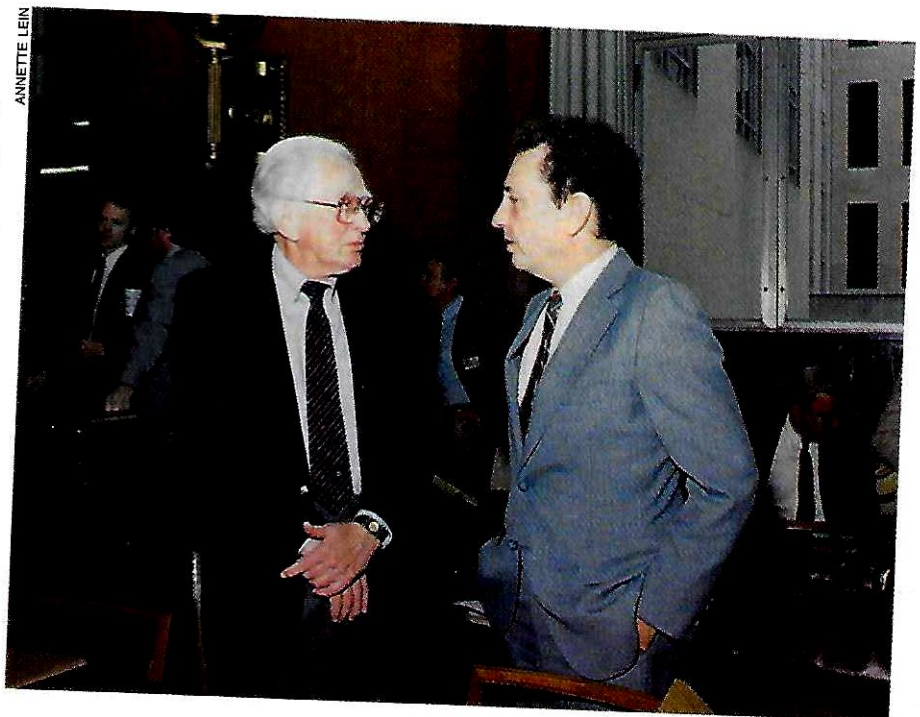
"Hell no, I support the President. I voted with him as much as [right-wing Senator] Jesse Helms," he tells hostile constituents, neglecting to mention that Helms is also high on the opposition list. "These labels are like bikinis, they conceal more than

they reveal. I have to differ with him on Pennsylvania unemployment and matters of conscience, but I'm as supportive as I can be," he insists.

Indeed, this unpredictability has proven a source of additional power, giving Specter influence beyond straight party loyalty. In the Republican Senate, for example, whose slim majority means the leadership cannot afford to ignore the wishes of any Republican senator. And on the Judiciary Committee, which has an equally slim majority and "has always been really ideological, split between liberals on civil rights and right-wing conservatives on crime and gun control," notes one committee aide. "The only thing we ever passed by unanimous consent was Helen Keller Blind-Deaf Week. . . . There are always Specter and three or four swing guys in the middle. The question is, what do you have to do to get them?"

Specter is using this fragile power with growing skill, though he's also pushed too hard and come a cropper on some favorite measures. But "he doesn't have the look-and-leap mentality, where a senator reads about something in the paper and thinks he has to solve it," adds another committee veteran. "He's bright and serious about being a senator . . . learning those personal moves and getting pretty good." "Look," says Edward G. Rendell, '65 C, the current district attorney of Philadelphia and a Democratic prospect for governor in 1986, "Public officials aren't comedians or circus acts. Being well-liked isn't as good as being

Senator Specter exchanges views with Howard Metzenbaum, the Democratic Senator from Ohio, before a hearing of the Senate Judiciary Committee. The committee has handled, among other issues, the nomination of Edwin Meese for Attorney General.



effective. People leave the room with a lot of respect for him. . . . He's doing a hell of a job."

IF

THERE IS an Arlen Specter story at all, it does not begin in Philadelphia or even in Wichita, where Specter was born on Lincoln's birthday in 1930, the youngest of four children. It

begins in the tiny Russian village of Batzherinya, where Spectorisks were the only Jewish family, from which Chaim Spectorisky sailed for America in 1911, leaving poverty and pogroms. Chaim became Harry Specter, courtesy of the immigration service, landed in Philadelphia with relatives, stayed long enough to earn the price of a used Model T, then drove west as an itinerant peddler selling fruit and dry goods cross-country, marrying in Tulsa, settling in Wichita. "He did in one generation what took most people two or three," Specter says now. "He emigrated, then he pioneered. . . . It was the Depression, hard to make a living, he was always scratching for a way to make a buck."

When he was only five years old, Arlen "got up before dawn, helped to take out the back seat of the Model T. We would drive out into the country to buy cantaloupes for 50¢ a bushel, then drive back in to sell them, three big ones for a quarter, dodging the sheriff," because Wichita grocers

didn't want competition from street vendors. During the winter, they did the same thing with blankets, selling door-to-door.

But western Kansas was also oil country. There was hope in old drilling equipment. In 1938, a friend staked Harry Specter to a truck and they were in the scrap metal business, driving hundreds of miles from well to well, loading three tons of Number Two steel three times a day, getting \$70 for 18 hours' backbreaking work. "I got real good cutting up rigs with an acetylene torch," Specter recalls. "And I was very much inspired by that work—inspired to get out of it. The Senate is nothing compared to working a junkyard." In 1942, after siblings Morton and Hilda graduated from Wichita State University, the family moved 160 miles further west to Russell, a dusty little oil town, in fundamentalist territory that also produced Presidential candidates Gary Hart and Bob Dole. There, the Specters were again the only Jews.

But in Russell, Specter blossomed, becoming a *wunderkind* whose memory still oppressed Kansas schoolchildren 20 years later; "when our mothers kept asking us, why don't you grow up to be like Arlen Specter?" as one Kansan practicing law in Washington puts it. Specter edited the school newspaper, won two state debating championships, narrowly missed election as student council president, graduated second in his class. "Bob Dole was bright, but Arlen was brilliant," recalls their math teacher. "Arlen had the ability to transfer knowledge, and he was always quick with

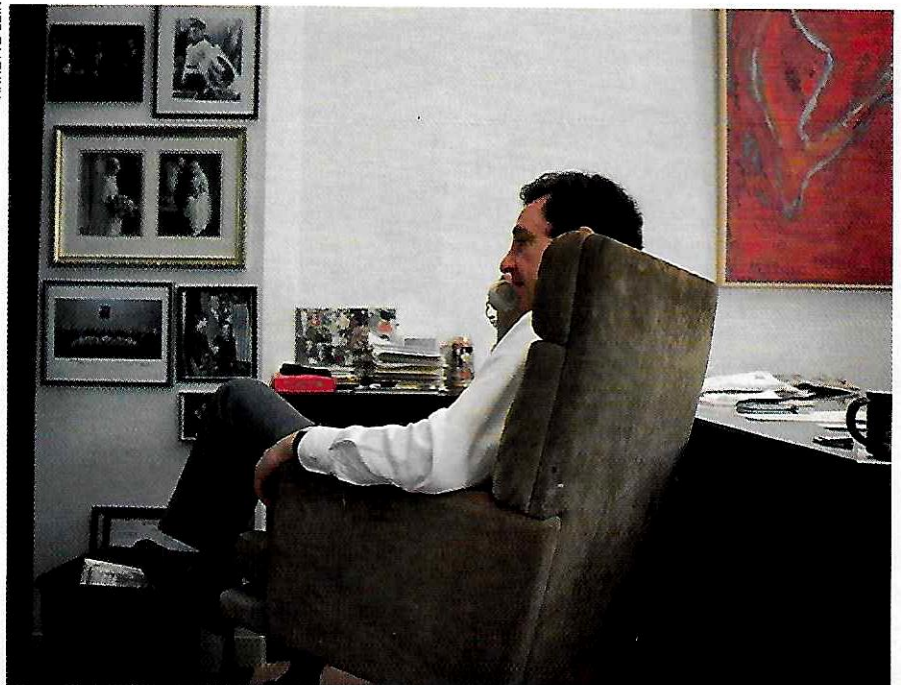
the answer . . . looking around to see what needed to be done. . . . Bob wasn't as apt to be influencing people." Specter also drove tractors on farms in summer, became a baseball nut, and developed the addiction to Dairy Queens that would later make one item indispensable on Pennsylvania campaign trips: a map marked with each Dairy Queen in the state.

In 1947, seeking to become a sports announcer, Specter enrolled in the School of Radio and Speech at Oklahoma State University. Then Harry Specter moved the family east "because my sister Shirley was 21 and needed a fine young Jewish man to marry," observes the Senator with a grin.

He wound up at Penn on an R.O.T.C. scholarship, living at home "because that's what you did," casually checking off pre-law as his major, collecting more debate titles, working on *The Daily Pennsylvanian*, meeting wife-to-be Joan Levy at a student dance, graduating Phi Beta Kappa before two years as an Air Force special agent doing background checks and criminal investigations. By 1954, he was in New Haven, courtesy of the G.I. Bill, living in a \$47-a-month Quonset hut while at Yale Law School. "I loved it," he says in a classic Specterism, "even the first year" (regarded by most students as a mental meatgrinder). "It was very difficult, very challenging." He finished at the top of his class and went straight to Dechert, Price, where he dove into the complexities of antitrust and trade law. Arlen Specter had found his *métier*.

Arlen Specter, the intense perfectionist, is said to run his staff ragged. He himself works 15-hour days—sometimes (right) in his office in the Hart Building; in the Senate at 4:00 a.m. to sponsor a measure; or negotiating artful compromises elsewhere.

ANNETTE LEIN



But public service beckoned, in part because it was a closed door. Specter was a registered Democrat but hadn't worked for the party; the local ward heeler refused to O.K. him for assistant D.A. He waged a six-month battle, pulled strings through his law firm, got D.A. Victor Blank, '52 W, to hire him in the fall of 1959. Then lightning struck. The day of his arrival, Blank was being grilled by the press because he had failed to indict Teamsters Local 107 officials for shaking down employers and looting the union treasury, then had filed last-minute charges in a way that avoided a public hearing. The case was so hot no Democrat wanted to try or hear it. Junior assistant Specter was drafted to write motions, and the judge sat and sat on the case. By the time it came to trial in March of 1963, "everyone else was gone." Specter won a first-ever motion to sequester the jury in a nonmurder matter, questioned over 250 witnesses in the most heavily covered trial in Philadelphia history. Attorney General Robert Kennedy sent observers "because he thought the fix was in." "Half the people in Philadelphia were on the take," L.B.J. Attorney General Nicholas Katzenbach said later. The guilty verdict came in at 2:00 a.m., three months after opening arguments. Specter was a tough, victorious, unbuyable prosecutor; his public career was launched with a bang.

There followed offers to join Robert Kennedy's Teamster strike force (declined because "I wanted to get to Washington on my own steam, not as somebody's bureaucrat"), then to join the newly formed Warren Commission (too good to refuse). There, lightning struck again. Specter was to assist former New York City Police Commissioner Frank Adams, who was responsible for tracing President John F. Kennedy's movements the day of the assassination. But "Adams was getting \$2,500 an hour or something" as a private consultant and dropped out early, leaving Specter to cross-examine Jack Ruby and John Connally, reenact the motorcade, develop the Single Assassin Theory—and spend hours with Chief Justice Earl Warren, the formative influence in his professional life.

Warren "was a great administrator but always in a hurry," Specter says. "He wanted everything done yesterday, he had no idea how the commission's work would be gone over with a microscope. . . . The whole nine months he never missed a day of court; he'd run over afterwards to the commission's office, sometimes with his robes flapping. . . . But he never made a nickel in his entire public career; it drove him bananas that Zapruder sold his film for \$150,000, that people were *making money* off this. . . . He didn't want to pay for the reenactment, he didn't want the *record*

SPECTER STILL LOVES ISSUES, THE CUTS AND THRUSTS OF FACTS AND ANALYSES; HE IS STILL ABSOLUTELY FEARLESS, HANGING IN FOREVER TO DO WHAT HAS TO BE DONE; HE FEELS PUBLIC SERVICE IS STILL THE HIGHEST CALLING, AND HE'S STILL PASSIONATE ABOUT THE RULE OF LAW.

printed. 'Nah—too expensive,'" Specter mimics, chuckling. "We finally got the Senators to convince him, who knew you put more garbage in *The Congressional Record* than the New York sewer system . . . and it was the tests and reenactments on the record that saved the commission," when its findings became "the most investigated case report in the history of the world."

In September of 1964, Specter came back to Pennsylvania as a special state attorney general charged with investigating corruption in the 260-year-old Philadelphia magistrates' system, whose lay judges had become collection agents for city landlords—"paid by the number of their convictions." Specter's fat report, filed a year later, ultimately led to a constitutional amendment abolishing the magistrates. But the assignment was also a way of keeping him out of the regular activities in the D.A.'s office. (Democratic minions thought him unreliable.)

By September of 1965, Specter was on the short list of Democratic candidates for district attorney, but "Arlen, we don't need another Tom Dewey here" said Frank Smith, Democratic boss of Philadelphia. Specter made that his campaign slogan, switched parties without switching his registration, ran as a reform Republican and a J.F.K.-Richardson Dilworth Democrat "because I thought it was important to have a two-party system. Also," he adds with a grin, "it was not exactly a shoo-in. Goldwater had just lost Philadelphia by 441,000 votes, and Republicans hadn't won since 1948." In other words, no one wanted

the Republican nomination, and the party had nothing to lose. Neither did Specter, though; his ads featured the retreating footsteps of a woman pursued by an unseen assailant, with a voice-over whispering, "Jim Crumlish won't stop it. Elect Specter D.A." He was sworn in in January of 1965 and became a Republican in fact.

In a world where party switches are usually seen—and punished—as the acts of Benedict Arnolds, this one left Specter untainted, though it still prompts questions about whether he's comfortable in his political home. "The only unusual thing about it," recalls one longtime city Democrat, "was you knew it was coming and he kept saying it wasn't. Everyone thought there was a deal to switch."

Specter's tumultuous years as D.A. made friends and enemies by the bushel, earning undying loyalty and eternal hatred. He "did a lot of things [former Philadelphia Mayor] Dilworth did," Moss notes: hiring on merit, cleaning out party hacks but keeping a third of the staff, including Crumlish aides Dick Sprague and Emmett Fitzpatrick, who became top assistants. He prosecuted corrupt reporters and inspectors, corruption in public housing, in city contracts and licensing, in Spectrum construction and urban renewal. He indicted state Senate President Buddy Cianfrani on voting-law violations (ultimately acquitted) and a raft of Jewish leaders for questionable financial dealings (mostly dismissed on technicalities, to howls of "turncoat" and "opportunist"). "Not done to show his independence," growls one former aide. "The evidence was there, and he went after people where he found it. . . . He arrested executives of Penn Central, too. They sure weren't Jewish." "Should a Catholic D.A. not prosecute Catholics?" asks another.

Specter doubled the D.A.'s staff, created crack gang, narcotics, and rape squads, got the state's juvenile laws amended, padlocked nuisance taverns in the black community, began pressing for stiffer sentences. And he ran for mayor against pedestrian Jim Tate, losing by an eyelash when he refused to endorse aid to parochial schools and promise to reappoint Police Commissioner Frank Rizzo.

Most of all, he "professionalized the office," says Rendell. "He could be extremely demanding. He would ask, why was the case continued? Why didn't you do this? Do that? He wanted assistants to take a stand in every case—impossible, given the snap judgments you have to make on your feet in the middle of a trial. . . . But he was great to work for. All of us knew the office would be 100% straight, asked to do the right thing, no politics."

There are still plenty of people who think Specter caved in "spinelessly" to Rizzo's

law-and-order rhetoric after 1969, though he fought Rizzo on police brutality and ordered assistants to testify against the city following one celebrated—and illegal—antiwar bust. But not Richard Nixon, who was heard to remark that Specter “appeals to blacks and young people” and nearly nominated him to the Supreme Court and an Attorney Generalship. Nor Specter’s staff, which went into near-universal mourning (and soon after, exile) when he lost to Fitzpatrick in 1973. “I ran into him outside the elevator,” Rendell recalls. “He asked me what I would do; I said open a practice, maybe politics. ‘Great!’ he said, ‘I’ll call [Republican Chairman] Billy Meehan for you.’ I said ‘Gee, that’s very nice, Arlen, but Billy won’t help much.’ I had been there seven years, I was chief of homicide, and Arlen didn’t even know I was a Democrat.”

That election “was like a splash of cold water in the face—poosh!” Specter says now, imitating shock. “I never took a loss personally, but my bad back is probably connected to that one. . . . The polls all said I would win with 165,000 votes. I got 208,000, but 440,000 turned out.” He shrugs ruefully. “I was linked with CREEP . . . it was a Watergate year.”

In more ways than one, as it happened: the next month came a direct offer to head Nixon’s Watergate defense. “I just about decided to do it,” he recalls, outlining a strategy that might have worked. “Then I went to Washington for a final meeting with Al Haig. I told him, ‘Before I take the case, I want to review the evidence.’ He looked at me like I was crazy. ‘The tapes? You mean the *tapes*? You can’t see the tapes!’”

And that was that. Specter went back to Dechert, Price, “where they still had some of the cases I worked on 14 years before” and buried himself in litigation, taking on labor injunctions, bank failures, “cases no one would accept for a nickel”—and winning most of them, says an associate. “He was an amazing lawyer, but his greatest skills were to respond, as appellee on appeal and [as] cross-examiner on trial. That’s the debating experience.” He emerged briefly to run against Heinz in 1976 “because I had \$35,000 in the bank and that was the spending limit. . . . Then the Supreme Court struck down the limit, and John practically spent \$35,000 for each family in the state.” He lost by 20,000 votes out of 1.2 million, and lost to Thornburgh two years later when a third candidate splintered the southeastern vote.

Then pollster Bob Teeters “came and asked me to run in 1980, because the polls showed only three Republicans could win—me, Al Haig, and Bill Scranton, Jr. . . . Scranton had decided not to run. Haig

SO, ARLEN, THEY SAY YOU ARE RUTHLESS AND OPPORTUNISTIC, THAT YOUR AMBITION KNOWS NO BOUNDS. ANY COMMENTS? HE LAUGHS AN ANSWER: ‘YES TO ALL QUESTIONS . . . IT’S BETTER THAN BEING CALLED CROOKED. AMBITION WAS A GOOD WORD WHERE I GREW UP. IT’S WHAT AMERICA IS ALL ABOUT.’

did intend to run, but for President,” Specter says with a chuckle. “He never set foot in Pennsylvania.” Eight months later, Specter was in the Senate.

IT

IS THE fag end of a foggy day and Arlen Specter is slumped in a car hurtling down the Pennsylvania Turnpike. Once the state was solid Republican, east to west,

top to bottom, for Lincoln and Union, steel and high tariffs, the only big state to vote Hoover in 1932, birthplace of the oil depletion allowance and Boss Boies Penrose, who could tell businessmen, “I believe in a division of labor. You send us to Congress; we pass laws under which you make money; you contribute to . . . send us back again to pass more laws to enable you to make more money.” The Depression, the New Deal, and union organizers changed that, making Pittsburgh and Philadelphia Democratic enclaves. Now the state’s in “magnificent decline,” as one commentator generously puts it, its steel areas pockets of poverty, its high-wage basic industries replaced by minimum-wage service and textile operations, a tradition-bound province with high out-migration and the lowest economic and population growth of any industrial state. These factors make it marginal for any statewide politician, especially one whose cultural views do not sit well with the

Republican middle, who will have no national coattails when he runs again.

So, two years before the election, Arlen Specter is already campaigning, raising money to scare off primary challengers, clocking 10 hours and four town meetings on a Saturday when other men are walking the dog or planting petunias, fielding the impossibly technical questions about Medicare and Social Security, the mutters about “Godly principles” and “mass murders of babies” (“I’m personally opposed to abortion, but my sense is we shouldn’t impose religion on it”), the angry speeches (“Isn’t that like me saying I’m against rape, but the Government should stay out of it?”), the hostile questions on E.R.A. and school prayer: “Was not your vote . . . a clear misrepresentation of the vast majority of people in this state?” “A senator has to do more than that.” “Sir, . . . I elected you to represent me, not think for me!” “Sir, I can’t represent you without thinking for myself. . . . If you want a computer to tabulate letters, you don’t need Arlen Specter in the Senate. But as long as I’m there, I’ll continue to vote my conscience and use my best judgment.”

If he wavered or temporized, they would eat him alive. But he stands fast, drawing them with him. “I congratulate you,” says a man with a Slavic accent, breaking the tension. “I teach the Reformation, and I know the horrors people inflicted on each other when they thought they could get the Government to back their religion.” “I lay it all out,” Specter hammers home to general applause. “What you see is what you get.” Back in the car, he adds, “By the time the election comes up, I’ll have an opponent. They won’t like his stand on these issues any better than mine.”

So, Arlen, they say you’re ruthless and opportunistic, that your ambition knows no bounds. Care to comment? He stirs, then laughs an answer: “Yes, to all questions. . . . It’s better than being called crooked.” Then the eyes flash, the mouth sets. Specter the Bulldog, straight and incorruptible. “There *are* bounds . . . and *ambition* was a good word where I grew up. If you weren’t damn well ambitious, there was something wrong with you. Ambition was what America was about, to make something of yourself, to excel. . . . To say you were ambitious was to say you were *conscious*. . . . And I never saw half of what my father saw. He came to the land of opportunity . . . so his children could be opportunists.”

He stares out the car window. “Let me tell you something. The Senate is a great prize; of course, you want to hold on to it. But you can’t be afraid of losing it. You can’t, you genuinely can’t. You can’t operate out of fear.”

END