

## THE CARLSON CHRONICLE

### Memories of George McGovern

The most decent person to ever serve in the United States Senate, South Dakota's George McGovern, has died. The 90-year-old former senator and 1972 Democratic presidential nominee passed away quietly over the weekend of October 20th.

With the 20/20 hindsight of history most folks with political memories at all willingly concede America would have been much better off to have elected McGovern rather than the ethically-challenged and ultimately disgraced Richard Nixon.

The only national political convention this writer ever covered was the Democratic convention in Miami Beach during a stretch of hot summer days in a sultry August week in 1972. I then worked as a Washington, D.C. based correspondent for the A. Robert Smith News Bureau.

We had major clients in Alaska (*The Anchorage Daily News*), Washington state (*Tacoma News Tribune*), Oregon (*The Oregonian*, the *Eugene Register-Guard*), and Idaho (*The Idaho State Journal* and the *Lewiston Tribune*). All were interested in receiving dispatches from their Washington, D.C. correspondent.

I can still hear, echoing in my mind, the rhetorical use of anastrophe, the beginning of a series of paragraphs with the call "Come home, America. . . ." It was a wonderful speech, largely written by McGovern himself. The only trouble was most of America had gone to bed by the time the much delayed convention agenda got around to the party nominee's acceptance speech.

It unfortunately became a metaphor for the admittedly disorganized campaign that followed managed by future Colorado Senator Gary Hart.

One of the significant factors delaying the acceptance speech was the crass move by Alaska's vain, egotistical and delusional Senator Mike Gravel to nominate himself as McGovern's running mate.

It is doubtful the people of any state will ever again be so embarrassed by one of their delegation on a national stage than were almost all Alaskans. An Alaskan native had been asked by the McGovern campaign to give one of the seconding speeches. Senator Gravel somehow talked her into turning the microphone on the

platform over to him in what was clearly an unscheduled and unanticipated gambit by the second term senator.

To the shock of many and the dismay of the McGovern team, the Alaskan senator gave an impassioned plea to the delegates to make the vice presidential nominee selection from the floor and force McGovern to accept the honorable Mike Gravel.

McGovern and Hart must have been absolutely apoplectic. That McGovern eventually named the depression prone Missouri Senator Thomas Eagleton who shortly thereafter was forced by the media to admit to having undergone shock treatments and had to withdraw is beside the point.

The herd mentality of the media can be merciless and it was, portraying the entire campaign as inept, being managed by amateurs and full of free love, anti-war peaceniks who smoked dope and never bathed. McGovern went down to one of the worst defeats in American presidential history.

Only during the Watergate hearings that brought down Richard Nixon did America begin to learn about all the dirty tricks utilized by CREEP to destabilize the McGovern campaign as well as manipulate the media's coverage.

A truly decent man had been slandered and demonized beyond belief. Especially puzzling to many was McGovern's failure to reference or even talk about the fact that he was a legitimate and decorated war hero having piloted a B-24 through 35 dangerous missions over Europe during World War II.

Like many veterans, he'd seen war up close and understood that too often old men full of false bravado send young men off to die in the misadventures created by their bluster.

What I will most remember McGovern for though is the fine, poignant and sad book he wrote, entitled *Terry*, about he and Eleanor losing a beloved and talented daughter to alcoholism. It was an honest, candid, unsparing account of their ultimately unsuccessful effort to save her from her eventual premature death.

Many parents, my wife and I included, had suffered through the same struggle and at the time I read the book I was sitting on the side of a mountain above our backpacking camp site deep within the BigHorn Crags, crying my eyes out sure that our child was headed for the same fate.

If there was one over-riding message in the book it was no matter what to never ever give up on a seemingly lost child. We did not and next month the lost lamb celebrates the tenth year of sobriety.

I consider it a greater miracle than my so far having lived six and a half years beyond the six months the doctors gave me when diagnosed with a rare cancer in November of 2005.

I will always be grateful for the encouragement I drew from the Senator's heart-breaking account. RIP, Senator.