

A BRIEF BILL COLLINS MEMOIR

It took two years of Stanford Business School to finally convince Bill Collins that he couldn't stomach business. Three years of the Army in Germany convinced him that the military was not the right track either (actually one day was enough). The Army came to the same conclusion, but the experience was good opposition research for life. A year hitchhiking in Africa amid the poorest of the poor, with lots of time for reading by the side of the road, offered more direction.

Two years in Washington, DC, pursuing elusive political fortune, were equally unproductive, though life as the only Caucasian on Fairmont St. in a roach-infested apartment was instructive, as was interning for Bob Giaimo, Claiborne Pell and Hubert Humphrey, not to mention a heady year in the Office of Emergency Planning. More rewarding was leading picket lines for the Congress of Racial Equality under the saintly Julius Hobson, and teaming to start a neighborhood credit union.

Returning to Norwalk meant entering politics, working on affordable housing, and joining the peace movement. City Council membership came before too long, and co-chairmanship of Fairfield County Citizens for Peace, plus looming warfare with the entrenched Democratic old guard.

A bitter challenge primary and 5,000 pot holders delivered door-to-door brought membership in the General Assembly and the chance to study under Irv Stolberg. Creation and chairmanship of the Democratic Study Group (ala Congress) brought a suspect liberal caucus to the Chamber which successfully alienated the leadership and led, in 1987, to the passage of Connecticut's Presidential Primary Act over the prostrate forms of Bill O'Neill and Ella Grasso. These years also afforded the chance to work under George Springer, Marc Caplan, John Flynn, John Cunningham, Mary Sullivan, Jeri Ann Putt and other heroes of the republic in groups such as CCD, LEAP, and CCAG.

But it was a long commute and Norwalk's moribund political leadership offered opportunity. Becoming mayor unexpectedly unleashed a groundswell of local enthusiasm for historic preservation, especially of the city's abandoned but architecturally splendid downtown. A major redevelopment project soon took shape and is now a tourist highlight of Connecticut. Other modernization followed, and a disappointingly unpopular attempt to generate more affordable housing.

After retirement Bill attempted unsuccessfully to become a revitalization consultant and then settled on journalism. He founded and wrote a weekly column for Minuteman Media, a foundation-funded non-profit syndicate which distributed, free of charge, a weekly package of progressive op-ed pieces to the nation's small newspapers whose publishers would never pay for anything liberal. This project still thrives, under the name Other Words, and is run by the Institute for Policy Studies, continuing to spread subversive progressive opinions to unsuspecting small towns around the nation. During this period he also served six years on the national board of Veterans For Peace.

Currently Bill is the active vice-president of Connecticut Citizens Research Group and continues to lobby Norwalk's listless city government in the ways of righteousness and modern practice.