THE WHITE HOUSE

Office of the Press Secretary

For Immediate Release April 9, 1997

REMARKS BY THE PRESIDENT
AT MEMORIAL SERVICE FOR AL SHANKER

Lisner Auditorium

12:12 P.M. EDT

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you very much to all of you, but especially to Eadie and the members of Al's family, to the members of the family of the AFT, the other labor leaders who are here, and other friends and admirers and those who are indebted to Al Shanker.

I'd like to begin simply by thanking everyone who has already spoken and all the people at the AFT who put together that wonderful film at the beginning. I think if Al were here and were whispering in my ear, he would say, "This has been very nice, Mr. President, but keep it short, we're getting hungry." (Laughter.)

I have to say also that Hillary very much wanted to be here with me today. She worked with Al on a number of things over the last 15 years and a long-standing commitment in New York kept her away. But I want to speak for both of us today in honoring a person we considered a model, a mentor, and a friend, a union leader, a national leader, a world leader. But first, last, and always, as the film began today, Al Shanker was our teacher, and clearly one of the most important teachers of the 20th century.

In 1983, in April, the Nation At Risk report broke like a storm over America and resonated deeply in the consciousness of the country, that our country was at risk because we weren't doing right by our children and our schools. One month before, I had signed a law passed by my legislature establishing a commission to study our schools and to improve them. And I had appointed my wife to chair the commission. And we were eagerly reading this report and the reactions to it, and we noticed that there was Al Shanker, the first leader of a union to come out and say, this is a good thing, we need to do this, we've got to raise these standards, we've got to hold ourselves to higher standards, we've got to be accountable, we owe our children more.

That began what was for me one of the most remarkable associations of my entire working life. Hillary and I had occasion to be with Al on so many different occasions, and one of the previous speakers said, you know, if you go to enough of these education meetings the usual suspects are rounded up, and after a while we could all give each other's speech -- (laughter) -- except for Al. (Laughter.) And it really did make a huge difference. After a while you get tired, you get off the plane, you're spending the night in another strange hotel room, you're showing up at another meeting.

But if he was there I always kind of got my energy flowing, my juices were running, and I knew it was going to be an interesting time. He was always saying that the students he taught wanted to know,

well, does it count. I can tell you whenever he talked, it counted. It counted.

Over all the years it counted for me. In 1989 when President Bush called the governors together for this education summit at the University of Virginia and I was the designated Democrat -- stay up half the night and try to write those education goals. I was always consulting Al who was there -- trying to draw out of him exactly how we ought to write this so that in the end we could actually wind up with not just goals, but standards that would apply to our schools and students across the country. And we thought we had done a pretty good job.

It didn't work out exactly as we wanted. So, in 1993, when I became President, we were working together again, and we drafted this Goals 2000 legislation. And we thought, well, this will get it done because the states will be developing their standards, but we'll have a national measure of testing whether we're meeting those standards, which is what we agreed to do way back in 1989 because Al Shanker wanted us to do that. He knew it was the right thing to do. But it never quite worked out because people always could find some excuse for it not to count.

So, in my State of the Union address this February, I announced the plan that is what Al Shanker wanted us to do all along, that we would develop national standards and that we would begin to make sure they counted, and we would begin with a 4th-grade reading test and an 8th-grade math test, but that we ought to go on and do more after that.

And after the speech, I called Al, as I had been calling him since he'd gotten sick periodically, and I said, you know, I hope you feel good now, because you've been telling us to do this for years and years and years, and finally your crusade will be America's crusade. Well, he only lived a couple of weeks after that, but he had to know that what he did counted.

You know, I have to tell you that one of the things that I valued most about him and one of the reasons that he had such a big impact on me is that I always felt that I could say whatever was on my mind to him without thinking about how I would say it. You know how we all relate to each other, you know, when teachers talk to administrators -- it's not that you're not honest with them, but you have to think about how you have to be honest with them. Right? (Laughter.) Or school board members talk to teachers or politicians talk to union leaders or union leaders talk to politicians. It's not that we don't say what's on our mind, but we think, well, we have all these sort of preconceptions that we've learned over a lifetime about how people who are in some other group view the world. So it's not that you're not honest with them, but you know you've got to talk to them a certain way or you won't even be heard.

I never gave a second thought to that with Al Shanker. I never thought, here's this guy who grew up in New York City and I'm some rube from the country and I'm a politician and he's a labor leader, he's got all this stuff, I got to think about -- after about the second time I was with him I never thought about it anymore. It's like a huge burden lifted off your shoulders to realize you can say any outrageous thing that comes to your mind if you believe it, and here's a person you can trust to absorb it with a level of self-confidence and integrity that will permit an honest conversation to ensue.

And I see a lot of you nodding your heads. You know I'm telling the truth, don't you? You felt the same thing. (Laughter.)

And if we could all achieve that with each other, if somehow

we could give each other the confidence to think and be who we are, the way he did to all of us, what a better world we could build. And he did it not to let us off the hook but to put us on the spot. That was the interesting thing that I thought was so important. He thought that this whole standards movement was essential for democracy to work, that it was the only way we could ever give every child, without regard to their background, a chance to live up to his or her God-given capacity. It was the only way we could ever avoid the kind of false elitism that always creeps into every society, was to give everybody a chance to reach high and achieve high and find dignity and meaning in life.

He did not believe that how you learn depended upon accident of birth. And he thought all the arguments used to deny the need for some sort of national standards for measuring ourselves were ridiculous. I'm very sensitive to that now because one of the things I heard him say over and over again was he would compare standards. When people would say, well, standards will tie the hands of teachers or they won't be fair to poor kids -- and I heard all these arguments a thousand times. He would equate it to surgery. Now, I'm sensitive to that now. (Laughter.)

And I thought to my self, how would I feel if Al Shanker -- I never realized it -- how would I feel if I had heard my surgeon just before my recent surgery making all those arguments about there really is no uniform standards here. (Laughter.) Well, there is, but I'm not going to observe it because I have my own way to do it. I'd say, please I'd like to have another doctor. (Laughter.)

We're laughing about this now, but this was a profoundly wise man who lived with us. And because he was also a good man and a self-confident man and he wanted us to be fearless and thinking, he made us feel that we could say what was on our minds, but that we had to keep being honest and reaching higher and going further.

Al Shanker once said something about Bayard Rustin that he should have said about himself. He said the great thing about Rustin was that he didn't put up his finger to see which way the wind was blowing. He had the guts to say what he felt was right, no matter how unpopular it was.

Al Shanker would say something on one day that would delight liberals and infuriate conservatives. The next day, he would make the conservatives ecstatic and the liberals would be infuriated. He really -- even though he came out of the, if you will, the left wing of our society in the sense that he was a passionate union leader, when he thought about the future, he never thought about what wing he was seeking; he thought about how he could seek the truth and synthesize the facts and move us all forward. And that too is a great gift that we will sorely miss.

And again, I say, he let no one off the hook -- no one -- not politicians, not administrators, not the public, not the students, and certainly not the teachers.

In the last years of his life, he worked hard to bring people all over the world together around democracy and freedom and dignity. And he wanted teachers to lead the way. As the son of Russian immigrants, he had a deep interest in the work of the United States Information Agency, which has been sending American teachers abroad and bringing foreign teachers to America to support the development of democracy, especially in Central and Eastern Europe and the newly independent states of the former Soviet Union.

I want to announce that today, from now on, teachers who participate in these international programs in civic education will be designated Shanker Fellows. (Applause.) Some of them are here with us

today, and we thank them for their presence.

In 1999, when the first 4th graders take the reading exam and the first 8th graders take the math exam, they, too, will be part of Al Shanker's legacy. And if, God willing, our budget passes, instead of 500 of those board-certified teachers, like the wonderful woman we heard just before the Vice President and I came up here, that Al Shanker worked so hard for, we'll have 100,1000 -- 100,000. (Applause.)

He really believed if we could get one in every school they would be magnets, they would change the whole culture of American education. If this national certification movement, the standards movement for teachers could just get one of those board-certified teachers in every schoolhouse in America, it would change the culture of education forever and change the whole way we thought about teaching. And we are determined to do that, and that, too, will be part of his legacy -- along with his love of life and music and art and bread; along with all the energy that he put into his family and his friends.

Al Shanker's life fully reflected the wisdom of the words of Herman Melville -- I bring out this quote from time to time and I don't think I know anyone it applies to better. Herman Melville said, "We cannot live only for ourselves. A thousand fibers connect us with our fellow men. And among those fibers, as sympathetic threads, our actions run as causes, and they come back to us as effects."

Al Shanker's cause was education. And through his lifelong devotion to it, he lifted up our children, our schools, our teachers and others who work in our schools, our nation and our world. He was truly our master teacher.

Today, education is the number one priority of the American people. Al Shanker helped to make it so. His life was full of tumult and controversy, of growth and triumph. But what I think he would want to know is, does it count? You bet it does. It counts, Al; and we thank you, we love you, and we bid you Godspeed. Thank you. (Applause.)

END 12:25 P.M. EDT

THE WHITE HOUSE

Office of the Press Secretary

For Immediate Release February 24, 1997

STATEMENT BY THE PRESIDENT

Hillary and I were deeply saddened today to learn of the passing of Albert Shanker.

Al spent his life in pursuit of one of the noblest of causes: the improvement of our public schools. Since 1964, he led educational organizations -- first as the President of the United Federation of Teachers in New York and for twenty-two years as the President of the American Federation of Teachers. He challenged the country's teachers and schools to provide our children with the very best education possible, and made a crusade out of the need for educational standards. He believed, as I do, that children should notgo through school without learning the basics of reading, writing and arithmetic.

Our thoughts and prayers are with his wife, Eadie, and his family tonight.

-30-30-30-

Noa A. Meyer 04/19/99 06:40:47 PM

Record Type: Record

To: Christine N. Macy/WHO/EOP

cc:

Subject: shanker tales

First time that the award is being called the Albert Shanker Distinguished award even though they have given it under a different name in past years.

Thomas Hobart, President will introduce HRC.

POSSIBLE JOKE: Shanker was a great orator who could spellbind an audience. Every time he gave a speech at the United Teachers there was a pool for how long he would speak. He could easily talk for over an hour. There was always a pool and knew that there would be a pool.

1983 a Nation at Risk - Al was the first to say that they were right that we were on the rising tide of mediocrity. Statesman for public education. That era of reform that he started has kept education on the front burner since 1983. He did a remarkable thing for public education and unions. Stood up and said we need to make some changes.

Al was in the forefront of the civil rights movement. Under his leadership the UFT sent station wagons to the south for voter registration in the 60s. He walked with MLK - in the beginning of civil rights. Was there for the beginning of collective bargaining. Always fought for the underdog.

Connoisseur of wine and loved to bake bread - which is a well known fact about him. Once he was in Washington eating at the restaurant at the Hiatt hotel across from the AFL - CIO and he ordered some olive bread. After he tasted the olive bread he asked the waiter to bring him a cutting board and a knife. He went down to his room and brought up some home made olive bread. He gave a piece to the waiter and some others working at the restaurant. They were so impressed by the quality of his bread that they asked him to come and guest bake for them. He obviously was a little too busy to work as a baker on top of all of his other interests and responsibilities, but his expertise in so many areas should be noted.

He was known for the his busy schedule. On any given day he could be delivering a speech over lunch in LA and then off to Boston to deliver a speech over dinner.

He was up every morning at 5 to do his morning reading and was on the go after that.

He always said that the best way to educate yourself on anything is to read everything you can get your hands on.

He was a devout bargain hunter. Very busy person who always found time to shop. Loved stereo equipment - could tell you just about anything about stereo equipment.

Multi-faceted human being who wasn't just a union leader or an educator.

New York Times in 1975 ran a photo that captured him walking by a "danger" sign during a break from strike negotiations. That was how he was known - as a walking time bomb.

Movie, "Sleeper" Woody Allen takes up after a war and revolution about 100 years from now. Woody Allen was frozen wakes up after 100 years. Someone asks him what happened and someone explains that, "some guy named Al Shanker blew up the world with the Atomic bomb." Viewed as a militant. But his image was later reformed with A Nation at Risk report and his leadership in accepting its criticism and recommendation.

Charter schools not popular with this audience.

aft.org

Inside AFT

Inside AFT--Special Edition--April 9, 1997

CLINTON, GORE LEAD TRIBUTES AT SHANKER MEMORIAL GATHERING

A courageous leader.. a steadfast friend... a tireless fighter...a gifted intellect ... and, above all, a master teacher.

That's how Albert Shanker was remembered at a memorial gathering for the late AFT president at Washington, D.C.'s Lisner Auditorium on April 9. Led by President Bill Clinton and Vice President Albert Gore Jr., an array of education and labor leaders shared heartfelt tributes and honored the lasting legacy of Shanker, who died Feb. 22 after a long battle with cancer.

"First, last and always, Al Shanker was our teacher, and clearly one of the most important teachers of the 20th century," Clinton told the crowd. "To honor Shanker's contribution to education and his efforts to foster democracy around the globe, Clinton announced that teachers who participate in the United States Information Agency's exchange program in civic education would be designated as "Albert Shanker Fellows."

SETTING THE AGENDA

Clinton also said Shanker's legacy is seen in major components of the education agenda the President unveiled in his 1997 State of the Union message, including proposed federal funding to expand dramatically certification through the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards and new national assessments in reading and math to make high academic standards count for students.

"Today, education is the number one priority of the American people. Al Shanker helped make it so," Clinton said. "But what I think he would want to know is, Does it count? You bet it does. It counts, Al; and we thank you, we love you and we bid you Godspeed."

TRANSFORMING THE DEBATE

Gore described Shanker as a tireless fighter and a man of principle--someone who battled not only for better schools but also for democracy and human rights around the globe. On education, "he was guided by a simple standard," Gore remembered. "He went to work every day because he knew the crusade to improve our public schools was good and necessary and right."

This lifelong battle for meaningful reforms ultimately transformed the national debate on education, Gore stressed. "In a sense we were all [Shanker's] pupils. ... Where we stand today is very different because of where he stood."

As president of the union from 1974 to 1997, Shanker "didn't just run the organization but changed it--and profoundly for the better," AFT secretary treasurer Edward J. McElroy reminded the crowd. He described him as a gifted leader who understood early on that professionals expected unions to go beyond wages and working conditions and evolve into organizations "that build the institutions where members work."

A NATION AT RISK

Education Secretary Richard Riley remembered Shanker's tireless advocacy of a public education system worthy of this nation. "He challenged us to do better. And when we did improve, he challenged us to do better even still," Riley said, adding, "It's our job to keep up the fight" for better schools.

Both Clinton and National Education Association president Bob Chase remembered Shanker's early, courageous stand for school reform when the landmark "A Nation at Risk" was released in 1983. "In retrospect, it changed everything," said Chase, allowing teachers unions to "become agents of change" in the education debate.

HUNDREDS AT GATHERING

A string quartet played as nearly 1,000 AFT staff and leaders, representatives of government, education institutions, labor and civil rights organizations, overseas trade unions and friends and admirers gathered for the tribute. The program began with a video tribute that outlined the AFT president's early battles to win collective bargaining for teachers; his early involvement with the civil rights movement and his commitment to democracy and free trade unionism abroad; his efforts to shape the education reform agenda; and his expansion of the union to include paraprofessionals and school-related personnel, health care employees and state and local employees.

Also addressing the Lisner audience were AFT vice presidents Sandra Feldman, Thomas Reece and Lorretta Johnson; former AFL-CIO president Lane Kirkland and needle trades union president Jay Mazur; George

Washington University president Stephen Joel Trachtenberg, former New York City Schools chancellor Anthony Alvarado and Rebecca Palacios, a NBPTS-certified teacher from Corpus Christi, Texas; international labor leaders Fred Van Leeuwen and Stefan Nedzynski; Rep. Eleanor Holmes Norton of the District of Columbia and Sen. Daniel Patrick Moynihan of New York.

This special edition of "Inside AFT" was prepared by Mike Rose. Trish Gorman, editor.

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New York Times
February 24, 1997

Albert Shanker, 68, Combative Leader Who Transformed Teachers' Union, Dies

By JOSEPH BERGER

Albert Shanker, who rose from being a substitute mathematics teacher to become a tough, canny labor leader who in the 1960's transformed New York City's United Federation of Teachers into one of the nation's most powerful unions, died on Saturday at Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center in Manhattan. Mr. Shanker, the longtime president of the American Federation of Teachers, the parent organization of the United Federation of Teachers, was 68 and lived in Mamaroneck, N.Y., and Manhattan.

He died after a three-year battle with bladder cancer, said Janet Bass, a spokeswoman for the American Federation of Teachers.

Sandra Feldman, who succeeded Mr. Shanker as president of the U.F.T. in 1986, on Saturday called her predecessor a teacher's teacher who was "deeply committed to both public education and the labor movement as a means of creating a better life for all Americans."

"He could be passionate about his beliefs," she said, "yet at the same time he had the rare ability to rethink issues and come up with fresh approaches as times changed."

Although he became a respected thinker on national educational issues, Mr. Shanker is best remembered for his combative role as the head of the 85,000-member U.F.T., the New York City teachers' union, during the turmoil of the city's school decentralization experiments in 1968, turmoil that resulted in the closing of most schools for 55 days during the fall term and which were so racially and religiously divisive that the effects are still being felt three decades later.

The dour Mr. Shanker became so widespread a symbol of stubborn combativeness that Woody Allen included a reference to him in his 1973 comedy "Sleeper." A character played by Mr. Allen is frozen in 1973 and awakens in the year 2173 to learn that civilization was destroyed because "a man by the name of Albert Shanker got hold of a nuclear warhead."

Undoubtedly Obstinate, But a Solid Negotiator

At times Mr. Shanker was undoubtedly obstinate. But he was also an artful negotiator and organizer who built the federation from a feeble association into perhaps the state's most powerful union, one that could virtually veto appointments to the Board of Education and determine the makeup of the city's 32 local school boards.

He was also a pragmatist willing in 1975 to put $150 million of his union's pension funds at risk to save the city from defaulting on its debts.

Associated Press, 1980

Albert Shanker

In the second act of his life as president of the American Federation of Teachers, with 900,000 members concentrated in large cities, he was widely regarded as a champion of rigorous educational standards. In a column that he wrote weekly for years as an advertisement in the Week in Review section of The New York Times, he called for a national competency test for teachers, pay increments tied to teacher quality and more rigorous requirements for high school graduation.

In yesterday's column, he discussed the flaws of the self-esteem movement in schools. Educational authorities like Theodore Sizer called him a "towering figure."

"I'm proudest of the fact that I've confounded people by being honest," Mr. Shanker said in a July interview with Joyce Purnick of The Times. "I believe in traditional discipline and that history should not be distorted for current purposes. But I also believe that smaller schools where teachers and kids know each other's names are more effective. I called things as I saw them, so in certain ways I could be viewed as a progressive educator and in other ways as a traditionalist."

Mr. Shanker, a former junior high school mathematics teacher, had a quicksilver intellect and was a powerful debater, blessed with a memory for anecdotes and metaphors. But he rose to fame as a fighter more than a thinker, in his iron-willed battle against efforts by local black groups to take control of their neighborhood schools.

In the late 1960's, many blacks in New York City were frustrated by the sputtering drive for integration and the school system's poor record in educating their children. They pressed for school decentralization in their communities, believing it would give parents a greater voice in the education of their children.

Some members of the city's central Board of Education opposed such community control, fearing for their authority. Mr. Shanker, the son of European Socialists who himself had marched in civil rights protests in Selma, Ala., was originally amenable to the first experiments in community governance.

In March 1967 an agreement was reached between the State Legislature and Mayor John V. Lindsay for an extra $54 million in state aid to education if New York City would present a school decentralization plan by the end of the year.

Three experimental school districts were set up in three poor districts with large minority populations — East Harlem, the Lower East Side and Ocean Hill-Brownsville in Brooklyn. Mr. Shanker's union gave advice to Rhody McCoy, a black teacher who was named administrator of the governing board of the the Ocean Hill-Brownsville district. Mr. Shanker even arranged for voluntary transfers of some teachers out of Ocean Hill and their replacement by more ideologically congenial professionals.

But in a turnabout in April 1968, Mr. McCoy summarily transferred 13 white teachers, assistant principals and one principal out of the district against their will. Mr. McCoy offered no specific pedagogic reasons, but it was believed he thought that the professionals in question were trying to sabotage the decentralization experiment.

"He called me and said, 'Something is going to happen and I'm afraid it's going to hurt our relationship,'" Mr. Shanker recalled. "It was absolutely impossible to fathom except on the basis that he was threatened or something had happened there" in the district.

A Testing Ground For Community Control

To Mr. Shanker and his union, the transfers were illegal, a violation of civil service laws and union contracts involving the right of workers to hold jobs unless charges of incompetence were proven. They also worried that the action in Ocean Hill would spread to other communities where local figures who Mr. Shanker called "vigilantes" would try to seize control of the schools.

To supporters of the Ocean Hill district, the matter was a test case of community control. Coming after the urban riots that followed the assassination of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and a wave of upheavals by students on college campuses, the conflict seemed to crystallize the nation's social fault lines.

The union prevailed in court but could not get political leaders like Mayor Lindsay to use police to re-

More

William E. Sauro/The New York Times

Albert Shanker at a rally in City Hall Park in September 1968 during the teachers' strikes. The walkouts closed most of the city's schools for 55 days, putting more than a million children out of classrooms.

store the teachers.

"Lindsay told me dozens of times during the strike: 'Al, you're absolutely right, but do you want the city to burn down?'" Mr. Shanker recalled. "I said, 'Where's it going to stop? That's blackmail.'"

In September, Mr. Shanker called the first of three citywide strikes that crippled the nation's largest public school system. The walkouts succeeded in closing 85 percent of the city's 900 schools for a total of 55 days into November, putting more than a million children out of classrooms and forcing tens of thousands of working parents to scramble for child care arrangements.

During the days when schools were open, union teachers had to endure angry crowds outside many schools. Inside the Ocean Hill schools, members of the Black Panthers and militant local leaders like Robert (Sonny) Carson, who had been invited in by Mr. McCoy, delivered antiwhite diatribes and threatened the teachers' families. The atmosphere was also poisoned by anti-Semitism directed at the many Jewish members of the U.F.T. Anti-Semitic catcalls were shouted by protesters and appeared in newspapers put out by the Afro-American Teachers Association. A student's anti-Semitic poem was read on the radio.

Each time the Board of Education gave in to Mr. McCoy's governing board, Mr. Shanker ordered the teachers to walk out. He did this in the face of opposition voiced in many of the city's editorial pages, the Ford Foundation and the prestigious Public Education Association.

The strikes did not end until the State Education Commissioner, James Allen Jr., suspended the Ocean Hill board and appointed a trustee to oversee the return of the union teachers.

Mr. Shanker spent 15 days in jail for calling the strikes. For years afterward, he was often demonized for tarnishing his union's reputation for idealism and leaving a legacy of tensions between blacks and Jews.

The accusations were deeply wounding to Mr. Shanker, whose integration efforts began when he was a college student at the University of Illinois and picketed segregated movie houses and restaurants in Urbana. But he always defended his decision, comparing the expulsion of teachers to Nazism.

"To me, what was going on here was the same thing," he said. "Pushing a guy out of a principalship because he's white. Taking a bunch of teachers and calling them all sorts of anti-Semitic names and threatening to kill their kids or their husbands or wives. Somebody has to stand up to this and say you're not going to profit by this."

In the aftermath of the 1968 strikes, the State Legislature passed a law that decentralized the city's schools into 32 districts and gave elected boards the power to run elementary and junior high schools. Behind the scenes, Mr. Shanker made sure the law had strong protections for teachers' jobs.

A Changing View Of Decentralization

"We wrote the decentralization law," he said.

With turnouts in school board elections as low as 6 and 7 percent, the union's endorsements proved pivotal and it became evident in a few years that the strongest force in decentralization was the United Federation.

But in 1996, Mr. Shanker was critical of decentralization in his interview with Ms. Purnick. Agreeing with many in education, he said that local school board elections continued to produce corrupt board members, very low voter turnout and confusion over unnecessarily complex ballots.

"It's all a shame and it's a moral outrage," Mr. Shanker said. "But how much does that have to do with whether the kids are going to read on grade level or not? There's some correlation, but I would say not much. Because you're still not going to educate kids, because you have no educational plan out there."

The leader of the strike that changed New York was, for most of his life, a tall, lanky and ungainly intellectual with black horn-rimmed glasses and a mournful cast, like Eeyore's in "Winnie the Pooh." He loved ideological debate and developed a pincer wit that enabled him to excel at it. An introspective man who read widely in history and biography, he also became a sophisticated baker of bread, a winemaker, an aficionado of African art and a seeker of the best stereo equipment.

Albert Shanker was born Sept. 14, 1928, into a family that was hardly uncommon on the Lower East Side, Yiddish-speaking Russian immigrants with Socialist passions.

His father, Morris, delivered newspapers. He rose at 2 A.M. seven days a week, pushed a cart stacked with bundles of the city's half-dozen morning newspapers through a five-mile area of Queens, then returned at 10 A.M. to deliver the afternoon newspapers. The young Mr. Shanker hardly ever saw him and knew him, he once said, as "this angry, disgruntled guy who grabbed a roll and coffee and went out to work again."

More

His mother, Mamie, was a sewing machine operator and a member of Sidney Hillman's Amalgamated Clothing Workers. So grueling was her work that Mr. Shanker once visited her factory and could not recognize her as she sat bent in sweaty concentration at her machine.

If both parents bequeathed a sympathy for workers, it was his thrifty mother who taught him how to negotiate. "I'd have to wait half an hour while she bought three tomatoes," he once said.

The family moved to the Ravenswood section of Queens and he remembered his childhood as miserable there. Many of his neighbors listened on radio to the anti-Semitic preachings of Father Coughlin and the younger ones sometimes took their venom out on Mr. Shanker.

"At the age of 12, I was 6 foot 3 and 110 pounds," he recalled. "I was Jewish and living in an Irish Catholic neighborhood, so everybody took turns beating up the biggest kid."

As a result, he mostly stayed indoors, listening to radio or collecting stamps. But at 14 he joined the Boy Scouts. When the scoutmaster was drafted into the Army, the teen-age Mr. Shanker ran the troop on his own and persuaded boys to join with the same zeal he would later employ to enlist teachers into his union.

Mr. Shanker attended Stuyvesant High School and the University of Illinois. He started a doctoral program in philosophy at Columbia University, but running out of money and patience, he took a year off in 1952 to teach at an elementary school for a salary of $38 a week. He never finished his doctorate.

Moving to a junior high school in Astoria, he found he liked teaching intellectually gifted classes. But after a run-in with a principal over what Mr. Shanker felt was lax discipline, he was assigned to the bottom classes in the school.

His relief came in union activities. Teacher unions then were astonishingly ineffective. There were 106 of them, in part a result of bitter divisions over Communist loyalties and over pay differentials that rewarded high school teaching more than elementary teaching.

The anti-Communist Teachers Guild was a weak group of 2,400 members. Mr. Shanker edited its newspaper, which was then delivered in unmarked envelopes, an indication of how suspicious authorities were of leftist unions.

Along with colleagues like David Selden, he organized individual schools, visiting three out of every four in the city. One person he signed up was Edith Gerber, a Queens teacher, who became his second wife in 1960 and who went on to head a mentoring program at the City University of New York.

In 1960, a merged body of teachers' unions, the United Federation, won the right to bargain for all teachers. Mr. Shanker, then the union's secretary, became its star. He had a knack for running meetings, letting opponents vent so much steam they infuriated the majority, who would vote against them.

In 1964, while in his mid-30's, Mr. Shanker was elected president. Three years later, he shocked New Yorkers unaccustomed to strikes by white-collar professionals by leading a teachers' walkout over issues of disciplinary procedures. The action resulted in the first of two jailings.

Focusing Efforts On the National Scene

After the upheaval of the 1968 strike, he began turning his attention to the national labor scene, and in 1974, in an action that fractured their friendship, he succeeded Mr. Selden as president of the union's parent, the American Federation of Teachers, but also retained leadership of the U.F.T. for another 12 years.

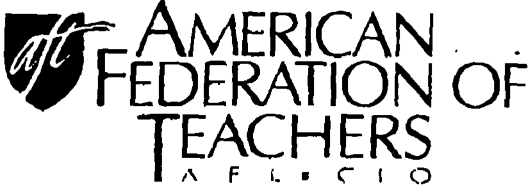
"When he moved to Washington, he became an education statesman and began thinking about things that needed to change," said Diane Ravitch, a former Assistant United States Secretary of Education. "How do kids learn best? What is the best way to organize a school? How do we maintain standards?"

Ms. Ravitch said he was a voice of common sense. "This is a field consumed with trends and fads and people get carried away with the newest thing," she said, "and he never gets carried away."

With time, Mr. Shanker's confrontational attitudes seemed to mellow.

"We got to the 1980's and we had too much of an adversarial relationship," he said in a 1992 interview of relations between unions and school boards. "You don't get much done through conflict."

Mr. Shanker is survived by his wife; four children, Carl, of Gaithersburg, Md., Adam, of Mount Vernon, N.Y., Jennie, of Philadelphia, and Michael, of Tarrytown, N.Y., and a sister, Pearl Harris of Cleveland.



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SANDRA FELDMAN
President

EDWARD J. McELROY
Secretary-Treasurer

NAT LACOUR
Executive Vice President

Natasha,
Here is the school safety info.
We are trying to locate the article about A Shooter (Here's one)

Fax Cover Sheet

DATE: 4/22/99

TO: OFFICE OF THE FIRST LADY FAX: ~~456 2878~~ 456 2239

FROM: CELIA HUNT LOSE DIRECT: 202/393 6357
AFT Public Affairs Department
PHONE: 202/879-4458
FAX: 202/879-4556

RE: SCHOOL SAFETY STATISTICS/TALKING POINTS

Number of pages including cover sheet: 5

Message:

I HOPE THESE ARE HELPFUL. PLEASE CALL IF YOU NEED ANYTHING ELSE.

CHL

internal use

SCHOOL SAFETY

- Most schools are safer than the community at large. Students are more than twice as likely to experience serious violent crime while out of school. (White House Conference on School Safety). Shocking incidents such as this belie the fact that schools are safe havens for teaching and learning.

- Large schools are more likely to report serious crimes. Less than one-tenth of small schools report serious violent crimes.
(1998 report of the Educational Testing Service Policy Information Center)
(Columbine has 1,800 students)

- The number of guns on school campuses continues to drop. Schools have done a good job of reducing the number of guns on campus. But ready access to firearms is a pressing issue, as this incident makes tragically clear.

- Violent incidents rarely occur out of the blue -- it is critically important to respond to warning signs. Involve counselors and family members. Various measures can prevent low-level incidents from escalating into violence.

- Although the vast majority of schools never experience serious incidents of violence, every school must actively foster a safe and orderly climate for learning. Students in small schools are less likely to get lost in the shuffle; alternative placements provide a place for violent and disruptive students to get the help they need without disrupting fellow students' education. Clear policies about expected behavior and consequences for misbehavior. Active enforcement of these policies.

- Zero Tolerance Policies. There is evidence that ZT policies succeed in making schools safer and more orderly. Since the passage of the statewide Safe Schools Act (which contains ZT policy), Texas has seen a sharp decline in the number of violent and disruptive incidents on school campuses.

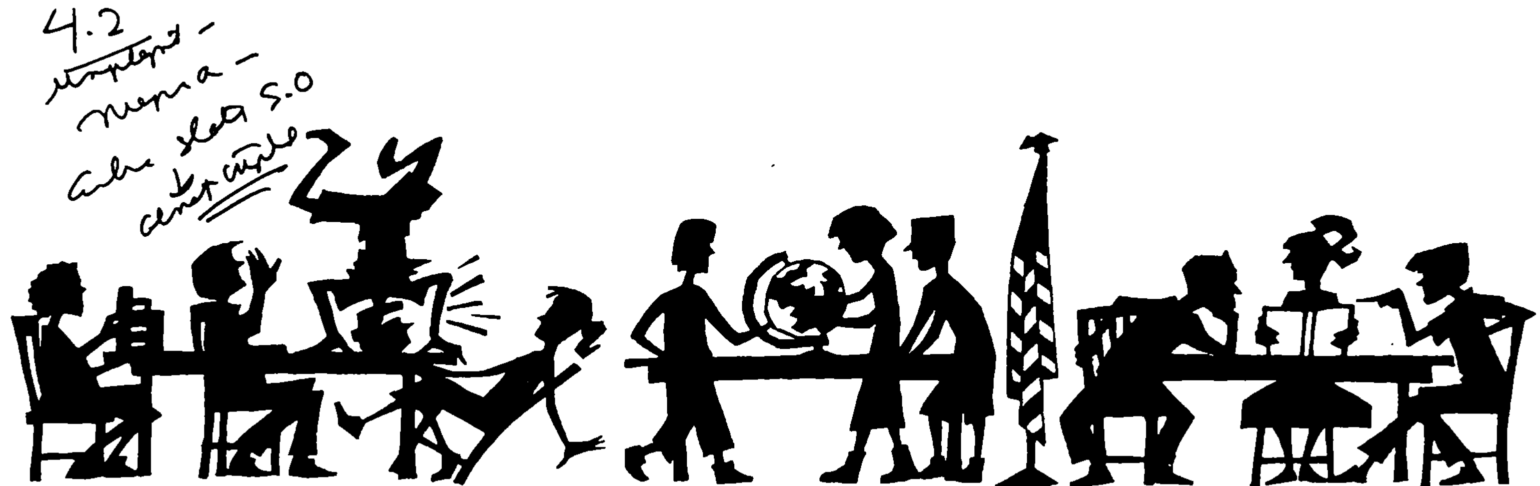
- Involve every member of the school community in creating a safe climate. Students should have a way to report their knowledge or suspicions of violent behavior. All school staff should be trained in school safety techniques.

- Schools are doing what they can to make sure students are safe. But they are only one part of the solution. Young people are bombarded with violent images passed off as entertainment. Many of them experience violence in their homes. Problems of this enormity require a societal response. Schools will continue to do their part, but cannot do it alone.

Classrooms Held Hostage

Restoring Order in Our Schools

American Federation of Teachers
President Albert Shanker's
Address to the 1995
AFT Conference on Discipline and Safety



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"Al's the best," gushes Bella Rosenberg, Shanker's longtime assistant. "He's a phenomenon of the 20th century!"

Shanker's life story is the stuff of fiction. He was born on Manhattan's Lower East Side on Sept. 14, 1928. His parents, Yiddish-speaking immigrants from czarist Russia, worked hard to make ends meet. When Shanker was a boy, the family moved across the East River to Long Island City, where his father, who had studied to become a rabbi, was a newspaper deliveryman and his mother was a sewing-machine operator (and, significantly, a member of the Amalgamated Clothing Workers union).

Shanker and his sister were frequently reminded of how bad things were back in the "old country," yet life in the United States was no picnic. His father would begin his day at 2 in the morning. "It was a typical immigrant's job in those days," Shanker recalls. "It was really hard and dirty. The newspapers would be dropped off outside our apartment 365 days a year. Bundles and bundles of papers." His father would use a pushcart to deliver the newspapers to houses and apartments on his route--an area about three-quarters of a mile wide and a mile long. "He'd get back at 7 in the morning, totally exhausted. And then he'd have some coffee and some breakfast. Then, at 10 o'clock, the afternoon papers would come out, and he'd start all over."

Shanker's mother sometimes worked 70 hours a week, under hellish conditions. "The shops were unsafe," he says. "The windows and doors were locked because they were afraid the workers would take a shirt or pair of pants or throw them out the window to a friend. There were no benefits. But because of the union, the workers eventually got a 40-hour week, and they got some health benefits, and they got some sort of pension plan, and there were some safety regulations."

Growing up in a pro-union household, where Franklin D. Roosevelt was considered an "absolute god," Shanker developed an early interest in politics and social justice. He also learned the hard way about prejudice. The Shankers had the misfortune of being the only Jewish family in a neighborhood made up primarily of working-class Irish and Italian families. "When I'd walk through the neighborhood on Sundays in the summer," Shanker recalls, "all the windows would be open, and I'd hear Father Coughlin"--the popular and controversial Roman Catholic priest and radio broadcaster--"with his anti-Semitic messages coming through." Sometimes, children in the neighborhood would call young Shanker "Christ killer," and once a group of kids even tied a rope around his neck in a hanging attempt.

As a boy, Shanker was tall for his age; by the time he was 12, he had already reached his adult height of 6 feet 3 inches. Yet, he was physically awkward and did not excel at school sports. He did, however, excel in academics, and after attending elementary schools in Queens, he was accepted to Stuyvesant High School, considered one of New York City's top public institutions. He graduated in 1946, ranking 125 out of a class of 625. Shanker applied to Harvard but was rejected ("It was a great disappointment," he has said).

So instead, he went to the University of Illinois at Champaign-Urbana, where he had a cousin in the area. The year was 1946, and the university was overcrowded with GIs, creating a housing shortage. That alone would have made it difficult for Shanker to find a place to live, but he had to deal with another problem: anti-Semitism. "At the university housing bureau," he says, "some ads would say, 'No Jews Wanted,' or 'No Jews or Negroes Wanted,' or 'White Anglo Saxon Protestants Only.'" When he finally found a place to live, about eight miles out of town, he used a bicycle for transportation.

Shanker was surprised by the open racism he encountered in Champaign- Urbana. "Blacks could not sit in the orchestra sections of the theaters, and no restaurant that served whites would serve blacks," he recalls. "So I became a member of an interracial committee at the local Unitarian Church, and we used to have sit-ins. Finally, we got a hold of an old civil-rights law that was passed right after the Civil War, and we went to court and got these places to open up."

Earning a bachelor's degree in philosophy, Shanker graduated with honors in 1949 and returned to New York, where he enrolled at Columbia University with the intention of acquiring a doctorate in philosophy. He completed all his courses but never submitted a dissertation. "I was one of the promising philosophy students," he says. "I was very, very good at it. But basically, I ran out of money and patience."

In 1952, Shanker decided to take advantage of a post-war shortage of teachers and take the substitute teachers' examination, "which, in those days, was fairly difficult," he

recalls. He passed the exam and was assigned to teach 6th grade at an elementary school on Manhattan's Upper West Side. Upon his arrival, Shanker found out that he was the fourth teacher that year to take on this particular group of students. ``It was very, very tough," he says. ``There were some students there from West End Avenue, which had fairly well-to-do people, but there was also this daily influx of Puerto Ricans. So about a third of my kids did not speak English."

It's clear that the seeds of Shanker's lifelong quest to elevate the professional status of teachers were planted during those first few months in the classroom. ``One of the stories that I tell often," he says, ``is about the word `professional,' and why I decided to become part of the union, apart from my family background. And why the word `professional' used to turn me off.

``I'd been teaching for about a week and a half, and I had just terrible problems with classroom control. And so one day, the door opened, and there was the assistant principal. And he stood there with his arms stretched out and pointing. I didn't know what he meant. And I was sort of beckoning him to come on in because I really wanted to talk to him. I needed help on how to prevent these kids from cursing and shrieking. When I would turn around and write things on the blackboard, they would throw things. But he just stood there pointing and then finally said, `Mr. Shanker. There is a lot of paper on the floor. That's very unprofessional.' Then he closed the door and walked away."

As one of two male teachers at the school, Shanker was asked to share ``snow patrol" duties; whenever it snowed, he and the other teacher had to walk around the school during their lunch break making sure the kids didn't get into snowball fights. The previous year, however, the other teacher had done the job all by himself. So, at a staff meeting, the teacher raised his hand to ask the principal a question. Shanker vividly recalls what happened next: ``He said, `Now that there are two men on the faculty to handle snow patrol, would it be OK to rotate--you know, the first day of snow he goes, and the next day I go?' The principal frowned at him and replied, `That's very unprofessional.'" Some 40 years later, Shanker still laughs at the absurdity of the principal's comment. ``So I got to see that the word `professional' meant to be obedient, don't rock the boat. The very opposite of a professional."

Listening to Shanker, you begin to realize just how far teaching has come since those post-war ``Blackboard Jungle" days.

``Some teachers would be assigned to be `floaters' in a school and had to teach in a different classroom each hour," he recalls. ``A few teachers were always given the most violent classes, while other teachers were out of the classroom most of the time on `administrative assignments.' Some teachers got their pay docked if they were a few minutes late because of a traffic jam, but others could come late as often as they wanted because they had friends in high places. Some teachers were always assigned to teach the subject they were licensed in and were given the same grade each period so they would have the fewest possible preparations. Others almost always taught several different grades, often out of the fields in which they were licensed." Even worse, when teachers took sick leave, they had to bring in a note from their doctor.

Shanker's mother, who had seen her own working conditions change dramatically thanks to the union, was particularly appalled by the fact that elementary teachers in New York did not have a duty-free lunch period; unlike junior high and high school teachers, they were required to supervise their students throughout the 35-hour school week. ``Even in the sweatshop, we have time for lunch," she told her son. ``You teachers are supposed to be so smart, but you're dumb not to have a union."

`Gospel of Teacher Unity'

No doubt Shanker would have given up teaching entirely if he hadn't discovered his life's calling: union organizing. He joined Local 2 of the New York Teachers Guild, which had been founded in 1917 with John Dewey as its charter member. An affiliate of the American Federation of Teachers, the guild was just one of 106 teacher organizations in New York City, and only about 5 percent of the school system's 50,000 teachers belonged to it. Moreover, the guild was the only organization that supported collective bargaining for teachers, a radical idea in those days.

``Members of the other groups said, `That's a trade union thing,'" Shanker recalls. ``If you get collective bargaining, you'll be just like the miners union--they're going to shoot you. Or you'll be crooked, like the Teamsters union.' And we said, `Look, you have 106 different groups fighting each other. The teachers ought to vote for one organization to

the classic George Meany mold." (Meany was the longtime head of the powerful afl-cio.)

That same year, when Shanker was elected a vice president of the afl-cio's executive council (a post he holds to this day), liberal Democrats all but gave up on him. ``Once a boat-rocker as a young Socialist rebel," A.H. Raskin wrote in The New York Times, ``Shanker has moved steadily rightward inside organized labor until he now ranks among the most orthodox of union establishmentarians, a highly articulate defender of almost everything George Meany does." (Shanker and Meany, both ardent anti-Communists, had supported the Vietnam War.) Some observers speculated that Shanker would eventually take over Meany's job.

Instead, Shanker, in 1974, was elected president of the AFT (although he kept his job as president of the uft until 1986). The position, combined with his weekly column, gave him national prominence, allowing him the opportunity to influence the education agenda for the entire nation. He continued to press for collective bargaining, but school boards, as Shanker said at the time, ``were no longer soft on unions." It was becoming more and more difficult for teachers' unions to gain concessions. Shanker saw the writing on the wall; he slowly began moving the AFT in a different direction, until, by the mid 1980s, the union became strongly identified with school reform and teacher professionalism.

Ironically, the nea, which had once rejected the idea of collective bargaining for teachers, had become the more militant of the two unions. ``Now, it was the AFT that was acting more like a professional association ( in the best sense) by proposing educational reforms," wrote Timothy Noah in The New Republic, ``and the nea that was intent upon protecting its constituency from criticismor scrutiny."

Meanwhile, Shanker's image underwent a remarkable transformation: The fiery union boss had become a respected advocate of innovative school reform. In speech after speech, he outlined proposals that he believed would finally turn teaching into a true profession, including a national test for teachers, career ladders, merit pay, and, yes, ``radical restructuring" of schools.

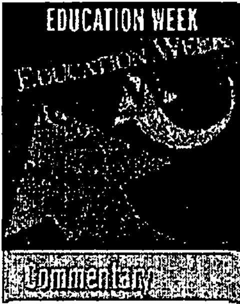
Sometimes, it was hard to believe what was coming out of the union leader's mouth. In a now-famous speech he gave in 1985, which he called ``The Making of a Profession," Shanker urged teachers to embrace these new ideas if they wanted to enhance their status. ``Collective bargaining has been a good mechanism, and we should continue to use it," he said. ``But now, we must ask whether collective bargaining will get us where we want to go." The New York Times ran the story on page one, under the headline, ``Shanker Urging Shift in Strategy To Aid Teachers."

Suddenly, Shanker was winning praise from politicians and policymakers of all stripes, including conservatives who had probably never before said a kind word about a union leader. In 1989, Chester E. Finn Jr., who had served as an assistant secretary of education under President Reagan, called Shanker ``one of the authentically insightful and imaginative figures in American education." But he also argued that while Shanker was taking the high road, ``the AFT locals are simultaneously going on strike, battling reforms, and defending the status quo as if everything were hunky- dory."

Others accused Shanker of jumping on the school-reform bandwagon out of sheer opportunism. Mary Hatwood Futrell, who at the time was the president of the National Education Association, told The Wall Street Journal that among ``the people who are in schools," Shanker was viewed as ``being so far out on a limb that he can't come back. They view him basically as trying to get headlines. He'll say or do anything if that's what it takes."

Nevertheless, many of Shanker's ideas took hold, particularly the concept of national certification for teachers, which is now being carried out by the private, nonprofit National Board for Professional Teaching Standards. But in recent years, the union leader seemed to have become dissatisfied with the results of the school-reform movement. He was especially troubled by the trend toward privatization, which he believed would dismantle public education. In speeches, Shanker had stopped talking about radical restructuring and had begun talking about restoring the academic mission of schools. ``That has to be the primary thing," he said in 1994. ``Other things have to be secondary, which they're not."

The clincher for his change of direction, Shanker says, was the 1994 Public Agenda report, ``First Things First." The study found that the public wants ``safety, order, and the basics" and is uncomfortable with many school reforms. ``We think the public's right about what our schools need," Shanker says, ``and we think they should get what they



TEACHER MAGAZINE:

Remembering Al *Shanker*

By Adam Urbanski

Read the news stories about Al *Shanker*'s death in this issue: "End Of An Era At The AFT" and "Albert *Shanker*, 1928-*1997*."

A friend and colleague recalls another side of the tough union president.

"E.F. Hutton," I thought to myself; when Al *Shanker* talks, everyone listens. I sat among several thousand others listening intently to *Shanker*'s keynote address. The normally noisy hall was now quiet. Unlike before and after his speech, no one was leaving the room, no one was whispering.

I was a new delegate to the American Federation of Teachers annual convention, but I already knew our president's reputation. This was a tough leader who always had a plan and a way to make it a reality. He stood up for what he believed--even if it meant going to jail. No wonder he commanded such admiration and such undivided attention.

So at first, purely out of respect, I listened. Soon, I found myself leaning forward so as not to miss a single word. He made sense. He spoke to me, not at me. And it didn't even seem like a speech; it was as if we were having a conversation in a living room. No jargon, no worn-out cliches--just plain speaking, frequently peppered with asides prefaced with "and by the way..."

Read an *Education Week* profile of Al *Shanker*, "*Shanker* Stands Test of Time," Feb. 21, 1996.

How refreshing--and how believable! He talked about what he knew and what he thought I might want to know. He was right.

Years later, I was elected president of my local union. The day after my victory, the telephone rang incessantly. "Hello," I said, answering yet another call.

"This is Al *Shanker*, Adam," the deep, rich voice at the other end announced.

"Hi, how are you?" is what I said. But what I thought was, "Oh, my God. *Shanker* is calling me!"

"I'm OK. I'm calling to congratulate you and to say that if there's anything I can do to help..."

"As a matter of fact," I blurted out, "I would like to speak with you about some ideas that I've been considering."

"All right, come down and we'll talk."

I agreed and wondered what it would be like to finally meet Al *Shanker* and speak with him face to face.

The day finally came, and *Shanker* waved me into his United Federation of Teachers office in New York City. (He was then president of both the AFT and the UFT.) "Come in, we're just tasting a new wine I discovered. Not expensive, but very, very good. Will you try it?"

"Sure. But just a little."

"All right. Here. Do you like it?"

"It's very nice."

"Do you want a case?"

"No, but thank you for offering. I really don't know that much about wines."

"You don't? Well, then, you'll have to learn, especially the reds. Or else what will we have to talk about?"

"Actually, there are some things I'd like to discuss with you."

"I know. We will. But the thing about wines, you see, is that they don't have to be expensive to be good. And by the way, this Amarone goes great with some chocolate biscotti I make. I always put a little hot pepper in them, and the taste lingers on your tongue."

During lunch that day, I yielded to ***Shanker*** when it came to selecting the wine. I secretly jotted down his choice.

Jotting down ***Shanker***'s choices of wine became a new habit for me--though I was by then already accustomed to jotting down his poignant words about education. Like so many others, I stole from him liberally and shamelessly. His metaphors and anecdotes are legendary.

Shanker's talent as a wordsmith was astonishing, inevitably leaving an indelible impression on the listener. And his common sense was truly uncommon. Always impeccably logical, he was also a lateral thinker--a relentless prober of possibilities. Sometimes he'd explore the question of how we could make better or stronger that which we already had; and then he would explore what else we could have that would be altogether different.

An enigma to many, Al ***Shanker*** defied labels. He was both a progressive and a traditionalist. He refuted the phony choice between compensation and dedication (no reason why teachers shouldn't do well while doing good); equity and excellence (the most insidious form of racism is to lower standards for someone because of race, ethnicity, or socioeconomic status); and unionism and professionalism (the stronger our union, the more able we are to build a genuine profession). And contrary to the popular perceptions of ***Shanker***, he also found effective ways to promote unity without unanimity, rigor without rigidity, and authority without authoritarianism.

Shanker had an irrepressible vision for teachers, for their unions, and for our public schools.

Shanker's fervor for strengthening public education in America was matched only by his passion for promoting democracy at home and abroad. He steadfastly believed that communist regimes would crumble--even when I and so many others could not yet envision it. His unswerving support of free-trade unionism and democratic impulses throughout the world made an important difference. He was a champion for freedom and human rights.

UFT President Sandra Feldman and I accompanied him on one of his frequent trips to Eastern Europe before the fall of communism, nearly a decade ago. After meetings with some of the heroic human rights activists from Czechoslovakia's Charter 77 movement, we took some time for sightseeing. It was a glorious, sunny day in Prague, and Al managed to locate just about every bookstore and record shop in the city. I helped carry all the precious "finds."

"I thought we came here to fight communism, not to shop," I murmured.

"You see these two as different activities?" he asked rhetorically. "And by the way, if you do shopping right, communism will fall."

Shanker's endearing wit and sense of humor were as quick and evident as his capacity for tenderness and affection. During that same excursion, we attended an international conference on human rights in Poland in my former hometown, Nowa Huta, near Krakow. This was my first trip to Poland since my family escaped in 1957, and I was somewhat apprehensive about my safety. Indeed, I was briefly detained, searched, and interrogated by Polish soldiers upon arrival at the Warsaw airport. Knowing this, Al checked on me each evening at our hotel before settling in for the night.

"Why are you acting like a doting father?" I asked him jokingly.

"Because I promised your mother," he said with a wink. If he had not already earned my immense respect and affection, he would have gained it then and there. And it didn't matter that he'd never met my mother or spoken with her. I've always wished that every teacher would have had the chance to meet and know him as he truly was: both steel and velvet. Al ***Shanker*** was not only the voice of teachers; he gave voice to teachers. He inspired them to aspire to more. He triggered among them a revolution of rising expectations, a continuing quest that will be his legacy.

Shanker had an irrepressible vision for teachers, for their unions, and for our public schools. That vision will become a reality because of the foundation he established and the leadership he modeled. He projected strength but also made others strong; he spoke to the task no less than to the heart; and he knew the bottom line, while he also saw the horizon.

The strong teachers' unions that ***Shanker*** helped build will continue to strive for a more genuine teaching profession and more effective schools for all our students. We won't forget his most recent admonition that "it is no less the responsibility of a teachers' union to help preserve public education than to negotiate contracts." (Yes, I jotted that down.) We will do this by promoting higher standards for ourselves and for our students.

We learned this from a wise teacher.

And by the way....

Adam Urbanski is a vice president of the American Federation of Teachers and president of its Rochester, New York, affiliate.

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AMERICAN
Educator

The Power of Ideas

Al in His Own Words

A Collection

Special Issue: Spring/Summer 1997
American Federation of Teachers

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