

# *Hell-Raising with Humor: Lorraine, Mayo, and Me*



Western Historical Manuscript Collection  
Kansas City

## Charles N. Kimball Lecture

Sidney L. Willens  
April 10, 2007

# INTRODUCTION

to the April 10, 2007  
Charles N. Kimball Lecture

## David Boutros

Associate Director, WHMC-KC

Good afternoon. My name is David Boutros and I am the Associate Director of the Western Historical Manuscript Collection-Kansas City, host of the Charles N. Kimball Lecture series.

Many of you are aware of the passing of John A. Morgan last January. It is fitting to acknowledge Jack today because this lecture series owes much to his advice, generosity, and advocacy. Shortly after Charles Kimball died in 1994, the WHMC-KC Advisory Committee, on which Charlie had served many, many years, voted to establish the Lecture series to honor Charlie. There had been questions about the future of Charlie's *Midcontinent Perspectives* series because the Midwest Research Institute did not seem inclined to continue it. Some of Charlie's friends preferred that the lectures end fearing that the quality of a new series would not meet Charlie's standard—a realistic concern given the time and energy that Charlie devoted to the preparation and production of *Midcontinent Perspectives*.

Instead, we offered the Charles N. Kimball Series, not as a continuation of the popular *Midcontinent Perspectives*, but still sharing Charlie's primary goal: to encourage reflection and discourse on issues vitally important to our region.

We sought Mrs. Kimball's permission to establish the series in Charlie's name, and I know that she consulted with several of his friends, including Jack Morgan, before giving her OK.

Our first lecture, given by Robert Kipp, was April 20, 1995, timed to coincide with Charlie's birthday on April 21st. By our third lecture in 1997 it was evident that the quality of the series, if not rivaling Charlie's earlier series, was well received and respected. Moreover, we needed additional financial support to continue and expand the series.

And this is when Jack Morgan's influence became important. I met with Jack to discuss our hopes to add at least another lecture each year. He pledged money and through his efforts funds were donated to the Charles N. Kimball Fund at MRI that continues to support the series.

I have always taken pride in that assistance, reinforced by Morton Sosland's eulogy of Jack, that "nonprofits that won his support realized they had been scrutinized by someone who really cared whether they were doing right."

For his contributions to the success of the Charles N. Kimball Lecture series, and the many more benefits he brought to our community with his wisdom, dedication, and energy, please join me in remembering and honoring John A. Morgan.

Today's speaker will be introduced by Judge Thomas Sims...

## Hon. Thomas E. Sims

Retired Judge, 1970-1995

I am delighted to be here.

I thank David Boutros for the pleasure of introducing a fellow who has become an institution in this city. Sid Willens, it has been said, has influenced more institutional changes in Kansas City than anyone in our town. Sid is a man without fear. He steps forward and takes up causes, time and time again.

In the 1960s, Sid's hell-raising pushed the Kansas City Police Department to give birth to the Office of Citizen Complaints, a model for the nation. In 1970, when Jackson County voters approved our "home rule" charter form of government, an ombudsman-type human relations office provision was included, written and championed by Sid. In 1978, Sid got fed up with blighted properties wreaking havoc in the Marlborough Heights area. He persuaded Municipal Court judges to create a Housing Court, the first of its kind. That's when I really got to know Sid. I was the first Housing Court judge. In the 1980s, crime victims needed a friend. Sid wrote Missouri's first crime victims compensation law and lobbied it through the legislature.

Sid won a \$1.6 million three-year federal grant to establish police-social worker teams inside police headquarters. He led the effort to win a \$259,000 federal grant for a pilot program to create monthly maintenance reserves for home repairs among low income people.

When Sid saw victims of crime mingling with criminal defendants on the 7th floor of the courthouse, he raised hell with the prosecutor to find a separate room for victims. He persuaded a magistrate judge to allow a continuance secretary to work out of the court's offices so crime victims would be notified in advance not to show up in court because the criminal defense lawyer intended to continue the case. Once, Sid, along with others, got stuck in a courthouse elevator without an emergency phone. He raised so much hell that Jackson County installed emergency phones in all elevators.

To show you the extent to which Sid will go for a cause, he took the case of his daughter and son-in-law to the Missouri Supreme Court involving a \$32.38 sales tax on the new car they had bought. Sid claimed they should not have been forced to pay sales tax on a \$500 rebate. Sid lost the battle but he won the war. The Missouri legislature changed the law. Today in Missouri you don't pay sales tax on rebates—unlike Kansas.

In the 1960s federal judge John Oliver assigned a murder case to Sid. He reversed the murder conviction of a 25-year-old airman imprisoned seven years. The case changed the United States Air Force manual for military psychiatrists who testify against the insanity defense.

Sid is the author of four handbooks, one an *Ombudsman Handbook* that has circulated worldwide. His *Observer Handbook* grew out of the 1976 Republican National Convention when Sid and Walt Bodine, of equal fame, fielded 450 volunteers to observe the behavior of police and protesters. For 12 years Sid and Walt teamed up on a public radio show called the *Hellraisers*. For 20 years Sid reviewed books on the law and court system for the *Kansas City Star*. Sid is the author of a handbook titled *Watch Over Witnesses* designed for citizen court-watching programs.

Sid has been very active with Boy Scouts of America, having written a *Handbook of Negotiations* for professional Scouters. He led the fund-raising effort in 1989 that established the H. Roe Bartle Memorabilia Exhibit located in Bartle Hall.

Sid has received so many awards that they are too numerous to mention. His professional colleagues have honored him with the Missouri Bar President's Award, UMKC's law school alumni award, and UMKC's Practitioner of the Year award.

A Kansas City native, Sid says his proudest achievements are that he captured his wife, Lorraine, for 52 years and they reared three children who begat seven grandchildren, all of whom live in Kansas City 15 minutes from his home. When you have that kind of luck, Sid says, hell-raising is heavenly.

It's all yours, Sid...

## Previous Charles N. Kimball Lectures

The Charles N. Kimball lectures may be found on the Western Historical Manuscript Collection-Kansas City web site at [www.umkc.edu/WHMCKC/](http://www.umkc.edu/WHMCKC/). Also located there is the full text of the Midwest Research Institute's *Midcontinent Perspectives Lecture* series from 1974 to 1993.

- April 20, 1995 - Robert A. Kipp, *Crown Center: An Emerging Vision for Urban Development*
- April 22, 1996 - Albert P. Mauro, *The Realization of a Dream: The Development of Hospital Hill*
- April 21, 1997 - Dr. Robert H. Freilich, *To Sprawl or Not to Sprawl: A National Perspective for Kansas City*
- April 21, 1998 - Mr. James M. Kemper, *Community Banks and Their Role in Civic Planning*
- October 21, 1998 - Mr. Donald H. Chisholm, *The Philanthropic Philosophy of Arthur Mag*
- April 21, 1999 - Ms. Vicki Noteis, *Visions of a City: Kansas City's Planning Legacy*
- October 21, 1999 - Mr. John A. Dillingham, *It's All About Eating: Kansas City's History and Opportunity*
- April 24, 2000 - Mr. Gerald W. Gorman, *Ilus Davis: Exemplar of "The Greatest Generation"*
- October 23, 2000 - Rabbi Michael Zedek, *One Man Views the Heartland: A Critical Study of Character and Community*
- April 23, 2001 - Dr. Kala M. Stroup, *Kansas City and Higher Education: A Partnership for Prosperous Citizens and Cities*
- October 22, 2001 - Mr. Robert R. Wheeler, *A Review of Education in 2001: And a Look Forward*
- April 30, 2002 - Dr. Charles J. Carlsen and Dr. Wayne E. Giles, *The Peoples College: Community Colleges in Kansas City*
- October 22, 2002 - Dr. Carol A. Mickett, *History Speaks: Visions and Voices of Kansas City's Past*
- April 21, 2003 - Mr. Andres M. Dominguez, *A Latino Presence in the Heartland: Challenges and Opportunities*
- October 27, 2003 - Mr. Landon H. Rowland, *Arthur E. Stilwell: The Legacy of an Entrepreneur*
- April 21, 2004 - Mr. Carl J. Schramm, *Kansas City: Its Past and Future as a Cradle for Entrepreneurs*
- October 20, 2004 - Mr. John Madgett, *"Old Miserable": A History of the Missouri River in Kansas City*
- May 2, 2005 - Dr. Elson S. Floyd, *UMKC: A Great University for a Great City*
- October 20, 2005 - Ms. Carol Marinovich, *Consolidation: A Green Flag, Not a Checkered Flag*
- April 19, 2006 - Mr. Jeffrey C. Borchardt, *Kansas City Board of Trade: 150 Years of Commodity Markets Evolution*
- October 16, 2006 - Dr. Richard P. Coleman, *The Establishment in Kansas City: A Historical View*

## *Hell-Raising with Humor: Lorraine, Mayo, and Me*

Sidney L. Willens

Attorney at Law

April 10, 2007

Thank you very much, Judge Sims.

Ladies and Gentlemen, many years ago in a courtroom before a jury of twelve, I committed the cardinal sin of a trial lawyer: I asked one too many questions in cross-examination of a witness. The witness testified he was a half block away from the scene of an auto accident and he saw my client run the red light. I should have sat down and shut up. Then I could have argued to the jury that nobody could see the red light from that distance.

Instead I opened my mouth and asked, "How come...how come you say you saw my client go through the red light from so far away?" The witness replied, "I was looking out my office window with a pair of binoculars watching pigeons and I saw your client speed down the street through the red light."

I lost the case. I promised never again to ask, "How come?"

So David Boutros and the Dr. Charles N. Kimball Lecture Series committee members, you can bet your last dollar that I'm not going to ask, "How come...how come I received this wonderful honor to speak in the name and memory of such an inspiring man."

There is one "how come" question you, the audience, might ask, "How come this lecture is titled "Hell-Raising with Humor: Lorraine, Mayo, and Me." The answer is that David Boutros and Tom Sims came up with the title, a mixed bag if ever there was one.

David, I learned, was an avid listener of the Hellraisers show Walt Bodine and I put together on public radio for almost 12 years. Tom I've known for almost 40 years. He filled in the rest of the title "Lorraine, Mayo and Me."

And since "me" is in the title of this lecture and modesty is an overrated virtue, I'll start with a story of my mother and me.

At some points in our lives—if we are lucky—there are people who bring out the best in us, people who offer support and encouragement when we most need it, people who want us to succeed.

My mother, Esther Willens, was my first coach. The views of my mother on child rearing were so good during her 96 years of life and living that her grandchildren and great-grandchildren swarmed around her and sought her ideas, and psychologists asked her opinion. In 1944 I learned the best lesson of my life. I was 16. My mother overheard me talk on the telephone. I accepted an invitation from a Boy Scout buddy to go out and drink a beer. My mother asked if I really wanted to go. I said no.

Mother was furious. "All right! All right! I know I'm too young to drink beer."

"I'm not angry about you drinking beer," Mother said, "I'm angry because you said 'yes' when you wanted to say 'no'."

The first requirement of life and living and hell-raising: "Never say 'yes' when you want to say 'no'."

The surest way to failure is to try to please everybody.

Forgive me if I don't try to please everybody in this audience.

H. Roe Bartle, chief Boy Scout executive here, gave me my first lesson on humor. When I was 12 years old, the Chief as he was called, stopped preaching a Protestant Sunday morning sermon at the Osceola Boy Scout Camp, walked over a hill, entered the shower stall area and proclaimed in that deep baritone voice of his, "Young man, your loud singing has interrupted my sermon. Why are you taking a shower instead of praying with your faith?"

Naked, trembling and dripping wet, I stepped out of the shower and said, "I'm sorry. I'll go pray now."

Knowing that he had thrown the fear of God into me, the Chief smiled and said, "Don't do it again, son, and if you do, learn to carry a tune."

H. Roe Bartle knew how to raise hell with humor.

Lorraine Willens should be standing here beside me. My sweetheart and friend of 52 years treated all disasters as mere incidents and none of the incidents as disasters. When a guy has got a gal like that who is a registered nurse he has children who have seen so much of their mother's quiet bravery that they expect it of themselves.

That, I submit, makes for a peaceful home. Without peace inside the home it's tough to become an effective hell-raiser on the outside.

My feeling for the underdog may stem from the fact that I have had two jobs in my life and have been fired on both, once by General Douglas MacArthur and once by the dean of city managers, L.P. Cookingham.

On the *Daily Pacifican* in Manila, Philippine Islands at the end of World War II, I was the GI Ann Landers, the Mailbag Editor. The *Daily Pacifican* was often called the *Stars & Stripes* of the Western Pacific. GIs wrote to me about everything—bugs in the flour, commanders, movies, liberty ships returning to the states with empty berths after the war had ended. And, of course, they were great leads for stories that I wrote. And so my name was all over the place.

MacArthur finally had enough of the Willens by-line and sent a squad to ambush our staff, ordering us out of our editorial offices with bayonets drawn. In 48 hours I was digging ditches next to Japanese prisoners of war cutting grass.

The story went around the world.

After I got out of the service—with an honorable discharge I might add—I was fired again.

In 1951 Senator Estes Kefauver and his crime sub-committee came to Kansas City to hold hearings on organized crime. Following revelations of the sub-committee, the city created a new position, senior investigator attorney for the Department of Liquor Control.

I got the job.

Almost two years into the work I submitted to the *Kansas City Star* a story on the history of liquor laws going back to the founding of this country. It was approved by my boss, Fred R. Johnson, Director of Liquor Control.

But at the last minute City Manager L.P. Cookingham disapproved the article with my by-line. I refused to remove the by-line. The *Star* published the article and I got fired.

Having now been fired by two bosses, I came to believe that I would rather be a hell-raiser working for myself than a whistleblower with no job security.

Persistence and perseverance are absolutely essential ingredients for hell-raising.

Here's a story to show how persistence got my Catholic wife and me an audience with Pope John Paul II.

In 1984 the government of Israel invited me to Jerusalem to speak on the subject of the police and the law. If I were to meet top Jewish officials in Israel, I said to myself, it was only fair that my

Catholic wife meet the Pope. So what did I do? I went to my favorite instrument, the telephone and put in a person-to-person call to the Pope in Rome.

"Who?" asked the Kansas City operator.

"The Pope in Rome," I replied.

"This is the New York overseas operator" was the second voice I heard.

"This man wants to speak to the Pope," said the Kansas City operator.

"Who?" asked the New York operator.

"The Pope." I repeated my request.

"This is the Rome operator," was the third voice.

"I have a man in the United States of America who wants to speak to the Pope."

"Who?" asked the Rome operator.

"Yes, ma'am," I interrupted. "I want to speak to the Pope."

"It's 3 o'clock in the morning here. The Pope is asleep."

"What time does the Pope get up?"

"How do I know when the Pope gets up," the Rome operator shouted. "Nobody has ever asked me that question before."

"I'm sorry I upset you. Will you at least give me the Vatican's direct number?"

She did. At 9 a.m. Rome time, I placed a second person-to-person call. I gave the operator the Vatican's direct dial number.

"Wait just a moment," I heard the Vatican operator say.

"This is Brother Maguire speaking," was the next voice.

"There's a man who wants to speak to his Excellency."

"I'm sorry. His Excellency doesn't take personal calls."

I interrupted. "Brother Maguire, the government of Israel invited me to speak in Jerusalem and I want my Catholic wife to meet the Pope."

"I'm sorry, we don't allow personal calls to his Excellency."

The operator cut me off.

But she did give me Brother Maguire's direct dial number.

Brother Maguire was the pipeline to the Pope. He said "we" don't allow personal calls to his Excellency. Immediately I made a station call back to Brother Maguire.

"No, your wife can't have a private audience. His Excellency meets only with heads of state."

"But Bobby Kennedy met with the Pope. He's not the head of state."

"But he's the brother of the head of state. Go to your Bishop for a pass to see his Excellency in St. Peter's Square. He'll wave to you and Mrs. Willens from his balcony. Good-bye, Mr. Willens."

The next day I went through two secretaries and got to Cardinal John Cody in Chicago who was involved with Kansas City Jewish leaders when he was a Bishop here. Cardinal Cody, laughing hilariously at my story, said, "Sidney, any Jew and Catholic married 30 years ought to meet his Excellency. Call that Brother Watch-ma-call-it back in Rome and ask him if a Bishop won't do what about a Cardinal? My secretary will call you for references."

And so it came to pass that Brother Maguire and I became friends and Lorraine and I had our audience with his Excellency. A photo of us huddling with Pope John Paul II appeared in 252 newspapers. The Associated Press caption read:

"Pope John Paul II speaks with Mr. and Mrs. Sid Willens in Vatican City. Nobody calls the Pope personally. But for Willens, persistence paid off. A Vatican spokesman said the Pope will never forget the man who tried that call."

Among many funny newspaper headlines, one read: "Man Hounds Vatican Out Of Love For His Wife."

Art Buchwald and I have something in common. The Pulitzer Prize winning Jewish humorist says in the book he wrote just before his death early this year, that after he fell in love with a Catholic woman, he went to a priest in London and said he had a problem.

"What's the problem?" the priest asked.

"My wife is Catholic and I am Jewish."

The priest replied, "No problem, as long as you are not a Protestant."

Buchwald says he and his wife, Ann, lived happily ever after for forty years.

Lorraine and I lived happily ever after for 52 years until her death almost two years ago.

Incidentally, I highly recommend Buchwald's book titled "Too Soon To Say Goodbye."

### Headlines Across The Nation

### Audacity Gets Results

**Couple get the pope's attention with long distance**  
*Pair Planning Papal Pilgrimage Proves Push, Persistence Pays*

**'GIVE ME THE POPE' —THEY DO**  
*Calls help lawyer keep promise to wife*

**Has unlikely meeting with pope**

**Person-to-person call leads to visit with pope**

**KC man wangles papal audience**  
*KC Man Has Pope's Number*

**Papal visit gift of love**

**Papal audience highlights a love story**

**Man hounds Vatican out of love for his wife**

**Persistence pays he gets audience with pope for wife**  
*Direct Call Connects- Later*

**Papal Push, Persistence Pays**

**He Reached Out And Talked To The Pope**  
*The Vatican has its own red tape Kansas City man makes connection*

**'Operator, I'd like to place a call to the Pope'**  
*He goes straight to the top*

**'Hello There, May I Speak To The Pope?'**

**Persistent Sidney Meets Pope**  
*Persistent attorney cuts through red tape, gets to meet pope*

**Kansas City pair meets pope**

**Sid Willens meets Pope John Paul**  
*To meet the Pope, you needchutzpah*

**Persistence Wins Papal Audience For Midwestern Lawyer Wife**

**Papal pursuit**

**'Uh, hello, Rome, is the pope home?'**  
*When push comes to shove, pope's a pushover*

**Try and try again**  
*Stubbornness helps get visit with pope*

**Anything to meet pope**  
*WITH GRIT AND DETERMINATION*

**Missouri man's papal chase is triumphant**  
*Missouri Man Started with Person-to-Person Phone Call*

**'Hello, is this the Vatican? Lemme talk to the pope'**

**Lifelong Dream of Former Resident Now a Reality**  
*Midwest Jewish- Catholic couple meet Pope*

**Hello? Let Me Chat With The Pope...**

**6 Years of Trying to Meet Pontiff Finally Pay Off**

"The Vatican never forgot the man who had tried that call."  
*Associated Press*

Persistence is the mother's milk of hell-raising. Persistence paid off in a case that made history in Kansas City.

On the morning of September 29, 1966, a 39-year-old black man named Claude Bailey walked into my office with a bandaged head, started crying and said he had been beaten up by police the night before and charged with resisting arrest and careless driving. I knew Claude. He rented an apartment in a building Lorraine and I owned.

"What did you do wrong?" I asked Claude.

"Nothing," he replied.

"Where did it happen?"

"47th and Campbell."

"What time did it happen?"

"At 4 o'clock in the morning."

"Why were you driving at 4 o'clock in the morning?"

"I was going to work."

"Where do you work?"

"At Winstead's on the Plaza. I'm a cook. I prepare the meat for the steak burgers before the place opens up. I've done it for the last seven years."

"Tell me what happened after the police stopped you."

"The cop came over to the driver's side and told me to get out of the car and I did. As I was handing over my driver's license, another cop started going through my glove compartment. I turned my head to see what he was doing and the cop grabbed me by the neck and threw me to the ground. Before I knew it, I was handcuffed and the cop started beating me with a night stick."

I believed the story. It had the ring of truth. I accepted the case.

Day and night I knocked on doors in buildings facing 47th street near Campbell. I found four eyewitnesses who heard noise outside, got up from bed, looked out the window and saw a policeman beating a man lying face down in the middle of the street. A second officer stood by doing nothing.

Despite the four witnesses I produced, the Police Department covered up the incident, wouldn't get rid of the officers, and forced me to present the evidence before the Board of Police Commissioners.

On January 7, 1967, the board fired one officer for brutality and suspended the other. It was the first time a Board of Police Commissioners fired an officer for brutality following a public hearing.

A slew of hate calls and letters hit our home. "Willens, you die" was painted in bright red letters on our driveway. Lorraine, on her hands and knees, scrubbed out the words before our children saw them.

Following the victory in the Bailey case, I gave a speech to African-American clergymen at St. Augustine's Episcopal Church at 27th and Benton. In the question and answer period that followed, a minister stood up and asked, "Why are you doing this for us Negroes?" The question caught me off guard. But only for seconds.

Angrily, I shouted back, "Because I'm a Jew, that's why! If a lynch mob strings you up, I'll be next!"

Black ministers jumped to their feet, came to the lectern and hugged me. It's a moment I will never forget.

The police board's decision triggered an uproar inside the Police Department. The police board and Chief Clarence Kelley were accused of betraying their officers. A few months after the board's decision, The *Star* and the TV stations told of the implementation of a new complaint procedure, designed by a Chicago research team the police board had hired. Curious and suspicious, I got a copy of the new rules.

Lo and behold, the rules called for a so-called hearing with the complaining citizen alone in a room without a lawyer facing the accused officer with a lawyer. Five police officers sat as judges.

Another battle was about to begin.

On July 3, 1969, the *Kansas City Star* on its front page published verbatim the rules I proposed for a police complaint office headed by a civilian. With a morning *Kansas City Times* and an afternoon

*Kansas City Star* back then, news space was available to superb reporters like Harry Jones, Jr. and Charles Hammer and equally talented editorial writers and editors like James W. Scott, Robert P. Sigman, and Frank Spurlock.

Aroused by the police board's delay in reacting to the so-called Willens plan, the Interdenominational Ministerial Alliance of Black Ministers demanded a meeting with the Board of Police Commissioners. For almost 16 months a battle raged between the Police Department that wanted a police officer to head the office and those of us who wanted civilian control.

On September 26, 1969, 16 months following the police board's decision in the Bailey case, the Office of Citizen Complaints opened its doors headed by a civilian. The office became a model for the nation. Clarence Kelley was lauded. President Nixon would soon nominate Kelley as our nation's second FBI director following the death of J. Edgar Hoover.

When Clarence Kelley left Washington and returned to Kansas City, we met for lunch arranged by D.W. Gilmore, a police commissioner with whom I had developed a cherished relationship during the battle for the Office of Citizen Complaints. When I asked Kelley why he initially fought so hard against the complaint office he gave an answer I wrote on a paper napkin.

"A police chief must decide virtually every day whether to be a sturdy oak for his officers or a supple willow bending with the winds of change. The public outcry eventually made me bend against the wishes of my officers."

And then I asked Kelley, "Chief, you were lauded during your nomination process for FBI director for having had the initiative to create a model police complaint office. Didn't you feel a little hypocritical when the Congressmen questioned you?" Kelley replied with a smile, "Sid, I was hoping you wouldn't snitch."

Here's a story of how humor helped when Lorraine developed a life-threatening disease.

In July 2002, Lorraine and I drove to Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota. Lorraine was suffering from hypotension, a low blood pressure disorder. Forty miles outside of Rochester, Lorraine had a brain-busting headache. Eating up the highway at 70 miles an hour, we arrived at St. Mary's Hospital where Lorraine ended up in bed with a dose of morphine.

Looking for a way to relieve her stress and mine, I saw in a dress shop window a beautiful stuffed animal—a Saint Bernard dog made in France. Overcoming the shop owner's resistance to sell a promotional item with a hefty offer, I made the purchase, strapped the dog in a wheelchair, named it Mayo, and wheeled it from doctor's appointment to doctor's appointment. It brought laughs throughout the clinic, the likes of which nobody had ever seen at that prestigious institution.

More laughter erupted when a Mayo doctor placed a stethoscope on Mayo's chest and a tongue depressor in her mouth. My camera flashed, souvenirs for the children and grandchildren of doctors who obviously knew the healing power of humor.

A Marriott Hotel parking attendant got into our car, saw Mayo through the rear view mirror, and jumped out in fright, thinking the dog was real. When he realized it wasn't real, he laughed uproariously. We received the best valet service you can imagine.

It's amazing the special attention you receive when you make people laugh and smile.

Hell-raising among senior citizens requires a special sense of humor.

When Bob Hope was near death, the 100-year-old comedian, when asked where he wanted to be buried, said, "Surprise me."

A man, ready to die, instructed the funeral home to inscribe on his tombstone, "I told you I was sick."

I know you senior citizens in the audience will say after I finish this speech that I am telling you to make the most of your life and that most of your life is gone already.

But most of your life isn't gone already. You have plenty more time to raise hell.

Think about it this way. Research shows that people who lose themselves in the service of others live longer, have stronger immune systems, have fewer heart attacks, and have a deeper sense of meaning and purpose than those who work only for the buck.

So for those senior citizens who will live longer by hell-raising, I urge you to follow three simple rules:

1. Age isn't important unless it's a bottle of wine.
2. Humor and laughter are tranquilizers with no side effects.
3. Learn to laugh at yourself—why let others have all the fun?

The next time the doctor says not to worry you'll live to 75 and you are 75, laugh and say you found a doctor who didn't lie to you.

Keep raising hell and you'll live to 100.

You'll say you found a lawyer at the Charles N. Kimball Lecture Series who didn't lie to you either.

In summary, the way you think is the way you raise hell.

Hell-raising doesn't depend on who you are or what you have.

Hell-raising is the pursuit of a vision of integrity and excellence.

Hell-raising means you are sensitive to the social problems of the day.

Hell-raising means you are calling for changes when need be.

Hell-raising means you are strengthening the democratic institutions that will help bring those changes about.

Never forget it—even if you never meet the Pope.

Thank you for the honor of your company.

## Questions and Answers

**Willens:** We are going to open up for questions but I want to sum something up: I hope that when you leave here that you are inspired to raise hell in a positive way with sensitivity. I woke up this morning at 4 o'clock, and in my pajamas I wrote this and I want it to hit home. Hell-raising has two aspects to it: one is to protect our civil liberties—our Bill of Rights. The second is to protect our pocketbook from the merchant who sells defective merchandise. Since so much of my hell-raising has been trying to persuade government institutions to do what they ought to do, I would like to give you one recent example where I was protecting my pocketbook—it just came up absolutely by accident.

For more than a year I ordered office supplies by phone from Office Depot and the service and the quality of the merchandise were excellent—get on the phone and they were all delivered the next day. But last January I received a defective toner cartridge. For two months—and I take notes of everything and I will show you some tricks about that in a minute—for two months I had talked with Office Depot customer service people living in the Philippine Islands, India, and South America, Scout's honor, with no satisfaction. Now keep in mind I am drinking coffee in my pajamas and you might think it takes a lot of time, but it doesn't if you know how to use the telephone and only have to find the number. If I could call the Pope, I could surely call an official of Office Depot; I only had to find his number on the internet.

So I tracked down the name, address, and phone number of Mr. Francis F. Blake, Executive Vice President of Business Development and Corporate Operations. Now I knew I would not speak to Mr. Blake—I have done this before on other things—but usually you can find someone who is right next to him, and that's all you can expect, because a CEO is busy and unlikely to pick up the phone without somebody playing interference.

I talked to a Mrs. Rosenberg in Delray Beach, Florida, which is the headquarters for Office Depot. So I told her my name is Sidney Willens—I didn't tell her I am a lawyer. I don't like to tell people I'm a lawyer because you don't need to be a lawyer; you're going to leave here and save more money by not ever needing a lawyer!

She says, "Your name's Sidney? My granddaughter is named Sydney."

"Really, would you like to know the story of how my mother named me Sidney?"

"Yes."

So I said, "My mother was born in London, England, and my mother always loved the name because back then Sydney was a wonderful girl's name. So she came to this country and she had a boy but she loved that name Sydney and so named me Sidney, that's how I got it."

"Oh really?"

We laughed a little about this, and all I can say is that Mrs. Rosenberg said, "I have your account up on my computer and I just credited you \$220.66." Now here's the letter I faxed to Mrs. Rosenberg—and this is where praise helps, but you have to be sincere:

Cecile Rosenberg  
Executive Offices  
Office Depot

Dear Mrs. Rosenberg,

*Please express to your granddaughter Sydney that I adore her grandmother Cecile. Tell Sydney that her grandmother did more for me in five minutes than Office Depot people from all over the world did in two months. Tell Sydney that if she ever needs a lawyer she will receive a credit of \$220.66 against my fee. Tell Sydney that if she is as efficient as her grandmother Cecile she will grow up and never need a lawyer.*

But there's a PS—a moral:

*PS: To Mr. Francis F. Blake. Were it not for Mrs. Rosenberg, you would have lost a customer. The remarkable efficiency of Office Depot's system in delivery of merchandise was totally obliterated by its system of returning defective merchandise. You would do well to study this fact pattern.*

I took that one complaint and enlarged it to cure the root cause of many complaints. And so that is a way to hell-raise for your pocketbook.

And so now I should introduce Mayo. (laughter).



Mayo and Chloe Ortals, Sidney's granddaughter, November 2, 2003. *Sidney L. Willens (1926- ) Papers (1170kc)*, WHMC-KC.

I want to tell you another story. This was such a stressful moment in a marriage and I made up my mind to find a word to help me. There's a vocabulary of success in my judgment, and other positive thinkers like Norman Vincent Peale—you just need to find the word. I had to figure out how to help our children and grandchildren think through Lorraine's illness.

I put a card table up for Lorraine and covered it with beautiful dining room tablecloth with a candle. Our granddaughter Chloe came in and asked, "What are you and grandma doing?" and I said, "We're having a picnic." And that child continued to come to our home to the picnic,

and everyone else came to the picnic. Just that little change with the word “picnic” made all the difference.

And one last thing: the yellow pad is your key—you should keep the yellow pad by the phone and whatever you do, keep documentation!

On the table are some handouts: a piece that I wrote for the *Kansas City Star* [March 24, 1991] titled “Facts, facts, and more facts are the most effective way to go” and printed on yellow paper. Why is it yellow? “When you see red, go for the yellow.”

The other is an ombudsman piece that I also wrote for the *Star Magazine* [February 5, 1978] and was picked up all over the world by the International Ombudsmen Association. It starts out with the ombudsmen concept developed by twelve of us around the country (I will be a name dropper, including Ralph Nader) who brought over the Scandinavian concept of ombudsmen in the 1960s.

Oh, and my father bought this when I was twelve years old—another tool, though perhaps a little outmoded, with carbon paper and all. That’s the first typewriter I had, and God only knows that I’m thankful that I learned how to type!

Now let’s see if we have any questions—somebody’s got to have one quick question. Yes, sir—oh, this is our first Jackson County Ombudsman, Larry Guillot.

**Larry Guillot:** I was the Jackson County Ombudsman in the office Sidney created. I worked under Sidney for about seven years from 1973. Before I ask a question I want to ask the audience: How many of you have been involved in one of Sidney’s schemes? (Laughter). Involuntarily? (Laughter) I think it must be larger than that. The audience should know Sidney never goes to committee meetings. He works in his pajamas. He makes friends on the telephone. He calls them tele-friends. So I would like Sidney to share with us how he gets people to do things they really don’t want to do. Also, Sid, will you share who are all those “cc” interested citizen names on the bottom of the letters you send all over the world? Do you have a postage stamp machine in your home?

**Willens:** Larry knows my secrets. First let me talk about committees. I want you to know that about 30 years ago I founded an organization called SOPLACH. How many of you want to know what that stands for? The Society Of People Lovers And Committee Haters. How many would like to know the motto of SOPLACH? “Search all your parks and all your cities and you will find no statue of committees.” As to the “cc’s” on my letters, one of the ways to get attention is to show people I am sending copies to everyone I call “interested citizens” and “news media.” People usually do right if they know the whole world will know if they do wrong. Eternal publicity is the price of liberty. No, I don’t own a postage machine, but the post office loves me.

**Myron Chaffee:** I was Sidney’s baby-sitter more than 60 years ago. His mother paid me a dime for three hours. Sidney, every letter you have ever written has a PS, isn’t that correct?

**Willens:** Yes, Myron, virtually every letter. I learned that from the Direct Marketing people. Never in the last 30 years have I written a letter that is more than a single page. A single page letter with a PS is an attention grabber.

**Question:** Have you found someone you could mentor that has the same enthusiasm for some of the subjects that you do? You will be retiring in eight or nine years.

**Willens:** I must say your vocabulary is wrong. There is no such word as “retirement” in my vocabulary. The word is “commencement”—a new beginning. My fear is the commencement of Alzheimer’s. I lost my car keys this morning and when I found them I didn’t know what they were for. (laughter).

Any other question, any at all. You are all at peace. Thank you for coming.

## **Facts, facts, and more facts are the most effective way to go**

*Sidney L. Willens*

*Kansas City Star*, March 24, 1991, page J4

Our society is becoming more impersonal every day. The more computers rule our lives, the less human the human race becomes.

We must learn the art of hellraising—without anger. Anger is the cancer of effective complaining.

An effective hellraiser must recognize that it's almost impossible to find out what "truth" is. God knows what truth is. If only God would tell us what truth is, we who are lawyers will win our lawsuits.

What's the point? An effective hellraiser must know that the courtroom is the last resort and that the jury is not God. A trial lawyer develops a model. A trial is time present against events of time past.

The law of evidence supplies a trial lawyer with a host of rules having to do with the way "truth" is arrived at. The aim of a trial lawyer is to build up credibility on his or her side and to discredit the opposition.

When a lawyer presents a witness before a jury, the goal is to bolster believability for the client. Cross-examination aims to attack believability. The idea is to make it seem more or less likely that the witness is telling the truth.

An effective hellraiser must understand that the bottom line may be a trial before a jury. So you must be a sleuth, hell-bent on uncovering provable facts.

The hellraiser's weapons are a yellow pad, telephone, single-page letters and copying machine. An effective hellraiser must script conversations and be ever aware of possible witnesses and documentation.

The question is, "What are the facts?" The question is not, "What is the law?" The law seldom decides the issue; the facts do.

So it must be said that your noble cause of hellraising will not motivate people to action. Facts motivate people.

There are hundreds of good researchers of the law to one who is a Sherlock Holmes. The hallmark of a winning trial lawyer—and hellraiser—is to be more focused on the facts than anyone else in the room.

Often I see young lawyers just out of law school who regard facts as beneath them, a department belonging to what they perceive to be lesser brains of a detective bureau or the untutored labors of a ditch digger.

These young lawyers have not learned that facts are the foundation, the only sure foundation upon which is built a successful outcome and how difficult and complicated it is to dig them out.

It is not uncertainty about the law that is the problem in the courtroom, it is uncertainty about facts—the facts which generate the law.

Any lawyer who seeks to intimidate a hellraiser should be told, "The law is a mass of abstractions. I know the facts, you don't. "When you can talk to a lawyer like this, you have indeed become an effective Hellraiser."

Sidney L. Willens, a Kansas City lawyer, appears monthly on the Walt Bodine "Hellraisers" show on KCUR-FM public radio.

## **FACT GATHERING**

(Three years of law school on a single page)

Four words offer a guide for fact-gathering:

### **CHRONOLOGY**—

means to write facts and events in order of occurrence.

### **SCRIPT**—

means to put exact words on paper as television writers do for actors. (Who said what, to whom, when and where, and who was present, if anyone?)

### **DOCUMENTATION**—

means letters, photos, and other paperwork.

### **DIAGRAM**—

when necessary—if somebody did something instead of saying something.

***BETTER A SHERLOCK HOLMES  
THAN AN OLIVER WENDALL HOLMES***

# WHMC-KC

The Western Historical Manuscript Collection, a joint collection of the University of Missouri and the State Historical Society of Missouri, contains primary source materials for research and welcomes use by scholars, students and the public. Our network allows for the full resources of the Collection—the holdings of all four branches in Columbia, Kansas City, Rolla, and St. Louis—to be available to researchers throughout the state.

The Kansas City office opened in 1980 with a mission to collect, preserve, and make available for research, documents relating to the history and culture of Kansas City, western Missouri, and the Midwest. Since that time, approximately 12,000 cubic feet of documents have been acquired. The Collection owns the papers of important **civic and political leaders** such as Charles Kimball, Ilus Davis, Charles Wheeler, Oscar Nelson, H.P. Wright, Lou Holland, William Volker, and L. Perry Cookingham; the records of **businesses and industries** such as the Kansas City Board of Trade, the Kansas City Stock Exchange, and the J.C. Nichols Company; a very large collection of materials relating to **Kansas City's built environment**, including the records of the architectural and planning firms of Hoit, Price and Barnes, Wight and Wight, and Hare and Hare, among others; the records of **not-for-profit civic and social organizations**, including the Chamber of Commerce of Greater Kansas City, the Kansas City PTA, the Woman's City Club, and the National Council of Jewish Women; the papers of **scholars and historians** who have researched and written on Kansas City's history, including materials from the Kansas City History Project, and the papers of Bill Goff, Lyle Kennedy, A. Theodore Brown, and James Anderson; and a variety of other collections dealing with such diverse topics as labor unions, the Battle of Westport, music and cultural arts in Kansas City, neighborhood development, civil rights, Kansas City school desegregation, and the overland trails.

Questions about the use of or donations to the Collection should be directed to David Boutros, Associate Director of the Kansas City office. (816) 235-1543; [WHMCKC@umkc.edu](mailto:WHMCKC@umkc.edu).

[www.umkc.edu/WHMCKC/](http://www.umkc.edu/WHMCKC/)

**Cover photo:** Sidney and Lorraine Willens with Pope John Paul II in Vatican City, February 1, 1984. An Associate Press caption for this photo: "...Persistence for over six years by Willens paid off with this greeting. In 1977, planning a trip to Rome, Willens made a personal call to the Pope. Nobody calls the Pope personally. Although he didn't speak to him and the trip was postponed till now [1984], the Vatican never forgot the man who had tried that call." *Sidney L. Willens (1926- ) Papers (1170kc), WHMC-KC.*

Western Historical Manuscript Collection-Kansas City  
302 Newcomb Hall  
University of Missouri-Kansas City  
5100 Rockhill Road  
Kansas City, Missouri 64110-2499