

*Jack Marco*†

It all began for me in the fall of 1968. My hair was longer and a lot darker. I was just out of school and about to start my career as a teacher at Bloom Township High School. Viet Nam, civil rights, and pollution were issues occupying my attention—so was the Democratic Convention in Chicago. My father urged me to get involved in politics, and he convinced me to go to an event in Calumet City and listen to our state representative, Tony Scariano.

While I thought Scariano was terrific, I was blown away by another man who spoke, Abner Mikva, who was running for Congress in an overlapping district. A state representative himself, Mikva had challenged the Daley Machine, was against the war, was great on civil rights, and on and on.

I signed up for Citizens for Mikva that day. I learned how to canvas in that campaign. It was fun, and it was easy. Scariano and Mikva won. Winning in politics was easy.

In the summer of 1970, I volunteered in Ab's congressional office. There I met Genie Ermoyan: sweet as could be and tough as nails. Dave Cleverdon and Leon Davis were also on Ab's staff, and they convinced me to organize the Ninth Ward of Chicago for the upcoming election. We won. Ab beat a man named Harold Marks by a three-to-one margin. Winning elections was not that difficult.

I went back to teaching, although my dream was to someday be a college math professor. One day in May 1971, I opened the mail only to find a letter from Saint Louis University offering a full fellowship. As I began to celebrate that evening, I received a call from Ab, a champion of public education whose wife was a schoolteacher. After telling him my good news, Ab said, "Aw, forget teaching. Come and work for me. There are plenty of good teachers." I did as he said.

The first day on the job, Genie told me that the operational word in this job is flexibility. I learned more about this flexibility four months later once I had settled into this new job. Genie had

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the congressional staff over to her apartment to celebrate my twenty-fifth birthday. At about ten o'clock, Ab called to give us the news. The Illinois Supreme Court had ruled that a Republican-sponsored congressional remap bill, which had been stalled in the legislature, was now the law. The old Second Congressional District, like all Gaul, was divided into three parts. Ab was now in the same district as his good friend Ralph Metcalfe.

There was a district north of Chicago with no incumbent. So Ab said, "Look at the numbers. Could we win there?" The numbers were not encouraging, as no Democrat had been elected there since 1880. However, Adlai Stevenson had come close in the last election. And it did include Evanston. Besides, Ab's elections were easy!

I remember driving on Dempster from the lake to Des Plaines, then back along Sheridan in New Trier. What were we doing here? How would we ever organize a campaign here? Ab said we could.

The local newspapers gave Ab's name a new prefix: "South Side, Liberal, Carpetbagger." The primary election was tough, but we won. Now we faced a general election in a Republican district against Sam Young. Where did Sam come from? After all, it was Sam who once told the congregation at Beth Israel that "some of my best friends live in Skokie." At the first debate, at New Trier West High School, we had packed the audience. Sam started his tirade on Ab by listing all of the missile systems and defense programs Ab had voted against, and with each one the crowd cheered louder until he had them all on their feet. I am not sure Sam ever did figure out that it was Ab they were applauding for those votes.

The 1972 election night was tough. Ab seemed to take it the best of all of us. After all, he knew how his plan would work out in the end. It was just one battle, lost by 7,459 votes. He knew it would get better.

In 1974, Henry Bayer took over the precinct operation after having turned Evanston into a well-oiled machine in 1972. Henry was the best organizer I have ever met. Report nights, when area chairmen called in their canvassing progress, were feared by those who did not produce. And if they did not call in, they would be called! Henry worked on a twenty-four-hour clock; there was always time to track down a delinquent volunteer. Typical report nights went well into the mornings. One special night, Henry was particularly upset with Young, and, besides, the canvassing was not going as well as he wanted. I noticed he had Jim Epstein and

Jerry Esrig looking up phone numbers off of some letterhead. I assumed he was tracking down volunteers who had not yet reported. But calling them at three in the morning seemed a bit harsh. Soon Henry got on the phone and started calling, one by one, the Doctors for Young Committee, confirming their support and asking for additional contributions.

Of course, we had committee problems of our own. Each year, our Lawyers for Mikva Committee continued to grow. We started 1974 by calling those lawyers who signed on in the previous campaign to make sure we could still use their names. We then went on to build the list. Later, we discovered that when one man was called—call him Bill Smith—our volunteer thanked him for his support and then asked to speak to his brother, Ed. He said Ed was not there but we could certainly use his name, too. Soon after, we mailed out our solicitation to lawyers, displaying proudly our long list of Lawyers for Mikva. Mike Royko, then of the *Daily News*, was so impressed with this effort that he dedicated a column to it. After all, Ab was well-known as a reformer, a man of strong character and ethics. And as only Royko could do, he pointed out that one lawyer, Ed Smith, was in prison, doing time in Stateville Penitentiary, and wasn't that an interesting endorsement? (That explains why Ed could not come to the phone.)

It all played out as Ab knew it would in 1974. It was a great victory party at the White Eagle in Niles. We had five thousand volunteers on the street that day. We won by a margin of 2,878 votes (50.09 percent of the vote). Compared to the next one, it was a landslide.

What a great campaign it was in 1976. We had a plan for registering college students during the summer and making sure that they got absentee ballots in the fall. After all, most, although not all, of those votes were ours. This was the only disagreement I ever had with any of the Mikva women. Laurie Mikva was working hard on this project and did not like my plan of beginning our phone calls to students by asking if they were for Ab. She wanted to register every student; it was the right thing to do. I recall saying, "We're not out to save the world; we're just trying to elect a congressman. If they're Republicans, let them register themselves." Jim Epstein then made a comment about what an inspiration I was to these young people.

The Kantors in the first campaign, Judy Gaynor in the next two, and then Julian Berman in the fourth were responsible for

fundraising feats. The most often heard comment from our contributors was that it was like sending a child to college—except that it took six years. In 1972, it cost \$200,000. By 1976, it was more than \$400,000. Judy seemed to have one event after another, always very classy—and always raising lots of money. I'll never forget the grand opening of Arnie's. Arnie Morton, the famous Chicago restaurateur, donated his restaurant for a reception before it opened to the public. It was a magnificent place on Rush Street with crystal chandeliers. Judy called me the day of the event to say attendance was not looking good and to ask me to help get some bodies to fill it up. I called our campaign offices and told our student interns there was a free meal available at Arnie's. Of course, they all showed up, splendid in their jeans, cutoffs, and Mikva T-shirts, to join our contributors at the gala. I thought Judy was going to faint as they devoured the shrimp table. Unfortunately, Arnie himself was there, and he was not pleased.

Election night was long in 1976. In fact, it took about a week. Our count had us losing when we went to bed. It was not until the official canvas that we discovered we had actually won by 201 votes: 106,806 to 106,605. Sam challenged the election, and we went through a recount. Our victory held. Then Sam went to Congress and challenged it again. House Resolution 527 dismissed Sam's challenge, and Ab then came to be known as "Landslide Mikva" in the Democratic Caucus.

HR 527 was adopted in May 1977, marking the end of Sam Young's political career. I retired that year, too, to try my hand at the private sector.

Bob Perkins and Greg Kinczewski took over in 1978 with a new challenger, John Porter. It was a very tough year for Democrats, but Ab won by 1,190 votes, five times the margin of 1976.

For a full decade, we never worked harder, believed stronger, or grew more than in those campaigns. It was Ab's plan all along to give us that. And for that we are all so very grateful.