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# Outlasting

## THE POLITICIANS

As the Faces at City Hall Changed, Rick Orlov Kept Decades of Daily News Readers Informed

BY KERRY CAVANAUGH

WHEN RICK ORLOV became a news reporter after graduating from Cal State Northridge in the 1970s, he expected to have fun in journalism for a couple of years before he got a real job.

Nearly 40 years later, he's one of the most respected and well-liked reporters in Los Angeles. He's covered four mayors and five governors. He's jetted around the world for a story and dodged libel lawsuits. He's even negotiated the surrender of a murder suspect.

Yet the reporters who have worked with Rick know him as a tireless reporter who can file three stories a day and a front-page weekender, and as a generous colleague who can always offer a source and is willing to show City Hall newbies the ropes.

Rick graduated from Cal State Northridge in 1970 with a political science degree and was hired into Copley



City hall press corps in the early 1990s, when there were reporters for the Daily News, Times, Herald-Examiner, City News Service and LA Weekly.

(Below left) Rick Orlov interviews former mayor Richard Riordan.



Newspapers training program, before landing a permanent reporting job at the Alhambra Post-Advocate. He must have shown promise because Rick was city editor by the end of the year. He moved on to the Copley News Service and soon became bureau chief in the Los Angeles County Hall of Administration.

In between assignments in Cancun and Canada (he was a travel writer too) Rick got his political education through the "Kenny Hahn Way of Government." The veteran politician, then a county supervisor in his 50s, would invite Rick and other reporters to sit in on staff meetings, listen to his calls and otherwise get extraordinary access.

For a 25-year-old reporter, the experience was eye-opening.

"He treated us as equals. He made us realize how important we were, because they needed us," Rick said. "But I also realized early on that it's not me. It's the paper I represent. Any power or influence I have is from being

a newspaper reporter and it's the newspaper that has the power.

"I'm just enjoying the ride."

In 1977, a friend suggested Rick get a job with the Valley News and Green Sheet, which was trying to make the leap from community shopper to real newspaper. Rick was hired as an investigative reporter.

One of his first stories revealed that a Los Angeles Community College District chancellor had gone on vacation and stuck taxpayers with the bill for his dog's kennel care. The chancellor sued the paper for libel, prompting Valley News publisher Scott Schmidt to march into the newsroom and announce a \$50 bonus for Rick. It was the newspaper's first libel lawsuit.

Over the next few years, Rick helped cover some of L.A.'s biggest stories—the Night Stalker and the Hillside Strangler

After he had written about a gruesome murder involving the Israeli Mafia, one of the wanted suspects called Rick, who negotiated a deal with him—a 20-minute interview and then the suspect would surrender to police. LAPD officers on the scene tried to take the suspect right away, so Rick called then-Assistant Chief Daryl Gates, who ordered his cops to back off, saying a deal is a deal. Rick got his interview.

Having covered enough crime and mayhem and taken a turn as assistant city editor at the Daily News, Rick moved to Los Angeles City Hall in 1988 to follow another group of characters.

It was the era of Mayor Tom Bradley and a raucous City Council, with Joel Wachs and Zev Yaroslavsky. On Fridays at 5 p.m., Rick pulled out the vodka, beer and chips as his City Hall office became the informal gathering place for political reporters, Council aides and politicians—even Bradley stopped by a few times. Strictly off the record, the parties were a way to blow off steam and talk politics.

During that time Rick developed his reputation as a straight-shooter and an even-handed reporter, thanks to his sophisticated political insight and a dead-on B.S. detector. If a new reporter needs to know what is or is not a story in City Hall, Rick is the authority.

"Rick approaches City Hall with a quasi-mellow, quietly ironic point of view. He knows what's happening, sees the fraud, the chicanery, the charlatanism—and reports on it," said John Schwada, a long-time political reporter, now with KTTV Fox 11.

"But he has a long view that our politicians will probably always travel in these ruts in the road and that there's no sense



in getting too terribly worked up about it."

But, Rick is loved for more than his reporting chops and insight. He is kind and generous with colleagues; respectful and trustworthy with sources. Known for keeping confidences, Rick has been a shoulder to cry on and a wide adviser to many.

"He's the kind of guy you can talk to, run ideas by," said Supervisor Zev Yaroslavsky.

"For a political reporter to be around as long as he has and still be universally liked and loved by the people he covers—and still be a good reporter, who is relevant and breaks stories—is truly remarkable."

In the newsroom of today, when veteran reporters are leaving the business and the remaining reporters are cranking out multiple stories a day, Rick's insight is more valuable than ever. His weekly political column is a must-read for those inside City Hall, and he gives Angelenos, on a daily basis, the most thorough coverage of Los Angeles politics.

While colleagues are fretting over the future of the business, Rick maintains the long view. People told him when he started in newspapers in the 1970s that the business was dying. Maybe that's why he figured journalism would be a temporary gig.

"I still feel that way," Rick said, with a laugh. "Sometimes I think I'll get to do this for another year and then get a real job."



Orlov and then-Councilman Mark Ridley-Thomas in City Hall chambers.