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A Journalist's Tribute to Arthur R. Miller

Many people begin the best part of their week late on Fridays exclaiming, "TGIF!" Others, including, I suspect, Arthur Miller, begin the best days of their week at dawn on Mondays exclaiming, "Thank goodness it's MONDAY," even though they might have worked through the weekend. Arthur, the Energizer Educator, seems to have created a life's mission early on: teach young men and women to become lawyers, teach lawyers of all ages to become better lawyers, and teach lawyers to become fine judges. But he has gone further than the confines of the legal community. His additional self-styled mission has been to inform the rest of us, who are not trained in law, to understand how things legal affect us in our daily lives.

In 1975 our team at ABC-TV created *Good Morning America*. For two hours on weekday mornings our mission was to present information to millions of viewers accurately, quietly, in good taste—interesting, thoughtful, reasoned conversation on the broadest range of subjects, including national and international affairs, education, the law, medicine, and so on—all kinds of information they might use in some way to make their lives better. Doing that work for over eleven years was a privilege. And meeting and talking with knowledgeable men and women about significant challenges and solutions in our daily lives was, also, a privilege.

Our regular contributors were experts in their chosen fields, but they were also experts at translating the often-technical jargon of their professions' languages to make the information understandable to us civilians. No one was more expert at doing so than Arthur. For

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years, he was always available to come on the program when a new Justice came on the Supreme Court or a legal decision came down potentially affecting each of us in our daily lives. And he always presented this information with a sense of humor (where appropriate, of course) and with the ever-present twinkle in the Miller eye. Arthur was a significant player in helping us to fulfill our media mission.

Outside of *Good Morning America*, Arthur joined another challenge of mine. In 1987, I produced and hosted an ABC-TV prime-time special on the 200th anniversary of the U.S. Constitution. Arthur agreed to be my legal guide and advisor. Who better! At the risk of destroying our professional collaboration, I told him that I did not want any black robes, courthouses, courtrooms, or lawyers on the program. Politely, he did not ask me what I had been smoking. Not unlike our *Good Morning America* mission, I wanted to tell stories about how the Constitution affects how we navigate our daily lives, where possible without legal jargon. Because the Constitution is extensive and complicated, I asked him if there was any small part of the document that reflected its core meaning. I was beyond excited when he said, “Yes . . . it is the First Amendment, signed in 1791, because our personal freedoms *are* the very core of the Constitution, and that it is, also, an umbrella of opportunity that allows us to pursue our dreams and try to make the most of our lives.”

Comparing my many, many extraordinary professional experiences is not possible, but making this program was more fulfilling than I can describe. We told personal stories about how “regular folks” were able to use the wonders of the Constitution to make their lives better.

For instance, there was a twelve-year-old Vietnamese girl who escaped from Vietnam as a “boat person,” winding up in public school in Louisiana speaking three words of English. By the eleventh grade she was in honors English and taught her entire school the true meaning of the First Amendment’s Freedom of the Press Clause. Thinking about what Cat Tuong Nguyen did still gives me chills.

There was a Yugoslav-American who demonstrated in front of the Yugoslav Embassy in Washington, DC, and later was arrested and tortured while visiting his mother in his homeland for exercising his constitutional rights in America. The media, then Congress, using its powers, saved him and brought him home to America as he taught us about our right to peaceably assemble.

There were two wonderful women in their seventies at a senior center in Torrington, Wyoming. The center Director told them that

they had no right to challenge his judgment about what shape tables should be used in the big dining room. He told them to “shut up and keep their noses out of the Director’s business,” then threatened to bar them from the center. Free speech, anyone? They sued and won in federal court in Cheyenne. (Whoops. I lied. We did see the inside of a courtroom in a wonderfully dramatic way.) And, by the way, the women were correct about which shape tables were best.

And two sisters from Belfast, Northern Ireland. One stayed there, the other came to America. We saw the differences in how they lived their lives—the joys and opportunities in America for one sister, the tragedies of life in Belfast for the other.

Each story reflected the privileges (there’s that word, again) of our living in a country with the most remarkable document of governance ever written. Along with Arthur’s wonderful guidance, we were grateful to the ACLU for its help in our effort to tell the Constitution’s stories.

All of us who have seen Arthur in action in the classroom, the courtroom, or on TV are grateful to him for his commitment to helping us to appreciate and respect our laws. Arthur has helped us understand how those laws work and how they make our lives better than they could be in any other country on the planet. Thank you, Arthur, colleague, counselor, and friend.

