
FOREWORD

by Buzz Bissinger

Trying to capture the essence of Philadelphia in fewer than 1,500 words is both an honor and a plague. The honor part comes in being asked by the editors of *Philadelphia* magazine to come up with some snazzy and clever insights into the heart of this place. The plague part comes in actually doing it with some modicum of accuracy, in finding the heart when there are so many different veins within the heart itself—beautiful, blown-out, bucolic, bereft, bountiful, bare, buoyant, brutal, booming, bust. After all, what city in the country, what city in the world, has an art museum as beloved for the steps outside that the great Rocky graced as it is for the priceless works that hang inside? The Louvre in Paris? The Metropolitan in New York? The Tate in London?

Yo, get a frigging life. And the Phillies stink.

But surely there must be a common artery, a universal Philadelphia truth whether it's North Philly or North Wales, Manayunk or the Main Line, Brewerytown or Bryn Mawr. I've thought about this for months, and every time I think I've got it, something else comes into my head that delightfully screws it up. I consider *The Philadelphia Story*, the quintessential Katharine Hepburn film based on the life of the quintessential Main Line Queen, Hope Montgomery Scott. Then I think of *Rocky*, because how can you be a Philadelphian and not think of Rocky in his gray and soiled sweatshirt on top of those Art Museum steps with those upraised arms and the exquisite panorama of the Ben Franklin Parkway stretching beneath him? I think of Frank Rizzo when he was the police commissioner of this raging and racially divided city in the 1970s with a nightstick stuck into his cummerbund. Then I think of Ed Rendell 20 years later when he was the mayor and had the city in the palm of his hands with his rumpled irreverence and sat at his desk one day trying to figure out a baseball team fielded

entirely by local sports mascots. I think of David Brenner and Will Smith, Mike Douglas and Mike Schmidt. I think of a mayor with a street for a last name and a film director with a night for his middle one. It's confusing, wonderfully confusing. I think maybe there is no Philadelphia It, no communal heart, but then I think of Frank E. Reighter.

Who?

It's part of the reason I like him, an anonymous man in a city that has never been about the silly gloss of celebrity. I like what he represents—humble, funny, feisty, a day at a time in this city of rowhouses and corner bars and luncheonettes and cars parked in the middle of Broad Street. Reighter's take on the city, made several years ago in a newspaper story, came in the context of describing the impact and importance of another quintessential Philadelphian.

His name was Larry Feinberg, and he was born in a rowhouse in South Philly in 1902. He died 73 years later in Los Angeles, but in between he was simply known as Larry, the Larry of the Three Stooges, the Larry who spent so much of his life getting the stuffing slapped out of him by the sadistic and Hitlerian Moe and trying to answer back. In 1999, a push started in Philadelphia to honor Larry with a mural, and it was then that Reighter, an avid collector of Three Stooges memorabilia in between his regular gig as a stocker of shelves at a local grocery, came up with a quote that is still on the front of my refrigerator. "He is a perfect type of Philadelphian," said Reighter of Larry's Stoogerian plight, "always fighting the level of people above him. Stocking shelves at night, I think about this stuff."

I still smile whenever I read Reighter's description. I appreciate it in particular, having spent five-and-a-half years of my life probing the belly of Philadelphia in a book I wrote called *A Prayer for the City*. I had 402 pages, and I only wish I had a phrase in there as dead-on as what Reighter said in 27 words. It isn't perfect—there are many exceptions to it—but it's good. Because Philadelphia is an underdog city, constantly (and unnecessarily) feeling it has to justify itself in the shadows of New York to the north and Washington to the south. It is a city of scrappers and streetfighters at every level whether it's politics, business, or that ultimate cockfight known as a Philadelphia courtroom. It is a city that wears a chip on its shoulder with such warrior fierceness I sometimes think we're all equipped with spears.

I realize I am playing into a certain stereotype of the city, the beer and a lunch bucket city, the ham-fisted city, the pretzel city, the hoagie city, the city that cheered Kiteman when he crashed at the Vet because let's cut the crap, the frigging guy stunk. Philadelphia is more than that, much more, not just a city, of course, but a wide and expansive region of three million. It is a place with the most beautiful neighborhoods in the world, from Society Hill to Chestnut Hill to the royal estates of the Main Line. It is a place of funk and culture from the jazz joints of North Philly to the Philadelphia Orchestra. It is a place with the greatest urban resource known to man, the splendor of Fairmount Park and the Wissahickon Creek.

The sensory extravaganza of Philadelphia comes every time I walk through it or ride through it. It's exciting and refreshing, but it's still not enough. I want secrets both delicious and dark. I want the intimacies of the people who make this city so unlike any other. Which is where *Philadelphia* magazine comes in. The magazine has been a precious resource for me ever since I was a student at Penn in the early 1970s. Its journalism is the best of any urban magazine in the country, tough when it has to be, unflinching when it has to be, compassionate when it has to be.

The collection of profiles in these pages only reinforces even more the futility of what I have just tried to do: If you want to know the heart of Philadelphia, the complete heart with all the different veins, sit back and enjoy, and read these wonderful pieces about such diverse forces as Julius Erving, M. Night Shyamalan, and Ed Rendell. Revel in them as I did when I read them. And feel special afterwards. Feel proud to live in a city that may not be the biggest in the world, or the most glamorous, but has enough individuality and idiosyncrasy to circle the globe a hundred times over.

INTRODUCTION

In the 1960s and 1970s, *Philadelphia* magazine was a pioneer of the so-called New Journalism, and largely defined the template of what a city or regional magazine can be. At a time when most city magazines were Bibles of Babbitt, peddling gaseous boosterism and selling content to advertisers, *Philadelphia* was breaking china in Main Line drawing rooms, shining light into the smoky back rooms of Old Philadelphia power, and writing unflinchingly about the city's seamy underbelly. Among its coups: Exposing the *Philadelphia Inquirer's* top investigative reporter as a shakedown artist. He was fired and spent the rest of his life in prison. A 1966 article called "The Dancing Master" led to the closing of the Pearl Buck Foundation. It was a story that detailed how an Arthur Murray dance instructor had taken over the famous author's life, and was abusing Korean war orphans that the foundation was supposed to help. Both stories made national news.

One of the staples of the magazine has always been the profile, an in-depth prose portrait of a newsmaker or larger-than-life character who in some way defines Philadelphia. This volume brings together, for the first time, some of the best of these pieces just as they first appeared in the magazine. The subjects are among the brightest lights in the recent history of Philadelphia—with a handful of infamous charmers and oddballs included for good measure—captured with a greater depth and intimacy than in any other local medium. Since these pieces were written, some of the subjects' circumstances have changed, of course, but the profiles are meant to reflect the subjects in that moment and milieu.

Mark Kram Jr.'s piece on Robert Montgomery Scott, for example, was the portrait of a man out of time, the grandson of über-WASP Hope Montgomery Scott and standard-bearer for a patrician way of life long associated with the Main Line and in its twilight. Spending a single, revealing day with Ed Rendell, then riding high as "America's Mayor," Lisa DePaulo famously captured a man who puts the animal back in political animal. In his 1997 profile of

Comcast's Brian Roberts, Larry Platt trapped in amber a business titan on the cusp of greatness.

Yet the fame that comes with greatness—especially in this city—can be a double-edged sword, as another Platt profile, of Phillies third baseman Mike Schmidt in 1995, makes painfully clear:

It was about 7 o'clock one morning during the winter following the 1983 World Series, the one in which Schmidt had managed just one bloop single in 20 at-bats as the Phillies lost in five games to the Baltimore Orioles. It had been snowing most of the night, so Schmidt wasn't surprised when the phone rang and he learned that the school bus carrying his kids—Jonathan and Jessica—had gotten stuck. He got in his four-wheel drive and braved the slick suburban streets around Media before pulling up alongside a yellow bus on the side of the road. Rolling down his window, he realized it wasn't his kids'.

"I saw all these cute grade-schoolers on the bus," he recalls today, sitting behind the wheel of his emerald green Lexus on his way to pick up Jonathan, now 15, from school. "All of a sudden, one of these really cute little kids recognized me—I see him point and yell. They must have been in fourth grade. Then the whole damn bus, every one of these kids, just starts booing me."

Likewise, the other profiles collected here resonate with a sense of the subjects living in—and interacting with—this city. Tracking the careers, lives, and foibles of 29 Philadelphians over the last two decades substantiates what a wonderfully rich and odd and sometimes difficult place this is.

THROUGHOUT the collection, we've also interspersed "My Philadelphia Story" as a quick interlude. It's a form—the subjects speaking directly to the reader, in their words only—that yields startling insights and revelations. Terry Gross, we learn, is quite content to have many of her radio listeners think she is gay. Former mayor W. Wilson Goode, who presided over the bombing of an entire city block, offers that "In the whole scheme of things, MOVE was a bad day. But it's not something that has ever, or that ever does, weigh me down." Only in Philadelphia.

Yet it's the in-depth teasing out of the arresting and mighty by our finest writers that makes this collection such a varied walk through this city. Here is Stephen Rodrick's opening paragraph of his funny and telling profile of renowned playboy Harry Jay Katz:

It's a sultry summer evening, and the pulse of Philadelphia night life is flat-lining. By dusk on this Monday, most of the dwellers of America's fifth largest city have already tramped home. Jaywalkers on Broad Street pause in the middle of the city's most famous boulevard for aimless chitchat without fear of vehicular homicide. A valet stands idle, rhythmically tossing and catching a lone set of keys. It's no different inside the Palm, a sirloin and

potato establishment popular with the folks who rule this town. But at 8 p.m. sharp, the mood goes from tepid to warm. Harry Jay Katz has arrived.

We're off and running into the night meanderings of one of the most charmingly shameless rogues this town has known. Or, consider Christopher McDougall's ride into the workaday world of a very different sort of Philadelphia legend:

Nearly every house on the block is still dark at this miserable hour of a wet spring morning when Mayor John Street comes double-timing down the steps of his North Philadelphia rowhome, coatless in the fine, needling rain. Street's face is stony, but his body jitters with energy as he rams a Hefty bag into a trash can and speedwalks down the driveway.

"Okay, Bush," he orders his driver by way of greeting. "Office."

Marion Winbush slides open the side door of an all-black van that from the outside could pass for the A-Team command vehicle; inside, with its deep crimson upholstery and dim yellow lighting, it feels more like a hearse.

The richness of the characters in this collection stretches in surprising directions: Here is M. Night Shyamalan, right before his career-making *Sixth Sense* hit theaters; Olympic rowing coach Mike Teti en route to the Gold; legendary (and legendarily difficult) lawyer Richard Sprague in the autumn of his career; Curtis Institute piano prodigy Lang Lang when he's just beginning. Some of our subjects were embraced by the city (Sound of Philadelphia producer Kenny Gamble), while others were shunned (including Schmidt, merely baseball's greatest third baseman ever). Here, too, are figures of varying degrees of notoriety: We charted the rise of convicted murderer and self-proclaimed "political prisoner" Mumia Abu-Jamal to international cause célèbre; discovered how whiz kid Wharton dropout Mark Yagalla embezzled \$30 million of investors' money and lavished it on high-priced hookers; took a hard look at world-class race-card player Richard Glanton, then-head of the embattled Barnes Foundation.

Collectively, a group snapshot of a place and a time emerges: Philadelphia around the turn of the twenty-first century. The men and women behind the proverbial camera, including Lisa DePaulo, Buzz Bissinger, and Chris McDougall, are among the finest chroniclers our city has known. They give us Philly and its variegated resident species: The Philadelphian.