

Poem for Maurice Hinchey

What a marvel was Maurice Hinchey!!

Born in NY City on October 27, 1938
from a “working class family”
in the Lower West Side

He spent most of his life in Saugerties
He served in the Navy on a destroyer in the Pacific

He married Brooklyn-born Erica Laumer
and they had two children, Maurice, Jr. and Josef (named
after Erica’s father)

Erica encouraged Maurice to attend college
and to become active in politics.

While Maurice attended New Paltz College where he picked up
a B.A. in 1968 and an M.A. in ’70
he worked as a toll collector for the NY Thruway

Maurice was the chair of the Saugerties Democratic Committee
and in 1972 challenged Woodstock’s Clark Bell
who was serving in the State Legislature. Maurice lost,

but ran again for the Legislature during the
Miracle Year of 1974 after Nixon resigned
as president under the threat of impeachment.

Maurice was swept into office
in the Democratic surge that fall

He quickly involved himself in helping the local economy,
and in environmental protection.

He was legendary for getting gov’t help to assist local economic development,
and equally legendary for his historic work protecting
and cleaning up the environment.

One of his early triumphs in the Legislature was his help in passing the
Freshwater Wetlands Law of 1975, with amendments in subsequent years.

Hinchey became chair of the Assembly’s
Environmental Conservation Committee in ’79,
and served as chair for the next 14 years.

Although very patriotic, Maurice nevertheless took on the military in 1980
with a report that detailed military dumping at Love Canal,
the nation’s first major toxic dump site.

He was crucially involved also in the enactment of our country’s first law
for regulating acid rain.

Hinchey also served tirelessly on a number of Assembly committees
the Ways and Means, Rules, Banks, Health, Higher Education,

Labor, Energy and Agriculture committees.

I first met Maurice in November of 1977
during a performance of the Municipal Power Cantata
a “ballad-opera” of spoken and sung work
promoting public ownership of electrical systems
as allowed by New York law.

It was written by me and Eli Waldron,
and starred Dean Shambach as the Electric Bill Monster
and the much-missed Jerry Moore singing “The Electric Bill Blues,”
plus Maurice’s future wife, Ilene Marder, was one of the organizers
of the Municipal Power Cantata

Woodstock Supervisor Val Cadden was given a place of honor
on the edge of the stage during the performance

Maurice read part of the script
and our friendship flourished from that day forward.

Hinchey very much believed in public ownership of the power system
(and supported creation of a State Bank, such as in North Dakota
which provides credit for public projects & regular working people.)

A Dashing Figure

Maurice cut a dashing figure
in progressive circles.

He was very fastidious. Kept his hands sweat-free
as he adroitly moved from supporter to supporter, say,
at a campaign rally.

Wow, could he rivet a crowd!
looking each in the eye
as they shook hands
so hat each felt
a jolt
of intimate contact.

It was almost a mystic power he had
with audiences.

Maurice’s 41st Birthday

Friday 10-12-1990

(I print from my 1990 Journals my memories of Hinchey’s 41st birthday party)

“Worked on Tuxedo book. [During those years I wrote a book length study
tracing Maurice’s efforts against organized crime’s illegal
waste-hauling activities in New York State.]

“Miriam had a 2 pm appointment with Maurice. The meeting lasted an hour and
she was happy. She was able to show how extraordinarily much
she knew about climate change....

“He’s worried about Long Island under Global Warming.

(Miriam Sanders worked for a year as a member of Maurice's staff during which time she researched and wrote an extensive report on the effects of climate change on New York State.)

"Woodstock Supervisor Brian Hollander took us in the rain (we had car trouble) to the Birthday Celebration at Hillside Manor in Kingston. We sat at the round table with Maurice, Ilene, Robert Kennedy, Jr., & Maurice's two sons, Maurice, Jr. and Josef. The place was packed.

"Mike Sommers, the chair of Saugerties Democratic Committee, m.c.'d. There was a jazz trio. I set up my amp & talking tie on a chair. Then we ate & Robert Kennedy, Jr. spoke. He was stirring & had a broad view of history and the environment— particularly on the loss of species on L.I. Sound and the Atlantic coast.

"In table talk Kennedy said the figures didn't look good for the Environmental Quality Bond Act. Hinchey added that that would be very, very bad for the environmental agenda in N.Y. State. [Thankfully the EQBA did pass.]

"Then RFK, Jr. announced Hinchey, who spoke briefly. Then I performed my song/poem, "The Mighty Mo" backed by the Talking Tie, a clip-on tie with a tiny keyboard attached down the front leading via computer cable to a synthesizer) I taped it. It turned out okay.

The crowd roared approval at the end. The song-poem spoke of the beauty of N.Y. State, how it's like a nation [NY, and California also, during the Trump era, have to act like their own nations because of all the slashing of enviro regs & cutbacks in fairness.]

Song for Maurice "The Mighty Mo!"

New York State—
so beautiful—
Up and down the Hudson
down to the eagly heights
of New York City—
from Tupper Lake to the Delaware
from Buffalo to Montauk Point
It's like a nation.

Its rivers and its fields
Its wild & teeming land
Its villages— its towns
Its pulsing cities—
It's like a nation.

There's a man that's standing
down by the water

—it's the Mighty Mo

He knows we have to take some risks for the water

—The Mighty Mo

for water is the greatest thing and
 once it's gone it's gone
 for a thousand years

He seethes
He's always on the move
Yet he always seems to find a path
through the chaos
of so many issues and so many people and plates
to heal
in New York State—

—the Mighty Mo

Protecting the environment
is leavening

Even your best friends get mad at you

Some will say you don't do enough
Some will say you do too much
too soon too late
 too fierce too tame
 too fast too slow
 too far
 or not far enough

It's hard to be a rainbow warrior
at the Gates of Wrath.

But all the toil & toil
 is worth every hour
 you spend

when you see the
 mists swirl around
 the Catskill peaks at dawn

or when the city plays
 the strings
 of the Brooklyn Bridge
in a New York song.

New York State—
so beautiful—
Up and down the Hudson
down to the eagly heights
 of New York City—
from Tupper Lake to the Delaware
from Buffalo to Montauk Point—
 It's like a nation.

There's man that's standing down by the water

—He's the mighty Mo

It's one thing to say it another thing to do it

—the Mighty Mo

He knows you have to take some heat
that few are willing to take
to heal the toxic sea

He's the Mighty Mo
The Mighty Mo
The mighty mighty mighty mighty mighty Mo

Maurice realized early on
how New York State
is defining itself as a Nation
within a Nation

He's a man who
like few others
has helped articulate
a vision
of abundance, fairness,
clean air & water,
protected open space
& forests
& economic justice
for all of us

Historic Effort to Remove Elements of Organized Crime from the Waste Hauling Business

Throughout much of the 1980s and into the 1990s Hinchey and his
hard driving staff worked without cease
to remove the mob from the waste hauling business
in the Hudson Valley

He and his staff published a lengthy 1986 report,
‘Organized Crime’s Involvement in the Waste Hauling Industry’

which was key in focussing the attention both of law enforcement and the public on the threat
organized crime poses to the air and water.

Once while serving as volunteer for Hinchey
I visited the Westchester County District Attorney’s office to get information
on a mobster attempting to open illegal waste-dumps
in the Hudson Valley

and I noticed that they had pages of Hinchey’s organized crime report
pulled out and tacked to the Westchester DA’s office wall.

Executive Assistant (and Saugerties resident) Paul Miller was a key writer for Hinchey
in those years. Also key was a peppery and colorful former British Intelligence agent named
A. J. Woolston-Smith, known as Smitty, who had been part of the Watergate investigation

team of the 1970s. Smitty looked into things for Hinchey such as the illegal dumping of medical waste off of barges, and radium contamination in New York City.

Another key Hinchey organized crime investigator was Gail McFarland-Benedict.

Maurice took risks. To protect him, the FBI opened a sub-station in the building in Kingston where Maurice had his local offices. Hinchey had to undergo a number of unpleasant confrontations, one of the more grim was the "handshake that wouldn't end."

He was visiting a mob-run landfill and went into the trailer to speak with the owner. Maurice was ready to leave and the gangster shook his hand and said, "Take care of yourself."

It was the hand-grab from hell— a lengthy, clingy, grasp that, by its duration, seemed to convey a message. Finally Hinchey was able to detach his fingers, and not long afterwards, the assemblyman picked up a pistol permit.

Maurice's Spartan office in Kingston back then had blue carpeting, with a framed poster with the text "Secure the Peace" above a photo, "Elect Harry Truman President," and another poster for the MGM Judy Garland Wizard of Oz.

Hinchey and his investigators also took on the illegal dump located in Tuxedo, New York, operated by a convicted murderer named Frank Sacco, who had ties to mobsters in Westchester County. Answering the complaints of residents who were being overwhelmed by stench emanating from the dump, which was located in the downtown area, Hinchey visited Tuxedo, and held hearings of his committee in the town hall, resulting in a 1989 report, "The Tuxedo Story."

Federal investigators became involved, with the result that a Tuxedo town judge and the local police chief were all found guilty in Federal Court of taking bribes from Mr. Sacco.

In early 1988, Hinchey sent a two-page letter to every Town Supervisor in New York State warning of criminal figures bringing illegal construction and demolition debris commingled with hazardous and medical waste to the ravines of towns in the state.

Hinchey's efforts in preventing organize crime from involvement in the waste hauling business in the Hudson Valley resulted in a severe crimp in such activities, and in convictions of some organized crime connected haulers.

Role in Creating Hudson Valley Greenway

In leading and organizing the effort to create the Hudson Valley Greenway that Maurice Hinchey secured another place in history.

The Hudson River Greenway did not just spring spontaneously from the mind of the era, like the ancient goddess Athena springing from the forehead of Zeus.

It required thousands of hours of work, and spirited leadership on the part of Maurice Hinchey, urged on by thousands of others, up and down the Hudson, who saw the beauty of this grand idea.

How do you create something as far-reaching and complicated as the Greenway?

First of all, you go to the public. You set up many public meetings,
which Maurice did.

You print brochures and flyers. You draft laws. You approach Town Boards,
County Governments, established groups, and seek to inform and
get their ideas and support.

One of the first efforts toward a Greenway
was to restore quality fishing in the River, with a law back in 1979 and '80
establishing a Hudson River Fishery Management Program.

In 1986 Hinchey held hearings on the topic "The Future of the Hudson Valley Environment."

In early 1987, he promoted a bill to create a Hudson River Valley Authority.
And he was instrumental in passing the New York State Hudson River Estuary
Management Act, thus creating Hudson River estuarine districts.

He kept drumming up support, from both sides of the aisle,
for the enactment of a Hudson River Valley Authority or Partnership.

By 1988, Hinchey had introduced legislation which
"would initiate a greenway study along the Hudson River from New York City
to the Adirondacks."

Governor Mario Cuomo had endorsed the greenway concept in his State of the State talk.
A survey by Scenic Hudson had shown that 75% of Hudson Valley residents
approved of the Greenway.

Hinchey led a three year study, including 17 public hearings in the 12-county region,
which featured a well-done report, by mid 1991.

So that on December 31, 1991, Governor Cuomo signed the Greenway legislation.
It would have never been done except for the non-stop organization work and
leadership of Maurice Hinchey.

It was a moment in history for him.

Serving in Congress

In 1992, 28th District Congressman Matthew F. McHugh
retired after 18 years in the House.

& Hinchey ran for it, & won the Democratic nomination for the district,
which had been renumbered the 26th after New York lost three districts
as a result of the 1990 census.

Hinchey served New York's 26th congressional district from 1993–2003,
then from New York's 22nd congressional district 2003–2012

After election shenanigans in Ohio in 2004 which stripped John Kerry
of the Presidency,
Hinchey was one of 31 members of the House who voted to uphold
the objection to counting the electoral votes from Ohio
in the United States presidential election, in order to encourage
"a formal and legitimate debate about election irregularities."

If Hinchey's vote had prevailed, American history would have been

significantly different.

Maurice was one of just a few in Congress
to sign on to Dennis Kucinich's drive
to impeach George Bush

After the New York Times first disclosed the existence of the Bush
administration's warrantless surveillance program in late 2005,
Hinchey was among the first members of Congress to criticize the program.

Hinchey wrote the Justice Department requesting an investigation.

For his efforts to commemorate the 400th anniversary of Henry Hudson's 1609
sailing up the Hudson River, Hinchey was made an Officer of the Order of
Orange-Nassau on September 4, 2009 by the Ambassador of the Netherlands
on behalf of Queen Beatrix.

He was awarded the Dutch royal order for his work to commemorate the
400th anniversary of Henry Hudson's exploration and discovery of the Hudson River
and for his efforts to strengthen the U.S.-Netherlands relationship.

In May 2010, Hinchey, along with two other Progressive democrats,
Louis Capps and Jay Inslee, signed a petition to ask Obama
to delay Shell from beginning exploratory drilling near Alaska.

Hinchey worked strongly against fracking in upstate New York.
Unfortunately, the Obama administration paid little heed to a request by
Hinchey to slow drilling in New York and Pennsylvania.

On November 2, 2010 Hinchey was elected to his tenth term as Congressman
for the New York State 22nd Congressional District,

Then, on April 22, 2011, Hinchey's office announced that he was being treated
for a curable form of colon cancer. A statement released by his office said that
Hinchey would have surgery at the Albany Medical Center,
receive treatment at the Ulster Radiation Oncology Center in Kingston,
N.Y., and also undergo chemotherapy.

He retired in January of 2013, after 20 years in Congress.

The Maurice Hinchey Catskill Interpretive Center was dedicated to him
in Mt. Tremper. The Catskill Interpretive Center— Another great idea from Maurice.

Since retirement, Hinchey continued his demand for national healthcare,
for economic justice for all and for protection of water and the environment.

Then, he became afflicted with a neurological disorder which prevented
him from forming sentences, Maurice was forced to pull away from his 43 years
of non-stop work to improve and protect our way of life.

Maurice was battered by what Tim Leary called
“biologic phasing”

Ahh Maurice
so sad and so tragic
to have been robbed of your ability

to use your voice
for a better world.

On July 19, 2015, a large celebration of Maurice
was held at Diamond Mills in Saugerties
on South Partition Street

I was honored to sit at Maurice and his wife Ilene's table.
And I was very saddened to note how limited Maurice's speech was
though he seemed clearly able to read text.

The most poignant moments I thought came upon seeing
Maurice's eyes filling with tears greeting and hugging his former colleagues in the
House of Representatives
at the Diamond Mill celebration

He was weeping I think at least in part because of the tragedy of
recognizing and remembering his colleagues
but not being able to speak with them.

His Various Marriages

In the 1990s Maurice's marriage to Erika
ended, and he married Ilene Marder,
with whom he had a daughter Michelle

Later, Maurice separated from Ilene,
and married Alison Lee, but then was
separated late in life from Alison,
and Maurice remarried Ilene
with whom he was residing when
he passed away on November 22, 2017

Ah hail the remarkable person known to us as The Mighty Mo
His physical body is gone, but his Mighty Spirit lives on

—Ed Sanders
Woodstock, N.Y.
December 2017



Maurice and Ilene dancing, July 19, 2015

