PERSONAL HISTORY

THE DANGER OF GETTING TOO CLOSE TO A *SOURCE*

Richard Darman was my source in the Reagan and Bush Administrations—and my best friend.

By Bob Woodward

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Darman in his White House office, in 1985. Photograph by Diana Walker / Getty Images

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"Woodward, Darman," he said. It was how every phone call from him began over two decades. Richard G. Darman was what I call a "hide in plain sight" source, because it was widely known that we were close friends. Not known, but perhaps suspected, was that he was a pipeline for me into the White House during the Presidencies of Ronald Reagan and George H. W. Bush.

I first met Darman in 1973, during the Watergate affair, which I was covering for the Washington *Post* with my reporting partner Carl Bernstein. Darman and I were both thirty, and both obsessed with work and with the dramatic political history we were witnessing. At that time, Darman was a top aide to the Attorney General, Elliot Richardson, who had refused to carry out Richard Nixon's order to fire Archibald Cox, the Watergate special prosecutor. Richardson resigned and Nixon fired Cox. This was the firestorm called the Saturday Night Massacre, a crucial event that helped lead to Nixon's resignation, on August 9, 1974. Darman regularly filled me in on the behind-the-scenes story, its color and meaning.

Darman was a Harvard graduate, an overachiever, clearly driven, cerebral, witty, and tenacious. He believed in the good that both he and the government could do for the

country. He was an idealist and a cynic. He once told the New York *Times* that his only hobby was work.

We had countless long lunches together—Saturday or Sunday—at the Madison Hotel, across the street from the *Post*, discussing government, journalism, and ourselves. I felt like I was getting a master class in how government really operated. Plus, many scoops. In later years, Darman would drive out on weekends to our country house near Annapolis, Maryland, to spend large parts of the day with me and my wife, the journalist Elsa Walsh, who was particularly fond of him. Some people found him arrogant, but I loved his comfortable confidence as a friend and a source. It was part of what made him so extraordinary and valuable. He knew how to turn on the charm, and he did for both Elsa and me.

The most celebrated source of my career was Mark Felt, the No. 2 man at the F.B.I. during the Nixon years, who died in 2008. I referred to him as Deep Throat. But if Felt was on one end of the source spectrum—a secret source for thirty-three years, who operated entirely in the shadows, deeply paranoid and careful about what information he provided me and how he did it—Darman was his opposite. Flagrant and out in the open, he casually spoke to me about the most sensitive and high-level decision-making inside the Reagan and Bush White Houses.

So much of the U.S. government ran on paper. What Darman understood better than most was the *flow* of paper, what it said and what it left out. Darman introduced me to one of my most important channels of information: the staff secretary. "A key to understanding what goes on in any White House," he told me, "is the staff secretary."

The position sounded to me like a paper pusher, a mindless cog in the bureaucracy. In fact, as Darman tutored me, the staff secretary sees and controls all information that goes to the President. Darman asked to be, and was appointed, staff secretary during Reagan's first term. In that period, he knew virtually everything important about Presidential business, behavior, and decisions. He was known as a master of policy detail and made himself the indispensable man in the Administration. His information checked out. Darman was a protégé of James Baker, who was chief of staff to Reagan. In Reagan's second term, when Baker became Treasury Secretary, Darman became his deputy. And from 1989 to 1993, under Bush, he was the director of the Office of Management and Budget.

From critical national-security information to the colorful office tales he shared, Darman provided me with a gold mine of information. I interviewed him in at least fifty-eight meetings or phone conversations. I have boxes filled with hundreds of pages of notes on our discussions. After our most important conversations, as is my practice, I typed a memo of one to six pages, laying out in detail what he'd said.

Darman was hardly an elegant presence. He cut his own hair and clearly did not care what clothes he wore. He was pudgy until he went on one of his intensive weight-loss programs. When he lost weight, he would rarely buy new clothes; he just tightened his belt ever tighter.

Darman was one of the smartest people I have ever interviewed. He had analytical brilliance and analytical patience. He had a hawklike ability to zero in on weaknesses —in policy, in people, and in his own Administration.

Reagan delegated a lot of his authority, creating a power struggle of wannabe Presidents among his advisers. Each one struggled to secure greater power for himself by isolating others from the President, Darman said. Baker was one of the most enduring if not triumphant of those competing for power and proximity to Reagan. "Jim Baker has to stop trying to be President," Darman said to me of his mentor.

Darman had a cool disdain for everyone. Over the years, I do not believe I ever heard him voice much respect or admiration for any of his superiors—Reagan, Bush, or Baker. In 1987, Darman told me, "For four years in the Reagan Administration, I lived in a world of delegated authority without a fully engaged President. With a team of competing Presidents trying to kill each other off in secret." Reagan was forgetful but not necessarily cognitively impaired, Darman said.

As Baker's protégé, Darman had participated in these internecine and often wretched White House wars. He told me that his role, which was highly secret, would have been described in earlier eras as a "hatchet man." Baker periodically deployed Darman to discredit and even destroy Baker's rivals for Presidential attention in the Administration. Chief among those rivals were the Secretary of State Alexander Haig, Reagan's top aide Edwin Meese, and the C.I.A. director Bill Casey. I knew I was being used sometimes, but that did not mean that the information I gleaned was not accurate.

Darman maintained that he executed these "hits" with hard facts, rarely embellished. He was a careful man. Over the first eighteen months of the Reagan Administration, he said, Haig had been hanging himself with his ego and impulsiveness. Darman just helped speed up the process by leaking precise, detailed accounts of Haig's behavior at meetings, privately telling selected reporters and others that the Secretary of State was a "joke," an "ass-kisser," a "danger to the Republic," and even "insane." Haig finally resigned in 1982.

The next target was Meese, Reagan's Presidential counsellor and close confidant. Darman said that he spread stories of Meese's ignorance and quasi-scandalous activity over ten thousand dollars in moving expenses that Meese might have improperly reported to the Internal Revenue Service as supplemental income. Nothing came of it.

In 1983, Baker and Casey became embroiled in a public dispute over who had clandestinely obtained Jimmy Carter's briefing book for the 1980 Presidential debate. Darman directed a barrage of stealth media fire at Casey. He dismissed Casey as a hopelessly out-of-touch intelligence chief who risked too much on behalf of the President and undermined the legitimacy of the C.I.A. and covert action. "A naïve conservative who has a kind of nineteen-twenties view that you can preach away communism," Darman said about Casey, in a 1985 interview.

The hardest of Darman's targets to dislodge was the First Lady, Nancy Reagan. While Darman poured scorn on her in private, describing her to me as a "mean bitch," he could not find a way to drive a stake into her heart. He wanted to reduce her influence with the President as much as possible. He couldn't understand the basis for their marriage. Reagan had clearly been hurt by his father's alcoholism and unemployment. The President had an emotional wall within him, Darman concluded, and no one knew whether Nancy got through that wall. If so, she would have been the only one who did, he said.

Although Darman could be slashing and unforgiving, he was a generous friend to me over the years. We had one of our long lunches in April, 1982. I had been offered an on-air job at CBS television and was seriously considering it just for a change from a life writing newspaper pieces and books. I was also at a real crossroads. The year before, when I was the editor of the *Post's* Metro section, I had made a mistake that insured that I would not succeed Ben Bradlee as executive editor of the *Post*. One of the reporters under my wing, Janet Cooke, had won a Pulitzer Prize for an article headlined "Jimmy's World," about an eight-year-old heroin addict, which turned out to have been fabricated. It was a giant mistake on my part, and I took responsibility. The incident reinforced in my mind, and to others at the *Post*, that I was not cut out to be an editor. It was also a moral failing. If I had tried to save the child first, the fraud would have been identified.

As an editor, I gave the journalists in my unit an enormous amount of running room, but demanded more and more from them. "Let's peel back more layers. We haven't gotten to the core yet," I would say. "Go back. Interview them four more times." I wanted maximum-impact stories. Some journalists called being under me a "gilded graveyard," because their stories were unlikely to make the paper more than once or twice a year. That pressure, coupled with my lack of supervision and distraction with my own reporting, had led to my spectacular failure with Janet Cooke. One day, Don Graham, the publisher of the paper, took me out to lunch and said, You'll always have a home here, but you'll never be executive editor. I understood.

Darman sketched out on paper a comparison of all the advantages and disadvantages of continuing to work at the *Post* while writing books, versus moving to TV. He wrote up nine categories to compare, including "challenge," "perceived external success," "impact," and "skill level." For "impact," he gave the *Post a 4*, versus only a 2 for TV.

That was the Darman I knew. The opposite of a bare-knuckled partisan, he was all brains and elbows, a pushy strategist with an unconcealed take-charge persona. What he should have told me, and maybe wanted to, was that I would not be any good on television.

We were two sides of the same coin, different but similar in many ways. My young daughter Tali and Darman's son Willie were the same age and became friends. They often accompanied us on our weekend outings, lunches and dinners, playing together while Darman and I talked for hours.

At one point over the years, Darman said that he was appointing me to be the godfather to his son Jonathan. I was surprised and worried about the

inappropriateness of a journalist becoming godfather to the son of a close source. But I could not find a way to voice my objections. I said nothing. The problem was that Darman was my best friend and a source. He was the closest friend I ever had who was not also a reporter.

I should have realized the danger. But the information flow and the time with Darman was so valuable and at times exciting that it started to have a narcotic effect. We had such fun. I didn't want to lose him or his information channel.

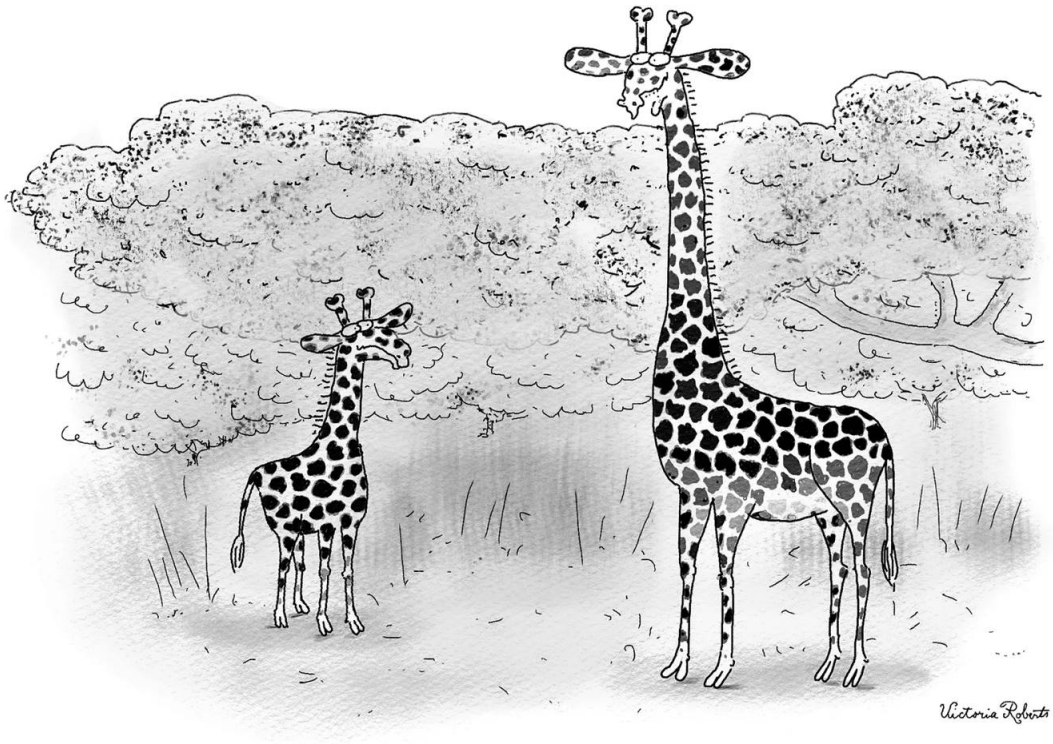
In 1981, little more than two months after entering the White House, Reagan was shot by John W. Hinckley, Jr., in an effort to impress Jodie Foster, who played a teen-age prostitute in the film "Taxi Driver." The bullet lodged about an inch from the President's heart. He was under anesthesia during a two-hour emergency surgery at George Washington University Hospital. Bush, who was then Vice-President, was returning from Texas that afternoon aboard an Air Force jet that was not equipped with advanced voice communications.

"Honey, I forgot to duck," Reagan reportedly told his wife before going into surgery. He told his doctors, "Please tell me you're Republican." Reagan's courage and sunny optimism won widespread praise.

It was nine months after the assassination attempt—a good indication of how long it takes to find out what really happens during a crisis—that I learned of, and wrote a story for the *Post* about, the frightening few hours after the President was shot. Before then, the public hadn't known where his nuclear-code card had been. It was Darman who eventually revealed to me that the F.B.I. had taken possession of the secret code card, which Reagan usually carried in his wallet, during their evidence-

gathering process after the shooting. The card's loss had caused a serious dispute. The President's military aide—the officer who travels with the President carrying the top-secret handbook of military options, including nuclear-strike options—fought a losing battle against the F.B.I. agents at the hospital. The Attorney General, William French Smith, who was stationed in the White House Situation Room, instructed the F.B.I. to take control of the card. Charles Ruff, the U.S. Attorney for D.C., told me, "There was a confrontation on the scene with the military adviser or aide. It was resolved to my best knowledge within thirty-six to forty-eight hours." There was a lot of discomfort and uncertainty, however, during those hours.

White House officials worked hard to assure me that there had been no loss of control over the U.S. nuclear arsenal, no real crisis. The communications director, David Gergen, told me, "At no time during the events of March 30th was the national security of the United States impaired. Beyond that, we have no comment." But to me the incident raised a plethora of questions about how well the emergency system operated in a time of crisis, and all the ways it could have failed. I recalled sitting in French-history class as a Yale undergraduate on the afternoon of November 22, 1963, when the professor was handed a note during his lecture. It was almost unheard of to interrupt a lecture, and it seemed rude. The students stirred uncomfortably at the clear breach of protocol. The professor opened the note and read to the class, "President Kennedy and Vice-President Johnson have been shot in Dallas." There was a pause. "Class dismissed." We filed out and I went to a small eating hall and watched television. It was quickly apparent that the report about Johnson was inaccurate. First reports often are wrong.



"And when you grow up you, too, will have this fabulous view."

Cartoon by Victoria Roberts

Open cartoon gallery

When I spoke to Darman about Reagan's shooting and the debacle over the nuclear-code card, to my surprise, he agreed with me on the dire risks. "A wounded President on its face jeopardizes the national security," he said. "But this system doesn't work, and the Administration knows it has problems and there is no more crucial sensitive system that has to work." I published what Darman told me in the paper without naming him.

On the day Reagan was shot, the Defense Secretary, Caspar W. Weinberger, had, on his own authority, publicly raised the readiness of U.S. forces from the normal DEFCON 5 to DEFCON 4 on the standard scale of five levels of alert for defense conditions. My anxieties heightened.

During a conversation in June, 1985, Darman seemed tired and frustrated. He told me that he was going to leave government. I doubted that. After a discussion of the President's tax policy and the Soviet Union, I turned the subject back again to what Reagan was like immediately after the shooting.

My handwritten notes from that interview offer one of the clearest examples of how every detail and raw emotion is compiled over months and even years of reporting and used to set the scene in my books. I was able to take readers inside the room with the President as he returned to the White House after a two-week stay in the hospital. In my book "Veil," published in 1987, I wrote:

> The next morning the President limped from his bedroom to an adjoining room in the upstairs residence. He emerged slowly, walking with the hesitant steps of an old man. He was pale and disoriented. Those who observed were frightened. Reagan hobbled to a seat in the Yellow Oval Room, started to sit down and fell the rest of the way, collapsing into his chair.
>
> He spoke a few words in a raspy whisper and then had to stop to catch his breath. He looked lost. The pause wasn't enough, and his hands reached for an inhalator, a large masklike breathing device sitting next to his chair. As he sucked in oxygen, the room was filled with a wheezing sound.
>
> Reagan could concentrate for only a few minutes at a time, then he faded mentally and physically, his wounded lung dependent on the inhalator. During the following days, he was able to work or remain attentive only an hour or so a day.
>
> Meese, Baker, [the deputy chief of staff Michael] Deaver and the few others who were granted access to the President were gravely concerned. This was supposed to be the beginning of the Reagan presidency, but at moments it seemed the end of Reagan, the Reagan they knew. At times he

> was overcome with pain, he seemed in constant discomfort. His hearty, reassuring voice sounded permanently injured, his words gravelly and uncertain. His aides began to consider the possibility that his was going to be a crippled presidency. That it would, at its very beginning, devolve into something similar to Woodrow Wilson's at the end, a caretaker presidency, and they reduced—or elevated—to a team of Mrs. Wilson's.

Fortunately, Reagan did recover. But to this day I have always focussed on the vulnerabilities of Presidents. That is in part why I try to maintain relationships with Secret Service agents, and with F.B.I. and C.I.A. officials. They see and hear so much firsthand.

Darman was willing, even eager at times, to talk about the most sensitive intelligence matters, including N.S.A. intercepts and covert C.I.A. operations. He was always careful not to talk about matters that would harm national security, I believed, but he would go right up to the edge—a reporter's dream source.

"Recently the intelligence man ran in and said, 'You got to read this,' " Darman told me on a Sunday afternoon in March, 1985. It was an intercept from the Japanese, outlining what U.S. negotiators were going to say at an upcoming meeting.

During a weekend trip to Maryland, Darman shared with me one of his favorite Reagan stories. In October, 1981, Reagan was pushing hard for Congress to approve the sale of E-3A AWACS (Airborne Warning and Control System) aircraft to Saudi Arabia. The sale totalled $8.5 billion and was the largest U.S. arms package ever proposed for a non-NATO country at that time. I remembered it was reported in the paper, I said. When the President was informed that he had won the AWACS vote, he said prayerfully, "Thank God." Correct, Darman said, but what the report left out was

what he said next. After Darman and Deaver delivered the news of the vote to the President, Reagan said, "Whew! Ever feel like you shit a pineapple?"

Darman understood and appreciated the extraordinary power of the Presidency. And, like so many, he felt its gravitational pull. He dreamed of the office for himself. In 1992, during Bush's Presidency, Darman told me that he was giving thought to running for President in 1996. This was the first time I had ever heard someone voice such an ambition with real seriousness.

"If Buchanan could do it, why not me?" Darman said, referring to Nixon's aide Pat Buchanan. Darman realized that he had no electoral base but argued that he could present an economic plan and defend it. "Bush can't defend the plan," he said. "I could never be elected, but I could get exposure for it."

I did not know what to say, so I said nothing. Even people you think you know well can surprise you with their ambition. I thought it showed his love of power and attention, and his genuine motivation to fix a lot of what he saw as wrong.

Bush had become President in 1989, and had appointed James Baker to be Secretary of State and Darman to be director of the O.M.B. This made Darman one of the most powerful unelected officials in the government, involved in the main financial and strategic decisions of the Administration. The O.M.B. prepares the President's budget, essentially setting the framework for key federal spending and policy priorities. It gave Darman a chance to get his fingers in every pie.

I was hardly on Bush's Christmas-card list. He declined my requests for an interview, for reasons I could readily understand. During the two highly charged years of Watergate, Bush, who was then the chairman of the Republican National

Committee, spent many months denying the significance of the scandal, before Nixon finally resigned. In early August, 1974, when the so-called "smoking gun" tape surfaced, showing Nixon ordering the Watergate coverup, Nixon's counsellor Dean Burch reported that Bush "broke out in assholes and shit himself to death!"

In the months leading up to Bush's attempt to win reëlection in 1992, he had been flying high with the great success of the first Gulf War. His approval rating was nearly ninety per cent. And yet he was trailing his main opponent, Bill Clinton, on economic issues.

"I'm being hung out to dry by the political ambitions of George Bush," Darman said forlornly one August evening, when he arrived for dinner at our home near Annapolis. He was wearing a jazzy sports coat but looking dour.

"Very down," I wrote afterward, at the top of my memo. "Says directly that he worries that the U.S. government is in trouble, that the economy is in trouble. Individuals are correcting their balance sheets, but not the U.S. government."

"I'm supposed to be the chief balancer of the budget," Darman said, "and I'm not doing it." He seemed visibly depressed. Darman said he realized that over the past several years he'd struck what he called a "Faustian bargain" with Reagan and then Bush. He confided in Elsa and me that at times he'd gone along with Administration decisions that he believed—and in some cases knew—were irresponsible, and now he feared that he'd compromised himself and sold off his soul. "I don't think I have," he added hesitantly.

"He has to keep asking himself, and recently asked himself again," I wrote in my notes.

The White House's bipartisan budget deal of 1990, when Darman persuaded Bush to break his "no new taxes" pledge to voters, was still overshadowing everything. In March, 1992, Bush admitted publicly that he made a mistake raising taxes. Darman felt "intellectually and morally" that it was wrong to issue this statement renouncing the budget deal. Darman said that Baker told him, "That admission is the worst

political mistake I've ever seen." In the "Baker lexicon," Darman added, "there are never mistakes. You never say it was a mistake, period."

Darman told us that he'd gone to the President and offered to step down. "If you want me to resign, I will," he said. "I will be out of here in thirty seconds." He leaned across to me and said he didn't want to "pull a Richardson" and resign. A hint of his humor broke through the gloom.

"You really let him off the hook," I said, of Bush. "You should have put the monkey on Bush's back."

"I've been discredited," Darman said, shaking his head. Why stay on? To get my good name back, he said, answering himself. People often ask if I'm doing it for the power. I don't think so, he said. If I quit I couldn't do good things. There is good left to do, he continued, as if talking himself into it.

"Just the other day I asked if I am kidding myself," he said, spiralling into gloom again. He worried that he was becoming someone who would walk over anyone to achieve his objectives.

Darman said forcefully that the country needed a leader with "1. Vision; 2. Substantive Knowledge; 3. Guts."

"Clearly that person is not Bush," I wrote in my notes. "Over all, this evening, Darman is mourning whether he has lost himself and his idealism. He keeps saying, 'I feel I have more integrity than anyone realizes,' as if it were being questioned."

"Well," Elsa said, "when a lie is told, something deceptive is done, you ought to resign."

“If I had to resign when someone lied, I’d have to resign every day,” Darman replied.

Elsa left the table for her daily swim, and, most likely, to give Darman and me time to talk alone. But Darman followed her out and sat by the pool as she swam. When she paused, Dick would talk about regrets in his personal and professional life.

Elsa and I were both shaken by his sadness. At least he was aware. So many people make a deal with the devil, compromising their principles, and are not able to acknowledge it to others or to themselves. I admired him for confessing it.

Despite his fraying emotional state, I continued to push Darman for more insight into Bush’s economic policy. It was growing clearer that this would be the decisive issue in the election. Editors at the *Post* gave me the O.K. to report a four-part series on the economy. I told Darman.

“To come out before the election?” Darman asked, sounding bewildered and slightly worried.

Yes, next month, I said.

“That will mean the focus is Bush,” Darman said.

“Yes,” I told him. “I volunteered for it, as I have lots about the subject. The economy is topic A. I can write something that is factual, serious, and substantive.” I added that I would observe the deep-background rule of our interviews and reflect Darman’s point of view as budget director.

“There is not much I can do about it,” he said. “Any series certainly will not be in Bush’s interest.”

As you know, I have done extensive reporting and talked to many others in the Administration, I said. "I owe it to myself, and in some sense I owe it to you" to write what we know to be true.

"I hoped this wouldn't be until after the election," Darman said, but added, "You are free to do what you have to do."

I knew that anything I wrote on Bush's flailing economic plan would implicate Darman. He was at the center of the fractious and indecisive debates among members of Bush's team and top aides over what the President's economic policy should be.

"The reality is that the Clinton program is a sham and Clinton will be worse," Darman told me. "He has gotten away with murder [on his economic proposals] and will be worse when he is President. He will bend to the left, worse than Bush has bent to the right."

Darman's tone suggested that he saw my focus on Bush and not Clinton as unfair, almost an injustice. "There is nothing like you on the other side," Darman exclaimed, meaning that no one was examining Clinton's economic policies.

I cannot control that, I said. I had to focus on the reporting I had done.

"You can talk about your own moral obligation," Darman added miserably, suggesting that I was failing it here. He knew I was a bit of a crusader and viewed getting the facts and reporting as the most serious undertaking. I knew I could be self-righteous, often unpleasantly so.

"I was unequivocally led to believe it was for after the election," Darman said. "You said you were doing a book not to come out for two to three years."

Yes, but I am also a reporter for the *Post*. I had published numerous stories for which Darman had been a key secret source. The main difference was that he was not individually or directly implicated as a subject in those stories.

This is a practical decision, I told him. As a journalist, I have an obligation to publish the economic series before the election, I said. It's too important to wait for the book.

Getting to the heart of the matter, Darman said, there is a conflict between our "friendship" and the "journalistic obligation."

I agree, I said.

The problem was that Darman and I had become so close and had so many discussions that we'd grown complacent. It was the "Dick and Bob Show." I believe Darman felt that because we were such close friends he could say anything and I would protect him from news where he was the subject.

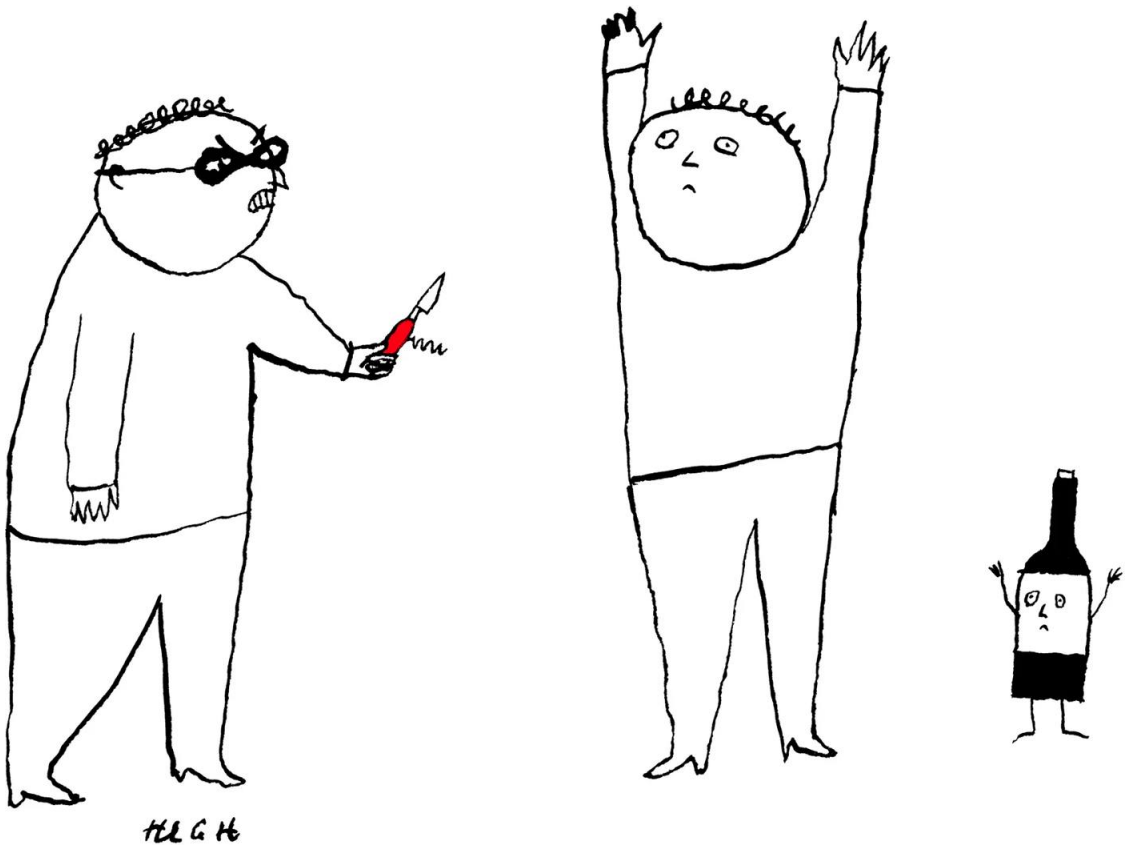
My constitution, however unfortunate, is to report good, verifiable information no matter who you are. I am a journalist. It is not just a job but who I am. I also see what a moralist I can be.

Darman said he was in a bind. He either urged things that were not accepted by Bush or "was a willing party to the decisions." This is the Faustian bargain I made, he said, to keep his position. I've compromised myself, he repeated.

I said I would contact him in several days to outline the stories in case he wanted to add something, repeating that I had talked to dozens of people about Bush's economic policy. This wasn't just about him.

That was September 26, 1992. A week later, October 3rd, I called him at 11:30 A.M.

Darman asked, Can you give me a summary of the four articles? They would start to appear in the *Post* the next day.



Cartoon by Roland High

Open cartoon gallery

The first article was about the origin of the "Read my lips: no new taxes" pledge, I said—the appeal of not raising taxes. The second was about how the no-new-tax pledge scuttled the mission of reducing the budget deficit—a key goal of Darman's. The third article, I explained, was on how Bush decided to declare the pledge a "mistake" and urge new tax increases. It said that responsible economic policy required more revenue for the federal government—a position Darman had argued for passionately. And the fourth was about how Bush's advisers fought bitterly and were split on economic policy. They had failed to develop a policy after nearly four years because of personal animosity and turf fights that were fierce even by Washington's standards. It was a full dose of backstage conflict.

I appreciate knowing that, Darman said. He thought the fourth article, about the hostility and infighting among Bush's team on economic policy—himself, the

Treasury Secretary, Nicholas F. Brady, and the Council of Economic Advisers chairman, Michael J. Boskin—was "gratuitous."

"I can't understand the relevance of putting these stories out that hurt me and hurt Bush," he said, and added, "Bush has lost the election anyway."

Polls showed that Bill Clinton was well ahead of Bush. And yet it still astonished me to hear Darman acknowledge that he expected Bush to lose. He was on a sinking ship. Publication of an article like this, Darman said, "may make it barely possible for me to stay in office." He added that he thought writing about personal conflicts within Bush's team was counter to the serious purposes I claimed in my journalism and would "only highlight the idea of 'throw the bums out.' "

"I am sorry it has come to this," he added with a sigh.

At the time, I was self-righteous. Darman was telling me that publication would hurt him and his career and that, as his friend, I shouldn't publish. I was arguing that it was my job to publish and that I would. "How did I turn out to be the lucky man so you can prove, 'I can attack friends'?" he asked.

That was painful to hear. It was not my purpose, but I could clearly see how it could look as though I was trying to prove my journalistic chops and independence. In a way, I was. The "just doing my job" argument would only go so far. The truth is, I saw a chance to write about the center of what was really going on in a way that I believed no one else had or was going to do. I reminded Darman that he had suggested I do a project on the economy.

"There is no enforceable contract on these things," he said.

I knew that was right. My editors and I had the freedom to decide what to publish.

I said that the two of us had grown too close, given our jobs as journalist and high government official. "It was dangerous," I said. "At times like boys playing with fire."

"No," Darman said, "the two of us did not get too close. Despite the portrait and the charges that I am Machiavellian and manipulative, in fact, I'm a fairly simple, ordinary person, and friendships are important."

I believed that our friendship was as important to him as it was to me. I did not believe that he was "ordinary." I don't think he believed it about himself. He had spent his whole life proving he was not ordinary and had succeeded. He was a formidable force, and everyone knew it.

Sometimes people have a vision of themselves that just doesn't fit with reality. For some sources, reading their words and descriptions in my articles or books can be like holding up a mirror to themselves, and they don't always like or agree with what they see. The same goes for reporters. I have ambivalent feelings about the public portrait of myself as "all business" and cold, even though, when it comes to journalism, I want to appear distant and factual. But, when it comes to personal relationships, I hope to be the opposite—warm, caring, and attentive.

I had seen how Ben Bradlee's friendship with John F. Kennedy had tainted the *Post's* reporting on anything related to the Kennedys. I did not want my friendships to color or water down my reporting. Darman said his wife, Kathleen, held the view that all the policy abstractions he and I focussed on so urgently were "hypocritical." We should focus on the relationship between the two of us, she said. For her, that was so much more important than government policy and political discussions. But Darman and I would not be who we were if we weren't consumed by our work, the politics of the day, and ourselves.

"I try to figure out if it puts me in a position so I have to resign within a week," Darman said. "I'm going to be asking the question: what public interest was served in getting rid of Darman? It's going to be hard."

"Yes, it is going to be hard," I agreed.

My series on Bush's economic policies ran above the fold on the front page of the *Post* from October 4 to October 7, 1992, a month before the election. It was a devastating look inside the Administration's making of economic policy, and included the type of policy detail and all-encompassing scenes usually found in a book. The New York *Times* brought in two of its heaviest hitters, Maureen Dowd and Thomas Friedman, to write about my economic series. "Political circles were consumed with talk of recent articles in The Washington Post by Bob Woodward that offered a highly negative look at the troubled economic policies of the President's first term, compliments of Bush insiders," they wrote. The President "and his family were said to be furious about what they saw as the betrayals of senior aides who were willing to criticize Mr. Bush in articles published only a month before the election." They zeroed in on my sources, too: "Because the Post articles strongly reflected the point of view of Mr. Darman and because Mr. Darman and Mr. Woodward are good friends, many in the Administration assumed that the budget director was the source of the biting commentary."

A lead editorial in the *Wall Street Journal* described the series as "transparently Dick Darman's attempt to set the tone of all future histories of economic policy during the Bush years."

A syndicated column by Rowland Evans and Robert Novak pointed out, "Many argue that Darman has used the nation's most renowned investigative reporter to relate his version of the budget deal at a moment of maximum political peril for the President." I did not agree with this. I think Darman was really telling his version as he experienced it.

Clinton had centered his campaign on this very issue. Or as his lead strategist, James Carville, put it to the campaign staff, "It's the economy, stupid." As Darman had correctly forecast, Clinton beat Bush, winning 370 electoral votes to Bush's 168.

My friendship with Darman was now over. This was hard for me and Darman, but also hard for Elsa and our children. Elsa urged me to try to reconcile. My daughter Tali and Dick's sons could not understand why their fathers couldn't simply "get over" the rupture. Fights among friends happen. Disagreements happen. Apologize. Get over it. Move on.

Four years later, in 1996, Darman published a book called "Who's in Control? Polar Politics and the Sensible Center." Darman sent Elsa and me an inscribed copy. "For Bob Woodward and Elsa Walsh, With appreciation for years of friendship. Best, Dick Darman."

I was completely surprised. He was reaching out after four years. In his book, he revisited 1992, saying, "The end of the Bush term was not pretty." He named me without naming me. "A longtime reporter-friend violated both a specific promise and a basic trust with a regrettable public account of the administration's trials," he wrote. This was milder than I deserved. The anonymity muted his criticism significantly. I am sure this was his point. He could have named me and really issued a full blast. But he did not do what I had done.

For the last ten years of his life, Darman stayed out of the public eye. He withdrew. The hurt he caused Bush was well known. We did not speak for more than a decade.

In 2007, at Elsa's strong urging, I contacted Darman's family after learning he was in Georgetown Hospital, probably dying. At 9 P.M. on Tuesday, December 11th, I went

to see him. He was in intensive care. I had no plan about what to say—maybe that we'd had so many great years of friendship and we should remember them. I would always value those years. What does a bad ending to a friendship really mean? Does it nullify the friendship? Extinguish it from memory? For me, it did not.

Darman was not conscious or was so heavily sedated that he did not open his eyes or talk. As he lay there with every tube and monitor imaginable going in and out of his body, I talked, voicing deep regret that I had been out of the picture for so long. I let you down, I told him.

I never sought to repair the friendship. In the years since the articles, I had held my stubborn ground. I have never felt so stupid.

That painful experience changed my approach to friendship. I was more careful. My wife and daughters say I retreated within myself a little when I was engaging a source. If I became close to someone I might write about, I tried to make it clear that reporting was my business. Life was not off the record. Nor could it be or should it be.

In the hospital room, I approached his bed and kissed his forehead. He died the next month, on January 25, 2008. I never had another friend like Dick Darman. ♦

This is drawn from "Secrets: A Reporter's Memoir."

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