

Excerpt

The offices of the publisher of *The New York Times* would overwhelm anyone from the outside. I came clutching, once again, my portfolio of numerous credentials and was ushered in by a friendly and graceful black doorman into the presence of the man himself. Arthur Hays Sulzberger stood up and shook my hand. He must have been in his late fifties or early sixties. He greeted me with a broad smile, asked about Lord Halifax (it was our link) and settled down for a chat. It turned out to be more of a monologue than a conversation. After stating my case, looking for a spot in American journalism, I just sat there and listened, almost incapable of uttering a word. The surroundings, the man himself, the mere fact that I was sitting in the office of the publisher of the most influential newspaper in the world, made me shy, silent and unsure. Sulzberger must have sensed my uneasiness. His voice was soft, his posture relaxed. But his message was as clear and as crisp as any other one that I had received during my travail.

“It is not the best of times to search for a writing job,” he started. “We at the Times decided, not long ago, not to hire people from the outside. We promote individuals from within the organization. Besides,” he looked at me sharply, “how much do you know about America? How much have you studied our history, our political system, and our social and economic structures? We could not hire anyone whose elementary knowledge of our country is lacking. Sure, you are well versed in the European situation. But we already have a number of European experts, a number of correspondents located in Europe. That is where we keep them. Not here.” He stopped for a while, as if awaiting my reaction. He got none. I was still mesmerized by the situation, still numb and too shy to respond.

“Let me give you another piece of advice,” he continued, “avoid New York. This is not the place to learn about America. Try to find a location somewhere else in the country. In the provinces, your experience, your knowledge is bound to be unique. In New York, there are plenty of people similar to you. In addition, it is bound to be a learning experience for you. What about looking for a lecture agency? That would give you an opportunity to travel around, to acquire first-hand knowledge about the country, to meet people from all walks of life. An experience of that kind would give you a chance to decide what you want to do and which way you wish to proceed.”

There was once again a sharp look of expectation answered by my total silence.

“Why don't you think it over and come back to see me in a week or so.”

I finally regained my voice.