

Former lobbyist Joe Miller tells stories from the campaign trail and the halls of Congress at the Hawk 'n' Dove on Feb. 23.

### That Wicked Wine

If money is “The Wicked Wine of Democracy,” as Joseph S. Miller alleges in his 2008 memoir, he would make one heck of a vintner.

By his own admission, the former campaign operative and lobbyist “trafficked in every kind of dollar awash in our political system.” Thick envelopes of cash, union treasury checks, skim, “laundry” and “the old reliable folding stuff” all passed through his hands on its way to candidates and legislators. Retired since 1992, Miller acknowledges his role in “a trade that hardly dared speak its name,” but makes the case that greasing the wheels keeps democracy rolling. He also tells some great stories.

A self-confessed political junkie, Joe Miller began his career as a journalist in Seattle but was quickly lured into the 1954 campaign to elect Dick Neuberger to the US Senate. Some seat-of-the-pants maneuvering and skillful use of media resulted in Miller’s first campaign success. There was no looking back. Soon he was organizing the media campaign to reelect Washington Senator Warren Magnuson and being tapped by Senate leader Lyndon Johnson to ensure that William Proxmire delivered Wisconsin. By 1957, Miller was being hailed by the Washington Post and Times Herald as “the Democrats’ answer to Madison Avenue.”

Suddenly a hot commodity, Miller embarked on a heady blur of Senate campaigns that featured a veritable

BY KAREN LYON

Who’s Who of American politics. He hobnobbed with the DC elite and the Los Angeles glitterati. He drank too much at the Carroll Arms Hotel, a favorite watering hole on Capitol Hill. Then in 1960, Miller was hired to coordinate congressional campaigns with the Kennedy-Johnson ticket. By Election Day, the frantic schedule and wearying battles had taken their toll. “My contribution to Kennedy’s victory had been negligible,” he admits, “and I knew that I was only as good as my last campaign.” With new “boy wonders” eager to nudge him aside, he realized that “the big brass ring had come around, and my hands had slipped off it.”

So in 1961, Joe Miller became a lobbyist, but only, he writes, “to fill in the time between campaigns. I was going to be like the French girl from the provinces who only worked in the Paris bordello to get her grubstake so that she could go home and live a respectable bourgeois life.” He never made it back to the provinces. For 32 years, he argued the causes of labor unions, the forest industry, air traffic controllers, railroad workers and maritime concerns. While lacking the star power of his campaign stories, these tales of characters and corruption are equally compelling – if often disheartening.

Miller is not an apologist for the dubious ethics of lobbying; nor is he repentant. “Would I do it again?” he writes. Typically, he responds with a story, this one about a gambler who has lost everything in a rigged poker game. “Why did you play when you knew that the game was crooked?” his friends ask him. “I had to,” the gambler replies. “It was the only game in town.”

Joe Miller will share stories from “The Wicked Wine of Democracy” at the Hawk ‘n’ Dove, 329 Pennsylvania

Ave. SE, Feb. 23 at 7 p.m.

### The Book of Punk

In “Punks: A Guide to an American Subculture,” local author Sharon M. Hannon provides as thorough and insightful a guide to this cultural phenomenon as you’re likely to find. Part of a Greenwood Press series that also covered beatniks, hippies and skinheads, “Punks” serves as a primer to an influential but often misunderstood movement. For the uninitiated and adherents alike, this A to Z is a fascinating look at an American subculture.

Punk first appeared in the 1970s as a backlash to the flabby spectacle that rock and roll had become. “Punk sharpened the blade and sliced through the pompous, bloated pretensions of arena rock shows,” writes Hannon.

Believing that energy and creativity counted more than virtuosity or connections, pioneering bands such as the Ramones and the Stooges harkened back to the “rebellious, rudimentary musicians” of rock and roll’s formative era, playing what they liked and caring little for public acclaim or commercial success. Happily for them

and their successors, a generation was primed to listen.

In “Punks,” Hannon presents a comprehensive history of the entire subculture. She describes punk clubs, radio stations, fanzines, fashions and art; devotes a chapter to women in punk; presents a critique of the media’s treatment of punk in movies, print and television; compiles biographies of key players such as Patti Smith, Iggy Pop and Lou Reed; and even provides a glossary for those unversed in mosh pits, goth and crowd surfing.

In a series of thoughtful interviews, representatives from the punk subculture speak for themselves, often belying their image as raw, snarling iconoclasts. Jello Biafra of the Dead Kennedys, for example, advised his followers in 1977 to think about the big political issues of the day and how they could make a difference. Acknowledging that “most of the people reading this aren’t going to be ... punk rockers forever,” he warned nonetheless against “[letting] the attitude you have now evaporate if you start making money working for IBM.” He ended with a credo that spans generations: “Don’t give up and don’t mellow out.”

Washington area aficionados will be especially interested in Hannon’s focus on the local scene, including her insight that punk gave DC crime novelist George Pelecanos “the courage to start writing.” Hannon is also author of “Women Explorers,” part of the Library of Congress’s “Women Who Dare” series.

### Egg on Her Face

Olivia Paras is having a bad day. Roused before dawn by a pair of burly Secret Service agents, the White House chef learns that a guest at a presidential dinner she’d served the night before has dropped dead. “For

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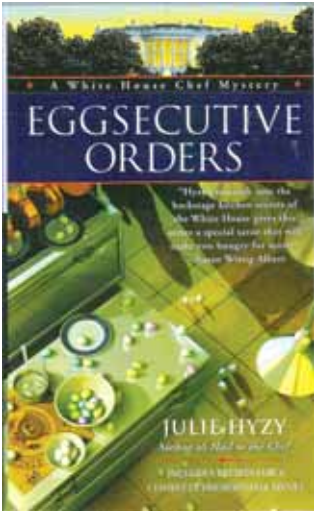
*A Compendium of Readers, Writers, Books, & Events*



Local writer Sharon Hannon is your guide to the world of punk in a new book about the often misunderstood subculture.

a chef,” she laments, “this situation — a dead dinner guest — couldn’t be worse.” Or could it?

In “Eggsecutive Orders,” the third in a series of White House



The White House Chef cracks open the case in an “eggcellent” new mystery by Julie Hyzy.

Chef mysteries by author Julie Hyzy, Ollie and her staff are not only under suspicion of poisoning the man, but are also banned from the kitchen until the autopsy results show otherwise. And the Easter Egg Roll is in a few short days! How will she get all those eggs boiled and dyed — as well as juggle out-of-town guests, a pair of hysterical celebrity chefs, a slimy gossip columnist, and her conflicted romance with a member of the presidential protective detail? And, of course, solve the crime.

If you doubt her ability to keep all those eggs in the air, you don’t know Ollie. As one of her nemeses sarcastically remarks, “Oh wait! I forgot just who we’re dealing with here — the White House chef who feeds the first family and saves the world in her spare time.” The plucky chef once again shows her sizzle, foiling a plot with overtones of international espionage and rampant political ambitions. In between escapades, the reader is treated to Ollie’s inside view of the White House and some entertaining DC interludes as she takes her visitors sightseeing. As in her previous books, “Hail to the Chef” and “State of the Onion,” Hyzy includes a whole menu of recipes at the end, focusing this time on — what else? — eggs. ★

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