

My Book Tour and Backstage Liaison

The old adage about fifteen minutes of fame has certainly held true for me. Mine occurred in 1997, when a book of rehashed computer columns, *Techno-Crazed*, hit bookstores.

Hit may not be the right word, but let's proceed.

Techno-Crazed was the first computer title published by Peterson's, better known for publishing books about how to get into college. They overlooked some obvious tactics, like sending the book to computer magazines, and placing it in computer stores.

But their publicity team pulled off a coup, setting up a bona fide New York City media tour: *CNN Morning News*, CNBC's *Money Club*, Sony Worldwide Radio and the big enchilada, ABC's *Good Morning America*.

A lone Minnesota boy with a PC clone, up against the New York media, is classic David and Goliath scenario. Unlike David, I was scared stiff. But I made up my mind I would embrace the challenge -- for my kids, as a lesson in overcoming shyness.

As the shadow of the jet crisscrossed Manhattan on our approach to LaGuardia, I knew that publicity was the key to getting my book on the best seller's list. Because this book summed up all the frustration people ever felt about computers and networks. It was funny, incisive, and doggone it, it was packed with useful, down-to-earth advice. Add to its natural merits this terrific publicity tour, and I envisioned people mentioning my name in the same hushed breath as Jim Seymour.

I must have bolted upright in the hotel bed a dozen times

before the 4:30 a.m. wake-up call. I dressed and stumbled down to the limousine driver, who drove me to the CNN studios. There I found I was scheduled to follow none other than Bill Gates! Although he had the presence of mind to videotape his appearance, hyping his book *The Road Ahead* from the sanity of his own time zone.

The interviewer on this show was a British fellow named Stuart Varney. He introduced me as someone who divided computerdom into savants and people like himself. (Actually, I divide it into lots of types.) He said to me, "Mike, I truly hate computers. Windows is dreadfully confusing to me, and I simply hate the Internet. What do you think I should do?"

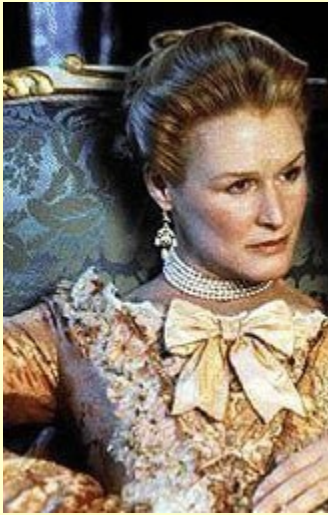
"Something else?" I asked. It was my only good line of the tour.

That segment went OK. The next one, CNBC's *Money Club*, was rougher, because it was a financial show, and my book was about lots of things, but not finance. I could tell the anchorguy thought I was a fraud, but at least he didn't betray me with the screech of the body-snatchers.

Late that night I sat in with Darrell Ankarlo on Sony Worldwide Radio, and that went much better. On TV, the cue card is king, but on radio, the talk jock is king. Darrell and I had fun sparring with one another about Mac versus Windows, and Bill Gates' money.

In the morning, it was time to do *Good Morning America*. In the Green Room, I was pacing nervously. The only other person in the room with me was a smallish woman with downy hair. I don't know why, but I assumed she was the hostess or assistant producer or something. So when I pointed and asked if the Danish on the snack tray were strawberry or raspberry, I was surprised when she turned to

me crisply and said, "How the hell should I know?"



It was the last thing Glenn Close ever said to me.

Anyway, after all this attention, you'd expect great things from the book. Like, people rushing out and buying it. But they didn't. The book was remaindered. It sold a measly 1,337 copies worldwide. Maybe it was because Peterson's was taken over by Thomson International, and they shut down our division.

Just possibly, maybe it wasn't the greatest computer book ever, after all.

But it had my name on it, and I rode in a limo for two days flogging it like a pro. I will always cherish that moment in the sun. And thank you, Ms. Close, for being you.