

Inauguration Day, October 4, 1995, dawned as one of those extraordinary Michigan fall days. The sky was a brilliant blue. The yellows and reds of the fall colors provided the perfect backdrop for the colorful robes of the academic procession marching across the Ingalls Mall toward Hill Auditorium. The Baird Carillon in Burton Tower rang out with the familiar academic themes.

Yet, perhaps it was just my imagination, but instead of academic pomp and circumstance, the refrain of Berlioz "March to the Scaffold" kept running through my mind as I followed the academic procession to my inauguration that fall morning. Perhaps it was an enhanced awareness of just how challenging the Michigan presidency had become, blending the challenges of leading one of the most complex institutions in modern society while surrounded by a bewildering array of complex political issues. Perhaps it was the lingering stress of the long process leading to my selection as president, all the while serving as provost. Or perhaps it was just a sensory overload, because of all of the activities of inauguration week. Or maybe it was just something I ate...

Earlier in the week, the Rackham School of Graduate Studies had celebrated its 50th year with a symposium on the University's impact on graduate and professional education. The next day, Michigan would beat its traditional rival, Michigan State, in a season which would end in a Big Ten Championship and a victory over USC in the Rose Bowl. And, in a most fitting display of irreverence--at least for Michigan--a small group of activists had staged a protest outside the entrance of Hill Auditorium on an array of issues that have long since faded into the obscurity of the 1960s antecedents. Indeed, one student in the platform group even joined in the festivities by displaying a sign stating that "Duderstadt was illegal", referring to the contention by several newspapers that the Regents had followed the practice of most other universities by conducting a confidential presidential search, must to the annoyance of the press.

So What Is a University President, Anyway?

Paul Gray, former president of M.I.T., once characterized the modern university president as someone who lives in a large house and begged for a living. And to be sure, many presidents do live in large, stately houses on the campus, and all presidents are expected to be actively involved in fund raising.

But there are many other roles. In a sense, the president and spouse are the first family of the University community, in many ways serving as a mayor of a small city of thousands of students, faculty, and staff. This public leadership role is particularly the case when the university is very large (e.g., the University of Michigan has over 50,000 students, 3,500 faculty, and 25,000 staff) and is located in a relatively small city (Ann Arbor has a population of 100,000--except on football weekends when it doubles in size).

The president of a large university also has a significant role as the chief executive officer, responsible for the management of a diverse collection of activities ranging from education to health care to public entertainment (e.g., intercollegiate athletics). For example, the University of Michigan has an annual

operating budget of \$2.6 billion, more than 20 million square feet of physical facilities, and more than \$3 billion of funds under active management. If we were a business--and, of course, a president should never suggest this, at least within earshot of the faculty--Michigan would rank roughly 200th on the Fortune 500 list.

However, unlike the corporate CEO, who is responsible primarily for shareholder value, the University president-as-CEO is responsible for everything that occurs in the University--at least everything bad. The old expression "The buck stops here." applies in spades. Anything that happens, whether it involves the president--or, indeed, is even known by the president--from student misbehavior to financial misdeeds to town-gown relations eventually ends up on the president's desk. Indeed, presidents even find themselves blamed for the misfortunes of athletic teams.

Further, unlike most corporate CEOs, the president is expected to play an active role generating the resources needed by the University, whether through lobbying state and federal governments, seeking gifts and bequests from alumni and friends, or clever entrepreneurial efforts.

The president is also expected to be the "defender of the faith", both of the institution itself and the academic values so important to a University. I sometimes thought of this latter role as roughly akin to that of a tired, old sheriff in a frontier western town. Everyday day I would have to drag my bruised, wounded carcass out of bed, strap on my guns, and go out into the main street to face whatever gunslingers who had ridden in to shoot up the town that day. Sometimes these were politicians; other times the media; still other times special interest groups on campus; even occasionally other University leaders such as deans or even Regents. And each time I went into battle to defend the University, I knew that one day I would run into someone faster on the draw than I was. In retrospect, it was amazing that I managed to perform this particular duty of the presidency for almost a decade with only a few scars to show.

The final role of the presidential family is a pastoral one. In a very real sense, we were "Mom and Pop" of the extended University family. Students looked to us for parental guidance, even as they insisted their rejection of *in loco parentis*. Faculty and staff sought nurturing and understanding care, particularly during difficult times for the University. To both those inside and outside, we were expected to be cheerleaders for the University, always upbeat and optimistic (even though we frequently shared the concerns and were subject to the stresses of the rest of the campus community).

In view of these multiple roles, all important, yet together far more than any couple could possibly fulfill, it was not surprising that Anne and I approached the inauguration with considerable apprehension--regarding it as less a celebration than as an execution. Indeed, the very term used to describe inaugurations, the "installation" of a new president, suggested bolting one into the leadership chair of the University.

So, Just How Does One Become a University President, Anyway?

Despite the stress and rigors of the position, many people view a university presidency as the top rung in the academic ladder--although most knowledgeable faculty would tend to rank it more toward the bottom. The search for a president is a complex, time-consuming task conducted by the governing board of the university using a byzantine process more akin to the selection of a pope than a corporate CEO. This process is particularly difficult in public universities because of the impact of sunshine laws--notably those laws requiring public meetings of governing bodies and allowing press access to written materials via freedom of information laws. It is also complicated by the intense politics swirling about public governing boards, which tend to be tightly coupled to partisan politics.

The Duderstadt's' experience with the gauntlet of the presidential search was a particularly trying process, since we faced the dual challenges of being an internal candidate while leading the University as both provost and acting president. Like the Shapiros, Anne and I had spent our entire careers at Michigan. After graduate school and a brief period as an Atomic Energy Commission Postdoctoral Fellow at Caltech, we packed up our children and our belongings and left the sunshine of Pasadena in December, 1968, to arrive in sub-zero, blizzard conditions in Ann Arbor. For the next decade, we climbed the usual academic ladder. I progressed through the ranks as assistant, associate, and then full professor of nuclear engineering. Anne moved somewhat more rapidly in her areas of interest, assuming the presidency of the Faculty Women's Club Newcomers Group her second year in Ann Arbor while earning her M.S. degree at Eastern Michigan University. Much of our time during this period was spent in the all-consuming task of raising children in Ann Arbor, which inundates families with extracurricular opportunities...competitive swimming, gymnastics, music, theatrical productions, etc...

Unlike many faculty, I became actively involved in faculty governance throughout the 1970s. As a member of the Senate Assembly, I chaired the principal faculty advisory committee to the provost--first for Frank Rhodes and then for Harold Shapiro. I then served as a member of the powerful Budget Priorities Committee, the group which designed and implemented the "smaller but better" resource reallocation process in the late 1970s and early 1980s. In part because of this active involvement in University-wide activities--and Anne's strong involvement with similar University-wide groups--I was asked by Provost Billy Frye to serve as Dean of the College of Engineering in 1981. To say this was a surprising choice--to us and to the engineering faculty--would be an understatement. While I had extensive experience in faculty governance, indeed, having just been nominated for SACUA, the executive body of the Senate Assembly, I had little experience in academic administration, having never served as a department chair.

But Bill Frye took a chance by turning the leadership of the College over to one of the young turks, and, in a similar spirit, I invited several other young faculty to

join me in the dean's office: Chuck Vest (later dean, provost, and currently president of M.I.T.), Dan Atkins (later dean of both engineering and the founder of our new School of Information), and Scott Fogler (later chair of Chemical Engineering and today regarded as one of this nation's real leaders in engineering education). Within a few years this team had overhauled the College of Engineering, replacing over one-third of its faculty with strong, young scholars, moving its programs into new facilities on the University's North Campus, and more than doubling the level of its research and PhD activities--critical in determining academic reputation.

Working with such a young, energetic, and talented team to rebuild the College of Engineering was an exhilarating experience, but by the mid-1980s, we were all beginning to wonder what we would do for an encore. Indeed, the College had undergone such dramatic change, that we worried that the solidification of our gains might require a different leadership style than the "Go for it" approach of the Duderstadt years.

However, once again, fate seemed to intervene. Following Provost Billy Frye's decision to return to his alma mater, Emory University, as its provost, President Harold Shapiro launched a search for a new provost that eventually found its way to our doorstep. This experience should have served as a warning of what was to come on the next rung up the ladder of academic administration. Although the selection of a provost should be a highly personal one made by the president, alone, since the two must serve as a tightly knit team in leading the University, Harold Shapiro decided instead to launch a major consultative process, complete with a broad-based search committee assisted by an executive search consultant or head-hunter, Jerry Baker, of Lamalie and Associates. For almost a year, this committee met with members of the University community, and with Jerry's assistance, interviewed a number of candidates both internal and external.

### Survival Instinct

A strange personality transformation occurs during the early years of a public university presidency. Successful presidents--or shall say, surviving presidents--develop a sixth sense, a primitive instinct that keeps them always on the alert for danger, almost as if they were a hunted animal. And well they should, since the average tenure of a public university president has dropped to less than four years, and the most common cause of presidential demise is a political blowup.

Public universities, by their very nature, are caldrons of boiling political controversy. From their governing boards, generally determined by the political process of either gubernatorial appointment or election, to the contenuous nature of campus politics, to the ever strident attacks by the media, public university presidencies are subject to stresses far more intense than other arenas of higher education. As a result, public university presidents must not only develop an unusually thick skin, but as well an acute instinct to sense danger.

Following the meeting in which the Michigan Regents elected me as the 11th president of the University, Robben Fleming, then serving brief term as interim president and earlier the president of the University during the turbulent days of student unrest in the early 1970s, pulled me aside for some advice. He noted that a public university president should never take the slings and arrows launched by others as personal attacks. Rather people were simply angry with the institution, not the president. But he also acknowledged that such attacks still hurt!

After months of enduring such attacks, one develops a survival instinct, a tendency to look under every rock, behind every tree, to question everything. Little wonder that some presidents eventually self-destruct, and that others surround themselves by staff with a tinge of paranoia to serve as the canary in the mine shaft.

In our case, we had the fortune of entering the presidency with a great deal of knowledge about the university from our many years on the faculty and as members of the campus community. We knew where most of the control knobs were located, and where most of the bodies were buried. But even with our extensive knowledge, there were daily surprises. Of most frustration both to us and other members of the University administration was the increasing politicization of the Board of Regents as special interest groups came to dominate the political parties that nominated candidates for Regent elections. One by one, the more senior members of the Board were either worn down to the point of retirement or defeated by the political process, yielding a Board ever decreasing experience and ever increasing political divisions. The fact that four Regents--half of the Board--lived in Ann Arbor and hence were frequently lobbied by faculty, students, and staff on various issues made things even more difficult.

In most universities--all private universities and many public universities--governing boards view their role first and foremost as trustees for the institution. They accept the responsibility to nurture and support the president, particularly during stressful times. Unfortunately, as special interest groups came to dominate the political parties that controlled the nomination process for the Michigan Regents, our board rapidly lost any semblance of a trustee role, and instead viewed their role primarily as watchdogs for the public interest, much as a congressional investigative committee would function. The Regents relished their roles as elected public officials, and they came increasingly to believe that their constituents--and members of the university administration--should lobby them for their support, with ample quantities of perks thrown in for good measure. Not a good thing!