

Sunday, April 20, 2008

Underdog is two years old / Happy 420

Â Â Today, Underdog is two years old. We launched on 4/20/06 with this tribute to 420: Â Â Since our 2006 launching, Underdog has blogged every weekday, except for holidays and a few vacation days (sometimes I blog a few articles in advance of vacation days, and pre-program the articles to upload each day I am away). My law partner, Jay Marks, gets in on the act sometimes, and I look forward to more postings from Jay. Our first anniversary blog entry is here.Â Â Â Why do I blog?Â Through blogging, I keep a valuable diary that helps keep my written and oral penÂ sharpened, my self-awareness deepened, and my bully pulpit strong.Â Also, it can be more important to touch one person in the audience inÂ a valuable way than for thousands to receive the message in a muchÂ less profound way.Â My motivation for blogging goes far beyond having a web presence for our law firm, to a thirst to express critical and undiluted messages about justice, and to increase the number of people who will assert their rights with the police so as never to need our criminal defense services in the first place.. So many civil liberties need to be won andÂ re-won worldwide. One of the most effective ways for a non-full-time writer or television/radio personality to get out the pro-civil liberties messageÂ is through blogging.Â Â Imagine, just two decades ago, beforeÂ Gorbachev took over in the Soviet Union followed by the fall of the Berlin Wall, samizdatÂ dissenting publications in the Soviet Union often got distributed by recipients (riskingÂ prosecution)Â retyping and distributing the publications, when printing presses and photocopiers were scarce, and strictly controlled by the iron-fisted government. Today, except in such places as North Korea, whichÂ even bans cellphones, dissenting writings can travel to a much wider audience with lightning speed over the Internet from nearly any country. Â Consider the high price that such literary greats as Pramoedya Ananta Toer and Vaclav Havel paid for writing and distributing their writings under severely oppressive regimes. When I first visited Indonesia in 1988, the brutal government apparently only kept Pramoedya Ananta Toer -- probably the nation'sÂ most famous writerÂ and its greatest potential engine to advanceÂ the national and still rather newborn Bahasa Indonesia language to uniteÂ a nation that neverÂ had been muchÂ united before independence -- out of prison (after being in and out of prisons many times before, under the Suharto and Sukarno regimes and by colonial occupiers before that)Â and away from government executioners and assassins in order to prevent a foreign aid and tradeÂ stoppage had Indonesia done otherwise. His books were banned in Indonesia at the time, although some booksellers clandestinely sold them under risk of imprisonment. Speaking on tour when I met him in 1999, Pramoedya was deeply emotional when he said that the Indonesian government's efforts to ban his books was like trying to cut off his life. By that time, and to this day, Pramoedya's writings were much more freely available in Indonesia than when I first visited. Â Pramoedya went to great lengths to keep his written and oral voice going.Â For instance, he started his Buru tetralogy orally through a chain ofÂ his fellow Buru island prisoners,Â at the timesÂ he was denied pen and paper, only to complete the multi-level mosaic story in book form years later. Sometimes he was able to smuggle out notes "written under adverse conditions".Â Subsequent to the Prague Spring, before Gorbachev,Â Vaclav Havel was repeatedly hounded and oppressed for his writings. Index on Censorship once ran an article on Havel showing him smiling and carrying a sack of beer ingredients weighing down his body -- but not his spirit -- at the brewery where he worked. Â Pramoedya and Havel paidÂ high prices to keep their writing voices heard. I pay a small price if any. Perhaps the only price I pay is to alienate potential clients and othersÂ both by my plain messages andÂ often very direct words, but sometimes people come around towards some of my ways of thinking, even if years later, and even if my words only have a small influence on the turnabout. While IÂ understand the benefit of speaking in a diplomatic manner to open listeners' ears, I do that enough in court, and tend to be more direct and unvarnished in our blog, but perhaps not as unvarnished as my brother lawyer Marc RandazzaÂ whose blog is among the small handful that I read almost daily. Â Just as musicians benefit from playing before live audiences and from their feedback, I benefit from blogging before our Underdog audience and from receivingÂ feedback online and on the street.Â Please keep your feedback coming. Jon Katz.Â ADDENDUM I - HAPPY 420Here's our first blog entry: April 20, 2006Supporting marijuana legalization on 4/20 and every day.In celebration of the annual 4/20 marijuana legalization events, partner Jon Katz appeared on WOCM 98.1 FM (Ocean City, Maryland) toÂ promote the legalization of marijuana for medical, personal, and industrial use. The same evening, Jon spoke on the criminal defense of drug cases at the invitation of the University of Maryland chapter of the National Organization for the Reform of Marijuana Laws, after the screening of Busted.Â By Jon Katz.Â Â Â ADDENDUM II - HAPPY BIRTHDAY, JUSTICE STEVENSÂ Today, Supreme Court Justice John Paul Stevens turns 88 years old. Justice Stevens is often, but certainlyÂ not always,Â one of the more reliable justices for giving some real offset to at least five of the justices who are more dangerous to civil liberties, those five being Chief Justice Roberts and Justices Scalia, Thomas, Alito and Kennedy.Â

Posted by Jon Katz in Drugs at 00:00

Happy Birthday, Underdog, and congratulations Jon.
Anonymous on Apr 21 2008, 21:13