

It Was  
All About  
the Story

**When you get too close to someone, it's easy to lose perspective**—the forest-for-the-trees problem. Much of my fifteen years working in the office adjacent to Al Vogl's seemed caught up in daily-grind stuff, like the usual copy-editing nonsense—quibbling about serial commas and bowdlerizing profanity in quotations and whether there should be a space in "DuPont."

Still, all of us at the magazine were quite aware of Al's larger-than-life persona, both his obvious gravitas and the idiosyncrasies about which readers knew nothing: his film-noir turns of phrase and pop-standards references, his insistence on meetings run with a measure of formality, the never-

explained boxing gloves dangling ominously in his office, his disapproval of lunching at one's desk (a practice to which his staffers stubbornly clung), his queries "What think?" and "For eval" scrawled across the top of manuscripts.

A magazine's *raison d'être*, of course, is to communicate with those outside its walls, and again, perspective is hard to come by from the inside. So I asked some of those who knew and worked with Al to offer brief remembrances of him, and they poured in, from freelance writers, interview subjects, columnists, former and current staffers, and a few of his favorite publicists, Conference Board employees, and colleagues at the magazines he edited before arriving at the Board in 1990.

What came to people's minds when thinking of A.J. Vogl? He made a striking impression, both at first and over time, in voice and dress and demeanor. And he brought out the best in writers—usually by rejecting their first drafts and suggesting how to make the second sparkle. Taken together, respondents' comments paint a clear portrait of, as Al's voice-mail message put it, "the man himself": a dapper, old-world gentleman driven by high standards and boundless curiosity.

There were far too many remembrances to squeeze into even eight magazine pages; the version you're reading now, posted at [www.tcbreview.com](http://www.tcbreview.com), contains the full-length remembrances.

—MATTHEW BUDMAN

## A.J. Vogl pushed everyone to be a little bit better.

### Serena Spiezio:

How can I sum up a decade-long relationship in a few paragraphs? Ten years ago, Al took a chance on a recent design-school graduate whose only real job had been as associate art director for *Playgirl*. After he hired me, he told me that he'd called me in for an interview only so that he could meet "the person who worked with the hunks." I have never regretted giving up the hunks.

Al was tough on the writers who worked for him, but he was even tougher on his art directors. "Sightings," the back-page photo feature, caused the most disagreement: I would show him at least fifteen photos every cycle that he would deem "just not right." When asked to explain what he thought was "right" and why these were wrong, he would simply say, "I just know it when I see it." Al would apologize for being unable to put his reasoning into words—which

must have been tough for an editor—but over the years, I came to realize that he was right. He did know it when he saw it.

His mentorship and sense of style and grace were inspiring. I will miss coming in every day to have the man I considered my mentor greet me—from behind the morning's *Financial Times* and a cup of black coffee—with a warm, "Good morning, Serena."

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*Ms. Spiezio is creative director of The Conference Board Review.*

### Vadim Liberman:

If someone had told me eight years ago that I'd land a job at a business magazine, my likely response would've been . . . actually, no one would've told me that.

Me? At a *business* publication? I had almost no editorial experience, and for all I knew, Jack Welch was some guy who marketed grape juice. I don't know what Al saw in me to persuade him to hire me, but I know what I saw in Al: a man decades older with whom I'd never be able to relate. After all, the guy wore a bow tie—while my tying skills extended little beyond my shoelaces.

Today, I know who Jack Welch is. Even better, I know who Al Vogl was: a visionary editor, an understanding boss, an inspiring mentor, and someone who has taught me more about business, writing, and editing than any formal education ever could have. Over the years, I like to think I schooled Al in a thing or two as well. He would periodically relay to me something he'd just read in *The Wall Street Journal*, and I'd let him know what I'd just discovered about Madonna or Britney Spears in the *New York Post*.

When it came to pop culture, I was Al's personal Page Six. He was usually amused. This un-relatable man wasn't so un-relatable, after all.

In response to a note I sent him upon his retirement in February, Al wrote: "I'm bound to say I don't deserve your kind words, but if not me, who? The hell with false modesty! Let's just say that it was quite a ride, and along the way I learned a great deal from you." Right back at you, Al. You may have gotten off the ride early, but I will forever carry my memory of you and all you've helped me accomplish.

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*Mr. Liberman is senior editor of The Conference Board Review.*

### Warren Boroson:

Intelligent and inquisitive, with a warm, winning smile and a terrific sense of humor, Al was so good-natured that he was profoundly reluctant to hurt anyone in any way. At *Medical Economics*, the most severe dressing-down he ever gave me was: "You sure took a long time on that story!" When he took the helm of *Next*, a future-oriented magazine, and invited me aboard, we had a grand time.

One unusual thing we did at *Next* was to conduct Delphi polls: We asked a group of experts a series of questions, then sent their answers back to them for a second vote; usually a few of the experts changed their answers, as they abandoned positions they weren't that sure of. We did Delphi polls on which stocks to buy now, where the next nuclear war would occur (India-Pakistan), and whether we have already been contacted by aliens. Carl Sagan answered yes to the last, placing him in the minority. On the second round, he changed his response. But we never published the article; the magazine folded first.

As editor of *Medical Economics*, Al had had a tough managing editor under him. He needed one at *Next*. There was lots of infighting, and Al was lucky to leave before it folded.

*MD*, a cultural magazine for physicians, was perfect for Al, with his unbridled curiosity, his wide knowledge of the Two Cultures, his good taste. I made him very happy when I wrote an article about Typhoid Mary, and was able to publish a letter she had written that had never been published before. What tickled him was a letter he received from a physician-reader, furious that we had run the letter he was planning to be the first to publish!

He was a rare gentleman. It was truly a privilege to work with him and to know him.

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*Mr. Boroson is a financial columnist and author of more than twenty books, including, most recently, How to Pick Stocks Like Warren Buffett.*

### John F. Budd Jr.:

Had I been privileged to have a few last words with Al, I would have thanked him for fertilizing my mind and making me a better writer. When you've been writing as long as I have, it's easy to get complacent, even smug, about yourself. But on those singular occasions when Al edited what I'd written—after the usual preliminary, "sounds interesting—let me see something"—I'd say to myself, "Damn, why didn't I see that?"

Al was the quintessential New Yorker: always neatly dressed, with a tie, of course, and a hat—felt in the winter, straw in the summer. Quietly debonair, suave but not pretentious. We'd spend a luncheon at some interesting beanery (from the University Club and New York Yacht Club to Rothmann's and Smith & Wollensky) examining the *sturm und drang* of business, politics, newspapers, and newsgathering, with an occasional sidebar on mysteries (my wife's a mystery writer and critic; Al was a mystery buff). Naturally, there was the obligatory probe of story ideas—I learned to come with at least two or three, to gain a cautious thumb's-up on one.

We shared a curmudgeonly view of pretense, hypocrisy, and incompe-

tence. Watching him saunter down the street, one sensed a man of unusual nature: an author, a playwright, an entrepreneur?

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*Mr. Budd is founder and chairman of the Omega Group, a New York-based PR think tank.*

### Melissa Master Cavanaugh:

For those of us who were editors at the magazine, the daily challenge of working with Al was in maintaining the style that we jokingly called "Voglian"—authoritative yet never pompous, playful without being silly or trivial. Al had firm edicts about every element of the magazine, from the colors that were used in its artwork (anything but purple) to the words that were banned (e.g., "proactive"). He placed no proscriptions, however, on the magazine's content. Al sought ideas beyond the traditional purview of a business magazine and in doing so created a publication in which a chorus of voices had their say.

His innate skepticism ensured that his standards remained high: I was neither the first nor the last to pitch a story and receive only a cocked eyebrow in response. But when Al saw promise in the seed of an idea, he had a keen ability to coax it into full flower with his pointed questions and insightful suggestions. What's more, he trained a generation of editors to do the same. Al's unique voice is inimitable, but his generosity and skill in imparting his editorial acumen ensure that his legacy lives on.

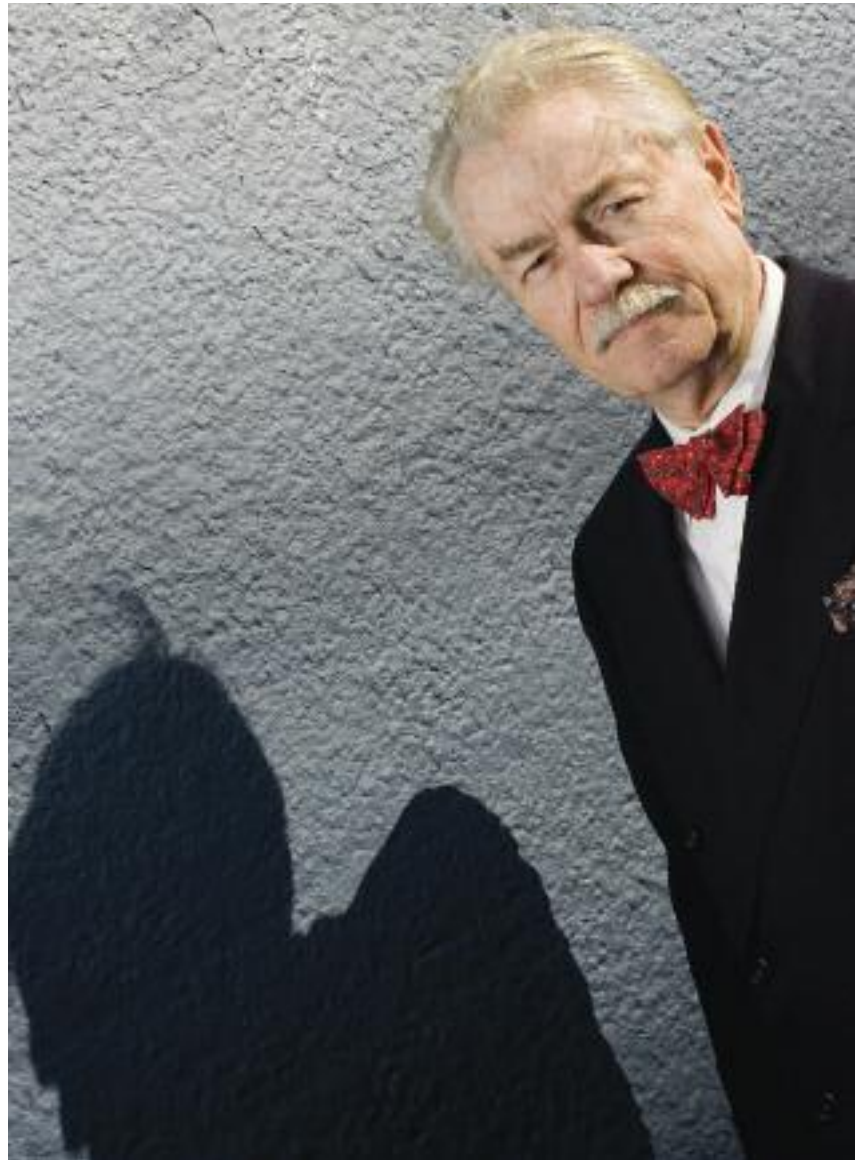
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*Ms. Cavanaugh is senior editor at strategy+business and held various editorial positions in nearly seven years at Across the Board.*

### Jim Champy:

Authors don't like having their work or ideas rejected, but when Al Vogl said that an idea or column wouldn't work in his magazine, you knew that he had a good reason. I always learned from talking with Al and from the questions that he

You can't slip anything past a man who cares enough to wrestle with a bow tie, and showing up unprepared for a meeting with AI was like bringing a knife to a gunfight.  
—Dennis Dittrich



asked. He was kind, in a wonderful straightforward way, even when he said no.

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*Mr. Champy is chairman of Perot Systems' consulting practice and author of, most recently, Outsmart! How to Do What Your Competitors Can't..*

### Stuart Crainer and Des Dearlove:

As longtime aficionados of everything American, we felt we had encountered A.J. Vogl long before we were first invited to write for *Across the Board* a decade ago. Looking at his photo—the bowtie and the mustache—and the scarce syllables of his name, it felt as though we had met him somewhere before. Definitely. Perhaps it was all those Damon Runyon stories, and time spent in American bars or on Greyhound buses. To Englishmen with a taste for bourbon, Springsteen, Chandler etc., AI seemed to fit the classic hard-boiled-editor stereotype to a T. Appearances can be deceptive, though: AI wasn't hardboiled after all. Indeed, his e-mails to us routinely began with a cheery "What ho?" And we thought Americans didn't do irony.

AI was a classic editor in many other ways. The acid test for an editor must be whether he actually improves what is written. This seems obvious but is often overlooked—an author ends up looking at a published article only to find that the original purpose and vim has been lost along the editorial way. To get the best results, the writer should feel that the editor is working with him, pushing in

the same direction. With AI, we were often pushed and always propelled in sensible directions, which improved what we had originally written. We were very pleased to see our articles appear in *Across the Board* and *TCB Review*. They were always better than we remembered.

When we met face-to-face—on sadly few occasions due to the Atlantic Ocean in between—we always enjoyed the company of AI and Matthew. Over a chicken tikka masala, we admit that work tended to be peripheral to more general, wide-ranging, and interesting discussions. In AI, we found an unbounded curiosity. And that is how it should be. AI was a professional, but he

realized that there is a whole lot more to life than work—and a whole lot more to work when it has life.

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*Messrs. Crainer and Dearlove are U.K.-based journalists, editors, authors, and ghostwriters.*

### Robert L. Dilenschneider:

Two glimpses of AI Vogl: At a dinner party in my home, AI remarked to me that he would not receive well stuffed shirts or people who knew the world owed them. We're looking for fresh ideas and thinking, he said—commodities that are in short supply.

AI was a man of ideas who was intent on making the world around him better. As a guest speaker in a

meeting, he once said, "If this is all we have to say, I fear for America and American business." The level and quality of talk in the room immediately increased.

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*Mr. Dilenschneider is founder and principal of the Dilenschneider Group.*

In the field of business journalism, Al was an under-appreciated treasure. He was a fine writer, a cogent thinker, and an honorable man. He never promised anything he couldn't deliver, but you could always count on him to do the right thing. We shall miss him sorely.

—James O'Toole

#### Dennis Dittrich:

I enjoyed working with Al Vogl because I knew I had to bring my "A" game. Al was an editor straight out of the comic books. He had no use for ambivalence, did not suffer fools well, and wore a real bow tie. You can't slip anything past a man who cares enough to wrestle with a bow tie, and showing up unprepared for a meeting with him was like bringing a knife to a gunfight. You had to have answers and they had better make sense, or he'd scrape you off the bottom of his wingtips. I often thought that anyone who could convince Al to change his opinion on anything should open a chain of car dealerships. I was also the recipient of his kindness, though, and I enjoyed trading ideas with this substantial man.

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*Mr. Dittrich is an assistant professor of art at New Jersey City University and president of the Society of Illustrators.*

#### Karen Edelman:

Al was a superb editor, king of the headline, a mentor and a paternal figure to many of us. He taught me so much, most notably:

1. Headlines matter! I'll always remember the dreaded customer-supplier-partnerships article he assigned me at *Across the Board*. I toiled; it was painful; my heart was not in it. But then, the epiphany—I came upon a headline that I thought framed the piece perfectly: "Suppliers Are From Saturn, Customers Are From Jupiter." Butterflies as I put it in his inbox. Over a decade later, his "Great title!" atop the edited copy remains a major career victory.

2. Question, question, question! Question anything that either you or the reader might not understand.

3. Curiosity is a gift. Al was always curious, excited by breakthrough ideas and smart people. This, I believe, is what gave this magazine its heart, its ability to take chances and offer new, unconventional ideas that mattered to its readers.

4. Brutal honesty, with a touch of humor, can be endearing. After I left the magazine, he and I would meet for lunch about once a year, always at Diwan, his favorite Indian restaurant. In early 2003, I was expecting my daughter a few months later. He asked me about names, and I offered two possibilities for girls. First, "Lauren," at which he smiled, then scoffed, "That's kind of . . . boring. What's the other one?" I tried again—"Eliza"—and his eyes lit up. "Like Eliza Doolittle?" I nodded. He smiled. The name stuck.

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*Ms. Edelman is an editor, a conference planner, and co-founder of Speaker-Blast.com.*

#### Larry Farrell:

I first met Al Vogl back in 1994. He was my dream image of what a big-time New York magazine editor should be: erudite, bow tie and all, but at the same time sort of disheveled-looking in a sea of books, magazines, and article drafts piled high all around his office. I was thrilled to meet him because he was the first blue-chip magazine editor to publish an excerpt from my first book. Al was everything I

hoped he would be and more: razor-sharp, critical, a bit grouchy, and an idea-inspiring guy over lunch. For fourteen years, he remained a true friend and mentor.

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*Mr. Farrell is an entrepreneurship consultant and author of the magazine's "Entrepreneur" column.*

#### Gail Fosler:

The Al Vogl I knew was a lover and practitioner of music who could be seen slipping out of the office at 3 in the afternoon to take piano lessons at the Turtle Bay Music School. When another colleague left The Conference Board recently, I mentioned that I had had my father's piano shipped from California—but, alas, it arrived with the piano bench empty of all my favorite sheet music. A few days later, Al turned up at my office door with a fistful of sheet music. You gotta love a guy like that—and I did.

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*Ms. Fosler is president of The Conference Board; as the Board's chief economist, she wrote the magazine's annual-forecast article every January for eighteen years.*

#### Al Foti:

Al and I worked together—him Editor, me art director—for many years and produced various business and consumer magazines. I enjoyed every minute we spent together, whether brainstorming cover concepts, talking music, quoting lines from *Casablanca* and *Laura*, or hiking in the hills of New York State. Come September 16, I will raise a glass to my dear friend and toast our common birthday. Here's looking at you, kid.

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*Mr. Foti is a landscape artist and photographer in Woodcliff Lake, N.J.*

#### Brian Hackett:

I met Al when I was doing research on organizational change at The Conference Board. I had become somewhat of an expert on management fads and how senior executives

at large companies were a bit like lemmings; I used to refer to it as “management by magazine”—and enjoyed sharing my frustrations with a magazine editor. (Thanks to Al and his team, *Across the Board* was not one of those magazines.) He and I had lunch about once a week, and I’d drop into his office and to steal books and a bit of wisdom. Al wasn’t too crazy about other business magazines’ listmaking—100 Best, Most Admired, Most Innovative—even when he saw how much ad revenue those issues generated.

Al got the chance to interview most of the top management thinkers, and was nice enough to let me sit in on some of his interviews, introducing me to folks like Jim Collins and Ram Charan. (When I organized an executive roundtable with Ed Schein and Chris Argyris, Al wanted to be there, so I got to return the favor. He knew that it would be a rare chance to be part of a true dialogue with two of the foundational thinkers on dialogue and organizational learning.) Al taught me the power of truly listening, and he taught me how to ask good questions—and how to pay attention to how you pay attention.

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*Mr. Hackett is a leadership coach and co-founder of Apex Performance.*

### E.J. Heresniak:

I never wrote for money, God knows. I wrote pretty much for Al. We seemed to have some small space of simpatico about the novelty of new things, and perhaps a similar skepticism. I’m not sure. What I do know is that I got a lot of freedom to wander around with ideas that popped into my head and that for me is the fun of writing about stuff and about writing for Al. There have been other editors, of course—Melissa Master [Cavanaugh] and Matthew Budman and Vadim Liberman, whom I called Vlad until Al reminded me that the only Vlad he knew was Vlad the Impaler of Romania and suggested I might

have more success negotiating my excesses if I used the guy’s right name. But no matter whom the intermediary, I still wrote for Al. Anytime I was lucky enough to sneak something into what I called “his book,” I knew I’d done well.

Al never took junk or jumbles or jetsam, and no riddles. Al only took stuff that made at least some sense, had a point, and piqued his unending interests and curiosity. He was never demanding or demeaning, but he made you work to get it right and readable, and I am better for it—and for having him on the other end of countless e-mails. We disagreed often, albeit in a gentlemanly way that never crossed a line of civility, and he always won, which in retrospect is infuriating. I tossed some good stuff figuring I’d win one eventually, but I never did.

We met face-to-face fewer than a dozen times—always for lunch when I was in New York—and Al always made both time and great conversation. When he decided to retire, it didn’t matter much to me. I knew whom I was writing for. Al, I still do.

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*Mr. Heresniak has written the “Adventures in Cyberspace” column since 1996.*

### Hoffer Kaback:

There are many kinds of outgoing voicemail messages: robotic, cloying, verbose, those ending with the admonition to “have a nice day,” and others. (No doubt Al would have chosen to have his fingernails torn off rather than to submit to being compelled to utter, let alone record, the loathsome phrase “have a nice day.”) Unsurprisingly, Al’s voicemail message reflected his personality. Dryly—and with only a homeopathic trace amount of pedantry—he informed callers that they had reached not Al Vogl but the voice of Al Vogl. How can you argue with that?

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*Mr. Kaback is president of Gloucester Capital Corp. and the lead columnist for Directors & Boards.*

Al was constantly looking to breach the “fourth wall” of business-journalism convention; other publications used ghostwriters to create articles, but only Al would ask me to write about what it was like to actually be a business ghostwriter.

—Art Kleiner

### Skip Kaltenheuser:

I had the pleasure of writing several articles for Al. Part of the pleasure was that he allowed this scribbler the space to put in what I thought necessary, so that I didn’t have to clip thoughts to meet a tight fit. Just touching base on a topic seldom does its complexity justice, and usually isn’t enough to impart perspective that might be useful or thought-provoking. Al wasn’t interested in dry boilerplate; he appreciated the nuances. He also didn’t torture a writer’s style in order to try and have the magazine’s articles written in the same voice. Magazines that do that can have a mechanical feel, and *Across the Board* lived up to its name stylistically as well as in subject matter. For what it’s worth, I’ve noticed the magazine’s articles are frequently quoted to support points in a broad range of academic papers, indicating they are regarded to have some heft as well as a good read. Perhaps this comes down to Al having a sincere curiosity in the subjects he rolled onto his pages.

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*Mr. Kaltenheuser is a Washington, D.C.-based freelance writer.*

### Bill Kelley:

Al was my boss at *Sales and Marketing Management* when his daughter Katrina was born. Over the course of congratulating him, we

discussed his now having a daughter along with his son Tim. Al said, "I think that's good. I understand daughters are more likely to help you in your dotage." It's tempting to write, "Al said with a smile," but I don't think Al would like the construction, and more important, those lucky enough to have known him know exactly how he said it.

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*Mr. Kelley is a Los Angeles-based TV and business writer.*

### Omar Khan:

Too often, people of eminence (as Al Vogl certainly was in his paradoxically distinctive yet unassuming way) make scant time for getting to know new people, much less to consider new ideas from them with more than a benign disdain. I met Al at lunch at Oceana, and we were deeply engrossed within minutes in a round robin about the world, politics, economics, the sad conflation of status and stature in today's society, the role of America, corporate competitiveness, and the role of coaching in leadership success. By dessert, we had an article fleshed out: "Confessions of a Global Coach."

Weeks later, I submitted an article on that topic that detailed numerous coaching approaches. Al sent it back, politely and with generous appreciation for the ideas, clarifying that he wanted an exposé, a look into the life and interactions of a global coach. He forced me to humanize it, and we had a much better piece, and I suspect the readers a much better time with it.

Al's ability to be a midwife to ideas, as well as a tough crucible for their forging, was always leavened by a wry yet ultimately compassionate squint on people and the world. Though he could affect a curmudgeonly air, he was essentially a passionate humanist, and a pragmatic optimist. I will miss Al's exceptional capacity to be a conduit for so many ideas and so many perspectives. But I will also miss the amiable luncheon companion, who could be both

a wonderful balm and so effective a pinprick.

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*Mr. Khan is senior partner at Sensei International, a global leadership-development firm, and co-author of Liberating Passion: How the World's Best Global Leaders Deliver Winning Results.*

### Art Kleiner:

When I first began writing about management in the 1980s, I was trained as a journalist to look for "beats." And in business journalism, there are lots of specializations. Finance and Wall Street. Marketing and advertising. Fashion business. High-tech. Corporate governance. I'd tried my hand at a lot of these, but the place where people were making the most difference was in the field of management, the organization of people and processes, the design of companies at a day-to-day level, the realm of enterprise knowledge. Lots of books were being written, there was a lot to understand, but there weren't any editors interested. Even in business magazines, nobody recognized the field for what it was: a pool of snake-oil salesmen where, nonetheless, the solutions to the unsolvable problems of our time were being forged.

And then I met Al Vogl: thoughtful, sharp, genial, ready to laugh, with a slow and scratchy voice that reminded me of the sunset seashore, appropriately cynical about the poseurs and the charlatans but intrigued by the birth of a field of knowledge. I soon began writing for *Across the Board* as often as I could; for a while, I was regularly writing book reviews. I always had the impression, as a writer, that Al and the whole staff were paying attention, close attention, to both the significance and the phrasing of the pieces. I never felt controlled; I always felt that the more I tried to get to the heart and soul of a book or a subject, the better the editors (and the readers) would like it. Al was constantly looking to breach the "fourth wall" of business-journalism convention; other publications used ghostwriters to create articles, but

Waiting for a bus near the New York Academy of Medicine, Al was accosted by a young kid who demanded money. Al gave him a fistful of change—and a piece of his mind, something like: What is this city coming to where you can't even wait for a bus without getting mugged? The kid threw the change back at Al and said, Keep your damn money! Al told that story and laughed and laughed.

—Warren Boroson

only Al would ask me to write about what it was like to actually *be* a business ghostwriter.

When I got hired as the editor-in-chief of *strategy+business*, Al was the first person I turned to for advice. Characteristically, he was generous, interested in mutual publishing arrangements (which we never quite pulled off), and genuinely interested in seeing our magazine do well. He understood what all great editors understand: The more great magazines there are, the more great readers there will be. Especially in a field like business. Because he edited *Across the Board* and *TCB Review*, the business journalism ecosystem is richer, deeper, and more full of life in immeasurable ways.

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*Mr. Kleiner is author of, most recently, a new edition of The Age of Heretics.*

### James Krohe Jr.:

Editors are often too ready with every kind of advice to writers except what they really need to hear, which is to get out of the business. Al gave a writer advice he could use—like which food cart in midtown had the best borscht.

Calvin Trillin has recalled how those who got promoted to senior editors at *Time* in the old days were not really editors, just promoted writers. (He could write, of course—he was just too intelligent to try to make a living at it.) Happily for people like me, Al was the pure article. He never meddled with one's prose, demanding only a clearer focus.

Often his ideas for stories grew, like blisters, from small irritations. While killing time waiting for a call back from a "service" rep about a small problem he'd had with a new chair—the bottom had fallen out of it—he emailed me his plight. "Corporate hotshots say that 'exceptional' customer service or what they call CRM (customer relationship management) is at the top of their must-do list," he wrote. "So why is customer service so bad?" The result was a 2006 cover story that tried to answer that question.

More to be prized in an editor than a knowledge of the ins and outs of the subjunctive is tact. I never heard Al diss a colleague, but he liked to tell stories on himself. His piano teacher once asked him to bring in favorite song to work on. Al showed up with Billy Strayhorn's "Lush Life." "He says, 'This I don't need at ten o'clock in the morning.'"

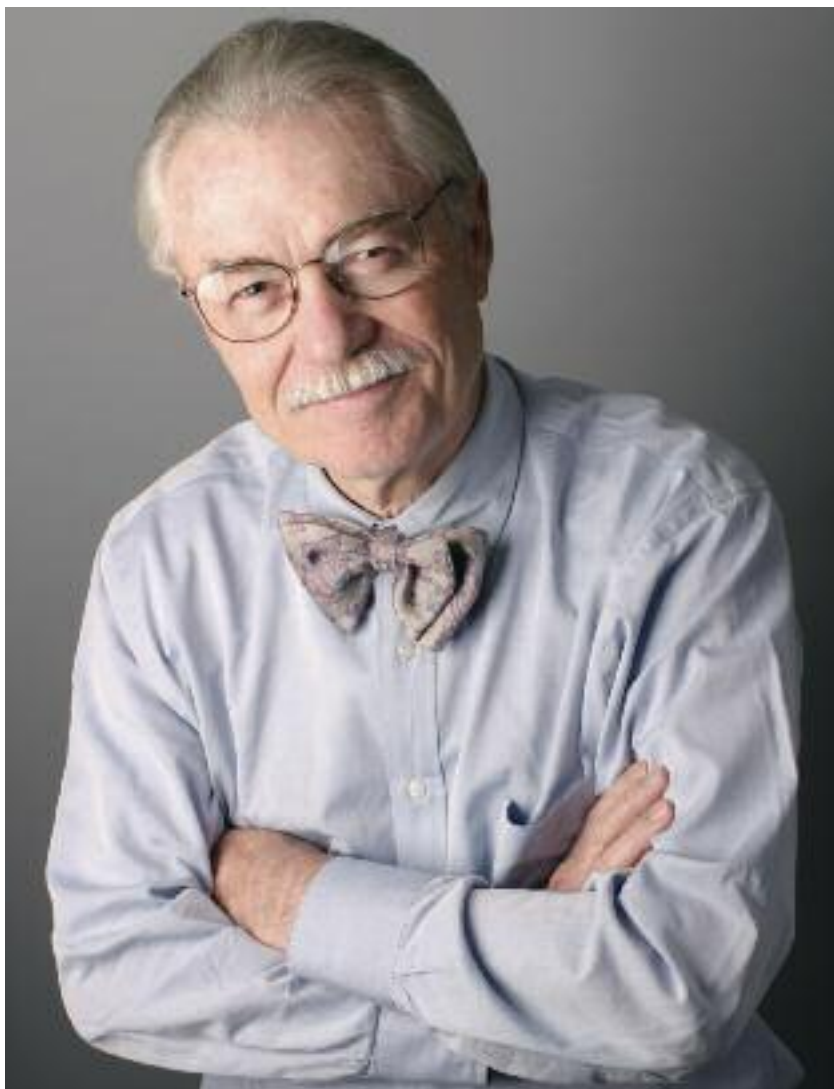
We worked together for all of his eighteen years at *Across the Board* and *TCB Review*, on some two dozen articles, but never met. We talked about getting together someday in Chicago or New York, but things never worked out. That was one deadline I am especially sorry I missed.

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*Mr. Krohe is a Chicago-area writer and editor.*

### James Leynse:

Through a photo agency, I got the assignment to photograph one of the Q&As Al was conducting of a notable author. I had photographed many interviews over the years and had never found them to be the most interesting work, but I had also learned to never turn down work. So



there I was, an hour before the interview, setting up my lights in one of the least inspiring conference rooms I had ever been in. To add to my enthusiasm, art director Serena Spiezio warned me that Al's interviews tended to go long: "After you get what you need, feel free to go," she told me.

Ten minutes before the interview, Al showed up, in jacket and bowtie—I suddenly felt underdressed—and reiterated that I didn't have to stay for the whole interview. A few minutes later, the subject arrived. We settled in, and I started taking pictures. After the first half hour, I kept taking pictures every now or then—to show I was still there or to capture a special expression—but mostly I was just listening. Al was very well prepared for the interview: He seemed

to have read not only the book under discussion but every other book the author had written, as well as all the relevant commentary in the press. He was polite but asked tough questions. I stayed for the whole two hours.

I had the privilege of accompanying Al on many such interviews. While they often went long, I never left early. They were all too interesting to skip out on.

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*Mr. Leynse is a New York-based freelance photographer.*

### Geoff Loftus:

What I really remember is Al's utter fearlessness as an editor. He was completely committed to "a harder edit"—even with his own writing. With someone else's writing, his

With his tweedy jackets, bow ties, and brush moustache, he always struck me as an editor who would have been at home at *The New Yorker* in the Algonquin/Thurber days.  
—Howard Muson

edits could border on savagery: He would slash three unfocused paragraphs out of an article with a stroke of his pen as he read, deleting as fast as thought, and condense the offending paragraphs into one or two concise sentences.

Many editors I've worked with have a moment or two of doubt before making such a drastic revision. Some worry that they're butchering the author's tone; others are too lazy to think the revision through clearly. Al never hesitated, slashing and condensing his way through an entire article quickly and yet thoughtfully. In two years of working with Al, I never saw one of his trademark overhauls that didn't improve the original immensely. Al lived on the "less is more" theory, and his hard edits produced articles that said cleanly and clearly what the author had nearly fumbled away. I remain in awe of how quickly and well he could remake an article—I've been doing this for almost thirty years, and I'm still struggling to get to Al's level.

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*Mr. Loftus is vice president of the Society of Corporate Secretaries and Governance Professionals and former managing editor of Across the Board.*

### Allan J. Magrath:

Over the fifteen years I knew Al as my editor, he always asked the toughest questions. I've had a ton of editors in twenty years of professional writing and six books, but most just helped with suggestions on pacing or depth or how to add insight or energy to what I'd penned. By contrast, Al was about as gentle as a grizzly han-

dling a tasty salmon: Why would anyone want to read this? Why do you think it's unique? Why would a CEO or senior manager care about this? What makes you think your ideas can be useful across different industries or markets or economic situations?

He stood me on my head and made me really think about the reader's view rather than the writer's, and he always made the writing stronger, the examples more telling, and the finished product more persuasive. He left all the writers he dealt with better off.

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*Mr. Magrath is director of corporate marketing for 3M Canada.*

### Justin Martin:

Back in the early 1990s, I worked for Al at *Across the Board*. My first impression: a tough, old-school editor. One time, he sent me to cover a conference. When I reported that nothing newsworthy had transpired, his response was withering: "What happened? Did you take a nap?" But he gave me a second chance, assigning me a feature story, and worked me hard. Guess what? The story turned out really well. I formed a second impression: a tough, old-school editor with a knack for pushing people to do their best. After I left the magazine, we'd meet for lunch periodically, and what always struck me was his genuine interest in whether I was growing and stretching myself professionally. He was no longer my boss, but he clearly still cared. To nurture talent in others is an awesome ability.

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*Mr. Martin is author of Greenspan: The Man Behind Money and Nader: Crusader, Spoiler, Icon.*

### Laton McCartney:

I was a "true gent" and a wonderful mentor. I worked for him at *Medical Economics*, my first magazine job, and he soon gave me a terrific assignment: a story on doctors in Portland, Ore., which at the time was voted America's most livable

city. I stayed at *ME* only a year, but we kept up and had lunch a couple of times a year. Al was always impeccably dressed, interested in almost everything, and immensely proud of his daughter Katrina and his wife Linda. He could converse with a high-powered CEO about lofty topics, but in his heart he was Raymond Chandler, always on the case.

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*Mr. McCartney is former editor-in-chief of InformationWeek and author of, most recently, The Teapot Dome Scandal.*

### Barbara Monteiro:

My business is fourteen years old, and during that time I have taken my most fascinating authors to Al Vogl: Lucian Bebchuk, C.K. Prahalad, Ken Blanchard, Bill George, David Dotlich, James O'Toole, Meg Wheatley, and Joseph Jaworski, to name just a few. Al did them the honor of reading their books thoroughly, and I told my authors that they were meeting the best interviewer in town and that they'd be in good—not hostile—hands. Al was always careful, though, about whom he agreed to meet. I remember calling him with a famous author; his response was, "Yes, I know, but I need to read the book before I can set up an interview." He didn't want to take someone's time if he wasn't going to use the interview for the magazine.

And Al had perspective on the world of business: When the Jack Welch/Suzy Wetlaufer scandal broke, I happened to meet him walking on Lexington Avenue. I was perplexed by the whole thing and blurted out to him, "Why would Welch tarnish his record?" Al laughed. "He isn't tarnishing his record," he said. "He's just horny."

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*Ms. Monteiro is president of Monteiro & Co., a New York-based literary PR firm.*

### Howard Muson:

Al Vogl once "killed" an article that I wrote for *Across the Board* because he didn't think it had a point. I thought it had a point; we

just disagreed. Now, some might say that it took a certain amount of chutzpah to reject an article by the man who had hired him for the job some years before. I'm sure it wasn't an easy call for him. The piece had taken a lot of work, and I wasn't happy about losing it either. I swallowed hard, however, and never lost respect for Al, whom I had come to know as an editor with the highest editorial standards and personal integrity.

With his tweedy jackets, bow ties, and brush mustache, he always struck me as an editor who would have been at home at *The New Yorker* in the Algonquin/Thurber days. We shared an ironical view of the world. Over the years we had convivial lunches at which we exchanged editors' gossip along with article ideas. And, yes, we commiserated over a publication that was in so many ways more stimulating than most mass-circulation business magazines—a *succès d'estime*—but had never broken through the advertising and circulation ceiling to make fat profits.

After one such lunch, we were returning to The Conference Board's offices at 845 Third Avenue when Al spied a rather disheveled, elderly beggar. Making his way across the crowded sidewalk, he greeted the man and handed him a bill—a one or a five, I couldn't tell. Returning to our conversation, Al explained that the man was out there every day; he related some of the details of his sad life story. As much as for his editorial integrity, I admired Al for that small gesture. He not only gave this man money—he had reached out to him. I expect he gave that man a bill every time he spotted him during his lunch hour.

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*Mr. Muson, Al's predecessor as editor of Across the Board, is a freelance writer.*

### Erone Newman:

For the twenty-one years I've been at The Conference Board, I have always read the magazine and found it interesting. But when Al Vogl came

to *Across the Board*, I suggested that reading it was a must for the ladies in my department, and when some of them started reading, they agreed with me. Once I was coming back from vacation and reading the magazine in the airport, and a man asked me where I got it. I suggested that he subscribe and gave him the subscription insert and my work telephone, and then forgot about it—until one day he called me to get a subscription. I told Al that I should open a newsstand to sell *Across the Board*. When the name changed in 2006, against Al's will, he told me, "I fought hard because I know you would have liked it to stay the same."

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*Ms. Newman is a customer-service representative at The Conference Board.*

### James O'Toole:

Being interviewed by Al was like having a chat with a respected, wise, and kindly uncle. He was charming and elegant in a marvelously old-fashioned way. He had an unmistakable twinkle in his eye, if anyone ever had one. Of course, he asked tough questions, but they were fair and always intended to bring out the best in the person being interviewed. Unlike many columnists, reporters, and editors (for example, those at *HBR*), Al was without ego. He was concerned with representing the ideas of the person being interviewed, or the writer whose work he was editing, instead of using the person as a vehicle to express his own ideas or biases.

That doesn't mean Al wasn't a leading thinker in the field of management. In fact, he and the magazine were invariably a step ahead of the popular business press, and even of professional journals (again, compare the number of cutting-edge, imaginative, and creative pieces found in *Across the Board* and *TCB Review* during his watch to the number of drab, safe, dry, and tired articles found in *HBR*).

In the field of business journalism,

Al was an underappreciated national treasure. He was a fine writer, a cogent thinker, and an honorable man. He never promised anything he couldn't deliver, but you could always count on him to do the right thing. We shall miss him sorely.

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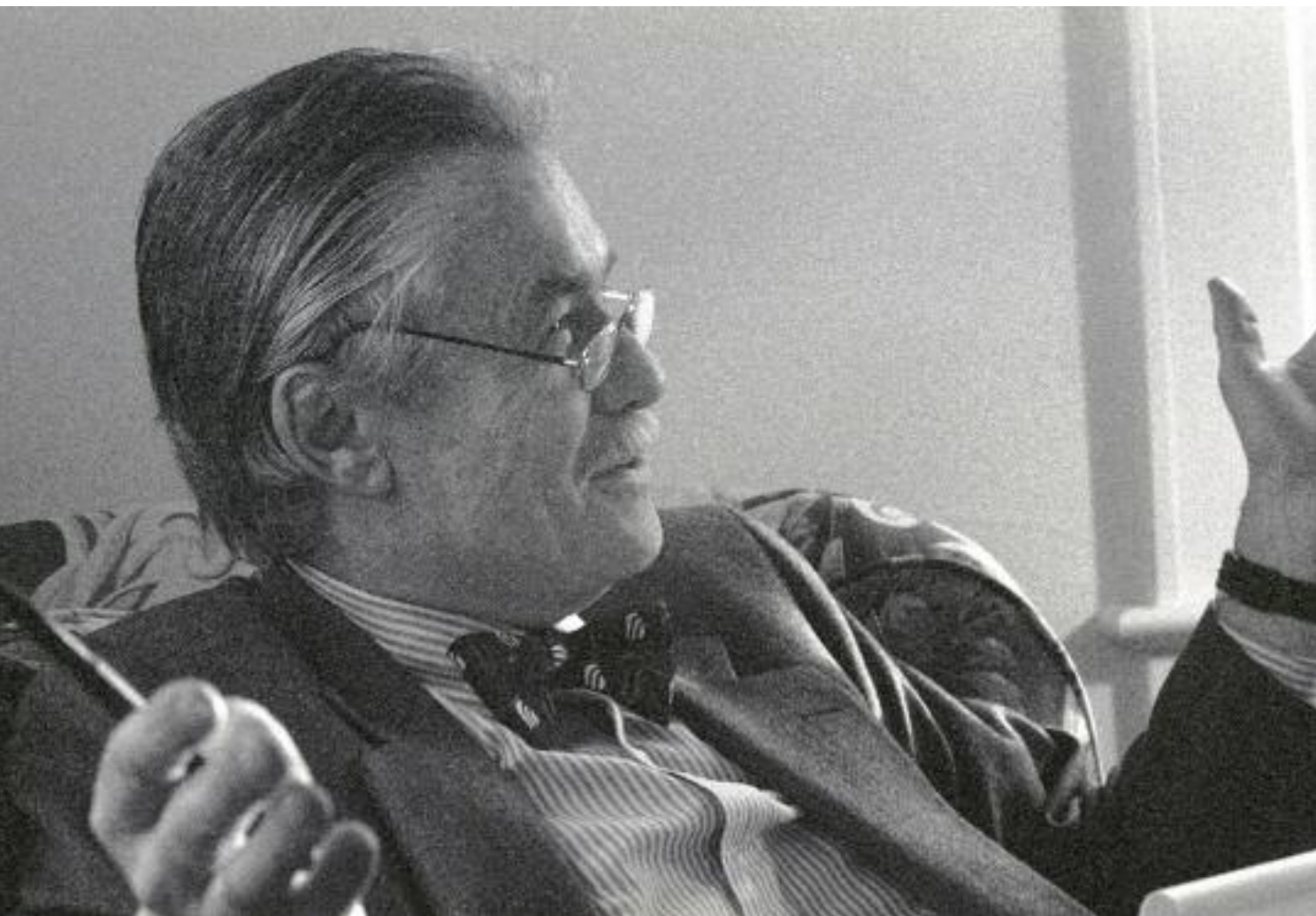
*Professor O'Toole is Daniels Distinguished Professor of Business Ethics at the University of Denver's Daniels College of Business and co-author of, most recently, Transparency: How Leaders Create a Culture of Candor.*

He stood me on my head and made me really think about the reader's view rather than the writer's, and he always made the writing stronger, the examples more telling, and the finished product more persuasive.

—Allan Magrath

### Steven Piersanti:

It was my privilege on a dozen or so occasions to pitch story and interview ideas to Al, based on my observations about business and the world and based on that year's new crop of authors and books published by our company. I was always especially impressed by three things. First, Al displayed a gift for cutting through the mass of ideas and materials I presented to quickly find the gems—the best story ideas and interview angles for the magazine's readership. He was often ahead of or more perceptive than other media editors in seeing what was important and interesting. Second, Al did not offer readers what they read in other business magazines or were comfortable reading. Instead, he was continually bringing in challenging new viewpoints, examining business issues from broader perspectives, and generally staying ahead of many more stodgy business publications. Third, Al was unfailingly courteous, atten-



tive, and respectful in every interaction that I had with him. It was always a pleasure to meet with him.

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*Mr. Piersanti is president and publisher of Berrett-Koehler Publishers Inc.*

#### **Bill Schiffmiller:**

**A**I gave me, as his first art director *At Across the Board*, the break I needed to prove my creative worth in the professional world. Of the many bosses and clients I've had over the years, Al was whom I considered my mentor. For years, in many given business and creative situations, when faced with a challenge, I would ask myself, "What would Al do?" He was no-nonsense, demanding, and fair, a true professional—with a vice for dark choco-

late. How many editors get ready to come up with headlines with a piece of dark chocolate?

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*Mr. Schiffmiller is founder and CEO of Akoio, a designer of solutions for consumers with hearing loss.*

#### **Jay Schuster:**

**F**or many years, "Meet you under the clock at the Waldorf" was the code word for visiting with Al for lunch. At a small table, he made concrete suggestions on articles Pat Zingheim and I were fashioning and did it with charm, care, and grace. Al even knew how to reject an article idea with class. Pat and I appeared at his office in the '90s to have our first book interview, and what an interview it was! Always prepared,

Al cut to the chase and added value and content to our discussion. He was an effective editor—and a good friend.

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*Mr. Schuster is co-founder of Schuster-Zingheim and Associates, a compensation consulting firm.*

#### **Andrew Singer:**

**I**wrote a number of stories for Al between 1991 and 2006. One was titled, "Can a Company Be Too Ethical?" This was the sort of topic Al liked—broad, contrarian, a bit edgy, and thought-provoking. When I submitted my manuscript, Al wasn't as enthusiastic as I had hoped. It soon became clear that I had missed the ball: I had not provided clear examples of companies punished for

He was tough as nails, wielding a pencil like an ice pick, and so-so articles metamorphosed, under his guidance, into worthwhile reading.

—Peter Tobia

being “too ethical”—something central to the piece. He proceeded to dissect the cases that I had included, explaining why this company really wasn’t punished, that one hadn’t really acted ethically, and so on.

I was soon convinced. But this was a serious problem. It was not a circumstance that could be easily fixed by moving a few paragraphs around, say. It required new material. Better stuff.

I had already devoted many hours to the piece. I wasn’t keen on wasting any more time, and my inclination was to chuck the whole thing. But Al was just as firm that the story was salvageable. He provided some examples where I was close. He suggested a few additional sources. He talked the problem through. As he was speaking, I began to see how things might be improved. Eventually I got the story done to Al’s specifications. It was much stronger for the extra effort, and he made it the cover story of the April 1993 *Across the Board*.

Al had the firmness required of a good editor—both for tearing a story apart and building it back up again.

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*Mr. Singer is editor and publisher of Ethikos.*

### Anne Spielman:

In life, if you are lucky you find interesting and unique people to enrich your life. Well, Al Vogl did that for me. His presence will be deeply missed.

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*Ms. Spielman is the receptionist of The Conference Board.*

### Marilyn Stern:

By the time I arrived at *Across the Board* in 1990, Al had already played a big role in my life and career, having published my first article—about the dark Norwegian

winter—in *MD* in 1984. Pitching the piece to Al was intimidating: Answering his incisive, quick-fire questions was like defending a doctoral thesis. It set the standards very high for the rest of my editorial career, for which I’m most grateful. Indeed, what began as a short article eventually became a book.

At *ATB*, Al expected results from everyone. Seeing potential excellence where we may not have recognized it in ourselves, he gave us opportunities to develop and grow. That first year, he promoted picture editor Bill Schiffmiller to art director, sending him out for the necessary training. I took Bill’s place as picture editor, but Al gave me opportunities to write—and to indulge a penchant for puns.

Al’s insistence on accuracy, both in reporting and writing, was the best journalism training I could have received. Once, I proposed publishing an item taken from a renowned financial newspaper—something about using corncocks as fuel in the Andes. Prescient, you might say. But in the early ‘90s, Al was dubious, despite the newspaper’s reputation. He had me track down the original source, which turned out to be MIT’s *Technology Review*, whose editor confessed that, yes, it had run the story—as an April Fool’s joke. “You’re the first publication to fact-check it!” he told me.

Beyond the realm of journalism, Al inspired me in one more way that, unfortunately, I never got to tell him about: his devotion to learning jazz piano. Upon leaving the magazine after seven years, I took up traditional fiddle, though I was approaching 40. I had learned from him that it’s never too late to pursue a passion.

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*Ms. Stern is a New York-based photographer.*

### Jay Stuller:

Whenever Al visited San Francisco, we’d get together for lunch and talk a little about corporate politics and more about parenting. Even though he was seventeen years older than me, I had grown-up daughters and he had a young one, and so as he did with most any subject, Al asked a lot of questions, soaking up as many observations and insights as he could coax out of you.

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*Mr. Stuller is a journalist and corporate-communications specialist.*

### Peter Tobia:

Al Vogl was a certified original. “The man himself isn’t here right now,” his voicemail message announced. Yep, you knew that “the man” behind that voice was different. Al was a good and decent man, and a terrific editor. He was tough as nails, wielding a pencil like an ice pick, and so-so articles metamorphosed, under his guidance, into worthwhile reading. Al was always fully attentive and respectful, and never too busy to listen to an article idea, but pity the PR flack who attempted to “gas” his way around his considerable analytical armor. Al forced me to think more deeply, write more wisely, and represent my clients more effectively.

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*Mr. Tobia is president of Market Access, a literary PR firm.*

### Richard J. Whalen:

You always knew where you stood with Al Vogl. If he liked something, he said so, and if he didn’t, he said precisely why. Al was clear and painstaking in giving guidance for revisions. If he wasn’t, or if you disagreed, he would cheerfully repeat himself, hear you out, and then lapse into eloquent silence. By then, you had already made the fixes he wanted. I am confident that Al is in a special place in heaven reserved for editors who remember they are, first and last, writers too.

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*Mr. Whalen is author of seven books and blogs for CQ Politics.*