

My lost plane and Daniel Ellsberg

When I was 10 I received a wonderful present — a toy airplane with silver wings. It came with a small fishing rod used to let the plane out and reel it in. On a windy New Hampshire

Occasional Muse

spring
day in
1949 I
took the
plane
out for

its first flight, and I lost it! It flew away, rod or no rod. I must have misread (or ignored) the instructions. I can still see the plane, untethered and birdlike, soaring into the sky.

I walked home dejected and looked at the box the plane came in. There was the name — Marx Toy Company — and an address. I sat down and wrote a letter, pouring out my 10-year-old broken heart.

Within a week or two a letter came from the Marx Toy Company, not a form letter from some PR person but a personal letter from the president of the company — Mr. Marx himself. It was a kind response, complimenting me on my well-written letter, suggesting that perhaps the directions could have been clearer, but pointing out that I should have attached the line to the rod before letting the plane out. Then came the best part: Mr. Marx promised to send me a replacement plane.

I waited for the plane to arrive. Days passed, then weeks. Finally, I told my mother that I wanted to write a letter to Mr. Marx to re-

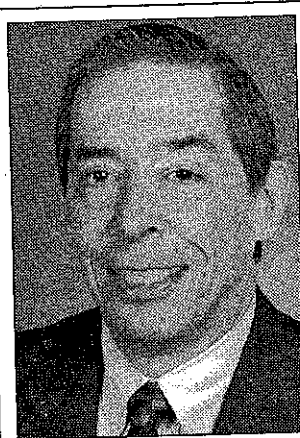
mind him to send the plane. She told me I could not write such a letter. Apparently she thought it undignified, a breach of an unwritten rule of decorum that only she somehow knew. So, compliant child that I was, I wrote no letter — and I never got the plane.

I told this story recently to Daniel Ellsberg, who was speaking about the Pentagon Papers case at an American Bar Association Communications Law conference in California. I had known since

1971, when Ellsberg leaked the papers to the New York Times, that he was married to Patricia Marx. I even thought, back then, of writing to her father to ask about my plane. But, once again, I didn't. Maybe I was still under my mother's influence; or maybe it just didn't seem like a proper thing for a Boston lawyer to do.

As I told the story, Ellsberg reacted to his late father-in-law's letter, "That sounds just like what he

would do." When I got to the point where the plane didn't arrive, he said, "You should have written him another letter." I told him the rest of the story. His face dropped. Daniel Ellsberg, 57 years after my plane flew away, shared my lingering disappointment. He asked for my card, gave me his, and told me he would tell the story to Pat when he got home.



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