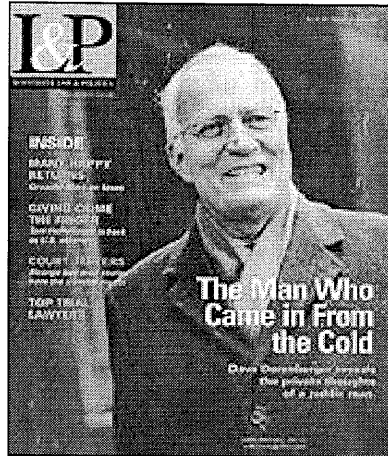


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Fast-paced Paul

Even during the hottest days of the year, Wellstone kept going and going and going.

by Adam Wahlberg

I met Paul Wellstone in the summer of 1990. Coming from a family of Democrats, I was accustomed to supporting liberal candidates, and when my mother told me earlier in the year that she had a contact with the then-nascent Wellstone campaign, I decided to offer my services as a volunteer. I was a political science major in my junior year at St. Cloud State University (SCSU).

My offer was received graciously since the campaign didn't have anyone working for it on the SCSU campus and I was immediately put to work. I didn't do much, mostly just distributed flyers and campaign literature, but I felt like I was making a contribution. I didn't get a chance to meet Paul until he and a couple staffers came to town for St. Cloud's annual "Wheels, Wings & Water" Fourth of July parade.

Paul and the staffers arrived on campus at about 9 that morning. He bounded out of a truck and made a bee-line for me: "Hi there, I'm Paul, thank you so much for helping us today." We chatted for a few minutes, he wanted to know what I was studying and how long I'd been active in politics, and before long we all squeezed into the cab of the truck and rode to the start of the parade.

It was stifling hot that day in St. Cloud, at least 95 degrees with stick-to-your-shirt humidity. The plan was for the two staffers and I to hand out Wellstone buttons and literature while Paul would

walk along and wave to the crowd. At least that's what I thought he would do.

Much to my amazement, Paul proceeded to run, not walk, not even jog, but *run*, from left to right for the entire two-mile route—which took about an hour and a half to complete—trying to shake a hand of every parade-goer. Now I was 20 at the time and in reasonably good shape, but I was stopping every 15 minutes or so to grab some water and cool off. But not Paul. He couldn't shake enough people's hands. And remember, this is St. Cloud, not exactly a bastion of liberalism. Almost all of these folks were clueless as to who he was, and most, it's safe to say, probably wouldn't be likely voters of his if they knew his positions. Didn't matter. He'd even say that to people, "Vote for me or vote for someone else, just make sure you vote in November!" Always moving, always smiling, always talking. And I could see that his friendliness and exuberance was winning them over, based on the smiles he received in return. It was exhausting and exhilarating to see.

We got to the end of the route and I was about to pass out, but Paul was clearly energized by the experience. I began to fear he would go back to the beginning and walk the parade-route again. Thankfully, his staff members reminded him that they needed to get back to Northfield. We drove back to campus and he dropped me off in front of my dorm. "Thank you, Adam, for all your work up here, " he told me, "and please tell all your friends we could use their help." And after a final pat on the back, I jumped out and he and his staff pulled away.

I walked slowly back to my dorm, still a bit dazed by the experience, and immediately got on the phone with a few friends. "You would not believe the guy I just met. I don't think he has a prayer of winning, but my God it's not going to be from a lack of effort."

I didn't know Paul well. But I shared a little bit of time with him on that sultry St. Cloud day. I'll never forget him trying to shake all those hands.