USING VIVID ILLUSTRATION IN ORATORY:

by L. D. Naegelin

Rogers once explained that what you tell people they seldom remember, All-Around Senior Girl' plaque in but what you show them they never forget. That's why he was fond of using stories to illustrate the ideas he had to share — they made his message memorable. Orators can benefit by following his strategy, for vivid illustrations provide stated points with color, shape, and substance.

In "A Gift from the Heart: Storytelling in Original Oratory," Deborah Simon of Milton Academy states, "Using a story . . . can help a speaker stimulate his audience's imagination; it can empower a speaker with a tool that will help him vividly recreate a human experience that might reflect the listener's own values or offer the listener a new perspective to consider." At the very least a story can create a vivid picture to help the listener sense what the words are all about. Not all illustrations, though, must be fully developed stories. On occasion, the speaker may use a clarifying quotation or a simple example, perhaps an allusion which connects to information already stored in the listener's brain. The key is to find an appropriate way to click in to the our outlook, we will begin to see audience, a way to flesh out an idea failure as a logical and necessary step so that it makes a memorable impres- in the total life formula. Consider the sion. Otherwise, a speech may remain successful research chemist whose a collection of statements rather than chauffeur would sit in the back of the an elaboration of meaning. Gale Nelson, my high school speech coach constantly reminded me that telling projects. One day the chauffeur comis dogmatic. It's posturing. Good speaking, like good writing — he so often that he could give it himself. argued — depends on illustration The good natured scientist replied, through story and example. His sug- "Okay, you're on tomorrow." The gested ratio was 40% telling, 60% next day the scientist, dressed as the showing.

privilege of working with orators However, when the speech ended, a from many schools. Together we have discovered some exciting ways feur felt completely unable to answer to use stories and illustrations in speeches. The following excerpts from winning oratories demonstrate various approaches to sharing

Approach #1 -Personal Example

"Then what about fame? How important is fame in the scheme of success? A friend of mine told me a story

That wonderful communicator Will recently. When she was a seventh grader, she used to gaze at the "Best our school's biggest trophy case. She aspired to one day have her name on the plaque. Yet, interestingly enough, when she approached the end of her senior year and the award was given out, she realized that even though the girl who won was wonderfully talented, some of the most unique and giving people she had known throughout high school were not necessarily at the top of the class. They hadn't won all the awards, piled up the accomplishments. Harvard, Yale, and Princeton weren't beating on their doors. By popular standards they hadn't achieved the mark of success. Were they then to be counted out? Are all without money and glittery toys failures?"

> (From a speech by Katherine Bullock, Onkwood H.S., Ohio)

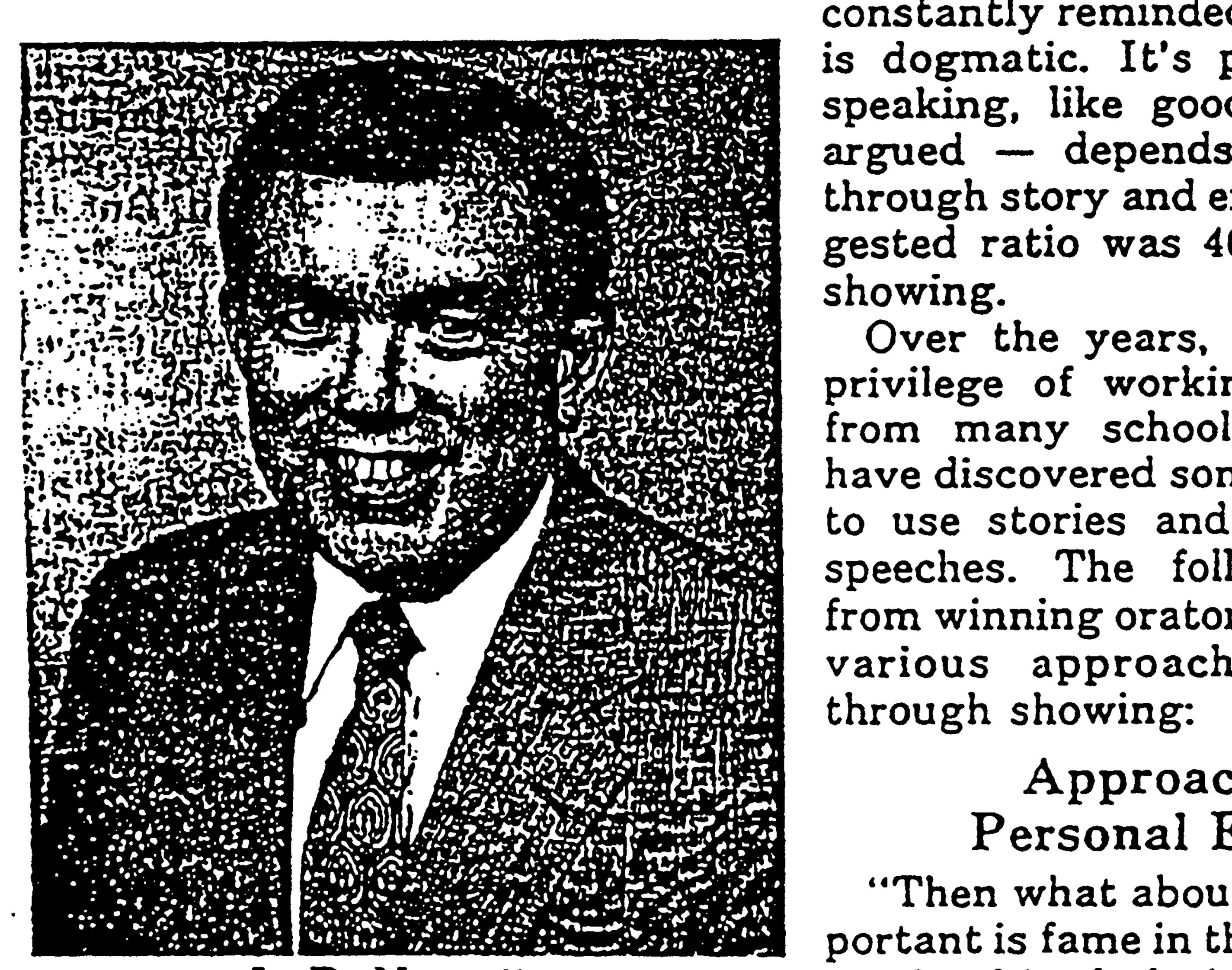
Approach #2 -Anecdotal Story

"A third benefit of the F-word is that it can keep us from taking ourselves too seriously. It can renew our willingness to try, our enthusiasm to experiment. With this as room and listen whenever the man went somewhere to explain his mented that he had heard the speech chauffeur, sat in the back of the room Over the years, I have had the while his driver spoke flawlessly. question period began. As the chaufany question, he responded to the first one by saying, "My work is so simple that anyone ought to be able to understand. To prove how simple, I'll have my chauffeur answer the questions." Here's a man responding to life with a sense of humor. And the approach really helps. It relieves the unbearable pressure."

(From a speech by Allie Lichter, Stuyvesant H.S., New York) March 1991



SHOW ME



L. D. Naegelin

Approach #3 -Literary Example

"Sometimes our victories are small, personal triumphs that go unrecognized by the world. In Ernest Hemingway's The Old Man and the Sea, for example, Santiago does everything in his power to bring in the great fish he catches. He fights the weather, the sharks, and even his own doubts, but in the end he arrives at the shore with nothing but the skeleton of a blue marlin tied to his boat. The people on the shore laugh at the old man and his catch. But Santiago is undisturbed by the sneering. He has fought the good fight. He has struggled with his whole heart to win. Therefore, when he goes to sleep, exhausted from his marvelous battle, he dreams of lions, of victory. In his heart he is the winner."

> (From a speech by David Frederick, Jesserson H.S., Texas)

Approach #4 - The Historical/ Biographical Example

the nature of procrastination and how does the test judge potential? looked at some of its causes, let's not Well, if you can define words like put off any longer deciding what we desuetude and lascivious, then you can do about it. When the ancient Greek scholar Demosthenes found that he could not resist delay, he shaved the hair off one side of his head. Why? He wanted to look so severe endemic disease mentioned in silly that he'd be ashamed to be seen the novel Lord Jim. I'll admit that in public. That way he could stick to his studies. Several centuries later French novelist Victor Hugo found that he was having a similar problem. He couldn't finish a book he was writing. Well, anyway, to force himself to write, he ordered his servants to hide all his clothes until the story was complete. Both these men resorted to unusual — but at least for them effective — methods to deal with their problem. But I don't really want to be half-bald and naked in order to stop procrastinating."

> (From a speech by Judy Kim, Stuyvesant H.S., New York)

Approach #5 -Statement Followed by Descriptive Quotation

"Yes, the first step is to know what we want to accomplish. And it's important to think about our goals in terms of our talents and our limita-

tions. In other words, if a person has absolutely no ability to sing, it would be a little ridiculous to set his sights on becoming a pop singer. As Will Rogers once commented, "The best hunting dog in the world can't be an eagle. And an eagle can't point." You see, all of us face drawbacks. Nevertheless, we still need to set goals so that we have a destination."

> (from a speech by Andy Thornton, Churchill H.S., Texas)

Approach #6 -Hypothetical Example Tied to Substantive Data

"The first concern with the S.A.T. is the actual basis of the test. Supposedly it's a measure of that elusive quality called learning potential. Sadly, it does little to evaluate the student who does well because of hard work. Consider the case of David. He's a good student who applies himself, so he earns good grades. But he has one problem; he doesn't excel on standardized tests. The result? The S.A.T. classifies him "Well, now that we've examined as a candidate of low potential. And have average potential. To rate at the top, you have to know words such as ouabain, which is an African poison, and schistosomiasis, which is a such words may come in handy on a really boring date if you have nothing to talk about; but do they really demonstrate learning potential?"

> (From a speech by Austan Goolsbee, Milton Academy, Massachusetts)

Approach #7 -Statistical/Factual Support

"Skillful lying today is an admired trait. A survey by People magazine. for instance, found that 2 of 3 adolescents questioned admit respecting people who lie well. As one 18 year old girl put it, "If you can lie and not get caught, that's a real talent. I'd rank it right up there with being a math genius." A study by Newsweek arrived at similar results. Successful fibbing was judged an absolute necessity for achievement in sales, banking, law, and politics. And there you have it: lying is laudatory."

> (From a speech by Jason Reneau, MacArthur H.S., Texas

Sources for Stories

So if stories are important, where can they be found? Unfortunately, there's no such book as The Perfect Oratory Story Book. However, there are some general sources that can be helpful. Those my students and I have turned to most often include the following:

"Personal Glimpses" and "Point to Ponder" from The Reader's Digest Books by Charles Swindoll Books by Paul Harvey The Book of Heroic Failures by

Stephen Pile Life Sketches by John Hersey Close to Home by Ellen Goodman Books by Andy Rooney Books by Walter Burghardt

One Night Stands with American History by Richard Shenkman and Kurt Reiger

I also encourage students to read newspaper and magazine articles and columns with their eyes open for interesting facts, quotations, and/or stories. Some students have built their entire oratory around a set of related stories that had special appeal for them. My constant reminder to students is that they cannot sit back and wait for illustrations to fall into their laps. They have to search. And they have to enlist the help of others - parents, friends, and librarians. Some of the best materials my students have come up with have been suggested to them (or me) by the school librarian.

A Final Word

Illustrations in and of themselves will not make an oratory. There must be important underlying ideas which the stories clarify and amplify. The language used to relate the stories must be vivid and specific. And the overall delivery must give proper emphasis to what is being said. But if the orator will remember the power illustrations have to give impact and ignite intérnal vision, and if the speaker will work to find and shape stories that flesh out the message, then the speech can be a great deal more than a ten minute lecture. It can become a vivid portrait of thought that, more than merely telling about life, will show the very essence of living.

(L. D. Naegelin is a speech arts coordinator for the Northeast Independent School District in San Antonio, Texas and a member of the NFL Executive Council. Mr. Naegelin has coached 6 national champions and has placed twelve students to the final round of oratory.)

The Rostrum