



The Campaign

Everywhere my father speaks, in the living rooms of unpainted farmhouses, on bandstands on rainy village greens, people respond positively to what he has to say. Have enough people heard his message?

By ELIZABETH RABY

***M**y father and mother, Andrew E. and Edith W. Nuquist, came to Burlington, Vermont, in 1938, when my father was hired as an instructor in political science at the University of Vermont. My father was glad to have found a job during such difficult economic times. Natives of Nebraska, my parents did not then suspect that the move to Vermont would be permanent.*

To make the trip to Burlington from the University of Wisconsin, where he had been a student in the Ph.D. program, my father purchased an ancient truck. Mother remembered with considerable embarrassment the final labored climb of the old truck, backfiring and spewing exhaust, up Pearl Street to the apartment my father had rented for his family. Everything they owned was crammed into or tied to the top of the overloaded vehicle.

*When my father arrived in Vermont, his field of interest was international relations. Very soon, however, he became fascinated by his adopted state. Although he always retained his internationalist outlook, he became a specialist in the local and state governments of Vermont. Among his publications are *Town Government in Vermont* (1964) and, with Edith*

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ELIZABETH RABY, who currently lives in Santa Fe, New Mexico, writes nonfiction and poetry. In 1998, she wrote an article for *Nebraska History* about the unsuccessful 1934 campaign for governor waged by another member of her family, her grandmother, Maud E. Nuquist.

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W. Nuquist, Vermont State Government and Administration: An Historical and Descriptive Study of the Living Past (1966).

What follows is a chapter from a memoir that, in part, details my family's Vermont experiences.

Burlington, Vermont, primary election night, 1946: My father, Andrew E. Nuquist, has challenged the incumbent Congressman, Charles A. Plumley—the recumbent incumbent, as my father's supporters called him in their politer moments—for the Republican nomination. In 1946, Vermont went through the formality of a follow-up two-party election, but the primary *was* the only real election. During the campaign, Congressman Plumley gave a speech in which he told the audience that some of his friends supported the proposed bounty on beavers, while some others of his friends were opposed to such a measure. And where did he stand on the merits of the issue? "I'm for my friends," said Charlie.

My father has been approached by a group of prominent men who think it is well past time for a change. "I can't afford a campaign," my father tells them. "How much do you need?" they ask. "Five thousand dollars," he answers, and it has been provided.

My mother gives up her position as president of the Burlington League of Women Voters to manage my father's campaign. She has no experience running a campaign, but my father has long depended upon her organizational skills. My father worries that he is still considered a newcomer to the state, a flatlander, having lived in Vermont for only eight years, and he has the misfortune of teaching at the university. He's heard that people think he's Jewish because of his thin beak of a nose and his strange name.

The five thousand dollars has seen to the printing and distribution of cards, posters, and advertisements for the newspapers and the radio stations. It has purchased a used car, pre-World War II model, that carries us from one campaign appearance to the next. Its frequent failure has made my father late to many events. The radiator overheats; fan belts and hoses disintegrate; the headlights fail.

I remember the oncoming lights and roar of a bus on an otherwise empty road late at night. My father steps into the road, waving his brown felt fedora like a signal flag. The bus rumbles to a stop. My brother and I stumble up the stairs, Mother close behind, into the curving gray plush interior, the few sleepy, curious faces roused momentarily by the row of lights the driver turns on for us.

The drama of my father's ghostly white shirt disappearing as the bus pulls away, and every snore, whispered conversation, and scent of dust and tobacco is intensified by a new phrase, "unscheduled stop," and a



VOTE FOR
ANDREW E. NUQUIST
 FOR
Representative to Congress

REPUBLICAN PRIMARY
 AUGUST 13, 1946

INDEPENDENT INFORMED
 YOUTHFUL

"Sober Consideration of All Legislation"



(over)

VOTE FOR
ANDREW E. NUQUIST

FOR THE RECORD

- I believe that permanent peace can come only with United States leadership.
- I believe in equal regulation of both industry and labor.
- I believe in improving the position of Vermont farmers by the completion and use of the power resources of the St. Lawrence sea-way.
- I believe in the conservation of our natural resources.
- I believe in keeping land in farms and not in lakes.

BACKGROUND

1. Associate Professor of Political Science U. V. M.
2. Chairman of Vermont State Chamber of Commerce Committee on Local Finances and Affairs, 1941-1943.
3. Public Panel Member, Regional War Labor Board, 1943-1946.
4. President Vermont Association for the Crippled, Inc., 1942-1946.
5. Director Town Officers' Educational Conference, U. V. M.
6. Lecturer Town Officers' Conferences, 1939-1941.
7. Honorary State Farmer Degree awarded by Vermont Future Farmers of America.
8. B.A., Doane College, 1927; M.A., 1936; Ph.D., 1940, University of Wisconsin.
9. 3 years short term missionary teacher in China, 1927-1930.
10. Married, 2 children, 40 years of age.

(over)

*Campaign card for
 Andrew E. Nuquist, 1946.
 Courtesy of the author.*

new hour, midnight. The silent driver stares ahead into the darkness, his face a waxy candle lit by the glow from his cigarette.

I don't know when or how my father got home. I don't remember the long dark walk up the hill from the bus station to our house on Cliff Street.

On another memorable occasion the floor of the car bursts into flame. A carpet covering a gaping hole has worked its way down onto the road and friction has turned us into a bonfire. My father, in his good suit, leaps repeatedly over a fence, past startled Jersey cows, and fills one little paper cup after another with water from a fortuitously placed stream.

One day we attend a Sunday rally in the Northeast Kingdom of Vermont. We rise early, Mother packs a picnic basket, and we set off on our long drive. A clank and a jolt and something is wrong with the car once more. My father gets out to raise the hood and stare helplessly at the engine. His curses rise again and again to audible level. "Now, Andrew," my mother says each time. "Now, Andrew," and he subsides. Finally a farmer comes by and patches us up somehow so we can continue, inching forward slowly, while ominous noises rumble out of the motor.

At last we arrive. Here is something I have never seen. An unpainted farmhouse, torn screens, and a front yard of unmown grass that rises above my knees. Under a tree on a trestle table rest a big jug of lemonade, redolent chicken pot pies, coleslaw, and heaps of fresh strawberries. There is a tethered pony with many children waiting to ride. They know how to do it! They know each other.

Mother tells us to go play, but not to take any food. She says it has been too much work for these women, and too much expense, for strangers like us to have the benefit. My father moves off, shaking hands and talking to people. Mother follows him. My ten-year-old brother has become invisible to me. My five-year-old self presses against the trunk of a tree.

Finally it is time for Daddy's speech. Grown-ups crowd into a dark parlor. Somewhere in the middle of the crowd, I sit on Mother's lap. My brother sits beside us. Daddy stands beside the round stove. Everyone looks at him while he talks. I am so proud. Afterwards we climb back into the car to begin the creeping, rattling, apprehensive ride home.

Everywhere my father speaks, in the living rooms of unpainted farmhouses, in grange halls, on bandstands on rainy village greens, people respond positively to what he has to say. Have enough people heard his message? Mother tells my brother and me not to expect Daddy to win. He's running to show that old Charlie is not invincible. That in the *future*, with more time and money, someone will beat him.

My mother gives over the campaign to a newspaperman, a convert to



The Nuquist family, 1946. Left to right: Edith, Elizabeth, Andrew S., and Andrew E. Nuquist. Courtesy of the author.

the cause with more experience and good connections. Tonight, however, election night, they both think my father has a chance. The early returns look good. He is ahead.

Every room on our first floor is crowded with men who cluster around radios, tuned loudly to different stations. Someone sits in the front hall by the telephone that rings again as soon as the receiver is replaced. The house fills with cigarette smoke, the rise and fall of voices, shouts, cheers, oaths, all to the delight of my brother and myself. We are at first underfoot, watching the chalked tallies, the slips of paper as they are torn from the adding machine, the men running from room to room with new bits of information. Then we are banished to the top of the stairs, where we watch and listen as best we can through the bannisters.

This has been the most exciting summer of our lives and this, by far, the most exciting evening of all. At midnight our father is ahead. Unbelievably we are both sent to bed. I nurse profound feelings of disappointment and injustice for the five minutes before I fall asleep.

When I awake the house is quiet. The scent of coffee and bacon has joined the stale odor of cigarettes. I run downstairs where my parents are moving quietly about. They both look tired. For a minute I hesitate to ask the question.

“I lost,” my father says. “I didn’t expect to win, you know.”

“But you were ahead,” I say. “You were winning.”

“I didn’t have time to get to everyplace,” he tells me. “I lost where they didn’t have a chance to hear me. If I’d gotten into the thing sooner, I might have pulled it off. But I’m still an outsider here.”

I feel like crying but I don’t want them to know. I’m afraid I will hurt their feelings. I pretend it’s nothing much to me, and I don’t ask any more questions. I feel sad to an extent probably unimaginable to my parents. I’m just a very small girl.

There is very little further discussion then or ever. I don’t know how my brother feels. He doesn’t say. My father reveals no emotion about the loss. He doesn’t talk about it at all for awhile. He sells the car as junk. Some time later my mother says she is glad we don’t have to move to Washington. She didn’t really want to leave our house. She likes Burlington.

Two years later, the same men approach my father to consider another attempt. They tell him that he showed the state that Charlie Plumley could be beaten. This time, they say, he could do it for sure. This time they don’t offer to pay. My father turns them down. He never runs for office again, nor does any other member of the immediate family, but to this day the tallying of any election stirs my blood.