

# Studs: outspoken tribal elder

By George Vukelich  
Press Connection Writer

APR 20 1979

I spent a day last week accompanying Studs Terkel on his round of speaking engagements in our town and I'm still not sure whether he's a journalist who does Sociology or a sociologist who does Journalism.

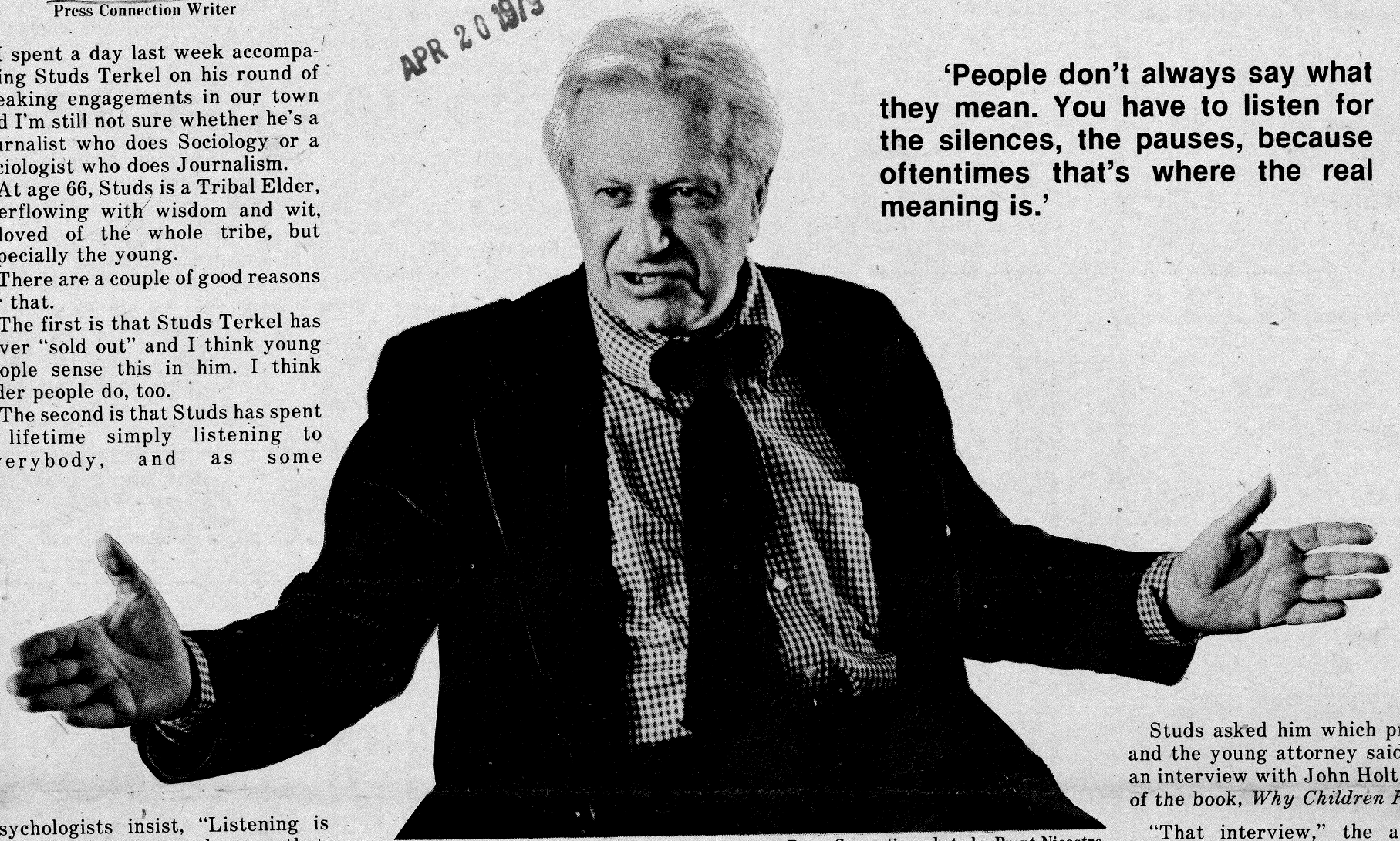
At age 66, Studs is a Tribal Elder, overflowing with wisdom and wit, beloved of the whole tribe, but especially the young.

There are a couple of good reasons for that.

The first is that Studs Terkel has never "sold out" and I think young people sense this in him. I think older people do, too.

The second is that Studs has spent a lifetime simply listening to everybody, and as some

'People don't always say what they mean. You have to listen for the silences, the pauses, because oftentimes that's where the real meaning is.'



— Press Connection photo by Brent Nicaastro

## Studs Terkel

psychologists insist, "Listening is Love." The young people sense that, too.

"People don't always say what they mean," he says. "You have to listen for the silences, the pauses, because oftentimes that's where the real meaning is."

It is this ability to capture the real meaning, the truth of people that has made Studs preeminent among journalists. No one — not Cavett, not Carson, not Cronkite himself — interviews people the way Studs does. He not only listens, he hears. And he is aware. Terribly aware.

"Is the Capital Times here?" he asked at his news conference. "Any reporters from them?"

Everybody looked around the room.

"Naw, they wouldn't send anybody," Studs answered himself. "But if anybody did show up I'd ask them why they were scabbing."

"They" never did show up. The State Journal did. And The Milwaukee Journal. And The Milwaukee Sentinel. But not "they." In another time, in another reality, a visit by Studs Terkel would have rated coverage in the afternoon paper. But not this time. This time, not one word. Not word One.

"I get The Connection," Studs laughed.

At the 602 Club over a glass of chablis — "It's because I'm trying to lose a little weight" — he talked about his other Madison connections. His wife Ida was from here. He had made a film with Stuart Hanisch. He was friends with a lot of people here; Stan and Dimetra Shivers, poet Felix Pollack. And of course, Ron McCrea, the third generation journalist who will be included in the new Terkel book, *American Dreams*.

We drank to that and then Studs got onto how so much of the American dream was hype these days.

"Take 'The Deer Hunter,'" he said. "A bunch of steelworkers talking and everything is f---g this and f---g that and they never talk about working. Nobody says the word working. It's like working is a dirty word."

That's hype, Studs insists. The message is that the American working man is a clod. No dignity. No sensitivity. A clod. Likewise the working woman.

"Take Norma Rae," he said, "A

union organizer comes down South from New York and he has all the answers that the poor dumb local people don't have. Especially the poor dumb local woman. He doesn't learn anything from them, right? No dignity. No sensitivity. That's a hype too. That's the image of labor that's going down these days."

It's not going down with everyone though. After his lecture at the Memorial Union, a young woman came up to Studs and identified herself as a second-year Med student. She wanted him to autograph a copy of *Working*.

"I never understood working people before," she said. "I could never talk to them. Now I have real talks with the janitor."

"Great," Studs exulted. "Then we'll get a real human doctor."

A young man, a practicing attorney, confronted Studs with four Terkel volumes for autographs: *Division Street: America, Hard Times, Working and Talking to Myself*.

"I was teaching in Chicago," he said, "when I heard one of your programs, and it changed my life."

Studs asked him which program, and the young attorney said it was an interview with John Holt, author of the book, *Why Children Fail*.

"That interview," the attorney recalled, "really articulated for me the dissatisfaction I was facing in my job. It made me realize that the classroom was a fundamentally authoritarian structure and, well, it just turned me around. I left teaching. I don't know if it was his book or your interview."

And that's the way it went all day. At Porta Bella. At Pres House. At WHA-TV. On the Library Mall.

A jazz buff recalling when Studs interviewed Mahalia Jackson. Another recalling when Studs hosted "Wax Museum," his Chicago jazz radio show. And the expatriate Chicagoan admitting to being at a Phil Ochs — Jim Kweskin Jug Band — Georgia Sea Island Singers concert at the old McCormick Place back in 1965 and hearing the "tremendous ovation" when the M.C. walked out.

"It was Studs," the expatriate smiled. "Who else? I didn't know him then, but the people sure did. And they loved him."

Now, almost 15 years later, the people still know Studs Terkel. And he still knows them. And they still love each other.

"Let him teach a course up here," one student said. "On anything. You could hold it in Camp Randall."