

Celebrity Journalist Plaskin Tells Students How It's Done

By KAREN BRADY

He interviewed Phil Donahue Tuesday afternoon in New York.

That evening, he was at the Manhattan gala where Elizabeth Taylor, wearing a purported \$6 million worth of jewelry, introduced her new line of perfume, "Passion."

Wednesday morning, the Buffalo-born author, musician and journalist Glenn Plaskin flew back to his hometown saying "I smelled deliciously of Passion for two hours last night and the lobster tails were good, too."

By mid-afternoon, the 34-year-old celebrity journalist was appearing, as the Amherst Central Schools' latest distinguished graduate, at the Amherst Middle School, telling the students before him of the "irony" of his presence among them:

"In the fourth-grade, I was at the Eggert Road Elementary School and I was getting F's in my bad subjects and D's in my good ones. I was taken, with my parents, to a very grumpy, unmodern principal who told my parents that I had a very low IQ and that they shouldn't feel bad 'because garbage collectors can be happy, too.'

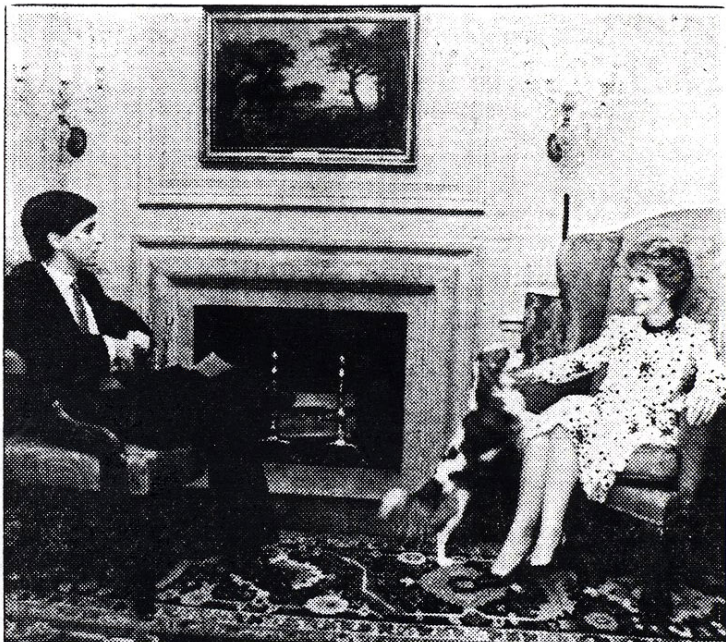
"I'm not thumbing my nose at what that principal said so much as I want to tell you that what is happening to you now, no matter how much you plan, or think you know what you want — maybe be a doctor or a lawyer — may not be at all what is going to happen to you in life.

"Most people today seem to equate getting A's in school with emotional health," Plaskin observed. "And I eventually got A's, too. But I was very unhappy as a little boy, and that's why I didn't do well."

While a student at Amherst, Plaskin became a brilliant pianist who wanted to be an internationally known concert artist, and did. But, after one highly acclaimed performance, he decided he would rather write. "For the time being, anyway. A lot of people thought at first it was a mistake, a terrible gamble."

Instead, it was another professional triumph: Plaskin's first book, "Horowitz: A Biography," published earlier in this decade, was not only controversial and comprehensive but critically acclaimed, an unauthorized biography that dealt, for the first time in print, with the great maestro's alleged homosexuality.

"But I was still restless after Horowitz. I knew there was much more in me to do," said Plaskin who will appear again today and Friday at different Amherst pub-



Amherst native Glenn Plaskin interviews first lady Nancy Reagan.

about celebrity journalism and doing what "I haven't done for eight years, playing the piano. But not classic piano, 'cocktail music.'"

At each presentation, Plaskin gives a slide show featuring pictures of "the most interesting celebrities I have interviewed, the most interesting subjects I have written about, everything from Mrs. Reagan to cows at a Denver rodeo."

He has had several private interviews with Nancy Reagan at the White House.

Plaskin, who has done syndicated celebrity interviews on national TV as well as in Playboy, Esquire and other national magazines, told The Buffalo News:

"My own experience in the Amherst schools here taught me that a lot of kids think they want to go into journalism, want to interview the stars but they don't really know what a journalist does. They also don't have the skills: They can't write a good letter or make a good phone call."

Recently hired by New York University to teach celebrity journalism and by NBC's Today Show to do contributing celebrity interviews on air this spring, Plaskin said; "my agent is looking into syndication of my interviews, more TV appearances and writing for more of America's best-read magazines.

With interviews with Paul Newman and Barbara Walters, as well as Mary Tyler Moore and Elizabeth Taylor to appear on national and international newsstands in the next few months.

Central Senior High School, who has also done advanced study at the prestigious Peabody Conservatory of Music, said "part of the honor of being asked to be a 'distinguished graduate' this week is that I can visit with my family here."

Included are Plaskin's mother, Anita Rausch of Williamsville; his grandmother, Essie Feinberg of Buffalo and his father and his wife, Albert and Beth Plaskin, also of this area.

Plaskin offered Wednesday's student listeners a list of ways to interview celebrities successfully:

"Choose your hook, a current reason to be doing the interview. Do your research so, when you get there, you're prepared. Make sure you look good that day and have all of your questions on one piece of paper. Relax the person you've come to see. I usually bring along homemade cookies or flowers or a copy of my 'Horowitz' book as a gift."

"After the interview's over," Plaskin continued, "call at what you think is a good time and ask some follow-up questions, so the celebrity will know how much you care about the story. Then listen to your tape (Plaskin tapes all interviews), transcribe what you have and make an outline.

"Then, do your 'introduction.' Talk in print about how the person looked, smelled, talked and so on. Next, put the puzzle together and write it."

Is that all?

"No," said Plaskin. "The most important part is to hand in the