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**HEADLINE:** Agnew's Meteoric Career Began Brightly in Md.

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**BODY:**

It was the new politics of Maryland, the friends of Spiro T. Agnew recalled yesterday, that sent the Greek immigrant's son on a breathtaking rise from lowly suburban Baltimore to the halls of the White House.

And it was the Free State's old traditions -- the ones involving envelopes of cash conveyed quietly to public officeholders -- that marked him for political ruin even as he began that remarkable climb to power.

Until his death Tuesday of leukemia, Agnew maintained his principal residence in California, but to those who knew him best, he was first and last a Marylander, who summured every year in Ocean City like thousands of other beachgoers in the state.

"I think he still considered himself a Marylander," said former governor Marvin Mandel, who played a decisive role in Agnew's capturing the governor's mansion 30 years ago.

Four years earlier, in 1962, the gods of politics smiled for the first time on Spiro Theodore Agnew, when a bitterly divided Democratic Party handed the Republican the keys to the office of Baltimore county executive.

Then, in 1966, state Democrats did it again, nominating a gubernatorial candidate many considered so unfit for the office that party leaders such as Mandel defected and quietly helped Agnew. It was an important moment in the state's political life as Agnew -- that would be Ted Agnew, progressive Republican Ted Agnew -- showed that suburban government administrators, not just inner-city machine pols, could compete statewide.

"His initial mark was that he took suburban politics big-time," recalled journalist Frank A. DeFilippo, a former Mandel aide. "His was a totally different take on things."

In the first flush of victory, Agnew and his wife, Judy, were in New York City for a gala luncheon given by Louise Gore, a Montgomery County Republican who also had just won election, in her case to the Maryland Senate.

Gore's keynote speaker at the gala was a Manhattan lawyer named Richard M. Nixon, who, after lunch at the Waldorf-Astoria, went over to a Park Avenue apartment where Gore introduced him to Agnew.

They chatted for about an hour, and as Gore escorted Nixon to the elevator, he turned to her and said, "I like your governor. He speaks very well. Get him out on the road, Louise. Let more people hear him."

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To Gore, Agnew the governor was a class act, forever curious about her good-government causes such as mental health and prison reform. Always gracious, devoted to Judy, the tall, tanned Agnew looked the part of governor.

But there was that other side, a certain arrogance that installed the sauna and wine cellar in the executive mansion and sent the governor to the golf course every Wednesday afternoon. "He was difficult to like," DeFilippo said. "He was a relentlessly middlebrow kind of guy, standoffish. He didn't like to work."

Agnew had a remarkably thin skin when it came to the news media, a testiness that went all the way back to the county executive days. Once, a journalist asked the politician how it was he stayed so crisp-looking all the time, to which Agnew replied: "I never cross my legs or lean back against the chair."

In 1968, after Nixon plucked him as his vice presidential candidate, Agnew caused a flap when he walked to the rear of the campaign plane and asked about napping Baltimore Sun reporter Gene Oishi: "What's the matter with the fat Jap?"

"He was a petty politician," said Blair Lee IV, a Silver Spring developer whose Democratic father became acting governor after Mandel resigned in his own scandal. "He had the look. He clearly didn't have the integrity."

Agnew wasn't governor long enough to leave a deep imprint on state government -- he prepared only two state budgets -- and some Democratic critics still fume at the \$ 30 million shortfall he left his successor, Mandel, and the thousands of Marylanders he ordered trimmed from the Medicaid rolls.

Mandel, who was forced to raise the sales tax in Agnew's aftermath, takes a fairly generous view, praising his political moderation. "He didn't have the opportunity to get his hands into the real operations of government," Mandel said.

Sometimes when he tried, the General Assembly blocked him. Once, when Mandel was speaker of the House of Delegates, Agnew tried to abolish the state censorship board by erasing all funding for it in the state budget. Mandel and other legislative leaders had to educate the new governor that he couldn't always do it his way.

The famous Agnew temper flared in the spring of 1968, when he lectured leaders of Baltimore's African American community after rioting rocked the city in the wake of Martin Luther King Jr.'s assassination. But the public dressing-down caught Nixon's eye, and a GOP ticket was born.

In one of the turnabouts that keeps politics interesting, the Nixon-Agnew campaign failed to carry Maryland that fall, as Democrats used their old standby -- walking-around money -- to energize voters in Baltimore for Hubert H. Humphrey. Legend has it that Mandel's money men spent \$ 14 a head to get out the vote. A jittery Nixon was furious at Agnew on election night, cussing him out for failing to carry his own state.

"The very same people, the Democrats, who got him elected in '66 defeated him in '68," DeFilippo said. "The state had caught on to him."

Lee, whose family and career are steeped in Maryland politics, marveled yesterday at Agnew's life story, the swiftness of his success and the certainty of his final disgrace. "Lightning kept striking this guy who never had a machine, an organization or a record," Lee said. "He was a little hustler out of Baltimore County who made it to the White House, with no anchor, no mooring, no core. Gives politics a bad name."

**GRAPHIC:** Photo, ap; Photo, upi , Frank A. DeFilippo, an aide to then-Gov. Marvin Mandel, said of Spiro T. Agnew: "His initial mark was that he took suburban politics big-time. His was a totally different take on things." Spiro Agnew gets a kiss from his wife, Judy, after winning Maryland's gubernatorial election in 1966.

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