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## Carl Paladino's tale of helping defuse 1970 Syracuse University student strike doesn't ring true with some

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Paul Riede / The Post-Standard



Carl Single / Courtesy of Onondaga Historical Association

Students occupy the Syracuse University Administration Building following the Kent State shootings on May 8, 1970. Carl Paladino says he helped resolve the dispute, but many doubt his tale.

Syracuse, NY -- Carl Paladino may be rattling a lot of cages in **his campaign for governor**, but he made few waves during his three years at the **Syracuse University College of Law**, his former classmates say.

His close friends at the school describe him as a quiet, hard-working and compassionate man who bore little resemblance to the fiery candidate they read about now. Other classmates react with surprise that he was in the Class of 1971 at all.

"I have no memory of the person in this photograph," said **Karen DeCrow**, of Jamesville, the only woman among the 108 graduates in the class portrait that hangs in a hallway at the law school. "He was not running around with a baseball bat. If he was, I would certainly remember him. ... He was a mystery man."

In an interview last week about his law school days, Paladino acknowledged he cut a fairly low profile at the school. In fact, his most remarkable memory is of an incident that even his closest friends say they were unaware of — and others say could not have happened at all.

In early May 1970, campuses across the country exploded after four students were shot by National Guardsmen

during an anti-war protest at Kent State University. At SU, students barricaded the campus and forced the school to shut down classes. Syracuse police Chief Tom Sardino took a cautious approach to the crisis, keeping uniformed police off the campus.



Carl Paladino was a low-key law student at Syracuse University. "I didn't socialize much," he said. "It was three years of studying and working hard at it."

Paladino, who was involved in a program in which law students interested in criminal justice rode along with police patrols, said he was working with undercover officers on campus to try to prevent any violence or property damage.

Then on May 7, a dissident faction of students occupied the administration building. According to Paladino, the students wouldn't let SU Chancellor John Corbally out of the building.

"When the riots came, I was the one who negotiated for Chief Sardino to take the place of the chancellor, who the students had locked down in the administration building ..," he said. "Sardino had the idea that he would come up and they would let the chancellor leave and take him as their hostage, if you wanted to call it. ... So when Sardino came up with this idea I negotiated with these guys, who agreed to let the chancellor go and take Sardino in his place

...

"Sardino asked me if I would do it, and I said sure. So I went out and found them and I said, you know, 'Take the police commissioner and let the chancellor go home. The guy's got to take a shower, I mean for God sakes ...' So they said, 'Yeah, OK'."

David Bennett, an SU history professor who visited the administration building during the protest, scoffed at Paladino's account.

"That's completely wrong," he said. "He's either living in Cloud Cuckooland or, shall we say, his historical memory is clouded by whatever it is."

Bennett said no one was held hostage during the protests. That is confirmed by several others who were there and by news accounts from the time.

According to a Post-Standard report from May 8, 1970, Corbally wasn't in the building when the students entered and demanded to see him. He arrived about 15 minutes later and entered the building with Sardino. The two emerged two hours later. Corbally left and set up a temporary office elsewhere. Sardino went back into the building and spent the night talking with the protesters. His presence in the building was completely voluntary, said John A. Beach, an attorney for the university at the time who was working closely with Sardino. The protest ended peacefully the next day.

Jules Smith, a Rochester attorney and former classmate of Paladino who visited the administration building that night, said he doesn't know of any involvement by Paladino. "I have the feeling that this may be an urban legend in Carl's mind," he said.

Paladino's close law school friends Joe Pavone, of Liverpool, and Mike Rice, of Long Island, both said Paladino never mentioned the incident to them and that they had no recollection of it. But Rice said it wouldn't be unusual for Paladino not to say anything. "We weren't the kind of people who said, 'I did this, I did that,'" he said.

Beyond that incident, Paladino's memory may have been foggy about his role in the program in which law students rode along with police. He told The Post-Standard he helped run the initiative and that "I think I started the program."

Travis Lewin, a law school professor then and now, said he started the program and that he had no recollection of Paladino or his involvement. Pavone and Rice did confirm that Paladino participated in the program.

In a follow-up call Friday, Paladino campaign spokeswoman Robin Wolfgang said Paladino stood by his assertions.

Beyond that exciting spring semester, Paladino describes his time at law school as uneventful — even "boring."

"I didn't socialize much," he said. "It was three years of studying and working hard at it."

Pavone, a retired assistant U.S. attorney, can attest to that.

"Carl was very mature," he said. "He just wasn't a party guy. He studied hard and had great integrity, in my

opinion.”

Paladino often talked passionately about Buffalo and growing up in his working class family there.

“He’s kind of emblematic of Buffalo,” said Emil Rossi, a law school friend who is now a Syracuse lawyer. “I mean, look at what Buffalo’s been through, but they’re still fighting. He’s doing the same thing.”

During his first two years at SU, Paladino drove home every Friday — accepting passengers who paid for gas and tolls — for a job preparing newspapers for shipping on the docks of the Buffalo Courier-Express, the morning paper that has since closed. He said the Friday and Saturday shifts started at 9 or 10 p.m. and went through the night. On Sundays, he drove back to Syracuse to prepare for his Monday classes.

“It was a lot of pain, you know?” he said. “But when you’re from a poor family you’ve got to work hard. That’s how I earned my money to help pay for tuition and living expenses.”

While on campus, Paladino lived in an undergraduate fraternity house, where he worked as resident adviser in return for room and board.

He got married between his second and third year, and his wife, Cathy, lived in an apartment with him in Syracuse during his final year at SU, teaching fifth grade at a Syracuse school.

Although Paladino said he didn’t discuss politics much, he did run his first political campaign — his only campaign before this year — while on campus, and won a seat along with Pavone on the Law Student Senate.

“I don’t think it was too long of a campaign,” Paladino said with a laugh. “It was probably a day and a half of walking around the cafeteria and the student lounge.”

He said his platform was dominated by his belief that the school was giving scholarships to wealthy students with influential parents rather than to poorer students like himself.

“It was an abusive way to run a school,” he said. “I think this was the main issue I ran on. I went to the dean and said, ‘Hey, this isn’t fair.’”

Paladino said he was more “moderate” in law school than he is today, but he strongly disagreed with the students who were protesting America’s involvement in Vietnam, and would occasionally engage them in conversation at Varsity Pizza and other spots. He had taken four years of ROTC while in undergraduate school at St. Bonaventure and was commissioned as a second lieutenant in the Army. He attended law school on a military deferment.

“I didn’t like the war protesters,” he said. “I didn’t like that whole hippie crowd. I thought it was very disrespectful for the troops. I didn’t necessarily like Richard Nixon and the government either, but I respected the soldiers.”

His disapproval never translated into the kind of anger associated with him today, his friends said.

“I don’t think the Carl I know is the Carl I hear on TV or I see written about,” Rice said. “Carl is smart; I think he is

using the attention to get what we need. This state is screwed up ... You need someone to go up there with Carl's energy."

Paladino said his current anger is for the benefit of the people he wants to represent.

"There's nothing wrong with being angry," he said. "The people are angry and they want everyone to know it. I'm angry for them, and I'm illustrating that anger to the ruling class. And we're telling the ruling class, 'Your day is done. Go. Get the frig out.'"

That level of anger wasn't necessary in law school, he said.

"I wasn't an angry student, no," he said. "I was mellow."

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