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# Opening Remarks

## Transforming trials into teaching moments

Right about now, most SU students are wending their way home for winter break at the conclusion of what began as quite an eventful semester at Syracuse University.

As I'm sure many of you are aware, on the first day of fall '98 classes, the Service Employees International Union Local 200A at SU—composed of custodians, groundskeepers, library workers, food service employees, and others—went on strike. The strike occurred after lengthy contract negotiations between the union and SU reached a stalemate.

Not surprisingly, the event caused quite a stir as union picketers in purple T-shirts took to the streets to broadcast their demands to everyone within earshot, and well beyond. Fortunately—to the credit of both the union and SU—negotiators reached a tentative agreement less than a week after the strike began. On September 6, Labor Day eve, union membership approved a new contract. The strike was over. Things on campus could finally return to normal.

But then again, maybe not.

A not-so-funny thing happened in Central New York the following morning. Just before 2 a.m. a late-summer storm rolled into the area that turned out to be a *derecho*—a line of thunderstorms that produces fierce, arrow-straight winds in excess of 100 miles an hour. It uprooted trees, mangled vehicles, damaged buildings, ripped down power lines, and generally made a mess of everything we call Syracuse.

And you thought our winters were bad.

I revisit these two events not as a recap of SU Headaches 1998, but to bring to light one of the more interesting aspects of

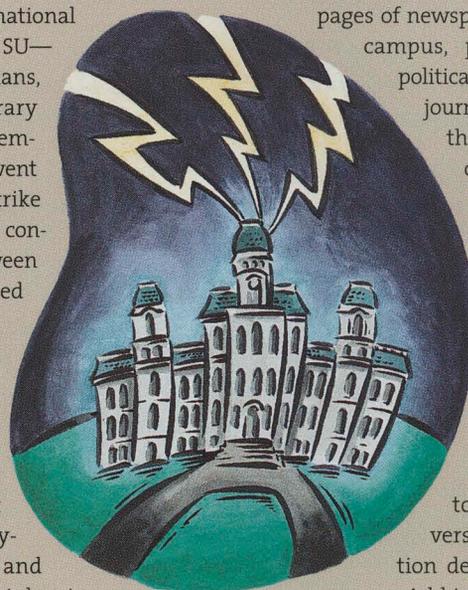
University life—how quickly virtually any event that happens at this student-centered research university can be transformed into an invaluable teaching tool.

Consider the union strike. The minute the workers took to the streets, the stories of University/union negotiations peppering the pages of newspapers both on- and off-campus, professors of history, political science, public affairs, journalism, and more, seized the opportunity to educate students not only with textbook theories on labor issues, but also with real examples of union activism right in their own backyard.

Lessons from the Labor Day storm proved equally valuable. It was impressive to witness how the University continued to function despite the *derecho's* damage. Add to that the contributions of the many students, faculty, and staff who assisted in community-wide cleanup efforts after the disaster, and you can't help but appreciate that opportunities for education at SU come just as readily outside the classroom as they do within.

All these months later there still remain throughout the City of Syracuse many signs of the storm's wrath—tattered roofing, barren stumps, mangled tree limbs, massive mulch piles.

And I'll wager there are just as many signs still remaining in the minds and hearts of SU students and staff, who rose to the occasion to prove themselves remarkable, generous citizens.



JEFFREY CHARBONEAU  
MANAGING EDITOR