

## ROBERT PRECHT ('80)

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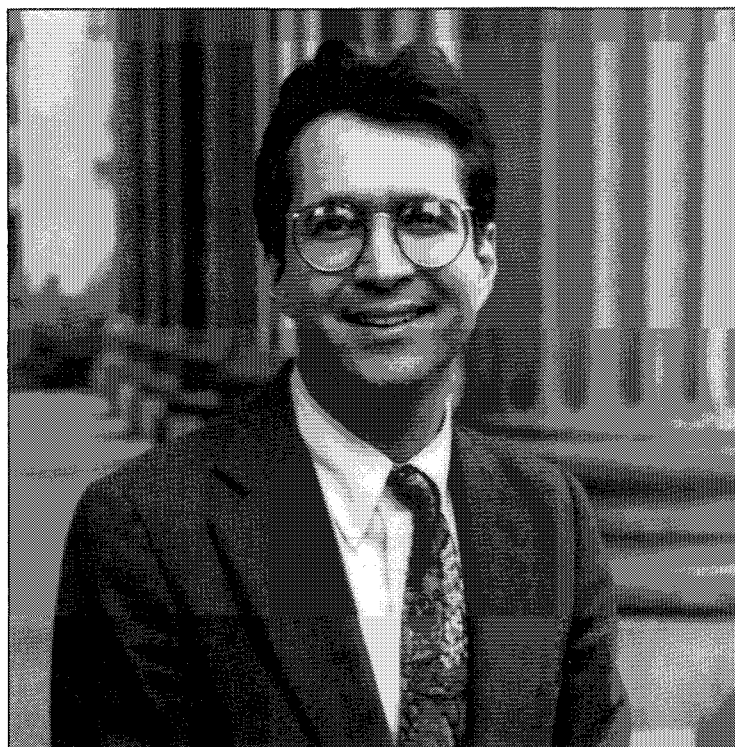
February 26, 1993 will forever be an important date in Robert Precht's life. It is the day the World Trade Center in New York was bombed. Precht is representing Mohammad Salameh, the first person arrested in the case.

Just as Precht was beginning to wonder if his career as a public defender for the Legal Aid Society in New York was his best occupational decision, he was appointed as Salameh's counsel.

How did this happen? "Luck of the draw," according to Precht. He was filling in for a colleague when he heard that a man had been arrested in connection to the bombing. The thought of handling the much publicized case did cross his mind, but he doubted its likelihood.

Ironically, Precht had complained to his sister just one week earlier that public defenders do not get the important cases. "The important cases usually go to big-name lawyers or lawyers who charge high fees, and the public defender doesn't usually get those types of cases," he said. In a fashion he compares to a Frank Capra movie, the case of a lifetime fell into Precht's hands.

"It was a very strange experience," he said. "I didn't even know that I would



*Photo: Fadi Kheir*

have it."

The vast publicity surrounding the case has given Precht more than his "15 minutes of fame."

Outside the courthouse following Salameh's presentment, Precht was crushed by "a stadium full of reporters and cameras with lights going," he said. "This huge group of reporters just fell on me because I was basically their only contact with this person who had just been arrested."

Precht recognizes the important role of the press during a case as controversial as this one. Considering the adverse publicity Salameh has received, Precht has tried to convey the 'innocent until proven guilty' message to the press without saying too much and risking the case or saying too

little and losing the media's interest. He has appeared on Larry King Live, Good Morning America, CBS This Morning and The Today Show.

Humanizing Salameh has been Precht's intention, since there had been, what Precht calls, "a tendency to demonize him into a stereotypical terrorist."

In the midst of the pre-trial publicity, a reporter revealed that Precht is the late Ed Sullivan's grandson, something Precht rarely told anyone. "I just wanted to be judged on my own merits," he said.

But Precht admits his show business background has come in handy. "In dealing with the media I have felt quite comfortable," he said. "I haven't felt very intimidated by it, and I think part of it is because I was exposed to lights, cameras and action when I was growing up."

"I've never met a criminal defendant who did not have any goodness in his heart," he said. Precht plans to show that and guarantee Salameh receives a fair trial.

"I'm sincere and I believe strongly in my role as an advocate," he said. "I benefited greatly from the intellectual atmosphere there [at the Law School], I also had very good experiences doing clinical work at the UW, which I think shaped my career."