

and manuals; Wikiquote, an online “book” of quotations; Wikispecies, a cyber-directory of species; and, of course, Wikinews, the free-content news source that you can write and upload yourself.

Wikipedia, though, is not all sweetness and light, and it does not always control itself. When the people can upload their own encyclopedia, lots of things can happen, and not all of them good. Your enemies can use it as a global poster board to smear your name if they want, and it can take time to sort out. John Seigenthaler Sr., the founding editorial director of *USA Today* and founder of the Freedom Forum First Amendment Center at Vanderbilt University, woke up one morning and found his bio on Wikipedia as follows: “John Seigenthaler Sr. was the assistant to Attorney General Robert Kennedy in the early 1960’s. For a brief time, he was thought to have been directly involved in the Kennedy assassinations of both John, and his brother, Bobby. Nothing was ever proven.”

He was not amused. That bio entry was being read and repeated all over the world. On November 29, 2005, he wrote the following in an op-ed piece in *USA Today*:

This is a highly personal story about Internet character assassination. It could be your story.

I have no idea whose sick mind conceived the false, malicious “biography” that appeared under my name for 132 days on Wikipedia, the popular, online, free encyclopedia whose authors are unknown and virtually untraceable. There was more:

“John Seigenthaler moved to the Soviet Union in 1971, and returned to the United States in 1984,” Wikipedia said. “He started one of the country’s largest public relations firms shortly thereafter.”

At age 78, I thought I was beyond surprise or hurt at anything negative said about me. I was wrong. One sentence in the biography was true. I was Robert Kennedy’s administrative assistant in the early 1960s. I also was his pallbearer. It was mind-boggling when my son, John Seigenthaler, journalist with NBC News, phoned later to say he found the same scurrilous text on Reference.com and Answers.com.