

The Women's Review of Books

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Lynn Walterick, *Senior Editor*

13 June

Lissa —

I've had happier days as a camper, I'd say.

But here is the ... streamlined ... version.

If anything keeps me, I'm here tomorrow.

I hope your conferences about your campers —
happy, yes? — were good, and that the
day winds down reasonably.

Again, Lissa, Thanks so much. And I greatly
enjoyed talking this morning, too.

Take care,

Lynn

Rose can

LISSA MUSCATINE : INTERVIEW (Revised)

Tell us about the position of Press Secretary.

We're in an odd situation, an unprecedented one. *with me* A First Lady is also running for political office. I leave talking about her campaign to her campaign staff, and I essentially deal with everything else: her record as First Lady, her role, her thoughts and beliefs, her family, her actions and preferences, and personal kinds of things, which range from the truly comical to the truly absurd to the painfully cruel. To give you a comical example, people call all the time about her hair. The day she went to vote in the New York primary, we must have received ten calls at least about why she'd had her hair cut. And the truth is that she'd just gotten up and wanted to be at the polls very early and so she just dashed out without blowing it dry. And there were all these commentaries about the "haircut"--which wasn't.

It must be frustrating at some point, though, this focus on appearance.
Well, she has a pretty good sense of humor about it.

What is there about Hillary Clinton that people ought to know and don't know because the press doesn't get it to us--maybe they can't, maybe they choose not to, maybe they've obliquely changed it?
I just gave a commencement address to a girls' school here, and one of the messages I wanted to get through to these young women is that not only are they going to have incredible opportunities, they're going to have to make a lot more choices, and they're going to make choices that test not only their minds but their hearts. I talked about some things in my own life, but I ended by saying something about the First Lady that spoke not so much to her political accomplishments or her policy accomplishments as to her character--her personal qualities and the empathy she has for other people, which manifest themselves on a daily basis when you're around her. People are aware of her intellect, they're aware of her high-powered professional career. What they don't recognize is that this is an extremely down-to-earth person with tremendous humanity. That's why I think she is so good in public life -- she combines that formidable intellect with a very deep and real concern for the plight of people who are vulnerable. Her mother and her church instilled in her a sense of obligation to the larger world, the common good. If you look at her personal history, you'll see that in law school she was working at the Yale-New Haven Hospital with abused children. She was volunteering at the legal services clinic. She went to work for Marian Wright Edelman before there was even a Children's Defense Fund. This sort of commitment to social action and public service speaks to a level of compassion and empathy and generosity of heart that I think most people aren't really aware of in her.

Why is that? What you say about public service, and being brought up to have the feeling of needing to give, sounds in some ways like what people have always said about the Kennedys. But something has blunted that message getting out about her. Is it her gender, or the fact that she's the First Lady, or the fact that she's married to somebody who turned out to be controversial? Or is that too simplistic?

I think there are a number of reasons. She's a transitional figure in history, the first First Lady of her ilk. There's never been a professional First Lady, that is, there has never been a woman who's had a career of her own in that position, and that was greeted with a certain amount of ambivalence by the American public. This is a job with no exact portfolio, no job description. People tend to project onto it what they want their First Lady to be, and a lot of people have strong feelings about that. I think just by virtue of her being a departure from the norm there was a certain scepticism, and also a certain tendency, perhaps, on the part of the media and even the public to see her very one-dimensionally.

And I also think that one of the things that happens to women is that people sort of take snapshots of them, and assume that the one snapshot that day is what the woman's entire personality, or entire day, is like. In fact, if you'd take a typical day for the First Lady--let's look at one before Chelsea went off to Stanford--she's having breakfast with Chelsea at 6:30 in the morning, then she's talking to her mom on the phone, then she's reading her policy papers from her staff, then she's going out and giving a speech, then she comes back, and at 3:00 she's checking on Chelsea's homework with her. But if you took only one snapshot of any of those particular activities, and assumed that that was the total picture, you'd have a very limited picture of her--or of any woman with a multifaceted life.

6:30

I do think there is a gender angle to it, to some degree. But I think it's more that she's in a derivative role of First Lady. It might be different if she were the president—or, say, the prime minister of Britain or India or Israel or Sweden. I'm not sure that those positions, and the women who have held them, have evoked the same kind of public reaction. There's not as much room for ambivalence about the way they go about their jobs. But we don't yet have a parallel in this country.

It's iconic Nat
 People here have had some visceral reactions. However, if you travel with the First Lady around the world, you see that she has tremendous status, almost iconic status, as a champion of women and of democracy and human rights. We were recently at the United Nations [for the Beijing Plus Five conference on global women's rights], and these women from around the world just mobbed her, trying to get to her, to touch her, to get a picture of her. Because she really is one of a tiny number of people in the world, frankly, of any kind of political stature, who is affirming what these women are trying to say.

But why her personality hasn't come through more... well, anyone's personality is hard to convey publicly. Remember, too, she started off with health-care reform, which is a very serious subject with not a lot of room for levity. And, to recur to your comparison to the Kennedys: they were kind of the darlings of Washington. They were from New England, they were upper-crust, they were East Coast, they were blue blood. And this First Lady and the President came in from Arkansas, and I think the prevailing Washington culture wasn't ready for that and wanted them to be something they weren't. So I think there was a certain degree of resentment that they weren't out at the right parties, going about town, anointing the social climbers.

Yes, and even though Washington sits on the edge of the so-called South, and we've certainly had Southern presidents before, the Clintons seem to have been the recipients of a real dose of anti-below-the-Mason-Dixon line.

I think it was that, and it was Arkansas: a small state with its share of problems. Stereotypes disappear so slowly. And it's ridiculous, because the Clintons are tremendously intelligent and cultured people. And of course they really are policy wonks—much more interested in that than in political gossip. But I think the bulk of the ambivalence about Hillary Clinton is that she is a transitional figure. People think there's a comparison to Eleanor Roosevelt. They are very similar in their spirit of activism and in their ability to influence their husbands politically and legislatively. But Eleanor Roosevelt, with all due respect — who may go down as the greatest First Lady ever, although I think this one will be right up there with her — was not a professional woman. So this is an enormous departure.

But about the women?
 And one manifestation of that departure is her race for the Senate seat from New York. Now that Rudy Giuliani's out as her Republican opponent and Rick Lazio's in, how's she looking at the race?

She's not underestimating Lazio; she realizes that he is a formidable candidate with a lot of advantages that Giuliani did not have. And he is extremely hungry for it, he's very clever, he's gone after it for a long time. It will be interesting to see, as time goes on, whether the substance of her record — which is so long and so deep — comes to be appreciated by people. I believe that women will realize that she has been a great voice for them, in many different ways. She has, for example, been extremely influential in helping to implement policies in breast cancer treatment, child care and after care, and she helped establish the Vital Voices program for women around the world. She's championed girls' education in poor countries. And of course she champions a woman's right to choose.

Aside from the issue of choice, it appears that the press has not really reported on those activities nearly as widely as on other matters.

I think a lot of it is that the press today is consumed with the horse race—with the tactics, with the polls, with the race. They're not as prone to pay attention to the substance, to analyze it in any sort of a rigorous way, or even to understand it. And so important actions tend to get left behind a lot of the time.

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Is the coverage in the New York race based on substance now? Are we past the "Oh my god she's a carpetbagger, oh my god she's married to the man she should have walked out on" reportage and responses?

I don't know. We might have been if Giuliani were still in the race. I think that Lazio clearly is trying to make the carpetbagger thing a big issue. But I think that she will do what she always does, which is to stick to her issues, to talk about them constantly. That is why she is running for Senate, and this is what she has spent her life doing--not in elective office, but in other arenas. This is what interests her, what concerns her and what has motivated her to take on this challenge. She will campaign on her issues and hope that her message gets through. And I think it will. I think that people are fundamentally more interested in that than in who's winning, who's losing, who's up, who's down, is Lazio being mean or is he being nice, is she going on the attack or is she on the defensive...

And, speaking of substance, one of my big concerns in this job is getting folks to understand that her impact as First Lady has been extraordinary and is unprecedented to the extent that she has a White House staff that is a force unto itself, working not only within the White House but within the Administration on domestic policy issues, at her behest obviously. Having that staff does enable her to champion particular pieces of legislation and policies that she believes in or has promoted or wants to promote. That's just never happened before.

Can you give an example of that?

I think Chris Dodd. [Democratic Senator from Connecticut] may have said it best. We did a piece with CNN a couple months ago that addressed the First Lady's role in affecting policy, and CNN interviewed him because he is one of the members of Congress with whom she's worked very closely. And he said something along the lines of, "When I want to get something done that relates to children, I don't go to the President, I don't go to the Chief of Staff, I don't go to the Director of OMB-- I go to the First Lady."

An example that I find hugely significant is this: during health care reform she was out, going around talking to people, much as she's done on her listening tour of New York-- which, by the way, is really her m.o.-- she learned from talking to senior women that under Medicare they were only eligible for a mammogram once every two years, as opposed to every year, which at that age is problematic! You should be able to get one every year. And she made it her business to look into it, and now women who are covered by Medicare can get mammograms every year. Because she thought it was critical, and she made sure it happened.

You'd say, then, that she is an activist within the government?

I think you can deduce from this that she has been very strategic about how to use the office of First Lady to promote legislation, to champion certain causes, to effect regulatory changes, and even to ensure that there's enough in the budget to cover these programs. And this involvement has been, for her, a very conscious way of going about doing things. It will be reflected upon historically as something new and also as something that was at the time unique.

It sounds as if, whatever happens in New York, we haven't seen the last of her by a long shot
Not at all. This is her *raison d'être*.

You were a journalist before joining the Office of the First Lady. Tell us something of your story.

I grew up in Berkeley, California, went to Harvard, majored in history, fought for the implementation of Title IX, and then I didn't want to go straight to law school or graduate school so I went and worked for the *Delta Democrat Times* newspaper in Greenville, Mississippi, which was edited by Hodding Carter and had won a Pulitzer Prize in 1946 for civil rights reportage. I was there for a year, and just then Rhodes Scholarships were opened up to women. I applied, got one, went to Oxford for two years, during which time I was an intern in *The New York Times'* London bureau. Decided I wanted to be a journalist; came back and worked for the *Washington Star* until its demise two years later. Then I worked as a journalist at the *Washington Post* for twelve years.

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But, frankly, I never felt entirely suited to journalism, largely because I grew up in a very politically activist family in an activist town, and I got into journalism because I thought it would be a good way to convey my values and beliefs. It turned out to be more like working for an insurance company. Of course, I learned a lot from it, had tremendous experiences and obviously got great practice writing. But when Bill Clinton was elected I said, "This is my generation, and this may be the only time in my lifetime there's a Democrat as president, and if I'm going to make a switch and try to do something in public service, this would be a good time." So I wrote a letter to the chief speech writer at the White House--whom I had never met--even though I'd only make a few speeches in my life. And it basically said, "Hello! I would like to be a speech writer." Anyway, to make a long story short, eventually they hired me as half-time speech writer to the First Lady and half-time to the President.

premier at the time

Speech writing is a highly collaborative undertaking, and that's why it was great fun to write for her, and it was very comfortable doing it. In writing for the President, I was always struggling to imagine how he would say something.

and it came fairly naturally for me.

After a couple years I later became her full-time speech writer, and then, in 1997, I took some time off to be with my young children. Two years later her press secretary decided to leave, and the First Lady asked if I would come back for the last year to do that job, since I had a background in the media. And I couldn't say no, so I did.

here I am

And that completed your move over from being a member of the media to representing a political figure to the media. Did that change have any effect on your perspective?

You mean did I have difficulty adjusting? I was aware of it a little bit at the very beginning when I first started as a speech writer, I remember walking into one of the first events I attended in the White House--the President was addressing a group of lawyers from legal services or something like that. I was standing in the back of the room with some of the other speech writers, and the President was announced in, and everyone on the staff started clapping--and of course I had been so trained not to clap that I although I found myself doing it I felt unbelievably self-conscious about it. And yet it was something I very much wanted to do.

Were you still struggling with some sense of having to maintain objectivity?

I think I had come to the realization that I didn't have objectivity to begin with; that was why I was not comfortable as a journalist. I actually never thought that objectivity was the right kind of guideline for journalists, because we're subjective people, and I think you have to be aware of what subjectivity you bring to a news story. The key is not to be partisan. But to think that you're going to be objective is impossible. I never held myself to that standard. I tried to hold myself to the standard of not being partisan, but even that was painful, the wrong temperament for me. I'm much more temperamentally suited to being in the room clapping and stomping my feet for Bill Clinton. It took a very short time for me to feel happy that I was able to do that.

Continuing the focus on the media and perspective: once we've got a woman president or vice-president, do you think the media will finally be able to get beyond gender and just deal with people as people--or is gender just that factor that's always going to be in politics, as elsewhere, even if it is tacit, even if people are pretending otherwise?

That's a really interesting question. I wonder if what we will arrive at is a point where a woman who becomes president is treated like a man who's president--which isn't to say very well, by the way. The level of scrutiny and the blurring of personal and private vs. public is so huge at this point. But I think its possible that we will get to a point where a woman president is subjected to that form of scrutiny more than a gender-infused scrutiny. After all, remember that Bill Clinton's thighs used to be a big news story when he would go out running. And was he gaining weight or losing weight?

But they're still doing that kind of scrutiny.

Yes. To some degree that happens to anybody in that position, and maybe we'll get to a point where that's all that happens to a woman if she's in that position--maybe she will be seen as having enough bona fides, having gotten herself there, and having been elected, by the way, by a majority of the population or at least a plurality. Then maybe she can function as a person who is really being reviewed as a president, not as a

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woman president. That said, I think it could be about the only position where that could happen. I feel for the man who'll be the First Gentleman! I mean, that guy's gonna be dissected...

I think so much will depend on the woman, on how she defines the role as well, and herself in it. If she's a very charismatic, winning personality, maybe she'll have better luck. On the other hand, look at Margaret Thatcher! Maybe that's the personality that does better in terms of having her public image anatomized.

What do you see as your biggest challenge--and your biggest satisfaction--in being the press secretary to the First Lady?

I think the biggest challenge is that we live in an age--not to be too cliched, but...--where information is often viewed as knowledge when in fact it is not, and where, because of the revolutionary changes in the way that news is conveyed to the public--namely, the Internet, cable television, 24-hour news cycles--there is such a premium on getting information out that there is a commensurate lack of interest in knowing whether the information is accurate, or newsworthy, or relevant to the public. So what's challenging is trying to figure out a way to get people to appreciate the substance of what happens here, to get beyond the horse race and focus on the issues, and to try to see Hillary Clinton in the largest context, not in the most microscopic. To try to see her as the sort of paradoxical and complex person that she is, and to appreciate that, frankly, most women of this generation who are professional women are paradoxical.

What is most satisfying is that I think we all feel--those of us who work for her--that we're all part of something much bigger than any of us, including her. That this is really about a set of values and a kind of vision of how the world could be better, and that what we are doing, in mostly small ways but hopefully important ways, is to get us closer to a world that really reflects those values. And that's pretty darn satisfying.

END

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END

LISSA MUSCATINE : INTERVIEW

Tell me about the position of Press Secretary.

I am Hillary Clinton's White House Press Secretary. We're in an odd situation, an unprecedented one, actually, with the First Lady also running for political office. I leave talking about her campaign to her campaign staff. I essentially deal with everything else: her record as First Lady, her role as First Lady, her thoughts and beliefs, her family, her daughter, their house, her actions and preferences, and personal kinds of things.

And clearly you get asked those "personal kinds of things" in every conceivable permutation and combination.

Yes, from the truly comical to the truly absurd, to the painfully cruel.

Maybe just elaborate one of the comical ones.

Well, people call all the time about her hair. The day she went to vote in the New York primary, we must have received ten calls at least about why she'd had her hair cut. And the truth is that she'd just gotten up and wanted to be at the polls very early and so she just dashed out without blowing it dry. But there were in fact all these commentaries, then, about the "haircut" --which wasn't. That's the more or less comical kind of thing.

It must end up being frustrating at some point, though: this focus on appearance.

Well, she has a pretty good sense of humor about it.

From that, let me ask this: What is there about Hillary Clinton that people really ought to know and don't know because it doesn't get out--the press doesn't get it to us, maybe they can't, maybe they choose not to, maybe they've obliquely changed it somehow.

I just gave a commencement address this past weekend to a girls' school here, and I realized that one of

the messages I wanted to get through to these young women is that not only are they going to have incredible opportunities, but they're going to have to make a lot more choices, and they're going to make choices that test not only their minds but their hearts. And I went on to talk about some things in my own life where I felt that had happened to me. But I ended by saying something about the First Lady that really spoke not so much to her political accomplishments or her policy accomplishments as to her character—her personal qualities and the empathy she has for other people, which manifest themselves on a daily basis when you're around her, in ways large and small. I think that people are aware of her intellect, they're aware of her high-powered professional career. What they don't recognize is that this is an extremely down-to-earth person with tremendous humanity. And that's why I think she is so good in public life -- because she combines that formidable intellect with a very deep and real concern for the plight of people who are vulnerable. This has always been true of her. Her mother and her church really instilled in her a sense of obligation to the larger world and her responsibility to contribute to the common good. As a result, if you look closely at her personal history, you'll see that in law school she was working at the Yale-New Haven Hospital with abused children, and she was volunteering at the legal services clinic and working with families there. She went to work for Marian Wright Edelman before there was even a Children's Defense Fund. This sort of commitment to social action and public service and to improving the conditions of people speaks to a deep humanity, and to a level of compassion and empathy and generosity of heart that I think most people aren't really aware of in her.

Do you want to speculate on the reasons? What you say about public service, and being brought up to having the feeling of needing to give, sounds in some ways like what people have always said about the Kennedys. And I think that most people just accept that as the story about the Kennedys. But something has blunted that kind of message getting out with regard to Hillary Clinton. I don't want to sound so simplistic as to say that it's her gender, or it's the fact that she's the First Lady, or it's the fact that she's married to somebody who turned out to be controversial, but what do you think?

I think there are a number of reasons. I think she's a transitional figure in history. She is the first First Lady of her ilk. There's never been a professional first lady before her, that is, there has never been a woman

who's had a career of her own in that position, and that was greeted with a certain amount of ambivalence on the part of the American public. This is a job with no exact portfolio, no job description. What happens is that people tend to project onto it what they want their First Lady to be. A lot of people have strong feelings about that. I think just by virtue of her being a departure from the norm there was a certain scepticism, and also a certain tendency, perhaps, on the part of the media and even the public to see her very one-dimensionally.

And I also think that one of the things that happens to women is that people sort of take snapshots of them, and they assume that the one snapshot they take that day is what the woman's entire personality, or entire day, is like. When, in fact, if you take someone like the First Lady, you know, she's having breakfast with Chelsea at 6:30 in the morning (this before Chelsea went to Stanford, of course), and then she's talking to her mom on the phone, and then she's reading her policy papers from her staff, and then she's going out and giving a speech, and then she comes back, and then at 3:00 she's checking on Chelsea's homework with her... but if you just took a snapshot of any of those particular activities, and assumed that that was the total picture, you'd have a very limited picture of her—or of any woman with a multifaceted life

And I do think there is a gender angle to it, to some degree. But I think that is related more to the fact that she's in a derivative role of First Lady. Were she president, she might not have to put up with that stuff., or were she prime minister of Britain, or the prime minister of India or Israel, or Sweden, or wherever. I'm not sure that they have the same public reaction; there's not as much room for ambivalence about the way they go about their jobs.

And of course we've had no such analogous figure in this country.

No. And I do think that people tend to have visceral reactions. But, you know, one of the great ironies is that if you travel with her around the world, you see that she has tremendous status, almost iconic status, as a champion of women, as a champion of democracy and human rights. We were just at the United Nations on Monday [for the Beijing Plus Five conference on global women's rights],

and these women from around the world just mobbed her, trying to get to her, to touch her, to get a picture of her. Because she really is one of a tiny number of people in the world, frankly, of any kind of political stature, who is affirming what these women are trying to say, and that's huge.

But why her personality hasn't come through more... well, I think it's hard to convey. And, then, she started off with health-care reform, which is a very serious thing: it didn't leave a lot of room for levity.

No, there's nothing funny about it, nor is this a public long on detail, or very forgiving about perceived failures, even when the failure is not necessarily the fault of the person most centrally involved.

Right. And I think the other thing, quite frankly, is this: You made the comparison to the Kennedys. They were kind of the darlings of Washington. They were from New England, they were upper-crust, they were East Coast, they were blue blood, and Jackie Kennedy was an enormously glamorous and elegant woman, and JFK was a virile, powerful, smart, quick, charming guy. And this First Lady and the President came in from Arkansas, and I think the prevailing Washington culture wasn't ready for that and wanted to have them be something else, something they weren't. So I think there was a certain degree of resentment that they weren't out partying, at the right parties, and going about town, and anointing the social climbers who wanted to be anointed.

And also, even though Washington sits on the edge of the so-called South, and we've certainly had Southern presidents before, I think the Clintons got a real dose of anti-below-the-Mason-Dixon line. I think it was anti-below-the-Mason-Dixon line, and it was Arkansas: a small state with big problems. Stereotypes disappear so slowly. And it's ridiculous, because the Clintons are tremendously intelligent and cultured people. And of course they really *are* policy wonks. They're *much* more interested in that than in political gossip. So I think that was part of it also. But I think the bulk of the ambivalence about Hillary Clinton is that she is a transitional figure. People think there's a comparison to Eleanor Roosevelt. They are very similar in their spirit of activism, in their ability to influence their husbands politically and

legislatively and all that. But Eleanor Roosevelt, with all due respect -- who may go down as the greatest First Lady ever, although I think this one will be right up there with her -- was not a professional woman. So this is an enormous departure.

Let's look briefly at one of the manifestations of that departure: her race for the Senate seat from New York. Now that Rudy Giuliani's out as her Republican opponent and Rick Lazio's in, how's she looking at the race?

She's not underestimating Lazio, believe me; she realizes that he is a formidable candidate. He has a lot of advantages that Giuliani did not have. And he is extremely hungry for it. He's very clever. He really wants it, he's gone after this for a long time. I think it will be very interesting to see, as time goes on, whether the substance of her record -- which is so long and so deep -- comes to be appreciated by people. And I also think that women will realize that she has been a great voice for them, in many different ways. She has, for example, been extremely influential in helping to implement policies in areas of vital concern to women, from breast cancer treatment to child care and after care, to establishing the Vital Voices program for women around the world. She's championed girls' education in poor countries. And of course she champions a woman's right to choose.

I realize that those are all matters of record. But aside from the issue of choice, I am not sure that the press has stressed them or reported them nearly as widely as they report on other matters.

I think that a lot of it is that the press today is consumed with the horse race. They're consumed with the tactics, they're consumed with the polls, they're consumed with the race. They're not as prone to pay attention to the substance, to analyze it in any sort of a rigorous way, or even to understand it. So that stuff tends to get left behind a lot of the time.

Is it being different at all in this New York race? Is she getting covered on substance now? Are we getting past the "Oh my god she's a carpetbagger, oh my god she's married to the man she should have walked out on" kind of reportage, and responses?

I don't know. We might have been if Giuliani were still in the race. I think that Lazio clearly is trying to make the carpetbagger thing a big issue. But I think that she will do what she always does, which is to stick to her issues, to talk about them and talk about them and talk about them. That is why she is running for Senate, and this is what she has spent her life doing--not in elective office, but in other arenas. This is what interests her and this is what concerns her and this is what has motivated her to take on this challenge. And she will just stress her issues repeatedly and hope that the message gets through. And I think it will. I think that people are fundamentally more interested in that than in who's winning, who's losing, who's up, who's down, is Lazio being mean or is he being nice, is she going on the attack or is she on the defensive...

And, speaking of substance, one of my big concerns in this job is getting folks to understand that her impact as First Lady has been extraordinary and is unprecedented to the extent that she has a White House staff that is a force unto itself, working not only within the White House but within the Administration on domestic policy issues, at her behest obviously. And having that staff does enable her to champion particular pieces of legislation and policies that she believes in or has promoted or wants to promote. That's just never happened before.

Give me, if you will, an example of that.

Well, I think Chris Dodd. [Democratic Senator from Connecticut] may have said it best. We did a piece with CNN a couple months ago that addressed the First Lady's role in affecting policy, and unbeknownst to me they went to Chris Dodd because she's worked very closely with him and other members of Congress. And he said something to the effect of, "When I want to get something done that relates to children, I don't go to the President, I don't go to the Chief of Staff, I don't go to the Director of OMB-- I go to the First Lady."

And an example that I find hugely significant: during health care reform she was out, going around talking to people, much as she's done on her listening tour of New York-- which, by the way, is really her m.o.—and while she was out there she learned from talking to senior women that under Medicare they

were only eligible for a mammogram once every two years, as opposed to every year, which at that age is problematic! You should be able to get one every year. And she made it her business to look into it, and now women who are covered by Medicare can get mammograms every year. Because she thought it was critical, and she made sure it happened.

What I'm hearing you say is that she is an activist within the government, yes?

I think what you can deduce from this is that she has been very strategic about how to use the office of First Lady to promote legislation, to champion certain causes, to effect regulatory changes, and even to ensure that there's enough in the budget to cover these programs. And this involvement has been, for her, a very conscious way of going about doing things. It will be reflected upon historically as something new and also as something that was at the time unique.

Well, it certainly seems that she intends to continue this kind of thing once she's no longer the First Lady. Whatever happens in New York, it strikes me that we haven't seen the last of her by a long shot.

Oh no, no, no. This is her *raison d'être*.

Let's talk about you for a bit. How did you get to the Office of the First Lady? What's your story?

I grew up in Berkeley, California, went to Harvard, majored in history, fought for the implementation of Title IX, and then I just didn't want to straight to law school or graduate school so I went and worked for the *Delta Democrat Times* newspaper in Greenville, Mississippi, which was edited by Hodding Carter and had won a Pulitzer Prize in 1946 for civil rights reportage. I was there for a year, and that was the first year that Rhodes Scholarships were opened up to women. I applied, got one, went to Oxford for two years, during which time I was an intern in *The New York Times'* London bureau. Decided I wanted to be a journalist; came back and worked for the *Washington Star* until its demise two years later. Then I worked as a journalist at the *Washington Post* for twelve years.

But, frankly, I never felt entirely suited to journalism, largely because I grew up in a very politically activist family in an activist town, and I got into journalism because I thought it would be a good way to convey my values and beliefs. It turned out to be more like working for an insurance company. Of course, I learned a lot from it, I had tremendous experiences, and I obviously got great practice writing. But when Bill Clinton was elected I said, "This is my generation, and this may be the only time in my lifetime there's a Democrat as president, and if I'm going to make a switch and try to do something in public service, this would be a good time." So I wrote a letter to the chief speechwriter at the White House, whom I had never met, and even though I'd only make a few speeches in my life. And it basically said, "Hello! I would like to be a speechwriter." Anyway, to make a long story short, eventually they hired me as half-time speechwriter to the First Lady and half-time to the President. Speechwriting is a highly collaborative undertaking, and that's why it was great fun to write for her. I did not feel that way writing for the President, I might add. I was always comfortable writing for her; with him I was always struggling to imagine how he would say something.

After a couple of years, when I came back from my first maternity leave, it was obvious to everyone that she needed someone full time, so I asked if I could become her full-time speechwriter—and that's what I did. And some years later, while I was on my second maternity leave—this was in 1999—her press secretary decided to leave, and the First Lady asked if I would come back for the last year to do that job, since I had a background in the media. And I couldn't say no, so I did.

And that completed your move over from being a member of the media to representing a political figure to the media. Did that change have any effect on your perspective?

You mean did I have difficulty adjusting? I was aware of it a little bit at the very beginning when I first started as a speechwriter, I remember walking into one of the first events that I attended in the White House-- the President was addressing a group of lawyers from legal services or something like that. I was standing in the back of the room with some of the other speechwriters, and the President was announced in, and of course everyone on the staff started clapping—and of course I had been so trained *not* to clap that I

although I found myself doing it I felt unbelievably self-conscious about it. And yet it was something I very much wanted to do.

Were you still struggling with some sense of having to maintain objectivity?

I think I had come to the realization that I didn't have objectivity to begin with; that was why I was not comfortable as a journalist. I actually never thought that objectivity was really the right kind of guideline for journalists, because we're subjective people, and I think you have to be aware of what subjectivity you bring to a news story. I think the key is not to be partisan. But to think that you're going to be objective is impossible. I never held myself to that standard. I tried to hold myself to the standard of not being partisan, but even that was painful. It's the wrong temperament for me. I'm much more temperamentally suited to being in the room clapping and stomping my feet for Bill Clinton. It took a very short time for me to feel happy that I was able to do that.

Continuing the focus on the media and its perspective: once we've got a woman president or vice-president, do you think the media will finally be able to get beyond gender and just deal with people as people--or is gender just that factor that's always going to be in politics, as elsewhere, even if it is only tacit, even if people are pretending otherwise?

That's a really interesting question. I wonder if what we will arrive at is a point where a woman who becomes president is treated like a man who's president--which isn't to say very well, by the way. The level of scrutiny and the blurring of personal and private vs. public is so huge at this point. But I think there is a possibility we will get to a point where a woman president is subjected to that form of scrutiny more than a kind of gender-infused scrutiny. After all, remember that Bill Clinton's thighs used to be a big news story when he would go out running. And was he gaining weight or losing weight?

But they're still doing that kind of scrutiny.

Yes. To some degree that happens to anybody in that position, and maybe we'll get to a point where that's *all* that happens to a woman if she's in that position—maybe she will be seen as having enough bona fides,

having gotten herself there, and having been elected, by the way, by a majority of the population or at least a plurality. Then maybe she can function as a person who is really being reviewed as a president, not as a *woman* president. That said, I think it could be about the only position where that could happen. I feel for the man who'll be the First Gentleman! I mean, that guy's gonna be dissected.

It's hard to know. I think so much will depend on the woman, on how she defines the role as well, and herself in it. If she's a very charismatic, winning personality, maybe she'll have better luck. On the other hand, look at Margaret Thatcher! Maybe that's the personality that does better in terms of having her public image anatomized.

What do you see as your biggest challenge—and your biggest satisfaction—in being the press secretary to the First Lady?

I think the biggest challenge is that we live in an age--not to be too cliched, but...--where information is often viewed as knowledge when in fact it is not, and where, because of these revolutionary changes in the way that news is conveyed to the public -- namely, the internet, cable television, 24-hour news cycles -- there is such a premium on getting information out to the public that there is a commensurate lack of interest in knowing whether the information is accurate, or newsworthy, or relevant to the public. So what's challenging is trying to figure out a way to get people to appreciate the substance of what happens here, to get beyond the horse race and focus on the issues, for example, as we were talking about earlier, and to try to see Hillary Clinton in the largest context, not in the most microscopic. To try to see her as the sort of paradoxical and complex person that she is, and to appreciate that, frankly, most women of this generation who are professional women are paradoxical.

What is most satisfying is that I think we all feel -- those of us who work for *her* -- that we're all part of something much bigger than any of us, including her. That this is really about a set of values and a kind of vision of how the world could be better, and that what we are doing, in mostly small ways but hopefully

important ways, is to get us closer to a world that really reflects those values. And that's pretty darn satisfying.



Lwalterick@aol.com
06/12/2000 12:00:46 PM

Record Type: Record

To: Lissa Muscatine/WHO/EOP
cc:
Subject: The interview

Lissa,

Though actually I think I do want to call this a "conversation"...

This copy is the final, edited version: I took home a hardcopy transcript, which I'd already done rough cuts on, and worked further on it yesterday, and then entered all the changes on my computer here. The unfortunate thing is that I don't have a printer here at home, and so I don't have a hardcopy of what I'm sending you in front of my nose here. [Actually, I could quote long passages verbatim now, believe me...] I don't think that's going to be a problem--means I can't cite page numbers to you here, but I am not sure I need to do that.

Overall I was striving for balance, clarity, and integrity, and you'll tell me if I've missed them. This version comes in at a little over 4000 words, which is long for WRB, even in the summer issue, but not too long (over my etc. does this get cut further in house....). I hope I've kept the heart of it: I think so, and certainly I think the sound of you, your instincts and beliefs, all come through. I did try for balance among the number of subjects we engaged.

At times, of course, to make it flow and to make it fully intelligible to readers who aren't you and me--we knew what we were saying, even in my sometimes stammered shorthand--I have switched phrases around or concretized generalities. I don't think I've put any words in your mouth that don't belong there: you may want to look at the discussion of the Clintons coming in from Arkansas. There, to effect a transition, I did insert a phrase about stereotypes dying slowly--that to replace the off- the -record observation about rednecks (they're stereotypes, eh?). But if you don't like that, or anything else, just tell me.

I will be here, at home, today--617-247-3857--all day, maybe, or maybe not, out once later in the afternoon. You can get me in the evening as well. I'll be at the Review as of about 10 tomorrow morning.

I gave a copy of this edited transcript to a dear friend who has been following my endeavors on this political special issue. She really enjoyed reading it, said--and not to please me at all--that it is engaging and cogent and something folks should read. Then she said,--and I gotta tell you they're my sentiments precisely, but they may perhaps gain additional credibility

coming out of the mouth of someone else--"Lissa Muscatine sure seems to be a good role model....for young women, but also for those not so old women like me..."[she's 49, and I have two years on her].

Which is to say, among many other things, how good it is to hear someone who still believes, and works from those beliefs.

Let me know what you think. And as ever, thank you so much.

Lynn

PS: I'll take a swing through galleys, when they are printed, to deal with any malingering typos,etc.



- LISSAI~1.DOC

✓
to Lissa

The Women's Review of Books

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F A X T R A N S M I T T A L

Number of pages (including cover): 4 Date: 9 May 2000

To: MELANNE VERVEER chief of staff

Fax: 202 - 456 - 6266

From: Lynn Walterick, Senior Editor

Comments: 2 letters attached: one to Ms Verveer
one to Lissa Muscatine.

Thank you -
LWalterick

5-09-2000 1:45PM FROM

The Women's Review of Books

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Lynn Walterick, *Senior Editor*

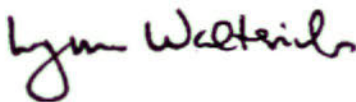
9 May 2000

Melanne Verveer
Chief of Staff
Office of The First Lady
Room 100
Old Executive Office Building
Washington DC 20500

Dear Ms. Verveer:

Some weeks ago you very kindly saw to it that my letter to The First Lady was passed along to Lissa Muscatine in the Press Office. She and I had some discussion, and now I would like to reach her with the attached letter. I hope I may ask your kindness again.

Yours sincerely,



Lynn Walterick

The Women's Review of Books

Wellesley College
Center for Research on Women
Wellesley MA 02181

Voice 781-283-2552/ Fax 781-283-3645/ Email lwalterick@wellesley.edu

Lynn Walterick, *Senior Editor*

9 May 2000

Lissa Muscatine
Press Office of The First Lady
The White House
Washington DC

Dear Lissa:

Three things up front: first, if I've added an extra s to your name, apologies; second, I have no doubt there's a more "formal" way to construct the inside address; and third, my inquiry here is not—not exactly, anyway—pursuant to my earlier hope of getting an interview with The First Lady for the issue on women and politics we're publishing this summer. Clearly the requirements of her campaign in an increasingly surprising political season call for really stringent decisions as to what she can and cannot do in terms of making herself available. I did very much appreciate your call and the opportunity to talk with you, and I will say—as you did allude to at least a "maybe" here—that if after the election there might be some chance of my getting to talk with her, I would certainly, certainly like to keep that option alive.

My subject at the moment might surprise you (though I suppose it's likely that your professional instincts don't entail a lot of surprise), but I am at least going to essay it here and hope that you will (at least) consider it: Is there any chance that you yourself would do an interview with us? Increasingly as this issue has gained shape it is focusing on a nexus of women, politics, and the media—and certainly you are someone who can speak volumes to that. I wouldn't envision anything long or laborious—nor would I concentrate my inquiries on Hillary Clinton (though she would not go unmentioned, needless to say). I think I'm looking more for a kind of day-in-the-life narrative, a bit of the story of the journey that has taken you where you are. I realize that you could be construed by some to be the voice of The First Lady, so I would want to be very sensitive and careful with questions. Indeed, I would send them to you for your thoughts and approval before we proceeded.

And we could proceed in a couple of ways: a telephone interview (and I think it would take no more than about forty-five minutes or so, which is the length of a couple I've done), or, if you'd rather, an interview by e-mail. I would prefer the former—it simply imparts more immediacy to the exchanges; well, it *permits* exchanges—but whatever would prove most congenial to you would be fine

Muscatine-2

with me. As I have noted, I have plenty of reason to be in the DC area, though scheduling that kind of in-person meeting is doubtless more time-consuming than either of these other options.

We would of course send you an edited transcript of the interview, for any emendations and your sign off.

We go to press with this issue on June 19, and, realistically, getting an interview transcribed and approved does take a little time. But I would say that the interview itself could take place between now and the end of May, and we could work with it editorially into the first ten days or so of June.

I don't mean to get ahead of myself: you may find this proposal the last thing in the world you want to do now or ever. I did ask Florence Graves yesterday if she thought that might be your reaction, and she said she doubted it and added that she would *love* to see such an interview with you. If this is shameless accruing of allies, so be it....I'd love to see it too. I'd love to do it.

If you can let me know, over the next week or so, what in fact you do think that would be helpful indeed. It's probably best to reach me at home; I'm in the office here only a couple days a week and do all other work out of home: 617-247-3857. The e-mail address is Lwalterick@AOL.com.

Thanks for listening; I know you've got a lot going on these days. I really hope it's looking good out there on the winding roads of New York State.

All the best,



Lynn Walterick

VOGUE (Hellas)
Q AND A with HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON
JUNE 2000

Which single issue would you judge to be of highest importance in the developed world, particularly concerning women?

It's hard to pick one issue because there are so many that are important to women. But the good news is that we have made tremendous strides, particularly in the five years since the United Nations World Conference on Women in Beijing.

In the United States, we've extended health care coverage to several million children who were uninsured. We've made dramatic increases in funding for programs to combat domestic violence. We have made an unprecedented number of loans to women who own small businesses. We've done more than ever before to assist families with child care opportunities and family leave. We've seen greater numbers of women get involved in the political process, both as candidates and at the grass roots.

Still, challenges remain that require our further commitment and attention. We still have far too many people who lack access to quality, affordable health care – and many of them are women. While we have made progress in the economic arena, we need to get to the point where women get equal pay for equal work. We can do more to help parents – and especially women – balance the demands of family and work. These are a few areas where we need to do more.

You have been particularly interested in health care and more recently in issues concerning our youngest children, ages 0 to 3. Why do these issues concern you so much?

So much of life flows from one's health, whether we are children or adults. Obviously, children are better able to develop intellectually, socially and physically if they are healthy. Adults are better able to meet their responsibilities to their families as well as on the job if they are in good health. So I believe that, as advanced societies, we should be at a point where our citizens are assured of access to the health care they need. It's not just a philosophical issue, it's an economic and social one too.

As for our youngest children, this turns out to be a critical developmental stage of life. New scientific discoveries have told us much more about brain development during the first three years of life. As a result, we are in a much better position to help children develop to their full potential if we start early with very simple steps

such as talking, reading and singing to them. In 1997, the President and I hosted a White House Conference on Early Childhood Development with experts ranging from scientists to doctors to parents. The conference really helped raise awareness about these crucial years of childhood and offered practical advice to parents and others involved in raising children.

Do you feel that a woman's political profile is trivialized when the media make a fuss about the way she dresses or wears her hair? How conscious are you of the fact that we are living in an era obsessed by image and surface impressions of people in public life?

One thing I learned very soon after coming to the White House was that the media certainly can get preoccupied with appearances. I can't even keep count of the number of stories that have been written about my hair! Much of it is a natural curiosity and fascination about people in the public eye. But I honestly don't think that voters decide who they're going to vote for based on a politician's wardrobe or hair style, or whether a woman candidate wears a yellow dress or a beige suit.

What are your favorite ways to relax?

I love to walk. That's one of my favorite forms of relaxation. I also do a lot of reading. I like movies and we play cards a lot as a family. I love music and have quite a few of my favorite CDs in my office. Sometimes I find it relaxing just to chat on the phone with my friends, especially when I've been on the road a lot.

What is your experience of Greece and are you planning to visit anytime soon?

I've been to Greece twice as First Lady, and each visit has been a wonderful experience for me. I was privileged to visit in 1996 and to go to Olympus for the lighting of the Olympic torch, which was a truly memorable occasion. I also have had the great pleasure of visiting with women leaders in Greece, who talked to me about many of our shared concerns.

Mostly, though, I came away with an even deeper appreciation of Greece's ancient history and its contributions to our civilization. I found it profoundly moving to be in the birthplace of democracy and to think about how much our own democratic values and principles are derived from Greece and the Greeks.

And of course, as anyone who visits Greece knows, it is simply a beautiful country and the people are wonderful. I look forward to a time when I'll be able to visit again, but it probably won't be until after my Senate campaign is over.

Would you care to elaborate on your political ambitions?

As you know, right now I'm a candidate for the United States Senate from New York. I believe I can make a difference in the Senate because, while I've never held elective office, I have worked on issues affecting children and families for more than

30 years. Whatever I do in my life, I hope to advance the cause of children and families and the most vulnerable in our society. That is my ultimate goal.