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INTERVIEW OF THE FIRST LADY
BY JULIA REED, VOGUE MAGAZINE

Q I want to talk to you, obviously, about the health care thing, because that's what -- when we come out, hopefully you all will be in the middle of (inaudible).

MRS. CLINTON: Great. Great.

Q But first, since it was, you know, during the campaign that I last saw you and at the beginning of the campaign at that, and it's November and it's a year after the election kind of thing, I mean, what has -- what -- (inaudible) such an obvious question, but what has it been like? What have you learned?

I mean, it was a tough campaign. You were probably better prepared than almost anybody else coming into this job, but still there must have been some surprises, some stuff (inaudible) you thought?

MRS. CLINTON: Gee, yes, there were, all of those. I think just the reality of living here and being in this position, no matter how much you've read about it or watched it on television, it is different from even what you could have imagine. You know, you just move into a dynamic part of history, and all of a sudden everything you do or say is possibly grist for somebody's mill.

I mean, it's very odd to move from being an essentially private person, which I was, even though my husband was a governor, to being someone who is very much in the public eye all the time. And making that adjustment, in terms of our personal living conditions and our mobility, has been probably the hardest piece of goods for us.

Q In the campaign, you were obviously equally visible, but it didn't -- I mean, you still weren't here. And you weren't quite as -- I mean, you've had to do all this other stuff, take on this huge health care thing, but you also are looking at -- are being looked at as a symbol that you weren't even during the campaign. I mean, your clothes, your haircut, everything -- I mean, did that -- I mean, that must have been a little difficult --

MRS. CLINTON: (Laughter)

Q -- every time you put on a hat or cut your hair. I mean, I can see that you probably figured, it's like, "Okay, I've got to get myself together. This is the easiest way possible." But every time you do something, it's front page news, literally.

MRS. CLINTON: Yes. But, you know, you have to take it with a certain amount of humor. I mean, you cannot take all that seriously. I think you'd go a little bit crazy if you did. And that's sort of the way I've adopted my attitude toward it. I mean, I just do the best I can, and that's all I can do.

Q The other thing about this year is obviously it's been -- on top of everything else -- a very difficult year personally, with the loss of your father and then such a close friend. How has that been to juggle with everything else?

MRS. CLINTON: Oh, it has been really hard. You know, when my father had his stroke, it was in a way a blessing, because my brothers and mother and I got to be there together and got to be with him.

But it was also very hard. I mean, any family who has gone through that -- even when your parents get into their 80s, like my father was, still you're never fully prepared for it. And going through it is something that we all do at one point or another in our lives.

But it was a -- it was a very hard time. But it was also a good time, because I got to stop everything else I was doing and just concentrate on that. So I feel in a way lucky that I could.

Somebody said to me today -- it never had really been presented to me like this -- is that when you are in your middle years, which I guess I am now, the average middle-aged American has more parents alive than children. I mean, that's just kind of phenomenal. I don't know if it's true, but it sure did strike me (inaudible), because most of us are kind of in this sandwich generation who'll deal with all these issues.

Q Yeah -- now, in the beginning -- in the middle -- right after your father's death, particularly when you gave that speech in Austin, the sort of spiritual quest speech -- for lack of anything else to call it -- but, I mean, are you sorry, kind of, that you -- I mean, because you got so much -- I mean, it seemed to me that you didn't

exactly get -- have what you were trying to say represented at all times accurately in the press.

MRS. CLINTON: Oh, but that always happens to me. I mean, you can't worry about that. No, I'm glad -- I'm always grateful to have a chance to say anything that I care about. And I was grateful for that chance.

No, I don't expect ever to be fully understood by the press, because the press is such a wide, disparate, diverse group. And people hear with the ears that they have, which are their own ears plus the ears of their commercial pressures. So I didn't really worry about that.

I was more interested in participating in the event that I had gone to, and the event was about the meaning of community, the kind of definition of who we are in this world today, what kind of people we want to be. And I think those are very important issues. And, you know, some people may kind of make fun of anybody's religious or spiritual life, because they don't understand it or they think they're so much smarter or more in tune than somebody else.

Q Religion makes a lot of Americans nervous.

MRS. CLINTON: Well, it does. And I think that's a shame, because, you know, one of the great opportunities in this country is to pursue what one means by religion and to have a chance to develop spiritually, however one defines that.

And my husband said the other day, in some remarks he made, that, you know, the freedom of religion doesn't mean the freedom from religion. And so I'm very hopeful that if I can contribute in any small way to a discussion in this country about life and its meaning and who we are and what we're intending to do, I'm happy for that.

Q I mean, do you have any specific ways that you plan on doing that? I mean, I realize you have a lot on your plate right this minute.

MRS. CLINTON: No, I think it's more of just trying to legitimize the conversation -- I mean, letting people know that people who care about religion, their relationship with God, their role in their world, how they view their life in relation to other people, are not of all one kind, that there is a great diversity of belief, and it should be celebrated and used as a means for exploring how we can build a better life for ourselves and each other. I think that's very exciting.

Q You said in a New York Times profile, when

you touched on a lot of this stuff, that your philosophy was not quite coherent yet. And you said still (inaudible) closer to --

MRS. CLINTON: Well, I mean, I have a lot of -- I have a lot of very old-fashioned basic ideas. I don't have any new philosophy. And --

Q I mean, I realize you're not --

MRS. CLINTON: I mean, I'm not here to --

Q (Inaudible)

MRS. CLINTON: Yes, I'm -- I -- you know, I -- and, you know, people can make fun of the very simple propositions about, you know, following the Golden Rule and, you know, trying to have some sense of eternal values in your life.

And I don't know very many of us who are real coherent about what that means in some abstract theoretical way. But on a day-to-day basis, there is a lot of opportunity for people to ask themselves whether they're living up to their own values and ideals. I mean, I don't think that's so complicated.

And there's no way to sit down and describe it in some universal manner, because so much of it is experience-based. And we, you know, hopefully more attuned to what's important as you get older, and you spend your time trying to fashion a life that has more integrity than maybe you even knew about when you were a younger person. And I just think that's all part of growing up.

Q You sound more like -- I mean, at times -- I mean, I remember hearing your husband early on in the campaign -- he was (inaudible) to a DLC meeting, and it was the weekend of (inaudible). And everybody I think expected him to get up and give a sort of big time soothing speech, you know, even though he was not the president (inaudible). But what he said that stuck in my mind the most was that, you know, (inaudible) with us anymore, we have to take back -- and there's no way to take back the cities except for like one by one by one by one. And you seem to be saying that --

MRS. CLINTON: Sure.

Q -- more and more.

MRS. CLINTON: Yes. Now, I think there are --

Q Simple straightforward people in communities

doing good for other people in communities, period.

MRS. CLINTON: That's right. And being responsible for yourself. Now, I think there are policies that are more likely to create conditions in which people are willing and able to take responsibility.

But at bottom, it is an individual choice. I mean, will you be a law-abiding person or not? Will you be a responsible parent or not? Will you clean up your front yard or not?

I mean, you have to take the kinds of challenges we have and sort of collapse them into understandable human-size pieces. And I think that's what my husband was talking about. It sure is what I believe.

Q How can you (inaudible) --

MRS. CLINTON: Yes, but it's -- it's not a throw-money-at deal. It's a -- it's reinstilling some sense of personal responsibility in people who, for a variety of reasons, at all levels of society, have basically walked away from those responsibilities -- and kind of an atmosphere in which people are once again trying to come to grips with what makes for a good life and good community, and once they think about that -- it's pretty old fashioned and basic.

Q I agree with (inaudible) --

MRS. CLINTON: Well, that's what we're trying to do. That's what we're trying to do. We're trying to talk about it, we're trying to do things like, you know, this may seem a little bit unconnected, but I see it very directly related in the budget package, the earned income tax credits will remove a lot of people who work for a living out of poverty.

So we begin to send a signal work actually is better than welfare. It's not just rhetoric, it's actually true. Instead of the policy that's been followed in the past where, you know, people went out and worked these minimum wage jobs, without child care, without health care, and then paid taxes, they saw their neighbors going on welfare getting food stamps, health care, sometimes child care. It made no sense. And you had all these people who used to spout things like family values not willing to change the system.

So my husband sort of slowly but surely is changing the system. And when you say to millions of Americans, "Work will pay off, taking care of your family is important and your government is going to reward that instead of penalize it, for a change," that is a policy that supports all the

talk about responsibility.

Q Now, when you say stuff like this you don't sound very much like the Marxist that (inaudible) --

MRS. CLINTON: The Karl Marx's or the Groucho Marx's.

Q That's right.

MRS. CLINTON: I never could figure out which one they were saying.

Q Well, that's right, Walt Shapiro, he did have quite a good sense of humor. Either one.

MRS. CLINTON: I know once somebody called me a Marxist and I went up to him -- a member of Congress -- and I said, "I don't think I look at all like Groucho Marx."

Q I know who that guy is. He doesn't have a very good sense of humor. He probably didn't say anything.

MRS. CLINTON: Yes, he was a little dumbfounded.

Q But your friends say that you're not -- I mean, like, going over the (inaudible) -- I mean, people close to you call you -- go so far to say you're not ideological; do you agree with that?

MRS. CLINTON: Yes, I do. I think I'm pretty down to earth and pragmatic about what I want to get done, and what I hope to see people do for themselves.

Q So you're not a Marxist and you're not (inaudible). We've got that narrowed down.

MRS. CLINTON: That's right. One of the three stooges, maybe, but not the Marx Brothers.

Q You know, it must be difficult, I mean, because all of the clips that I go (inaudible), I mean, like the meeting with Barbara Bush, the front page picture, you know, with you guys walking through. It's this really great picture and the Times, which went on to say this, you know, is not true, that the headline was "Tough Political Insider Meets Devoted Wife and Mother," (laughter).

MRS. CLINTON: I think I am a devoted wife and mother, and that was so nice of them to say that about me.

Q But, I mean, you know, then you go into page

A6 and it says, "Actually both" -- I mean, (Inaudible) Mitchell is one of the toughest people I ever met in my life, you know. It's like -- it said "both could fit both." But, I mean, you must get that a lot. The first time I saw you, you were racing off to a party for Hillary's (sic) nanny and you were going to the Nutcracker and all this stuff, and your devoted press secretary here says that you never leave Chelsea's side. I mean, it must be tough on you to sort of have to defy --

MRS. CLINTON: But after a while you just don't pay any attention to it. I mean, part of what I have learned is that conflict and opposition sells. And so it wouldn't matter what I did, there would be a need to make me in opposition to something else in order to create a conflict because that's more interesting.

So once I understood that I figured, heck, I mean, I could have a personality bypass and somebody would still figure out a way to make whatever the new me was in opposition to something else. So you can't worry about that.

Q Do you, in fact, still have some time with your family?

MRS. CLINTON: Oh, yes, we have a great time. In fact, Bill and I were talking about that the other day. Because he actually lives where he works I think we actually have more family time together. And because I don't -- I now, you know, I'm a full time volunteer, and I volunteer (inaudible), so it is easy for us to see Chelsea when she gets home from school and to come home for dinner. It's just a lot easier than it was.

Q She seems to be handling it, like, amazingly well.

MRS. CLINTON: I'm so far --

Q I saw her walking in the Memphis Airport the other day, she looked quite oblivious. Everyone was sort of, "Wow," and she was like a normal kid walking through the airport in a pair of shorts.

MRS. CLINTON: I hope so. I really want her to be. I think she deserves that.

Q She certainly does. Now, let me ask you one more thing before we move on to health care, which is, do you -- so much has been made of like -- I mean, you call yourself now a full time volunteer, and certainly you've worked full time in one capacity or another, and so much has been made of

the fact that, you know, half the people -- your fans say, "Well, you're more qualified than your husband. We wish you were President," blah, blah, blah. You've gotten that from the very beginning.

Was there ever a moment when you realized sort of somewhere along the way that you had to sort of -- I mean, because editorial writers have made much of this, I thought maybe you could answer it instead of someone like Paul Greenberg, who I'm sure (inaudible) -- than have him talk to you say, you know, there must have been a moment where you realized if you were going to have the power, do what you want to do to, like, effect change in this country, that you would have to hitch your star to his and sort of possibly felt as though that might have been a sacrifice. You know, "Okay, I'll change my name, I'll do this because it's too late for me to be President, or for me to have a career of my own. But this is what he wants, and this is what I want, we're going to have to" --

MRS. CLINTON: Oh, I just think that's such nonsense. People who sit around speculating about other people's lives should have something else to do with their time, as far as I'm concerned. I just don't see that that is even a fair conclusion to draw. I mean, I've done pretty much -- well, I've done exactly what I wanted to do with my life. When I say "pretty much," I haven't scuba dived yet, I haven't run a marathon.

But you know, I mean on the important things I feel very good about the decisions that I've made. And I always made a decision at the time because it was the right decision for me to make in the present. I'm not somebody who thinks down the road, you know. When I married Bill Clinton he was a failed congressional candidate. When I fell in love with him he was a guy at Yale Law School who was going back to Arkansas. I mean it was just --

Q And you knew that.

MRS. CLINTON: Oh, yes. I mean, that was one of the hard decisions to try to make. So I just don't have any real information to add to their speculation about my life because it has been my life and I've led it the way I wanted to lead it, and had a good time doing it. And I don't think anything is predictable. I couldn't tell you where I was going to be in five years, I never --

Q So the much (inaudible) agenda of the first couple --

MRS. CLINTON: You know, I wish we were that smart.

I had somebody say the other day to me about health care, they said, "You certainly have been clever in the way you planned these leaks." And I said, "Oh, right. We know exactly. It was all strategically developed." (Laughter) I mean, who knows where these things come from.

I almost wish I could take credit for being so clever that when I met Bill 22 years ago I could plot out my future. But that would be just sheer nonsense.

Q Well, talking about the health care -- I mean, you're right up on it now as --

MRS. CLINTON: We are.

Q How visible are you going to be, sort of, getting it through the Congress?

MRS. CLINTON: As visible as I need to be. It is something I believe in very strongly and I'm in it for the long haul. I do whatever I can to try to get the message out and convince people that it's good for them and for the country.

Q Did you read Novak's column yesterday?

MRS. CLINTON: No.

Q I don't blame you. It was talking about people within the White House are scared to let you get out in Congress to push it through because of your reputation for not enough compromise and you'll sabotage the health care plan.

MRS. CLINTON: See, I just think that's nonsense again because I think -- see, every time you read anything like that now you have to ask yourself, "What is this person's agenda?" And it's almost like a game you used to play when you were --

Q Well, Novak's agenda is you don't want the health care plan --

MRS. CLINTON: You've got it.

Q -- (inaudible) --

MRS. CLINTON: You've got it. So why would he raise doubts about my going to Congress? Maybe to try to plant the idea that I shouldn't go because if I do go, I might actually help get it passed, which is what my hope is. So you've got to sit there and ask yourself, "What are these

guys really" --

Q Yeah, it's closer to your (inaudible) than almost anybody's, so you would have more at stake --

MRS. CLINTON: I also have spent eight months talking with every member of Congress who would meet with me, both Republicans and Democrats. I've learned a lot. I think we have moved the debate forward dramatically. There has been all kinds of consultation and decisions along the way that have increased the chances of our actually getting national health care for the country.

And I'm very grateful for all of the good help I've gotten up on the Hill from both Republicans and Democrats. And I have the feeling -- at least they tell me that they really love to have me up there. So I can only (inaudible) that the enemies of health care would prefer me not to be there, which of course only makes me more anxious to be there because I want to get health care passed.

AIDE: May I inject one thing. As of mid-August she has had, alone, over 114 meetings with members.

Q Oh, I know. And they all actually -- I mean, on both sides of the fence --

MRS. CLINTON: Yes. We've had a great time. And you see, I think it's real interesting how this town works because too much of it works on the basis of kind of trading information instead of working to create results. And a lot of the pundits are really in the category of just speculation and information trading. It doesn't matter to them whether anybody in America gets health care or not because they have their own health care, and what they're interested in is sort of stirring up the pot and making things as controversial and provocative as possible.

And that's not the way I operate. What I'm interested in is results. I mean, I don't care who gets the credit, I just want us to have a health care plan that removes forever the stories from my mind of people who are shut out of health insurance because of a pre-existing condition, thrown out of a job and losing their health care, working for 30 years and being uninsured, even though they show up for work every single day. I mean, I want those people to be given the dignity of knowing their health care will always be secure.

So as far as I'm concerned, the pundits and all the rest of the people who are out there treating this as though it were some game should be put in their place. It's not a

game, it's serious. And it happens to people when they're sick or they're scared of being sick, or they have a sick child, deserves to be treated with respect, and not the subject of talk show ranting and raving, or columnists who don't really care whether they get health care or not.

Q And the other thing, back to what (inaudible) -- people were acting like you might be the holy terror when it (inaudible) -- and what stuns me every time I talk to any of those guys it's like, as soon as you walked in there and talked to them, they're so surprised. It's like, "Oh, you know, she really" -- I mean, it's so easy to charm those guys, I mean, they should be ashamed. I mean, anybody who walks in and gives about two minutes and is relatively (inaudible) -- I mean, not to take anything away from you, but you know, it's such a town that we're so used to operating on what they expect to happen, what they're used to have happening. I mean, did you find them sort of startled when you walked in there and just sort of --

MRS. CLINTON: No, but you know, I've had a lot of experience, I used to try lawsuits in lots of rural areas of the south, particularly Arkansas, in the 1970s, particularly, but even the early '80s it was such a odd event for a lady lawyer to be there that I had, you know, fellows come in with deer woods in their camouflage and sit in the courtroom with their feet up on the rail watching me.

Or I'd have judges calling their friends to come over, or canceling plans for the barbecue so they could all wait and see what the lady lawyer did. I had judges calling up and having food brought into the courtroom so that other people could see me do things. And I always called it the talking dog syndrome. There is a certain element of surprise associated with it, but I don't mind. It's all part of people getting used to times changing.

Q Well, that's what we talked about when I first interviewed you. I mean, you -- for good or bad -- have fallen into having to fulfill the role of, like, the turning point in our -- this is like the first presidency of his generation, I mean it's like a huge change. I mean, such a generational change, it's the first time we've ever had a first lady who has had a job, and whose husband was running against people (inaudible) also had a career.

MRS. CLINTON: Yes. And you know, you pointed that out early -- I guess earlier than anybody else -- in the article that you wrote, and I kept referring back to your article. All during the year people would ask me these questions like, you know, "Where did you come from," and I'd say, my gosh, if my husband were running for governor or

senator you wouldn't even be asking me these questions because there are so many men married to women who work. And I'd say, "Go back and read the article about me." Ruth Harkin --

Q I was going to say, you seem quite demure --

MRS. CLINTON: And it's true on both sides of the aisle. I mean, you know, if Bob Dole runs for President his wife is a woman who has had a job all of her life.

Q I know. So (inaudible) -- you know what I mean, it's still not as scary.

MRS. CLINTON: But because it's generational, and because it's the first time, number one, you have anybody of this generation being President; and number two, bring along the kind of lifestyle changes of working spouses, relationships that people are trying to work out, in a sense of partnership, and slightly different attitudes about that. I mean, there's a lot going on.

Q In fact, I don't know, I mean, maybe in a way -- I mean, it just didn't -- it seems to me, I was thinking about this right this instant that, like, because your role here is official, you're running something that's quite substantive that's going to change the course of the country, it's like people are not used to that now, it's not a big thing that you're running the health care task force.

But in a weird way there is less flak about this than there was about Nancy Reagan or Roselynn Carter, who were assumed to going to be like traditional first ladies -- whatever that's supposed to mean -- actually to open their mouths every once in a while. The uproar was greater. I mean, people like to be told what is going to happen and (inaudible) say it's over now, the First Lady is going to, like, work.

MRS. CLINTON: Well, I think, too, that a lot of the women who have been in this position -- you know, I look around this room -- and each one of them broke new ground. There was always something new going on, whether it was known to the public or whether it was publicized, oftentimes it carried controversy because the woman slightly stepped outside the boundaries that would have been there before.

But every one of these women, from my readings about them and my knowledge of them, you know, felt the responsibility of trying to be who she was and make a contribution to the country, take care of her husband and her

family. And you know all of us do what we can with the opportunities we're given.

So for me it just seems natural to keep on doing what I've always done. It would have been contrary to who I was to assume some different kind of a role, and I just have to count on people being willing to accept me for who I was and not impose a stereotype of the past on me, or use me to impose a stereotype on anybody in the future.

I don't want what I've done to become some new stereotype where everybody who runs for President, man or woman, has a spouse who is then asked, "Well, what are you going to do?" That person should be able to say, "I am who I am, and I'm going to do what is right for me and my family, and make my contribution to the country the way I see fit."

I mean, we ought to get to that point.

Q I agree. There still is that ceremonial role, you know. People keep saying, "Well, you know, they haven't even had a State Dinner" --

MRS. CLINTON: Now that's a bad rap. I mean, that's a real bad rap.

Q No, I just -- it's not my rap --

MRS. CLINTON: No, I know. But I've heard that and you know, we'll have a State Dinner when the State Department asks us to have a State Dinner. We've probably entertained more people than most people do in four years, you know, in eight months. We've had constant entertainment. But we haven't had a formal State Dinner because the State Department and the National Security Council determined that they would go at this in a slightly different way. The President was not somebody who had been in the federal government for 100 years. He had to meet these people first.

So I'm anxious to have a State Dinner. If they decide we're going to have one, we're going to have one and it will be terrific, it will be a lot of fun.

Q Now what about the fashion thing -- I have to ask one fashion question or I won't be able to go back to work. (Laughter) It seems ridiculous to ask you this in terms of whatever else we're talking about, you know, and what are you going to do for your wardrobe kind of thing. I mean, you seem to be doing quite well getting yourself dressed every day. (Laughter)

MRS. CLINTON: I consider that a major

accomplishment.

Q I do, too. (Laughter) But I mean, you must be getting the designers -- there still must be, like, "Will she, or won't she wear this?" Are you going to, like, do anything official like pick a designer that you're going to use --

MRS. CLINTON: No, because I love American designers and I'm having a great time -- just like I did at a much lower visibility before Bill was President. I love wearing different American designers. And I like wearing different styles. I don't --

(End Side 1)

(Begin Side 2, in progress)

-- Bill Blass' dress that I wore in Japan. I love, you know, off the rack. I love all kinds of different outfits. I'm big on St. John knits because they travel so well.

So for me it's what do I like and what strikes my fancy at the time. It's not any big plan. That's always been a character defect of mine. I've never been able to do trunk shows because I can't think that far ahead. I can't.

Q Well, also we're talking about the, like, different hats you're wearing and your particular role. I mean, it's a little bit different, you're doing so many different things. I mean, you can't be expected just to buy one Scaasi wardrobe, or whoever, and to.

MRS. CLINTON: Well, it wouldn't -- I mean, that's not the way I am. I mean I really like variety. And I also want to help showcase American designers, and so when I went to Japan, you know, I don't -- I may have one designer twice, but otherwise I wore all different kinds of designers clothes for different occasions and really like that.

AIDE: Time to wrap up.

MRS. CLINTON: We have time for one last question.

Q Okay. Then I'm going to ask you, what is the thing that you're most proud of with the health care package?

MRS. CLINTON: That we will be able to assure every American of health security at affordable cost for the rest of their lives. I think that is just wonderful.

Q Any disappointments, stuff that you wish you could have been able to put in there and didn't?

MRS. CLINTON: No, I'm satisfied that we're doing what we can, we're doing what we should do at this point. I'm disappointed that we didn't do it 20 or 30 years ago because it's much harder to do now and it's more difficult to face a lot of these problems for the country. But I'm confident that once we do it, it's going to be one of the greatest accomplishments that the country will have ever achieved.

Q And you do intend to fight for it on the Hill despite what Robert Novak says. (Laughter)

MRS. CLINTON: Absolutely. I intend to fight for it anywhere because I believe in it and I care about it and it's the right thing to do for America.

(End of interview.)