

6/28/91  
Chautauqua - Family

PHOTOCOPY  
PRESERVATION

June 28, 1991

As I was listening to Letty (Cottin Pegrebin) introduce me, it ran through my mind that many of the things I have done in the last 20 or so years in my life have been connected with trying to define what it means to be an adult, a woman, a wife, a mother in today's world.

I think all of us come to the idea of family with some built-in presumptions because we all were members of one, and so it's probably a bit presumptuous and perhaps a little bit foolish to stand in front of a group such as this to talk about these matters, but we were invited to do so, and it was a wonderful reason to come to Chautauqua, so here I am.

I thought I would spent a little time talking about how I came to these issues about family and marriage and parenting, and then share with you some of what it means to try to have a marriage and a family in the public eye. Then, my husband will talk ... he'll talk about whatever he wants to... but I think he will talk about (at least as of 8:00 this morning) some of what we've tried to do in our state to make conditions more friendly toward the responsibilities of parenting and families.

You know, I was thinking, as I have, steadily, for the past several days, about these issues that we've been discussing here this week. I am so delighted that Chautauqua has chosen once again to focus on the family. My husband was here three years ago in a similar series of lectures.

It is very clear to me, and I think, to many of you here, that our country can only be as strong as our individuals are, and our

individuals can only be as strong and as competent as the families from which they come are. And, it is imperative that we begin to study and understand those connections.

I first began to think about this, really, in the context of my church. I was raised, and am, a Methodist, and I can remember in my junior high years having the experience of being taught and ministered to by a youth minister who was wise beyond his years. He assumed although we were only 13 or 14 or 15, we could learn something about the world outside of us.

And, he spoke often that the families we were part of and the world in which we live was a very, very tiny part of the whole global experience. He took us to care for the children of migrant families who came up from Mexico to pick the crops -- it's impossible for many people to believe it now -- but when I grew up outside of Chicago, three blocks from where I lived, in a suburb which is now totally a concrete field, there were all kinds of other fields, where crops were grown and people made a living by coming to pick them, and we were out there as youngsters, working with very different kinds of families from our own.

And, he took us down to the central city of Chicago, where we learned to meet and talk children from very different kinds of backgrounds, different cultures, with different sorts of expectations for their lives.

I can remember thinking from that time forward that one of the great mysteries that I was concerned about is how did we raise children with different backgrounds and cultures and economic standards to have to kind of competence and character that we needed to have to

keep our country going and to make society really available in all of its quality to as many of our people as possible.

When I went to college, in the middle and late sixties, it was clear there were lots of forces at work in our society, many of which were tearing and pulling at its very foundations. That prompted me to think even more about what are our problems and how do we begin to address them.

Then, in law school, my first month there, I read an article about Marian Wright Edelman, who many of you heard speak yesterday, and she inspired me, and when she came to Yale, I went and met with her and said I wanted to try and work with her, and I did, from that summer through the many years that have led to my being on her board and chairing it now.

So these themes about how do we provide for families and how do we give them the resources they need to do their job, has been a biding concern of mine for many, many years. Being concerned about something, though, doesn't necessarily mean that one understands it.

I have to confess that at the same time that I was concerned about how we raise children and equip them and prepare them and nurture them, I was also going through what many women my age have gone through, and that is, how do we define for ourselves as women what we want out of our lives.

My mother did an absolutely superb job, in my opinion, again presumptuous, of raising me. But she did it as a full time mother. She did it having lunch on the table every day when I came home from school, and she did it every afternoon when I came home from school.

Yet, I, along with so many members of my generation, for reasons that are complex and difficult, often, to articulate, and often encouraged by those very mothers who were there for us 24 hours per day, chose a different way.

My mother never went to college. She absolutely believed with all her heart that I would, and I did. She was never a professional, but she believed with all her heart that I could do whatever I set my mind to, if I was willing to make the commitment. I chose to become a lawyer, and to fulfill her confidence and faith in me.

But, it became increasingly difficult for me, along with many of my friends and compatriots, to understand how this new role that we had chosen to assume would fit with the kind of marital and parenting responsibilities that were also an absolutely essential part, we hoped, of our own experience; but certainly of the human experience.

That kind of tension and struggle between the redefinition of adult roles and the needs that children have to have met, is one of the defining struggles of the past 20 years. It is acted out in our homes, in our communities, and it has societal repercussions that we're only beginning now to understand.

I know for a long time the idea of marriage, for me, was not as clear as it certainly was for women of an earlier generation. Because, I didn't know how it would fit in with this new personality or person that I was developing.

Unfortunately I went to Yale Law School, where Bill Clinton also chose to go. If that hadn't happened, I don't know what I'd be saying to you this morning. But the first words I heard out of his mouth occurred as I was walking through the Yale Law School Lounge, one day

with a friend of mine, to get a Coke after class. I heard this voice say, "And not only that, we grow the biggest watermelons in the world."

I said, "Who is that?" and she replied, "That's Bill Clinton. He comes from Arkansas and that's all he ever talks about."

I should have known then what it's taken me years to find out, that was absolutely true. But I got to know him over the time of our being in class. He will tell you that we got to know each other because we were both in a class where we were the two worst attenders. I think that's a cruel criticism of my attendance at that class. But, it's probably got some truth in it.

But we did get to know each other, and we found that we had many things in common. We were both very concerned about our country and its direction and fascinated by politics, and committed to public service. We also realized that a marriage between two people like us was never, ever going to be easy, if it could even happen at all.

When we graduated from law school, he went right back to Arkansas. I wanted nothing to do with that. I had never been to Arkansas, and like many people who grew up in Chicago, wasn't even sure where it was. I did know that they grew the biggest watermelons in the world, but that was about the limit of my knowledge.

So we thought, well, this was one of those relationships that can't really stand the test of time, because we are so different, we have career paths that probably cannot be reconciled, and so it's been a very important experience, but it's probably finished.

That's not the way it worked out. I went to work, as Letty said, for the Children's Defense Fund, first, and then, in January of 1974,

went to work for the impeachment staff, that investigated President Nixon, during Watergate. These are two very intense jobs.

During that time, Bill taught at the law school in Fayetteville, and then decided to run for congress, because he couldn't find anyone else who would run and raise some of the issues that he wanted raised. So, again, it didn't seem very likely that we would ever find our way together.

But, one of the real challenges, it seems to me, for women growing up such as I have, women as a friend of mine describes us as "on the cusp," caught between two changing paradigms about what it means to be a woman, a wife and a mother. One of the things, it seemed clear to me, was a challenge for those on the cusp was to deal not just with our ego, in which resided our ambitions, our education, our motivations, our hopes for ourselves as an actor in the world, but also our emotions.

It was clear to me, as much as I would have liked to have denied it, that there was something very special about Bill and there was something very important between us. When President Nixon resigned, in 1974, I had to make a decision. What was I to do?

I could have gone to work for a big law firm in a place like Chicago or New York, I could have gone back to work for the Children's Defense Fund, stayed on that career path that for whatever series of motivations, I had been moving toward all of my life. I also knew that I had to deal with a whole other side of life -- the emotional side, where we live and where we grow and when all is said and done, where the most important parts of life take place.

So, I called the dean of the law school, and I said, "When I met you, you said if I ever wanted to teach in Arkansas, you'd give me a job. Is that still open?"

He said "Yes," so I moved to Arkansas in 1974. My family and friends thought I had lost my mind. I was a little bit concerned about that as well. And I moved to Fayetteville, Arkansas, a town smaller than anywhere I had ever lived before, and to teach in a law school a subject I didn't even know yet, because they hadn't assigned it to me. They did that about two days before class.

So, it was an adventure, to put the most optimistic look on it. But it was something I had to do. Because even then, I knew that the struggle that integrates our lives is an on-going struggle. And to turn away from the challenges that are posed in our lives is to turn away from who we are. And a lot of the dissonance and the difficulties that conflict us today, are at bottom, I think, rooted in this conflict about who we are to be in a very different world than any of us were prepared to live in.

Eventually we got married, and I thought at that point that I had it figured out. I thought "Well, here we are. We've gotten married." I knew Bill was interested in politics, so he would go off in the morning and do politics. I thought I'd married another professional. You marry a doctor or a lawyer, you go off in the morning, you do your job, and you come home.

I'd go off in the morning, I'd be a lawyer, and we'd come home in the evening and talk about "How was your day?"

What I didn't realize was that when your in a political life, there are a whole different set of obligations that are imposed upon you

from the outside. And that was one of the greatest continuing education courses I've ever been a part of.

Because even if intellectually I thought I knew what was going to happen, being married to someone in politics, pragmatically I didn't have a clue. And anyone who lived through my coming to terms with what it meant to be a political spouse in Arkansas can attest to that.

I started off believing that one of the best things I could do for my career and his was keeping our lives as separate as possible, so there would never be any question of conflict of interest, since I really did want to practice law.

So, I kept my maiden name, and you would have thought that I had decided to do some terrible deed equivalent to killing the first born. I didn't have any sense of how significant a decision that would be seen as being by the people of Arkansas. So, I kept my name and decided I would just keep practicing law, meeting at the dinner table, going somewhere, and then Bill was elected governor. We had our first and only child (maybe our first child) while he was in the Governor's office. And that was like chapter two of the experience I lived through, because to be pregnant while married to the governor means that it is everybody's baby. It is not just your baby. And people walk up and offer all kinds of unsolicited advice -- totally off the wall -- whether you're looking for it or not.

It also means that when you go to Lamaze, which is what Bill and I chose to do, a lot of the men in the state think he has lost his mind. Especially the older men, who would stop him and say "I can't believe you even want to be in the hospital, let alone the delivery

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room. I always used to support you until I learned you were going to do something as crazy as that."

It also means that when it is finally time to go to the hospital, you are surrounded by state policemen, all of whom want to be helpful. But any woman who has ever gone to the hospital with one man, and I don't mean to be sexist, I really don't, but there are certain biological imperatives that still rule the universe. And if you've gone to the hospital with one man, you know how difficult it is to keep him functioning. But if you've gone to the hospital with your husband and four state troopers, you cannot believe what it's like. Especially, when they're all running around having no idea what they're supposed to do. Weeks before, in an effort to be organized for this moment, I had posted what we would take for our Lamaze experience, and one of the things was a little ice pack.

Well, I get out to the car, trying desperately to get to the hospital, and I see this conscientious trooper, dragging a huge plastic garbage bag. I said "Larry, what is that?"

He said "It's the ice you need."

I said, "I do not need a garbage bag full of ice."

But those are the kinds of experiences that my mother likes to call growing experiences. I sometimes refer to them as "groaning experiences." But they enable at least me to have some opportunity to see how a lot of other people live, because if Bill had not been elected governor and if I had not been as active as I'd tried to be in our state, meeting a lot of people and working with them, I would never have had the opportunity to be part of as many families as I have been, nor would I have had the opportunity to see how this

struggle between the traditional model and this new one that is yet being born is played out in the lives of very many different kinds of people.

It is often impossible for me to imagine what it must be like to be the single parent of children who has to be at work at 4:00 in the morning. I can't even think about how you must need to organize your life in order to do that. And yet, hundreds of thousands of women and men do that every day. So, being in the position that I've been in, has enabled me to at least grow in understanding of what families are going through and how difficult these times are.

I don't think that we're even near writing the last chapter on it. My experience is maybe a little bit atypical because so much of our married life and our parenting has been played out in the public eye. But, I think the stresses and the strains are the same across the board. And one of my hopes is, through efforts like these and other kinds of outreach, processes and communities around the country, we can begin lending a helping hand to families who are going through this transition.

I don't think it will do us much good merely to be quiet, or to list the statistics that exemplify the trouble that we're in in this country. I do think it's time for us to take a deep breath and say "We cannot turn back the clock overnight, but we can begin trying to make life a little easier through the day, for all those people who are trying to do the best they can to define their roles.

And, if we can move in that direction, then I think we will have made some progress, and I appreciate the chance to have shared this with you today.

## QUESTION AND ANSWER FOR H. CLINTON:

IN THE ISSUE OF BLENDING A PUBLIC LIFE WITH A PUBLIC LIFE, A POLITICAL LIFE, HOW MUCH OF THE MEDIA INTRUSION INTO THE PERSONAL AND FAMILY LIVES OF PUBLIC FIGURES IS APPROPRIATE AND HOW MUCH IS INAPPROPRIATE?

HLLARY: I think that a certain amount of media interest and intrusion is part of the job and it answers the legitimate needs that people have to know something about their public leaders. It has become increasingly difficult, though, for those of us in public life to understand where the lines are, and who is drawing them.

It is difficult to live a life that has some personal integrity to it, to deal with the problems and the challenges that come to any family or marriage or individual, if you think every single decision you might make would be on the front page of the newspaper.

So, I don't have an easy answer for that, Dan, but it has been a continuing problem for us. One quick story, when our daughter was born, one of my goals from the morning she was born, was to insure that she would have as normal a life as we could imagine under the circumstances, so I didn't have a million photographers at the hospital and we haven't exposed her to the press. We have kept her, I think, with a sense of privacy, so that she could develop who she was as opposed to being told very early, "Go do this and look good doing it, because the press will be there. So, we've tried to walk that line, and it is very hard, and it is one of the main reasons why people opt out of public life, today.

And, I wish that the press would realize that the more intrusive they get, the shallower the political leadership they will get, in my opinion.