

Hillary Clinton's Introduction -- Angela Ohm ('94)

The first time I saw Hillary Rodham Clinton's face was the day I saw a photograph of her in Governor Clinton's office. I was on a tour of the state capitol with my fifth grade class. At the time, I knew very little about the Clintons in particular or politics in general, but I did know that people were saying there was something different about Arkansas' new First Lady.

Six years later I met Mrs. Clinton when she gave a speech at Arkansas Girls State. A lot had happened in the six years since I had been in the Governor's office. A very controversial and, as it turned out, highly successful reform of Arkansas' school system cost Mrs. Clinton some popularity; and I, like many unfamiliar with all the issues, had come to view her a bit negatively. But the speech she gave that night changed my impression of her and of what could be possible in my own life.

I was raised in a very traditional family, in a very traditional, small Southern town. It was not as oppressive as it sounds; my parents raised me with the expectation that I could be anything I wanted to be and it was a given that I would go to college and graduate school. But one crucial thing was missing in my life -- a role model. When Mrs. Clinton stepped on the podium, she gave me one. To this day I do not remember exactly what she said. But I do remember the incredible sense of possibility I got from seeing my dreams embodied in a person on a public stage; and seeing them not merely accepted but applauded and admired. She was so obviously intelligent and commanding that her gender seemed completely irrelevant, which made it seem possible to me that perhaps mine might one day be as well.

Originally, I wanted Mrs. Clinton to speak here because, quite frankly, I wanted to show her off. I wanted my new friends in New York to get to know someone they would not expect to be from Arkansas. It took awhile for the voters of Arkansas and Mrs. Clinton to get to know each other and learn to work together smoothly. I am sure that many felt such an accomplishment was an impossible dream -- how on earth could the modern Mrs. Clinton and the very traditional Arkansas electorate tolerate each other? The answer, it turns out, is very well. The reason, I believe, is that Mrs. Clinton represents the new reality for women and their families both in Arkansas and throughout the nation -- her life is a combination of work and family, and her work a combination of public and private activities.

You have heard many things about both Mrs. Clinton and Governor Clinton in the past few months. Many of you may think that you already know Mrs. Clinton, but odds are you do not. Impressions gained second-hand are rarely correct, so it is my hope that today you will have the opportunity to get beyond what has made Mrs. Clinton so sensationalized in the press, and catch a glimpse of what has made her so special to me and many others.

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For me to be back in this auditorium I was here in 1989 _____ when the Law School sponsored a conference on Women in the Law with particular attention paid to some of the major issues that affect women's role and participation in the legal profession and I was grateful then for the dean's kindness and support of that effort and am grateful now that I can be here with him and his wife, Lisa, who are friends of ours. I am very grateful to Angela, what she said in her introduction meant a great deal to me, but more than that the way she said it and the quality of her participation that she has sought to obtain opportunities for herself, speak more eloquently about what is happening to young women all over the country than anything I might add.

I know that many of you have probably never been to Arkansas and have had very little experience and I apologize to John for his having to stand outside in the hot sun for five hours. It probably has more to do with the lack of traffic than the hospitality. But one of the things that I hope happen is that you get to know Angela and as perhaps you follow this campaign that my husband and I are engaged in is that you will learn, not just about Arkansas, but about our region of the country because one of the great challenges confronting us is to unify this country and bring us together across regional lines and to be sure that we understand we have far more uniting us than dividing us.

I was struck the other day when I saw _____ in the U.S. Times which prompted me to think about all the people I knew

in Arkansas and that region of the country because actually in my region of the country there are actually others who are missed too and I want you to understand that _____ and _____ population which reminds of one more story. And that was the wonderful story about the current lieutenant governor in Georgia. A man named Peter Howard who spelled it Pierre and when he ran for lieutenant governor, as you might guess, running for lieutenant governor of Georgia with a name like Pierre when you pronounced it Peter was no easy task. So he ran a radio ad in which he explained to everybody in Georgia that Pierre was French for Buck. [Laughter] _____ to be here and to be part of this centennial celebration.

It means a great deal to me to be invited to participate and this is because I know some of the women who are the distinguished graduates of this Law School. I've worked with them. I have followed their careers and I'm grateful for the contributions that they are making.

I am also pleased to have this opportunity because it gave me a chance to step back for a few minutes from the daily give-and-take of the political process and to seek through what are the defining issues that I have been motivated by through my legal career. What are those themes that are important to me? And are there particular contributions that women have been making in lieu of our understanding of the law? To give our job descriptions more depth and reach. To provide for the full participation of all of our people in the legal system and to be given the rights to responsibility that are other dues. And as I was thinking about

this I began thinking about my own career and what I would like to do in a few minutes in this afternoon if to talk about some of those themes in my own experiences and then we have time for questions of any kind that you would like to pose for me. Because I think it's instructive for each of us who have been in the legal field as a teacher, as a practicing lawyer, as any kind of any academic studying a particular subject -- all need to be asking ourself what is my contribution? What motivates me? Why have I chosen the path I have? What have I contributed?

Because I went to law school in the late 1960's and I went motivated by the belief that a legal career was a way to help deal with some of the problems that confront our country and to utilize the tools and the training that would be available through that study and profession in a way that made a contribution to the larger social, political and economic issue that were at that point and still are _____ so many questions about who we are as a nation and whether we will fulfill our basic promises to ourselves.

When I entered Yale Law School it was a time of a lot of upheaval. It's always a little bit bewildering to me to read about the 1960's like they were another decade but was just ripped out of history and put on a shelf and that we take it down to spear at with curiosity because it was a part of what had been the development over the last thirty or more years of a new awareness in this country that I think now we are at a point of making sense of.

I think we can take what has gone on in a post-World War II era like looking at several benchmark but certainly starting with President Kennedy's assassination, the assassinations of Dr. King and Bobby Kennedy with the kind of disturbances we had in the city with the civil rights revolution, the Women's movement, Watergate, on down the line, this country has suffered through a series of psychic and political shock. In spite of what those of us who seek a career in the law are doing, whether we admit or not, is attempting to make a sense of all of that activity that swirls around us. We may never be active in any kind of political endeavor, but by the very work that we do, in the private practice, in academia, we are attempting to make sense of our society. We are attempting to provide guidance as to what direction it should be doing and to try and explain and communicate that to a wider audience.

And when I began Yale Law School in the late 1960s my principle concerns were using my law degree in whatever way I could to make an impact. Hopefully from my perspective one that would enhance opportunities, end discrimination and provide the kind of base that I thought this country desperately needed in order to right itself and provide the sort of firm foundation we were required to have after all of the turmoil of the 1960s.

I was motivated first by an article I read in the Times Magazine. It was a very short article. But it was powerful in that John has already referred to Mary _____. She is one of my _____ and mentor. A woman who was raised in rural South

Carolina, attended Southern College, graduated from Yale Law School and was among the young lawyers to _____ the Mississippi during the Civil Rights Revolution. When I read in that Time Magazine was about somebody who was _____ and viewed with the passion that it taken her to Mississippi in the first place, but was now turning that with particular urgency on what was happening with children in our country and particularly poor children.

Shortly after reading that article I saw a notice on board similar to what you may have seen to come here this afternoon in which it said that Mary _____ was going to be speaking at Yale. I went over to listen to her speak and it was like Angela's description of her experience. I knew that I was in the presence of someone who not only was a special person but who could teach me how to make a better contribution to the causes I cared about. And I went up to her afterwards, and I asked her if I could work for her and she said well yes but I have no money to pay you. I said well if I could find money to pay myself would you let me work for you? She said who could turn down that deal. So I got what was then called a walk through to civil rights research council draft and I went to work for the predecessor to the Children's Defense Fund which Mary started called the Washington Research Project.

That summer of 1970 I worked on issues are still prominent on the social agenda of this country. Issues primarily concerned with civil rights with particular emphasis on issues of economic justice. Because during that time I was in part assigned to working with a subcommittee that was then chaired by Senator

Rondale. And Both Senator Rondale and then Congressman Brattaman were the architects of such much of the positive legislation in the 60s and 70s that if enacted and carried out properly would have made a significant difference in the quality of life of millions of Americans today. They were often successful but they often found themselves stunned by those who do not see the role open for government to play a positive and affirmative difference in the lives of American.

And this subcommittee that Senator Rondale was chairing was then was taking a decade retrospective look. Edward _____ of 1960 documentary about the condition of migrant farm workers and I did field work on that and made presentations in order to try to bring up-to-date what the status of migrants were around the United States. It's one of those issues under _____ and _____ but you must ever be vigilant because exploitation is always waiting right around the corner. I remember being in that steering room when the doors flew open and a cadre of my college from Yale came in who was working that summer from one of the big law firms in Washington. And I asked her what they were doing there. And they told me that they were there because one of the clients that they had with the firm was being possibly questioned on the treatment of migrant workers. They wanted to be there to do what they could to repair the image of their clients. And I will never forget the way that made me feel. Because I think lawyers have important and positive role in representing their clients' interest, but I also think lawyers have a positive role in

helping their clients understand what their obligations may be as well. And that lesson has stayed with me throughout my private career, as well as my public involvement.

One of the other experiences I have had at that at Yale was going to work for what was Bambi Premier Organization for Legal Services, an New Haven Legal Services Organization, one of the early projects funded by the Ford Foundation. Through that work, I began my long interest in children, and particularly the impact that the legal system had on children. I was assigned to a case with a young lawyer that involved an elderly black woman who had been a foster parent to a child ever since the child's birth. The child was then two years old. This was the only mother the child had known. The child was of mixed parentage -- black and white. And the state had decreed that the child would be put up for adoption and placed in another home, preferably in the state's opinion, a white family with far more material resources than the older black woman could afford the child. The black woman was heartbroken. She came to legal services and asked for our help.

I began working on that case. It made no sense to me then. And it makes no sense to me now that the state would intervene in a relationship that was stable and had produced an affectionate child, filled with energy and curiosity. But the state was following its rules, its bureaucratic imperative and we were forced to fight every step of the way to try to present the child's point of view; to try to be sure that the child's rights could be treated

as a full and functioning human being, with particular interest and attachment was taken into account. We lost the first round.

The child was removed from the home. We then convened a _____ of equity with my client being able pick two and we picked for her in a state picking _____. All four of the experts after examining the child, after examining the home, came back to the court and said do not disrupt this relationship. And the court said I respect your opinions, but I think you are overlooking what is really important in a child's life. This woman is old. She's got health problems. She may not last very long. The relationship may be disrupted at some future point. She's had one minor arrest in her life so maybe she's not a fully proper citizen and besides the child will be placed in a home with far more advantages. It will be able to tend to every one of the child's need so the judge over rode the expert's opinion and confirmed the removal and permitted the adoption to go forward.

Based on that experience I began, what has now for me, been a 20-year effort to do what I could to set forth the kind of conditions under which children should be removed from homes, how they should be treated, and what kinds of results we should be looking for when we make those terrible decisions. I can't report a lot of progress to you. I can't report progress from anywhere in this country. Our welfare system is overwhelmed, the exposure of drug addiction, particularly crack has made it nearly impossible for even the best intentions system to keep up with the demands that is confronted. But we have to continue trying because at

_____ a child should be considered a human being with the same kinds of needs and interest as any adult. And we have to work out the best way to protect that child without unduly interfering with the family's prerogative but without necessarily unilaterally turning over all decisions to the family. At the same time we have to recognize the state under most circumstances make a very poor substitute parent.

So how do we provide the best protection when the state has to intervene? That whole constellation of issue around children rights and welfare has been a continuing concern of mine; and led me to become involved in Carnegie Council on Children, the Children's Defense Fund and to found the Arkansas Advocates for Children and Family. I've also, as a lawyer, used my training to bring suits on behalf of foster children and foster parents to try to begin to make sense of those conditions that should underlie the decisions that are terrible to make but which a caring community of adults is often forced to confront.

Another thing that I was struck by as I begin to try to work that out for myself was how little the law recognizes the significance of these issues. Very often in law school we don't give the same respect or status to courts of domestic relations or courts affecting children and their future. It is considered more respectable or considered higher status to worry about what particular provision of the Internal Revenue Code might apply in a particular set of circumstances. I often thought about if I would have these discussions when I was at Yale is that part of the

reason for that is that there is a certain logic and analytical rigor that one can bring to worry about the Code. It is a universe on to itself.

Yes it _____, yes we have to worry about their interpretation but at bottom there are no where near as messy as dealing with real people, real problems. And we need more _____ to _____ as a full time vocation or at least as an interest pay attention to what is happening to our children today and give guidance to not only families that are often struck with having to make very difficult decisions but young people themselves who are often put in the position of having to make a decision that might even put them at odds with their bearings and particularly with the state that has to often be the decision maker of last resort. We need more good legal minds thinking through to the difficult and messy problems in order for us to make better sense of the systems that we currently have.

Another one of the things that have motivated me has been the full issue of political integrity within our political process. I have firsthand exposure to that during the impeachment inquiry work in 1974. Because when I came to that work it as one of the young _____ lawyers who was hired I came without any preconceptions of about what would be found as a result of the investigation. So with a very profound conviction that this was a thought that had to go forward and had to be handled in a loyal a way as possible. It was probably the most intense and in many ways satisfying experiences as a lawyer I've ever had, because I worked

with some of the best lawyers I've ever worked with and it was done under conditions of extraordinary pressure but by people who were committed to making the right decisions and without any kind of bias entering insofar as they were able to prevent that.

And when that House impeached President Nixon and he resigned I felt that the system had indeed been vindicated and that its integrity was intact. I respected the President for resigning; I respected the House for having bitten that bullet and made that hard decision; I accepted the country regardless of their political partisan feelings for having accepted it. And it gave me what is still today a rock bottom belief in the significance of our working through the process that we have and being full participants in it. Even when times get tough and when the decisions don't go the way I would prefer I have never lost faith in that process.

It has been interesting to me during this campaign for reporters to ask me have you ever thought about not doing this? Or, why did you do this? Why did you decide that you and your husband would subject yourself to this? It's hardly a question the first time I heard it that I understood. Because I believe that what we are trying to do is important and I believe that the electoral system is the only we have. And it has stood up in good stead to work out the differences among us and even more importantly to create a new consensus about the values by which the company will lead its rights as we move toward the 21st century.

In addition to those things I've have also been animated by women issues and particularly the work I did and chaired the

American Bar Association commission on Women. And I have to confess that when I was called by a very, very fine lawyer of this city, Bob McCrary who was then serving as the ABA President to chair this first commission my response was to say no. Then I did not want to have yet one more thing to do and I wasn't really as committed in my own mind to the idea that there was a lot of work to do there. I knew there was clean up work but I thought that that could be handled without my involvement certainly. But the more he talked and the more I realized the ABA's commitment to raising issues that had been ignored the more willing I worked the service. And in the course of that work from 1987 until last summer, what I found was discrimination against women in the legal profession persistent, some of it was blatant, some of it was violation of the law.

But most of it was more subtle than that and consisted of barriers being _____ to the full participation of women and the kind of continuing bias that entered in with their feelings as though they can be all that they should be as a layers and as colleagues in the Bar. What began _____ to those findings which came after intensive studies and hearings that were held was to publish a series of reports that I will _____. The first would ask the ABA House Delegates to reaffirm this profession above all else to be committed to the idea that discrimination has no place and to do all that it can to end racial and gender discrimination. We also published a manual that was a response to

and new strategies for dealing with the access issues that are being presented to us. During the _____ administration I served on the Board of Directors of the Legal Services Corporation and chaired it for the last several years. I saw that corporation expand its services and provide the kind of face level access that millions of Americans would otherwise be denied if it were not for the Legal Services Corporation's proposals and projects that are out there working today.

But today having looked back at more than a decade now, I see that we are running just a stage late. Again, we need lawyers committed thinking through how to be creative to deal with our access issues. We need to try things like the Miami Drug Force where first time drug offenders are diverted into that court and for the kind of treatment that they receive they are permitted to work off their sentence so long as they don't commit another offense. We need to figure out what we are going to do besides fall back on incarceration since we now have the highest rate of incarceration in the entire world and several years ago past. And in the percentage of our people incarcerated, both South Africa and the former Soviet Union.

And finally public education has been an area that I tried to use my legal skills and talents in to help. Again, it's an area that I commend to each of you. There is no shortcut to rebuilding the lives of millions of Americans that have been thrown into disarray because of the changes in the world around them.

_____ in a place like Arkansas that within two or three

the kind of inquiry we had received about issues that were being struggled with in the profession.

Those issues were _____, how do we help, not just women but all lawyers balance their family and work responsibilities? We are all engaged in the juggling act as we attempt to hold down two full time jobs, one at home, and one in the work place. How do we deal with alternative work strategies? Because as we become more technologically able to communicate between offices and with clients we are going to find different kinds of work patterns that are opened to us. How do we deal with that? And finding an issue that hasn't been talked about much when we began studying in 1987, 1988 and 1989 but which had obviously burst through the national consciousness and that was sexual harassment. It became clear to the Commission that it was a prejudice and real problem in more settings than you and I would care to admit and certainly was the hearings or the confirmations of Justice Thomas the whole country understood what we had written about in setting forth a model policy. Again I commend to you because as lawyers you need to think through how to set fault things that will govern sensitive and difficult issues and I appreciate your taking a look our _____ trial and thinking through how we can make it better.

The other point though is related to the one that I have done on women's issues is the much more general issue of access to justice. Because we are not moving forward, we are falling backward. Our courts over overloaded. Both civil and criminal litigants are often lost in the shuffle and we need new thinking

miles of this great University you can find people who made a good living for themselves and their families without much education. Some of you are from families like that. But the opportunities that once were available are shrinking very fast and we have to as lawyers think through how we can help make our public education system the roots to opportunities that it always has been. My work has led me to help draft standards for my own state, to work on projects that have help drafted legislation both for state legislation and for the Congress. It is an area again needs the help and guidance of lawyers.

So finally, what I would present to you today are the themes that have motivated me, that took me to the lawsuit in the first place and have kept me going. During my private practice, even though my primary obligation was then to private clients, I have tried always to think through how would what I'm doing fit into my larger purpose and what I really cared about. The quality of life in my community, the quality of relationships among people, the end to discrimination, economic and educational opportunities. And I like to be reminded of several of my heroine comments. One, they come from a great quote of soldier recruits. And that is that when she was speaking on behalf of not only an end to slavery but the role that women could play in speaking out against slavery she was interrupted by a gentleman who said I have no interest in listening to you. I have no interest at all. You are like a flea as far as I'm concerned. And she shot back at him well if I am then I intend to be a flea for justice. And what that's has always said to me is

that it doesn't necessarily require a great grandstand flag. It doesn't even really matter who gets the credit. We can all be fleas for justice, at the very least.

And finally a quote from my friend Mary _____.

Someone who had just published a book that consist of letters to her three sons called the Measure of our Success which tries to explain what should be really important in the life of children and how we as adults, even though without children and those who like me and many of you with children, should be trying to help our own children and others realize their full God-given potential. And Mary in this book says that you know, there shouldn't be anything fancy or complicated about it. Service is the rent we pay for living. It is the very purpose of life and not something you do in your spare time. There will be so many opportunities for each of you to render service however you define it. But think about what it will be and as you go through your law career, first year at this university and then beyond, think about how in some way everyday you too can be a flea for justice. Thank you very much.