

12/31/94
RENAISSANCE
CONVENTION DINNER

PHOTOCOPY
PRESERVATION

THE WHITE HOUSE

Office of the Press Secretary
(Hilton Head, South Carolina)

Internal Transcript
1994

December 31,

REMARKS BY THE FIRST LADY
AT THE RENAISSANCE CONVENTION DINNER

MRS. CLINTON: Thank you. Thank you all. Thank you so much. We are so happy to be here this year, and we think that this year is our 12th new years time with the Lader's and their extended family. And it has meant so much to Bill, and Chelsea and me over the years.

And as we were coming down today, and driving from the Marine Base where the plane landed into Hilton Head, my husband and I were talking about some of those evenings in the past, some of those times that we spent here, the friends that we have made. And it is a remarkable feeling of almost coming home to see so many of you.

And it is so exciting to see the children that we have known for 12 years who are now in college, and getting married and in jobs. And there is a way in which all of that has deepened our appreciation and our feelings about new beginnings at the start of these last 12 years.

And I want to thank Linda and Phil, and all of you, for helping to create this unusual and remarkable gathering, which so like most of life cannot be easily described or stereotyped. And maybe in 1995, that is one of the lessons we will all learn and apply. As the song we sang tonight suggested, life is so much more complicated, so much richer than any of our efforts to label and categorize, so that we can try to bring into some small box what is out there.

And for us there have been many, many highlights over the last 12 years. But the friendships, the relationships, the help, advice, the constructive criticism, the caring and concern, the prayers, the love that have flowed among us, has really been a very sustaining part of our lives.

And I thought for just a minute I would, in my own memory, review some of the highlights of this past year, and of years past in the spirit of Renaissance. Because it is important, I think, for all of us who gather here to both count our blessings and look at our challenges honestly, renew ourselves, think how best we can meet the future, make a contribution, and keep all of the various parts of our lives together with integrity, so that they add up to a whole as best as we are able to conceive that.

One of the most telling comments that I've ever heard at a Renaissance gathering, and one that I have quoted endlessly, always with proper attribution, is the comment that Stell Ramey (phonetic) made a few years ago. Stell, as we all know, and have grown to love her, is usually our designated feminist secret weapon at Renaissance, in which she holds forth as only Stell can, and scores points in her loving, but very effective way. And I have laughed and groaned at Stell Ramey for a dozen years. But the particular comment I am thinking of came at the end of a marvelous panel in which people talked about what was really important in their lives. And Stell ended, after talking about her own upbringing, particularly talking about what it meant to grow up in the Depression and the challenges that she faced as a woman, by saying "I have loved and been loved, and all the rest is background music". (Applause.)

I have, as maybe some of you who heard her say it that day, had many opportunities to think about that, to really ponder what it meant in my own life, and to be very grateful that I had words, thanks to Stell, to express often what I felt in the face of the various challenges that have come across my path in the last several years.

I also think back to a time very early in our gathering together when I, for the first time, was meeting many of the friends that Linda and Phil had made here in South Carolina. And we would sit around in much smaller settings that this, often going past the appointed time for a lunch or a dinner, and Phil and Linda would have to come and round us all up, talking about women's lives, and the challenges in women's lives. And it is an issue that I think is as timely now as it has been past in the generations.

And I remember so clearly, as we would sit around these tables, the different choices that the women who were there had made in their own lives; the choice to be a full-time homemaker and mother; the choice to be full-time, dedicated to a profession or a career that meant so much; the choice that many of us make both actively and by default, to balance all of the different parts of a woman's life.

And I so value those conversations with many of the women who are here tonight, because we were able to talk honestly about what it is that makes both being a woman today, toward the end of the 20th Century, the best of times and the worst of times. How it is the most marvelous opportunity that we have been given to express ourselves, to take responsibility for ourselves, to make choices and accept the consequences of those choices. And yet how difficult it still is, because of the many obligations and responsibilities that we all juggle.

And those conversations too, have echoed in my mind, as during the past two years I have struggled to find my own voice, and to be able to be accepted for who I am, against a broad background of a lot of background music that has little to do with who we are as individuals, and what we are attempting to do as we construct/compose our own lives in today's world.

And I also remember the fun we have had. I've often said to my husband that there are several deficits in Washington. We all know about the budget deficit, but one of the biggest is the fun deficits that exist because we don't have the sense of joy that we need to in the great adventure that America is. America is still becoming. We believe that some of our great opportunities lie ahead of us. But they need to be embraced with a sense of adventure, and yes, I would say, fun.

And so remembering back over the years as people talked about serious matters, as we struggled over issues, as even occasionally in this gathering which so values civility, some sparks would fly. Still, there was a sense of fun, the joy of exploration and commitment, the intensity that comes from caring, and also the laughs that were shared as people found common ground. So that too, is something I carry with me as I look at the new year.

This new year coming up, as every new year does, carries so much promise, and of course, so many problems. But trying to stay focused on what is possible, to make common ground, to appreciate the others point of view, to agree and disagree civilly, to have a sense of what our over-arching goals and hopes for our country, our communities, our families, our own lives may be, is what I always leave the Renaissance experience feeling.

And during this past year, which has been for us, as a family, a marvelous year. For us in the public eye, it's had its ups and downs, but it has been consistently one in which we have felt blessed and grateful to be given the opportunity to serve.

And during this past year when the slings and arrows would be slug about, I ran across another phrase that is my gift to Renaissance this year, which I have found to be extraordinarily helpful. And it's a phrase from the writings of Henre Nuvin (phonetic), the Catholic theologian. And it's in his marvelous book about the parable of the prodigal son, in which he looks at that parable from every point of view; that of the son, the father and the disappointed brother. And in it is just this one simple phrase in which he talks about exercising the discipline of gratitude.

And for all of us in this room who are so blessed, who are so able to reap the fruits of our genetic coding, our educations, the parenting and mentoring that we received, gratitude is something we should feel every day. And by turning it, in his phrase, into a discipline, we don't lose anything, but instead, it becomes part of the warp and woof of every single moment. So that no matter what happens, no matter what is said, no matter what the outcome of the genuine efforts to help and change, there is always something and someone to be grateful for.

And I am grateful for my daughter, whom many of you have seen grow up here at Renaissance, and I am grateful for my husband.

And it is my great privilege to introduce to you, the President of the United States. (Applause.)

END