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Dan Rather Interview
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ANCHORS: DAN RATHER

BODY:

HILLARY

DAN RATHER, co-host:

She is a woman on a first-name basis with the world. First lady Hillary Clinton is a political superstar. She has a history of making history, and tonight she's on vacation in Florida, deciding whether to do it again, this time by making a run for the United States Senate in New York.

We sat down together a few days ago and she talked her future and her recent past. She outlined what she believes in, what she hopes for, and how she's gotten through the hard times in the White House. As she prepares for a life after the White House, a life she now insists will be in New York, Mrs. Clinton is also steeling herself for tough questions from political friends and foes, and from the New York media.

And here's a tough question, one that you're gonna be asked repeatedly, time and again, and you're eventually going to have to answer. For whom do you root: the Mets or Yankees?

Mrs. HILLARY CLINTON: That's a very good question. You know, I just love baseball. So the politic answer is that, since I do plan to live in New York, no matter what I end up doing, I'll root for both.

RATHER: Ah, but you know New York. New York in many ways is split between those who cheer...

Mrs. CLINTON: I know.

RATHER: ...for the Mets and those who cheer for the Yankees.

Mrs. CLINTON: I know.

RATHER: So, I have to pressure you to come back. Mets or Yankees, Mrs. Clinton?

Mrs. CLINTON: Well, you know Dan, that's one of those questions that I probably am gonna have to give serious thought to, to give you a final answer.

(Footage of Hillary Clinton walking with Dan Rather)

RATHER: (Voiceover) Hillary Rodham Clinton hasn't answered many questions in the past year and a half. Now even the easy questions have complicated answers. But, then, she's pretty complicated herself.

Mrs. CLINTON: (From previous video) You know, I suppose I could have stayed home and baked cookies and had teas, but what I decided to do was to fulfill my profession, which I entered before my husband was in public life, and I've tried very, very hard to be as careful as possible, and that's all I can tell you.

RATHER: Once, a political lightning rod...

Unidentified Announcer: (From graduation video) Hillary Rodham Clinton!

(Footage of Clinton at graduation; audience at graduation; Clinton waving to everyone)

RATHER: (Voiceover) ...today, she is political lightning, a crowd-pleaser and first-class fundraiser, a person under enormous pressure to step into the arena, this time on her own.

Let's talk about the New York Senate race. We can't do this interview and not talk about it.

Mrs. CLINTON: Right.

RATHER: So it's in the papers again now. You've made up your mind to run. It's just a matter of time or an announcement. Is that a fair description of where you are?

Mrs. CLINTON: No, not really. I'm still thinking about it. People are still talking to me about it. I've been very flattered by the people who've come to me and asked me to consider it, and I'm obviously very interested. It's such a big decision. You know, a--a year ago it had never crossed my mind. Even six months ago, it wasn't anything that I'd ever thought about, but I'm very committed to, you know, learning about a lot of different issues that I've worked on all my life, and how they affect people in New York, because I think that, you know, everything that happens in America happens in New York. And as I've listened to people and talked with them, the kinds of things I care about: education and health care, better jobs, better, you know, balance between work and family, the kinds of issues that I think are gonna be on the front burner in the years to come are ones that are of great concern to New Yorkers and of great concern to me.

RATHER: Why New York? Why not Illinois or Arkansas, where you spent a lot of you time?

Mrs. CLINTON: Well, you know, I never would have predicted that this event could have occurred, that I would be considering this, but people came to me and asked me to consider it. And of course, I'd been thinking about and talking to Bill about, you know, living there after we finish in the White House. I think that both of us would really enjoy that. So it just all kind of came together, and that's why I'm--I'm pursuing it and considering it so seriously.

(Footage of Clinton with the president; Clinton holding a baby; Clinton posing for the cameras)

RATHER: (Voiceover) She talks like a candidate, and she walks like a candidate, and she kisses babies with the best of them. But she remains stubbornly coy about whether she'll run and when she'll decide.

RATHER: You really haven't made the final decision?

Mrs. CLINTON: No, I haven't. I haven't.

RATHER: Have you made a final decision to at least launch an exploratory committee?

Mrs. CLINTON: No. I've considered that carefully. And that would be the next step that I would take, if I go forward.

(Footage of Clinton with the president and Chelsea on Election Night 1992; Clinton with baby in foreign country; Clinton with refugees; Clinton in a classroom; Clinton with Senator Charles Schumer)

RATHER: (Voiceover) She has been pushing forward and pushing the envelope since Election Night 1992, building a reputation here, and abroad, for her work with women, children and families. She has gone the extra mile to visit refugees, returned home to push for public schools, and crisscrossed the country to campaign for Democratic candidates and causes.

Mrs. CLINTON: (From previous video) More than 35 million households across America have guns. And in a third of those homes, the guns are stored loaded and unlocked.

(Footage of Clinton giving speech about gun control at Columbine High School)

RATHER: (Voiceover) Since the killings at Columbine High School, she has waded into the war over gun control, and led the national grieving.

Mrs. CLINTON: (From Columbine speech) What happened here at Columbine has so deeply affected the rest of our country that we are all Columbine.

(Footage of Clinton and the president at Littleton)

RATHER: (Voiceover) On the day we met, those issues were on her mind again. She and the president had spent a long day in Littleton, Colorado, meeting with parents who lost children in the violence at Columbine High.

What can you say to them? What do you say to them?

Mrs. CLINTON: Oh, Dan, it's--it's one of the hardest things Bill and I have to do. And, you know, we've had to do too much of it in the last six and a half years. You know, today we did a lot of hugging, a lot of saying how sorry we were. We looked at a lot of mementos, and then we talked about what we could learn from this, and what we could do to try to make sure it never happened again, if that were humanly possible.

RATHER: Tell me what you talked about.

Mrs. CLINTON: Well, a lot of them have, you know, been thinking hard about what they could do to give meaning to this. You know, they don't want their children to have died in vain, and neither do we. So some said 'Well, we hope that parents will just hold their kids tight and spend time with them.' And a lot of the parents wanted to go out and speak to other parents about how precious this time with children is. Some were very anxious to talk about the need for better gun laws and then to enforce those laws, to make sure that, you know, people didn't get away breaking laws, and whatever new ones we needed should be passed and implemented.

Some wanted to talk about the culture and what we could try to do to send stronger signals about how to really turn this culture around, this culture of violence that people have, I think, rightly talked about. So there were so many different ideas. But what was so heartening to both Bill and me is how, in the midst of such an enormous tragedy, you know, that neither of us could even comprehend, these people were looking for hope and meaning. They really want America to not just have the feeling of hurt and sorrow that we all feel, but to do something with that feeling, and to really make some of the changes that could make a difference.

RATHER: Colorado, like many states in the West, Southwest, South, is in some ways, a gun culture. I mean, people here grow up with guns. Guns are pervasive. Was there any talk of that?

Mrs. CLINTON: I think that there was talk about the need for better gun laws, and to implement them. But, you know, America's become a gun culture in many respects. We have so many guns. And I was pleased that the Senate did pass some meaningful gun legislation, and I hope that they'll continue to do more, and I hope the House will agree. And that, you know, we will close loopholes. And that we will make a very clear statement that we're not going to permit guns to fall into the hands of disturbed or criminal juveniles or anyone else for that matter.

(Footage of Clinton and the president in Littleton)

RATHER: (Voiceover) She says that if she runs for the Senate, it will be because of what she's learned in places like Littleton, and in spite of what she's lived through in Washington.

Question, Mrs. Clinton: With all that you've been through in politics, you know, virtually under siege for at least the last year and a half, why in the world would you want to go into that kind of campaign...

Mrs. CLINTON: Well, you know...

RATHER: ...particularly in a tough state like New York?

Mrs. CLINTON: Well, you know Dan, I--you know I just spent the afternoon listening to people who'd suffered an unspeakable tragedy, losing their children in the Columbine High School killings, and they wanted to talk about what we could do together. They wanted to talk about how we could bring people together to solve our problems. They were not filled with bitterness or hatred. They were filled with hope and positive energy.

And I respond to that. I've--I'm someone who thinks that, you know, we are so blessed to live in this country. And, for me, having an opportunity to serve in the United States Senate, if that's what I were to decide to do and were fortunate enough for the people of New York to give me that chance, would enable me to work with people and bring people together and try to solve problems that were on people's minds.

(Footage of Clinton and family with dog)

RATHER: (Voiceover) But what's on the minds of many Americans is her marriage and the personal troubles that have been played out so painfully, so publicly.

President BILL CLINTON: (From previous video) These allegations are false.

RATHER: In a year and a half of denials and details and DNA, she has maintained her silence.

You know, you never met anybody who wants to respect your privacy more than I do...

Mrs. CLINTON: Thank you.

RATHER: ...but you're a very public person...

Mrs. CLINTON: Mm-hmm.

RATHER: And sooner or later in New York, they're gonna say, 'Why are you still with this man?'

Mrs. CLINTON: Oh, you know, we've been together for, I guess, 28 years. We've been married--we'll be married 24 years this year. And we have a deep and abiding commitment to one another. And it is something that has been part of our lives, really, almost from the time we met. And, you know, I'm--I'm old-fashioned enough not to talk about my private life, and I respect your respect for it, but I--I think that, you know, I look back on all of those years together and it's just something that means a great deal to both of us.

RATHER: Given what you've been through the last year and a half or two years, did you ever consider leaving him?

Mrs. CLINTON: I'm not going to talk about that. I--I respect you, Dan, but I'm not going to answer those questions.

(Footage of Clinton talking to Rather; Washington, DC; Clinton at the State of the Union address)

RATHER: (Voiceover) She doesn't bat an eye, and she doesn't give an inch. She has set firm boundaries that she doesn't want broken. And whether she runs for Senate or not, she is already on a campaign to make Americans define public and private the way she does.

Pres. CLINTON: (From State of the Union address) In her historic role to serve our nation and our best ideals...

RATHER: But in the Clinton White House, public and private, his past and her future, are hard to separate.

If you were to run and if you were to be elected, you would walk into the United States Senate, famous or infamous, depending upon your point of view, as being a pit of deal-making compromise. And you'd be walking into a Senate in which a large number of the senators were the same senators who had put your husband on trial and, indeed, tried to run both of you out of Washington, for all intents and purposes.

Mrs. CLINTON: But, you know, it is the United States Senate. It's part of the most important legislative body, I would argue, in the history of the world. And there are a lot of good things and there are a lot of good people who are working hard together. And, you know, after all the years that I've been in Washington, and after all the difficulties and the challenges that you refer to, you know, I still really believe that we are blessed to be Americans and that public service is a privilege.

So I'm not at all discouraged or pessimistic about the political process. I just know how tough it is. I know a lot more about that than I did before I got to Washington.

RATHER: And much of what she learned came during the impeachment of her husband. In a moment, the first lady speaks personally about that, about how she survived it, and about the messages sent to young people in America by the president's behavior.

(Announcements)

RATHER: Polls show she is one of the most admired women in America, but even after seven years in the spotlight, she remains a riddle for many people. It's hard to know what keeps her going: through marital problems made public; political fights turned ugly; through triumphs,

disasters, and always the demands of her work. Tonight we get some answers about how she does it from the only person in the world who really knows.

Mrs. CLINTON: You know, I've--I've been really blessed. I mean, I know people might look at this and think, 'Oh, my gosh,' you know, 'with what she's been through, how can she say that?' But...

RATHER: Hard to see how you've been blessed the last year and a half or so.

Mrs. CLINTON: Well, but, you know, nobody would wish on anyone what we and the country have gone through the last year and a half or so, but I also have learned a lot. And I have been able to share experiences with people that have been extraordinary, with their outreach to me, their prayers, their good wishes, their concerns.

RATHER: Seven years ago on "60 Minutes," she seemed to ridicule the idea of staying with a straying husband.

Mrs. CLINTON: (From 1992 "60 Minutes") You know, I'm not sitting here as some little woman standing by my man like Tammy Wynette. I'm sitting here because I love him and I respect him and I honor what he's been through and what we've been through together. And, you know, if that's not enough for people, then, heck, don't vote for him.

(Footage of Clinton talking with Rather)

RATHER: (Voiceover) Today she doesn't talk about fidelity. She talks about forgiveness, and dealing with personal pain.

Mrs. CLINTON: Sometimes things come totally out of the blue, and something good or terrible happens to you, neither one of which you could have predicted, and--and probably certainly don't deserve. Life is not by any means fair or easy for anyone, but part of what I think we're challenged to do is to keep trying. And to keep trying not only on our own behalf, but on behalf of anyone whom we can touch and whom we can help.

RATHER: You mentioned you're a religious person. Did you find yourself praying more over the most difficult period?

Mrs. CLINTON: Well, I've--I've prayed a lot ever since we've been in the White House. It's been--it's been a circumstance that certainly requires a lot of prayer and a lot of people...

RATHER: You smile, but I sense you're serious.

Mrs. CLINTON: Well--well, I'm very serious about it. I have prayed a lot and I've been prayed for a lot. And I have been grateful for the prayers of people I know, and people I will probably never meet. And it has helped me enormously. And, you know, sometimes it's--it's--it's a way not only of pouring your heart out, but of really getting filled up again with, you know, some energy and some hopefulness and positive feelings that can carry you forward.

(Footage of Clinton addressing a committee)

RATHER: (Voiceover) She has always been more comfortable explaining health care...

Mrs. CLINTON: (From committee video) On the benefits package, we have priced that out very carefully, congressman.

(Footage of Clinton talking to press)

RATHER: (Voiceover) more effective fighting off financial questions...

Mrs. CLINTON: We went into Whitewater to make money, not to lose it.

(Footage of Clinton on "Today" show)

RATHER: (Voiceover) ...more at ease on national television blaming partisan politics for her husband's problems.

Mrs. CLINTON: (From "Today" show video) It's this vast right-wing conspiracy that has been conspiring against my husband since the day he announced for president.

(Footage of Clinton and the president at the public gathering)

RATHER: (Voiceover) Hillary Rodham Clinton's latest incarnation is probably the one she likes least: long-suffering wife; for some, an object of sympathy.

(Excerpt from Democratic Convention; Clinton with the president at Democratic conventions; Clinton sitting with the president; Clinton getting out of limo; Clinton addressing New York Democrats; Clinton with teen-agers; Clinton with Boys and Girls Clubs members)

RATHER: (Voiceover) But now the woman who has always been at his side and on his side may be about to step out on her own. And as she flirts with a run for the Senate, she is once again on the brink of breaking new ground for American first ladies. Soon she could be campaigning for herself. But the agenda she lays out seems downright old-fashioned. She sees her work as focusing on children and families, and the unique problems they face today.

Mrs. CLINTON: In some ways, I think we've been running kind of an experiment, if you will, in raising of children. It's not anything anybody planned. It's been unwitting. But we've been changing the way we live, and we've been tearing down a lot of our institutions, we've been undermining a lot of old values. We've allowed all kinds of influences in our front doors that we never would have before, to influence the lives of our children. We've worked in ways, and our families are structured differently than was ever done before. So there's just been many, many things that have changed within one or two generations, which we really have to pay attention to. And we--and we really have to start taking some action on--on behalf of our kids.

RATHER: Give me a specific one or two things, something concrete you think we could do and should be doing.

Mrs. CLINTON: We have to be better connected to each other and particularly to our children. We have to do more to build a sense of community. Now what does that mean? Well, it may mean that our high schools and our schools are too large for children to really feel connected to the adults who are there, for the adults to know them. You know, I was recently in a school in Queens, in New York City, and--and I was just stunned that in a school built for 1,500 kids, there were 2000 kids, and that there were gonna be 500 more because of overcrowding.

You know, that sends a real message to children that, 'You're not our first priority. We're not gonna make space for you.' I go to so many towns and see now schools that have no play areas, where kids have no safe places where they can gather. It's very different from the way most of us grew up. It is just a lot harder to be--to be a child today. You know, if--if we were doing something in the front yard of our house when my mother wasn't home and the woman across the street saw us, she'd be out in a minute to tell us to, you know, stop doing that or she'd tell our mother. We could walk down sidewalks. We could ride our bikes to the parks.

There were so many other ways that we were connected. The church was a big part of our life. You know, my father was home for dinner every night at the same time. We have changed so much about how we live that I don't think it's useful at all to point fingers and place blame. It's much more a question of how each us will take responsibility in our own lives, and in our professional and public lives, you know, to begin to speak out and make the changes that we need.

RATHER: You mentioned again children.

Mrs. CLINTON: Mm-hmm.

RATHER: It--it's been--you know--it's been your--your burning passion--it's just--to what you've been connected for most of your career. Did or did not the president, your husband, last year, did he communicate mixed messages to young people about right and wrong?

Mrs. CLINTON: Well, I--you know--again, I'm not gonna go back and, you know, talk about that in any public way at this time. I think he has, himself, spoken about the people he let down and the disappointment he caused. So I will let him speak to that.

But I think no matter who you are or no matter what you do or what's done to you, there's always the chance to try to make it better. That there's always the hope for forgiveness; to forgive and be forgiven. And that comes certainly out of my religious faith, but it also comes out of my personal experience.

RATHER: Do you believe in redemption?

Mrs. CLINTON: Absolutely. I've seen too much of it. I've not only seen it in the lives of other people, I've seen it in my own, and those I love around me. So I do.

RATHER: Let's pretend for a moment it's 2050. There's an encyclopedia and it has a picture...

Mrs. CLINTON: Mm-hmm.

RATHER: ...of Hillary Rodham Clinton...

Mrs. CLINTON: Mm-hmm.

RATHER: ...one-time first lady of the United States. What do you think the caption under that picture will be?

Mrs. CLINTON: I have no idea. I have no idea. You know...

RATHER: What would you like it to be?

Mrs. CLINTON: Oh, my goodness. You know, I don't think about myself in those terms. I-I really do try to get up every day and just do the best I can. I know that may sound sort of simple but that's how I live my life. And I think I've been sort of transition figure in the minds of a lot of Americans because of, oh, the age at which we came into office, the backgrounds we brought, the things we worked on. My concerns, which I try to continue advocate. So I think that I've been a transition figure. And I don't know what the final judgment on any of that will be.

RATHER: We've talked about the possibility of running for the Senate, you said that you're obviously interested in it. What are the possibilities that one day, someday, you'll run for president?

Mrs. CLINTON: Oh, my gosh, that's n--not possible I don't believe. I mean...

RATHER: You've thought about it though, haven't you?

Mrs. CLINTON: No, I haven't.

RATHER: Never considered it?

Mrs. CLINTON: People have said that to me, but it's something I've--I don't take seriously at all. It's not even--it's--it's not even the--the universe of--of my thinking.

RATHER: Like it or not, I know you'll like it not, your husband is one of two presidents to have been impeached.

Mrs. CLINTON: Mm-hmm.

RATHER: Do you agree or disagree it's gonna be in the first paragraph of his obituary?

Mrs. CLINTON: Well, I--I don't know. That depends--I suppose it depends on who writes the obituary. I don't think that it is by any means the most important contribution of his presidency, which I consider to be filled with very significant progress for our country.

RATHER: He told me that he'd--in an interview...

Mrs. CLINTON: Mm-hmm.

RATHER: ...that he did not consider it a badge of shame. Do you?

Mrs. CLINTON: It was such a political process. It was--it was a tragically political misfortune for our country. And I think that when the history is written it'll be seen in a broader context and will be more understood.

RATHER: You've talked about that before, but--if--now have a chance to reflect on a little, of all the allegations, accusations, charges made, what do you consider the most--the--the most unfair attack?

Mrs. CLINTON: Well, you know, I think that the entire process was an unfortunate one, and I'm just glad it's behind us now. I'm glad that--that we survived that painful period. And it was painful. It was painful obviously for me and for my family and for our country.

(Footage of Clinton talking to Rather; Clinton walking in crowd; woman using camera)

RATHER: (Voiceover) It is the most she will share about the past year and a half, and for some in our confessional society, that may not be enough. But Hillary Clinton doesn't care. She's intent on sharing something else: Not what she's gone through, but what she's come away with.

Mrs. CLINTON: You know, when you go through any kind of difficult experience, you have a choice. I mean, you can let it break you and embitter you, or you can take whatever you've experienced, whatever pain or suffering, and decide that you're still gonna have faith. You know, your faith in God, your faith in your fellow man, that you're still gonna believe that you can make a contribution to a better life. It's a choice. Every single day we wake up, you can choose to be cynical or hopeful. You can choose to be grateful or contemptuous. You can make all those choices. And for me, it's not a very hard choice.