

SCHULMAN, HEIDI
TBS DOCUMENTARY

THE WHITE HOUSE

Office of the Press Secretary

For Internal Use Only

INTERVIEW OF THE FIRST LADY
HEIDI SCHULMAN, TBS DOCUMENTARY

MS. SCHULMAN: I was thinking about what we were talking about the other day. I was thinking about, in talking with you about your upbringing and my upbringing, my mother, in the very traditional fifties, she was the mother, she was at home. She did all that stuff. I was trying to think about the influences. You grew up in the same very traditional time. What were the messages that you got as a girl growing up in the fifties? What kind of expectations that you had then?

MRS. CLINTON: I had great parents who gave me the most encouraging messages you could have had. Because my mother was a full-time mother and home maker. I came home for lunch from school all through grammar school. She was always there when I got home in the afternoon. But she always just instilled in me the idea that I could do whatever I wanted to do, and that I would have to work hard to get whatever I thought I wanted out of life, and that I should be as committed to school as possible. But she never ever told me there was anything I couldn't do.

And my father sent the very same messages. I had two younger brothers. He didn't treat us any differently. We all went out running around the tree to catch football passes. We all played sports together. And he was always telling me that I would be able to do whatever I wanted to do if I worked hard.

So the messages were not in any way related to my being a little girl. They were very much in mind with what they hoped would be the ability I would have as an adult to make the right choices for myself.

MS. SCHULMAN: Do you remember what your expectations were, and did you think you would have a job, that you could get married and have kids? Do you remember what you thought of that then?

MORE

Diversified Reporting Services, Inc.

918 16TH STREET, N.W. SUITE 803

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20006

(202) 296-2929

MRS. CLINTON: I think I always assumed I would have a job of some kind, and also that I would have kids, even though I didn't know very many women who had done both, except for some of my teachers whom I respected greatly. Because I don't think I ever knew any woman who was a professional until, probably, I was in high school or college. But I always assumed I would do both. I just didn't know what it would be. Depending upon my age it was be a ballerina, or be a policeman, whatever it was I was going to do. But I always assumed I would have some kind of a job, and that I would have children.

MS. SCHULMAN: I think I did, too, but I can't sort out sort of where it happened. There came a time in the sixties when suddenly it was expected that women would at least try to do it all.

Can you sort out -- I admit that I can't -- the influences that kind of got you to make the choices that you made about being a professional, something about being a lawyer?

MRS. CLINTON: Well, I think that building on a base of both my parents' encouragement and that of my teachers, who always encouraged me to push as hard as I could, to learn as much as I could. Starting when I was probably in high school I began to look around and think what is it that would be interesting to do. And for a long time I thought I wanted to be a doctor. I am still very impressed by people who commit their lives to medicine.

And then when I went to college, it was during the sixties, and there was so much going on around me, lots of political activity, that over the years I was at Wellesley I began to think about wanting to be involved in political life or public life or helping to make decisions that I hoped would make people's lives better. And at that time going to law school seemed like a way to try to learn the skills that I would need if I wanted to be actively involved in the political and public world.

MS. SCHULMAN: It was still not easy for you to do even then being a woman and getting into law school.

MRS. CLINTON: It wasn't. I remember very clearly going to take the law school admission test. I went to

MORE

Diversified Reporting Services, Inc.

918 16TH STREET, N.W. SUITE 803

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20006

(202) 296-2929

Harvard because that's where it was given. There were very few women in the group. And a lot of the boys who were taking the test gave us a very rough time, the few of us that were there. Lots of jostling before we sat down, whispers before they told everybody to pick up their pencils and go.

When I was trying to decide about going to law school, I was trying to make up my mind between the schools that had accepted me. And I remember going to a party at Harvard Law School -- trying to decide whether I would go to Harvard -- and being introduced to a very distinguished senior law professor by my date who said, "Oh, Professor So-and-So, this is Hillary Rodham. She is trying to make up her mind between coming here next year or going to Yale, our nearest competitor."

And this professor looked down at me -- just like a scene from Paper Chase -- and he said, "Well, first of all, we don't have any competitors. And, second, we already have enough women." So I decided, well, I would go to Yale.

MS. SCHULMAN: We don't have enough appreciation for the fact that such a short time ago men actually said those things --

MRS. CLINTON: Oh, yes, they did. And also said things like, "Well, we have more women this year in the entering class because, of course, we can't take as many men because they are either in the service or doing their deferred duty of some kind. So that's why we have so many of you." Those were the kinds of things that were said even in my first-year class to a lot of us.

MS. SCHULMAN: It seems like women always have too many choices to make. I mean, you fell in love and made a choice to follow the man you loved back to his home state. Obviously much has been written by people who said that was not a good career move to you at the time.

MRS. CLINTON: I didn't exactly think about it as a career move.

MS. SCHULMAN: But women are constantly confronted with those kinds of choices that somehow men don't make. Was that a hard decision for you to make?

MRS. CLINTON: Oh, gosh, it was a very hard

MORE

Diversified Reporting Services, Inc.

918 16TH STREET, N.W. SUITE 803

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20006

(202) 296-2929

decision. But, you know, my view of how you live a life is that you try to integrate all of the parts of your life. And I think in many ways women have always understood that. Even when women mostly worked inside the home, they had to balance a lot of demands even in those days. And I think now it's a more obvious set of juggling demands that you face, but women have always had to really choose between their duties and responsibilities to themselves, to their husbands, to their children, to their fathers, to their mothers, to everybody around them.

And I think that what we have seen happen in the last several decades is those choices, which have always been very personal and struggled through by individual women, be made now at a public level. And for me, the real hope I have for my life is at the end of it I will have done what I wanted to do; not what anybody else wanted me to do, but what I chose. And I have often thought that when something is hard work, whether it's going to law school or anything else that challenges you, that's probably what you should do.

And for me, making the choice after having, much to my amazement, fallen in love with somebody from a place called Arkansas, to actually say to myself, this is hard. I knew how to do well in school. I knew how to start a career. But trying to figure out how to have a relationship with an equal, and to really carve that out, that was hard. And there weren't any books you could buy at the bookstore about how to do it.

And I knew that if I walked away from it, if I said to myself, well, you know, there is no opportunity for me in Arkansas, why should I have to make the choice, it's not fair, he should have to make the choice, maybe superficially that would look like a sensible thing to do. But it would do great violence to who I was and becoming every day of my life. So I decided I would do what my heart said to do because if you try to lead an integrated life, you try to mesh all those pieces of yourself.

So I moved to Arkansas. I didn't know anybody besides Bill and his family. And I cannot tell you what a great decision that was. I mean, it was strictly one that was made based on instinct, I guess, as much as anything. But I went to a place where I met people, became lifelong friends, where I confronted problems that on very human terms I probably could have avoided easily if I had gone a

MORE

Diversified Reporting Services, Inc.

918 16TH STREET, N.W. SUITE 803

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20006

(202) 296-2929

traditional route of graduating from Yale Law School, getting some kind of neat job somewhere in the meritocracy, living with people like myself, socializing with people like myself.

And there I was in the midst of a state, where my husband seemed to know everybody, and where we were then involved in the lives of so many people unlike us. It was an extraordinary and wonderful experience.

MS. SCHULMAN: I will ask a relatively short question. Why do you think this whole discussion about what a woman's role is, is so emotional?

MRS. CLINTON: Because I think there is no right or wrong answer. And what we have done is try to impose on women in general some view about what women should do or shouldn't with their lives. There has been a model. Let me try to make one size fit all. And women have never been the same.

And I think we have done violence to women. We did violence to women by telling them in earlier times that they had to stay at home, and they had to be primarily committed to their children. We lost millions of artists, we lost judges, we lost doctors, we lost engineers, we lost all kinds of talent.

Then we flipped the pendulum, as we often do, and said, okay, now you have to be out in the world. And we lost good mothers and dedicated community volunteers. And so, instead, what we have to try to do is say to each woman, live your own life. and that may vary from your 20s to your 40s to your 60s to your 80s. But be whoever God meant you to be. And don't be moved from one stereotype to the other. Be an individual, and be independent, and carve out your own identity. But that's threatening to people who fall into these boxes about what we should or shouldn't do.

MS. SCHULMAN: Continuing about what we were just talking about. I mean, certainly you have more experience, probably, than any woman in the country about what people's attitudes are towards what a woman's role ought to be at this point.

The discussion hasn't changed much over the century; has it? I mean, where do you sort of see where we are as women in terms of the way people look at women in this country (inaudible)?

MORE

Diversified Reporting Services, Inc.

918 16TH STREET, N.W. SUITE 803

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20006

(202) 296-2929

MRS. CLINTON: I am actually optimistic about where we are with respect to how women are viewed and the goals that they are fulfilling. But you are right that the conversation has stayed pretty much the same for several centuries. Certainly if you go back in the 19th century you begin to see the very same words and the terms of the debate that became prevalent in the 1960s and seventies. I think it's in part because people's roles and identities are changing.

We have collapsed history because if you look at how women lived over the millennium, you and I would not even be alive. I mean, the mortality rate for women of childbearing age was such that it would be very unlikely either of us would have survived. And if we had, so that we could then be one of the old women of the clan or the village or whatever, we would be given a certain amount of deference because we were so rare.

So women's lives, even in their longevity, starting at about the turn of the century, became much longer and we lived past our children's early years, and we were able to start thinking more broadly about what it meant to be alive and to be an individual.

Then with the advent of labor-saving devices in the home, the -- I mean, I can remember even with my grandmothers, Monday was wash day, Tuesday was ironing day. There was a certain rhythm to the week that was totally determined by what our work was. That became less of a burden on women.

So many things have changed in the last century, but at an accelerated rate in the last 30 or 40 years, that it's hard to look back and to find your moorings as our grandmothers could do looking back centuries and saying that their lives in many ways were very much like their ancestors' lives.

So that is true not only for women, but also for men. We are charting new ground. And that means there is much more responsibility given to each individual to determine how we will spend more time. And that responsibility can be very liberating but also terribly frightening and burdensome. Because when you have a set structured life, where you know what is expected of you, and

MORE

Diversified Reporting Services, Inc.

918 16TH STREET, N.W. SUITE 803

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20006

(202) 296-2929

everyone around you knows where you fit into the social structure, you don't have to make very many independent decisions.

And many women were sheltered from a lot of the dangers of the outside world by male relatives. And certainly, then, once they marry. Now we are venturing out. And I think that it is hard in the course of a generation to undo the expectations and attitudes of the millennia. And I am not at all surprised that these debates go on, and that the emotion involved in them is so intense. Because they really are part of a new way of living for both women and men. But the differences affecting women's lives are even more noticeable.

MS. SCHULMAN: (Inaudible) new way of living for me was having my daughter at 37, at which point I completely threw out all of my old priorities. What was it like for you?

MRS. CLINTON: I don't think there is any doubt that for me motherhood -- and particularly my relationship with my daughter -- has been one of the best experiences of my life, and continues to be. Not only because of what it added to my life, but because of what I have learned from it. Watching someone grow and develop, who shares some of your views, but not all of them; who struggles to find her own independent voice and her own identity, brings up a lot of the same issues that I face.

And I find myself watching and nurturing that process. But like mothers going back thousands of years, wanting to be protective, wanting to say, look, life is not always easy, there are a lot of tough spots in the road ahead, and knowing that in today's world she is not going to leave her father's home and go immediately at the age of 15 or 16 or 17 into the home of her husband where she will begin to produce children, and then -- that is not going to be her life pattern.

And so she has to be better prepared to deal with issues, even more so than I was, because I think my generation kind of stumbled into a lot of this, in part fuelled by the aspirations of our mothers who came out of the depression and the Second World War, and went into the homes in suburbia America and devoted themselves to their children. But always with the view that they were doing it so their

MORE

Diversified Reporting Services, Inc.

918 16TH STREET, N.W. SUITE 803

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20006

(202) 296-2929

children could have more than they have. Always wanting to see their children succeed. And success would be defined differently depending upon the mother doing it or the culture out of which she came. But there was a hope unattached to any kind of real idea of what this would mean.

And with us, I think having struggled through, trying to combine the aspirations of our mothers with their experiences, because my mother was the best mother that anybody could ever have, and I want to be as good a mother to my daughter as she was to me. But she did it differently than I am doing it. So trying to learn from what she did, and take those basic values, but transplant them into my life experience, which is different, I then see how my daughter will move even beyond that.

But I want there to be continuity. Even as she moves into a world of change, I want her to be rooted in the kind of values and ideals of her grandmother. I want her to pick up the experience that I bring from having lived through the sixties and the seventies and the eighties, and confronted a lot of the challenges that we have.

But then I think that she and your daughter and others are going to have a much greater opportunity to say here is what I want to do, and not so easily be moved by what others' expectations of them might be.

MS. SCHULMAN: Is there a single reference of that experience that you would most like to give her?

MRS. CLINTON: I think just to be true to herself and to be always listening to that internal voice that each of us have, that parenting tries to help a child develop through the culmination of love and discipline, and to know that ultimately she has to be answerable for what she does, and she has to feel good about who she is. No man can give that to her, no job can give that to her, no external experience can give that to her. That has to come from within. It has to be rooted in some spiritual sense of who she is and some emotional stability.

And it's always a struggle because life does not just hand you a map and say if you follow this road everything will turn out all right. You are going to get knocked around, you are going to have unexpected things occur.

MORE

Diversified Reporting Services, Inc.

918 16TH STREET, N.W. SUITE 803

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20006

(202) 296-2929

I used to read a lot to Chelsea when she was a little girl. I read everything. But one of the things I read over and over again, as much for me as for her, was a little nursery rhyme that goes something like this:

"As I was standing in the road, as quiet as could be, a great big ugly man came up and tied his horse to me."

And I used to say to her, you know, you could just be out there standing quiet as can be, minding your own business, and just out of left or right field will come something totally unexpected. And it's those moments that you have to know who you are, and you have to draw on that inner strength, and you have to stand up for what you believe. And none of us ever knows when that happens. And the real quality of your life will be determined in those moments. And that's for me what I hope I can convey to her so that she will be fully equipped to take on whatever life hands to her, even a horse.

MS. SCHULMAN: So many of your moments in your life are public, and everybody seems to have an opinion on what a First Lady ought to do. When you read these histories, is there advice from former first ladies that you especially like?

MRS. CLINTON: I have gotten so interested in reading about all the women that have been in this position. And of course it is like watching the wheel being reinvented. Many of the things that have been said about me have been said many times before about other women, going back into history, starting with Martha Washington whose husband thought she deserved a salary because she had so much work to do as the wife of the President; going through Dolly Madison who integrated all male oyster bars and took women to the Congress to watch as the senators debated issues; and started houses to take care of poor orphaned children. Moving all the way through history toward our most recent first ladies like the second Mrs. Wilson who kept the country going in many respects. And of course Eleanor Roosevelt.

But even women who didn't live their lives as publicly as Mrs. Roosevelt. Someone like Mrs. Truman, who was deeply involved with her husband. Nearly every night they were in the White House together. They would go over his work. She would read what he was writing, she would critique his speeches. They just didn't choose to let that

MORE

Diversified Reporting Services, Inc.

918 16TH STREET, N.W. SUITE 803

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20006

(202) 296-2929

be publicly known.

And then the women of more recent times speaking out on issues: Jackie Kennedy Onassis single-handedly renovating the White House. Or Mrs. Johnson making an incredible mark on our environment and natural preservation. Or Mrs. Ford speaking out on breast cancer and ERA when that was not even the subject that was fit for polite company. And looking at what Mrs. Carter did being the first First Lady to testify before the Congress.

You can go and see all of the extraordinary talent that these women brought, and how every one of them was criticized no matter what she did. If she stayed in, she was criticized. If she went out, she was criticized. And the real lesson is you cannot pay any attention to that. You have to do what you think is right for yourself and for your family. And that's true no matter who you are or where you live.

And then in my case I have to do what I think is right to make my contribution to the country which I care very deeply about. So I have drawn a lot of strength. Because everything that has been said has been said many times before in many different ways, and often even more vitriolic than anything that I have been subjected to.

MS. SCHULMAN: Let's pick up that just for a second and tell me a little bit more about the Eleanor Roosevelt (inaudible).

MRS. CLINTON: Well, Eleanor Roosevelt is someone whom I admire so much. I always did. But being in this position and learning more about what she did and what she put up with, while she was trying to make a contribution to the country, has just increased my admiration for her. And I was amused to find out that even before her husband became president, newspapers were editorializing against her saying, we don't want to hear from her. And during some of the campaigns they had buttons saying, "We don't like Eleanor either." They were always after her.

And there were some columnists and others who were almost on a campaign against Mrs. Roosevelt. But she had a very centered view of herself and her life which enabled her to just kind of move through that with incredible amount of grace, and to always be working on what she cared about, and

MORE

Diversified Reporting Services, Inc.

918 16TH STREET, N.W. SUITE 803

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20006

(202) 296-2929

not to get deterred.

MS. SCHULMAN: You talk about all these extraordinary things that all these women did, and yet we don't know about them. And that in itself says something about the position of women in all of this; doesn't it?

MRS. CLINTON: I think that's right. And one of the things that I have asked that we start doing on the White House tours is talking more about the first ladies. We have wonderful portraits down on the ground floor of the women who have lived in this house. And I tried to collect from storage all of the portraits of both presidents and first ladies so that every portrait we have is displayed somewhere.

Because I want this White House to come alive. And it is not a museum that is static. It is a living, breathing institution. And the people who have lived and worked here have given so much to it. And the women who have lived here have made remarkable contributions to it. So I want that to be part of the history.

I think there really is no need to distinguish between the two main schools of historical thought. But, you know, history is the aggregate of millions and millions of individual lives, and history is really the product of the great men kind of version of history.

What we want is a history that takes account of what our lives were like and which really recognizes the contributions, on the day-to-day level, of both women and men. But also kind of pulls from the shadows women who have major roles that they were playing even though at their time it was not socially acceptable for them to be recognized. Or they had to be discounted because they were, after all, only women.

But I think once we develop that history again, then they are going to be a lot of little boys and girls who are going to see role models and are going to understand that women have always made their contributions both at home and in the world outside the home; and that those choices that girls today face, every one of them is legitimate. That they should be able to choose what is right for them in their lives and then watch how their lives unfold.

(The interview was concluded.)

Diversified Reporting Services, Inc.

918 16TH STREET, N.W. SUITE 803

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20006

(202) 296-2929