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CAMPION, NARDI --  
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INTERVIEW WITH THE FIRST LADY  
BY NARDI CAMPION, WELLESLEY ALUMNI MAGAZINE

Q -- and I did a little reading on what you had to say about Wellesley, and heard a lot of good things. One of the things you said, was, when you were at Wellesley as an undergraduate, your philosophy was to bloom where you were planted. My question is, are you blooming where you are planted now?

MRS. CLINTON: I feel like it.

Q Go on. Tell me about that.

MRS. CLINTON: I feel very good about living here. I enjoy some of the aspects of it. I love the opportunity to meet people. I have learned so much about the way Washington works for good and for ill. That is like a continuing education course all the time. And I am so grateful that I have had an opportunity to work on health care. I just feel nothing could have been better for me than this particular assignment.

Q It's so exciting.

MRS. CLINTON: It is. It's thrilling. As hard as it is, and as challenging as it is, it is thrilling.

Q Well, now, when you were at Wellesley, you had required Bible; right?

MRS. CLINTON: Yes.

Q In fact, I think you had something to do with a big unrequired.

MRS. CLINTON: Yes, yes. Those were the days when we all thought we should do away with required courses. Now, looking back on it from my vantage point of nearly 25 years, I am very grateful I had all those required courses. And I think taking Bible was one of the real extraordinary

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educational experiences.

Q Who taught you Bible?

MRS. CLINTON: Clifford Green. He taught me -- I had him all year long for both Old Testament, New Testament. He was an extraordinary teacher. I learned so much and had an opportunity in that class to talk about things that now I know are among the most important issues that anybody could face in their life. But at the time, those of us who were 18 and 19 thought, you know, we didn't necessarily have to spend a whole year studying.

Q You were well grounded in religion?

MRS. CLINTON: I had an interest already in religion. I had an opportunity to do a lot of reading and studying during high school about theology, all those issues. It was very interesting to me. It was just a matter of principle. But many of us felt that people should be able to choose to take and not be required to take.

Q Here in Washington, what church do you go to? Are you affiliated with the Methodist church here?

MRS. CLINTON: Yes, the Foundry Methodist Church here in Washington.

Q And you go there every Sunday when you are here?

MRS. CLINTON: When I am here or whenever --

Q And Chelsea goes, too?

MRS. CLINTON: Yes, she goes to Youth Group. In fact, this morning she got up at the crack of dawn to go with one of her friends from school because her friend's church, a Presbyterian church, has a weekly breakfast before school for teenagers. And it is so smart. Because, you know, so many kids that age have so many activities after school, they can't possibly get everything in. This church has figured out that kids really want to get together, they want to spend time together. Chelsea left the house at 5:30 to be at the breakfast at 6 a.m. And she was excited about it. I thought that was a great idea.

Q And they do that every week?

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MRS. CLINTON: I don't want to say. I don't know. Because this is the first time she has gone, is today. She called home to ask me something about our plans. And she loved it. She said there were like 150 kids there six o'clock in the morning from all the schools all over the Washington area. They feed both the kids that go to this church and their friends.

Q They must have a leader like you had. What's it? Don --

MRS. CLINTON: Don Jones.

Q Now, where is Don Jones?

MRS. CLINTON: He is at Drew University in New Jersey.

Q He is still there?

MRS. CLINTON: Yes.

Q He had an impact on this nation; you know that?

MRS. CLINTON: Well, he certainly had an impact on me. He is still there teaching in the religion and philosophy department.

Q Speaking of things of the spirit, could you talk a little about lessons from your father's death?

MRS. CLINTON: Oh, gee.

Q Or maybe you don't want --

MRS. CLINTON: That's hard, yes. I mean, I was so grateful --

Q I think death is such a great teacher.

MRS. CLINTON: Oh, it is. It's a great reminder. That was really important. And the time I had to spend there in the hospital with my family and my father was clearly one of the most important times I have ever had in my life. It was wonderful because our whole family, not only was there physically, but there in spirit together. I didn't face so many of the difficult issues that families sometimes face

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when serious illness or death brings them together because they haven't worked out some of the issues that kept them apart as they were growing up. We didn't have any of that. So it was such a joyous and fulfilling experience in the midst of such pain.

Q What do you think -- what characteristics or outlook you think you have inherited from him?

MRS. CLINTON: Oh, my father was a pragmatist. He was tough-minded. He was not interested in any excuses from anybody. And he kind of cocked a questioning eye toward people who considered themselves important, and always would make the comment or ask the question that would kind of put it all in perspective.

Q He was a good Republican; right?

MRS. CLINTON: Lifelong. Absolutely. Except for Bill Clinton whom he went astray. You know, when my father first met Bill, he liked him in spite of himself. I think that's the experience many fathers of daughters have when they finally meet the person that their daughter intends to marry.

We had great political discussions all the time on visits home. And then when Bill started getting into political life, my father would come down to Arkansas and stay with us and gradually kind of worked with him and do things for him. And he always explained it. He said, "Well, you are not only married to my daughter, but you got good sense." Which I thought was kind of the crowning compliment he could pay to any person in political life.

Q How is your mother doing?

MRS. CLINTON: She is doing all right. It's been kind of up and down.

Q I called Lisa once and asked her if I could do an interview with her. And she said, no, she didn't --

MRS. CLINTON: She is not interested in interviews. She is doing pretty well. She is with us right now. She visits, spends a week or two --

Q That's good for Chelsea, too; isn't it?

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MRS. CLINTON: Absolutely. I am real proud of her. I think she is doing well.

Q It's hard.

MRS. CLINTON: It is. It's lonely. The loneliness is so difficult, she tells me. They had been married for something like 50 years, and it becomes part of your life. It is so hard to replace.

Q How do you find any down time, or what do you do for a little down time?

MRS. CLINTON: Oh, take long walks.

Q But where can you walk?

MRS. CLINTON: Well, sometimes we drive somewhere and get out and walk. Bicycle rides. Watch movies. Read for recreation. I've finished the James Carrol, Madonna Red, that you gave me.

Q Oh, good. That's a good thriller.

MRS. CLINTON: It was a great thriller.

Q I don't know why it's not a movie.

MRS. CLINTON: You know, that was the first thing I thought of, after I finished reading it, is that it was one of the most well constructed novels for a movie that I had finished in a long time.

Visit with my friend. One of the great things about living in the White House, we have a well situated place of refuge and respite, people who come through and come over for a meal, or spend nights.

Q Speaking of entertainment. I brought you something else. This is on loan. Have you ever seen this take-off on Watergate?

MRS. CLINTON: No.

Q It will knock you dead.

MRS. CLINTON: Good.

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Q It's so funny.

MRS. CLINTON: Good, good.

Q Larry Gilbert did it for television. It hasn't been made into a VCR, but a friend of ours, who knows him, got that for me. And I thought I would lend it to you.

MRS. CLINTON: Oh, boy, it's good.

Q It's the take-off --

MRS. CLINTON: I like that. I watch a lot of videos as well as use the movie theater there at the White House.

Q Get Lisa or somebody to drop it in the mail to me eventually. No hurry about it.

MRS. CLINTON: I am coming up to Hanelgram (phonetic). I'll get it watched and bring it up back with me.

Q Well, you don't have to worry about that.

MRS. CLINTON: Oh, it's going to be fun.

Q How are you feeling about the way the health thing is going?

MRS. CLINTON: I feel very good. I think the reaction has been generally positive. Most of the principal players in this health care system have been more positive than negative. I think the Congress is taking it very seriously. I thought one of the best things in the last several months is to see how the Congress has responded to this with a seriousness of purpose that I think is very reassuring to the country.

Everywhere we go around, to travel, to talk about this -- I was in Pittsburgh yesterday, I was in West Virginia today, I will be upstate New York tomorrow. The response from people is just terrific. Very enthusiastic. And people are also asking good questions. And that's why -- I have a copy of the book to give you.

Q Thank you.

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MRS. CLINTON: I am trying to get as many people to get engaged as I can, because once people really learn what we are doing, the support goes way up. If they only know a little bit about it, they are easy prey for the misinformation campaign.

Q Is there any way to simplify it so people can understand --

MRS. CLINTON: Yes, that's what this book is for. We have a book and a brochure which simplifies it and explains what people will pay, and tries to give it as clear a description as possible.

Q I have seen pictures of this. Yes, that's wonderfully done. Even I can read that.

MRS. CLINTON: I wanted it so that I could in good conscience understand it and give it to everybody so that they could know right off the bat what was in it.

Q Well, let's get back to Wellesley. It's hard for me to keep remembering that's what I write for. What are the things about your Wellesley education that have been most useful to you?

MRS. CLINTON: Oh, gee. I still think going to a women's college and having the opportunity for four years to study uninterruptedly, to play whatever role each of us chose in the life of the college, instilled the sense of confidence that is just unmatched.

I was talking with a friend of mine who has just left being the president of Randolph-Macon to go to be one of the chief executives in the new administration at Yale, Linda (inaudible). And she told me, when I saw her at Yale two weeks ago, that some recent research just completed, that Randolph-Macon and some other women's colleges had participated in -- not Wellesley -- show that even today women who go to women's colleges, by and large emerge with more confidence in their abilities, a greater willingness to take on graduate school, law school, medical school, in a percentage that is higher than --

Q Even today?

MRS. CLINTON: Even today. Higher than what you

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will find in even good co-ed schools. I don't think you can find that uniform level of confidence that seems to infect women at women's colleges at comparably good co-ed schools even still.

But for me, back in the '60s, it certainly was a posed question. I don't know what I would have done or what my experience would have been had I gone to a co-ed school. But I just have every confidence that I got the very best possible opportunity to develop my skills and talents at Wellesley, and I am very grateful.

Q I know you have talked about, what's his name, Alan Shekter (phonetic). Are there other professors or other courses that stand out?

MRS. CLINTON: Well, (inaudible) Stratton, I thought you were going to say, he was my political science professor my freshman year. He was terrific. He gave me a big boost of confidence.

Barbara Greene, whom I had my sophomore year for the international relations course, was one of the finest teachers I have ever had or heard about. She was gold. She left Wellesley shortly after that because her husband's job changes. But I can't say enough about her.

And Alan Shekter was terrific in encouraging us to think and to breaking down stereotypes.

Bill Phibbs, who went from Wellesley to be the president of Puget Sound, was one of my favorites. He and I disagreed often over specific issues, but he was always challenging us to work hard or think deeper. And we had one of the memorable classes that I recall. We had a seminar, and he really just pushed us to justify our positions and argue and stand our ground, and to give in when we couldn't make the effective argument. I thought that was great training.

I just have a raft of teachers that I remember with great fondness and respect.

Q I told Lisa this morning I had an interview with Linda Greene, (inaudible) Times. I am trying to think how I could do something from the Greene house to the White House. Linda has a child now in the third grade. But she said in

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the second grade -- this was -- we were talking role models, just her experience. She said, "My daughter in second grade told me the big thing is to get to be Hillary." The second graders are playing -- they have the Hillary game.

MRS. CLINTON: Oh, my gosh.

Q How is that for role model?

MRS. CLINTON: Oh, my gosh. I don't know. It's sort of overwhelming.

Q Yes. You have a ripple effect. You have no idea.

It's just wonderful when I think about that picture of Mrs. Roosevelt and how proud she would be of you.

MRS. CLINTON: Oh, I admired her so much.

Q Me, too.

MRS. CLINTON: And the more I learned about her, the more admiring I am.

Q Have you ever been down to (inaudible) Adams' grave?

MRS. CLINTON: The Greek?

Q Yes.

MRS. CLINTON: I have, years and years ago. I have not been there since we moved here. I intend to go --

Q In Blanche Cooke's book, where she tells about her --

MRS. CLINTON: Unfurling herself almost. I thought I can't wait for Blanche Cooke's second volume.

Q No, I can't either.

MRS. CLINTON: That was so well done. It made her live so vividly.

Q (inaudible) to Camper Bell (phonetic).

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MRS. CLINTON: Oh, did you go up there?

Q Yes.

MRS. CLINTON: That's supposed to be Camper Bell behind you.

Q Oh, is it?

MRS. CLINTON: Aha.

Q Who and what -- where was that done?

MRS. CLINTON: Well, it was given to the White House years ago to its collection and --

Q So much fun. This could almost be Sarah. It has a sort of look of her; doesn't it?

MRS. CLINTON: It's not specifically supposed to be the Roosevelts, but it's of that time and place.

Q Well, you must go.

MRS. CLINTON: I really would like to go. The story of President Roosevelt, that day that he spent, which resulted in his getting the chills at Camp Fellow, which turned into polio.

Q And when you go, look at those bedrooms. It's all so sparse. (inaudible) think of his growing up there.

How about a message to Wellesley, either alumni or undergraduates or both? A thought of Wellesley.

MRS. CLINTON: Oh, gee. I suppose. I am just so grateful for my experiences --

Q Okay. Keep going. That's right. You got the right --

MRS. CLINTON: I hope that the students there now appreciate how significant these years in their lives can be. Because it certainly keeps all of us, who have been there, connected in some way. They will never forget.

You remember Dean Frish (phonetic)?

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Q I sure do.

MRS. CLINTON: I'll never forget being in the old, what is now the student union, that sort of red building down by the lake by (inaudible).

Q Schneider.

MRS. CLINTON: Schneider, that's right. Being in there when it was a pretty ordinary place before they fancied it all up and made it so pretty. And I was down there having a cup of coffee. Dean Frish came in and sat with several of us; told us the story, which has always stuck in my mind, about how on one of her travels years and years before -- 30 or 40, I think it was -- she somehow was caught in a blizzard in Montana, and she was on a bus. And they herded everyone into this bus station. And there were not very many people there. But her eye was caught by this young mother with two small children in the terrible blizzard, awful conditions, no food, nothing to eat.

And Dean Frish told us. She said, "I sat and watched that young woman, and suddenly I knew she had gone to Wellesley." And so she told me that she went over and introduced herself to this young woman. And sure enough, she had gone to Wellesley. And Dean Frish looked at us and said, "You can always tell a Wellesley woman." And we all felt like, oh, my gosh.

And so from that time we would look at each other and say, would you be picked out by Dean Frish in the middle of a blizzard in a deserted bus station somewhere in Northern Montana? Act like it. I'll never forget that.

Q Well, Hillary, looking at your life as best I could, the turning point that interests me -- turning points are, I guess, what life is about anyway. But the one that interests me the most is when you graduated from Yale and decided to go to the Children's Defense Fund. And I wish you'd talk a little -- I mean, you must have had lots of opportunities to make lots of money.

MRS. CLINTON: I was never interested in that.

Q Talk a little about your making that big decision.

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MRS. CLINTON: Well, I had worked for the Children's Defense Fund when it was the Washington Research Project, before it became the Children's Defense Fund, as far back as 1970. And I admired Mary Adleman (phonetic), graduate of another women's college, Spelman. And I had felt so strongly that what she was doing was the most important work that one could imagine. She graduated from Yale Law School and used her law degree in the civil rights movement in Mississippi. And then on behalf of poor people and children. And it sounded like an exciting challenge that would be fulfilling. And so I went to work with her.

And then came the impeachment inquiry opportunity. So I moved on to that. That was such a historic occasion.

But the Children's Defense Fund, once I had started working Mary, I just never quit being involved in that project. I would visit with her, I would go to Washington to see her to help out in ways that I could while I was in law school. And I just loved being part of what she was going to do.

SPEAKER: Nardi, we've got to wrap up.

MS. CAMPION: Yes.

SPEAKER: You can ask one more.

Q One more. I wanted to ask if Chelsea has looked at those areas (inaudible).

MRS. CLINTON: We haven't even started talking about that. Just let things develop.

Q I have to tell you: I think the way you have managed to keep her separate is so admirable, and it must be so hard.

MRS. CLINTON: Well, it is, but actually people are beginning to understand why Bill and I have tried to do this. And recently I have had some funny experiences with some reporters and TV personalities that press very, very hard to have her involved in an interview of some kind. And we have said, no, there are some things that are appropriate. And most of it is just not appropriate for a child.

And after they finally take no for an answer, they

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say, "We agree with you. You are doing the right thing. Don't expose your child to us." It's just fascinating. In a perverse way they are reinforcing, because we knew as parents we were doing the right thing. But even for people in the media to acknowledge it, albeit (oratively)???, because they are trying always, as part of their job, to get as much as they can, just proves my point to me personally that children don't have to be in the public limelight when their parents are, however that happens. And they deserve to have their own childhood. They deserve to become whoever God meant them to be. And that cannot happen if they are pushed and pulled from one point to another.

Q One more question, Lisa.

SPEAKER: Okay.

Q Just say a little bit about Bill's being able to speak when the wrong speech is on, so I can write about -- I feel that's not been written enough about.

MRS. CLINTON: Oh, Nardi, that was so (inaudible).

Q Were you aware?

MRS. CLINTON: You know, I knew something wasn't quite right because -- but I didn't know what it was until after the speech. When he got up on the platform, after the standing ovation, and he walked into the chamber, I saw him turn around and say something to Al Gore. Then I saw Vice President Gore motion to somebody. And the person came over, and there was a whispered conference, and then that person left.

Q You could tell.

MRS. CLINTON: I could feel that. But it could have been anything. It could have been the President asking for a glass of water. It could have been the President saying, "There is a suspicious-looking person." I didn't know what was going on.

When he first got started, I could tell that he wasn't quite as warmed up as I knew he felt about the speech. But then he got his rhythm. And he got going, and it was a great speech, and it was delivered beautifully.

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And he told me later what had happened, how the wrong speech was on there. That was distracting enough. Then, when they began to make the corrections and -- what had happened is the military runs all the communications system for the President. It's a whole separate division. It's not really under the White House. It's under the military. And they do an excellent job under most circumstances.

But what happened, is, that they had never erased from the teleprompter the speech back in February. So when they called up the President's speech, they didn't know that they weren't calling up the speech they had just entered, but instead calling up the speech that was still in the memory. That was bad enough.

So he just proceeded -- he had a written text in front of him, but he proceeded from that plus his memory, plus his commitment to the issue. He had worked on it so hard. He said even more distracting was, in order to get to the new speech, they had to erase the other speech through. So here he is trying to concentrate on his speech and trying to deliver it to the entire chamber, which means he wants to move and look at the entire chamber, and rolling in front of his eyes are all of these words which is incredibly distracting. He kept his concentration, he was able to keep going.

I have always said about my husband, he is not only the smartest person I have ever met, he is the best in an emergency or a crisis that I have ever met. Ever.

Q There are not many people in the whole world who could have done that, if any.

MRS. CLINTON: He has an ability to immediately get down to whatever needs to be done when the pressure is on. I have always known that about him. And that is one more example for the whole world to see.

Q I have been really fed up with the press because I thought it was a really great story. It was all parenthetical --

MRS. CLINTON: Oh, I know.

Q -- the way they put it in. I really wanted -- I am glad --

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MRS. CLINTON: I think part of the problem, to understand this perspective, is that my husband is so low key in most encounters. He is so genuinely open to people that he makes a lot of things, which are very hard, look easy. So he doesn't -- this is the wife speaking -- he doesn't get the credit that nearly any other person would get. Because he can do things and do it in a sort of graceful way without drawing a lot of attention to the underlying difficulty. So I don't think people sometimes give him the credit for it.

So, gee, Bill Clinton got up, gave a speech largely from memory. But it was one of the most important speeches given in the United States by a president in the last 30 years. And, gee, it was just another day, you know. So I think that's part -- his skill in some way works against him.

(The interview was concluded.)

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