

06/30/93  
WATERS, SUSAN  
M MAGAZINE

THE WHITE HOUSE

Office of the Press Secretary

Internal Transcript

June 30, 1993

INTERVIEW OF THE FIRST LADY  
WITH SUSAN WATERS OF W MAGAZINE

The Residence

Q Would you ever like to roll up the rugs at the White House and jitterbug on the floor?

MRS. CLINTON: Sure, I hope we get to do that some time.

Q I mean, have you thought about that, you know?

MRS. CLINTON: I have thought about it; it's something that I'd like to do sometime.

Q Would you be able to roll up the rugs here or --

MRS. CLINTON: No, probably in the East Room. That's where the 19th and the first half of the 20th century balls and dances were held a lot.

Q So would you do jitterbugging?

MRS. CLINTON: Sure.

Q And as a member of your generation, I mean of this generation, how much do you honor tradition and how much can you experiment? I mean, how do you decide?

MRS. CLINTON: Well, I think you have to strike a balance, and we're trying to do that. You know, we've looked for unusual places to entertain in the White House like the Green Room and the book cellars, courtyard, and try to keep thinking of new ways to use this wonderful house that are consistent with the history and dignity of the house.

Q Have you read about any first ladies that did things that you -- how do you handle the history of the house? I mean, how do you research or do you read about --

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MRS. CLINTON: Oh, I read lots of materials about the house and stories about what kind of entertaining different presidents and first ladies had in the past are very interesting to me. I'm particularly interested in the 19th century because they had an incredible entertaining schedule. And oftentimes their parties didn't start until 9:00 at night.

Q I didn't know that.

MRS. CLINTON: They might eat at midnight, and then dance after that. It's remarkable to me the pace of socializing. But then, when you stop to think about it, there wasn't any television, there wasn't the increased mobility. You know, people really sought their primary way of communicating through socializing with one another. I'm not surprised by it, but I'm a little awestruck at how organized and extensive the entertaining was in the 19th century.

Q Would you be doing that yourself that late? I mean, it's hard in Washington to go that late.

MRS. CLINTON: Well, I don't know whether we will do that or not, but I am impressed by all those who went before me.

Q My last -- but this sort of is to follow it -- with people feeling sort of disconnected in a fragmented city or fragmented country, and the idea of needed change causing unsettlement, what's the best a good party can accomplish? I mean, I know a good party can't heal wounds and right wrongs, but what --

MRS. CLINTON: I think a good party anywhere, not just in the White House, can help people get to know one another a little better and learn from each other and enjoy each other's company as human beings not as a functionary in some other capacity in life. And it can be a relaxing and energizing opportunity to be with other people. And I think that's always positive.

Q Would you seat two people next to each other who you knew didn't agree, or would you -- maybe you wouldn't.

MRS. CLINTON: I'm not going to say.

Q Have you started to think about what you'll do for first -- how you'll handle your first state dinner or how you might -- what it would entail?

MRS. CLINTON: Well, we haven't had any occasion to have it. The State Department thought that it was better for the President to get to know the world leaders he didn't know in a more

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business-like working session. And so, there have been dinners and luncheons that are certainly important and we try to do a very appropriate job of those. But we haven't had the occasion to have a state dinner, and I'm looking forward to that. And when we do, I hope it will be a lot of fun as well as carried off with the grace and dignity that one should expect in the White House.

Q Have you done any research into that area, what other people have done?

MRS. CLINTON: We've looked at it but I haven't really focused on that because --

Q You've got so much else --

MRS. CLINTON: -- there are so many other things to be done.

Q What's been surprising about entertaining as the First Lady?

MRS. CLINTON: Just how much fun it is. It is just an enormous amount of fun and the people who we've had in all kinds of contexts because someone told me that we've already entertained -- everything we've done, you know, more people than some presidents did in their whole term because we've had huge events that have brought lots of people from different backgrounds together as well as much smaller private events. And it's all been fun. We've had a great time.

Q What's in your mind when you put together a guest list? Do you mix generations, professional interests, political people -- Donna Karan, of course, we're interested in and -- when you put together a list what's in your mind?

MRS. CLINTON: We do all those things. There are people we know, people we want to get to know, people who are doing something interesting or noteworthy in our country in the arts or in business. And so, we have a wonderful opportunity here to bring people together across a lot of lines that they would never cross otherwise.

Q I had a question. When you come back from a busy day have you ever thought of saying, well, you handle it? I do this -- somebody else does the flowers, menu, everything because I have had it and just let me know?

MRS. CLINTON: It's a lot easier for me because I have all this wonderful help.

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Q Well, I say this to my husband.

MRS. CLINTON: I remember saying that to my husband in the old days. But here there are so many professionals with extraordinary experience to do the work that you have to do on your own if you give a party under most circumstances. So, for me it is important to know what's going to be done and how it's going to be done but then I leave much of the actual work of doing it to the people who are so well prepared to do that.

Q So, where might -- what detail might you get involved in?

MRS. CLINTON: I get involved in all the details but once we decide on the details, it's somebody else's responsibility to carry them out. And then I'll do a walk-through or have a last minute conference about and make any final decisions that have to be made.

Q Would there be an order of things like whether or menu or the guest list is most important?

MRS. CLINTON: Usually the guest list is most important.

Q And then flowers?

MRS. CLINTON: Well, food is -- I mean just everything goes together. There really is no way to rank it. I mean, it all just fits together if you're looking at when we have a dinner that is followed by a movie it's a much more casual evening than if we have a dinner is followed by some kind of entertainment.

Q Would you ever mix china patterns?

MRS. CLINTON: Sure. We have.

Q In the small dinners for 40 have you set like one of each -- have you done a table with one of each?

MRS. CLINTON: I don't know about one of each but we've mixed china patterns.

Q I know that entertaining isn't didactic, it's not, but there are values that you can encourage and -- for example, you said no smoking. I wonder do you drink yourself?

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MRS. CLINTON: Oh, sure. Wine or a drink, yes. We serve a full bar and wine at dinner.

Q Would you say grace at meals?

MRS. CLINTON: We don't at our dinners where people are invited from all walks of life. We do in our private quarters at meals.

Q You said some values already -- mixing people, people you know and people you don't know. Any other values that you --

MRS. CLINTON: No -- we just want people to have a relaxed and enjoyable time and to feel better about themselves and the world when they leave than when they came.

Q I'm sure, because people would get -- it's thrilling to be invited.

MRS. CLINTON: Well, it's fun for us.

Q And to be invited with 40 people where you know that you can say something to you, you can say something to the President and the First Lady.

MRS. CLINTON: Well, it's fun for us, too.

Q We've heard a lot about the gilded cage. Is there a fairy tale aspect to living in the White House?

MRS. CLINTON: Well, it's a wonderful house to live in. It is filled with history and excitement at the same time. And so, for us, it's been a thrill just to be part of our country's history in this way. And the entertaining is something that gives us a lot of pleasure because my husband loves people and he loves to have people around and he loves music and he loves good food and he loves good conversation. And so do I, and so for me, it's a real pleasure doing that for him as well as for all the guests that we entertain.

Q Growing up, can you remember a favorite party that you went to and what made it good?

MRS. CLINTON: Gosh, I went to so many parties. Wonderful birthday parties where the pony would come, all the fun where people had a great sense of humor about themselves. I had a great party one time where it was a surprise birthday party not only for the woman who was surprised, but for all of us. We were picked up out of bed in the morning and taken to her house.

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Q That's fun.

MRS. CLINTON: It was fun. I was wondering why my mother was asking me to be sure to wear my best nightgown that night. All kinds of parties can be fun if people have the right attitude about them. I'm going to have to get to those parties again.

Q How long do you like to sit at the table if you -- or do you --

MRS. CLINTON: It depends upon the setting.

Q What makes a good guest?

MRS. CLINTON: Someone who comes with an open mind and a big heart and wants to have an experience that's positive and participates in the party.

Q Good dinner table conversation?

MRS. CLINTON: It can be broadly ranging, all different kinds of issues talked about as long as people are polite and they can state their opinions strongly, but they have to be respectful of other people's views as well.

Q Do you ever take a nap before dinner or do anything as a quick refresher?

MRS. CLINTON: No. (Laughter.) No.

Q Because you said in one interview that naps are good --

MRS. CLINTON: I'm a true believer in naps, but usually I don't have time to do them before dinner. It's a good idea, though, I think I'll start.

Q And then, I read that you and your husband, when you went to the Tabard Inn, had to bring his own water.

MRS. CLINTON: That was news to me. I never heard that.

Q I'll forget that, but is it hard to be normal?

MRS. CLINTON: Well, there are some things you can't do, but I don't know anything about bringing your own water. I never heard that before.

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Q What things -- because you vowed to be -- you went shopping at Giant -- I know it's my Giant. (Laughter.) But you've got out for expeditions. Where? Are there other kind of spontaneous things that --

MRS. CLINTON: There are, but I'm not going to talk about those, then they wouldn't be spontaneous anymore. (Laughter.)

Q I heard that -- I remember -- being told that when you were in Arkansas you'd invite pals over after something. And I was --

MRS. CLINTON: We still do that here -- a lot.

Q And I wonder, did you get to do it last night, or can you think of a --

MRS. CLINTON: No, but we had two couples as houseguests last night, so we came home and spent some time with them.

Q Who was that, or --

MRS. CLINTON: Oh, a friend from -- a couple from Arkansas and a couple from Kansas who are friends of ours.

Q And how do you deal with those guests?

MRS. CLINTON: Just have fun with them. Spend as much time with them as we can.

Q And there was one -- I have one fashion question left. And you may -- but anyway, what do women love and hate about fashion?

MRS. CLINTON: Oh, gosh, I have no idea. I think it's such an individual matter. I think one person's fashion is another person's disaster. So I think it's so totally individual, which is what makes it fun and wonderful.

Q Well, I think what's wonderful about your entertaining is the mix of people.

MRS. CLINTON: It's been great. We've had a just superb time with the people who come. We've all enjoyed it.

Q And these small dinners, I don't remember ever hearing -- to do those, you know, a lot of them. And then as you come to greet your --

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MRS. CLINTON: -- I feel very strongly about that.  
Well, this was fun, and --

Q Good, good. No, this was perfect, and you answered  
all my questions, and --

MRS. CLINTON: If you need any additional information,  
call Lisa, and I'll talk to you or she can get the information --

Q And good luck on your trip.

MRS. CLINTON: Thank you. See you later.

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