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RADIO NEWS PROGRAM
HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON
FIRST LADY OF THE UNITED STATES
WASHINGTON, D.C.

MRS. CLINTON IS A GUEST ON NATIONAL PUBLIC RADIO WEEKEND EDITION.

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INTERVIEW WITH FIRST LADY HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON ON NATIONAL
PUBLIC RADIO'S WEEKEND EDITION

JANUARY 13, 1996

SPEAKERS LIST: HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON, FIRST LADY OF THE UNITED
STATES
SCOTT SIMON, NPR

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SIMON: This is WEEKEND EDITION. I'm Scott Simon.

Hillary Rodham Clinton began a book tour this week, but she's not asked many questions about that book, "It Takes a Village," which details Mrs. Clinton's concerns for America's children.

At the same time a Senate committee is investigating her legal and financial affairs during the mid-1980's, when she was a partner in the Rose Law Firm of Little Rock, her husband was governor of Arkansas, and the firm represented Madison Guaranty Savings & Loan, a financial institution owned by a friend of the Clintons who was also their partner in the failed investment now known as Whitewater.

Just this week a lawyer in the Rose firm, Richard Massey, disputed some of Mrs. Clinton's recollections of how the firm came to represent Madison and what she did for them. Last week an old memo was discovered which said Mrs. Clinton had order firings in the White House travel office.

We interviewed Hillary Rodham Clinton yesterday in the Old Executive Office Building.

CLINTON: You know, we've been through this now for four years, and it started off as one thing and every time a particular set of charges are disproved and questions answered, the ground shifts. And there's never any stable ground to stand on to say, OK, everybody, let's take a deep breath.

SIMON: Well, let me ask what seems to be the question of the week. You

had, for a couple of years, people were interested in obtaining copies of the billing records of the Rose Law Firm in Little Rock. And now they're discovered.

CLINTON: Right.

SIMON: Now, where were they all that time?

CLINTON: I have no idea. But I'm delighted they were discovered, because once again they prove what I've been saying for four years, based mostly on my own memory and whatever information was revealed.

And that's what I mean about the shifting grounds, Scott. I mean, a month ago we were accused of destroying the records. They do turn up, and I have no idea where they've been, and, of course, the time is not great for me since I'd much rather talk to you about my book than these records. But I'm delighted they're out there, because they confirm what I have been saying.

SIMON: That the work you did for Madison Savings & Loan was minimal.

CLINTON: Exactly.

SIMON: Did that work or any of those hours, for example, include -- and I guess the records indicate this -- that you made a call to a state securities commissioner at the time that Madison needed the Commission's approval to proceed with a stock plan?

CLINTON: Well, my memory about that is that I called the office. I do not believe I ever talked with the commissioner. And the reason I called is that we didn't know -- namely, Mr. Massey and the law firm -- who in the securities office was to handle this kind of work, because it was something new for Arkansas -- other states had done it -- and the idea was to find out whether it was legal under state law.

And the securities commissioner, under Arkansas law at that time, had responsibility for supervising savings & loans, but I never knew who that person was, and so I called to find out. I'm not even sure that I identified myself, but I have no memory of having talked to the commissioner about this matter. I wouldn't have known what to talk about. I'm not an expert in securities law, and as I have said repeatedly, was minimally involved in the representation.

SIMON: Well, let me ask, you know, when -- the cribbing that goes back and forth between how many hours amount to what. There's this story about a man's got his drain stopped, and a plumber comes over, taps it once, drain begins to flow, and he turns to the fellow who called him and said, "That's be a hundred dollars." And the man says, "A hundred dollars for tapping the pipe? That ridiculous." And the plumber says, "No, no. That's \$5 for tapping the pipe -- 95 is to know where to tap it."

Now, when you are Hillary Rodham Clinton, and you are the spouse of the governor of the state, one phone call that is two minutes can mean a lot to somebody.

CLINTON: Well, it could, but in this instance it did not, because, despite Mr. Massey's excellent work -- and he's a very fine lawyer -- Madison didn't get permission to do what it wanted to do.

I keep making that point, that perhaps in retrospect I would never have even picked up the phone to call and say, gee, who handles S&L matters in the securities commissioner.

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XXX the securities commissioner?

CLINTON: I didn't think that that was, you know, anything that was inappropriate. And then to tell Mr. Massey who he should call and who he should deal with.

And so, for me, the idea that we keep having these house of cards built. You know, I practiced law in Arkansas for many years. People have gone over my life and my professional work with the finest of tooth combs, and apparently they are still trying to claim that on this one instance, out of all the work I did, something must have happened.

Yet, to me and many others who look at this fairly, none of us can figure out what they think it was.

SIMON: I was intrigued by something. You were a lawyer on the House Judiciary Committee...

CLINTON: That's right.

SIMON: ...during the Watergate impeachment hearings.

CLINTON: That's right.

SIMON: And I'm just wondering that, if you could put yourself back in that frame of mind once again, if the Nixon White House had come to your committee and said, "Those records you've been asking for for two years, we found them, suddenly we found them, and here they are," would you have accepted that explanation with a straight face?

CLINTON: I think we would have been delighted. The problem back then, you'll remember, is that documents were destroyed, tapes were missing 18 and a half minutes. The White House was not cooperating. They were claiming executive privilege on every piece of paper.

I think the contrast is so dramatic. We want the truth to get out. We would just love to have this matter brought to an end.

It's a little bit odd that here we are, both my husband and I, nearly 50 years old, which is hard to believe, we don't own a house -- we own half of the house that my mother lives in, in order to help support her -- he has his 1968 Mustang, I have my 1986 Oldsmobile Cutlass. A recent magazine said that with our legal bills we are bankrupt. So, if we had intended to trade on my position, I've done a very poor job of it.

SIMON: Did you ever say anyone in the White House travel office should be fired?

CLINTON: No. But I did express concern about the reports of financial mismanagement in the travel office that pre-dated my husband coming into office, and, thankfully, that was taken care of. But I did not make the decision about what was done, nor did I direct that any particular decision be taken.

SIMON: Is it just possible in the human game of telephone that Hillary Rodham Clinton says, "I'm concerned about the travel office, we ought to look into that," and eventually that gets translated by aides who were anxious to please you as "clean house."

CLINTON: Well, I can't speculate on what did or did not happen. I only know what I said and what I intended to convey.

SIMON: Mind if we talk about your book a little?

CLINTON: I would love to talk about my book.

SIMON: All right. Change of pace. A lot of it is much more sad ground, because you say in the book that despite the fact that we rhetorically say children are our most important commodities -- no pun intended, talking about your financial affairs...

CLINTON (LAUGHING): You are so good, Scott, I love that.

SIMON: Just occurred to me when I said it, I'm afraid -- but that you say we often don't invest in our most precious commodities, as we should.

CLINTON: Right. Right. Unlike stocks and bonds and commodities that are traded in a market, which is out there to be invested in, and you can see the immediate return -- you either make money or you lose money -- our children deserve a much more careful and long-term investment.

SIMON: You talk in the book about something I believe you called the "discipline of gratitude."

CLINTON: Right. Right.

SIMON: Interesting idea, that you need to remind yourself what you ought to be grateful for.

CLINTON: It is. That came to me, really, as a gift in 1993, which was a very difficult year for me personally. It started off with such a great high with my husband's inauguration, and such hopes, and then shortly after, my father was stricken by a stroke and died.

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XXX stroke and died.

CLINTON: Our friend Vince Foster killed himself. Throughout that year, I knew that my mother-in-law was much, much sicker than she let on and, in the fall, learned that she only had a few months to live, and indeed, she died before the year was out.

So I had to really dig down pretty deep in my own resources, and luckily, I had people who sent me books to read, gave me favorite scriptures, shared with me the stories of how, like me, they would just get their eyes welling up. I would be standing in a receiving line and something would remind me of my father, and I'd wonder whether my mascara was going to run.

And there was a book by Henri Nouwen (ph), the Jesuit theologian, and it was about the Prodigal Son. And, you know, sometimes it's good to be reminded that people don't get what they think they deserve, that life is unfair, that every one of us is going to encounter obstacles.

So the whole book was helpful, but in it was this phrase -- "the discipline of gratitude." And I had never thought of gratitude being a discipline. And I began to do that. I mean every day, no matter what is happening around me, I consciously try to discipline my own feelings and my mind about what I have to be grateful for, because by any stretch of the imagination -- even during the worst times, when people are accusing me of things and doing all that they do -- I'm a very lucky person.

SIMON: Would you ever run for office yourself? Do you ever think about that?

CLINTON: Oh, I don't think so. No.

SIMON: I mean did you ever, back in the '60s, between when, I believe, you were a Goldwater Girl...

CLINTON: That's right.

SIMON: ... and whatever you became politically.

CLINTON: That's right. And I feel like my political beliefs are rooted in the conservatism that I was raised with. I don't recognize this new brand of Republicanism that's afoot now, which I consider to be very reactionary, not conservative, in many respects. I'm very proud that I was a Goldwater Girl.

And then my political beliefs changed over time, but I've always thought that the role of citizen, the role of advocate, were as important in our democracy as running for office, and so it's not anything I've ever, you know, seriously considered.

SIMON: You know, whenever we've had to refer to you in news accounts, I -- and I hope I've done this over the year -- I've never used the term "first lady," because it struck me as antiquated. Do you use that term?

CLINTON: I don't use it much personally, but I don't object to people

using it, because it is a tradition that we think started with Martha Washington. So it's not the term so much, it's the expectations that surround the role that I find fascinating.

I have spent a lot of time in the last several years reading about my predecessors and have discovered that nearly every one of them had a kind of bumpy time here, because there's really no way to satisfy the extraordinary expectations that are put upon the person who is married to the president.

And it has been both somewhat sustaining, if you will, as well as a cautionary tale, to realize that the women who've been here before have encountered many different kinds of challenges.

And at the end of the day, you have to be yourself. You have to say and stand for what you believe in. You have to be willing to get up and go ahead and take the slings and arrows and just try to persist through them, because it's apparently an inevitable part of our American democracy.

SIMON: For example, if I may, when -- there's a -- William Safire of The New York Times said very bluntly in a column this week that he didn't believe you were telling the truth.

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XXX telling the truth.

SIMON: And then through Mr. McCurry, the President's press secretary, it was communicated that your husband took exception of the kind he would like to apply to Mr. Safire's nose, I recall.

CLINTON: But with a smile.

SIMON: No, understood, I think, on all sides. But the suggestion of that seemed to be this is personal criticism that the columnist is leveling, and so, therefore, I'm going to take personal exception when you talk that way about my partner in life.

But was it personal? Was it uncalled for? I mean, he was talking -- Mr. Safire was talking about your record as an attorney and a public figure. Did you take personal exception to that?

CLINTON: Well, I don't take what Mr. Safire says very seriously. As you pointed out, I was working for the committee that impeached President Nixon, for whom Mr. Safire worked and, best I can tell, is still working.

In fact, my mother took some offense, because being called a "congenital liar" seems to reflect badly on her and my late father. But, you know, I n't really have much to add to that.

SIMON: See, I wasn't going to repeat the phrase because I don't want your husband to punch me in the nose. We're right nearby, after all.

CLINTON: He won't. He won't.

SIMON: Thank you for all your time on a snowy day.

CLINTON: Thank you.

SIMON: Hillary Rodham Clinton.

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