

Nina Varghese on Hillary Clinton

Hillary Diane Rodham Clinton is the 67th United States Secretary of State and the 12th woman to run for President, in the 2008 election. As many of us know, Hillary was a Senator for New York from 2001 to 2009. She was also First Lady from '93 to 2001, as the wife of our 42nd President Bill Clinton. A lot of her firsts are due to this role as First Lady – first First Lady to run for President and to hold a Senator position but she was also the first female partner at a law firm just 10 years after college.

I picked Hillary because I find her a fascinating woman who has successfully juggled her career and family life - more on that part later. I am also drawn to her because she is an alum of Wellesley College which I attended as well, and I have seen her speak in person there a few times.

An Illinois native, Hillary first received national attention back in 1969 when she gave the first student commencement speech at Wellesley. What may surprise you is that she was actually President of the Wellesley College Republicans at the start of her time there. However by senior year her transformation towards a more liberal outlook had begun as she campaigned for an anti-war Democrat. I find it interesting that she has written, "I sometimes think that I didn't leave the Republican Party, as much as it left me."^[1] Even though I'm not liberal, it impressed me that she was open-minded and passionate in college, a trait that obviously carried on to her political life.

After Wellesley, Hillary embarked on a career in law upon graduating from Yale Law School in 1973. Two years later following a stint as a Congressional legal counsel, she moved to Arkansas and married Bill Clinton. Her interest in serving the community started as she cofounded the Arkansas Advocates for Children and Families. As the First Lady of Arkansas when Bill was Governor, she also successfully led a task force to reform Arkansas's education system. She sat on the board of directors of Wal-Mart and several other corporations. At this stage in her life, I particularly admire her ability to manage family, career and community.

Not everything Clinton did turned to gold however - one of her disappointments came when her major initiative, the Clinton health care plan failed to gain approval from the U.S. Congress when she was First Lady. Nevertheless she persisted in her cause, advocating the creation of the State Children's Health Insurance Program and other children's programs. Indeed her years as First Lady drew a polarized response from the American public – the start of criticism that would follow her into the 2008 election. But most notably, the state of her marriage was the subject of considerable speculation following the Monica Lewinsky scandal in 1998. I have always been fascinated by her decision to stay with her husband despite her admitted pain and shame at the extremely public scandal. In interviews however she has been supportive, saying she never doubted Bill's love for her. Whether she was foolish or self-interested, or a mixture of both is for you to decide. In any case, it's not a typical "Stand By Your Man" story.

Hillary is a mother to one child - Chelsea - who is now married. She has described feeling guilt in deciding how she was going to balance family and work as many working mothers, and I would argue working parents, do. She said she tried to put in as much time as she could, and she and Bill alternated some tasks like reading to her every night.

The last notable point about Hillary is her perception to many as an Iron Lady, a bit like former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher. It was very interesting to see how the public reacted when she became emotional on the campaign trail in 2008 in response to a question about how she manages it all.^[2] Whether she was tired or disheartened at her poll numbers, many people said they liked seeing the more human side of her.

I think it's obvious that Hillary was able to successfully integrate her community with work as she has championed the rights of women and children, and lobbied for better healthcare – benefitting millions. Both of these domains have clearly been integrated with her family as well, since much of her achievements would

have been a bit more of a struggle without the name she earned by marrying Bill. She also has tremendous social capital, seen from her ability to convince people to tirelessly support her. Even now many are calling for her to run for President again in 2012, a bid she has so far denied. There is apparently talk that she may be our next Secretary of Defense and if so is likely more credentialed than any other potential Presidential candidate.

I think everyone can learn from Hillary in terms of how she successfully navigates the political world, knowing for chewing people up and spitting them out. For better or for worse, she and her husband are still married and appear to love and support each other^[3]. To be such a success in her career (whether or not you agree with her politics) and yet have a family life is very admirable and I hope to emulate her in some of these ways.

^[1] Reading Hillary Rodham's hidden thesis, MSNBC

^[2] Newsweek Magazine, Hillary Tears Up <http://www.newsweek.com/2008/01/06/hillary-tears-up.html>

^[3] Marie Claire, Hillary Unplugged <http://www.marieclaire.com/world-reports/news/latest/hillary-clinton-interview>