

On My Mind
A. M. ROSENTHAL

The Constant Hearts

The decision to pick a public relations man for three Republican Presidencies as the spokesman for the new Democratic Administration is an important step meaning one or more of the following things:

1. The public and press are just as stupid as President Clinton obviously thinks they are and have never seen a cynical political gimmick they would not buy.

2. Under pressure because of the

White House: Serve one, serve all.

nature of the Presidency and his own mistakes, Mr. Clinton is losing his political rudder and his ship is swinging to port and starboard.

3. He never had a political rudder.

4. The leftish messianic rhetoric, and matching appointments, are over.

5. Don't believe it. In fact, with a Democratic Administration so rattled so early as to lunge desperately for a Republican spokesman, it's best not to believe anything for a while.

6. I am one of those Clinton voters who worry now about White House language and appointments that smell of class or racial divisiveness. Also! We resent being talked to as filthy rich exploiters of the poor as we work to pay off the mortgage.

7. We want Mr. Clinton to move forward by moving back — to the center where America's future lies; we think. And that is where Mr. Clinton is telling us he is going by mixing a famous Republican adviser into his White House blend; we think.

8. But here I am with a sour face — not because of the able and likable David Gergen himself but because of a matter of constancy, that lovely word. What does the President understand that word to mean, for himself, and the people he chooses to be close around him? If we do not know that, we cannot know him.

9. The Republican Administrations Mr. Gergen represented so well had specific positions that helped the country understand what they stood for. Among them were their positions on Vietnam, abortion, the rights of homosexuals, civil liberty laws, taxation, health care, government's role

in shaping the American economy and society, military strength and spending, financial help to the cities and, perhaps most important, how to deal with racial divisions.

Certainly Mr. Gergen must have agreed with his Republican chiefs on most of those issues, close to all. How would any self-respecting senior adviser serve or speak for an administration if he did not agree so much of the time as to make occasional disagreement unimportant?

But on all of those issues, and a lot more, Mr. Clinton has positions ranging from sharply different to opposite. He ran on those differences. He was elected because enough people agreed with him, not his Republican opponent or predecessors.

Now Mr. Gergen will have to explain and defend positions directly contrary to those of his former bosses, Presidents Nixon, Ford and Reagan. Conversion and repentance are all very well but I trust he will be asked when they took place on each separate matter.

Each time, did he tell his Republican Presidential employers? Or did all these epiphanies take place since Mr. Clinton's election?

If he will not tell us, can we trust him as much as we did when he got paid for speaking for Republican Presidents? We are talking constancy — not able and likable.

Mr. Gergen's constancy is not as important as a President's. If I had wanted to vote Republican in 1992, as I have whenever I wished, I would have done so.

But Mr. Clinton convinced me it was time for the Democrats to show their new stuff. Fool that I am, it never entered my mind that Mr. Clinton would come to think so much of Republican positions that he would select as his top spokesman a man who had represented them so well for years. If he had told me, I might have chosen the real thing.

Those White House kids are not fashionable anymore. They are taking the rap, good and hard, because the President did not figure out that he and his barber were still on the ground or wonder how come.

Too bad; I am more conservative than the kids but I was getting to like some of them. George Stephanopoulos told me no secrets, but he told me no lies. But of course people like that have to go — they are so young and inexperienced they only know how to speak out of one side of their mouths.

But I will bet that George will never go to work for Dan Quayle. □



Beth Bartholomew

Purity, Pederasty And a Fallen Heroine

By James R. Kincaid

LOS ANGELES
On the morning of April 2, in the courthouse of the small northern California mining town of Jamestown, a preliminary hearing was under way on charges against Daniel Driver for allegedly molesting several young boys. During the proceedings, the mother of one of the boys, Ellie Nesler, thought she detected Mr. Driver smirking. So she went and got a gun, walked back into court and stopped the smirks forever. Now charged with murder, Ellie Nesler, cast by the law as a killer, has made herself available for the role of cultural heroine.

Why we gave up on Ellie Nesler.

Ellie Nesler took us at our word. Believing that Mr. Driver was a pederast, she did what society wants done to pederasts: she plugged him five times, stopping perversion dead in its tracks. Never mind that Mr. Driver had not yet been tried. He was accused, and that is enough, especially when a child is involved. So she did just what we might assume Harriet Nelson would have done, thus furthering our modern, grisly form of frontier melodrama, in which child-molesters (or anyone we think might be one) can play the part of the cattle-rustling varmint.

Ms. Nesler's story, however, has not sold well. For a while it attracted the best tale-tellers we have: Phil Orah, Gerald, even Charles Kuralt. And Hollywood, of course, with its attendant plot-making flood of agents, producers and ghost writers. She got the nation's attention, and each of us was able to tell the story in our own way: either "ain't she great!" or "ain't it awful!" She was the heroine in either case: spontaneous eruption of American motherly virtue or vigilante wild woman.

Now, however, the fund-raising spaghetti suppers for Ellie Nesler and the

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telegrams offering support, love, money and I-know-just-how-you-felt bolstering have stopped. It seems that Ellie Nesler is not Harriet Nelson after all. She admitted that she had been waiting for an opportunity to shoot Daniel Driver for more than two years. She has a criminal record for auto theft, and on the morning of the shooting she was loaded with methamphetamine. In place of anguished motherhood pushed to the breaking point by a jeering defendant who was about to be coddled by a soft judicial system, we now have a drug-addled ex-con with a long-term vendetta.

Why does society want one story and shun the other? The original was more dramatic: it can occupy the mind for about 90 exciting minutes, which, allowing for commercials and interviews with the real-life participants, is about what a TV movie would sop up.

Beyond that, we liked her story because we need to think about child sexuality in stark terms with no human complication that could stain the innocence of the story and therefore of the child and, somehow, of ourselves. Alas, Ellie Nesler doesn't fit the tale of righteous mother anymore.

The story our culture feels it deserves would allow us to speak endlessly about child sexuality and the sexual attraction of children (for others) while maintaining our distance from these lurid tales. The initial attraction of Ellie Nesler was her separation from the eroticism involved. She gave us all an excuse to wash, guilt free, in the details of another trial and another story of a sexual relationship between an adult and a child. For her to serve as our surrogate, she had to be pure, so we could imagine her (and ourselves) to be so free of any thought of the erotic appeal of children that the very notion of it made her homicide!

So she should never have medicated herself that morning or have gotten in trouble with the law as a teen-ager. And she should never have admitted that she had thought about killing Mr. Driver before that delectable moment when any of us might have been so maddened by the unthinkable of it all that we would have sprung at the monster to rip his throat out.

But she did, so she has given up her right to represent us. Being complicated, she gets in the way of the view we want: the moving story of how parents affirm the unspeakableness of sexual interest in children by speaking of it frequently and, every now and then, murdering someone just to make the story stick. □

Observer

RUSSELL BAKER

Tonsorialitis

No, I'm not sore about the President taking his business to another tonsorial artist. If he thinks Cristophe of Beverly Hills can give him a better trim than Larry of Little Rock, O.K., he's the President, it's his hair, more power to him.

That's Larry with only one "r," please. It used to have two, but my bride said "Larry" looked over-stuffed with alphabet. I said to her what did she mean "overstuffed with alphabet," and she said it just looked too-old-fashioned.

I said what's wrong with old-fashioned. Next she'd probably want me to quit having True Detective and the Police-Gazette lying around the shop, I said, just kidding her, you know, the

Mr. Clinton's new clipper artiste.

way you do with your bride after you've been married 20 or 30 years so she knows how to take a joke.

So she said no, she's serious. The modern thing in the barbering art is dropping letters from your name, she says. Look at Cristophe of Beverly Hills. Drops an "h" and his second "r," quits calling himself Christopher, and he can not only raise the price to \$200 per trim, he can find plenty of saps who'll pay it to show they can afford a barber who's barbered his own name.

All right, I hear you, I hear you. You want to know what it was like cutting Mr. Clinton's hair before he became famous, speaking of which, did you see the pictures of him at West Point in the Sunday paper? I don't want to sound like sour grapes, but I want you to tell me your own personal opinion of that haircut.

Would you personally pay \$200 for that haircut? The man's ears are hardly visible, can you believe it? The President of the United States, and he looks like he's got no ears!

Of course what do you expect from Hollywood barbering culture? They've been hiding the ears out there ever since Clark Gable's, which, if you remember, looked like red sails in the sunset the first time they photographed him in the dark with the light behind him.

I used to tell Mr. Clinton, even after he got to be Governor, and he'd come in here and say, "Just a light trim,

Larry" — I still spelled it with two "r's" in those days — "just a light trim, Larry, scissors on the side."

And I'd say, "Governor, the public don't trust a governor when they can't see his ears. If you want to get re-elected you'd better let me use clippers."

The problem, see, is that when he was Governor, and even before, come to think of it, Mr. Clinton's ears were awful close to the side of his head, instead of sticking out sort of flaplike, like your average set of ears. So when he'd come in and say, "Scissors on the side," I'd always say: "No sir, Governor. Clippers on the side, and don't ever forget it if you want Arkansas to go on believing in you."

One day he came in here with Gore and that Stephanopoulos fellow and said to me, said, "Larry, these two good old boys both need a trim, clippers on the side." Well, they both got ears about the size of cabbage leaves and this Stephanopoulos knows it because he says no, he doesn't want clippers on the side, he wants scissors on the side, otherwise he's not going to have the trim.

But Gore says he's always wanted to know what he'd look like without all that hair for his ears to hunker down and nest in, and this is a good time to find out since his buddy Mr. Clinton has ordered him barbered clippers on the side. Stephanopoulos saved him, telling Mr. Clinton it was all right to have a little campaign joke at Gore's expense, but this one giving the whole country full disclosure of Gore's ears could mean the loss of four states in the Electoral College.

I kind of liked young Gore. He's got a nice jaw, doesn't he? The other night I was telling my bride I thought Gore would probably be President one of these days because he had the jaw for it, and she said, "Well, if he doesn't make it to the White House, he can always drop the 'r,' become 'Goe of the Nation's Capital' and make a fortune as barber to the stars."

Come to think of it, I could do that myself, couldn't I? If the stars really settle into Washington as the bride says they're bound to. She read that Barbra Streisand now spends all her time reading Thomas Jefferson and watching C-Span I and C-Span II when she's not watching CNN.

My bride says this sounds to her like a woman getting ready to be the first female Ronald Reagan, which reminds me by the way, you don't by chance happen to know who did the Gipper's hair dyeing, do you? □

By Bruce G. Blair

WASHINGTON
Since declaring its intention to give up its nuclear weapons almost two years ago, Ukraine has been building up a huge army and hedging its nuclear bets. Ukraine began temporizing only a month after its initial bold declaration, when conspirators in Moscow staged their coup and sent Soviet ground forces to Kiev with an ultimatum: Comply with the new regime or the army moves in. To back up the threat, helicopters reconnoitered the city while special forces trained to seize public buildings took up positions on the outskirts.

For Ukrainians, the incident drove home the precariousness of their sovereignty. Despite U.S. cajoling, Ukrainian legislators appear poised to backtrack and postpone joining the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.

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Lighten Up on Ukraine

While they will likely ratify the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty, they will surrender no warheads without firm security guarantees, Russian recognition of existing borders and several billion dollars for dismantling their arsenal.

Pressuring Ukraine seems only to strengthen pro-nuclear sentiment there. Russian officials and some Americans perversely favor pressing Ukraine to give up its 2,000 warheads in one or two years instead of the seven allowed under Start. Hackles rose in Kiev when Russia's ambassador referred to Ukraine's independence as temporary and when the Russian Vice President, Aleksandr V. Rutskoi, claimed Ukrainian territory.

This volatile mix of perceived Russian imperialism and U.S. haste to disarm Ukraine could push Kiev to try to seize independent control of the weapons on its territory in order to insure a nuclear deterrent against Russia. Russia still firmly controls the 176 ballistic missiles in Ukraine. And while Ukrainian troops physically control the 670 air-delivered warheads in storage there, only Russian codes can release the locking devices that prevent their detonation.

But Ukraine could take real control in a matter of months. Ukraine has the expertise to circumvent the locks on the air-delivered weapons and aim the missiles at Russia. Moscow might or might not sit by, but even a remote chance of a military response threatens stability.

To avert a conflagration, Russia and America should stop insisting that Ukraine precipitously hand over its weapons to Russia. Such demands only fuel Ukrainian paranoia. Instead, all three countries should remove all warheads from missiles scheduled for elimination under Start I and II and store them, along with Ukraine's air-delivered weapons, in jointly monitored depots in the countries they came from. That is, Ukrainian weapons would be monitored on Ukrainian soil by Americans, Russians and Ukrainians. Ukraine would still have to denuclearize in seven years.

This agreement would allay most of Ukraine's current fears. Removing warheads from Russian control respects Ukrainian sovereignty. Placing them under multinational guard defuses the dispute between Russia and Ukraine over who owns them, the

main stumbling block to Ukraine's joining the nonproliferation treaty. And participating in a fair multinational nuclear agreement, including stationing its own inspectors in the U.S. and Russia, would enhance Ukraine's international prestige.

Ukraine would also reap an eco-

International monitors for nuclear warheads.

nomie harvest. The U.S. has agreed to buy \$8 billion to \$13 billion worth of uranium from the old Soviet arsenal. Ukraine is to get a share of the proceeds. It should be able to cash in on its warheads as it turns them in.

Once secure in its sovereignty, Ukraine would be ready to disarm. And assured of Ukraine's non-nuclear future, the West would be ready for a new political and economic partnership with this emerging power. □

Make Health Reform Work. Draft Doctors.

By Richard C. Reynolds

PRINCETON, N.J.
The national debate on health care reform has highlighted a fundamental flaw in our medical system — the lack of doctors, even for those who have insurance, in rural and inner-city areas. There is only one practical way to deliver medical care to the tens of millions of Americans who lack it: mandatory public service by physicians.

At the end of 1992, an estimated 3,700 non-specialist physicians were needed in medically underserved areas. Although many physicians provide care to the needy at a reduced fee or no charge, volunteer efforts, splendid as they are, will never reach all Americans isolated by poverty, geography or residence in inadequate nursing homes, prisons or

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mental institutions. While these citizens receive care for serious illnesses requiring hospitalization, they remain deprived of basic health care.

Previous solutions have proved woefully inadequate. For example, community health centers today treat six million patients — only a small portion of the 35 million with no health insurance, and an even smaller fraction of others who might also benefit from the care such centers provide. Other insufficient solutions have included expanding the enrollment in health insurance plans, aggressive recruitment of physicians to underserved areas and educating patients to use medical care early and wisely when ill.

Unfortunately, training more physicians will only exacerbate the uneven distribution of doctors. Physicians tend to practice in the affluent communities where they like to live and close to the latest technologies required to practice a specialty. Another cause for regional shortages is that many young physicians graduate from medical school with a large tuition debt that often influences their

choice of what and where to practice.

President Clinton's proposals to finance higher education of all kinds in exchange for public service after graduation are worth exploring, but the responsibility to care for the medically needy should be shared by the entire profession, not just young phy-

Mandatory public service is the answer.

sicians who need financial aid to cover the costs of their education.

Besides, the Government's Public Health Service, which already offers scholarships to medical practitioners who will serve where there are shortages, cannot begin to meet the demand. The number of scholarships awarded each year has risen to 244 this year from 34 in 1986, yet enroll-

ment is dwarfed by need.

Mandatory public service for all physicians is not a radical idea. Beginning with World War II and continuing into the 1970's, physicians were required by law to serve for two years in the armed services or Public Health Service when called. They gave medical care to patients in military installations and publicly owned hospitals, to native Americans and to inmates of Federal prisons.

Mandatory service for physicians would also provide lessons for doctors now unavailable in medical school curriculums. Young physicians could not help but gain a deepened awareness of devilishly difficult "non-medical" problems such as drug and alcohol addiction, family violence and teen-age pregnancy which affect the health of patients.

A sense of obligation and social service once was a tenet of a physician's medical training and practice. Mandatory service needs to be re-introduced and re-emphasized for the entire profession. Medicine, the physician and, most importantly, the patient would be better served. □