

THE BRUNSWICK BEACON

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Women Of America, Take Over!

Granted I'm a highly impressionable sort, but the recent "Clinton for President" rally made a Hillary Clinton groupie out of me. With no preconceived notions, I instantly became a fan of this sleek, sharp, yet warm-hearted spokesperson for the Arkansas governor.



Marjorie Megivern

Leaving that rally with a glow of admiration, I was reminded of the two presidential wives I have met in the line of journalistic duty and the common thread that unites these experiences.

As a new education reporter for the *Star-News*, it was my enviable responsibility to accompany the winner of the regional spelling bee to Washington, D.C., for national competition. (Those were the days when this daily newspaper sponsored the regional winner)

It was a dazzling, fun-filled weekend for me, apart from my coverage of the bee, partly because we reporters got to see so many touristy sights along with the children.

One traditional activity for contestants was the visit to the White House for a reception at which the kids got to meet the First Lady. This was a highlight, as you might imagine, for wide-eyed youngsters, also for this wide-eyed reporter. In a great ballroom an enormous table was spread with zillions of cookies and wonderful punch to please youthful appetites; then everyone

filed by the First Lady for a handshake.

This was the Nixon era and, more significantly, the Watergate era. It was 1974 and the worst of the presidential revelations had just been laid before the nation. As a rabid Democrat, I brought little sympathy with me to Washington for "Tricky Dick."

However, when I lined up that day with the spellers to greet Pat Nixon, I was stricken with compassion and dismay. This pencil-thin little woman held in her drawn face all the pain of the investigation.

Nevertheless, she stood with dignity and grace through the ceremony of welcoming hundreds of children with a warm smile. This must have been one of dozens of activities she could have justifiably cancelled, but she didn't. I so admired this gallant woman, innocently trapped by a husband's ambition. When it was my turn to meet her, I choked out something inane like "God bless

you," and have held Mrs. Nixon in my heart ever since.

Two years later I met Rosalynn Carter just days after her husband's election. Chairman of New Hanover County's Mental Health Association, I was also still a *Star-News* reporter. I persuaded the newspaper to let me cover the national Mental Health Conference in Philadelphia, because Mrs. Carter would be there. Remember how deeply she had been involved in this cause long before she gained the limelight?

I hoped I could get an interview with her, but the conference day came and I still had not nailed down an appointment. My plan was to corral her at the event, at least for a few minutes.

With dozens of others in the hotel lobby the opening day of the conference, I craned my neck toward the entrance, awaiting the arrival of the new First Lady-elect. Right on time, she came through the doors, but had we not been familiar with her face, I'm not sure we would have recognized her. The slim little woman came marching in, unaccompanied by any entourage. Dressed in a downright dowdy skirt and cardigan sweater, she strode purposefully to the ballroom for her meeting, just throwing small, shy smiles in our direction.

Rosalynn Carter was not dabbling in mental health in order to get me-

dia attention. It was a genuine passion of hers and the report she gave on the convention floor demonstrated that. I stood in the balcony, surveying her and my chances of meeting her, spellbound by her ordinariness and by the depth of her involvement.

Suddenly I saw her leave the room below and I scampered out and down the stairs. There she was, on her way to the Ladies Room! No one else was in the hallway...now was my chance!

I stopped Mrs. Carter and introduced myself. She smiled vaguely at me, then remembered the name and apologized for the circumstances. "I'm sorry, but I just won't have time for an interview," she said graciously, and continued on her mission, perhaps an urgent one.

None of my meetings with First Ladies and a First Lady-hopeful were of much significance, but in all three cases I had the same reaction. Each of these women had qualities of substance, integrity and intelligence in measures far surpassing their husbands. Have we been electing the wrong sex for a long time, now? Feminist notion or not, I can't help wondering, what could this country be like with such responsible people at the helm?

Hillary, if Bill doesn't make it this time, why don't YOU try in '96?

Housing Rehab Effort Is Long Overdue Here

You may have missed the article on Page 7-A in last week's issue of *The Brunswick Beacon*, "Grant Would Upgrade Homes Along Busy Hale Swamp Road."

The news was important; it might have made the front page some other week.

Brunswick County is applying for its first community revitalization grant under the Community Development Block Grant program. Several municipalities, including Navassa and Southport, have received grants in the past. But the county has never applied.

Now the county is seeking a \$647,000 grant to improve housing conditions for residents living along Hale Swamp Road south of Shallotte.

You may know Hale Swamp Road by its former name, Blueberry Farm Road; it's one route for getting to Ocean Isle Beach from Shallotte. It's a route some people choose not to take, because they don't want to deal with what they see, something reminiscent of a Third World nation. Out of sight, out of mind, perhaps.

If you've ever gone that way, it most likely left a troubling impression, as it did with a consultant working on the county's application.

He said, "It kind of grabs you when you go down that road."

That it does. You have probably asked yourself, "How can people live in such homes, in such squalor?" That's probably as far as most people's concern has gone.

But the Brunswick County Public Housing Department didn't forget the families in those overcrowded, sub-standard houses on that road and in other neighborhoods across Brunswick County. With more than 500 substandard houses in the county, we have to start someplace, and Hale Swamp Road is an appropriate beginning point.

County Manager David Clegg was quoted last week as saying "It's time" for the county to get into community rehabilitation.

It's past time. While we might not want to admit it, such an effort is long overdue. It's a possibility now because it seems the county may be able to count a \$100,000 elevated water tower as its local match. How to match grants has been a stumbling block in the past, with the county unwilling to use its cash for that purpose.

We should all be embarrassed that there are families living in such conditions in our community. Decent shelter should be something families in America take for granted. This project will help fill part of the void; the Brunswick County Chapter of Habitat For Humanity will fill another; and home repair groups such as Helping Hands fill yet another.

By nature quick to judge others, we may ask how anyone would allow themselves to live in such conditions.

We forget—not having experienced it ourselves—that poverty and despair can paralyze the human spirit, sapping it of will, of dignity, of the ability to deal with anything more fundamental than mere survival.

Add to that the traditional escapes of our society such as alcohol and drug use, and you have a vicious cycle that may include abuse of family members, illiteracy, unemployment, drug and/or alcohol abuse, crime, teen-age pregnancies and unwed mothers—most any social ill you can name.

The Public Housing agency is talking about going the next mile, working with these targeted 18 families through a counseling program to not only provide decent housing, but to teach them how to maintain and care for their homes, and encourage them to continue their education.

That's a good beginning. But why not go one step further, and make it true community/human development project? Why not involve other agencies in trying to work with this target group of families? The county social services and health departments, Brunswick Community College and the literacy council, Hope Harbor Home and perhaps Southeastern all could play a role in giving these families an opportunity to regain their dignity and become more productive individuals.



How Busy Is Your 'Viewing Screen'?

Elsewhere in this edition you'll find an article by Marjorie Megivern about a reading program at Waccamaw Elementary School that encourages parents and their children to read, and even better, to read together as well as individually.



Susan Usher

This program is a fantastic idea. One of our employees, CeCe Gore, and her son Christopher participate. They give rave reviews.

The importance of reading can't be overemphasized. And how do children become readers except through the encouragement and example of their parents and other adult role models?

Studies by a University of Maryland sociology professor indicate that the average adult American reads just 24 minutes a day. That's down one-quarter since 1965.

With all the modern technology available to us, the question is asked, "Who needs to read?"

The answer hasn't changed. Writing in the Nov. 18 issue of *Time*, Stratford P. Sherman states it simply: "...everyone who hopes to be productive or successful."

He continues, "Reading is strongly connected to many of the most important skills in business—among them speech and writing, the primary forms of human communication."

How much time do you spend reading every day? Chances are more than the typical American citizen; after all, you're reading a news-

paper right now.

In contrast, how much time do you spend watching television? Television isn't all bad; that's a good thing since the average child spends more time indiscriminately watching television—the harried parent's babysitter—they do on schoolwork or reading.

A survey by the N.C. Division of Public Instruction of middle-school students about their television viewing habits yielded some similarly disturbing data.

Many of their parents do little better, glued to whatever's on the screen of the family's other television set.

The scene in many homes these days, with their multiple television sets and VCRs, is reminiscent of that described in Ray Bradbury's tale of *The Pedestrian*. It was written in 1951, just as that most marvelous and terrifying of all machines, television, started to become a household word.

The story was written as science fiction, but sometimes a writer's imagination has a prophetic quality.

Leonard Mead, the pedestrian is a man who goes against all the norms of A.D. 2053: He is unmarried, lives alone and prefers rambling the streets and meadows at night to sitting in front of the viewing screen that has become virtually an object of worship in each household.

When he heads out of an evening, he is always the only one about. All others are enthralled by their viewing screens, retiring to their living rooms and dens to see what's on the tube that particular night.

"Sometimes he would walk for hours and miles and return only at midnight to his house. And on his way he would see the cottages with their dark windows and it was not unequal to walking through a graveyard where only the faintest glimmers of firefly light appeared in

flickers behind the windows..."

"Hello in there," he whispered to every house on every side. "What's up tonight on channel four...channel seven...channel nine? Where are the cowboys rushing, and do I see the United States cavalry over the next hill to the rescue?"

One evening Mead is stopped by a robot-activated cop car that wants to know what he is doing out and about when he has a perfectly good house with air conditioning and other amenities.

"And you have a viewing screen in your house to see with?" the voice asked as part of its routine grilling.

"No," Mead said, telling the voice that he had walked at night for years.

The back door of the police car springs open and the voice directs Mead, "Get in."

"I protest!" "Mister Mead..." He peers into the cell-like area, a little black jail with bars.

"Where are you taking me?" he asks, though I'm certain he knew the answer.

"To the psychiatric center for research on regressive tendencies."

Mead and his escort passed one house on one street a moment later, one house in an entire city of houses that were dark. But this one particular house had all of its electric lights brightly lit, every window a loud yellow illumination, square and warm in the cool darkness.

It was the last bastion of the imagination.

It was Leonard Mead's house, of course.

"Unless Americans start reading more," warns Stratford P. Sherman, "they may someday lose their ability to imagine much of anything for themselves—including a world different from the one on the screen."

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Let's Stop Fussing Over Petty Annoyances

To the editor:

As a resident of Brunswick County, I have read with interest the on-going debate over the new post office at Seaside. I really don't understand the views and attitudes of some people, especially Mr. (Roney) Cheers, towards the new office.

I live on Ocean Isle Beach, or as Mr. Cheers said, "that end of the county". What is wrong with the people, contractors, developers, etc., on this end of the county? Don't the people of Ocean Isle Beach, Sunset, Calabash and Seaside and other parts of "that end of the county" pay taxes and deserve conveniences just as do the people in Shallotte? Haven't the people here always supported business in Shallotte as well as other areas of the county? Is there something wrong with progress in our county?

On the statement of the post office in Shallotte being a "landmark," the building, so I've been told, does not belong to the post office. It's a leased building. What happens when the lease runs out and the owner wants another business there? Or, what happens when a new post office is built in Shallotte? No more landmark!!

As for the postmaster's office, how many times has Mr. Cheers visited the postmaster's office in Shallotte before this debate? I checked. He never has. As for the mail handling, doesn't it seem feasible for them to have an expanded work area so as to better move the mail? How many times has anyone in the county had to meet a mail handler at the post office?

Since I've lived here and decided to make Brunswick County my home, I've found some

of the most wonderful people in the world! In my job I've traveled all over the world from Spain, Germany, South America, Japan, Singapore, Australia, Israel and all in between. I always have the same feeling inside—I can't wait to get back to Ocean Isle Beach and Brunswick County.

We have a great county and huge potential here, so why cannot all of us work together and get involved in the "really important issues and needs."

Let's make Brunswick County an even better place to live and stop fussing over petty annoyances.

Ken Proctor
Ocean Isle Beach

(More LETTERS, Page 5)