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on the 28th

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Sex and Politics

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by Marien Helz

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2004 Apex Awards!**

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Liver and Onions

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Sex and Politics

by Marien Helz

“Power is an aphrodisiac,” Henry Kissinger was reported to have said, and if one can judge by the photographs of glamorous women with their wrists lightly entwining his elbow, he found out the fun way. He was not married at the time, however, and when he did marry, he chose intellect, not starlet.

Since the country is still reeling from Kenneth Starr’s voyeuristic investigation of President Clinton, the temptation is to declare that someone’s entanglements are no one else’s business. Despite the fact, however, that we would have been better off without Starr—both financially and morally—connections between people have always been everyone’s business. In a firm or company, who lunches with whom and plays golf with whom determines who is on the inside of the decision making policies and whose job gets marginalized out of existence. Lawsuits have been filed and won because this kind of practice unjustly relegates individuals to subservient status.

The very existence of marriage is a declaration by societies the world over from before recorded history that who sleeps with whom is not only everyone’s business, it’s a matter for public license. The sanctity of the marriage bed and laws protecting it safeguard paternity, progeny security and heritage, and prevent transmission of disease. Promiscuity is simply unhealthy, individually and globally. With ever increasing abandonment of sexual mores came increasing threat of serious epidemic. First, there was antibiotic resistant gonorrhea, then genital herpes, and since those scourges did not serve as a wake up call, we are faced with the global AIDS threat.

We know from Starr’s lewd investigation that Clinton made sure in his indiscretion that there would be neither transmission of disease nor of what the British refer to as the problem of “split blood lines.” [A national paternity suit against a president, or even the rumors surrounding illegitimate offspring, would have derailed the process of government even more than what occurred.]

What Clinton was not able to control was the devastating effects on his wife and child and the disruption to his office caused by his dalliance. His family, however, is more a private issue than a public one—although with very famous people, the private and public tend to merge since there is no privacy for the families of such people.

The disruption to the office of a leader who dallies with staff is known to anyone who has worked for a supervisor who shuts himself in his office with his secretary and is incommunicado for hours on end when people need to confer with him. If Lewinski’s presence had not been a distraction, the staff would not have been so determined to remove her.

What redeems Clinton, if not exonerates him, is his breaking off the relationship prior to its discovery, his clear and opened remorse, his accomplishments in spite of it, and his determination to rebuild his integrity and the stability of his family.

His partner in indiscretion did not, unfortunately, receive equal clarity. In an interview shortly after the impeachment proceedings, she complained to Barbara Walters about the “meanies” who had her transferred out of the Oval Office. The affair, she claimed, kept neither her nor the President from doing their jobs—she conveniently ignored the disruption to the entire White House staff and to all Congress as Government ground to a halt.

Although Starr’s investigation was prurient and improper, public officials should be held to standards of behavior. Not to do so leads to the endangerment of ordinary citizens whom the government is designed to protect. We suffered with a president in the 1960’s who bragged to reporters that he had had a thousand women in his bed. Carl Rowan wrote that when he headed the U.S. Information Agency, he was “...approached by a shaken White House employee who told me of her first duty trip to the Texas ranch She said she was awakened in the wee hours of her first night there in terror, certain that someone was in her room. When a little pencil flashlight was shone on her face, she was too terrified to scream. Then she recognized ... [the] voice saying, ‘Move over. This is your president’.” That is nothing less than rape.

That president’s predecessor turned the White House into a brothel. Much darker rumors persist about the fate of some women with whom he was involved. What we know for sure is that that president was cavorting with someone who was simultaneously cavorting with crime figures. We also know that a promising young staff member died in a car from which his brother escaped after it crashed over a bridge.

In the same time period, a British Minister’s indiscretions discredited his government.

More recently, congressmen from both parties have been caught in sex scandals involving congressional pages—who are high school children—making those congressmen statutory rapists. While millions of our dollars have been spent investigating Clinton, these far more serious violations have received little attention.

Generally, a public figure’s misbehavior makes his family victims as well. Honorable politicians have little enough time for their spouses and children, and when dishonorable ones add illicit relationships, they are creating private problems that will eventually become public. Mitterrand’s apparently long-suffering wife was finally able to expose the baseness of her husband to the world by having his mistress and illegitima paraded at his funeral.

To paraphrase Shakespeare, *Misbehavior in great ones must not unwatched go*. At worst, a beautiful and bright girl on the threshold of adulthood has an affair with a congressman and disappears until a year later when her skeletal remains are found in Rock Creek Park. Whether or not the two circumstances are directly related, a powerful figure’s leading a young person into a covert life in which respectable connections are limited is an abuse of power and of government which is established to protect its citizenry.

Liver and Onions

by Charles Miess

It's not that I don't like liver. In fact, you can go down to the local diner or family restaurant on the night of a *liver-and-onions-special* and it's likely you'll see me there. Yeah, I know, cooked liver smells like a barnyard and all that, but I like it anyway—especially when it's served up with a heaping mound of mashed potatoes smothered in dark gravy. But it wasn't always like that. There was a time in my life when liver and mashed potatoes didn't sit well with me—but I'm getting ahead of myself—so let me start from the beginning.

Now, I'm not going to admit how long ago it was; let's just say I was about 19 years old. I had finished Navy basic training—Boot Camp they called it—and was heading for my first duty station. My orders were to report to the Brooklyn Navy Yard for duty aboard an old Destroyer of World War II vintage. Although I felt like an *Old Salt* already with that ten weeks of training under my belt, I



Photograph © 2004 John Miess

welcomed a little time at sea to prove it to everyone else. But I'll never forget the looks of that decrepit ship the morning I first saw it. In Navy lingo, a Destroyer is a *Tin Can* and this tin can looked like it had been kicked from Spain to Singapore. It had huge dents in the hull from bow to stern and from port to starboard. I was surprised it was still floating.

I walked up the gangplank and gave a sympathetic salute to Old Glory waving anxiously on the fantail, and followed with a crisp salute to the Officer of the Quarterdeck. "Request permission to come aboard sir," I said boldly as I showed him my orders. He directed me to the foc'sle (that's the front of the ship to you landlubbers), then through a hatch in the deck, and down a ladder to my cramped living quarters. This compartment, as they called it, smelled like a locker room for wrestlers. The bunks were stacked three high, with half-an-arm's-length between your nose and the backside of your shipmate's two-inch thick mattress above. I had the bottom bunk, which had to be hinged up when any of the three vertical occupants needed to get to their footlockers below me.

Well, I was unpacking my sea bag when another new recruit came aboard. He was tall and skinny and had his little Dixie Cup sailor hat cocked to one side of his bony head. His ears stuck out sideways, his nose was hooked like the beak of an albatross, and he had an Adam's apple the size of a walnut. Blow me down if he was the spittin' image of the cartoon character Ichabod

Crane—straight from Sleepy Hollow. But my mother didn't raise any inconsiderate boobs, so, of course, I would never tell him that. He introduced himself to me with some long Italian name that I have since forgotten. "I'm Charlie Miess—nice to meet you mate," I said.

"Miess, mice, mouse—Meeeeese, mice mouse," he repeated thoughtfully while staring at the overhead and scratching his Adam's apple. "I think I'll call you *Mouse*. You don't mind, do you?"

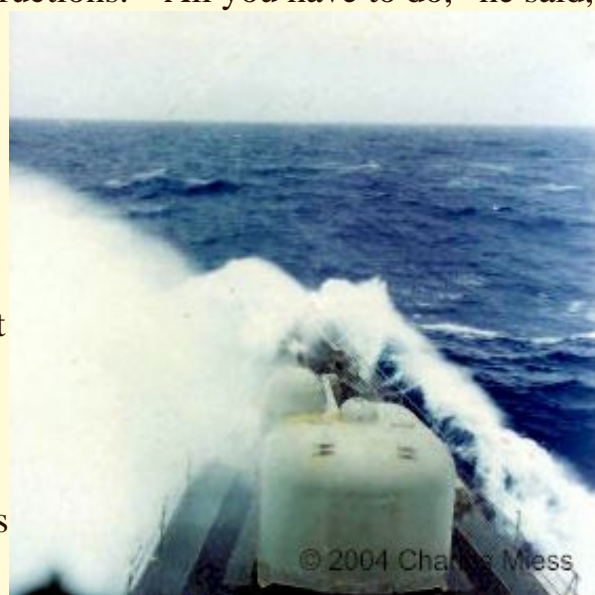
"Not at all *Ichabod*," I replied.

Just then, the tough, leathery face of the boatswain mate appeared through the open hatch in the overhead. "Hey pukes," he shouted, "this deck needs a swabbin'—get your tender butts up here—ON THE DOUBLE!"

Now I get along pretty well with most everybody, but there was something about this bos'un that I didn't like. Somehow I sensed that Ichabod felt the same way. With this common seed, an uncommon friendship started to grow. My new friend and I were still swabbing the foc'sle deck when a tugboat pulled our 377-foot scrap heap away from the pier. Then, under our own power, we started our voyage south, officially under way for San Juan, Puerto Rico.

It was late afternoon of the next day, off Cape Hatteras, when the winds started to pick up. Ichy and I had graduated from swabbing the decks to mess duty. We had liver that day. Never having done much cooking at home, the ship's cook gave me detailed instructions. "All you have to do," he said, "is fry the blood out." So, I was doing that and Ichy was beating up a big kettle of mashed potatoes with an antique, industrial-sized mixer. The ship was rolling and pitching pretty good by now and we were sliding back and forth across the slippery floor on our Navy issue, leather soled shoes. Ichy wasn't looking too perky and I have to admit that my appetite was faltering a bit. The smell of the liver frying was starting to get to me, so I decided that I would just have mashed potatoes that day.

"Take the spuds out on the line and then you guys go eat," ordered the cook, with the butt of a Lucky Strike dangling from the corner of his mouth. I grabbed the kettle of potatoes and my heart sank when I saw that the mixer had been dripping oil. There was a black puddle on the top of the potatoes like a ladlefull of gravy. The cook grinned as he churned it in with a couple of swirls of a big spoon. The liver was starting to look better.



We had to work in the scullery after dinner. The scullery is a hot, steamy little compartment with a perpetually greasy floor where the sailors return their trays of half-eaten chow. It was our job to scrape the stuff into a large corrugated garbage can, send the trays through the washer, and return them to the line. Sweat was pouring off my face as I slid across the floor with each roll of the ship. I felt like I had a ball of rancid fat in my stomach from the liver I had eaten. Ichy was in the passageway outside the scullery leaning against the bulkhead, staring off in the distance, and trying desperately to will himself into unconsciousness. I had always thought that *green under the eyes* was just an expression, but Ichy's face proved me wrong. On top of that, he hadn't eaten all day and so he went into dry heaves each time his mind slipped back to reality.

Now, I hope you don't take this as a sign of weakness, but I have to admit that I was feeling pretty sick too. Not wanting to jeopardize my *Old Salt* aspirations, however, I decided to go up topside and empty my stomach over the lifelines, in private. As soon as I stepped onto the weather decks, I was slapped in the face with a blast of wind and salt spray. I worked my way carefully to the lifelines, trying not to slip and be thrown overboard. Funny thing though, that cool, fresh air was all it took to get my digestive process back to normal again. I was standing there thinking of the fish that got cheated of their meal when I heard the bos'un's voice behind me. "Hey puke," he said, "I thought you were supposed to be on mess duty!"



Courtesy of Ken Denning RM3 NavSource

Back in the hot, greasy scullery, my stomach problems returned with a vengeance. I had to empty my belly one way or another. So, I grabbed the rim of the garbage can that was half full of liver scraps and tainted mashed potatoes—stuck my face into it—and inhaled deeply. The term *projectile vomiting* was born that day. Ichy was jolted from his semi-conscious state and cried out, "Mouse, you bastard!" Then he started his unproductive retching again.

"Ichy," I said between gasps, with my voice echoing around that can, "I think I know why the bos'un calls us pukes."

Cover

Reid

We are pleased to present Photography by Michelle M Mayer

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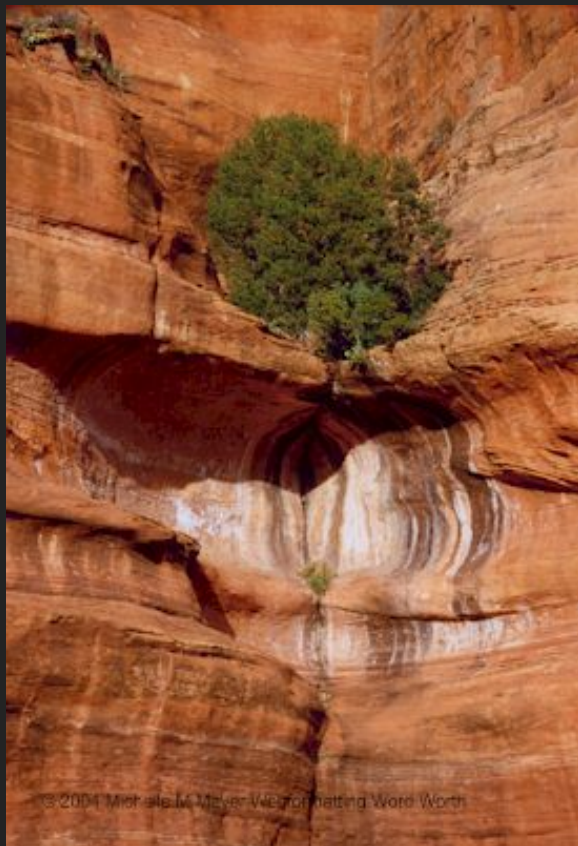
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