

A Still, Small Voice

Dear Lynne,

What do you feel about this article? It's too long to put into my next newsletter. Or, I could, I suppose, excerpt it into a 400 word essay, but I would first have to remove the sentences that support the males' view points (*if I could distinguish them from the womens'.*) Would you mind helping me on this one, please?

~ David Moorhead

A Still, Small Voice

ORIGINAL VERSION

~ David Brooks

Op-Ed columnist, New York Times

October 16, 2007

A few weeks ago, I interviewed Deborah Pryce, the Republican congresswoman, in her Washington office. There was a doll propped up against a windowsill, and I wanted to ask her if it had belonged to her daughter, who died of cancer at age 9 in 1999. But that question seemed to trespass on something out of bounds, so I asked about her re-election campaign in 2006.

Her Ohio House race had been one of the toughest in the entire country. And when I brought it up, I expected her to talk about the vicious ads that had been run against her. Instead, she talked about the ads that she had put on the air against her opponent.

"I was appalled by what I had to do," she said. In close races, the national parties send teams of professionals to take over campaigns, and the candidates who resist their efforts generally lose.

When Pryce spoke about the direct-mail letters that went out under her name, she did so with a look of disgust. She said that her friends kept coming to her to complain about the TV ads she was running against her opponent. Finally, her own mother told her she was ashamed of the ads.

The truth is, Pryce's opponents did worse. But it was her own ads that she kept dwelling on, and as she spoke, I could see that she'd been fighting the war that the best politicians fight—the war within herself to preserve her own humanity.

Politics, as you know, is a tainted profession. Professional politicians cannot serve their country if they do not win their races, and to do that they must grapple with a vast array of forces that try to remold and destroy who they are.

There are consultants who try to turn them into prepackaged clones. There are party whips demanding total loyalty. There is a culture of workaholism that strangles private life and private thinking. There are journalists who define them based on a few ideological labels.

And then there is the soul-destroying act of campaigning itself. Active campaigners are compelled to embrace the ideology of Meism.

They spend their days talking endlessly about Me. When they meet donors, they want to know if they are giving to Me or against Me. When they meet advisers and fellow pols, they want to know, do they support Me or not Me. When they think about strategy, it's about better ways to present Me. When they craft positions, they want to know, what does this say about Me?

No normal person can withstand the onslaught of egotism and come out unscathed.

And so there are two kinds of politicians: those who become creatures of the process, and those who, like Pryce, resist and retain the capacity to be appalled by what they must do.

An amazing number gladly surrender. "Public people almost eagerly dehumanize themselves," Meg Greenfield wrote in "Washington," her memoir. "They allow the markings of region, family, class, individual character and, generally, personhood that they once possessed to be leached away. At the same time, they construct a new public self that often does terrible damage to what remains of the genuine person."

These politicians become denatured pantomimes. They have no thoughts in private that are different from the bromides they utter in public. They confuse public image with real self. They talk to you as an individual the same way they would address a large crowd.

These simulated creatures end up successful, Greenfield emphasized, but also sad and lonely. They become the victims of the tawdry scandals that blow up from time to time.

But the other politicians—the more interesting and impressive ones—struggle to preserve their personal integrity. Many of those who struggle hardest have suffered a personal trauma, like the death of a child or time in a P.O.W. camp, which has created a private space that they refuse to sacrifice to politics.

Politicians of this sort do what they need to do to win, but they labor to preserve that inner voice. You see it in every conversation—an effort to ground politics in regular relationships, a capacity to carry on a candid inner monologue.

When I asked Deborah Pryce, for example, to reflect on her time in the House, it wasn't the political issues that she remembered most. It was the people she admired and the personal moments of compassion and bravery.

Pryce has retained that honest, inner voice, and she has decided to retire after this term. It's not as rewarding being in the minority, she says, and with the new, longer workweek, it's harder to get home to her adopted daughter.

Dear David,

I highlighted in red David Brooks' comments—just some of the masculinity he can't hide; my comments are in purple. Hope this helps and I could be totally wrong!

A few weeks ago, I interviewed Deborah Pryce, the Republican congresswoman, in her Washington office. There was a doll propped up against a windowsill, and I wanted to ask her if it had belonged to her daughter, who died of cancer at age 9 in 1999. **But that question seemed to trespass on something out of bounds, so I asked about her re-election campaign in 2006.** (a woman wouldn't hesitate to ask about the doll, but for a man, it would be risky to venture so close to emotions and feelings)

Her Ohio House race had been one of the toughest in the entire country. And when I brought it up, **I expected her to talk about the vicious ads that had been run against her.** (as any man would—looking outside himself for someone to blame for his angst) **Instead,**

she talked about the ads that she had put on the air against her opponent. (a man *would* be amazed at the lack of retaliation on her part)

"I was appalled by what I had to do," she said. In close races, the national parties send **teams** (always out-numbering the "player") of professionals **to take over campaigns**, (instead of joining the players already there) **and the candidates who resist their efforts generally lose**. (pay-back from the "team" for not cooperating)

When Pryce spoke about the direct-mail letters that went out under her name, she did so with a look of disgust. She said that her friends kept coming to her to complain about the TV ads she was running against her opponent. Finally, her own mother told her she was ashamed of the ads.

The truth is, Pryce's opponents did worse. But it was her own ads that she kept dwelling on, and as she spoke, I could see that she'd been **fighting the war** (typical male phrase; could've said trying to figure out the rules imposed) that the best politicians **fight** (there's that word again—if men don't flee, they're expected to fight)—the war within herself to preserve **her own humanity** (her own identity would be too feminine—he had to group her into his safer, larger context).

Politics, as you know, is a **tainted profession** (as if it's expected). Professional politicians (notice he didn't say professional "tainted" politicians) cannot serve their country (he really means their own interests) if they do not win their races, and to do that they must grapple with a vast array of **forces that try to remold and destroy who they are**. (male forces try to remold and destroy, not female)

There are consultants who try to turn them into prepackaged clones. There are **party whips demanding total loyalty**. (such a masculine description) There is **a culture of workaholism that strangles private life and private thinking**. (just like ambitious working men in real life) There are journalists who define them based on a **few ideological labels**. (men only have a few ideologies—win and reign, primarily)

And then there is the soul-destroying act of campaigning itself. Active campaigners are compelled to **embrace the ideology of Meism**. (what's in it for me is sooo masculine)

They spend their days talking endlessly about Me. When they meet donors, they want to know if they are giving to Me or against Me. When they meet advisers and fellow (fellow, even if a woman) pols, they want to know, do they support Me or not Me. When they think about strategy, (what man doesn't? a military term!) it's about better ways to present Me. When they craft positions, (make themselves up instead of being authentic) they want to know, what does this say about Me?

No normal person can withstand the onslaught of egotism (are males or females known as egotistical?) and come out unscathed. (so one has to be abnormal to withstand and emerge unharmed?)

And so there are two kinds of politicians: those who become creatures (tainted hairy monsters who block out their consciences?) of the process, and those who, like Pryce, resist and retain the capacity to be appalled by what they must do. (I.e., a man would not be appalled, but rather consider himself a hero for surviving the torture of what others did to him)

An amazing number gladly surrender. "Public people almost eagerly dehumanize themselves," Meg Greenfield wrote in "Washington," her memoir. "They allow the markings of region, family, class, individual character and, generally, personhood that they once possessed to be leached (by the male blood lusts) away. At the same time, they construct (morph to fit) a new public self that often does terrible damage to what remains of the genuine person."

These politicians become denatured (removing anything feminine I.e., natural) pantomimes. They have no thoughts in private that are different (like cementing a hole in a dam) from the bromides they utter in public. They confuse public image with real self. They talk to you as an individual the same way they would address a large crowd. (typical male communication mode)

These simulated (similar to real but not) creatures end up successful, Greenfield emphasized, but also sad and lonely. (blaming others for making him do it and then abandoning him) They become the victims (instead of deserving recipients?) of the tawdry scandals that blow up from time to time.

But the other politicians—the more interesting and impressive ones—struggle to preserve their personal integrity. Many of those who struggle hardest have suffered a personal trauma, like the death of a child or time in a P.O.W. camp, (like a man couldn't relate to the death of a child?) which has created a private space (like the garage for retreating into) that they refuse to sacrifice to politics.

Politicians of this sort do what they need to do to win, (like playing football with an injury—only wooses would quit) but they labor (physical as opposed to mental struggle) to preserve that inner voice. You see it in every conversation—an effort (physical energy expenditure) to ground politics in regular relationships, (I wonder what a regular relationship is!) a capacity to carry (more physical energy expenditure) on a candid inner monologue.

When I asked Deborah Pryce, for example, to reflect on her time in the House, it wasn't the political issues that she remembered most. It was the people she admired (relationships, not results) and the personal moments of compassion (a man would've had few) and bravery. (a man would make some up if needed)

Pryce has retained that honest, inner voice, and she has decided to retire after this term. It's not as rewarding being in the minority, (especially as a female in politics) she says, and with the new, longer workweek, it's harder to get home to her adopted daughter. (where she belongs, he's probably thinking)