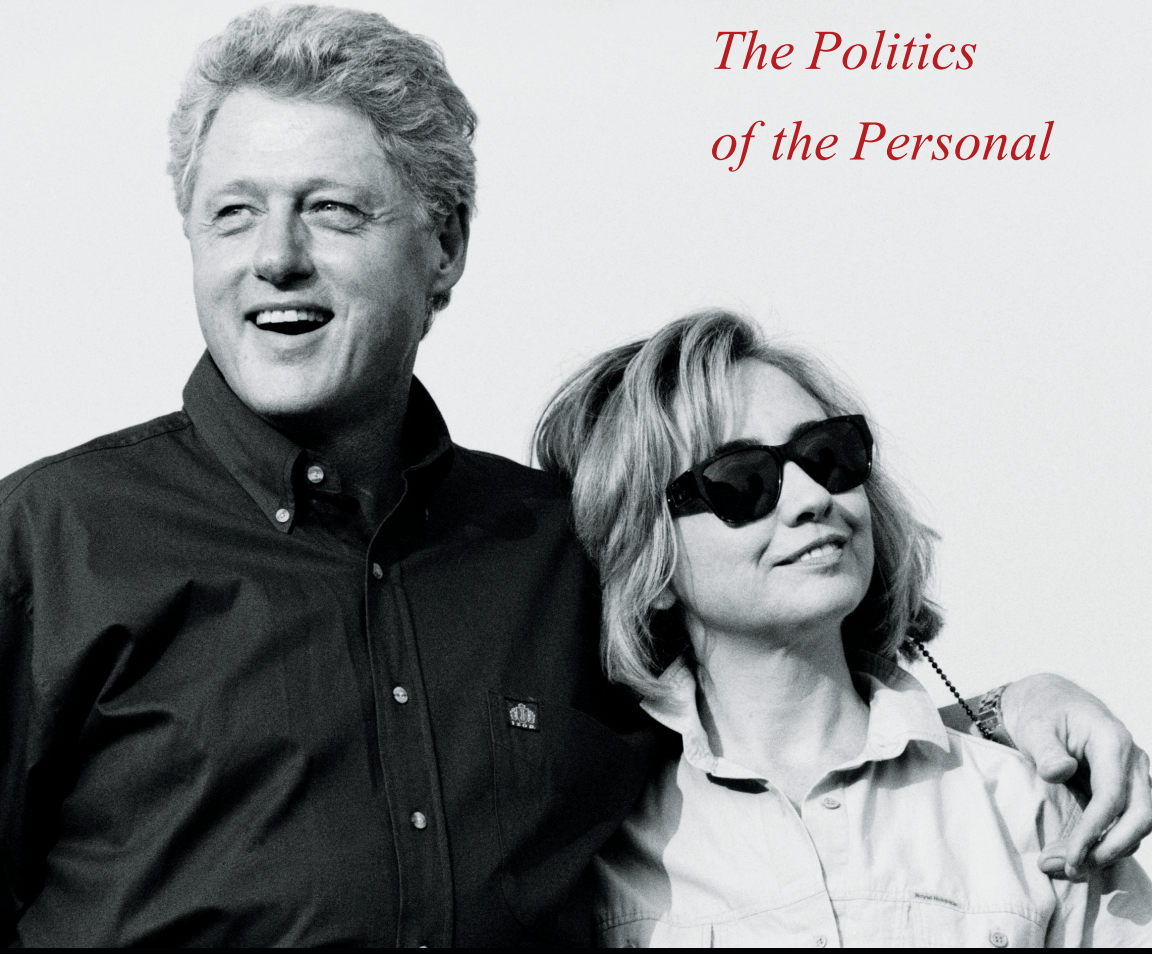
Bill and Hillary

The Politics of the Personal



William H. Chafe

PRAISE FOR

Bill and Hillary: The Politics of the Personal

BY WILLIAM H. CHAFE

"William H. Chafe understands, as do too few historians and biographers, that the personal and public lives of political figures cannot be separated. . . . Chafe is quite right to insist that the stories of Bill and Hillary Clinton prove the point."
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"Riveting. . . . Chafe sees clearly what we who were there, chronicling the Clintons in real time, missed."
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"The strength of this book lies in Chafe's reconstruction of the Clintons' early lives and the way their connection affected the decisions Bill Clinton made as governor of Arkansas and as president. . . . [*Bill and Hillary* is] a welcome reminder of the great promise that the Clinton 'co-presidency' initially held, and of the attributes, from Clinton's intellect to his willingness to engage on racial issues and his ability to connect with people, that made those of us who saw him sworn in truly believe, for a time, in 'a place called Hope.'"
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"Chafe . . . delivers a superior portrait of how the dynamic between Bill and Hillary Clinton affected their achievements in public life."
—*Publishers Weekly* (starred review)

"An engaging look at the personal relationship behind one of the most powerful political marriages in the nation's history."
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"Chafe is careful to back up his suppositions with good evidence, and the portrait that emerges is both believable and of consummate interest to political junkies. An illuminating glimpse behind the scenes."
—*Kirkus Reviews*

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The Politics of the Personal

William H. Chafe

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For Lorna,
who has been there
for the whole journey

Contents

Preface

At first glance it might seem strange that I am writing this book. I started off as a women's historian, writing primarily about the experience of housewives and working women, the suffrage movement, and the impact of the Great Depression, World War II, suburbanization, and latter-day feminism on different groups of women. Hand in hand with that, I pursued a commitment to tell the story of the civil rights struggle from the bottom up, using community studies of ordinary people—not heroes or heroines—to fathom the persistent struggle for social equality among black Americans. But at the foundation of all this was a belief, nurtured by growing up in a socially conscious church, that individuals could make a difference by engaging in the cause of social justice.

One theme running throughout my work is the tension between reform and radicalism in movements for social change. I came of age in the 1960s, when a generation changed every two years. Had I been born a few years later, I would have become a radical. But as it was I grew up with a belief that one could create change by working *within* the system, not by trying to *overthrow* it. Still, I was fascinated by the hair's-edge difference between being an ardent reformer and a confirmed radical. How far could a reformer push the envelope before it broke open?

To better understand that conundrum I undertook my first biography, a study of the quintessential liberal reformer Allard K. Lowenstein. As a leader of the National Student Association, Lowenstein became the young activist who first thought of bringing white civil rights supporters to Mississippi for the Freedom Vote campaign of 1963. He then moved on to become the architect of the Dump Johnson campaign of

1967–68. Lowenstein personified the dilemma I was trying to understand. How did a liberal construct his world? What stopped him from becoming a radical? When I started the biography, I had no idea of the tortured personal roots of Lowenstein's choice to become a liberal crusader. Only when I got inside his life did I discover how profoundly his personal experiences shaped his public life. The principal reasons that Lowenstein pursued his peripatetic lifestyle of reform activism went back to his ambivalence about being Jewish, his anguish after discovering that his real mother had died when he was one, and, above all, the realization that he was attracted sexually to boys. It was from these personal experiences that he could "never stop running"—away from the truth about himself, toward hopping the next airplane and taking on the next crusade. That insight provided the book with its title.

So it turns out that there is a line that directly connects a scholar passionately committed to studying issues of race and gender equality from the bottom up and a scholar who writes about the private motivations of individual men and women and how their private experiences end up shaping their political activities and public lives. It seems appropriate that Bill and Hillary Clinton came to political consciousness and maturity in the same decade I did, with the same focus on race and equality. And that subsequently, the struggle for women's liberation played a central role in their lives, as it did in mine and that of my family. Thus there is a logic to this journey, a roundedness. And rather than being strange, it seems natural to be writing this book about "the politics of the personal."

William H. Chafe
Georgetown, Maine

Bill and Hillary

Introduction

In the 1960s, the women's liberation movement introduced a new phrase into the national vocabulary: "The personal is political."

The slogan had its origins in thousands of consciousness-raising groups around the country where women talked about growing up in a society full of sex stereotypes. Cultural norms defined what was "feminine" behavior and what was "masculine"; what women could do, what men could do; how life could be compartmentalized into gender-labeled categories. American life was full of such categories. What was "public" differed from what was "private." "Political" issues defined one arena of life experience. "Personal" issues occupied a totally different realm.

Feminists disagreed. What went on in the bedroom or the kitchen, they pointed out, reflected patterns of power that pervaded Wall Street and the government as well. The tone of voice one adopted, the household roles one played, the assertiveness or passivity one displayed—all of these reflected a deeper truth: that the private and the public, the personal and the political, were connected. Who did what around the house spoke to a larger system of how power was apportioned, what opportunities did or did not exist. The conclusion feminists drew from this was simple and revolutionary: If relations between women and men were to change, *everything* had to change.

Since the 1960s we have learned to translate the insight of feminists into a larger understanding of what defines history, and of what animates politics. Public figures are shaped by private experiences. Their political behavior reflects personal values and choices as well as issues of public policy. Personal experiences infuse and inspire the choices that political figures make. What goes on in the family where a

child grows up helps define in fundamental ways how that child responds as an adult to moments of political or moral crisis.

By now that insight has extended into our study of people in power. We know that understanding the presidency of Franklin Delano Roosevelt requires understanding his relationship with his mother, his aristocratic roots, his marriage to Eleanor Roosevelt, and perhaps above all his experience of being a victim of polio. Similarly, we cannot understand Eleanor Roosevelt without knowing about her alcoholic father, her experience of intellectual awakening in an English boarding school under the tutelage of a strong feminist, her engagement in social activism through networks of women reformers, and the crisis of her learning of her husband's infidelity. The personal is political. The private and the public are deeply connected. Wives affect husbands, and husbands wives.

This book is about two people who even more than Eleanor and Franklin speak to the intersection of the personal and the political. Bill and Hillary Clinton have helped define the political life of a generation. No personalities in recent history speak more compellingly to the importance of understanding that the personal and the political are inseparable.

The entwined personal and political lives of Bill and Hillary Clinton offer new insight into how pivotal it is to understand the personalities of our leaders if we are to understand the politics they have helped shape for us. America provides no clearer example than the Clintons of the consequences of how the forces of the personal and the political are seamlessly connected.

ONE

Bill Clinton: The Early Years

It would be difficult to invent a childhood more bizarre than Bill Clinton's. He was born the son of Virginia Blythe, a nurse proud of her flirtatious nature who spent ninety minutes each morning putting on her makeup. Virginia's husband, Bill, lied serially about his past, and shortly after their marriage during World War II, he went overseas with the army. Five months after returning—and three months before Bill's birth—Bill died in an automobile accident. A year later, Virginia went off to New Orleans to train as a nurse anesthetist, leaving the care of her infant son to her parents. Virginia soon married her second husband, Roger Clinton, whose record of multiple marriages and troubled relationships made Bill Blythe's past look angelic. Soon alcoholism and spousal abuse consumed the Clinton household. Through all of this, Billy Clinton stood as the symbol of hope, the adored special child who would make everything right, the savior of an otherwise unredeemable situation. He emerged as a "family hero" who soon came to see himself, and be seen by others, as destined to become a leader, not just of his family and community but of the American nation as a whole.

Virginia Cassidy, Bill's mother, grew up in a household torn by conflict. Her mother, Edith Grisham, later called Mammaw by everyone, was born poor in rural Arkansas. She craved money and material goods but felt condemned to a life of working in the fields, trying to make ends meet. She married the boy across the road, James Eldridge Cassidy, a sweet, gentle, fun-loving man—not because he guaranteed her a better life, but because he was submissive and she could control him. Virginia's

mother demanded that they move in pursuit of more opportunities, so they crated their belongings and settled in Hope, a small city of five thousand. It was big enough to be a stop on the train line and boasted movie theaters, a commercial district, and a greater variety of people. There, Eldridge got a job delivering ice, while Mammaw trained as a nurse through a correspondence course and hired herself out to private patients. She reveled in her status, proudly wearing her starched white uniform and blue cape embroidered with gold initials. Eldridge had fewer pretensions, but he loved gossiping with his customers and making friends.[1]

But it was not a happy home. "My mother created sparks wherever she went," Virginia later wrote, "which meant that my father and I were the ones who got burned the most." Despite her professional pride in being a nurse, Virginia's mother was at heart mean-spirited, showing little affection for other people. "She had hellfire in her," one friend, Margaret Polk, recalled. Virginia agreed. "Her worst trait was her temper," she said, "which was uncontrollable. She was angry somewhere deep inside her, and she took it out on anybody who happened to be around." On the one hand, she enjoyed being able to help those in need. On the other, she could lash out at those who crossed her, stopping "at nothing to undermine them, to hurt them, in terrible ways." It was as if she possessed two personalities. One was the professional helper she showed the public, dressing up in her uniform and making a mask of rouge and lipstick, "like a stylized character in a Japanese kabuki show," in the words of the Clinton biographer David Maraniss. The other, a tyrant, was obsessed with controlling those around her, hiding a vicious streak of sadism. Her husband and daughter bore the brunt of this second personality.[2]

Not surprisingly, Virginia adored her father. "[I loved him] as much as it was possible for a daughter to love her dad," she wrote. "He was kind and gentle, and he loved laughing and fishing and storytelling and people—especially me." Eldridge Cassidy embraced people, reached out to them. When delivering ice, he often stopped off at a customer's home and stayed for a cup of coffee while he sent his coworkers on to the next stop. Some of his coffee companions were his prettiest customers. "He was a ladies' man," Margaret Polk remembered. Later, when Eldridge developed a bronchial condition, he was forced to give up his

ice route. Initially, he opened a liquor store, then a small grocery, where, under the counter, he also sold bootleg alcohol. Virginia, whom he called Ginger, loved hanging out at the store, watching her father interact with customers, extend credit to those in need, and laugh with his friends.[3]

Edith—Mammaw—was less appreciative. Hearing stories of Eldridge's "coffee-klatches" with his female customers, Virginia remembered, "she began her nightly screaming fits." Lunging at him, throwing things, and trying to hurt him physically, she accused him of philandering, though Edith herself was rumored to be romantically linked to doctors in town. When the Depression caused them to lose their house, she blamed Eldridge for "failing us." The Cassidy home was neither nurturing nor kindly.

Virginia watched both parents. In early adolescence, she started to emulate her mother's cosmetic habits. She used mascara, eyeliner, rouge, and lipstick, starting a ritual that would become obsessive through the rest of her life. But there could be no question of where her emotional loyalties rested. "Whenever I did something wrong," she wrote, "Mother would whip me furiously." Father, on the other hand, taught her to think the best of people, give them the benefit of the doubt, and reach out a helping hand.[4]

Ironically, the one issue on which both Edith and Eldridge shared a common outlook was race. One might expect that in a Southern small town the habits of generations of white people would prevail, with racism one way that whites could express their need to feel superior. But neither of Virginia's parents succumbed. Her father cultivated a clientele that was both black and white. He granted credit to blacks as readily as, if not more readily than, to whites. Every customer was treated with dignity and fairness. Edith, in turn, expressed horror when one day she heard Virginia use the word "nigger." Often she volunteered her services to black patients in need. It was the Cassidy home's one saving grace.[5]

Virginia took from each parent certain qualities. Like her mother, she became a consummate makeup artist, shaping the image she would present to the world while masking her own agenda. Willful and

tempestuous, she had her mother's flair for independence. She insisted on pursuing her individual objectives regardless of what others thought, a trait that would fuel her decades-long campaign against male doctors who she felt stood in the way of her professional development. But beyond those parallels lay a virulent anger at Edith's capricious and selfish behavior. Like the father she worshipped, Virginia chose to see good rather than bad in people. Purposefully, she set aside the unpleasant to focus on the positive. Denying all the negative realities that surrounded her became a habitual pattern of behavior. In her own words, she "brainwashed" herself to be positive. "Inside is love and friends and optimism," she wrote. "Outside is negativity, can't-doism and any criticism of me and mine. Most of the time, this box is strong as steel." It became the normative mode by which Virginia conducted her life—with profound consequences for her marriages and her children. Looking at a photo of herself taken in late adolescence, with her eyes hooded, she subsequently wrote: "By this time, I guess, I had already learned to keep my dark secrets to myself."[6]

Having finished high school, Virginia set off to realize her dreams, almost immediately engaging in a love affair that dramatically underscored her penchant to "brainwash" herself. Already known for being flirtatious and different, she left Hope to go to Shreveport, Louisiana, to train as a nurse anesthetist. That she was "going steady" with a boy back in Hope posed no problems at the Shreveport hospital the night she encountered Bill Blythe, a twenty-five-year-old who had brought another woman to the hospital for treatment. When he asked Virginia what that "ring on her finger" meant, she replied "nothing." "There *is* such a thing as love at first sight," she later wrote. And the moment she laid eyes on Bill Blythe, "all the rules were out the window." Like her father, Blythe seemed to love everybody. He told Virginia he was in sales, and she believed him. Charming, funny, ebullient, and, like Virginia, an ardent fan of dancing and a good time, Blythe won her heart immediately. "We talked fast," Virginia recalled, "[we] played fast [and we] fell in love fast." Virginia introduced him to her parents, who also were charmed. Two months after they met, the two married, and five weeks later, Bill Blythe went off to Italy to serve as a mechanic in the U.S. Army.[7]

What had transpired was a triumph of fantasy over reality and a

profound testimony to Virginia's instinct for seeing only her own version of what was true. In fact Bill Blythe was not a car salesman. All during the time they were seeing each other—on a daily basis—he was already in the army. Beyond that he came from a large family she knew little about. Most important, she had no notion that he had been married three times before, had divorced all three (and perhaps four) previous wives, had fathered at least one (and perhaps two) children, and in one of the legal cases preceding a divorce had been declared by a judge to be "guilty of extreme cruelty and gross neglect of duty." Everything about Bill Blythe, David Maraniss has written, "was contradictory and mysterious. He constantly reinvented himself, starting over every day, the familiar stranger, an ultimate traveling salesman, surviving off charm and affability." That Virginia did not discover the full story until more than four decades later highlights the absurdity of what had taken place. More telling was her blind-faith assertion that she could "go to my grave knowing that I *was* the love of his life."

When Blythe returned to Shreveport in the fall of 1945, he and Virginia talked about moving together to Chicago, where he had a job awaiting him as a salesman. They envisioned a life in which they could raise a family and live out the American dream. For three months, the reunited couple lived together in a hotel in Illinois while waiting until a house in Forest Park opened up. That process took longer than expected, and after she discovered she was pregnant, Virginia went back to Arkansas to wait. Shortly afterward, Blythe set out to drive through the night to spend the weekend with her in Hope. Driving too fast, he passed a car, then on the next curve, hurtled off the road and hit a tree. Though he managed to extricate himself from the car, he fell into a ditch full of water and drowned. Three months later his son Bill was born.[8]

Perhaps. Bill Blythe was still in Italy nine months before his son's birth, making it unlikely that he was the father of a child carried to full term. Virginia would later claim that Bill had been born prematurely. But during the period when she was writing her own book, Virginia never mentioned to her collaborator and coauthor that doctors had recommended an early, induced delivery—the story that she subsequently brought forward. Moreover, the birth was not typical of premature deliveries. Bill weighed six pounds eight ounces at birth, a weight not unusual for a full-term delivery. In his speech explaining his decision not to run

for president in 1988 in order to spend more time with his daughter, Chelsea, Bill Clinton said: "I made a promise to myself a long, long time ago, that if I was ever lucky enough to have a child, she would never grow up wondering who her father was." To Maraniss, the use of the word "who" suggested doubts in Clinton's mind about the true circumstances of his birth.[9]

Yet the story was about to become even more complicated. After giving birth to her son Bill on August 19, 1946, Virginia returned to her parents' home in Hope. Almost immediately, a war started between Virginia and her mother about who was going to raise—and control—the child. Before long, the winner became clear. As long as Billy was in her home, Mammaw would be in charge. To the exacting daily schedule Mammaw set—when Billy was fed, when he took his naps, what time he went to bed—there would be no exception. The few good moments of mother and son getting to know each other faded before the omnipresent power of her mother, who insisted on "monopolizing him." There was no place to go. Escape became the only option.[10]

After only one year of being a mother, Virginia went off to New Orleans, intent on securing the credentials to become a full-time nurse anesthetist. It was in many ways the only answer—fleeing an untenable family environment where humiliation and resentment were rampant, seeking the skills that would make possible an independent life, and doing so in a city perfectly suited for a girl who loved to flirt, dance, and gamble. As Bill Clinton noted in his memoirs, New Orleans was "an amazing place after the war, full of young people, Dixieland music, and over-the-top haunts like the Club My-Oh-My where men in drag danced and sang as lovely ladies. I guess it wasn't a bad place for a beautiful young widow to move beyond her loss." Yes, she sorely missed her son. He always remembered her kneeling by the train crying as she waved good-bye to him after one of his visits to see her. But compared with the misery of her mother's total domination back in Hope, this was liberation.[11]

In the meantime, Bill Clinton had to survive on his own the contested world of his grandparents, torn between the regimented authoritarianism of Mammaw and the warm embrace of his grandfather. Mammaw

ran a tight ship, with clear destinations in a narrow sea lane. As he was eating, a friend of Mammaw said, "she was showing him flash cards . . . [The coffee table] was filled with kindergarten books . . . She had him reading when he was three." At some level, Bill appreciated her dedication. "I knew the poverty of my roots," he later wrote. "I was raised by people who deliberately tried to disabuse me [of the] idea [that I was inferior] from the time I was old enough to think."[12]

He also appreciated the tortured dynamics of his grandparents' relationship. They loved him, he remembered, "much better than they were able to love each other, or, in my grandmother's case, to love my mother." Mammaw was "bright, intense and aggressive [with] a great laugh, but she also was full of anger and disappointment and obsessions she only dimly understood." Instead of dealing with her inner demons, she took out her pathology in "raging tirades against her husband and her daughter." Like his mother, Bill needed to escape, and as it had been for his mother, his outlet was his grandfather's store, where he went every day to play, eat chocolate chip cookies, and revel in the warm embrace of someone who clearly worried about the needs of others more than he worried about his own. In language almost identical to his mother's, Bill Clinton later wrote: "I adored my grandfather." He described him as "an incredibly kind and generous man."[13]

Among other things, Eldridge Cassidy taught his grandson Bill the meaning of racial equality—the natural gift of relating to black Americans, even in a racist Southern state, as friends and equals. "It was rare to find an uneducated rural southerner without a racist bone in his body," Clinton remembered. "That's exactly what my grandfather was." His grandson learned the lesson. He was "the only white boy in that neighborhood who played with black kids," said the daughter of a black customer who remembered what it was like to have fun with a white boy. So even as he squirmed under his grandmother's ironclad tutelage at home, Bill blossomed under the inclusive warmth of his grandfather at the store.[14]

In the end, Bill was shaped by that difficult family dynamic in ways remarkably like his mother. He chose to believe that people were more good than bad, to look on the bright side, to be positive and deny negativity. "A lot of life," he wrote, "is just showing up and hanging on; that laughter is often the best, and sometimes the only response to pain.

Perhaps most important, I learned that everyone has a story—of dreams and nightmares, love and loss, courage and fear, sacrifice and selfishness." His grandfather's store had provided a democratic space where he could learn to look on the positive side of human experience and not be possessed by the demons of negativity. "When I grew up and got into politics," he would state, "I always felt the main point of my work was to give people a chance to have better stories."[15]

Those lessons would become important far sooner than either Bill or his grandfather could have anticipated. Virginia had always been a party girl. She sported a dramatic white streak down the middle of her dark brunette hair, carefully crafted false eyebrows, and a face heavily made up with rouge and lipstick. Dressed to the nines in sexy outfits, she loved going to local nightclubs, even venturing on stage with the entertainers. "I pranced up there to [the stage] to hog the spotlight," she wrote. "In case you hadn't already figured it out . . . I might already have had a cocktail or two." Needless to say, Virginia soon found a series of male counterparts equally dedicated to the fast life. One of them was Roger Clinton, a local Buick dealer who knew her father because he had supplied Eldridge with bootleg whiskey. With dark curly hair and known as Dude, he dressed like a Las Vegas gambler, doused himself in aftershave, and was the life of the party. Soon he became Virginia's boyfriend. She knew he lived on the edge, sometimes got drunk and started fights, and often skirted the law. But "back then . . . getting drunk and crazy was considered cute," she pointed out. Needless to say, Mammaw detested him. When Virginia left town, she was delighted. She would now have total control over Billy, and Roger would be miles away from Virginia.[16]

But before long, the relationship became an item in its own right. After Virginia moved to New Orleans, Roger would come to visit; and he even paid for Virginia's return to Hope to see Billy. Perhaps most important, Roger seemed devoted to Billy, taking him to ballgames, bringing him special treats like a train set, making him feel important. Roger's evident love for both mother and son, of course, enraged Mammaw, who saw him as the ultimate threat both to her need to possess Billy and to her notion of a stable family life. This time, when Vir-

ginia announced her intention to wed Roger, there was no joy. Neither Eldridge nor Edith came to the wedding. Indeed, Mammaw became so hateful that she tried to secure legal custody of Billy and prevent him from living with Virginia. "She was willing to rip this family apart," Virginia wrote. "I remember thinking that the blackness inside of her had finally taken over and there was nothing left but the blackness itself." For nearly three years, Billy had endured being pulled and hauled between a controlling grandmother and a free-spirited, loving grandfather. Now he would enter another family dynamic.[17]

Virginia Blythe's marriage with Roger Clinton was, in Yogi Berra's words, "like déjà vu all over again." She knew he drank a lot and partied. That was one of the reasons she was attracted to him. She also was aware that he was a womanizer. On one occasion before they were married, when he was supposedly out of town, she saw his car, went to his apartment, and found the lingerie of another woman strewn about. (She hung it outside to embarrass him, and her.) But the full story of Roger Clinton was far worse, to the point where he made Bill Blythe seem like a saint.[18]

Like Blythe, Roger Clinton had been married a number of times. Indeed, he was still married the day he betrothed Virginia. He owed his wife child support and was more than $2,000 behind in his payments. Far worse, Roger Clinton had been accused repeatedly of spousal abuse, including beating his wife with his fists and attacking her with the heel of her shoe. Notwithstanding his warmth, charm, humor, and party personality, Roger Clinton contained a streak of venal misogyny that more often than not was out of control. Feeding all this was the fact that Roger was an alcoholic.[19]

It was the drinking that fed—and highlighted—Roger's underlying pathology. "Drinking had been so much a part of Roger's and my relationship," Virginia later recounted, "that I really hadn't worried about his excesses in any sustained way." Ever the willful optimist, Virginia either did not see or chose to deny the dangers lurking just beneath the surface. But a routine developed. Virginia and Roger would go to a nightclub. Roger would gamble and drink too much. Virginia would have too many cocktails. Then she would flirt with her companions and Roger would erupt in anger. Over time, the drinking and fighting became the norm, not the exception. They screamed at each other, Roger

accusing Virginia of trying to seduce and sleep with other men, Virginia upbraiding Roger for being out of control all the time. It was just like her mother and father, Virginia wrote, each partner berating the other with accusations of infidelity. Roger even took to following Virginia when she went off to work, convinced that she had scheduled a rendezvous with some unknown lover.[20]

The situation worsened. Roger owned a Buick dealership in Hope, purchased for him by his richer, more established brother. (It was viewed by most as inferior to the other major dealership in town, owned by the McLarty family, whose son Mack was a buddy of Bill's in kindergarten.) With declining money and status, Virginia and Roger decided to leave Hope when Billy was seven and move to Hot Springs. According to some, Roger lost his dealership in a crap game. According to others, he simply chose to sell. Besides, Hot Springs was a town more conducive to the couple's lifestyle. The tourist capital of Arkansas, it was famous for its nightclubs, casinos, and racetracks. All these soon became familiar haunts for Roger and Virginia. Now, with a new job at his brother's car dealership, Roger seemed settled financially. His brother also helped Virginia secure a job as a nurse anesthetist, though from the beginning she waged war with her fellow practitioners, especially the men whom she believed conspired against her because she was a woman.[21]

But whatever the economic stability they now enjoyed, the cancer at the heart of their relationship kept growing. Roger's drinking accelerated. The shouting matches became a nightly ritual. Physical violence reared its head. Once, back in Hope, Roger had become enraged when Virginia told him she was going to take Billy to visit her dying grandmother. He took a pistol and shot a bullet through the wall above her head. The police were called, and Roger spent the night in jail. There were no more such episodes. But in Hot Springs, with Roger drinking whiskey from tumblers, matters rocketed out of control. In 1959, when Bill was thirteen, Roger threw Virginia to the floor, and as she later reported, "began to stomp me, pulled my shoe off, and hit me on the head several times." Bill was home and called the family lawyer to report the episode. The next year, Bill heard his parents engaging in another nightly feud, with Roger, consumed by rage, accusing Virginia of seeing other men. According to Virginia's account, Bill rushed in and said

"Daddy, stand up. You must stand up to hear what I have to say . . . Hear me, never . . . *ever* touch my mother again." Bill himself later told a slightly different version. "I grabbed a golf club," he wrote, "and threw open their door. Mother was on the floor and Daddy was standing over her, beating on her. I told him to stop and said that if he didn't I was going to beat the hell out of him with the golf club. He just caved, sitting down in a chair next to the bed and hanging his head. It made me sick." Virginia called the police and Roger spent another night in jail.[22]

By then, Bill had a younger brother, named Roger after his father. One night Roger, five years old, heard "a strange noise—a sort of soft thud." He went into his parents' room and saw his father grabbing Virginia by the throat, with a pair of scissors in his other hand. Rushing next door, he called his brother: "Bubba, come quick! Daddy's killing Dado." When Bill arrived, he subdued his father and said, "You will never hurt either of them again. If you want them, you'll have to go through me." The sickness, however, would not go away. Eventually, Virginia sued for divorce, stating that "[Roger] has continually tried to do bodily harm to myself, and my son Bill." Bill himself told the court that "for the last four or five years, the physical abuse, nagging and drinking has become much worse." By that time, young Roger later said, his father was drunk 90 percent of the time.[23]

Tragically, the divorce lasted only a few months. Downtrodden and humiliated, Roger repented. He became deeply depressed, lost more than thirty pounds, went back to church, and every night found a way to sleep outside or on the front porch of the new home Virginia had purchased. He pleaded for forgiveness. Virginia called a family meeting to discuss what to do. "In my opinion," Bill told her, taking him back "would be a mistake." But caught up once more in her commitment to the positive and her denial of the negative, Virginia acquiesced, and the couple remarried. Predictably, the old patterns reasserted themselves—not the violence this time, but the verbal abuse, the drunkenness, and the jealousy.

Ironically, it was during the time Virginia and Roger were divorced that Bill decided to change his name legally to Clinton. Virginia saw it as a statement about "family solidarity," an extraordinary gesture both toward his younger brother, with whom he would now officially share a

name, and "to big Roger, [whom Bill always called Daddy and] whom Bill loved and never stopped loving." Not only was the timing strange; so, too, was the motivation, particularly given Bill's opposition to Roger and Virginia's getting back together. But there was a brother named Roger Clinton. Perhaps more important, there was also an actual person named Roger Clinton. It would no longer be necessary to explain who Bill Blythe was.[24]

All these events shaped Bill Clinton in pivotal ways. It would be impossible to grow up in such a turbulent household without experiencing extraordinary trauma. The impact was even greater since for such a long period of time he was the only child. Already the focus of enormous emotional energy from his grandmother and grandfather, he became the idol of his mother, the single redemptive feature of her life, the vessel into which she could pour all her hopes and aspirations. He even played the same role for Virginia's husband, Roger, who—for all his faults—nevertheless cared deeply for his stepson.

But the pressures placed on Bill Clinton by virtue of his being the "special" son were only compounded by the experience of being the child in an alcoholic family where abuse was the order of the day. How to make things right? How to act in ways that would save the situation? What to do when buffeted by angry voices, with people unable to contain their emotions, people out of control? As David Maraniss has pointed out, Clinton's circumstances fit perfectly the literature about alcoholic families. If you are the only person sane enough to see the havoc being wrought, the only defender able to inject stability into chaos, you bear an excruciatingly heavy burden. You are the only anchor the family has, you are the one who bears the responsibility for making things better, you are the protector who can salvage the unsalvageable. You become the *family hero*, the person who can take charge, who everyone recognizes as the sole source of rescue, the emissary to the outside world who can make things right by bringing credit and praise to a family otherwise lost. Thus brother Roger described Bill as "my best friend, my guardian, my father, and my role model." Virginia observed that "even when he was growing up, Bill was father, brother, and son in this family. He *took care* of Roger and me . . . [He] was a

special child . . . mature beyond his years." And Bill himself said, "I was the father."[25]

Through his own initiative, Bill started going to church at the age of eight, recognizing that people who were in need must seek help. Almost instinctively, he sought to garner attention and praise, becoming the centerpiece of every gathering he entered. While a student for two years at a Catholic school in Hot Springs, he tried to speak so much that a nun gave him a C for being a busybody, and when he moved to a public school, one classmate observed, "he just took over." He was the golden boy, the center of his family's hopes for rescue. His mother gave him the master bedroom in the house she moved to when she left Roger, his own car to drive to school each day, the veneration one would usually reserve for a box office idol. The adulation was welcome, but the burden was almost suffocating.[26]

To an extraordinary degree, Bill Clinton was aware of the trap in which he was caught. Writing an autobiographical essay in his junior year in high school—while the family drama raged around him—he noted: "I am a person motivated and influenced by so many diverse forces I sometimes question the sanity of my existence. I am a living paradox—deeply religious, yet not as convinced of my exact beliefs as I want to be; wanting responsibility, yet shirking it; loving the truth but often times giving away to falsity . . . I detest selfishness, but see it in the mirror every day." Caught between competing forces, he struggled to find a path to redemption for his family as well as fulfillment for himself. "Most of the time I was happy," he later said, "but I could never be sure I was as good as I wanted to be."[27]

These were penetrating observations for a junior in high school. Even more insightful were his reflections more than four decades later in his memoir, *My Life*. "We all have addictions," he once told Carolyn Staley, a next-door friend from childhood, but for the Clinton family growing up, alcoholism dominated all others. It was strange, the way it worked, Clinton wrote. "The really disturbing thing . . . is that it isn't always bad." Weeks could go by where "we'd enjoy being a family, blessed with the quiet joys of an ordinary life." During those times, it was easy to forget about the pain, or deny its impact. Clinton even acknowledged erasing from his memory the details of episodes in which he had been intimately involved, including when his mother called the police to

have Roger put in jail, or when Bill called the family lawyer after another episode of abuse. "I'd forgotten," he wrote, "perhaps out of the denial experts say families of alcoholics engage in when they continue to live with [the disease]." Roger's alcoholism not only terrorized the family, it also induced a kind of schizophrenia, with family members pretending it did not exist when it was not in full display, or repressing its fearsome reality lest it prove too much to cope with. In retrospect, Bill Clinton wished fervently that he could have found someone to talk with about what was happening. "But I didn't, so I had to figure it out for myself."[28]

Perhaps that was the beginning of what became Bill Clinton's obsession with the "secrets" in his life. He never told anyone—even those closest to him—what was taking place in his family, because these were "the secrets of our house." But he did reflect at length on how central his secrets were to his entire personality. "They make our lives more interesting," he wrote in his memoir. "The place where secrets are kept can . . . provide a haven, a retreat from the rest of the world, where one's identity can be shaped and reaffirmed, where being alone can bring security and peace." But there was another side, too. "Secrets can be an awful burden to bear, especially if some sense of shame is attached to them." Thus the pivotal experience of growing up in an alcoholic home generated in Clinton a lifelong conundrum: how to deal with that which others did not know about you, how to deal with your own feelings about those secrets, and perhaps above all, how and whether ever to confront openly the presence of the unspeakable.

In a dramatic display of insight, Clinton shared with the readers of his memoir his retrospective memory of how from the age of thirteen on he dealt with these dilemmas. "I know," he wrote, "that it became a struggle for me to find the right balance between secrets of internal richness and those of hidden fears and shame, and that I was always reluctant to discuss with anyone the most difficult parts of my personal life." "Some of what came into my head," he recalled, "scared the living hell out of me, including anger at Daddy, the first stirrings of sexual feelings toward girls, and doubts about my religious convictions." But he also recognized that his struggle resulted from "growing up in an alcoholic home and the mechanisms I developed to cope with it. It took me a long time just to figure that out. It was even harder to learn which

secrets to keep, which to let go of, which to avoid in the first place. I am still not sure I understand that completely."[29]

If the secrets Clinton kept became one abiding theme of his life, they led directly to a second: his understanding that because of his secrets, he was condemned to living "parallel lives." The first of these consisted of "an external life that takes its natural course," the second "an internal life where the secrets are hidden." Because Clinton had no one to talk with about his internal life, he focused his energies on the external. "When I was a child," he wrote, "my outside life was filled with friends and fun, learning and doing." But his internal life, the one that existed behind closed doors and could never be shared, "was full of uncertainty, anger, and a dread of ever-looming violence." Later in life, Clinton recognized that "no one can live parallel lives with complete success; the two have to intersect." But for the moment, Clinton's two lives—and the secrets they reflected—shaped his adolescence, helping to set in motion the life course that would eventually propel him onto a national stage.[30]

In that process, Bill's mother played an ever larger role. While rarely if ever discussing the problems at home with him, she continued to exude calm, confidence, and the conviction that looking on the bright side of things was always the better option. She reached out to friends, went to the races as often as she could, and continued to party; and when Roger became unmanageable, she could rely on the husband of her best friend, a policeman, to drive him around town until he sobered up and his anger subsided. In the meantime, she taught Bill how to praise and flatter women, particularly the would-be beauty queens. As Carolyn Staley noted, Virginia would come home from a hard day at work and tell Bill, "'You know, nobody has told me all day long how cute I am.' And we would say to her, 'Virginia, you are just so cute.'" How to please and charm women was a lesson Bill would carry with him the rest of his life. And she gave him her own adoration in return, framing his prizes, medals, and photo portraits on a special wall, which his friends called "the shrine."[31]

Bill devoted his energies to achieving the recognition that would bring praise to the family and allow him to feel he was doing his part to make

things right. A dominant presence in school, he became president of the Key Club (a kind of junior Kiwanis), a member of the National Honor Society, and an officer in the DeMolay, a sort of junior Masons. (Later he dropped out of DeMolay, a secret society. "I didn't need to be in a secret fraternity to have secrets," he said. "I had real secrets of my own.") "You could argue," Carolyn Staley later said, "that before he even left high school, he knew the leadership of the state." A band member, he played the saxophone, struck up an admiring, nurturing relationship with his band leader, and imagined a time when he might charm women with his playing. "Bill always had this sense about him that he collected girls," Staley told David Maraniss. "He had the eyes for girls everywhere." In all these activities, Staley remembered, Clinton loved to have people around him and would "make crowds happen. He had a psychological drive for it." Another friend, Patty Howe, noted that Bill "has never met a stranger since the day he was born."[32]

Exemplifying all these impulses was Clinton's brilliant campaign to become the state of Arkansas' nominee as senator for a national conference in Washington, D.C., of Boys Nation, the high school version of the American Legion. With single-mindedness, he set out to win the support of his colleagues at the Arkansas state convention of Boys Nation. By the time he had turned sixteen, Clinton later recalled, "I [had already] decided I wanted to be in public life as an elected official." Reading the politics of the Arkansas convention shrewdly, Clinton understood that his childhood friend from Hope, Mack McLarty, had the "governor" slot all wrapped up. But no one had a lock on the senate seat. So Clinton worked the dormitories where his classmates were staying, introducing himself to people, finding out who they were and what they cared about, seeking to develop a personal bond or connection.

But he was not just a glad-hander. The Arkansas meeting consisted of numerous mock debates on issues of national import. One of those was civil rights. Here, Clinton was crystal clear. From the time he hung out at his grandfather's store, he knew he cared about treating black people the same way that white people were treated. In the ninth grade, he had been the only person in his civics class who had supported Kennedy in the Kennedy-Nixon debate, and he became an even more fervent supporter after JFK called Coretta Scott King when her husband, Martin, was sentenced to hard labor in prison just before

the election. Now he put those beliefs on the line, arguing courageously in support of a resolution supporting civil rights. His convictions—as well as his politicking—paid off. He won his race to be named one of the two Arkansas senators for the Washington, D.C., national convention.[33]

In yet another indicator of what was to come, Clinton displayed his singularity of purpose when the highlight of the entire D.C. convention took place, a Rose Garden ceremony with President John F. Kennedy. Clinton was determined to be as close to JFK as humanly possible. Already six feet three inches tall at age sixteen, he used his long strides to get ahead of almost all his peers at the White House, ending up only fifteen feet from where the president would speak. At the end of his remarks, JFK hesitated. Then, rather than head straight back to the Oval Office, he moved toward the crowd. Clinton pounced, becoming the first to stand next to the president. There, a White House photographer took the picture that represented the culmination of a perfect expedition—Bill Clinton standing with a beaming smile next to the man whose office he one day aspired to hold. It was the picture he wanted, it was the picture his mother wanted, it was the first step of many to fulfill his dream—of making things right for the Clinton family. A hero in Hot Springs because of what he had done, Billy Clinton now reveled in the honor and praise he received as he worked the lunch circuit of the Elks and other local gatherings to bask in his newfound fame. Whatever his stepfather, Roger, did to overcome his own debilitating disease, Bill Clinton had shown that he was intent on living for the entire family and bringing pride to its name.[34]

If anyone questioned the seriousness of that determination, Clinton's decision to pass up an education at the University of Arkansas to apply to Georgetown University in Washington as his only choice for college should have settled the issue. Clinton had asked his guidance counselor where he could study foreign affairs. The Georgetown School of Foreign Service was the answer. More diverse, less Catholic, and with a substantially higher percentage of women than the larger college at Georgetown, it seemed an ideal fit for Clinton. His mother was making $60,000 a year as a nurse anesthetist, and she was willing to pay for it. So he told Carolyn Staley: "I am going to go to Georgetown, and I am going to go on to grad school, and I am going to get the greatest education

I can and come home to Arkansas and put it to work for the people here." A clear plan, a powerful conviction.[35]

Nor did Clinton waste any time putting himself forward once he got there. A young Protestant southerner from Arkansas might ordinarily have been expected to feel marginal. It was, after all, a campus dominated by Northeastern Catholics. Not Clinton. "Bill fit in perfectly," his roommate Tom Campbell, a conservative Goldwater Republican from Long Island, reported. "Outwardly he bore no signs of homesickness . . . He was exactly where he wanted to be." A serious student, Clinton fit in perfectly with the generally conservative lifestyle of Georgetown. "As a class, perhaps as a generation," Tom Campbell said, "we were attuned to the rules. There were no wild men, alcohol was not a problem, and drugs were unheard of . . . We rarely drank to excess." The match could hardly have been better. Based on his experience at home, Clinton was terrified of alcohol, rarely had so much as a beer, and had never viewed liquor as essential to social interaction. For Clinton, it was peanut butter and banana sandwiches, junk food, and occasionally peanuts dumped into RC Cola that fueled a social gathering.[36]

As if to show how well he fit in, Clinton almost immediately started a campaign to become president of his freshman class. (He probably made the decision before he even arrived.) "Bill . . . wanted to meet everyone," Tom Campbell said, "and to remember their names." He worked the residence halls, learned personal details about the people he met, and pitched his campaign to modest, middle-of-the-road issues like parking and getting involved in student government. Clinton may not have been a carbon copy of the affluent, sophisticated Northeasterners who ran Georgetown's social life, but he turned that fact into a plus rather than a minus. To the surprise of some, but not Bill Clinton, he won election overwhelmingly, and he proceeded to get reelected his sophomore year. Only in his junior year did he lose, having become too well known as a "pol." His opponent that year, a bookish embodiment of an almost anti-Clinton approach, criticized him for being "too smooth," an early version of the "slick Willie" characterization that would later haunt Clinton in the White House. No matter. Clinton had already achieved his goal of becoming known across campus as a student leader.[37]

Clinton also perfected his capacity to cultivate those with power and prestige. In this case that meant the faculty—and later his home state senator J. William Fulbright. He charmed Carroll Quigley, the professor who taught the Civilization requirement, becoming one of only two students out of 230 to receive an A. Quigley told his class that great men slept very little, devoting themselves instead to the larger goals of improving the world; thereafter, Clinton limited himself to only five hours of rest per night. With Quigley, as with others, Clinton displayed an intuitive capacity to discern an instructor's favorite issues and predict the questions they would ask on their exams. Schmoozing with professors became almost as much second nature to Clinton as cultivating political support from his fellow students.[38]

Before long, he had also managed to get a job working on Capitol Hill in the office of Senator Fulbright. He had already met Fulbright at the Boys Nation conference in Washington, but now he wangled an appointment with Fulbright's chief of staff, securing one of the few part-time jobs available. There, too, he used his charm and affability to learn everything other staff members had to teach him. He worked in the documents office, clipped the newspapers, and took maximum advantage of the opportunity to roam the halls of Congress as he delivered messages to various congressional offices. His work complemented beautifully the classes he was taking, such as U.S. History and Diplomacy and Theory and Practice of Communism. Indeed, Clinton was becoming more and more engaged with understanding the lessons of the Vietnam War—soon they would dominate his life—and took pride in working for someone "who doubled the IQ of any room he entered."[39]

The Fulbright experience simply extended Clinton's 100 percent involvement in politics during his time at Georgetown. The previous summer (1966) he had returned to Arkansas to work in a bitterly contested gubernatorial primary between Frank Holt, a dignified, Fulbright-type, civilized politician who believed in playing fair, and Jim Johnson, an Orval Faubus–like segregationist who played dirty and resorted to smear tactics. Clinton spent the summer driving Mrs. Holt and her daughters around the state as they campaigned, talking politics for hours on end. Once Mrs. Holt let Bill make a speech in Hot Springs when his grandmother was present. It was a powerful education in the

vicissitudes of campaigning and in the delicate balance that existed between the politics of hope and the politics of fear. Johnson ran a classic racist campaign, and "each day," Clinton would later recall, "we wake up with the scales tipping . . . one way or the other. If they go too far toward hopefulness, we can become naïve and unrealistic. If the scales tip too far the other way, we can get consumed by paranoia and hatred. In the South, the darker side of the scales has always been the bigger problem." Clinton believed that Holt was right to stay above the fray and not get down in the gutter with Johnson. But when Johnson defeated Holt, Clinton learned a harsh lesson.[40]

The depth of Clinton's absorption in the ways of politics grew with each year at Georgetown. "My formal studies increasingly fought a losing battle with politics," he later acknowledged. So much was happening. Clinton's dedication to the issue of civil rights had only intensified. When he had watched Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., deliver his "I Have a Dream" sermon at the March on Washington, "I started crying," he recalled, "and wept for a good while after Dr. King finished. He had said everything I believed, far better than I ever could. More than anything I ever experienced, except perhaps the power of my grandfather's example, that speech steeled my determination to do whatever I could for the rest of my life to make Martin Luther King, Jr.'s dream come true." Like a plumb line, civil rights ran as a constant through Clinton's life. "Nothing had as profound an effect on Bill's life," his roommate Tom Campbell said, than when Dr. King was assassinated in Memphis. "Bill was more in tune with what King meant to black people than the rest of us." When Carolyn Staley came to visit him the day after the assassination, they drove together to the black neighborhoods of Washington, distributed food and medical supplies to people who had been victimized by the riots, and cried together.[41]

Clinton was also touched deeply by Robert F. Kennedy. Always devoted to the Kennedy family, at Georgetown, Clinton had early become a fast friend of Tommy Caplan, a well-off New Yorker whose family had known JFK and who had done volunteer work at the White House. Caplan took Clinton to meet Evelyn Lincoln, JFK's private secretary, as she was working on the former president's personal papers. If anything, Clinton was even more attached to the president's brother, with his

passion for civil rights, for helping the poor, and for providing every American a chance to move forward. "He radiated raw energy," Clinton said. "He's the only man I ever saw who could walk stoop-shouldered, with his head down, and still look like a coiled spring about to release into the air." RFK, he later said, was "the first New Democrat . . . He understood in a visceral way that progressive politics requires the advocacy of both new policies and fundamental values, both far-reaching change and social stability." In fundamental ways, Clinton saw Robert Kennedy as embodying the politics he hoped to practice.[42]

For Clinton as for everyone else, 1968 became a year of destiny. The war in Vietnam deeply troubled him, as much because of its stupidity as because of its betrayal of American values. "His objection," Tom Campbell noted, "was not that the U.S. was immoral but that we were making a big mistake. He wondered how a great nation could admit that and change course. He thought America was wasting lives that it could not spare." At night they would argue about the draft over dinner. Campbell was going to join the Marines after graduating. Clinton supported Kennedy in the Democratic primary contest, viewing Eugene McCarthy, the other antiwar candidate, as someone who would "rather be home reading Saint Thomas Aquinas than going into a tar-paper shack to see how poor people lived." But in all of this, Clinton remained moderate in his political pronouncements.

That would be a Clinton hallmark—to be a player, but not to leave the boundaries of the game. "Though I was sympathetic to the zeitgeist [of 1968]," he later wrote, "I didn't embrace the lifestyle or the radical rhetoric. My hair was short. I didn't even drink, and some of the music was too loud and harsh for my taste. I didn't hate LBJ; I just wanted to end the war, and I was afraid the culture clashes would undermine, not advance, the cause."[43]

In the meantime, he continued the effort to understand what his own life was about and how he could make sense of the secrets he was carrying inside him. Roger Clinton had been diagnosed with cancer. Refusing radical surgery, he reconciled himself to ameliorative care. For her part, Virginia had emotionally distanced herself from the relationship. And as a consequence of the brutal violence toward Virginia that he had seen, his younger brother, Roger, now hated his father. But Bill

remained engaged. A part of him had always cared deeply for the man he called Daddy, appreciating those times when he had been a real father, doting on him, taking him to ballgames, showing what a caring parent could mean. Now Bill took over the role of parent.

At one point, after his mother told him the whole family had gone to church, Bill wrote, addressing Roger, to say how much he hoped that practice would continue. "None of us can have any peace, [Daddy]," he said, "unless they can face life with God, knowing that good always outweighs bad." There were two things in particular that he wanted to convey, Bill said in his letter. "1) I don't think you have ever realized how much we all love you. 2) I don't think you have ever realized either how much we have all been hurt . . . but still really have *not* turned against you." "Remember," he concluded, "don't be afraid to look for help *before* you do something you're sorry for—Don't be ashamed to admit your problem."[44]

Roger Clinton's final months brought some form of closure to the relationship that so fearsomely shaped Bill Clinton's life. As Roger's condition grew worse, doctors decided that treatment at Duke Hospital in Durham, North Carolina, offered the best hope for prolonging his life and easing his death. Roger took their advice. Although Duke Hospital was a five-hour drive from Washington, Bill visited his father virtually every weekend. He described those visits as long and languid. He and his father spoke more openly and intimately than ever before. "We came to terms with each other," Bill later wrote, "and he accepted the fact that I loved and forgave him. If he could only have faced life with the same courage and sense of honor with which he faced death, he would have been quite a guy."

The family went to Easter services at Duke Chapel, a magnificent Gothic cathedral, where together they joined in the triumphal hymn "Sing with All the Sons of Glory." While Virginia felt it to be a "healing time," for her son Roger, the death watch was an ordeal. Having prayed for years that his father would stay sober, only to see him turn drunk and violent, he now "prayed for him to die and he wouldn't die. That's when I got sick of praying." But for Bill, his father's death was liberating. The memories remained, the secrets were still hidden, the parallel lives moved forward. But at least there had been a good-bye that permitted some expression of love.[45]

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Whatever else Roger's death resolved, it never touched the largest legacy of Bill's childhood—his inability to develop a consistent relationship with women. He came close when he first arrived at Georgetown. Shortly after he started classes, he began to date Denise Hyland, whom he asked to the Diplomats Ball months ahead of time. Described by his roommate Tom Campbell as "a statuesque blonde from New Jersey," Hyland might have seemed on the surface to match the "beauty queen" model of the opposite sex that Virginia had taught her sons to seek out. But Hyland was much, much more. Open, inquisitive, engaged with his total personality, Hyland brought out all of Bill Clinton's best qualities—his intellectualism, his spirituality, his enthusiasm for politics and for a life of service. The two dated for his first three years at Georgetown. They spent long evenings together talking about their futures, sometimes on the Capitol steps, sometimes at the Lincoln Memorial. He went to see her family in New Jersey, she came to see his in Arkansas. She even went with him to see his father at Duke Hospital. When they were apart, they wrote long letters daily. "Maybe I am beginning to realize," he wrote her at one point, "that I am almost grown, and will soon have to choose that one final motive in life which I hope will put a little asterisk by my name in the billion pages of the book of life." It seemed the model of a lasting, intimate relationship in which they could tell each other anything and everything. But Bill never spoke a word to her about Roger's alcoholism, his abusive behavior in the family, or the devastating impact all of that had on Bill and everyone else involved.[46]

By 1968, Clinton had broken off his romance with Hyland, though he still wrote to her regularly. Instead, he started playing the field, "like a guy getting out of prison," a friend said. Once it was known he was available, women flocked to him. At the Capitol he was assigned by the Fulbright office to drive Sharon Ann Evans, Miss Arkansas, around Washington. She would be a frequent companion for years thereafter. The following summer, he started a relationship with his oldest and dearest friend from Hot Springs, Carolyn Staley. At Christmas that year she had given him a welcome-home kiss that was different from the usual sisterly peck on the cheek. "My God, where did you learn to kiss like that?" he had asked. But Staley wanted a serious relationship,

not just to be one of a posse of girlfriends. She soon discovered that that was not in the cards. When she came to Washington to visit Clinton at the time of the King assassination, Clinton had already started to date another woman, Ann Markusen, who also wanted and expected a serious relationship. "The guys at the house were furious with Bill for not being honest," Staley said. "I would be in the house [with Bill] and he would be on the phone with Ann."[47]

The pattern of multiple simultaneous relationships not only continued, it got worse. That summer he was dating three women at the same time and writing Denise Hyland daily. Staley remained deeply interested, but one day she went next door to Bill's house after church, and looking through the window saw him kissing Sharon Evans passionately. "I needed honesty," she said. "He hadn't ever said to me, 'I'm going to start dating Sharon now, so you're not my girlfriend anymore.'" Staley—who remained Clinton's devoted lifelong friend—thought long and hard about whether there was any future with this man she loved. In the end she decided the answer was no. "I always had been living in the world of monogamous relationships," she said, "and that was my ideal. And with him, I couldn't have real peace about whether that would be." Clinton would never be faithful. He now openly displayed a system of behavior full of dishonesty and egomania. He compartmentalized the women in his life, sequestering them into different categories, while feeling no compunction to reconcile his emotions into a coherent whole. This new penchant for multiple relationships fed a life of secrecy and reinforced his instinct to live parallel lives.[48]

The one consistent feature of Bill Clinton's maturing years was the steadiness of his climb to fame. A renowned campus figure, he knew countless politicians, including his home state senators, Fulbright and John L. McClellan. He had already told Carolyn Staley that he would go to graduate school before returning to Arkansas to serve the people there. But where to go? Why not Oxford, he decided. Fulbright had been a Rhodes scholar in the 1930s, and he encouraged his protégé to pursue the same course. Clinton was bright, curious, willing to take on any challenge. He had just written a 28-page paper on the Gulf of Tonkin resolution with 92 footnotes. And most important, he knew how to game the system. He understood how much his chances were

improved because he was a southerner and from a small state. All he needed to do was to burnish his credentials. Although a record as an athlete was not a prerequisite for a Rhodes, some association with sports could not hurt. So Clinton became chair of the Student Athletic Commission at Georgetown. He performed brilliantly in his state interviews, then aced the regional finals in New Orleans. Crying, wishing his father could have lived to see this, he called Virginia and said, "Well, Mother, how do you think I'll look in English tweeds?" With an almost flawless track record, Bill Clinton had moved one more step toward fulfilling the role of family hero.[49]

It had been an extraordinary journey, shaped by three primary forces distinctive to the Clinton family.

The first had been the death of Bill Blythe. It is impossible to read the words of Bill Clinton, then and now, without being overwhelmed by a sense of mortality—and ambition—that came from being born without a father. To be sure, his grandfather had filled that role admirably for a period, but he, too, died early. While campaigning for Frank Holt in Arkansas in 1966 with Holt's wife and daughters, Clinton took them to visit Bill Blythe's grave. In a note to Denise Hyland describing the experience, he wrote, "It was a good reminder that I have a lot of living to do for two other fellows who never even got close to the average lifespan."[50]

Over and over again, Clinton returned to this theme, never more poignantly than in his memoir. "My father," he wrote, "left me with the feeling that I had to live for two people, and that if I did it well enough, somehow I could make up for the life he should have had. And his memory infused me, at a younger age than most, with a sense of my own mortality." There was no actual memory of his father, of course, except in the remembrances passed down through his mother. But the import of the message was clear: "The knowledge that I, too, could die young drove me both to try to drain the most out of every moment of life and to get on with the next big challenge. Even when I wasn't sure where I was going, I was always in a hurry." Thus the impulse to live fully, to waste not a moment, to squeeze from each day every drop of learning and gratification he could find, all traced back to his desire to

redeem the life of the father he had never known—before his own life was taken away.[51]

The second force shaping Clinton arose from his experience growing up in a home racked by alcoholism, child and spouse abuse, and the tyranny of marital jealousy. Over and over again, Clinton talked of his love for his stepfather and his gratitude for the moments of affection, attention, and nurturance that Roger had offered. He would never have called him Daddy with such warmth if there had not been a core to the relationship. But that core was eaten away so persistently by Roger's binge drinking, the cruelty of his jealous rage toward Virginia, and the violent explosions that rocked their home that barely a remnant still existed. It was enough to sustain a measure of affection and care, never more visibly demonstrated than in Bill's repeated trips to Durham to see his dying stepfather. In the end, though, the experience with the ravages of alcoholism created a personal dynamic in which Bill Clinton felt called upon to rescue his family, make it whole, and turn the world right again. Like a religious compulsion, this mission consumed Clinton's life, adding depth, focus, and intensity to the passion he already felt for living life for both his lost father and himself.

The third, and perhaps most important, force shaping Bill Clinton's life was his mother. "It was she," he wrote in his memoir, "who taught me to get up every day and keep going; to look for the best in people even when they saw the worst in me; to be grateful for every day and greet it with a smile . . . to believe that, in the end, love and kindness would prevail over cruelty and selfishness . . . if God is love, she was a godly woman."[52]

But she was more as well. A striking individualist, she consistently refused to be confined to a niche. From her ninety-minute-per-day sessions putting on makeup to her brazen contempt for old-fashioned deference to medical professionals, she set her own path. She cared little whether others joined or followed her. When her mother imperiously seized control over raising Virginia's new infant son, Virginia bolted to New Orleans, intent on becoming an independent professional in her own right. She was strong-willed and impetuous. In each of her first two marriages, she ignored, denied, or did not care about evidence that the men she was marrying had lied to her. Refusing to acknowledge or recognize that which she did not wish to see, she helped encourage her

two sons, as well, to avoid confronting the implications of living in a dysfunctional family. Her own inability to deal with the secrets of her life, and her commitment to pursue her own parallel lives, helped make the same pattern a central theme of Bill's life.

Nor were her personal choices of dress, presentation, and behavior irrelevant to the way Bill learned to view women. In addition to her passion for makeup—the symbolic equivalent each day of putting on a multilayered mask that would prevent people from seeing the real person underneath—she insisted on playing the role of a coquette, flirting outrageously, getting up on stage after a couple of drinks to take her place among the performers, living the high life of gambling, partying loudly, and letting everyone know that she set her own rules. When working in the garden outside at home, she dressed in a sexy tube top with short shorts, daring neighbors to be scandalized by her appearance. Beauty queens, she wrote, represented "the image of womanhood my boys grew up with—starting at home with their coiffed and painted mother, and extending to the girls they squired to the proms." Growing up in a household dominated by such a female presence could not help but have an impact on the kind of women Bill Clinton was attracted to and how he behaved with them. By the time he finished Georgetown, he had already embarked on his own version of placing women into two categories—those who fit the "beauty queen" image he had learned at home, and those he saw as serious lifelong companions. Although Denise Hyland, Ann Markusen, and Carolyn Staley fell into the second category, he now seemed unwilling or unable to avoid mixing those relationships with women in the first category, the various beauty queens and "hot babes" he dated. The problem was that to persist in such behavior, he would have to compartmentalize his relationships, keep them from intersecting with one another, not see them as part of an integrated life. They would have to remain "secrets," part of his parallel lives. The only thing that was clear, even then, was that the person he asked to be his wife would have to be in the group who qualified as lifelong companions.

"The woman I marry," he told Carolyn Staley during his senior year in college, "is going to be very independent. She's going to work outside the house. She needs to have her own interests and her own life and not be wrapped up entirely in my life." It was a prophetic statement, but not

one that prevented Clinton from embarking on a life of relating to women that could only be described as schizophrenic and that in profound ways continued to reflect the influence of his mother.[53]

The Bill Clinton who graduated from Georgetown and headed off to Oxford was not a simple personality. The only feature that was abundantly clear from Boys Nation to the Rhodes fellowship was his commitment to be the "best in his class," in David Maraniss's words. Nothing would stand in Clinton's way as he cultivated friends, organized supporters, and networked with people of influence to put in place the foundation for his quest to make a difference, both for the people he hoped to serve and for his own family's reputation and well-being. Deeply conscious both of his own mortality and his need to live for two people, he understood instinctively how to ferret out the path to power. Even as a senior in college, he had impressed his classmate Jim Moore with his insight into Arkansas politics. Intimately familiar already with the courthouse networks, he told Moore that the best way to proceed was to be elected attorney general of Arkansas and then governor. From Moore's perspective, the only thing that remained unclear was how Clinton would define his challenges as he moved forward. Even then, his friends—male and female—freely predicted that he would become president.[54]

Less clear was how Clinton would grapple with the more complicated legacy of his youth. The path to political power offered the most accessible way to bring honor to his family, to make right all that was wrong about his adolescent years. But the principal influences animating his quest remained largely unexamined and unresolved—how to fill the void left by an absent father, how to address the secrets generated by growing up in a family torn by jealousy and alcoholism, how to bring integration to a pattern of living separate and parallel lives. At Georgetown he had made a start toward preparing "for the life of a practicing politician." Now, at Oxford, he would try to find a path that would allow him to bring personal conviction into balance with "the pressures of political life."

Notes

1. BILL CLINTON: THE EARLY YEARS

1. Virginia Kelley, with James Morgan, *Leading with My Heart: My Life* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1994), 19–21; David Maraniss, *First in His Class: A Biography of Bill Clinton* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1995), 21.
2. Kelley, *Leading with My Heart*, 19, 24; Maraniss, *First in His Class*, 20–22; Margaret Polk interview with Michael Takiff in Michael Takiff, *A Complicated Man: The Life of Bill Clinton as Told by Those Who Know Him* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 12.
3. Kelley, *Leading with My Heart*, 19, 20, 40; Takiff, *Complicated Man*, 11.
4. Kelley, *Leading with My Heart*, 23, 24, 28, 42, 51.
5. Ibid., 21, 28, 29.
6. Ibid., 14, 25, 28.
7. Ibid., 42, 43; Maraniss, *First in His Class*, 24–28.
8. Kelley, *Leading with My Heart*, 64; Maraniss, *First in His Class*, 24–28.
9. Kelley, *Leading with My Heart*, 54; Maraniss, *First in His Class*, 28.
10. Maraniss, *First in His Class*, 21; Gail Sheehy, *Hillary's Choice* (New York: Random House, 1999), 94–95.
11. Kelley, *Leading with My Heart*, 69, 71.
12. Myra Reese interview with Michael Takiff in Takiff, *Complicated Man*, 10; the Clinton quote is from Roy Reed, "Clinton Country," *New York Times*, September 6, 1992.
13. B. Clinton, *My Life* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2004), 10–11; Maraniss, *First in His Class*, 31; Myra Reese interview with Michael Takiff in Takiff, *Complicated Man*, 10.
14. B. Clinton, *My Life*, 11–12.
15. Ibid., 11–13.
16. Ibid., 17, 18.
17. Kelley, *Leading with My Heart*, 107–109, 72–80; Maraniss, *First in His Class*, 31–35. In an interview with Michael Takiff, Hugh Reese described Roger in the following words: "[he] was of real short stature. And real nice looking. Dark curly hair. Well dressed all the time. What we'd call a high roller in his gambling. He liked to party." Takiff, *Complicated Man*, 14.
18. Maraniss, *First in His Class*, 32; B. Clinton, *My Life*, 19; Kelley, *Leading with My*

Heart, 86; Sheehy, *Hillary's Choice*, 96. Margaret Polk described to Michael Takiff Mammaw's hate for Roger: "Roger had bought [Virginia] a lot of pretty clothes . . . Edith just tied them up in the backyard and burned them . . . She didn't want Virginia to have anything to do with Clinton." Takiff, *Complicated Man*, 15.

19. Maraniss, *First in His Class*, 32; Kelley, *Leading with My Heart*, 85.
20. Kelley, *Leading with My Heart*, 90–94.
21. Sheehy, *Hillary's Choice*, 98; Kelley, *Leading with My Heart*, 91, 94.
22. Kelley, *Leading with My Heart*, 146–49; B. Clinton, *My Life*, 52. Margaret Polk told Michael Takiff about the shooting episode: "He shot at her. He missed her, but the [bullet] holes are over in that house." Takiff, *Complicated Man*, 16.
23. Roger Clinton, with Jim Moore, *Growing Up Clinton: The Lives, Times and Tragedies of America's Presidential Family* (Arlington, Tex.: Summit Publishing Company, 1995), 1–3; Kelley, *Leading with My Heart*, 134; B. Clinton, *My Life*, 44–46, 79.
24. Kelley, *Leading with My Heart*, 146–49; B. Clinton, *My Life*, 52.
25. R. Clinton, *Growing Up Clinton*, 3; Kelley, *Leading with My Heart*, 137; Maraniss, *First in His Class*, 38.
26. Maraniss, *First in His Class*, 33–37.
27. B. Clinton, *My Life*, 58.
28. Ibid., 46, 51.
29. Ibid., 40, 46–47.
30. Ibid., 149.
31. Ibid., 48, 50; Gail Sheehy interview with Carolyn Yeldell Staley, 1992, in Sheehy, *Hillary's Choice*, 99; Kelley, *Leading with My Heart*, 151–53.
32. Kelley, *Leading with My Heart*, 45; B. Clinton, *My Life*, 45; David Maraniss interview with Carolyn Yeldell Staley, 1993, in Maraniss, *First in His Class*, 46; Patty Howe interview with Michael Takiff in Takiff, *Complicated Man*, 19, 27. On the other hand, Clay Farrar, another high school classmate, said that in high school, Clinton "was a total straight arrow—no alcohol at all—basically almost shy around the coeds." Interview with Takiff in Takiff, *Complicated Man*, 26.
33. B. Clinton, *My Life*, 60–61; Maraniss, *First in His Class*, 11, 14–16.
34. B. Clinton, *My Life*, 60–62; Maraniss, *First in His Class*, 20, 42.
35. Interview with Staley in Sheehy, *Hillary's Choice*, 105; B. Clinton, *My Life*, 66.
36. Tom Campbell, "A Preference for the Future," in Ernest Dumas, ed., *The Clintons of Arkansas: An Introduction by Those Who Knew Him Best* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press), 42–53. Campbell was Clinton's roommate at Georgetown.
37. Campbell, "Preference for the Future," in Dumas, *Clintons of Arkansas*, 47–48.
38. Maraniss, *First in His Class*, 53–57.
39. B. Clinton, *My Life*, 90–93; Maraniss, *First in His Class*, 83–85.
40. B. Clinton, *My Life*, 84–85; Maraniss, *First in His Class*, 75.
41. B. Clinton, *My Life*, 64; Campbell, "Preference for the Future," in Dumas, *Clintons of Arkansas*, 49. When Clinton met Staley at the airport, she later told Michael Takiff, he was very grave. There was no big hug, just the declaration "We have a job to do." Takiff, *Complicated Man*, 35.
42. Maraniss, *First in His Class*, 56; B. Clinton, *My Life*, 97, 122.
43. Campbell, "Preference for the Future," in Dumas, *Clintons of Arkansas*, 48–49; B. Clinton, *My Life*, 117–22.

44. B. Clinton, *My Life*, 79; Kelley, *Leading with My Heart*, 163–64.
45. B. Clinton, *My Life*, 105; Kelley, *Leading with My Heart*, 165–69; Sheehy, *Hillary's Choice*, 111.
46. Maraniss, *First in His Class*, 64–68; Campbell, "Preference for the Future," in Dumas, *Clintons of Arkansas*, 45; letter from Bill Clinton to Denise Hyland, August 11, 1965, in Maraniss, *First in His Class*. David Maraniss interviewed Hyland on three separate occasions in the spring and summer of 1993.
47. Maraniss interviews with Staley in 1992–93, in Maraniss, *First in His Class*, 64–65, 94–95, 108–109.
48. Staley interview in Maraniss, *First in His Class*, 116–17; Staley interview in Takiff, *Complicated Man*, 27.
49. Maraniss, *First in His Class*, 101; B. Clinton, *My Life*, 114–16.
50. Letter from Bill Clinton to Denise Hyland, July 14, 1966, in Maraniss, *First in His Class*, 78–79.
51. B. Clinton, *My Life*, 7.
52. Ibid., 69.
53. Interview with Staley in Maraniss, *First in His Class*, 117, 218; Kelley, *Leading with My Heart*, 90–92.
54. David Maraniss interview with Jim Moore, 1993, in Maraniss, *First in His Class*, 112–13.

2. HILLARY RODHAM: THE EARLY YEARS

1. Maraniss, *First in His Class*, 249–50; Sheehy, *Hillary's Choice*, 21; Carl Bernstein, *A Woman in Charge: The Life of Hillary Rodham Clinton* (New York: Vintage Books, 2008), 11–12, 16–27; Hillary Rodham Clinton, *Living History* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2003); Hillary Rodham Clinton, *It Takes a Village* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1995).
2. Sheehy, *Hillary's Choice*, 20–23; Bernstein, *Woman in Charge*, 13–14.
3. Sheehy, *Hillary's Choice*, 23; Carl Bernstein interview with Betsy Johnson Ebeling, Bernstein, *Woman in Charge*, 15–16, 21–22.
4. Bernstein, *Woman in Charge*, 13–16.
5. Ebeling interviews in ibid., 28–30; Gail Sheehy interview with Dorothy Rodham, 1992, in Sheehy, *Hillary's Choice*, 24–26.
6. Ebeling interview and confidential interview in Bernstein, *Woman in Charge*, 16–26; Dorothy Rodham interview in Sheehy, *Hillary's Choice*, 16.
7. Sheehy, *Hillary's Choice*, 23–24; Nicole Boxer interview with Carl Bernstein in Bernstein, *Woman in Charge*, 26.
8. Joyce Milton, *The First Partner: Hillary Rodham Clinton* (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1999), 17–25; Bernstein, *Woman in Charge*, 29–30. The bubble metaphor is from Gail Sheehy's interview with Dorothy Rodham in Sheehy, *Hillary's Choice*, 23.
9. Bernstein interviews with Betsy Ebeling and Linda Bloodworth-Thomason in Bernstein, *Woman in Charge*, 28–31; Sheehy, *Hillary's Choice*, 26–28; Edward Klein, *The Truth About Hillary* (New York: Sentinel, 2005), 53.
10. Bernstein, *Woman in Charge*, 28–33; H. R. Clinton, *Living History*, 24.
11. Bernstein, *Woman in Charge*, 34–37; Sheehy, *Hillary's Choice*, 21–23.