

LIFE AFTER VINCE - Lisa Foster

14P

SCREENED
By clpp Date 3/5/2010

VF death - John Butz - 9/27/95

① Search at the Park continue -
• have found some bullets -
• 1 is a .38 caliber --- doubtful it is
the one - sending it to the lab.

② Fingerprint delay - VF Sr. House ----

③ Henry Lee's efforts -

< point to suicide in park --- >

- gunpowder on glasses
- bone fragment
- blood stains ---

④ Paper from original printing of the gun.
gun prob. was not wiped

Pritchard / Rodeby -

tentative - wk of Oct 10-13

9-22-95

① Bater - Brett called HE

(follow up

① Scalice, Santucci -

① Scarza

HE call {
HE call {
① Ruddy
① Pritchard

• Bater told shift

① Bater talk Brett to HE should do this ---

• Probably in WDC -

HE set up interviews w/ Ruddy, Pritchard

A REPORTER AT LARGE

LIFE AFTER VINCE

For the first time, Lisa Foster discusses her ordeal in the two years since the death of her husband, Vincent Foster, and how she made her own investigation into why he died.

BY PETER J. BOYER

ON the second anniversary of Vincent Foster's death, his widow, Lisa, drove from Little Rock to his home town of Hope, Arkansas, and sat at his grave and cried. Then she visited her late husband's mother and advised her not to watch televised coverage of the Senate Whitewater committee, whose members were spending the week verbally ransacking Foster's White House office and showily examining his empty briefcase. A few days after the committee adjourned, in early August, I went to Little Rock to visit with Lisa Foster. She had watched part of the Senate proceeding and found it appalling—not in any particular but in the fact of its existence. She had hoped that Senate hearings conducted a year ago would conclude the Vince Foster "mystery" and end the speculations about scandal and conspiracy surrounding his death. They did not. Nor did a report last year by Robert Fiske, Jr., the first Whitewater independent counsel, who had found that Foster's death was a suicide unrelated to Presidential scandal. A new Congress and a new independent counsel, Kenneth Starr, launched their own inquiries, and the conspiracy mill has never stopped. "I could not have predicted that it would continue," she says. "I kept thinking it was going to end, and it never did."

Lisa went home to Arkansas from Washington after Vince's death, leaving the place that she believes destroyed her husband and ruined her life. She had never heard of Whitewater, but within months it was to become a synonym for Bill Clinton's undoing, and Vince was posthumously cast in a key role in a complex web of alleged scandal and coverup. He had been Bill Clinton's boyhood chum and Hillary Clinton's confidant and law part-

ner, in the White House, he was one of their most trusted aides. The revelation, five months later, that Whitewater files had been removed from Foster's office after his death suggested that he knew some damaging secret, and that it might even have pushed him to suicide. That tantalizing twist nourished a conspiracy industry on talk radio, on the cyberspace networks, and even in the mainstream press, which spun out scenarios explaining Foster's death. There were rumors of a "safe house," where Foster supposedly died; stories that he was gay or was Hillary's lover; and speculation that he was a secret agent for Israel or somehow involved in a government drug-running scheme.

Lisa Foster has remained publicly silent about her husband's death for two years. She is now convinced that it was a suicide, yet there were moments when she couldn't be certain about why he had been driven so far. When the rumors about Vince came rushing out, she sometimes thought, What if it's true? "That's one reason I never wanted to talk," she says. "I thought, As soon as I talk, they'll come up with something else they've found, and something I swore would never be true they'll tell me is true, and I won't be able to defeat it." At one point, even Vince's mother asked her, "Lisa, do you think he could have done anything?"

Lisa hates that doubt and has overcome it, having undertaken her own investigation of her husband's death. But her certainty about Vince is a hard comfort, dearly purchased. To believe completely in him, she says, she had to learn to believe in the despair that killed him.

BEFORE Lisa Foster's husband went to Washington with the Clintons, in January, 1993, the expecta-

tions of her life had been fully met. One of six children, she was reared a Catholic in the Protestant city of Nashville. Her father, an insurance broker, provided a solidly comfortable middle-class existence, with membership in the country club, and society debuts for his daughters. Lisa was educated by Dominican nuns through high school, and then went to Sweet Briar, a women's college in the Old Virginia tradition. Social life centered on big date weekends, when fraternity boys from the University of Virginia and from Davidson and from Washington and Lee would caravan in and party. It was on such a weekend in Lisa's sophomore year that she met Vince Foster, a sophomore at Davidson, on a blind date. "We had an absolute ball," she recalls. "I kissed him on the first date—I'd probably never done that in my life. I took one look at him and I thought, Oh, my God, you're the best-lookin' thing I've ever seen. I just went head over heels in love with him." Vince seemed so smart, and so interested in the world; Lisa, wanting to impress him, ordered a subscription to *Time*. When Vince told his mother about Lisa, he said, "She's a math major and she's a Catholic. She's not pretty, but she's kind of cute." Vince brought her home to Hope, and there his father, waiting outside the family's big white house, pegged his future daughter-in-law exactly right, and won her forever. "Well, I think she's beautiful," he said. "She looks just like Doris Day."

They were married in St. Henry Catholic Church in Nashville in April, 1968, when Vince was in his first year of law school, at Vanderbilt. His father had wanted him to go into the family real-

Lisa Foster, opposite: "There were certain things I know, because I was there, and there are some things I don't know—that I can never prove, except by faith."

estate business, but Vince, deeply reticent by nature, knew that he was no salesman, and he had chosen law. At the height of the American buildup in Vietnam, Vince joined the Arkansas National Guard; that required his regular presence in Hope, so he transferred to

work at the small but growing Rose Law Firm, in Little Rock.

Lisa was eager to get started, too. "All I ever, ever wanted to do was have children," she says. "And then, when I met Vince, all I wanted to do was be his wife and have children. I knew I might have

the Rose firm, he and Lisa bought a house in the Heights, an area near the club which proved to be the neighborhood of choice for future Clinton insiders. The Fosters' house, a big white Colonial, was redecorated by their next-door neighbor, Kaki Hockersmith, who

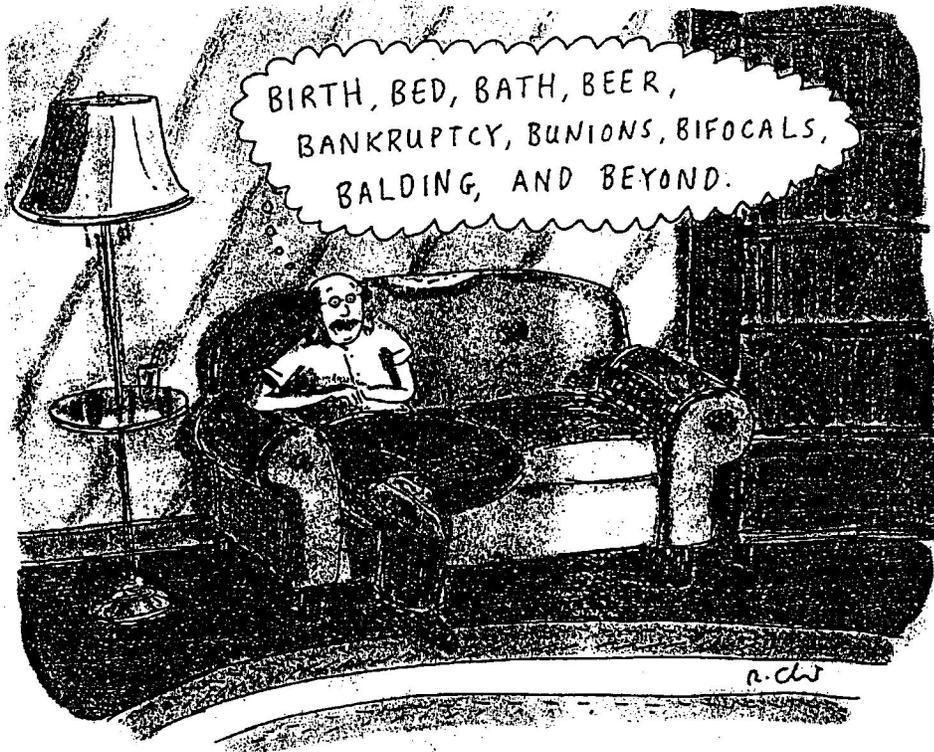


the University of Arkansas, in Fayetteville. Lisa got a job as a librarian, and Vince spent every day at the law-school library, developing a work ethic that inspired awe. "He'd work all day while the other law-school husbands were home watching the soaps," Lisa says. He overprepared himself to such an extent that at exam time studying became superfluous. He graduated first in his class, and earned the top score on the state bar exam. Eager to start his career, he skipped commencement and went to

work, and I was enough of a feminist even then to want to prove that I could. And I did, and that was fine. But I didn't really want to have a career." Four years after they were married, they had their first child, Vincent, Jr., and he was followed by a girl, Laura, and by another boy, John (whom they called by his middle name, Brugh). Lisa did volunteer work for the Junior League, played tennis at the Little Rock Country Club, and taught swimming to local kids, including Chelsea Clinton. As Vince prospered

would one day design the living quarters of Hillary Clinton's White House. People considered the presidency of the state bar to be Vince's for the asking, and, beyond that, he seemed a natural choice for the federal bench.

In their twenty-five years together, Lisa and Vince fashioned a sort of compact that guided their lives: Vince worked furiously, and made all the big decisions; Lisa provided the support system, running their home, minding the kids, and organizing their social life.



Over time, this delineation of roles became quite comfortable, and the line seldom blurred. Vince only rarely involved himself in the usual household battles with the kids, and Lisa kept her distance from his work. When Vince had a big case, he prepared for it frantically, day and night, right up until his court date, all the while bemoaning his chances, declaring that he was certain to lose. But he almost invariably won, or settled; he seldom lost. Lisa learned that this was just Vince's way of working, and it further deepened the line; one day, it would also obscure the signs of desperation.

LISA FOSTER was a friend and contemporary of Hillary Clinton's. They belonged to the same social set, in one of the most insular towns in America, yet their lives could hardly have been more different. Hillary was Little Rock's model of the nineteen-eighties superwoman—a high-powered lawyer, the state's First Lady, the mother of a little girl. Lisa was a stay-at-home mom. In the culture of their place and time, Lisa's life was very much the norm, and Hillary's an aberration. Bill Clinton's Yankee-lawyer wife, who defiantly kept her maiden name, seemed indifferent to the custom of the

home state. (Some of the Little Rock women had a beauty tip for Hillary's hair: Bleach it.)

It was Vince, not Lisa, who made the friendship between the Fosters and the Clintons. Bill had lived next door to him as a boy, and Vince met Hillary when they both did work for the Legal Aid Society, in the late seventies. After Hillary joined the Rose Law Firm, she and Vince and Webster Hubbell, another senior partner, became best friends, a troika. Vince valued his workplace relationship with Hillary, and when office politics reared he became her protector. Lisa and Hillary didn't lunch and shop together, but the Fosters were frequent guests at the Governor's Mansion. The Clintons went to the Fosters' pool parties and had more than one Christmas dinner with them. Lisa and Hillary sometimes discussed the different nature of their lives, and perhaps their exchanges held the hint of an edge. Lisa marvelled at Hillary's ability to manage a career and a child while serving as Arkansas's First Lady. "I don't know how you do it," she recalls saying once to Hillary, and Hillary replied, "Lisa, I don't know how you do it. I could never stay home with three kids all day."

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and Lisa were part of the inner circle of Arkansans celebrating Clinton's victory at the Governor's Mansion. It was a joyous night for the Fosters, uncomplicated by any suspicion that their lives would be changed by Clinton's success. The thought of going to Washington, Lisa says, "never entered my mind." Once, back in Vince's law-school days, Lisa had asked Vince, who was interested in the political issues of the time, if he would ever consider entering politics himself, and his answer was firm: no. Intensely cautious and inward, Vince lacked the politician's nature. "He didn't want to be a politician, because he didn't like to be in a good mood all the time," Lisa says. "And, obviously, he wasn't."

Yet during the weeks of transition, as Clinton assembled his government in Little Rock, the prospect of Vince's joining the team inevitably arose. He would come home from a lunch with Hillary and raise with Lisa the issue of going to Washington. Other Arkansans were leaping aboard, and Lisa told her husband, "I'm afraid if you don't do it you'll always be sorry." Then came word that Clinton had chosen Mack McLarty to be the White House chief of staff. Mack and Vince were old, close friends from Hope, and Lisa and Mack's wife, Donna McLarty, served on volunteer boards together. That decided it. On Christmas Eve, Clinton made Foster a formal offer, and when Foster accepted it the President-elect asked, "Are you sure you want to do this?" The job, deputy White House counsel, seemed perfect for Foster. He hated the spotlight, but as deputy to the chief counsel, Bernard Nussbaum, he would hold an insider's position of influence and trust. Besides, he was taken by the notion of a higher calling; it was a moment, soon to evaporate, when Clinton's promise of change carried the force of real possibility. Yes, Foster was sure he wanted to do it. He and most of the other Arkansans who followed the new, activist President and his wife to Washington genuinely believed that they were on a mission to do good.

At first, it seemed to Lisa that Vince was happy in Washington, maybe even a little too happy. "He was

EVERYONE'S GOING TO WASHINGTON

calling me, saying things like 'Last night we had cocktails on the Truman balcony and Judy Collins was there, and we all went out to dinner,'” Lisa recalls. She was not there, because Vince had insisted that she stay behind in Little Rock. Two of their children, Vincent and Laura, were away at college, but the youngest, Brugh, was in the middle of his junior year in high school, and Vince feared that an interruption might hinder his chances of getting into a good college. The family would join Vince at the end of the school year, and in the meantime he would live with his sister, Sheila, who was also going to work for the Clinton Administration.

Lisa was unhappy with this arrangement, and unreserved about voicing her feelings. It was the first time they had ever been separated. “I was angry at Vince about ninety per cent of the time,” she says. “I wasn't angry at him for going. I was just angry at him for ignoring us and leaving us behind, and making me have to deal with everything, all the decisions, and he was going up and getting all the so-called glory.” She and the children went to Washington for the Inauguration, but after the swearing-in Vince went straight to the White House to work, leaving his wife and children at the curb, uncertain how they would get back to Sheila's house.

Lisa was irritated by this, and didn't even go to the ball. Back in Little Rock, she found the prospect of running the household and preparing for the family's departure overwhelming. She had never expected to move out of her house, and when it was finally time to pack up she sat down on the floor and cried. She called Vince, and he told her to find a packer in the Yellow Pages. Lisa says that she feels guilty about the way she behaved during those months, especially in the light of what she soon discovered about Vince's life in Washington. “I whined about the whole

thing,” she says. “We had a lot of conversations over the phone that were sort of short, curt conversations, and we realized that we were both so tense about what we had to do that it was not easy for us to console each other.”

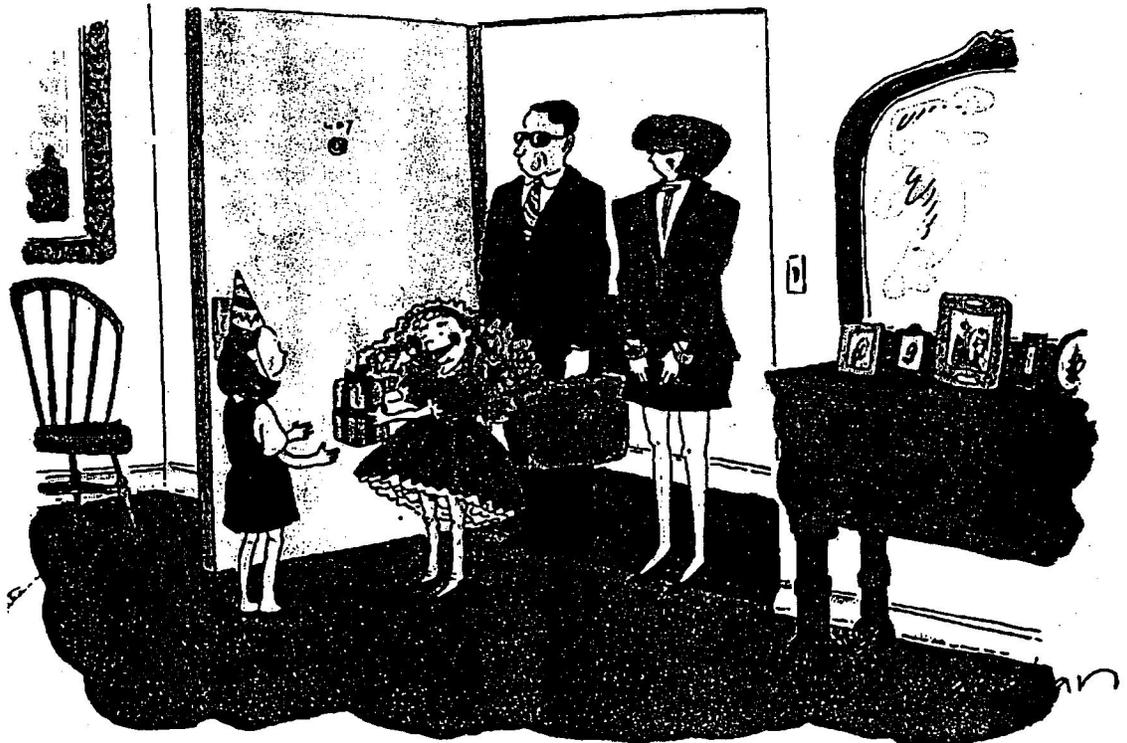
Lisa soon came to feel more optimistic about their new life. During Brugh's spring break, she went to Washington and found a small row house in Georgetown. It needed some renovation, but it was in a nice neighborhood—on Cambridge Place, next door to Senator Richard Shelby, of Alabama—and it was (by Washington standards) affordable. She moved Vince in, and got Brugh into the elite Sidwell Friends School, which Chelsea Clinton attends, for his senior year. Back in Little Rock, she managed to get their belongings organized for the move and the house rented.

School ended, and as Lisa prepared to leave Little Rock one more packing chore presented itself. Vince's father, a hunter, had died two years earlier, and Vince had taken his collection of guns. Lisa looked at the shotguns—“I'll bet you there were ten of them in the house,” she says—and deemed them too troublesome to pack up (Vince wasn't much of a hunter anyway), but she didn't know what to do with them. She worried that if she left the shotguns in the

attic the heat might cause the shells to explode. Finally, she bought a lock, put the shotguns in Vince's wine closet, and locked it. There were several handguns, too, including a .38 special, with an etched handle, which Vince's father had kept by his bed. But they were small and easy to move, so Lisa packed them and took them along to Washington.

Almost from the beginning, Vince realized he should have stayed in Little Rock. Like all the other Clinton appointees, he discovered that going to work in the White House after twelve years of Republican rule was a bit like occupying scorched earth. The counsel's offices had been left bare by the Bush people. At the Rose Law Firm, Vince had worked behind the burnished wood door of a spacious corner office; in the White House, his office had one window and was so small that the copying machine had to be installed in the hallway.

But the physical discomfort was secondary to the psychic discomfort, especially when things went wrong, and everything, it seemed, was going wrong. The aborted attempts, involving Zoë Baird and Kimba Wood, to fill the Attorney General job, and the ungraceful retreat from Lani Guinier as head of the Justice Department's civil-rights division, were more than just political em-



“My parents couldn't come, so I brought two of my backers.”

barrassments; they helped to establish the impression that the Clinton people talked a good game but weren't up to the grownup job of governing. These were problems that occurred on Foster's turf, and he was the sort of man to take such failures personally, and hard. He even assumed blame for Waco, somehow believing that the disastrous F.B.I. raid on the Branch Davidians' compound was his fault. Vince and the rest of the Clinton team, Lisa notes, "weren't up there to do bad things, and everything—just like Waco—just blew up in their faces, and it absolutely destroyed him."

Back in Little Rock, at the Rose Law Firm, Vince had had the luxury of coping with one problem at a time. In Washington, Lisa says, "he couldn't relax and make decisions; everything was immediate, and it had to be correct, because of the stakes involved. The intense scrutiny that they were getting made you feel like no matter what you do you're going to get criticized." She adds, "It was just like some dog nippin' at your ankles all the time."

And then there was Travelgate. Soon after the Clinton team took over the White House, they found that the Travel Office—which handled, among other things, transportation for the press corps—was in disarray; staff members were even suspected of embezzlement and kickbacks. Under Foster's direction, the counsel's office ordered an independent audit, and it resulted in the firing of seven staff members (ultimately, only one was indicted, and will go on trial next month); in a rather stupid move, the White House named a Clinton relative to temporarily manage some Travel

Office business. Bill Kennedy, another Rose lawyer on the counsel staff, had talked to the F.B.I. about a possible criminal investigation of the travel staff, and the White House was accused of abusing the Justice Department to cover up its clumsy cronyism. An internal inquiry was ordered, and Kennedy was reprimanded. Some people in the White House thought that Foster should have been, too, but he escaped direct rebuke. Foster was angered both by the reprimand to Kennedy and by the threat to him, and felt deeply wronged by the White House.

Things got worse, with the publication in June of the first of three now famous *Wall Street Journal* editorials that were harshly critical of Foster and the Arkansas "mores" that he and other Rose alumni supposedly represented. The *Journal* struck at Foster on a number of fronts, ranging from his disinclination to provide the paper with a photograph of himself (in violation of the Freedom of Information Act, the *Journal* asserted) to his brief aimed at keeping Hillary's health-care-commission meetings closed to the press and the public. In what soon proved a cruel irony, the *Journal* exploded Foster's anonymity by printing the outline of a man filled with a question mark, under the headline "WHO IS VINCENT FOSTER?"

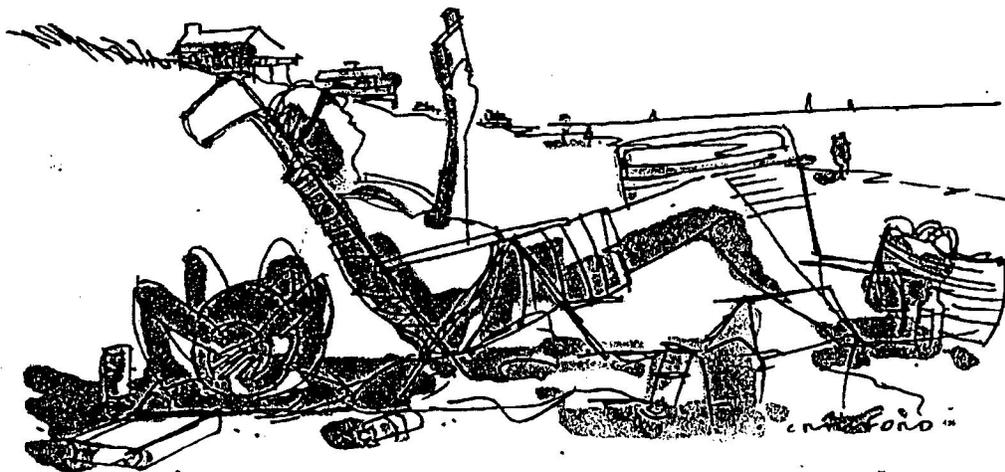
Two weeks after Lisa and the kids arrived in Washington, just as Travelgate was unfolding, Vince told her that he had made a mistake and had decided that he should resign. Something was discernibly amiss, but Lisa didn't see it. "You can't quit," she told him. "I just got here." She wanted a taste of the glamour

she thought Vince had been enjoying, but it was not forthcoming. "He didn't want to go out," she says. "He didn't want to do anything fun. He wanted me to stay home and cook. He never came home until nine or ten o'clock at night, then went straight to bed, and he got up and left at a quarter to eight in the morning. By the time we got there, it was basically awful. It was like: Well, I just moved out of my house, and I moved up here and he is unhappy. I have to make him happy. This is going to have to get better."

The two older Foster children got summer jobs, and Brugh did volunteer work, as was required by Sidwell Friends. Lisa undertook the redecoration of the house and played tennis with a friend at the Arlington Y. "I was kind of getting to like it," she says. "I loved having a place and fixing it up. I had all my cute living-room furniture in there, and I was beginning to think it was going to be possible for us to live there."

At the time, Lisa never considered the possibility that Vince was suffering from depression. In her world, emotional problems were not discussed, and depression in its clinical sense was an alien concept. "I knew he was down," she says. "I just didn't know that people committed suicide. I'd never had any experience with this at all—I hated it when people said he was depressed, because I didn't know what depression was." Perhaps she was too ready to dismiss Vince's worries over Travelgate as his characteristic overreaction to work. "I kept telling him that it wasn't any big deal. Nobody cared about it." She knew that the press was tormenting Clinton, but she thought that was overblown, too. "The press had it all out of proportion, just like Vince had it all out of proportion."

Looking back on their tense, brief time together in Washington, Lisa is filled with images of a desperately troubled man. He lost his appetite, and some nights he didn't sleep at all. "He got up one morning and said, 'I did not sleep one wink last night.' He looked awful. And I said, 'Oh, Vince, surely you slept some, you probably just



STAYING UP ALL NIGHT

don't feel like you did.' And he said, 'No, I didn't sleep at all. I just don't think I can go back down there.' And the next thing I knew he was dressed and had on his coat and tie and he looked like a million dollars. And I thought, Well, then, tonight you'll sleep."

He was losing weight, and Lisa remembers that he began absently wringing his hands, incessantly rubbing the thumb and forefinger of one hand into the palm of the other. At a meeting at Brugh's school, Vince slumped in his chair, Lisa recalls, and she thought he looked just the way his father looked in the weeks before he died, of cancer. "All I knew to do was to tell him I didn't think it was that big a deal and that everything would be O.K., and not to worry about it so much, and to take care of himself, and try to get more rest."

As a college freshman in 1963, Lisa had travelled to Washington for John Kennedy's funeral. Now she went to the church where Kennedy had worshipped—Holy Trinity, in Georgetown—hoping to find help for her husband. "I'd go there every Sunday and I'd pray for Vince," she says. "I'd say, 'Please help him make these hard decisions, and help him make the right decisions, so that he won't be so upset.'"

One evening in early July, Vince again told Lisa that he meant to resign. He was still unable to sleep. Worried, perhaps even a bit exasperated, she told him she was tired of hearing about how miserably he was failing in his job, and she urged him to take the offensive; she suggested that he write down some of the reasons that his difficulties were *not* his fault. He went upstairs, sat on the bed, and, on a sheet of yellow legal paper, wrote the list of complaints that would soon be found, torn into twenty-seven pieces, at the bottom of his briefcase, by an associate White House counsel, Steve Neuwirth. It was not a suicide note, Lisa says, but a kind of defense brief. "After that, he said one night, 'I haven't resigned yet. I've just written my opening argument,'" she recalls. "And I think that when he wrote those things down it was as if he were defending himself in what he thought was going to be



some kind of congressional investigation. And the *Wall Street Journal* was saying, 'Who is Vince Foster?' and I think in some ways he felt he had to defend himself. I was trying to tell him that he didn't, that he hadn't done anything wrong, that he should just basically carry on and it would all go away. But it didn't."

LISA still had hope, and it seemed to her that this difficult period in Washington in some ways had brought her closer to Vince. "He was talking to me so much, and I thought, Well, really we have each other, and I'll just be there for him, and maybe that will be the good that comes out of this—that we will get closer. He needs me, because he doesn't have anybody else." Lisa even talked Vince into taking a break from Washington, a weekend trip to an inn on Maryland's Eastern Shore.

The day they left for the shore, Friday, July 16th, was a particularly bad one for Vince. He told Lisa that his heart felt as though it were pounding out of his chest, and that day he went to the White House medical unit for a blood-pressure test. His pressure measured 132/84, well within normal limits. Realizing that there was nothing wrong with his heart, he telephoned his sister, Sheila, and told

her that he thought he was suffering from depression. She gave him the phone numbers of three psychiatrists. (One of them later testified, at the first round of Senate hearings, that Sheila had spoken to him about her brother, telling him that Vince held a very sensitive position at the White House and that his depression was "directly related to highly sensitive and confidential matters.") Around lunchtime, Vince called one of the names on the list, but didn't leave a message. He tried again later, and again left no message. Apparently embarrassed, and concerned that a diagnosis of mental illness would complete the ruin of his reputation, he charged the calls to his home phone.

Vince was visibly tense as he and Lisa drove out of town. Traffic was bad, and en route they realized that they had left Vince's suitcase at home, by the back door. His mood didn't improve much when they got to the shore. Again, he seemed single-mindedly focussed on getting out of the White House. At dinner that night, Lisa recalls, "I asked him if he felt trapped, and tears came to his eyes, and he cried."

The next morning, she remembers Vince sprawled on a park lawn overlooking Chesapeake Bay, negotiating their departure date. They now agreed

that they would not stay for the full Clinton term, but she hoped to remain in Washington at least until Brugh graduated from Sidwell, the following year. Vince wanted to leave immediately. Finally, they decided that Vince would stay in his job until Christmas, then find other work in Washington until Brugh graduated.

Vince's spirits seemed to lift after that, and they even talked about living on a houseboat until they returned to Little Rock. Back at the inn, they were wakened from a nap by a call from Webster Hubbell's wife, Suzy, who was staying with her husband at the home of mutual friends nearby. Hubbell invited the Fosters to join them for dinner that night and for the day on Sunday, and they did. Again, Lisa thought she saw Vince brightening. But something still seemed to be off-key. She told Vince that she intended to telephone their family doctor in Little Rock, Larry Watkins, to see if he could suggest anything. Whenever Vince had a cold or the flu, he asked Lisa to call Dr. Watkins for him, but this time he told her he would make the call himself. On Monday, he did call Watkins, and told him he thought he might need something for depression. Watkins prescribed the antidepressant Desyrel and telephoned in the order to a Washington pharmacy. Vince did not tell Lisa he had made the call. "He never, ever mentioned the word 'depression' to me," she says, "or anything even remotely resembling mental illness. Ever."

That day, July 19th, Foster arrived at his office with three stamped, addressed envelopes. His secretary noticed the addresses on two of them: one was to his life-insurance company, and the other was to his mother, in Hope. The envelope to the insurance company was subsequently found to contain his premium payment; the one to his mother contained papers completing the transfer of oil leases from his father's estate to his and Lisa's name.

That evening, at home, Vince received a call from the President inviting him to watch a movie at the White House. He declined. "That's good," Lisa told him. "You need a good night's sleep." Besides, she had prepared a family meal. That afternoon, the medication from Dr. Watkins, thirty fifty-milligram

tablets, had been delivered to the house. Vince took one tablet. Once again, Lisa seemed to sense a lightening in his mood. "He came into the kitchen, put his arm around me, and kind of joked with me," she recalls. "He went to the wine cabinet and said, 'Maybe that's what I need, some tannin.' Then we went up and got in bed and watched TV." They talked about their weekend away, and about trying to go away again the next weekend. Lisa asked Vince if he would do something special for her—go on a date with her the following night, Tuesday. Vince said that he thought he might have to attend a birthday dinner that night but that he would try.

On Tuesday, Vince left for work at 8 A.M., and Lisa noted that he failed to kiss her goodbye. She started to say something, but stopped herself. "I was trying to act so chipper," she says. "I didn't want to make a big deal. But he just had his back to me, so stiff. And he just walked out." She played tennis at eight-thirty and then went to a charity meeting with Donna McLarty. Afterward, the two women went to the lounge of the Four Seasons Hotel in Georgetown, and drank Perrier and sounded a theme that had become increasingly common among the expatriate Arkansans—the nastiness of Washington politics.

Lisa eventually went home, and around five o'clock she called the White House to find out about the birthday party, and was told that it was not until the following week. She figured that Vince would be home soon, for their date.

But Vince didn't come home, so Lisa called the White House again, and this time she was told that the President was appearing on "Larry King Live." "I said, 'Oh, he must be with a bunch of people watching the President on "Larry King,"'" Lisa recalls. She and Laura went upstairs to watch the King show. A few minutes later, the doorbell rang, and Laura went to the door. It was some

volunteers from Greenpeace, soliciting donations.

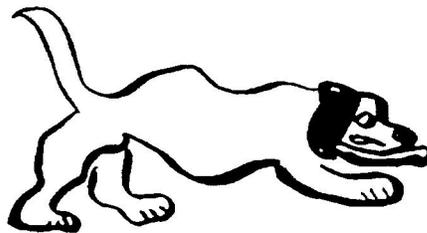
On television, King said that the President had graciously consented to extend his visit for another half hour. Lisa recalls that she groaned and thought, Oh, come on, Bill! You've got to learn when to quit! But a moment later the President and King came back on the screen and King said that Clinton had another engagement, and had to leave shortly. "He had this funny look on his face, the President did," she says.

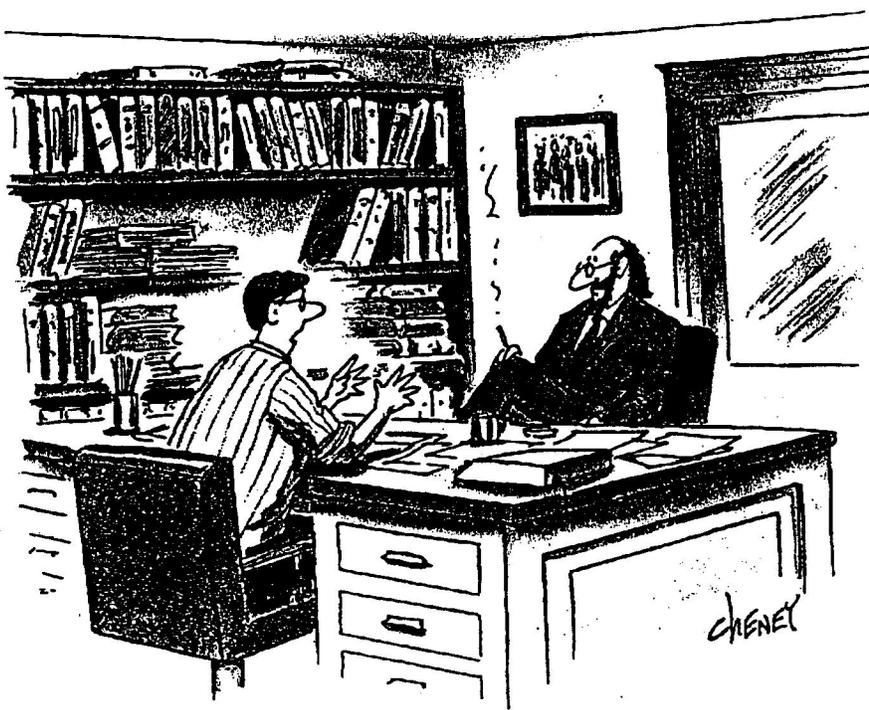
The doorbell rang again. This time when Laura answered it, there were two officers from the Park Police, a man and a woman. "Mother! Mother! Something awful. Come quick," she cried. The man said to Lisa, "Mrs. Foster, your husband, Vincent, is dead."

Lisa thought the officer had made a mistake. "I said, 'No, no, that's my son Vincent.' And he said, 'No, your husband Vincent is dead.'" She protested again that the officer must mean Vincent, Jr., because he and Brugh had gone to borrow their uncle's van, and Lisa imagined that there had been an accident. "And they said, 'No, your husband has shot himself.'" She is still remorseful about her first response to that realization. She says, "The saddest thing is that I had this little bit of relief that it wasn't Vincent."

Once the news registered, Lisa says, she didn't question it. "I never thought he'd been murdered. The worst possible thing had happened, but it was like everything came together." Lisa was told that Vince had shot himself with a .38 special, which she realized was one of the guns she had packed up and taken to Washington. She wanted to know whether her husband had shot himself in the mouth or at the temple. "I didn't know that he knew how to kill himself," she says. "But the children reminded me that he had just watched 'A Few Good Men,' and that is how the guy in the movie did it—he shot himself in the mouth."

In the chaos of that night, with the police and friends from the White House in her home, Lisa tried to console her daughter. Laura had been Vince's pride, and she adored him. When school was over that spring, she had spent a month with her father—before her mother arrived—cooking and cleaning





*"Words on paper, Ted. Just give us words on paper.
Our advertising people will do the rest."*

for him, and acting as his companion at official functions. Lisa now told her, "Laura, you had a better relationship with your father in twenty-one years than most people ever have. You're just going to have to let that come through."

WEBSTER HUBBELL and his wife took care of the move back to Arkansas. As Lisa left Washington, she felt a wave of revulsion against the place. "I can remember looking at Georgetown and thinking it was the ugliest set of buildings I had ever seen," she says. She was determined to get through the funeral without breaking down; she stared ahead, focussing on objects and avoiding eye contact.

Her friends wondered how she would manage, with two children in college and a third on his way, but financial survival was not what worried her. "Everybody thought, Poor Lisa and the kids won't have any insurance money," she recalls, because Vince's death was a suicide. But his policy had a suicide clause, allowing death-benefit payment to survivors if the insured party had held the policy for a prescribed period, and Vince had. And over the years he had built a college

trust fund for each of the children. "Unfortunately—or fortunately, I don't know which—he was the type of person who probably knew exactly what he was doing in that respect," Lisa says. "He probably thought we'd be well taken care of and maybe we'd be better off, financially, if he were dead, because if he went to a psychiatrist he'd never have another job."

At first, Lisa was preoccupied not with the nature of Vince's death but with tremendous despair at his loss. When she thought of life without him, she found herself embracing the idea of death. "I wanted to die after he died," she says. "There were a lot of times when I thought, This isn't worth it." She remembers being on an airplane with one of her sisters after Vince died and having to fly through a tornado-spewing storm system. Her sister was frightened. "Don't worry," Lisa told her. "You're with me, and God's not gonna let me die, it would be too easy. I would just love to die." But these thoughts inevitably led to images of her children. "I couldn't stand the idea of my children having to go through it more than once. It's just the most awful thing in the world, and I can't let them

think that I'd do it, too. I mean, somehow, I've got to stay alive, for them."

Lisa felt angry, too, at everyone—the Clintons, Vince, politicians, those Arkansans who stayed in Washington. She would see a picture of the White House on the news, and get livid. "I hated everything. I was mad as hell." She was angriest, perhaps, at God. She had always been a devout Catholic, never questioning, for example, that her own children would be raised in her faith, even though Vince was a Presbyterian. But when he died she suffered a crisis of faith, and has not yet emerged from it. At first, she questioned God. "Why didn't Vince run out of gas? Why didn't he have a car wreck? Why didn't he call? Why did you have to let him get so bad off when all he wanted to do was go up there and help his country and do some good things for people?" And then she stopped praying. She thought of Coleridge's Ancient Mariner, who surveyed his dead shipmates and was stricken by the fact of his own survival: "I looked to heaven and tried to pray;/But or ever a prayer had gusht,/A wicked whisper came, and made/My heart as dry as dust."

"Well, that's exactly the way I felt," she says. "You can't pray, because you don't know what you're praying for. You're mad as hell at God, and so you don't know what to say. You don't want to say, 'Help me,' because you think He's screwed you. What are you going to say—I praise you because you're great, even though you've done this to me?"

She kept going to church, because she didn't know how to stop going. But she wore jeans and a sweatshirt, and sat in silence through the service. People sent her cards urging her to turn to Jesus: "If I got one card about Jesus, I must have gotten a thousand. And I thought, Well, where was Jesus when I needed him? I don't know why God did this to me. I wouldn't do this to somebody I loved. You know, we're supposed to be children of God—I wouldn't do something like this to one of my children. It wasn't like we did something bad and we deserved it. I just didn't understand it."

The morning after Vince killed himself, she telephoned Bernard Nussbaum, searching for an explanation, and asked, "Bernie, did you fire Vince yesterday?" Nussbaum said of course he hadn't, but

WHAT TO PRAY FOR?

later told Robert Fiske's office that he had noticed that Vince had become less productive, and that he had urged him to take a vacation.

Lisa says, "I was trying to figure out what could possibly have happened that put him over the edge. I kept thinking, Now, what could have made him eat lunch and go out three or four hours later and shoot himself?" After Vince's funeral, she returned to Washington to talk to the Park Police, and Nussbaum gave her a partial answer, showing her Vince's torn-up note.

EVEN as various law-enforcement agencies and congressional hearings were investigating Vince's death, Lisa undertook an inquiry of her own. She went through every box of personal files from Vince's office which had been returned to her. "If you saw them, you'd believe even more what I'm telling you," she says. "There was a file for his father, a file for his mother, a file for the children's medical records. He was a perfect husband, keeping perfect records." She examined his American Express bills for the previous six years; she studied their telephone bill, and when she saw a number she didn't recognize (such as that of the psychiatrist) she dialled it. "I did all of it, every last piece of scrap paper, name, number—oh, I investigated everything. As a matter of fact, when the F.B.I. wanted my phone bill I'd already figured it all out for them. I had the name of everybody he called."

Curious about why Foster had an appointment scheduled for July 21st—the day after his death—with Jim Lyons, a Colorado attorney who had organized the Clintons' early responses to the Whitewater allegations, she called Lyons and asked him what the meeting was to be about. He told her that Vince was worried about a possible congressional hearing on the Travelgate matter.

Lisa has satisfied herself that Whitewater was not among Vince's anxieties—a view that echoes the White

House line and the conclusion of the Fiske report. Nevertheless, it is reasonable to suppose that Foster was well aware the Clintons could face future political embarrassments over their Little Rock land deal. As Hillary Clinton's former law partner and the Clintons' friend, Vince was also handling some of their personal legal work, including their taxes on Whitewater from 1990 to 1992. Just a few weeks ago, in advance of this summer's hearings, it was revealed that Foster had written a memo in which he described Whitewater as "a can of worms you shouldn't open."

Lisa says that her search helped her cope with the wilder speculative scenarios about Vince—the tales of secret Swiss bank accounts, of involvement in a C.I.A.-sponsored drug-smuggling operation, of the alleged use of a "safe house," and so on. "I got the last six years of American Express when they started talking about him flying to Switzerland, just so I could say, 'I know he didn't do it, because it's right here before me,'" she says. "There is no secret. Anything that I know about his death I have told the Park Police, Robert Fiske, and Ken Starr, and there is no secret. There is no conspiracy. There's nothing to tell."

Lisa was not always able to make such

assertions. Just a few weeks after Vince died, she was notified that his account at the White House credit union was overdrawn. She had emptied the account, and deposited the money in her own account in Arkansas, but Bill Kennedy called her and said that Vince's account hadn't had as much money in it as Lisa thought. He had been told, he said, that Vince had made several large cash withdrawals, of several thousand dollars each, from the account. "I went berserk," Lisa says. "I said, 'I don't know anything about that.' And I thought, God, what if he was being blackmailed, or maybe he had a girlfriend in some apartment somewhere, and I didn't know about it. My mind was just racing." Lisa says that she searched her records from the credit union and found the receipts from Vince's automatic withdrawals, and discovered a mistake—thirty-five-dollar withdrawals had been misread as thirty-five-hundred-dollar withdrawals. "But it upset me so much I virtually could not see," she says. "I thought I was going to faint."

One of her sisters came over, and she called another sister. Together, the next day, they took Lisa to a psychiatrist. She has been seeing him ever since. In therapy, she began working out answers to some of the remaining questions



"I thought I saw you by the lake this morning, but it was a stick"

about Vince's death, such as why he hadn't left a suicide note. "Do you know that about ninety per cent of suicides do not leave notes?" she says. "People who commit suicide don't want anybody to know they're going to do it. I mean, why do you think he went to Fort Marcy Park? If he'd wanted to hurt me or the President, he'd have done it right in front of our noses. But we'd have tried to stop him."

In December of 1993, her first Christmas without Vince, she was home alone and received a call from her Washington attorney. He told her that "A Current Affair," a tabloid TV show, was about to broadcast a rumor that he knew would upset her—allegations by Arkansas state troopers that Vince and Hillary Clinton had had an affair. Once again, Lisa broke down. She left her house, sobbing, and walked three blocks to a Catholic seminary, and there she sat beneath a statue of the Blessed Mother. "I cried my eyes out for forty-five minutes," she recalls. "I thought, This is more than I can take." But she then resolved not to be defeated by doubt, or even by grief. She thought about teaching math, something she had started doing before the family left Arkansas, and she went home to keep a tutoring appointment. This year, she started teaching math part time at a private school in Little Rock.

She had dealt with the Hillary question before, and so had Vince. The rumors of an affair first circulated during the 1992 campaign, when Bill Clinton was besieged by allegations of infidelity. Vince gathered the family and told them that the rumor about him and Hillary was false. "They're going to say that we had an affair," Vince said. "I don't see why I can't be friends with a woman at work without somebody assuming we had an affair."

Lisa says that she accepts Vince's statement. "One reason I believe that there's nothing to it is the way he treated me. I mean, I just don't think somebody is a loving husband and treats me the way he would treat me if he's having an affair, whether it's with Hillary or with anybody else. And the second reason is, I don't think Hillary would do it. I mean, she's the mother of Chelsea, and there's Bill. The type of friendship she and Vince had was not a romantic one. I

think professionally he was very close to

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her. I think he had a great deal of respect for her and for her mind. I think in a lot of ways he felt sort of protective of her, like when they lost a case. I just think that they were close friends."

She says that she considers Hillary a friend, but that she and Hillary have not discussed the issue of the alleged affair. "I mean, would you expect her to deny it? What good does denying do? It only elevates the accusation to some level of credibility and gives it some respect that it's not due."

In the end, Lisa says, she has come to her own accommodation with this and the other speculations about her late husband. "There were certain things I know, because I was there, and there are some things I don't know—that I can

never prove one way or the other, except by faith. I just have faith in Vince and faith in Hillary that they did not have an affair. If they did, who cares now? You know? Who cares? I sincerely believe that they didn't. But that doesn't matter to me—Vince is dead. It does matter to me that they're using him. I know that he didn't do anything dishonest, out of line, or as ridiculous as laundering money or bank accounts."

After the "Current Affair" broadcast, Lisa told her psychiatrist that she was still shaken by it. "I said, 'This is just outrageous. I can't believe that on top of losing Vince I have to deal with this.'" The doctor suggested that she try Prozac. The antidepressant gave her an understanding, for the first time, of Vince

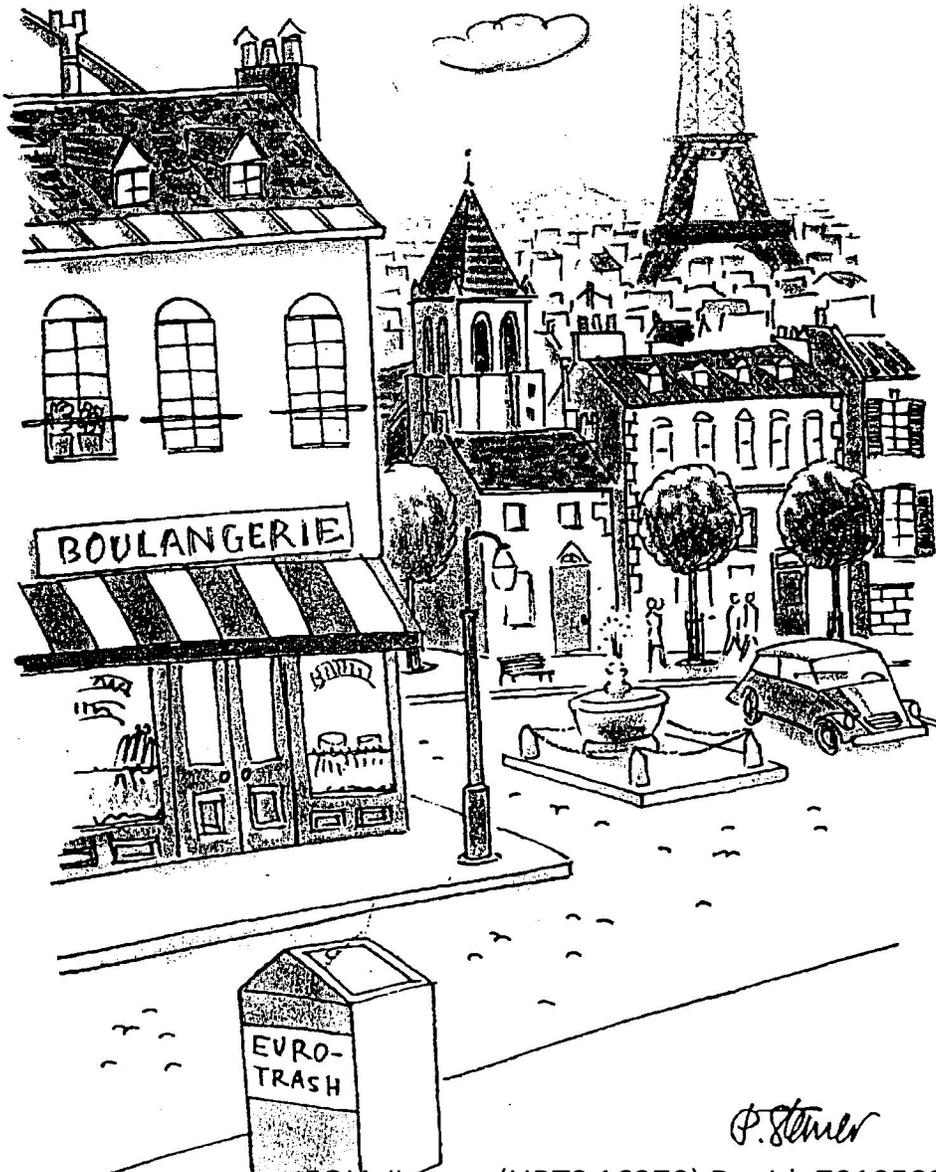
and his illness. "That's when I realized that it was a disease," she says. "Vince was just down, worn out, depressed. Lack of serotonin. He was just totally depleted. Prozac would have helped him sleep, cope, get up in the morning—deal with things without feeling such despair."

The course of Vince's depression, obscure to her even in the face of stark warnings, suddenly became clear. "Having been so low myself and come out of it, I realized how low he must have been, and how he didn't have help. I had a lot of help to get me out of it—psychiatrists and doctors and lawyers and priests and nuns and friends, everybody at every turn helping me."

Lisa believes that she has arrived at an answer to the most baffling question about Vince's last day. After he had a cheeseburger, French fries, and a Coke in his office, he walked out carrying his suit jacket, and said to one of the secretaries, "I'll be back." That was at 1 P.M. His body was found in Fort Marcy Park, in suburban Virginia, at 5:45 P.M. Where had he been during those unaccounted-for hours?

Lisa thinks that when Vince went to the White House parking lot, climbed into their car, and drove off, he may have had the gun with him but was not certain that he would kill himself. "I think he probably spent those three or four hours driving around trying to decide." She believes that Vince suddenly "flooded"—that his problems came rushing upon him, magnifying his despair. "I imagine that Vince was driving around and the thought of going back to the White House—it just made him claustrophobic. I think he was on his way to a nervous breakdown. I think he was just holding himself together."

Her children, she says, will have to reach their own understanding of their father's death. Vincent, who is selling securities in Atlanta, and Brugh, who is entering his sophomore year in college, have occasionally suspected that there is something they still don't know about their father's suicide. But Laura, like Lisa, has found some solace in the diagnosis of depression. "I think it made it easier," Laura says. "It's a whole lot easier seeing him as sick and having a chemical imbalance than to feel 'Oh, my God, he did this and he knew what



P. Steiner

A GREEN CRAB'S SHELL

Not, exactly, green:
closer to bronze
preserved in kind brine,

something retrieved
from a Greco-Roman wreck,
patinated and oddly

muscular. We cannot
know what his fantastic
legs were like—

though evidence
suggests eight
complexly folded

scuttling works
of armament, crowned
by the foreclaws'

gesture of menace
and power. A gull's
gobbled the center,

leaving this chamber
—size of a demitasse—
open to reveal

a shocking, Giotto blue.
Though it smells
of seaweed and ruin,

this little travelling case
comes with such lavish lining!
Imagine breathing

surrounded by
the brilliant rinse
of summer's firmament.

What color is
the underside of skin?
Not so bad, to die,

if we could be opened
into *this*—
if the smallest chambers

of ourselves,
similarly,
revealed some sky.

—MARK DOTY

he was doing.' It's easier to say it wasn't his fault."

ONE day last month, Lisa says, she quietly returned to Washington and thought, God, this place is pretty. Why did I never notice it?

The town had not changed in her absence. That very week, the former Justice Department official Philip Heymann was testifying before the Senate Whitewater panel, saying he had warned Nussbaum two days after Vincent's death that it would be a "terrible mistake" to keep investigators from going through the papers in Vince's office. On the other side of the Capitol, a House committee was gearing up for its own Whitewater examination. The next week saw the birth of a new speculation about Vince Foster—the assertion, in a New York Post column, that he killed himself in the White House parking lot, not in Fort Marcy Park.

But, unlikely as it must once have seemed to Lisa, Washington was about to make her happy. She had returned to town for Senate confirmation hearings on the appointment to the

of a Little Rock lawyer named Jim Moody. The Senate Judiciary Committee approved Moody's appointment without dissent, followed by confirmation from the full Senate. Moody is a former colleague of President Clinton's, and he and Lisa plan to marry at the end of this year.

Lisa and Vince had known Jim and his wife, Jo Ann, but the couples had not been close friends, and didn't see each other often. The Moodys came to Vince's burial service, and Lisa saw them there. She was shocked to hear a few months later that Jo Ann had died suddenly in her sleep. As Lisa began to get well, she started dating, and Moody—a man who, like Vince, had a high reputation—was one of those who called on her. They were comfortable together, his circle was her circle, and Lisa realized that she was enjoying herself again. When Jim asked her to marry him, she did not hesitate to say yes.

By then, Lisa had nearly completed a remarkable, if unsought, transformation from the woman who was once utterly content with a Junior League and country-club existence into one who had

faced—and faced down—a horrible nightmare. But she remains Lisa Foster, not Hillary Clinton: she is someone who has spent her life wanting to be, and being, someone's wife. That is her identity. When I asked her if she surprised herself at all by planning a new marriage, she said no, she is surprised only at having fallen in love again.

She and Jim plan to live in her house—Vince's house—when they are married. Sometimes Lisa looks up and sees Vince. ("I was out there weeding and I looked over and saw him standing there," she says. "I still see him in my bed.") Jim's office will be in a converted garage at the rear of the house, in which the boxes labelled "VWF Personal" are currently scattered around. When I asked Lisa how the children felt about the marriage, she said, "You'll have to ask them."

Laura, who was standing nearby, said, "I think it'd be easier if it weren't the same house." This surprised Lisa. There followed some discussion about bathrooms and about redecorating versus moving. Lisa had the final word. "I have this feeling about some things, and that is, I can't do anything about the fact that Vince is gone," she said. "The only thing I can do is try to make the best of what we have. I have found a wonderful man whom I love and who loves me, and who will be good to my children. And just because it's going to be an adjustment is no reason not to do it. The whole damned thing's been an adjustment. So we will adjust."

Earlier that day, after Lisa's morning tennis at the athletic club, she and I had lunch at Trio's, one of Little Rock's tonier cafés. This is the life she had before Washington, and the life she wants to have again. She knows that it will never be quite the same, because too many of her friends who went to Washington with Bill Clinton came back disgraced, embarrassed, or broken-hearted. She also knows that some might have expected her to remain the grieving widow a little longer. "I don't want to forget Vince, and I don't plan to," she said. "But I do plan on loving whoever's going to be my husband as much as I loved Vince, and being, I hope, a better wife and enjoying whatever life I have. But that is not to take away from Vince. That is more to honor him, as far as I'm concerned." ♦