

twenty minutes of impersonal, superficial banter. Eventually, she interrupts: "Philip, why do you want to be friends with me?" A smile teases his lips: "Oh, perversion..."

Does it sound familiar? The coffee, the silence, the banter, the teasing smile? We've read the scene in a hundred novels, including a few by Roth; we've seen it in a thousand movies, including a few with Miss Bloom. It is the final transformation of their relationship, from life to art. Philip has become "Philip" and Claire "Claire": he's not capable of *being* her ex-husband, only of *playing* him—auditioning the moment for some great work as yet unwritten. Marriage is ultimately only the research experiment for the art, and, if in

the process of dissection, the poor laboratory mice die, well, it's in service to a greater cause.

I'm not being entirely metaphorical here. As writers go, Claire Bloom could have done worse than Roth, and, if it's any consolation, she was lucky to escape with purely mental torture. In 1994, George Steiner wrote, as one great thinker on another, "The thinker inhabits fictions of purity, of reasoned propositions as sharp as white light. Marriage is about roughage, bills, garbage disposal, and noise. There is something vulgar, almost absurd, in the notion of a Mrs. Plato or a Mme. Descartes, or of Wittgenstein on a honeymoon. Perhaps Louis Althusser was enacting a necessary axiom or logical

proof when, on the morning of November 16, 1980, he throttled his wife."

Althusser is the noted French philosopher, though these days he's not noted at all for his philosophy but only for his resolution of the conflict between his calling and his domestic arrangements in that hotbed of French intellectualism, the *Ecole Normale*. "I pressed my thumbs into the hollow at the top of her breastbone and then, still pressing, slowly moved them both, one to the left, the other to the right, up towards her ears where the flesh was hard," he wrote. "Helene's face was calm and motionless; her eyes were open and staring at the ceiling."

Take my wife. Please. ❧



## PRESS WATCH

by John Corry

# None Dare Call It Bias

**Dole was right to kvetch, not that he deserved sympathy.**

Obviously it had to happen sometime: Bob Dole would criticize the press. As the days dwindled down and his time grew short, he said that "the country does not belong to the liberal media." In particular he was annoyed with the *New York Times*—"They don't put any anti-Clinton stories in the *New York Times*, only anti-Dole stories in the *New York Times*"—and the day after he said that, he cast an even wider net. "We've got to stop the liberal bias in this country," he told a Texas audience. "Don't read that stuff! Don't watch television! You make up your

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mind. Don't let them make up your mind for you."

This was an emancipation of sorts, and for once Dole seemed to be enjoying himself. The enjoinder not to read that stuff and not to watch television might have come from a pixie. The *Washington Post* reported that when Senator John McCain was told of Dole's remarks he "rolled his eyes," and said it was "not productive to beat up on the press." But he was ignoring the irony that Dole had spent most of his disastrous campaign in thrall to the liberal media he now was attacking. How else to explain, say, his late, and almost imperceptible, embrace of the California Civil Rights Initiative, the disappearance of partial-birth abor-

tion as an appropriate subject for discussion, or the reluctance to raise the so-called, and improperly labeled, character issue? But of course; all during the campaign, Dole and his advisers had been reading the *Times* and watching television. They knew what the political guidelines were, and they had followed them, all the way to oblivion.

Meanwhile, the press did not show any distress, or even much interest, when Dole charged it with bias. Not long ago, an accusation like that would have led to many cries of denial and perhaps a town hall meeting on "Nightline." This time, though, it barely made the Sunday morning talk shows, and the *Times* dismissed it with a lofty inference in its presidential-endorsement editorial for Clinton. It said that neither his "15 percent tax cut nor his wild charge that newspapers have pulled their punches on Whitewater

stands the test of logic or represents Mr. Dole at his best.”

So much for liberal bias; it did not exist, but even if it did, it was scarcely worth talking about, and anyway no newspaper, and certainly not the *Times*, had been soft on Whitewater, or on any of its tributaries. That, however, was not convincing. The same day the *Times* reported Dole’s plea not to read that stuff or watch television, it also ran another installment in “The Clinton Record” series. This one examined immigration policy. It began on page one, and took up almost an entire inside page, and said that while Clinton might have waffled on immigration, he had shown more compassion over the issue than the mean-spirited, xenophobic Republicans.

The story did not mention the finding by the Justice Department that the Immigration and Naturalization Service had failed to go after thousands of illegal aliens who obtained documents from corrupt officials, and used them to get federal benefits. More important, it did not mention the estimate by the FBI that as many as 100,000 of the one million or so immigrants who became citizens in the last fiscal year—more than twice as many as had become citizens in the previous year—might have criminal records. But deep in the story the *Times* did quote a memo to Al Gore from an aide last March: “Unless we blast the INS headquarters...we are going to have way too many people still waiting for citizenship in November.” It followed this with a denial by a Clinton aide that the White House was speeding up the naturalization process because it believed the new citizens would vote Democratic. Then the *Times* dropped the whole thing. Right, and the *Times* was being fair-minded and non-partisan, and there is no such a thing as liberal bias.

Not long ago, however, the *Chicago Tribune* reported in a front-page story that Democratic front groups in Chicago were bringing forth tens of thousands of immigrants to be processed as citizens with the understanding that they would then vote for Clinton. Last August, in a mass ceremony at Soldier Field, some 11,000 immigrants were sworn in as citizens even though many

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could not speak English, and had received virtually no instructions on the rights or duties of citizenship. Immigration workers simply handed out certificates. The *Tribune* reported that the general counsel for the Immigration and Naturalization Service had said procedures like this were “improper” and violated federal law, but that this had been ignored. Orders to waive the rules had come from Gore’s office.

The *Times*, of course, saw things differently. The facts in its story were accurate—the paper of record prides itself on that—but a liberal Democratic intelligence had been at work in arranging them. The process is done by rote. Some things are emphasized, and some are not, and a damning memo is casually mentioned, and then dismissed. A story on immigration policy might also have said that cheap politics and the multi-cultural impulse had joined; in the Clinton era, even the concept of citizenship is debased.

**B**ut the *Times* could see no news value in a story like that. None may dare call this bias, but it is; and it is practiced by journalists who may even be unaware they are doing it. In a herd of independent minds everyone thinks alike. What is news, and what is not, is arrived at by consensus. Critical faculties are suspended. Advocacy replaces reporting. The week after the *Times* examined Clinton’s immigration policies, it looked at his record on civil rights. The story was accompanied by a box that listed “promises in the civil rights area” he made as a

candidate four years ago. Among them were promises to work for passage of the Motor Voter bill, support statehood for the District of Columbia, and require employers to spend 1.5 percent of their payrolls on education and training. The concept of civil rights was twisted into a previously unrecognized form, and made to rebound to Bill Clinton’s credit.

This kind of thing did not defeat Dole—he was wonderfully inventive at finding ways to lose on his own—but surely it made it easier for Clinton. He is an amoral man, without the normal allotment of guilt or shame, and, as Senator Bob Kerrey once pointed out, he is also “an unusually good liar.” He re-invents himself, his policies, and even his memories with ease. When he said he vividly recalled seeing black churches burn in Arkansas as a child, apparently he believed it. Probably he can be better explained by poets or psychoanalysts than by journalists, but in politics the journalists get the call. “Where’s the outrage?” Dole asked in the final days of the campaign, and even though it was inspired by desperation, it was still a good question. The media in general, and television in particular, approved of Clinton’s policies, and so they excused his behavior. People around him got a blank check, too. Responsible reporters now acknowledge, although very quietly, that they showed a tolerance that would have been unthinkable in a Republican administration.

Consider what would have happened if, for example, 900 confidential FBI files had turned up in the Reagan or Bush White House. The outrage Dole wondered about would have been boundless. If there were a six-month gap in the log showing who had access to the files, there would have been calls for impeachment. The FBI files in the Clinton White House, however, barely made the evening news. In fact, only CNN reported the six-month gap, as well as the disclosure that the White House knew it was collecting files on Republicans. ABC, CBS, and NBC were not interested. Meanwhile, at the same time they were ignoring the FBI files, the networks all did at least two stories on the decision by the House ethics committee to widen its inquiry into Newt Gingrich’s college course. According to

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# Upheaval in Israel

## Should Israel Make Further Concessions to the Palestinians?

As of this writing, the situation in Israel has gravely deteriorated. The Palestinians have exploded into murderous rage, into violence, and into bloodshed. Almost 100 people—Israelis and Palestinians—have been killed. Close to 1,000 have been injured. Can this situation be calmed by Israel's making further concessions to the Palestinians?

### What are the facts?

**A carefully programmed riot.** The pretext that was decided upon by Mr. Arafat to whip his followers into a killing frenzy was the opening of an entrance to an archaeological tunnel that in no way desecrates any Islamic holy places. The pretext of the "offensive entrance" to the tunnel is utter nonsense.

What makes the world's hypocritical indignation to this alleged desecration particularly disgusting is that during the 19 years that the Jordanians occupied East Jerusalem prior to the Six-Day War, they

drove all Jews out of their part of the city, destroyed all synagogues and Jewish holy places, and used the headstones of Israeli cemeteries as paving stones and to build military latrines.

The world, now so critical of Israel, stood silently by.

The world has come to expect the "Moslem fanatics" to commit unspeakable crimes and acts of terror. The bloody rioting in Israel under the ridiculous pretext of a tunnel entrance was carefully programmed and orchestrated by Arafat and his cohorts, in an attempt to destabilize the peace process and to press for further concessions by Israel.

**No peace by making more "concessions".** The previous Israeli government imprudently allowed Yasser Arafat to form a fully armed and equipped "police" force that now numbers 45,000 men. That is without question the highest police-to-population ratio anywhere in the world. But these are not really "police", of course; these

are soldiers, trained to attempt the destruction of Israel in the final assault on the Jewish state, a destruction that, so far unsuccessfully, they have unremittingly attempted for almost 50 years.

Those who believe that peace with the Arabs can be obtained by making concessions to them and by giving them more land are dreamers. The vaunted peace with Egypt is a sham. Egypt is armed to the teeth with the most advanced conventional and "unconventional" weaponry and is frantically engaged—just as Syria, Libya, Iraq, and Iran—in the production of atomic weapons, biological weapons,

and poison gas. What for? The answer is obvious. It's all for the next assault against Israel that, it is hoped, will finally drive the hated Jews into the sea and make Israel disappear from the face of the earth.

### Israel — America's steadfast ally.

For Israel to allow itself to be dismembered, allowing the creation of a Palestinian state, and be made helpless and at the mercy of its sworn enemies, would be suicidal folly. A strong Israel is America's most reliable anchor in the Middle East. Iran was America's great ally; it is now our most implacable enemy. Saudi Arabia, the kingpin of our Arab policy, is shaky and could be toppled any day by internal unrest. Turkey, considered the staunch "eastern flank of NATO", has just elected an Islamic fundamentalist government. Israel alone is America's steadfast ally in the entire Middle East. To diminish Israel's strategic potential by attempting to truncate it would be a major policy blunder.

Any pretext, however flimsy, will suffice to provoke Arab/Muslim fury. Without any provocation, the Palestinian police turned its weapons on Israel. There are many minorities in the world, who would be deeply grateful if they were given even half of the autonomy that Israel is granting the Palestinians. But there must be a limit. In the interest of the world, the interest of the United States, and, of course, the existential interest of Israel itself, we must hope that Mr. Netanyahu will stand firm against all pressures: That he will not allow the creation of a Palestinian state in the "West Bank"; that he will not yield the strategic Golan to Syria; and that he will not countenance the division of Jerusalem.

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Tim Russert, NBC's fatuous Washington bureau chief, "It's awful, it's serious, it's devastating." What may (or may not) turn out to be a technical violation of campaign-spending law was seen as more important than the White House misuse of the national police force. None may dare call that bias, either, but it is; it is also frivolous, irresponsible, and stupid.

In years past, the networks tried to keep up at least the appearance of serious purpose, but even the appearance now has fled. Dan Rather allowed his hair to go gray, but that was mere cosmetics. Campaign coverage was reduced—by 40 percent from four years ago, according to one estimate—while twenty-something producers whose interest in, and knowledge of, government and politics was minimal, were given the responsibility for what was left. The MTV generation arrived both in front of, and in back of, the cameras. Television news grew softer and sillier. Meanwhile, the character issue disappeared. Clinton got a break when, just as they were in George Orwell's *Newspeak*, the words "honor," "justice," and "morality" were dropped from the correspondents' vocabulary. It is possible that we have a way now to explain one of Dole's problems. Republican presidential candidates always have a gender gap. Women vote for them in disproportionately fewer numbers than do men. In Dole's case, though, the gap was a chasm, and as hard as he and Mrs. Dole tried, they never were able to close it.

The Media Studies Center, best known for its finding that 89 percent of the Washington press corps voted for Clinton four years ago, has offered a reason for this: Women do not know as much as men. The Media Studies Center hesitated to put it that way, of course, but it found that women relied more on television than men did for news about the campaign, and that women were more likely than men to rate the coverage as "excellent" or "good." It also found that women were less likely than men to listen to news on the radio, or to read newspapers, news-magazines, or books about politics or government. In other words, Dole was lost from the start. The gender gap, along with so many other things, was firmly etched in stone. It was not abortion, family leave, or Medicare, stupid; it was the news. ☞



# Death of a Friend

*Friday*  
**A** terrifying phone call from Burdette Feierabend, former wife of my pal Peter Feierabend, at about 9:30 p.m.—just as I was pulling onto the Hollywood Freeway after a modest Rosh-Hoshana dinner. I did not get to the call until much later. But by pure ESP, I picked up the car phone and called Burdette exactly one minute after she had called me. Peter had gone away on a rafting trip about ten days before on the wild Salmon River, near the Frank Church Wilderness of No Return, and I wanted to see how his trip was going. It was night one of the Jewish High Holidays, a time that has often been marked by death and disaster for my family and friends. I had expected to hear from Peter some time ago, and I was worried—which was why I called Burdette.

"How are you doing?" I asked.

"Not too good," Burdette said and started to cry. The hair on the back of my neck started to stand up.

"I just got a call from the people on the trip," she said. "Peter's been missing in the river for about twelve hours, and the sheriff says he's probably drowned."

I think I'll tell you about Peter Feierabend now, so you'll understand why I started to pound the dashboard and pray and sob and scream.

In 1992, I first came to visit North Idaho on the advice of my friend and frequent director in commercials, Mark Story. I fell in love with Sandpoint, as I have written before. A large part of the reason was Peter Feierabend, who at the time was the caretaker for Mark Story's elegant home in Hope, near Sandpoint.

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Peter met me at a tiny market called Hi-Hopes and showed me the house. It was impressive, with its dark hardwood floors, its spectacular lake views, its indoor pool, shooting range, and wine cellar, but I was most impressed with Peter.

He was a hippie in the only good sense of the word. He was a man who had turned his back on civilization, commerce, and cities to earn his own living, create beautiful woodwork, and read the classics. He was too gentle for the larger world, but was perfect for Sandpoint. He drove me all around the town, and told me the history of the second biggest fresh water lake west of the Mississippi, Lake Pend'Oreille. It was formed, he said, by a gigantic water back-up behind a glacier as other glaciers melted. As recorded in ancient Indian lore and confirmed by geologists, the resulting flood swept from what is now Western Montana to the Pacific Ocean, and the glaciers gouged out Lake Pend'Oreille. He told the story as if it had happened yesterday, in complete awe for the power of nature and the elemental forces of physics.

When I came back to North Idaho a few months later, I brought Tommy, who was then five. He hit it off immediately with Peter's son, Alex, and we all became pals. Alex's sister Rachel hung with us too, and we had a little family in North Idaho. We would take long drives up to Kootenai Bay, Canada, across the bay on the world's longest free ferry ride, into Montana, around the Hope Peninsula, to Ruby Ridge. We would talk, and Peter would tell me about his life. His father had been from the stock of German settlers in America. He had fought in the armor with Patton in World War II and been repeatedly decorated. His mother was Jewish, which made him Jewish by Jewish law, a descendant of well-to-do Swiss lawyers. He grew

up in Corona, in the San Gabriel Valley, and then in Newport Beach.

Both of his parents had died young—the father when Peter was only twelve and the mother when Peter was in his twenties. Peter had diabetes but otherwise had been a fairly ordinary young man—until he got into a swimming pool. Then, as he often told me, he was "a god." He could swim that hardest of all strokes, the butterfly, like a rocket ship. He was on his high school swim team, then all-California, then All-American at Brigham Young. "On land, I'm nothing," he often said. "A total failure by the standards of your friends in L.A. But in the water, I'm a god."

Peter was raising Alexander and Rachel pretty much by himself. They lived in a cabin a little ways outside town, and they lived modestly, but well. Many the time I saw Peter, obviously suffering from the effects of diabetes and a hefty night of dining well, standing unsteadily but determinedly at the kitchen range, making a huge breakfast for his kids, dressing them, and making sure they had done their homework.

For most of the time I knew him, Peter had almost no money. But he made sure his kids had plenty of food, warm clothes, and even the things kids must have in North Idaho, like snowboards and mountain bikes. He had a natural, easy way with kids. Alex and Tommy would climb all over him, wrestling, pulling his head and neck, and he would just pick them up, throw one over each shoulder, say, "I've got you,

