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# Growing Up Cartoonist in the Baby-Boom South: A Memoir and Cartoon Retrospective

Kate Salley Palmer

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Growing Up Cartoonist

*in the*

BABY-BOOM SOUTH

*For*  
JIM MCKINNEY  
*and*  
AUBREY BOWIE,

*who weren't afraid to take a chance  
or to take the heat for my work.*

*Their lives would have been less complicated without me, but  
I'd never have developed as a cartoonist without them.*

*I hope they know how much I miss them.*

# Growing Up Cartoonist

*in the*

## BABY-BOOM SOUTH

*A MEMOIR AND  
CARTOON RETROSPECTIVE*



*by Kate Salley Palmer*

*Foreword by Richard W. Riley*



CLEMSON UNIVERSITY  
DIGITAL PRESS

2006

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# Foreword

by Richard W. Riley



Governor Riley's 1983 "State of the State" address.

Kate Palmer's political cartoons are great—that is, if they are about someone else. At any rate, they justify a look into her life. Where did this free and caring and funny spirit come from? What was her family like? Were they also contrarians?

Kate Palmer's career at *The Greenville News* coincided with mine as governor of South Carolina. During that time, she drew many unflattering pictures of me and my political colleagues. Why, then, should I write a positive foreword to her book?

Well, I probably shouldn't. But I find all good political cartoonists to be interesting and, whether you agree with her or not, Kate Palmer is interesting. She is what we in the South call "a character." Thus, she enjoys exposing to the world her cartoon characters in their most vulnerable light. And she makes a clear and biting comment in the process. She calls herself a satirist, which she defines as a "professional smartass." Most of her subject characters would agree with that definition.

To tell the truth, I couldn't turn Kate down when I read in the draft of this book that she had written in such endearing terms about two of my wonderful friends of times gone by. Jim McKinney, former editor-in-chief of *The Greenville News*, and Aubrey Bowie, former assistant editor, are deceased now. But they were editorial writers of the highest caliber. They had to be near-saints to put up with Kate and her "take-it-to-the-edge" cartoons. Kate dedicates her book to them, and for that I am grateful.



Also, Kate, in all of her challenge to the status quo, makes a pictorial comment that is humorous and serious at the same time. One can disagree totally with her editorial comment but still understand clearly, and in an instant, what she is saying—and then the reader quietly chuckles.

As Kate indicates, she wanted to be a teacher and she surely would have been a very interesting one. But she says she flunked the admittance test to the School of Education. (I doubt that.) At any rate, had she become a teacher, she probably would have passed any contrarian student with flying colors.

After you read this book and chuckle at some of the outrageous political cartoons, I hope you will take from Kate Palmer, the person, a belief in the power of a free society where editorial expression is brutally honest.



# Acknowledgments

It took me twenty years to write this book. Most of the chapters had already been written when, five or six years ago, a doctor told me that I had attention deficit disorder and offered me medication. I did have a hard time working, but I ignored it until early 2005, when I read the book *Driven to Distraction*—about ADD in adults. The case studies in that book floored me. “Whoa,” I thought—“I just *wrote* a book like this!” So I went back to the doctor to report that I had ADD, and he reminded me that he had already *said* that—and again offered medication. So—I would like to thank the makers of Ritalin, without which this book would never have been finished. It was then too late for me to go back through the whole book to include my newfound enlightenment, so I left it the way it was—it’s probably more interesting that way, anyway.

My heartfelt gratitude goes to the young, brilliant, and patient Charis Chapman, my editor at the Clemson University Digital Press. She does exactly what a good editor is supposed to do: she figures out what you are *trying* to say, and helps you say it more coherently. Everything good about this book is because of her. Oh—and thanks to Charis’s dad, Wayne Chapman, who heads up the Clemson University Digital Press—he saw potential in this cartoon retrospective, and I’m grateful to him for taking it on.

I thank my parents for reading tirelessly to me and to my siblings, and for keeping a weird assortment of books in our home. We had *Anna Karenina*, lots of Mark Twain, *Helen’s Babies*, *Experiment Perilous*, *Little Women*, and tons of Agatha Christie mysteries. We also had a two-volume set of 1906 encyclopedias that asserted (among other things) that “the atom is the smallest particle of matter and cannot be split.” My favorite book was a 1933 edition of Don Marquis’s *The Life and Times of Archy and Mehitabel*, illustrated by the great cartoonist George Herriman. I love its dedication page:

dedicated to babs  
with babs knows what  
and babs knows why

Thanks to Dot Yandle, former editor of Clemson’s *The Messenger*, who first hired me as an editorial cartoonist in 1972 (I got fired after she left), and who read the initial concept of this collection in 1986. That version, written while I was still grieving for my *Greenville News* job, came off as more than a bit whiney. Dot criticized it brutally—and she was right. I think one of her suggestions was: “Get over it.” I thank her for her honesty. Dot’s daughter, Kathryn Smith, former editor of *The Anderson Independent-Mail*, ran my cartoons for a while during the late 1980s and later suggested that I try a humorous political column (like “South Carolina’s Molly Ivins”) for that paper. The assignment resulted in my 1994 election night essay, “We Held a Gubernatorial Election and Elected a Goober.” That one essay proved to be the first and last in the planned “series”—at the request of the paper—but I thank Kathryn for her support all the way. I must also express my gratitude to Neil Calkin for his careful reading of the first draft of *Growing Up Cartoonist* and for his suggestions and encouragement. Thanks go also to Lucy Rollin, Ross Cornwell, and Don McKale—good friends and respected writers who were kind enough to read early versions of this manuscript and make helpful comments.

I am deeply grateful to George Booth, one of my favorite cartoonists, who allowed me to use a cartoon of his in this book, even after I confessed to him that I try to copy his style all the

time. “We all copy somebody,” he said.

I’m grateful to the land of my fathers: my home state, my beloved South Carolina, which produces some of the most colorful politicians for which a cartoonist could ask, and to the many politicians—local, state, and national—who have reluctantly provided fodder for my cartoons. I thank the editors who cut me a little slack when I needed it, and to the entire community of cartoonists—a job bonus they don’t tell you about. Thanks to Lucy Caswell, curator of the Ohio State University Cartoon Research Library, who first requested my “papers.” She’ll receive all the national stuff. Thanks to Herb Hartsook, director of the South Carolina Political Collections at the University of South Carolina, who will receive my South Carolina papers, and who saw some value in a book like this. Thank you, Alex Moore of the University of South Carolina Press, for your encouragement. I am also deeply grateful to the Caroline McKissick Dial Publication Fund (South Caroliniana Library, the University of South Carolina), which provided a generous grant to help support the publication of this book.

I’m also indebted to William Faulkner, for demonstrating that run-on sentences are okay (unless I’m wrong about Faulkner, which is entirely possible, and understand even less grammar than I feared).

I thank my son and daughter, James and Salley, for reading portions of this manuscript, for laughing in most of the right places, and for contributing their own brutal assessments. My husband, Jim, has been there to make me stop working or to suggest that I get back to it—whichever I needed, whenever I needed. He is the best road manager a scatterbrained writer could have. To paraphrase Don Marquis:

I’d like to thank jim  
for jim knows what  
and jim knows why

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kate Salley Palmer". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Clemson, SC  
March 2006

# Part One



WHAT ARE LITTLE  
CARTOONISTS MADE OF?



*Cartoonist Jerry Robinson drew this picture of me at my first cartoonist's convention in 1976.  
(I've changed a lot since then.)*

# Introduction

I was a newspaper editorial page cartoonist from 1975 until 1984. From 1980 to 1986, I was nationally syndicated. After that, I did cartoons for smaller markets through 1988. This book is my first political cartoon collection. Though I'll probably never stop doing cartoons, I'm finding that writing and illustrating picture books for children is great, too. You still get to draw a lot of pictures—without all the death threats.

Most of us cartoonists started out the same way: as class clowns trying to entertain our schoolmates, always at the expense of whomever happened to be in charge. Those of us who wound up doing political cartoons for a living simply moved on to bigger classrooms.

When I was growing up, it was not unusual to be punished for such subversiveness—if you were a boy. For a girl, it was scandalous.

As a regular practitioner of subversive humor, I did a lot of time in detention hall, the only girl in a room full of boys. It wasn't easy on my family, but it was the best preparation I could have received for my chosen career and eventual ties with the AAEC (Association of American Editorial Cartoonists).

Growing up cartoonist is difficult for anyone, under any circumstances. But it used to be more difficult than it is today. When the Baby Boom unleashed hordes of marauding students on the public education system around 1951, the only thing teachers could do was send the troublemakers (like me) out of the room so the others could learn.

Today's lower student-to-teacher ratios and more enlightened educational methods enable school systems to better accommodate the various learning styles that students bring to the classroom. Now we recognize that individuals learn and process information differently from one another and that intelligence can manifest itself in many ways. Modern school systems can identify learning disorders early in a student's educational progress and can deal more effectively with the vast diversity within the student population.

None of these things make future cartoonists any easier to teach or even to have in the classroom, but I believe the absence of modern theories of education during the 1950s and '60s makes a great excuse for me to use when recounting my own rocky passage through the education system.

Once, in Nashville for a cartoonists' convention, I appeared on a local TV show as part of a panel of cartoonists discussing our work. We explained that we'd had similar experiences as kids in school—frequently called down by teachers, sent to cool our heels in the hall, and required to stay after school to atone for the havoc we'd wrought that day. In fact, more than one of our teachers had seen it as his/her duty to announce that “Life is Not Just a Big Joke, You Know,” or that if we didn't get serious, “You Won't Amount to a Thing.”

Latent cartoonists are not the team players or company cheerleaders destined to be rewarded by schools and corporations. We tend to be difficult, annoying, and seditious. But we can't help it. Really. When the host of the Nashville TV show asked how many would-be cartoonists had been lost to the world because of stifling treatment by authority figures, we panel members exchanged amused glances and answered, practically in unison: “None!” Official disapproval is something you *have* to go through to be a cartoonist, we explained. You have to butt heads with Authority. Anyone who allows herself to be stifled by the consequences of that head-butting doesn't have what it takes to be a political cartoonist in the first place.

If the TV host had asked how many cartoonists had been lost to the world because *jobs* are so rare, the answer would have been: “Hundreds!” Not every born cartoonist gets to practice his calling. Some are forced into show business, politics, or crime. It is no accident that one sees very expressive cartoons drawn by famous actors, comedians, rock stars, heads of state, and mass murderers.

For a girl, being born a cartoonist in the post-World War II South was to face densely tangled uncharted territory without so much as a machete. Lucky for me, I was the oldest of three daughters and one son born to a father who was voted “Biggest Clown” and “Wittiest” in high school and a mother who was voted “Best Sport.” (Mama’s senior superlative described her athletic accomplishments as well as her sense of fun.)



*Daddy and Mama on a successful pre-war fishing trip.*



My father was the first person ever to suggest that I become a political cartoonist. Daddy had loved Bill Mauldin’s cartoons in *The Stars and Stripes* during World War II when they were both in the army—Mauldin in Europe, Daddy in the Pacific. My father talked about Mauldin’s cartoon soldiers, “Willie and Joe,” as if they were friends of his. I know Daddy hoped that I’d be able to use art and satire in a humorous way to help folks trapped in impossible conditions not to feel so alone—the way Willie and Joe had helped my father and the other “dogface” soldiers of World War II.

Humor has a way of holding off the scary existential loneliness that haunts people like me and my father and soldiers at war. I believe those of us who use satire and humor in our work are, contrary to observable evidence, extremely sensitive souls—too horrified by random catastrophe to take life straight. Without our work, we would probably do drugs, go insane, or become the aforementioned actors, comedians, rock stars, politicians, or criminals.

Maybe we think too much. Maybe we feel too much. Flannery O’Connor is said to have declared that she wrote to “find out what I think.” She spoke for many artists with that line. Finding out what you think is not as easy as it sounds. Once, when our adult Sunday school class was studying the nature of art and artists, I was asked to address the group. The class book had stated that man, like the primitive caveman, produces art to say, “I was here!”

I told the class that I didn’t think that had been written by an artist. People write their names on bathroom stalls to say “I was here,” but that is not generally considered to be art. I could only speak for myself, I told them—but I use art to quell a cosmic loneliness that follows me. I think most artists crave small moments of perfect understanding that are rarer than shooting stars or four-leaf clovers. With our art, we try to create optimum conditions for those moments. We are like those people who make landing strips for UFOs: we don’t know what’s out there, but we suspect we are a part of it. We know it’s big, and we are both frightened and thrilled by it.



*In a famous Bill Mauldin cartoon, Willie turns to Joe and asks, "Why th' hell couldn't you have been born a beautiful woman?" I drew this cartoon in imitation of Mauldin's style in 1980, when they started letting women into the military—as soldiers, not just nurses and secretaries.*

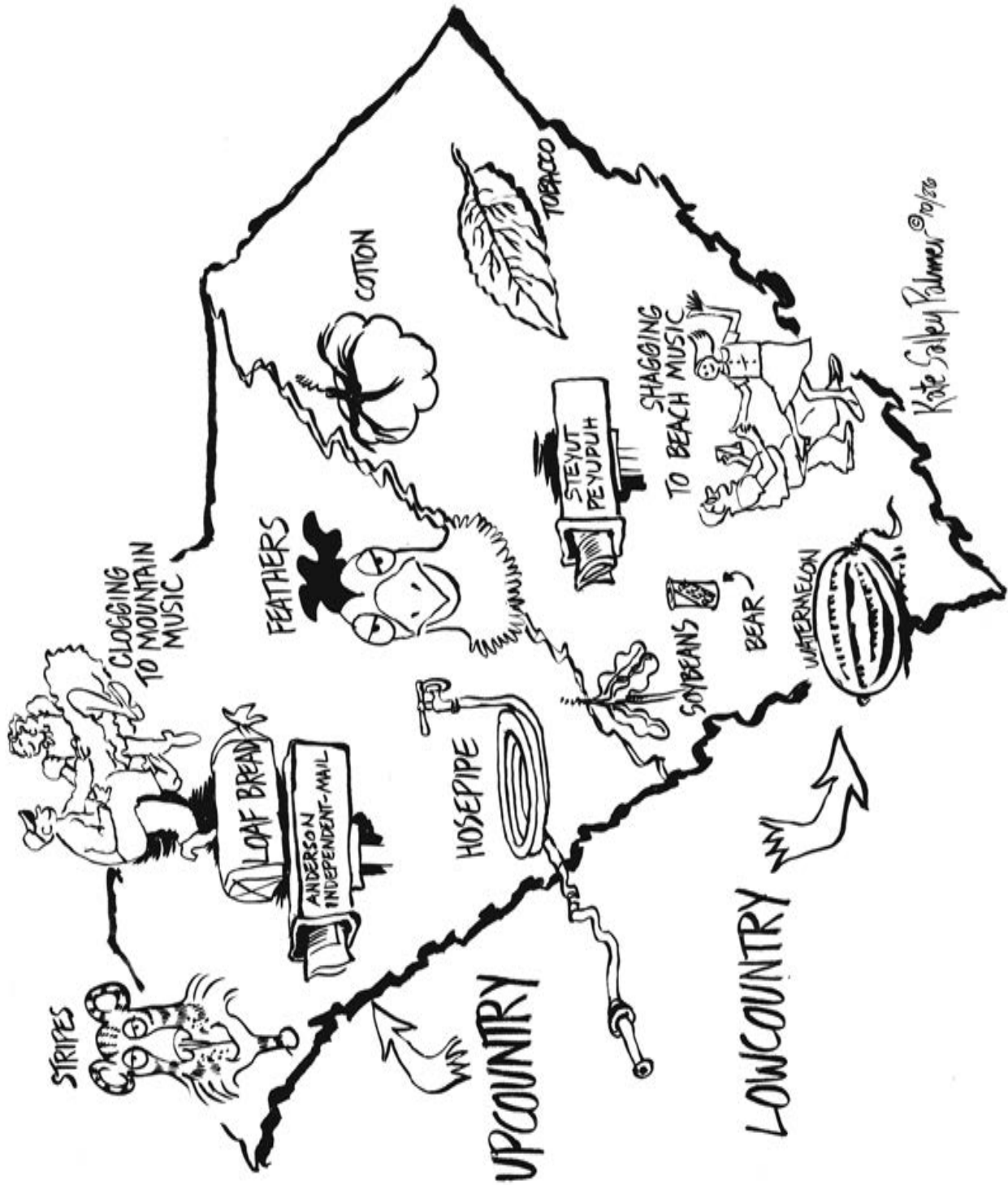
James Thurber, in his book *My World and Welcome to It*, describes writers of short humorous essays of 2000 words or so (like himself) as jumpy, nervous individuals, afraid of meeting themselves walking around the corners of buildings—people who aren't sure where they fit in a world that others find so unalarming. "In the living room of Life," he says, "they have not removed their overcoats."

That is the truth of why we cartoonists do cartoons, and why it means so much to us. (Which is not to say that some of us don't fall victim to a variety of other crutches, as well.) Those of us who are interested in and/or alarmed by politics become political cartoonists. We do it to make ourselves feel better. If we make you feel better, too, that's wonderful. But, really, it is ourselves we are trying to save.



*Daddy as an Army private in the Pacific during World War II.*





Kate Salley Palmer © 10/20

# One

## *Rivelon and Stalin's Dead*



*Rivelon Farm*

South Carolina is a state of many divisions, geographical and otherwise. The three major geographical areas are the Upcountry (or Upstate), the Sandhills (or Midlands), and the Lowcountry. The Sandhills region stretches in a narrow strip down the center of the state and includes the capital, Columbia. The land here drops rather suddenly. This dropoff, called the “fall line,” marks the edge of an ancient continental shelf. Most of South Carolina used to be under water, which is why the soil is so sandy across much of the state. In the Sandhills and Lowcountry, you can still find fossils of sea animals.

The Sandhills divide South Carolina geographically and culturally. Moving northwest from this region, you’ll find yourself in the Upcountry—surrounded by rolling hills of red clay as you approach the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains around Clemson and Greenville. If you travel southeast from the Sandhills, toward the Atlantic, you’ll enter the Lowcountry—flat plains, densely tangled swamps, and farmland. Customs and speech patterns differ drastically between the Lowcountry and the Upcountry. The Upcountry was settled from the north and west by Scotch-Irish and German pioneers moving down through the Appalachians. The Lowcountry, on the other hand, was settled by British, French, and Germans who traveled up the rivers from Charleston. The Native Americans they encountered have had a significant impact on South Carolinians since colonial days. And of course all regions of South Carolina—but especially the Lowcountry—

are deeply influenced by the dialects, customs, and cultures of the African slaves who were brought over to work the land. Colonial settlement patterns created a lasting cultural and linguistic divide. Even today, the inhabitants of South Carolina's Lowcountry probably have more in common with the coastal plains areas of Virginia than with the Blue Ridge region of our own state.

My family is rooted in Orangeburg, a Lowcountry town located about seventy miles inland from Charleston. My parents, grandparents, and most of my great-grandparents grew up there. Orangeburg is the largest municipality between Columbia and Charleston and, when I was growing up, was home to about 13,000 people. People from my hometown have a patois that is unique. In fact, those of us who were raised in the city of Orangeburg speak a different version of that patois than folks who live in outlying areas of the same county. Hearing my own accent in radio interviews and on TV, I was horrified to discover that I sound like Rosalyn Carter—but with a stutter. People who are unfamiliar with this state have asked me at various times if I were from Boston, Charleston, Louisiana—even England!

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, upcountry farmers were leaving their depleted and washed-out farms to work in the new textile mills that were spawning small towns every few miles in the red clay hills. Meanwhile, folks in the Lowcountry were just getting down to the business of clearing forests to farm. The sandy loam soil there made the area quite productive agriculturally, and the flat terrain made farming easier. Upcountry residents became accustomed to the sight of what they called “mill hills”: rows and rows of small, identical houses clustered on the slopes of a hill topped by a large, noisy, brick mill. But I grew up with fields that seemed to stretch forever—and skies bigger than the land. Stately houses, comfortably nestled among leafy trees, rose from the middle of those fields, while tiny sharecroppers' shacks dotted the fields' edges, tin-roofed and unpainted.

When I say that towns in the Lowcountry are “few and far between,” I am not kidding. Even today, there are long, straight stretches of highway between Orangeburg and the coast where you do not see a single light at night—not even a mercury-vapor lamp on a telephone pole guarding a lonely farmhouse. On overcast nights, these empty stretches are the darkest dark you can imagine. It feels like a living thing, that darkness. You watch for comforting tunnels of overhanging trees and Spanish moss. Car headlights illuminate them and ground you.

Clear nights present a different problem. The Milky Way is clearly visible, and you almost have trouble picking out individual stars and constellations for the deep-space illumination competing with their brilliance. At those times, the vast dome of the Lowcountry sky is transformed, and the universe reveals itself. But you have to be careful. Star-gazing while driving can be dangerous. The stars mesmerize you. Again, the headlights of your car ground you: it feels like they're the only thing keeping you from falling into the sky.

As a child, I truly believed that the sky was a huge dome that sat upon the flat earth. I could not grasp the notion that Earth is round. The skies were so big, so encompassing, that they seemed to be more important than the land. I thought that traveling into “outer space” would necessitate puncturing that dome somehow—and what was the point of that? What was the dome made of? Glass? What if it broke? The grownups around me, unaware of the depth of my misconception, struggled to answer my many questions on the subject: “How do you get *out* of the sky to get to the moon?” I would ask. “Are the stars inside or outside of the sky?” Such questions made no sense to them, of course. They tried to explain, but it wasn't until I was in the third or fourth grade that the concepts of a round Earth and an infinite universe finally drilled their way into my understanding.

When I first moved to the Upcountry town of Clemson, where I have lived now since 1968, I suffered from severe claustrophobia—even outdoors. Everywhere I looked, trees and hills—and more trees and hills—hid the sky from me. I'd never realized how exciting it had been to watch



*My father and his family on the steps at Hilltop in Orangeburg, circa 1923 or '24. Numbers indicate (1) James Raworth Salley, Jr. (my uncle Rotie); (2) Susan Stokes Salley (my great-grandmother); (3) James Raworth Salley (my grandfather); (4) George Lawrence Salley (my great-grandfather); (5) Kate Zeigler Salley (my grandmother); and (6) William Zeigler Salley (my father).*

approaching storms; here in the Upcountry, storms sneak up on you. The many small towns here are so close together that their lights hide whatever night sky peeks through trees or around hills.

The longest black-water river in the U.S.—the Edisto—flows through Orangeburg on its way to the coast, where it empties into the Atlantic at Edisto Island. The river moves through swamps, and huge tree limbs hung with Spanish moss reach out over the water. My parents knew from experience that those limbs were often hung with lazy snakes as well, which would sometimes fall, surprising hapless boaters traveling the dark waters of the Edisto. Highway 301 crosses a bridge over the Edisto River on its way to Florida. Before I-95 came along and spoiled things, businesses lining 301 enjoyed a lively trade from the steady stream of Yankees (anybody not from South Carolina) coming and going. Jack Nolan's motel and restaurant was always busy. In the restaurant area, people paid a dollar for a real cotton boll in a plastic bag. The smell of French fries hung in the air.

Living here in Clemson, I miss my beloved Spanish moss and live oaks—neither of which will thrive here (although one sprig of Spanish moss, which my husband tossed up on an elm branch near our deck after a trip to Orangeburg, has managed to survive for about two years.) Even today, though, the smell of French fries cooking at bull-bat time on a summer evening always reminds me of my childhood.

From the time I was about two until I entered the second grade, we lived in one of those large, tree-shaded houses, where Daddy managed a dairy farm for his cousin, George Salley. From the house, situated at the end of a dirt lane about a quarter of a mile from the highway, we couldn't really hear the traffic on 301, but we could smell Jack Nolan's French fries.

We lived in the old farmhouse my great-grandfather, George Lawrence Salley, had built just outside of Orangeburg. The house was called "Rivelon." My uncle Rotie (James Raworth Salley, Jr., Daddy's older brother) told me he used to ride with my great-grandfather in a horse-and-buggy over the then-treacherous roads that led to Rivelon to help him inspect the farm. That old house had a history of sorts involving soldiers from the War between the States, but family lore has garbled it.

Maybe part of the problem is that Rivelon was just one of several houses built by my family—and it changed names at least once. According to Rotie, “Rivelon” might have been what his cousin *George* called the house, but its *original* name was “Hollydale”—which is what my great-grandfather had always called it. After a number of years at Hollydale/Rivelon, my great-grandparents had built a house in town, at the corner of Ellis and Summers Avenues, and moved there. They called *this* house “Hilltop.” (I don’t know what the deal was about naming houses back then.) Then my *grandfather* built *another* house (just called “The Salley House”) around the corner from Hilltop, on the same block. That’s where Daddy and Rotie grew up.

Rivelon was a very old house by the time I came to live there; yet, even now, I can walk through its tall rooms in my imagination. French doors separated some rooms, worn rugs covered the wavy wood floors throughout the house, and gigantic claw-footed bathtubs crouched on bathroom tiles. Light curtains hung in lofty open windows through which, from early spring to late fall, sweet early morning smells awakened the room where my younger sister Marty and I shared a bed, and cats slept in rectangles of sunshine on the floor.

I can tell from old photos that the house was pretty run-down, but it didn’t seem that way to me. Out back, we played with chickens and dogs in the lowcountry sand. And there were fig trees to climb—which wasn’t always such a good thing. When I was four, I got stuck in the great big fig tree outside the kitchen window. Mama was seven months pregnant with my second sister, Margaret, at the time. She had to heft herself into that tree to get me down. She’s still mad at me about it.



*Yaya as a WAVE.*



*Marty and me on the back steps at Rivelon.*

Standing on the front porch with Daddy one day, looking out over the vast grass-splotched front yard with its huge live oaks—and over to the left, a grove of pecan trees—I felt suddenly lucky. “Daddy,” I said, “are we rich?” He just laughed like I had said something funny.

Both of my mother’s parents and her then-unmarried sister Mary lived with us there at Rivelon. We called my grandfather “Daddy Spahr” and my grandmother “MaMa Spahr”; my aunt Mary was “Yaya”—my name for her, from before I had learned to say “Mary.” (Yaya is pronounced “Yangh-yangh”—through your nose at the end of each “Ya.”) All the adults, including Yaya, thought my name for her was “cute,” and they perpetuated my error by using the name themselves. Yaya continued to insist that we children—including cousins—call her “Yaya” long after we were grown with children of our own. Yaya had served in the WAVES during WWII and was a bank executive until her retirement. It was very embarrassing for us, as teenagers, to call the bank and ask to speak to “Yaya,” but everyone seemed to know who we meant.



*Marty (L) and me with Daddy Spahr.*

I guess he had a right to be: he'd lost his business—a successful jewelry store and watch repair shop—in the Depression. He'd lost his house, too, which was one reason why everybody in Mama's family who needed a roof moved in with us after my grandmother had her stroke.

Daddy Spahr was always pretty patient with me, though. I used to follow him around. I know I was a pest, skulking around behind him, waiting for him to read me a comic book. Often, he'd give in and read to me. I was into *Dagwood* and *Blondie* comic books, the jokes in *The Reader's Digest*, and the Sunday funnies, which really were works of art back then. Newspapers printed comics in a much larger format than they do today. This spaciousness made possible dynamic—and drama-



*MaMa Spahr with my cousin Jim and me.*

Yaya was into country music. She liked “I Cried at Your Wedding,” “Tennessee Waltz,” and lots of others. After supper, we would sit around the record player and play Yaya's records. My sister Marty and I would sing. Yaya's favorite was Hank Williams's “Cold, Cold Heart.” After we grew up and until the day she died, Yaya would cry whenever my sisters and I sang that song—but she always requested it.

Mama's mother, MaMa Spahr, was bedridden at Rivelon, requiring round-the-clock care due to a stroke she'd suffered soon after I was born. She could barely speak, but we children visited her in her room often. She didn't seem to know who we were, but did seem happy to see us. Mama said that her mother told her once, “Myrtis, I can see that nice Mr. Salley out there in the yard. You ought to set your cap for him.”

Mama said she laughed and replied, “Mama, I did—and we have three children to prove it!”

Daddy Spahr was something of a curmudgeon, but



*Daddy Spahr (L) with a person I don't know, outside his jewelry store.*

tic—drawings and stories. I loved the pictures, even though I couldn't read.

Daddy Spahr also told wonderful funny stories and sang songs about "Old Dan Tucker" and "The Animal Fair." Once, I found him lathering up for a shave in the bathroom. I stood in the doorway and said, "Hey, Daddy Spahr." He replied, "Hello yourself. If you want a piece of cornbread, look on the shelf." I thought that was hilarious. (I have always been easily amused.) Sometimes the adults and I would listen to newsman John Cameron Swayze's radio broadcast together. Daddy Spahr said John Cameron Swayze always sounded like he was crying.

One fall day that smelled faintly of wood fires, my father decided to take me hunting with him. He took his double-barreled shotgun, one of our bird dogs, and me. We tramped out across a field of crop stubble, talking about the birds we would shoot and how the dog, who usually slept on the front porch, would "point" them out. We would pluck the birds and clean them and cook them, Daddy said. I wasn't all that excited about the prospect of cleaning birds, having seen it done. But I was happy to be with Daddy.

A covey of quail suddenly took flight, and Daddy raised his gun and shot. I screamed bloody murder, and the dog bolted for the house.

Later, I heard Daddy telling Mama about it. He shook his head, sadly, talking about me and that dog. "They're both gun-shy," he mourned.

Sometime around then, I did something that still prompts Mama to ask plaintively, "Why did you break the legs off my china horses?" I committed that crime at least fifty years ago. You'd think she'd be over it by now. But those china horses were a cherished wedding gift that she foolishly kept within my reach in the corner cabinet. Thinking back on the incident, I'm pretty sure it had something to do with the fact that she was about to present me with another superfluous sibling. Marty, nineteen months my junior, was insult enough; Margaret, my youngest sister, was just *really* unnecessary. My indignation apparently took the form of destructiveness. I think I originally meant to pop off only one horse's leg, but it made such a satisfying "snap!" that I popped off another—and another, and another—until the whole herd was legless. The only experience I can compare it to is popping bubble wrap, which I will do for hours unless somebody takes the stuff away from me.

I eventually grew to tolerate—and even to like—Margaret. The first word she said was "Ready!" during a game of hide-and-seek. Margaret and Marty were hiding and I was "it." Hiding my eyes, I waited for the ready signal. When I heard it, I went to search for them—and there they were, in plain view! The baby was smiling and Marty was furious. "We weren't ready!" she protested.

"But you *said*—"

"That wasn't me!" she sputtered. "It was *Margaret!*"

I was thrilled. "Margaret said 'Ready?'" I marveled at how smart the baby was.

Marty wasn't as impressed. She fumed about it for days.

Once she started talking, Margaret never stopped. To this day, it's hard to slide a word in edgewise.

Just as Margaret was learning to talk, I was learning to read. There was always some adult around to read to us at Rivelon—fairy tales, newspapers, novels—or just whatever they them-



*I actually remember when this was taken. Mama and Yaya were urging me to "Smile!" But I meant to show my disgust with the new baby. Sorry, Marg. . . .*

selves were reading. I loved sitting on someone's lap and being read to. Inevitably, words began revealing their secrets, starting with comics and the jokes in *The Reader's Digest*. Whenever I came to a word I didn't know, there was always some adult to ask.

But my entrance into the public school system was an embarrassment, a disaster—and a harbinger of things to come. I pitched one of my famous tantrums. Screaming, crying, and kicking my little feet, I clung to Mama. My teacher was Miss Mary Lou Dibble, whose sister, Miss Ruth Dibble, taught first grade across the hall. Mama and Miss Dibble pointed out to me that my very disgusted cousin, Jim Spahr, was also in Miss Mary Lou's class. Only then did my tears subside enough for Mama to sneak away.

Later in this book, you are bound to encounter the term “hissy fit,” as it applies to me and to the way I behave when thwarted. You may wonder at that time, what is the difference between a hissy fit and a tantrum? “Tantrums” are usually—but not always—confined to childhood. They are actually out-of-control hissy fits that make observers long for a pot of cold water to throw on the perpetrator. My mother once actually did throw a pot of cold water on my then-four-year-old sister Marty, who was pitching an extended tantrum on the kitchen floor at Rivelon. It worked. Marty sputtered to a stop and calmed down enough to cry normally. (“But you have to be careful who you throw water on,” Mama laughed. Marty's a lawyer now—the one with Mama's power of attorney.)

“Hissy fits” are the more controlled tantrums that adults use to get their way. Please note that I did not confine the definition to women. Have you ever seen a baseball manager argue with an umpire or a football coach rip off his headphones and stomp on them? Ever seen Bobby Knight coach a basketball game?

Hissy fits.

We were supposed to learn reading and writing in Miss Dibble's class. But the trouble was, I already knew something about reading, and they gave us these really boring books that you weren't supposed to read ahead in—but my curiosity always got the better of me. (I had to see if they got more interesting; they did not.)

I got in trouble for reading ahead and, among other things, for daydreaming. Teachers sent me to stand in the hall. (“The hall” would become a weird sidelight of my public school education. I think it's called “time-out” now.)

My worst disappointment that first year was the revelation that our reading books would *stay* boring. It was just a string of dumb stories about one family: Mother, Father, Dick, Jane, and Sally. In one of the more “advanced” first grade lessons, “Mother” and “Father” guessed which colors Dick, Jane, and Sally had used to paint their boats—by the color of the paint splotches on their clothes! It made me long for *The Reader's Digest*.

(I tried calling Mama and Daddy “Mother” and “Father” for a while until they told me to knock it off.)

Writing was tougher. I had already learned to write my name at home, when I was about four. I wrote it on everything: in the dirt, in Mama's cook-



*Me and Marty and Yaya's Dodge.*



books, on the walls—and even, sadly, scratched it with a nail into the side of Yaya’s brand new 1951 Dodge. Yaya was a sport. She just laughed and told me I had done a good job—and not to do it again. My parents made sure I understood the “don’t do it again” part.

So, I thought I already knew how to write—but apparently, I’d learned the wrong way. I had not practiced making perfect letters on special paper using solid and dotted lines as guides. When you make a capital “B,” the bottom loop has to stick slightly further out than the top loop. Straight letters are supposed to be really straight, and all the curves must be uniform. My penmanship was a disappointment to, apparently, everyone—myself included. I never did earn higher than a “C” in handwriting for the many years they graded us on it.

My favorite part of the school day was when Miss Dibble handed out Manila paper and crayons so we could draw. We weren’t supposed to break the crayons or waste the paper, so the pressure to create the perfect drawing every time was pretty intense. Once my classmates discovered that I had a knack for drawing, they would line up at my desk to ask me to draw a “man” there, or a “house” here, or “Indians and cowboys,” or whatever their notions were.

My cousin Jim was the one they went to for drawings of tanks and helicopters. The boys liked to draw the actual fire and explosions themselves, complete with sound effects. Some days, I drew so many pieces of art for everyone else that I didn’t have time to do my own. Though I often wished Miss Dibble would make everybody do his own work, I was flattered by the attention.

By the third grade, I was getting rather more negative attention from teachers than positive. It seemed to me that I was spending an inordinate amount of time standing in the hall.

One effort to curry favor with my teacher that year appeared only to alienate her further. It was a bleak March day; my teacher and I were standing together at the row of vast windows lining our classroom wall. Feeling a sense of camaraderie, and hoping to engage her in some topic that she, as an adult, would find interesting, I looked up at her and said, “I sure am glad Stalin’s dead, aren’t you?”

The cold stare she turned on me is something that I won’t forget. It held a mixture of astonishment, annoyance, and dismay. Not at all what I’d been going for. She turned back to the window. “Yes,” she said.

End of conversation.

I can’t remember a time when politics was not a topic of discussion in my home. Daddy Spahr frequently held forth on his views. My father did the same.

Interestingly enough, given the social norms governing gender roles of that era, Mama and Yaya held forth as frequently and with as much self-assurance as the men. Maybe this had to do with the fact that Yaya had served in the WAVES and Mama had served as the first woman teller at the First National Bank in Orangeburg, where she and Daddy both worked before the war.

Their example may help explain a few things about my sisters and me. My sister Marty was the first woman sports editor for a daily newspaper (Orangeburg’s *Times and Democrat*) in the Southeast—and the first woman ever allowed into the press box at Clemson University’s Death



Valley Stadium (much to the consternation of the male sportswriters). In the early 1980s, she became an attorney, and now she works on the South Carolina Legislative Council (a disadvantage to me, as we can no longer discuss many issues in state politics). I, meanwhile, became one of the few female political cartoonists to practice what remains a male-dominated art. And my sister Margaret is a marketing genius, a tough negotiator, and a better businesswoman than either of us. I think my baby brother, Bill, played football in high school and college just to get away from his sisters.

We children learned early that Truman was president and that FDR was God (except, of course, for his wife, Eleanor, who was Satan). We listened to the radio news with the adults and heard their discussions of the issues. They laughed a lot and it all sounded interesting.

Daddy and Mama talked to one another continuously. My parents both worked, so they cherished the time they had together at home—time which varied according to their jobs. They discussed everything—their families, their co-workers, the old days, the future, and whatever was going on in town. They brought home new stories or rehashed old ones. They also talked a great deal about state and national events, including politics.

Because both my parents—and their parents and even their *grandparents*—were Orangeburg natives, they knew practically everyone in town. They even knew everyone's mamas and daddies and where all the skeletons were buried. They shared an almost shorthand language. There was a lot of laughter. My father was a funny man, and Mama thought he was just hilarious.

One thing Daddy liked to do, at any time of the day, was to spread the newspaper out on the dining room table and read aloud from it anything he found funny or alarming. Most things, he found funny—especially if they concerned people Mama and Daddy had grown up with; the alarming stuff usually had to do with Communism and the spread of it.

Daddy would call out to Mama, who was generally up doing stuff like getting supper, feeding my baby brother, finding clean pajamas for us—or she might just sitting be there drinking coffee, if it happened to be a weekend.

“Myrtis, listen to this!” he’d call to her, if she wasn’t in the room. Then he’d read to her, for instance, a piece about the unusually small number of votes a certain well-to-do blowhard in our town had received for town council. Daddy would then embellish this by telling her a story he’d heard about how one of Orangeburg’s more freethinking citizens had seen the unpopular blowhard that day—and had told him, “If I didn’t have any more friends than that, I believe I’d start carrying a *pistol*.”



*Marty (in Daddy's lap) and me on our favorite climbing car.*

Another time, Daddy recounted the case of a family friend who was called as a witness at a trial in a nearby town. When the opposing attorney questioned this guy, it was to ask him at what time had he seen the events he had described; our family friend had answered with numbers so precise as to raise doubt in the attorney's mind. “And how is it, Mr. —, that you are able to remember the time of these events with such precision?” he challenged.



*Orangeburg's town square, in the early '60s, with its requisite Confederate soldier monument. Mama remembers walking alone to the dentist as early as the age of eight. The dentist's office was in that domed turret on the left corner of our main street. She'd sit in the dentist's chair, gazing out of the window and wishing she were that Confederate soldier.*

Daddy's friend had answered, "I looked at my watch, because I figured some jackass would ask me."

Daddy had a habit of talking to babies and animals as if they were friends of his. Sometimes, when we'd leave the house, he would warn our dog, Blackie, not to watch TV, because it wasn't good for him. When we got home, Daddy would go straight to the TV and place his hand on the top, as if to make sure Blackie hadn't disobeyed and switched the TV off quickly when he heard us coming in. Another time, when Blackie was really old, I heard Daddy tell the dog, who was lying beside his chair, "Blackie, people say you're living on borrowed time." Then, as if he had hurt Blackie's feelings, he added, "But that's okay. Everybody borrows these days."

My son, James, had a rather large nose when he was born (it fits his face very nicely now, though—he grew into it). James loves the story of the remark I overheard my father make to him as he, the baby James, lolled in his car seat on our dining room table. Returning from fixing a bottle, I saw Daddy talking to the baby. "You're a fine looking boy," remarked my father to his grandson, "even if your nose *is* all over your face."

Commentary and embellishment on the news—and everything else—was a way of life for us as children, and later, as adults. It disappointed—even surprised—me when I discovered that other people didn't share my family's sense of humor and our interest in news and politics.

To us, it was a form of entertainment.

## Two

### *Daydreaming and Piddling*



*The “new” Ellis Avenue School, built in the early 1930s; I attended the first through third grades here.*

After Yaya married a farmer from Cordova, South Carolina (and looked so pretty we forgot to cry at her wedding), MaMa Spahr took a turn for the worse and had to be placed in a nursing home. She died soon after that. Daddy Spahr got lung cancer and had to move in with Mama’s older sister Sue. We moved into a small apartment in town near the Ellis Avenue School, where I had completed first grade and would enter the second. Daddy Spahr died, and Mama put glow-in-the-dark stars and moons all over the ceiling in the bedroom I shared with Marty. If I got to missing the farm and Daddy Spahr, I could sometimes look at those moons and stars in the dark of a summer night with the windows letting in dog barks and grass smells, and I wouldn’t feel so bad.

Our tiny apartment was part of a whole block of attached tiny apartments, with a green space and sidewalks that ran behind everyone’s back door. Laundry flapped from what seemed to be one continuous clothesline. There were other kids to play with—to whom we were not related! We rode bikes and conspired to build clubhouses. We watched *Howdy Doody* and *Pinky Lee* on the first TV set we’d ever seen—at our friend Tommy Smith’s apartment.

Mama got a job at the bank because she said she was tired of us watching everybody else’s TV, and she wanted to get one for us—but I think it was because she really liked to work. She enjoyed being out in the working world; she was good at it. We even got a couch and a chair for the living room with the extra money she brought in. The couch had three cushions on the seat and on the back. Daddy decided that those back cushions would serve nicely as the strike zone

for his pitching practice. He had played some baseball in high school, and he loved the game. The “practice” he devised started with oranges. He would position himself on the “mound” for each pitch; after checking the first-base runner, he’d go into a full windup—complete with the high kick—and hurl the orange at a spot between two back cushions, hoping to wedge the orange between them. That was a strike. Whenever this happened, he’d call the whole family into the tiny living room to view the perfection of his pitch. He almost always hit the target, but sometimes he hit it too hard, and the orange flew between the back slats of the couch, bursting against the living room wall. (After one too many oranges splatted against the wall, he switched to throwing matchboxes—the small, rectangular kind with the little red-tipped matches inside. Once he’d compensated for their lighter weight relative to oranges, he became quite adept at wedging them between the cushions.)

By the time Mama finally got our first TV, a year or so after we moved to the apartment, I had become addicted to *Howdy Doody*. It broke my heart when the Republican National Convention preempted *Howdy* the whole first week we had our own TV. Our parents found the convention fascinating, but Marty, Margaret, and I were inconsolable.

My father delivered Coburg milk in a truck packed with clear ice from the ice plant. At the end of each day, the truck would have some of that ice left over. In the summer, after he’d made his deliveries, Daddy would drive his milk truck to our place, and all the kids would run out to get a chunk of the clear, smooth ice that the milk bottles had been packed in.

We kids also looked forward to playing after work with Mr. Lee Cowling, our next-door neighbor, who was a Cherokee from Oklahoma. He was really big and strong, and he would sling us kids around until we were woozy. His daughter, Sharon, was my best friend in those days. Mr. Cowling had a brother, Bruce Cowling, who was a real movie star. One night Mr. Cowling knocked on our screen door to tell us to turn on the TV—his brother was on *I Love Lucy*! (Just recently, Mama called me from Orangeburg to tell me that Bruce Cowling had a really big part in a Thin Man movie—*Song of the Thin Man*—that she was watching on one of the classic movie channels!)

When I was in the second or third grade, I had my tonsils out. I can still recall the scary spinning sensation of going under ether (the cheesy pinwheel effect in Alfred Hitchcock’s *Vertigo* actually captures that feeling quite accurately).

Relatives, young and old, had reassured me that “they give you all the ice cream you want” after the surgery, but they forgot to mention the unceasing nausea. (Anesthesia always makes me ill; it’s probably connected somehow to my lifelong motion sickness problem.) I feared the shots, too, which, in those days of torture-chamber syringes, were quite painful.

Mama’s brother Herman was visiting one day when a nurse approached me with one of those awful instruments, aiming to give me a shot. While I was still crying, Herman picked up a syringe she had laid on a towel-covered tray next to him, and every time she bent over, he pretended to stick her in the butt with it. That really made me laugh. While I was out of school, my class wrote letters. My cousin Jim—Herman’s son—wrote that they had seen a helicopter, which was a big deal then, and that Martin Becker, a classmate of ours, had fallen two stories down the stairwell in the old-fashioned school building and landed on his head. Everyone in the class mentioned Martin. He apparently has a hard head, though—he spent some time in the hospital, but he came through fine. He even became famous, sort of; his picture appeared in the paper when he left the hospital. Now a successful businessman, Martin recently told me that he believes he’s alive today because he landed on two of the larger members of our class—future football players Jimmy Wells and Keith Brickelmeyer. (I expressed my disappointment at having missed seeing all the blood on the steps.)

In those days, I walked to and from school, which was only about three blocks from our

apartment, but I was always late. Once I finally made it to school, I was inclined to daydream in class. “Stop daydreaming in school!” Mama would say. “Okay,” I would answer, fully intending to do so. Then the very next day, I’d return from some adventure in my head to find the class laughing and the teacher staring at me impatiently—and know I’d done it again.

(*You* try to stop daydreaming sometime!)

Mama also got notes from the teacher about my tardiness, urging her to see to it that I got to school on time. “How could you be tardy?” Mama would ask. “You start out in plenty of time!” She was right. I did start out in plenty of time. “Why can’t you get to school before the bell rings? Are you piddling on the way?”

Well, yes, I was piddling. And piddling is even harder to kick than daydreaming.

Between our home and the school were endless diversions for an easily diverted child like me. There was a “shortcut” that led through some vacant lots, fields of wildflowers and tall weeds that got brown and crunchy in the wintertime and grew back lush and green in the spring. In the winter you could find things like pennies, used combs, or rocks that looked like diamonds. I could look for roly-poly bugs, crickets, and caterpillars. I’d lose myself just watching ants carry stuff into their mounds. Mama would get me out the door on time, but I was always late.

In the spring, I found red-topped sourweed to chew on and a groundcover that I knew would feel good on bare feet. It bore the most delicate purple flowers that looked like tiny jack-in-the-pulpits. I loved a long-stemmed weed which appeared only at a certain time each year, boasting one fragrant tiny blue flower right on the tip. The delicate smell of those flowers will forever mean “school’s almost out” to me.

There were lots of green tangled vines that bore small pods which, in the early spring, gave forth green pebbles which were okay to eat, if you were in an adventurous mood. Ah, but by the time school was *really* ready to let out, those peas were black and hard as BBs. We used them as ammunition for our pea-shooters, which we made out of hollowed-out grapevine stems or, in a pinch, straws from the lunchroom.

When I wasn’t daydreaming or piddling, apparently, I was showing off.

“Kate,” my mother would sigh in exasperation, “why must you *always* be the center of attention?” (The way Mama said it made it sound like a *bad* thing.)

I can’t blame her for being exasperated. She suffered for my proclivities. More than one teacher diagnosed my tendency to clown around in class as a symptom of insufficient attention at home. This was, of course, untrue; as the oldest child, I had been performing for delighted and receptive adult audiences for years. My recitations and songs were very popular at Christmastime, “The Night Before Christmas” and “Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer” being two of my more frequently requested numbers.

My classroom antics led to frequent banishments to *the hall* for a large part of my elementary school tenure. I didn’t know it then, but I was already a pioneer: not many girls were singled out for such punishment. You really had to be *annoying* to be sent to the hall if you were a girl. Somehow, I don’t think Mama would have been comforted to know that I was in training to be a cartoonist.



*My own self—third-grade photo.*



*Arnold Roth's portrait of me.*

## Three

### *The Pitfalls of Potential*

In high school, I never quite understood why so many of my extremely intelligent schoolmates—National Honor Society members with enviable grades who never forgot their homework or accidentally left their books at school—dreaded standardized aptitude and achievement tests. The time limits paralyzed them: they panicked and forgot everything they knew. Some of them even worried for days *before* the tests.

Me, I just *loved* standardized tests. I liked getting out of class to take them. The questions didn't bore me, and a little thought and concentration revealed most of the answers. Even better, nobody ever broadcast scores, handed out results in class, or announced scornfully to the class that "someone" had not followed directions. There were no obvious repercussions for messing up. For me, the tests were just fun. In fact, I found that, unlike almost everything else in the academic arena, I could actually focus on standardized tests long enough to complete them. Even the time limits helped. (I always waited until the last minute to do everything, anyway—and with a standardized test, the last minute is *now*.) I was like the contestant on the TV show *Jeopardy* who, when asked why he had become a *Jeopardy* contestant, replied, "Because my wife says I am a veritable fount of useless information." I was, too—and still am! Problem is, I just never seem to know the right stuff at the right time.

Unfortunately for me, the school system took the achievement scores quite seriously: They kept placing me in what would today be called the "gifted" classes even though I consistently made some of the lowest grades in those classes. Then, because I continued to "underachieve," teachers lost few opportunities to scold me for wasting my "potential."

Potential can be a horrible burden. I wouldn't wish it on anyone. My alleged potential has stalked me since I was old enough to know I wasn't measuring up. Whenever I went to see the high school guidance counselor—the football coach, who was famous for making his counselees cry—I always got a lecture about how hard college would be (*if* I got that far) unless I buckled down and did my work. I didn't cry; I'd heard it all before. In fact, official disapproval was one thing I had learned to cope with very early in my dealings with the Educational System.

It will probably not surprise you to learn that I did not shower myself with scholastic glory in high school. I goofed around in class, making it difficult for "Serious Students" ("Kate, there are some Serious Students in this class who have done their assignments") to get their work done. Teachers called me down like a fifth-grader, usually in front of the whole class. (Of course, this might have had something to do with my running back-row commentary, my habit of reading *MAD Magazine* in class, and my drawings of everything from the teacher to the Beatles.)

On the back row, I found an appreciative and entertaining group of guys (they were almost always guys) who could misbehave and *still* make Honor Society. These were folks who actually *belonged* in the gifted classes. Like me, they never had problems with standardized tests—but unlike me, they rarely got caught writing notes, drawing pictures, or commenting on classroom proceedings. On one occasion, however, one of them suffered by mere proximity to my desk. A teacher fairly shouted at me: "Kate, if you continue to behave as if life is just a big joke, you'll





*Orrin, Ann, and Coke watch as Kate puts the finishing touches on her “work of art” for Mrs. Higginbotham’s Latin class.*

never amount to *anything!* You and—Arthur!” My friend Arthur and I exchanged quizzical glances as to why he was singled out to share in my humiliation. We figured that Arthur had been caught laughing at some dumb thing I had done.

One day I drew Mr. Turner, my chemistry teacher, as a mad scientist. He confiscated the drawing, as most teachers did when they caught me, and continued with class. Later, Mama (who was by that time the school secretary) told me that Mr. Turner had brought the drawing to her—laughing so hard he could hardly talk. He wanted to keep it—I believe he even had it on his bulletin board for a while. (Every so often, I was lucky enough to find a teacher who understood that a person isn’t defined by her grades.) At the time, I was hanging onto “D” average in chemistry—a subject so impenetrable to me that I was scared to sit anywhere but in the front row for



*Rosa D. Higginbotham*

*Mrs. Higginbotham, the only teacher I asked to sign my annual.*

fear I’d miss out on some stray glimmer of understanding. Mr. Turner’s reaction to my drawing, though, meant more to me than a good grade in chemistry, which seemed out of reach anyway. Then came the exam, which accounted for a big chunk of our six weeks’ grade. And the exam was—yes! *A standardized test!* I made an “A” on the exam, and Mr. Turner told Mama that if I hadn’t been sitting right under his nose, he’d have thought I cheated.

Mostly, I scraped by with a “C” average—which brings us to one of the kindest things a teacher has ever done for me, although she probably did it to keep me from disrupting the class. Mrs. Rosa D. Higginbotham was the Latin teacher. We had to have two years of a foreign language to graduate from Orangeburg High. I chose Latin because you didn’t have to speak it. I had already, I think, almost flunked Latin once, and there was no way I’d graduate without passing every semester.

Fascinated by a huge, detailed illustration of “The Fall of Rome” in our textbook, I asked Mrs. Higginbotham if I could try to reproduce it in paint on brown paper all across the back of the room. She said yes—and allowed me to work on it in class! I didn’t know until later that she gave me enough credit for that mural to bump me up to a “D”!

I probably didn’t deserve the “D,” because after I had painted the outlines of the elements of the work and become familiar with which colors went where, I began numbering open spaces and mixing large batches of corresponding colors. After numbering each can of color, I encouraged classmates who had finished their work, or who had a free period, to go to Mrs. Higginbotham’s class and paint by the numbers. I had to clean up the painting—smooth out the rough edges—but did it look great! Some friends and I even had our picture taken for the school annual, pretending to work on the finished project, when, in fact, it had just been started.



*An illustration for the high school annual.*

I was the unofficial school illustrator, doing artwork for the school annual and making campaign posters for virtually everyone running for student body president my senior year. The only guy who didn’t ask me to do his posters actually won the election. His posters featured stenciled U.S. flags on either side of an inspirational patriotic quote. And then he blew everyone out of the water with his speech. (He’s a cardiologist now. He never had much trouble in school.)

Like many other cartoonists, I have not met with unqualified success as a member of the Work Force. It was a relief for me to learn, at our cartoonists’ conventions, that if you ask almost any one of us why he does cartoons for a living, you will get a variation on the reply, “Because it’s all I can do!”

How true.

My first job was after school and on Saturdays at a department store owned by the husband of one of my first cousins by marriage (which is partly how I got the job). I was a fifteen-year-old high school sophomore. My chief duties consisted of designing and changing window displays.

Having never made an actual study of merchandizing, marketing, or store window displays, the depth of my ignorance was so profound as to be merciful: at least I didn’t know how much I didn’t know.

Someone took me out back and showed me a warehouse stacked to the rafters with naked mannequin parts, Styrofoam arches, Easter-colored latticework, plastic flowers, gold-painted Greek columns, candelabra, and I don’t know what all—everything piled on top of something else and jumbled in front of other stuff that looked interesting until you pulled it out.

I did the best I could, figuring that they probably just expected me to fix up those windows using some of the stuff in the warehouse, dress the mannequins in some nice outfits, and scatter accessories around.

It later occurred to me that my reputed ability to draw pictures might have figured into my hiring. They probably thought I was an artist! Many people think that if you can draw, you have an eye for design. Not true in



*My illustration for the Forensics Club.*

## INDUSTRIAL ARTS



MR. MANUEL P. BLACK—Agriculture; MR. W. J. SToudenMIRE—Mechanical Drawing, Shop

my case, though perhaps I would have had a more developed sense of design if my high school had actually offered a course in art. The closest Orangeburg High School came to offering an art course was mechanical drawing, taught by Mr. Stoudenmire. I was the first girl in the history of OHS ever to take it. (Girls were supposed to take home economics.)

Mr. S. taught us how to use a T-square and triangle and to measure accurately; how to draw machine parts (and to read such drawings); and how to do architectural hand-lettering. But we learned nothing of color, line, form, texture, or composition in mechanical drawing. It wasn't really art. Which was okay with me, because—though I didn't know it yet—I was actually a cartoonist, the “real” artist's evil twin.

My window displays were fine, as far as I could see—which wasn't very far, considering my marketing and artistic limitations. I would crawl around in the warehouse looking for stuff that wasn't too beat up, tape it together, repaint over the last repaint, and drag it across the parking lot

and through the store to the front windows, which faced Orangeburg's main drag, Russell Street.

All the store buildings back then were bright, busy, and familiar: Fersner's Department store, Andre's Jewelers, J. W. Smoak's Hardware Store . . . and the magical, unattainable Fink's, where the financially gifted adolescents of Orangeburg bought their Villager blouses and sweaters, their Weejuns, their Gant shirts, their circle pins, and—the scents that *were* the '60s—Ambush (for girls) and English Leather (for boys).

The store where I worked was not cheap, but it was no Fink's. Our mannequins wore Bobbie Brooks and fake Weejuns. I posed them stiffly facing the sidewalk, in front of a spray-painted, fabric-draped wicker chair, which I had littered with more pocketbooks and jewelry than you would find at a DAR meeting. Everything in the window competed for attention. I had no clue what to do with the floors, though, so I usually left them bare—and my backdrops were always empty.

My cousin's husband came to me to register his concern and that of the salespeople who had become alarmed enough to report the horrors I was constructing. As we talked, and as the true depth of my ignorance began to reveal itself, he began to sweat. Did I have any plans for the Christmas displays? he bleated.

It was only October, I replied, logically; there was plenty of time. I thought I would just rummage around in the warehouse and see if I could find any Santas or elves or whatever. Maybe string some Christmas lights around the edge of each window, make a frame of lights . . . spray some fake snow all over. I really hadn't given it much thought. My cousin's husband blanched. His face took on the pale hue of those great big fish they used to sell at the grocery store, all laid out on the ice and staring at you with their round, round eyes.

Had I, he wanted to know several days later, ever heard of a man named Elvin?

Well, of course I had heard of Elvin. In fact, I was sick of hearing about Elvin. The salespeople—the glamorous lady in jewelry and cosmetics, the fellow in menswear who always smelled

of Hai Karate, the nice grandmotherly lady in accessories—they all talked about him. Elvin had been the window dresser before me. Elvin was a genius, they said. His windows had won awards, you know. He went to work in New York!

Everybody remembered Elvin's windows in detail—like the time he ordered Lord knows how many pounds of sawdust to be dyed green, pink, and yellow for his Easter windows. They told him he just *couldn't* dye all that sawdust, and Elvin just *did* it! And it was glorious!

But his Christmas windows—they were legendary! Why, last Christmas, right before he went to New York, Elvin did the best Christmas windows ever. He dressed the mannequins in shimmering white dresses, covered the floor in red velvety fabric, and wrapped huge boxes as colorful gifts, which he then stacked around the mannequins. He put smaller wrapped boxes on the bigger ones—and draped jewelry and other coordinating accessories on the boxes! But—most astounding of all—he then completely covered the windows on the inside with red paper! You couldn't see the displays!

“What on earth is Elvin up to?” everyone wondered. They couldn't *believe* it when Elvin climbed into those windows—and tore *holes* in the paper for the people to see through! Wasn't that just the most fabulous idea? Of course, it made customers curious, you know—and once they'd walked close enough to get a peek through those holes in the red paper and see those glittery dresses and gift boxes and jewelry and everything (all perfectly color-coordinated), they naturally came right on in to the store. Elvin was a genius; there was certainly no denying that.

Well, my cousin's husband said, he had spoken with Elvin in New York, and Elvin was willing to come give us a hand right after he got his windows done up there. No reflection on me, but they just thought I might need a helping hand. That's when I knew for certain that I was flunking the job. It felt like math or chemistry class all over again.

Elvin arrived right after Thanksgiving. He was tall and slender, with the fanciest hairdo I'd ever seen on a man. As soon as he arrived, Elvin took charge. He gave orders for staff from departments all over the store to follow. He had people climbing ladders or holding ladders for him to climb. He hauled stuff in from the warehouse and ripped it up and reassembled it to perfection. Elvin had a lot of charisma—personal magnetism. You just wanted to be around him all the time; he was so funny and smart. We started having a great time.

But then my cousin's husband decided that the store needed me in the gift-wrapping department, and I had to go work upstairs in customer service with three crabby ladies who all wished they were somewhere else. There I found yet another job I couldn't do. Complaints about me began almost immediately: I was too slow; I used too much paper, too much tape. I began to have severe chest pains and migraine headaches. I actually thought I was dying, but it turns out that it was only the first of a lifetime of anxiety attacks.

I kept thinking, “If only I can find something that I'm as good at as Elvin is at what he does, I'll be happy. . . .”

I never saw Elvin after that, but his Christmas windows were magnificent—though all I can remember is huge, sparkly, multi-pronged white stars hanging against a midnight-blue backdrop, with the mannequins in festive red.

My subsequent encounters with my cousin's husband have been interesting, though. Once, in the early 1980s, while I was the nationally syndicated political cartoonist for *The Greenville News*, there was a family gathering in Orangeburg. My cousin was there with her husband, my old employer. He and I discussed politics for a while. Then, as our conversation turned to the days when I had worked at his store, he said to me—in a resounding voice, using language that I repeat only out of faithfulness to his unrestrained style of speaking—“I swear, Kate, until a couple of years ago, I thought you were *retarded!*”

“Well, sure,” I thought. “Compared to Elvin. . . .”

The one time I can remember “living up to my potential” happened in the spring of my senior year in high school. Mrs. Cope, my English teacher, sent me—to my astonishment—along with the smartest people in our class to the University of South Carolina to compete with the rest of the smartest English students in South Carolina for a \$500 English scholarship sponsored by Governor Russell.

In the car going to Columbia, we all tried to figure out why I was there. We just assumed there had been some horrible mistake and that some deserving smart person was being unjustly deprived of a chance to compete. We joked about it, but I felt awful.

When we got to the competition, I had to sit in a large auditorium with smart people from all over the state and take a spelling test. I knew the words they called out but had no clue how to spell most of them. (My unique and creative spelling of “ecstasy” that day now pervades many aspects of the porn industry. Can you charge royalties on something like that?)

After the spelling test, we got to choose one of several topics and write a short essay. I chose the topic “In Defense of Idleness,” and wrote the essay—surprised at how easy the test had been. Except for spelling, there’d been no hard questions. All you had to do was write!

Comparing notes with the others on the way home, I realized that, not only I had hideously flunked the spelling portion of the test, but everyone else had written longer, more complex essays than the one I wrote. Chalk up another failure.

I *really* felt guilty when a girl in my English class (who hadn’t been chosen for the competition but who always made better grades than I) told me that “everybody” thought I had been chosen because my mother was the school secretary! I knew she was wrong, because I knew Mama wouldn’t allow such favoritism; but since I didn’t really know why I had been chosen, I couldn’t argue with her. (Mrs. Cope apparently told my mother at the time that she chose me because I had scored really high on a standardized achievement test, and because she thought I was “creative.” Mama remembers telling me this, but as I recall it, I had no clue why I’d been included until after the competition was over.)

When the scholarship winners were announced . . . well, they must not have counted spelling or something, because I was one of two people from Orangeburg County to win one of the governor’s English scholarships! I had beaten the smart people at something!

It did not keep me from secretly wondering, though, if maybe the people grading the test knew that my mother was the school secretary. . . .



MRS. CAROLYN W. COPE  
English

"Hope we can  
make 2 more years!"  
'Mrs. Salley  
(mother!)"



SECRETARY—Mrs. Myrtis S. Salley  
ASSISTANT—Miss Brenda Singletary

*Yes, Mama was the school secretary. But I believe her message in my annual sheds a bit of light on my precarious position as a student.*



*Jimmy Margulies' impression of me.*

## Four

### *The Sixties in Orangeburg: Strom and Frankfurters*

As a child, I was not allowed to sing, hum, whistle, or in any way attempt to reproduce “The Battle Hymn of the Republic” within Daddy Spahr’s hearing. For an old guy, Daddy Spahr could hear pretty well. He could detect “Battle Hymn” from anywhere in the house. It was a “Yankee” song, he explained—and Yankees, taken as a group, were widely regarded to be ignorant, uncouth, hostile, and probably Communist.

Southerners still harbored a deep resentment against Yankees for injustices that had occurred during the Reconstruction period that followed the War between the States. Every family had at least one story about how some vengeful bureaucrat, corrupt official, or other representative of federal authority had wronged them. My mother’s grandfather, James Martin, for instance, had owned a place in the Charleston area, called “Martin’s Landing,” that was confiscated by the federal government during the Reconstruction. Mama says she still has copies of legal papers he filed in a futile attempt to get his land back from the government.

In 1945, my father returned from army service in the Pacific with a kinder, gentler view of some Yankees, but he greatly disdained the ones he encountered who didn’t want to eat food prepared by African-American cooks. My family’s attitude toward blacks resembled that described by the author Florence King, who has written expertly about the contradictory social attitudes held by southerners—and the convoluted logic required to rationalize those contradictions. For instance, it was fine to segregate people—as long as you didn’t hurt their feelings.

Compared to their hostility toward Yankees, carpetbaggers, and scalawags, my parents’ attitude toward “the Negro” seemed positively benevolent—except, of course, for the “outside agitators” that came to town during the civil rights movement to “stir people up.” The pejorative “n” word was not allowed or spoken in our home. We were taught that the polite term of reference was “colored people” and that only trashy whites used racial epithets.

“Negro,” by the way, is a word that I mispronounced grievously until my sixth grade teacher, Mrs. Una Belle Hoover, taught our class the correct pronunciation. It was 1957, Elvis had just had his first real hit record, and in Mrs. Hoover’s class, we were going over the list of new spelling words, as we did every Monday, pronouncing them before learning the definitions. The word “Negro” fell to me. I looked at it.

“Nigra,” I said, making sure I put the “r” sound in there.

“Nee-GRO,” said Mrs. Hoover. My southern ears heard no difference.

“Niiii-GRA,” I said, thinking maybe she just hadn’t heard that “r.” Mrs. Hoover was very patient. She knew what she was dealing with. She knew it would take time.

“Neee-GRO,” she pronounced again.

“Niii-GRA?” said I.

“Neee-gro.”

By this time, the other kids in the class were looking around in puzzlement. They thought I had pronounced it correctly on the first try.



“Nii—” Then, something clicked. I said, “Neee-grol!”

“Correct,” said Mrs. Hoover, and moved on to the next word without comment. That’s when it first occurred to me that we can hear things all our lives and not really *hear* them.

In 1960, I started the ninth grade. By then, I had acne in full bloom and was just miserable. I was never what you would call “popular,” but my gorgeous and smart sister Marty was, and I enjoyed her achievements vicariously, which annoyed her no end. It’s a good thing I came first in the sibling order, or it would have been really sad. Her teachers, expecting another underachieving Salley, were astonished to learn that Marty would not accept less than an “A” in anything. She did the work it took to earn those “A”s, too. Thank goodness our parents never made a big deal over report cards. They seemed satisfied with my “C”s and encouraged Marty to stop and smell the roses.

By the time she got to high school, my sister Margaret had resolved not to compete with either me *or* Marty, and she set about making various teachers’ lives miserable. Mama worried that Margaret would not go to college. Higher education for us all had been Mama’s dream ever since the Depression had robbed her of that opportunity.

By that time, I was a college student myself (making “C”s, of course).

“Mama, not everyone is cut out for college,” I consoled her.

She would have none of *that*. “Margaret’s IQ is as high as yours and Marty’s!” she snapped. “Marty’s?” (I had assumed she had *me* beat.)

I found myself perversely annoyed at Margaret for wasting her potential.

In high school, while my friends participated in activities such as cheerleading, basketball, or Forensics Club practice after school, I walked home to ride my bike. There was a trick I could do that I thought was pretty great. I’d get up as much speed as I could on Central Avenue, the street perpendicular to our own Azalea Drive. When I got going fast enough, I’d stand straight up with both feet on the bike seat and stretch my arms out to the sides like airplane wings. Leaning just a bit to the right, I’d turn onto Azalea Drive and go flying past my house. Of course, I had to be careful not to turn too sharply. That caused instant crash landings, from which I still have several scars. I had to watch for loose gravel, too—and the occasional car. I once made the mistake of performing this trick for my skeptical husband, Jim, when I was twenty-five. Everything went fine until I sailed past my house and heard Mama screaming. She and my two-year-old baby James were standing at the screen door looking out (something Jim forgot to warn me about), and I got a furious lecture about how I was a mother now and had to think of *someone* beside myself! It went on for ages, but that was the gist of it.

I had other after-school activities, as well. Some days, I’d come home and pick out a good book, which I’d take across the street and up into my favorite tree. The tree didn’t have any low limbs, so I had to shinny up a good six feet or more before there was a foothold. Then I’d climb all the way to the top. It was a tall tree. I’d sit there and read until Mama started calling me—usually not until almost dark, or when supper was ready. From that tree I could see for miles. I could see the red blinking light from the radio tower behind the house of a boy I had a crush on. And I could read in peace. I thought I was invisible up there, but Margaret tells me that she and Mama could stand at the front door and see me clearly. Margaret was alarmed, even as a child, to see me so high in that tree, she says. She asked Mama more than once if somebody should go out there and get me down. Mama would just sigh and say, “She’ll come down when she’s ready.”

When I finally came inside for the evening, I often found lively supper-table discussions underway. We always had questions about the civil rights movement and Vietnam, but those questions seemed to upset my father—he was as much at a loss for answers as we were.

When I was growing up, my parents were southern Democrats, which until recently has had very little to do with being a *real* Democrat. Every southern politician who hoped to be elected

to office or who even wished to be taken seriously had to be a Democrat back then. Democratic primaries—not general elections—settled politicians' futures, because no member of the Party of Lincoln stood a possum's chance on the highway of being elected to any office anywhere in the South. Only Strom Thurmond could break this rule. He could call himself just about anything he wanted to—and still get elected. In 1954, for example, he became the first—and still only—candidate for the U.S. Senate to be elected on a write-in vote.

My parents were kind and good people, but they didn't swim against the political current of the times. Once, curious about presidential elections, I remember asking Mama which candidate she and Daddy had favored for president in 1948—Dewey or Truman. "Billy," Mama called, "who did we vote for in 1948—Truman or Dewey?"

Daddy mulled it over. "Isn't that the year Strom Thurmond ran for president?"

In the presidential election of 1948, when I was two years old, my parents, together with practically every other registered voter in the South (meaning whites, of course—this was before the Voting Rights Act), had deserted the Democratic Party and voted for Governor Strom Thurmond on the "Dixiecrat" ticket. Thurmond had led a walkout of several southern states at the Democratic National Convention over the issue of civil rights. He was nominated for president at a separate convention in Birmingham and eventually carried four states in the national election: South Carolina, Mississippi, Alabama, and Louisiana.

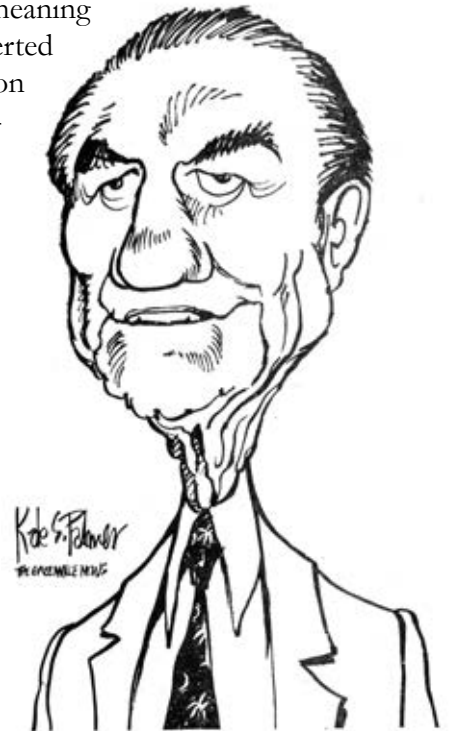
Then, in 1952, my parents—again, along with most of the other registered voters in the South—voted Republican for the first time in generations. They liked Ike and his Commie-baiting running mate, Richard M. Nixon. Anyone in the South who continued to vote the old party line in national elections was thereafter known as a "yellow-dog Democrat" (because he'd vote for a yellow dog if it were a registered Democrat).

Later, in 1964, Senator Strom Thurmond abdicated the Democratic Party for the politics he loved, stumping the state for Republican Senator Barry Goldwater. The South effectively turned Republican after Goldwater, following Thurmond's example.

In 1960, the year I entered high school, it was generally understood that a vote for John F. Kennedy was a vote for the pope, Communism, integration of the public schools, and God knows what all. We watched some of the debates on television and all agreed that Mr. Nixon was clearly the winner.

There were a few exceptions. My friend Ginger's daddy was a yellow-dog Democrat who had served one term in the U.S. House of Representatives before Orangeburg realized he was a liberal and voted him out of office before he could do any damage. While he was in Washington, Ginger's daddy had met Kennedy personally and liked him. Whenever we had a sleepover at Ginger's during the 1960 campaign, I piously refused to lick Kennedy envelopes. Our high school held a mock election that year, and Ginger's older brother, Huey, played Kennedy. I forget who played Nixon, but I believe Kennedy got only one vote in that election. Huey's, I guess.

In the end, Orangeburg High School proved not to be representative of the rest of the country. Kennedy won, and Nixon skulked off to California. Though the rabid McCarthyism of the 1950s had faded slightly by this time, Communism and the Cold War would continue to dominate the political landscape for years. Required reading for graduation from Orangeburg High



*Strom Thurmond, circa 1977.*

School in 1964 was *Masters of Deceit* by J. Edgar Hoover. We had to pass a test on it. The book was all about the Communist Plot to take over our country by pretending to be like ordinary folks—and we wouldn't know until it was too late that the groups we belonged to were just infested with them. The year Kennedy was elected, Castro's revolution in Cuba had brought Communism to America's doorstep, and there were increasing fears that it would spread throughout Southeast Asia and Latin America. President Kennedy won my father's grudging admiration during the Cuban Missile Crisis, but the Vietnam War loomed on the horizon.

One warm evening during this time, Senator Thurmond came to Orangeburg and gave a speech at our high school gym. Mama and Daddy took us kids to hear the senator, perhaps less out of conservative zeal than in a quest for entertainment. The school was only a block from our house; there was nothing good on TV, and my parents' recreational resources were pretty limited, what with the six of us crowded together in a rather small house. (One of my parents' favorite activities at that time was to drive back and forth in front of the bank to watch the new time and temperature sign change.)

Thurmond drew a simple analogy in reference to the conflict in Southeast Asia that night. The world and its countries, the senator insisted, are like a string of frankfurters: if we let the Communists get away with taking one little tiny bite, then they'll want another. If we let them have another, they'll take another, and another, and another—"until all you have left is the string."

"Dang right," said Daddy, who had no use for anyone who wasn't willing to fight Communists. (Of Arkansas's Senator Fulbright, Daddy scoffed: "He wouldn't wipe spit out of his eye.")

In November 1963, I went on a school visit to Erskine College with my friend Anne. As her mother drove us up to Due West, we heard a song on the radio about going to San Francisco and being sure to wear some flowers in your hair. "Do you know what that song's about?" asked Anne, who always did (and still does) know more about the world around us than I.

"No," I said

"Hippies."

"What's a hippie?"

"They're flower children who live out in San Francisco."

"What's a flower child?"

"I don't know. I read that they love people—they love everybody."

"Well, they sound nice."

Anne's father was a Presbyterian minister, so she didn't mention the free love part. Not that she or I would have understood it, anyway.

Anne's mother returned a day later to drive us back home to Orangeburg. We were just leaving the college when some of the girls we'd been hanging out with ran out to stop our car. "Turn on the radio!" they said, breathlessly. "The president's been shot!"

We thought they were teasing us, as they had done during most of our visit, but the radio confirmed the worst. We listened to the radio all the way home. For a long time, we persisted in asking Anne's mother if the president was going to be okay, or if he would die. She was too stunned to talk much. Finally, we fell into a dazed silence. When they announced that he was dead, we all cried. The world didn't seem safe. I wondered what those hippies with flowers in their hair were thinking.

We later learned that, had we been at school that day, we'd have witnessed laughing and cheering at the announcement. I wish I had been there. I'd love to know who *didn't* laugh; who *didn't* cheer. Peer pressure is a powerful thing. Knowing some of the dimwits I went to school with, though, they were probably just cheering at the prospect of getting out of class, like when school lets out for a hurricane. You know it's bad, and it's going to get worse—but hey! We might

get out of school for it!

I watched Kennedy's funeral at Ginger's house, with her family. It was a quiet time—the first “live event” covered by TV cameras. We couldn't take our eyes off it.

Later, on a Sunday, my family had just come into the house from church; Daddy cut on the TV just in time to see Jack Ruby shoot Lee Harvey Oswald. “He shot him!” Daddy exclaimed, turning to the rest of us, stunned. “He shot him!” Turning back to the TV, he murmured, “He just *shot* him. . . .”

Kennedy, a civil rights advocate, was now gone, but it didn't stop public school integration. Daddy had seen early on that this was Kennedy's intention, although it surprised him when President Lyndon Johnson—a southerner—signed the Civil Rights Act of 1964. There was no way he could avoid signing it, really. The civil rights movement was popping up in places where white people didn't even know they were racist, and the nonviolent protests led by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. proved impossible for anyone to ignore. The tide of American public opinion had irrevocably turned.

South Carolina's social and political climate, too, had changed drastically. In 1963, Clemson College had successfully integrated under the guidance of Governor Ernest F. Hollings, Clemson President R. C. Edwards, several enlightened industry leaders, and the watchful eye of the national press. Our state's local public school districts followed suit with varying degrees of cooperation depending upon the ability of their respective superintendents to decipher handwriting on the wall.

My friend Barbara's father, Mr. Clark, was the superintendent of the Orangeburg school system. He resolved to see our schools integrated calmly, without the use of force. He gathered folks from both races and held several strategy sessions to devise a plan. Orangeburg High School integrated in 1965, the year after I graduated and as soon as they could after the Civil Rights Act was signed—if you can call two black students “integration” in a town whose population ratio of blacks to whites was about seventy-thirty. It happened peacefully; Mr. Clark had planned well.

But a prominent person in our town, whose brother was a powerful state legislator, provided seed money and encouragement for a “segregation academy,” one of many private schools that sprang up like mushrooms in the South wherever public schools integrated. Orangeburg's was called Wade Hampton High School, where “Dixie” was the school fight song and they flew the Confederate flag as often as possible. “White flight” began in earnest. My baby brother attended the public schools (he had Mrs. Hoover for the sixth grade, too!) until he started wearing his hair too long to suit Daddy and making “B”'s without bringing his books home.

By that time, both Marty and I had taught in the public schools, and we told our parents at a family meeting that we thought they should leave Bill in the public system because we believed that white flight would hurt our town in the long run—and it has. But my parents wanted more discipline for Bill—a dress and behavior code (and rules about hair length). So they sent him to Wade Hampton in the eighth grade and through high school.



*Ernest “Fritz” Hollings in 1987*



*The Salley siblings in the 1960s. Left to right, standing behind Bill: Marty, Margaret, and Kate.*

In retrospect, it may have been a good thing for our family. Daddy died of cancer in 1975, at the age of fifty-seven. Bill was then sixteen, a junior in high school. Wade Hampton's rules and regulations helped Mama and Bill at a difficult time in all our lives—but especially in Bill's. The stricter system worked for him. He was elected president of the student body, excelling in the classroom and in football. Then The Citadel gave him a full athletic scholarship, just when his mama and sisters were wondering how we'd be able to send him to college. He graduated from The Citadel (where they *major* in discipline) with good grades—and he was elected co-captain of the football team his senior year.

Bill's collegiate accomplishments made us very proud—especially me. I lived in awe of my siblings who did well in higher education. They fulfilled their potential. Margaret did not go to college—and didn't really need to, as it turns out. A talented businesswoman, Margaret would only have been slowed down by college.

Five

*Terrible Tom and the Boys*



KATE SALLEY, Cartoonist

*From The Garnet and Black, 1968.*

**M**y friend Barbara and I roomed together our freshman year at Winthrop College, an historically all-girls' school. (My great-aunt May had been in one of the first graduating classes.) I still couldn't spell, but I had gotten lucky with test scores and a loan or two. At Winthrop, I was excited about my major in art. Finally! I would get to take classes in something I was good at! (Not so fast, Kate.)

This was the 1960s, and non-representational (abstract) art was the only kind they taught at

Winthrop. When one of my art teachers caught me drawing a cartoon in class, he sniffed, “That’s not what we’re doing in here.” Well, I had figured *that* out the day he’d danced around the class, exhorting us all to “Pretend you are caged birds who have been set *freeee!*”

As if that wasn’t bad enough, there were a lot of rules at Winthrop, and I kept breaking them. My hall-mates were sneakier than I, regularly getting away with murder. I, on the other hand, got nabbed for stuff like sliding down fire escapes, forgetting to sign in (after remembering to sign out), and making too much noise. Offenders had to appear before House Council, a group of very serious sophomores who meted out punishment, which invariably consisted of restriction to one’s room for a designated period of time. After I had suffered this indignity about fourteen times for stuff like making a roomful of girls scream by telling ghost stories, or for burping too loud in the hall during exam week (I was practicing!), I rebelled and refused to go to House Council one more time. The president of the Student Body Judicial Council made a personal visit to my room to warn me of dire consequences, but it only made me more stubborn. I told her they could restrict me till the end of time and it would not injure my social life, because those of us who had arrived at Winthrop without boyfriends never had a chance to encounter potential dates—unless you counted the horny high school guys who lurked in the lobbies of our dorms. (When *they* started looking good, you *knew* you were in trouble.)

By the end of the year, Barbara and I had both had enough of Winthrop’s single-gender atmosphere, so in 1965 we transferred to the University of South Carolina. Barbara joined a sorority and roomed with her sorority sisters; I wound up with a succession of other quite interesting roommates.

One of my favorite roommates, Kit, would settle down for a refreshing nap at 8 p.m.—in spite of the fact that she had a huge test the next day. “Be sure to wake me up in an hour!” She would say. “Will you *get* up when I wake you up?” I asked one night, as she settled down on the eve of an important philosophy exam. She assured me that she would get up. I had already learned that Kit could sit up with her eyes wide open, insist she was awake—and still be asleep. You had to ask her questions until she gave you a coherent answer.

The problem was, she could get pretty testy during the questioning. That night, after she’d slept for an hour, I tried to shake her awake. She sat up, opened her eyes, and stared into space—never a good sign. I offered to go down to the snack machines and get her something. She nodded blankly.

“What do you want?” I asked, checking our pocketbooks for money.

“Eternal Truth,” she answered.

“What?”

“*Eternal Truth*,” she repeated, starting to get a bit testy.

“Eternal Truth?—okay,” I said, humoring her, “How much does it cost?”

She sighed at my ignorance. “It costs a dime.”

“A dime?”

“Yes.”

“Kit,” I asked carefully, “exactly how do you *buy* it?”

She was really irritated by now. “You put the dime in the machine, and you press the button that says . . . *Coke*.”

She wanted a Coke. At last, Kit had awakened. Fortunately, she thought it was as funny as I did. We called soft drinks “Eternal Truth” for a long time after that.

I majored in elementary education at USC, having discovered at Winthrop that I was no good at “art.” That choice reflected my insecurity about math, as well: elementary education, of all majors, required the least math. I had forgotten about spelling, though, and flunked the admittance test to the School of Education by misspelling one too many words. They placed me in a

remedial reading and spelling class for learning-disabled students. Our textbook was *The Wonderful World of Dr. Spell-O*. My sister Marty, who was then a freshman at USC (and would later make Phi Beta Kappa), was more mortified by my failure than I, so naturally I flaunted the book whenever we walked on campus together. I enjoyed the remedial class, but after two weeks—when they finally discovered that I could actually read—they let me into the School of Education. I spent the next three years learning how to make bulletin boards and play flute-o-fones (plastic recorders). I'm sure they tried to teach me other things, but I've forgotten most of it. One memory I do have from an education course at USC is a single sentence spoken by a visiting professor: "Teachers don't like creative students, principals don't like creative teachers, and superintendents don't like creative principals," he told us.

I'll never forget that; it sounded to me like an Eternal Truth.

My cartooning career really began while I was a student at the University of South Carolina. I did a cartoon strip entitled *Terrible Tom and the Boys* for the student newspaper, *The Gamecock*. It should give any young aspiring cartoonist hope, inspiration, and a great sense of superiority to see these strips—and my early political cartoons. The work is grossly amateurish for a future professional cartoonist. But I was enthusiastic, and the strip was inexplicably popular, earning me the title "Cartoonist" in the 1968 *Garnet and Black*, our school annual.

I got the gig by accident. I happened to be sitting next to Carol Mullinax, *The Gamecock's* editor, in biology class. She noticed that I was taking notes the way I always take notes—by drawing pictures—and asked me to come up with a strip idea for the paper.

(Carol made an "A" in biology. I made a "C.")

The cartoon strip featured three university administration officials—President Thomas F. Jones ("Tom" in the strip), Vice-President for Student Affairs Charles H. Witten ("Chuck"), and Dean of Men Eugene Cooper ("Gene")—as super crime-fighters who charged about the campus solving mysteries, costumed in tights and capes.

*Terrible Tom and the Boys* ignored the burning issues of that troubled time (civil rights, Vietnam) and went straight to the heart of the mundane concerns of the average student on campus.

By addressing issues such as whether, say, a student's lunch would be edible, or whether his car would be towed, or whether she could make it back to the dorm before curfew or get away with wearing slacks without an overcoat in public, *Terrible Tom and the Boys* appealed to those who were too lonely or too overwhelmed by life in general to worry about revolutionizing society or bringing down the Establishment. Every now and then, however, the strip did manage to strike a chord with the students, as happened when the executive council of the Associated Women Students hooked up with the Dean of Women to declare war on "excessive wearing of slacks by women students at Carolina."

From today's vantage point, it seems laughable, but in 1967, there existed a rigid dress code for women, and it was strictly enforced. Fashionable skirt lengths at that place and time hovered between mid-calf and the bottom of the knee. Miniskirts were beginning to come into vogue for lower-class British women, hippies, prostitutes, and New Yorkers—none of whom were likely to serve as role models for aspiring Southern ladies of my generation.

Aspiring Southern ladies of my generation knew very well what "nice" girls did—and did not—say, wear, and do. And we tried not to get caught saying, wearing, or doing the wrong things. We were told that ladies wore skirts. With our skirts we wore hose, or stockings, because it was understood that any female over the age of fourteen who appeared barelegged in public was a shameless floozy.

Unfortunately for us, this was before the days of pantyhose, which—uncomfortable as they are—would have been a heavenly relief from the constrictions of the commonly worn and despised panty girdle.



By **BERRI ANNE BURNETT**  
Staff Writer

A threatened crackdown on coeds' wearing slacks and bermudas brought widespread controversy to the USC campus this week.

Faculty and staff members have commented and issued complaints according to Dean of Women Elizabeth Clotworthy.

Associated Women Students Executive Council has requested until further notice that all girls do not wear slacks or bermudas on campus:

Carolina women are expected to dress appropriately and neatly at all times. Since this has not been the case, the officers of AWS request that no slacks or bermudas be worn anywhere on campus pending final act by the House of Representatives."

According to Joyce Woodward, president of AWS, there has been excessive wearing of slacks and bermudas on the campus, particularly in the classrooms, and in other public places such as the Russell House, downtown, and the Five Points shopping district.

Girls have also been wearing tight blue jeans and sweat shirts without coats or with only short waist coats, she said.

#### NOT APPROPRIATE

Mrs. Woodward commented, "I think that Carolina women should dress as ladies and I do not think slacks and bermudas are appropriate on campus for ladies."

In an interview Susan Wells, second vice president of AWS, expressed her idea on the subject: "I feel that if girls do wear slacks, that they should dress and appear womanly instead of wearing tight blue jeans and slacks."

The problem came to a head during exam week, when, officials say, there was a definite increase in slacks wearing.

The Executive Council issued the request last week and an AWS meeting was scheduled for Thursday. At this meeting the bill to allow or prohibit wearing slacks on campus was to have been presented, discussed, and voted upon. The publication deadline of *The Gamecock* prevented any further information on the meeting.

The sponsors of AWS, Dean Clotworthy and Assistant Dean of Women Patricia M. Paschal, "do not feel slacks or bermudas are appropriate attire for class or any administrative academic building on campus."

#### IMAGE "TOO CASUAL"

"The image of women students has become too casual on campus,"

Dean Clotworthy told *The Gamecock*. "I don't want to be old-fashioned, but the standard of neatness never changes. I believe that wearing slacks tends to make manners and attitudes casual."

The general policy of dress in the case of the bermudas is stated in the "Carolina Coed Code" manual.

"Bermudas, slacks or other similar apparel is not permitted on the campus, in University or other public buildings, or in town unless a raincoat is worn at all times.

"Bermudas or slacks may be worn anywhere in the women's residence halls except in the main lobby of each residence hall and the residence hall cafeteria.

"Bermudas or slacks may be worn to and from cars when you are not planning to get out or when attending picnics or similar outings."

Random interviews with some of the USC students strongly indicated belief that coeds should be allowed to wear the casual dress.

Sandra Baker, a freshman, opines, "I see no reason why girls should not be allowed to wear slacks on the campus as long as they do not go to extremes. If they dress neatly, then they should be allowed to wear whatever they want. The majority of Carolina coeds should not have this privilege revoked due to a few girls."

#### "NOT TO CLASS"

A sophomore majoring in aeronautical engineering, Vickie Eslinger, said, "I don't think they should be worn to class, but I see no reason why they shouldn't be worn at any other time as long as they are worn in good taste."

Jan Hubbard, a major in sociology, expressed her positive view. "If a girl looks presentable in slacks, she should be allowed to wear them anywhere on campus as long as she is wearing a coat over her slacks. Blue jeans, I feel, should be banned since this type of clothing was not intended for a girl to wear."

Sophomore Bill Moore said, "I think that if a girl doesn't care enough about her appearance to wear the proper clothes, then she could be allowed to wear whatever she likes."

Kathy Fugid, a member of the AWS Social Committee, commented, "A woman of Carolina is also a lady of Carolina. A lady never wears slacks where they are inappropriate. However, the wearing of slacks should not be banned on the campus in all circumstances. It is up to AWS to decide on these circumstances."



Storm

Arouses Campus

Coeds' Wearing Slacks



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"Terrible Tom and the Boys" in action. (Author's note: I have re-lettered some of the words in the strips to make them more readable—the words themselves have not been changed.)

The panty girdle encased the feminine torso solidly from waist to mid-thigh in a tough, only slightly elastic material designed to minimize any suggestive shape or stray jiggle. Our thigh-high stockings were attached to built-in tabs on each leg of the girdle. Over this we wore full slips, no matter how hot the weather.

Gradually, during those crazy rebellious '60s, we women students went a little berserk, what with the hippies out in San Francisco and all. (Those hippies didn't even wear bras!) We started wearing slacks, bermuda shorts, and even blue jeans in public places—without the ubiquitous trenchcoat required to disguise such transgressions. (If you'd overslept in the morning, you could shave precious seconds off the time it would take you to get to class by quickly clasping a belt at

the waist over your nightgown and pulling the gown high enough that a trenchcoat would hide it.)

On February 10, 1967, an article appeared in *The Gamecock* describing the developing decency crisis among the women of Carolina. Soon afterwards, I added a new member to the team of *Terrible Tom and the Boys*. She was the dean of women, Elizabeth M. Clotworthy, a.k.a. “Wonderwoman.” (Original, eh?) I costumed her in the same super crime-fighter garb worn by the men—shorts, tights, and a cape.

Now, be nice and don’t sneer—these are some of my first efforts as a cartoonist. Above (p. 39), I am embarrassed to admit, are two samples of my cartoon strip, *Terrible Tom and the Boys*. They are typical of the strips I did in response to the furor over the dreaded slacks.

In the first strip, after Wonderwoman saves “the boys” from a mad scientist, they criticize her immodest clothing and threaten to take away her ID card. (ID card confiscation was the dean of men’s—“Gene’s”—favorite method of punishment for campus infractions.)

In the second strip, Wonderwoman explains the limits of her powers.

Later that year, Dean Clotworthy herself appeared at an intramural football game dressed as Wonderwoman—in a *skirt!*



Garter Bowl classic.

Enthusiasm was sparked by the appearance of vivacious, vocalizing faculty cheerleaders personified by our own “Wonderwoman Betty.”

# Six

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## Kickoff

### I.

#### LIFE BEGINS

The day after I graduated from college in 1968, I moved upstate to Clemson, South Carolina, to start a job with the now-defunct Clemson University Educational Media Center. My job was to produce drawings and lay out pages for educational materials to be used primarily in graphic arts. I loved the work and my co-workers, but the boss sent me to the school psychologist for my inability to get to work on time (I was usually about twenty minutes late almost every day). The psychologist and I had a pleasant visit. I told her I got all my work *done* on time, but I just couldn't seem to be *at* work on time. My boss at Clemson appeared to think my tardiness was evidence of some sort of pathological mental problem. I asked the psychologist if she thought so, and she said no, but that I should probably quit the job since my boss thought so. Finally, in the spring of 1969, I did quit. I had begun to think the *boss* was nuts.

While I was working at the university, I had my own apartment, which I loved, but I didn't realize what a gross housekeeper I was until visiting family members pointed it out to me. I was too busy trying to construct life-size chicken-wire-and-papier-mâché figures in my living room to pick up the clutter—or dust, or sweep, or scrub the bathtub, or wash dishes. I planned to paint the completed giant human caricatures and dress them. It's a mystery to me where I got that notion, or why I thought it would be a good idea. Maybe I'd read an article about the artist George Segal, who used plaster casts he made from actual human models to create lifelike sculptures that he posed in realistic positions, sitting on chairs or looking out of windows. The effect is quite disconcerting. I, on the other hand, planned to make my papier-mâché people funny—like cartoons of real people—and place them on the furniture around my living room like guests. Whatever impulse made me start the project, I lost interest about halfway through, abandoning everything right where it was. My living room was littered with torn newspapers, glue and chicken wire for months.

The best thing about my first summer in Clemson was meeting Jim Palmer, a doctoral student in agronomy (the study of crops and soils) who didn't seem as alarmed by my weirdness as most of the other guys I had dated. Not only that, but he was smart and he made me laugh. One day, he opened my refrigerator and casually started identifying all the noxious organisms he found growing there. I thought it was funny, and—astoundingly—so did he. I was as impressed with his calm acceptance of my obvious shortcomings as I was with his knowledge of microbiology.

He really won my heart the evening I stupidly cut my own hair right before we were supposed to go out. I had cut it short—really short. *Too* short. Worse, it bristled with uneven places and bad gaps.

“This is it,” I thought. “This is when he will find a polite way to stop seeing me.” When Jim arrived for our date and caught sight of the destruction he said, “Well, I'll be dog.”

I have since learned that “I'll be dog” can mean anything from “That's interesting” to “Well, *that's* a nice (or unpleasant) surprise” to “Oh, my God, get me *out of here!*” That evening, I interpreted it to mean that he wasn't horrified enough to leave me right then and there—and, for some

reason, he wasn't. He saw how distraught I was, of course, and assured me that all I had to do was "drop back and punt." He took me to his barber the next day to get the haircut evened out.

We planned to get married as soon as Jim got his PhD, in the summer of 1970.

When I told Jim I'd quit my job at the Media Center in 1969, he said, "Well, I'll be dog." I had a teaching certificate, so teaching school seemed to be a logical thing to do—as Mama had put it, it was "something to fall back on." So I lined up a teaching job starting in the fall and mooched room and board off a generous employed girlfriend for the summer.

Finding a place to live during the school year proved to be almost impossible. I answered nine or ten ads in the local paper, but no one would rent, they said, to a "single" woman. I wound up paying fifty dollars a month for a room and bath in a private home. (Things have changed a lot for women since 1969.)

That fall, when I started my teaching job at Northside Elementary School in Seneca, South Carolina, I was assigned to teach thirty-three sixth-graders in a self-contained classroom (meaning they didn't change classes during the day—I had to teach everything). I was still twenty-two years old, and my sixth-graders were only a year older than my brother, Bill.

My class was the only one at Northside that was self-contained, because most of my students were band members who needed to practice together at specific times. They were a heterogeneous group: four or five students were non-readers, four or five could read faster than I could, and the ones in between were on various levels of development.

On the first day of school, one child asked, "Miss Salley, is that your paddle?" He pointed to a spot behind me. I turned to see a rather thick board leaning against the wall. I was confused. "My paddle for what?"

"To paddle us," said another voice.

Were they kidding?

"Of course not!" I replied. "I don't intend to paddle any of you."

The children were astonished. "All the teachers have paddles."

"Well, I don't." They looked around at one another in disbelief.

"How many of you have ever been paddled in school?" I asked. Every hand went up—I could not believe my eyes. I tried another approach. "How many of you have *never* been paddled in school?"

Not one single hand. "You're telling me every last one of you has been paddled at some time during your years in school?"

"Yes, Ma'am, we get paddled all the time!" The children began talking all at once, each reciting the history of his or her struggles—how many times she had been paddled and for what offenses, which teachers had been the toughest on him, and so on.

"You'll paddle us, too," one child assured me, nonchalantly. Being paddled had obviously become a fact of school life for them—so much so that it had lost its power over them.

I never even came close to wanting to strike a child that year, but I itched to paddle some teachers every once in a while—teachers who stood guard, large paddles at the ready, as they frowned down at rows of silent children pressed as close to the walls of the hall as they could get.



I still had a pretty thick lowcountry brogue then, and the children spoke with a sharp upcountry twang that I found difficult to understand. They said “nat” for “night,” “rat” for “right,” “squar” for “square,” “far” for “fire,” and so on. They used idioms that were unfamiliar to me as well.

Although my upcountry husband uses terms that my family and I find amusing (such as “loafbread” for “a loaf of bread”; “hosepipe” for “garden hose”; “footfeed” when referring to the accelerator pedal in a car; and “boot” when he means the trunk of a car), his pronunciation didn’t sound as foreign to me as that of my sixth-graders.

The kids had an even tougher time understanding my speech than I did theirs. One day, during a spelling test, I called out the word “tire,” which we had discussed all week as part of the spelling list. Not a head went down—not a pencil touched paper. The class stared at me in disbelief.

“Miss Salley, we ain’t had no word lak that,” offered a student.

“Haven’t had,” I corrected.

“Miss Salley, we haven’t had no word lak that.”

“Y’all have studied this word all week long.” I told them, abandoning the grammar lesson temporarily. (I *had* given them all the words, hadn’t I?)

I checked to make sure. There it was. “Tire,” I repeated, giving them a hint. “Those round things on your car.”

Not a flicker of understanding or recognition registered in their eyes. Even the students who learned quickly and easily were looking at me as if they had never heard the word before.

That’s when I thought—“How do *they* say it?”

“Tar,” I said.

A chorus of voices murmured “Oh!” Heads went down and pencils scribbled.

I loved my class that year. Unfortunately, the other teachers figured out almost immediately that I didn’t know what I was doing. My organizational and teaching skills were woefully deficient, of course. (Boy, I wished I’d paid more attention in my college classes.) My faltering start as a teacher was obvious to everyone; conversation ceased whenever I entered the teacher’s lounge.

I first realized something was wrong when my kids came in after recess to report that other teachers were stopping them on the playground, asking them what page we were on in the math book, or how much homework I was giving them. (I had my own reasons for not giving much homework. In my class, there were maybe two or three children whose parents had a college education. Some of the parents were high-school dropouts. Some had not even made it to high school. Some parents worked separate shifts at a mill. Many were quite poor. I was pretty sure that whatever I didn’t teach those children in class, they would not get at home.)

Admittedly, I was not the most organized teacher, and I’ve already mentioned that I don’t notice a messy room even when I’m standing in the middle of it. But my disorganization and failure to keep my room tidy was only part of the problem. The real problem was the set of unspoken and unwritten rules held dear to the hearts of at least three older teachers and followed diligently by younger ones who knew what was good for them. A new teacher like me discovered one of these rules only after she had broken it—by not having a paddle, for example, or telling the students she’ll never paddle them.

Today, when I visit schools as an author/illustrator, I see experienced teachers mentoring new teachers—and taking pride in their successes. I’m glad things have changed since 1969-70. When I was a new, inexperienced teacher, I really could have used some professional teaching advice.

As it was, my students (who were sharper than some teachers gave them credit for)

informed me that I was criticized if I took them to lunch a couple of minutes too late or too early, or if I marched them in a line down the *middle* of the hallway instead of along the walls. They let me know about the rules I was inadvertently breaking and gave me advice on how to avoid such mistakes.

Long after I had left teaching, I learned from Anne, one of my best Clemson friends, that my year at Northside was still a subject of interest. By then, the old Northside Elementary building was long gone. As it happened, one of the teachers who had been at Northside during the year 1969-70 wound up at Anne's school. By this time, I was a cartoonist—and Anne reported that my cartoons were sometimes discussed in the teacher's lounge. During one such discussion, the old Northside teacher sniffed, "She may be a good cartoonist, but she sure can't teach school."

Anne and I got a good laugh out of that. Then, when I asked her if she had spoken up in my defense, she said, "Of course not—I wanted to see what *else* the woman would say!"

The desks in my room were hardly ever in straight rows. Given that each of my thirty-three students were on different learning levels, I sometimes found it impossible to relay a difficult concept to the entire class so that everyone would understand. I just couldn't think of enough ways to explain the material. At such times, I would instruct the children who were still confused to pull their desks in a circle around the five or six students who claimed they did understand. I'd ask those students to teach the others. It made my class look and sound chaotic: the straight rows of desks dissolved into clumps, and there was a lot of talking going on. It drove the other teachers crazy (as my students learned at recess), but it worked. When I visit schools now, teachers tell me that this is a bona fide educational technique widely used today—it's called "mentoring."

I believe the young principal at Northside protected me from the other teachers. I know they complained to him about me, but the only time he ever said anything was one day after school when he came into the room, sat in one of the students' desks, and asked me why I was still on the first chapter of the math book. I told him it was because some of the students hadn't mastered the first chapter yet. The principal reminded me that it was almost Christmas. He was really nice about it. But he did let me know that I should move on. I had to leave some children behind.

My sixth-graders helped me a lot. I like to think that it was good for them; it certainly made them feel as though they had a stake in the class. They pointed out words I misspelled on the blackboard, and they saved me from all the exasperated notes the office kept sending because I couldn't keep track of lunch money. After one too many such notes, I finally asked the children to take daily responsibility for the lunch money. They took turns counting and recording the money and delivering it to the office—and they helped one another if they had trouble. After the kids took over the lunch money each day, I never got another note from the office about it.

The children also made all the bulletin boards for our room.

Before my students started on their first bulletin board, they couldn't believe I was going to let them do it. They claimed they didn't know how bulletin boards were done; they had always just magically appeared. "Not in this room," I said. The students had a thousand questions. They were afraid that their constructions would, somehow, violate some universal law of bulletin boards.

"Teacher, we ain't got no stencils!"

"Haven't any."

"Haven't got."

"Okay. Do you know what the letters look like?"

"Yes'm"

"Well, draw them on paper and cut them out. Make your own stencils."

"But the words won't be straight."

"If I can read them, I don't care if they're straight."

Most schools have some sort of room where teachers can get craft paper, stencil kits, and other craft supplies, but if someone told me where to find such things at Northside, I don't remember it. (As I have since learned, from teacher friends and from teachers I have met during school visits, many South Carolina teachers today supply the room-dressings themselves—posters, maps, stencils, bulletin board materials, alphabetic borders to hang above the chalkboard, and various other teaching aids. They spend hundreds of dollars of their own money each year on classroom materials.) Our classroom did have tempera paint and brushes, though, so we covered our bulletin boards with old newspapers and painted them. Before we started, we'd talk about the subject of each new bulletin board and discuss how the children could visually represent their ideas. I especially remember their bulletin board on "pollution." They decided to divide the board down the middle. On one side—the "polluted" side—gray newspaper pages served well as smoke and dirty buildings. On the other side, they painted a scenic blue sky and green grass to represent a healthy environment. The words weren't straight, but that was the prettiest bulletin board I have ever seen—ever. And quite informative, too. I was very proud of my class.

That was the only self-contained class I ever taught, so I remember almost every one of my students, and I think about them often. I hope they were able to pass math in the seventh grade. I told my husband once that I'd like to write them all a letter apologizing for the sixth grade and all the important stuff I failed to teach them.

Jim and I got married that summer, 1970, and it was wonderful having our own home together. He started working as a Clemson University Extension Specialist in agronomy—the department where he'd earned his PhD.

Meeting and marrying Jim seems to have been a self-fulfilling prophecy. One night while I was still at the University of South Carolina, I found myself, as on many nights, hanging out with about a dozen other girls in someone's dorm room, talking. The topic turned to what kind of man each of us wanted to marry. Virtually every other girl in the room said she hoped to snag a doctor or a lawyer. (Nobody said "insurance agent," "professional golfer," or even "investment banker.") When my turn came, I surprised myself—and everyone else—by saying I wanted to marry either a teacher or a farmer. Pressed to explain, I said I thought that people taught or farmed did so because they loved it—because the work made them happy. I wanted to marry a happy man.

When Jim started his work at Clemson, it occurred to me that I had hit the jackpot—I'd married both!

That fall, I started teaching art at Pickens Elementary School. I taught the whole school—first through the sixth grades—but had no art room. I shared the "book room" with the PE teacher (a young man with whom I had virtually nothing in common) and wheeled a cart loaded with supplies from room to room, where I'd spend forty minutes a week with each class.

I had to be a mean teacher. It was the only way to get their attention. I didn't have time to be nice or to get to know the students.

I told the kids in one class to draw a still-life I'd arranged at the front of the room, and one student said, "I ain't gonna do it."

"Yes, you are." I told him.

"Make me, teacher," he said.

I walked over to his desk, gave him a close-up stink-eye, and snarled, "You do what I say or you'll be *very, very* sorry."

It was a bluff, of course, but he was only in the second grade, so he got busy. With the older kids, though, it wasn't so easy. You had to make them cry. If a student was being disruptive or insolent, I'd usually invite him out of the classroom to "talk." It was almost always a boy—and most of them were taller than me. The students who remained in the room, accustomed to phys-



ical punishment or yelling from teachers and administrators, would usually fall into a stunned silence, wondering what horrors awaited their unruly classmate.

Out in the hall, the troublemaker would lean against the wall, refusing to look at me. I'd use the one weapon that I was pretty sure he hadn't experienced yet: kindness. I'd start out by assuring the kid that I genuinely liked him and that I'd noticed he was someone others looked up to. He obviously had some leadership ability, and I was proud of his rare gift of humor. I wanted him to be as popular a person as I knew he could be, but I hated to see him making a clown of himself because some of the other kids were laughing *at* him—not *with* him—and I *really* hated to see him squander his abilities in this way. By this time, the kid was usually crying, so I'd send him back into the room with tears streaming down his face, where his classmates would gape at me with a mixture of fear and awe, wondering what I had done to him—and imagining the worst.

(Somebody should probably have tried that on me.)

Walking down the hall one day at Pickens Elementary with students lined up on either side of me, I heard a whisper, "There goes the meanest teacher in this school." I smiled.

By the end of the school year, I was about four months pregnant with our baby James, and deliriously happy to stay home doing art of my own for shows and galleries.

Galleries weren't knocking one another out of the way to get my work, so Jim and I, following the example of Jim Harrison, my sister Margaret's very successful artist husband, began to follow the outdoor art show circuit. Harrison was generous and supportive with his advice on making a living as an artist, but my art is very different from his, and, unlike him, I have no head for business. More than once he has sighed sadly and said to me, "Kate, you'll never get rich as an artist."



*I win second place at the Festival of Roses art show in 1974. I was pregnant with Salley at the time—hence the “maternity smock.”*

He was right, of course. It seemed that every piece of art I did turned out to be a cartoon. At outdoor art shows, people would stop at my displays and laugh. I sold a bit—and even won some awards—but I was doing caricatures and cartoons on the side the whole time. In 1972, our local bi-weekly paper, *The Messenger*, agreed to pay me four dollars per cartoon to do local issues, but that only lasted a year. They said I was too expensive.

In 1974, I became pregnant with our daughter, Salley. I continued to do art at home, sending James to childcare a block from our house. I had become fascinated with the whole Watergate saga. It was like a soap opera, and I knew all the characters. Lying on the couch watching the hearings on TV, I drew pictures of senators, witnesses, and the president—anyone who caught my interest. (In 1972, I had voted for Nixon for the second time, still holding on to the conservatism of my childhood. In truth, the Democrats had seemed too much like *me* to be trusted with the whole government. I won't be fooled again.)

During my second pregnancy, I began running a mile or two almost every day with several other pregnant friends. Most of us already had two- and three-year-olds, whom we brought with us when we met at nine in the morning at Riggs Field on the Clemson University campus each

day. Riggs Field is the soccer stadium now, but at that time it was an empty, grassy field surrounded by a quarter-mile track. As we grew bulkier, we didn't slow down. My doctor said running was okay, so long as I didn't fall. I did not intend to fall. At the end of my eighth month, the baby descended somewhat, pressing on a nerve and making it difficult for me to run very far. My friend Margie had no such problems. She was full-term the day we raced. She beat me—and *I* had run almost an 8-minute mile! No telling how fast she was going. That night, she went to the hospital and gave birth to her second son, as easy as you please. That kid, the last I heard, was in medical school at Harvard.

Another member of our running group gave birth the day Nixon resigned: August 8, 1974. I'll probably always remember that kid's birthday because of it. (He's a lawyer in Charleston now.)

My Salley was born in October, making our family complete.

We friends continued to meet at least once a week for lunch at someone's house—with all the kids, of course. We agreed it was cheaper than a psychiatrist.

Still, I kept doing cartoons. I couldn't stop. Jim was—and always has been—encouraging and supportive, with his own special brand of advice: “Drop back and punt,” “Try not to get sacked out of field goal range,” “If you block and tackle, the touchdowns will take care of themselves,” “Sometimes all you need is three yards and a cloud of dust,” and other wise adages.

I really wanted to work full-time, doing daily cartoons for a newspaper editorial page. By early 1975, I had a hefty portfolio of cartoons and caricatures I'd been adding to off and on since I'd lost my freelancing job at *The Messenger* in 1973.

## II.

### A FOOT IN THE CARTOONING DOOR

*(with a little help from Coach Howard)*

It was Frank Howard, the late, legendary football coach at Clemson University, who sort of provided the inspiration that led to my job at *The Greenville News*. Howard coached at Clemson for three decades, during which time he was famous for (among other things) his rather colorful method of expressing himself—specifically, for his unrestrained use of profanity, ethnic epithets, and scatological humor.

Coach Howard did not hold back when it came to motivating his “Tigers” to greater glory for Clemson.

Our friend Jay, who played for Frank Howard in the 1960s, told us about an incident that occurred during a road trip to Georgia Tech—an incident that Jay likes to refer to as “the only time I ever felt inadequate.”

Clemson had a solid team that year. Their favorite play, “three yards and a cloud of dust,” had given them a respectable season. But Georgia Tech—coached by the great Bobby Dodd—was undefeated, with a reputation for ferocity that preceded them.

In fact, by the time the Clemson team got to Atlanta for the game against Tech, the players were pretty well frozen to their seats, afraid to get off the bus. Coach Howard thus found himself forced to deliver a locker-room pep-talk to a group of tense and fearful players who were reluctant to even enter the locker room.



*Frank Howard*

Rising to the occasion, he paced the center aisle of the bus, calmly encouraging them.

In his uniquely vivid way, he made what he intended to be a rational observation. “Why, them Georgia Tech boys ain’t no different from you and me,” he reasoned. “They got two dicks and a ball just like everybody else.”

The players looked around at one another in horror. “Then we *were* scared to get off the bus!” Jay laughed.

Of course, the team collapsed in laughter, the tension broken. “We charged off that bus and into the locker room—we were really pumped up,” Jay said. “But we should have stayed where we were; we got our fannies whupped that day.”



*Jim Palmer, out standing in his field, on a trip to Argentina in 1991.*

toward the sports metaphor, said to me, “Kate, them editors ain’t no different from you and me. They got two dicks and a ball just like everybody else.”

Yes!

I charged right into that building and found my way to the editorial page. Aubrey Bowie, the assistant editor, was reigning in Chief Editor Jim McKinney’s temporary absence. He offered to buy my cartoons for five dollars apiece, and I happily accepted.

We all need a pep talk sometimes. I sure did in the spring of 1975. Our son was three and our daughter was about eight months old. Jim and I put the kids in the car and drove the thirty-five miles from our home in Clemson to Greenville, South Carolina, so I could present my cartoon portfolio to the editorial page editor at *The Greenville News*.

I was scared to death. Jim practically had to push me out of the car when we got there. I stood frozen on the sidewalk in terror, clutching the portfolio of political caricatures and cartoons I’d been doing for months.

“And don’t come back until somebody *looks* at that stuff!” Jim insisted. He knew it was too easy for me to take “no” for an answer. It had happened at smaller papers already.

Now I was about to offer my cartoons to one of the largest papers in South Carolina! What if the editors smirked at my ignorance and laughed at me behind my back? What if they could detect that I really had no idea what I was doing? What if . . . ?!

I began to hyperventilate.

Jim, whose advice tends naturally

# Part Two



## ADVENTURES IN POLITICAL CARTOONING:

THE GREENVILLE NEWS  
(AND BEYOND)



*Ben Sargent's drawing of me.*

# Seven

## *First and Ten—The Greenville News*

1975-1980



Aubrey Bowie, the assistant editorial page editor at *The Greenville News*, was about four years older than I—tall, knock-kneed, and so flat-footed he had to wear special shoes. But he wore them with style. At work he usually dressed like a distinguished college professor, sporting tweed or corduroy jackets with leather elbow patches, starched cotton shirts, silk ties—that sort of thing. He even had a lovely black cashmere overcoat that would have overwhelmed someone less imposing. Always fragrant with some aftershave du jour, he had thick, dark, curly hair and light, hazel-colored eyes.

An irredeemable endomorph who loved to eat, drink, and smoke cigarettes, Aubrey fought a never-ending battle with his weight. His theatrical talents found a home in the local theater, and he “trode the boards” several times a year. He once wheedled me into creating the set for one of his directorial efforts, *The Front Page*. Set design being one of the many subjects on which I was profoundly ignorant, I was a little nervous. “That’s okay,” said Aubrey. “Just make it cartoony.” I did, and we thought it looked great.

Aubrey was a dream of an editor. He was, above all, a laugher. He’d come by my desk to look over my shoulder at what I was doing—and fall over laughing. Something—some way I’d drawn a local politician, or the visual elements I’d chosen to express a concept—would strike him as just hilarious. Ever the actor, he’d sway around the room, propping himself up in doorways, holding his stomach and hooting with laughter. Then he’d go back to his desk and have fits of the giggles all day.

Whenever it was necessary to tell me that one of my cartoons would not run, Aubrey understood better than anyone how extremely important it was to assure me that there was nothing actually *wrong* with the rejected cartoon.

I needed to know that I was only being censored.

Jim McKinney, the editor-in-chief of the editorial page, was a veteran newspaperman who had covered the State House back in the days when the entire state government—including the governor’s office, the lieutenant governor’s office, the offices of all state senators and representatives, the House and Senate chambers, and the offices of all the state agencies—were housed in that one building.



*McKinney and I, at the request of no one, perform “Amazing Grace” at the company’s annual employee appreciation dinner.*

The South Carolina State House is a domed structure whose grounds—a peaceful oasis of shady trees, green grass, flowering azaleas, and scampering squirrels in the heart of Columbia—cover a city block. The building’s exterior is studded with bronze stars to mark the hits from Sherman’s cannon-fire. From 1962 until 2000, the flagpole atop the dome hosted three flags in descending order: the Stars and Stripes of the United States of America, the state flag of South Carolina, and the Stars and Bars of the Confederate States of America—a country which, as most of us know, no longer exists.

McKinney knew practically everybody in the state, including some of my relatives that I didn’t know myself. He was as rumpled as Aubrey was neat. Evidence of his breakfast could frequently be detected on his tie, shirt, or jacket—all of which were fashioned of hardy polyester. Three pairs of glasses hung tangled around his neck.

“Why don’t you get trifocals?” I’d ask him as he fumbled on his chest for the right pair with which to view my cartoon.

“What for?” he’d ask me, his bleary blue eyes nearly vanishing under his bushy white eyebrows as he scowled at me—his faux gruff mode.

He was an ex-marine with an impressive command of profanity and a million stories of World War II. (One of my favorites was about the Pacific typhoon his ship survived. The seas were so high, the ship tilted almost ninety degrees!) McKinney was probably the only person who could call me a “wench” and live. That became his favorite term for me, next to the ever-popular “god-damn wench.” (My language deteriorated miserably working with Aubrey and McKinney.)

Jim McKinney was a Southern-Baptist-turned-Catholic, a rare thing in the South—and he was serious about it. He and his wife, Maria, a New Zealander, had met during the war, and he went back to get her when the fighting was over. They had four children—all grown by the time I began working at *The Greenville News*. Maria was Catholic, so McKinney converted to Catholicism—and gained such an indelible sensitivity to what he called “minority religions” that it was difficult for me to get even a mildly critical Bob Jones cartoon past him.

Bob Jones University, located in Greenville, South Carolina, calls itself “the world’s most unusual university,” and it is not kidding. BJU teaches the most rigid Christian fundamentalism found anywhere—including Oral Roberts University and Jerry Falwell’s Liberty University. When

I was a cartoonist at the *News*, BJU students preached regularly on Greenville's street corners and led protests against the Jewish mayor's ecumenical prayer breakfasts. I'd argue with McKinney about my anti-BJU cartoons, pointing out that, since the school was becoming a major political force in the Upstate of South Carolina, it was open to criticism. In other words, BJU was asking for it. McKinney agreed with me—privately. But, as a converted Catholic, he was reluctant to endorse public criticism of the fundamentalists, with whom he sympathized because they were, at that time, a "minority religion."

McKinney could drive me crazy in a million different ways. Sometimes, he would reject a cartoon because he didn't "get" it—and he figured that if *he* didn't get it, nobody *else* would get it. The problem was that, except for sports and public television, he hardly ever watched TV, so any references to popular television shows or characters got the McKinney axe.

He was conservative, but he was not rigid; he could surprise you with a radical viewpoint expressed right out of the blue. You never knew whether he meant to shock you or lure you into an argument, or if he was just airing his own opinion. He really loved to catch you off guard just when you thought you had him figured out. That drove me up the wall. That, and his damned puns. I was known to throw a hissy fit now and then protesting McKinney's intransigence on a cartoon, or some other subject on which we disagreed.

The Equal Rights Amendment was a point of contention between us. The editorial board weighed in frequently against ratification; I tried to counter that with pro-ERA gems. Sometimes they ran, sometimes not. I was fighting a losing battle in South Carolina, of course (this state didn't ratify the amendment giving women the right to vote until the mid-1960s). But no matter how heated our arguments became, they weren't personal—except the one time McKinney called me "naïve" and I went ballistic. He had gone too far! "Goddamn it, don't you ever call me a goddamn name again!" I yelled.

My friend Anne, a graphic artist at the paper, was waiting to go to lunch with us. As I flounced past her in a self-righteous huff, she said, "Trashmouth."

One day, after a week of fighting with McKinney, I itched to draw a cartoon that would drive him crazy. I didn't intend to actually *show* it to him; it was purely for my own amusement. I used Jimmy Carter's "Fireside Chats" as the basis of my cartoon, adding to that the president's frequent calls for Americans to conserve energy, save money, and find ways to enjoy themselves without large expenditures of either money or fossil fuels. When Aubrey saw the cartoon, he thought it would be funny if I presented it to McKinney as if I actually expected him to run it.

"No! No! NO!" yelled McKinney when he saw it; Aubrey and I were laughing so hard, it was a while before we could get through to him that the cartoon was a joke.

That was the thing about working for Aubrey and McKinney. We could fight and yell and argue with one another, and I could come away with my self-respect intact. It gave me confidence for the next round. My opinion was as important as theirs. They always won, even if they chose to give in, because they were the bosses. I knew that.



... MY FELLOW AMERICANS... WELCOME  
TO THE FIRST VALENTINE'S DAY  
"BEDSIDE CHAT"... WITH ME  
IS MY LOVELY WIFE, ROSALYNN,  
WHO WILL HELP ME SHOW YOU  
HOW "JEST FOLKS" HAVE FUN  
WITHOUT SPENDING A WHOLE  
LOT OF MONEY...



But my confidence in my work didn't suffer. Many times, after a particularly contentious session, we'd all go to lunch together, where we'd share personal worries and plans. McKinney often said that he was trying to "toughen me up."

Jim McKinney had worked at *The Greenville News* so long, he knew more *Greenville News* lore than the publisher. When I got there, the paper had recently ceased to be a family business. It had been absorbed into a large corporation called Multimedia, which owned several newspapers and TV stations. (One of Multimedia's more interesting holdings was *The Phil Donahue Show*. In 1979, I believe, Donahue came to Greenville to address the stockholders—and Aubrey snuck me into the meeting. What an editor!) The publisher and other *Greenville News* executives whose titles I never could keep straight were housed on the second floor of the building, along with the newsrooms, photography department, composing room, and library. The editorial page offices occupied part of the third floor, and Multimedia executives claimed the rest.

From the very beginning, Aubrey and McKinney did their best to shield me from the publisher—and to shield the publisher from me. They served as a buffer between me and real trouble—a fact I didn't fully appreciate until later. The only time I ever went in person to the second floor to get a cartoon approved was late one day when McKinney was out of town and Aubrey had a plane to catch. It was 1978, and Strom Thurmond was running for what he promised would be his "last term" in the U.S. Senate. He was then seventy-five years old, having served in the Senate since 1954, and his age was getting to be an issue.

Thurmond's opponent that year was the young, energetic, and attractive Charles "Pug" Ravenel, who launched into a campaigning frenzy. Ravenel was plane-hopping the state and beating the bushes, spending almost twenty-four hours a day on the campaign trail. Thurmond remained in Washington, tending to the affairs of his constituents and being "Senatorial." I drew Senator Thurmond wearing late nineteenth-century clothing, sitting at an antique roll-top desk and talking into a vintage, "candlestick"-style telephone. I copied everything—desk, phone, clothing, hat, and even the pose—from an old photo of William Jennings Bryan. I just added a few well-placed cobwebs and changed the face. Any caption, I thought, would be overkill, but I call the cartoon "Strom Thurmond on the Campaign Trail."



“The publisher will hate it,” said Aubrey, aware that the *News* was planning to endorse Thurmond for the Senate. I started to argue with him, but he held fast. Finally, I asked if I could take it to the publisher myself for approval. Aubrey sighed and said that if he hadn’t had a plane to catch, no way; but since he did, go ahead.

As predicted, the publisher was not amused.

“I don’t like it, but I’m not going to censor you,” he said.

The cartoon ran.

For a while there in 1978, I was a member of the otherwise all-male Greenville News Editorial Board that met with and questioned candidates for office—both local and national. I mainly drew pictures at these meetings, but I always made it a point to quiz the candidates about their positions on the Equal Rights Amendment. At that time, the ERA was still viable, and I was a big supporter. But none of the newspaper guys ever broached the subject. My persistence did not go over well with the editorial board because the newspaper opposed passage of the ERA.

But I think my downfall was Nick Theodore, who appeared before the editorial board during his campaign for state senate. At a candidates’ forum two days before the meeting, I had drawn caricatures of Theodore. As I drew him again during the editorial board’s question-and-answer session, I thought I noticed that his hair was parted differently. Flipping through my sketchbook to the earlier drawings, I confirmed my suspicions.

And so, as the other editorial board members grilled the candidate about his campaign expenses, background, political philosophy, and plans for state revenues, I suddenly blurted, “Nick, do you always part your hair on that side?”

The candidate seemed a bit taken aback; the entire room fell silent. All eyes fixed on me. “I mean . . .,” I said, “didn’t you have it parted on the other side last Sunday at that meeting?”

“Oh, yeah,” he smiled. “I had a haircut, and the barber always parts it on this side when it’s shorter.”

Aware of the solemn disapproval my silly question had provoked, I tried to recover by pretending to take notes and asked, as seriously as I could, “Would you tell me—do you intend to part your hair on this side for the entire campaign, or will we see it parted differently?”

Theodore laughed. “It all depends on whether my hair gets too long to part it on this side.”

Throats were cleared, and serious questioning resumed. A few days later, Aubrey told me that the publisher had requested that I refrain from speaking during future editorial board meetings. I could attend, and I could draw, but I was to keep my mouth shut. I threw, of course, a major hissy fit, which moved Aubrey not a bit.

“I won’t go, then!” I shouted. “I’ll just quit going!”

“Fine,” said Aubrey. “But the publisher isn’t asking you to stay away. He just doesn’t want you to talk.” I didn’t go to another editorial board meeting. Aubrey and McKinney were content for me to stay away from the second floor completely. I’m pretty certain that it suited the newspaper executives, too, who more or less left me alone after that. And, though I did miss the opportunities to draw state officials from life, it was a relief not to have to visit the second-floor executive offices. Things were way too serious down there.



*One of my drawings of  
Nick Theodore*

I preferred the lighter atmosphere of our offices, where Aubrey and McKinney somehow found ways to fill the gaping “holes” that faced them on each day’s editorial page; where political debates were often heated but never personal; where Aubrey, confronted with a distressingly innocuous opinion-column subject, could sigh, “Gee—I can’t decide whether to just ‘Deplore’ or to ‘View with Alarm’”; and where my editors enjoyed sharing the stories of odd incidents—and even odder characters—that comprised *Greenville News* lore.

The building that housed *The Greenville News* was relatively new in the mid-1970s. McKinney declared that he had liked the old building better. (McKinney always liked old stuff better.) You can’t trust a building without cockroaches, was his attitude—and the old building had had some of the biggest. Also, the new building was designed to be divided into rooms by a modular partitioning system. Without the partitions, you had an expanse of open space that was effectively a huge communal office. All the desks, including my drawing table, were out in the open. The only people on the editorial page staff who had offices with doors were the editors themselves, who ventured out often. There was always a lot of visiting, laughing, reading aloud of letters to the editor, and informal discussion of topics to be covered on the editorial page. Large windows overlooked the cracked parking lots and encroaching kudzu that lined downtown Greenville’s South Main Street in those days.

As time went on, I got an office. It was big, with a huge window that faced the Blue Ridge Mountains, which were quite distracting on clear days. The window gave me exciting views of approaching thunderstorms, and sometimes winter sunsets turned it orange.

Gradually, partitions appeared, closing people off from one another. Little by little, the open, shared workspaces were reduced to windowless cubbyholes. By the time I left, in 1984, you had to have a reason to venture out of your assigned space. And on a recent visit, I found narrow, dark hallways linking silent, unfamiliar rabbit-warren-like clusters of tiny cubicles—each just big enough to hold a desk, chair, computer, and phone. Though my office didn’t change until I left the *News*, others had real problems with the modular system. Anne, the graphic artist, constantly complained of problems in her life caused by “full spectrum deprivation” at work.

It’s enough to make you homesick for cockroaches.

McKinney despised the new modular system from the beginning—and with good reason: he was almost killed during the construction of the building. Pecking away on his typewriter, oblivious as usual to the world around him, he was seriously hurt when one of those steel partitions got away from the workmen and hit McKinney on the head, knocking him out cold. The company sent him home—and to a doctor. He couldn’t see straight for a while. Aubrey insisted that he “wadn’t right” for a long time after that.

McKinney also found it tough to get used to the new VDTs, or “video display terminals”—word processors hooked to a mainframe computer that were supposed to make typewriters and paper almost obsolete. In the mid-to-late 1970s, though, there weren’t enough VDTs to go around, so the editor had to write his column or editorial on paper first, then call this guy named Ott to bring him a VDT. Ott, who should have been grumpy as hell but wasn’t, rolled the VDTs around on a cart to whichever writer had fleshed out an idea enough to need one. Toward deadline time, there was always a panicky demand for Ott, who remained cheerful through it all.



*Aubrey Bowie*

Sometimes a VDT would fizzle. The writer would always take this personally. Especially if, like McKinney, that writer had resisted the infernal things to begin with. Ott would have to come and take the defective VDT away, leaving the writer fuming as he waited for another machine—which might or might not work.

Mac McConnell, the editorial page editor for *The Piedmont*, our afternoon paper, was especially resistant to the new technology. And Mac McConnell was never in a mood to be trifled with. (His full name was Fernando Cuello McConnell IV. McKinney said Mac's great-granddaddy was named after a pirate in Virginia. Apparently, his great-great-grandmother just liked the name—and it has become a persistent, if unlikely, McConnell family tradition.) McConnell was not in good health when I first began working at the *News*, having already had about half of his stomach removed. His liver and kidneys weren't working so well, either. But he had enough energy to beat the crap out of a VDT that ate one of his editorials and then pooped out on him. By the time Ott arrived to rescue the offending machine, McConnell was trying to drag it over to the window to heave it out—which he couldn't have done anyway, because (1) he didn't have the strength, and (2) the windows in that new building didn't open.

In the early 1980s, right before he died, McConnell was on dialysis, but he came to work on the days he wasn't hooked up to the machines. Sometimes he wore his bedroom slippers, but he came.

I thrived on all that craziness.

It wasn't until 1978 that they finally made my job full-time, at which point I became the first ever full-time editorial-page cartoonist for *The Greenville News*, the first ever full-time editorial cartoonist in South Carolina, and one of only three women in North America doing editorial cartoons full-time. The quality of my work began to improve rapidly because, for the first time, I was working at it every day. Daily deadlines force a cartoonist to develop both as an artist and as a satirist.

By that time, McKinney was talking retirement in two or three years. We figured that Aubrey would take over his job—and he would have, too, if he hadn't suffered a massive heart attack at age thirty-seven. It happened while Aubrey was driving home from a concert at Furman University one night. In the car were his wife, Linda, and a friend of theirs who was an Episcopal priest. Aubrey pulled over when he began to feel ill, and he and the priest, Richard, got out of the car. Richard said that Aubrey fell against him and breathed out what sounded like his last breath. Not hearing the corresponding intake of air, Richard jabbed Aubrey in the chest with his elbow as hard as he could, then got behind the wheel and drove like a maniac to the hospital.

*A drawing I did to illustrate a column Aubrey wrote about the drum set he got for Christmas.*



Linda said they were driving on sidewalks and medians and around traffic—and attracted not one police car!

Aubrey's heart stopped several times in the emergency room. Richard gave him the last rites. I asked Aubrey later if that had scared him—Richard performing the sacrament for the dying. He said no, that it was oddly comforting.

While Aubrey was in the hospital awaiting bypass surgery, McKinney and I visited almost daily. Usually, we'd have an argument over some cartoon idea of mine for Aubrey to settle.

Of all my cartoons McKinney most emphatically did not “get,” the toughest to get him to approve were my song parodies, which I loved to do. These cartoons were inspired by the song parodies that appeared in *MAD Magazine* in the 1960s and '70s. In these parodies, which I greatly admired, politicians and other public figures, skillfully caricatured by cartoonist and illustrator Mort Drucker, sang familiar songs whose lyrics had been hilariously altered. Unfortunately, the only songs the *MAD* writers seemed to know were Broadway show tunes and movie themes which weren't very familiar to me. Sometimes I could sing the songs and sometimes not. The idea appealed to me, however, on several levels. The song parodies were wonderful vehicles for political satire. I could costume my characters (usually politicians) and place them in a setting of my choice, like a play—and then further satirize them through the lyrics, which I loved to write.

McKinney deferred to Aubrey on the song parodies. Aubrey's rule was simple: I had to be able to sing the song. If I couldn't sing it, he said, our readers wouldn't be able to, either.

One day, as we drove to the hospital, McKinney and I argued over a song parody cartoon I wanted to do. I said, “Aubrey would like it!”

“Well, get Aubrey to approve it, then,” said McKinney.

So I had to stand at the foot of Aubrey's hospital bed and sing the song I had written. He approved it, and McKinney ran it.

Aubrey had bypass surgery shortly after that. I hung around outside the waiting room with McKinney and others from the *News*. Aubrey's wife, Linda, emerged from pre-op—and she was *laughing*. She reported that, as the doctors and nurses were wheeling Aubrey to the operating room, she and other family members were trying to kiss him and hug him. Ever the thespian—and a bit loopy from the sedative—Aubrey had said, “Please, please—no autographs! If I'd known I'd attract such a crowd, I'd have come incognito!”

He recovered quickly, but it began to dawn on me that he was not to be my editor at the *News*. McKinney was now about to go into semi-retirement, and they had quit talking about “when” Aubrey would take over. I found those two huddled together more than once, whispering and glancing at me. Then one day at lunch, they told me. Aubrey was going to take over the afternoon paper, *The Piedmont*, when McConnell retired. A new chief editor was coming to the *News*.

“But I don't want a new editor!” I whined. “I want y'all!”

“That's why we haven't told you,” said McKinney. “We knew you'd be upset.”

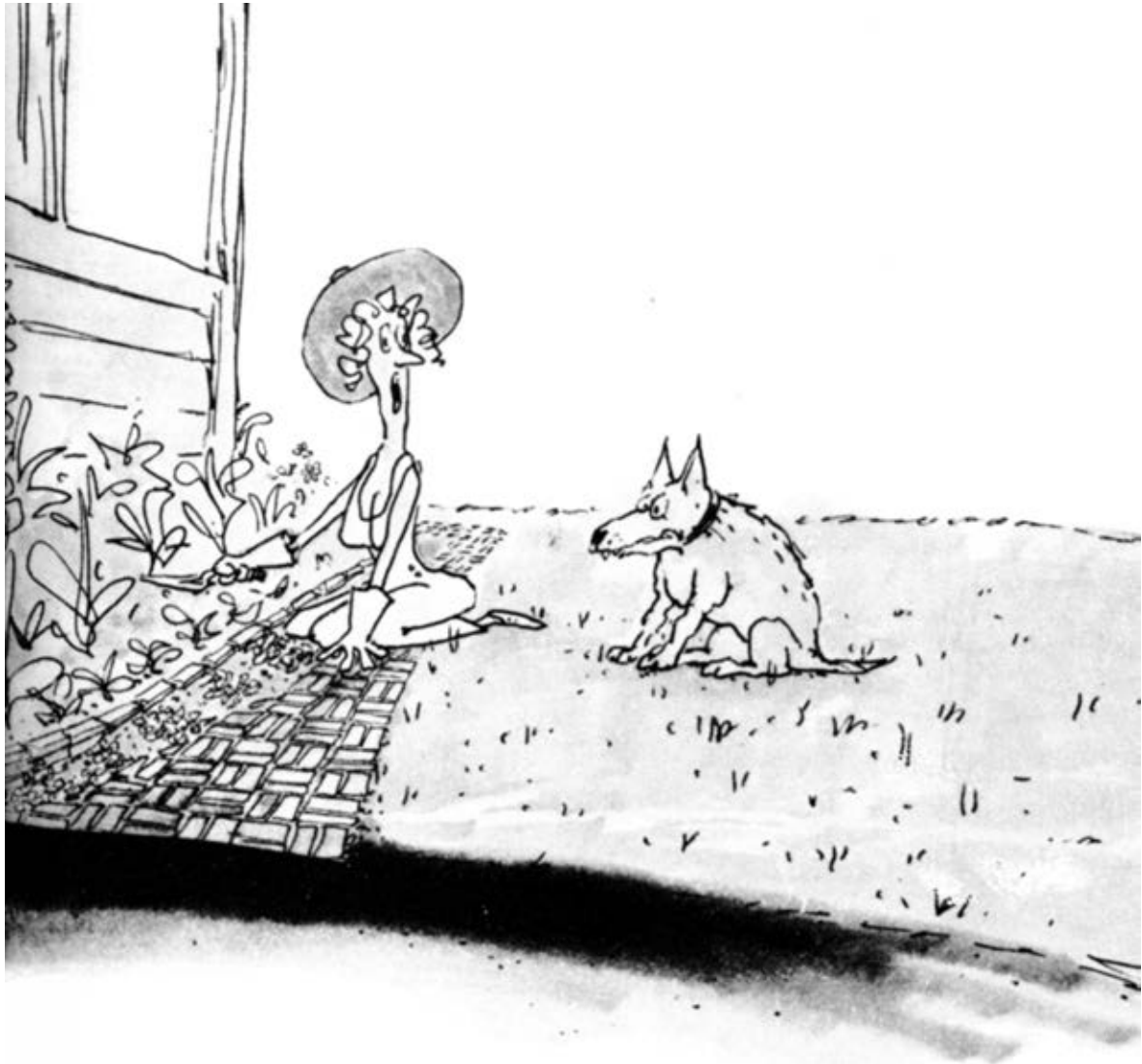
Upset? *Upset?* I was horrified! What if the new editor didn't understand my hissy fits? What if the new editor expected me to be professional? What if the new editor figured out I didn't know what I was doing? What if the new editor was as tough to break in as McKinney? What if he was tougher???

I began to obsess over the coming upheaval in my life. How could Aubrey and McKinney be so selfish? (It was all about *me*, of course.) Who would shield me from the publisher, and vice versa?

I thought of a cartoon in a book by George Booth, another of my favorite cartoonists. The title of the book is *Think Good Thoughts about a Pusycat*. The title cartoon shows a very silly woman, wearing a large hat and gardening gloves, tending her flower bed and talking to her dog.

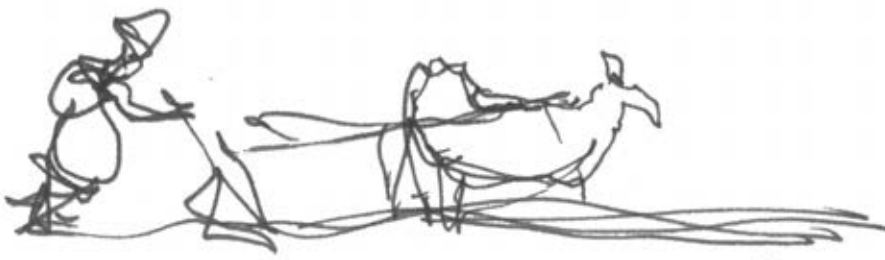
Looking up from her digging, she turns to the dog. "I want you to start thinking good thoughts about someone *new* at our house," she tells her mortified-looking pet. "I want you to start thinking good thoughts about a pussy cat."

Well, I felt like that dog.



BOOTH

*"I want you to start thinking good thoughts about someone new at our house.  
I want you to start thinking good thoughts about a pussy cat."*



SHEPHERDS



Kate  
PALMER  
Mexico City 77

*Jim Borgman's drawing of me at the 1977 AAEC convention in Mexico City.*

# Eight

## Cartoonist's Conventions

There were many things I loved about being a cartoonist. By 1976, *The Greenville News* was publishing my work regularly, and I became eligible for membership in the Association of American Editorial Cartoonists—a group of people whose acceptance and companionship I have grown to value as one of the major supports of my professional life. In those days AAEC required that cartoonists have at least three cartoons per week appear in an actual publication to qualify for membership. Thanks to syndication, I was able to meet this requirement even after I lost my newspaper job in 1984 (more on that later)—and in recent years they've had to ditch the rule completely to accommodate the many members whose jobs are being eliminated. My family and I eagerly anticipated the annual AAEC conventions, and we went to as many as we could.

The first convention I attended took place in Washington, DC, in 1976. Etta Hulme (of *The Fort Worth Star-Telegram*) and I were the only women members in attendance.

Jim joined the “Ladies’ Auxiliary”—the first ever male member of that group. (They call it the “Spouses’ Auxiliary” now.) He reported that they spent about two hours debating the appropriate gift to bestow on outgoing presidents of the group. He thinks they decided on a pin.

I, meanwhile, headed for the business meeting, which was apparently a “men only” thing. They let Etta in, because they knew her, but I was stopped at the door and advised to attend the Ladies’ Auxiliary meeting. I said that my *husband* was in that meeting, and I intended to enter this one. Draper Hill of the *Detroit News*, who was the AAEC president that year, had to intercede and assure the guys that I was, in fact, a cartoonist before they let me in. During the meeting, several men approached to ask me to leave. I just held up my notebook with the sketches I was doing, and they gave up.

I understand, really, why the male cartoonists were so reluctant to let me into the business meetings. At that time, there were so few women cartoonists that, when the guys came to AAEC conventions, they mentally classified any women they saw as either “wives” or “Etta.” They feared the intrusion of wives—not to mention *kids*—into their meetings. Some of the older guys, who shared a ribald camaraderie, may have felt inhibited by the presence of women, afraid they'd have to suppress their juvenile clowning and behave in a civilized manner. Those meetings were their opportunity to really be themselves—to entertain one another and behave outrageously, childishly answering the roll with other folks’ names, climbing over chairs to attack people who nominated them for office, and generally reverting to the class clowns they never really ceased to be. Spouses and other responsible people tend to frown on this sort of behavior.

I know the male cartoonists needed fellowship; we all do. There were so few of us then—and even fewer now. I certainly didn't want to ruin things. I wanted the AAEC to stay just the way it was—dirty jokes and all. I could take it if they could.

An entirely different issue is why female cartoonists have been so rare all these decades. One explanation could be that, historically, the targets of political cartoons have been almost exclusively white males, who generally held most of the powerful positions we lampooned. I also think there's a real resistance in our culture to politically outspoken women—unless they're outspoken about the right things: education, children, volunteerism, charitable causes—that sort of thing.



Though they need not be worshipful of authority, women are not supposed to be irreverent, either. Or hard-hitting, for that matter.

Maybe this will change as more women become politicians and captains of industry. Inevitably, they will start making the same idiotic mistakes as their male counterparts; and as more African-Americans and Hispanics gain wealth and power, they too will become targets. We women, African-Americans, and other “multicultural” cartoonists will have our pens and pencils ready. I am optimistic that abuse of power will, fortunately for cartoonists, soon transcend race and gender.

Sitting there in that first business meeting, I hoped the guys would get used to having me around. I loved them all. I wanted to be their best friend; their sister. I wanted to go everywhere with them and to do everything they did. I wanted, as I said, to be one of them.

There is a kinship we share, this small tribe of men and too few women who practice political cartooning. At that 1976 AAEC convention, there were few differences between my male colleagues and me that I could see, except that I was gender-busting an almost single-gender profession. We all faced a scary blank page every day. Most of us had to handle local—and, for some, national—notoriety. Many of us had difficult bosses. We young Turks were trying to stay married and raise decent children.

That part about the children is where my male colleagues and I may have seen life a bit differently. I was the only married woman with small children in the AAEC for years. So the differing societal expectations regarding our families may have separated us. I read of one cartoonist who hung a mattress on the door of his home studio to shut out the noise made by his kids. His wife brought him his meals there. Jim and I did not have that arrangement.

We cartoonists knew our limitations. In those days there were few of us who were willing to take much responsibility, and those cartoonists unlucky enough to be nominated for an office always tried to con others into serving instead. The vote on future convention sites was always entertaining. Typically, the cartoonist working in a proposed city, aware of the time and energy it takes to host a convention, would spring forward to disparage his own city while singing the praises of other nominated locations.

Jim really enjoyed the Ladies’ Auxiliary because there he found a whole group of people who did nothing but complain about being married to cartoonists. He felt right at home.

In 1977, the cartoonists met in Mexico City. I couldn’t afford to take Jim and the kids, so I decided to go alone. My mother did not like that idea. She voiced those reservations as she and my sister Marty and I sat around the family dining room table in Orangeburg one afternoon.

“You can’t go gallivanting off to Mexico like that,” said Mama “You’re a married woman!”

“Mama,” I asked, “why is it that when Jim goes on a business trip, he’s going on a business trip; but when I go on a business trip, I’m ‘gallivanting?’”

“Kate, you know how men are. You’ll be one of the only women there.”

“They’re bringing their wives!”

“Not all of them. And they’ll be drinking, and the next thing you know, they’ll be backing you into a corner, and. . . .”

Marty piped in. “What difference does it make? She’s had her tubes tied!”

Even Mama laughed and just shook her head about how times have changed.

Mama is the original wet blanket. When I learned that we would be going to the White House at my first convention in 1976, to meet then-President Ford, Mama was horrified. “You can’t go to the White House!”

“Why?”

“You don’t have anything to wear!”

What she meant was: “You’ll wear something awful and they’ll think your people are common!”

It used to hurt my feelings, but when I turned about forty-eight, I quit worrying about it, and now Mama introduces me as her “hippie” daughter. I never was a hippie, of course, but that’s the only explanation she can come up with for the way I dress, talk, and live. She’s comfortable with it, she “don’t mean nuthin’ by it,” and I’m happy because now I can be myself, and Mama can say, “Well, I never could do a thing with her!”

The 1981 convention, which was held in Nashville, was probably one of the rowdier conventions. It was there that one of our group overheard the registration clerk tell a couple as they were checking in to the hotel, “Don’t worry, your rooms aren’t anywhere near the cartoonists.”

George Strait had a nightly gig at our hotel, and groups of cartoonists went to the bar after hours to draw one another and to listen to him. As an added bonus, the renowned country artist Tom T. Hall had invited us convention-goers to his home. We had wonderful chicken and all the trimmings, picnic-style, at his farm. There was a bluegrass band playing in a gazebo, and Jan Powell, wife of Raleigh cartoonist Dwane Powell, was throwing chicken bones at them.

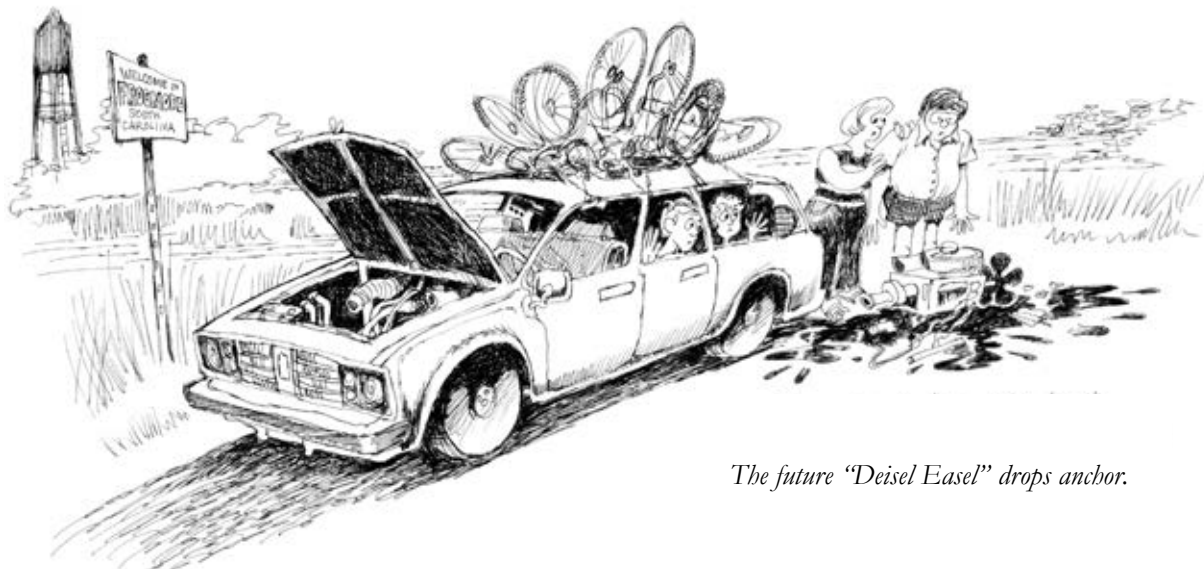
“Kate, when you get through with your chicken, throw the bones at the band—they like it!” she said as I sat down, whereupon she tossed a bone at the lead guitarist, who deftly dodged it. The band may not have liked it, but they did put up with it, nimbly dodging our throws.

But that’s not all they had to put up with. I’m not proud of this, but later that night, I climbed right up there with them and told them to follow me in “C.” I then sang my trademark cartoonist’s convention song, “Dirty Old Egg-Sucking Dog.”

Meanwhile, my six-year-old daughter Salley, who loved Tom T. Hall’s songs (especially “Sneaky Snake”), had been shadowing the singer-songwriter all night. Finally, he looked down and said, “Salley, every time I turn around, there you are!” So he picked her up and carried her on his shoulders the rest of the night. He even dedicated the performance of one of his songs to her.

The 1985 convention was held in Orlando, Florida, where a Disney spokesman taught us all how to draw Mickey Mouse and Jiminy Cricket. We drove our clunker diesel station wagon to the convention. With the help of the cartoonists, it would soon be transformed into the legendary “Diesel Easel.”

This car was a real lemon. We’d bought it used from a man who told us it would go another 4,000 miles or another 40,000 miles. It went 10,000 before “dropping anchor” on the way home from Fripp Island—in Frogmore, South Carolina—on the hottest day of the summer. Our friends Jay and Anne and their children were with us, driving separately in their van. It was obvious to Anne and me that we’d have to tow the car home behind the van, but our husbands were



*The future “Diesel Easel” drops anchor.*

not convinced and we could not persuade them. They seemed to be in some kind of testosterone frenzy, rejecting any suggestions from our gender until the idea occurred to them independently. So, while Jim and Jay went off to consult with various men they found loitering around a garage, Anne and I took the children to a fast-food place to wait.

As we sat there with our cranky kids, eating french fries, Anne said, “Do you know what the worst part of this is?”

I had several suggestions, but she shook her head and pointed out the window to where our husbands were talking earnestly to the only garage mechanic to be found in the town of Frogmore.

“It’s having to pretend that *they’re* in charge.”

The guys didn’t decide that the thing to do was tow the car and have it fixed in Clemson until the kids were past cranky and on the way to mutiny.

So we towed our station wagon home behind Jay and Anne’s van, into which we squeezed eleven people. Anne and I had to sit in the back scrunched up with the kids while our husbands—Jim and Jay—sat in the captains’ chairs and worked the radio. We couldn’t run the air conditioner because we needed the power to pull the car. Wedged in so tight that if one person turned over, we all had to turn over, we all kept our faces in books to keep from snarling at one another. Anne’s seventeen-year-old daughter, Cary, the oldest child in the wayback, and my fourteen-year-old son were lying facing one another. Cary looked up from her book long enough to chastise my son: “James, stop looking down my blouse!”

James defended himself, “I can’t help it—it’s right *there!*”

It was a bad, bad car. At the cartoonists’ annual softball game in 1985, we parked it and gave out auto paint and brushes to let the cartoonists decorate it.



*Jeff MacNelly and Draper Hill work on the Diesel Easel.*

I drew a possum on the hood, all curled up like it was dead. Draper drew Jimmy Carter there, too. One guy drew a lemon on the door. Jeff MacNelly drew the Loon character from his cartoon strip *Shoe* and wrote “The Diesel Easel. What a Weasel” under it. Draper gave us a spe-

cial license plate he had designed featuring Detroit's Mayor Coleman Young above the slogan "Do It for Detroit."

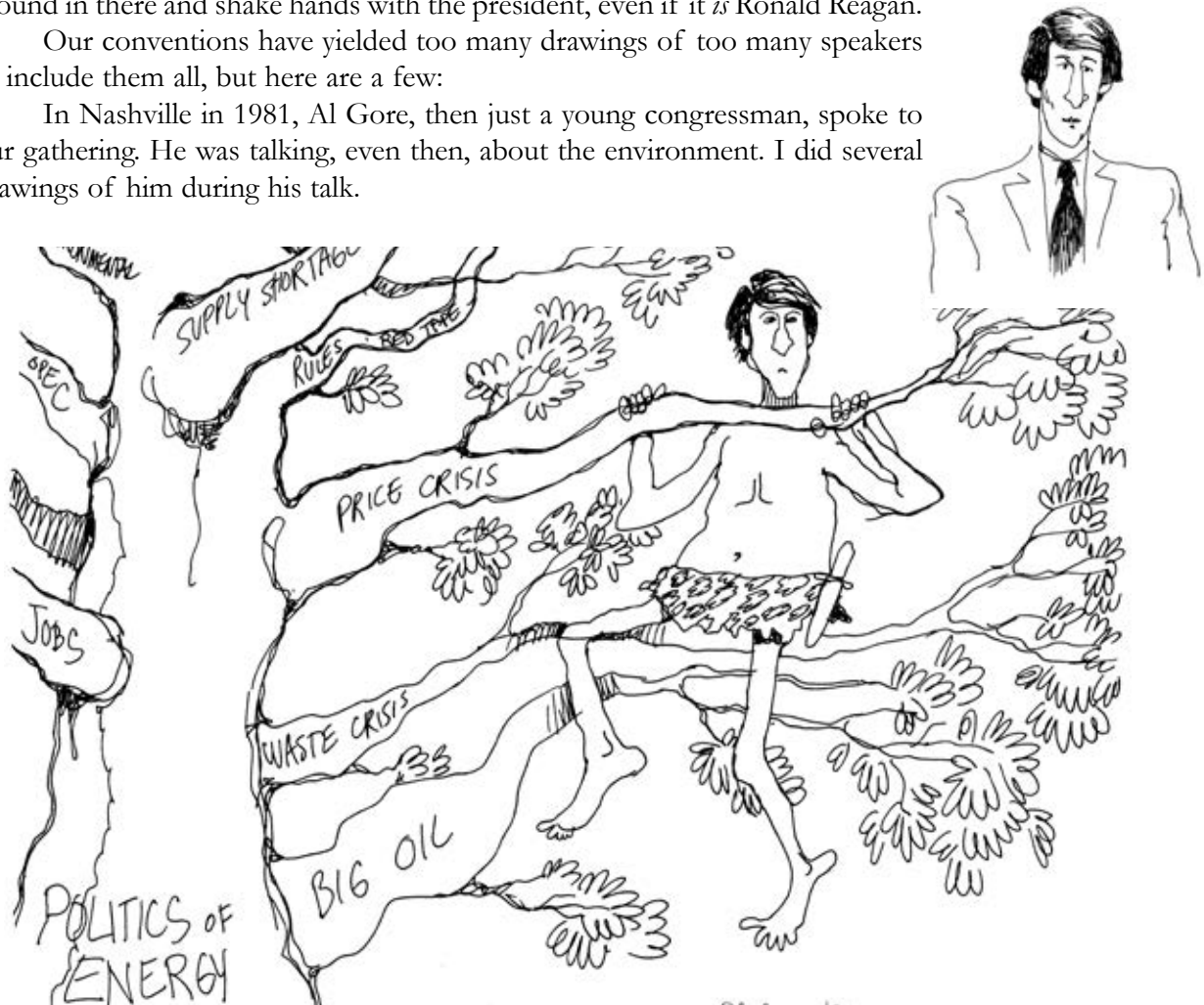
We drove the car for about a year after that, during which time it became famous around Clemson and on the highways in our area. It also embarrassed our teenagers intensely, so we got the good out of it. We finally had to junk it after a series of annoying breakdowns—but we kept the license plate. And the hood. I wanted to keep the fenders and the doors, but they wouldn't let me.

Cartoonists will draw anywhere, on anything they can find, so a word of advice: if you are ever invited to speak to a group of cartoonists, don't bore them. I'm serious about that. Our conventions attract very important politicians and many famous people due to the high profile enjoyed by many of our members—especially those who work at large newspapers or who are widely syndicated. Politicians especially like to demonstrate their tolerance for us by appearing as speakers. They should remember that, as a group, we represent the back row of the classroom and are apt to revert to our subversive ways, challenging their statements and ridiculing them in our drawings. The more pretentious the speaker, the ruder we become.

The AAEC customarily met in Washington DC every election year, so whoever happened to be running for reelection as president would invite us to the White House. The "big" cartoonists—New York's Jules Feiffer, some of the Pulitzer Prize winners, and others—disapproved of our willingness to be used as props for any president's campaign photo-ops. But most of us aren't lucky enough to work in big cities, where we get to see newsmakers up close. We are thrilled by a visit to the White House and are—I'm sorry—willing to smile for the cameras just to get to walk around in there and shake hands with the president, even if it is Ronald Reagan.

Our conventions have yielded too many drawings of too many speakers to include them all, but here are a few:

In Nashville in 1981, Al Gore, then just a young congressman, spoke to our gathering. He was talking, even then, about the environment. I did several drawings of him during his talk.



In 1982, the cartoonists met in San Francisco. Gore Vidal and Jerry Brown were running against one another that year for the Democratic nomination for U.S. Senate. They had refused to appear together in any forum, and had avoided one another successfully until the cartoonists came to town. Each candidate had gotten the impression that he would be the only speaker at one of our nightly banquets—and each man reacted with consternation and fury when he saw that we'd booked his rival for the same event. Jerry Brown's speech was humorous, witty, and set forth his agenda. Gore Vidal's was positively acidic. He aimed vicious sarcasm at his opponent and at the cartoonists for putting him in the position of having to share an audience with Brown.

It was *not* boring.

At the final banquet of the convention, we were trapped for what seemed to be an eternity by the flamboyant defense attorney, the late Melvin Belli. Belli liked the sound of his own voice so much that his lengthy speech was recorded in countless sketchbooks, on napkins, on tablecloths, and, I believe, restroom walls. One cartoonist even had time to draw—in excruciating detail—the



lawyer himself delivering an argument to a jury of twelve who were yelling angrily in unison: “OKAY, OKAY, HE’S NOT GUILTY—JUST SHUT THE \*@?! UP!” Every juror in the drawing had been lovingly rendered.

Belli wore a black cashmere suit lined in red silk with a red silk hankie peeking out of the breast pocket. We weren't sitting close enough to see him that well, but I got a couple of sketches that seemed characteristic of his presentation.



*Above and top right: my sketches of Melvin Belli; lower right: Melvin Belli as drawn by my friend Draper Hill.*



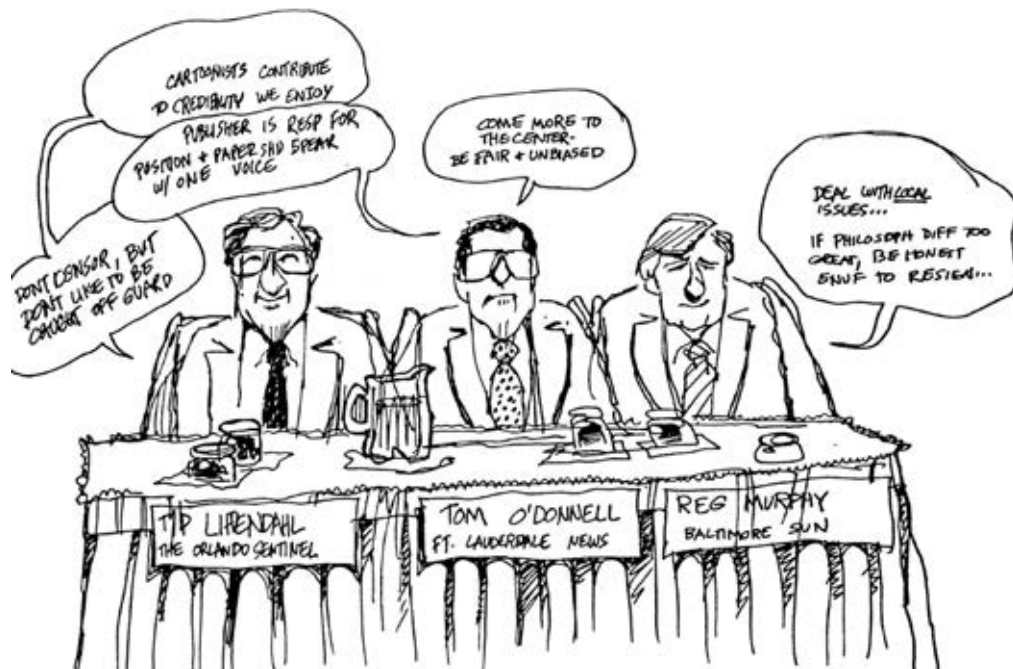
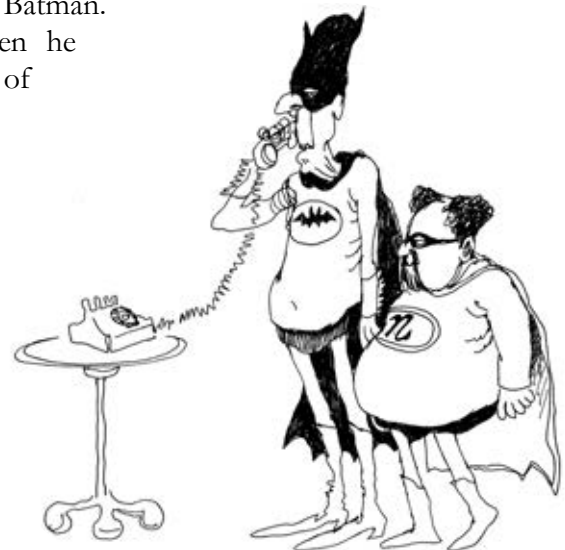
Lyn Nofziger and President Reagan.

idiot, so I drew him in his underwear. (We cartoonists will entertain ourselves.)

At the 1985 convention in Orlando, a panel of publishers voiced their concerns about dealing with staff cartoonists. I did this sketch—my way of taking notes—at the panel discussion concerning the cartoonist’s place on the editorial page. All three panel members were newspaper publishers. Their remarks underline the problems that editorial cartoonists face even today.

At a later convention, Lyn Nofziger, former advisor to President Reagan, gave us fodder for caricature. At first, he spoke at length on the virtues of the president. Then he began to assert that he, Lyn Nofziger, was such an important advisor to Reagan that some of the Reagan virtue probably rightly belonged to him. That’s when I began to mock him: I drew him as Robin to Reagan’s Batman.

Then he just sort of seemed like an



The publishers’ panel from the 1985 convention. To sum up their points, Tip Lipendahl of The Orlando Sentinel said that editorial cartoonists add to newspapers’ credibility and shouldn’t be censored . . . but added that publishers “don’t like to be caught off guard”; Tom O’Donnell of The Fort Lauderdale News felt that newspapers should “speak with one voice,” and that cartoonists, like reporters, should strive to be “fair and unbiased”; and The Baltimore Sun’s Reg Murphy felt that cartoonists should “deal with local issues,” and that if “philosophical differences” with the newspaper were too great, the cartoonist should “be honest enough to resign.”

*The Chicago Tribune* Editorial Page Editor James Squires spoke to us as well. Both cartoonists at the *Tribune*—Jeff MacNelly and Dick Locher—had won Pulitzer Prizes. Squires’ quotes had preceded him. In an interview, he had reportedly said that there are only five or six good cartoonists in the country, and the rest are copying them. During his talk to us, he asserted that “the only way to edit MacNelly is *not* to edit MacNelly,” which, duh, is how we all thought our editors should edit us. Then he pissed everyone off by repeating the thing about there being only five or six good cartoonists.

That’s why I drew him with pens stuck in his shield. The guys gave him a pretty good grilling, but I just drew. (It had only been a year since I’d resigned from *The Greenville News*, and I was feeling a bit shaky.)

But I was among friends at these conventions. People who had the same problems, who felt the same fears, who shared the same work. I had known this ever since my first AAEC convention, back in 1976. At the final banquet, I experienced one of those Perfect Moments of communication for which all artists strive. We convention-goers were seated in a large banquet room filled with about twenty round tables and a head table. Five or six cartoonists and their wives sat around each of the smaller tables. At the head table were the AAEC officers, guest speakers, their wives, and the keynote speaker for the evening. In those days, everyone wore evening dress to the final banquet. It was a highly dignified, black-tie occasion.

Then—as the less-than-dynamic keynote speaker, Ralph Nader (who read his speech from a yellow legal pad), began to get a little boring and long-winded—a vague rustling spread ominously through the audience. Suddenly, the occupants of one table collapsed in laughter, everyone shushing everyone else. Papers were surreptitiously gathered and passed to another table from which snickers of suppressed laughter could be heard. Everyone seemed to be drawing! Hunched over sketchbooks, envelopes, paper napkins, tablecloths, and anything else they could find, these professional cartoonists were doing what, to them, came naturally. Pens scratching and flying, they were drawing unflattering cartoons of a person who was preaching, lecturing, and talking down to them. The only other experience I’d had with this sort of phenomenon was in detention hall back in high school.

Girls had been in the minority there, too.

We fell into spasms of laughter as we passed cartoons and sketches around our table. We showed our creations to other tables and got to see their stuff in return. There was one cartoon of Nader talking to a roomful of skeletons covered in cobwebs; one of Nader nude; one of Nader speaking to a roomful of snores; and countless other wonderful caricatures.

I kept waiting for Nader to call us to the front of the room to “share with the rest of the



*James Squires*

class” just what it was those of us in the back found so funny. But, luckily for us all, Ralph Nader gives a speech with his head buried doggedly in his legal-pad notes, so he didn’t see a whole lot of what was going on.

It came to me then that the fact that female cartoonists are rare was irrelevant in the end to my being a political cartoonist. What is finally relevant is the fact that what I have in common with the men—and they with me—is more fundamental than the shapes of our bodies.



*By the 1984 Oklahoma City convention, the number of women members of the AAEC was approaching half a dozen. Pictured (left to right) are me, Etta Hulme, Sue Dewar, Signe Wilkinson, and M. G. Lord.*

What we have in common is that we have paid the same dues. Our lives have been marked by the same struggles with Authority. As the kids with “bad attitudes,” we have suffered repeated Official Reprimand. We have humiliated and embarrassed our loved ones. We have poked holes in the fabric of convention for no better reason than to expose it for our own amusement. Our subversive antics on solemn occasions have courted public disgrace.

As we grow older, we are no more inclined to heed the call for decorum or to retreat from the threat of Official Disapproval than we were at the age of fifteen.

“So this is it,” I smiled to myself. “This is where all the class clowns in America end up!” A warm, secure feeling of kinship settled on my heart.

I was home at last. These rowdy people being shushed by their wives were my brothers.







*Me by my friend Roger Harvell, who is the current Greenville News editorial page cartoonist.*

## Nine

### *"What Kind of Pen Do You Use?"*

The tools of the cartoonist's trade have changed dramatically over the years—though never so much as in the past decade or so. We older cartoonists pursued what seemed an impossible dream for many years. We longed for the perfect tool, technique, or combination thereof that would give us:

- 1) Mobility—to be able to draw anywhere, at any time.
- 2) Speed—to meet deadlines.
- 3) Convenience—no messy brushes, bottles of indelible india ink, or pens to haul around.
- 4) The Right Touch—the drawing tool had to “feel” right. Some of us are painterly artists, some are line artists; some of us produce loose sketches and drawings, while others prefer a more tightly controlled, “finished” look.
- 5) Quick and easy delivery—getting original artwork to an art department on time usually meant working in the office, but the nature of the job sometimes made it difficult to keep normal office hours. Even if we were on location at a news event, such as a political party convention or a bowl game involving a local college team, we still needed to be able to transport sketches to the newspaper as quickly as possible.

- 6) Reproduction value—the cartoon had to look good when printed.

There were no perfect solutions then, and the tools we used varied widely. Especially before computers, the drawing implements and methods we used to create our cartoons were so personal, of such immense variety, and so critical to our jobs that “What kind of pen do you use?” became a ritual question we cartoonists posed to one another regularly in our quest for cartooning enlightenment. If we admired someone's work, we naturally wanted to incorporate its admirable qualities—its rough style or smooth elegance—into our own. Cartoonists' conventions were yearly show-and-tell sessions: every one of us had his or her favorite drawing implement, but no one had the *perfect* drawing implement. Personally, I've always preferred doing my art in pencil, but pencil lines were not black enough or thick enough to reproduce properly back then. There were many different kinds of pens—as well as other tools—but each had its own limitations. We all longed for *the* Perfect Solution—the tool, medium, or technique that would end our search forever.

Our work combined the problems of graphic artists and columnists—a weird hybrid. Those daily deadlines required speed, and the limitations of newsprint reproduction at that time dictated that we work—for the most part—in black-and-white.

Even today, some cartoonists still use india ink and drawing pens with removable and interchangeable steel nibs. The artist can produce broad or fine lines with the same implement simply by changing the pressure or angle of the pen—which sounds easy, but it isn't. Working with india ink, of course, has its own disadvantages. It isn't very portable, and you're always having to worry about knocking ink jars over. India ink is very black—and indelible. Once you spill a drop of it on an article of clothing, that garment is ruined. We artists got into the habit of wearing cheap or old clothing almost all the time—which was probably not good for our status as pro-



For this cartoon (which I drew in 1980), I used a watercolor brush dipped in india ink.

They laid down a solid, heavy black line that covered well; they were more portable than india ink or the special, hard-to-find varieties of paper we sometimes used to enhance our cartoons (more on those later); and they came in a variety of sizes. There was one problem with them, though—and it was insurmountable. They bled through “Liquid Paper” or whatever other correction material we used, no matter how many layers we used. That was the kiss of death for the permanent felt-tip marker, because there is not a cartoonist in the world who doesn’t make mistakes. In fact, if you have bought an “original” cartoon from the 1940s through the 1980s and it is *not* covered in correction fluid and/or blue pencil markings, you may want to have it checked out. (Though some cartoonists did transfer their preliminary drawings to art paper by tracing them using a light table.)

Many cartoonists have tried—and some have discarded—engineering pens. The only ones available to me were called Rapidographs, and most cartoonists of my generation have probably used them at one time or another. The points of these pens are hollow tubes. A thin wire inside the tube delivers that very black india ink—but you have to be careful. Some of those pen points are very fine, and it’s easy to stab yourself, leaving a small black mark that will be with you forever. I don’t know why it never occurred to me to actually give myself a real tattoo—a discrete butterfly or something somewhere. But tattoos weren’t popular then, except for WWII navy veterans and prisoners who tattooed their knuckles. Also, those things *hurt*.



I used an engineering pen for this 1981 cartoon about the sad state of air traffic control at our nation’s airports.

professionals in the office, but most of us were not paid enough to keep replacing our wardrobes. (It still pains me to buy clothes anywhere except large discount chains that keep their prices down by using child labor in foreign countries. I’m trying to break that habit.)

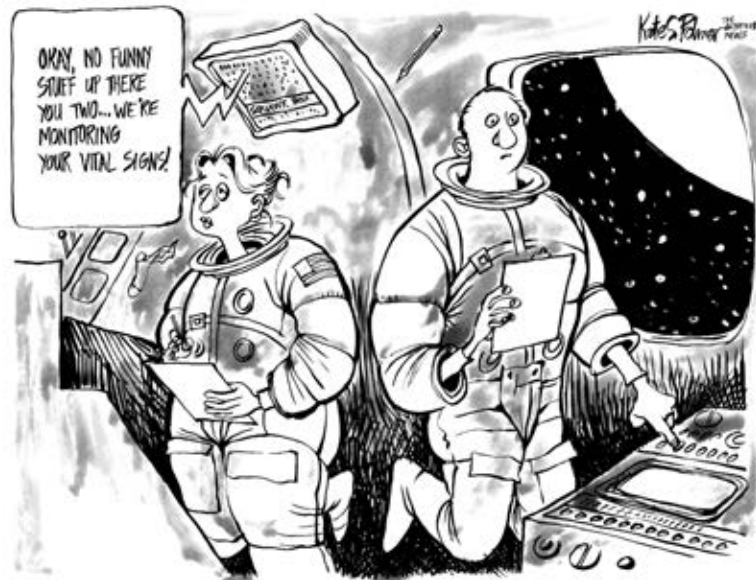
Improvements in newsprint reproduction capabilities in the 1960s, ’70s, and ’80s gave cartoonists greater freedom to experiment with materials. Some still used the older methods, as I mentioned—but with a lighter touch.

Tools like felt-tip markers looked promising for a while.

Engineering pens come with a variety of nib (or point) sizes, and an entire set is very expensive. They store the india ink (which is too thick and too fast-drying to be used in regular or fountain pens) in refillable reservoirs, so you don't have to keep dipping them. This makes them more portable than old-style drawing pens or brushes, which require frequent dipping. Engineering pens can be used on practically any type of paper, but the drawback is that the lines they make are too uniform. To achieve any variety in the width of the lines, one must either thicken thin lines by tracing over them repeatedly, or else change nibs a lot. The most frustrating thing about engineering pens is that they must be babied if they are to continue working properly. Engineering pens that are not cleaned regularly and stored carefully soon require a lot of shaking and cursing before they'll deliver ink—and then it's likely to be a great glob of black just on the most delicate area of the drawing.

One new tool that was all the rage at one cartoonist's convention was the sponge-tip brush-marker. The ink is black enough (for a while), and it acts enough like a brush to satisfy those of us who value portability over style. But I've had a hard time finding them, and the ink doesn't flow thickly for long enough. The lines soon become an unsatisfactory gray as you use the pen. It takes two or three of these brush-marker pens for one large cartoon. If you work smaller, you might be able to get three or four cartoons out of one pen—if you remember to recap it tightly each time you use it.

Patterns of lines or dots were the closest we could come to achieving shades of gray. In order to avoid the tedious process of crosshatching or stippling in shadows and subtle contrasts by hand, we often reached for various shortcut solutions. Many cartoonists became addicted to Grafix paper, a unique product that—I am not kidding—can only be found in Cleveland, Ohio. Once the cartoonist has drawn and inked his cartoon on the Grafix paper and erased any pencil marks, he uses a watercolor brush to apply a clear liquid developer (which comes with the paper) to the areas where gray is needed. Like magic, a textured pattern appears. The pattern may consist of fine lines, heavy lines, crisscrossing (or crosshatched) lines, or speckles, depending on what type of Grafix paper the cartoonist has ordered from the company. If used correctly (and blotted carefully), the paper does a nice job of approximating gray or shadows. I never could get the hang of it, though. I always used too much developer—and then forgot to blot it, so my originals wound up all dark brown and messy.



*An example of the Grafix paper effect, circa 1977.  
(I did the line art with a watercolor brush dipped in india ink.)*

Just recently, our cartoonists' online forum went berserk when they discovered that the company in Ohio was going to stop producing Grafix paper. One cartoonist actually called the company to make sure. They told him that the press they'd been using to produce the paper was so old and worn out that it couldn't be fixed. Cartoonists all over the country are now busily hoarding the stuff. (Well, those who still have *jobs* are hoarding it.) That led other cartoonists to reminisce about the old days of Zipatone, Amberlith, and Rubylith.

Amberlith, Rubylith, and Zipatone are the trade names for overlays we sometimes used instead of Grafix paper to create grays or solid areas in our cartoons. These overlays consist of two layers. The first layer is a thick, clear sheet of acetate. That is covered by a thin, self-stick second layer of cellophane imprinted with patterns of lines or dots—or, in the case of Amberlith and Rubylith, solid color. Though really intended for use in schematic drawings, the overlays worked for cartoons too—but the work was tedious. First, the cartoonist had to *very carefully* line up register marks on the overlay with corresponding marks on the cartoon. If the marks didn't line up exactly, the pattern would appear in the wrong place. Then—after carefully taping everything down—the cartoonist, with a sharp blade and a steady hand, cut through the *top layer only*, peeling it away wherever no pattern was needed. When the cartoon was printed, the pattern would appear only in strategic areas. Many cartoonists and graphic artists used overlays—and many of us have suffered repeated accidental stab-wounds from the sharp, pointed X-acto blades we used. Rapidograph tattoos and X-acto scars: we old-timers wear them proudly.

Still, we had it a whole lot easier than nineteenth-century cartoonists like Thomas Nast, who had to draw their work backwards on a block of wood, then get an engraver to carve it out. Some artists doubled as their own engravers. Typesetters had to assemble individual book and newspaper pages by hand, arranging the text around engraved image blocks using lead slugs stamped with letters, numbers, and punctuation. By the summer of 1965, when I worked my first newspaper job as a proofreader for Orangeburg's *Times and Democrat*, the printing process had become both faster and more efficient. Machines did the most tedious typesetting work, and art reproduction capabilities had improved dramatically. I worked odd hours—from 7 p.m. to 3 a.m. One of the teachers from my high school had a second job there, and he drove me home after work. I don't think Mama would have let me work those hours if he hadn't been there. As for me, it was nice to know he was out front in the newsroom. I worked in the back, where they composed the pages and where the big printing press turned huge rolls of newsprint into newspapers. I loved to watch the photographs come rolling in from the wire services on a machine that turned smooth metal plates into photos just by carving parallel lines. In the darker areas of the photos, the lines were thick, while the lighter parts were made up of thinner lines; there was very little, if any, solid black. The end product was a machine-carved engraving of a photograph that then went to the page composer, who fitted it in among the metal letters that made the words.

*The Times and Democrat* had two wire service machines—AP and UPI, I think—which clattered to life whenever a statewide, national, or international story came in. Those machines spewed out an inch-wide yellow tape dotted with an indecipherable pattern of perforated holes. The editors were somehow able to read the holes, moving the tape through their fingers as they studied the contents. When they found a story they wanted to use, they took that tape to a linotype machine operator in the composing room (where I worked). The operator then fed it into the machine. Somehow, the holes in the tape instructed that machine to produce the necessary letters and characters for the story from molten lead supplied by the linotype operator. With much noise and commotion—and faster than the eye could follow—the machine spelled out the story in lead slugs, which it lined up in sequence on a metal tray. The linotype operator then took the tray of words over to the guy who composed the pages. The composer put the page together—words, pictures, everything. And every bit of it was metal, a mirror image of the printed

page: the composer had to be able to read backwards.

Once the composer had completed the page to his satisfaction, it was inked, and a copy was made for me to proofread. I liked to read, but I was a lousy proofreader. Nothing ever looks wrong to a person who cannot spell. (Lucky for me, they didn't realize how truly incompetent I was until it was time for me to get back to school anyway.) But once I had given my OK, the composed page went into the pressroom. After the metal image of the page had been used, the slugs that made up the words were dumped back into a washing-machine-sized vat of burping molten lead to be turned into silver lava, ready for another page. My desk was located right between the vat of molten lead and the huge open doorway that led to the pressroom. The three or four linotype machines behind me made a deafening racket that, combined with the din of that press when they cranked it up, created a not-unpleasant hypnotic cacophony.

In the decade between the mid-1960s and the mid-1970s, printing methods changed drastically. When I started working at *The Greenville News* in 1975, the paper had just switched over to photoengraving and offset printing. The new photoengraving process, in which an image was chemically etched into a metal plate (as opposed to being carved into the surface), was far superior to previous engraving techniques and could produce images of greater detail and quality than ever before. Cartoonists went nuts. Suddenly, we could cram our cartoons full of all kinds of detail using finer brush or pen lines—and it would all reproduce! Sometimes our cartoons were *too* full of detail, and our editors had to rein us in. But our art did take on more personality because we were free to use a greater variety of drawing tools.

Before the advent of the dry paper copier, however, many cartoonists were at the mercy of the folks in the engraving room for extra copies of their cartoons. These copies were called “Velox prints” or “Veloxes.” The engravers at our paper, who were perpetually engaged in labor disputes with the management (South Carolina has never been friendly to unions of any kind), liked to demonstrate their indispensability by making it almost impossible to obtain their services. My editors informed me that I was “management”—even if I didn't want to be—and refused to let me talk to the engravers. Surly and suspicious, the engravers grouched about the extra work and questioned every request for Veloxes of my cartoons. It was enough of a hassle just to get extras for my own records, let alone fulfill the requests for reprints that trickled in every now and then, or for copies to enter into awards competitions.

The day I discovered a large, new dry paper copier in our executive offices marks a huge milestone in my cartooning career. I still remember staring in wonder at the perfect reproduction of my art—on regular, normal paper! Suddenly, I could get good, clear, black-and-white copies of each cartoon—and I could have as many as fifteen if I wanted! (I was afraid to ask for more—I didn't want to be noticed by someone who would not approve of my use of the machine in the Multimedia Executive offices, and I didn't want to get the person who had introduced me to the copier in trouble.) Finally, I was able to send work to syndicates for their consideration. When the Field Newspaper Syndicate (now North America Syndicate, unless they've changed the name again) began to distribute my cartoons in 1980, I simply mailed my cartoon each day to California. My work had been syndicated for nearly four years by the time I resigned from *The Greenville News*, and I still had syndicate obligations to fulfill, so Jim and I bought a dry paper copier for our home. It cost as much as a small car and we had to endure three years of payments, but it kept me in business.

I have always been impatient for technology to catch up with me, probably because I don't like to spend much time on one piece of art. I like to do the work, finish it quickly, see it reproduced to my satisfaction, and start on another right away. (Oddly, in between the time I handed the art over to the editorial assistant in Greenville and the time I pulled into my driveway at home, I would completely forget that day's cartoon. Jim would ask, but I could never remember. This

amnesia would last until I saw it the next morning in the paper. Other cartoonists have said that the same thing happens to them.) Until modern computers and the Internet came along, I hated almost everything I produced. I was either dissatisfied with the drawing, disdainful of my weak attempt at an opinion, or disappointed at the poor reproduction.

Only in the past five years—long after I began working on this book—has publishing “gone digital” in a big way. Advances in computer hardware and software and the ease of access to the Internet have given cartoonists more effective ways to produce and deliver our art. We can literally draw our cartoons with the computer now—or draw on paper in any medium, in any color, and scan our drawings into the computer. We can make corrections and adjust the scanned art to be as dark or as light as we want; we can even add or remove color as we please, producing a full-color, monochrome, grayscale, or plain black-and-white image—all from the same sketch. A growing number of cartoonists no longer even produce originals. Everything is digital. This does not mean, of course, that computer cartoons all look alike. The results are as varied as they ever were—even more so, I believe, now that there are more choices.

Today’s large external hard drives, DVD recorders, and various other electronic storage media make it possible to store almost limitless quantities of the art we create digitally, and we can now deliver our art to clients almost instantaneously via e-mail or websites. Getting artwork done and ready to print is easier today than ever before—and printing technologies have improved, too. Today’s printers are very fast and accurate and can reproduce thousands of gray tones and colors. Even with all these improvements, though, art is still reproduced using dots—only now the dots are called pixels.

At today’s conventions, we are more likely to pester each other with such questions as: “What software do you use?” “Do you have a Mac or a PC?” “Do you have a pen tablet?” “What size tablet should I get?” “What format do you use to save your work—TIFF? JPEG? Bitmap? Photoshop?” “Do you scan at 300 or 600 dpi? How about 1200?” “What sort of data storage do you use—DVD disks? An external hard drive? A web site?” “How can I preserve the darkest, crispest lines?” “What are your thoughts on grayscale? What about color?” “What kind of compression do you use for emailing pictures, and what is the best way to get my high-resolution files to customers?”

And . . . “What kind of pen do you use?”

# Ten

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## The Cartoons



JUST WHEN YOU THOUGHT  
IT WAS SAFE TO GO BACK  
INTO POLITICS...



|                |     |
|----------------|-----|
| National ..... | 81  |
| State .....    | 133 |



To a cartoonist, the daily news is unsurpassed as an action-packed continuing story of power, greed, corruption, passion, lust, and wild adventure. *Desperate Housewives*, *Days of Our Lives*, all those TV reality shows, and those HBO special series on crime and sex seem tame by comparison. Politicians and TV pundits are the stars of this real-life comedy-drama, and the political cartoonist is a devoted constant observer.

Familiarity breeds commentary. Instead of “When will they find out who the baby’s father is?” or “Why do I watch *Survivor*, and who will be kicked off the island next?” we ask questions like “How long can the Republicans (or the Democrats) pretend the president is in charge?”; “Why does the stock market always soar when jobless rates are high and take a dive when there’s good news about the economy?” and “If Condoleeza Rice and Hillary Clinton got into a fistfight, who would win?”

The story unfolds in newspapers, magazines, journals, books, and—more immediately—on television and online. Editorial cartoonists as a rule are more likely than their editors to watch the news on TV. The other media may offer more comprehensive coverage; but television, in addition to its ability to deliver stories almost

instantaneously, revealed Jimmy Carter’s famous smile to be a sort of tic and Ronald Reagan’s characteristic “head bob” to herald a run of rhetorical excess. Today, it reveals that

George W. Bush is a nervous giggler and a “grabber”—that is, he manhandles almost everyone he talks to, even if it’s only writer

Calvin Trillin; that Bob and Elizabeth Dole have both had face-lifts; that Al Gore looks stiffer than he probably is in person, given that he was a reporter for *The Nashville Tennessean* for several years—and has allegedly inhaled his share of a certain illegal weed; that the essence of Ross Perot’s mania is in his eyes; and that Bill Clinton’s allergies can make him look like W. C. Fields. Furthermore, when it comes to legs (and it always does, doesn’t it?), George and Barbara Bush beat Bill and Hillary Clinton.

Much of what we see on the daily news makes us cartoonists angry—just like anyone else. But we are lucky enough to have an outlet for it. As “Sigmund,” the psychiatrist on the TV show *M\*A\*S\*H*, once observed, “If anger turned inward is depression, then anger turned sideways is Hawkeye.” We could get angry and yell at the TV screen, but we get angry and draw cartoons instead: anger turned sideways.

Once the editorial cartoonist has formed an opinion, she must find an effective way to communicate it visually. Accomplishing this feat requires more than just a knack with a pen. The cartoonist must call forth everything she’s ever read in her entire life, from Shakespeare to the backs of cereal boxes; everything she’s ever seen; every conversation she’s ever had; every song she’s ever heard—until she hits upon a connection that resonates. These things—all the accumulated experiences of her life—are the raw materials that go into the cartoon machine. Sometimes they’re not enough.

Sometimes they’re too much.





*The changing hairstyles of Hillary Clinton, 1994-2000.*

Some days, brilliant ideas bubble to the surface, where the alert cartoonist snatches them up before they can sink back into the murky depths. Cartoonists with daily deadlines must grab what they can as it appears. They don't have the luxury of discarding the mediocre in favor of some wonderful idea that might not come in time to meet deadlines. On a really great day, the fabulous visual image that percolates out of the cartoonist's subconscious is wed to fingers that draw like magic. Those are special days, usually taken for granted because the cartoonist believes it should always be so easy. More often, the psyche offers up a great idea—only to see it butchered by a cartoonist whose drawing mechanism is temporarily out of whack. Or maybe the fingers are gassed up and ready—but the brain is asleep at the wheel. On such days, the cartoonist is inclined to fits of artistic wallowing. She's convinced that other cartoonists don't suffer the way she does . . . that they do their work effortlessly, and if she were smarter or more talented, it would be that easy for her, too.

In other words, as they say in the song, "Some days are diamond, some days are stone."

The cartoons in this book are arranged more or less chronologically by year. They span the years 1975 through 2005. Grouping them by subject matter would have been interesting, but I was more attracted to the idea of establishing a timeline of events. Arranging the cartoons by year also allows the reader to see the evolution of my artistic style, revealing the influences of other artists and the various affects of different drawing implements. I have tried to arrange the cartoons by subject within years, however; so, for example, if I have three good cartoons about the 1984 presidential campaign, I'll group them together even though they ran at different times of the year.

You will notice that the cartoons covering state and local issues have their own subsection immediately following the national cartoons. The division is not always strict, because local and national issues often overlap—when national campaigns roll through the state, for example, or

when our senators and representatives take a stand on major issues or “bring home the bacon” from Washington. But I have tried to call the shots as I see them. I have also included a number of cartoons about Clemson University and the University of South Carolina. Since I graduated from USC but live in Clemson, I believe I have a unique perspective on the fierce rivalry between the two large universities in South Carolina. For most people in the state, the main issue is football, even though the two schools are no longer in the same athletic conference (USC left the AAC in a snit years ago and joined the SEC—a move which they probably regret deeply). But the rivalry extends beyond sports into state politics, affecting funding for new academic buildings, research centers, and outreach programs.

The early cartoons are those I did while working part-time at *The Greenville News*; the majority are those I did while employed full-time at the *News*, while the most recent ones are those I did just for fun or for the T-shirts I give to my friends and family every Christmas—whether they like them or not.



*The artist at her desk at The Greenville News in 1982.*



President Ford appoints former child star Shirley Temple Black "Chief of Protocol"; this cartoon prompted an angry letter-writer to call me a "male chauvinist pig" in a letter to the editor. I was still new to the job. . . .

1976

Carter swamps opposition (Udall and Wallace) in the Democratic primaries.



Ford faced a tough challenge from Ronald Reagan for the GOP nomination.



1976



By August of '76, Ford's campaign was running out of funds. . . .

Carter had some difficulty adjusting to the challenges of national government. . . .



1977

Senators Jesse Helms and Strom Thurmond led the charge against efforts to return the Panama Canal to Panama.





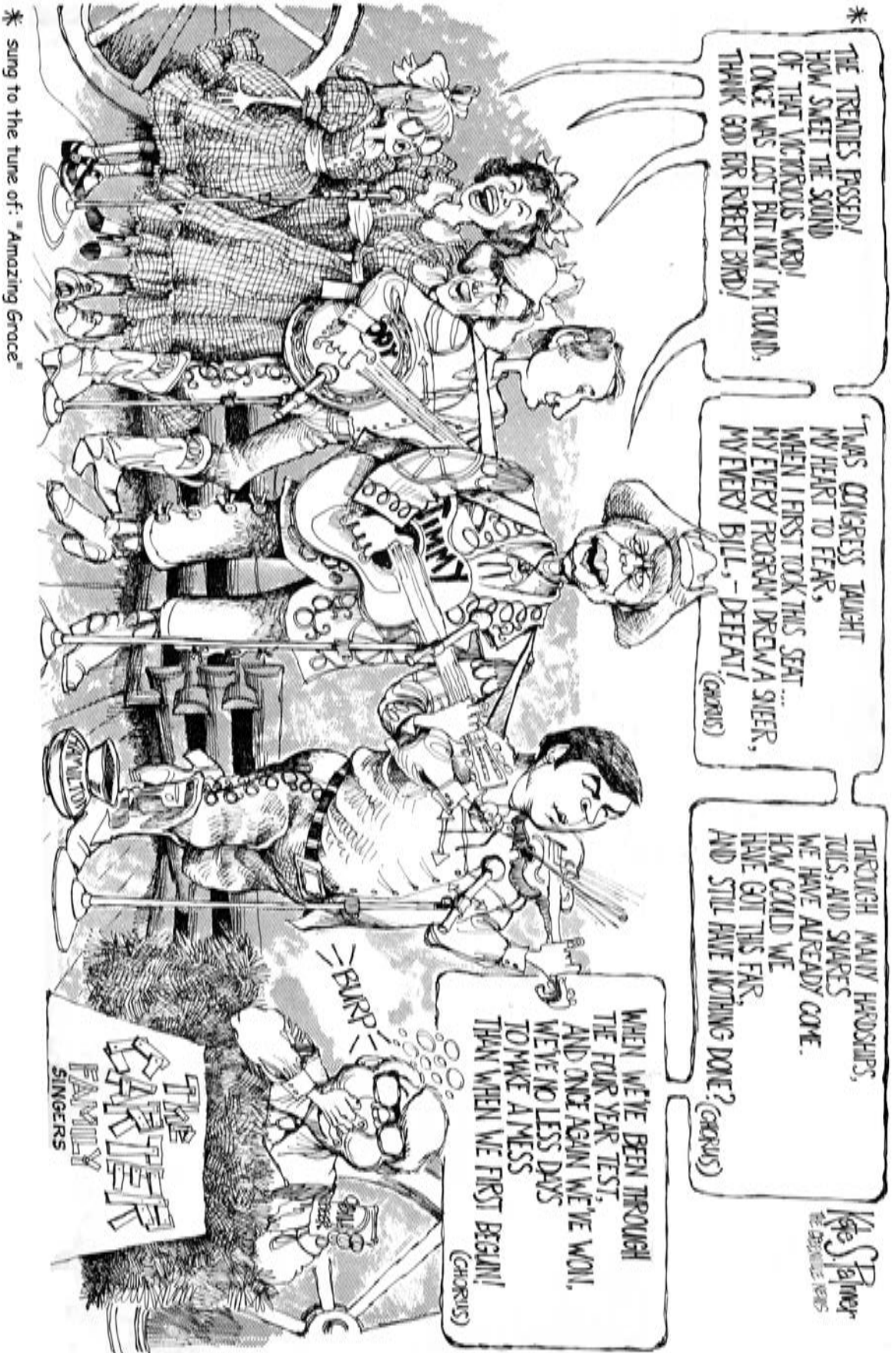
Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev didn't like President Carter's emphasis on human rights in dealings with the USSR.

1977

1978

Carter got big-time credit for the success of the Camp David Summit.





\* sung to the tune of: "Amazing Grace"

Almost halfway through his presidency, Carter was finally able to tuck a major accomplishment under his belt: passage of the Panama Canal Treaty.



Carter's anti-inflationary plan: Ralph Nader hated it . . .



1978



. . . and labor leader George Meany wasn't crazy about it, either.



President Carter had piously urged White House staffers to stop “living in sin.” I pictured him preaching a similar doctrine of self-denial to big-spending government agencies.

1978

1979

In the late 1970s, U.S. oil consumption rates sped unchecked down a dead-end street.



Kate S. Palmer  
THE GREENVILLE NEWS



Chrysler threatened to go belly-up and raise a big stink; President Carter and the taxpayers saved the company from bankruptcy.

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1979

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In 1979, the powers that were took bold steps to advance gender equality. . . .





In the shortage-ridden '70s, the oil companies used the slightest hint of a “slowdown in supply” to justify more drilling—even in environmentally sensitive areas. The public poo-pooed a *real* shortage.

1979



\*SUNG TO THE TUNE OF:  
"YOU CANT GIT A  
MAN WITH A GUN"



After the departure of the Shah of Iran in early '79, Ayatollah Khomeini closed the Israeli embassy in Tehran, then turned it over to Yassir Arafat and the PLO. The takeover of this embassy, plus the seizure of the U.S. embassy later that year, gave enemies of the U.S. and Israel access to very sensitive material.

1979



Andrew Young, Carter's UN ambassador, was fired after lying about a forbidden meeting with the PLO.

November 1979: when a group of Iranian militants took hostages at the U.S. embassy in Tehran, the State Department found it difficult to understand the situation—except via press reports.



1979

The hostage-takers claimed to be “students.”



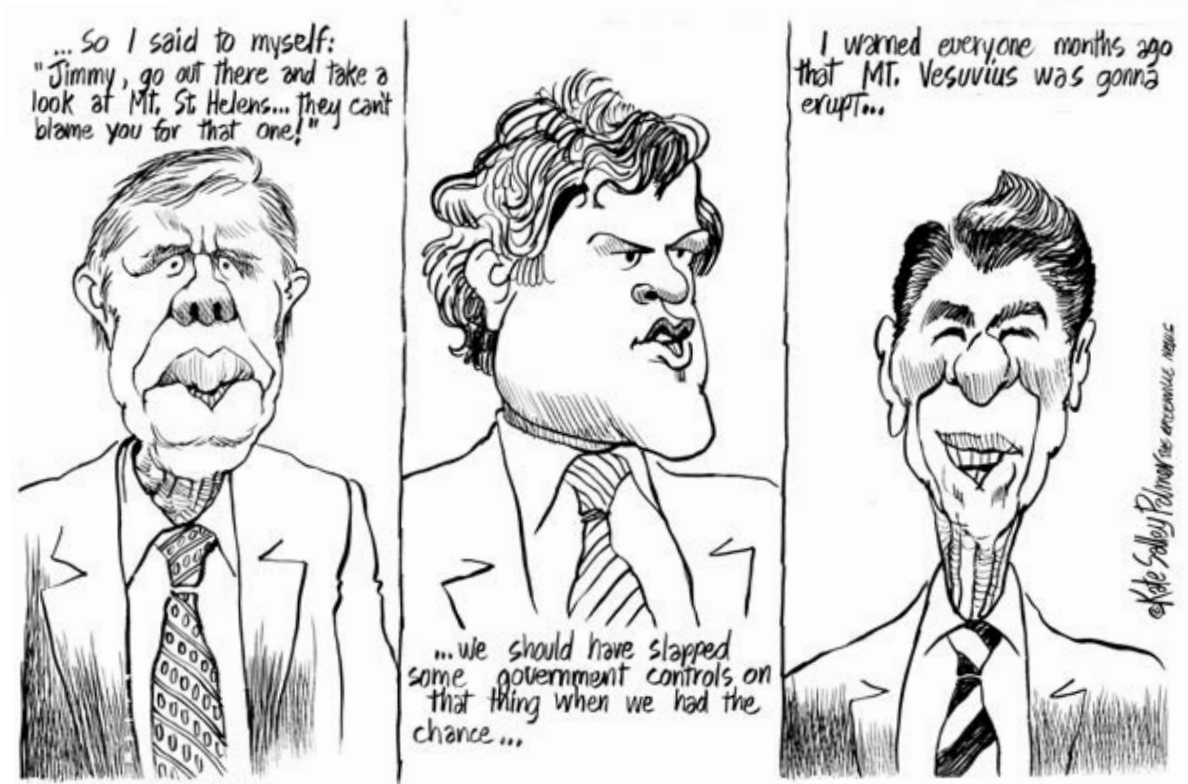
Many overprivileged women feared the Equal Rights Amendment; they foresaw forced military service, being thrust into the work force, and having to use the same bathrooms as men.



1980

In 1980, the attempt by the wealthy Hunt brothers of Texas to corner the silver market backfired when the price of that commodity fell.

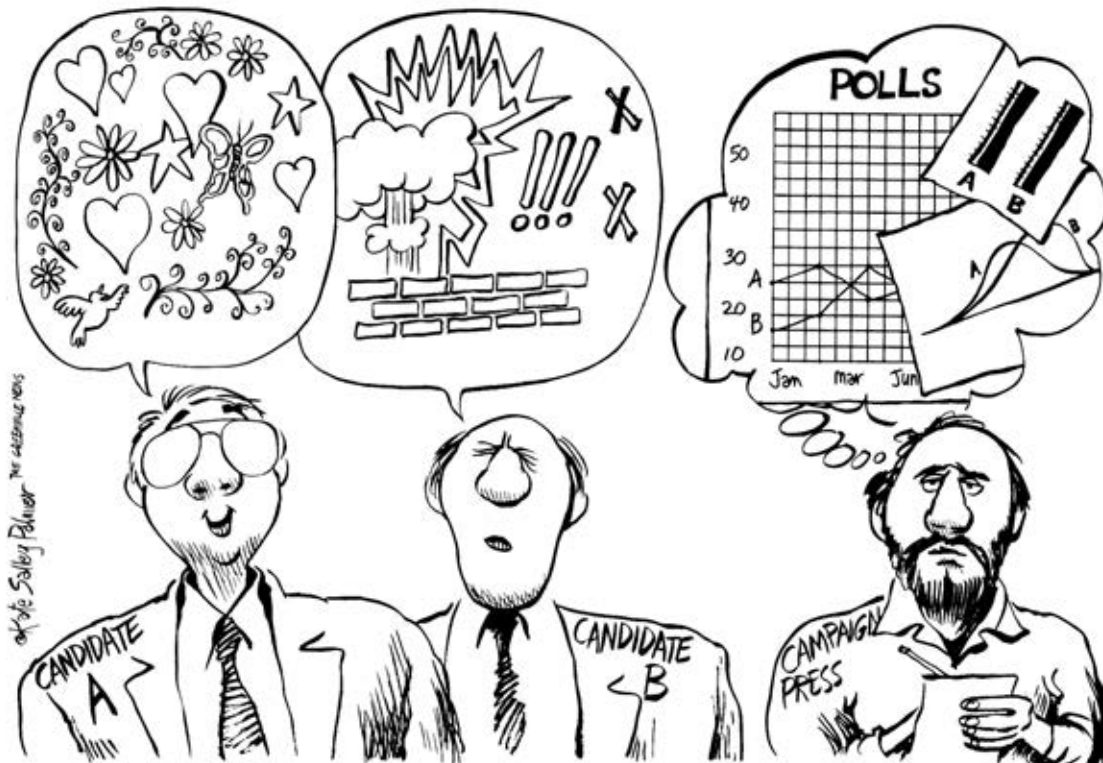




In a campaign year, candidates will try to milk almost any event for political advantage. . . .

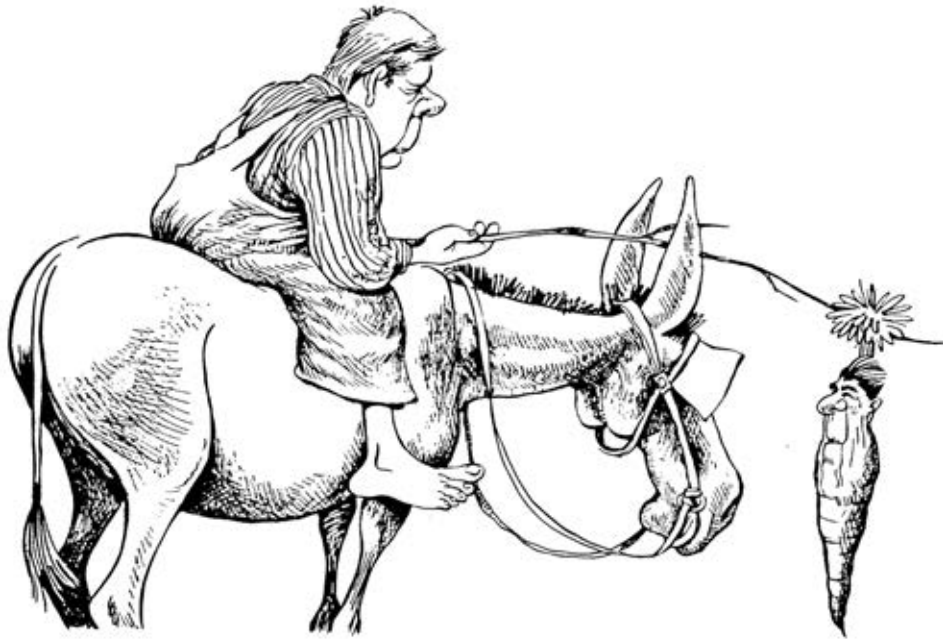
1980

. . . While the national media often seem more interested in handicapping the horse race than in analyzing candidates' viewpoints.





Kate Soley Palmer ©1980 THE GREENHILL NEWS



With his poll numbers down and the election quickly approaching, Carter tried two strategies: (a) lure Democratic voters with dread of the alternative, and . . .

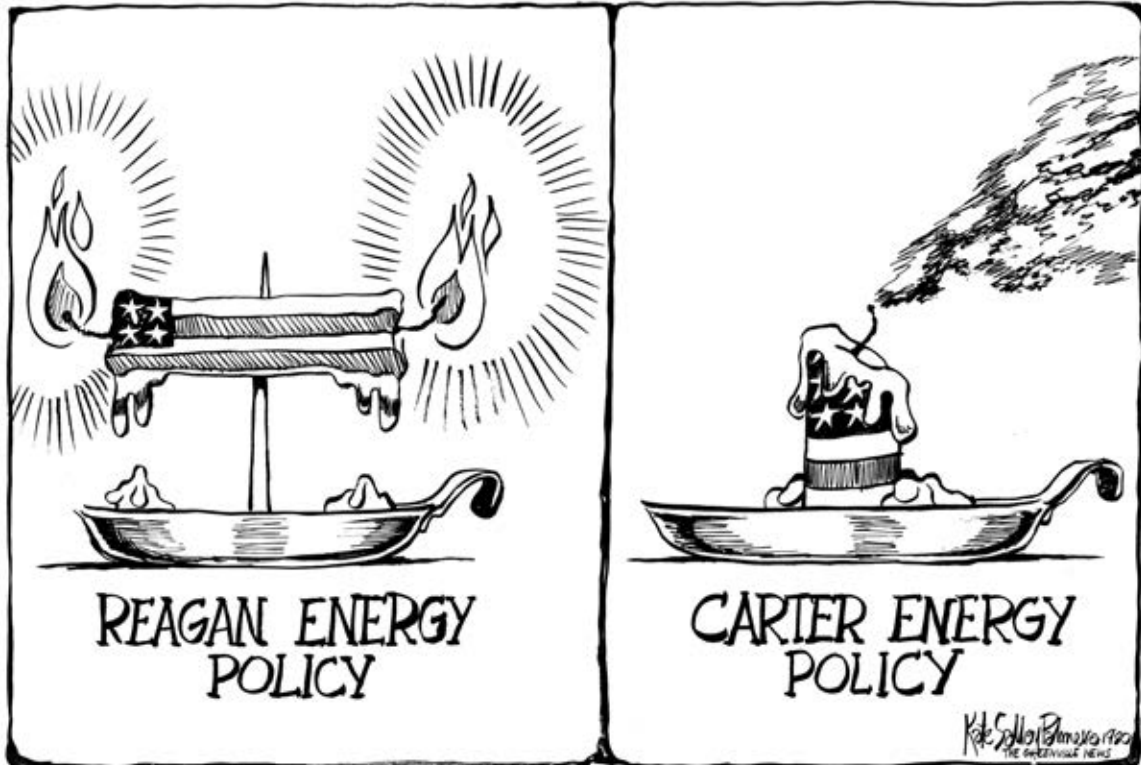
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1980

. . . (b) “act presidential.”



Kate Soley Palmer ©1980 THE GREENHILL NEWS



It became obvious during the 1980 presidential campaign that the candidates' energy policies differed radically.

1980

Third-party candidate John Anderson drew votes away from Carter in the 1980 election.



President Reagan rode into office with promises to fix the budget by controlling “waste, fraud, and mismanagement.”



1980

1981

Reagan's election made entitlement programs nervous. They saw themselves as targets for elimination.





Newly elected President Reagan seemed to spend a lot of time at his ranch in California . . .

1981

. . . leading some to question the depth of his involvement in his own administration.



The president talked tough when it came to weapons, and he never met a piece of military hardware he didn't like . . .



1981

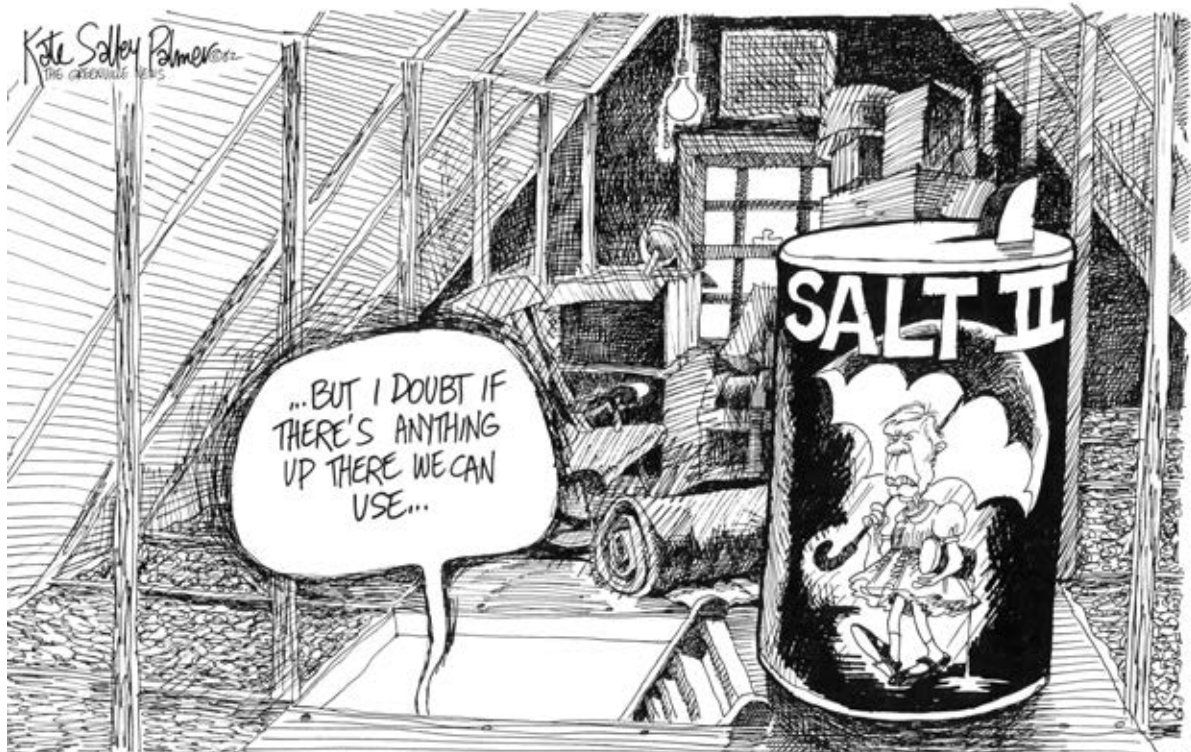
. . . but persuading other NATO countries to follow his lead proved to be a bit like herding cats.





The Cold War in a nutshell: two grumpy old men, too stubborn to speak to one another, hunkered down collecting bombs.

1982



The Reagan administration rejected practically all of Carter's agreements with the Soviet Union—including the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks.

The Reaganomics Recession seemed to dismantle FDR's New Deal. (This cartoon was rejected and did not run in *The Greenville News*. It ran in syndication.)



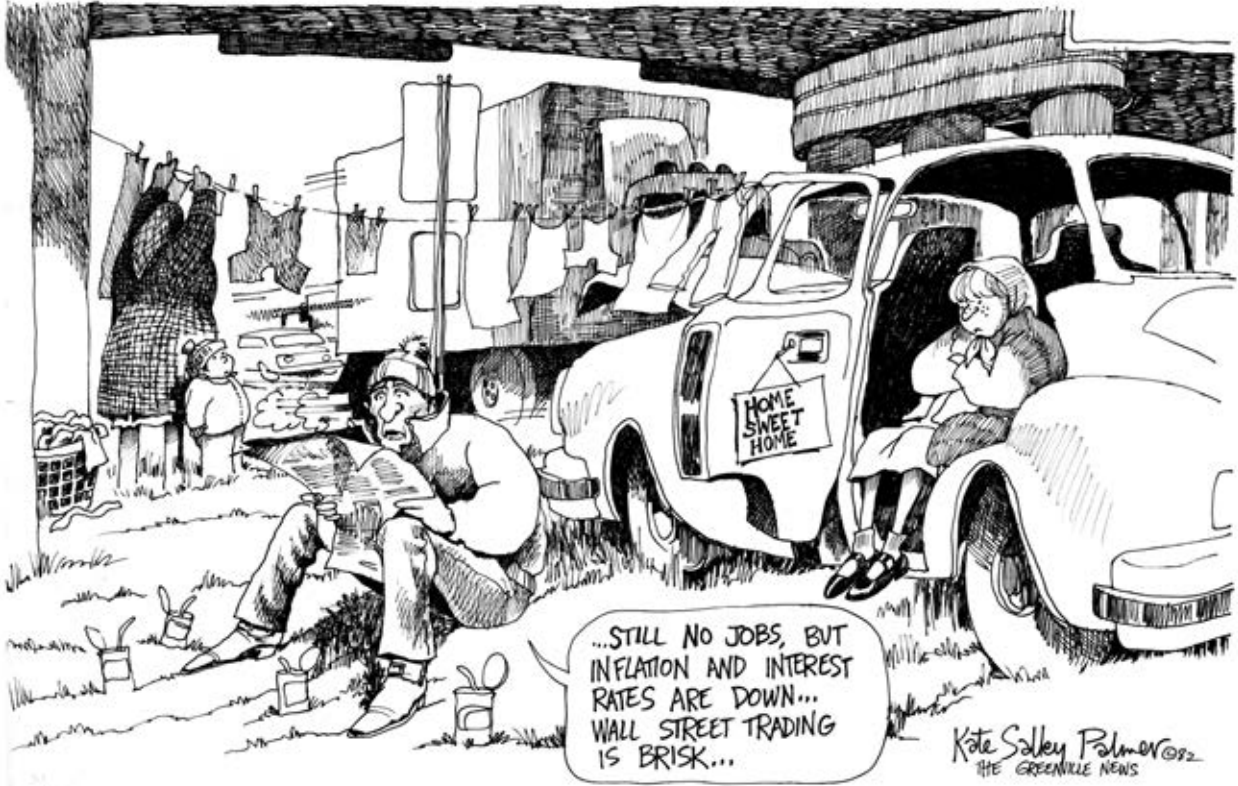

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 1982
 

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But just when it seemed that the Social Security trust fund would suffer from the effects of Reaganomics—Fed chief Alan Greenspan worked his magic!





The government didn't seem to care about those not invested in the stock market . . .

1982

. . . for whom the oft-forecast "recovery" never seemed to materialize.







Republican Jeremiah Denton led the fight in the Senate to adopt a “squeal rule” for public health clinics. Any young person requesting birth control would need parental consent.

1982



Days before July 4, 1982, the deadline for ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment expired. The amendment has been re-introduced into Congress every year since then, without success.



Senator Jesse Helms tried to keep the public focused on the “New Right” social agenda, but people kept getting distracted by the high unemployment rate.

1982

The “New Right Agenda” included putting prayer into public schools—but it’d be “voluntary.”





Reagan's first speech to the UN paid lip service to the goals of that organization, but he couldn't help showing his true feelings.

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1982



The U.S. and the Soviet Union participated "remotely" in England's war with Argentina over the Falkland Islands, sharing intelligence, satellite info, and other information with one party or the other.



Reagan tried to allay the military's defense-cut fears. . . .

1982

Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin destroyed pesky Palestinian enclaves in Lebanon to eliminate terrorists who lived there. He may have overdone it. This action had disastrous consequences.





The president asked taxpayers for money to bring order, stability, and democracy to the troubled nation of El Salvador. His plans on that score were long on rhetoric but short on specifics.

1983



Faced with criticism over the deficit, Reagan tried to shift the blame. . . .



There was a *huge* gender gap between Republicans and Democrats in the early '80s

1983





The 1984 presidential race saw Democrats savaging one another. Not a dart landed on Reagan.

1984



The theme of the '84 Democratic National Convention was "UNITY." Former President Carter was not encouraged to make an appearance.



In the 1984 presidential race, President Reagan was the clear favorite from day one. . . .

1984

The 1984 GOP convention proved to be a celebration of party policies by those who benefitted from them.







1984

The United States allied itself with some pretty unsavory characters in its efforts to halt the spread of Communism.





(Top and bottom) The administration fell in love with the idea of a so-called “Star Wars” space-based missile defense system.

1984





Canadians accused U.S. industries of causing a new kind of pollution: acid rain.

1984

Kate Solley Palmer ©84  
NEWS GROUP CHICAGO, INC.  
Field Newspaper Syndicate



The Pentagon and *The New York Times* editorial page harped on the Soviets for using “yellow rain,” a nasty form of chemical warfare, against innocent Cambodians. MIT scientists discovered the truth.



The president called for “swift and sure retribution” for terrorist acts. But nobody knew where to find the terrorists—so any “retribution” would surely claim innocent lives, which would then be avenged by more terrorist acts, and so on.

1985

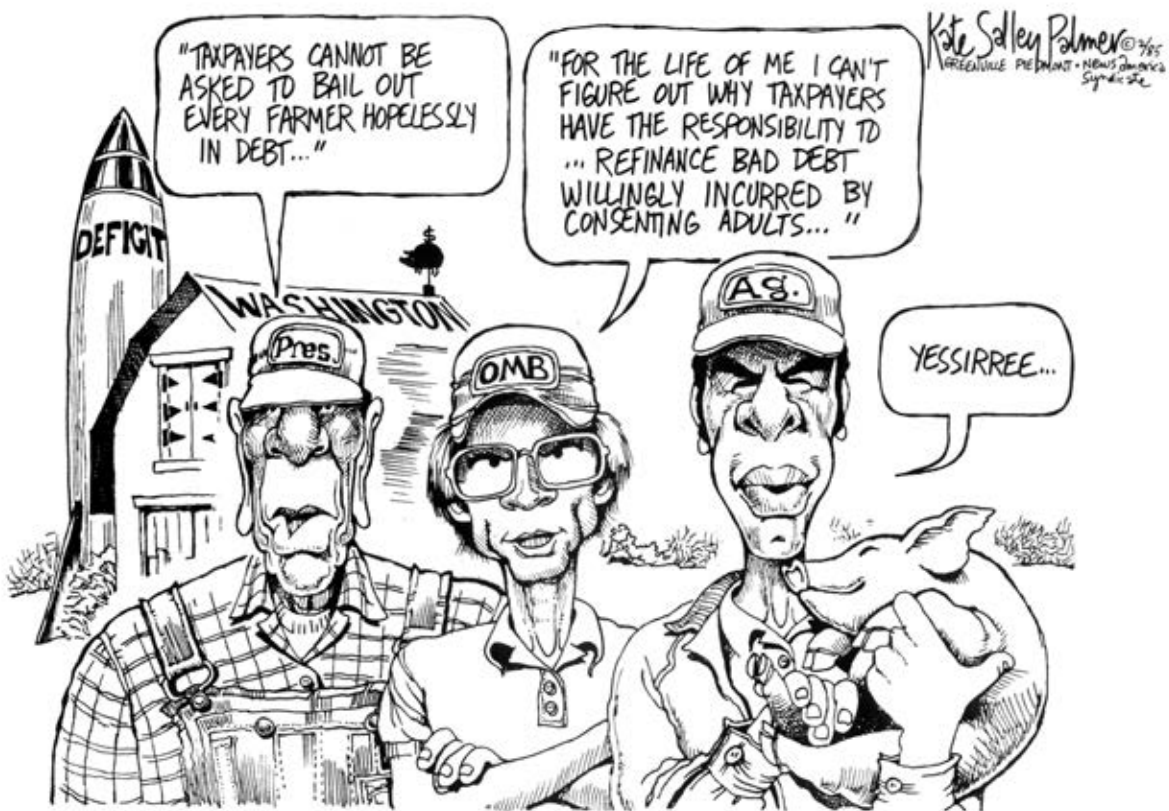
Aglow with the recent military successes in Grenada but still obsessed with eradicating Communism in Central America, Secretary of State George Schultz explains his administration's strategy to the rest of us.



Reagan's State of the Union speech proclaimed a "New American Revolution."



1985



It's wonderful when you can use politicians' actual quotes against them—and let the picture do the talking.



Reaganomics was working—just not for everybody.

1985

Senate Majority Leader Bob Dole had a tough time getting Weinberger to cut military spending.



Budget Director David Stockman seemed to take pleasure in cutting social programs. . . .



1985

Meanwhile, Attorney General Ed Meese weighed in on Affirmative Action.

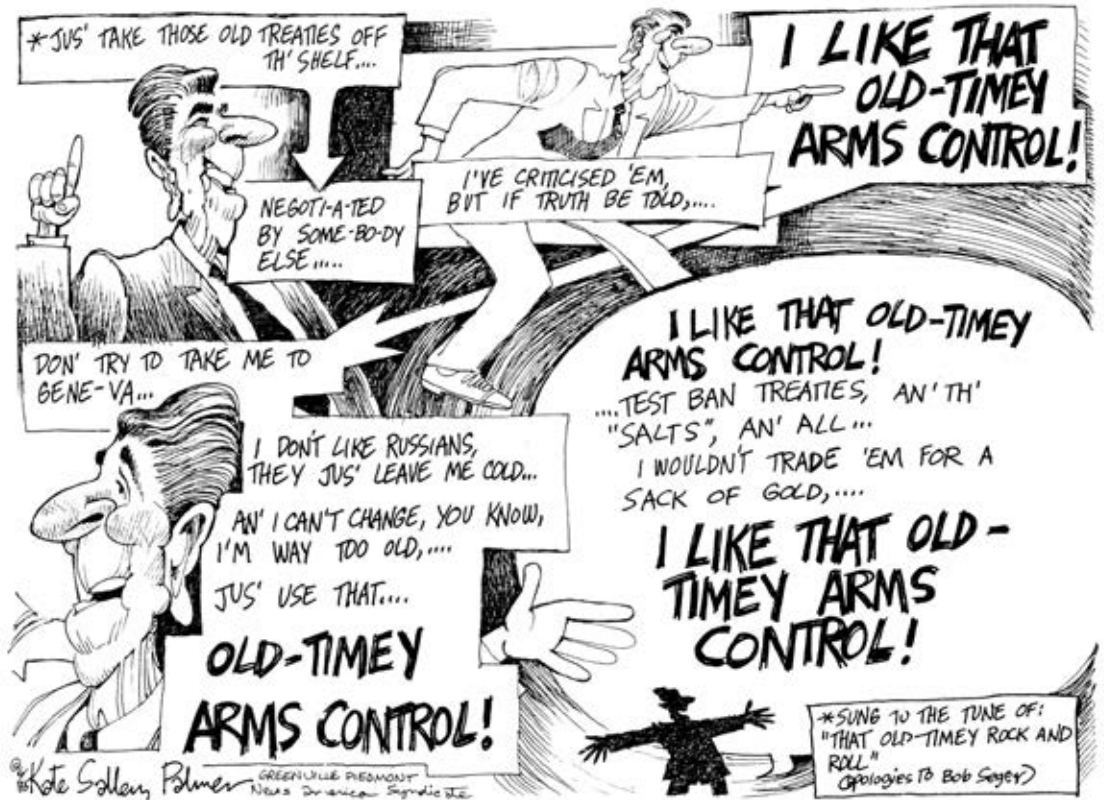




How Defense Secretary Weinberger got NATO on board for "Star Wars" missile defense system. . . .

1985

Having previously disparaged President Carter's Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (S.A.L.T.), Reagan later decided it was too much trouble to think up something better—and adopted them.







The Iran-Contra affair: in late 1986, it was revealed that the National Security Council, under orders from Reagan, had arranged for millions of dollars in secret arms sales to Iran in exchange for the release of hostages. Secretaries Schultz (State) and Weinberger (Defense) professed ignorance; Congress cried foul.

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 1986
 

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Then it turned out that money from the Iranian arms sales had been used to fund a Contra army in Nicaragua—despite the fact that Congress had forbidden U.S. interference in that conflict. White House operatives John Poindexter and Oliver North were involved up to their necks but claimed to have approval from the top. The president seemed confused.



“I’m rubber, you’re glue; what bounces off me sticks to you”: the charisma of Ollie North.



1987



Under immunity from prosecution, Fawn Hall, Oliver North’s secretary, testified to shredding files and removing documents from the National Security Council office. Her rationalization: “Some things are more important than the law.”

Reagan nominated controversial conservative judge Robert Bork for the Supreme Court.



1987



But was it just a stunt to divert attention from the Iran-Contra hearings?



Another of my song parodies. This one is about the power—and cost—of TV ads in political campaigns.

1987

Two weeks after I did this cartoon, the stock market crashed. Stock prices were beginning to look wildly inflated to me, and junk bonds were everywhere.



Kate Solley Palmer © 11/14/87



Reagan makes two rather unfortunate “jokes.”

1988

In the future (after 1996, on the assumption that Bush would serve two terms), I saw a bad economy still being blamed, not on Reagan, but on national pariah Jimmy Carter.





Campaign '88: George Bush and his running mate, Senator Dan Quayle, emphasized "patriotism," distracting voters from real issues like the environment, education, and the economy.

1988

1989

The many faces of George Bush, 1980-89.



We supplied Afghanistan with weapons to evict the Russians, but the Afghans seemed less than grateful. . . .



1989

Brer Reagan gives Brer Scandal the slip.





The Clintons at home (a) in the White House, and . . .

1993

1994

. . . (b) in the future, feeling the effects of all those Whitewater legal bills that started piling up after the GOP took over congress in 1994. (This was my 1994 Christmas T-shirt design.)

### THE CLINTON EX-PRESIDENCY



"WELL, IT AINT A DOUBLE-WIDE, BUT HECK- WE DONT NEED THE ROOM- SOCKS RUN OFF- AN' THE GOV'MNT SENT CHELSEA TO ONE O' THEM ORPHANAGES, ON A ACCOUNT OF WE CANT AFFORD TO SUPPORT HER AND ALL THESE HERE LAWYERS. SO NOW IT'S JUST ME AN' HILLARY, RATTLING AROUND LIKE 2 BB'S IN A BOXCAR. HILLARY'S GOT IT FIXED UP REAL NICE ON THE INSIDE, THOUGH.... RIGHT, HONEY?... HILLARY?... RIGHT?... - OH, AND-BEST OF ALL - JIMMY CARTER SAYS WE'RE PRETTY HIGH ON THE LIST TO GET A HABITAT HOUSE REAL SOON!"





Bob Dole and his wife Elizabeth campaigned for “family values”—against violence and sex in movies and popular music. Dole’s rallying cry was “Where is the Outrage?” “Soccer Moms” didn’t know; they preferred Clinton, not blaming him for popular culture.

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 1996
 

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The Doles reminded me of a disapproving “Mom and Dad” who thought Elvis was alarming, while the “kids”—the Clintons—were young “rebels without a cause” who actually condoned the new trends. (Both Elizabeth Dole and Hillary Clinton were later elected to the U.S. Senate.)





Bill Clinton's self-destructive behavior during the Lewinsky scandal—as dramatized by his careless skiing into a grove of trees. . . .

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1998

James Carville, as Clinton's attack dog, attempts to discourage Special Prosecutor Ken Starr from pursuing his investigations. (Neither of these 1998 cartoons was published.)



The Starr Report leading to President Clinton's impeachment appeared *everywhere*.



1998

Folks reacted in various ways to the shocking news that the president had lied.





Yet another song parody. Former President Carter laments his unpopularity (compared to Clinton's) while in office, considering the fact that he is a scrupulously—if piously—moral man.

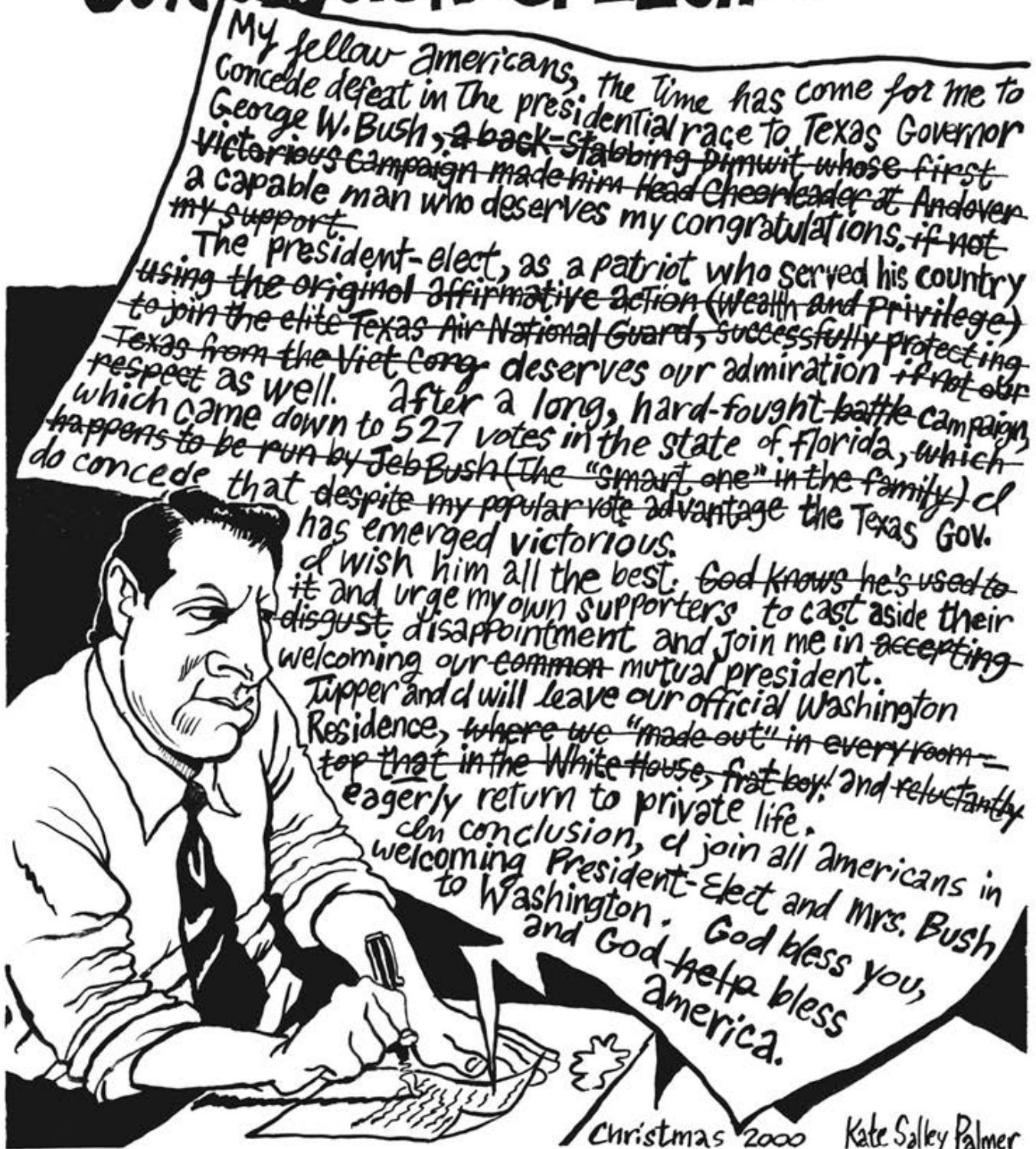
1998

2005

Laura Bush had publicly expressed her hope that her husband would choose a woman for the Supreme Court; he nominated Samuel Alito instead.

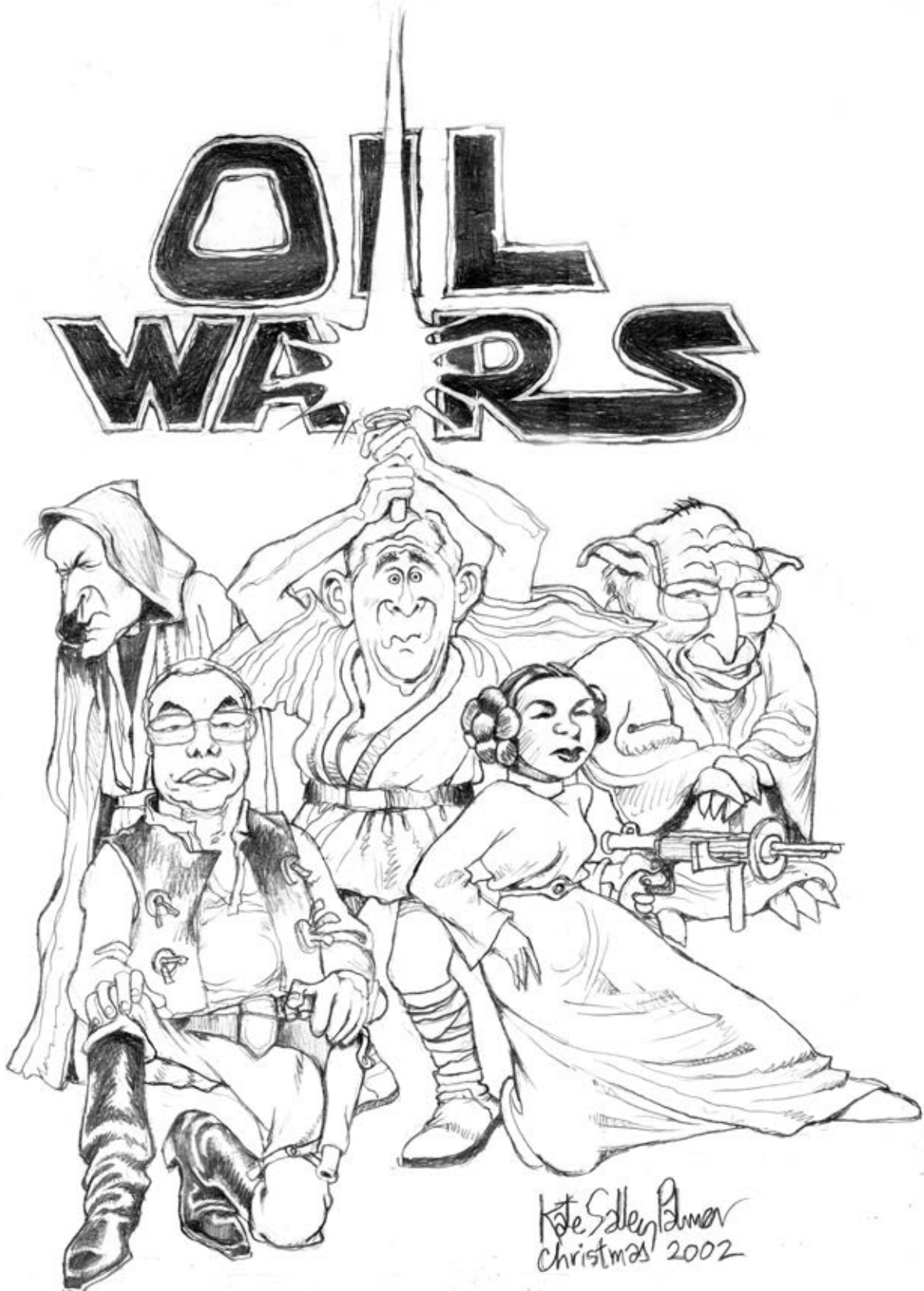


# THE FIRST DRAFT of AL GORE'S CONCESSION SPEECH...

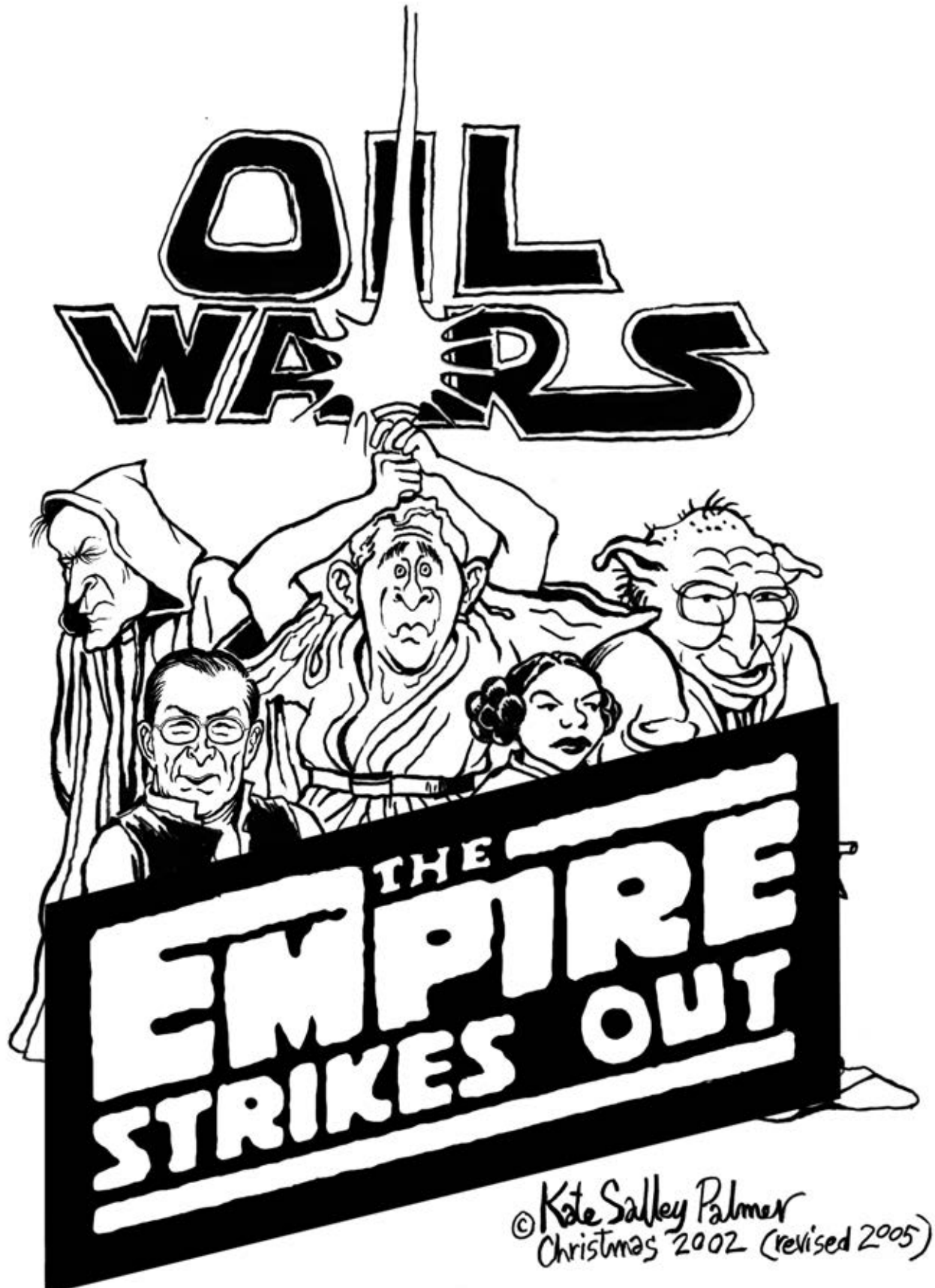


My Christmas 2000 T-shirt design. I had to finish this before the outcome of the post-election battle for the presidency was known, but the Bushes were already moving into the White House.

My 2002 Christmas T-shirt design (pencil). It was pretty clear by that time that we were going to war. I could think of only one compelling reason why the Bush administration would abandon Afghanistan and invade Iraq.



The Star Wars parody worked well—Condoleezza Rice looks a lot like Princess Leia, Colin Powell is great as Han Solo, George the Father is a wise and mysterious Obi-wan Kenobi to his son's clueless Luke Skywalker, and Dick Cheney is an evil Yoda.



My Christmas, 2005 T-shirt (ink). I had to give out disclaimers with this shirt, warning people not to wear it here in South Carolina. (Since Colin Powell was no longer in the administration, I substituted Donald Rumsfeld as Han Solo.)

# II

## STATE CARTOONS

### CARTOONIST'S DISCLAIMER

These amateurish early cartoons are embarrassing for me to even look at, much less include in a book. But I think it's instructive to see the evolution of a cartoonist's competence—to witness the experimentation with various styles and drawing implements. With tolerant editors, perseverance, and hard work, a bad cartoonist can develop into a competent artist.

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1975

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AND SO, FOR YOUR PART IN THE FIGHT AGAINST THE ERA, WE.... ALICE!

The Equal Rights Amendment for women needed only a few more states for ratification. Anti-ERA groups showed up at the South Carolina State House with cakes and pies to lobby legislators. Many cakes were decorated with large red stop signs that said “ERA” instead of “STOP.” Everybody knows that feminists can’t cook, right?



Greenville County schools feared that without a tax increase, "non-essential" services and classes would have to be cut.

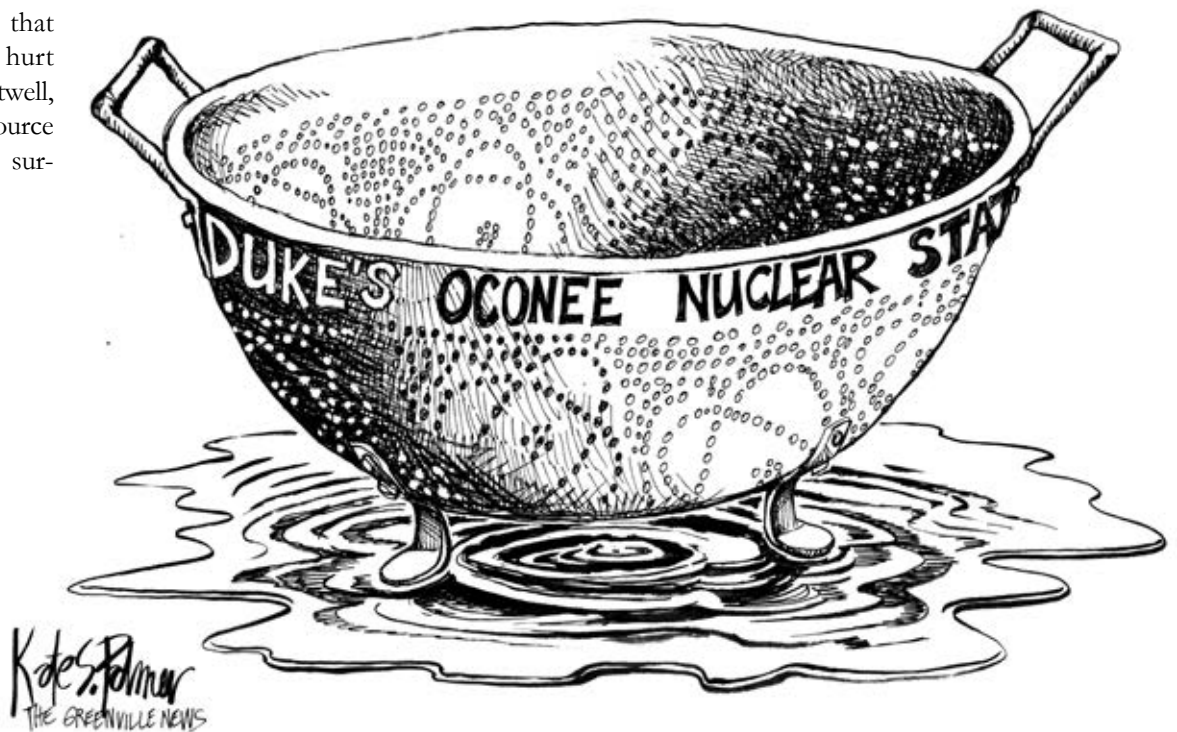


1976



Another local cartoon, addressing the need for detox facilities and other shelters for the growing number of homeless addicts in the city.

Duke Power's Oconee Nuclear Station reported several "harmless" leaks of "stuff that probably won't hurt us" into Lake Hartwell, a major water source for Clemson and surrounding areas.



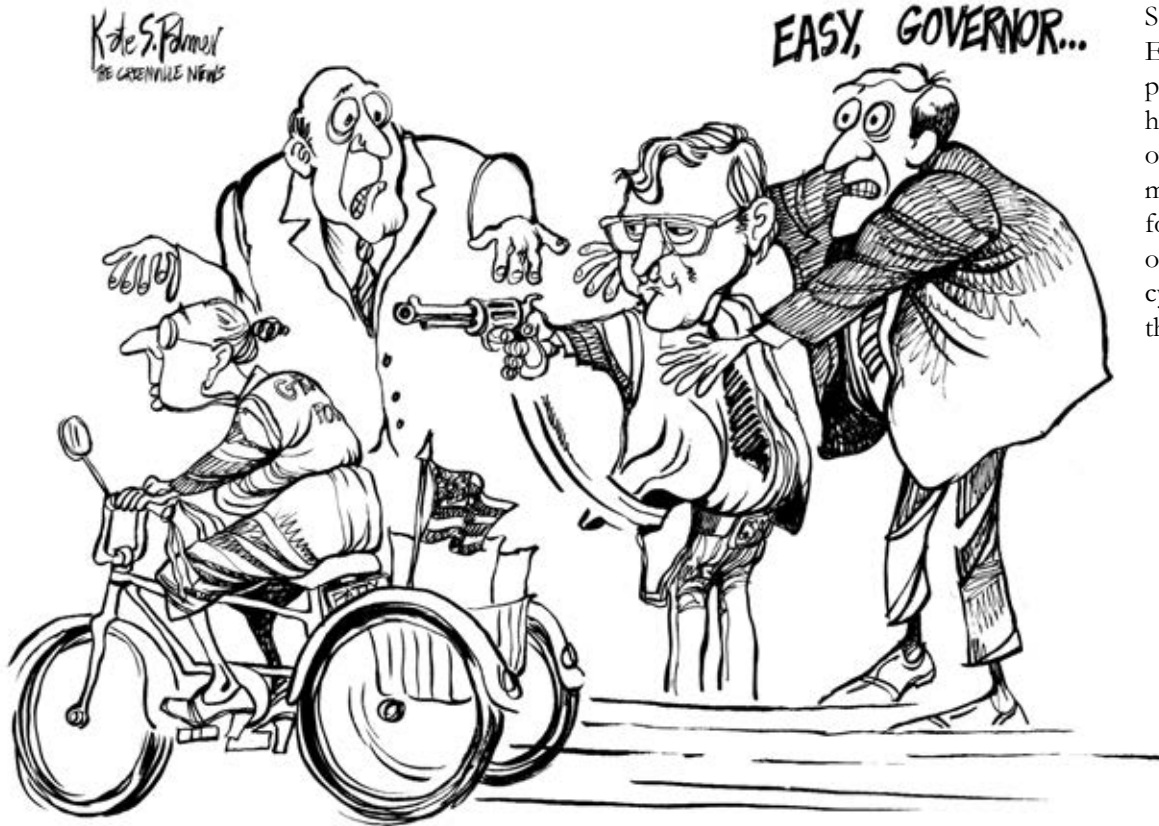

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 1977
 

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The Savannah River Reprocessing Facility (or the "Bomb Plant," as they call it in the Lowcountry) had some folks concerned about nuclear safety in our state.

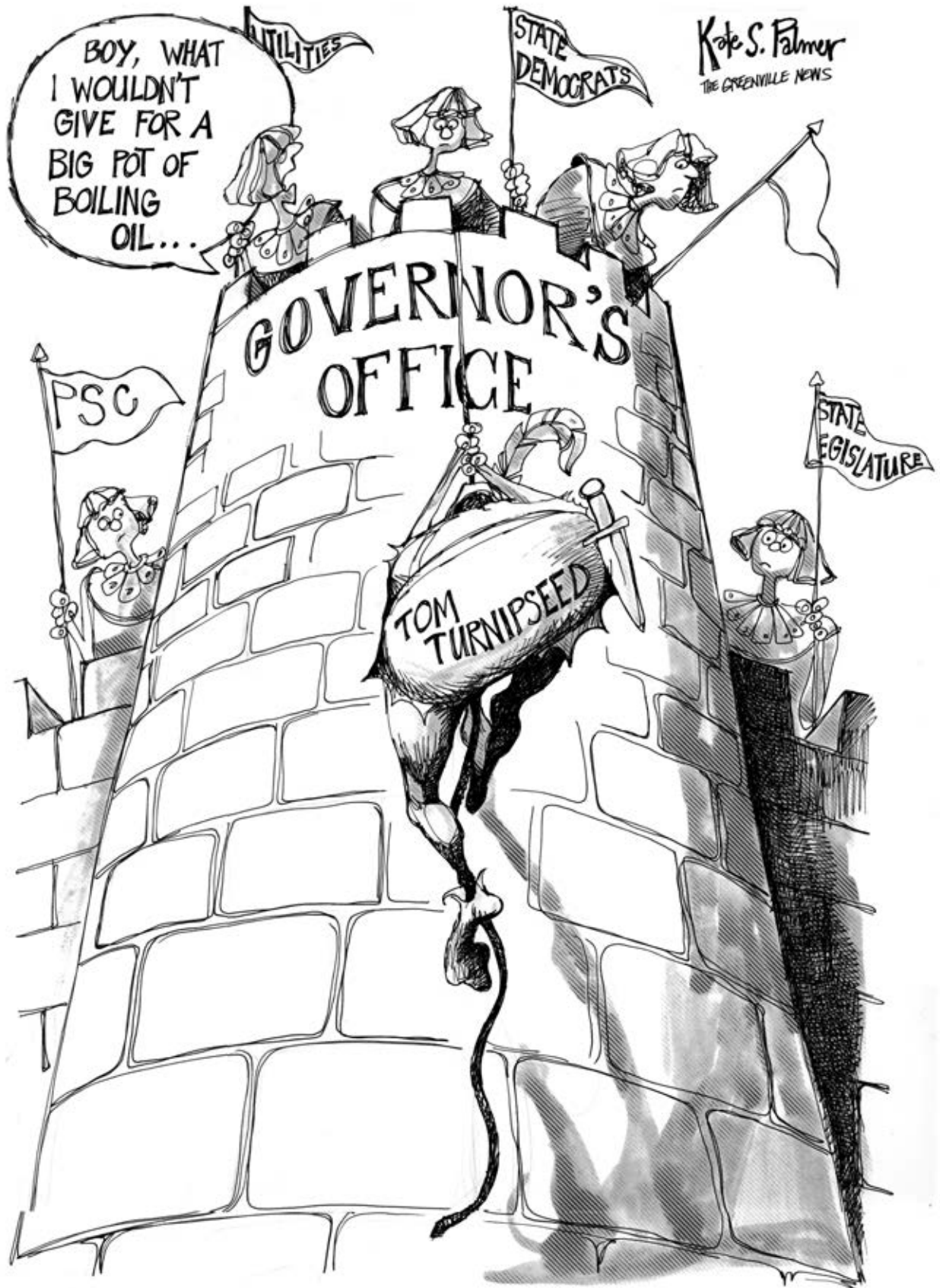


SC Governor James Edwards packed a pistol during the heated controversy over a proposed law mandating helmets for bikers. Crowds of menacing motorcyclists surrounded the State House.

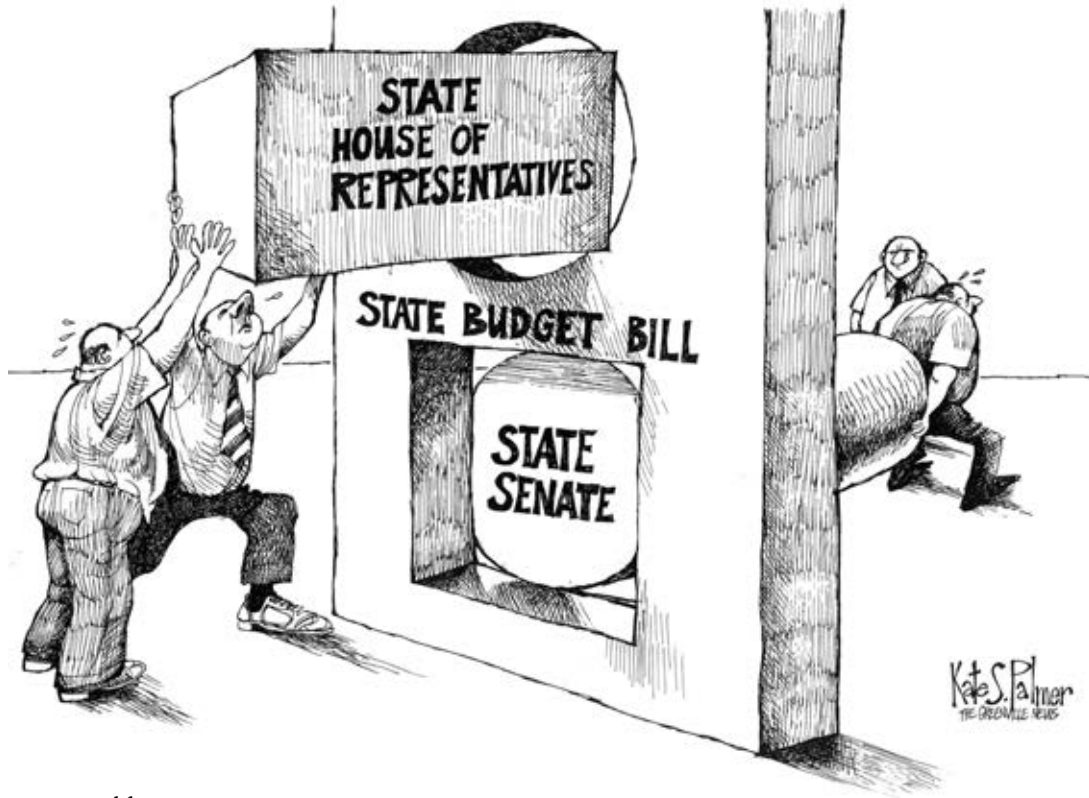
1977

South Carolina's much-anticipated Russell Dam Project fell victim to President Carter's attempts to impose budgetary restraint.





1977—The outspoken Tom Turnipseed makes a gubernatorial bid.



This cartoon could run every year.

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1978

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And don't even *say* the word "zoning."





Powerful State Senators Rembert Dennis (at the desk) and Marion Gressette spent many thousands of dollars on office furniture in 1978. Two legislative office complexes near the State House now bear their names. (I was denounced on the floor of the State Senate for this cartoon.)



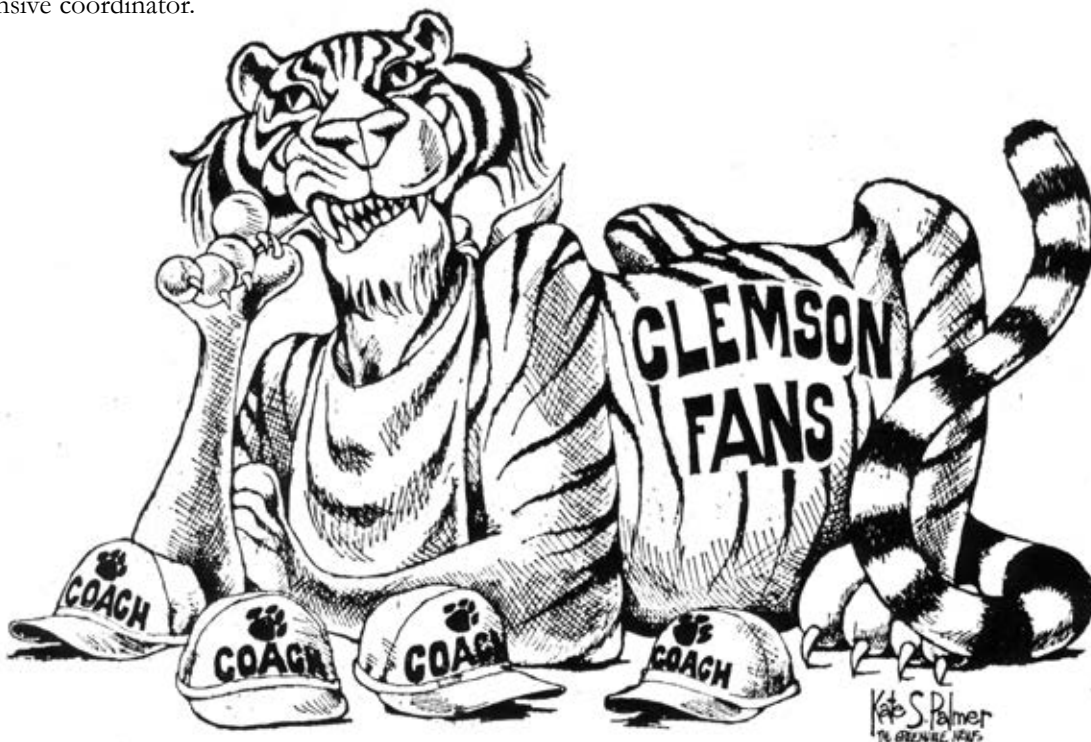
I drew this cartoon on the occasion of Clemson University's second Gator Bowl. Fans really did dress like this—I wore white overalls, but more mature female fans bought polyester knit fabric emblazoned with a lovely tiger-paw design and made pantsuits for themselves. Some even made blazers for their husbands—who *wore* them. No kidding.

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1978

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Clemson is bad to fire football coaches. Frank Howard left in 1969, then came Hootie Ingram, Red Parker, and—right before the 1978 Gator Bowl—Charlie Pell was replaced by Danny Ford, the team's popular young offensive coordinator.



South Carolina taxpayers are happy to exempt donations to the state's athletic booster clubs.




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 1979
 

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George M. Seignious II, The president of the Citadel, South Carolina's military college, was nominated by President Carter to be an arms control negotiator. During his confirmation hearings, the proud southerner was asked if he thought the U.S. could trust the Russians to abide by treaties. . . .



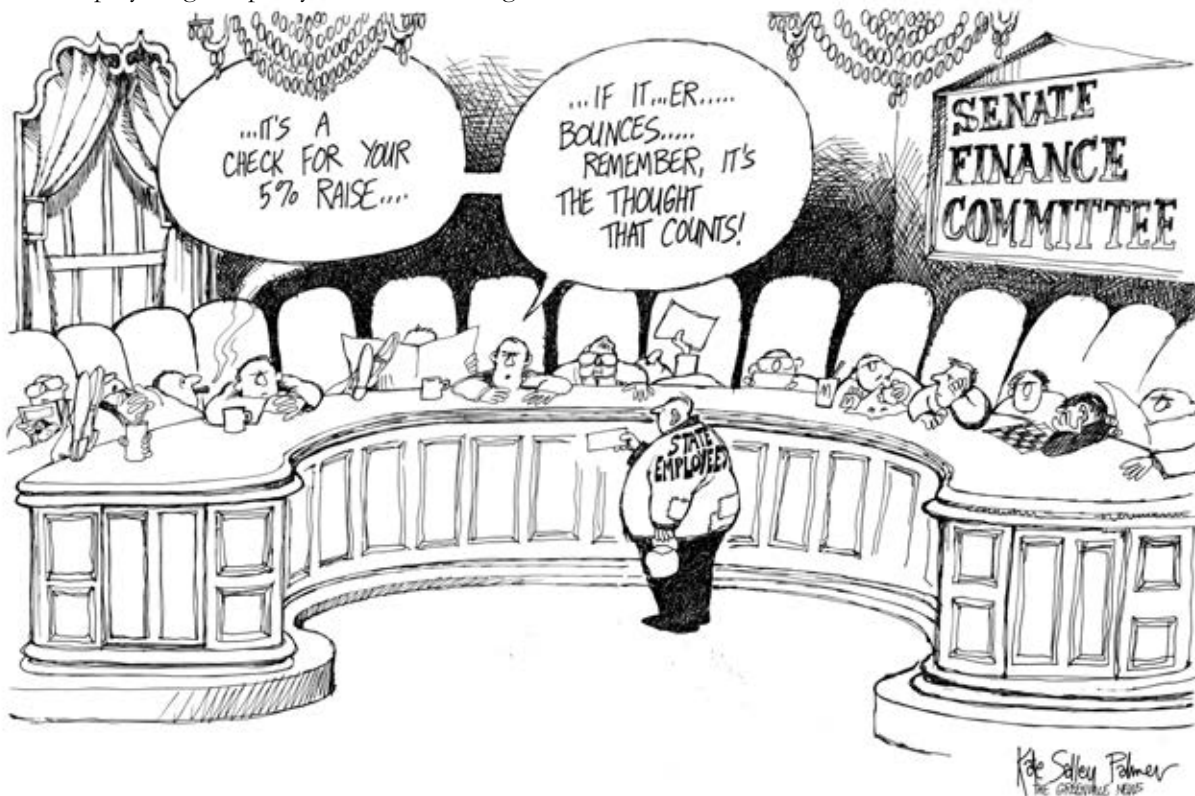




Governor Dick Riley took a tough stand against nuclear waste dumping in South Carolina. He insisted that other states in the Southeast allow such waste to be stored in their own back yards.

1979

State employees got a paltry raise from the legislature—as usual.



Governor Riley, stating that the General Assembly should exercise more “discipline” in spending, used his line-item veto to shred the appropriations bill.




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 1979
 

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Powerful Senator Marion Gressette, who opposed reform of the Public Service Commission, found upon his return from an illness that the reformers had been at work behind his back.





Lt. Governor Nancy Stevenson was not happy about Governor Riley's decision to seek another term in office.

1980



The ink hadn't dried on new Clemson University President Bill Atchley's contract before he started indiscriminately firing top University officials.

The Reagan campaign was up against George Bush's "Big Mo" in the 1980 GOP primary. South Carolina pulled the Gipper back on track.



© Kate Solley Palmer  
1980

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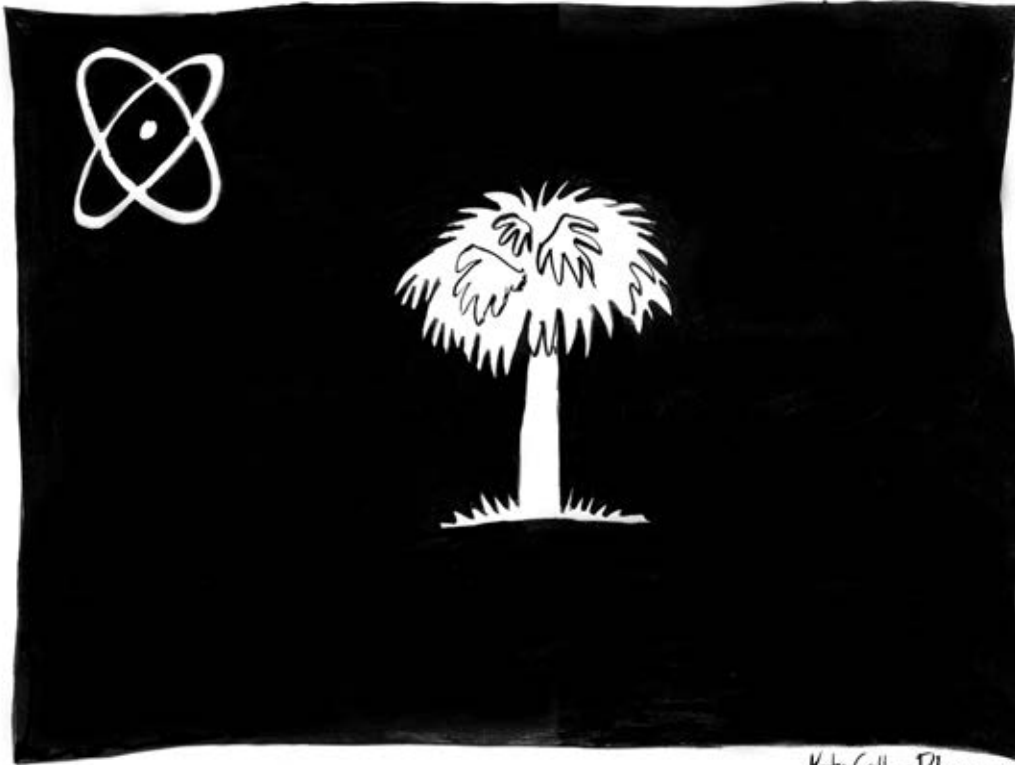
 1980
 

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© Kate Solley Palmer  
1980

Admiral James Stockdale, Vietnam POW and war hero, becomes Citadel president and runs afoul of the Board of Visitors when he suggests a few changes. . . .



By 1980, the state of South Carolina was becoming known as a dumping ground for nuclear waste. I sarcastically suggest a change in our flag. . . .

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1980

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South Carolina Rep. John Jenrette, caught in the ABSCAM sting, blamed alcohol for his dishonesty.



Jim Edwards, South Carolina's first Republican governor, served as Reagan's Secretary of Energy. He saw only one "alternative" source. . . .



1981

The University of South Carolina spawned a litter of expensive satellite campuses, which she fiercely guarded.





Strom Thurmond, ranking member of the Senate Judiciary Committee, continued to call for abolition of the Voting Rights Act, arguing that it was no longer necessary—despite the evidence from his own state.

1981

1982



Thurmond reluctantly acceded to renewal of the Voting Rights Act—but some organizations argued for reform of the primary runoffs as well.



The members of South Carolina's General Assembly liked the antiquated district map (which had gotten them elected, after all), resisting any proposed changes.

1982



Another song parody: State Senator Norma Russell, an outspoken opponent of the Equal Rights Amendment, ran briefly for Lt. Governor. She was *really* fun to caricature.



The state legislature tried to dodge the issue of overcrowding in state prisons.



1982



Lobbyists and powerful legislators: their relationship reached critical mass during the "Lost Trust" scandals of the late 1980s. I'm too cynical to believe things have changed much.

Recruiting violations landed Clemson on NCAA probation the year after the football team won the National Championship. Fans were devastated.

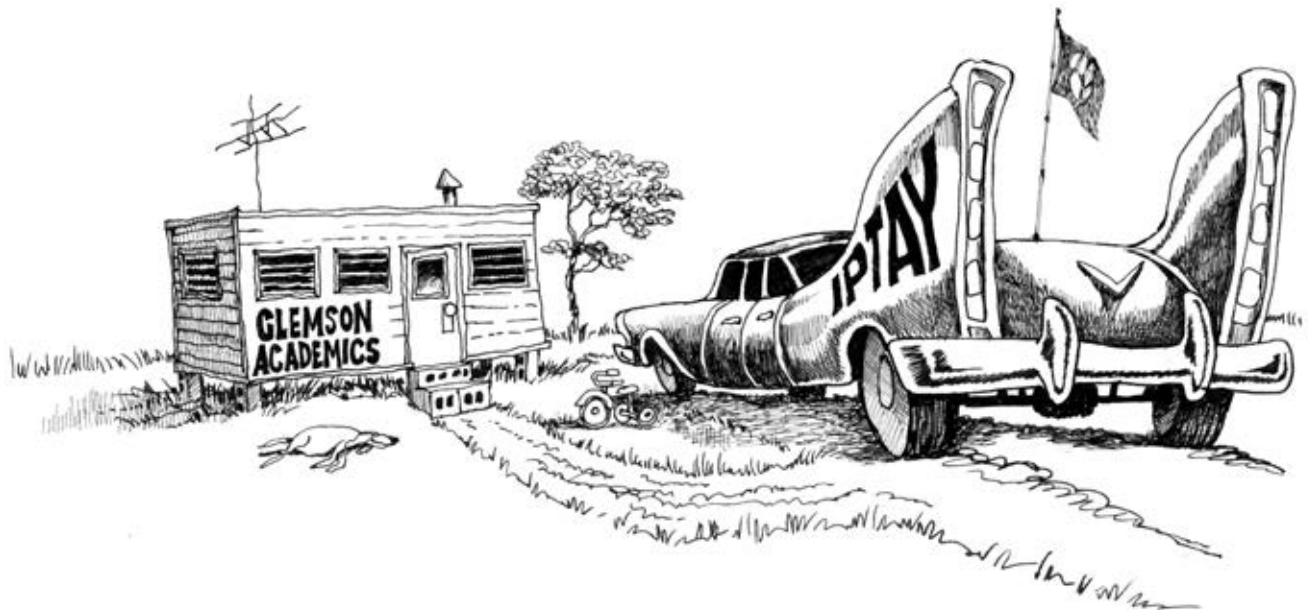


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1982  
1983

Donations to IPTAY, Clemson's athletic scholarship fund, totaled five million dollars—equaling academic giving for the entire university—in one year.

*Kate Salley Palmer* 085  
THE GREENVILLE NEWS





The “Bomb Plant” reported a “slight tritium leak”—assuring the public that there was nothing to worry about. Some of us worried anyway.

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1983

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South Carolina Democrats summon their usual degree of enthusiasm for challenging Senator Thurmond.





State legislators childishly resisted removing the Confederate flag from the dome of the State House. It was not removed until the year 2000.

1983

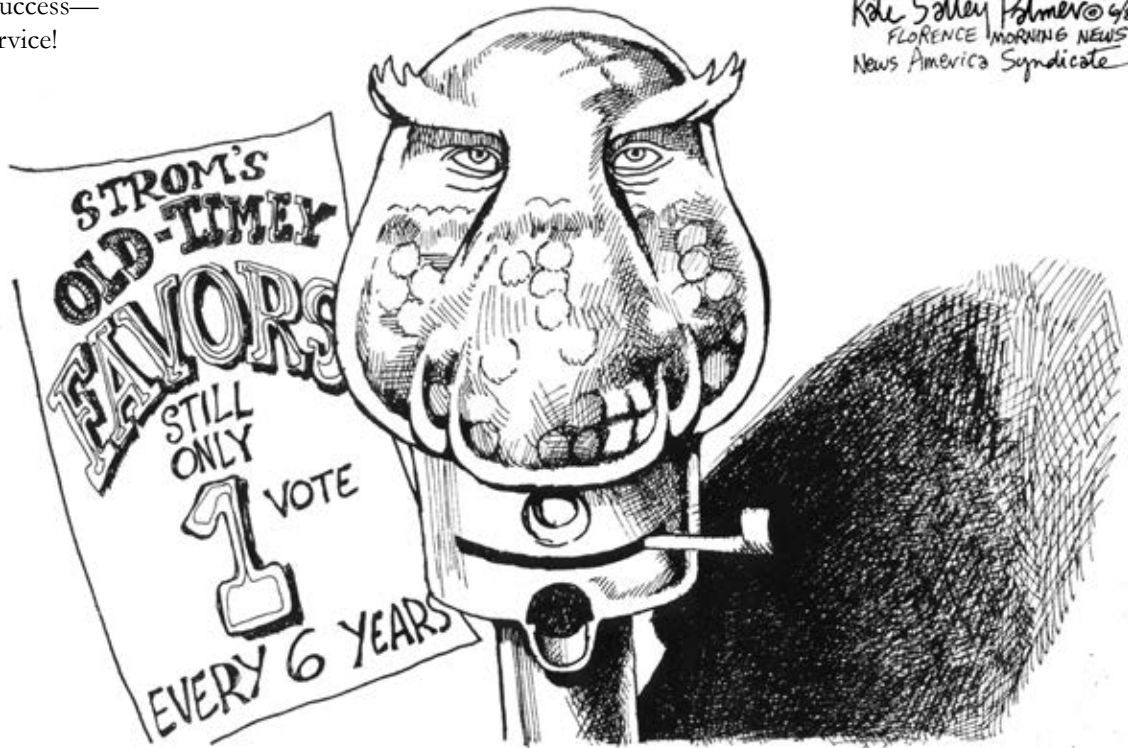
1984

My frequent arguments for spending more on public education have always made sense to me, but South Carolina always seems to find a way to shortchange the students.

*Kate Solley Palmer ©84 THE GREENVILLE NEWS/Star-Field Newspaper Syndicate*



The secret to Strom Thurmond's success—constituent service!



1984



Senator Hollings' run for president in 1984 was marked by frequent references in the national press to his thick low-country South Carolina accent.



South Carolina's two U.S. senators agreed on at least one thing—protecting the state's textile industry.

1985



I imagine incredibly wealthy South Carolina textile tycoon Roger Milliken at one of the gigantic international textile machinery expos held regularly in Greenville, South Carolina.

The NCAA recruiting scandal prompted Clemson's President Bill Atchley to fire football coach Danny Ford, over the protests of Athletic Director Bill McLellan. Then the trustees got involved—on McLellan's side—and declared Atchley to be an "ineffective college president." Throw in Clemson's rivalry with the University of South Carolina Gamecocks, and you have a cartoon.



1985



State Senator James Waddell, chairman of Clemson's Board of Trustees, demonstrates the board's eagerness to select a new Clemson president.

This time, the Clemson tiger devours a university president.



Kate Solley Palmer © 7/85  
GREENVILLE PIEDMONT-News America  
Syndicate

1985



Football season begins with the Tigers weakened by dissent and scandal, and the Gamecocks riding high; the game may have to go nuclear.

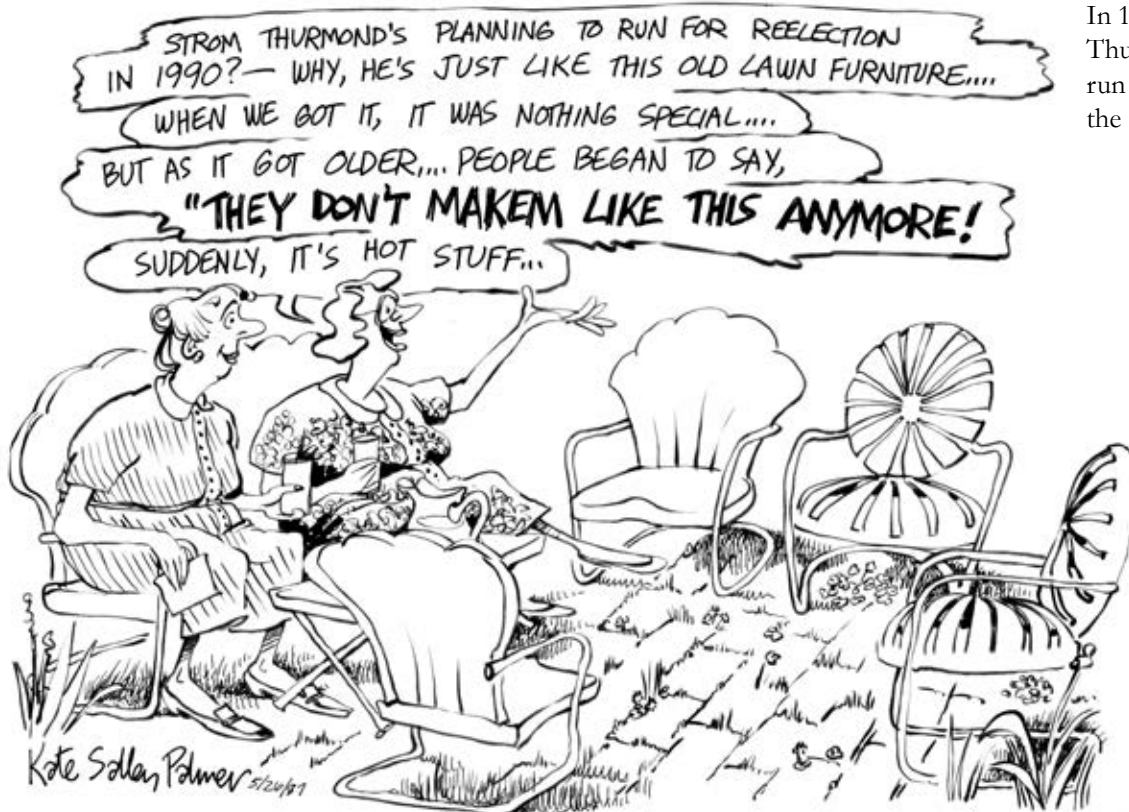




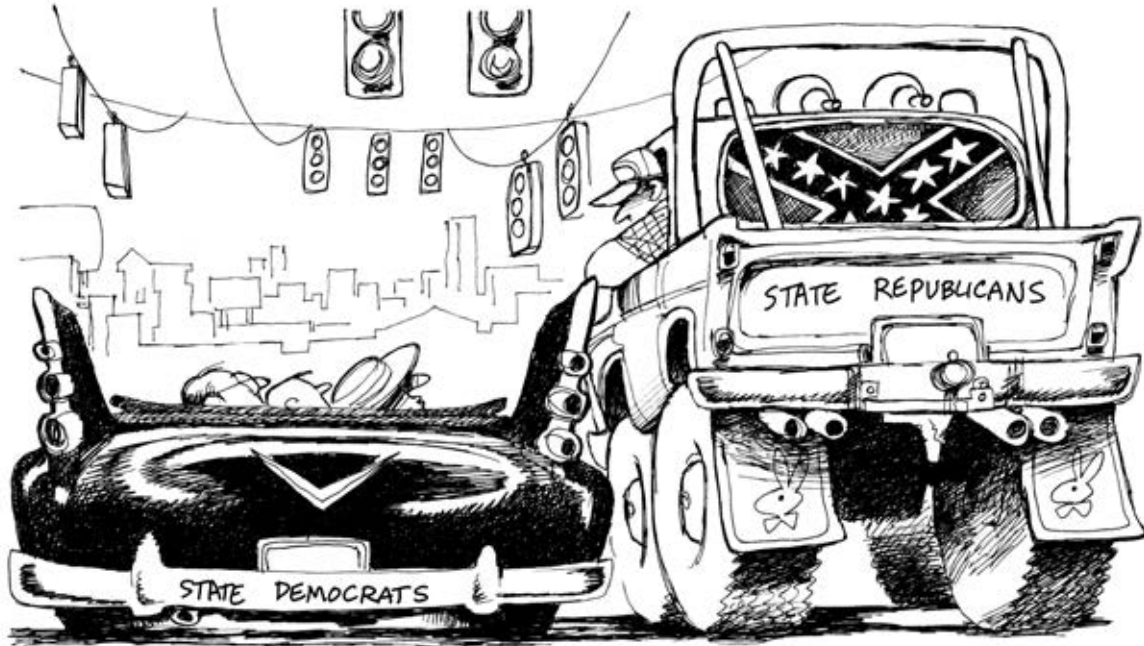
In 1986, newly elected Governor Carroll Campbell had hoped that Tommy Hartnett, another Republican, would be elected lieutenant governor, even going so far as to refer to Hartnett as his “running mate”—a title without meaning, as South Carolina awards offices to vote-getters, not parties. Democrat Nick Theodore won the most votes for lieutenant governor that year.

1986

1987



In 1987, the elderly Strom Thurmond geared up to run for his eighth term in the U.S. Senate.



© 7/87 Kate Solley Palmer

By 1987, South Carolina's moldy, old-fashioned Democratic Party was beginning to deal with some new kids on the block . . .

1987

. . . but the traditional protectionism of South Carolina's textile industry remained paramount to both parties.

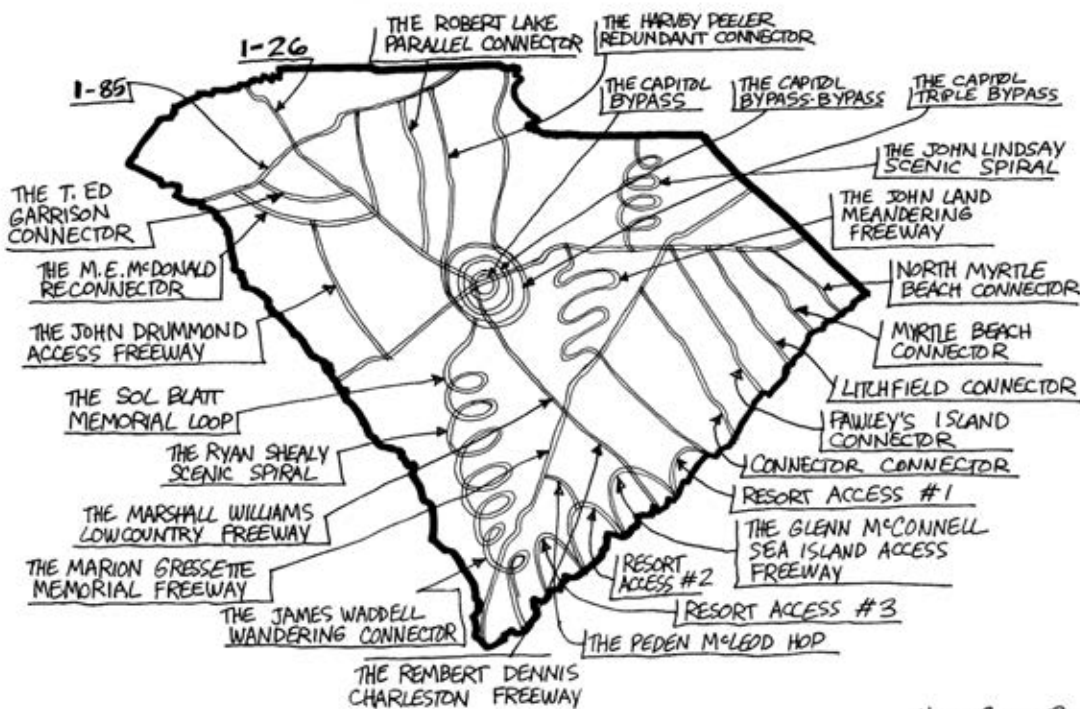


The federally managed "Bomb Plant" came under congressional criticism for lax safety operations.



1987

PROPOSED REVISIONS - SOUTH CAROLINA HIGHWAY SYSTEM



The state was in need of new highways—and improvements to old ones—but could we afford to build enough for everyone?

Kate Soley Palmer © 2007

Kate Solley Palmer © 2/87



During the Riley administration, South Carolina had made an agreement with other southeastern states to share the burden of nuclear waste disposal. Compliance remained a problem.

1987

This cartoon could run every year. State property owners resent paying taxes to support public education. If I were to do this cartoon again today, I'd portray the property owners as more affluent.



Kate Solley Palmer © 9/91

South Carolina's response to the AIDS epidemic was to put sex education in the schools—teaching abstinence only.



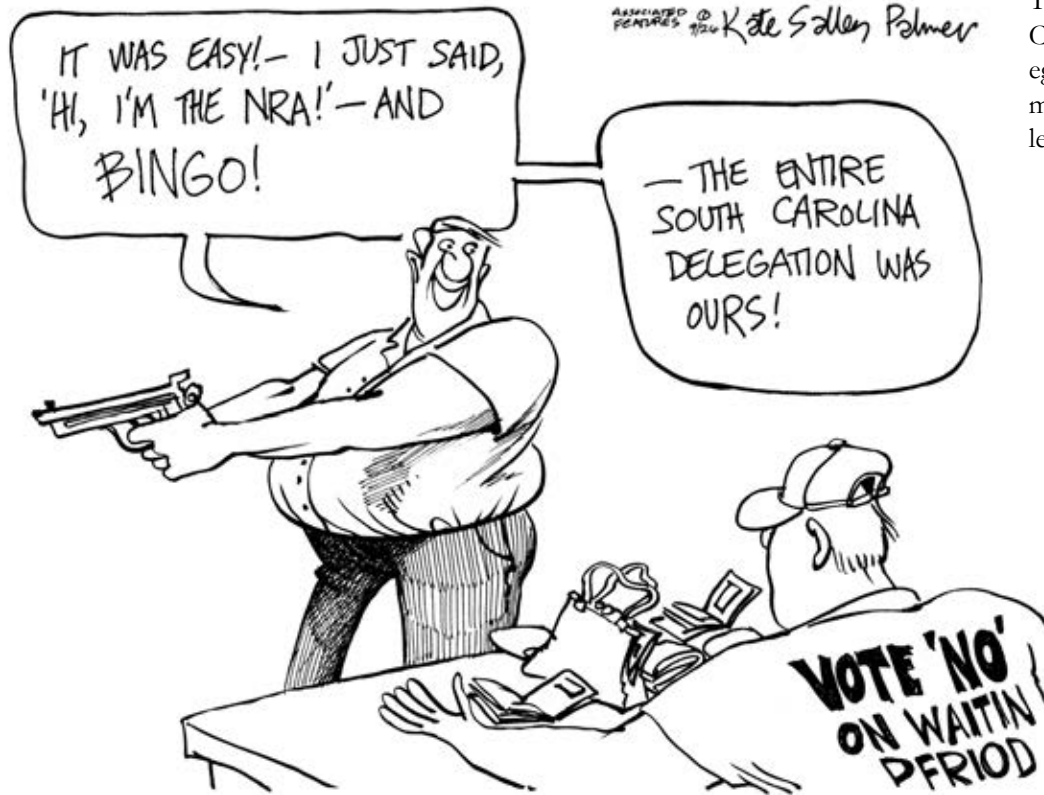
1987

1988

Kate Salley Palmer © 7/10/88



State senator Nell Smith tried valiantly but in vain to force the General Assembly to see the light.



The NRA owns the South Carolina congressional delegation on every vote—no matter how much sense the legislation makes.

1988

The legislature kept promising auto insurance reform, but they took forever to get around to it—and it *still* doesn't work.





The EPA slacked off helping states clean up hazardous waste sites. This is the first of a very few cartoons I did for a local paper, *The Greenville Journal*, which sought me out in 1999.

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1999

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Greenville Baptist Churches announced a campaign to pray for the conversion of Jews to Christianity during the Jewish High Holy Days. (This is one of the last cartoons I did for *The Greenville Journal* before they fired me.)

# Eleven

## *No, I'm on the Editorial Page*

Every editorial cartoonist sooner or later faces the person who assumes that all cartoons belong in the comics section of the newspaper. The task of explaining to this person where one's cartoons can be found is not easy. Usually, the questioner has no idea of the location or purpose of the editorial page or why it has "comics" on it. I will try to explain it all for you.

At this writing (and the situation could change tomorrow), the typical newspaper editorial page is divided into distinct sections. Unsigned editorials usually go in the leftmost column. Their purpose is to express the consensus opinions of the newspaper's editorial board, which is usually made up of the publisher, the chief editorial page editor, other editorial writers, and whatever corporate chieftains care to sit in on the meetings. (Sometimes a hapless cartoonist is required to attend.) These unsigned editorials represent the official policy of the paper. If the board fails to reach a consensus on a particular subject, the publisher or some corporate person will invariably have his own views enshrined there. At too many newspapers, the unsigned editorial section is the most boring part of the page, a long gray column of text that strains to say nothing at all without appearing to be wishy-washy. It takes a lot of words to say nothing—many more than it does to be clearly understood. When they are not actively waffling, unsigned editorials too frequently sink to the role of community cheerleader, abdicating their responsibility to enlighten, moralize, or even entertain.

The rest of the editorial page offers commentary in the form of signed opinion columns, letters from readers—and, of course, the editorial cartoon. The opinions expressed in these signed pieces range from reasoned arguments to lunatic ravings from all over the political spectrum.

Staff writers and nationally syndicated columnists furnish the opinion columns. Opinion writers, be they local or national, identify their authorship and often have "specialties," such as right- or left-wing agendas, women's issues, minority concerns, humor, wry observation, exposé, etc. The column writer becomes identified with this signed work, unlike the anonymous authors of the unsigned editorials. Some newspapers only publish columns that resonate with their own particular mission, philosophy, or political viewpoint; others strive for "balance."

The "Letters to the Editor" section serves as a public sounding-board for local readers with personal peeves, beefs, or pats on the back they'd like to share. Letters range in tone from approval to reproof to downright hostility. They are edited for length, clarity, profanity, and libel at most papers.

And then there are the political cartoons.

For the purposes of this book, I use the terms "political" and "editorial" almost interchangeably—although, really, there is a distinction to be made. The label "editorial" suggests to many of us cartoonists that the cartoon in question is an illustration of someone *else's* opinion, while a "political" cartoon is (to be picky about it) the cartoonist's *original* work of political or





social commentary. There are wonderful cartoonists who do editorial illustrations, but the political cartoon should be an unambiguous work of impact and immediacy, which can be appreciated—or deplored—in seconds. It is signed by the cartoonist, who takes the blame for its content. A satirical drawing with an air of irreverence, if not irresponsibility, the political cartoon often sacrifices logic, reason, fairness, and a great deal of subtlety for the sake of immediacy. But that's okay. Most cartoonists are not very logical, reasonable, fair, or subtle people. Cartoonists are satirists; and “satirist” is really just another word for “professional smartass.”

I have found that, if it is not strictly true that nobody likes a smartass, those who do are few and far between. It is a rare person who can tolerate someone with the unfortunate habit of telling the truth as she sees it in the bluntest and most irreverent manner possible—and who possesses a daily forum for doing so. As a group, satirists have a long and unparalleled history of “problems with authority.” It is probably not a

coincidence that, anywhere in the world, as soon as a dictator (right- or left-wing—it's all the same) assumes power, the first people to be thrown into prison are the satirists.

This is why every free society needs political cartoonists. Actually, *every* society needs political cartoonists. *Somebody* has to make fun of Power. There are courageous cartoonists working under quite repressive governments all over the world. Many of these have spent time in jail for their work. Others have suffered even more grievously. This is all the more reason why a free society such as ours should value dissent as an expression of its vitality and a demonstration of its tolerance—if not its enthusiastic embrace—of freedom of the press.

Of course, institutions (like newspapers) even in a free society sometimes fall short of the aforementioned “tolerance of dissent” ideal. Today's newspapers are becoming more homogenized as more news outlets are acquired by fewer corporations with every passing day and every passing merger. Newspaper publishers strive to appear non-threatening to whatever powers—that-be currently have the means to deprive them of their positions.

Any time a newspaper fears it may suffer financial reprisal—or even a bit of civic inconvenience—the first person to be fired is the cartoonist. Hardly ever is it a columnist, no matter

how many columnists the paper has on payroll. The easiest way for a newspaper to make everybody (especially local publishers and their corporate overlords) happy is to just dump the staff cartoonist. Syndicated cartoons by famous Pulitzer Prize winners are readily available, cheaper, and less likely to tread upon sensitive local toes.

Editorial cartoonists are also sometimes mistaken for comic strip cartoonists, to their unqualified horror. Some editorial cartoonists do have cartoon strips on the side, but these strips are almost never political—they are a way for that cartoonist to branch out into pure humor.

One exception—a cartoon strip that *is* a political cartoon—is the widely syndicated *Doonesbury*, by cartoonist Garry Trudeau. Trudeau has stood on the front lines of social and political commentary since the Vietnam War; and, though his work often contains humor, he has never strayed from his mission to satirize, inform—and even, at times, to shock. *Doonesbury* is so controversial in my area that one newspaper runs it in the classified ad section so sensitive readers will have to really make an effort to be offended by it. There was very little grumbling in the ranks of editorial page cartoonists when Garry Trudeau won the Pulitzer Prize for Editorial Cartooning in the 1970s.

Occasionally, though, the Pulitzer does go to a gag-driven cartoon strip from the comics pages. This always drives us editorial page cartoonists crazy. Not only does it endanger our fragile job security and give our editors (who are worried about their *own* jobs) more fuel for their arguments that we tone down our satire and consider the sensibilities of the newspaper subscribers, we see it as a grave insult and a deep misunderstanding of our work. The main purpose of a comic strip is to entertain; our cartoons are critiques. Though many comic strips do offer snippets of political or social commentary (some of which are even hard-hitting and insightful), the point of the strip is usually the joke at the end. Comic strip cartoonists also do not face the same resistance from editors, publishers, and angry local readers that confronts most editorial page cartoonists daily. When a non-political comic strip wins a major award that is historically reserved for political cartoonists who fight in the trenches every day, it only makes things more difficult for us all.

An ongoing debate among editorial cartoonists over the past couple of decades or so concerns the possibility that we *ourselves* have contributed to the blurring of the lines between political cartooning and the comics. Back in the early 1970s, the unwieldy, over-labeled editorial cartoon styles of the past were giving way to the more casual, freewheeling political-social commentary that we, the younger generation of cartoonists, were crafting. (Although alert readers of this book will discover—as I did, to my horror—that I labeled practically *everything* in my cartoons!)

My generation was widely influenced by the *MAD Magazine* of the 1960s, which showcased the dead-on caricatures by Mort Drucker. Though *MAD* occasionally featured political commentary, it was primarily a humor magazine. Then, in the mid-1960s, political cartoonist Pat Oliphant arrived from Australia and knocked our socks off with his unique style that incorporated more humor than was, at that time, customary in U.S. editorial cartoons. Previous generations of cartoonists had preferred to mock their politicians from a respectful distance, personifying them as donkeys, elephants, Uncle Sam, and so forth; and their portrayals of individual politicians' faces tended to be fairly realistic (unless he was a hated national enemy, like Hitler). But, like *MAD*'s Mort Drucker, Oliphant used caricature brilliantly, distorting the features of politicians but leaving no doubt as to their identity. Using a horizontal format that soon became popular among American cartoonists, his cartoons are set pieces full of characters and imagery which can either deliver complicated, layered messages or drive home simple ones.

Another contribution Oliphant made to political cartooning is his collection of shortcut images (Uncle Sam as W. C. Fields, NATO as a yard of chickens, NOW as a terrifying Wagnerian opera diva in a horned helmet, and other unabashedly stereotypical but easily recognizable fig-

ures). These icons have seeped so insidiously into the visual mainstream that we assume we thought them up ourselves. (It's a good thing cartoonists don't have to pay royalties on the images we steal.) Pat Oliphant continues to hit his targets every day with such virtuosity—combining superbly rendered drawings and caricatures with scathingly witty commentary—that we should be ashamed of ourselves for even trying to keep up.

Another influential editorial cartoonist and humorist was the late—the wonderfully great—Jeff MacNelly, whose goofy, folksy approach and gentle humor delivered his editorial messages so painlessly that even those of us who disagreed with his point of view loved him. He, too, used the horizontal format, populating his cartoons with people, dogs, buildings, cars, trucks, ships, fighter planes, and all types of weapons. He could infuse inanimate objects with an amazing degree of personality and humor. Jeff was never happy with his caricatures, though I thought they were very good. He complained that the fingers and arms of the people he drew looked like wet spaghetti. I tried to copy the wet spaghetti, because I liked the look. But it never worked for me. Nor was I ever able to draw tanks, bombs, planes, or ships with any personality.

Jeff was a prodigy who earned his first Pulitzer at the age of twenty-four while working at *The Richmond News Leader*—and received two more as his career matured. Naturally, he, too, spawned a crop of imitators who couldn't match his philosophical sophistication or his wit. Both Oliphant and MacNelly became widely syndicated in the 1970s, and their influence spread all over the country. They made mixing politics and humor look easy.

Unfortunately for the rest of us young cartoonists, our editors and publishers—impressed by those two virtuosos and the humorous style they used to such great effect—gradually began to demand more humor from us, too. Trouble is, comedy and satire are both very difficult to master. Now, even I believe that without humor, satire—real, biting satire—just comes off as sarcasm. And satire *itself* can be funny—but not everyone recognizes it when they see it. (One local newspaper that ran Art Buchwald's columns had to place the word "satire" in big, bold letters every few paragraphs so that people would stop taking Buchwald so seriously.) Though a good cartoonist might occasionally create a cartoon that is both piercingly satirical and hilariously funny, it takes outstanding ability to accomplish both on a regular basis. Pat and Jeff, though their drawings were often very funny, always presented *viewpoints* in their witty cartoons. They were—what's the word?—*talented!*

Frankly, though, not many editors were able to tell the difference between caricature with a purpose . . . and just a funny face. To be fair, editors inhabit a world of words, while cartoonists experience life visually. Language and imagery are two very different forms of expression, and few people are good judges of both. If you ask me, I think it's a shame and a sorry joke on editors and cartoonists to be bound like two cats with their tails tied together, caught in an endless battle of words versus pictures.

And so, with the increasing availability of funnier, more viewer-friendly cartoons—syndicated to our very own newspapers at bargain-basement prices—those of us whose editors were already beginning to suggest that we use a "feather, not a meat ax" in our cartoons got the message that we'd better lighten up. Most of us couldn't churn out brilliant gems of satire and wit every day; faced with our bosses' demands for more humor (backed up by the threat of editorial rejection), our cartoons tended to become funnier—but less satirical. Mere illustration began to pass for opinion; mere humor for satire. Editorial cartoons evolved into simple riffs on the headlines, kind of like Leno and Letterman or whoever will replace them. Cartoonists became almost interchangeable for a while.

This situation abated as we cartoonists of the 1970s began to find our own styles—and today's younger cartoonists bring new influences to the table. They love animated television shows like *The Simpsons* and *South Park*, which offer sharply satirical social commentary. The new

cartoonists know politics and history and are producing fine cartoons—many of them created directly on the computer.

Lucky for them, and for those of us who still freelance, it is much easier to get information these days than it was when I was a full-time cartoonist. Information and visual images abound on television and the Internet. When I first began doing cartoons, there were three television networks that ran nightly news shows: ABC, NBC, and CBS. Then, in 1980, Ted Turner launched CNN and changed TV news forever. Suddenly cartoonists, being visual animals, had more opportunities to place faces with the names we were reading about in newspapers. (Well, the *national* names and faces, anyway.)

In the 1970s and '80s, it was extremely difficult for me—working so far from Columbia, our state capitol—to follow state news in a timely fashion or to find good likenesses of any but the most prominent state politicians. Newspaper coverage of state issues struck me as confusing and incomplete. Issues in our state take a long time to unfold and are hard to follow, maybe because so much political maneuvering takes place in committees, restaurants, bars, and on dove shoots. Many state concerns, moreover, are never conclusively resolved. A victorious vote on one day can be squelched any number of ways the very next day—or in a week, or a year, or even several years down the road. Given my aversion to actual work and my rationalization that it would not do for me to know too much more than my readers, it would have taken a more diligent analyst than I to make sense of it all.

As for caricature (which I loved to do), even if it *had* been possible to get timely video footage or photos of the parties involved in a state issue, it would still have been tough to sort out the good guys and bad guys. It was therefore easier for me to do national and international cartoons than to do cartoons about state issues. So I did the easy stuff. It was hard enough!

My Bob Jones, Jr. cartoon certainly illustrates the problems I had with local news. I had read at work one day that Bob Jones, Jr. (the former president of Bob Jones University in Greenville and the father of current president Bob Jones III) had put some kind of prayer curse on then-Secretary of State Al Haig for denying a visa to the radical Irish Protestant leader Ian Paisley. I had a photo of Bob Jr. and did a cartoon about it using his face. But the local TV news that night showed his son, Bob III, speaking from the Bob Jones University podium with a voice-over about the incident. So I erased the father's face and drew Bob III, figuring that TV news wouldn't lie, right? Wrong. When I got to work the next day with the cartoon all inked, my editor, Aubrey Bowie, told me that Bob *Junior* had said it, not Bob III. I told him what I'd seen; then I called the



TV station. The news director said, oh, yeah, that Bob Jr. had said it, but they only had file footage of Bob III, and they didn't think anybody would notice. I laid into him, but I was the only person who complained. I don't even think the Bobs caught it.

Today's cartoonists face new problems. One interesting, if alarming, development since my own days as a cartoonist has been that television coverage of national news events seems to have evolved into a cacophony of pundits—political columnists, commentators, and “think tank” spokesmen and -women possessing

varying degrees of scholarship and reason—each professing to analyze the issues of the day. Many of these “experts” harbor undisguised political ideologies and ties to interest groups that espouse and fund narrow political agendas. They are not journalists, although they play them on TV. They are Personalities: politically driven celebrities invented by TV news to fill all the space on cable channels like CNN, MSNBC, CNBC, and FOX. It’s hard to come away from one of these shoutfests with any real understanding of the issues. Nowadays, as I follow the news, I have to watch one or two cable stations, read one or two periodicals, and get Jim to read the paper to me every morning before I can make up my mind.

Another problem for today’s political cartoonists is that real Power—our perpetual target—has gone underground. Power today is defined by *access* to lawmakers and fueled by money. Politicians—or even the offices they hold—are no more powerful than the interest groups that support them. These groups—tobacco companies, insurance companies, drug companies, oil companies, and defense contractors; lobbying coalitions and Political Action Committees (or PACs) funded by large corporations, professional organizations, and other moneyed interests; and even large media outlets, to name just a few—act individually or together to elect and influence lawmakers.

Now *that’s* power.

Our funny little pictures of politicians no longer mean very much, except in context. I’ve wished since 1987 that we could make politicians wear those NASCAR racing suits with bright patches representing each of their donors. I even did a color cartoon to that effect in 1994.

Most ominously for newspaper cartoonists, the rise of the Internet allows more and more people to get their news online for free. The costs of producing a daily newspaper are rising, and subscriptions are falling. A few large media conglomerates are swallowing up smaller media outlets in cities all over the country. Focusing on the bottom line, more and more executives and businessmen are rapidly reaching the conclusion that the editorial cartoonist is an expense the newspaper cannot afford.

Cartooning positions are being eliminated at an alarming pace. When I joined the Association of American Editorial Cartoonists in 1976, there were many respected editorial cartoonists working full-time at newspapers all over the country—more than 150, according to Clay Bennett, the 2005 president of the AAEC and a Pulitzer-Prize-winning cartoonist with *The Christian Science Monitor*. But today, Bennett says, full-time cartoonists only number about eighty. The AAEC website reports a larger number of members—but too many of us are either semi-retired or freelancing.

As more and more of us become unemployed and our newspaper positions go unfilled, we cartoonists will find other ways to speak out. We will work for Internet publications; we will use the Internet to self-syndicate; we will become publishers of our own work. Maybe we’ll build openings to the world that even we don’t know about yet. But one thing is certain. We will never stop doing cartoons, even if we can’t earn a living at it. We will do them just for ourselves. We will be doing political cartoons when we are ninety-seven years old, living in the old cartoonists’ home. We can’t help it—we can’t stop.

# Twelve

## Resigning for "Health Reasons"

### I.

#### NEW EDITOR—NO PUSSYCAT

It is a well-known and possibly documentable fact that a significant number of cartoonists either resign or get fired when their newspapers change editors. I lasted four years, but I should have quit sooner.

Shortly before the new editor arrived at *The Greenville News*, I had a dream that comforted me at the time but which proved to be prophetic in a way I did not anticipate. I dreamed that, pulling into my driveway after a short trip, I was horrified to notice that my front door was ajar. Local TV news and public service ads had just begun warning (terrifying) a formerly untroubled citizenry of new threats lurking in modern life. One message in particular had me spooked: "Never Enter Your Home If The Door Is Open When You Get There—The Burglar May Still Be Inside!" In my dream, I entered anyway, fearing the worst—not that I'd be hurt, but that the house would look like one of those chaotic homes in the movies that have been ransacked (which is to say that it would be even *more* of a mess than I had left it). Imagine my surprise, then, when I saw that, instead of tossing the house for valuables, the burglar had *cleaned* and *organized* it! It had never looked better! I was both confused and delighted.

Some dreams are so vivid, they wake you up. So I woke Jim, described my dream, and told him that I thought it meant that the new editor would be *good* for me—would help me get my thoughts organized and rid my mind of all the clutter. Jim grunted "Hah!" and turned back over. But I was optimistic.

I should have realized that order can't be imposed from the outside; it has to come from within. I should have known that the irrational, convoluted thinking which produced my cartoons would not suddenly become coherent simply because my editor was a person who valued clear thinking. That dream, which comforted me at the time, I now interpret as a warning for me to straighten up and fly right.

As the new editor's influence began to assert itself, people gradually stopped goofing around at work. The environment became really professional and businesslike—which, if you've read this far, you'll understand was a real hardship on me. I can be professional and businesslike only for short periods at a time. My previous bosses, who hardly ever pulled rank, had always just ignored me as I flung myself dramatically around the office, proclaiming outrageous things I didn't mean. But the editorial regime-change brought with it an unwritten hissy-fit embargo. You might not think this is so awful, but then you are probably a normal person who never got sent out of class for giving a smartass answer during parents' day in the second grade.

The fact that the arrival of the new editor coincided with the 1980 election of Ronald Reagan undoubtedly contributed to my discomfiture. *The Greenville News* was a conservative paper that had heartily applauded my jabs at Jimmy Carter. The Powers That Be were pretty horrified when I tried to do the same things—or worse—to Ronald Reagan. This made it more difficult to

get cartoons approved. As the cartoon rejections piled up, I gradually became more frantic and insecure than is normal even for editorial cartoonists—and this led to *internal* hissy fits, which can trigger all sorts of physical ailments.

In 1984, it became clear that the Democrats would nominate Mondale, and that Reagan's "Morning in America" would keep on shining—with the Olympics in Los Angeles and everything. I realized that the chances of my getting a Democratic president to kick around were not so great.

I also began to worry about my kids, because in those days there was no after-school care, and James and Salley had both outgrown the childcare establishments in town. James and Salley were "latchkey kids," a much-deplored social phenomenon resulting from the growing number of us "Working Women Who Wanted It All."

Producing acceptable cartoons took longer and longer, and I had to stay later and later at work to complete them. My husband's work took him out of town overnight for a few days almost every week, and in the winter I was never home before dark. I did become more disciplined, but my ability to glean specific information from text did not improve. I had to highlight George Will's columns like term paper assignments. One day I realized I had just underlined every single sentence in his column, trying to understand it. I began to think that I had never been a good cartoonist—and that I wasn't smart enough to become a good cartoonist.

I felt like I was juggling seven or eight delicate glass balls that I could not drop: husband, children, work, home, social obligations—even Christmas cards and thank-you notes. Each sphere looked the same when it was in the air—but if I were to drop one, I would then see that some of the "glass" balls turned out to be balloons—or soap bubbles. I couldn't tell until one had shattered or floated away whether it had been delicate glass or just hot air. To complicate things further, other people would stand on the sidelines and suggest that I simply let some of them go and forget them. Most folks expected me to walk away from my work without a second thought, assuming that, as a woman, my family "came first." It was emphatically *not* a contest between my family and my work. I needed them both.

No one ever seemed to question the dedication of professional *men* to their families or remarked upon *their* ability to blend work and family. The problem for me was the *workplace*—not the work itself. I was as passionate about my work as any male who loves his. The problem was never my family. Our home was—and is—a messy, cluttered sanctuary.

In the early 1980s, if a woman with children had problems at work, those problems were invariably compounded by the lack of childcare, carpooling resources, and community support. If she became overwhelmed, she was expected to resign quietly, citing the necessity to "spend more time with her family." (That phrase, when uttered by a man, has lately become a laughable euphemism for "If I don't resign, they're gonna fire me.")

I know now that my work situation wasn't much worse than that of dozens of today's cartoonists—and it wasn't as bad as some of the horror stories I've heard lately at the conventions and on the Association of American Editorial Cartoonists' Listserv. Also, as a person who doesn't work and play well with others, I'm proud to have lasted so long in one place as a political cartoonist. I was employed at *The Greenville News* longer than I'd lasted anywhere else. It was my personal best.

But in the winter of 1984, at what should have been the height of my career, I resigned from the only job I'd ever been good at, citing "philosophical differences" with my newspaper. It was the truth, but I caught hell for it. I'm sure they would have preferred my resignation letter to state that I wanted to spend more time with my family.

I should have paraphrased another Frank Howard quote. In 1969, when he resigned as the Clemson football coach, Howard declared that he did so "for health reasons: the alumni got sick of me."

## II. WHAT KIND OF MOTHER WOULD . . . ?

Leaving work you love would be traumatic for anyone, I suppose. That was certainly true of my leaving *The Greenville News*. I missed friends and co-workers—the familiar everyday surroundings I’d come to take for granted. It was tough for me to get my bearings. In fact, I was probably what you’d call depressed. For about three weeks that winter of 1984, all I did was sit on the couch and stare into space. I refused to give interviews to TV stations or newspapers about my sudden job departure. I actually quit reading newspapers or watching the TV news—afraid I’d get a cartoon idea I couldn’t use. I didn’t cook or clean house or do much of anything. Social gatherings were torture for me. (By “social gatherings,” I mean stuff like going to the grocery store.)

At that time, Salley was in the sixth grade, and James was in the ninth. They’d come home from school and find me there on the couch, practically catatonic. They’d fix themselves snacks, then sit down and talk to me. They didn’t know from catatonic, so my unresponsiveness was fine with them. It just encouraged them to talk more. They talked about school, their classmates, projects they had to do; they worried aloud about friends, sports, and if they were popular.

You know how experts say parents should “talk to their kids”? Well, those weeks on the couch taught me that all you really have to do is let *them* talk. Just sit there and don’t say anything unless they ask you a question. You don’t even have to listen very closely. In fact, it may be better not to listen. Some of the stuff they tell you would probably be pretty disturbing if you weren’t catatonic.

I guess I was kind of like a dog. You know your dog is on your side. You can tell him anything and he won’t repeat it or call somebody’s mama or go to the principal to complain. Your dog is just happy to have you there with him.

Eventually, as I began to come out of the fog, I began to notice things again. The world, which had been so gray for so long, began to take on color once more. One morning, several months after I quit the *News*, I was having breakfast at MacDonald’s with my friend Cecile. Suddenly, delighted by a shimmering thicket of early spring trees outside the window behind her, I exclaimed, “Cecile! Look how many different *greens* there are in spring!” Since Cecile is an artist, I knew she would appreciate such a glorious sight. She looked, then turned back to me. “Wow—you *have* been depressed,” she said.

Another thing I noticed as I continued to improve was the drastic change that had taken place in societal attitudes toward working women. During the 1970s, married middle-class women with children who worked “outside the home” were relatively rare. We were, in fact, the subject of many magazine and newspaper articles and TV “Special Reports” citing the deleterious effects of daycare—now more properly called “childcare,” as my daughter-in-law, a talented preschool teacher, reminds me. (“We don’t care for the *day*; we care for the *child*,” she always points out.)

Everyone called it “daycare” then, though, and it was bad. We working mothers of the ’70s were the targets of studies which showed that the children of “stay-at-home moms” felt more secure, did better in school, and were less likely to be aggressive, get pregnant, use drugs, or wind up in jail. (“Single parents” were not even worth mentioning in those days. Their children were obviously doomed.)

I started working at *The Greenville News* in 1975, but my position was not made full-time for another two and a half years. Aubrey and McKinney did go to bat for the upgrade in 1976 or ’77,



though. They arranged an interview for me with a new mid-level manager I'd never met.

"Wear a dress," Aubrey had said.

I did.

The first thing my interviewer said was "Pretty dress."

Then he asked if I were married and if I had children. I told him that I was and I did. At that time, James and Salley were very young. He asked the children's ages. I told him. Then he asked how I could justify working full-time when I had two such young children at home. I wanted to tell him that if the Equal Rights Amendment passed, a question like that would be illegal; but I didn't. Instead, I told him that I thought my husband and I had the situation under control, and that *The Greenville News* didn't have to worry about it.

When I reported the essence of the "interview" to my editors, I don't think I'd ever seen McKinney so mad. (Unless, of course, it was at me, during a political discussion.)

I worked part-time for two more years until, in 1978, I became the first full-time editorial cartoonist in South Carolina.

The full-time position came with its own problems. I worked forty miles away from my home in Clemson, at the mercy of traffic—and, after 1980, at the whim of a new editor. If a cartoon was rejected, I had to stay at work until I came up with an acceptable alternative. Many times in the early '80s, I didn't get home until seven or eight at night. My husband traveled overnight for a couple of days almost every week for his work as a Clemson University Extension Specialist, but when he wasn't traveling, he could be home by five.

Before 1980, we lived in a neighborhood where the school bus picked the kids up almost at our door. But getting everyone safely *out* the door in the morning still posed problems. Back when James and Salley had first started school, I'd shave about fifteen minutes off their daily getting-ready-for-school time by bathing them and dressing them in their clean school clothes before they went to bed at night. My defense for letting the kids sleep in their clothes was "How dirty will those clothes get while they're *asleep*?" After half an hour at school, almost *every* kid looks like he slept in his clothes anyway.

My mother was horrified; on the other hand, Jim's family may have *thought* I was an incompetent, lazy, good-for-nothing mother, but they never—not once in more than thirty years—gave me a single indication if it.



*Dyeing Easter eggs with the children.*

I tried to measure myself against other mothers when it came to such things as birthday parties. My children had parties, and I baked their cakes myself—until they began to request store-bought ones. On James's seventh birthday, I decorated a special cake for him. He loved the movie *Star Wars*, so I thought a Darth Vader mask and helmet would be just the right decoration. Unfortunately, I didn't wait until the cake—which was a little lopsided to begin with—had cooled completely to apply the dark-

brown icing I'd concocted for Vader's face, and rivers of brown, goopy confectioners' sugar ran in directions that I had not intended, dripping randomly over the sides. My friend Louise (whose son is James's age) was, unfortunately, there to witness the disaster. Her helpfulness took the form of laughing derisively, causing me to protest the adequacy of my creation.

“But it *does* look like Darth Vader!” I protested. At just that moment, Salley—who was three years old at the time—passed through the kitchen.

“Salley!” Louise called. “Who does this look like?” She held the cake down for my daughter to see.



*The infamous Darth Vader cake.  
(Notice how it's listing to the left.)*

Salley studied the cake carefully, aware that there *must* be a correct answer—one she should know. Finally, she looked up at Louise and gave the only answer she could think of: “Louise?” she guessed.

Not bad, I thought. Louise *did* have a pageboy hairdo reminiscent of Darth Vader's helmet. The whole incident struck us as so funny that our friends, families, the whole town of Clemson—and now our grown-up children—retell it every once and a while even now. Sometimes all you have to do is say “Darth Vader cake,” and people start laughing.

But, as I said, I tried.

There were no after-school programs for older children in those days. That meant that as they outgrew childcare, my kids joined the legions of “latchkey children”—those who wore house keys around their necks so they could let themselves in after school while their parents worked. (Even *more* articles and news stories about this alarming new harmful phenomenon saturated the media.)

When the children were a little older, we moved to a new neighborhood, where we lived at the end of a mile-long, dead-end street. James and Salley, by this time too old for daycare, disembarked from the school bus at the mouth of our street. They then had to walk that mile home—rain or shine—almost straight uphill. They had orders to call me at work the minute they got home. Salley usually used these calls to report that James had told her there were spiders in the garage, or that he was eating ice cream with his mouth open just to gross her out, while James took the opportunity to complain that Salley kept hitting him, and could he please hit her back?

I'd listen happily, glad to hear their voices.

My neighbors—my friends—were appalled at the situation, maybe because they felt responsible for my children while Jim and I weren't there. My sister Marty, then a law student, told me that DSS (the Department of Social Services) could take my children from me at any time if any of my friends, neighbors, in-laws—anyone—reported the situation. But the worst was the day James told my *mother* that he was a “latchkey child.” I caught hell for that.

James and Salley did not participate in Scouts; I'd heard too many “stay-at-home moms” voice resentment that they had to ferry the kids of “women who work” to such programs. They were able to participate in YMCA sports, though, which were held after working hours and at the same time and place for both kids, thus making it easier to get both children to these activities. Thank goodness Salley didn't pine for dance classes or Girl Scouts or gymnastics—and thank goodness she didn't mind being the only girl on her soccer team or her basketball team. She played softball, too, and James played t-ball, baseball, and soccer. We had great friends who were willing to help us carpool to the Y. We ferried as many kids as we could whenever we could, and the other parents took up the slack.

It *does* take a village to raise a child.

Jim coached Salley's softball team, and I had to coach when he was out of town. Knowing nothing about sports, my main goal was to keep the girls from crying on the field because we were losing so badly. (Crying on the bench was allowed. I felt like it myself.)

My struggles as a working mother were made more difficult by my tendency to sleep too late—another quirk of mine that met with almost universal disapproval. Being a night person, I have a hard time waking up on time anyway, but I especially dreaded those mornings when Jim was away and I had to get the kids off to school. One such morning, while the children were still very young and we lived in the house where the school bus picked them up outside our door bright and early every day, I *really* wanted those kids to catch that bus. I did *not* want to take them to school in my pajamas again. Unfortunately, when I finally woke up, it was 8:30. “Oh, crap,” I thought—“not only have they missed the bus—they're gonna be *late*.” That meant I'd have to get out of the car and go into the school offices in my robe and pajamas to sign them in.

I rushed to their rooms. They weren't in their beds. (They were up!) Downstairs in the den, two empty little cereal bowls sat on the coffee table, but my children were gone. They had gotten themselves ready, had breakfast, and caught the bus without even waking me up!

I drove to both their schools that morning (Salley was at a separate primary school) before I went to Greenville, got them each out of class, combed their hair, and told them never to leave the house without telling me again. By the time they were in junior high, I had a serious reputation around town—no doubt embellished by my offspring.

But by 1986, suddenly it was *cool* to be a “woman in the workplace.” My sister Marty, by then a practicing attorney, even called me one morning—laughing—to tell me she'd seen a psychologist on *The Today Show* giving working mothers advice about child rearing. One of the TV psychologist's brilliant suggestions had been “Bathe the kids at night and dress them in the clean clothes they'll be wearing the next day—it saves time in the morning.” I made Marty *promise* to tell Mama what she'd just told me.

So now it was OK to be a working mother. There were after-school programs in the public schools and private childcare facilities for older kids; and daycare facilities for infants through preschoolers cropped up in office buildings as the workplace accommodated more female employees.

Just when I'd lost the last workplace I'd ever enter as an employee.

I was forty years old. It's no fun being ahead of your time.

# Thirteen



## Fourth and Long—Time to Punt

When you think about it, my career dreams were perhaps just a trifle grandiose. There I was, working in Greenville, South Carolina, and planning to be the first woman ever to win the Pulitzer Prize for Editorial Cartooning. In 1980, to my mind, that didn't seem so far out of reach. After all, there were only three full-time women editorial cartoonists in all of North America—and only two of us were nationally syndicated. I figured that sooner or later the Pulitzer people were bound to cave to the pressures of the times and give the prize to one of us—like NASA finally sending a woman astronaut into space, or Reagan finally appointing a woman to the Supreme Court.

I figured I had a shot, anyway. It should have been a clue to me that Etta Hulme hadn't won yet, and she had been doing really great cartoons for longer time and with a much wider syndication than I had. But—ignorantly—I liked my chances anyway.

Being just a little bit famous in a relatively small place can sure go to a person's head. I wasn't as famous as the local weatherman or any of the college football coaches in the area. But a cartoon of mine did appear in *Ms. Magazine*; another had been featured on CBS's *Face the Nation*, and, in 1980, my actual picture was in *USA Today*. The photographer they sent to take my photo told me she also did some work for *Newsweek*, so I asked, "Why don't you tell them to run one of my cartoons once in a while?"

She lowered her camera and sneered, "You're *getting* your picture in *USA Today*."

"I'd *rather* see one of my cartoons in *Newsweek*—my work's important to me."

"That's what they all say," she shrugged. That photographer must have been accustomed to egotistical jerks, but every cartoonist knows that publicity is just a means to help you keep doing cartoons.

All of that publicity put together was not a big deal—but back then, I thought it might help me keep doing what I loved to do. For the first time in my life, I actually felt successful at something. I felt competent—proud of the work I was doing.

But I never felt secure. All I cared about was job security at *The Greenville News*. Though a little more money would have been nice, I really didn't want to go anywhere else. I felt like the kiddie-show host in Roger Miller's song "King of Kansas City" who turns down a better job for more money in Omaha because he's "the hero of the younger set."

I'm the number one attraction  
At every supermarket  
Parking lot,  
I'm the King of Kansas City,  
No thanks, Omaha,  
Thanks a lot.

By about 1982 or 1983, I was beginning to think that some kind of award—*anything*—would soon be necessary for me to hang on at *The Greenville News*. I did win one award, but, in the end,

it didn't help. I won the Freedoms Foundation's principal award, their George Washington medal for editorial cartooning in 1981, for a cartoon I did contrasting the joyous reception given to the fifty-two hostages from Iran with the indifference—even hostility—returning Vietnam veterans had faced only a few years earlier.



The Freedoms Foundation may have mistaken me for a conservative. They were very nice, though. My mother flew to Atlanta for the formal banquet and ceremony, leaving my sister Marty to fend for herself in the hospital after an appendectomy. I gave a speech in which I mentioned that giving awards to cartoonists only encourages them, and added that my father would have been proud of this one. General Vernon Walters was the keynote speaker, and he did a great job of scaring us to death about all of Russia's nuclear bombs and how we need more military and defense stuff. I wasn't really listening—but I was drawing.



*General Vernon Walters*

The Pulitzer Prize for Editorial Cartooning didn't go to a woman until several years after I left *The Greenville News*. I'm glad it went to my colleague, Signe Wilkinson of *The Philadelphia Daily News*. Her cartoons display her rare combination of wit, good sense, and talent. Ann Telnaes, another great cartoonist—talented and fearless—was the second woman awarded a Pulitzer. Hers came after the millennium, so that's at least one woman per century. I hope more women will become political cartoonists, and that it will become less remarkable for people of my gender to snag cartooning Pulitzers.

We cartoonists who lose our jobs, it seems to me, are sort of like old baseball players who can't admit that the game is over for them—who will think of themselves as baseball players forever. I'll always be a cartoonist. I still do cartoons every now and then, just to entertain or comfort myself.

My friend and cousin-by-marriage, Jimmy (who disagrees with my politics one hundred percent), actually *was* a major-league baseball player in the 1960s and '70s. His professional baseball career spanned North America from Montreal to Hawaii, with stops at most of the teams along the way, including the Dodgers for a while. (Jimmy had something of an allergy to baseball managers.) Since his playing days ended, he has coached, sold sports equipment, managed farm teams, and scouted for various major league teams. He has an uncanny knack for spotting good athletes, and for recommending seemingly minor adjustments that can dramatically improve a player's performance. He'll spend two hours telling you how to throw a knuckleball if you let him, or how to hold a bat so that you get a natural follow-through. (After listening to him for several hours one night, I tried his hitting technique at infield practice for a young softball team my husband was coaching. For the first time in my life, I could actually hit the softball—with either hand!)

Once, before I resigned, Jimmy heard me express my fear that I might have to quit my job or risk being fired. In his uniquely sensitive way, he turned to the other friends who were present and said, "What the hell's the matter with her? Hasn't she ever quit a job or been fired before?" Then he turned to me and said, "Kate, these guys"—our friends—"they work for themselves, so they don't understand. But with you and me, well—there's always some SOB standing between us and perfection."

Back in 1980, I had signed a five-year contract with the Field Newspaper Syndicate, which placed my cartoons in a package with the work of five other cartoonists. They planned to market us to newspapers under the title, "The Best and the Wittiest." It's an awful name, I know, but nobody asked us cartoonists before they named the package. My own suggestion would have been "The Field Hands." (Later, the Chicago Sun-Times Company, which owned the syndicate, was sold to Rupert Murdoch and the name of the syndicate was changed to News Group Chicago, then again to News America Syndicate. I think it's called North America Syndicate now, but my former mates in our little package are still laboring under "The Best and the Wittiest"—or they were the last time I checked.)

National syndication meant that my cartoons were automatically sent to the more than 200 papers subscribing to our cartoon service. Suddenly, my work was appearing in newspapers from San Francisco to Philadelphia. It brought in more money, too, which was nice.

I knew that resigning from *The Greenville News* meant risking the syndication for which I'd worked so hard. Other cartoonists who had lost their base newspapers had subsequently been dropped by their syndicates. My editor at the syndicate was not optimistic. He pointed out that national syndicates, as a rule, believe that a newspaper's name beneath a cartoonist's signature lends an authority to the work that few cartoonists can claim on their own—and furthermore, it was his opinion that cartoonists without base newspapers don't produce high quality work.

I called the editorial page editor of *The Florence Morning News*, who had run some of my cartoons in the past. His paper was already subscribing to the syndicate package, so he agreed to let me use *The Florence Morning News* as my base paper as long as he wasn't bound to run every one of my priceless gems. He even offered to pay me a little bit for any extra state cartoons I sent him. That's how I was able to keep my syndication. In fact, the editor of "The Best and the Wittiest" told me that he was surprised to see my cartoons improve with my resignation from *The Greenville News*!

Unfortunately, the syndicate editor who liked my work was fired in 1985. He called from



California to warn me. We both knew what it meant. The new syndicate editors weren't as thrilled with my cartoons, so I terminated that contract just short of renegotiation time.

For a while, I did nothing but refinish furniture, build shelves, and drive my family crazy. When I started talking about ripping up all the carpet in the house and replacing it with a do-it-yourself parquet floor, Jim finally suggested that perhaps I should explore the cartooning opportunities left to me. In October 1986, on my own, I started a small fax syndicate designed to sell state cartoons to South Carolina newspapers, and by the summer of 1987 there were nine newspapers subscribing to my work.

The next September, however, I was forced to admit that, although it was fun, my state syndicate was costing more money than it was earning. I could draw the cartoons, but had no clue how to sell them or how to operate a business. I took a deep breath and reluctantly closed up shop.

About the time I gave up my state syndicate, another newspaper agreed to run my political cartoons. I did cartoons until 1988 for *The Anderson Independent-Mail*, and, after that, for a small syndicate called Associated Features.

I would have made more money during this time if I had been working as a part-time greeter at Wal-Mart, and I am dead serious when I tell you it's probably the only other sort of work I could manage. On second thought—I wouldn't be able to do that, either, if you have to get to work on time and be nice to people.

During those last three or four years at *The Greenville News*, in fact, there had been days when, driving past road construction crews on my way to work, I would envy the guy whose job it was to stand there with the sign that says "STOP" on one side and "SLOW" on the other. Not the one with the walkie-talkie, who had to coordinate with another sign guy farther down the road. That would be too complicated and fraught with opportunities for disaster.

So, in 1988, as far as cartooning was concerned, I was fourth and long—a punting situation. My options had run out, and it was time to give up possession. But it was hard to accept. I've always had trouble watching football on TV—not because I'm not interested, but because I can't watch a punting team jogging onto the field without feeling a bit of their defeat at that moment.

Rather than pace on the sidelines, I started hanging out with my Clemson friends who teach elementary school. These women dragged me into every “teacher’s store” they could find. When I reluctantly followed them into a children’s bookstore, I thought I’d hit bottom. I have never liked children’s books that much—not even as a child. I’d always preferred comics or funny parts of novels that my family read to me. There was a novel called *Helen’s Babies* that Mama read to us, and we kids requested parts of it every night. My parents did read children’s books to me—Mother Goose and fairy tales. I hated the cute morality stories designed to teach children to behave themselves. The few picture books I can recall captured my attention through writing that didn’t talk down to me or through art that drew me in.

I didn’t read to my own children enough. Many of my friends took their toddlers to the library once a week to choose new books to read—and I’ve heard many writers declare that their mothers introduced them to libraries at an early age. Alas, I was not among those prescient mothers. We’ve always had a lot of books around the house, but libraries have confused and overwhelmed me all my life. I can’t find my way around in them, and I’m always afraid I’ll forget to return the book, or even lose it. James and Salley had to be content with whatever children’s books we already had, or with the books others gave us. Such was my distaste for children’s books that I only read aloud to them things that I enjoyed, too. We read Dr. Seuss books, because they were silly and fun (and quietly subversive), and Richard Scarry’s books, because I enjoyed learning simple things like what people do all day.

When my friends entered the children’s bookstore, I whined and slumped like a kid after them. As I sulked from shelf to shelf, dragging my fingers over what I considered predictable fare—Disney “books-of-the-movie,” elementary word-play silliness, and stories about rabbits and bears going to school—one cover caught my eye. It looked as if it had been illustrated by a political cartoonist. I checked, but the illustrator was someone I’d never heard of—Stephen Gammell. His colored-pencil illustrations were funny, simple, and imaginative. Simple illustrations are hard to do, because the artist must combine an expert eye for the subject with a seemingly effortless command of his medium. It’s almost impossible to distort something into a satisfying caricature of itself unless you’ve drawn the real thing first. This guy was a real artist. The story was short, as a picture-book story should be, but it was full of characters and action and humor. Best of all, there was no moral. It was just itself. It was nothing more or less than a joyfully satisfying poem. The illustrations and the text went together so well that it was hard to remember afterwards which elements of the story had been told in words and which through pictures. I bought that book, written by poet Cynthia Rylant. It was called *The Relatives Came*, and it started me off on a new career.

I started playing around with colored pencils and—despite my chronic library anxiety—went to the Clemson University library to check out every book I could find on the writing and illustrating of picture books. I wanted to know what makes a good picture book and how the text and illustrations fit together. The first guidebooks I checked out were older ones that outlined what kinds of writing and illustration worked best in picture books. They listed a few examples of books that were well written and illustrated, so I checked some of those out next and studied them carefully. Then I went back for more information, this time selecting more recent books and magazines that also explained the mechanics of picture-book construction—how many pages make up the average picture book (thirty-two); how the pages are folded and cut; how to design your pages; how to decide whether to lay out your book in double-page spreads or to do it one page at a time; and many other things nobody thinks you have to know.

After months of research, I wrote down the stories and drew pencil illustrations for about three picture books, making them into storyboards, like a cartoon strip—two panels at a time, each representing a double-page spread. It had taken me seven months of full-time work to get that far—and I still hadn’t figured out how to get the books to a publisher. (I had to read *more*



books about that.) Finally, I sent all three books to about ten publishers each. When one book was rejected by a publisher, I'd send it to another. In order to keep the system straight, I had a kind of handmade graph of when and where each book had been sent—and when it had been rejected. I was rejected by many of the finest publishers in New York. One day's mail held seven rejections. That was a record. I didn't take it personally, because (a) I'd worked for newspaper editors; (b) I had more than one story out there; and (c) it really wasn't personal. Most of the rejections came in the form of a card or a form letter.

Finally, two publishers called to express interest in the same story. One wasn't crazy about the art, and the other wasn't crazy about the writing. I rejoiced at having spoken with *two publishers!* Then Simon and Schuster called to say they wanted to publish my story, "The Pink House." They weren't quite ready to sign off on my art, though—I had, after all, never illustrated a picture book before. So, before they made a decision about my illustrations for "The Pink House," they asked me to illustrate a book by Dianne Johnston Hamm called *How Many Feet in the Bed?*, a counting book in which three children climb into their parents' bed and count all the feet by twos. The editor at Simon and Schuster thought it would be a difficult book to illustrate because there was little or no action in the text. She felt that the illustrations needed to lend the book a "cinemagraphic" feel; static illustrations could bog it down. Luckily, I loved Dianne Hamm's text; I have since learned that I sometimes have to turn a job down if, on the first reading, I can't see the scenes in my head. While I was illustrating that first book, I wrote another book and sent it to my editor at Simon and Schuster. They called to say they wanted to put *The Pink House* on the back burner and publish the new book, *A Gracious Plenty*, next—which they did. So, by 1991, Simon and Schuster had published two books with my name on them, which I thought would make it easy to get more work. Maybe it would have, if I hadn't started another cartoon fax service to newspapers—and quit writing picture books. By the time I figured out that this cartoonist thing was over (at least as far as actually getting *paid* to do cartoons went), Simon and Schuster had been taken over by Paramount or Viacom or some other huge multinational conglomerate—and both my editor and art director had left. I no longer knew anyone in the building, and they didn't know me.

I was able to get some illustration work for other publishers, but not enough to keep me out of trouble. I didn't realize in those days that the big publishers are not going to send you on a book tour or get you on the *Today Show* unless you are a famous person—like the Duchess of York ("Fergie"), who wrote a series of silly stories about a helicopter named "Budgie." Most author/illustrators have to be their own publicists and sell their own books.

Many times, I would set up school visits on my own, relying on the local booksellers to get my books there—and the books would not arrive in time. This happened too many times to suit me. Then, in 1995, *A Gracious Plenty* went out of print. Jim and I got the rights and films to that book from Simon and Schuster, and, in 1998, we formed our own independent publishing company, Warbranch Press, Inc. We took the films for *A Gracious Plenty* to a printing company in Anderson, South Carolina, and had them print 4,000 copies in softcover. Later, when I'd finished the illustrations for *The Pink House*, we took those to the same printer—Electric City Printing—and had 5,000 copies printed.

We sold those books ourselves, knowing that if we didn't, we'd face a serious storage problem. We ordered cases of the books I'd illustrated for other publishers and sold those, too. That way, we knew we'd have enough books to cover any event.

I gave presentations at schools, charging an honorarium, but granting a ten percent rebate on sales of my books. I also presented at reading conferences, teacher's conferences, and other meetings. That led to other school visits. Thank goodness, after a couple of years, Jim retired from the Clemson University agronomy department and began to manage our business full-time.

By then, I had another two books ready to go, and we published *The Little Chairs* in 1999. But for the first five years, Warbranch Press lost money. *A Gracious Plenty* and *The Pink House* had already sold out and been reprinted, but we weren't charging enough to cover our costs.

By the fifth year, we were ready to give it up; but with the publication of our last two books—nonfiction picture books about the Revolutionary War in South Carolina—we started making a slight profit. I hadn't realized that such books were needed as resource material for third-grade classrooms in this state until someone from the state Department of Education spotted *Palmetto: Symbol of Courage*, which I wrote to inform the classes I visited about the history of our state tree and why it appears on the state flag. Schools and teachers began buying that book in large numbers. Our latest book, *Francis Marion and the Legend of the Swamp Fox*, is even more popular, thanks to the computer illustrations by our son, James. His art looks like lovely oil paintings, with none of the cartoony quality of my work.

I have, once again, found work I love. School visits are a cherished bonus to picture book writing that I never anticipated. I always tell the students that I write *picture* books, not *children's* books. The student groups often respond to my sense of humor even when their teachers don't—an indication that I have found my audience. But I write the books for myself, not for anyone else. If the students like the books, that makes me happy; but I tell them that they have their own stories to write, and that they should write for themselves.

Parents and educators often ask me what “grade level” my books are appropriate for. I honestly don't know. I've had adults buy my books for themselves, or for their siblings—and any book can be read aloud, so they are on the grade-level of whoever likes them.

I still do cartoons just for myself and for the annual Christmas T-shirts I've given to friends since 1989—and I'm still a member of the AAEC. We go to as many of their conventions as we can. I feel more at home there than with the children's book writers. Children's book writers are, as a group, very nice people, but they don't often get kicked out of bars and hotels at four a.m. for singing too loud, and I would miss that.



*The ToonTones, our cartoonist “pickup” band, at a convention in the early 1980s. Tim Menees plays piano while Dwane Powell (in flannel) plays guitar, Bill Sanders plays banjo, and I sing. Mike Keefe plays everything, but here he’s just on mandolin.*



Canadian cartoonist Blaine's picture of me.

## Fourteen: Postscript

### Campaign News You Didn't Hear



When he was a candidate for President and I was still the editorial page cartoonist for *The Greenville News*, I saw Governor Ronald Reagan fall into one of his birthday cakes. It happened during the 1980 campaign, in front of a slicked-up Chamber of Commerce crowd at Vince Perone's Restaurant in Greenville, SC. I wasn't supposed to be there, but my friend Carol got me in. She was the local news producer for the ABC affiliate out of Asheville, NC. She had insisted that I accompany her to get Secret Service clearance for the 1980 campaign, because she had an exclusive interview with Reagan after the speech, and other candidates to cover at a later time.

Carol and I had been friends for so long that she knew that, as a caricaturist, I wanted—and needed—to draw from life whenever possible. This was a chance no caricaturist could pass up.

By the time Ronald Reagan hit Greenville, he had the '80 GOP nomination pretty well sewed up. Carol was under his spell already—almost as giddy as the Chamber of Commerce. My attitude was more one of skepticism, if not scorn. For one thing, we political cartoonists like to think that, as a group, we are pretty resistant to the charm of politicians (though to be on the safe side, we usually try to avoid meeting them face to face). Secondly, I am personally allergic to conservative Republican charisma.

Vince Perone's restaurant was crazy with excitement the evening of the Reagan address. It caused alarming heart-lurches just to breathe the adrenalin in the air. The Chamber of Com-

merce, a rainbow of “steppin’-out” clothes, was seated at banquet tables. Everybody’s aura was all fluffed for the occasion.



Carol and I flashed our press credentials as we lugged her equipment to the small platform where the TV press was setting up. The platform was about fifteen or twenty feet from the stage area, where local and state GOP dignitaries perched at a head table. Two empty places at the head table awaited Ronald and Nancy Reagan. The TV press jostled for position in its designated space, networks and local stations snarling at one another over territorial rights. There was no doubt that Carol would win. She once “accidentally” dug a high-heel into the sneaker-shod foot of a national network cameraman who was trying to move her out of position.

I joined the “writing press” at a table directly beneath the stage—next to the steps that led to the head table. The writing press—seven or eight puffy, rumped white men, fresh off the “Zoo Plane,” no doubt—sat staring into the cosmos behind a clutter of coffee cups, cigarette butts, ashtrays, notebooks, and wadded-up napkins on the table.

They barely noticed when I took the last empty chair. The Zoo Plane is the plane of reporters that follows Air Force One or the plane carrying major candidates from stop to stop. They take turns riding in the candidate’s or the President’s plane.

The excited crowd shushed itself to whispers and rustles as one of the dignitaries on stage arose to speak. He introduced Republican Congressman (later SC Governor) Carroll Campbell, who, in turn, made a few opening remarks before introducing the candidate of his dreams—Ronald Reagan, there with his wife, Nancy.

The applause was enthusiastic as Secret Service escorts hacked a path through the Chamber of Commerce for the couple’s slow progress through the crowd. They slowed as they approached the steps where we stood. I was backed up against the press table and stuck in position there. Before climbing to the head table, the Reagans stopped and turned to face the crowd. Stopped right in front of me, close enough for me to have touched the candidate’s coattail had I been so tempted—which I was not. A dark-suited forest of tall secret service agents surrounded us.

There was some sort of fanfare, and someone at the head table spoke. Nancy Reagan’s red outfit shone through the suits. Large men around me seemed to be talking into their coat sleeves.

Then, as the familiar “Happy Birthday” arose from the multitude, a giant cake with white icing and burning candles was wheeled on a cart towards Reagan. This was the week of his sixty-ninth birthday, and the candidate was meeting the age issue head on. At every campaign stop there was a birthday celebration. “Mamma Perone” had ordered up a special cake for this one. Ronald Reagan, the Good Sport, leaned over to blow out the candles on the tall fluffy cake. Flashbulbs went off to catch the lighthearted moment. Reagan “overbalanced”, as we say in South Carolina, and fell front-first into that cake.

He recovered beautifully. I was impressed. White cake icing covered him from his lapels to his zipper, and he was laughing. Gingerly, he removed his suit jacket. Turning with the self-assurance of a man for whom disaster is only an adventure you haven't met, he handed it off behind him with an apologetic smile. Then he forgot about it.

I couldn't forget about it. The only people standing behind Reagan at the time of the Great Jacket Hand-Off were secret service agents and me. All the dark suits between me and Reagan's icing-covered jacket leaned out of the way. Several pairs of dark glasses cast cold attention on me. I won the jacket by default. Turning, I held it out in appeal to the now-alert writing press across the table. They shrugged. I had visions of attempting to clean it myself, messing it up even worse, and being roughly interrogated for hours—maybe even detained until some responsible family member or friend could vouch for me. As I have mentioned before, cartoonists have this—uh—problem with authority. As I continued to stand there, dazed by the responsibility placed in my hands, a young man dressed in the mustard-yellow vest, black trousers and bow-tie of the waiters at Perone's reached me through the confusion with an offer to take the jacket away and have it cleaned. Gratefully, I gave it to him.

By this time the Governor's trousers and tie had been wiped almost spotless as he continued to laugh and wave to the crowd. While others hovered over her husband's flawed wardrobe, Nancy Reagan began to look about frantically. Catching me in a sharp glare, she croaked, "What did you do with his jacket?"

"Er—I gave it to someone who promised to clean it." I replied, praying that that was the right answer.

Mrs. Reagan sucked in a horrified breath. "His index cards are in the pocket!"

The writers behind me chuckled. "Talk about spontaneous!" said one.

"Yeah," whispered another. "He's given that speech eighty times at least. He ought to know it by now."

If Ronald Reagan was concerned about the loss of his index cards, he gave no sign of it that I could see. Mrs. Reagan was frantic, although she hid it well. I am something of an expert on frantic women who hide it well, and I know one when I see one. Mrs. Reagan kept the corners of her mouth turned up in a simulated smile, but she held hurried, whisper-conferences with one campaign official after another. As the couple turned to mount the stairs to the stage, the Governor appeared to be having a jolly time. His wife looked stricken.

During the dinner which followed, the Reagans chatted with the other occupants of the head table. Mrs. Reagan's eyes darted every so often to the side entrance, and she intermittently lost that smile. I was on my fourth or fifth drawing of Congressman Campbell and the Reagans—near the end of their meal—when a young man hurriedly mounted the steps to the stage and handed a packet of cards to Candidate Reagan. He accepted them with gratitude. His wife almost fainted with relief.

The speech Governor Reagan gave that night brought forth the now-familiar themes of cutting taxes and attacking waste, fraud, and mismanagement in social programs; urged the rearming of America; called for a





renewal of national pride; trotted out numerous questionable anecdotes to support his positions—all without his appearing to glance at the infamous index cards. Nancy Reagan gazed at her husband with naked adoration. So did Congressman Campbell. I drew all three of them several times with little hearts and cupids all around them. The Chamber of Commerce whipped itself into a froth of nationalistic chauvinism—stomping, cheering, weeping, pounding the tables, waving little American flags. I hadn't heard that much noise since Clemson played Notre Dame at Death Valley.

If the cake incident made the national news, I didn't see it. I didn't even see it on the local news programs, although Carol said her station reported it—with video.

It wasn't mentioned in my own newspaper. I asked our political reporter some weeks later about the incident. He said that he had included it in a photo “cut-line,” or caption, and someone had edited it out.

He was grateful to me for bringing it up; he was beginning to think he had imagined it all, he said.

Looking back, I realize that what happened that night was nothing less than a harbinger of the Teflon Presidency. If Gerald Ford had fallen into one of his birthday cakes, he'd have icing stuck to him for all eternity. And the hapless, dour, crisis-ridden Jimmy Carter—sitting up there in the White House with John Anderson and Teddy Kennedy breathing down his neck, and all my colleagues starting to draw him the size of a peanut—well, the country, it seems, was ready for a president it could love. Embarrassing Presidential mishaps or misstatements would either go unreported or ignored by the public for the next six or seven years.

What a wretched time for me to have been a political cartoonist.