

My Unimpeachable Method of Mate-Finding

By Gara LaMarche

AS THE LEAVES turn to red and gold, my thoughts always turn to Richard Nixon and the notorious Saturday Night Massacre of Oct. 20, 1973. It never fails to invoke fond memories. After all, if it hadn't been for Watergate, I never would have met my wife.

On that Saturday night 15 Octobers ago, I was a Columbia University sophomore, watching the Mary Tyler Moore show in my fraternity room while cooking up some Hamburger Helper on my single hot-plate burner. A news bulletin announced that President Nixon had fired Watergate Prosecutor Archibald Cox — or rather, fired the attorney general and his deputy because they wouldn't obey his order to fire Cox.

Robert Bork, then third man on the totem pole in the Justice Department, agreed to do the dirty job.

Nixon was a Darth Vader figure for me and most liberal college students (there were more of us then) in 1973, and outrage over the Saturday Night Massacre spread rapidly through the Columbia community. The next night, there was a

hastily organized protest meeting at the law school.

The place was packed. Everyone was hot to do something. Most of the students who spoke called for some form of mass protest action — rallies, marches, civil disobedience. These were effective tools in the antiwar and civil rights movements, but I didn't think the "take to the streets" approach would work to rid us of Nixon, and might even be counterproductive. So I stood up to speak.

I argued that more sophisticated political action

'Suppose Nixon had never existed? I never would have met my wife.'

was called for. We needed to put pressure on Congress, at the grass-roots level, to begin impeachment proceedings. Rallies and marches might make us feel good, but diligent, district-by-district political organizing would be more effective. I thought it was a stirring speech, but it didn't seem to sway many people, so I left the meeting before it was over, feeling disillusioned.

Four or five other members of the audience felt the same way, and followed me out of the room. We got together and decided to found our own small impeachment group. For weeks afterward, we set up a card table each day outside the main entrance to the Columbia campus, supplied pens and paper, sold stamps and provided the names and addresses

of every member of the House of Representatives. We stopped students and others and asked them to petition Congress to urge Nixon's impeachment.

Hundreds and hundreds did, and soon the local news media took note of our little retail political movement. It was a heady time. It turned out that ours was the right strategy for dislodging Nixon, and if anyone actually took to the streets to protest the Saturday Night Massacre, no one noticed.

One of the people who came up to me after my law school speech and worked with me in our impeachment group eventually helped me get a job as a substitute teacher at the nursery school where he had once worked. By the fall of my junior year, I was a part-time nursery school teacher (and still a full-time student), living like a king on my \$5,000 salary. But that isn't really the point. The point is that while teaching nursery school, I met the woman who later became my wife.

Is that so remarkable? Maybe not. But suppose I had never opened my mouth at the law school meeting. Worse, suppose Nixon had never fired Cox, or that Nixon had never existed at all. Never mind how 20th-Century American history could have been altered — I never would have met my wife.

My advice to today's more "apolitical" students is to keep these musings in mind the next time you're more inclined to stay in and watch MTV than go off to a protest meeting. Maybe, just maybe, if you rouse yourself to go, you'll change the course of history — at least your own.



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