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Mr. William Jefferson Clinton
President of the United States of America
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington DC 20500-0003

October 28, 1996

Mr. President:

I am a 22-year old staff writer for the "St. Albans Messenger," a daily newspaper located in the heart of a Northwestern Vermont town. In my sixth week on the job, I encountered a woman who had an incredible story to tell.

The name Rosalie Lepeltier is familiar to you, I'm sure, and she was willing to share a memory that is special to her: the night you escorted her to the Hot Springs High School Debutante Ball of 1964.

As you can see from the enclosed story, Rosalie has neglected to see you as solely the Commander in Chief. She has taken it upon herself to treat that one night in 1964 as a special event and still remember you as, in her own words, "Billy Clinton."

In reading this story, you will also notice that Rosalie lives a stereotypical Vermont life; her country home is filled with morality and intelligence, two virtues she has surely passed along to all seven of her children.

For Rosalie, sharing her story with me gave her the chance to unbury a cherished memory in a modest way. As the story says, she would love to reunite with you one more time, and the song she wrote on that first inaugural night back in 1993 is wonderful; you should hear it yourself.

For myself, speaking with Rosalie gave me the opportunity to look at you and your position in a new light.

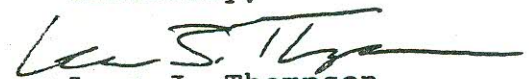
While a number of journalists have tainted our reputation by blowing you and your life out of proportion, I was fortunate enough to indirectly experience you in a manner that allows me to now view you as the same blood-pumping human being that I am. If I were to meet you, I would see more than the President of the United States, and I owe that to Rosalie Lepeltier.

I understand that you are running on a hectic schedule right now, Mr. President, but I thought you may enjoy reading about an old friend in any spare moment you may have. So enjoy the story and know that Rosalie and I are thinking of you.

If you wish to respond, please write to the return address I have provided at the opening of this letter.

Take care of yourself, and breathe after the election.

Sincerely,


Leon J. Thompson

A date with Bill Clinton

An East Fairfield woman's one-of-a-kind memoirs

By LEON THOMPSON
Messenger Staff Writer

EAST FAIRFIELD—"I don't even really remember that night. He knew me, I knew him, and he wanted to do it. It was a nice occasion."

The "he" in this case is William Jefferson Clinton. That "night" was 32 years ago.

Today, Rosalie Lepeltier sits at her kitchen table, the old yearbooks from Hot Springs High School laid out before her. As she talks, the memories of that night so long ago—her date to a debutante ball with the young man who would become president—slowly return.

Lepeltier is wearing blue overalls, a uniform one might expect of someone who makes clay smoking pipes for a living. That's something she has done since 1977.

Her life in this small rural town could not be more different than that of Bill Clinton. Their lives have taken radically different paths from their roots in the rural South.

Lepeltier doesn't follow politics. She doesn't watch television; the set is unhooked. She doesn't buy newspapers, and she has no desire to comment on any of Clinton's achievements or the alleged scandals that have dogged him over the years—Gennifer Flowers, the Whitewater investigation, Paula Jones.

The tall, slender woman lives in a house with a view of



(Right) Now an East Fairfield resident, Rosalie Lepeltier poses with her recognizable escort to the 1964 Hot Springs Debutante Ball. (Above) Lepeltier looks through a high school yearbook with her son Vincent.

Stone's Sunoco out the living room window. She has difficulty drawing the line between Bill Clinton,

president of the United States, and Bill Clinton, the member of the drama club who escorted her to the Hot Springs Debutante Ball.

"I always see him as the person I knew," she says. "I

Stone's Sunoco out the living room window. She has difficulty drawing the line between Bill Clinton,

president of the United States, and Bill Clinton, the member of the drama club who escorted her to the Hot Springs Debutante Ball.

"I always see him as the person I knew," she says. "I

'I always see him as the person I knew. I acknowledge his rise to power, but Billy Clinton will always be Billy Clinton.'

— Rosalie Lepeltier.

grew up in Hot Springs, Arkansas, a "bicycle ride" from Hope, Clinton's hometown. Lepeltier was one year behind Clinton while attending Hot Springs High School.

As she looks through her Hot Springs Trojans yearbooks, pointing out Clinton's picture in every other club photo on every other page, she remembers an active, involved, warm and sincere teenager who stood out in his class of about 400.

"He was very, very active, and into politics right from the beginning," Lepeltier says. "He excelled at anything he did and was an ambitious high achiever. He was well-liked and popular, too. He was cut out for the eventual job he got. Well, at least the campaigning."

Clinton's face is everywhere throughout his 1964 senior yearbook, a foreshadowing of what newspaper and magazine covers would be like in the U.S. some 30 years later.

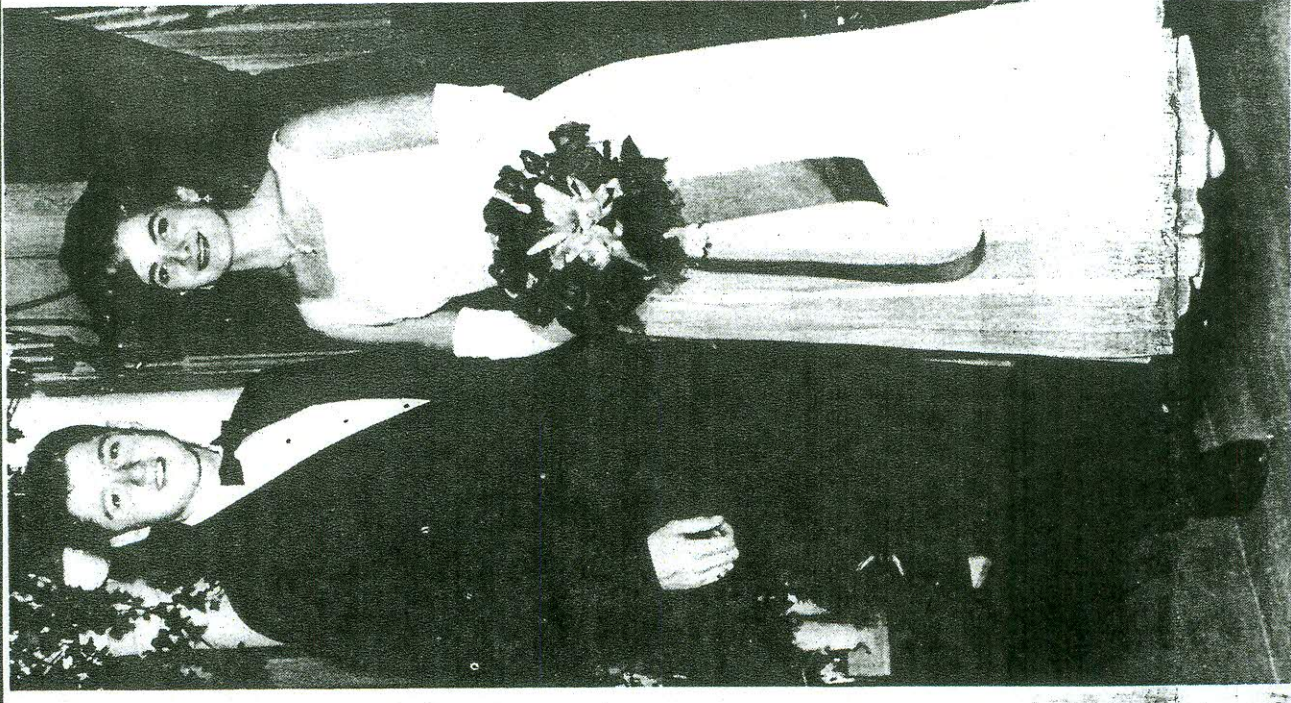
There's the president in his band major uniform with a caption that reads "Billy Clinton."

There he is again, wailing away on an alto saxophone in a group shot of the Trojan jazz band, The Stardusters.

And, yes, there he is one more time, in what would become a much-publicized photo, shaking hands with President John F. Kennedy at the White House.

Clinton did not sign Lepeltier's yearbook, but she has a photo of herself and

—Bill Clinton/DATE on the back page.



Clinton date:*continued from the front page*

Clinton — a future Vermonter and a future political giant — dressed to the nines at the Hot Springs Debutante Ball.

In 1964 Clinton was attending Georgetown University in Washington, D.C. and was home for the holidays. Lepeltier decided she wanted to attend the ball. A Christmas formal sponsored by her high school. It was held at an elegant hotel.

A member of numerous clubs herself, she had known Clinton by association. Going against all traditions of the day, she asked him, and he accepted without hesitation.

"It was like a fairy tale experience," she says of that night. "The ballroom was more impressive than the escort, but I couldn't have chosen a better person, could I?"

As tradition dictated, her father escorted her to the ball and gave her hand to Clinton. Clinton was a good formal dancer, she recalls. However, the conversation that evening was limited.

"There wasn't a lot of talking," she says. The music was too loud.

Lepeltier says she had no amorous feelings for Clinton.

"There was no boyfriend/girlfriend thing," she says, shaking her head. She emphasizes that Clinton was a complete gentleman who really didn't date frequently in high school. "He wasn't a ladies' man," she says, as if proud to destroy a current stereotype.

Lepeltier treats the night and her date with a future president with the utmost modesty. She refuses to live in the past or treat that one evening as the basis of who she was, or who she has become.

"This was an interesting vestige of the past that has nothing to do with my present or future. I don't want a lot of nosey people interfering in my private life or blowing this out of proportion," she says, staring into the candle atlame on her kitchen table.

"What bothers me the most is that this is nothing big, and people will try to make it out that way."

All seven of her children understand their mother's feelings about her date with Bill Clinton.

"I don't care," says her son Vincent, 9, on his mom's date with the president. "It doesn't interest me that much."

As Vincent plays with the family's dog, Lepeltier reflects on a different part of her life, the eight years spent in Paris with her former husband and her children. She remembers it as being anything but the "City of Love."

"That was a hard life," she recalls. "You have to conform more there. It is limited and small minded."

She and her family chose Vermont over Paris and over Arkansas, because her father was born in Groton and had owned land here for years.

Lepeltier and her husband divorced in 1994.

While residing in Paris she did hear from an old high school buddy who was attending Oxford University.

"It was about 1970," Lepeltier says of the reunion between herself and Clinton. "He just came into my home and visited with my family."

Lepeltier searches for a couple of letters buried somewhere in the Clinton memory pile one her table. As Vincent walks the dog through the house on a leash, she jumps ahead 22 years in her story.

In 1992, the governor of Arkansas was about to become the next president of the United States. Steadfastly campaigning across the country, one of his stops that September was in Burlington. Lepeltier decided to attend the rally with a couple of her children.

She never got to speak with Clinton that day and decided to write him a letter explaining her attempt at one more reunion.

"I wanted you to know that I wanted to find the man I once knew behind that picture-perfect image," she reads from her letter — a document reproduced on spiral notebook paper and written in blue ink.

She received an almost immediate response — a typed letter on Clinton/Gore Campaign stationery. On the right hand corner of the letter is a handwritten note.

"I am so sorry I missed you," wrote Clinton. "Please forgive

Vacancies:*from page one*

the time commitment the job entails, Gonnella-French said. "No one is certain yet they can afford that amount of time," she said.

There is also a reluctance to actively campaign for the positions, Gonnella-French said.

However, some possible candidates have told her they would be willing to offer themselves for appointment, she said.

"There is a sentiment of apathy to be found in the community; there is a core of people in the community who get involved but many more who do not," she said.

"I don't think it's just with school board issues," she said. "It seems like people just don't want to go out and get involved period."

Filling vacancies on the school board is frequently a difficult task. Superintendent of Schools Larry Ross said.

In his time as superintendent, he cannot recall any slot being contested, he said.

"It's a no-win situation generally as far as the public is concerned," he said. "No matter what the board's decision, someone is generally disappointed."

The flip-side of the issue is that being a board member is an important way for an individual to contribute to the success of the school, Ross said.

"The reality is the education of young people is a difficult job, but we need to emphasize that there are positive parts to being a board member," he said. "You can make a difference by influencing the direction of the school."

Correction

In a St. Albans Chamber of Commerce article on page 6 Thursday the setting for a Chamber mixer was listed incorrectly. The December mixer will be held at the Comfort Inn.

THE WEATHER

TONIGHT: Mostly clear. Low 35 to 40.

TOMORROW: Saturday, mostly sunny and milder. High 55 to 65.

REST OF THE WEEK: Sunday, partly cloudy. Lows in the 30s. Highs in the upper 50s to mid 60s. Monday, partly cloudy with chance of a shower. Lows in the 40s. Highs low in the 50s. Tuesday, partly cloudy with chance of a shower. Lows in the 30s. Highs 45 to 50.

OBITUARIES**CLEMENT E. HURTEAU, JR.**

A Mass of Christian Burial was celebrated for Mr. Clement E. Hurteau, Jr., Monday in Holy Angels Church, Father W. Andre Houle, a close family brother-in-law, and pastor of St. Peter's Church in Rutland, was the celebrant. Altar servers were James Brouillette and George Swann. Offertory gifts were presented by Clem's children Shawn, Michael and Jennifer Hurteau. Readings were offered by Clem's sister-in-law Linda Johnson and brother-in-law Thomas Baxter. Music was by organist and soloist Claire Hungerford. A guard of honor was present from the St. Albans Town Firefighters and Rescue Squad and from the Catholic Daughters of the Americas, Court St. Mary. In attendance at the church was the Ladies of St. Anne, St. Albans City Fire Department, St. Albans Town and City Clerk's Offices, Holiday House Nursing Home, Rocheleau Appraisal Service and the Vermont National Guard, 186th Battalion of Winoski. The bearers were David Brady, Lawrence Cherrier, John Geary, Albert Houle, Douglas Johnston, Roy Parsh Jr., Randy Swann and Kelly Westcom. The funeral cortege was escorted to Mt.

Calvary Cemetery by the St. Albans Town Rescue Unit where prayers of committal were offered by Father Houle. The Vermont National Guard held a Military Salute to their fallen comrade. The honor guard was under the direction of O.I.C. Capt. Robert Bates with firing squad members 1st Sgt. Don Gauthier, SFC Kevin Dalley, SSG Dan Landry, SSG Dominic Della, SSG Peter Viat, SSG Dan Bashaw, Sgt. David Brown and the bugler SSG Michael McGovern. Following the Salute presented the American flag from the veterans casket to Clem's wife Carolyn Hurteau. Interment followed in the Hurteau family lot, Sunday evening the Catholic Daughters of the Americas, with their chaplain, Father Bernard Bechard, S.S.E. held a rosary and Christian Wake Service with the family and friends in the Brady & Levesque Funeral Home.

ELLIS L. (JAKE) MCKNIGHT

Ellis L. (Jake) McKnight, 81,

passed away Sunday night,

October 20, 1996 at his home in

Pennsylvania. A complete

obituary will follow at a later

date.

**THE CROSSROADS**

MDA — where help and hope meet.

Orange Count

By ROSS SWED
Associated Press Writer

"That's personal."

She received an almost immediate response — a typed letter on Clinton/Gore Campaign stationery. On the right hand corner of the letter is a handwritten note.

"I am so sorry I missed you," wrote Clinton. "Please forgive



RANDOLPH, Vt. (AP) — It's 5:45 a.m. The rain has stopped, but the fog persists on