

Just Plain Bill No More

The Metamorphosis of a Pol From Arkansas

By David Von Drehle
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There is a seam in the fabric of time, the moment when a man stands in the sunshine with the Capitol towering over him, and a multitude stretched before him, and his words moving directly from his throat to the history books. Life is different beyond the seam.

With the whole world watching, Bill Clinton took that step yesterday. The gifted boy from humble roots in rural Arkansas completed his transformation into a storybook figure of the American Dream.

And certain changes came with it. Windy Bill Clinton, the Arkansas pol, became a president capable of brevity and pith. Clinton the Glad-Hander gave way, at least for a moment, to Clinton-of-the-Magisterial-Wave. The hand that signed "Bill Clinton" to proclamations as governor signed "William J. Clinton" on its first presidential document.

Of course, he still carried many recognizable traits: After a morning prayer service, Clinton jawed outside Blair House with his vice pres-

ident-elect and others; as a result he was 27 minutes late arriving at the White House. President Bush and his wife, Barbara, were left waiting. Clinton took the oath an uncharacteristic minute early, but by parade time was 45 minutes behind schedule again.

And watching him hike up Pennsylvania Avenue at the head of the huge procession, he looked much as he did before. His suit coat was unbuttoned, giving him that familiar friendly bearish look, and he was flashing the old thumbs-up and biting his lower lip.

But the change was fundamental. A veteran of the long Clinton campaign was sucking on a beer the other night at Washington's Union Station and discoursing on the transformation a president goes through. "Nothing will ever be exactly the same for him," the aide said. "Even his friends realize we will have to learn to relate to him a little differently." It was a common refrain among FOBs around town this week.

Clinton's transforming day began

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First Family's first moments: *The president hugs Hillary and Chelsea Clinton on the inaugural podium.*

BY RAY LUSTIG—THE WASHINGTON POST

CLINTON, From A1

with a vivid rite. Bush's national security adviser, Brent Scowcroft, arrived at Blair House at 7 a.m. in the company of a military aide. The aide explained to Clinton how to launch a thermonuclear attack. "The football"—that briefcase of deadly codes that follows the president everywhere—was passed along with the torch at noon.

At 8:06 a.m., Clinton burst into public view, with his wife, Hillary, and daughter, Chelsea. They breezed into a limousine for a 3-minute ride to the Metropolitan A.M.E. Church. As president, he will have to get used to three-minute rides, and 30-second rides, and rides of 50 yards or even less. The Secret Service does not like presidents hoofing it.

Bach's gentle air, "Jesu, Joy of Man's Desiring," was playing as the Clintons entered. The music stopped abruptly in favor of a brass fanfare until they reached their seats, and then the organist led the congregation through the popular hymn "Holy, Holy, Holy," at a rip-snorting pace. Clinton knew the first verse by heart, and peeked over Hillary's shoulder at the words of Verses 2 and 3.

The Rev. Robert Stephanopoulos, a prominent Greek Orthodox priest from Manhattan and father of White House communications director George Stephanopoulos, read some Scripture. His selection: The prophet Isaiah counseling his countrymen "to loose the bonds of injustice . . . to let the oppressed go free . . . to share your bread with the hungry and bring the homeless poor into your house. . . ."

Clinton's friend from high school, Carolyn Staley, sang the same song she sang at his second inauguration as governor. Then the Rev. Gardner Taylor, the famed preacher from Brooklyn's Concord Baptist Church, gave the best speech this city heard in a whole week of speechifying. He seemed to

sweep up the whole of human existence, "the grandeur and the grime," and when he was finished Clinton and everyone else in the church sprang to their feet and applauded.

As the service was ending, Clinton wiped tears from his eyes.

It was about 10:30 a.m. when he reached the White House—another of those brief limo rides, but this time Secret Service agents hung from special handles on the outside of the car and the short passage

"Nothing will ever be exactly the same for him."

seemed charged with a new importance and danger. He was very near to being president.

Perhaps he felt lucky as he rode with Bush to the Capitol. The day was magnificent: sky cloudless, sun brilliant, air bracing. He planned to give a speech about spring, and about hope, and his setting was perfect, almost beyond believable.

The event itself was so rich that even senators gawked, and some took snapshots with little cameras hanging from their wrists. Albert Gore Jr. was sworn in as vice president at 11:45 a.m., and then the Marine Band played toe-tapping marches as the last seconds drained from the Bush era.

When Clinton completed his oath at 11:59 a.m., a cheer went up that startled the gulls from the fountain at the western end of the Capitol. They wheeled and cried while cannon boomed a rumbling salute. He was introduced for the first time as "The President of the United States."

The thing he worked so hard for was his. Afterward Clinton lunched with Congress

and traded good-natured barbs with Senate Minority Leader Robert J. Dole (R-Kan.). Speaker of the House Thomas S. Foley (D-Wash.) presented the new president with a letter opener to "cut through the tangle of legislative challenges," and Clinton said: "Like magic I tilted in Senator Dole's direction."

Dole got him back by suggesting in a stage whisper that the new White House pens write only in red ink.

The Clinton era had begun.

And then the day stretched out in a long blur of beginnings. Clinton reviewed troops of the armed forces he suddenly commands. He rode the presidential limousine through a roaring canyon of his people. He tried speaking to them through Mr. Microphone—as Bush liked to call the limo's loudspeaker system—but the crowd's noise drowned him out, so at last they coaxed him from the car with chants of "We Want Bill!"

Clinton stepped onto the reviewing stand at 3:50 p.m. to the strains of "Hail to the Chief." Was this everything he imagined? He looked blissful as the bands marched past, covering his heart when flags went by, standing solemnly for the passing of troops, clapping and waving to high school majorettes, snapping a salute to an Indian chief.

The president got so engrossed in talk with Secretary of State-designate Warren M. Christopher that he almost missed the fabulous Florida A&M University band, but brother Roger Clinton shouted and gestured enough to focus his attention.

Behind the Old Executive Office Building, the sun faded to black. In the White House, busy laborers in blue uniforms scurried to unpack all the Clintons' possessions. When at last the parade ended and Clinton climbed the driveway to his . . . home . . . everything was to be just the way he wanted it.

That is not the life of a poor boy from Hope. It is the life of a new person: President William J. Clinton.