

b Philadelphia Inquirer  
Sunday 3-14-93



Steve Lopez

## Specters, please get it together

Not long ago, Philadelphia Councilwoman Joan Specter had a piece in *The Inquirer* on the subject of guns and violence in schools.

It couldn't have been more timely. As everyone knows, there seems to have been an explosion of gun-related violence lately, not just in schools, but everywhere.

The Waco situation, for instance, and the murder of a Pensacola doctor outside an abortion clinic. In Philadelphia, we've had the carjack murder and the woman charged with shooting her daughter.

In her piece, Joan Specter said there were six shootings in local schools last year, and "at long last, metal detectors are in place at public high schools." She said we can only make the world safer if we "put our children ahead of politics."

### A fly on the wall . . .

For the first time, I found myself agreeing with something said by a member of the Specter family. But I also wondered what it would be like to have breakfast with the Specters.

Maybe like this:

**Joan:** Arlen, can you pass the butter?

**Arlen:** Yes. No. I'm not sure. Has anyone written an editorial on whether I should pass the butter?

**Shanin:** Dad, you were great on Anita Hill. And wasn't it something, the way the campaign made Lynn Yeakel out to be a bigot?

**Joan:** Shut up, Shanin. And grow up. Arlen, I'm trying to do something about violence, and it's a little embarrassing having you hold out against the Brady Bill while people are blowing each other's heads off. And can you explain why the hell you take all that money from the National Rifle Association?

Of course, I'm not at the breakfast

table, so this is only a dramatization.

But it's interesting that while Joan writes about crime prevention, her U.S. senator of a husband holds out against a bill that would require a five-day waiting period to buy a gun.

The bill is named for James Brady, who was shot in the head while serving as President Reagan's press secretary.

In October, Lynn Yeakel, Specter's opponent, stood in front of Children's Hospital in Philadelphia with Brady's wife, Sarah, and said: "Who stands in the way of the Brady Bill? George Bush, Arlen Specter and the NRA."

Sarah Brady said Arlen Specter had received \$133,000 in NRA contributions over the years.

My advice to the Specters, if

they're to avoid this kind of embarrassment in the future, is that they stay out of journalism. At least until they get to know each other better.

### Like senator, like son

Last year, Arlen, while trying to explain his magic bullet theory, shot himself in the foot. And six weeks ago, Shanin wrote about U.S. Attorney General nominee Zoe Baird, who dropped out in the controversy over her employing two illegal immigrants.

Shanin was upset, saying good people will be discouraged from public life if exposed to this kind of bashing. And on this subject, actually, maybe we should pay heed. As a top adviser in his father's last campaign, Shanin speaks from experience.

In one of the most despicable tactics in recent campaign history, Yeakel was branded a religious bigot because of a Middle East position taken by some members of her church. Shanin himself called her "indifferent to bigotry."

In lamenting Baird's demise, Shanin wrote, "Virtually no attention was paid to the question that continually dogged then-Judge Clarence Thomas: Was this the best-qualified person for the job?"

Shanin, Shanin, Shanin.

First, Thomas' qualifications were the last consideration.

Second, Arlen Specter did more than his share to make that so.

Third, after Arlen trashed Anita Hill and paved the way for Clarence Thomas, Shanin himself told me his father didn't consider Thomas the most qualified person for the job.

See? Commentary can be tricky.

### Recommended reading

But I digress. On Friday, I called Arlen Specter to talk about guns. He didn't call back personally.

He might have been rethinking his position on the voter registration bill again. He was *against* on March 5, and *for* on March 9, after reading an editorial that scolded him. This made four positions for him in one year, a Specter family record.

An aide called to say the senator got \$6,900 from the NRA in '92, but \$130,000 is high for his career. She also said Specter doesn't think gun control is a good crime deterrent.

That makes no sense to me. But I'll defer to a man who built a career on the theory that a bullet can do gymnastics. I would only suggest that Arlen "put our children ahead of politics," to borrow a phrase.

If you haven't seen it, Arlen, I can send you a copy of Joan's work.