

This much I know

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It is important to feel time passing. Clinton is driven by a sense of mortality, having to do with the fact his father died before he was born. He told me once that everything he did he did for two people: Hillary and his father. As a result he never forgot that the American presidency is work, a job, and one with limited time. Comebacks are what America is all about. F Scott Fitzgerald said there are no second acts in American lives. It's the most untrue thing ever. There are second and third and fourth acts.

Always be prepared to change your point of view. I grew up 10 miles apart from Hillary Clinton. When I worked with her at the White House she was often the pessimistic realist and I was often the optimist. The relationship worked because sometimes the roles would switch.

I saw JFK speak when I was 12. He taught me that to be heard you did not have to shout and wave your arms. I heard he read the New York Times, so I found a newsstand in Chicago where I could buy it and I read it religiously a day late. To me growing up in the Midwest, newspapers were the opening up of the world.

My grandmother had been a showgirl. She lived with us in her nineties and told me stories. All the stories were versions of the classic American story of perseverance over adversity.

My father and uncle were both good boxers. My precinct captain in Chicago who gave me \$5 for getting people out to vote was a corner man in the ring. Standing up to bullies was what you were taught to do.

America is a place of endless possibility. The American leaders who can articulate that are the ones that resonate. President Bush's rhetoric is the exact opposite of America - dark and apocalyptic.

We are the products of our parents' beliefs. Clinton's father used to say when he died he'd go to Roosevelt.

Your good name must be defended. On my first day at the White House, there was a story on a website that said I was a wife-beater. It seemed to me I had no option but to file suit. If you do not stand up for yourself, why should anyone believe you when you say you will stand up for them?

Lawyers stop at nothing. I was called to the Grand Jury three times. The worst part was that I never knew how reckless the Whitewater prosecutor Kenneth Starr would be. It was said he would indict a ham sandwich.

I was a political journalist for 27 years. The main difference between being a journalist and being a politician is that a politician is completely vulnerable.

Politics is all time and patience. Time and patience tell us that the Republicans are running scared. The demographics are all against them. That is what makes them dangerous.

Don't trust your friends. The attack on me during the impeachment by Christopher Hitchens was totally unexpected. I was a friend of his, but he was not my friend. It's only under duress you learn who people are.

Great leaders make everyone feel important. Clinton was genuinely interested in who people were and where they came from. That was as true for individuals as for foreign policy. As a result, the world did not regard the United States under Clinton as the arrogant superpower it seems now.

There are no fixed points in politics. Hillary said her husband was a master of ambiguity, which is the most crucial quality. A political leader should never believe events are simple or settled.

Writing is a way of coming to terms with events. My father and brother both died while I was writing my book, which put the rest of it in context, and made me hope the writing would last.

Fathers learn from their children. My sons were teenagers at the time of the impeachment trial. My younger son went through the whole thing every day. I was not home till late every night. One night, he posted on the fridge a handwritten note with a quote from Martin Luther King: 'We will remember not the words of our enemies, but the silence of our friends.'

My Jewishness has always been a source of strength. My father was the opposite of a persecuted figure. He and his friend went around busting up Nazi rallies in Chicago in the 30s armed with tyre irons. My religion has always been the root of my faith in secularism.

All marriages are mysterious.

I never operate with a sense of fate, but fate seems to operate with a sense of me.