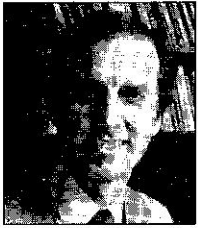


EDITOR'S ETC.

BY DEAN MERRILL



It was a dark and stormy night—literally. Thunderheads plumed into the April sky, and the aging DC-3 groaned westward against the turbulence. My fiancée, flying home to see her parents for Easter, gripped the armrest and wished for solid ground.

The mood was lightened, however, by the handsome man in the dark suit across the aisle, a junior Congressman on his way home for some early campaigning. He'd be seeking another two years in November, and he regaled the potential voters on the plane with jokes and banter.

"Where do you go to college?" he asked my fiancée. "What's your major?" They chatted amiably, trying to ignore the bumpy ride. Soon the stewardess came down the aisle trying to serve beverages, a tricky task. "Need a little help, sweetheart?" the man asked with a wink. "Always glad to help a constituent, especially if she's blonde." The passengers laughed.

Then it happened. The plane shuddered, and the cabin went dark. People moaned. Were they going to crash? No, the engines were still droning. But all interior lights were dead.

No one enjoyed lurching through thunderstorms in the dark, but the

Congressman was most disgusted of all. Things like this happened nearly every trip home, he announced in a loud voice. He began to swear about the airline's shortcomings. The stewardess came by to apologize, but failed to assuage his ire.

The more minutes that went by, the more profane he became. After

"Need a little help, sweetheart?" the man asked with a wink.

half an hour in the dark, the plane finally landed at my fiancée's city, where her parents greeted her with relief.

Today, more than 20 years later, the one-time Congressman, with a little more gray in his hair, is working hard to become the next President of the United States. You'll find his views outlined, along with those of his opponents, in the cover story and chart on page 16. He is now one of the well-packaged, thoughtful-sounding leaders who aspires to guide this nation.

I asked my wife the other night, "What if your buddy from the plane ride wins the nomination? Are you going to vote for him?"

She thought for a moment, then said, "No, I don't think so." I reminded her that her family had always favored his political party. "Yes, I know," she said, "but I saw enough inconsistency that night to know what he's really like."

Lord Chesterfield, English statesman of the 1700's, once told his son, "You must look into people as well as at them." This election season, American Christians have an awfully lot of candidates to look at. It takes a careful eye to see inside the individual, to discern whether the personality is made of steel or stubble.

Is it fair to ask such questions? Many voices today say no; don't get "personal," let the candidate have his "privacy," the public positions are all that matter. I disagree. Four years in the Oval Office are bound to push the occupant beyond the most carefully laid policies and campaign promises. At that point, principle takes over. Which principle?

D. L. Moody once defined character as "what a man is in the dark." Between now and 1992 our nation may well hit one or more stormy nights. Let us, with God's help, choose the steadiest pilot.

Dean Merrill

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