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His divorce was brutal.

date. They talked about education for the handicapped. "It was really cute," says Elizabeth. He kept up the courtship at long distance during his lonely '74 campaign for re-election to the Senate in the downcast of Nixon's tailspin.

Bob Dole is a loner who can't stand to be alone. If there aren't four people in his office pressing him at once, he'll work the phones. Elizabeth Hanford was rather taken aback when he asked for a favor. "If you don't mind my calling you kind of late in the evening, it's just kind of something I look forward to..." She was a warm voice at the other end of exhausting days driving the monotonous infinities of Kansas.

Elizabeth hesitated. "These middle-of-the-night calls didn't put me in the best situation for work the next day, but I felt like that was one way I could make a contribution to his campaign."

The most revealing story Elizabeth told me was of Bob's visit to her parents in North Carolina. One morning, unbeknownst to his wife, he went downstairs while her mother was fixing breakfast. He had on bathing trunks, with a towel thrown over his shoulder.

"I want you to see my problem," he said. Then he pulled off the towel.

"It was something he felt needed to be on the table," says Elizabeth, still awed by his painful honesty. Even today, Dole admitted to me, "I purposely won't look at my shoulder in the mirror. I don't know why. It shouldn't bother me."

Finding a moment to get married in December 1975, the Doles moved into his apartment in the Watergate; six months later he was off and running again—this time on the national ticket. It was a breakneck ride. The survivor of Ford's vice-presidential selection process, Dole was the only Republican whose conservatism was concrete enough to please the ascendant Reagan right-wingers. Ford's people said, "Let's announce in Russell. Tomorrow."

His eye blooded with a broken vessel from all the strain, Bob Dole came home to Russell, this time in a la-di-da (as he would see it) presidential helicopter. The whole county had a population of 9,664, and yet 10,000 people were jammed in the courthouse square to see him. Stepping smartly to the speaker's stand, Dole introduced the president while his wife and his daughter, Robin, flanked Mr. Ford. But what met his eyes were the faces of the people who had filled the cigar box for his operations.

"I can recall when I needed help, the people of Russell helped..."

His voice broke off. His left hand came up to his head. Elizabeth instinctively leaned forward—was he about to collapse? Ford restrained her. Russ Townsley flinched. He'd heard that "silence" only a few times, in connection with assassination. But then Dole's shoulders began to tremble. The audience could see that Bobby Dole, unbelievably, was just plain crying.

Ford broke the awkward silence by rising to his feet to

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lead the applause. With scarcely a dry eye left in that sun-filled courtyard, Townsley went back to his paper to write, "I was relieved to see it was Bob Dole, being as human as I've ever seen him in thirty years."

BUT THE ROUGH EDGES WERE STILL THERE, and under the glare of his first national campaign, they made Bob Dole look small and mean. He personalized his crude partisan attacks. His charge during the debate with Walter Mondale that every war in this century had been a "Democrat war" turned off the nominal Democrats he needed, and incensed conservative columnist George Will, who condemned Dole as a liar about history who deserved to be forgotten.

Despite polls that showed he'd helped gain significant support for the ticket, Dole was blamed by the press for losing the election for Ford. It was Bob Dole's first political defeat. "I'd always wondered how he'd react," says Phyllis. "He can't stand to lose control." Indeed, he did not react well.

"Remote" and "hostile" are two words used by old Kansas associates from whom he remained aloof for the next four years. His humor, or the brittle remains of it left in the detritus of that campaign, he turned on himself. Referring to his debate with Mondale, he quipped, "I went for the jugular—my own."

During the holidays after the campaign, though he's never sick, Dole succumbed to the flu. He gave his only comment on the defeat: "Elizabeth," she remembers him saying, "this is a disappointment. I'm so glad I have you." That was it. And that, for Bob Dole, spoke volumes of appreciation. He never raised the subject again. When the Senate reopened, he plunged back into his work, kept busy, kept moving forward, kept running.

By 1980, some of Elizabeth's social confidence seemed to have rubbed off on her husband. This was a lady not so much as grazed by the Cinderella complex. Raised comfortably in Salisbury, North Carolina, she distinguished herself at Duke University and Harvard Law School, and staked out a yuppie career path well before her time. While her friends were trading in frat pins for wedding rings, Elizabeth slipped off to the Soviet Union and talked about Sputnik. She made it to the White House (as consumer-affairs adviser) by age thirty-three, setting a record Bob Dole likes to say he can't match.

The senator appears delighted by his wife's dazzling success. Predictably, she shies away from the suggestion that theirs would be a mom-and-pop presidency. A woman who commands the equivalent of four divisions in the Reagan revolution, with 100,000 employees as secretary of transportation, could hardly be expected to find fulfillment in picking china patterns. Certainly she would redefine the role of First Lady. Perhaps Robin Dole, less ambitious, could pinch-hit as First Daughter while Elizabeth did what she likes best: launching seaways, selling railroads—that sort of thing.

In 1979, the Doles were already in demand around Washington as a power couple, her smiling, bubbly manner a perfect complement to her husband's acerbic stiffness. What many miss is that she's as disciplined as he is. Schooled in professional southern charm, Elizabeth says nothing she doesn't intend to do—with utterly (Continued on page 146)

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(Continued from page 120) convincing spontaneity. If she thought her husband's run for the presidency in 1980 was doomed from the start, she never said so. She appeared at joint speaking engagements with the poise of a perfect meringue, a delicate, sugary coating over her own raw ambition. For her, the decision to quit her prestigious job to help her husband campaign was "all good for the career path." This time, Dole himself will resign as Senate minority leader, "if it looks like I have a real shot," and expects his wife to quit again. In the event of a successful Bob Dole presidency, the redoubtable Elizabeth would have a unique opportunity to present herself as the first experienced female presidential candidate.

Robert Ellsworth is Dole's only confidant besides his wife. I asked him to assess how the man's character has been shaped by his life. He demurred. When I pressed, he came up with the Germanic myth of the ring, on which Wagner based his opera cycle: two would-be heroes, one given a head start by the father of the gods; the other, Siegfried, born without privilege or even a living father. It is Siegfried who conquers all.

"Dole has not been given anything by the gods, ever, yet he's emerged from it all as truly whole, internally powerful," said the man ranked as "general" in the senator's exploratory committee for the presidency. "That's what it takes."

Perhaps, but it can also create a control freak. The Doles' only child was

born fat, according to her mother. Her father used to needle Robin with mean nicknames, and he bugged Phyllis about her weight too. Called her "Bones." As she analyzes it, "he had to fight to get control, and I think he can't understand when other people can't control."

Dole's own discipline is there in his military bearing, in his work habits, in his management of staff. Jo-Anne Coe, for twenty years his faithful office manager, cannot remember a word of praise. He can fire people as coolly as his father read the war wires.

The bright side of his need to control is how proficient he's made himself at so many things. Dole has become as good a speech writer as any of the pros who used to work for him. He winks it now, alone. And he is known around town as his own best press secretary—no offense to the very able man who holds that title, Walt Riker. Dole became virtually the designated hitter for Republicans during the Iran crisis. He didn't miss a Sunday on a major news show for six weeks. Other Republican leaders watched in awe. Almost daily he came up to bat and threw out another suggestion for what Reagan should do to save his presidency.

But, alone among Republican leaders, Dole never called for the obvious: Donald Regan's resignation. Why? Because Bob Dole learns from past mistakes. During Watergate the CREEP people had hung him out to dry. There he was, taking heavy flak as G.O.P. chairman, and Haldeman and Ehrlichman wouldn't take his phone calls. When Transcan exploded, Dole culti-

vated his former enemy Regan, and was cut in on the loop of phone calls when everyone else was on the outside. He went out of his way on *Face the Nation* to praise the president's dissembling chief of staff. As a result, Dole was able to separate himself from a tar-baby president, collect praise from all quarters as a voice of reason, even knock Reagan on the op-ed page of the *Washington Post* and simultaneously—just short of miraculously—earn a pat on the back from Reagan through Regan.

"Sitting next to his office door is like watching George Brett take batting practice every day," says Riker. "Dole is a Political Hall of Famer."

But what does he stand for? What is Bob Dole's vision of America's future?

Dole's brand of conservatism stands apart from the triumphant economic ideology of the Reagan era that has brought us record-busting deficits straight through a prolonged recovery. And he remains aloof from the Ramboesque interventionism on foreign policy. His innate sense of fairness has prompted him to back such conservative bugaboos as protecting voting rights for blacks, the 1962 tax increase, and the food-stamp program he helped to start with George McGovern. When reporters feed back to him criticism from conservatives who want a true believer, his anger flashes: "That's too bad. There's a need."

Dole still has a sound enough conservative voting record to earn a zero rating from the liberal Americans for Democratic Action. He has consistently voted with the president on defense,

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S.D.I., and funding the contras; with the pro-life forces on abortion; with the National Rifle Association on looser gun control. He has called for constitutional amendments that would mandate a balanced budget and allow for organized school prayer. And on arms control he dug in to repulse efforts in the new Democrat-controlled Congress to force the administration to comply with the unratified SALT II treaty.

But the pragmatist in him keeps muddling the scorecard. To protect his agricultural constituency and woo farm states before the 1986 congressional elections, Dole urged the administration to offer a bonus to the Soviet Union for buying grain from U.S. government-subsidized surplus. On the tax increase he fought for as Finance Committee chairman, closing loopholes on bankers and insurance fat cats, he told Reagan to "just say yes," and got away with it. Today, Dole can point to a \$10 billion annual reduction in spending.

But does this add up to the sort of coherent political philosophy that can separate Dole from the pack—what his rival George Bush calls, in exasperation, "the vision thing"? Vision is a gut feeling for how the world works that is formed before reasoning begins. Bob Dole grew up with hardworking people who were all broke at one time or another. In that isolated state of mind called Western Kansas, hotbed of populism a hundred years ago, the paradox that enflamed passions then is echoed loud and clear today: that for all his industriousness, intelligence, machinery, and ability to feed the Western world, the American farmer is being driven into peasantries. Although they have been long and generously endowed out of the public coffers, Kansas farmers—just like Bobby Dole as a boy—like to think of themselves as long-suffering but never dependent on government. Yet not long after he formed his first tentative hypotheses of how the world worked, Dole's own control was kicked out from under him. He felt in the gut what it is to be helpless through no fault of one's own.

So one would have to get up awfully early to pigeonhole Bob Dole.

"Dole has a gift for phrasing that sometimes allows him to have it both ways," says political analyst Richard Reeves. Who else can warm the cockles of conservative hearts by slamming Democrats even as he collects praise

from the likes of Mondale, McGovern, and Bill Bradley for having grown beyond narrow partisan politics?

Dole had no shame in admitting to me, "I'm not an ideologue." His own senior political adviser, David Keene, elaborated: "Dole's problem is to drag that overall vision out of himself. You can't be elected president by giving a legislative briefing." Keene also worries that his man has become too hot too soon. "Tactical exploitation can overwhelm a broad theme."

"It's no particular political philosophy that draws me to Bob Dole as a presidential candidate," says Republican senator David Durenberger, echoing many moderates in both parties. "But for the period of fragmented interests we'll be in at least until 1993, he would be a good decision-maker."

Most Democrats, liberals, and media people I've asked about the notion of Bob Dole for president say essentially the same thing: "I could live with Bob Dole." That's not chopped liver, at least in a general election. But it's traditionally been the poison pill for Republican primaries.

Potentially more serious is the loner problem. A man can't become president by himself. He can't raise his own money, write his own speeches, be his own press secretary, and still shake a thousand hands after every appearance. And so, when the political handlers look over Bob Dole, they see his fierce independence as a liability. During his 1980 bid for the presidency, he fired his campaign manager and several consultants, hurtling himself toward a humiliating defeat. Ellsworth has already taken him to the woodshed on the subject. The senator assured him, "If we're going to do this, we're going to do it right."

The senator was riding high in the polls and political columns when he dropped in for a down-home reception in Russell last January.

The original campaigners—doctor, broker, oilman, farmer—mostly hung back in the kitchen, a bit awed by this talking head they see on TV who looks ten years younger than any of them. Tanned from a typically two-day vacation at Elizabeth's condo in Miami, Dole presented his glamorous, fifty-year-old wife. Svelte since she started peddling on their new stationary bike, Elizabeth has stopped going to Nancy Reagan's hairdresser, and has switched to

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a younger, looser style. She was happy to have a day with her husband. Normally they communicate by check-off memos that fly between their offices. Some weeks the closest the secretary gets to the senator is to sip from the banquet glass he just left.

The talk among Dole's core constituents was of hard times and extreme solutions. "I'd like to see about three Arab heads of state go boom boom," seethed an oilman. "Thing that bums me out is they're supposed to be Christian countries," said another. "All's I say," chimed in a farmer, "there's no way to get ahead of Russia unless you destroy it."

One could almost hear Dole's mind racing, the laser beam in his brain illuminating problems too far ahead for him to find solutions, yet. The people of Russell are still in Bob Dole, but he has grown beyond them. As he told me later, "I can see it coming in rural America—'It's either me or them'—farmers who are making it who don't want to be dragged under by interest payments to keep their neighbor afloat."

But what he gave them was a quick legislative briefing and a pep talk. "We

Robert Dole

will be coming to Kansas quite often, entertaining people who might be looking for stories. Be sure to keep telling them all those lies."

After a second stop in Kansas and a standing ovation, Senator Dole stood outside the snug six-seat charter he likes to commandeer around the country. The wind snorted across the Kansas plains and bit into his shoulder. Elizabeth was already inside, buried in briefing papers. The Doles dined on their usual campaign-plane appetizer—Dunkin' Donuts—and finished off with a doggie bag of barbecued beef. There was no small talk. She read. He read. Once, he chuckled and read aloud a newspaper item: "The only thing George Bush has left to run for is the Best-Dressed List."

Forty minutes outside of Washington, Dole caught me napping. He grunted and pushed a cup of coffee at me. He wanted to talk, to use the time.

"You come out here to Kansas and talk to people and they never did want to fund the contras," I began. "That's right," Dole said. "I don't

think they're unwilling to be persuaded, but nobody's persuaded them yet."

"How do you feel about it?" "There may be other ways to resolve it. Free elections, a negotiated settlement. Before I start cheerleading for somebody who's called a freedom fighter, I like to see the whole deck."

Dole was a hawk on Vietnam. I asked if he had second thoughts. "I voted for the Cooper-Church amendment [to withdraw U.S. troops] after defending the Nixon White House," he admitted. "I think Nixon did the right thing in getting us out of there."

It took him an awfully long time, I mentioned.

"Yeah. And there was never any American support." His voice suddenly became more intimate. "Every day you had a body count. How many did we kill today? How many did they kill? I mean, it's sort of sick. Not a very good period in American history."

After a pause, he added that if he was ever in a position where he had to retaliate militarily, he'd do it "as quickly and as painlessly as possible. It wouldn't be a game with me."

I recalled our first talk. Dole had

mentioned an insight he has that he thinks nobody else does. "You're sort of sensitive to people around you, whether they're poor, hungry, cold, old, sick, disabled. If I were whole, I'd be embarrassed to go into a paralyzed veterans' association." The self-revelatory words "If I were whole" had stopped me.

"Do you think you've ever fully accepted the loss of your arm?" I asked him quietly.

"Oh, I hope not," he said. "Not that I have any self-pity. But I still fantasize sometimes of raising my arm."

"I think it makes you try harder. Sort of like Avis, you're number two. I push and push and push. Not because I'm disabled. I like to be a player."

Still running, still overcoming. Dole may not have accepted his handicap, but he makes it work for him. He can't quite connect the funny bone to the shoulder bone, or make the emotions move the muscles so that strangers can feel the sincerity and compassion of this complex man. But there is no telling what Dole might be able to draw out of himself in the next two years. Not even he can know. □

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