

**THE COMMON SENSE OF ELLEN GOODMAN
KENNEDY LIBRARY FORUM
FEBRUARY 29, 2004**

JOHN SHATTUCK: Good afternoon, and welcome. On this leap day of 2004 -- I hope you all noticed -- it is a great pleasure for me to declare that spring is officially open. And if you look out the window, you can see the curtain rising on spring. And our spring forum series is inaugurated this afternoon with a wonderful program with Ellen Goodman and Jim Carroll. I'm John Shattuck, the CEO of the Kennedy Library Foundation, and on behalf of myself and Deborah Leff, who's here in the front row, the Director of the Library, I want to thank the sponsors of these wonderful forums, Fleet Boston Financial, soon to become Bank of America, Boston Capital, The Lowell Institute, *The Boston Globe*, Boston.com, and WBUR.

In thinking about the title of our forum today, "The Common Sense of Ellen Goodman," all I have to do is look out at this wonderful audience, overflowing on a day that is very nice outside, and recognize that all of you had the common sense to come indoors to listen to this wonderful program, one of America's finest and above all most sensible commentators on the challenging world that we live in. And here at the Kennedy Library, we pride ourselves on having good sense and we have done so by pairing Ellen Goodman with James Carroll, one of America's most thoughtful and insightful writers. Let me just say a few words about each of them to set the stage for the conversation that they will have with each other and then with all of you.

Ellen tells a wonderful story in the introduction to her new book, *Paper Trail*. She writes that her daughter used to say to her friends when they asked her what her mother did for a living that, quote, "my mom gets paid for telling people what she thinks." Ellen writes that she thought this was a pretty good job description, so she used this to describe a course that she had been invited to teach at Stanford on opinion writing, which she called, quote, "Telling People What You Think." But when she arrived at Stanford, she found that the university catalog had mislabeled her course, and now was calling it "Telling People What To Think." I'm stealing her lines. This isn't fair. But they're her lines. And then when she tried to correct the catalog, things went from bad to worse, and the title morphed into "Telling People How To Think." And she writes, "In one slip of the keyboard, I had evolved from being a fascist to being a neurobiologist, from uttering dogma to reading minds.

In a media world that is so full of talk show violence, shouting, and just plain intolerance, Ellen Goodman is a beacon of sanity. While many of us may think she actually does read our minds, we know that she never utters dogma. Her wonderful columns help us interpret the things about daily life and political life that are at once far more complex and much simpler than the way they are portrayed by the rest of the media. Here's one more vintage Ellen Goodman story, also from the introduction to her new book. She says, "The other day, a woman came up to me and said, 'You're always writing what I'm thinking.' I laughed and answered, 'We're both in trouble then.' But I suspect," she writes, "I do write what she's thinking about. We both open up the morning paper or log onto the computer or turn on a TV and say," quote, "Oh, no, now hormones cause

Alzheimer's,' or 'So they captured Saddam Hussein. Now where are the weapons of mass destruction?'"

Ellen is the voice of common sense in a world spinning out of control. And for being that voice year in and year out, she has won the Pulitzer Prize for distinguished commentary, and many, many other of journalism's top awards. For three decades, she has told us about social change and its impact on individual people. And since her days as a starting reporter at the *Detroit Free Press* and then as a columnist with *The Boston Globe*, now syndicated to more than 450 newspapers across the country, Ellen Goodman has interpreted politics at home and around the world, and in the family and down the street in a way that sticks with us as we go about our daily lives.

To talk with Ellen about her new book, which is on sale in our bookstore-- and I'm sure she would be delighted to sign copies after this event-- we are very, very pleased to have with us this afternoon one of Boston's and America's finest writers, my friend Jim Carroll. From religion to politics, to war and peace, to social justice, Jim Carroll's writing illuminates our times like a true north star, guiding us through the maze of modern life. Jim entered the priesthood in 1969 and later served as Catholic Chaplain at Boston University and as a columnist for *The National Catholic Reporter*. He left the priesthood and embarked on a distinguished career as a playwright, novelist, poet, and nonfiction writer.

He won the National Book Award for *An America Requiem*, his moving account about his long struggle with his father, an Air Force general, over the Vietnam War. And in his monumental work, *Constantine's Sword*, published two years

ago, he explores the origins of the Holocaust and the relationship between the Catholic Church and Judaism. The author of many other books, including a new novel, *Secret Father*, Jim Carroll also writes a weekly column for *The Boston Globe*, which we all turn to with great alacrity, because he brings his penetrating truth to disturbing subjects like Mel Gibson's new film, "The Passion of Christ," and George Bush's doctrine of unilateral preemptive war. Please join me in welcoming Ellen Goodman and Jim Carroll to the stage of the Kennedy Library.

JAMES CARROLL: Greetings, ladies and gentlemen. I'm so pleased to be here with you and with Ellen. I get to say the introductory word or two. But I'm going to try to adjust this microphone so that I can see you and see Ellen at the same time, and so you can hear it.

ELLEN GOODMAN: Are we ruining the sound system?

JAMES CARROLL: Let me just do this a little bit, because I want to look at you, Ellen.

ELLEN GOODMAN: All right.

JAMES CARROLL: I may be all right. You think? Okay. So, what a privilege it is to be here this afternoon. I first want to acknowledge John Shattuck and that fabulous introduction that honors both of us, John, and note that John himself is recently the author of a very important book derived from his experience as a human rights prophet, State Department official, and former ambassador to Czechoslovakia, *Freedom on Fire*, a book that everyone should take note of in this

special time, because it's addressed, in powerful ways, to the problems facing us as a country.

But *Paper Trail*, Ellen's book, a treasure between two covers, many words that have made us all so devoted to Ellen Goodman's writing down through the years. And this book is a very special publication, because it's drawn from her work over the last decade. And because of that, it really effectively amounts to a very powerful chronicle of what we've been through in this last period of time in our country and in the world, as men and women, as Americans, as parents, as children, as people trying to make sense of life in a very quickly changing time.

So this afternoon it's our privilege to have a conversation with Ellen. I'll begin it by raising some questions that I have and that may be of interest to you. And then at a certain point, I'll open the conversation to everyone in the room, and hope that we can all enjoy this splendid afternoon and the hospitality of the folks here at the Kennedy Library.

Well, Ellen, it's nice that we're here. And I have to ask first, before we turn to your work, because I look forward to doing that, but I'm full of feeling for your own connection with this place, and the gift that you were just given by John Shattuck. If it's not intruding on a sweet moment that I was privileged to witness, would you tell the people what just was given to you, and what it means?

ELLEN GOODMAN: Yes. John came up -- There are four generations of my family here today, although I think the littlest one was just removed. So if you hear a sound, that's the fourth generation. But my family's connection with the

Kennedys goes way back to the time when my father had worked for Kennedy's campaign for the Senate. And then my father, Jackson Holtz, ran for Congress, and Jack Kennedy nicely came and campaigned with him. And John just gave me this wonderful photograph of myself, and my mother who is here, and my sister who is here, and my father and Kennedy. So I think I was 12 or 13 at the time. So I now have this picture to share with the rest. It was really wonderful. And there is a tape that my father did in the Library, too, so there is a sort of special family connection over all these decades.

JAMES CARROLL: I noticed President Kennedy, then Senator Kennedy, standing next to your father, but it seemed to me he had an eye headed in your direction. Is that-- No? Well, John just quoted your daughter, Katie -- Is she here?

ELLEN GOODMAN: No.

JAMES CARROLL: As saying, "My mom gets paid for telling people what she thinks." How do you know what you think, Ellen? We depend on you for the clarity of thought that you bring to complicated subjects. How do you get there yourself?

ELLEN GOODMAN: Well, I think one of the things that people tend to think that columnists just kind of sit there and suck their thumb and then start typing. And they forget -- I was a columnist for ten years before I ever wrote a column, so I think they forget how much of column writing starts with reporting.

JAMES CARROLL: You were a journalist for ten years before you wrote a column.

ELLEN GOODMAN: Right.

JAMES CARROLL: You said you were a columnist for ten years.

ELLEN GOODMAN: Oh, I'm sorry. I was a reporter for ten years before I ever wrote a column. In fact, when Tom Winship gave me the column, the big joke to him was that he was trying to get my opinions out of the newsroom.

So I think that one of the things that you do is, for many of the columns, I do what all of you do, which is that I open up the newspaper, and there is something in it that just hits me as interesting. And I often begin the columns with a question. What does it mean that suddenly there's an ad in the paper to buy eggs from young, Ivy League educated women with high SATs who are also tall? I mean, what does that mean? And that started off one column. Or certainly in the last weeks here, how did gay marriage become a topic of such extraordinary concern? So I start off often with a question. And then I start doing reporting. And I talk to people, and I want to figure out where at this moment on social change we would be in a story like cloning eggs, or same sex marriage?

And then, after I've done the reporting, then comes the hard part, which is that you have to sift it all down and figure out what in fact you do think about that. And that is just the somewhat mysterious process of trying to hear all the voices in your head, and then step back and say, "Okay, what do I think?" And lots of times you

write a column, and you will say what the story is and what one side thinks and what the other side thinks, and then you'll sit there with your hands clasped in prayer, waiting to come to the conclusion of it. But I think being a columnist also means finishing, and in fact getting to that point where you tell people what your opinion is of something.

JAMES CARROLL: When you have to submit to the discipline of 750 or so words, does that help shape the thought process? Does it bring the complications down to a point for you? I mean, if you were an essayist who worked in three and four thousand words regularly, would your thinking be different? What does it mean that you're a columnist?

ELLEN GOODMAN: It means you write short. It means you write on deadline. You can be good, you can be bad, but you can't be late. And it's interesting, because as things grow shorter and shorter -- and we all know how short sound bites are now -- there's a point at which you actually can't say anything. I think if you're writing under 500 words, you actually can't describe an issue. But I think 750 to 800 words, you can pretty much tell a story. And I must say that very often my first draft of a column is closer to 900 words, and then you begin the process of cutting back to a complete ... cutting back and back. And people always ask, "How long does it take to write a column?" And the answer for journalists always is, "How long do I have?" So I think you're honing it all the time.

JAMES CARROLL: Is the experience of writing the column different for you now than it was 25 years ago when you began? Does it come more easily?

ELLEN GOODMAN: I think when you're a young columnist in particular, there's more panic, that you think ... you're starting that day, and, oh my God, what if I actually can't do it today? And then when you get older, and you've done it enough, you realize that even though at 8:00 in the morning you don't know what you're going to do, you know that by 5:00 in the afternoon you will have done it. So you develop, I think, a little bit more confidence in your own completion of tasks.

JAMES CARROLL: As you talk about your method, let's get particular and talk about one of the areas in which questions are incredibly complicated: bioethics, for example, a range of questions that you've addressed under that general heading. You just referred to one, cloning, the whole notion of chosen DNA, paternity and maternity. These are questions that, speaking for myself, I just can't quite get my brain around. I don't know. The word ethics. What is the right and the wrong of cloning? What is the right and the wrong of these new and increasingly exotic forms of procreation that human beings are capable of now? It seems to me we don't have ethical guideposts in this range, in this place. You are someone who does in fact lead us into ways of thinking about such questions. What are your guideposts? What are your ethical points of reference that enable you to take on such questions?

ELLEN GOODMAN: First of all, I think it's really interesting that we've developed this whole professional called ethicist. I mean, an ethicist -- you don't go to the graduate school of ethics. You don't get a degree in it. You can start being an ethicist if you're a lawyer. You can start if you're a doctor. *The New York Times* now runs a column on ethics where the ethicist comes out of nowhere, is a

journalist. So we can all be ethicists. And I think some of it comes out of your view of the world and your experience, as well as then trying to hone it down. And I think it's troubling for all of us. I mean, I tackle the bioethics questions quite a bit, because they're so hard, and you do have a headache trying to figure it out. And some of them are as easy as ... To me, it was a pretty simple call to say we shouldn't be buying the eggs of educated young women. We shouldn't have an ad in the paper saying, "Come, let me buy the eggs of an extremely well educated person." These are not things that are for sale. And I think we come from that because we know babies aren't for sale. So you move towards that in a somewhat more logical way.

And I can't go through one issue at a time, but some of them are also ... There is a history to some of this, and some of it is also what feels like a violation of your own experience of the world. And then you also talk to, again, you talk to people who may move you one way or another.

JAMES CARROLL: Are you afraid of being wrong? Or another way to ask the question is, how did you learn to trust your own judgment so consistently?

ELLEN GOODMAN: Am I afraid of being wrong? I think that every journalist that I know, every columnist that I know does not want to open up the paper the next day after they've written the column, and they're reading their column, and they say, "Did I say that?" You don't want to suddenly disagree with yourself at that moment. So I want to feel certain that this is in fact what I believe by the time I do it. And I generally do. Sometimes I change my mind. Sometimes the

issue moves. And one of the wonderful things about having a column is that you have another chance to write again.

I think about the time, for example, I wrote that I did not agree with the idea of needle exchanges to reduce the incidence of AIDS. I didn't think the government should be giving out needles, in large part because I thought you made the government a co-conspirator in what was a crime, which was drug use. So I wrote that, and then time went on, and it turned out that this was a very effective way of not having AIDS spread. So you look at the comparison of those two possibilities -- giving people an instrument they might use for illegal drug use versus having them get AIDS -- and you say, "Whoops, I was wrong on that." So I had a chance to write a second column saying that I was wrong.

And you know, in politics, we don't give people that option very often. Changing your mind is part of growing and changing, if you'll excuse the expression. But for politicians, we call it hypocrisy. We say you can't do that. We say it's a contradiction in your record rather than allowing them the same thing that all of us have, which is a gradual change of point of view. I mean, I think where people have come, for example, on gay issues, is indicative of how tremendously people's points of view have changed. And we have to give people some room to make those changes.

JAMES CARROLL: It's curious about your work, because I wouldn't myself label you. One of the things I admire about your work is that it's not easy to label. I wouldn't label you a political columnist, and yet you're constantly addressing the subjects that are the pillars around which our politics turn, gay marriage only

being the most current example. In this book I am struck by the fact that ten years ago you were writing about domestic partnerships, and then at a certain point you took up the question of civil unions, and now ... Would you reflect on that evolution, moving through time? Can you see a pattern in how we change our positions as a people?

ELLEN GOODMAN: Well, in some ways *Paper Trail* is a narrative of social change, I realized, because I was the one who was picking the columns out for the book. And the narrative of social change on gay issues did begin with a few ultraliberal hamlets beginning to contemplate the possibility of domestic partnerships. And then you went to the issue of civil unions when this phrase was invented in Vermont in the year 2000, and everybody in Vermont thought the sky would fall, and that Ben & Jerry's ice cream would curdle, and the maple sap would stop running. And none of that happened. But you fast forward now to talking about gay marriage, and suddenly civil unions becomes the conservative and moderate position, which is a wonderful way to look at it. Because we tend to think, "Oh well, if you reach too far, there will be a horrible backlash," which also happens. But it also happens sometimes when you reach too far, the thing that once seemed radical now seems moderate. And that I think happened on gay rights issues in this country. Also what happened simultaneously was a kind of national coming out, that gay people who had been much more closeted started talking. And we realized that we had gay people in our workplace, and gay people in our families, and suddenly Dick Cheney's daughter -- even conservatives -- Dick Cheney's daughter, and Phyllis Schlafly's son, and Newt Gingrich's sister. So that even conservatives now, including the President, are talking about civil unions, while at the same time there are people still waving "homosexuality is a

sin" banners. But that's become almost a minority position. So it's this fascinating way in which it's been a really wonderful issue in which to watch the way change in attitude happens.

And sometimes also -- not to belabor this one, but since we're on the subject -- sometimes also the law changes before attitudes change. So that in looking at the gay issue and looking back to what Justice Marshall talked about, the comparison with interracial marriages, and when you look back to 1948, when the high court in California overturned their ban on interracial marriages, 90% of the people in this country were opposed to interracial marriages. That's 90%. I mean, that's everybody. And now that would be really an extreme minority position. So sometimes the law changes first and then attitudes.

JAMES CARROLL: Would you think in a similar way about the changes that have taken place in the women's movement, maybe even going back to when you started out as a young reporter in Detroit and through the 60s, and where we are today? What's the story there? How do you mark it?

ELLEN GOODMAN: Well, the story of the women's movement -- and I tend to think of the women's movement literally as the movement of women from one life pattern to many. And there are many ways to look at it, certainly in terms of autobiography, you know, that many of us ... my generation was what Pat Schroeder calls the beachhead generation. In other words, we kept landing on the beachhead, and establishing a beachhead for the next generation, and we still are now as older women, I think. So we established a little beachhead for the first women to go to graduate schools, the first large group of women to be working

mothers, with all the judgment that that entailed, the first women to get through ... You know, a lot of firsts.

And then up comes the younger generation, and it's possible now to be a conservative feminist, which would have been a contradiction in terms. There are many young women who are leading the lives that were radical, again, in my generation, and they're conservative. And some of them, you say, "You forgot." But some of them also have a variety of choices. And in the book, I write about ... You mentioned, Jim, when we were talking earlier that I had written about Hillary Clinton four times, I think. And in the book I realized I had written about Hillary Clinton as First Lady and partner, two for the price of one First Lady, and then Hillary as wronged wife, and then Hillary as senator, which is itself this huge transition from being a wife to being a senator. And then you look again at this campaign, and you see a range of candidates' wives in this campaign who in some ways model all the, quote, "choices" women have. You have a doctor and a lawyer, and a general's wife, and so forth.

And you see that, yes, it's wonderful. Women have all these choices, just like these women do. Although none of them are running for president, but never mind. They have all these choices, but at the same time, every single one of these choices is trashed, so that the Judy Dean story because really an example of that, too.

JAMES CARROLL: When they're trashed, what's happening? The negative energy that comes toward women in such a situation, or toward gay people who want to get married, or toward -- you name it -- people who take positions against

the consensus -- What is this trashing that happens in America? And what do you make of it? And sometimes we talk about the culture wars. Why would civil discourse in America be characterized as warfare? Is America a crasser, coarser, more confrontational place now than it was? What do you see in this?

ELLEN GOODMAN: Well, *Paper Trail* starts basically in 1994 when the culture war was ... Remember "angry white men," you know, and Newt Gingrich? And so, I think that this country, the great strength of the country is its diversity. And it is the most diverse country. And there is no one model, and there are so many races, religions, ethnicities, all, by the way, doing a pretty good job of living together, and we're very conscious of that now compared to the rest of the world. America, we may talk about cultural wars, but this is not Rwanda -- just to keep some perspective on it. At the same time, within this large, diverse society of people who by and large get along, there are groups that hold hard to verities, and feel very reluctant to open up their minds to other possibilities. So we have our fundamentalists. And that makes for some very rough struggles.

I would say in the story of women's change, I think there is a lot of unease, even among women, about whether we're doing the right thing, whether we are able to balance. For example, social change has been so lopsided in the last 20 years, and women's values, which were care-giving and nurturing and family values, and men's values were by and large ... Women's values traditionally were thought of as being connecting and community. And men's values traditionally were thought of as being independence and success. And then you come to a moment where women are allowed all the values of individualism, but at the same time there's been a real lopsided change, so that there is a net loss in the amount of care-giving

that's going on in society. And I think that we're genuinely worried about how do you balance the attractions and the possibilities of individual achievement with the need for care-giving?

JAMES CARROLL: Yes. And women seem to stand more in the crux of that problem than men.

ELLEN GOODMAN: Absolutely. Because we have been the traditional nurturers of family and community, I think we feel that conflict much more intensely than men do.

JAMES CARROLL: What are your observations about gender in a broader way? We've seen stories in the last couple of weeks about the violence and the -- what? -- the entitlement of student athletes in a disturbing way. We see over the years a pattern of stories about violent young men, boys in high schools, a problem that cuts across the classes in our culture. War-making, of course, is overwhelmingly a male activity. Having found a very special voice as a woman speaking out of the woman's movement, and in a particular way, not to narrow you to this, but in a particular way, claiming the authority of the woman's voice, what are your reflections on the problems confronting males in our culture?

ELLEN GOODMAN: Well, I think that the issue that you brought up of male violence, I think, in a way, I'm not always looking for the good news, but in a way, the good news is that when there are pockets of violence like that, we're talking about it. The women who were assaulted are talking about it. The culture is not supportive of that behavior, to put it mildly. When you look overseas, you see

shame and women not talking about it. So you see the silence over male violence. You see male violence accepted as a norm, so that somebody kills his pregnant sister last week in -- what was it? -- Jordan, I think. And he gets a three-month sentence, because it's considered to be an issue of he had to protect the family honor. So we're so far beyond that that it's worth worrying more about the pockets of violence where it is accepted as essentially the norm.

JAMES CARROLL: I'm struck listening to you that we can't talk about any of these issues -- violence, gender, values, politics -- in our present conversation without having reference to what we see on television, which has become in a way the dominant conversation pit, if you'd like. Anybody here old enough to remember conversation pits? Ellen, you could be a TV star. I mean, you're a wildly admired national voice with huge readerships in all of the major cities and, as they say -- what do they call them? -- markets in America. Why aren't you on television?

ELLEN GOODMAN: You can't think on television. I mean, you just can't think. I mean, I always laugh, because, like, last week I did "The Today Show." And what do people say when they've seen you, by the way -- not heard you, seen you -- on television? They always say, if they're nice, "Oh, you looked great," or "It looked good." But they don't hear. I mean, the wonderful thing about writing, and writing in newspapers, and sort of the op-ed page is the last sort of thoughtful corner of the American media. So they'll take it out. They may actually re-read it. They'll pass it to a friend. They'll put it on a refrigerator door. They have it. And if it's television, you have no time. Speed trumps thoughtfulness routinely. You just have no time to say anything. You can't think out loud anywhere nearly as

well as you can when you're writing, as you know as a writer. And I've never been attracted to doing it.

I tell a story in the book about when I was asked to do one of these food fight shows. And this one was O'Reilly. And don't even ask why I said yes. I have no idea why I said yes.

JAMES CARROLL: You're a nice person.

ELLEN GOODMAN: It was a bad moment. And I was leaving the *Globe*, running to the car that was going to take me to the studio, and I literally – literally -- ran into the glass door. Now, I had at that point been working at the *Globe* for 25 years. It wasn't like it was a new door. So I figured that was God's way of telling me I should never do the Bill O'Reilly show.

But the other thing that happens -- I mean, the fascinating thing about television is that most Americans feel somewhat ambivalent about the great issues of our time, some of the social issues that we've been talking about, whether it is gay marriage or abortion or Iraq, or almost anything. But you only see ... On television you see that ambivalence split in half, two people of absolute certainties duking it out. And I've tested this a few times, because I don't do late night television at all. Because I don't speak at 10:15. I'm through for the day at that point. So whenever the booker calls -- and it's usually a very nice young woman, and she'll call to see how you feel. And she'll say, "How do you feel about this issue?" And if I don't want to do the program, all I have to do is say, "Well, I have kind of mixed feelings about that." And you can hear the phone going down.

JAMES CARROLL: So what does it do to the quality of our politics when the national conversation is so polarized?

ELLEN GOODMAN: I'm interested in this, because it means that nobody can speak at great length. I've been thinking about that, just because of the way people have talked about ... I'm going to have to write about this, about how, "Oh my God, Kerry's got to learn to get it down to 18 seconds," or "No, that was way too complicated an answer." And whereas, say, Bush has got it down to two seconds.

JAMES CARROLL: "Nope."

ELLEN GOODMAN: "Nope." "Yup." And that's before he makes the jargon mistakes. So what does that mean, that we've all become, like, judges of how people should use the media? So it's become ... anybody who speaks in full paragraphs, or in layered, or says, "I believe this, but it isn't that simple, and I voted for the Iraq war, but then I came to realize ..." We don't allow that complexity of thought. And my other ... Would we listen to a Lincoln-Douglas debate that went on for six hours? Didn't it go on for six hours, if I recall?

JAMES CARROLL: Well, you're beginning to sound a lot like John Kerry, and that's good for John Kerry, I would say. Maybe people will start telling John Kerry, "You're sounding more and more like Ellen Goodman."

ELLEN GOODMAN: He would win nothing.

JAMES CARROLL: I'm aware that there are many people who want to join the conversation, and I'll open it in a moment. But let me just lift up two other general areas, one general, and then I want to ask you about a few specific columns that you wrote. But I'd love to hear you reflect on the tension between the public and private in your life as a writer. You often draw on your own experience, even your own family experience. Your wonderful grandson, whose birthday was a couple of weeks ago, I think, was the subject of a column. You often write very beautifully about the domestic life, drawing on your own experience. How do you protect the sense of your own private space when you do that, and how do you honor the privacy of other people in your lives when you do that?

ELLEN GOODMAN: Oh, I just rip them off. They're all here anyway for some obscure reason. I don't write confessionally, of course, and I generally operate with the feeling that, you know, every columnist has sort of six columns in them, personal columns. That's the first three weeks. And my personal life isn't all that interesting. So unless something that's happening relates to others, I rarely do write about it. At the same time, I think that readers want to know that you're a person. You're not an authority speaking from on high. You're a fellow struggler. You're somebody who is in the same daily life. I have the same problems trying to get my computer to work. I wrote a column not long ago on the self-help economy, and how we've all thrown back on our own. And also that I am a person in time and space, and a real person. So I think that people will accept you, even if they disagree with your opinions, and they will listen to you better if they in fact believe that you exist, if you're real.

JAMES CARROLL: Could I ask you to apply the same standard then to politicians who are confronted with their version of the same problem? Do you have advice for a politician, how to be real and personable without being confessional? We've all had that squirming moment when a politician tells us something we really didn't want to know.

ELLEN GOODMAN: Although some politicians have made us squirm more than others. Clinton made us squirm a lot more than others. Well, I think you do protect -- I think you can protect that space. And I was interested when Howard Dean was running, and his wife Judith Steinberg, Dean attempted to protect that space. And I had gone up last fall and interviewed her during the time when she wasn't talking to anybody. She was talking to me quite nicely. In fact, we laughed. My husband drove me up, and I happened to just be getting over a bronchitis thing. And I sat within her wonderful little office, which looks like sort of the room that's still in your house from when your kids were in grammar school, you know, the old wooden desk and stuff. And she was so pleasant that within about 15 minutes, I had to control this impulse to tell her my symptoms. It was true.

JAMES CARROLL: Probably wouldn't have happened with her husband.

ELLEN GOODMAN: No, no, not at all. He's a very different kind of doctor. He's much more of the removed doctor. I mean, he, if you had cancer, would come in and say, "Well, you've got cancer." And I don't think she was like that. She's not like that. So I think that they attempted to keep the personal separate

from their lives, and nobody allowed it at all. And I think it would be wonderful to simply allow people to make all of these choices.

At the same time, we do want to know something about who a politician is, so that the life story, whether it's the John Edwards life story of where he came from, or the John Kerry story of where he came from, that life story does speak to us, because we feel that politics emerges in part, but not fully, out of biography. I mean, if it emerged fully out of biography, John Kerry and George Bush would morph. And so it's as important to know why they're different from biography as why they are the same.

JAMES CARROLL: And finally in this introductory part, you've written some very powerful columns over the ten years that the book *Paper Trail* represents. And at the time, I'm struck by how huge their subjects loomed. And I'd like to just lift up a couple of them and ask you to tell us what you think these subjects mean now. You just mentioned President Clinton. You wrote several columns entitled, at least in the book, "Clinton, Monica, and Us." For all of the angst that was generated around the Clinton/Lewinsky relationship, what do you make of it now? And as we get farther away from it, do you have an intuition as to how this story will resonate down through the years?

ELLEN GOODMAN: I can't believe how much I miss him. I mean, I wish we had a democrat with his political skills right now. He's a tremendously skilled person, and a total screw-up, too. Excuse me. And I think that that matters a whole lot less than it did in the moment. It's a shame that he completely ruined his

legacy through his own personal flaws. But it seems a lot less important, particularly in the post-9/11 world than it did at the time.

JAMES CARROLL: You wrote powerfully about Princess Di at the time of her death, which was an event that consumed Western civilization, in a way, for weeks. What do you make of it now?

ELLEN GOODMAN: I'm not sure what that was all about to this day. I think, again, it was just sort of -- It was this person whose Cinderella story was cast up onto the screen. And when it ended tragically, people put their stories, put their fantasies and their fairy tales over onto that life. And I still to this moment -- I never felt that connection myself. And I've never quite gotten the intensity of that story. But, you know, in many of the ... I wrote a whole chapter in the book called "Speed Zone," and many of those things, that here today/gone tomorrow, you know, gone, from Bobbitt -- Remember?

JAMES CARROLL: Remind us who Bobbitt was.

ELLEN GOODMAN: Well, I started that--

JAMES CARROLL: Discreetly.

ELLEN GOODMAN: I started that column by saying that I was reading the newspaper with my husband that morning, and he looked up at me and for the first and only time in our lives together, he said, "You could give this one a good leaving-alone." It was about Lorena Bobbitt, who took to her husband.

JAMES CARROLL: And Elian Gonzalez, you were about to say. Elian Gonzalez, which consumed us for so long. That story came and went. OJ Simpson all the way through to Kobe Bryant to the scandal of the moment, and so many of those TV court cases. What do they mean? The problem with a culture that's addicted to the scandal of the moment is that when something truly significant comes along -- Enron, the Roman Catholic Church priest abuse, bishop cover-up scandal, a change in American foreign policy, preemptive war -- the danger is that those events too will be treated like these more ephemeral, insignificant sensations. Can we distinguish between what's grave and what's shallow, and what deserves a good leaving-alone?

ELLEN GOODMAN: Oh, I think people can distinguish. Whether the media can is another story. But I think if you ask people to distinguish, they certainly know the resonance of 9/11, the feeling of being at this moment in history when our relationship to the world is up for grabs, and we're on the tipping point of -- are things going to go along pretty well the way they have, or is catastrophe ahead? I mean, I think people really do understand that. People relate to the jobs when ... Because people and their families are out of work. Or they relate to healthcare. But they don't always see it reflected, because of this link between information and entertainment, I mean, this immediate morphing to entertainment that we call infotainment now. But I think people know what's serious in their own lives and in their hearts.

JAMES CARROLL: Well, your readers are lucky. And we have a roomful of them here. And I'll invite anyone present who'd like to join the conversation to

come to either of these microphones. And perhaps you could introduce yourself to Ellen when you begin, and feel free to join the conversation. Yes, sir?

Q: My name is Martin Greenfield, and I'm a long fan of yours.

ELLEN GOODMAN: Thank you.

Q: I've heard the analogy that newspapers have become to television what magazines used to be for newspapers.

JAMES CARROLL: A little closer to the microphone, sir.

Q: That newspapers and columns have come to be for television what magazines used to be for newspapers. I remember as a youngster, I used to read the daily newspaper and wait for magazines such as *Cosmopolitan* or *Liberty* or *Saturday Evening Post* to come out with a full explanation of what was happening. Do you agree with this tendency, and do you see any way that this might be reversed?

ELLEN GOODMAN: I don't think that -- I think you were saying that newspapers were the -- Can you help me? Try that one more time. I lost the analogy, I'm sorry.

Q: Well, newspapers are to television, I gather, as magazines used to be to newspapers. That is to say, the thoughtful background, the context that you can't get from television now you get from newspapers.

ELLEN GOODMAN: Thank you. I appreciate that. I do think that newspapers are both fuller in terms of fact gathering, and also they do tell you what it means in a way that television doesn't. And if you mean also in terms of the way the audience has shifted, that you have ... The people who read newspapers now, there has been a diminution in the numbers of people who read newspapers. But the people who read them read much more thoroughly. All the research will tell you that. So that they are really reading ... This is the part of the population that really wants to know what happened, and what it means. I'm in the "what it means" end of the business. And I think as more and more facts are thrown at you and events go faster and faster, people do long to know what it all means. But I think that transition has already happened, and I don't think it's necessarily a bad one.

You also didn't mention the other thing that is truly instant, which is the Internet that has a new edition out every minute. So a lot of people are getting their instant information from the Internet, and then looking to television for a little bit more, and newspapers for much more, and then magazines for a whole other, longer view of things.

Q: Miss Goodman, in 1976, in Anchorage, Alaska, on a refrigerator was a column that began, "I know a woman who is a grateful wife." And I just want you to know that I still own that. It's gone from the refrigerator. But on behalf of a generation of women who became feminists because of you, and kept the feminine in feminist, I would like to thank you. And also, would you speak just briefly about keeping the feminine in feminist?

ELLEN GOODMAN: Well, I'm not sure what you mean by keeping the feminine in -- Can we say keeping the female in feminist?

Q: Absolutely.

ELLEN GOODMAN: And I think that one of the things that happened in this long, historic change is that for a while during this period of lopsided change, women's lives were moving towards men's. And men's lives were not moving anywhere nearly as much towards women's. And then women sort of said, "Oops, wait a minute, here. I want to have everything. I want a lot that was traditionally thought of as male, but I want to get that, the best of social change, the best of the male lives, without losing the best of the female, best of what was a part of our lives." So I think there has been for the last, oh, ten, 15 years, a sort of psychological juggling that matches the juggling that's going on in our everyday frenetic lives. And I think women have been trying to balance the values of caregiving with the values of individualism and success. That's an old ... So those are the ... Keeping the traditional female values and actually trying to make them have more power in the world at large. And that's been quite a struggle.

Q: My name is Grace Olin, and I had the privilege of being interviewed by you 35 years ago when you were a beginning reporter. It's wonderful that you have a market beyond Boston, which I think is great. We think of ourselves sometimes as not representing the nation.

ELLEN GOODMAN: Why?

Q: Do you keep in mind, and do some of the editors of the papers beyond Boston give you the negative feedback? And what kinds of topics would you leave alone?

ELLEN GOODMAN: Well, I wouldn't leave anything alone, except when it deserves a good leaving alone. But sure, I get response ... You know, one of the things about e-mail, one of the things about telling people what you think for a living is that they tell you what they think of what you think. And e-mail is definitely the mode by which this happens. And my e-mail runs on the bottom of the column in many, many newspapers, so that I get a response back from people. And somebody, I hope, will encourage someone to do a Ph.D. thesis on why people will write e-mails in a language and a voice that they would never write a letter or talk to you. So I get a lot of the "you Massachusetts liberal" thing. And that's the good stuff. And I think it was two weeks ago now, or a week and a half ago, I wrote a column just thanking San Francisco when they started gay marriage, because they took the heat off of the Massachusetts liberal once again.

But this whole thing about how we're in an isolated pocket of the country where nobody agrees with our values, I don't buy it. First of all, I think -- I mean, red states, blue states, I can never remember which we are. We're the blue, right? I don't buy it entirely. I think that there is certainly a tension between conservatives and liberals, but it's not so much east and west. Sometimes it's urban versus rural. Sometimes it's one religious group versus another. But I don't think it's anywhere nearly as Massachusetts versus the country, or Massachusetts and San Francisco versus the country as it's sold.

JAMES CARROLL: You remember that slogan from 1972: As Massachusetts goes, so goes the District of Columbia. You're a funny woman. Tell us about the role of humor in your work. You often have a way of disarming readers as they're confronting a complicated question with a genuine written humor, which is very hard to pull off. Are you conscious of that? Does it come naturally? Is it something you work at? How is it?

ELLEN GOODMAN: Well, I think if you don't go through life with some kind of irony or humor, you're really sunk. And I think I do probably come by that just as a matter of temperament. But also, how do you look around and see things and not see the incredible sort of head-shaking humor in some of it? Sometimes I think we're sort of blind to the dualities and the contradictions and the just hysterical stuff that's going on. I mean, some of it is pretty serious too, so you don't always feel that it's appropriate to laugh, like at the President. But some of it is not.

JAMES CARROLL: Well, I know that's one of the things that endears you to readers. Yes, sir?

Q: I'm Dan Asher from Cape Cod. I'm not a reader of your column. I read other publications, sorry to say. But my question follows on the heels of the question that was asked earlier. Perhaps I'll put a business spin on it. How do you satisfy *The Boston Globe*, the business end of *The Boston Globe*, and yet you may ... Are you in contradiction with your viewpoint with people who live out in Iowa, Idaho, Montana, and so on, where you may be ...

ELLEN GOODMAN: My daughter lives in Montana, so don't pick on Montana.

Q: All right. North Dakota, or some other places that might not be as liberal or as open to new ideas as I assume -- correct me if I'm wrong -- your key audience here in Massachusetts.

ELLEN GOODMAN: You know, I don't think about it very much, to be honest. There's a wonderful line from Eudora Welty where she says, "I write for myself and others. The others, dear reader, are an afterthought." And it's not true entirely at all, because you do think about ... You want to be clear. You want people to understand. You want to be respectful of people who disagree with you. And that's probably one clue, because I really do try to tip my hat to the people who disagree, and sort of say where they are, and where I am, and how to work through that to hopefully my conclusion. But if not, at least they know that I have respected them. So I think some of it really is that if you show respect for other people's point of view, they will follow you through and listen to it. It's also true that newspapers do want to reflect a range of opinions, and they don't go very far left anymore. But they do want to reflect some ... you can't do that. You just can't write that way. And it's not at all in my head. What's in my head is what Jim said: 750 words, get the deadline, got to be done by 5:00, got to be able to get it right. And a lot of us in newspapers were, for example, horrified at the Jayson Blair kind of story. Because a lot of us, you know, we get up at 3:00 in the morning and say, "Oh my God, was it 23 or 24 billion," you know, trying to make sure that things were accurate. So worry about accuracy. Worry about tone. Worry about the structure of a column: a beginning, a middle and an end. Worry about what I think. But don't worry about whether there's a business risk.

JAMES CARROLL: My wife, Alexandra Marshall, observed on our way here today that you're one of the few columnists who actually seems capable of changing minds. One imagines -- and I've had the experience myself, w all probably have -- that you do have a way of making an argument that does change the reader's mind, which actually isn't the style of column-writing in America today as it's evolved. It tends to be much more staking a position and not particularly worrying about whether someone can come to that position with you or not.

ELLEN GOODMAN: I think it's important that people are able to listen to you, that if you just throw down the gauntlet people aren't able to listen. And I don't expect to change minds, thank you. I mean, I'm happy when it happens. But I do like it when someone says, "You know, you made me think about that a little differently, turn it around a little and think about it in a slightly different way."

Q: My name is Irving Smolens, and I'm from Melrose, Massachusetts. And earlier in the conversation the subject of ethics came up. And I would like to find out, how do we determine actually what is ethical? You know, I was directly involved personally when President Truman decided to drop the atomic bomb, and I approved of that because I'm probably standing here today because of the fact that he did that. So to me that ethical consideration eventually morphs into morality. Was it moral to do that? And from my standpoint personally, it was. And yet I consider myself to be a very highly ethical person. So where do you draw the line? How do you determine what actually is ethical? Is it personal

consideration, or is it just the well-being of humanity that's the basis for making that determination?

ELLEN GOODMAN: Well, you raised one of the most complicated ethical decisions. And I personally think there are very strong and morally valid positions on both sides of that. And I don't know if you've seen "Fog of War," but for a lot of people of the younger generation had to be reminded through "Fog of War" that there were 100,000 people killed by firebombing Tokyo, too.

Q: And Dresden.

ELLEN GOODMAN: And Dresden. Well, yes, and Dresden, and so forth. So I'm going to be -- Forgive me for being glib, but you make moral decisions the way porcupines make love: very, very carefully. And people are not always going to come out on the same side of these. That's why it's important to have a range of people. I was just noting today that the President's bioethics commission -- He's now having people on the bioethics commission who only agree with him. Well, you know, you then have an unethical bioethics commission. So, I mean, it is extremely important to have a range of people from different moral traditions too to argue these things out and to assume that we're not all going to come out on exactly the same sentence on the same page of that issue. But I don't have a quick answer for how you make all those ethical decisions, except probably one at a time.

Q: Excuse me, Jim. Would you care to enter into that conversation? Because you're always writing about ethics and morals?

JAMES CARROLL: Well, I actually have made a point as a columnist to write every August 6, or the week of every August 6, my own ongoing struggle with the very problem you lifted up. And I honor your point of view, and of course there's absolutely no argument with the point of view of someone who understands August 6, 1945 to have been the event that enabled them to live. And I know that there are many thousands of American veterans who remember that date that way and, therefore, gratefully. But I also think the burden of history requires us not to second-guess the people who went before us, but to make fresh judgments constantly on the decisions that went before us. And I think ethics, in a way, is a constant revisiting of the past, not out of nostalgia or obsessiveness, but precisely because our decisions in the future depend on wisdom we glean from the past. And I therefore salute you for reminding us of August 6. August 6 is, even more than 9/11/2001, the day that marks before and after on the earth, I believe. And we have to understand it. That isn't ever to sit in judgment of President Truman from a position of moral superiority. But I do believe we have an obligation to understand perhaps that decision didn't have to be made that way. And what would the world be if another decision had been taken? And the reason to imagine that is because President Truman legitimized nuclear weapons on that day. And the United States of America, and to a lesser extent the world, still lives with legitimized nuclear weapons. And that's the moral condition of the earth today. And it's an exceedingly dangerous one. And in order to get out from under it, we have to think more fully about the first decision. So that would be, in all honesty, my way of explaining to you that we probably disagree in the end about August 6, 1945.

Q: We do, but only on that particular issue.

Q: I'm Tom Dwyer from Mansfield, Massachusetts. I think I'm going to move from the sublime to the ridiculous here with this question. But I'm interested in actually both of your opinions on this fascination that we have in our culture right now with reality shows and reality TV, and the fact that it's not just reality shows and reality TV. It now becomes news. And we have news shows that talk about what happened on the reality TV the night before, and make it sound like it is actually legitimate news for the morning shows. I'd be interested in your thoughts on that.

ELLEN GOODMAN: Well, you just echoed them. It's bizarre. I mean, it is totally bizarre, I mean, how much of the space entertainment news -- I mean, there is also an oxymoron, entertainment news, but how much of the space now takes place in and around entertainment, whether we have ... And then you can't always tell when it's news and entertainment anyway. I mean, was the Janet Jackson story news or entertainment? And when did it move from entertainment to news? The wardrobe malfunction, for those of you who have blessedly forgotten. And it's such a media culture that everything that goes on in it is in fact also turned into news and often frivolized, if that's a verb.

Q: But if I could just ask one quick follow-up, why is that? Why are we fascinated with this as a society?

ELLEN GOODMAN: Well, first of all, are we, or is it presented to us by the media, and it's cheap television? But also, I do think there's one other piece of it

that I find interesting, which is that Americans now don't necessarily know who their neighbors are. And the people in the entertainment world have become their neighbors, the people they gossip about, the people they think about. We keep throwing up new people onto the chart, whether it's Scott Peterson -- suddenly he's the neighbor that we now gossip about. And it is a way in which people connect at the water cooler, who may not even know each other anymore. So there's some sort of strange transformation going on around the word, community. And we are now a community of television watchers and of Internet observers. And these are our people. Not really our people. And it doesn't really matter. But we were talking about Princess Di before. People reacted as if she were their sister or their relative. And in fact, she wasn't. But there is this disconnect with the real people that you work with -- or, not necessarily work with but live in the neighborhood, and this strange, odd connection to people who in fact you don't even know.

Q: I'm Nick Danforth. I wanted to ask you, Ellen, to say a little more about men, especially in the domestic domain. Because I talked to you 30 years ago, when we were at Harvard. You were a Neiman fellow. And I remember you being very sensitive to men's pressures, strengths and weaknesses, very appreciative and balanced. And I think you have been very sensitive in the 30 years since then about both gender issues. And, by the way, I think the men are another example of how you can get more readers to hear you if you don't hit them over the head. You've done that more than, I think, any woman writer. But I want a report card. How are we doing? Because today you said twice women have made great changes in the women's movement years, but men haven't. And I work on this issue. I'm hoping it ain't so awful. Are we hopeless, or is there help?

ELLEN GOODMAN: Oh, no, I think that men have also made great changes. The society supports the changes that women have made towards men's lives by real stuff, paychecks, etc. But men have made great changes. Certainly, a whole generation of men are not the fathers they had. They've changed, in terms of fathering, tremendously. At the same time, I think men have gone through a period of change that mirrors the sort of external changes that women's lives have gone through. Women's lives have gone through, you know, balancing family and work. And I think in some ways, men have gone through a kind of internal change, that they went from having as a role model John Wayne to Alan Alda to something sort of halfway between Colin Powell and Bruce Springsteen, a sort of muscular sensitivity, if you will, that men have struggled to be strong without being silent. And that has been an internal struggle that I think many men are sort of halfway through that process as well. So that both in terms of fathering, men have changed enormously, and in terms of this psychological change. At the same time, society does not support and is probably more frightened of men changing than even of women, so that, for example, if a woman decides to leave work to stay at home, there's a lot of difficulty for that, too. Will she be able to get back in? Etc., etc. How does she feel about her work and family? But for a man to do it, he is judged far more harshly by society and finds it far harder to get back into the workforce even than women do. So society is pretty harsh on men, still.

Q: I'm Albert Schilling. I've been a medical oncologist since 1948. And it's great to see the many great bits of knowledge that we have now that will be of great help to us. I'm thinking specifically about what we know and will know about the genes and stem cell. Readers like to look on columnists as our champions, especially if they say what we'd like them to say. Now, on stem cells, there's a

great deal of opinion that the President has wisely thought supports his decision about slowing down this type of research. I'd like to ask two columnists of somewhat different styles what columnists can do to help us, those of us who think that gene research should be forwarded? It was great to see the headline in the *Globe* today that at least Harvard is taking some steps to move this forward.

JAMES CARROLL: Well, I think of Ellen Goodman as a model here, which is how to simplify an incredibly complicated question. And I confess that for me, the complications outweigh the simplifications still. But my broad frame of reference is that we live in a revolutionary time. The human species is undergoing rapid change so dramatic that we can even see it. These are mutations, cultural and species mutations, we're living through. The change, in one century, of the entire meaning of reproduction and the relationship of the physical self to reproduction has really made so many traditions and traditional impulses irrelevant, of no use to us. I come from a very powerful religious tradition. Many of our most dearly held principles are discredited now, leaving aside the particular scandal. I'm not talking about that. I'm talking about the natural law theory of moral analysis, for example. So in that kind of change, as Ellen has indicated again and again, I think we all have an obligation to proceed as thoughtfully as we can. But, of course, science doesn't wait for us to come to our conclusions. And that's one of the things we're at the mercy of, that in a way it doesn't matter what I or Ellen or even President Bush decide about cloning, in a way, because the bench scientists who are at work on cloning are not waiting for our opinions to be expressed. So it's a very huge dilemma, and I'm not giving you any clarity, the kind of clarity you asked for. But I think we need to take very seriously the lessons of the past, but we can't be bound by them. And we have to discover as we go what it means to be a human

being in this new context. So that's a framework, and what that does mean is we might sit more lightly to tradition than we would have thought we would. And we know now that we have to even be open to the question of what is it to be a human being? These are very large questions that are going to dominate the 21st century.

ELLEN GOODMAN: Jim always has a deeper, more global look at it than I do, I must say. That was very wise, typically wise. I worry that people are totally clueless, that here we are, we're talking about cloning, and trying to parse the difference between whether you clone a human being, or you have stem cell cloning. And people are still arguing all over this country about whether they should teach evolution in the schools. So how do you get to the point of having a serious public conversation -- and it should be a public conversation along the lines that Jim said, too -- how do you get to having a serious public conversation if people don't even know what a stem cell is? And part of what the job is is to try to explain the fundamentals, too, and to explain where it fits on this large spectrum of change that you were describing and then to actually say, "You know, we've got to make distinctions here, that we can ..." Certainly, there are going to be Raelians who are going to be trying to clone human beings in sort of a scam way somewhere around. But we've got to also say, "You know, it's important for us to be able to cure certain diseases. And we can do this in a way that is morally acceptable." That's my take on it. And it's better if we keep some control on it than we just let it become an outlaw activity. It gets into some pretty wifty ground, though. Wifty, by the way, is a word I made up.

JAMES CARROLL: It's a good one. Just as a note of procedure, Ellen is happy to meet you after this event and continue the conversation and sign books if you

choose. And so, aware of that, I'll recognize the three people who are at the microphones now, but after that we'll draw toward a conclusion after you read something. Yes?

Q: Thank you. My name is Meredith Berrica from Braintree. And Miss Goodman, I really appreciated your article on plan B, your editorial on plan B this morning in the *Globe*. And you spoke about the pharmacist who refused the prescription after calling his pastor. And I was wondering if you could comment on what I perceive to be as really a bombardment of religious fundamentalism in the country, and where you see that heading, especially with an evangelical as a president. If you could comment on that, I'd appreciate it.

ELLEN GOODMAN: We do have a group of American fundamentalists. I mean, I was struck after 9/11. One of the columns I included in the book was after 9/11 when Pat Robertson and Jerry Falwell both said that basically it was our fault, because we had so drifted away from moral values. So that, in essence, our fundamentalists agreed with their fundamentalists that America was to blame. And so I was very struck by that, and I have been struck for some time at listening to this kind of harsh, tightfisted view of the world. I think there are religions that look at the world with open hands, and there are religions that hold with tight fists. And in general, I think America is openhanded. I mean, we hear so much about religious fundamentalism, but at the same time, we have to look at how we're living. And this is a country that is much more diverse than it was, that is much more welcoming to immigrants, not always, but is much more welcoming to immigrants than even this city was a century ago, and that has gone through a huge transition in terms of women's and men's lives. And it is going through a

huge transition now, very much towards accepting our gay brothers, sisters, coworkers, etc. So I think we have to fight the opposition, and to feel very comfortable speaking up and not to be beaten down by what's perceived to be stronger than we are. So I think we have to feel very comfortable with that. At the same time, I think we have to recognize that things are more open than they were two generations ago, and feel a little bit more confidence and a little bit more strength.

Q: Paul Callahan from Canton, former teacher. I just want to say, Jim and Ellen, I appreciate your columns. I appreciate the fact that, in 750 words, both of you can compact so much information. I'll leave you with something to write about tomorrow. Reading in the paper today that one of the things that people are getting attached to are machines and toys. If you read that article, I'd like to hear your comments on that.

ELLEN GOODMAN: I did read it. It was an article about Sherry Turkle's work on how people are getting so attached to machines. And she had a wonderful moment in there where she described her own relationship to a robot, that the robot had made eye contact with her, and that she had reacted as a human being to a robot making eye contact with her. And I thought, whoa, that was really an extraordinary and fascinating moment, that we respond as humans to something that is inhuman.

Q: I'm Richard Neely from Plymouth, Massachusetts. It's an election year. We have a particular race going on in our district, and we have a presidential election. Clearly, the candidates that come to the top are those that have huge war chests.

What's the long-term implication for our democracy when one has to raise millions to buy an office?

ELLEN GOODMAN: Well, I'm so glad you asked that question, because you gave me the chance for a one-word answer. The implications are lousy. So it's a very troubling issue. And I think we've had a variety of ways of finance reform, and we've never really gotten there because we haven't really had that commitment, and it's time that we did.

JAMES CARROLL: Well, we've come to this point in the conversation where I'm going to honor the book we're here to acknowledge by asking you, Ellen, if you would pick a passage and read from it for us.

ELLEN GOODMAN: Well, I was going to read you one of my favorite columns, which was just to lighten it up, about BOTOX. But I think I'm going to be much more self-indulgent than that, since my family is here, and I will read the column about the birth of my grandson instead, if you will allow me to be family-centered for the moment. This happened right after my grandson was born, which was over a year ago, just over a year ago.

“We are watching the sunrise, my grandson and I. It's our time of day, when his sleep-deprived parents hand him over, warm and groggy. Maybe this is why God created grandparents, I tell this newborn. At his stage of life and mind, our biorhythms are in pre-dawn synchrony. We do the morning shift together. It's been only a few days since grandparents, cousins, honorary aunts and uncles and friends began welcoming this boy into our village. Pictures and good wishes are

still traveling across the Internet tribe. Now sitting here I wonder if there's a grandparent pheromone or instinct that goes unmentioned in the DNA research. There must be some chemistry that turns adults with opera subscriptions and espresso machines into people who put bumper stickers on their cars that say, "Ask me about my grandchildren."

Logan was born three weeks early into a troubled world: War brewing with Iraq, North Korea threatening nuclear weapons, suicide bombings in Israel. I remember the Chinese curse: May you live in interesting times. Then I smile at my grandson and ask, "What was your hurry?" When he ignores my question, I rerun the family tape to other best of/worst of interesting times. I was born in 1941, just months before Pearl Harbor and before the war in Europe became the Second World War. My daughter was born in 1968 at the height of the Vietnam War, in the weeks between Martin Luther King Jr.'s and Robert Kennedy's assassinations. Our birth years were so dismal that even the wine wasn't worth the space in a wine cellar.

We too were brought into a troubled world. For my mother and myself and my daughter, birth was/is a leap of faith over fear. For us, a newborn was/ is as life-affirming as the most predictable scene in some old movie – “boil the water!” -- or the final episode of a sitcom that climaxes in a trip to the maternity ward. From time to time, my daughter and I laughingly ask Logan what he wants to be when he grows up. "Are you ready to take your SATs?" His birth projects us into the future, but it also returns us to those first moments when all we really want for our children is safety, when keeping them safe is our primary job, and primal emotion.

Nearby, there is a small store of safety equipment that his parents have acquired: A car seat for the rear seat only. A stroller with a seat belt. A carrier with a sturdy strap. A monitor to hear his cry from one room to another. There is a cache of baby books as well. In the favorite of these, the authors encourage parents in ways that make babies feel that their world is a safe place.

But is it? When my daughter was an infant, I used to wonder what the world would be like if we gave every world leader a single newborn to care for, hands on. Would the tender, anxious responsibility for daily survival change everything they did -- or merely justify it? When Francis Bacon wrote that children are our “hostages to fortune,” he was scorning families as “impediments to great enterprises, either of virtue or of mischief.” But these days I read those impediments with a very different emotion. If those hostages to fortune make us expand the safety zone, so be it.

After Logan's birth, I offered his family a blessing that I had learned from a friend who lived in India. May your house be safe from tigers. My son-in-law smiled and assured me that there are no tigers near here, only bears and an occasional mountain lion.

Now the sun is over the mountains, and my grandson is sleeping. In this peaceful hour, I know that children are the real act of daring in a dangerous world. May your house be safe from tigers, little boy, and from the occasional mountain lion.

Thank you.

JAMES CARROLL: Ladies and gentlemen, I'm going to interrupt your applause just to say two things. One, to acknowledge you. Walt Whitman once said about great poets that they require great audiences. A great columnist requires great readers, and you have represented a whole nation of Ellen's readers here this afternoon with your thoughtful attention and your fine questions. So thank you for making it palpable how Ellen's reach extends.

And I'd also like to conclude by acknowledging John Shattuck and the people of this magnificent institution and really to acknowledge the completion of the story here. Jackson Holtz, one of the many people who enabled John Kennedy to launch his career from this state, a tie between Ellen's family and Senator and President Kennedy that is really, in a very moving way, honored by the Kennedy Library's welcome of Ellen here today.

And Ellen, for your fans and your readers, I can only say what everybody across this country knows very well. You are, as they say, a national treasure. And we thank you very much.

ELLEN GOODMAN: Thank you.

Q: And now, Ellen will join anyone who'd like to have a book signed or to continue the conversation out by the bookstore. Is that right? Thank you.