

turned out that she had eventually pleaded guilty to loitering, a minor offense.

When the story appeared, however, Tripp and her attorneys told other news organizations that she had been the innocent victim of a prank—that her friends had stolen the items, planted them in her purse, and then called the police. One of the people present at the arrest, Kevin Milley, who is now a police patrolman in Montville Township, New Jersey, gave an interview in which he corroborated Tripp's version of events.

Last week, Tripp's attorney Anthony Zaccagnini said, on CNN's "Larry King Live," that the charges against Tripp had been "dropped," and went on to say, "The friends admitted to the felony charge." But he then added that Tripp had pleaded guilty to loitering. In April, Zaccagnini told ABC that Tripp hadn't thought it necessary to disclose her arrest and detention to the Pentagon. This was true, Tripp has told Fox News, because the presiding judge and her lawyer at the time had told her, "You can honestly say you have never been arrested." When *The New Yorker* repeatedly asked Zaccagnini to respond to new information about Tripp's arrest, he issued the following statement: "Due to the continuing investigation into the unauthorized release of information related to matters now under investigation, what can be said has been said."

Tripp's lawyers have also stated that her parents have verified her account, but neither of them would speak to *The New Yorker*. Tripp's former stepmother has a different recollection of the arrest. Davis recalls that when Al Caro returned from Greenwood Lake he declared that he was "disgusted" and that "he felt she'd sunk to the bottom." Davis remembers Caro telling her that he thought Linda had started to lie to him about what happened but then got scared and told the truth. "No, she wasn't set up," Davis concludes.

In an effort to sort out these discrepancies, I found an officer who had been present at the arrest, one of the owners of the Long Pond Inn, all four of the "accomplices" listed in the police report (but never charged), another friend who was there, and one of the two robbery complainants. (The arresting officer and

the other complainant are dead.) Six of these eight participants were willing to speak on the record. With the exception of Milley, who may very well possess crucial information that the others don't have, they all dispute aspects of Tripp's account, though some details of their recollections vary. It's not surprising that twenty-nine years later people remember things differently, but the level of skepticism of those who were there that morning is noteworthy.

Skip O'Donnell, the officer present at Tripp's arrest, is now a law-enforcement official elsewhere, and he recalls the incident clearly. "None of them came forward and said she was innocent, it was a prank, or anything like that," he says. For Tripp to say



otherwise now, O'Donnell believes, is "ridiculous." If the theft had been a practical joke, he asserts, the police would have "cut everyone loose." Gerald Spivak, who now works at a Toyota dealership in New Jersey, owned and managed the Long Pond Inn with his father in 1969. Linda Tripp "can say she didn't do it, but I remember it, even after twenty-nine years," he says. Tripp, he recalls, was a "regular" at the inn's bar, and the two men who claimed that they were robbed worked there as his bartender and bouncer. "We called the police," Spivak says. "Someone brought charges against her." Spivak admits that neither he nor anyone else actually saw Tripp take anything, and some important details of his recollection changed in the telling. But, he says, "if she was set up, why did she take a lesser plea? If I was set up, I'd fight it all the way, and so would you."

Most of the other members of the stranded group scoff at Tripp's version of events. David Young, who now lives in Aurora, Illinois, says that he vividly recalls the moment when the group of teen-agers was stopped by police and the stolen watch fell to the ground between him and Tripp. Linda stepped forward and said, "I took it," Young recalls, with some gratitude, since, as he puts it, "as far as I was concerned, she did the right thing—at least she didn't frame me!" Similarly, Lynn Farrell, who is now a New Jersey housewife, says, "No one set her up, absolutely not." Bill Byrne, who is now the chief financial officer of a textile company in New Jersey, says, "No one in our group would

do anything like that. Call the cops as a joke? That's ridiculous!"

Kevin Milley, however, has a different version of events, which he may be sharing with Kenneth Starr. In March, Milley spoke briefly to the *Washington Post*, but through a lawyer he refused all other interviews until I produced a list of the witnesses who had gone on the record to dispute his account. In our conversation, Milley sounded good-hearted and sincere. But what he told me was somewhat different from what had appeared in the *Post*. The newspaper had reported his saying that "two boys in the group whose names he could not recall took a watch and money from hotel rooms at the Long Pond Inn . . . and stuffed the items into Tripp's purse without her knowing. The boys then called police and reported a theft." But Milley says that the *Post* didn't get his story straight, and he suggested to me that the real culprit had been another young woman, who later confessed her guilt to him, and whose name he declines to make public. He believes that this woman also confessed to the police soon after Tripp's arrest. Skip O'Donnell has no memory of such a confession, and the woman in question angrily denies the accusation, saying, "I adamantly and categorically deny any involvement in the situation at all."

Tripp's statement that the judge and her lawyer told her, "You can honestly say you have never been arrested," cannot be verified, because the magistrate who heard her case, John J. McManus, has died. And Fredrick Falick, a Legal Aid lawyer who handled her case, says that he represented hundreds of cases of teen-age troublemaking and doesn't remember this one.

Several weeks after Tripp's arrest, Lynn Farrell and another girl who had been with Linda on the morning of the arrest bumped into her in Tripp's home town. If Tripp had been falsely accused, Farrell says, she showed no sign of resentment. Instead, Farrell recalls, Tripp seemed "boastful" that she'd got out of the situation with little more than a slap on the wrist. "She never said anyone else had confessed."

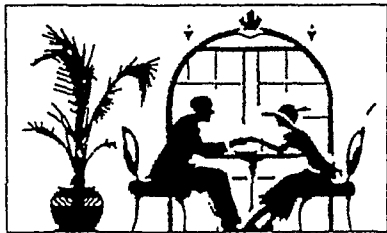
Whether or not Linda Tripp told the full truth about this embarrassing moment in her past, it is remarkable that American politics now seems to hinge on such trivial pursuits. ♦

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|----------------------|--|-------------------|-----|
| COMMENT              | Mogul Utilitarianism . . . . .   | John Cassidy      | 5   |
|                      | Rupert Murdoch makes more than a mistake.  |                   |     |
| THE MAIL             | . . . . .  |                   | 10  |
| GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN | . . . . .  |                   | 12  |
| THE TALK OF THE TOWN | . . . . .  |                   | 31  |
|                      | The spoils of "Titanic"; James McDougal; Eric Breindel; etc.   |                   |     |
| DEPARTMENTS          |  |                   |     |
|                      | The Political Scene Portrait of a Whistleblower . . . . .  | Jane Mayer        | 34  |
|                      | The reason for Linda Tripp's anger lies close to home.   |                   |     |
|                      | Annals of Addiction Saying Yes to Drugs . . . . .  | David Samuels     | 48  |
|                      | To stay competitive in a managed-care world, the Hazelden<br>Foundation is revamping the image of addiction.   |                   |     |
|                      | Letter from Uganda Our Children Are Killing Us . . . . .   | Elizabeth Rubin   | 56  |
|                      | Some twelve thousand children have been<br>kidnapped by a rebel leader who is forcing them to<br>join his army and is turning them into murderers.   |                   |     |
| THE DOMESTIC LIFE    | Earthly Delights . . . . .   | David Nasaw       | 66  |
|                      | William Randolph Hearst's friends, guests, and servants<br>explain why San Simeon was nothing like "Citizen Kane."   |                   |     |
| AT THE MUSEUMS       | Pierre Bonnard . . . . .   | Jamie James       | 80  |
| FICTION              | "Natural Color" . . . . .  | John Updike       | 82  |
|                      | A midafternoon surprise on Main Street.  |                   |     |
| THE CRITICS          |  |                   |     |
|                      | A Critic at Large The "Primary Colors" cure . . . . .  | Hendrik Hertzberg | 86  |
|                      | The Art World Chuck Close at MOMA . . . . .  | Simon Schama      | 91  |
|                      | Books Nancy Kricorian's "Zabelle" . . . . .  | Joyce Carol Oates | 94  |
|                      | The Theatre "A Flea in Her Ear," "Art" . . . . .   | John Lehr         | 96  |
|                      | The Current Cinema "The Big Lebowski" . . . . .  | Daphne Merkin     | 98  |
| POEM                 |  |                   |     |
|                      | "48 Big Daffodils" . . . . .   | Deborah Pease     | 54  |
| CROSSWORD            | 8 x 10 Cryptic No. 37 . . . . .  |                   | 99  |
| SHOUTS & MURMURS     | Take Two . . . . .   | Frank Gannon      | 100 |
| COVER                | <i>A Night to Remember</i> , by Art Spiegelman   |                   |     |
| DRAWINGS             | <i>Donald Reilly, Edward Frascino, Mick Stevens, Charles Barsotti, Richard<br/>Cline, Robert Mankoff, Michael Crawford, Bruce Eric Kaplan, Jack Ziegler,<br/>Robert Weber, Frank Cotham, William Humilton, Roz Chast</i> |                   |     |

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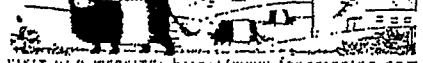
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# PORTRAIT OF A WHISTLEBLOWER

The family history behind Linda Tripp's anger.

BY JANE MAYER

LINDA ROSE TRIPP, a middle-level, middle-aged career bureaucrat, seems an unlikely character to find at the center of a White House crisis. Yet in the course of one day in January, she became the mechanism, the "Tripp wire," that set off perhaps the most bizarre and hysterical episode in the history of the American Presidency. Since then she has been in seclusion, waiting to appear before the Whitewater grand jury.

A whistleblower's motives are often complex. Principles can play a part; so can hurt feelings, workplace resentments, and family disasters. It is usually a potent mixture of civic indignation and personal anger that compels someone to risk job and reputation in order to expose perceived wrongdoing.

In the case of Linda Tripp, eight weeks of feverish news-gathering has failed to explain fully why she decided to betray her friend Monica Lewinsky and level charges against a former employer, Bill Clinton.

To be sure, many theories have been put forward for Tripp's actions: that she was a right-wing mole in a Democratic White House; that she wanted to sell a tell-all book to a publisher for a huge advance; that she felt personally insulted by one of the President's lawyers; that she was afraid the investigations conducted by the Whitewater prosecutor Kenneth Starr and by Paula Jones's advocates would ensnare her; that she was public-spirited; that she was simply a meddler, a gossip, and a snoop. There may be bits of truth in each of these theories. In addition, however, evidence

suggests that Tripp's actions were consistent with a lifelong pattern of behavior that may be rooted in her childhood.

Psychobiography is at best a form of speculation, of guesswork about the



This was not the first time that Tripp had demonstrated an interest in other people's sexual transgressions.

motives of public figures, but with Tripp, the most curious player in this strange drama, the details of her life are all we have to go on. What we know from friends and colleagues—many of whom demanded anonymity—is that Tripp has always been slightly obsessive about marital infidelity, perhaps because her philandering father caused her such pain and anger. And she appears to have become even more embittered about men after her own divorce. To understand what she did on January 16, 1998, it helps to examine events that happened long before she met Bill Clinton or Monica Lewinsky.

That day, Tripp invited Lewinsky to meet her for lunch at the Ritz-Carlton Hotel in Arlington, Virginia. Shortly after they arrived, several people surrounded their table and identified

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