

themselves as F.B.I. agents and federal prosecutors. The team escorted both women upstairs to a hotel room, and Lewinsky was informed that for several months Tripp had been surreptitiously taping her young friend's romantic confessions about the President of the United States. Monica began to weep and loudly accuse Tripp of betrayal. She was so distraught that the prosecutors finally asked Tripp to leave.

Tripp drove to her home, in a cul-de-sac of middle-class houses in Columbia, Maryland. The President was scheduled to be deposed the next day in Paula Jones's sexual-harassment lawsuit, and Jones's lawyers had been trying all day to reach Tripp, who had also been subpoenaed in the Jones case but had not yet been deposed. That evening, in her antique-filled living room, where she has been known to keep cages for her dog and for her pet rabbits, Tripp sat down with members of Jones's legal team and gave them detailed information about Lewinsky's contacts with the President, including meetings, gifts, and efforts to find Monica a new job. According to the *Washington Post*, the lawyers used this information the next day to question the President closely in his deposition.

This episode, now so famous in the annals of Clintoniana, was not the first time that Tripp had demonstrated a penchant for office intrigue or an interest in other people's sexual transgressions. In 1987, she worked as a secretarial assistant in Army intelligence at Fort Meade, where émigrés from the Eastern bloc were sometimes debriefed. Her colleagues there remember her as an excellent stenographer, but also as an inveterate busybody, who was particularly concerned that a senior officer might be having an extramarital affair. "She was underemployed, so she would fill her time by gossiping," one of her former colleagues said. "She was the type who always knew all the dirt. She wasn't wrong, but it wasn't stuff you necessarily wanted to know." When Tripp moved to the Pentagon, and then on to the Bush White House, in 1990, she continued to pass around information—sometimes to the press—about other people's romantic lives. In January, CNN reported that "Tripp was known as a source of never-proven allegations about President Bush's personal

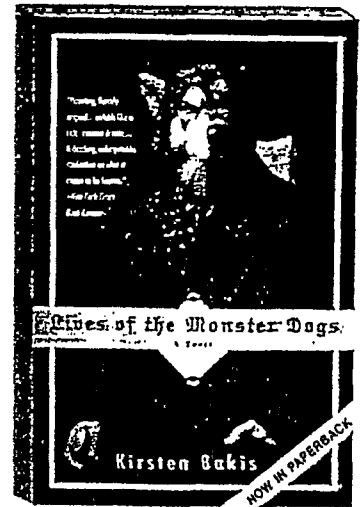
life." Through her lawyer, Tripp denied this, and Dorrance Smith, who supervised Tripp at the Bush White House and now works at ABC News, also dismisses it as "laughable," explaining that Tripp "was never in a position to be taken seriously as a source." Yet a well-established news reporter who dealt with Tripp in those years insists that she loved to talk about people's relationships, and that she was very outspoken about Bush, among others.

Tripp also took an intense interest in the marital problems of less powerful people. Edita Butler, a law librarian in Ellicott City, Maryland, was a divorced mother raising three children on her own when Tripp became her neighbor many years ago. "She was prying into my life, trying to get the scoop on my divorce," Butler says. Tripp spoke very personally about the subject. "She told me the children always lose in a divorce," Butler says. "And that she knew because she was from a broken home herself. She told me she would never forgive her father."

TRIPP'S father, Albert Carotenuto, was a short, heavy-featured man who taught math and science at West Essex Regional High School, in North Caldwell, New Jersey. Tripp's mother, Inge, was a German war bride whom Albert met during the Berlin airlift. Inge settled in as a housewife in Morris County, New Jersey, to raise Linda, born in 1949, and another daughter, born six years later. Albert was a strict disciplinarian, and "Linda was angry her whole life," one relation says. In a memorable act of defiance, Linda, denied permission to attend a rock concert, took a sharp object to the paint on her father's beloved Mercedes. But she was a very good student at Hanover Park Regional High School, where she was a member of the Future Nurses of America, and she was well liked as a funny and loyal friend. By her senior year, however, she had to endure the public shame of her father's having an affair with a fellow-teacher, J. Lowe Davis, which a person familiar with the family says he admitted was only one of many infidelities.

Inge sued for divorce. It was, by several accounts, a troubled period in Linda's life. One person recalls that she disappeared for a stretch of time, alarming

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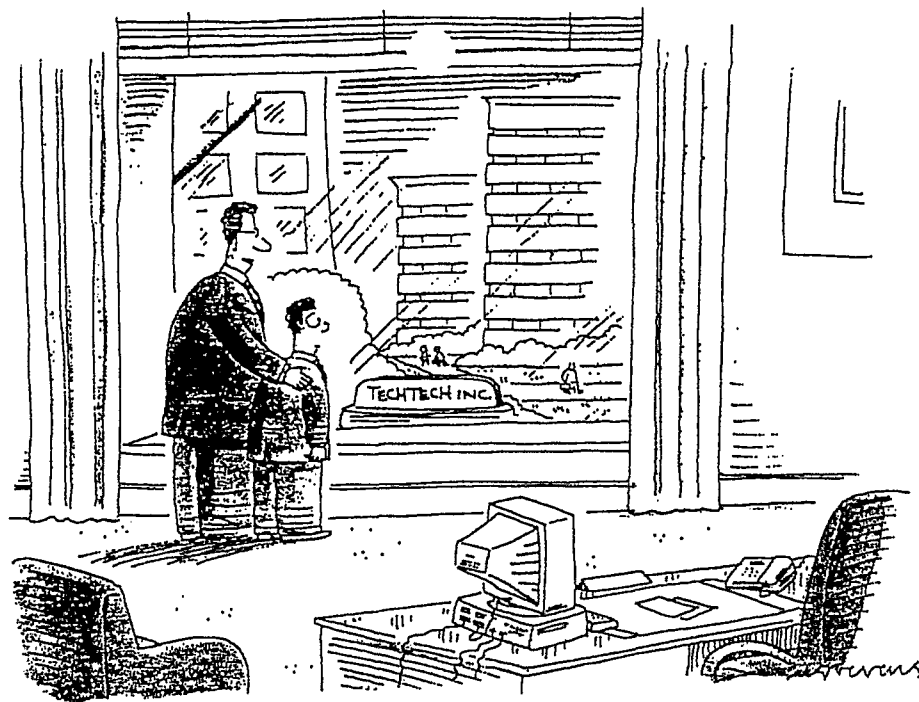
FROM THE PUBLISHERS OF: A TIME WAREHOUSE COMPANY

her parents. On May 12, 1969, when she was nineteen, records show that Linda Carotenuto was arrested in the small resort town of Greenwood Lake, New York, on a grand-larceny charge. According to the police report, two men, Robert Hoffman and Paul Orlando, accused her of stealing two hundred and sixty-three dollars in cash and a watch valued at six hundred dollars from their rooms in the Long Pond Inn. She was arrested at 8:30 A.M., after the stolen goods were found in her possession, the report says, and she gave "oral admissions" to the police. The next afternoon, she posted bond and entered a plea of not guilty. As of March 13th, the outcome of the case could not be determined.

According to the Defense Department, when specifically asked on a security-clearance form in 1987 whether she had ever been "arrested, charged, cited or held by federal, state or other law enforcement or juvenile authorities regardless of whether the citation was dropped or dismissed or you were found not guilty," Tripp answered no. She also answered no to the question "Have you ever been detained, held in, or served time in any jail or prison?" The form, which Tripp signed on April 14, 1987, warned that "a knowing and willful false statement on this form can be punished by fine or imprisonment or both"; such a misstatement would be a felony under federal law. Asked for a response, Tripp's lawyer, James Moody, says he relayed detailed questions to her but "she hasn't responded." He would not comment, explaining, "I don't know the first thing about it."

A year after the arrest, Carotenuto married Davis. Eight years later, they, too, divorced, and Davis moved away. She is now a newspaperwoman in Florida. Reached recently, she said she didn't want to talk about the family, and was stunned to learn that the woman she was seeing on the news was her former stepdaughter.

Davis's marriage to Carotenuto, who had changed his name to Caro, also failed because of a suspected affair with a neighbor. Not long after their divorce, he married yet another woman who lived on their block, in Essex Fells, New Jersey. "It was a regular Peyton Place," says Thomas Russell, a neighbor, who says his former wife had an affair with Caro (which she denies). Caro could be "a hell of a nice guy," Russell said. "But he thought with his trousers. He wanted



"Someday, son, all this will belong to Bill Gates."

them younger and younger." Neighbors also noticed a trait in Caro that Tripp complained about to friends: he was opinionated and overbearing, and was quick to belittle his wives, his children, and other people's kids. Linda later told friends that she blamed her low self-esteem and her weight problems on her father's browbeating. Though Caro paid child support and alimony, he rarely saw or mentioned his older daughter after his divorce from Inge. "I think he was very, very hurt that the family was so estranged," a relative says. "And I think Linda felt abandoned."

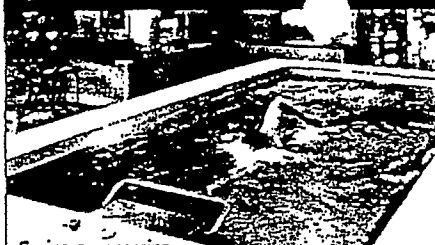
In October, 1971, less than a year after her parents divorced, Linda married Bruce M. Tripp, an enlisted soldier who is now a retired Army colonel. She was twenty and had completed secretarial school. As she followed her husband from base to base, she proved to be a smart and resourceful military employee, and she worked her way up to a top security clearance. The couple raised two children, now twenty-one and eighteen, before separating, in 1990. The marriage had been turbulent, according to neighbors, and the divorce was apparently difficult for Tripp. According to court testimony, it became final only after she failed to appear for two hear-

ings, having fired her lawyer. Tripp's hairdresser, Patrick Hagen, remembers commiserating with Tripp, because he, too, was going through a breakup at that time. After her divorce, "she became a harsher personality," he says. Hagen says she also became a problem client for the salon, treating his employees rudely.

Around the time of the divorce, an old friend who worked in the Bush White House encouraged Tripp to become a "floating secretary" there. According to Hagen, the saving grace in Tripp's life was her job, which she loved. After Clinton took office in 1992, Tripp's friend was laid off, but Linda, who had a reputation for being cheerful and hardworking, was kept on. One White House colleague remembers that Tripp seemed to suffer from what the Clinton staffers called "Bushitis"—that is, a belief that the younger, less formal Democrats lacked the dignity and polish of their Republican predecessors. For example, Tripp was horrified to discover that Mrs. Clinton sometimes used the multi-stall ladies' room outside her office. "Mrs. Bush would rather be catheterized than use a public rest room," she said.

It appears that Tripp began talking about the President's behavior toward women long before Monica Lewinsky

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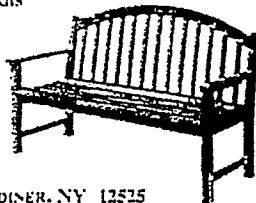
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came on the scene. A memo of Tripp's from the Bush Administration says that Linda was offended by what she perceived as the oversexed atmosphere of the Clinton White House. As a floater, she was sometimes stationed near the Oval Office, Tripp told her friend, where she claimed she could see Clinton flirting. "It knocked her for a loop," the friend says. "She just couldn't tolerate what she saw as misbehavior." Tripp talked often with F.B.I. agent Gary Aldrich, who left the White House in 1995 and later published a controversial book accusing Clinton of numerous incidents of sexual misconduct. Aldrich, who says he had "maybe seventy-five or a hundred conversations" with Tripp, recently told Gerardo Rivera that "Linda Tripp and I and about two thousand other permanent White House employees shared a scorn for what we were seeing."

Despite her disapproval of the Clinton Administration, Tripp wanted to stay on. Her job performance was good enough so that the Clinton team was willing to keep her. In 1993, she was offered a permanent secretarial position in the White House counsel's office, although it is unusual for even an exemplary civil servant to be carried over from one party's White House to the other's in such a sensitive job. Clinton's then White House counsel Bernard Nussbaum, who gave Tripp a staff job in his office, was a savvy New York lawyer but a Washington novice. Colleagues say he hoped to benefit from her institutional memory as a White House veteran. But soon enough Tripp began to criticize her new bosses. She sometimes worked for Vincent Foster, and complained to colleagues that he was spending too much time on the President's personal legal problems. When Foster committed suicide in July, 1993, she told one friend that she was traumatized. She was also privately critical of the investigation into his death. In a notorious E-mail written during the search of Foster's office, she derided Nussbaum and two other White House lawyers as "the three stooges."

This was the beginning of a period of intense scrutiny of White House operations, with the Foster suicide, Whitewater, and Travelgate all running together into one big contentious mess—a tangle

of special investigations and convoluted conspiracy theories. Tripp was called as a witness in some of these inquiries. A few White House colleagues began to suspect that she was talking to the press. A White House official says that ethics officers received "repeated complaints" that Tripp was leaking. One such complaint, a former staffer says, involved



Tripp's talking loudly on the phone to CNN's Wolf Blitzer. There is no hard evidence of Tripp's leaking to the press (there rarely is), but she did tell friends that she suspected that Foster had been driven to despair by knowing too much about the Clintons' machinations. She also had a preliminary conversation with the literary agent Lucianne

Goldberg and her son Jonah about collaborating on a book about Foster's death. Tripp did not want to write anything herself, because she didn't want to jeopardize her job. Goldberg's plan seemed to be to develop the topic for one of her authors, such as former L.A.P.D. Detective Mark Fuhrman. The project never went anywhere. Still, the idea of doing a possibly lucrative exposé had been planted. ("Did she daydream a little?" Jonah Goldberg asks. "I won't say no.")

According to one former co-worker, Tripp was the kind of person others confided in, and she often befriended younger women on the staff, soliciting confidences and offering career advice. "She was fun," says a staffer who occasionally went out for drinks with Tripp and, like Monica Lewinsky, found herself involved in many gossipy phone conversations. But several of the women who trusted Tripp ended up feeling betrayed. They discovered that she spoke disparagingly about them to other staffers, and in one case spread unsubstantiated rumors about someone's supposed drinking problem.

Tripp was also close for a time to Kathleen Willey, the Richmond socialite who was a White House volunteer and the wife of Edward Willey, a Democratic Party donor. Colleagues say Tripp was drawn to Willey's glamour and piqued by her apparent closeness to Clinton. In November of 1993, Willey confided in Tripp that Clinton had made a pass at her, which Clinton denies.

Tripp schemed with Willey to get her a permanent staff job. Together, they went in March of 1994 to Lloyd Cutler,