

What do I do now?

I hadn't considered this before. In this past year, which was so ripe for political commentary, it had never occurred to me that this problem would arise. With Giuliani, Romney, Tancredo, Biden and so many others in the nomination picture, there was always an easy target for barbs and brickbats. Now this happens. The field has narrowed to Mc Cain, Clinton and Obama. Sorry but Mike Huckabee is going nowhere except to that large file of formerly competitive political candidates who are significant only in bar bets and trivia games.

The problem is that I like Mc Cain, Clinton and Obama. I don't mean that I would vote for each of them. I do have my preference. What I mean is that each of them deserves my respect and begrudging admiration. Begrudging because politicians as a group tend to be challenged in areas like integrity and rational thought. I like Mc Cain's forthrightness about any topic you care to mention. I like Clinton's resolve in the face of the huge anti-female bias that confronts her every day. And I like the fresh air that Obama breathes into our tired electoral process. It's been a while since we've had a viable candidate who can actually make a speech. He can.

Since I like each of them it's going to be difficult to write clever, snotty things about them on a regular basis. With Rudy it was easy. Any single issue egomaniac is a huge target. With Mitt it was easy. Anyone who changes his façade more often than a chameleon is an inviting trove of topical stimulation. With Tancredo it was too easy. Any bigot who is dumber than a stump pretty much writes the commentary for you. By the way, I'd like to congratulate the American electorate for retiring each of these wannabees. But now I'm stuck with candidates who are actually the best qualified of the whole pack. Where's the fun in that?

If the President were able to run again everything would be OK. Never has so much easy material flowed from a single human residing in the White House. They say that President Harding, in the 1920's, was an editorialist's delight with his incredibly crooked cronies and his weakness for amorous affairs. But I wasn't around then and criticizing politicians sort of loses its punch when they're dead. But if President 43 were still a going concern come November, if he were running again, all my problems would be over.

But he's not. And I'm left with this trio, all of whom I would like to have dinner with.

That's pretty much my litmus test for determining where notable personages fit on my scale of general worthiness. I imagine Veronica and I having dinner with them. If the image is a pleasant one with easy conversation, lots of laughs and hugs goodnight then I deem the individual in question to be okee dokee. If they pass the imaginary dinner test they're good by me. Obama, Clinton and Mc Cain pass the dinner test. There are a lot of folks who don't pass but that's a column for another day.

I am considering replacing the imaginary dinner test with the much more demanding imaginary two week driving vacation test. In this test Veronica and I would pile into a mid-sized sedan with the notable person in question and hit the road for points west including but not limited to Mt. Rushmore, Little Big Horn and the Arizona Meteor Crater. We would drive a minimum of eight hours a day and stay in chain motels. As most of you know, a close quarters driving vacation is challenging on many levels ranging from annoying personal habits to conflicts in musical tastes. Emerging from one of these trips with relationships not only intact but improved is a sure sign that your travel companion is an alright cigar. I haven't tried applying this test to the big three candidates yet and I hesitate to speculate who would be the most fun.

Oh, there are plenty of things to single out and disagree with among these three. The Iraq war is first among them. This piece of insanity will be remembered as America's signature mistake of the past fifty years. I believe in single payer national health insurance. Yes, nationalized medicine. Get over it. I think we should make it easier for immigrants, legal and otherwise, to become citizens and taxpayers. Just tell me which of the jobs they have that you want and I'll reconsider my position. Finally, I wish all the candidates would push environmental issues to the front of their agendas. I think we need a "New Deal" style public works instituted to deal with environmental challenges and our collapsing infrastructure. Currently, the candidates talk more about emotions than emissions.

But commenting about issues is not nearly as much fun as satirizing personality types. Give me the Senate blowhard with his Zeppelin sized ego. Give me the spineless fear monger who has no problem sending other

people's children to die. Give me the disfunctioning demagogue howling on the radio about his rights. These are the folks who make life worth living for a columnist.

Instead I am confronted with a trio of talented, likeable people. What do I do now?