



## MY BEST SHOT

by Lisa Ross

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### ME, MY DAUGHTER AND MR. LIEBERMAN

My daughter and I spent several weeks before the Democratic National Convention sifting through Al Gore's Vice-Presidential choices the way most people worry about what they are making for dinner. While engaging in this type of conversation on the way to the supermarket might seem strange in the "millennium of me," political discussion is a habit going back generations in my family.

Regretfully, I opined to my daughter that the two most qualified people for the slot—Senators Feinstein and Lieberman—were certainly not topping Gore's list. I could not imagine any political consultant concluding that Americans would vote to put a Jewish-American a heart beat away from the Presidency, in spite of the "inclusion" message du jour of both major parties.

My viewpoint was informed by childhood tales about Senatorial candidate Helen Gahagan Douglas' trouncing by a savage campaign, wrapped in pink paper, that insinuated a Jewish Communist Conspiracy. We heard silly suggestions that John F. Kennedy's election would make the Pope a virtual Secretary of State, and we witnessed the last-minute torpedoing of LA Mayor Tom Bradley's gubernatorial bid with racist whispers warning that Baldwin Hills would over-take Beverly Hills. That was then.

Government is far more diverse today than when I was growing up, and my daughter is used to the powerful presence of women in political life. But, the ultimate political glass ceiling at the top-of-the-ticket remained oppressively impermeable after the only bold political social experiment with the VP job, Geraldine Ferraro, flopped. So, I told my disbelieving daughter, in the era of orchestrated poll-driven politics, no rainbow ticket this year. Maybe next time- a phrase I've repeated for 30 years.

For us, Lieberman's selection was a source of unqualified amazement and joy. Life in America suddenly changed dramatically for my daughter and for hers to come. As Hadassah Lieberman,

the child of concentration camp survivors declared the night of the announcement, what a country America is and is becoming.

For a short time, the money-driven excesses and mixed moral messages of modern-day politics evaporated in her revelatory vision of a truly diverse country. Gore walked the walk and the plank in one dazzling stroke.

But, the muted response from my Jewish friends temporarily dampened our celebratory mood. Many feared attention from this national Jewish coming out party. Perhaps the country might discover how diverse the culture really is, and that the constant and often contentious internal squabbling so much a part of the strong fabric of Jewish life might expose some exploitable vulnerability. After all, many of Mr. Lieberman's conservative views are not universally shared within the Jewish community.

Mostly, my friends were not worried about the fringy skin-head junk on the Internet, but about the pain of a thousand small cuts by insinuation that began within moments of the Lieberman announcement—discussions about his ability to observe the Sabbath and serve the country, questions regarding the "Israel loyalty factor" and the careful assignment of Jewish columnists to the first wave of Lieberman bashing. But, Mr. Lieberman's daily grace under fire salves wounds before they open.

Helen Gahagan Douglas never got over the brutality of her Senatorial campaign experience, but she said prophetically, "In trying to make something new, half the undertaking lies in discovering whether it can be done. Once it has been established that it can, duplication is inevitable."

So, my daughter and I are thrilled and inspired that we are here. We decided to share Mr. Gore's faith in this country, don the appropriate rhino skin, and strut our stuff. The Jewish community and America are already stronger for Joseph Lieberman's candidacy, and we feel it everyday.