

This passage is from a book.

POLITICS IN THE LIVING ROOM

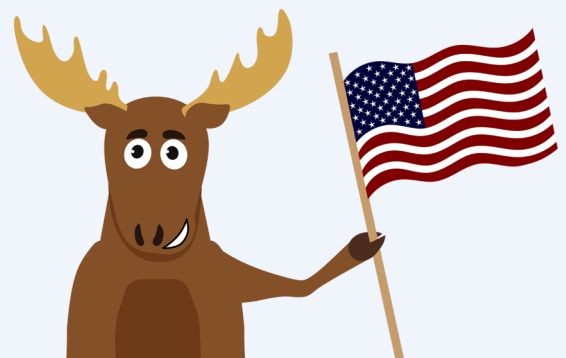
This account discusses the presidential campaign of a man named Bruce Babbitt, who was from Arizona. He ran in the New Hampshire presidential primary in 1988. Early in his campaign, he went to breakfast at the home of a man named Dan Burnham, who lived in Dublin, New Hampshire. Dan invited several friends over to his house that morning to meet Bruce.

Living Rooms

The nine people sitting around the breakfast table at Dan Burnham’s house chatted amiably as they passed around platters of sausage and bacon, croissants and English muffins, jars of homemade preserves, and a large pitcher of orange juice. The discussion was lively, eclectic, and spiced with occasional humor—the kind of informed discourse you might expect from well-educated members of the professional class. These were people who read avidly—books, magazines, more than one daily newspaper—both to keep abreast of the latest developments in the news and to satisfy a well-honed curiosity in the world of ideas. All had traveled extensively in their lives, which, added to their educations, and their involvement in numerous community and state organizations made them able to converse intelligently on a diverse range of topics: the balance of trade, the new leadership asserting itself in the Soviet Union, environmental issues from the depletion of the ozone layer to nuclear power, domestic politics, and the nature of leadership. It had the tone of a conversation among peers. Everyone participated.

They tried fairly successfully to carry on a normal conversation, though this wasn’t exactly easy. Two reporters were taking notes from nearby chairs. A photographer from a local paper leaned in occasionally and popped a flash picture, making them self-conscious enough not to emphasize a point by gesturing forcefully when a sausage was on the end of their fork.

A television crew from Cable News Network circled behind



their chairs, shooting footage. Their group included a banker, the owner of a small woolen mill, the director of a charitable foundation, an environmental activist, a woman involved in the local United Way and arts council . . . and a candidate for president of the United States. Dan Burnham had invited friends over for breakfast with Bruce Babbitt.

March of 1987 was not yet a week old. New Hampshire's citizens, the first Americans to cast ballots for a presidential candidate, still had eleven months to make up their minds. Most of them were as yet unaware of the field of candidates, let alone concerned about the choice they would ultimately have to make in the primary. But Bruce Babbitt, the former Democratic governor of Arizona, had already been campaigning for president for roughly a year and a half.

He had been in New Hampshire enough times by now to know the state's geography, its political demography, and its various idiosyncrasies. Since June of 1986 he had been making two excursions into the state a month. He already knew the names of every Democratic mayor in the state and had met privately with each one more than once. The same for a host of state legislators, party officials, environmental activities, day care advocates, and editorial writers and political reporters of most of the state's small daily and weekly newspapers. Babbitt had already climbed Mount Washington, New Hampshire's highest peak. He had attended a pancake feast at the home of a state representative in the mountain region, a clambake hosted by a state senator on the seacoast, a hot dog barbecue with the county chairman along the upper reaches of the Connecticut River, and a meal at a Greek restaurant in Manchester.

Sharing a meal with a small number of New Hampshire voters was, therefore, nothing new to Babbitt when he sat down to breakfast at the Burnham household. Serious candidates for the presidency, whether they are considered long shots or sure bets, are normally from the highest ranks of



prestige and power in our society. Inviting one of them over for an informal breakfast at your home with just a few of your personal friends is not something that would come to mind to many people in America. Nor would it be entertained seriously by any presidential campaign, unless the host was someone of considerable political influence—or, in one of the years leading up to the presidential primaries, someone who happens to live in New Hampshire.

The idea came to Dan Burnham in early 1987: what better way to learn about the Democratic presidential hopefuls and take their measure than to sit them down in his house and have a long talk with them? Having spent a good portion of his life in the news and public relations fields, Dan knew the difference between reading about an event or a personality and actually attending the event or meeting the person. It isn't that things are necessarily distorted by the media, although that sometimes happens; it's just that so much is left out—a lot of the nuance, the context, even a lot of the basic information is sacrificed to the rigid space limitations of a newspaper or magazine account.

Dan had already decided to involve himself with one of the Democratic campaigns; he just needed to decide which one. He was curious about how they worked, about learning from the inside the answers to what he called "the tantalizing questions of what it takes to win the New Hampshire primary." Perhaps his attitude was a vestige of his early years as a reporter. A journalist's tools are a curiosity about the way the world works, the intelligence to gather the necessary facts and opinions, and the objectivity not to allow his own prejudices to skew his story unfairly.

Dan and his friends asked Bruce Babbitt a lot of tough questions during their breakfast together. The group had a long discussion about the issues of the day. In the end, Dan was impressed with Bruce Babbitt and decided to work for his campaign. When the primary election was held in February 1988, Bruce Babbitt came in 6th among the Democratic candidates. He dropped out of the presidential race a few days later.

*This account has been edited to make it shorter and easier to read.

Notice & Wonder

- Write down any words you don't know and look them up in a dictionary.
- In what way is this account an example of retail politics?

*Source: This passage is from a book by Dayton Duncan called *Grass Roots: One Year in the Life of the New Hampshire Presidential Primary* (1991), pp. 23–33.*

