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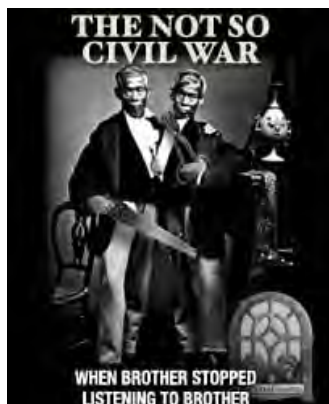


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*From the May, 1977 issue of
National Lampoon*



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voices

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ME AND JACQUES CHIRAC

JERRY SOVERINSKY

THIS PAST AUGUST I was leafing through a comic book when French President Jacques Chirac phoned. "Finally," I thought to myself. "He wants to return my Pyrex." After dispensing with the obligatory pleasantries, he steered the conversation to matters closer to home: Thanksgiving. Did I have plans?

My relationship with Jacques dates to the mid 1970s, when I met his first wife, Nora, by chance. I was in the fourth grade in a Detroit suburb, and Nora was completing her anesthesiology residency at Beaumont Hospital in Detroit. I was struck by an errant dodgeball during one spirited recess exchange, an ambulance brought me to Beaumont Hospital, and...well, the rest tells itself. (But remind me to tell you about that one time Nora and I got caught rounding the bases by her seventeen-year-old son. You could have chilled water in *that* room.)

Nora and I dated casually for the next few years. It wasn't until the Spring of sixth grade that I learned she was, in fact, married. The wounds from love are never appropriately timed, perhaps, but this is especially when you're only ten. Confronted by Jacques while Nora was helping me with my algebra homework, my first words as he burst through the kitchen door were, "Are you hungry?"

"Jacques, you're back from France," added a weak-kneed Nora, looking guiltily down at a particularly difficult word problem. The pieces suddenly began to unravel.



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My relationship with Nora over, I ran into Jacques a few months later, when I was collecting for UNICEF in Detroit's Belgian neighborhood (Little Liège).

"Aren't you . . ." I began, unsure that I had made the right connection.

"Ahh, Jerry. The boy who has known my wife," he traded back tastefully, depositing two Canadian quarters into my UNICEF can.

We were able to laugh about our previous misunderstanding, since he had recently divorced Nora and was now under heavy medication. I told him that I was no longer seeing Nora, as her lies had been difficult to forgive, and besides which, she was a poor kisser. He asked how she took the breakup, and I told him that I had no basis by which to compare her reaction. I then lifted my shirt to reveal a half dozen purplish knife wounds, seeking his assessment.

He laughed empathically, no stranger was he to Nora's mood swings—"I once passed gas during sex, and she hobbled my femur for two years with one crazed swing of a bridge chair," he confided—and the conversation eventually turned to good-natured Nora-bashing. We both howled uncontrollably when discussing her unconventionally-coiffed pussy. Quelle surprise!

Since his breakup, his life had encountered some road bumps. He was working in the neighboring suburbs, performing some type of panhandling—I couldn't understand the particulars, but he seemed genuinely happy. He was saving money to return to France, where he seemed resolute to get a job in the food industry and then coattail it into politics (I remember smirking to myself when he told me his plan, the first time—and last—that I would ever underestimate his determination).

He demonstrated a few invaluable life lessons (using sand to obscure pee stains on light-colored trousers has served me well to this day), and as a gesture of appreciation, I returned the next day and gave him my Ron LeFlore baseball card (the 1980 Montreal Expos edition, virtually worthless anyway—though he certainly appreciated the Montreal-French connection). A friendship was forged.



We were inseparable pals as I stumbled through those awkward teen years. I can still recall vividly a Spring day when I was twelve, and the pained embarrassment I felt as I exited my pediatrician's office, a scoliosis brace protruding from the back of my Members Only jacket. Tears welling in my eyes, I was relieved to find a boisterous Chirac waiting for me in the parking lot, with a well-constructed sign that read, "You can hardly notice."

"Really?" I asked incredulously, temporarily bolstered by this unsolicited show of support. "I feel like a scarecrow."

"You know something, you look like a scarecrow!" Chirac traded back playfully, before backpedaling into a volley of self-admonishment.

"I'm sorry, I'm sorry," he begged, noticing my sudden emotional regression. It was clear he felt repentant for capitalizing on my insecurities.

"I'm kidding!" I blurted out, euphoric to be the one to now control the comedic tempo. A sheepish look spread over his face, and he shook his head in resignation: He had indeed been fooled.

And so it went.



High school was no less amicable, and I'm still immensely proud that he was able to watch through the keyhole as I banged Jenny McCallister in the 10th grade teacher's lounge (while the Geometry sub was eating lunch, no less!).

Some things you probably didn't know: The first thing you notice when you meet Jacques Chirac today (or tomorrow), besides his poor posture, is his falsetto voice ("I forgot Nora's 25th birthday," he confided, reflexively grabbing his crotch while wincing with pain at the memory). It's a bit unsettling, knowing that the leader of Europe's second largest economic power sounds eerily like Beverly Sills, but his gracious smile quickly disarms you. Very soon, you feel as if you're talking to a man with a much deeper voice.

And you wouldn't know by his pear-shaped physique, but Chirac is an accomplished athlete. He had been a synchronized swimming champion at Lille Junior College, and he later rowed crew for Toulouse A&M. He continues to work out religiously (he carries a Thighmaster in his briefcase), and there are whispers among French cabinet members that he runs a sub-five minute mile (very much on the QT, since he rarely runs in public, owing to a very feminine gate that has attracted scathing media coverage. "Hobbled femur casualty?" I asked him recently, but he was mum. Better to forget.).

Jacques returned home to France when I began the 11th grade, and we began a regular correspondence that has continued to this day. I marveled at a distance as his earlier career goals became realized: first busboy, then waiter, and now French President. No shortcuts.



But now Jacques was calling, he was returning to the US on a goodwill/PR tour, and he had several days free over the Thanksgiving weekend.

I had planned on having dinner with my family, and it didn't seem wise to put Jacques in a house full of Israel supporters. So I feigned an illness to my family and decided that I would entertain Jacques at my Lake Michigan cottage.

"No, I'm sorry, I won't be in the Midwest," he countered, thanking me for the invitation. "I'll be in Arizona."

"Oh. Sorry I'll miss you, then," I responded. "Have a good trip."

"Thanks," he replied, sincerity hanging on the word. "I will."

more by this author



He'll Have the Salad...

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It's not everyone who scores an interview with Ralph Nader—as it turns out, only because we were the first to actually ask him. But throw in a free meal and the guy won't frickin' shut up.



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