

Debate Party

The night of the first presidential candidate debates, my mother decided to host a "Debate Party" complete with an assortment of casserole foods, wine, beer and fruit salad. She also invited her super liberal friends: Donna Loudin, Shirley Capping and Gloria Berger. I showed up early because dutiful daughters always show up early to help their mothers with preparations and hosting.

I'm more of a fan of my mother's cooking than political debates but her friends can be entertaining at times. Donna spent half of her life in DC and retired from the Air Force. Shirley is originally from New Jersey and still has a thick accent to prove it. Mrs. Berger was my third grade elementary school teacher, she's ancient and can barely walk but she still makes out of the house holiday clearance sales.

I helped my mother arrange the taco casseroles, salad, dressings and plates. A little after 7:00 pm, the guests began to arrive sporting their parties 'logos on caps, shirts and even purses. I got myself a heaping plate of salad, casserole, cookies and cheese along with a glass of red wine and took a seat near the flat screen. The debates had started and as a voter who had no idea whom they were voting for, I was interested to see what the candidates had to offer. Ms. Shirley sat down next to me with a plate filled similarly to mine.

"Under the President's new health plan, I didn't have to pay a cent for my colonoscopy." She yammered over the flat screen after a long sip from her glass or wine. She glanced my way to make sure I was listening.

"Really?" I responded, hoping that this was her only comment so I could focus on the candidates. Darn, the mediator was horrible.

The president's opponent began discussing his plans for healthcare but before I could hear the last half of his first sentence, Ms. Shirley decided she needed to add something to the commentary.

"He's lying!" Ms. Shirley said, childishly drawing out the second word. "He's such a liar! Liar! Liar! Where is the fact checker? God! What a liar!" By the time she was done screaming at the opponent, the opponent had finished and the president was now speaking.

"Why is he even running? He doesn't have a chance in hell!" Shirley yelled at the flat screen over the candidate's voices.

"Did you know that before the president's health care plan came into effect; my husband had to pay three thousand dollars for his colonoscopy!" She seemed to be speaking to no one and everyone in the room at the same time. "Can you believe that? Three thousand dollars?" As she spoke, she got louder and more shrill. My mother stepped out from the kitchen to check on the other guests, Donna and Mrs. Berger.

Shirley eyed me and filled her wine glass from a nearby bottle. "Who are you voting for?"

"I don't really know." I responded honestly, "I don't like either one of them...but I'm concerned about the debt... and definitely women's rights." Even if I had liked one of the candidates, I couldn't hear them because of Ms. Shirley's screaming at the flat screen. She looked completely confused at my response and yelled, "What did you say?" as if I needed to repeat what I said. My mother, sensing something was amiss, came into the living room and offered second helpings of the leftover casserole and fruit salad. Shirley politely refused the leftovers and then concluded "I know your young, Maggie, but you're going to have to pay for your colonoscopy like my husband did if you don't vote for the liberal side!" She downed her fourth glass.

I repositioned myself on the black leather sofa, slightly annoyed. I had come to the party hoping to hear plans and ideas from the candidates themselves. Isn't that what a political debate is? I might have even expected some intelligent conversation from my mother's friends. Instead, I had suffered through an hour of Shirley's drunken rant on the candidates.

I gracefully left the party five minutes later, using fatigue as an excuse. Mom and the others seemed to understand, since I'm a student with a job and all. I got home, turned up volume on the TV so I could catch the last part of the debate and ran a bubble bath. The candidates dodged the mediator's questions, talked over each other and discussed Iraq, Iran and Israel. I soaked in the bath thinking about the election, the state of the country and my own future. Shirley's words kept repeating in my mind, "I know your young, Maggie, but you're going to have to pay for your colonoscopy like my husband did if you don't vote for the liberal side!"

From the bathtub, I heard the mediator conclude the debate. A few seconds later, a fabric softener jingle followed the debate program. How preposterous of an idea is it, to let a presidential election vote hinge on whether my future colonoscopy is paid for or not? What about the people with no health insurance? What about the national debt? What will the job market hold for me when I graduate? What about my friends, Gabe and Mike who want to get married? Which candidate can address these issues? Why can't both parties work together? Why do politics have to be ugly? Why can't Shirley Capping consider others before herself? I still don't know which candidate I will vote for but I do know that I will be thinking about the less fortunate and the ones with no voice.

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