

Blue State of Mind

Aimee Valentine

Blue State of Mind



an interview about the making of a Kansas Democrat
edited and illustrated by Aimee Valentine



I come from a family of Democrats in Kansas. Believe it or not, back in the day, Kansas had **two** Democratic Congresspeople, a Democrat Governor, and maybe not majority in the State House, but it was darn close.

My father was State Finance Chair for a couple campaigns and State Democratic Chair too.

He was an attorney for a long time and then he was appointed a District Judge in the State of Kansas.

I have two younger sisters, and we'd sit around the Kitchen table and talk about politics. It was fluid, and our parents were very validating in our opinions.



Kansas is Burning



It used to be a more...
humane state.
It's become very **RED** in the last
15-20 years. And that had a lot
to do with Operation Rescue
coming in.

There was a doctor in Wichita,
I knew his daughter in college,
named Doctor Tiller, and he
was the **ONE** doctor, in
probably the TRI-
State area
who performed

The thing about late term
abortion that people forget
is that by the **TIME** you're
6 or 7 months along, as a child,
somebody who's **HAD** a child,
it's not really an "**OPTION**." It's
not like "Well, do you want hamburger
or spaghetti?" It's something that is a
serious consideration, and it's usually
medical concerns for the mother.
But it's an ugly procedure,
and, as a result,
Operation Rescue is
able to make
a lot of
hay.

late
term
abortion...

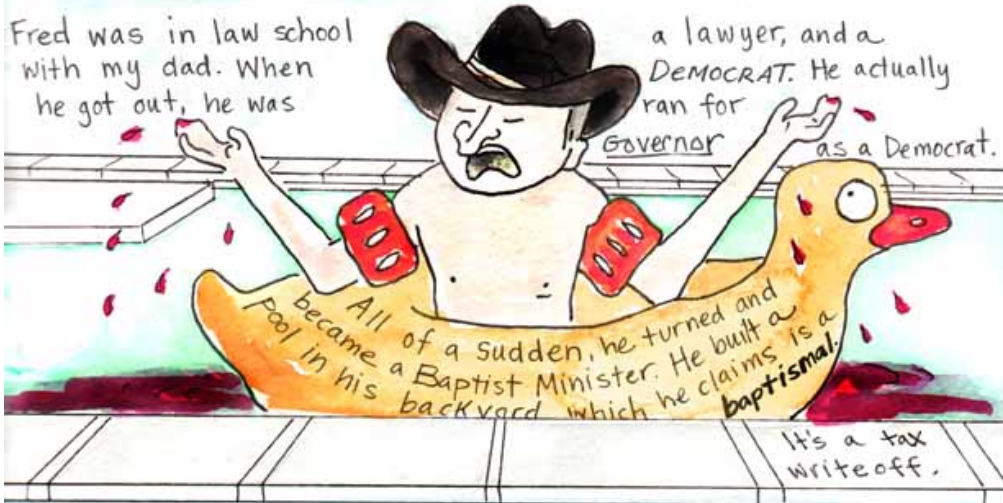


ANGELS & BAPTISTS

...and then you have Fred Phelps and his family...

Fred was in law school with my dad. When he got out, he was

a lawyer, and a Democrat. He actually ran for Governor as a Democrat.



It's a tax writeoff.

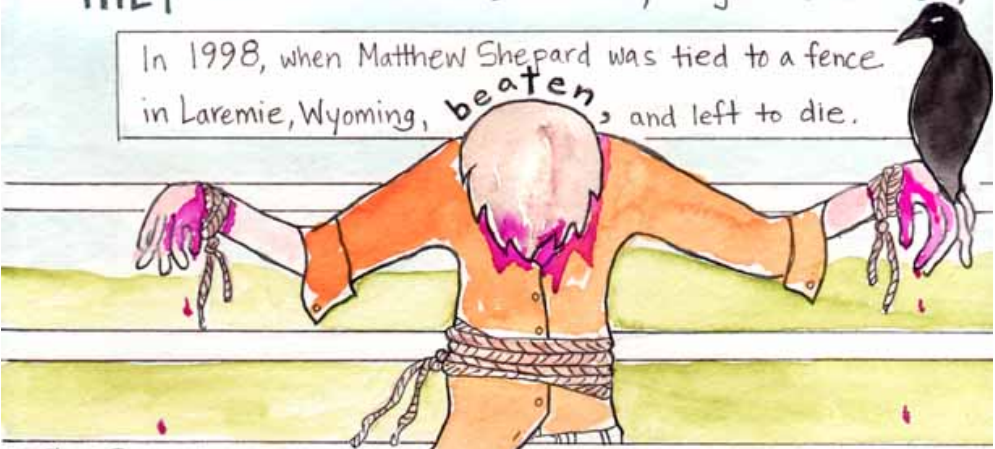
His children protest ANYTHING that has to do with *homosexuality*, even if it doesn't have anything to do with it, they make it ABOUT it.

They protested Randy Shilts' funeral obviously. But also Bill Clinton's mother's funeral. And Hillary Clinton's father's funeral. NOW, they've taken to protesting military funerals, because, as THEY say -



THEY were the ones in Laramie, do you remember?

In 1998, when Matthew Shepard was tied to a fence in Laramie, Wyoming, **beaten**, and left to die.



The Phelps' Baptist church went up and protested his funeral.



So ~ people sewed sheets on Big butterfly wings, and stood in front of them,



ANGELS
so the family wouldn't have to see them as they went into the church.

RUNNING UPHILL

My Uncle John was a farmer, and he answered an **AD** in the newspaper that said they needed someone,

a **DEMOCRAT**, to run for State House.

He called and talked to them, and said,

So he staged a campaign, and **won**, and became a State Legislator. Then, after awhile, he became Speaker of the House in Kansas.



You know, I think I want to **do this**.

...like, he was going to be running against an **INCUMBENT** popular with businesses, and, you know, here comes this **PROGRESSIVE** Democrat, and when you hear that, sometimes it means "raise your taxes". They thought he'd have a big uphill battle against an incumbent, well-liked, Republican governor



AND THEN he decided he wanted to run for Governor. And I can remember the day he came over to our house, and my mom and dad had spent the night before writing down ALL the reasons he **SHOULDN'T** run...



How was that meeting?

Well, John came over, we sat down, we gave him ALL the reasons why we didn't think he should run, and he answered **EACH ONE**. And then we said 'Then you **NEED** to run.'



I went out door-to-door, just like I had for McGovern, when I was 5.



I would walk up and knock on the door, and some body would open and say **OH!** What a cute little girl! How are you?



I'm here to give you some information about George McGovern. He's running for **PRESIDENT.**



I'm just **EDUCATING** them. I really enjoyed doing it.



It wasn't like they were **USING** me... it was like **Halloween!**



It was really grassroots back then. You really were **TALKING AND TOUCHING**. In 1978, I was 11.





THE LONG WAY AROUND

I started the first Young Democrats Club in my high school.

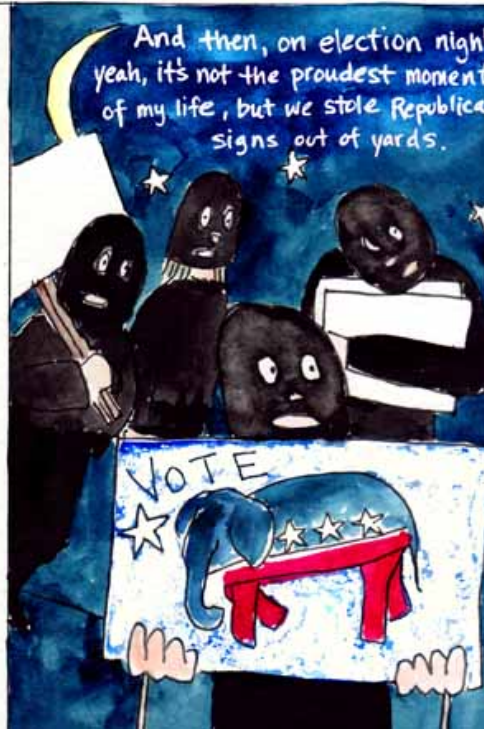


We would get together and kvetch about politics, talk about issues, or, if there was a political campaign that needed help in our community...



...We'd do door-to-door, we'd do phone banking.

And then, on election night yeah, it's not the proudest moment of my life, but we stole Republican signs out of yards.



I ran for Student Body President my senior year, after two kids had gotten into the race:
 One, whose daddy owned Baskin Robbins, so he could hand out free ice cream coupons!

And the other one, whose daddy owned the skating rink, and he'd hand out free coupons for skating

So I ran under the Communist ticket

Oh, I put up a bunch of signs with sickles and hammers! And said Marxist things. I wanted to rile it up. yeah, it was a long way around. Nobody else understood it. It was the fall of 1984.

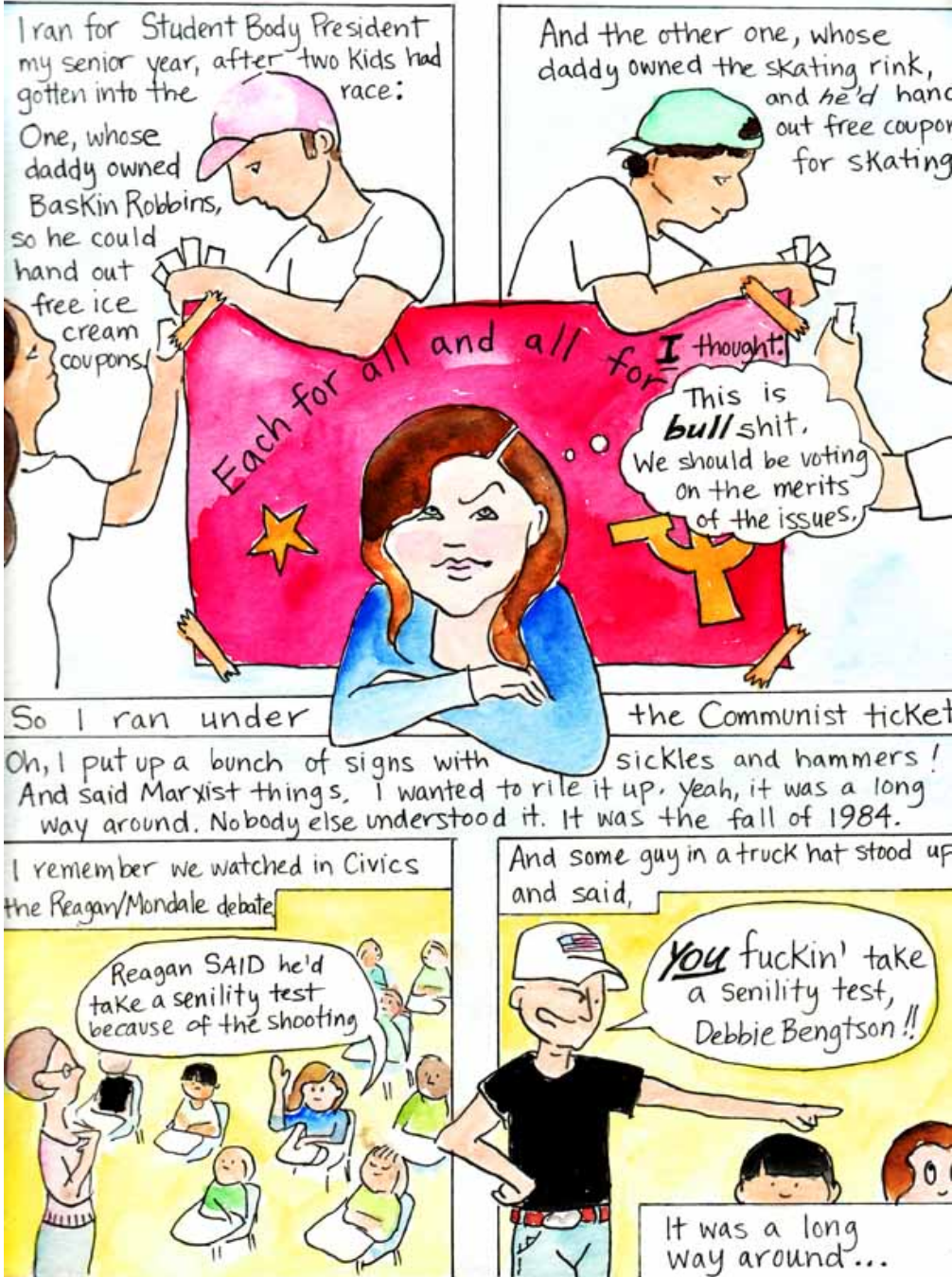
I remember we watched in Civics the Reagan/Mondale debate

Reagan SAID he'd take a senility test because of the shooting

And some guy in a truck hat stood up and said,

YOU fuckin' take a senility test, Debbie Bengtson!!

It was a long way around...



PHASES & PARTIES & PROTESTS

So I go to college, and I DON'T go to my father's alma mater, Kansas State. I go to University of Kansas, in Lawrence. HUGE DIFFERENCE.

I remember getting all my stuff packed into the car, and turning around, looking at the house I grew up in...



... my dad **BOUNDED** out of the front door, and I'm thinking this is going to be one of those tender father/daughter moments.

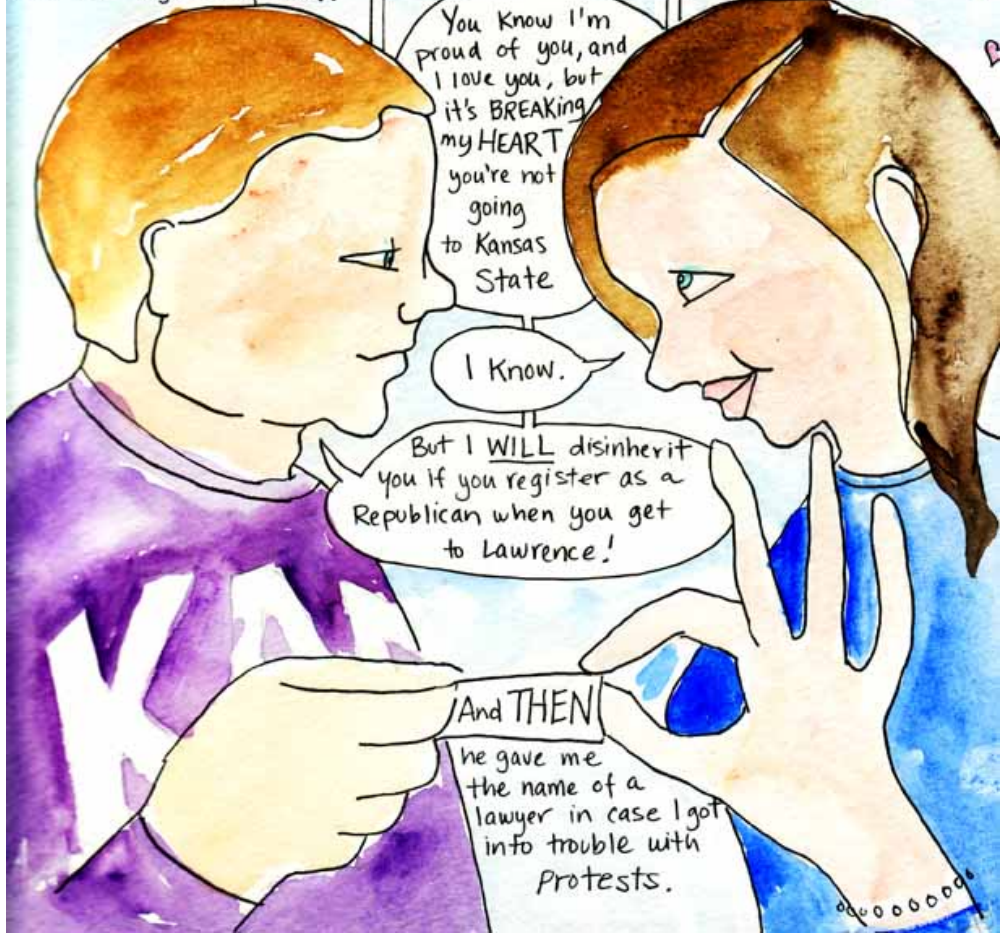
You know I'm proud of you, and I love you, but it's **BREAKING** my HEART you're not going to Kansas State

I know.

But I WILL disinherit you if you register as a Republican when you get to Lawrence!

And THEN

he gave me the name of a lawyer in case I got into trouble with protests.





At the time, they were doing Apartheid protests on campus.

My dad *thought* I would jump up and be part of that.

But I never was.

I always wanted to EDUCATE people. And I felt like the Apartheid protests on campus were a bunch of well-*meaning* people who weren't educating anybody on the issue.

And that, as a result, they weren't really making a difference.

They were *JUST* pissing people off. I didn't think that was effective.

I did join the Young Democrats my freshman year, but they were affiliated with the Communist and Socialist parties on campus.



Now, I don't mean to sound mean...

... but all these Communists would drag into these meetings with us, and I would just be like



What the fuck.



I mean, I ran for President in high school in the Communist party, but it was a joke, you know? I had no INTENTION of affiliating myself with these people.



You've got to REALIZE. Kansas is Kansas.

It's a LOT different than the coast. When you're talking to people, you have to communicate on an ACCEPTABLE and FRIENDLY level they're going to be receptive to...



...and if you come out with some guy named "Boog" Highberger, who dresses like Jesus, NO ONE is gonna listen to you in the state of Kansas about issues that are important and MATTER.

"BOOG" was head of the Communists at KU, and also a grad student. He later ran for the Lawrence City Council and even MAYOR, and WON.

As a communist?

NO! That's the thing. PHASE. And that's what

It's a I saw it as.

"This is a big, fat Phase, and I don't want to be affiliated with you workin' your shit out." I wanna EDUCATE people. So I quit the Democrats, and once the Communists and Socialists drifted away, I joined the Democrats again.



We joined forces with Planned Parenthood and with Emily's List.

We protested Domino's Pizza.

Because they're anti-choice?

Right. We got these t-shirts made and passed them out...

But the franchise are owned individually... and this LITTLE GUY called me up and said,

Please, please stop.



And we did. Because, you know, we felt bad for him.

Anyway, that was college.



RUNNING DOWNHILL



After college I worked on the gubernatorial campaign, and that was my Uncle John, he ran for a third term. In Kansas, you can only have two consecutive terms, but you can run again. So, he left office in '86, and ran in '90

Fred Phelps ran against him, and a woman named Joan Finney, in the gubernatorial primary.



I remember the day of the primary VERY well... I walked into the morning meeting we used to have everyday and said

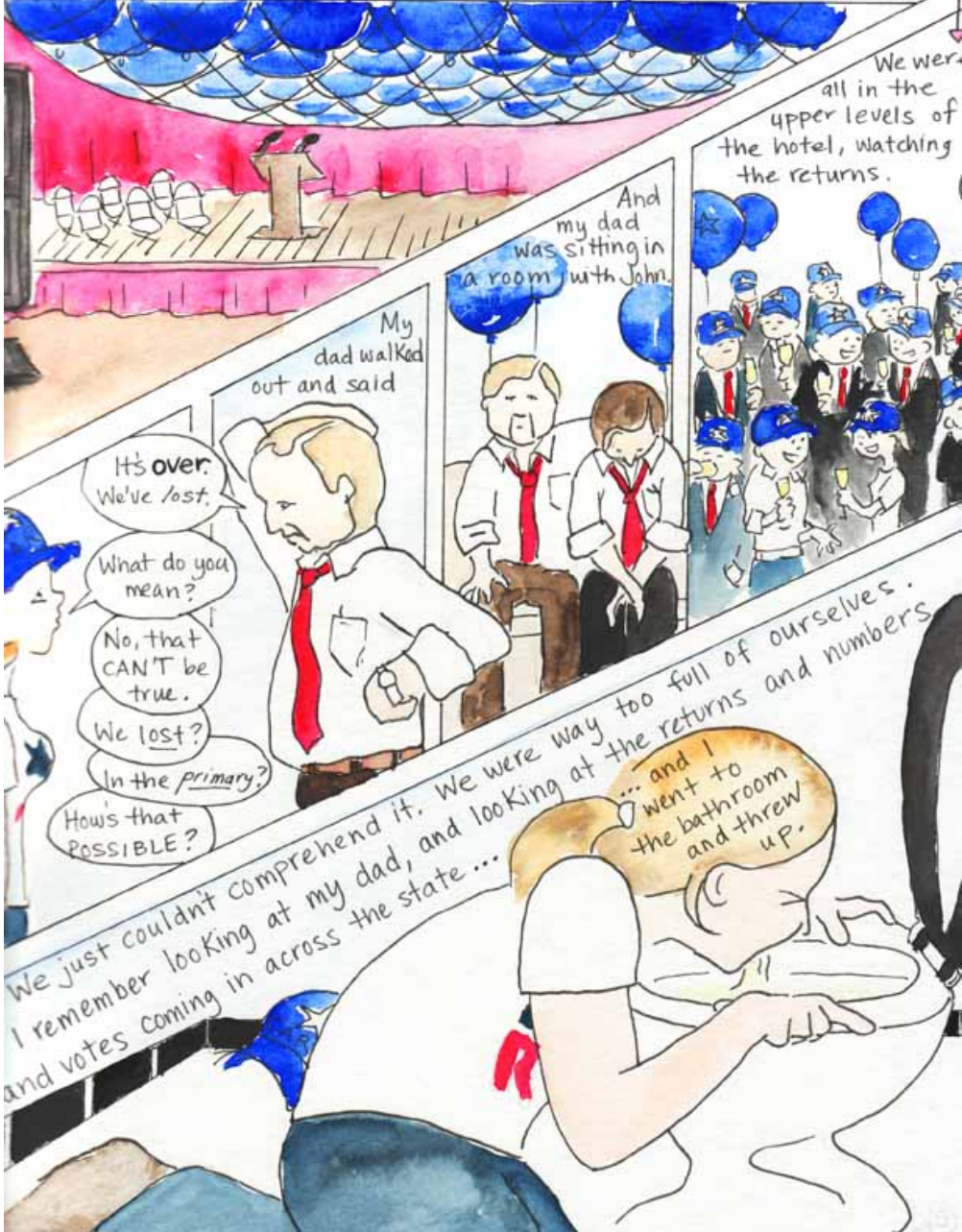
Let's pass the hat! Let's bet as to HOW MUCH we're gonna win by!

Japanese politicians come in, spend ELECTION night with our victory

Later in the day, we had a delegation of Japanese who were doing a tour of the U.S. We invited them to come and watch a political group.



We had this HUGE party venue, and a BAND, and speakers



We were all in the upper levels of the hotel, watching the returns.

And my dad was sitting in a room with John.

My dad walked out and said

It's over. We've lost.

What do you mean?

No, that CAN'T be true.

We lost?

In the primary?

How's that POSSIBLE?

... and I went to the bathroom and threw up.

We just couldn't comprehend it. We were way too full of ourselves. I remember looking at my dad, and looking at the returns and numbers and votes coming in across the state...





And I went home that day
 got my National Enquirer, went
 into the basement, and I
 just cried.

BUT
 by the
 time I left,
 Iowa a few months
 later, I had all these
 people pounding signs
 in yards, giving people
 rides to the polls. I had
 even **MANAGED** this guy's City
 Council campaign. He was
 terribly shy. He didn't wanna go
 door to door, and he didn't wanna
 make phone calls and **EVERY**
 day I'd say "Bob,
 pick up the phone."
 And
 he
 won.



I went back to Boone years later
 and visited with them again.
 It was just like family. And
 Bob was **STILL** a City Councilman.



So after Iowa I went back to Kansas. I was in WAY over my head at an ad agency, and got Fired... my fiancée had broken up with me... I had nothing to do...

... so I started volunteerin you know, get my toe back in the water, I miss it so muc

In '92, like '08, people came out from under ROCKS to support the Democratic Party. It was an upswell the Democrats had never seen, especially in Kansas City, Kansas.

And our SIGNS kept getting stolen... Imagine THAT. I put up a note:



We got a big response. People said "what can I do?"



EVERYONE can contribute.
EVERYONE has a place in politics.

I lined out all the different jobs: Door to door, phone banking, human billboard,

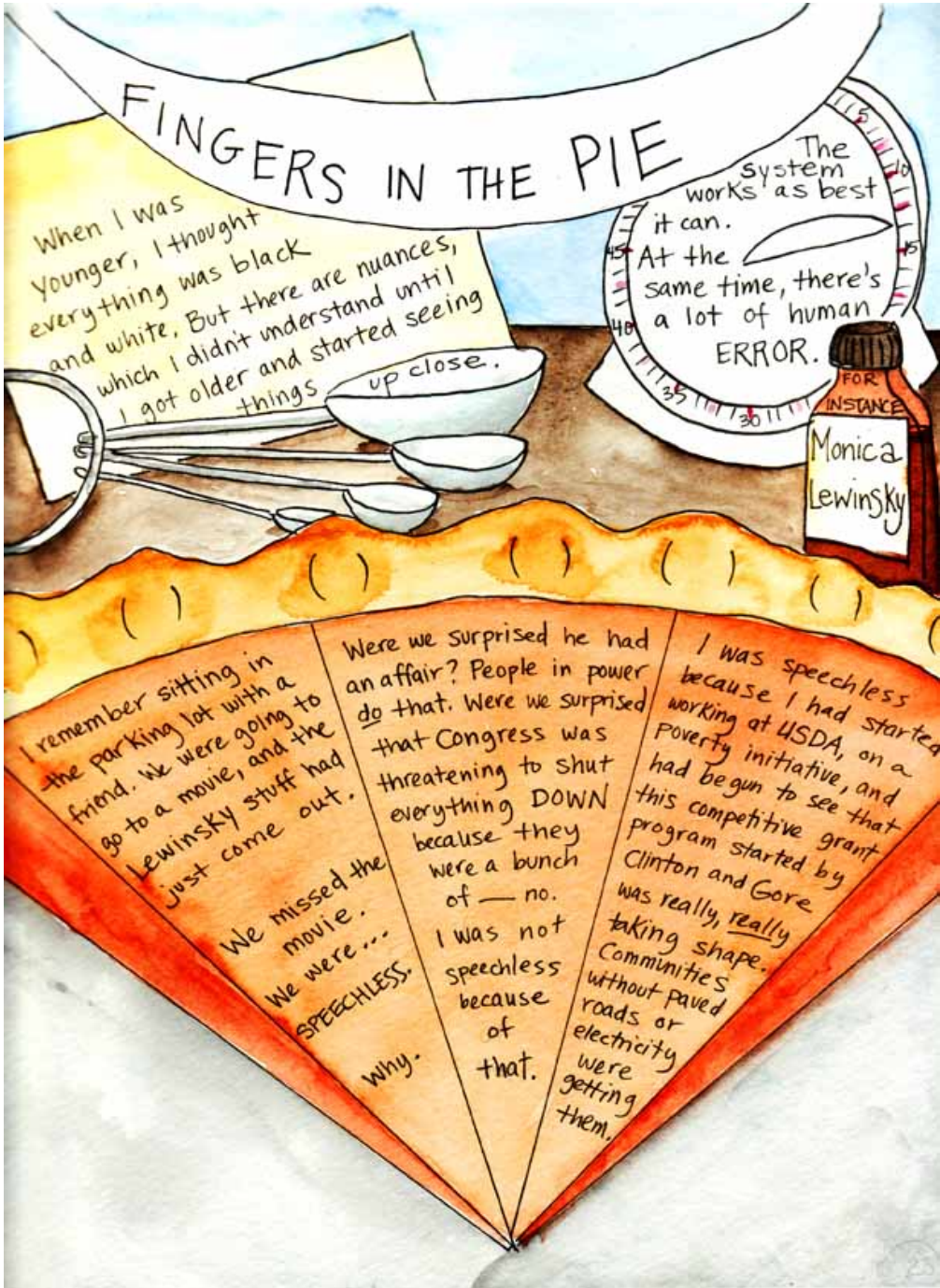
driving people to the polls ~
So this big guy comes in ...











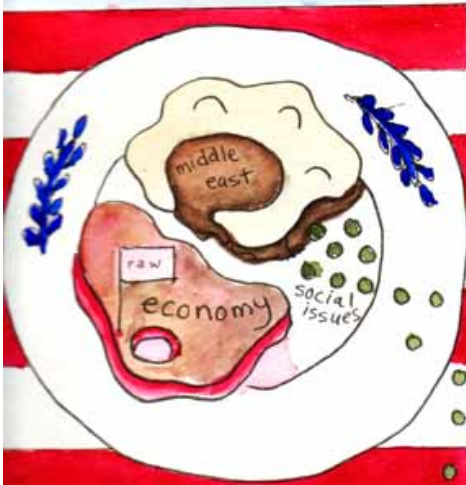


IT'LL RUIN YOUR DINNER

Do you evaluate Obama based on your ideals?

He's got a lot on his plate .
There are times I get frustrated
at the things he's done....

....but you know, on MOST days,
he gets up and his personal secretary
comes in and says, "Mr. President, I've
got another SHIT SANDWICH for you



to eat
today."



And he has
to keep eating shit sandwiches all day long

