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## GARY HART AFFAIR TURNED SPOTLIGHT ON PAPER

*JIM SAVAGE, jsavage@herald.com*

It was a warm May evening in 1987 and Herald reporter **Jim McGee** and I were running to catch up with presidential candidate Gary Hart.

**McGee** had been secretly watching the comings and goings of Hart and Donna Rice for nearly 24 hours. I was The Herald's investigations editor and had joined him at Hart's town house in Washington 12 hours earlier. Hart finally noticed that something strange was going on outside his town house. He had just emerged from his home, circled the block and strode past our rental car where we had been sitting for hours. He seemed agitated. I had a feeling that this would be our only chance to talk to him. There was a police station nearby. One call from Hart and our amateur surveillance project would be over.

When Hart headed back toward the alley behind his town house, I turned to **McGee**. "I think we should talk to him right now." Hart clearly knew he was being watched. "Let's do it," **McGee** said.

As we rushed around the tall brick wall behind the building, we nearly crashed into Hart. He had sensed he was being followed and deliberately waited at the blind corner. After nearly bouncing off the leading candidate of the Democratic Party, **McGee** and I breathlessly announced that we were from The Miami Herald and we had a few questions about, well, about the beautiful, young blond woman from Miami who was inside his home.

A difficult way to begin a conversation with a married man under the best of circumstances.

Soon we were joined by political editor Tom Fiedler, who was wearing a jogging outfit. Fiedler would explain later that he knew Hart from the campaign trail and was wearing his jogging clothes as a disguise.

The Gary Hart-Herald affair would never get much more dignified than that.

### STIRS UP STORM

The story of Hart's weekend with Donna Rice is arguably the most controversial story published by The Herald during its first 100 years. Before it was over we were accused of hiding in Hart's bushes (we never did), peeking in his window (we never did), and failing to watch his back door (OK, nobody's perfect).

Abe Rosenthal, the former editor of The New York Times, accused us of "hiding in the dark, listening for squeaking bedsprings."

When the esteemed ex-editor of The New York Times tells the world that he didn't become a newspaperman to listen to a candidate's bedsprings squeak you know you have done something very, very undignified.

In the weeks that followed, The Herald's story would undergo a very rigorous examination by journalists around the world.

Editors from The New York Times and ABC News assigned their best investigative reporters to check out

all the conspiracy theories that grew up around our story. They never wrote anything, because there was no conspiracy, just a very strange story that grew out of a series of coincidences.

It all began with an anonymous telephone call - that's how we began our lengthy postmortem story. It took 236 inches - more than two full pages - to explain how and why The Herald produced the 32-inch story published May 3, 1987, that ended Hart's political career.

That initial phone call came, ironically, in reaction to a column Fiedler had written defending Hart against unconfirmed reports in the media that he was a womanizer.

The woman on the phone refused to identify herself. She told Fiedler she had read his column but she disagreed with his point. She knew Hart was a womanizer. In fact, he was having an affair right now with the woman's friend, whom she described as an attractive, young blond woman who was a part-time Miami model. The caller said her friend was going to Washington that Friday evening to spend the weekend with Hart.

That's when the coincidences that drove the story began. The caller never told Fiedler exactly when her friend was flying to Washington and she never called back with further details. After a quick huddle, Fiedler, **McGee** and I picked what we thought was the most likely nonstop flight from Miami to Washington that Friday evening.

**McGee** rushed to the airport and barely caught Eastern Airlines Flight 996. On the plane, **McGee** began looking for an attractive, young blond woman. He spotted several women who fit the description. One of them was carrying a distinctive, shiny purse.

When the plane landed, the attractive woman with the purse met another young woman and disappeared in the crowd as **McGee** worked the phones to get Hart's Washington address.

Soon after arriving by cab at Hart's town house, he spotted the same young woman with the purse. She was arm in arm with Hart, walking out the front door of his town house.

So now we knew a young woman from Miami was with Hart - exactly as predicted by Fiedler's caller. If **McGee** had missed that flight, or if his cab had been late, we wouldn't have known that and maybe we would have never published the story.

If Fiedler had not published a column defending Hart against vague allegations of womanizing we would not have learned of Donna Rice from one of her friends.

Another coincidence: Our story was published on the same Sunday that The New York Times published a story that contained Hart's denial of womanizing allegations and his famous challenge to the press to "follow me around . . . it will be boring." We had a prepublication copy of that story and included his ill-timed challenge at the end of our story.

After a few days of heavy criticism from Hart, his campaign chief and some journalists, our story stood.

For Hart, the former Colorado senator, however, things would only get worse.

After denying that he had a relationship with Rice, there was a series of embarrassing disclosures: there was the boat trip to Bimini on the Monkey Business and the pictures of Rice sitting on Hart's knee.

#### AFTER THE FALL

Since then Hart and Rice have returned periodically to the public arena.

After being appointed by President Bill Clinton to the Commission on National Security, Hart today is in the middle of the national debate over homeland security.

Donna Rice Hughes appeared recently for an encore interview with ABC reporter Barbara Walters. She

said she turned down more than \$1 million for details of her relationship with Hart. She again refused to answer Walters' more intimate questions about the affair. Three years ago she was appointed by Congress to the Child Online Protection Commission and has written a book about protecting kids from pornography on the web.

Today, 15 years after we confronted Hart outside his town house, the Hart-Herald story is still the starting point for a continuing debate about the media's responsibility to report on public officials' private lives.

AP FILE MONKEY BUSINESS: After The Herald broke the Gary Hart-Donna Rice affair, this photo emerged in June 1987.

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