Barack and Me

SHARBARI AHMED

I am going to take a position. No one could ever accuse me of shying away from taking a stand on anything. But this is a big deal because I have been uninspired and loathed to take one. Months ago I wrote a column titled "I am Stumped" that lamented the fact that we did not have a viable Democratic candidate for the Presidency. I grimly predictedI think, it was so long agothat we were looking at a Republican administration for the next four years. Rudy Giuliani has since dropped out of the racethank goodness, as has Mitt Romney and hopefully Huckabee, the obligatory Christian zealot that every red-blooded American election seems to need and havewill as well. McCain will be the Republican nominee and he is a warmonger, but smarter than most. Okay so now for the position. Last Tuesday, "Super Tuesday" several states voted for who they thought should get the candidacy, including my state. I cast my vote. I went to my son's school and walked to the Democratic party's fold out table and gave them my driver's license and asked the volunteers about the turnoutnot so great apparentlyand I skipped to the booth. On the yellow ballot were printed names that ten years ago no American could imagine seeing as choices for president. A woman, and a black man, who are actually the only people now running on the Democratic ticket. I knew it would happen eventually. I did not think it would be during my prime years.

I peeked around the edge of the voting booth to see if anyone was paying attention to what I was about to do. The volunteers were knitting, chatting and re-arranging donuts on a tray respectively. No one knewor cared most likelyhow long I had agonised over who I wanted to see on television for the next four years telling me that the state of my union was in fine shape. I turned back to the ballot, read the instructions, and filled in the sideways oval next to Mr. Barak Obama's name.

My relationship with Barack has been fraught with emotional ups and downs. We were first introduced almost four years ago at the Democratic national convention in Boston when he spoke with the passion and erudition of a young, radiant Martin Luther King. He stirred in many people the hope that our American ideals were not lost and that we could in fact imagine a world that was graceful and expansive. I developed an affection for him and was looking forward to watching him grow up and evolve into what I hoped would be our next president in 20012 or 2016. I was taken aback when, without so much as a bye your leave; he threw his untried hat into the ring. I thought it showed an acute lack of self awareness and tremendous arrogance and my affection waned. It occurred to me that he could just be testing the watersand he may very well have been and when he saw he had a chance he began to pursue the brass ring in earnest.

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I felt strongly that he had not earned the right to even consider himself a viable candidate. He had not paid his dues.

When he went on the Oprah Winfrey show and made non-committal noises about how we would all hold hands and the love fest would begin if he were President I was ready to throttle him. There was nothing presidential about him. He wrote a memoir and peddled it everywhere. People said it was inspirational.

Oprah was enraptured but she has a history of jumping the gun and getting excited over people and things that are not sound. She is never held accountable because she is Oprah and allowed to make mistakes publicly. And then slowly, almost timidly her dream candidate went from dipping his big toe to submerging himself and his whole family into the presidential ocean. I ignored him and then I criticized him energetically (see I am Stumped) and then I dismissed him.

It was over between us. And he didn't even know it. I was overwrought because Hillary was not a real option for me and I still believe she is not a real option for