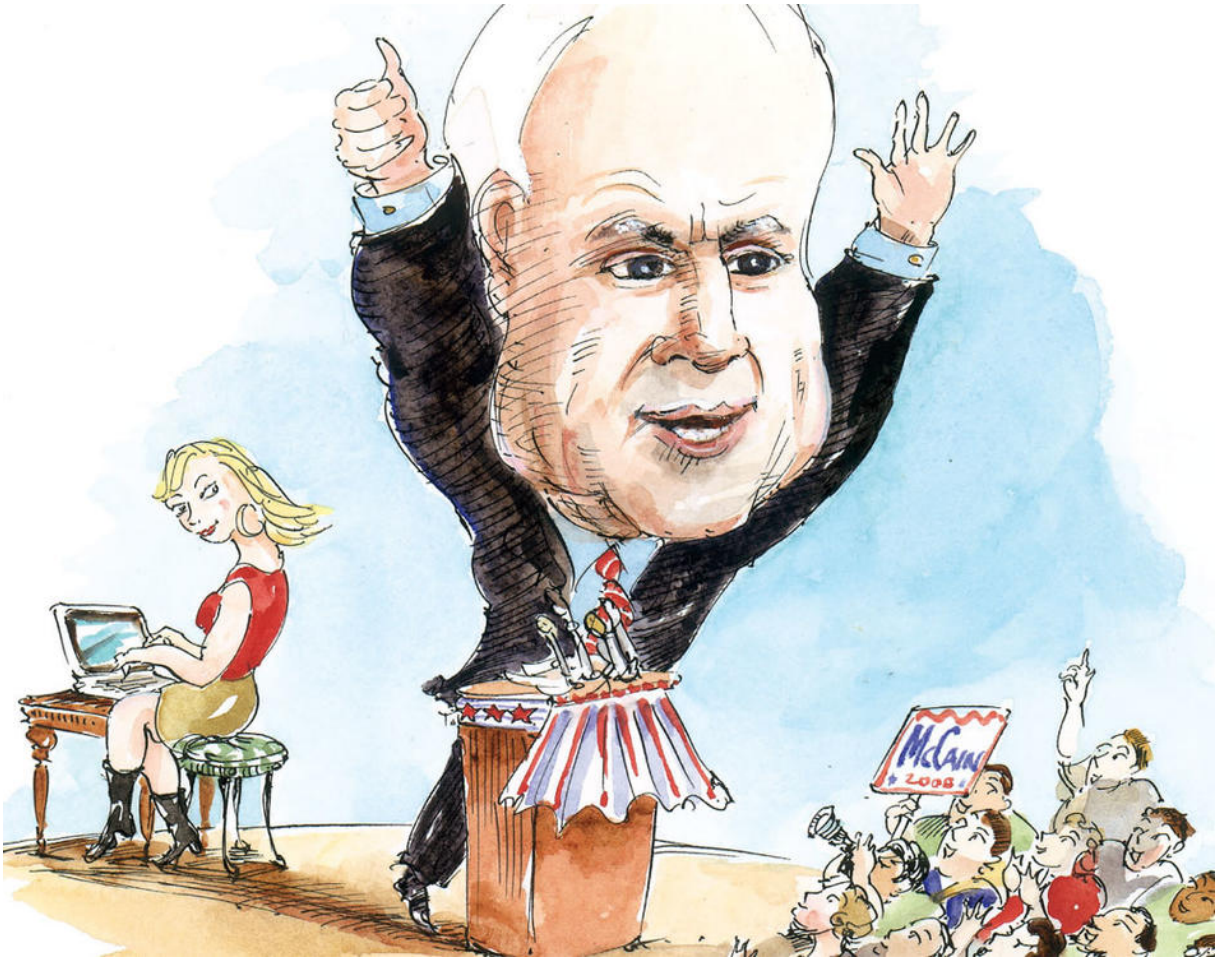
Alumni

McBlogger

Meghan McCain '07CC starts a blog to promote her father's presidential campaign.

By
Emily Brennan '03BC, '09GSAS
|
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Mark Steele

It was July 2007, and Meghan McCain had a decision to make. She'd just graduated from Columbia with a degree in art history, and had a résumé boasting internship gigs at *Saturday Night Live* and *Newsweek*. With her credentials, her

genial personality, and her command of fashion and pop culture, she could have gotten her designer-boot-clad foot in any door in New York.

On the other hand, her father, Senator John McCain of Arizona, was running for president, and a seat awaited her on the Straight Talk Express, McCain's campaign tour bus.

"I had no idea what I wanted to do," the younger, blonder McCain said recently.

A precedent had already been set for presidential children. Jenna and Barbara Bush glad-handed during their father's second White House run, and Chelsea Clinton was set to stump for her mother's policies. But McCain, though a loyal daughter, was not a natural campaigner, and tended to shy away from the spotlight.

"As much as I admire Chelsea Clinton, I could never do what she does. If I did, I'd embarrass my family," McCain says wryly. Then, in a more earnest, self-conscious tone, she quickly adds, "I get very nervous speaking in public. I didn't inherit that from my dad."

And so she did what other 20-somethings do when they want to share their thoughts and enthusiasms but remain on the sidelines: She started a blog.

Launched in October 2007, McCain Bloggette provides a behind-the-scenes look at John McCain's bid for the presidency. Meghan, along with two friends who also run the blog and fund it independently of the campaign, writes entries and posts dozens of photos of her father's every rally, interview, and speech, from Seattle to Memphis to Jersey City. The idea came to her when her brother Jimmy was deployed to Iraq that summer. "It was very emotional," says McCain. "All these things were running through my head, like 'My brother could die,' and 'Why are we doing this?' I thought, 'OK, I can't control this situation, but I can control how people see my family and give them a more intimate look.'"

This slice-of-life approach suits McCain perfectly. Although she has come to agree with most of the Republican platform, she was previously registered as an Independent and remained outside Columbia's political life in college. Accordingly, the blog focuses on the campaign's quotidian details and shows the human side to her family, mostly in candid shots with captions that poke fun in a wholesome, good-natured way. There's John McCain on the bus, collar unbuttoned, smiling, his staff laughing in return ("My father's always cracking jokes"). There's Cindy McCain, her

mother, visiting a nursery school in Cambodia (“Mom always seems to find a baby to cuddle”). Then there’s Meghan herself, dressed in black, boarding a plane (“Could my sunglasses be any bigger?”).

She also shares lists of what she calls her passion and her obsession: the music on her iPod, which ranges from the latest in alternative rock and hip-hop (The New Pornographers, Kanye West) to older stuff like Tom Waits and Blondie (or *really* old, like Rachmaninoff). She recently added a country music playlist, inspired by a trip to Nashville and her country-loving roommate at Columbia.

It’s all part of an effort to make the campaign process approachable to people beyond *New York Times* readers, and McCain says she has received the biggest response from women and young girls. “I love it when young women come up and say to me, ‘I love talking about clothes and makeup, but I’m glad we can also talk about the environment and the election.’”

Despite her reluctance to talk policy, McCain has gradually become more comfortable publicizing support for specific initiatives of her father’s, such as combating climate change, promoting stem-cell research, and declaring a commitment to stay in Iraq. Still, she steers clear of in-depth discussion of these issues. “No one wants to read policy from me,” she says. “It’s not my style.” That style — part ingénue, part sass, part Valley Girl hipster, with a disarming mix of sincerity and self-effacement — is hardly the stuff of a hard-core political blogger.

For the moment, she’s continuing her role as chronicler of her father’s personal side, publishing a children’s book about him in September, *My Dad, John McCain*. Win or lose for her father, she also muses about producing a book about the election, from a candidate’s daughter’s point of view. “I would love to have seen Reagan’s children’s or JFK’s children’s perspectives,” she says.

Yet there is a glimmer that McCain has indeed been bitten by the politics bug. Talking about one of her father’s upcoming town-hall meetings, where local citizens interrogate candidates face-to-face, her voice rises with excitement. “The politician has to answer questions face-to-face. He’s standing there, and if someone’s angry, he’s going to see it. It’s the truest form of democracy, going back to Lincoln.”

McCain may never stump policy, but she’s proved herself to be a quick study in another ingredient in getting a candidate elected: making him look electable.

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