

Something to Burn For

By LYDIA FREEMAN

I'm on the way to interview Eva Scott, the first woman on the Virginia Senate. I have gotten lost 3 times with a GPS. I brush my hair at a red light because I know that I don't have any free moments left.

I notice the men in the truck beside me staring. They wave, and I offer a slight smile in return. I keep my eyes on the road, refusing to look back over. Until they pull ahead, holding a white sheet of paper with an explicit meaning.

The message is too short, Too clear. I reach for my phone; Call my best friend. Leave a voice mail.

"I just feel. I just feel."

It cuts me off. The word left ringing in my head. *Cheap*. I just feel cheap.

I drive the rest of the way to Amelia. Maybe I shouldn't be shaken up by the words, but I am. I don't want to interview anyone. I want to wander into the middle of a cornfield and stare at the clouds until I replace the memory of those words with images of dancing hippopotamuses and smiling puppy dogs.

But I don't. Instead I get lost again. Call Mrs. Scott. She directs me and is waiting outside her house when I arrive.

She introduces me to her husband, sister, and an old family friend. We sit down for the interview. Soon, I am so drawn in by her stories of a newspaper and her views on the Tea Party movement that I struggle to ask the list of questions I have lain beside my steno pad. There is passion in her voice for politics and for her people.

"What classes do you take at college?" she asks me.

"English and Communications with a minor in Business."

"Are you involved in politics?"

"I want to learn more."

And I do as I sit with her, listen to her, and write answers to questions I haven't even asked.

"I was a pharmacist, and I owned my own drug store," she explains. "I am a real conservative. Conservative first, Republican second. When the Republican member of the House had a stroke and couldn't run, I decided to. I ran in six weeks and won by 121 votes."

She was a member of the House of Delegates until 1981, when redistricting struck again.

"I would have lost my district," she said. "That would have made it impossible for me to win. I decided to run for Senate."

No woman had ever won in a race for Virginia Senate, but Eva Scott did. And while Scott may have been the only woman in the Senate, she never gave thought to discrimination.

"Did you face discrimination because you were a woman?"

She laughs and reaches out to slap my knee. "I knew you were going to ask that question. They used to ask me that all the time. I'm sure I was, but I went into politics with a purpose in mind. It didn't bother me one way or another. As an independent, I had friends on both sides of the aisle. We stopped a lot of legislation we were opposed to, and I never let it bother me."

She laughs again. "But I did have a key to my own bathroom."

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She continues the story. Telling me about driving home at night, so that she could be with her family. She tells me about her husband's support, but lack of appearances at meetings. ("I brought him to a dinner once, and I introduced him to people and told them, 'See, I do have a husband!'") She tells me that she put a limit on how much people could contribute to her campaign because she never wanted to feel so indebted that she compromised her beliefs. She tells me that if the people trusted her enough to elect her, it was her duty to continue in public service even after she finished her time in office.

"You need to burn for something," she tells me. "Deep inside. And you should for a cause: that the people are taken care of. That they have their freedom."

Scott grew up as the daughter of the Republican County Chairman.

"My friends weren't Republicans," she tells me. "I remember arguing with them on the school bus!"

"Why do you think women should be involved in politics?" I ask her.

"Because there's a difference between men and women," she answers. "Women sincerely believe in a cause. Women go down with a cause, and they conscientiously believe in that as the reason for election and service. Women run a household and spend time with their children and with education."

Scott points out that once women were not even involved in local government. With time changing, more and more women choose to be

involved. But with involvement in politics, challenges must be faced.

"You must have the support of your family and husband," says Scott.

She advises honesty. "Do what you say you'll do and do it. Not everyone will agree with you. Fulfill what you say you'll do for the people. Work hard. Read bills. Know what's coming out of the committees and think about the effect on the economy and the people. Ask yourself, 'Is it right?'"

She ends the interview with this statement:

"I think that we who have been here should contribute to the political process. Everything comes down to being decided. What is it going to cost to protect the economy and the people at the county, state, and national levels."

She hugs me three times as we walk out, invites me to hear Jamie Radtke on July 12, and asks for my cell phone number.

I get in the car and drive, passing the same cornfields. The memory of those words pressed against the truck window.

I am a woman. I don't know if I caught the eyes of the men in that truck through my red car, the brush through my hair at the red light, or my slight smile. But it doesn't matter.

There are times when we must overlook discrimination for a cause. Whether that cause be monumental or the act of keeping our word, we can choose to continue or walk away. We must burn for something so deeply that all thoughts of discrimination are able to slip away. 