

ATHENAEUM SOCIETY

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WHAT THE? WHY WOULD YOU DO THAT? WHO AM I?

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## WHAT THE? WHY WOULD YOU DO THAT? WHO AM I?

Back in July of this year, my world was forever changed in a great way. My wife and I found out that we would be expecting our first child in March of 2020. I started reading pregnancy books on what I could expect each trimester and what I could expect from her new body changes. It was riddled with at this week...you have a mustard seed. Or, by week 38, the baby is the size of a watermelon. You can expect to see these changes and so on and so forth. I even read up on how I could be as an expecting father toward my wife and newborn son. Yes, we found out we would be having a boy. A son, pregnancy books, tutorials, and I have even listened to a few podcasts to be in full preparation...got it! Child birthing classes were scheduled yesterday. All steps taken to be prepared, I think?

However, what I was not prepared for is the change in hormones that I would witness and also encounter. We are 23 weeks in – and yes, my world has changed “for better and for worse.” Hey – I realize I took the vow in marriage but I’m not sure who I am learning more about– she or myself? Did you know that I can’t walk softly through the house, ever, even with walking with socks on? I talk way too much as well and apparently I am even louder when I am trying to be quiet. My wife will also say, “and why



do you absolutely loath clean dishes in the sink.” “They are clean, leave them alone.” But babe, it’s clutter and I hate clutter. I also bet you didn’t know I’m too precise with my hair (or what hair I have and that I shave too much.) Hence, the collection of disposable razors that I won’t throw away for some reason. (Wait – don’t we have his and hers vanities but yet the degree of scrutiny seems to be the most on this one) These examples just scratch the surface as my entire paper and presentation could be on the weird and quirky things that I do on a daily basis that’s clearly been a main focus the past 23 weeks. Again, I think I am learning more about myself than the actual “fatherhood” process.

Settling on an Athenaeum paper topic is never easy unless something you are passionate about just hits you between the eyes or maybe, life’s experiences drove you to it. As you have heard clearly so far, the latter came out of left field like a high fly ball and hit me between the eyes. As I was watching a program here recently on Netflix, a statement was made “In order to be President of the United States, one has to be crazy or a bit quirky. Or perhaps, a bit of both. Considering my new circumstances and quirks pointed out daily, I pondered the question “Could I really be President of the United States?” I mean, according to my wife, I am a bit of both. Don’t misunderstand me, I have no intentions of running for President of the



United States and my wife loves me despite quirky and flawed behavior.

So tonight, gentlemen we delve into former Presidents of the United States as they relate to quirky and odd behavior to see if they were either crazy, quirky or perhaps a bit of both. I present to you a paper entitled, "What the? Why would you do that? Who Am I?"

Now, here's something that could have only happened in the age before the Internet and smartphones. According to many reports, including one from the New Republic, one of our earlier Presidents had a pretty big thing for skinny-dipping. Indeed, one of the 40-plus men to hold office in the White House loved to take off his clothes and go for a quiet dip in D.C.'s famous Potomac River.

According to the Huffington Post, his daily ritual, which began at 5 a.m., had less to do with a weird sexual thing and more to do with helping him deal with the stress of, you know, being full-on president of the United States. Ironically, his affection for nude swimming was actually quite well-known among the press. Case in point: Journalist Anne Royall was able to secure a history-making interview with the President by catching him skinny-dipping and then hiding his clothes until he agreed to answer her questions, according to the Huffington Post. Strangely enough, he was not the only president who loved to take his clothes off and go for a dip. Among



the others, according to the New Republic: Theodore Roosevelt, Franklin Roosevelt and, perhaps less surprisingly, John F. Kennedy. (JFK got up to lots of mischief.) Who am I.....John Quincy Adams.

He may be immortalized on Mount Rushmore, but when it came to public speaking, even a nervous first-grader could have wiped the floor with him. That's right, while he was an excellent writer — as evidenced by the Declaration of Independence — he reportedly suffered from crippling stage fright. As a lawyer, he struggled to even present cases, and he never even spoke during the monumental Second Continental Congress. "I never heard him utter three sentences together," claimed colleague and future second U.S. President John Adams.

From what scholars can tell today, he may have only ever delivered two speeches himself — his two presidential inaugural addresses. Today, these speeches are among America's most famous inaugural addresses, but anyone who actually attended these speeches would have had a hard time telling you what they were about. He spoke so quietly that the people in the audience had to strain to hear him. Researchers from Duke University have concluded that he likely suffered from undiagnosed social phobia. So, for all you shy folks and shut-ins out there, you too can become president! If he



could do it, so can you. You probably can't buy Louisiana again, though.

Who am I....Thomas Jefferson.

He may have been responsible for the atrocities of the Trail of Tears, and may have been a notorious brawler, but apparently he had a whimsical side as well. As the story goes, he taught his pet parrot, Poll, to cuss up a storm. At his funeral, the parrot swore so profusely that attendees were shocked, and Poll had to be removed. The Reverend William Menefee Norment wrote a book him and, according to him, Poll went off. Who am I...Andrew Jackson.

One former President, a highly decorated World War II general, did a lot of cool things when he was president. To blow off steam, he really liked to play golf. He loved it so much, in fact, he wanted to practice his putt closer to work and home, so he had a putting green installed at the White House. However, his predecessor was super in love with the local squirrels – he liked to feed them. His squirrels started burying nuts in the green, ticking off his successor to no end. In his frustration, he joked that all the squirrels should be shot and told the grounds keeping staff to do something about the darn squirrels.

The poor groundskeepers tried to scare them — the squirrels weren't scared. Then, the staff started a trap-and-release program, where they let the



squirrels out in some park in DC. That didn't do much to keep the population down, but the President did get into some hot water for trying to "rehome" the little fuzzy-tailed rodents. His opponents, in particular, jumped right on it, saying he was an enemy of wildlife. Wildlife in general? The President liked. But squirrels on his putting green? He did not like, and he wanted them gone. Who am I....Dwight Eisenhower.

We've heard about plenty of people resorting to alternative medicine to stay healthy, but this President may ultimately take the cake. According to the (admittedly) sleazy-sounding book, *White House: Confidential*, this President "enjoyed having petroleum jelly slathered on his head" every morning while he ate breakfast in bed. The reason: he apparently believed that somehow, some way, slabbing a bunch of Vaseline-esque jelly on his head over breakfast would be great for his health. Incidentally, various reports also claimed that, while serving as Vice President, he acquired the nickname "Silent Cal" because he wasn't much of a casual talker. Which, after hearing about Coolidge's love affair with petroleum jelly, actually totally makes sense. Who am I....Calvin Coolidge.

When this President first took office, there wasn't yet electricity in the White House — all illumination was provided by gaslights. But even though he oversaw the installation of electric lighting into the executive residence,



he and his wife refused to touch any of the light switches themselves. This wasn't out of vanity or disdain for menial tasks—the couple were genuinely afraid of being electrocuted by the newfangled technology.

According to White House History, "few people at the time had enough faith in electric lighting to use it exclusively — its use was barely a decade old." Put that way, we can kind of understand his fear of going boom just because he wanted a little extra light — we all know that one old person convinced their cell phone is going to kill them, or that going outside with wet hair will give them pneumonia. Who am I...Benjamin Harrison.

Would you believe that this former President — commonly called a "bloody butcher" because of his battle tactics — was actually a would-be pacifist? Reportedly, he was not as much of a fan of violence as you might expect from observing just about anything he ever did. He claimed that he detested war, and even had an aversion to guns. Additionally, according to a PBS biography of this President, "He despised killing animals and hated blood so much he refused to eat meat unless it was charred." When he ran for election, his campaign slogan was actually "Let Us Have Peace."

When he won, America had a Republican president, with anti-war and anti-gun views, who despised killing animals and hated eating meat. It just



goes to show you how much the political parties of the U.S. have changed since then. Who am I...Ulysses S. Grant.

While a few first ladies were particularly stylish, few American presidents enjoy the same reputation. The Plain Dealer reports that this President owned about 80 pairs of pants. He reportedly changed them — and the rest of his outfit — several times per day. As Mental Floss notes, he even wore a tuxedo to casual dinner at times. And while he refused to hire a bodyguard to protect him during his presidency, “he did hire a valet who attended to his clothes and personal belongings.” Who am I...Chester Arthur.

This President was one of our most brazenly unapologetic presidents. He did things his own way and didn't care what you thought about it. One of his odd habits was to give interviews from the bathroom while actually using the bathroom. Presidential biographer Doris Kearns Goodwin describes how "he just didn't want the conversation to stop. If you were in the bedroom holding back when he went into the bathroom, he would just call you in and say, 'come on in, I haven't finished what I'm saying.'"

This President seemingly had no shame. As biographer Robert Caro describes, "He early became fabled for a Rabelaisian earthiness, urinating in



the parking lot of the House Office Building as the urge took him. And, if a colleague came into a Capitol bathroom as he was finishing at the urinal there," that wouldn't stop him from kicking off a conversation.

The former President numbers among the most narcissistic American presidents in United States history. In addition to showing signs of bipolar disorder, he "was a man possessed by inner demons," according to one biographer. He had a sense of emptiness and "insatiable appetites: for work, women, food, drink, conversation, and material possessions." Additionally, Johnson had some famously exhibitionist tendencies, another mark of a narcissist. He showed them off by "urinating in a sink, inviting people into his bathroom, showing off his abdominal scar, and exposing his private parts." He was quite proud. Who am I...Lyndon Johnson.

And, to bring this paper to close, this President never smiles and/or laughs. You might get an occasional smirk. (There are memes galore of the infamous smirk) Additionally, he always moves something in front of him into the middle of the table, be it a glass of Diet Coke or a coaster. He holds a glass of water with two hands. Eats cheeseburgers in bed. And, speaking of Diet Cokes, he drinks upwards of 12 a day. Also, like many of us men, NO ONE can touch the remote control in his house. Speaking of TV, he has



three in his own bedroom. Obsessed with Shark Week, obsessed with his hair (like myself), eats pizza with a fork and knife, has a love/hate relationship with the media..... Who am I...yep, our current President of the United States....Donald J Trump.

Hearing all of these quirks and behaviors of former US Presidents, clearly my quirky behavior seems miniscule to me. Again, let me re-iterate, I have no ambitions of my more quirky and erratic behaviors being put on blast by the social media. I will not run for President. And, to further point out, the Netflix show I was watching was entitled "House of Cards." President, Frank Underwood and his wife Claire, on the show, completely and utterly prove the point that one that takes on the job of President of the United States has to be either a bit quirky or crazy. If you haven't seen this program on Netflix, I highly recommend the watch.

In closing, I am interested in the comment portion of tonight's meeting and looking forward to hearing of maybe some people you have researched with quirky behaviors. Furthermore, maybe you will lend a glimpse into your own personality by telling at least one of your quirks or interesting behaviors. I do know that William Turner sleeps in a toboggan



nightly. Yep, Rip Van Winkle himself. Thank you gentlemen, I enjoyed your attention.