

News

Sen. Clinton Signs For Fans

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Sen. Hillary Rodham Clinton, D-N.Y., signed copies of her best-selling memoir at the Charles Hotel on Monday, drawing a crowd of more than 1,000 autograph seekers from throughout greater Boston to Harvard Square.

Clinton's fans began congregating outside the hotel in the early morning. By noon, when signing began, a dense line of people—cradling copies of Clinton's book under their arms—wound among the six American flags in the hotel plaza, through the marble pillars inscribed with the words of John F. Kennedy '40 and along the row of windows where hotel guests huffed and perspired over exercise equipment.

At a makeshift counter erected near the street, a cluster of visitors clamored for the last blue admission slips—the only way to get past metal detectors and Secret Service agents and into the auditorium where the former first lady was wielding a pen and, by all accounts, a warm smile.

Clinton's book *Living History* has sold more than 1 million copies since sales began on June 9. The tremendous surge of popularity that its publication brought her was evident in Cambridge Monday—autograph seekers offered the senator effusive praise as their arms encircled Clinton's face, emblazoned in elegant black and white on the memoir's dust jacket.

"I think what she has done in the White House and afterwards is admirable," said Boston resident Becky Schneck, toting her signed copy of *Living History*, which she had not finished reading, under one arm. "As a career woman myself, I admire her."

In spite of the long wait in line—the most die-hard fans had been waiting for nearly five hours—most autograph seekers were thrilled by the opportunity to meet Clinton.

"It was a lot of fun. She's a very charismatic, beautiful woman," said Cambridge native Robyn Ward as she wandered back into the sunlight clutching a signed copy of the memoir. "She made eye contact. She made it very personable, even though it went quickly. I love her to death, and I hope she runs for office."

With the possibility of a 2008 presidential campaign looming on the horizon, attending the junior senator's signing was a strong political statement for some.

"I support Democrats. I support Hillary because she's a Democrat," said Patricia Hawkins, a Belmont social worker who said she appreciated the senator's stance on health care and welfare.

For others waiting in line, coming face to face with the former first lady was nothing new.

"In November 2000, I was at the Grand Hyatt hotel in New York to watch her elected as senator and I've enjoyed continuing to see her career blossom," said Benjamin B. Bolger, a student at the Graduate School of Design and teaching

fellow at the College. He has been crossing paths with Clinton since working in the White House Press Office eight years ago.

Citing the "breadth and depth" of Clinton's knowledge, Bolger said the senator's memoir offered a unique perspective on her experience as a politician, wife and mother.

"I think that the book helps to define the difference between a public career and a private life," he said.

Despite beginning to loop her name across Living History's first pages a bit behind schedule, Clinton and her attending entourage met the line of visitors so efficiently that she was able to sign more copies of the memoir than she—or Wordsworth Books, which was sponsoring the event and unloading hundreds of copies of the book at a makeshift checkout stand outside the hotel—had planned. Clinton originally agreed to sign 800 books, but the actual number exceeded that, according to a Wordsworth employee.

Hotel attendants led groups of 10 autograph seekers through the swinging glass doors to the lobby of the Charles Hotel and up two flights of stairs to the auditorium where Clinton was waiting.

Rules posted outside kept the line moving briskly. No customer could present more than two books for Clinton to sign. The senator would not sign anything except Living History, and would not, under any circumstances, speak to the press.

Clinton's schedule for the day also included a private meeting in the hotel's presidential suite with a variety of local politicians and public figures—including University President Lawrence H. Summers, who served as secretary of the Treasury during the Bill Clinton presidential administration.

Some people waiting in line were taking advantage of Clinton's proximity to garner a signature for friends and family members miles away.

"I just bought the book so I could get it signed for my mom," said Divinity School student Sarah Knapp. She and friend Haemin Lee sat down in the shade of a potted tree after an hour of waiting in line. "She lives in Indiana, and the senator couldn't get that far."

Some 30 inching footsteps behind them, Wayland resident Peggy Patton noted the preponderance of other middle-aged women among the waiting crowd.

"People are willing to give her a chance," she said. "I guess that's what we're doing—giving her a chance."

As the hour passed, a small insurrection took hold at the end of the queue. Former Extension School student Heidi Erickson—who gained public notoriety in May when 72 dead Persian cats were discovered in the refrigerators of her two local homes—arrived half an hour late, and the Wordsworth representatives had run out of admission tickets.

Now leading a group of about 40 ticketless autograph seekers, whom she dubbed "the Hopefuls," Erickson followed the length of the line, shouting out requests for the little blue slips with an extended palm.

"I went through the whole line looking for tickets," she said, grinning broadly beneath her platinum locks. She carried a copy of Clinton's book beneath one arm—one of the pre-signed copies that Wordsworth began selling when the tickets ran out, she explains.

But a signature was not enough for Erickson. She wanted to meet Clinton and—like all of the Hopefuls—shrugged off attendants' claims that this would be impossible without a ticket.

Some did not even have a book. Shakia Gaither and Malak Yusuf, who had arrived at 12:30 p.m., were hoping for more than a signature. They hoped to woo Clinton to address the City School, a Dorchester-based non-profit organization that aims to instill the capacity for social leadership in local youth.

"People would definitely listen to her," Yusuf explained.

"I admire her," Gaither added.

The Hopefuls were still far from the entrance to the hotel as 1 p.m. neared. But under considerable pressure from Erickson, who trotted purposefully to and from the lobby, many managed to be ushered upstairs.

But on the corner of Bennett and Eliot Streets opposite the hotel, two young men were fomenting fresh conflict. Resting a United States flag over a shoulder, they were surrounded by a series of handwritten anti-Clinton posters.

"Do you know where Bill is?" one read.

“Liar, liar, pantsuit on fire,” another chided.

One of the two protestors, Boston resident Eric Cambell, argued with a series of women leaving the signing, memoir in hand.

“I just don’t like the woman,” he said as countless copies of the senator’s face passed him on the sidewalk, toted by hundreds of smiling fans.

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