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The Myers report; Former Clinton press secretary knows a thing or two about girl power

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At the end of this exhausting, presidential election season the United States may have its first (fill in the blank here) president.

If it's media darling and Illinois Sen. Barack Obama, we will have our first black president.

At 72, Sen. John McCain (R-Arizona), would be the oldest inaugurated president.

And Sen. Hillary Clinton (D-New York) would be the the first woman.

While it's not the same as holding the nation's top job, Dee Dee Myers knows a little bit about being a "first" in the White House. As President Bill Clinton's onetime press secretary, Myers was not only the first woman to hold the job, but also, at 31, the youngest.

Now 46 and with a resume that includes television political talk-show host, writer for "The West Wing" and lecture-circuit speaker, the married mother of two has penned Why Women Should Rule The World. Part memoir, part state-of-the-feminist movement address, the book is at its best a conversation about Myers' odyssey from Clinton mouthpiece on the campaign trail to White House press secretary; the brutality of Washington D.C. politics, and what she's learned about other women who have climbed a mountain to get to the top of their professional game. Tucked in the stories are depressing statistics (women earn 81 cents for every dollar men earn) and a lesson that men and women should both learn: We're different. From how we solve problems to how we play sports. Deal with it.

She is quick to point out that this is not about man-bashing -- after all she loves her father, is married to a man and is the mother of a son -- but about seeing the differences between men and women, and how both can have a great influence in positions of power.

In a recent interview with the Sun-Times, Myers talked about everything from the upcoming election to her struggles as a young woman in a big job. And she doesn't rule out re-entering the world of politics.

Q. So you were the first woman to hold the title of White House Press Secretary. What's it like to be a "first"?

A. It's kind of a bummer, at the point when you're in a really remarkable

situation things are moving so fast that you don't have a lot of time to reflect, "This is a really amazing job to show up at." It never occurred to me when I pitched this title that Hillary Clinton would run for the presidency. It was three years ago and I thought maybe she would.

Q. Are you in touch with former President Clinton? I know you were pretty critical of him, especially during the impeachment.

A. I do keep up with him, have talked with him. He was mad at me for a couple of years after the impeachment -- and let me say I thought the impeachment was a travesty -- but we're OK now.

Q. The obvious subtitle here is, "Elect Hillary." Where do you stand?

A. I think it's fantastic that she's running -- and running such a great campaign. A lot of that has been overshadowed by the nature of the race. We also have Barack Obama who would be the first African American and both of them bring that "first" to the table. I [voted for] Hillary Clinton but I would be happy with either Hillary Clinton or Barack Obama as nominees and president.

Q. But yet, in the book, one gets the distinct impression that as then-Chief of Staff Leon Panetta was showing you the door, you wish she would have had your back. Or at the very least you would have had her ear.

A. I wish certain things could have been different. At the very time when I was fighting to hold on to my job and fix the whole way it was structured, her universal health care plan was collapsing, Democrats had lost the Congress and President Clinton was in a political crisis. So in some ways I thought she could have been more supportive of me, but I understand there were other things going on. I guess I just would have just appreciated a little empathy.

Q. What about Dana Perino, President Bush's current White House Press Secretary? Have you met her? Swapped stories?

A. A few years ago Scott McClellan [Bush's then-White House Press Secretary] invited the former press secretaries back for the annual holiday party. That's where I met Dana. She was Scott's deputy. And we've talked since then about common experiences, dealing with the press. We also talked about the ways our jobs were different.

Q. The release of the book is interesting -- are you trying to get back in the political game?

A. Not now. I would never say never, but it's really demanding and it's not something where I want to work 100 hours a week when my kids are so young. I'm still very much associated with Bill Clinton. I think if Barack Obama or Hillary would become president they wouldn't want me in that role. You know, some other point in my life, it would be an honor to serve. I could contribute differently than when I went in 15 years ago. I'm a little older, I'm a little wiser.

Q. There are some great insider tales here. Was it tough to pick and choose what to share?

A. I learned a lot of that from Aaron Sorkin, whom I worked with [as a writer on "The West Wing"] and what he likes to do is pull back the curtain and show people things they didn't know about things like the White House. So some of this is, in writing a memoir, you're contributing a bit to history. The other thing is, I think I'm always interested in and I always encourage women to talk about their setbacks. If you look across careers -- no one's career is a straight upward trajectory. I

think it's important for women to talk about that so other women won't feel like this isn't the end of the world. I think that's really important to let other women not just see the successes but also where you were unsure or the deck was stacked against you so you don't feel alone.

Q. If not Sen. Clinton this time, do you think you'll see a woman president in your lifetime?

A. I think we'll have a female president. Just the fact that Hillary has had the success she's had -- she's got a very good shot.

Lisa Donovan is a Sun-Times' metro reporter.