

## Thinking Back on Blagojevich

Written by Rich Miller

Sunday, 11 December 2011 05:40

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"I ... I ... I ... I ... I couldn't fathom what I would say to those two girls," U.S. Attorney Patrick Fitzgerald stammered last week when asked what he would say to Rod Blagojevich's daughters after our former governor was sentenced to 14 years in prison.

It was impossible not to think of those little girls last week. Even some of the most hardened, partisan Republicans I know felt no joy at Blagojevich's long prison sentence because of those kids. I don't know the children well, but I did spend some time with them a few years back and thought they were good kids, even normal kids, despite their father's position at the time and the overall weirdness of their situation.

He didn't dote on them much when I spent three solid days with Blagojevich and his family on a bus tour through Illinois in April of 2007. The governor's time was almost purely spent with me, his staff, and others who jumped on and off the bus during those three very long days.

After we'd been on the road a while and had dispensed with formalities, I decided I'd try to personally warn the governor that he was heading for serious trouble. The feds had already indicted Tony Rezko and were in hot pursuit of the governor's best friend, Chris Kelly. Their ultimate target was obviously the governor. He had to radically clean up his act or they'd get him, I warned. I was as stern as I could be without raising my voice, for fear that his children, sitting just a few feet away, would hear. They didn't need to know that I thought their dad was destined for prison.

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A few hours later, Blagojevich surprised me by offering me a job. I smirked and tossed out the highest salary that came to mind. He said it could be arranged – in a tone that meant there'd have to be some subterfuge to get me all that cash. I immediately turned him down, explaining that he'd never listen to me anyway, so I'd probably quit and end up dead broke and pursued by the feds. I knew Rod was just fantasizing that he could handle having somebody like me around. It was obvious that he never listened to anybody who didn't constantly reinforce his own heroic notions about himself.

Right up until the end, he was always the good guy on the white horse, and everybody else was trying to bring the great man down. Remember when he demanded to know whether Fitzgerald was man enough to meet him in court? The guy just asked for it. It's as if he wanted to be defeated.

Ironically enough, the insanity of the past three years seemed to make Rod Blagojevich a better father. He appeared to draw strength from his family, and they from him after his arrest, impeachment, trials, and convictions. He seemed to become the doting dad that he'd once hoped to be, and his children, despite all the adversity, did better than most expected. But now what happens to them?

"It's not like their name is Smith," Blagojevich told his judge last week about his girls. "They can't hide."

No, they can't ever hide. Even when their father's villainy fades from the national memory, that name will haunt them wherever they go. And it's really too bad, because they didn't deserve this fate. I hope they can learn to forgive him.

As for me, I don't think I will ever forgive the man. What he did to his state, his party, his friends, his staff, and his family justifies every day he'll spend behind bars. His attorney Sheldon Sorosky defiantly pledged to appeal his client's prison sentence last week, and Blagojevich told reporters, "See you soon." He still doesn't get it. He'll never get it.

But we have to get it.

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We have to stop hiding from ourselves.

Illinois has to eventually come to terms with why it re-elected this guy knowing full well that he was a criminal. Our democracy was perverted by an attractive candidate with lots of slick TV ads.

Democratic Party leaders have to finally fess up to the fact that they cynically wanted to hold onto the governor's office more than they wanted to see a decent person elected.

The sycophants who told him how great he was every hour of every day need to apologize.

And his Republican Party enablers should stop lying about their own involvement.

It's past time for atonement.

*Rich Miller also publishes Capitol Fax (a daily political newsletter) and [CapitolFax.com](http://CapitolFax.com).*