



## The Hugh Hefner of Politics

From porno to the primaries: the long, strange life of pro-Hillary blogger and radio personality Taylor Marsh.

**Joe Mathews, The New Republic** Published: Monday, June 16, 2008

LAS VEGAS--I ask Taylor Marsh whether she really keeps a gun to protect herself from her detractors, as she claims on her website. So, she escorts me into her bedroom to show the proof: an HK 9mm handgun. "I know how to use it," she says, pointing the weapon briefly in my direction (it's unloaded) before walking over to the other side of the bed. There, she holds up her husband's firearm, a Ruger Mini-14 rifle. "I am just reviled everywhere," she declares with more than a hint of pride.

She's proud because, in all honesty, being hated has been good for business. Without hatred, Marsh wouldn't be half the Internet celebrity she is today. Her feverishly pro-Hillary Clinton site, [TaylorMarsh.com](#), has made her a standout in a progressive blogosphere overrun by Obama soldiers. She has argued that if Obama "was a woman, he wouldn't be getting the time of day;" she has called superdelegates "spineless" for not backing Clinton; and she has routinely portrayed Obama and his supporters as wimps and crybabies ("What do we get from Obama and his team? ... Waaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaah"). She's also picked fights with some of the bigger names in media, from Josh Marshall ("visibly sexist") to the late Tim Russert (whom she called "anti-feminist, misogynistic, ego driven" months before his death) to MSNBC personalities such as David Shuster and Chris Matthews. Of them, she wrote, "I ... cannot believe in the 21st century we have Neanderthal men parading around with such arrogance."

All this spewed venom, of course, has earned her quite a bit of attention, much of it negative. Her site includes a catalogue of the hate mail she receives. "CACKLE FOR ME NOW BITCH!" read one from an Obama supporter after the results of the North Carolina primary were announced. Posters on Marsh's *bête noire*, the Obama-loving *Daily Kos*, have called her a "world class liar" and "a lying hack." Recently, Obama supporters began an online effort to cancel her credentials to cover this summer's Democratic National Convention. There's even a web site called *The TM Experience* devoted to criticizing Marsh and her "Marshian" followers. It's no wonder that she's now subject fodder for *The Washington Post* and guest material for MSNBC.

With Clinton out of the race, Marsh says she will vote for Obama. But even as early as this spring, well before Hillary's concession, I encountered no Clinton stickers and no Clinton signs at her home. And when we spoke, Marsh took pains to describe herself not as a Hillary super-supporter, but as something closer to a feminist avenger, pushing back against Clinton-hating, Obama-loving male commentators and bloggers whom she sees as both sexists and professional competitors. His supporters "are in love [with him]," she posits. "They are sexually attracted to him."

"She has been pegged as *the* Hillary supporter, and yet she's not," says her longtime friend Judy Proffer, a former publisher of *LA Weekly*. "I'm sure there's some spiritual and emotional alignment between Hillary and Taylor because they are both underdogs in a man's world, though that's not the whole thing."

The "whole thing" is more complicated. In this campaign, Marsh seems to be giving an extended performance, perhaps her best yet, in a long, strange life of performances as a dancer, a Miss America contestant, a Broadway performer, a Los Angeles TV actress, a relationship columnist, a freelance sex researcher, a porn website editor, and even a phone sex operator (for about three days). Taylor Marsh has always wanted to be a star.

**Michelle D. Marshall** (still her legal name, according to Nevada voting records) was born in September 1954, in Columbia, Missouri. The Marshalls were conservative, churchgoing folks. Though she says she held onto a little bit of that outlook (she worked for her brother's unsuccessful congressional campaign in 1980, and even voted for Reagan that year because she preferred his stance on national security), she ultimately wanted something different for herself. "I wasn't willing to settle for the life most of the women I saw and knew were living," she wrote in a 2000 book called *My Year in Smut: The Internet Escapades Inside Danni's Hard Drive* (more on that title later). "I was willing to break every rule to create the life I wanted for myself."

Seeing nothing anti-feminist about it, she entered and won the Miss Missouri pageant in 1974 and competed to be Miss America later in the year, earning an educational scholarship. Confronted outside the pageant by a woman protesting the objectification of women, Marsh shot back, "Do you want to pay for

my college tuition?"

In 1975, she graduated from Stephens College, a predominately female arts school in Columbia, and began working as a dancer and actress in regional productions. From there, she moved to New York and then to LA. She accumulated some success (small parts in Broadway productions like the Cole Porter musical *Happy New Year*, and a role on a Henry Winkler TV pilot), but it wasn't enough to make a career out of. By the mid-'80s, Marshall, a lifelong keeper of diaries, began to pursue writing more seriously, and made sex and the sex industry her subject. She used the name Taylor during a brief stint as a phone sex operator and added the surname Marsh as a pseudonym on a trip to Amsterdam, where she interviewed prostitutes. "Taylor was my secret, but today she is who I am," she wrote in the 2000 book. "She is an extension of the girl from Missouri who had to create another life for herself in order to discover who she was."

In 1994, a temp job took her to the *LA Weekly*, the city's alternative paper. She eventually authored a column, "What Do You Want?" that touched on sex, relationships and even some politics. She also started the paper's alternative personal ad section, devising language (bondage became "knotty fun") that could get past the editors.

From there, she took a job as managing editor of Danni's Hard Drive, the web business of porn star Danni Ashe. Marsh's 2000 book focuses on her year at the company, on her sex research, and on Ashe, who marketed herself as the only woman alive to have been featured on the cover of *JUGGS* and *The Wall Street Journal*. "Don't laugh at this," Marsh told me, "but I really wanted to be the Hugh Hefner of politics."

In the book, in which Marsh compares herself not only to Hefner, but also to Alfred Kinsey and Larry Flynt, she tells the story of a "strong and sassy authority bucking female writer (me) who, while accomplishing a lot for her boss, would ultimately become the sequin studded g-string that cut just a little too tight up Danni's derriere." Mixing the political with the prurient, she tried to make the website an outlet for those, like her, who believed that porn should be feminist, or at least socially conscious. But when Marsh couldn't convince Ashe to kill a pictorial of a naked stripper on a school playground ("It was like holding up a welcome sign for pedophile fantasies"), she quit the same day. "There comes a point in time when you have to say: This is wrong," she says. "And you walk out."

**The recording studio she maintains** on the second floor of her Las Vegas home is roomy and high-tech. There's a top-notch microphone and two computers on a large desk, a handful of phones at the ready, and a giant Jasper Johns\* American flag on the wall. A few rescued cats paw their way around the plants and bookshelves in the corners of the room. She does four shows a week in here, and though it *sounds* very much like a radio show and *feels* very much like a radio show, nobody pays her to do it; it only airs on her website. When she first moved to Las Vegas, in 2002, she (with the help of Proffer, the *LA Weekly* publisher) bought time on a tiny station in town and stayed on the air for four months--but she failed to land a longer-term contract. Her new operation is a classic example of dressing for the job you want, not the one you have.

On the day I watch her tape her radio show, as is normally the case, Marsh's on-air persona is very calm and reasonable. She speaks without notes, able to move skillfully from a detailed analysis of campaign polling to the war in Iraq to the day's Maureen Dowd column on Obama--and her delivery is smooth: She pauses dramatically for effect, and she doesn't scream. In these quieter moments, she is often at her most effective, offering clear-eyed analysis that is as smart as anything on CNN. There is little of the bombast that's so evident on her website.

She picks up steam as she moves away from pure politics into a discussion of media and sexism. "We are seeing more different-looking faces on cable," she says. "We are already seeing more women. The only reason I am getting the attention I'm getting--even though I damn well earned it--is because of Hillary Clinton."

Not that the attention has done her much financial good. She earns only a little bit more than she spends on her business, and it's simply not enough to live on, she says. The salary of her husband Mark, a technician for a gas company, pays the bills. (The two met when he turned on the gas at her first Vegas apartment). Right now, Marsh is hoping to parlay her newfound notoriety into a show on Air America or on satellite radio. But it's a tough line to walk. She has to become popular enough to earn a radio gig, while remaining unpopular enough to be noticed.

"I'm working that very hard," she says of her attempts to get a paid radio job. She's been scrambling to set up meetings with radio execs, and her listeners have been sending letters in her support. "I don't understand why they don't give me a shot. I've been marooned in the desert for far too long."

With that, Marsh offers a big laugh, and talks about the places she'd love to base a radio show: LA again would be nice, maybe the Bay Area, or perhaps she could relocate to DC and live near the woman who put her on the map. These days--with Hillary Clinton back in the Senate--the improbable, comeback victory Marsh most hopes for is her own.

*Joe Mathews, an Irvine senior fellow at the New America Foundation, blogs on direct democracy at [www.newamerica.net/blog/blockbuster\\_democracy](http://www.newamerica.net/blog/blockbuster_democracy).*

\*Correction: This originally said Jackson Pollack.

CLOSE WINDOW

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