

BUILDING CHARACTER

A Tribute to Lincoln

BY MICHAEL JOSEPHSON

OK, I'm an Abraham Lincoln groupie. He is by every measure my biggest hero. My daughter Abrielle was named after him and our dog is named Lincoln. By sheer good fortune, my son Justin was born on Lincoln's birthday. I often visit the Lincoln Memorial and stand in awe of his magnificent eloquence and his legacy of honor, courage, compassion, humility and humor.

Yet in his own time he was more often ridiculed than revered. He was unmercifully belittled in the papers that often called him unrefined, simple, a bumpkin. He was ungainly, to some downright ugly.

But what a man! Self-educated, self-made, he was a skillful lawyer and effective politician whose character made his name almost synonymous with integrity. He was an inspirational leader who really believed in democracy—a government of the people, by the people, for the people. Empathy and compassion were in his blood. He felt the pain of others as deeply as any man could, yet duty made him a leader of our nation's bloodiest war.

Now one of the most esteemed men in all history, Lincoln was often depressed by feelings of inadequacy. Groucho Marx once joked, "I wouldn't want to be in

any club that would have me." But the original source for this classic line was none other than a young, self-effacing Abraham Lincoln, who quite seriously wrote to a woman who rejected his marriage proposal: "I can never be satisfied with anyone who would be block-head enough to have me." It's interesting, in a world that places such a high value on self-esteem, that one of America's truest and greatest heroes was genuinely, perhaps excessively, humble. ■

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