

## THEY RIDICULED ABE

# Have Troubles? Reflect on Lincoln

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Whenever we feel lonely and unappreciated and burdened; whenever we find it hard to go on trusting ourselves and our best values; whenever we worry about being unattractive or ridiculous or socially ill at ease—then we can remember Abe Lincoln and love him the most. That unfortunate, awkward and very great man to whom we all owe so much.

From the beginning to the end of his life, Abe Lincoln was always laughed at and brutally derided by others. He may have learned to turn the other cheek, but he never did learn to look the other way. He was always being hurt anew, always unprepared for the hostility he encountered.

Lincoln was born with a tall hatful of handicaps, social, physical and economic.

You think you've got problems?

● Abe's mother was an illegitimate child, the object of some scorn. But she was sweet and tender and understood Abe, and he missed her terribly when she died before he reached his teens.

● His father was a ne'er-do-well, and some say an alcoholic. He despised young Abe's love of learning and literature, and resented it for the time it took from useful work.

● Abe was ugly and clumsily tall, but did you also know that he had a high, squeaky voice which always gave out on him in a comical manner just at the most crucial moments? (For example, it cracked hideously during the Gettysburg Address.)

● Some say that Abe's attachment to Anne Rutledge has been oversentimentalized, but she was his first love, and she died tragically.

● Abe's wife, Mary Todd, was a very neurotic woman who was deeply attached and dependent on him, but could never refrain from chastising him and humiliating him in public. She was also a compulsive spender, who ran up the most extraordinary bills. Robert, her only surviving son, had her declared incompetent in her old age because he could not keep up with her extravagances.

● Two of Abe's sons were born with physical handicaps, and two of them died suddenly while children. One of them died in the White House during the darkest days of the Civil War. Understandably, Mary Lincoln went to pieces for a time, and Abe never left her bedside.

● He was always vexed with in-law trouble. Mary's southern aristocratic family looked down on him and snubbed

Mary's "barefoot boy" even after he had reached the presidency.

● He was subject to serious depressions, so dark that he could only sit and brood. In the 20th century, his family doctor would have referred him to a psychiatrist, and perhaps the editors of Fact magazine would have sent around a questionnaire—as they did with Candidate Goldwater — asking psychiatrists if this man was mentally stable enough to assume the presidency!

Abe Lincoln became a great man because he did not succumb to social pressure, despite his eternal sadness and loneliness, and he never returned hatred for hatred. He reasoned things out for himself, in his slow and worried but deady accurate manner, and kept his own counsel.

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