

Selection of Quotes from Becoming by Michelle Obama

“My worries going to high school, if they were to be catalogued, could be filed under one general heading: Am I good enough?... Not (good) enough. Not (good) enough. It was a doubt about where I came from and what I’d believed about myself until now. It was like a malignant cell that threatened to divide and divide again unless I could find some way to stop it.” (p55/56)

High school got off to a good start and Michelle Obama notes, “with each little accomplishment, with every high school screwup I managed to avoid, my doubts slowly took leave.” (p58)

But they returned as she entered the senior end of high school. Michelle Obama was in the top 10% of the year group and had an appointment with a school/college counsellor where she expressed an interest in applying to Princeton University.

“It’s possible that during our short meeting the college counsellor said things to me that might have been positive and helpful, but I recall none of it. Because, rightly or wrongly, I got stuck on one single sentence the woman uttered.

‘I’m not sure,’ she said, giving me a perfunctory, patronizing smile, ‘that you’re Princeton material.’”

She goes on: “failure is a feeling long before it’s an actual result. And, for me, it felt that’s exactly what she was planting – a suggestion of failure.” (p66)

Michelle Obama did, of course, go to Princeton.

The doubts returned just before the announcement of Barack Obama’s candidacy for Presidency: “I still held on to the worries I’d had since childhood. What if we are not good enough?” (p230)

And they flooded back when she became First Lady: “For me it revived an old internal call-and-response one that tracked all the way back to high school... and found myself gripped by doubt. Confidence, I’d learned then, sometimes needs to be called from within. I’ve repeated the same words to myself many times now, through many climbs, ‘Am I good enough? Yes, I am. Am I good enough? Yes, I am.’” (p284)