

## KATIE O'MALLEY'S MARCH

THE MOTHER OF FOUR AND BALTIMORE DISTRICT COURT JUDGE  
NOW JUGGLES A NEW RESPONSIBILITY -- FIRST LADY (BUT DON'T  
CALL HER THAT)

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Four-year-old Jack O'Malley was walking straight toward the barrier of ferns that decorated the edge of the raised podium where his father would deliver his inaugural address.

But before he reached the stage's perilous perimeter, Jack's mother gently reeled him in. She tucked the boy under her coat - with only his head poking out, he resembled a baby marsupial - and then stifled a giggle.

No one was the wiser. The state of the youngest member of Maryland's first family was secure.

Catherine Curran O'Malley has grown accustomed to just such moments. Lots of children. Lots of attention. And with many Maryland residents watching the first lady's debut, big pressure, too. Yet, she held it together - without a grimace or groan, smiling throughout. An adept multi-tasker.

As Martin O'Malley settles into the governor's job, his wife is juggling her responsibilities as first lady, a commuting Baltimore District Court judge and a mother of four. She comes from a prominent political family, the daughter of J. Joseph Curran Jr., the former state attorney general and lieutenant governor who

spent nearly a half-century in public life. But because she is a judge she must abide by the court's prohibition against "partisan political activity," which restricted her from campaigning for her husband. As a result, even her voice remains a mystery to many Marylanders.

Though the O'Malleys and their three dogs have moved from their modest Baltimore home to the governor's mansion in Annapolis, she'll also keep her court assignment - which will continue to limit her public work. But she says she's looking forward to the challenge of balancing all her duties and that she'll manage, as she always has, with the help of loved ones and friends.

"I've always had a lot of people saying 'You know, you've got a lot on your plate, why don't you let me take this off?'" O'Malley, 44, said during an interview last week in a sitting room of Government House. "I learned early on to say, 'OK, thanks.' Because it really was the only way to get through it. I think that sort of made it all work without me having gone crazy."

Described by colleagues and neighbors as candid and sincere - someone who has opted for a family-style dinner at the governor's mansion so her children don't get used to being served - O'Malley appears comfortable with the latest round of chaos. But to spend just a few minutes with O'Malley, who has long, auburn hair and laughs loud and often during a 90-minute interview, is to discover that she's at ease talking about almost anything.

She said, for example, that it's hard to resist the mansion's delectable food, which is prepared by three chefs. "If I ate three meals a day here, it would be 'Super Size Me,'" she said, referring to the film about a man who grows fat living off fast food.

She remembers thinking that her husband was "a nerd" when she met him.

She's quick to chat frankly about a range of other topics, from being pregnant at her wedding to the friskiness of a family dog named Scout that was fixed, but, O'Malley noted, "still has the drive."

O'Malley has an opinion as well about being called first lady. She doesn't like it.

"I have a problem with that first lady thing," she said. "I keep saying, just call me Katie. ... It's a little pretentious, walking around calling yourself the job title that you are."

Lessons in modesty

O'Malley learned about humility from her father, a modest man who recently stepped down after two decades as Maryland attorney general.

Having grown up in a big political family in Baltimore, the third of four Curran children, the first lady isn't taken with the trappings of office and didn't consider bagging her career to host dinners at Government House, Curran said.

"I think she's bright and has a lot of energy, and she can do both," said Curran, who sat next to his daughter in Annapolis last week during the governor's first major policy address.

Certainly, life in the Curran household in Baltimore's Homeland neighborhood served as fitting training. Joe Curran, a product of Baltimore's Irish-Catholic machine who also served in the state Senate and House of Delegates, was always running for something, and O'Malley cut her teeth making the sale for her dad. The Curran children pitched in, knocking on doors, stuffing envelopes, introducing him at rallies.

But O'Malley also learned the value of family from her parents, including her mother, Barbara, a painter. Her father frequently made them breakfast, greeting his three daughters in the morning with the same song.

"The most beautiful girl on Springlake Way, and she goes to Notre Dame. She has a dog named Lamont. She has a brother named Max ... " Curran would croon as he fried eggs for the girls, each of whom would have qualified.

O'Malley was an attractive teenager, popular with the girls and the boys. A graduate of Notre Dame Prep, she and her sisters wore the same kinds of clothes, swapping looks and copying each other. They beat up on the youngest Curran, Max, until he got old enough, and big enough, to fight back.

O'Malley graduated from Towson University and the University of Baltimore School of Law, her father's alma mater.

She met Martin O'Malley in 1986 at a Maryland Association of Counties meeting in Ocean City, where she was campaigning for her father's first bid for attorney general and he was working for Barbara A. Mikulski. Their paths again crossed by

chance in 1988 when he passed on a phone message from Katie to a friend who happened to work with him in the Baltimore prosecutor's office.

"He said, 'Oh, I would drink her bath water,'" the first lady recalled that the friend told her. "'You've got to introduce me to her.' Isn't that the grossest? Isn't that disgusting?"

A few days later, she saw him sing Irish tunes at McGinn's in Baltimore. She walked in and found O'Malley alone onstage, the flag of Ireland behind him. "I went, 'Oh my God, what a nerd,'" she said. "But he was cute. He had those guns, those muscles."

During a break, he asked her to the Joseph Meyerhoff Symphony Hall for a concert featuring Mary Black, the Irish songstress. O'Malley said it took her a few dates to fall for the funny guy with the "turtle eyes."

"As I had gotten older and had some boyfriends in the past that weren't very nice, I got picky," she said. "But my one thing, whoever I was going to end up with had to be funny. And not like stupid funny. Smart funny."

They married on Aug. 25, 1990. O'Malley said she was pregnant at the time and that they were in love, bound for the altar eventually. His opponent in the 43rd District Senate primary race, however, accused him of getting married for political purposes, the first lady recalled. O'Malley would lose that contest a few weeks later, by 44 votes.

When Max Curran, an attorney and fellow UB alumnus, ponders how his sister is transitioning to first lady, he thinks back to 1991.

That February, O'Malley - still in law school - gave birth to the couple's first child, Grace. During the spring and summer, she studied - with her brother - for the bar exam, which she passed in July. And that fall, Martin O'Malley won a seat on the City Council.

A whirlwind by anyone's standards.

"It really is quite a feat," Max Curran said. "She's been doing it a long time."

O'Malley doesn't do it alone, however. These days, she rises at 5:30 a.m. to get herself and the three oldest children - Grace, 16; Tara, 14; William, 9 - dressed. A state trooper drives them at about 6:45 a.m. to Baltimore, where O'Malley is dropped at work and the kids go to school.

At the end of the day, the children are picked up by their grandparents, and they head back to Springlake Way - much like their mother once did - to do their homework. O'Malley and her driver swing by after work to get them, and the whole crew heads back to Annapolis for dinner with the governor and Jack.

Administrative Judge Jeannie J. Hong, who works with O'Malley at the North Avenue District Court, said they bonded, above all, as working mothers. But Hong said O'Malley - who is on a domestic violence criminal rotation for three months - also knows the names of the bailiffs and the cleaning crew and that when she

finishes her docket, she pulls cases from other courtrooms to help lighten her colleagues' loads.

"She's just so personable, she has no airs," Hong said. "It's hard not to be affected by her enthusiasm and cheerfulness."

O'Malley is quick to mention all the friends who have helped maintain her sanity, pitching in during the flurry of the gubernatorial campaign, which kept the candidate on the road and left her managing work and the family, and later throughout the transition.

Life, O'Malley said, is easier at the mansion. She has an expansive staff - a resident manager and butler, among several others - who help with the cleaning and shopping. For a family that has never had extensive help - they gave up a once-a-week cleaning woman when their daughters' private school tuition went up - it's a luxury.

O'Malley, dressed in a bright green sweater, black skirt and tall suede pumps and wearing little makeup on a recent afternoon, said she brings work home now, something she couldn't do when she had to cook for the whole clan, and do their laundry. She even sneaks in time to read for pleasure.

Keep roles separate

The challenge for O'Malley is to make the most of her public role, given the restrictions imparted by the court.

Mary Boyle, a spokeswoman for Common Cause in Washington, urged O'Malley and her husband to be careful about any potential conflict or overlap in their responsibilities. Transparency is best, she said.

"Do we think that she should quit her job? No, certainly not," Boyle said. "But I think that in cases where she is being asked to rule on a decision that directly affects his office or a law that his administration made, then it would probably be prudent for her to consider recusing herself."

Kenneth A. Gross, a Washington attorney who is a member of the Council on Governmental Ethics Laws, agreed. But, he added, "It seems like it was a potentially bigger problem when he was mayor."

With a judge's political activities forbidden by court ethics laws, O'Malley probably will craft a public role different from her predecessor, Kendel Ehrlich. A former prosecutor, Ehrlich was an outspoken adviser to her husband on policy matters. The couple has two small children.

O'Malley has said she will focus some of her energies as first lady on curbing truancy problems across the state. She said that in court she sees too many kids who have been doing drugs or dealing, hitting their girlfriends and more. And she knows that most of them never finished high school.

"I hate seeing kids not getting a fair shake, not getting the opportunities that they need," she said. "Either because their parents aren't doing what they need to do or because the system isn't doing whatever the system's supposed to do."



Marjorie O. Rendell, Pennsylvania's first lady and a judge on the U.S. Court of Appeals for the 3rd Circuit, cautioned that "you have to think two steps ahead of how someone may perceive something." She is careful not to walk in parades or make appearances at county fairs during the years that her husband, Gov. Edward G. Rendell, is up for re-election. But like O'Malley, she, too, never considered giving up her career to be a full-time first lady. And, in her state role, Rendell has launched "PennCORD," a civics education effort that meshes nicely with the work she does in court.

"Obviously, being a judge gives you some lines that are drawn for you," Rendell said, adding that managing both responsibilities is possible.

"The advice to her is enjoy it," Rendell said. "It really is wonderful."

O'Malley agrees, that much is clear. Even in those public moments - maybe especially in those moments - when she's also being a mom. Like on the podium that bitter cold day last month, when her husband readied himself for his inaugural address, and Jack O'Malley finally wound down. With an ivory coat draped across his back, he fell asleep in her arms.