

This profile of Senator Patty Murray appeared in *People* magazine, in a series of profiles of women who serve in the U.S. Senate. Throughout the profile, authors Thomas Fields-Meyer, Elizabeth Velez, and Mary Boone emphasize Senator Murray's reputation as "a one-time soccer mom who represents the interests of ordinary folks." Why do you suppose the authors gave this emphasis to their profile?

# From Welfare to Washington

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MARY BOONE

**Once told that a mom with kids had no place in politics, Patty Murray carves out a powerful niche in the U.S. Senate**

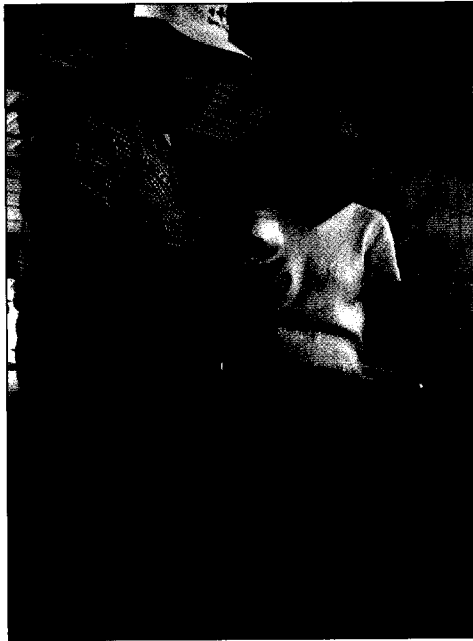
*In the 10th of PEOPLE's occasional series on the 13 women currently in the U.S. Senate, we profile Washington Democrat Patty Murray. Raised in a tiny town by parents of modest means, she could not afford even such basics as health care. On the Hill since 1993, she has made it her duty to put the needs of average families first.*

Patty Murray was a young mother of two when she first visited the Washington State Senate in the early '80s. Then a homemaker, she had come to fight against budget cuts for an educational program that had helped her improve her parenting skills. "I was trying to figure out why these people couldn't understand what was happening with kids and families," she says. "And I realized that I was looking down on all these old bald heads."

She lost the battle, at least temporarily. But the encounter helped spur Murray, 51, to enter local politics a few years later, starting down a path that would lead her to the U.S. Senate. There she has made a name for herself as a one-time soccer mom who represents the interests of ordinary folks. "She didn't create this image to win a political race," says



Murray "never tries to be something she's not," says Sen. Tom Daschle, a fan.



"She's gutsy," a colleague says of Murray (at a Yakima, Wash., apple farm).

Sid Snyder, majority leader of the state senate. "That's who she is."

Those feelings shaped her political priorities—such as the Family & Medical Leave Act she helped pass in her first year in D.C. and the education bill she successfully sponsored in 1998, aimed at hiring 100,000 new teachers nationally. Her achievements have brought her increasing clout. Appointed last December as the first woman to chair the Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee, she was charged with raising funds for the party's upcoming Senate races. Since the Sept. 11 attacks, she has a new challenge, chairing the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Transportation, which oversees legislation regarding the nation's airports—such as the airline-security bill the Senate unanimously passed in October. Terry McAuliffe, chair of the

Democratic National Committee, says Murray's sensitivity and determination will make her a major player. "Because she's so unassuming, she's often underestimated," he says. "But she is up and coming—one of the Senate's shining stars."

Murray was born in 1950, one of twin sisters, to David Johns, a dime-store manager, and his homemaker wife, Beverly (both deceased), in the rural community of Bothell, Wash. The family—Murray has five other siblings besides her twin—got by but couldn't afford to buy health insurance or even visit a clinic. "We suffered through measles, chicken pox and everything else that kids get," says Murray, "and we never went to see a doctor." Still, the children gained a civic sense. Beverly cleaned the local church every Sunday morning, and the family regularly took food to poor families. "My parents taught me that we have an obligation to something bigger than ourselves," says Murray.

They also instilled a strong work ethic in their children, who labored in a variety of jobs from picking strawberries to helping in the store. "We all worked," says Murray's twin sister, Peggy Zehnder, a seventh-grade teacher in Bellingham, Wash., "because that's what we needed to do." It became even more important when Patty was 16 and her family learned that her father had multiple sclerosis. "It was heart stopping," says Murray. "It made us understand that you have to be able to rely on yourself and your family."

With David incapacitated, the Johnses went on welfare briefly, and then Beverly took an accounting course with government aid and got a job as a bookkeeper for a ferry company. That experience gave Murray an appreciation for how government can help in times of need. "Without the social services that allowed her to get the training she needed and get a job," says Murray, "my family wouldn't have made it."



"Women have to work harder in the Senate than men," says Murray (winning in '98).

As a teenager Patty escaped into books and played flute and piccolo in the school band but had no interest in politics beyond becoming secretary of a girls' service club. Then, as a Washington State University freshman, she successfully led a 1968 protest against a dress code requiring skirts each night at dinner.

It was also at WSU that she met Rob Murray, whom she married in 1972. She worked as a secretary to help put him through his last years of school. Rob, now 51, was in the Coast Guard and went on to work loading ship cargo, and they settled in Shoreline, a bedroom suburb north of Seattle, where she became a full-time mom to their son Randy, born in 1976, and daughter Sara, born three years later.

Murray was volunteering at a state-funded cooperative preschool when she learned that the legislature was going to cancel the program's funding. Murray drove with the kids 72 miles to Olympia to complain. But when she met with a legislator, she says, "I was told that I could not make a difference, that I was just a mom in tennis shoes." She took that as a challenge. "A mom in tennis shoes has as much right to

make policy as these guys in tasseled shoes," says Murray, who enlisted friends and made enough calls to restore funding.

Inspired by that success, she ran for the school board in Shoreline, losing by 300 votes. But when the candidate she had opposed died three months later, she was appointed to fill his term and stayed for seven years, eventually becoming president. Despite an economic slump and a public eager to see lower taxes, she spoke out for public-school funding. "It wasn't a popular view, and I admired her bravery for that," says Jack Rogers, a retired Shoreline school administrator. In 1988 she was elected to the state senate, where she helped pass one of the nation's first state family-leave laws. Buoyed by her success, she ran for the U.S. Senate in 1992, challenging five-term Republican Congressman Rod Chandler for the seat vacated by Democrat Brock Adams. She was dramatically outspent, but her populist message appealed to voters, and she took 54 percent of the vote.

In the capital she learned that women still had to prove themselves. "A woman, when she gets elected, they



A top advocate for education, Murray visited a Seattle school in September.



Husband Rob (with Patty and grandson Aidan) admires his wife's "quiet, inner strength."

wonder if she really knows anything," says Murray. What she did know was the difficulty of balancing work and family. "She wants her staff to be home

with their kids," says chief aide Ben McMakin. "When she calls me at home about work stuff, she actually apologizes." Her own balancing act has become more complicated. After son Randy graduated in 1995 from a Virginia high school, husband Rob and daughter Sara returned to Shoreline, where Rob, who resumed a job as a computer-systems director, "can be seen as his own person," says Murray.

She returns there most weekends, hiking, salmon fishing with her family and visiting constituents. During the week, she e-mails her family daily. She takes satisfaction in the work but never forgets that it was family that got her into this in the first place. "The people I meet in Washington, D.C., aren't going to care about me when I leave here," she says. "My family will."

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### Reflecting on What You Have Read

- 1 It would come as no surprise to most readers to learn that a politician (or, for that matter, anyone else) cultivates a public image that does not reflect his or her private life. In what ways do the authors of this profile try to convince you that Senator Murray's public image and private life are one and the same? Do they succeed in convincing you? Why or why not?
- 2 To what extent do the photographs of Senator Murray convey an image of someone who represents the interests of "ordinary" citizens? What aspects of the photographs help create this image?
- 3 Look closely at the captions that accompany the photographs. What do those captions add to your understanding of or attitudes toward Senator Murray?
- 4 How does this profile explain Senator Murray's reasons for becoming interested in politics? Why might this explanation seem especially appealing to readers of *People* magazine?
- 5 The authors of this profile go into detail about the challenges Senator Murray has faced as a child and as a parent. What reasons do you see for including information about these challenges?

# Writing in a Visual Age

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*Cover Photos:* directional buttons/keypad: © Steven Puetzer/Photonica; woman taking photograph: © Brandan Harman/Photonica; minidisks in cases: © Neo Vision/Photonica

*Composition:* TechBooks/GTS

*Printing and Binding:* R.R. Donnelley & Sons Company

*President:* Joan E. Feinberg

*Editorial Director:* Denise B. Wydra

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Library of Congress Control Number: 2004101197

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Manufactured in the United States of America.

1 0 9 8 7 6

f e d c b a

*For information, write:* Bedford/St. Martin's, 75 Arlington Street,  
Boston, MA 02116 (617-399-4000)

ISBN: 0-312-39497-7

EAN: 978-0-312-39497-4

### *Acknowledgments*

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