

ARTS & SOCIETY

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Running Matic

Katie O'Malley is happy to talk
about life as prosecutor, mom,
and political wife
and daughter —
provided you can
catch up with her.



By Dan Fesperman, *Page 9.*

COVER STORY

The calm amid the chaos

Katie O'Malley juggles law, politics and motherhood. The key? A large extended family and being 'totally groomed for craziness.'

By DAN FESPERMAN : SUN STAFF

Monday morning, and another spinning week of the Power Mom derby begins for Baltimore County prosecutor Katie O'Malley. The alarm sounds the starting bell at 6 a.m. Time to gather homework, breakfast, car keys, school lunches, the briefcase. Then, drop off the kids at school, the nanny's. Arrive at the courthouse. Put away criminals the whole day through. Run a few miles. Drive home to give the kids dinner, a bath and a book at bedtime, while all along the telephone rings like a fire alarm.

The girls of the house — Grace, 8, and Tara, 7 — seem to go with the flow.

The boys are a different story.

They're "a handful," sweet as pie but throwing themselves with abandon at everything that looms into sight. There is William, 2. And there is Martin, 36. He's the husband and father and, come Tuesday, the new mayor of Baltimore. And ever since he decided last summer to run for the city's top job, the O'Malley household has rarely slowed down for more than a few minutes at a time.

But hold the sympathy cards.

"Everybody is saying, 'Poor Katie,' but if it bothered her that much she wouldn't do it," says her boss, Baltimore County State's Attorney Sandra O'Connor, who catches blurred glimpses of O'Malley coming and

HHHHH!" But you're like, 'Oh, that's great,' because you can't say, 'Listen, do you have any idea how completely annoying this is?' So, you want to make sure you get everybody's name and number down and then hand it to Martin and go 'Here. This is what you wanted.'"

At such times it can sound as if Katie O'Malley thinks she has finally bitten off more than she can chew. Don't bet on it, friends and family say.

"Katie has always had a very full plate," longtime friend Joan Sweeney says. "I think she'll manage very well."

Besides, it's apparently her destiny. Look into her past, and it is loaded with foreshadowing of a full and busy life.

The power of family



going from the office just down the hall. "Anytime you've got that many balls in the air, it's got to be tough, and now she's about to add another one. But I think she loves the political side of it."

Indeed, if anyone seems especially trained and equipped for juggling law, politics and motherhood, it's Katie O'Malley, daughter of an attorney general, veteran campaigner and longtime student of the chaos theory of living.

The secret ingredient in making this formula work is family. Her mom, Barbara Curran, picks up the kids from school and day care. Brother Max baby-sits. So does sister Mary, whose daughter Bella is a playmate of Grace and Tara. Even her sister in Florida, Alice Florin, visits a fair amount, and Martin's parents frequently drive up from Rockville.

Then there's her pop, Joseph Curran, attorney general of Maryland. Hardly a day goes by when he doesn't phone to chat or see how things are going. At times, in fact, it can seem that the entire Curran clan is either knocking at the door or calling.

"Some nights when the phone would be ringing for the fifth time," Martin says, "I'd say, 'Katie, this has to be Alice,' because all of the other Currans had already checked in."

Lately when the phone rings it's more often a job seeker or someone with an idea to peddle, someone who wants the ear of the new mayor but will settle for the ear of the new mayor's wife. Even if it's after 10 p.m.

"The phone's awful," she says. "It's awful. People say, 'I've got some ideas on school partnerships ...' and I'm thinking, 'AHH-

The power of family

The Curran household was a place where Dad was nearly always holding office or running for one, or both. And even though Mom stayed home, she, too, had gone to law school. The kids of the house pretty much had to pull together, especially the three sisters, born one year after the other, sharing a bedroom and school uniforms, double dating and swapping gossip.

The kids always pitched in for Dad at campaign time, going door-to-door on hot summer afternoons, knowing that the cool reward of a Slurpee waited at the end of the trail.

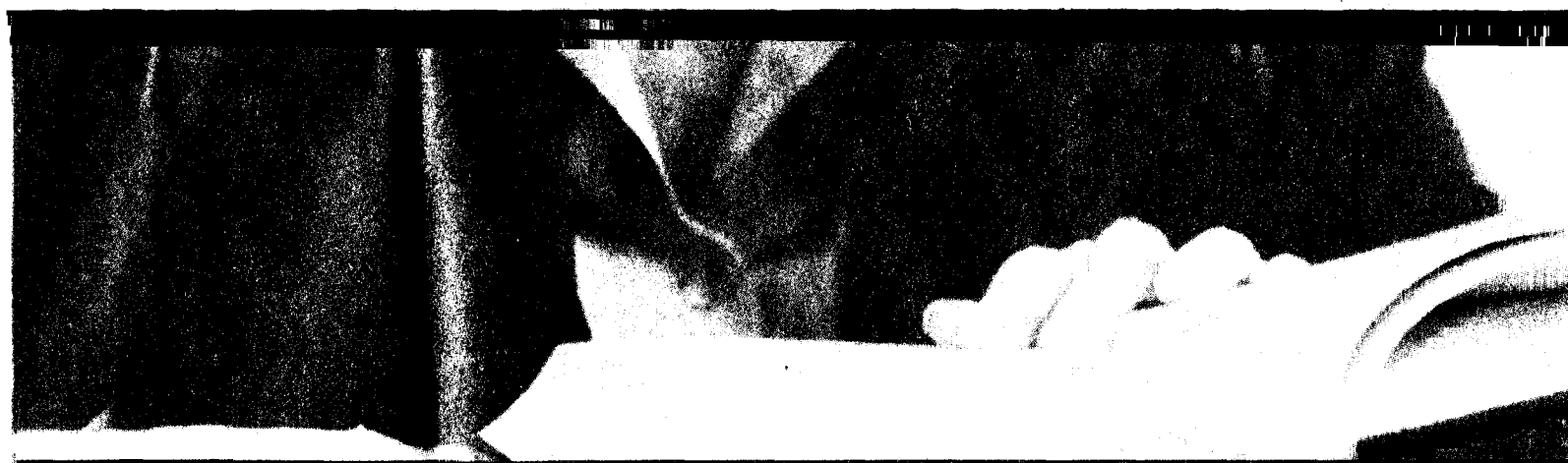
Katie thought some about those afternoons two summers ago, when she recruited her own daughters to campaign weekend after weekend for her brother Max, who was running for the House of Delegates.

Grace, her eldest, began to tire of the routine, Katie recalls.

"She was getting a little sick of it near August, and she said, 'Are we going to be doing this for the rest of our lives?' and I said, 'No, no, the campaign's going to be over in a few weeks.' And then I just looked at her and I started to think: 'Oooh, I better not tell her I've been doing it my whole life.'"

Last summer, with Martin's mayoral campaign under way, on came another flashback. The Curran home had been a place where repairs tended to be put off, particularly in the case of the dishwasher. It went unused for 20 years, perennially awaiting the repairman who would be summoned "after the election."

At the O'Malley household, a modest two-story brick home in



JOHN MAKELY : SUN STAFF

Prosecutor and Mom: With school pictures of her children on the bulletin board in her office, Katie O'Malley prepares a case.

northeast Baltimore, the reigning symbol of lagging repairs is the deck out back. It creaks and wobbles, and the warped wood has turned a deep and splintery gray. In a family of lawyers, it has all the hallmarks of a tort in the making. So, Katie asked about getting a new one.

"After the election," Martin replied. Wonder what it will look like in 20 years.

Childhood offered harsher lessons, too, and some still come in handy. What's so unnerving about a bunch of hecklers at your husband's news conference compared with a nasty bunch of white supremacist demonstrators picketing your front lawn because your dad voted for equal housing legislation? How tough can it be getting over an election loss once you've stood next to your dad while he conceded defeat in a congressional primary?

But the Curran family's greatest trial, and the event that still galvanizes its intense loyalty, was the death of Katie's brother William at the age of 16 months. Katie was 7 then. Her sister Alice was 8, Mary was 9. And one day Katie went up to William's room and found him limp, not breathing. The family rushed him to the hospital, but it was too late to help. The cause of death is now known as Reye's syndrome, a condition in children that can follow a viral infection, sometimes triggered by taking aspirin.

Dad came home to break the awful news.

"Telling the girls," Joe Curran says, "was probably the most difficult thing I've ever had to do."

"It left a hole in our hearts," says Mary Curran.

"I remember everything," recalls Katie, now 37. "It was awful. I think that experience, of losing a sibling who everyone obviously loved so very much, really brought the family close together. ... A lot of it has to do with the realization that at any time it can all be over, for any of us."

When Katie and Martin's son was born two years ago, there was no doubt that his name would be William. Mary's son, who's also 2, got the Irish version of the name. He's Liam.

In the public eye

The closeness of the Curran home produced in Katie a personality that works well under stress, and in close quarters. She is straightforward without being blunt, with a wit that is sharp but not wounding. Her warmth seems genuine, not forced.

They are qualities that serve a courtroom lawyer well before a jury, in a profession that seemed like a natural even as her sisters gravitated elsewhere. Alice went into accounting. Mary became an actress, then a photographer.

But none has ever strayed far from politics — at least not during election seasons — and it was during her father's first run for attorney general in 1986 that she first caught the eye of a young man working in the U.S. Senate campaign of Barbara Mikulski. His name was Martin O'Malley, and he spotted her at a Democratic Party rally.

"I remember asking Mikulski, 'Who's that?' And she said, 'That's Curran's secret weapon, one of his beautiful daughters.'"

Some two years after that, Martin arranged a meeting through a mutual friend. A year and a half

later, they married. It was an easy match — two slender and attractive people with an abundance of energy, both raised in crowded Catholic households in the suburbs of Maryland, and both 1981 graduates of parochial prep schools. Each was a veteran campaigner from way back, and each came from a household where John F. Kennedy had been a hero.

It didn't take Martin long to launch his own campaigns, first a narrow loss to state Sen. John Pica Jr. in 1990, then a winning campaign for a city council seat the following year. By then, the hurly-burly had begun in earnest. Through those first two campaigns Katie was finishing law school, clerking for the state's attorney's office, studying for the bar exam and, oh yeah, having a first child and then carrying a second.

"It couldn't have gotten crazier," she says. "So I think we're groomed. We're totally groomed for craziness."

Then as now, family pitched in. She and Max went through law school together and studied for the bar together. Once she passed, criminal prosecution seemed like a good fit, and she became an assistant state's attorney in the office where she had been clerking. Her boss has been impressed.

"You can give her anything," O'Connor says. "She looks for work."

So, while the new mayor, a one-time defense attorney, talks about a "zero tolerance" policy on crime, his wife is already a veteran of the trenches, after years of meeting the enemy head-on.

A career in law

Sometimes it's a grind, plodding through a morning's crowded docket of thefts and assaults,

going up against small-time lowlifes with fresh haircuts, wearing their ties too tight. She deals briskly with case after case, slowed down by defendants who show up without attorneys, or attorneys who show up without their defendants.

About 40 times over the past nine years she has handled jury cases. Then she can slow down a little, put her strengths to work.

"She's great in the courtroom," O'Connor says. "She just has a great presence about her, a presence and a warmth."

Perhaps her biggest prosecution was a double murder in Middle River that had been dormant for 17 years, which she and colleague Kim Detrick handled last April. They won a conviction partly on the strength of the testimony of a remorseful accomplice, but their breakthrough was a DNA test linking the suspect to a bandanna worn by the killer.

Warren Brown, a defense attorney who has opposed her at times, says: "She's always on top of her case. She'll have her witnesses prepared, and she knows her law."

But his highest praise is that, "She's not bullyish at all, and some of them out in Baltimore County are," particularly when they're prosecuting an African-American defendant before an all-white jury, he says. "There were opportunities where she could have been heavy-handed, but she wasn't."

One of her specialties has been cases involving physical and sexual abuse of children, after O'Connor sent her to training for cases involving infant fatalities. When those are the stakes, a mother's protective zeal comes in handy. But it also makes it harder to leave behind the emotions of the case.

"She has [See O'Malley, 10F]



GENE SWEENEY JR. : SUN STAFF

The political wife: Katie gives her husband a hug after his acceptance speech in the November mayoral election.

On the cover: Katie O'Malley keeps a portrait of her husband, Martin, the city's new mayor, on her desk amid files and messages.



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COVER STORY

A full and busy life

[O'Malley, from Page 9F]

told me at times how she'll leave and get kind of teary about things," her sister Mary says.

A promotion that takes effect this January should ease that. She'll be one of the two heads of a new section prosecuting economic crimes — assorted swindles and scams.

Friends and colleagues believe there also may be a judgeship in her future, whether by appointment or by election.

"I have thought about it," she says, "because I've always been interested in public service. So I've thought about, would I want to be a state's attorney? Would I ever have a problem running for a judgeship? So I'm not sure if I'll ever rule it out, but I think after this past [mayoral] election it's definitely moved to the back burner."

The campaign

It was only six or seven months ago that her husband was talking about his own ambitions the same way. A run for mayor, in fact, wasn't even on the back burner when Mayor Kurt Schmoke announced last December that he wouldn't seek re-election.

On the television news late that night, one of the local stations began handicapping possible contenders. "My name immediately went up on the screen," Martin recalls, "and Katie and I both, as we were falling asleep with the 11 o'clock news on, chuckled and laughed. 'Look, they think you're running for mayor. Good night.' 'Good night.' We kind of blew it off."

Six months later, sensing a weak field, he entered the race. It took Katie a while to get used to the idea. Her first response had been to point to young William and say to Martin, "Take a good look at your son, because if you win you won't see him for the next four years."

As the campaign built momentum, Martin coined a phrase about Katie that became a stock part of his stump speech. He would introduce her as "the most beautiful woman in Maryland."

"I've asked him to stop that," she says. "My first reaction was to roll my eyes, but that looked pretty awful. But it did get embarrassing after a while. It's sweet, but it's also a little hokey."

It also undersold her talents as a campaigner.

"People relate to her right away," Martin says. "There are no airs to her. She's tireless and she's articulate and she's strong."

Such qualities have been tested recently. In putting together his transition team and preparing to take office, Martin has had little time to attend to his usual duties around the house. Often he has not made it home until midnight, only to head back out the door at 7 a.m. It has been enough to make the O'Malleys' earlier life together, which once seemed such a juggling act, seem leisurely by comparison, and Katie now speaks of those days with nostalgia.

"What we'd do normally, but not since the campaign, is that I'd have dinner with the kids real early, and when he'd come home he could spend a little bit of time with them before bed. Then we'd have dinner later and he'd cook, and he's a great cook. So then we would have a chance to maybe talk for an hour before we went to bed. I'm not sure if that will all come back again. I hope so, 'cause it was fun. It was our little life."

As for the never-ending phone calls that still clamor through the household late into the evening, perhaps the O'Malleys will soon become one of the last families in America to get an answering machine, or sign up for voice mail.

Wise advice

Katie also hopes to follow the advice of Dr. Patricia Schmoke, who knows this turf well. A busy professional in her own right, her oldest child was 7 when her husband was first elected mayor in 1987.

She, too, was almost hopelessly swamped for a while, perhaps even more so because she hadn't grown up in a political family.

"It used to drive me absolutely crazy at first, and after a while the requests just become overwhelming," Dr. Schmoke says. "But what you come to realize is that even though you can do a lot, you can't do it all. And the first thing you have to do is make sure that your children aren't left in the dust."

Katie has heard the advice, and believes it is sound. If she ever strays from it, she might do well to recall one of her longtime memories of her father, a man who on occasion was

also overly pressed for time.

"He'd be at the sink when I was little, and I swore he was losing his mind because he'd be talking to himself. The water's going and he's getting things together after breakfast and he's talking to himself, and I'd think, 'Oh no, he's lost it.' I'd say, 'Dad, who are you talking to?' 'Oh, I'm just practicing for court.'"

Perhaps family history will repeat itself one morning soon at the O'Malleys' kitchen sink. Perhaps not. But consider this recent moment:

It was a weekday morning, and a bad one, because Katie got stuck using Martin's car. He'd foisted it on her with some hasty words about what to do if the transmission got stuck in park, which he said happened only rarely. Just jiggle some wires beneath the gas pedal, he said.

So, of course, when she eased into the busy drop-off line at Immaculata School and put the car in park to let Grace and Tara out, the transmission stuck. The car wouldn't budge. Horns began to blow. She bent down to the gas pedal and fiddled with the wires but nothing happened. People began to shout. The horn blasts grew longer, louder. But the car just sat there. Martin's car, damn it. Until finally some guy from the school jiggled a wire and the gears lurched and she was rolling, fleeing the symphony of impatience to the sanctuary of the courthouse.

Then she strolled briskly across the street for a scheduled interview at a nearby dell, where, steam still rising, she came through the door preoccupied and, yes, muttering. Just like her dad at the kitchen sink.

Come Tuesday, when Martin is inaugurated as mayor, the potential for further muttering seems certain to increase. Maybe Grace and Tara will begin to think she's lost it.

"There's definitely going to be more to do," she says. "It will be a huge job for him. He's going to have far more people pulling on him, and people that are going to need him. I'm just trying to prepare myself mentally for how I can not be another one of those persons pulling on him, but help him if I can, and make some sort of haven so he can come in and sort of regroup."

So wish her luck. Or wish her a new transmission, or a new deck. But, please, no sympathy cards.