



Kay Bailey Hutchison

American Heroines
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Q: What have you found to be the most important trait for success in your own life?

A: Perseverance, hard work and enormous energy. I could have given up so many times, but didn't. Sometimes when I was on the verge of giving up, the last try broke the barrier.

Q: What has been your biggest obstacle, and how have you overcome it?

A: The biggest obstacle was not being able to get the first job out of law school. Major Texas law firms did not hire women. I interviewed for four months before getting one job offer; that was from the City Attorney of Houston (to whom I will be forever grateful). By the time I received this I had interviewed with KPRC-TV and decided to become a television news reporter instead of a lawyer. It turned out to be a huge advantage in my life and opened the door to public office. The classic case of "thank heavens for unanswered prayers."

Q: What, for you, was the best preparation for the "rough and tumble" of life?

A: Growing up in a small town with very supportive parents. I had a solid base of values; my friends were just good, hard-working, down to earth people. There were not a lot of frills. When I didn't get something I tried for, my parents encouraged me. When I hit obstacles in later life, I had learned to keep trying, believing something good would eventually happen.

Q: What is your greatest negotiating strategy?

A: Try to find a result that makes both sides feel they have accomplished something.

Q: What is your most helpful childhood memory?

A: My wonderful parents.

Q: What is your best advice to young women starting in politics?

A: Don't go into politics too early. Obtain real world experience in a profession or business. You will be more effective, have better goals, and know what your core principles are when you have been in the work place for 10 years or longer.

Q: How have you managed to combine the passion and duties of politics and motherhood?

A: I try to avoid evening functions so I can be with our children in the evenings. I plan breakfast meetings after they are in school. I try very hard to allocate time and take them with me on trips and to events when possible. Every working mom faces the pull of responsibilities, and we all try to manage so that our children grow up knowing that they are loved and that we have given them the tools to live a good and productive life.

Q: What do you think of the state of American politics today, and how could it be improved?

A: We would all like to see less partisanship, eliminate personal attacks of any kind, and guard against the criminalization of politics. We must encourage our best and brightest to serve in public office; nothing is more discouraging than the personal attacks that many campaigns employ.

Q: If you had to pick one of the many causes that you have championed over your career, which one would you say has been the most important to you, and why?

A: Elevating the quality of life for our military. Those who serve in this way are protecting America, and they should have our utmost respect.

Homemaker IRAs and pension reform. We should not penalize a family when the mother decides not to work outside the home. The tax code has done that for years; I am trying to correct this inequity.

Bringing more emphasis to scientific research and education. America must keep its emphasis on research in science and medicine to continue to lead in technological and medical breakthroughs.

Q: What writers have inspired you most as a child, and which ones inspire you now? What do you read for fun?

A: Early childhood: Grimms Fairy Tales and Hans Christian Anderson Fairy Tales Elementary and Junior High: Hardy Boys by Franklin W. Dixon (Leslie McFarlane) High School and College: Frances Parkinson Keyes.

Now for pleasure: MM Kaye, Jeffrey Archer, Herman Wouk, Colleen McCullough, Larry McMurtry, Jean Auel, James Clavell, Edmund Morris, David McCullough, Cokie Roberts.

I am partial to biographies and historical novels.