

Q&A with *Tom DeLay*

At one time, Tom DeLay was hailed as one of the most powerful Republicans in Washington D.C. After a 21-year stretch as a politician, DeLay is living happily in Sugar Land enjoying life as a father, author, foster care advocate, and political consultant. His 2009 appearance on *Dancing with the Stars* brought DeLay back into the limelight.

How did *Dancing with the Stars* find you? I'm not really sure. They called my book agent out of the blue. I thought it was a great idea and my daughter who loves dancing was ballistic! I accepted right away.

What was it like being on the show? It was a real kick, but a lot of work. We practiced six days a week for four to six hours a day for the five weeks before the show. I didn't think I signed up for that much work! But the show fit me well and I had a great time until I had to quit because I had stress fractures in both feet. It was physically grueling, especially for a 62-year-old.

How did you get involved in politics? I was involved in politics my whole life, I just didn't know it. I was in the seventh grade when I won my first election by beating an eighth grader for student body president. Then I was on homeowners' associations and other boards. I started working for candidates and became a precinct chairman. They gave me a guide and I read the whole thing. When someone suggested I run for a state representative position, I thought about it, read a textbook on campaigns, ran, and to make a long story short, I won.

Why did you move to Sugar Land? I lived in Simonton for about 10 years and in 1978, I was elected to the state legislature [representing Fort Bend County]. The distance was hard on my family, so in 1982, we moved everything to Sugar Land. Sugar Land was the most dynamic area around and we liked suburban life. Everything was happening in Sugar Land.

You had three foster children live with you. How did that come about? My wife Christine loves kids. She is a high school teacher and she's weird: She loves teenagers! She got involved with Child Advocates of Fort Bend. We learned how awful our system is for these children and then we traveled all over trying to see how these children should be cared for. The result was the Rio Bend community.

What were you like in high school? I was class president, involved in everything from school plays to football. I graduated in 1965 third in my class. In 1967, I married my high school sweetheart, Christine, with whom I started going steady as a sophomore. We have been married for 43 years come August.

What was the most difficult aspect of politics? Maintaining a sense of family. While in the state legislature, I completely neglected my family. [When I was elected to the House,] I had to completely reorganize my priorities and make my family come first. You can get so wrapped up in it that your family suffers. I missed the first 12 years of my daughter's life, so when I went to Washington, I moved my family there. I don't miss the long hours, but I do miss having a say.

There is a lot of negative talk about Congress being so divided. What do you think about partisanship in Congress? Division comes from the country, not from individual politicians. Politicians are a mirror image of their districts. I believe debate is healthy for the country. People don't have to agree all the time. You work for the ideas and what your constituents like. It is better to debate in the House and Senate than with guns on the street. I welcome people bringing ideas no matter what they are.

You've been around a lot of extremely successful people. What would you say is a characteristic these people have in common? The most successful people I've met know what their world view is. They know who they are and where they want to go. They also have a "never-quit" attitude. **SLM**

Interview and photograph by Jen Petty

JEN PETTY loves working as the editor of *Sugar Land Magazine*, but foremost is the mother to three sweet kids.

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