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NANCY PELOSI INTERVIEW
MAKERS: WOMEN WHO MAKE AMERICA
KUNHARDT FILM FOUNDATION

Nancy Pelosi
United States Representative
7/12/2011
Interviewed by Betsy West
Total Running Time: 43 minutes and 01 seconds

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ON SCREEN TEXT:

Makers: Women Who Make America
Kunhardt Film Foundation

ON SCREEN TEXT:

Nancy Pelosi
United States Representative

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BETSY WEST:

You're ready. So Leader Pelosi, I want to start at the beginning and I want to ask you about your upbringing, where you were brought up and what your family was like.

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NANCY PELOSI:

I was brought up in Baltimore, Maryland. We lived in Little Italy, in the Italian section of Baltimore. We were devoutly Catholic, fiercely patriotic, proud of our Italian American heritage, and staunchly democratic.

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BETSY WEST:

And your siblings?

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NANCY PELOSI:

I was the seventh child, first daughter, youngest child. Six boys, one girl. One of the boys died when he was young and so I was raised with five older brothers. I highly recommend that.

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BETSY WEST:

You do recommend it?

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NANCY PELOSI:

I do.

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BETSY WEST:

Because why?

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NANCY PELOSI:

Well, they were wonderful. It's the only way I knew and it was fine with me.

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BETSY WEST:

What were the attitudes of your parents toward you as the only girl in the family?

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NANCY PELOSI:

The attitude my parents took toward me, as the only girl and the youngest in the family, was overly protective. And then on top of that, having five older brothers to be overly protective. So I was always declaring my independence, pushing people aside, making my own way, and independent, I think that would be the word to describe me.

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BETSY WEST:

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What do you think that your parents' expectations were for you back then?

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NANCY PELOSI:

Well, we're talking about a long time ago and expectations were different then. I think my father thought that- I don't know that he thought I would get married, but that I would be a professional woman, not that I would run for office. My mother thought I would always live with her or be a nun. And when I said I was getting married, it was like, "Well, we always thought you'd stay with us or be a nun."

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BETSY WEST:

Did she try to really actually push you to be a nun?

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NANCY PELOSI:

Well, as I said, I had an independent spirit. So if she did, I didn't notice, although she had some strong suggestions in that regard.

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BETSY WEST:

We've seen the picture of you, the swearing in of your dad as Mayor of Baltimore. How did that influence you, to grow up in a political family?

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NANCY PELOSI:

Well, I knew right from that day forward that I didn't like to be the center of attention. I did not consider it... I was glad when it was over. I was thrilled to be swearing in my father. I had to recite a little speech, which the nuns taught me when I was in first grade. But the minute the spotlight was off, that was when I was happiest.

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BETSY WEST:

So you didn't like it at first.

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NANCY PELOSI:

No, I didn't. I was very shy. It's hard for some people to believe that, but I was the shy one. So in my involvement in politics over time, it was always behind the scenes with state chair, promoting others.

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BETSY WEST:

What kind of an influence did your dad have on you?

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NANCY PELOSI:

My father was a star. He was a great natural orator. He cared about people. He fought for them. And he was great and a great dad. I learned a lot of things, just watching him, learned how to win elections, things like that, learned how to count. That was good.

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BETSY WEST:

Count votes?

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NANCY PELOSI:

Count votes. But my mother was a bigger influence. My father was the public figure and so people think of him, but my mother was really the force. She was just absolutely great. She had lived even in my generation or my daughter's generations, my goodness, Lord knows what she would have been able to accomplish. Instead, she was in a very Italian American culture, a culturally conservative community, very liberal politically, however.

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BETSY WEST:

How was she a force?

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NANCY PELOSI:

Well, you can imagine having seven children, raising six of them, makes you strong. But she was a beautiful lady and she loved her mother, loved her parents, and that was a lesson to us about respect for family. She was sort of like my father's unpaid assistant, organizer, community activist, and the rest.

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And she always taught us about public service really being very personal. My father taught us as being political and official, she taught us about it being very personal. The doorbell would ring and people would come there, looking for a job, looking for a bed in the city hospital, housing in the public housing, in the projects, food. She'd always have them in too... You never knew who was going to be sitting at the table, but she always taught us that we had that responsibility.

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When I was a little girl, I knew how to tell people how to get a bed in the city hospital, housing in the projects, all the rest of it, just by listening to her. But she was beautiful and strong and respectful of all of our neighbors and friends, in a very wide circle of what you might call political friends.

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BETSY WEST:

Were you conscious, at the time, outside your family of girls and boys being treated differently? Did you ever wish you were one of your brothers, wish you were a boy?

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NANCY PELOSI:

No. Well, I didn't wish that, period. Not that I didn't love them and think they were wonderful, but I had my mother as a role model. And no, that would never have even occurred to me. It's just that it was a different time. My brother really demonstrated an interest in politics and he was the one that was groomed and he became the Mayor of Baltimore, too, my brother, Tommy. Nobody ever thought that I would be interested, starting with me, that I would be interested in politics.

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Again, when I was in first grade, my father became mayor. When I went away to college, my father was still mayor. So in the '50s, in my teenage years, I just wanted to rock around the clock, be normal, normal teenagers.

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BETSY WEST:

So you were married soon after college and began a family. Five kids, six years. That's pretty amazing. Tell me about those days, your family life.

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NANCY PELOSI:

Well, when I was married, my husband and I lived in Manhattan, which I loved. I love New York. And so we were on top of the world. There we were,

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out of college, living in Manhattan. We proceeded then to have five children. On the day I brought my baby, Alexandra, home from the hospital, that week, my oldest child, Nancy Corinne, had turned six.

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So fifth child, six years old. Alexandra was the only child born in San Francisco. Four of them were born in New York. What was it like? What's it like not to wash your face some days? It was busy.

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BETSY WEST:

But fun.

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NANCY PELOSI:

Oh, my god, glorious. Sometimes, when young women would come up to me in Congress, when I came to Congress, they'd say, "What's it like to be a woman member of Congress" I'd say, "It's nothing like a newborn baby." It's great to be woman member of Congress, but it's nothing like a newborn baby. Some people take issue with that, but that's what I think.

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BETSY WEST:

You began your family just as the women's movement was taking off. Did that have any impact on you?

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NANCY PELOSI:

I think it was a little bit further along by then, but... Well, my mother, if she were at a certain point of life at that time, would've been the first in line for the women's movement. She was always encouraging women. In fact, I remember, when President Clinton was president, every time he would appoint a woman, whether it be Madeleine Albright or Wendy Sherman, whoever it was, every time he appointed a woman, she'd be writing me a note saying,-

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- "Please be sure she knows I'm watching her, praying for her." She was very advanced in terms of women's expectations, aspirations, what women should be able to do. So while, on a formal way, it was something that I... I think I probably engaged in it more officially in the '70s, a little bit later once my children were in school all day and all of that, when we were fighting for paycheck equity, women, 79% for every dollar. That was one of our banners at the 1976 Democratic Convention.

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My mother was really, probably, she didn't realize it at the time, but she was probably one of the early feminists. She didn't know it by that name, but she was a strong advocate for women. And on the other hand, she wanted me to be a nun. So she was going to protect me from all of the world's ills.

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BETSY WEST:

So you have a pack of kids that you get involved in politics. How did that happen?

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NANCY PELOSI:

Well, it happened when I was a little girl. Of course, you never walked into our home, as lovely as it was, without seeing on the table there at the entrance bumper stickers, placards, political pins, brochures, all the rest of that. Whether it was a federal election, statewide election, city election, my father running for mayor, whomever, we were engaged in elections all the time. It was great. Campaigning was a way of life for us.

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The better part, of course, was after the campaigns, to do the public service, but we never shied away from the fight. And so I always understood that we all had a commitment to public service that we had to honor, that it was a noble calling, public service was, and that we all had our role to play and we had a responsibility to our community and to our neighbors. And that stayed with me and, of course, I carried that with me. How I got back in... I mean, I pamphletted with my stroller in New York, with my babies in the stroller, go door to door.

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It's hard to do in New York because sometimes they don't let you in the apartment building. Sometimes you have to disguise yourself as a trick or treater around Halloween right before the November election. But one way or another, we were slipping things under the door. But later, I really did not had the faintest interest, inclination or anything to be involved, myself. I did accept a position to be on the Library Commission in San Francisco.

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The Mayor of San Francisco, Joe Alioto, called me one day I was home and he said, "Nancy, this is Joe Alioto. How are you? What are you doing? Making a great big pot of pasta?" I said, "No, Mr. Mayor. I'm reading the New York Times." His wife loves when I tell this story because it was that time of the day when the children were home from school, they already had their snack, they were doing their homework, and I was always on call, but I also was reading the paper.

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And he called and he said he wanted me to be appointed to the Library Commission. I said, "No, I love the library. I always volunteer, but I don't need any official title," and he said, "No. Yes, you do. You don't do these things and volunteer. You get an official title with it." And that's a lesson that I learned from him that I passed on to other young women, as well. Be recognized for what you do.

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And when I went on the Library Commission, I loved it and people wanted to know what my opinion was and how I was going to vote and would go out to

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the neighborhood libraries to hear how important... Libraries are important because wealthier people buy their books, other people go to the library, or they go there for research, at least they did in those days, before all the technology. Now, they still do, in a different way. But in any event, the lesson of that story was that, be recognized for the contribution that you make. I tell that to young women all the time.

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BETSY WEST:

So you went on to the Library Commission and then you got more involved.

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NANCY PELOSI:

Well, what happened was the Library Commission, as with other public entities, was needing more funds. And somebody said to me, "Does anybody here know Leo McCarthy?" He was the Speaker of the Assembly in California. And I said, "I know Leo well. We can go talk to Leo." So we went to see Leo to see if we could get more state funding for public libraries. And then one thing led to another and I was big supporter of Leo McCarthy and he became a big supporter of mine,-

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-encouraged me to be a party officer, eventually the chair of the California Democratic Party all through Leo. He was really, if I had a California mentor, it was he, but that was the transition. It was, "Okay, I'm trying to do normal

things that normal people do, but they're seeking a solution in government and, therefore, politics. So I know how to do that.”

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BETSY WEST:

You didn't see yourself as-

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NANCY PELOSI:

No.

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BETSY WEST:

-a public person. So tell me how that happened. How did you-

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NANCY PELOSI:

Well, what happened was the path from the kitchen to the Congress goes as follows, as a supporter of Leo McCarthy, who was the Assembly Speaker in California, and as a friend of Jerry Brown, when Jerry Brown decided to run for president, Leo was his chairperson, his chairman. And so I said, “Leo, if Jerry wants to run for president, the California primary is far too late. It's in June. And by then, we will probably have a nominee who can then dominate the party in California.”

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Appointments that are made, delegates election, national committee members and all are made by the presidential at that time. It's changed now. So I said, "If he wants to run for president, he should run for president in Maryland." In Maryland, they had something on the ballot that said that, if you're a recognized candidate, any place in the country, your name is placed on the Maryland ballot. You can take it off or you can leave it on.

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So I said to Leo, "Let's talk to Jerry about leaving his name on the Maryland ballot," which he did and we went, established a campaign, my brother and my father, all that, and friends, and he won. And then when we went back to California, Jerry Brown said, "Nancy Pelosi is the political architect of my victory in Maryland," and boom, then I became a national committee woman, a chair of Northern California Democratic Party, chair of the party, dah, dah, dah. But that was really the exit from the kitchen.

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BETSY WEST:

What about the decision to put yourself out there to run for Congress?

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NANCY PELOSI:

Well, that was not for a few years later. '76 is when Jerry ran for president. It wasn't until '87 that, in the meantime, I became chair of the party. We

attracted the Democratic Convention to California. It was wonderful. We nominated Walter Mondale and the first woman to be on a national ticket, Geraldine Ferraro, very emotional, Italian American. We had a congresswoman, Congresswoman Sala Burton, who was my dear friend and I loved her very much, as did my children and my husband,-

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-she had followed in her husband's footsteps, Phillip Burton, who was a giant in the Congress. Then when he passed away, she became the congresswoman. And then when she took ill, she encouraged me to run. She said, "I want to support you. I want to endorse your candidacy." It was nothing I had really even thought about, but she said, "It'll make me feel better if you would say you will run," because she was not well.

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So I did and, within a matter of weeks, she passed away. So I was, boom, just boom. And I was thinking, two years from now... She said, "I'm not going to run for reelection in two years." Two years from now, it was six weeks from now. So I talked about it with my husband and my children, especially my youngest daughter, Alexandra, because four of the children were already in college. We had one at home. Alexandra was going into senior year. She would be in senior year when I would take office.

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So I went with all the sincerity and to my baby daughter and said, "Alexandra. Now, Mommy has a chance to run for Congress. I don't know if I'll win or not, but what's most important to me is you. And if you want me to be here with

you, that's a good decision. There's no bad decision here, or I can run for Congress. Either way, I'm happy." She said, "Mother, get a life." I had never heard the expression before.

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This is 24 years ago. I never heard the expression, "Get a life," before. So I did, in Congress, and she was okay with that. In fact, she said, "What teenage daughter wouldn't want her mother away for two or three nights a week?" She's very close to my husband, so it all worked out.

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BETSY WEST:

Well, she has a point. A lot of political experts said you couldn't win the primary. You were called a dilettante. What was your strategy?

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NANCY PELOSI:

Well, the thing is is that I'm never one to be characterized by somebody else. Otherwise, how could I even do my job? Many of the people that were in the race were people I had had events for at my home, who had sung my praises so much as a great party chair and all the rest of that. I thought we were friends. But I knew, growing up in politics and from my own experience in the political arena, that there's nothing as, shall we say, can be as mean-spirited as an intra-party fight, an internecine battle there.

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And so I knew. And so my friends would call me and say, “Can you believe they said that about you?” I'd say, “Why are you wasting my time? If you're upset by what they're saying, go volunteer at the campaign office, raise me some money, reach out to friends, but don't... What is the purpose of your call? I don't care what they're saying. I'm running my race. I'm not looking back at where they are. And if I were not in front, I wouldn't be the target.” And I think it surprised people when I was the front runner, right from the start.

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BETSY WEST:

Do you think you were underestimated?

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NANCY PELOSI:

Well, either I was underestimated or they decided to take that tact, but they always underestimate women or they try to characterize. And that's another message that I give to young women. Do not allow yourself to be characterized by them. There is no secret sauce. They always have this mystique, a man in a suit with a tie. Okay. There's a given that certain things go with that. Uh-uh. You have something very special to contribute.

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Have confidence in what your goal is, what your vision is about our country or community, what your knowledge is about getting a job done with a plan

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to do so, and how you can attract support to do it. That's about leadership. And so I never let them bother me, but the more demeaning they would try to be, to me, that just showed how desperate they were.

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BETSY WEST:

So you get to Congress, it's still pretty much a boys' club then, the late '80s. Can you describe what that was like?

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NANCY PELOSI:

Suppose you went to a dinner and there were 435 people there, so it's at about 40 some tables, and not two of them would be filled by women. That's what it was like, not two of them were filled by women. It was overwhelming. And I think Barbara Boxer used to say, "In the beginning, they thought it was nice, and then they thought it was... something different was happening."

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BETSY WEST:

You mean, having women there.

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NANCY PELOSI:

Having women there. Yeah. I had a sense of responsibility. I think all of us who served then, and now, had felt that we represented our own districts. That was who sent us there and that's who we spoke for, but we also felt a relationship with all the women in the country who cared about what we were doing in Congress. And later on, when I became leader, I more clearly assumed that responsibility, but it was...

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Well, I don't know how different it is now, but it was a time where you would go sit at the table and you'd make a suggestion and then they'd say, "Next." The next person would make a suggestion. If it were a man, he said exactly what you said, they said, "Isn't that great? Let's go with what Joe suggested." And you think, "Well, I just suggested that," but I think women overwhelmingly have that experience.

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BETSY WEST:

You hear this all the time.

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NANCY PELOSI:

It's stunning. And if there are two women at the table, then you look at each other and say, "Oh my gosh." I think the... funniest example of this was we used to go out Tuesday night, all of us. It would be a certain group of us who were all friends, some from California, and just friends. And we would relax

and it would be funny. And there weren't that many women in Congress. So therefore, at the table, say there would be 15, a dozen people, maybe.

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Well, Barbara Boxer, Barbara Canalli, and I were usually the three women who were at the table. And you'd talk, you'd just jump in because nobody asks you what you think, never. So one night, they start talking about when their babies were born. They were talking about childbirth. And they're going on. "Oh, I'll never forget it, I'll never forget it. They put on the green gown, went in, had the mask, the whole thing. And I brought my camera and I took pictures. You want to see the pictures?"

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The other one would say, "Well, I went in, two minutes, I was out the door. Uh-uh. I was fainting and out the-" And they were going on and on. And we're looking at each other and to think, did it ever occur to them that we might know something more about childbirth and what it was like that day or evening than they do? Or that we may not even want to hear about it, be the part of childbearing and rearing that we want to talk about over dinner? And so when we confronted them with this,-

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- "We understand that you never ask our opinion on anything, but do you think you could've turned around and say, 'What do you think?'" Well, what we would've thought is they sounded really like bozos, "Oh, I had on the green gown, I had on the mask, I had my camera." Oh, it's all about you. Right? Here's the mom, here's the baby. It's all about you. So that was like, the worst.

A week or so later, we were at dinner with the loveliest man, Don Edwards. Don Edwards was a congressman from California. He was the floor leader for the ERA.

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He was the feminist of the men. And we were having dinner and we were talking about a subject and he turned to me and he said, "What do you think, Nancy?" And I thought, "Oh, Don, I mean, you have no idea what that sounds like. As a matter of fact, last week," told the whole story. Well, they were all at the table. They said, "We never did that. We never did that." They didn't even know what they didn't know, about what they did. Imagine. Bozos.

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And some of them are my very best friends in Congress, but that just gives you some idea that they never even thought that we might have an opinion or we might say we don't want to hear about it.

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BETSY WEST:

Well, let's talk about that transition. At one point you were asked, you said, "I'm not interested in leadership."

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NANCY PELOSI:

Early on. Yeah.

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BETSY WEST:

Early on, "I'm not interested." So how did that evolve? The opening came up for the whip and you went after it aggressively. How did that happen?

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NANCY PELOSI:

Well, early on, people were saying, "You should run for leadership," this or that. First of all, I wasn't even coming to Congress. Then I got here, thinking I'm doing my civic duty. And everybody said to me, "You're going to love working on the issues. You love politics because you love policy. You're going to love working on the issues." And indeed, I did. So rather than doing my civic duty, I really enjoyed what I was doing. And I took a deep drink of it.

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The appropriations committee, I focused on policy, policy, policy, the intelligence committee, security, all of that. I loved all the learning that went with it and then the judgment it gave you once you knew all this. So I was steeped in the policy. And of course, there is no honor that I will ever have in Congress that equals stepping on the floor every day, representing the people of San Francisco. So I love my district. I love the policy. It's almost two jobs, legislative and representative. And so I wasn't particularly interested.

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What turned in my head was, when we lost—we lost in '94, '96, '98, 2000, 2000—and I said, "Wait a minute. I'm not waiting for lightning to strike. I

know how to win elections, but I can't win it if I'm just raising money for other people to make decisions. I have to have a role in this. And that way, I can attract the support because I can commit to... I know how to win this." And then we did.

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But anyway, that's why I ran for leadership. And I don't think people thought that... I don't know what they thought, but I knew that, when I ran and I asked people for support, that enough people had encouraged me to run all along, that I would win. I don't like to put people out on a limb unless I have a very good chance of winning.

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BETSY WEST:

So what was it like to finally be at the leadership table? You go to the White House with a member of the congressional leadership. What was that like?

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NANCY PELOSI:

Well, I'd been to the White House many times as an appropriator and as an intelligence committee member. And I didn't think a whole lot about when I was going for my first day, for the first meeting of leadership with the President of the United States. I had no anxiety about it at all. I was just going to a meeting at the White House. So when I got there and the door closed behind me in the room where the meeting would be, the President, the Vice

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President, House and Senate, Democrats and Republicans, table of 10 approximately,-

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-and the door closed behind me, I realized that this was unlike any meeting I had ever been to the White House. In fact, it was unlike any meeting any woman had ever been to the White House at the table as a representative of the Democrats, and not appointed by the President, however wonderful that is, but nonetheless, in my own right, in the right that my members had given me, not beholden, not derivative from the man at the head of the table, the President.

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The President was gracious, President Bush, President George W. Bush. He was gracious, as he always is. He's very lovely, welcoming me, "Looking forward to working as..." And he was saying something to the effect of, "We look forward to hearing your views. I'm sure they'll be different than some of ours. Ha ha ha." And as he was speaking and then got into talking about a legislative agenda, I could feel very closed in in my chair. Very, very closed in. I'd never felt that before. It was very different for me, very closed in my chair.

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And all of a sudden, I was realizing that sitting on that chair with me was Susan B. Anthony, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Lucretia Mott, Alice Paul, Sojourner Truth, you name it. They were all on that chair. And then I could hear them say, "At last, we have a seat at the table," and then they were gone. And my first thought was, "We want more. We want more."

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Not that you don't know, but it certainly drove it home, the fact that we stand on the shoulders of so many women who fought so hard and times that were so, shall we say, unfriendly to women hitting the road to talk about women's right to vote 150 years before or longer, and the shoulders now that other young women stand of ours and responsibility we have to those who went before and those who come next, and the women who are out there now.

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BETSY WEST:

As politicians rise in leadership, they frequently become targets. I think that's particularly true for female politicians. What was that like? What happened as you became more powerful and more public, I guess?

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NANCY PELOSI:

Or more effective. I think one of the reasons that people become a target is if you're effective. If you're not effective, who cares? But we took on some mighty special interest here, whether it was energy, whether the oil industry, some on Wall Street, the health insurance industry, you name it. We passed the biggest consumer protections in history. We passed healthcare reform, make healthcare a right, not a privilege, no longer being a woman as a pre-existing medical condition.

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We passed Wall Street reform, as I mentioned, took on the giants, passed a magnificent energy bill that President Bush signed, made a big difference. We haven't finished with our climate change aspects of it, but when you show that you can get a job done- Because these people had ruled. They had ruled and people had said, "You'll never get a healthcare bill passed, you'll never get an energy bill passed, you'll never get a Wall Street reform passed," but we did.

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We did many things that I'm very proud of, including, every step of the way, trying to end discrimination, discrimination of women in the workforce with Lilly Ledbetter, the first bill the President signed, and ending his first two years the President... after Obama's repeal of Don't Ask Don't Tell, very important. So when you are effective, you are a target. And I was effective, policy wise, says she immodestly, but also politically.

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I know how to raise the money and make the, shall we say, clear-eyed decisions you have to make about winning. And that's how we won the House in the first place. So you become a target and then they'll use any... You're responsible for everything. My gosh. If it rains, if it doesn't rain, it's all your fault.

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BETSY WEST:

Are there particular ways in which women become a target?

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NANCY PELOSI:

What I see that they do to women is to trivialize what women have accomplished, to give the impression that they don't know the recipe for the secret sauce that only men know, that they undermine them in their strengths, which is a high ethical standard, and bring fresh eyes to the subject. They call that inexperience or naivety, but whatever it is, they try to undermine. And it's really unfair because I think it's in everybody's interest, Democrats and Republicans,-

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-to have many more women in all parties represented in Congress, and in government, and in business, and across the board. I know that nothing has been more wholesome for our political system, for our government than the increased participation of women.

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BETSY WEST:

You became a particular target, especially when you became minority leader. You became the woman they love to hate.

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NANCY PELOSI:

Yeah. You're talking about when I first became minority leader?

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BETSY WEST:

Yeah. When you became minority leader, a lot of nasty things said about you.

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NANCY PELOSI:

Yeah, always. Well, I figured... I took that as a badge honor. I considered the source, A and B, that if I weren't effective, they wouldn't be wasting their time on me. But that's, again, a lesson that I give to young people. Do not let anybody shake your confidence about what you came here to do. You got to fight that fight and you cannot let them, if you are, as I am, a staunch Democrat, you cannot let them choose the party's leader in future because you might be effective.

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But personally, it's a hard thing for your family and for your friends. They don't reap the benefit of being able to make the contribution that you make here, wherever it is, and they get their feelings hurt if somebody's saying mean things about you. Some of us, you get in the ring, you're in the arena, you jump in the ring. If you throw a punch, you better be ready to take one and, if you take one, you better be ready to throw one. It's not very nice to say. One of the problems with it is it's a tough arena.

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It's a very tough arena. Power is not something anybody has ever given away in the history of the world. For over 200 years, we had a pecking order up here, what man was going to do what next and how would they do musical chairs among those positions. And so now, you're saying, "We're going to break the marble ceiling. We're doing things differently," and that is resisted. But again, you know why you're there. It's the existential question, why am I here? I'm here to make a difference.

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And if that difference hurts the feelings of the special interest of big oil, big health insurance, big Wall Street, not everybody in all of those categories, let me hasten that, not to paint everybody with the same brush, so be it.

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BETSY WEST:

Do you think that sometimes women have trouble dealing in that very tough arena?

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NANCY PELOSI:

Well, I think that, whether women have trouble dealing in it, it's not an appealing aspect of what we do. And so what I'm trying to say to them is, "You are needed here. It's urgent for more women to be involved in government and politics. So come on over and we will..." What I keep saying to women is,

“We've got to watch each other's backs more carefully.” I had tens of millions of dollars spent against me. I have a very thick skin.

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I eat nails for breakfast, I put on a suit of armor, and I go into battle. A lot of people don't do that and they don't want to do that. They want to come in and play the role that they play. But if they want to emerge, they have to understand that they become a target. And we have to watch women's backs in politics because I know the world is competitive in business and in academic world and all the rest, but this is a very tough arena.

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BETSY WEST:

Talk to me about, after several elections, your move to bring Democrats back into the majority.

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NANCY PELOSI:

Well, in 2006, again, one of the reasons that I'm not always lining up everybody as a friend is because I wanted to do things differently. And we said we wanted to take a private sector approach. So if you're number two, how do you get to be number one? And it required great discipline to do it, to all stay on the same page with the same message, to have our timing be such that some people we would be uncomfortable with.

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They wanted to go faster or this or that. But nonetheless, from our private sector: first, you do this, then you do that. You do everything in its time.

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BETSY WEST:

You had a plan.

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NANCY PELOSI:

We had a plan and the members placed confidence on us, in the plan. And President Bush gave us a gift. He went out there to say we want to privatize social security. And so that was one path. And then we had a couple other paths that reinforced each other and served us well, but it was about a plan, it was about singing from not only the same hymnal, but the same page, and everybody knew the role they had to play and it was coldblooded, clear-eyed, and effective.

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And then when we won, it was a great victory. And then I was elected by my colleagues to be speaker. But the fact that I was the first woman speaker was pretty exciting. For me, it was just really important that the Democrats win. Even when I was in the leadership, I never thought I was going to be speaker. I thought Dick Gephardt would be speaker, but then we didn't win, and then it was up to me to carry the ball, and I knew how to do that.

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BETSY WEST:

So there've been, what, 237 women in Congress, in the House of Representatives? You're the first, the only woman to be the Speaker of the House. Tell me about that day.

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NANCY PELOSI:

Well, when you talk about the fact that there were, what, 237 women who've served on Congress, and that's probably nearly out of 13,000 people, well over 12,000 people, just to put it into that perspective, as well. Again, for me, the excitement was that the Democrats were winning the majority in the Congress. I was overwhelmed by messages from around the country. And what was particularly satisfying to me was that I had so many communications from fathers of daughters saying, "Now my daughter has another opportunity. Thank you." And that was great because the moms always have confidence in their daughters, but having the dad say that, that was really great.

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BETSY WEST:

And that picture of you with all the children, tell me about that.

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NANCY PELOSI:

Well, when I received the gavel, they asked me if I wanted to have my grandchildren with me on the podium. Maybe they didn't ask. Maybe I asked. I don't know how it had evolved, but my grandchildren were going to be on the podium with me. But when they came up to the podium, I could see it in the eyes of the kids out there that they wanted to be there, too.

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So I said, "Well, all the children, come up." And oh, they scampered up, Democratic children, Republican... Well, children are children, but from both sides of the aisle, shall we say. From both sides of the aisle, they scampered up there. And... Was pretty exciting because, for me, my whole interest in politics is an extension of my role as a mother. My role in politics is about what we do for our children. That's it. It's about them,-

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-it's about their future, it's about their health, their education, the economic security of their families, clean and safe neighborhoods, world at peace, economic security. And so for me, the best thing was to be able to gavel it in the name of all of America's children, our poorest children. That, to me, was the important thing.

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BETSY WEST:

You talked about breaking the marble ceiling and you said the sky's the limit. The number of women in Congress really hasn't increased at all. In fact, I think it's decreased a little bit. Why do you think that is?

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NANCY PELOSI:

Well, a couple of things. First of all, we had a big spurt. And spurts are that. You get a big spurt in that. Can you sustain that? What we did for a while in the last election, many Democratic women were defeated, as many Democrats were defeated, but you know what? We just have to come back. And I think there's going to be a place where it's no longer little increments, in terms of- It's going to be much more, much bigger numbers as women just go out there, assert themselves in a way to take over;-

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-and the public becomes more and more... The public is way ahead of the politicians, in terms of women. Public, I think, is much more receptive to a woman President of the United States than maybe some of the politicians. I always used to say, it'd be easier for a woman to be elected president than to be elected speaker of the house because it's all inside here. And the American people have the ability to decide who the president's going to be and they are much more progressive, if that's the word to use, in that regard.

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BETSY WEST:

I want to talk just a little bit about the work family challenge. You had what looked like a very traditional marriage for the first 25 years, was it? And did your marriage change as you got more involved in politics?

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NANCY PELOSI:

First 25 years, oh, my gosh, the way you say that. When I was active in politics, but not personally running, I was quite busy in my spare time as well. Once my children were in school all day until they went away to college, I thought, "I can change the world." Once you take care of five kids all day, you know how to manage time, you're a diplomat, you're an interpersonal expert, you're an engineer, you're an editor, you're all these things. That's what I say to women.

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Count that as a giant plus on your resume that you were home, raising those kids. Hardest job in the world. Most fulfilling, but hard. So I had a husband who was cooperative when I was doing all the political volunteer work, as well, but of course, that's volunteer and so you can dictate the use of your time. I always say to some of my friends now, when they say, "What's the secret of a happy marriage?"

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I said, "Well, Paul and I think that we have found the secret of a happy marriage, but you may not want to live 2,500 miles apart three or four days a week."

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BETSY WEST:

All right. I have to ask you, first of all, Geraldine Ferraro's nomination, you mentioned it briefly, what was it like to be in that room?

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NANCY PELOSI:

The nomination of the first woman to be on a national ticket, it was... Well, I guess it's not a good analogy to say it was like a stampede of elephants, but it was thunderous in terms of the cheering and the pounding and the rest of it. It was emotional, it was patriotic,-

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-it was something so fabulous. And she was just great and we all loved her. But that was a moment. You know, there are things that are a moment. That was a moment, something spectacular. We were so proud.

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