



‘The Real World’ in Wausau

When Rachel Campos-Duffy failed to land a spot on ‘The View,’ she realized she had more important work

It’s a hot August morning in Wausau, and one of U.S. Rep. Sean Duffy’s most important constituents expects him to do some heavy lifting.

“The chairs and the loveseat,” Rachel Campos-Duffy says into her cell phone. “To the upholsterer. The guy’s got the shop in his house. No, there is no sign. It’s the second house past that puny little bridge. On the left.”

There’s a pause. “The left!” she says, then adds “Love you, too!”

She hangs up and smiles apologetically. “We’re moving this week, so it’s good Congress is in recess. I’ve got a million things for him to do, and he’s got a truck.”

They are moving from Weston to Wausau. There are some beautiful, big, old houses in Wausau, “but mine’s not one of them!” she adds with a laugh.

And they are moving themselves, with the help of their children, friends and the teenage sons of friends. “I don’t need movers. I’ve got six kids, and they can all carry boxes.”

For a former TV personality and published author, Campos-Duffy is delightfully down-to-earth. And for a woman with degrees in economics and international studies, she is completely at home as a wife and mother.

Campos-Duffy met her husband in 1998, when both were selected to reprise their roles on the MTV reality series “The Real World,” in which random

housemates were thrown together and then filmed 20 to 22 hours a day.

She appeared in the show’s third season, “The Real World: San Francisco,” in 1994; Sean Duffy was featured in the 1997 offering, “The Real World: Boston.”

“It was good training for both of us; we’ve been in the public eye a long time,” she says.

“I had just finished my undergrad degree at Arizona State, and it sounded like fun,” she remembers of six months living in a house with six strangers.

“We wore microphones all the time, and the only place the cameras didn’t go was in the bathroom.”

A self-described military brat, Campos-Duffy was raised a strict Catholic. Her Mexican-American father met her Spanish mother in Madrid when he was stationed there with the U.S. Air Force. Campos-Duffy, who has one sister and two brothers, was born in England, and lived in Spain, Turkey and Peru while growing up. In her 20s, she also lived in Caracas, Venezuela, while working for the U.S. State Department as a summer intern, and in Kerala, India, as well.

On “The Real World,” her conservative political views antagonized her more liberal housemates, helping fuel the interpersonal conflicts that the producers were looking for.

After the show ended, she hung around Southern

California, doing television work and attending the University of California-San Diego to earn her master's degree.

In 1998, she and Duffy were selected to appear on MTV's "Road Rules: All Stars," in which they traveled around the East Coast of the United States and in New Zealand and Los Angeles in a Winnebago motor home with four other people.

"The first moment we met is captured on camera," she says. Within a year, they were married.

Duffy was finishing law school at the time in St. Paul, Minn. Meanwhile, Campos-Duffy had caught the eye

Campos-Duffy agrees with her congressman husband that the U.S. needs immigration reform.

of Barbara Walters, doyenne of the daytime talk show "The View," who was looking for a token conservative to join the cast.

"They were looking for someone young. But why, I don't know: 20-somethings don't watch 'The View,'" she says. "Sean and I made a deal: If I got the job, he would move to New York. If I didn't, I would move to Hayward.

"He was tricky," she says with a grin. "He first took me to Wisconsin in August, to a cabin on a lake up north. And you know how beautiful the lakes are. I had never lived in a small town before, and I found it very charming."

She didn't get the job and moved to Hayward after he finished law school.

Then came her first Wisconsin winter.

She laughs and rolls her eyes. "It took me a year to lose my fashion sense and learn how to dress for warmth instead of looks. But now I've got my UGGs. I love the snow, I love Christmas — I just love Wisconsin."

They lived in Hayward for two years, then moved

to Ashland so Sean Duffy could be assistant district attorney for Ashland County.

He was appointed to the DA's job when Michael Gableman, now a Wisconsin Supreme Court justice, left to become a Burnett County Circuit Court judge. Duffy was re-elected four times with no opposition; he resigned in 2010 to run successfully for the 7th District congressional seat.

The family then moved to the Wausau area to be closer to an airport so it would be easier for Duffy to fly back and forth to Washington, D.C.

Their family was growing. Their six children are Evita Pilar, 13; Xavier Jack, 11; Lucia-Belen, 9; John-Paul, 7; Paloma Pilar, 5, and MariaVictoria Margarita, 3.

These days, Campos-Duffy devotes what little free time she has to an organization called the Libre Initiative. She began it as an effort to lure Hispanic voters to Republican causes but has since expanded its message to help Hispanics achieve the American dream through education and hard work — much as her Hispanic parents raised her to do.

"One of the saddest things I see today is our kids being told the American dream is dead," she says.

"But it isn't, especially not among Hispanics," she insists. She says Hispanics create small businesses at three times the rate of other Americans "but they don't get a lot of credit for that.

"Instead," she said, referring to a famous speech by President Barack Obama, "they get told 'You didn't build that.'"

"The pope said, 'We get our dignity from earning our bread.' That's what I'm afraid we're losing in this country when we replace work with welfare — our dignity."

She agrees with her congressman husband that the United States needs immigration reform, but says the idea that some illegal immigrants should "self-deport" themselves back to their native countries is ridiculous.

"If there is an economic demand for labor — whether in agriculture or in high tech — we need to have an immigration system that responds to that,"

she says.

"I support giving the 11 million undocumented [immigrants] a legal status that allows them to live and work here free of fear," she adds.

"If they want to become citizens of this great nation, they can apply for citizenship the way everyone else does. I don't think offering them a 'special pathway,' or an expressway to the front of the line, is fair to the millions of people who are already in line. There are folks who have been waiting for years. We have to be fair to them, too."

Somewhere in the midst of all that child-raising and moving, "The View" called again — and once again, after weeks of auditioning, Campos-Duffy didn't get the job.

"When I didn't get it the second time, I thought I



was going to be upset. I had been telling myself that I was 'between gigs.' But then I realized I really love being a stay-at-home mom," she says.

And home means Wisconsin. "I live here," she says simply. "I hardly ever go to Washington with Sean."

Even though motherhood is "one of the most unappreciated jobs in the world," she says, today's mothers don't face some of the problems their own mothers faced.

She works with the Libre Initiative, a group that helps Hispanics achieve the American dream.

"The isolation is gone. We've got the Internet, cell phones, mini-vans.... It's a choice. It's work that has its own dignity and, frankly, it's really important. I like being the CEO of my house."

In fact, she threw herself into motherhood so enthusiastically, she decided to write a book about it. *Stay Home, Stay Happy: 10 Secrets to Loving At-Home Motherhood*, was published in 2009; most of the reviews at Amazon.com are positive.

"Writing a book was hard work," she says, remembering how she would write at night, after getting the kids into bed. "Ugh. It was kind of like having a baby — you don't know what you're getting into."

Nor was she fully aware what she was getting into when she married a future politician.

Sean Duffy is a real Northwoods kind of guy, born and raised in Hayward.

He worked his way through college and law school by entering professional lumberjack competitions, including logrolling and speed-climbing. In 2003, he appeared as both a competitor and commentator on ESPN's "Great Outdoor Games."

For all that, his wife says, "He's not real handy around the house. He can chop wood, but that's about it." ■

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