

Gore's Secret Weapon

Karenna Gore Schiff Gets Out the Vote for Dad

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The Columbia community is a sea of overextended overachievers, but someone has to take the cake.

As if being a third-year law student at Columbia weren't enough, this 26-year-old doctor's wife, mother of an eight-month-old, and our nation's Second Daughter insists on heading a political movement in an attempt to upgrade herself to First Daughter status.

Her public image as blonde-bombshell-Harvard-pothead-cheerleader far behind her, Karenna Gore Schiff, the oldest child Vice-president Al

Gore, has challenged the unwritten

law that says only the prodigal son shall walk into a political parent's spotlight. She is the national chair of GoreNet, a grassroots organization which seeks to garner support for Al Gore from the Rock the Vote demographic.

Frustrated by low voter turnout of young people, Schiff has travelled through eight states, giving self-penned addresses at low-dollar nightclub fundraisers over the last six months. During a recent bus trip to New Hampshire, she brought along a group of Columbia Law GoreNet members to campaign door-to-door in support of their candidate of choice.

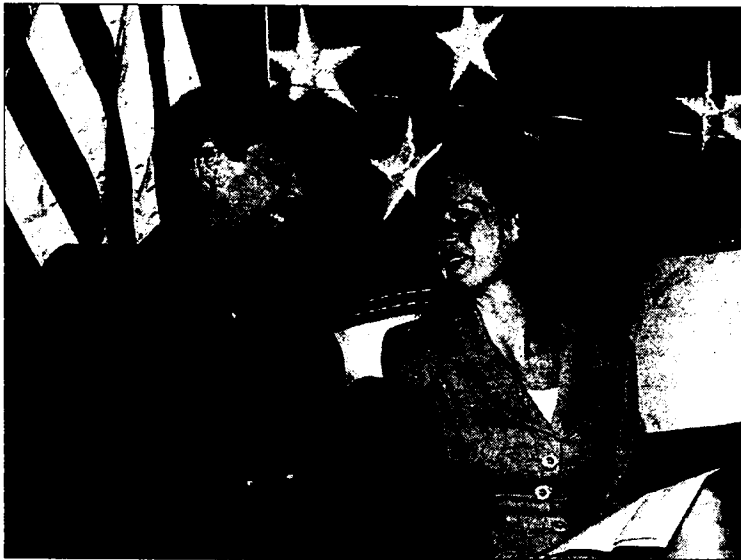
Pepper Brill, third-year law student and GoreNet member, shakes his head in wonder at his multifaceted peer. "Karenna, I think, has more hours in the day than the rest of us," he said.

Over tea at Ollie's, Schiff, appearing well-rested, was nonchalant about her frenetic schedule.

"I definitely feel like there's a lot going on right now, but I'm always reminded that I'm actually lucky, because so many other people have kids and jobs and a lot of competing concerns," she said.

After graduating from Harvard, Schiff spent a year in Spain, followed by a brief stint in Seattle as an editorial assistant at Microsoft's *Slate* magazine.

She initially dabbled with attending Vanderbilt Law, her father's alma mater, but settled on Columbia, attracted by the school's diversity and rigorous curriculum and strong



COURTESY OF KARENNA GORE SCHIFF
Columbia Law student Karenna Gore Schiff and her father Al Gore work together closely to draw youth support for his campaign.

resources in property law. Marrying a New Yorker was something of a draw as well—in July of 1997, she wed Andrew Schiff, a primary care physician at New York Hospital.

She claims it was her grandmother, a Vanderbilt Law School alum, who had pushed her to attend Vanderbilt.

"I think she's just forgiven me for choosing Columbia," Schiff admitted.

In her three years at Columbia, Schiff feels fortunate to have forged through her studies with relative anonymity, safe from public scrutiny over her familial ties.

Trae Williamsom, a fellow third-year, attributes this ease of normality to Schiff's low-key style. "She's been very down to earth—just another law student."

Schiff is grateful for the reciprocity. "People have been really, really understanding and nice about not projecting anything on to me or making me constantly representative of my father," she said.

"It's a little bit different this year, because in the past I've always been decidedly anonymous. And that's changed, because now I'm advocating for him and his candidacy. So I now will have a conversation in the hall about the campaign, whereas before that just never happened, because it was kind of like 'don't ask don't tell.'"

Born on her parents' farm in Nashville, Tennessee, Schiff has played an active, if not, public role in

her father's campaigns since he first ran for Congress when she was three years old.

During Gore's 1988 presidential bid, the 15-year-old Schiff, nestled in a hotel room amongst a swarm of advisors, reportedly looked up from her homework occasionally to add "Dad, I don't think that's right."

"My dad has made, I think, all of his kids feel like we should voice our opinions whenever we want," Schiff said.

That voice has become so strong that many see Schiff as her father's most valuable asset in the efforts to improve his public image.

With her porcelain beauty, calm demeanor, and unassuming presence, talking casually about her "dad" as if he sold insurance down the street, she seems the ideal antidote to Gore's notoriously stoic style.

She is credited for giving the boot to Gore's more formal wardrobe, encouraging him to hit the road in khakis and polo shirts, and to campaign in a scriptless "open meeting" style. Additionally, she and a friend, feminist writer Naomi Wolf, were the most adamant supporters of Gore's move to distance himself from Clinton in the early days of the campaign.

With a trained politician's discretion in her blood, she refrained from discussing the specific content of her advice to her father, with whom she speaks several times a day, but said the discussions are 'very informal.'

"We're a close family... It's not like I'm in any professional role as an advisor... I just want people to get to know him the way I know him," she said.

This man, she says, has an oft-misunderstood, "hysterically funny," deadpan sense of humor and a passionate hunger for learning.

"He will always drag us out to art galleries on Saturday morning, that kind of thing, and interview the curator, or whatever, about every aspect of the painting," she said.

Her father's public identity aside, Schiff also struggles to soften young people's image of her mother, who in 1985, upon hearing the sexual lyrics to Schiff's copy of *Purple Rain*, began an extensive campaign which led to the creation of the Parental Advisory warning labels.

"In fact, what she was advocating was really to help really busy parents by giving them some guidance about what was in what they were buying, not to prevent it from being written," Schiff insisted.

As an avid Ice-T fan in the eighth grade, Schiff suffered an unusual blow when the rapper wrote a song lambasting her mother.

Despite her parents' political influence, she said that her own life will not lead directly into a law career after graduation. Tops on her list is spending time with her baby boy named Wyatt, who was born on July 4th.

Though the buzz circulates about a potential jump into politics, Schiff says she has no definite plans. In the meantime, she worries about young Americans who have grown apathetic about the political process, indifferent to running for office themselves.

"People want to have jobs that others will respect them for doing. And think that it becomes pervasive when you hear so many cynical comments about what politicians do. I hope that we as a country will inspire more young people to join politics. So want to be a part of that somehow, she said.

But first she needs to finish law school.