

In Elizabeth Dole's world, Washington is consuming—and politics is family. BY JOHN SEDGWICK

The Woman Behind That Unwavering Smile

HE CALLS THEM "MY Elizabeths." They are the godchildren Elizabeth Dole has acquired from her circle of fellow Washington insiders, and even she's not exactly sure how many young charges she has. "It's a lot," she says, laughing. "A lot." There's Florida Congresswoman Tillie Fowler's daughter Elizabeth, whom Mrs. Dole invited for a power lunch at the age of 7 at the Department of Transportation. And there's Red Cross vice president Jenna Dorn's son Jonathan: last Christmas, Mrs. Dole bought him a gigantic, "Big"-style musical keyboard after she hopped out a tune herself at F.A.O. Schwarz.

Elizabeth Dole has always cloaked her ambition with warmth and charm. But at heart she is very much like her husband: for them, politics is family. Elizabeth's marriage to Bob Dole came late—she was 39, he 52—and having children was never a priority. "Either way would have been fine," Mrs. Dole, now 60, told NEWSWEEK. "But we knew that marrying later in life, that was probably not going to happen." The two frequently travel separately; some days they're lucky to connect on the phone. It can be lonely, and in this vacuum Mrs. Dole has created a kind of surrogate family through her godchildren. Even with them she pays relentless attention to detail: she calls each of her "Elizabeths" every Christmas Day to see how her presents went down.

In her world, nothing is ever unscheduled. Her single-



DAVID HUME KENNELLY FOR NEWSWEEK

Details, details: Profoundly driven, Mrs. Dole memorizes her speeches and practices her lines before important calls

minded preparation has enabled her to move from the small-town South of the 1950s to the Ivy League, then glide from the Johnson administration to cabinet posts under Reagan and Bush. She even rehearses her lines before important telephone calls.

Her striving started early. The daughter of a well-off Salisbury, N.C., wholesale florist, Elizabeth—nicknamed Liddy—took countless piano, riding and dancing lessons. At Duke she was both May Queen and Phi Beta Kappa. The big decision came after graduation. "The conversation we had in college was, 'Were we going to have a career, or were we going to marry?'" says Elizabeth's Salisbury friend Wyndham Robertson. "You couldn't do both in those days." Elizabeth was pinned to a man from Davidson College and, she says, "there was talk of marriage." Instead, she went north to Harvard Law.

The law degree was radical: she was one of only 24 women in a class of 550. Always fretting, Mrs. Dole found it terrifying that the final exams counted for your entire grade. On weekends, she would sometimes take refuge with the family of law librarian Earl Borgeson so she could study in his guest room, free from requests for dates. On vacations home, she would take to her room with books; her mother sent food up on a tray.

Armed with her degrees, Elizabeth went to Washington in 1965 and soon got a job in the White House office of consumer affairs. She was rising through the ranks there when she met the recently divorced Bob Dole in 1972. After their 1975 wedding, Elizabeth barely altered the professional life that had kept her busy—and unmarried—until she was nearly 40. She ran Transportation under Reagan and Labor under

Bush; now she's head of the Red Cross. Along the way, she also rediscovered the Methodist faith of her childhood, something that may have been an antidote to her dogged careerism.

Politically, she is his closest adviser, but far from a controlling influence. In joint TV appearances, she nudges Dole to stay on message. (During the senator's celebrated dust-up with Katie Couric over tobacco during an interview to promote the Doles' joint autobiography, Elizabeth sweetly put in, "Why don't we talk about the book?") In strategy sessions, she is a voice for discipline and clarity. She piped up about the vice-presidential selection. Supply-side author Jude Wanniski told NEWSWEEK that Elizabeth had championed Jack Kemp. But Dole makes his own decisions—and doesn't always feel compelled to give her a heads-up. When he secretly decided to retire from the Senate last April, NEWSWEEK learned, he did not inform her until the plan was final.

Still, Mrs. Dole's résumé inevitably evokes comparisons to Hillary Clinton's. The two do share certain things: their Methodism, a relish for political life. And there have been questions about Mrs. Dole's finances: the Dole intimate who managed her blind trusts, David Owen, wound up in jail on income-tax charges. (There is no evidence of wrongdoing on the Doles' part.)

For the Doles, the stakes in the coming months couldn't be higher. When Dole left the Senate, he said he had "nowhere to go but the White House or home." But after 35 years in Congress, Dole knows no other world. Mrs. Dole has a bit more to fall back on: she's got the Red Cross, and her godchildren. Still, the Washington game is no less hers than his. So she'll give the race the classic Elizabeth Dole treatment: an obsession with detail—sugar-coated with a flawless smile.