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A Conversation with

THE HONORABLE NANCY PELOSI
HOUSE DEMOCRATIC LEADER
AND 60TH SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE

EXCERPTS FROM *KNOW YOUR POWER – A MESSAGE TO AMERICA’S DAUGHTERS* BY NANCY PELOSI,
HOUSE DEMOCRATIC LEADER

On the fourth of January, 2007, I was sworn in as the first woman Speaker of the House of Representatives in U.S. history, the highest elected office any woman had achieved.^(P1)

Becoming the Speaker is a significant accomplishment, but I have never felt it was a personal victory. Rather, I see it as a pivotal moment for all women.

As I accepted the gavel from Republican Leader John Boehner, I told my colleagues: “This is an historic moment—for the Congress, and for the women of this country. It is a moment for which we have waited over two hundred years. Never losing faith, we waited through the many years of struggle to achieve our rights.

But women weren’t just waiting; they were working. Never losing faith, we worked to redeem the promise of America, that all men and women are created equal. For our daughters and granddaughters, today we have broken the marble ceiling...

We have made history, now let us make progress.”^(P8)

Growing up in Little Italy impressed upon me the vitality immigrants bring to America. With their courage, optimism, and determination to make the future better for their families, they fulfill the American dream. They made America stronger. That has been true throughout American history, and it is true today.^(P 11)

I had intended to major in political science, but at Trinity at that time you had to major in history in order to study political science. Our teachers often quoted the great English historian J.R. Seeley’s aphorism: *History without political science has no fruit, Political science without history has no root.*^(P 33)

On the day I was sworn in, some of my fellow members had told me, “you’re not supposed to say a word...you’ll just say yes. That’s all. That’s the way it’s done.”

Oh my, I thought, with some disappointment. *All these people have come from California, from Maryland, from all over to see me sworn in, and I’m not going to say anything? Don’t the powers that be know my campaign slogan was “The Voice That Will be Heard”? How can I not be heard?*

But then, after I took the oath, Jim Wright, the Speaker of the House, who was presiding, graciously said, “Would the gentlewoman from California like to address the House?”^(P87)

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Who said she could run? That put me into fighting mode. I did not need anyone to tell me I could or could not run.

By running for Whip, I would defy more than two hundred years of men following in each other’s footsteps for all of the major leadership positions.^(P. 102)

We want more—in the United States and the world!

Every issue today is a woman’s issue—the defense of our country, our economy, education, health care, energy, and protecting the environment. To get more women into public office we must get more women involved in politics. What people don’t realize is that even small amount of time volunteering can make a difference. Can you make a few phone calls? Can you lend your home? Help write press releases? Work for what you believe in, whether it’s on a local, state, or national level. That’s what I did.^(P. 127)

I remember telling [Congresswoman Lindy Boggs] that I thought I had too many opportunities, that perhaps I should give up one of my positions...In her wonderful southern accent, she said, “Darlin’, no man would ever, ever have that thought.” And then she gave me a significant piece of advice. “Nancy,” she said, “know thy power.”^(P. 125)

Whatever you can do, just do it. Don’t overstate what you will deliver, and always complete the task agreed to. But get involved, for the future—for your children and grandchildren. For women and girls.^(P. 128)

By electing a woman Speaker, my colleagues turned the old system upside down. In order to understand why we have never had a woman Speaker before, it is necessary to understand the culture of Congress. When I arrived at the Capitol there were 20 women out of 435 representatives. Twenty-one years later, there are 74 women (54 Democrats and 20 Republicans). We want more!^(P. 135)

Every person in Congress was sent there by the American people, and we owe it to one another—and to all of our constituents—to treat one another in a civil way. In

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my swearing-in speech, I quoted Thomas Jefferson, who wrote, “Every difference of opinion is not a difference of principle.”^(P. 148)

Congress is similar to any job in that you have to know the topic at hand. It’s all about learning the subject and doing the work. This is especially important for a woman in any field dominated by men. If you know your stuff, it’s very hard for them to diminish you.^(P. 150)

The moment I took the Speaker’s gavel was, as I’ve said, an historic moment for the Congress as well as for the women of America. But it was also a victory for America’s children and their future. For the first time in history, the Speaker opened the house by saying, “For all of America’s children, the House will be in order.”^(P. 168)

When I was first elected to the Democratic leadership, I received messages of congratulations from women and girls around the world. What was interesting to me was the large number of good wishes I also received from fathers of daughters, who saw my success as opening new opportunities for girls. I appreciated the sentiment because of the special relationship Paul always had with our daughters.^(P. 173)

As long as we recognize the power within us, we will continue to have choices, and we will continue to lead.

The source of that power can be the other people who guide us. It can come from the knowledge that courageous women throughout history paved the way for us. It can come from our roots and our families, which give us strength. And it must come from within ourselves—from our faith, our accomplishments, and our values.

Know your power.

When you do, others will know your power, too.^(P. 174)

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