



Comedic actress and D.C. native **Casey Wilson** hits her stride on the new hit show "Happy Endings."



Happy at Last

BY LAUREN PAIGE KENNEDY

JAY CLENDENIN

Die-hard Democrat James Carville and rah-rah Republican Mary Matalin already have two daughters—but if they had a third, she just might resemble actress Casey Wilson. Maybe not in looks. Maybe not in temperament. But like the Carville kids, the star of ABC's comedy "Happy Endings" had no choice but to hone a well-developed sense of humor in a blue-state/red-state, forever-clashing political household.

Still, the "Saturday Night Live" alum credits her politically opposed parents with her ability to find a laugh. Born and raised in Alexandria, Va., Wilson regularly returns inside the Beltway to visit her father, Paul O. Wilson, who for 20 years has helmed political com-

If I wasn't an actress, I'd return to D.C. in a heartbeat. Should I give it up and move to Old Town and start a jewelry business...or maybe a bake shop?

munications firm Wilson Grand in Old Town. He's also served as a Republican strategist and consultant for more than three decades. Her late mother, Kathy Wilson (who died of heart failure in 2005), served two terms as vice chair of the National Women's Political Caucus (NWPC) in the early 1980s, was a fierce advocate of the Equal Rights Amendment and was influential in supporting now-retired Justice Sandra Day O'Connor's appointment to the Supreme Court in 1981, as well as the Mondale-Ferraro presidential ticket in 1984.

"My mom would post political signs in the side yard," Wilson, who turns 32 in October, reminisces for *Washington Flyer*. "And my dad would put opposite signs in the front yard. Then they'd switch them." She giggles at the thought. "It was very contentious."

But lovingly so. While her own political leanings tend to fall in line with her mom's—the actress even stumped for Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton's failed bid for the presidency back in 2008—Wilson claims her father inspires only bipartisan hugs. "My dad just won this 'Good Guy' award for being as socially liberal a Republican as you can be," Wilson says. "Alexandria is such a Democratic town; there are two other Republicans there, and my dad is friends with both of them. But everyone loves my dad!"

[Among Democrats] he's like the token: "Oh, we love Paul. We *accept* Paul!"

Perhaps such daily rigorous debate is what first prepared the rising star to take on the fight that making it in Hollywood requires. Wilson, who co-wrote the 2009 screenplay "Bride Wars" and is slated to appear in Seth Rogen's latest offering, "The Guilt Trip," later this year, is the first to admit her formative years in the nation's capital were key to her success. Here, she chats with *Flyer* about her childhood spent at the Kennedy Center, why she still doesn't consider herself a famous person and her lifelong love of Rehoboth Beach.

Washington Flyer: You were raised in D.C., began your career in New York and now live in Los Angeles. Describe each town with just a word or two, if you can.

Casey Wilson: OK, here goes. L.A.: sunny and

desperate. Washington: pulsing. And New York? Creative.

WF: Pulsing, indeed. Did you know that D.C. is home to the one of the highest concentration of Ph.D.s in the country?

CW: You're not getting anywhere in Washington unless you're fiercely intelligent. You may not agree with everyone's opinions. But everyone is smart.

WF: Do you miss it?

CW: If I wasn't an actress, I'd [return] to D.C. in a heartbeat. I'm always like, "Should I give it up and move to Old Town and start a jewelry business? Or maybe a bake shop?" I loved growing up in Alexandria. Our neighbors were our best friends. They lived behind us, and their names were the Crooks. So we always said we had crooks in our backyard. My dad is still there. But my career keeps me in L.A.

WF: How often do you return?

CW: I go back two or three times a year. Always for Christmas, sometimes Thanksgiving, and we go to Rehoboth Beach, Del., every summer. We just got back from renting a house there for a week, 10 of us strong. I've gone to Rehoboth since I was a baby. I love it.

WF: Growing up with parents like yours, are you, too, a political junkie?

CW: I am. My mom was president of the NWPC for eight years. So I traveled with her to 45 states before I was 3. One time when I

was a baby, my mom had to get me back to my dad, so [NASA astronaut] Sally Ride flew me back on her lap on a flight. My mom was very active. We were, and are, just a diehard family. My dad's a feminist, as well.

I very much grew up in the political arena. As for me, I was class president for all four years [of high school], but that was the close of my political career. I did campaign with Hillary Rodham Clinton; I was on the road with her in Indiana, and that was the highlight of my life! At the time, all the quote-unquote "celebs" were campaigning with Obama.

And I must underline this: I was *not* at the time, and am still barely considered a celebrity. I was on "SNL" [then], but I was *not* a celebrity, yet they took me with open arms. I thought I'd be passing out literature. But they had me introducing her and President Clinton on stage at all the rallies. It's one of those things where you think, 'I should not be here, but here I am!' I'm a huge Obama supporter now that he's president. But when people say, 'Hey, Hillary would have been great,' I say, 'Um, no-duh!'

WF: You gained some notoriety for playing Elizabeth Dole on "SNL." Are you into political humor?

CW: The sketches I like are subtly political, the ones that look at men and women, but I wouldn't say I'm overtly into political humor. Although I watch "Veep" because I love Julia Louis-Dreyfus.

WF: Your parents were amazingly supportive of your pursuing an acting career, weren't they?

CW: Oh, yes. When I was little, I watched "The Sound of Music" a million times, so my mom organized the neighborhood kids to do a performance for all the parents. After that, I just wanted to keep performing, so my dad built me a stage in the backyard. And I would direct and write ... and then fire kids! It was a source of embarrassment, because my parents would have to explain why their friends' kids had to be fired. They didn't know their lines!

But [my parents] sought opportunities for me. The Kennedy Center did a summer program, and they let me audition for that. I'd take a cab into the city or take the Metro by myself when I was pretty young. And I went out to Bethesda and did children's theater. We didn't have a ton of money, they had to work, so they'd put me in a cab and off I'd go. My dad took me to Second City [comedy troupe] every year for five years. And my mom found me a program at Yale for summer drama, which led me to [my attending] NYU ... where I discovered I wanted to do comedy. I love funny women. Goldie Hawn in

“Private Benjamin” and “Overboard.” Lucille Ball. Madeline Kahn...

WF: You’ve continued your mother’s legacy after she passed away unexpectedly seven years ago at age 54. Tell us about the Kathy Wilson Foundation.

CW: My mom was known politically, and she was a tough cookie. After she transitioned from politics, she started Abracadabra, a highly accredited preschool in Alexandria. She was a fierce advocate for children with special needs. We were shocked when hundreds of people came to her funeral ... it was eye-opening to see what an impact she had. We decided to start the foundation (kathywilsonfoundation.org) to provide tutoring and teacher training, and grants for children. It’s been going for about six years and going well. It’s a small foundation, but it’s a vital one.

WF: She’d be so proud of you: You’re on a hit show. “Happy Endings” is being called the new “Friends.”

CW: This is a perfect fit for me. I auditioned for the show randomly, and I just happened to get the part. It was very lucky. I’d just left “SNL” ... there was some magic involved there. It’s exhilarating! It couldn’t be more fun, collaborative or creative. I love

working with five other comedians. Not just actors; comedians. They have a different sensibility—they can make anything funny. It’s so rewarding.

WF: Your character, Penny, is one of six longtime friends. She’s always single, which is always ripe for comedic riffing.

CW: The writers are phenomenal. Like last year, my character didn’t want to go to a wedding alone. So the twist was that she was seated at the Skype table and winds up dancing with someone’s uncle—through a laptop. We have a small but devoted—and growing—following. And I’m so grateful for that.

WF: Tell us about your screenwriting.

CW: My writing partner, June Diane Raphael, and I just finished a film, “Ass Backwards,” a female road-trip buddy comedy starring



Alicia Silverstone. We’re writing a pilot this year, too.

WF: So you’ll stay bi-coastal?

CW: I travel a lot for work. And as much as I sort of put down L.A., I really do kind of love it. And I love to travel. I see my dad a lot; we do a lot of weekend trips together. If you live in L.A., you have to get out of town once in a while. I’m happy to be there for my work and for creativity, but you need to have little breaks. Like to Rehoboth Beach. 🌴

Take a landmark to a landmark.

Metro is the fast, easy and affordable way to see just about everything you want to see in the nation’s capital. Save money with a One Day Pass, just \$14 and available from a Farecards and Passes machine at any Metrorail station. For more about Metro, visit wmata.com.

