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ARSHI SIDDIQUI

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A CLOSER LOOK

- **Age:** 45
- **Education:** Bachelor's in economics and political science, University of California, Davis; J.D., Georgetown University
- **Residence:** The Wharf

“I remember the exact spot I was in when it came to me that I really wanted to be a lawyer,” Siddiqui says. “I was very taken with Washington and politics. I wanted to work on Capitol Hill at some point. Everything was very sure to that end.”

Law school at Georgetown was a natural choice for a California native with national politics on the brain. But her family wasn’t always on the same page. “They thought [politics] was something I might grow out of,” she says. “But I’m a person who gets very set on a goal.”

Siddiqui didn’t grow out of it. Instead, she worked her way up to serve as senior policy adviser and counsel to former House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., where she counts working on the passage of the Affordable Care Act among her proudest moments.

“I think my attraction to policy is that ability to get things done,” Siddiqui says. “It’s the art of the possible, the art of negotiation. I’ve been very fortunate in my career to be part of that process.”

In 2010, Siddiqui shifted back to the private sector, where

she currently serves as a partner at D.C. firm Akin Gump. In addition to her work with clients on navigating Washington and high-profile M&A deals, Siddiqui keeps an active pro bono practice, working with such nonprofits as the Council on Foundations and Lawyers Without Borders. She also works to support a scholarship fund for Aligarh Muslim University in India, where her mother attended college.

If she had to do it over again, Siddiqui says she’d still pursue Washington politics, even when the atmosphere can get a little stressful.

“I think people have gotten a lot more jaded about politics and institutions,” Siddiqui says. “It all goes back to individuals. Increased engagement doesn’t necessarily mean working for politicians or running for office. The more people understand the political process, the better.”

As a kid, what was your dream job? I was very taken with “To Kill a Mockingbird.” I decided I was going to be a lawyer. I liked the idea of what lawyers represented, giving everyone access.

Who was a favorite teacher you had growing up? I had a teacher in sixth grade who planted the seed for me in some ways. My parents had seen how education had changed their lives, so school was everything. But for me, I wanted to be social and I wanted to see the world. Mr. Hartman realized that I was at my best when I was engaged, and that’s when it became clear to me that I needed to find what I was passionate about.

What activities were you a part of growing up? I did debate, public speaking, softball, student government. I was in a few plays.

What was your favorite book as a kid? “To Kill a Mockingbird”

What superlative would you have earned in high school? “Most likely to talk my way out of a parking or speeding ticket”

What advice would you give your 15-year-old self? I was very much a contrarian. What I thankfully learned as I got older is that you have to be unemotional when you’re taking advice. When I was younger, my parents were right about a lot. But if they said it was sunny outside, I said, “No, it’s rainy.” As time progressed, I realized you have to take criticism.

What was your favorite subject in high school? I liked politics and I liked history. The reason I liked history is that I liked how individuals can spark change and how that leads to an even greater change as those ideas expand. I loved the idea of Mahatma Gandhi and what he did in India, then being one of the influences on Martin Luther King Jr. and others.

— Emily Van Zandt

