

Exclusive: Michelle Obama on 'Whirlwind' Year

Barbara Walters Names First Lady Michelle Obama the Most Fascinating Person of 2009

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Barbara Walters named Michelle Obama the Most Fascinating Person of 2009. The first lady and Walters are pictured on the ground floor of the White House, Dec. 1, 2009. (Official White House Photo by Samantha Appleton)

Michelle Obama is Barbara Walters' Most Fascinating Person of 2009.

Almost a year since the Obama family moved to Washington, D.C., the first lady reflected on the transition to the White House.

"It has been a whirlwind. But it's been amazing," she told Walters. "I mean, if you think about this year, I had to get these two beautiful girls settled into a new city, into a new home, into a new school. We got a dog. I visited eight countries with my husband. I planted a garden. I've started a mentoring program. It has been everything. And now, here we are at our first Christmas in the White House."

During her tenure as first lady, Obama has promoted healthy living and taken steps to combat childhood obesity -- creating a vegetable garden on the White House lawn and holding health fairs with exercise stations for kids.

"I think I've begun to lay the foundation to a conversation about the health of our kids -- particularly when we're looking at statistics that say that one in three kids in this country are obese, and those numbers increase if you're African-American or Hispanic," she said. "So we're going to spend a lot more time on that issue in the years to come."

The first African-American first lady is also one of the fittest. Wearing a sleeveless dress in her official White House portrait, Obama's toned arms have become part of her signature style -- and the envy of many.

Obama, who often joins her husband in the White House gym, told Walters that her workout regimen began after the birth of their first daughter, Malia.

"My personal routine hasn't changed much in the past 11 years," she said. "I really started right after I had Malia, our oldest, and some of that was, you know, in all honesty it was a little sort of revenge because I'm married to a man who has worked out all of his life. And regardless of how busy he is, he finds the time to work out. And there was a point at which I got a little resentful of that."

"[Malia] was still waking up for that four o'clock feeding and I'd get up because I'd be the first one to hear her, and he'd be asleep," she added. "And I thought, 'I'm up, I might as well go to the gym. And if I get to the gym, then he'll have to wake up and do that feeding.' I get a workout in and everyone will be happy. So you know, if there's anything that I can attribute these arms to, it's probably just determination."

Michelle Obama on Marriage, Family, Bo

The Obamas who have been married for 17 years have had their share of ups and downs. Michelle Obama told Walters that despite her confidence in her husband's natural ability, at a certain point, the grueling demands of politics bothered her.

"I had always had this dilemma," she said. "It wasn't that I didn't believe in my husband as a phenomenal leader. I mean, that was always the pull -- because I always thought, 'Well, if I wanted somebody as my state senator, or as my U.S. senator, or as my president, I would want Barack Obama.' And the only reason he wouldn't do it is if I said no."

When asked by Walters if the president would have stopped pursuing politics if she really put her foot down, the first lady said, "He would have."

"I think it's the truth, the fact that he would have not pursued any of this had I really, really put my foot down," she said. "It made it really hard to be the person that would stand in the way of someone else's dreams, and the possibilities of his leadership. And I definitely didn't want to be in that position. I think I made the right call."

First Lady's Guilty Pleasures?

Between greeting world leaders and raising tweens, Malia and Sasha, in the national spotlight, Obama's schedule is packed. But even she has her "lazy days." The first lady said her guilty pleasures are often "food based," or are watching "really bad TV" with the family's Portuguese water dog, Bo.

"I sit with Bo, who usually climbs up on my lap. He thinks he's a lap dog," she said. "He'll cozy up with me, and I'm just clicking through mindless shows. A lot of, you know, shows about food and design, and all that good stuff. And it's just quiet, and I'm not thinking about anything for that second -- not about the kids, not about my husband, not about my schedule. If I get an hour of that during the course of a week, it feels like heaven."

Obama gushed about Bo, who instantly became the apple of the family's eye.

"Bo is my baby, he's our son. He's wonderful. He's growing," she said. "It's like I'm a mother. You ask about my kid, I'm gone."

But the reality of life at the White House has not yet set in for the first lady, who said she sometimes walks through the grand, historic rooms and has to pinch herself.

"There are moments when -- especially at night when it's quiet or you're driving up to the White House at night and the white lights are shining on ... this beautiful home and you pull up to it, and somebody opens the door and says, 'Welcome home' -- those are the times when you think, 'Really? Wow. OK, here we go,'" she said

Barack Obama was dubbed Walters' Most Fascinating Person of 2008.