

Political journalist Jonathan Allen with his kids, Asher, 5, and Emma, 3



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After co-authoring his second book about Hillary Clinton, Bethesda native Jonathan Allen is ready for some family time

BY MELANIE D.G. KAPLAN

ON A WARM SATURDAY morning in February, political journalist Jonathan Allen takes a break from nonstop deadlines. He stands in front of the stove in his 1890s Capitol Hill row house and pours pancake batter into a hot pan. His kids, Asher, 5, and Emma, 3, dart through the kitchen, out the open door and onto the deck. Everyone looks forward to Dad's breakfasts—on this day, perhaps no one more than Allen. He's in

the final stretch of reviewing text for his second book, *Shattered: Inside Hillary Clinton's Doomed Campaign*, and he can almost taste a saner schedule.

After writing 2014 *New York Times* best-seller *HRC: State Secrets and the Rebirth of Hillary Clinton*, Allen and his co-author, Amie Parnes, are hoping for similar success with *Shattered*, scheduled for an April release. But his son, for one, hopes he's done with this book

business. "Asher said, 'Daddy, don't write another book,'" says Allen, the head of community and content for politics website Sidewire and a columnist for *Roll Call*. "I don't think I'll do another right away." He and Parnes, who had worked together at *Politico*, got the contract for the second book nearly three years ago. On Nov. 7, Allen says, they were writing about how Clinton won the presidency; two days later, they were writing about

how she lost the election.

Allen, 41, grew up in Bethesda and graduated from Walter Johnson High School, his mother's alma mater. From the time he was a child, he's been relentless with questions and had a knack for memorization: baseball statistics, kings of England, names of capital cities. Allen's father, Ira, who covered the White House for United Press International during the Ronald Reagan years, once took his son to an Orioles game and then directly to the University of Maryland, where he was teaching a journalism class. Seven-year-old Jonathan sat in the back, took notes on his dad's lecture and scored eight out of 12 on a class quiz. At home in their Ayr lawn neighborhood, Allen, his younger sister, Amanda, and their parents devoured books, newspapers, magazines and political shows such as *Meet the Press*.

"He picked up politics from me yelling at the TV," Ira says, noting that Allen's love of journalism came more from osmosis than any encouragement from his father.

In high school, Allen was captain of the *It's Academic* team, as well as a jock and a thespian. As a senior, he pitched a complete game in baseball (a come-from-behind victory over a far superior team), piled up with his teammates to celebrate, and ran into Walter Johnson just in time to have his makeup applied for the school musical *Dames at Sea*. He wrote for the school newspaper, *The Pitch*, and made \$7.50 per article covering local sports for *The Gazette*. Politics was barely on his radar—he read *The Washington Post's* Thomas Boswell religiously and wanted to be a sports writer.

After graduating from the University of Maryland in 1998, Allen became a reporter for the now-defunct *Prince William Journal* and then spent several years at *Congressional Quarterly*, where he met his wife, Stephanie, who was a researcher. They married in 2005. "The cool thing about covering Congress is

that there's no better place to interact with your sources," Allen says. "You have 535 people making policy for the country, and they're all available to you on a daily basis." In 2008 he won the National Press Club's Sandy Hume Memorial Award for Excellence in Political Journalism and the National Press Foundation's Everett McKinley Dirksen Award for Distinguished Reporting of Congress, both for a cover story about congressional earmarks.

After serving as *Politico's* White House bureau chief, Allen moved to Bloomberg in 2014 as a White House reporter, and within a few months became the D.C. bureau chief. Shortly after *HRC* came out in February of that year, he and Parnes were doing an interview on Sirius XM's POTUS channel when they got the call that the book had debuted at No. 6 on the *Times* best-seller list. *Unless I do something really horrible in my life, that will be the lead of my obit*, Allen remembers thinking.

These days, Allen has cut back on his working hours, but he still stumbles down to the living room every morning before sunrise, opens a Diet Coke and begins writing his morning newsletter for Sidewire. With his second book almost behind him, he's hoping to spend more time with his family—Nationals games with his father and son are high on the to-do list. Not surprisingly, in a family of scholars, Asher has already memorized the first 18 presidents in order. Emma has started singing "We Shall Overcome," which Allen says he may have been playing in the car.

A guest commentator who often appears on TV and radio shows, Allen still has moments of childlike joy himself, such as doing interviews at the same NBC studio in Washington, D.C., where he went for *It's Academic*. "I remember as a kid how cool it was to go there," he says, recalling photos of politicians and celebrities lining the walls. "Doing *Meet the Press* felt like a big moment." ■



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