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MEET TIM RUSSERT

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MEEET

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RUSSERT

NBC's highly respected newsman and moderator of 'Meet the Press' takes his turn in the hot seat. By Tamara Warren

The cherry blossoms have turned to rich green foliage, brightened by the gloss of April showers. Washington, D.C., is in its most welcoming season, evident from the large windows of the ground-floor office of NBC Studios, as the sun peaks out from clouds on a Monday afternoon.

The office belongs to Tim Russert, arguably one of America's most trusted and respected on-air personalities. Russert is easily recognizable as managing editor and moderator of "Meet the Press," political analyst for "NBC Nightly News" and "Today," and anchor of CNBC's weekly "The Tim Russert Show."

Deeply engrossed in his reading at his desk in the afternoon light, Russert, a lawyer by training, looks more like a thoughtful attorney than one of the most prominent figures in the media, as senior vice president and Washington bureau chief of NBC News. Bookcases, patriotic Uncle Sam paraphernalia and a flat-screen TV with four split screens fill his large office that adjoins a newsroom buzzing with activity.

When interrupted, he looks up, changing gears as his associate producer beckons him, and immediately, he switches from introspective to personable, settling into one of two chairs set for meetings. Crossing his legs at the ankle, Russert looks approachable, engaged and at ease in a navy, pinstriped suit, with his light brown hair parted neatly on the left side of his head

about their fathers, with morsels of sentimental and thoughtful musings on parents, inspired by the reaction to Big Russ.

“Sixty-thousand people wrote me letters about reading the [first] book. [They said] ‘Big Russ is your guy, but let me tell you about my guy,’” he says. “It’s really a road map because you find out what makes an impression on kids. It’s not giving them money or buying a car. It’s the opposite. They watch everything you do.”

Russert is family-oriented through and through. Perhaps that’s why he’s won numerous awards, such as 1995 National Father of the Year from the National Father’s Day Committee, and 2001 Father of the Year from the National Fatherhood Initiative. Fatherly attributes like strength,

Russert is true to his roots and his sports teams, including the Buffalo Sabres. The hockey team rewarded Russert’s support with a personalized jersey.

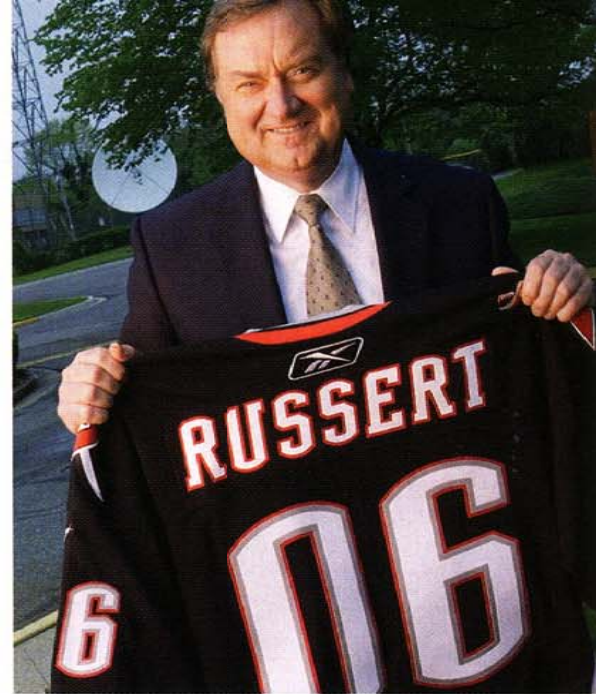
patience and attentiveness are evident in his disposition, but most of all, he exudes pride in his son.

It’s clear that Russert and his son have a unique bond.

“[Luke] says ‘old school, new school,’ and he looks at things that way. When I wrote ‘Big Russ,’ and I reread it, I realized I had written it as much for my son as for my dad. Then when my son read it, [it] had a profound effect on him. He’s like, ‘I knew what grandpa did, but I really didn’t understand it,’ but now he does. And, now in this new book, there’s a long introduction about my dad’s reaction and my son’s reaction after reading the first book.”

A topic that seems to affect Russert deeply is getting used to having Luke

away at college. He misses the daily routine of breakfast and driving his son to school. “It leaves a huge hole, there’s no doubt about it,” he says with a sigh. But get him talking about Luke, and Russert is the typical dad. “Sometimes I giggle and I see parts of myself,” he says. “If we’re going to



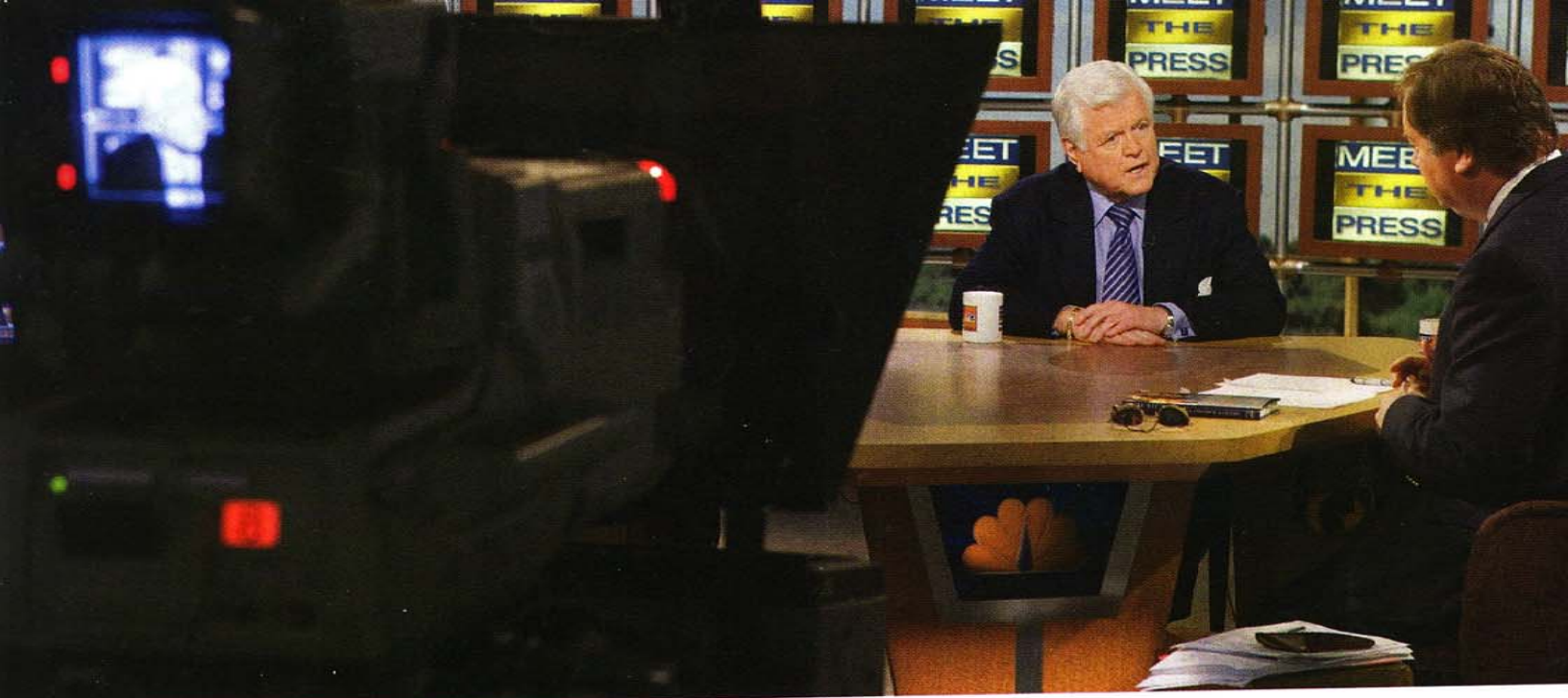
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IN THE KNOW

Just like he is on television, Russert is on his toes, beginning with his ability to easily interweave supporting statistics with his assertions. "Sixty-five percent say they get most of their news and information from television," he says, explaining the opportunity he has to impact the nation with his work. "You have to understand the limitations of television. There are limitations. And so what you have to do is use it. I have an hour of network television, which is a blessing and an oasis. Most of the interviews you see flying by are six or seven minutes long."

Much of what makes Russert a standout is his ability to balance meticulous research with a gut instinct for asking the right questions in a concise, logical manner. This savvy played out on "Today" in both the 2000 and 2004 presidential election.

"Matt Lauer said, 'In one word, what should the viewers be looking for tomorrow night?'" he recalls. "And I said, 'Florida, Florida, Florida.' He said, 'That's three words,' and laughed. That night I had my little white board and I held up 'Florida, Florida, Florida.' In 2004, I was back on the 'Today' show and Matt said,

Ohio, Ohio.' Those two elections were decided by those two states," he adds with a twinge of pride.

Affirming his news skills is a lengthy list of awards, such as his 2005 Emmy for his role in the coverage of the funeral of President Reagan, and the Joan S. Barone Award and the Annenberg Center's Walter Cronkite Award for his "Meet the Press" interviews with George W. Bush and Al Gore in 2000.

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Taking on the legacy of "Meet the Press"—now in its 59th year—was a challenge that Russert wanted when he joined NBC in 1984. As moderator of "Meet the Press" since 1991, Russert has become *the* face of Sunday morning television. "Whether you're liberal,

Independent, you can watch it and say, 'That's an interesting perspective or an interesting idea.' It makes you want to pursue more information or learn something more about a subject."

THE DAILY GRIND

To stay on top, Russert devotes most of his work day to preparation, often eating lunch at his desk, logging in about 10 hours a day. Yet, he takes care of himself, religiously carving out time in his morning to ride an Aerodyne bike 10 miles. "I do it rain, snow, sleet," he attests. Outside of work, he's more of a homebody, spending time with his wife, Maureen Orth, who is also an award-winning investigative reporter and author, in their home, located only five minutes away from the bureau. When they venture out, they prefer small, quiet neighborhood places.

A big part of Russert's week is the cyclical deadline that is shaped by the Sunday standoff. "I never know until Thursday or Friday who I'm going to have on "Meet the Press" generally, but I have a pretty good idea about who the subjects are going to be. You have to stay current on the war in Iraq, on immigration, on the Secretary Rumsfeld situation. [There will] be some intense research on Thursday and Friday and Saturday. I don't go out on

travel, I like to be places early. My son was traveling with his buddies over spring break. And he called me, and he said, 'I got them all up, Dad. We're at the airport and we're all checked in.' I started laughing, and I'm like, 'Oh my god, he's my kid!'"

Also telling of what it's like to live in the engaged Russert household

are Luke's recollections of dinner table conversations, which have long been colored by discussions of his parents' work, like interviewing the president or Michael Jordan. "We're a family that's centered upon reading the news," Luke says.

But it's not all hard news and sports for the Russerts. Luke talks about his dad's other passion—Bruce Springsteen. In college, the elder Russert had a stint working in concert promotions. The Russerts will see Springsteen in concert this summer. "He's a die-hard Bruce Springsteen fan," Luke says.

Luke's mother, Maureen Orth, wrote a cover story for Newsweek on Springsteen early in her career, but has found more sentimental ways to celebrate her husband's favorite artist in holiday gift giving. "She gave

my dad limited-edition prints of old-school [Springsteen] prints of the '70s."

After a short time in Tim Russert's universe, it's clear that it all comes back to keeping things in perspective.

"When I first started, I watched everything Tom Brokaw, Peter Jennings, Dan Rather, David Brinkley," he says. "You realize you have to be yourself. I'm very close to Tom Brokaw. Brian Williams and I talk all the time, so I have a lot of friends and colleagues in the profession, but I think in the end, you have to look into yourself and say, 'Am I being fair? Am I being faithful to the profession of journalism?' I watch everything and I read everything. It's the journey of life." ▼

Tamara Warren wrote about Terry Bradshaw for the January 2006 issue of NWA WorldTraveler. She lives in Brooklyn, N.Y.

▶ HOW TO GET THERE

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“Eventually, a guest will say something that’s unexpected or say something that’s just wrong, and you want to be in a position to say, ‘Excuse me.’”





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