



## Cushman more than just Newt's daughter

By [Carlton Fletcher](#) (643)  
[carlton.fletcher@albanyherald.com](mailto:carlton.fletcher@albanyherald.com)



Jackie Cushman

**ATLANTA, Ga.**— Jackie Cushman wears a number of hats over the course of one of her busy days.

She's a syndicated columnist, a published author with two books to her credit and another on the way, an in-demand inspirational speaker, a campaigner, a volunteer, a wife, a mother.

And a daughter.

Cushman, who spoke recently at the Lee County Chamber of Commerce's annual awards banquet, is the daughter of former U.S. House speaker and current on-the-rise GOP presidential candidate Newt Gingrich. And while her family ties give her plenty of material for her writing, Cushman said in a recent conversation with The Albany Herald that her relationship with Gingrich also helps keep her life from being boring.

"It's amazing the number of people who tell me, 'I never liked your father, but after meeting you I think I like him now,'" Cushman laughed as she drove from a speech at the Jackson County Woman of the Year luncheon in Jefferson to pick up her two children at school. "I try to remember that when I'm meeting someone for the first time.

"So many times we make assumptions about someone based on what we may have heard or read about them, and they turn out not to be that way at all. I never assume someone is one way or another."

Cushman could write a book on that topic alone after hearing the many things people have said about her father as he's navigated his way through a colorful and often bumpy political career.

"I have to admit, it wasn't easy," Cushman said of dealing with criticism of her father. "But like everything else, you have to get used to it. It comes with the territory.

“What I don’t like is when people say things that are untrue about my family. There have been a lot of untruths written about my parents’ divorce, and if I get the opportunity I’ll try to set the record straight.”

## **THE CAMPAIGN TRAIL**

Like the time Gingrich, who was speaker of the House at the time, met his daughter’s then-boyfriend/now-husband for the first time.

“We met dad at a bar, and I kind of stepped away to let the boys get to know each other,” she said. “I overheard these guys talking at a nearby table and one said, ‘That’s Newt Gingrich. He abandoned his wife and children.’ Well, I had to interrupt him. I told him, ‘I’m Newt Gingrich’s daughter, and I can promise you he never abandoned me.’”

“The guy was so apologetic, but I knew he was just repeating something he’d heard.”

And then there was the lady who picked Cushman up at an Alaska airport to take her to a recent speaking engagement.

“I told her I had to make a phone call, and I called my mom to tell her to check on the children,” Cushman said. “This lady gave me the funniest look and said, ‘Your mother is alive?’ She, of course, had heard differently.”

Serving as part of Gingrich’s team on the campaign trail would be enough to keep most people plenty busy, but that’s only part of Cushman’s daily routine. She writes a weekly column that is syndicated by Creators Syndicate and distributed to newspapers across the country, and she’s working on her first novel after writing and publishing “5 Principles for a Successful Life: From Our Family to Yours” with Gingrich and “The Essential American” on her own.

“I did my personal book and my historical book, so the obvious next step to me was a novel,” Cushman said of her latest literary work. “I was always the little girl who sat in the back of class and read, and novels were a big part of that.”

Even with her busy schedule, though, Cushman said she keeps her priorities in line.

“The focus of my life is my family,” she said. “I have two young children (12 and 10), and I want to spend as much quality time as I can with them while they still like me. We do as many things as we can together, and my husband and I coordinate our activities to make sure one of us is home with the children as much as possible.

“The kids find dad’s campaign process interesting and entertaining. They’ve been to a couple of debates and heard some of his speeches. After Christmas we’re going to take them to Iowa for some campaigning there.”

## **SURGE NO SURPRISE**

Of course, “dad’s” recent surge in the polls has everyone in the Gingrich camp excited, but Cushman insists she’s not surprised.

“Hey, my dad is the guy who faced down President Clinton on the balanced budget issue,” she said. “He’s not going to buckle when things get tough like they did this summer. He’s going to keep doing the things he’s done for decades now.”

“All the knowledge he’s accumulated over the years serves him well. That’s why he can relax at the debates and answer questions based on that knowledge, not some ‘facts’ that his campaign team has got him to memorize to repeat at the appropriate time. That’s why he hasn’t had the troubles some of the candidates have had.”

Given her insider status, Cushman is pressed for a few juicy tidbits, some things about her father people don’t know.

“A lot of people don’t remember that he’s lost before,” she said. “But both times on the morning after the election, he was out shaking hands during a factory shift change, telling the people he’d be back. He didn’t cry or moan, he just went back to work. One of the things he’s taught me is that life’s not about the failures, it’s about what you do afterward.

“Also, not many people are aware that dad’s a really funny guy. And, since he’s a conservative, they probably don’t know that he has a keen love for the environment. He strongly believes that we have to conserve the Earth God gave us.”

And there is one other thing.

“People remember the ‘Grinch’ magazine cover and the ‘crybaby’ magazine cover, and that’s how they judge my dad,” Cushman said. “That’s unfortunate. Because he’s a really good guy. He’s learned from the challenges in his life, and he’s a great dad and a great granddad.

“That’s the most important thing.”