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NOLA FOULSTON: PROSECUTOR, PARENT MOTHERHOOD SOFTENS SEDGWICK COUNTY'S NO-NONSENSE DA

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Everything about Nola Foulston's office bears the shine of success.

Dark wood desk buffed to a mirror finish. Cabinets of personal and professional mementos on which dust dare not alight.

And everywhere, photographs that Foulston shows off, then replaces in the exact spots from which they came.

Even Foulston herself seems polished to a high gloss.

There are her 10 perfect rose-colored nails. Dark liner setting off cocoa eyes. A suit tailored to fit snugly over a figure she anguishes about even in public.

In her official lair, District Attorney Nola Foulston inspires a litany of adjectives.

"Motherly" isn't one of them, even though Foulston has been a mother for four years. But it's not a side of her the public often sees.

The public Foulston is the woman most recently famous for putting someone else's mother away for 11 years for shooting an abortion doctor.

What Foulston exudes in her office isn't motherliness but authority. Power. Self-possession.

Her talk is tough, laced with mild expletives.

She seems coy, perhaps disingenuous, when she says in answer to a question about her personal life that "it's hard to talk about yourself. Even for a politician, I am shy somewhat."

And she parcels out facts like a miser, hoarding details about her private self, then tossing them out defiantly as if to say, "You want stories that show what kind of mother I am? Well how do you like this?"

There is, for example, the story about her son, Andrew's, tantrum in a Dillons, in which Foulston reveals that she doesn't spank but isn't afraid to threaten.

The moral? Foulston isn't brutal, but she isn't "a wuss" either.

It is only when she allows a visit to her home a few weeks later where she is padding about in bobby socks and riding pants in preparation for a visit to the stables that a picture of Nola Foulston, private person, develops.

! * * *

When Andrew awakens this morning after three attempts result ing in a fetal curl, mild keening and drawn-out moaning he emerges from the bedroom clinging to Foulston like a

barnacle to a ship, the Barney on the front of his nightshirt clamped to the horse club emblem on his mother's shirt.

Gradually he unpeels himself as Foulston sits. He rolls gently to the beige living room carpet, resting under his mother's dangling white cotton toe.

As he warms to the day, he swats at her, kittenlike.

But he likes interviews as little as she, intent more on fussing with Mommy than answering questions.

In a burst of pride, he volunteers to show off his toy room. His books. His collection of dinosaurs. (He sends one soaring when Mommy isn't watching.)

As he chatters on, Foulston enters the room, then crawls about on the floor, straightening the clutter and uttering exclamations of surprise: Here are the slippers we've been looking for! What happened to this hat!

Andrew just laughs, his tiny teeth shining in a row! .

* * *

Surrounded by the icons of a district attorney's life law books, diplomas, awards Foulston warily skirts the topic of motherhood. Her answers are often abrupt and challenging, her demeanor prickly.

Her own husband, Steve, says he won't visit her at the office because "she won't give me the time of day."

But as she talks of Andrew, she softens almost imperceptibly. The reserve is still there.

"I loved kids," Foulston says of the beginning of her marriage, "but it was not something I was aspiring to be, a mother. I think it was somewhat selfish, that I considered myself too busy to be a parent."

But at 37 or 38 she's 43 now "I started to think about having children." "Steve was a hard sell. We never married planning on having a child. We spent a lot of time (discussing it), as probably you believe two lawyers would."

But because of medical difficulties, Foulston says, pregnancy "isn't an option for me."

So the couple explored adoption. Eventually, she says, they arranged one privately through a friend.

"It wasn't anything heroic," Foulston says, "like we were going to save a baby or anything."

Foulston won't discuss details of the adoption. She doesn't want to describe the day she and Steve met Andrew.

"Andrew is our child," she says in measured tones. "He is not 'our adopted child.'

"This is my child, win, lose or draw."

* * *

After a time this Saturday morning, Andrew becomes so wrapped up in play that he forgets about breakfast. (Orange-pineapple juice. Milk. Cinnamon Toast Crunch, dry. One vitamin save the purples till last.)

He shuns the potty.

He puts off brushing his perfect little teeth.

Instead, he and Foulston stretch out on his bed.

For a while, Foulston scratches Andrew's back with her dark pink nails. Andrew's eyes roll back in his head. His thumb finds his mouth.

Foulston croons quiet conversation.

Then the two rest together, Andrew draping himself over his mother's ! midsection a bridge over a placid river.

When they separate, Foulston grabs Trouble, a stuffed white dog, and growls a bit of nonsense.

Andrew answers the dog, not his mother: "Trouble, can you read?"

"Oh, a little bit."

"What does this say? . . . "

Trouble answers, then Foulston shifts voices, from Trouble's singsong to Baxter Bear's drunken John Wayne.

Baxter asks for a little honey, which Andrew scampers off to borrow from Pooh Bear, who's sitting in the corner.

Most of the stuffed animals are Foulston's, on loan to Andrew.

The conversational technique, Foulston says, she learned from working with young crime victims.

* * *

Foulston proudly shows off the snapshots of Andrew in her office, accompanying them with oral captions.

This one was taken here. This one, there.

And doesn't he look just like his father? Especially when they're smiling together?

But pressed for an anecdote of motherhood, she instead throws a challenge. "You want me to tell you about the time he had the temper tantrum in Dillons and I had to take down his pants?" she spurts.

It seems that Foulston and her mother were with Andrew in the Dillons at 21st and Rock the day before Thanksgiving last year. The store was packed. There must've been 300 people.

The three ran into a friend, and the friend "tweaked" Andrew and said hello.

Andrew "went ballistic."

"Here is my son screaming at the top of his lungs," Foulston says.

"I should have just parked the cart (and) taken him out to the car, but being the stalwart that I am, (I said), 'I'm gonna live through it.'"

"He screamed and he screamed and he screamed."

Foulston yanked down his sweat pants and threatened a spanking she didn't deliver says she never would deliver despite being, herself, a self-professed "rascal" who was spanked as a child. (Usually, she says, she uses "1-2-3 magic" counting to three before dispensing time-out.)

The threat flopped. The caterwauling continued.

"I was sweaty," Foulston says. "It was just like, 'Let this be over, Lord. How long do temper tantrums last?'"

Finally, Foulston was able to pay for her groceries and head for the car. There, she attempted to deposit a "stiff and rigid" Andrew. In her frustration, she neglected to buckle Andrew's car seat.

And then it happened.

"It was like Psycho Child," she says. "He just turned it off."

* * *

Sometimes Foulston's mother criticizes her child-rearing, telling her daughter: "If you let him get away with that now, Nola . . . "

Foulston says she shrugs it off; she's finding her own way:

"I have instructed her that she has had her opportunity to raise children."

Speaking for herself, Terry Tedesco says she has nothing but praise for her daughter's mothering style "she follows all of my things that I've given her" and is a "good, loving, considerate, patient" mother.

A friend, Sally Roth, says Andrew has brought many changes in Foulston the love of a mother for her child, and new maturity.

Foulston's husband, Steve, wonders at her patience.

"She is really incredibly good with him," he says. "It really surprised me. . . ."

"She is not known for her patience. She's got the patience of a young rattlesnake normally. (But) she has the patience of Job with him."

Foulston says she works hard to separate what and who she is professionally her illusions about herself, she says from what she presents to her son.

In that, Steve Foulston says, she succeeds.

"There's the public persona of her as being this heavy-duty, grab-for-the-jugular prosecutor," Steve Foulston says. But personally, "she has just mellowed out since Andrew came into her life. . . ."

"We've got a real good marriage, and she just loves the hell out of that little kid.

"She's as happy as she's ever been."

* * *

In her office and out, Foulston is a creature of schedules, of plans.

"I'm a very compulsive, organized person," she acknowledges but not, she says to her embarrassment, Superwoman. Still, "we have a general routine to our lives."

She sees no reason the family cannot continue to live by a schedule.

For now, Andrew attends preschool. At home during the day, he's cared for by a nanny.

On weekdays, after Nola and Steve Foulston come home from work, Steve takes Andrew out to the golf course or the putting green. (Andrew has his own clubs and a wardrobe of snap-brim hats in gradually ascending sizes.) Nola may head off to ride her horse,

Famous. On other days, she'll work out.

Then the family eats a late dinner.

On Saturdays, Nola and Andrew buy groceries.

Once a week, the family journeys to Bookstar to browse and to choose at least one book for Andrew. Foulston reads to Andrew frequently and allows him very little television and then only children's programs. (Sometimes, though, he watches his mother on TV.)

Andrew's future is somewhat planned, too, Foulston says at least financially.

She has been setting aside money from early on. What Andrew does with it as an adult, Foulston says, will be his business and not hers:

"I don't have any grand plan for Andrew."

She would love for him to go to college. Maybe law school.

But "if he decides that he wants to own a gas station, the resources will be there for him.

"He's his own person. He's not my clone."

Caption:

PHOTO: (1) The DA at play: Nola Foulston, romping with son

Andrew, says she didn't aspire to be a parent at the time of her marriage.

Jeff Tuttle/The Wichita Eagle

(2) In 1990, Nola Foulston demonstrated how a Haysville resident had menaced

a police officer before being shot to death.

Laura Rauch/File photo

(3) Nola Foulston accepts a congratulatory hug from Judge Michael Corrigan after being sworn in as Sedgwick County district attorney in January 1989. On the job, she exudes authority, not motherliness.

Brian Corn/File photo

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