



Joe Scarborough's co-host is not an agitated, abrasive in-your-face sparring partner. Rather, she's a politically complicated, personally contented TV pro who's finally found her groove on a daily TV rumble.



SET MATES Brzezinski and Scarborough keep things light on MSNBC's weekday talk show *Morning Joe*.

thought I was listening to him. But I was totally wrapped up in what was going on around me."

By the time she was 16, as a student at the prestigious Madeira School in McLean, Va., she got her first big break with *The Mika and Melissa Show*, which aired on a local cable channel. From that humble beginning, and straight through to today, "I truly see myself as a journalist first, always raising questions," Brzezinski says.

One of Brzezinski's earliest coups on *Morning Joe* was a strikingly prescient interview with Michelle Obama in November of '07, when hope for a black president was virtually nil, particularly and most painfully among African-Americans.

In it, the future first lady told Brzezinski, "Black America will wake up and get it, but what we're dealing with in the black community is just the natural fear of possibility."

The ethic of persistent questioning and perpetual movement that drives Mika becomes apparent in the WABC radio studio. Headphones firmly in place, she alternates spoonfuls of soup and sips of Starbucks tea, all while fiddling with her BlackBerry and reading a computer screen scrolling info on upcoming callers' issues.

Despite the distractions, she keeps up a spirited discussion with Scarborough about President Obama's intentions to close the U.S. prison at Guantanamo Bay.

Scarborough stridently pooh-poohs reports of mistreatment, wondering aloud whether practices such as sleep deprivation and waterboarding can even be considered torture. "I want to know if waterboarding is torture. I want to know what torture is," Brzezinski fires back. "I don't want a bunch of

Morning Mika

By Meredith Nelson

"MIKA'S NOT A WACKO MARXIST," JOE Scarborough says. "She just plays one on TV." It's the kind of over-the-top, polarizing comment that gives *Morning Joe* its energy. The friendly ribbing on MSNBC's weekday-morning talk show often pits the conservative Scarborough, a former Republican congressman from Florida, against ascendant sidekick Mika Brzezinski as a member of the much-derided "liberal mainstream media elite."

Brzezinski takes it in stride. "If you tied me up and poked me with sticks and asked me questions on every ide-

ological issue out there, I think you'd find that I'm conservative in ways that might surprise you," she says.

Fresh off a Friday morning broadcast, Brzezinski is chatting while pulling off a sleek cashmere sweater and slipping into a T-shirt. Below the belt, she already is dressed down — jeans and daughter Emilie's Uggs — one of the perks of being a newscaster who sits behind a desk. She and Scarborough work around the clock, so it's strictly casual attire the minute they're off camera.

As she takes off her TV make-up, she checks the time. She has one hour to go 16 blocks from her cluttered dressing room on the 17th

floor of Manhattan's storied 30 Rock skyscraper in Rockefeller Center to the WABC radio studios at Penn Plaza. No easy feat on a frigid day in January. Before she heads out, she grabs her cell phone for a quick chat with her nanny, with whom she "co-mothers" daughters Emilie, 13, and Carlie, 10. They make some last-minute arrangements for Carlie's upcoming horse show.

"For the first time, I'm happy with all the pieces in my career and my life," the 42-year-old says. "Up till now it's been, 'This will get me to this, and that will get me to the next step.' Now I can't think of anything else I'd rather be doing."

The daughter of Zbigniew Brzezinski, national security adviser to President Jimmy Carter from 1976 to 1980, Mika spent her tween years sleeping over at the White House with childhood friend Amy Carter. As a kid tooling around Camp David in a golf cart, she once drove smack into Menachem Begin's shins.

At 16 she accompanied her dad on a secret, well-armed meeting with Yasser Arafat in Tunisia. An inkblot of a rabbit her mom made for her during the Iran hostage crisis hangs on the wall in her dressing room and office. Young Mika named it Bunny Sadr, after Abolhassan Banisadr, a key figure in the anti-shah Iranian revolution who became president under Ayatollah Khomeini in 1980. It was a fitting start for a woman who

now grills the likes of Madeleine Albright, Colin Powell, and Hillary Clinton. Oddly enough, Brzezinski, raised with two older brothers, never contemplated a political career, even in her formative years. She always wanted to be a journalist, she says.

"I would go with my dad when he was interviewed on the *Today* show, *Nightline*, and *Meet the Press*, and he



GOOD COMPANY Zbigniew Brzezinski, flanked by Menachem Begin (left) and President Jimmy Carter at Camp David in 1978, raised Mika among powerful world leaders, even when her antics proved a bit painful for guests.

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