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# Joe Biden

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## Introduction

Joseph Robinette Biden Jr.—known to millions simply as Joe Biden—has been a defining figure in American political life for more than fifty years. From humble beginnings in Scranton, Pennsylvania, to the heights of the presidency, his journey is one marked by resilience, ambition, heartbreak, and hope. His story is, in many ways, a reflection of the nation he has served: shaped by adversity, striving for progress, and always attentive to the everyday struggles of ordinary people.

Raised in a Catholic, Irish-American family, Biden's early life was imprinted with both privilege and hardship. The economic upheavals of his childhood, the challenge of overcoming a severe stutter, and the bonds of a close-knit family forged in him a sense of empathy and tenacity. As a young man, he discovered the transformative power of education, athletics, and community, which set the trajectory for his public career. Biden's experiences in Delaware schools and at the University of Delaware deepened his commitment to public service and social justice.

Biden's journey through law school, early legal practice, and local politics was neither straightforward nor without missteps. However, these formative years instilled in him a commitment to fairness and a determination to champion those whose voices often go unheard. His shocking election to the U.S. Senate at the tender age of twenty-nine, followed by unimaginable personal tragedy, tested his resolve like never before. The car accident that took his wife and daughter left him a single father grappling with loss even as he began one of the most consequential careers in the Senate.

For decades in the Senate, Joe Biden developed a reputation as a dealmaker, a passionate advocate for criminal justice reform, and a specialist in foreign affairs. He chaired critical committees, oversaw historic hearings, and sometimes courted controversy. His personal life, too, was defined by renewal and devotion, as he forged a new partnership with Jill Biden and raised his children in the face of ongoing loss and public scrutiny.

Biden's political ambitions led him twice to seek the presidency before his eventual selection as vice president on Barack Obama's groundbreaking ticket. His vice presidency was marked by vital legislative achievements, foreign policy crises, and a deepening of his commitment to the American people. After leaving office in 2017, Biden faced further personal loss and considered whether his time in public life had ended—until the tumultuous political climate of 2020 called him back to the arena.

This biography explores not only the public milestones but also the private moments that have shaped Joe Biden. Against the backdrop of America's evolving history—its

struggles for equality, reconciliation, and renewal—Biden’s life stands as a testament to unwavering resolve, faith in democracy, and the enduring spirit of service. As the forty-sixth president, his legacy continues to unfold, offering lessons in leadership, perseverance, and the possibility of new beginnings.

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## CHAPTER ONE: Scranton Roots: Family and Early Years

Joseph Robinette Biden Jr. arrived in the world on November 20, 1942, in the heart of Scranton, Pennsylvania. At the time of his birth, the Second World War was raging overseas, a distant rumble that nonetheless shaped the economic and social landscape of American cities like Scranton. Born at St. Mary's Hospital, he was the first child of Catherine Eugenia "Jean" Finnegan and Joseph Robinette Biden Sr. He entered a Catholic family of primarily Irish descent, a heritage that would remain a significant part of his identity throughout his life.

His parents, Jean and Joseph Sr., had met in high school and married in 1941. Joseph Sr. initially came from a background of affluence, and the family enjoyed a comfortable lifestyle early on. This early period saw a degree of prosperity, allowing the family a certain level of ease in the industrial city of Scranton.

However, the winds of fortune shifted for the Biden family. Joseph Sr. experienced significant business setbacks, leading to a period of financial strain. This downturn meant a change in circumstances, a move from a more privileged situation to one requiring greater frugality and resilience.

For several years during this challenging time, the Biden family lived with Jean's parents, the Finnegans, at their home on North Washington Avenue in Scranton's Green Ridge neighborhood. This multi-generational household was a common arrangement in those times, providing a safety net during economic uncertainty and fostering close family bonds.

Living with his maternal grandparents, Joe Jr. experienced a different rhythm of life. This period likely instilled in him an early appreciation for the support and stability that extended family could provide, a theme that would resonate throughout his life. The Scranton of his early childhood was a city deeply connected to the coal industry, a working-class environment that shaped the lives of its residents.

He was soon joined by siblings who would become lifelong confidantes and close allies. His sister, Valerie, was born in 1945, followed by brothers James in 1949 and Francis (Frank) in 1953. Despite the age differences, the Biden children grew up in a tight-knit unit, a testament to the family's emphasis on mutual support.

Scranton in the 1950s faced economic decline, and steady work became harder to find for Joseph Sr. The financial pressures mounted, leading the family to make a

significant decision about their future. A new opportunity arose in Delaware, prompting the Biden family to relocate in 1953 when Joe Jr. was ten years old.

The move took them to Claymont, Delaware, where the family initially settled into an apartment. This transition from the familiar streets of Scranton to a new state and a new community was a significant event in young Joe's life, requiring adaptation and resilience.

Later, the Bidens moved to a house in the nearby Mayfield neighborhood of Wilmington, Delaware. This move marked another step in the family's re-establishment in Delaware, providing a more permanent base as Joseph Sr. worked to improve their financial standing.

Joseph Sr. eventually found success as a used car salesman, a profession that provided a stable, middle-class life for his family. This achievement, hard-won after earlier struggles, ensured that his children had opportunities despite the earlier financial turbulence.

Growing up in both Scranton and Delaware, Joe Jr. attended Catholic primary schools. These early educational experiences were foundational, providing a sense of structure and community outside the home. The values emphasized in these schools, coupled with his family's faith, played a role in shaping his early worldview.

The moves between states and homes meant adjusting to new schools and making new friends, experiences that can build adaptability in a child. Each new environment presented its own set of challenges and opportunities for a young boy navigating his way.

Despite the financial ups and downs and the geographic shifts, the Biden household remained a place of warmth and strong family ties. The emphasis on loyalty, hard work, and perseverance instilled by his parents would become defining characteristics.

The transition from the industrial landscape of Scranton to the Delaware suburbs offered different perspectives and experiences. It broadened his understanding of American life beyond a single community.

His early years were not without their difficulties, as he would later reveal, but the foundation of a loving family and a grounded upbringing in these working-class and middle-class environments provided a crucial bedrock.

The values absorbed in his Scranton roots – the importance of community, the dignity of work, and the resilience required to overcome hardship – would stay with him, influencing his political philosophy and his connection to everyday Americans.

The move to Delaware opened up new possibilities, but the lessons learned and the relationships forged in Scranton remained a vital part of his identity. He often spoke of his Scranton origins throughout his career, highlighting the impact the city had on him.

His parents, particularly his mother, played a central role in his development, providing unwavering support and encouragement through the family's challenges. Their determination to provide for their children despite financial setbacks was a powerful example.

The close bond with his siblings, Valerie, James, and Frank, formed in these early years, would endure and become a source of strength and support throughout his life and career.

His time living with his grandparents also contributed to his understanding of family history and the importance of generational connections.

The move to Delaware, while challenging, was ultimately a step towards greater stability for the Biden family, allowing Joseph Sr. to build a more secure future through his work as a car salesman.

Young Joe navigated these changes, attending different Catholic schools as the family settled in Delaware. These schools provided continuity in education and values, even as the physical surroundings shifted.

The experiences of his early years, marked by both comfort and financial struggle, mobility and rootedness in family, laid the groundwork for the man he would become.

The lessons of adapting to new places, facing uncertainty, and relying on family support were invaluable, shaping his character and preparing him, in unforeseen ways, for the long and demanding path ahead in public life.

This period in Scranton and early in Delaware was a formative chapter, instilling values and providing experiences that would resonate throughout his decades of service.

The resilience shown by his parents in the face of financial difficulties, their commitment to their children, and the strong family unit they created were central to Joe Biden's upbringing.

The move to Delaware, while necessary, meant leaving behind the familiar streets and faces of Scranton, an early experience with change and transition.

But the connection to Scranton remained, a touchstone he would return to both

physically and rhetorically throughout his career, underscoring his working-class roots.

His early education in Catholic schools provided a moral and intellectual framework that would influence his public service.

The daily life of the Biden family in these years involved navigating the realities of their economic circumstances, the dynamics of a growing family, and the adjustments that came with relocating.

It was a typical American childhood in many ways, marked by school, family dinners, and the everyday adventures and challenges of growing up with siblings.

Joseph Sr.'s eventual success in the car business provided a sense of security that allowed the family to thrive in their new Delaware home.

The foundation of a strong family unit, built on love, support, and shared experience, was arguably the most significant inheritance of Joe Biden's early years.

These early chapters of his life, rooted in Scranton and transplanted to Delaware, provided the essential backdrop for the journey that would take him to the highest offices in the land.

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