

Betty Ford: Coping With New Visibility, Not Quite the 'Plain Country Girl'

By *Donnie Radcliffe*

Betty Bloomer Ford is demonstrating how a dancer's stance can help shave off the fatigue of standing for hours in receiving lines.

In her youth, she wanted to be a concert dancer and studied under such greats as Martha Graham, Doris Humphrey and Charles Weidman.

She is standing in her memento-cluttered Alexandria living room, her still-lithe figure clad in powder blue slacks and a sheer, semi-see-through blouse. Slacks are an at-home favorite she comes by naturally, she thinks, since it was another Bloomer—Anneli, in all probability an ancestor—who invented the divided skirt.

Betty Ford is unaffected but she is not quite the "plain country girl" she claims to be. She is bluish-spoken though, and on occasion, sulkily candid.

Is she aware that there are people in this town who are saying she is, well . . . ?

"Cracking up?," she suggests, voluntarily completing the question.

"Oh, yes, I'm aware," she continues, unflustered. "If anyone were to follow me for a week, they would realize that I'm as emo-

tionally well-balanced as any person they could compare me with. . . I know it's a very serious situation, but if I worried about it I wouldn't have time for anything else.

Betty Ford's schedule is booked solid through July—"no openings whatsoever"—with interviews and public appearances. The results may not be immediately apparent.

A Vogue magazine piece is in the works, and in its September issue *The Ladies Home Journal* will come out with a spread on the 35-year-old Chicago-born wife of Vice President Gerald R. Ford.

"I think September is a better issue than August, when people are on vacation and don't read as much," she said, displaying an awareness of timing that may or may not prove providential.

She said there is no connection at all between her new visibility and the fact that with the impeachment inquiry nearing a climax, people are increasingly curious to know who Betty Ford is.

Back in the beginning after Ford was hand-picked by Mr. Nixon as the first Vice President in history to take office under the

See FORD, M9, Col. 1



Betty Ford in the living room of the Alexandria home the Fords have lived in for nearly 20 years.

Gifts for the House That Has Nothing

By *Marine Cheshire*

Vice President Gerald Ford's wife, preparing to move into an official residence that is virtually unfinished, has been invited to "take anything she wants" from the storerooms full of foreign gifts that have piled up under the custody of Protocol Chief Henry Catto Jr.

Catto extended the invitation after being informed that the newly designated Vice Presidential home on the Naval Observatory Grounds "was as empty as 'Tart' and Mrs. Ford was beginning to feel like an impoverished Scarlett

VIP

O'Hara" as she prepared to take up residence there.

Inspecting the property for the first time last Tuesday, Betty Ford discovered that many rooms are completely bare of furniture and there are no pots, pans, silver, china or glassware.

When she asked for a drink of water, an embarrassed Navy steward had to tell her that there were no glasses and no paper cups either.

Catto's offer, according to Mrs. Ford's press secretary, Nancy Howe, is like being given the

Neiman-Marcus Christmas catalog and told to order one of everything."

Catto's storerooms at the State Department, since U.S. officials and their wives started complying with the Foreign Gifts and Decorations Act of 1966, have begun to look a bit like Ali Baba's cave.

Mrs. Ford will be able to choose silver tea sets, urns, boxes, hortic spraying dishes, trays, ice buckets and even a sterling breadbasket.

There are Oriental and Persian carpets of impressive quality, delicate table linens and valuable objects d'art of crystal and jade and rare porcelain. There are tapes-

See VIP, M10, Col. 7



Mrs. Gerald Ford: "I live from day to day, I really do."

Photos by Frank Johnson—The Washington Post

Betty Ford's Visibility: Not Quite the 'Plain Country Girl'

FORD, From M1

Twenty-fifth Amendment, there had been a lot of publicity. Too much. And Mrs. Ford said she finally cut it off because she did not want that much attention.

Things obviously have changed now, and much as Ford stomps the country in the name of the Republican Party (he recently clocked his first 100,000 miles as Vice President), Mrs. Ford is doing some low-key stumping of her own.

Two weeks ago, deciding that somebody from the administration ought to attend the funeral of the murdered Mrs. Martin Luther King Sr., she flew off to Atlanta. And she was seen off by the press. She had to be escorted back to Maine to meet them. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger was out of the country. Defense Secretary James Schlesinger was gone and well, "it seemed to me the next person in line was me."

She thought Mrs. King's death was "a tragic thing and I wanted to pay my respects to a very fine woman who had a great influence on the people of that church. And I thought someone should recognize that."

She was right. Except for Georgia Gov. Jimmy Carter, Mrs. Ford was the only dignitary present not connected with the civil rights movement or black politics. "Daddy King, upstairs, had his bedroom before the funeral, and he had his hair cut and he kissed her and told her how grateful his wife would have been."

Later, letters of gratitude came in to her from all over the country, but especially from Atlanta.

Some reaction to newsmaking Fords is not gratifying. Susan Ford, 17, was appalled last fall when she saw her father in three pictures of her father and an old girl friend holding it up on a Vermont ski weekend 34 years ago.

Mrs. Ford smoothed her daughter's ruffled feathers, telling her that "your daddy was only 26 years old and still at Yale. You wouldn't hesitate to have a picture taken with a boyfriend, so why would daddy hesitate with a girl friend?"

The Ford sons, Mike, 24, Jack, 22, and Steve, 18, had quite a different reaction. Recalled Mrs. Ford with obvious relish, "They thought the old man may have had something after all."

Ford's own tongue-in-cheek explanation of the girl's friend, one-time Poncey model and Miss America, came in a recent issue of Sports Illustrated. She was a "decoy" of sifting her "eager beaver" and while he ended up losing the girl, "the important thing was I learned to ski." It was an example, he said he often reminded his wife, of "instructive athletes, not competitive athletes."

Hearing that, as she sat there in her living room, the other onetime Powers model in Ford's life, Mrs. Ford, burst into laughter. "You know, Nancy," she said, turning to her press



Vice President and Mrs. Ford with daughter Susan 17, son Mike, 24, and his bride Gayle, 22.

ought to get a picture of Phyllis for our scrapbook."

Still another picture spread—this time of Susan—sent shock waves through the Ford family when it appeared recently in People magazine. Taken by the Vogue photographer who later sold them to People, the shots showed Susan cavorting in the family's backyard swimming pool. According to Mrs. Ford, "We did everything we could to prevent them being published."

They didn't have any luck but "at least they didn't use the one against Mrs. Ford, looking like a sex symbol. She had and she knows that."

Mrs. Ford and her son, Mike, 24, the blonde teenager, is "a well-developed girl, a nice healthy American girl—like we'd all like to be."

(With the exception of Ford, Susan was the first member of the family to receive Secret Service protection. That occurred at the time of the Patty Hearst kidnapping when federal agents moved in after learning that "the daughter of the Vice President" appeared on a Symphonise Liberation Army list.

"They [SLA] didn't mention Susan by name and they may not have known who the Vice President was," according to Mrs. Ford, who now has agents of her own when she requests them. "But we had to be very quiet about it because the FBI didn't want to lose its touch."

Then there was the "Jim marriage" item about Betty Ford's first marriage and how "everybody" in Grand Rapids knew it except the press. "The truth is," Mrs. Ford sighed, "nobody ever asked me. If they had I would have told them."

She does not know what became of that husband, William Warren, a former Grand Rapids Mich. furniture company representative whom she divorced after four years on grounds of incompatibility, getting a total settle-

"I've been a little busy," she said, grinning, "and I haven't been able to keep up with him."

It was a marriage "I could have easily skipped" but from it she found that "you can't change the way of a person's life." It offered one advantage, though, "because I certainly learned, and probably appreciate more, what a good marriage can mean."

She married Ford in 1948, never suspecting he wanted a career in politics. "He just happened not to tell me, so I really thought I was marrying a lawyer and we'd be living in Grand Rapids."

Jack Stiles, Ford's first campaign manager, was quoted recently as saying the once told Betty Ford that "if you can accept the fact that politics comes first and marriage second and live with it, then I think it can be a good marriage, a good partnership."

Mrs. Ford said no that wasn't quite right because it wasn't about politics and it had come from her sister-in-law, Mrs. Thomas Ford of Grand Rapids. The way it really went was "you won't even have to worry about other women because Jerry is married to his work."

"It certainly has been, as far as I know, Jerry loves women but he loves them in a nice way. He loves people."

Some of those people are being that Gerald R. Ford will move into the White House. "I will take a couple of months still others that it won't be a couple of years. Betty Ford claims that's something she never thinks about."

"No, I never do. I live from day to day. I really do. If I look at my schedule for the week ahead, or the month ahead, I let it pile up as to what is going to happen—say if we get into Admiral's House (at the U.S. Naval Observatory) around the first of

back door. I'd figure, 'Oh, no, I can't make it...'

Not that she doubts for an instant what kind of a President Jerry Ford would make. He would be "excellent... I certainly think as good as any" and she is no longer quite as adamant about his quitting politics at the end of two years, as she once was reported to be.

"When you project two years in this political situation we're in now, I don't think it's fair to say what you would or wouldn't do."

Only when it comes to Watergate and the inevitable question which presidential hopefuls will forever after have to answer, do her gray-blue eyes turn steely.

Could Watergate happen if Ford were President?

"Oh, no, never, because Jerry has seen Watergate happen and Jerry would never allow himself to be away from what was going on to the point that Watergate could be set up without his knowing it."

She said that Ford has no illusions "that he is any great brain" but then neither is he the dummy Lyndon Johnson once made him out to be with that now-famous remark about Ford playing football too often without his helmet.

"One of Jerry's law professors—a well-known Democrat—at Yale got tired of reading about how dumb he was and he said 'If you don't mind, Jerry, I'll do it on my own, vent ahead and let me see how you do.' The event starts a half-hour early."

Two months since Ford became Vice President, she has been "a revolution" because she said, she found out that "I'm much stronger than I realized. I was becoming more of a man's hand, but I've been made on me and it hasn't bothered me a bit."

Betty Ford speaks slowly, sometimes almost haltingly and she says it's because she chooses her words carefully to convey her precise meaning. When she writes, for example, a dog-eared thesaurus is always close at hand.

Her speech mannerism has nothing to do with the effects of tranquilizers she takes from time to time, she said. She uses those when she feels tension coming on "before it has a chance to work itself into a spasm type of thing and then radiate." That happens usually from exhaustion "if I've overdone it of course I've learned over a period of 10 years how to cope with the thing and pace myself—at least I've tried to cope. If anyone ever does learn that."

She has learned well enough not to be fazed much by Ford's minutia, thrown on at least three occasions when she arrived late at official functions.

Laughing it off with the explanation that Ford was late for their wedding and she has been making up for it ever since, she said she tells people "if they want me there on time, they should see me at the event starts a half-hour early."

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But nine years ago, shortly after Ford became House Minority Leader, "I had a lot of problems, a lot of time

problem, an imperceptible pinched net resulting from an injury, and her doctor suggested that "a lot of my netting be removed by not having any netting to take to us more or less sounding board."

"The children were too young; that sort of thing and when Joan came home, I didn't want to make aly beat on him. I wanted to make as pleasant as I could."

Betty Ford has kept up with even of recent months, experiencing six great shocks. For instance, when she

paid \$8,000 in taxes over three-year period "I think that I never made out his taxes right. It turned all his papers over to the University of Michigan and he has not subtracted anything."

She was equally shocked by reports that \$4,568 from Nixon campaign contributions had been used to help Mr. Nixon's gift of diamond and birthday. "There's no doubt in my mind that it was news to Mrs. Nixon said."

Not does the volunteer any real answers to such things as discrepancy between White House transcripts of Oval Office tapes and the transcripts released by the House Judiciary Committee.

She has not read either version of "I don't know whether I'll get to the completely mixed up. I think that they would help any, every something different comes out."

Richard Frazier, Mrs. Ford's chauffeur, was going to the store and other things, said Nancy Howe, it were out of kithy Hiter) and he needs some money.

Betty Ford sat down on a living room chair, opened her check book and stared at it. Thumbing back a arithmetic, she did some quick men write out the sum of \$80.

"I wasn't sure there was anything in it," she explained, visibly relieved that that there was, "after a hour of I brick and nearly 20 years ago, a girl from the pool, and at the newest in suits—the Secret Service "telephone booth" as she calls them, stand sentinels on each end—Mrs. Ford put still another way:

"You see," she said earnestly, "we just a normal American family at