

# 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-life 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—Annelia, 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 plain-spoken, though, and on occasion, strikingly 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 handpicked 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 Maxine Cheshire

Vice President Gerald Ford's wife, preparing to move into an official residence that is virtually unfurnished, 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 Cato Jr.

Cato extended the invitation after being informed that the newly designated vice presidential home on the Naval Observatory Grounds "was as empty as Tara" 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.

Cato'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."

Cato'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 Babba's cave.

Mrs. Ford will be able to choose silver tea sets, urns, boxes, hampers, serving 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

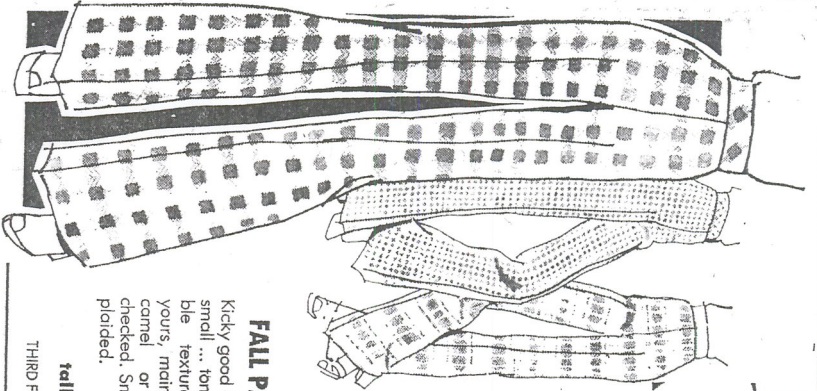


Mrs. Gerald Ford: "I live from day to day. I really do."

Photos by Frank Johnson—The Washington Post



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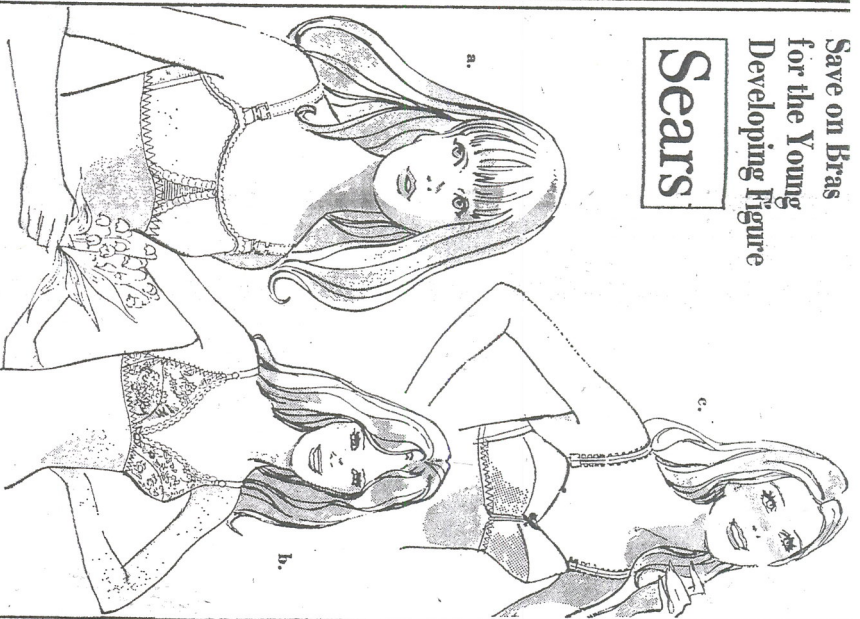
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tries and screens and paintings to cover the bare wall handsomely.

Catto, Congress' designated watchdog over all foreign gifts to U.S. officials and their families, is charged with recording and disposition of such gifts. Thus, he has the authority to transfer any items Mrs. Ford selects to the vice presidential residence for official use there.

The original recipients, who include former Vice President Spiro T. Agnew and former Secretary of State William P. Rogers, were required by the 1st statute to turn the gifts in as public property.

Catto had already asked the General Services Administration to dispose of many of the gifts as "excess personal property." That meant they must be turned over to a museum or some other public repository (sold at auction).

Catto is elated at what he considers "the perfect solution." Foreign governments will be pleased to have the items displayed in the Vice President's home, he said.

"It's going to make everybody happy," he says "especially Congress."

Catto's decision will certainly go a long way toward solving a ticklish problem for the Ford's.

Members of the House and Senate who pushed through legislation for the new vice presidential residence in May apparently were unrealistic in their estimates of the cost of making the house (circa 1884 a stately residence for the Vice President).

Testimony during hearings on the bill which was signed into law by President Nixon on July 11 projected that the "cost of the improvements to the house can be held to as little as \$15,000." The Secret Service was expected to get by with spending as little as \$33,000 for temporary security arrangements.

Sen. William Proxmire (D-Wis.), scoffed at those figures at the time. He quoted from a General Service Administration report which estimated that "it will cost \$276,000 to upgrade the house to vice presidential standards and \$359,000 to provide the protective improvements required by the Secret Service."

The \$276,000 figure was for structural renovation such as a new roof and an electronic-era electric system. It did not include furnishings and household equipment.

Apparently, Congress was unaware that the Chief Naval Operations who occupied the mansion previously either used their own furnishings or government issue.

The Ford's, who now live in suburban Alexandria are accustomed to a modest family-oriented lifestyle. They are not prepared to equip an official residence for entertaining.

Betty Ford, when she toured the Naval Observatory house last week, expressed dismay at what needed to be done. Her husband is already on record with Congress as promising that the Ford's, who didn't ask for the residence in the first place, intend to be "very frugal in what they spend on it."