

# Her Family Comes First

## Washington

"Yes, my husband and I discussed the vice presidential possibility," Mrs. Gerald Ford said.

"It's unavoidable, with all the news and the telephones ringing. I know Gerry's very happy as majority leader of the house — oops, I mean minority leader, he'd like to be majority leader. He's always been happy in the house; it's his first love.

"The Nixons have been close friends of ours since we came to Washington," Mrs. Ford went on, "and I think Gerry's a good team player. I think he'll do what the President wants him to."

Elizabeth Ford, 55, an admitted former tomboy whose all-girl football team of 12-year-olds beat the boys



AP Wirephoto

MRS. GERALD FORD  
A former dancer

back in her girlhood in Grand Rapids, Mich., is also a believer in team play. She thinks of her family as a team.

"Our marriage was founded on the basis that he was the congressman, and I was the wife and mother," said Mrs. Ford, who devotes most of her time to the family.

"So many wives are involved in their husband's careers, but by the time Gerry gets home, I've seen what's going on in the news, and I don't ask him about it. I know he's all talked out."

When Ford gets a chance to come home to his modest Alexandria, Va., house, which they built themselves, his wife tries to relax him with "idle chatter" or a good television detective story like "Cannon."

Not that politics are taboo in the house. There's a family tradition of discussing political pros and cons at the dinner table ("I don't know if we influence Gerry," Mrs. Ford said), and at least one member of the family didn't like the idea of being the vice president's kid.

Steven, a student at T.C. Williams High School in Alexandria, joked that he was "going to move out" if his father was named vice president. Mrs. Ford, a tolerant mother, said, "When you're 17 and you have a girl and a car and a motorcycle, you

don't want to get followed around."

Two older sons — Mike, 23, a student at the interdenominational Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary in Hamilton, Mass., and Jack, 21, in a forestry program at Utah State University — have been politically active in their father's campaigns.

Jack took the fall semester off last year to work with Young Republicans for the Re-Election of the President.

A 13-year-old daughter, Susan, is a student at Holton Arms, a private school in Bethesda, and is "very interested" in dance, Mrs. Ford said.

Betty Ford was a dancer herself, beginning lessons at age 8. She studied for two years under Martha Graham at Bennington College in Vermont, and once appeared in a Graham concert at New York city's Carnegie Hall.

She took dancing lessons in Alexandria to keep in shape until nine years ago, when a pinched nerve in her neck put an end to both dancing and skiing, which she also enjoyed.

"I was so impressed with Martha Graham," Mrs. Ford said. "She was almost like a goddess to me. She was very strict," a discipline that Mrs. Ford still appreciates and believes in.

Martha Graham was encouraging her to continue her dancing career. But Hortense N. Bloomer, Mrs. Ford's mother (her father William Bloomer, was a salesman for the U.S. Rubber Co.) convinced her daughter to come back to Grand Rapids and try hometown life for six months.

Back in Grand Rapids, she went to work as a fashion co-ordinator and met a young attorney named Gerald Rudolph Ford. She was attracted to him because "he was so terribly busy," she recalled.

"He was on every committee in town, the Red Cross, the United Fund, the humane society. We were both members of the NAACP, and we didn't really have much time for each other."

Their courtship was mainly 10 or 11 p.m. dates at a little bar called Saffy's, and weekends of skiing.

They were married in October, 1948, one month before Ford was elected to congress for the first time. When Betty Ford arrived in Washington in 1949, she confessed she'd had no interest in politics until she met Ford.

"Now I find politics absorbing and completely fascinating," she said at the time.

She must have.

"We had to get married on a Friday so Gerry could get to a football game on Saturday," Mrs. Ford said last week. After the game the honeymooners drove to Owosso, Mich., to hear presidential candidate Thomas Dewey speak. They finally arrived at their honeymoon hotel at 4 a.m.