

# The Story Of Ford's Journey To the Top

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Washington

He has a granite jaw, regular features and a demeanor that remains stern even in laughter. It is a model countenance for billboards and campaign literature. He believes in the homespun virtues of family loyalty, hard work and stubborn patriotism. No intellectual, he likes to think of himself as a devotee of sensible courses and determination rather than of originality and flair. He has admirers but no worshipful followers, critics but no real enemies.

About Gerald R. Ford there is no aura of charisma. But those who have known him sell over the years — in his undergraduate glory days on the gridiron in Michigan, in 25 years in the House of Representatives and in his brief tenure as vice president — now say he is just what the nation needs: A solid man, a leader to be trusted.

When President Nixon chose him in October as vice president-designate, Ford said he felt "something like awe and astonishment at the magnitude of the new responsibilities I have been asked to assume," adding: "at the same time I have a new and invigorating sense of determination and purpose to do my best to meet them."

As vice president, Ford traveled hundreds of thousands of miles, attempting to rally the faithful and at the same time establish his own positions. "I think a vice president ought to speak his own mind," he said.

At one point Mr. Nixon told him he was working too hard and suggested he curtail his schedule. Ford said he would not take Mr. Nixon's advice. "I would get very bored if I sat around and didn't get out to see the people," he said.

Ford's original name was Leslie King Jr. He was born July 14, 1913, and when he was two years old his mother divorced his father and left Omaha for Grand Rapids. When she remarried, her husband, Gerald Ford Sr., president of the Ford Paint and Varnish Co., adopted the young boy and gave him his name.

Gerald Rudolph Ford Jr. was one of four sons, and at South high he took a double lunch hour and earned spending money waiting on tables and washing dishes in a Greek restaurant.

What interested him most in high school was football. He made the high school all-city and all-state football teams, and moved on to continuing stardom as linebacker and center at the University of Michigan. He was graduated in 1935.

Turning down offers from the Green Bay Packers and the Detroit Lions, he attended Yale Law School during alternate semesters, spending the rest of the year as assistant football coach and freshman boxing coach.

After graduation from Yale Law School in 1941, Ford began practicing in Grand Rapids. Nine months later he enlisted in the Navy as an ensign, serving 47 months altogether, 17 of them aboard the light aircraft carrier USS

Monterey, and winding up as a lieutenant commander.

On his return to Grand Rapids he resumed the practice of law. Ford was encouraged by Senator Arthur Vandenberg, himself a Grand Rapids man who had made a big name for himself as an internationalist, and he entered politics.

Michigan's Fifth Congressional District was safely Republican, rural as well as urban, and its citizens were almost 100 per cent white and mostly of Dutch descent. Bartel Jonkman, the district's congressman, was an isolationist veteran, and Ford set out to beat him.

The neophyte won an upset victory, then paused long enough, in October, to marry Elizabeth Bloomer, who was born in Chicago but had lived most of her life in Grand Rapids.

From the moment he entered Congress in 1949, Ford's views on most questions have been conservative. A self-described internationalist, he was an outspoken hawk on Vietnam. He has voted against virtually all social welfare

legislation, has voted to weaken minimum wage bills, has strongly opposed forced busing, and while supporting key civil rights bills on final passage, has been severely criticized by civil rights backers for efforts to soften the legislation through amendments.

By 1959 he was being talked to as a candidate for leadership of the House Republicans. In 1960 Michigan Republicans endorsed him as the state's favorite son for the GOP vice-presidential nomination. The Michigan Republican State Central Committee said the five-term House member would give strength to the national ticket.

Within the House he was becoming ever more prominent. He headed a group of 15 GOP House members who spent four months studying defense and economy, and — to no one's surprise — ended up supporting President Eisenhower's positions in the Cold War.

The Michigan congressman fought carefully, doing his best not to make enemies out of opponents, and he won popularity among his fellow-representatives. For years the young Republicans in the House had tried to win a voice in

the party's congressional leadership, and in January, 1963, Ford took over as third-ranking Republican — chairman of the party's caucus in the House. He beat out the incumbent veteran by a vote of 86 to 78.

It was the first move in an attempt to rejuvenate the GOP image, which many thought suffered by contrast to the youthful Kennedy administration. This was the time of the Ev and Charlie show on TV, during which two rather senior Republicans, Senator Everett McKinley Dirksen and Representative Charles Halleck, served as the party's spokesmen.

Senator Barry Goldwater named Ford one of the four Republicans he could "wholeheartedly" support for the presidential nomination, and when he himself won that nomination he thought of Ford as a possible running mate.

Ford was one of two representatives whom President Johnson named to the Warren Commission to investigate the assassination of President Kennedy. When a book was published on the commission's work, with Ford as one author and an assistant as the other, there were charges that the congressman had profited from his position of public

trust. He defended himself by saying that he had only been trying to make the work of the commission readable.

Nothing stayed the momentum of his career. In 1964 he decided to challenge Halleck for the post of Minority Leader. Melvin R. Laird was another candidate, though both formally denied that they wanted the job. In the end, there were enough upstart Republicans to sweep Ford into office, and the Ev and Charlie show became the Ev and Jerry show.

Most of his campaign money came from outside his

district, much of it from officers or employees of large corporations such as United Aircraft, General Dynamics, General Motors, Boeing, Armco Steel and Teledyne-Ryan aeronautical.

In the 1970 campaign Ford failed to report \$11,500 in campaign contributions. He subsequently explained that he had complied with the Michigan law limiting contributions to candidates by signing the money over to Republican national headquarters. Roughly the same amount was routed from Republican headquarters to Ford committees such as Veterans for Ford and Latvians for Ford.

Ford insisted that there was no quid pro quo involved, and that what he did was "within the law." Michigan law limits expenditures only by the candidate, he suggested, and "has no limit on the amount of money that a committee can receive or spend."

Perhaps the most serious allegations made against Ford were in "The Washington Pay-off," a book by Robert Winter-Berger, a self-styled "influence peddler." Winter-Berger alleged that he had "lent" Ford \$15,000 that was never repaid.

"I've read his book, and I don't believe any of the things he said about me or any other person," said Ford.

After hearing Winter-Berger at Ford's confirmation hearings, some of the senators agreed; the author's testimony was replete with contradictions, and at one point he pleaded that he had written with "literary license."

Winter-Berger had also charged that Ford had been treated by Dr. Arnold Hutschnecker, the New York psychotherapist who had been consulted by President Nixon (though not for psychotherapy, insisted Hutschnecker).

"Under no circumstances have I ever been treated by any person in the medical profession for any psychiatry or otherwise," said Ford.

When a long day of buffeting at the Capitol ends and Gerald Ford returns to his home in Alexandria, Va., what he does not want to hear is more of the same. His wife is careful to watch the television news before he arrives.

The Fords have four children, three sons and a daughter, ages 23 to 16. The only child now living at home is Steven, 17. The others are Michael, John and Susan.

When his sons played high school football, Ford arranged his schedule to attend the games. And when President Johnson told Crown Prince and Princess Vong Savang of Laos that he didn't think college football was an accurate picture of America ("to see some of our best-educated boys spending an afternoon knocking each other down while thousands cheer them on hardly gives a picture of a peace-loving nation"), Ford objected: "Personally I am glad that thousands of fine young Americans can spend this Saturday afternoon 'knocking each other down' in a spirit of clean sportsmanship and keen competition."

Ford said that his one concern about becoming vice president was that "my friends might stop calling me Jerry." To make sure that his friends would look kindly on his appointment, he was ready to provide all the documentation demanded, including a statement of net worth indicating that as of Sept. 30, 1973, Mr. and Mrs. Ford were worth \$256,378, including \$162,000 in real estate: the Alexandria home, a vacation condominium in Vail, Colo., a rental dwelling in Grand Rapids, and a one-quarter interest in a cabin in South Branch Township, Mich.

His Alexandria home does not suggest the life style of a wealthy man. Its principal object d'art at present is a color photograph of the Fords and the Nixons, taken on the evening when Ford was named vice president.