

Ordinary family for extraordin

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WASHINGTON — And now a new First Family. Six of them, described by the lady of the house as "ordinary," all of them now in an extraordinary place.

Although President Ford has spent more than a quarter of a century in the public's eye, his family's life has been a private one.

Friends describe the Fords as unusually close. The four children talk things out with their parents. Ford and his wife, Betty, often ask them for advice.

The night before former President Nixon announced he would resign, the Fords had a family dinner. The White House, said Steven, 18, was not discussed.

Improbable as that seems on a night when most of the capital was buzzing with rumors that Ford's ascendancy to the presidency was imminent, the Ford's friends say the family simply isn't all that wrapped up in politics.

Elizabeth Bloomer Ford, at 55, is a tall, slim woman with high cheek bones and reddish hair, which she wears in a bouffant. She is described by friends as rather tense and nervous, but the years of political campaigning, pressures and raising four children virtually alone have left only a few wrinkles around her gray -

blue eyes.

But that doesn't keep the Fords from taking an annual ski vacation at their condominium at Vail, Colo., each Christmas. It's the only really free time the family has with Ford who has spent much of his time over the years on the lecture circuit and campaigning.

The responsibility of bringing up four children and the tumbling world of politics proved difficult for Mrs. Ford and at one point, she started seeing a psychiatrist. "He was a sounding board for me when Jerry was away," Mrs. Ford has said. "And it was a great help to me."

The Ford children have never shown much interest in politics. And they're not yet used to reporters who want to know their every opinion.

When several months ago, Jack, 22, told a reporter he was disillusioned with Nixon and thought his father was too, the remark prompted a long-distance telephone call from Ford senior.

Father, reportedly, was upset that he might offend his son by telling him what he could and couldn't say — and Jack was upset that he had compromised his father.

Michael, 24, is a second year divinity student at the Gordon-Conwell Theological

Seminary in South Hamilton, Mass., described by a friend as "totally wrapped up in his religion." A month ago, he married 22-year-old Gayle Ann Brumbaugh in her hometown of Catonsville, Md.

Jack Ford, 22, will be a senior at Utah State University where he is majoring

in forestry. He plans to get a master's degree in watershed management. Eventually, he may go to law school.

Jack is described as the humorous one in the family. "He really knows how to have a good time," said a friend. Last winter when Jack grew a beard, he met

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his father at a campaign stop and, at first, Ford didn't recognize his son. He is spending the summer working as a forest ranger in Yellowstone National Park.

Steven, 18, just graduated from public high school and plans to take a year off before starting college. Al-

though he was accepted at Duke University in Durham, N.C., he expects to be a cowboy on a cattle ranch in Utah.

Susan, 17, is an attractive blonde who will be a senior at a private boarding school in Maryland. She plans to live with her parents at the White House.



The first family posed Friday in the Oval Room of the White House after the inauguration ceremony. From left are John, Steven, Mrs. Ford, the President, Susan, Gayle, a daughter-in-law, and Michael Ford her husband.

—AP Photo