

VICTORIOUS WOMAN OF THE MONTH

BETTY FORD



“She’s been some tough cookie, that Mrs. Ford,” I thought as I stood across from the Capitol watching the Presidential motorcade pass, waiting in line for hours in the mild December night air, and finally walking through the Capitol Rotunda past the flag-draped casket of President Gerald R. Ford. I wondered how Mrs. Ford will manage now, without her partner of nearly sixty years.

Betty Ford’s life is a shining example of the Victorious Woman who, no matter what her social or financial status, focuses on her strengths and uses them to overcome struggles and challenges. She realizes victory isn’t always pretty nor does life fold itself easily and neatly into a one-size-fits-all box.

As a single woman, Betty Bloomer worked as a fashion coordinator and also studied dance, even starting her own dance company. She married at 24, an age considered somewhat old by the standards of her day. The marriage only lasted five years and ended in divorce, a marital solution that did not have the social acceptance it has today.

A little while later, Betty met Gerald Ford. She married him in 1948, shortly before he was elected to office. The new Mrs. Ford then settled into the life of a stay-at-home mom and was active in her church, her children’s lives and political clubs.

By all accounts, Betty Ford was no wilting, passive wife. On the contrary, and way ahead of the feminist movement, Mr. and Mrs. Ford were equal partners in both marriage and politics. As Mr. Ford’s career developed, Mrs. Ford consistently demonstrated an active willingness to hone her skills so she could grow into expanding professional roles.

Often outspoken, Mrs. Ford's wisdom and candor was something seldom appreciated in Washington's political circles. However, it was a characteristic always admired by her spouse. In the Ford Presidential Library, under the heading of "Most Valued Advice," the President listed his best advice as "that which comes from my wife."

Like every Victorious Woman, Betty Ford refused to merely survive her life and settle only for what life would hand her. Instead, through bad times and good, her history shows that she went after what she wanted with admirable passion.

When Mrs. Ford was diagnosed with breast cancer, many considered it embarrassing to talk about her illness in public; but she didn't hide. Instead, she openly fought the disease – and won – becoming an advocate for breast cancer awareness as well as other women's issues.

A few years later, Betty Ford entered a treatment center and battled an addiction to alcohol and drugs. Her painful process included an embarrassing loss of privacy when she was required to share a room with three other women at the treatment facility. Becoming clean and sober was a major victory for Mrs. Ford.

During that trying time, she saw the need for a different kind of treatment, one that addressed a woman's special needs. Her idea led to the founding of the Betty Ford Center. The facility opened its doors in 1982 and is renowned for its world-class treatments. Her personal victory made it possible for many more women and men to find their own victories through addiction.

As Mrs. Ford has demonstrated, creating victory is seldom an easy process. If it were, we would all be doing it more. Many goals can be achieved in life, but Betty Ford exemplifies the Victorious Woman difference: a willingness to persist through difficulties and push past limitations to grow into an ever-stronger, fuller expression of her true self.

We wish Mrs. Ford another victory as she faces this saddest of challenges, that is, to find comfort and meaning in her life without her beloved partner to share it with her.

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