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First Ladies: Betty Ford

Lead: After the dark days of Watergate and White House scandal, the nation needed a lift. It found one in the person of one of the most popular and refreshing of its First Ladies, Betty Ford.

Intro.: *A Moment in Time* with Dan Roberts.

Content: On the way to the helicopter taking the Nixons into exile in August 1974, Pat Nixon warned her successor that she would grow to hate the red carpets that attended life in the White House. Betty Ford never

did. She was one of the most interesting and bracing First Ladies, whose friendliness, candor and outspoken honesty became a lightning rod for carping critics, but gained her a level of popularity rare among the long line of Presidential ladies.

She was a divorced businesswoman when at 29 she met Gerald Ford, the former Michigan football star, struggling Grand Rapids attorney and future politician. Within a year they were married and he was engaged in his first run for Congress. In Washington she settled into the roll of dutiful congressional wife as Jerry began his slow climb to leadership. She raised four children, but never lost her sense of humor or spirit of

independence. His many absences wore thin but the relationship was strong. One night she rolled over and feigned surprise when seeing her husband in the bed, “what are *you* doing here?”

That same honesty resonated with a country tired of corruption and deceit in the wake of the Watergate troubles. She was a strong feminist, an advocate for the arts, and an effective political asset to her husband as he helped put the country back together and run for the Presidency on his own. After the White House she was frank and honest about her struggle with alcoholism and shocked and pleasantly surprised the country when she underwent facial cosmetic

surgery. Among First Ladies, Betty Ford was truly unique.

**At the University of Richmond,
this is Dan Roberts.**

Resources

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<http://www.whitehouse.gov/history/firstladies/ef38.html>