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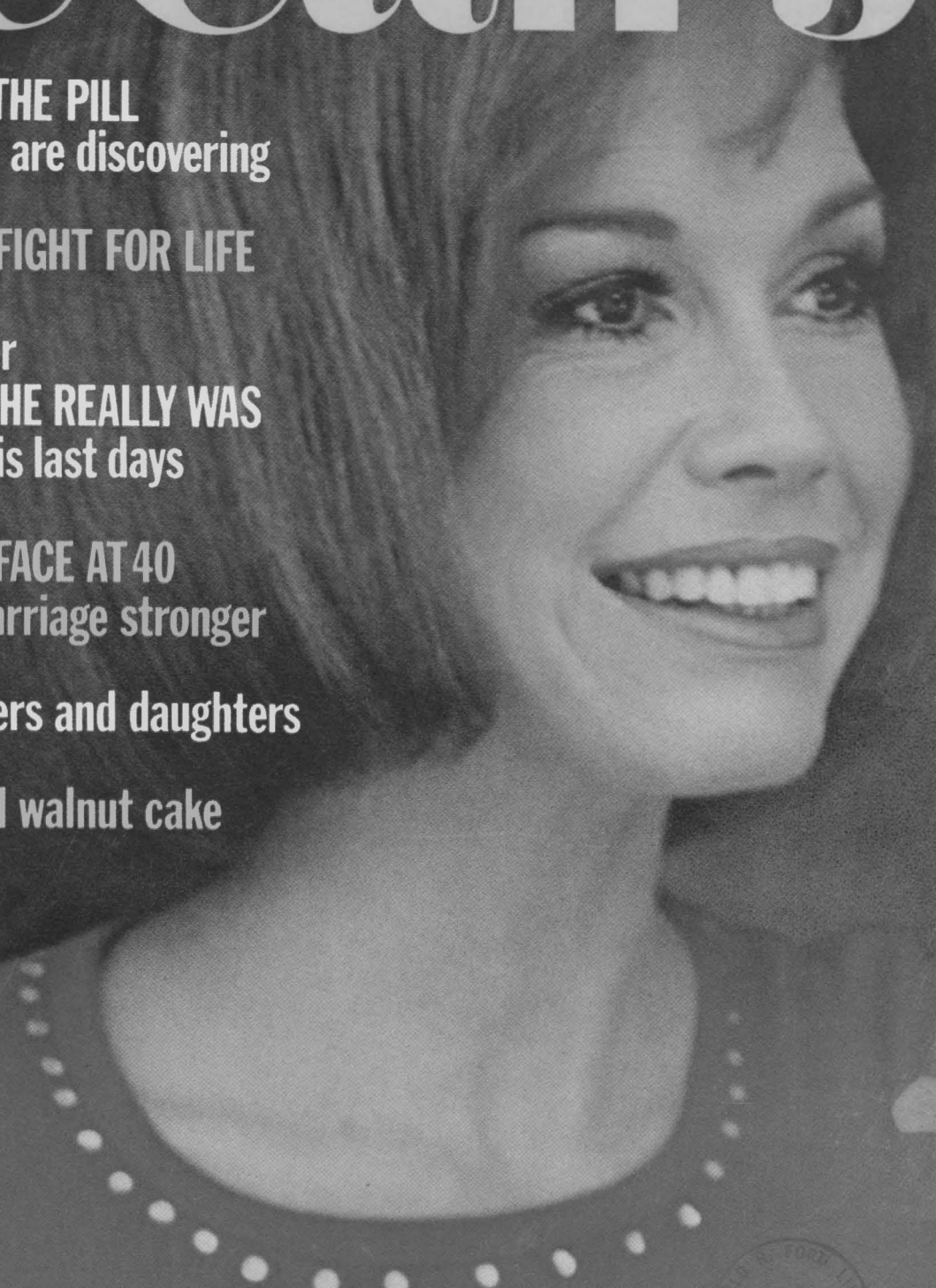
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BETTY FORD TALKS ABOUT HER MOTHER



In a warmly personal interview, the First Lady recalls how her mother helped her overcome her own emotional growing pains and expands on her controversial remarks about the sexual freedom of a daughter in today's world

BY LYNN MINTON

Someone once said that motherhood is the one job in the world where, at the moment of greatest success—when your children are finally independent—you are fired. Not every mother is fortunate enough to find a challenging new job before she is completely phased out of the old one, as Betty Bloomer Ford has in her position as First Lady, or, indeed, to have had the kind of relationship with her children and her mother that Mrs. Ford revealed in a recent conversation at the White House.

Like many people, I admire our President's wife—for her courage in publicly discussing her operation for breast cancer; for speaking out for things she believes in, like the Equal Rights Amendment, and not just echoing her husband's positions on other controversial issues, such as abortion; for the good relationship she seems to have with her four children; and for the loving and comradely relationship she appears to have with Gerald Ford, a man who has been concentrating on his career since the day he was late for their wedding because he was out campaigning for his first term in Congress and who spent most of his time away from home as the children were growing up.

What kind of home did Betty Ford herself come from to prepare her for such a man and such a marriage and such a life? Her father, William Stephenson Bloomer, a machinery salesman who also traveled a lot, died when she was 16, and I had been told that Mrs. Ford feels that her mother was the major influence on her life. I wondered to what extent her mother, Hortense Neahr Bloomer—who died of a cerebral hemorrhage in December, 1948, less than two months after her daughter's marriage at 30 to Gerald Ford—had played a part in making Betty Ford the kind of woman she is.

On the day after President Ford told TV newsman Walter Cronkite that the Supreme Court went too far in its 1973 decision legalizing early abortions, I interviewed the woman who rejoiced in 1974 that abortion had finally "been taken out of the backwoods and put into the

hospitals where it belongs" and who said recently that "if a woman doesn't want to have a child, it should be taken care of under supervision, the sooner the better." We talked in the large, cream-color sitting room in the family quarters of the White House.

"I felt a tremendous loss when my mother died," Betty Ford said. "I still feel a tremendous loss, because I think of her often, even though she's been gone ever since we've been married and we've been married twenty-seven years. I still dream—I guess everybody does—that my mother is alive and that she is a person and the relationship is mother and child, and then, of course, you wake up and realize that that's not true... that now you're the mother."

She talked a bit about childhood memories, which brought to mind an incident that had happened more than 50 years before. "I have a birthmark on my left hand," she said, "which I was born with, and when I first attended school—kindergarten—all the other children made fun of me and kidded me. Children can be very cruel, and when I came home from school crying because I had been ridiculed for having this birthmark, my mother explained to me that I was the only little girl in the world who had a birthmark like that, and so she could never lose me, no matter where I went. She would always be able to find me, and I was a very special child. And it really... I went back to school very proud. I guess I've never told this before."

"My mother was a marvelous woman, dearly loved by so many people," said Betty Ford. "Even my friends still refer to her. We did things together. She was very interested in the crippled children's home in Grand Rapids—she was the president of it—and I spent a great deal of time with her when she visited, and then I became active myself, working with children in braces."

After she died, I asked, did you ever have any feelings of regret, of, I only wish I had done such-and-such or said... "No," Mrs. Ford said, "because /turn to page 76

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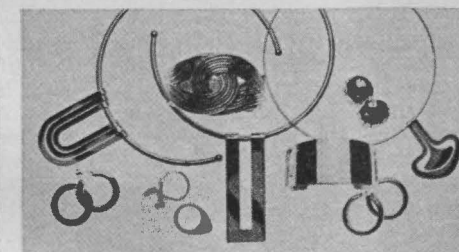
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continued

we were very close. We shared everything . . . even in our marriages we shared all our feelings. She had such a marvelous ability to reach people. And the things she did were always for other people. She was not the least bit self-centered. The greatest desire of my life was to be half as perfect as my mother was." I wondered if she hadn't felt intimidated by her mother's perfection, and I mentioned that John Eisenhower told me last year that he felt all his life the difficulty of living up to his father. President Eisenhower had, in addition, been a perfectionist regarding his son. Hearing this, Mrs. Ford said that her mother had been this way also, but that this had been for her an inspiration. "Once, when I was dancing in the high-school follies, I did sort of a sloppy job, and she saw the performance. When I got home that night she told me straight: 'If you don't do it well, don't do it at all.' She expected perfection . . . Still, she was always understanding."

I then asked how understanding her mother would have been if she had gone to her and said, "I'm having an affair." Acknowledging, of course, that her mother lived in a different time, was of a whole other generation, how would she have felt?

"Well," Betty Ford replied, "I'm sure she would have been very upset. However, I believe she'd sit me down and discuss it. I mean, she wouldn't go all to pieces and start crying or saying 'How could you do this to me?' or anything like that. She would be very composed, and she would feel I was in great need of help, that this was probably a very crucial time in my life. If I ever needed her, I needed her then." (At this point, Mrs. Ford's press secretary interrupted to emphasize that these were "purely hypothetical" questions. The scene we had been discussing, as well as the highly publicized Susan Ford "affair," had not actually taken place.)

I told Mrs. Ford that my own mother had made it clear she was against premarital sex but somehow had created an atmosphere so that I knew that if I ever *did* get into trouble she would be there.

"But that was exactly what I was trying to say in the TV interview with Morley Safer!" Mrs. Ford exclaimed. "It didn't come across that way. This is something I don't expect of Susan, but I always want her to know there is no generation gap. I don't want her to go to her friends or someone else like that. And I've talked to her about it—that she's to come home to her mother and father because we're the ones who would understand and do everything in our power to work it out."

"I've given Susan a great deal of freedom, and she's proved herself capable of handling it. I've let her go and do things that perhaps some other parents would not approve of, and yet I have perfect confidence that she would handle herself as an adult, and she has."

Obviously, Betty Ford and Hortense Bloomer were alike in an important way: They both believed in supporting

their children, right or wrong, in "being there" for them. And both had to cope alone for long stretches: Betty Ford's salesman father had been on the road for months at a time, and her mother had had to take care of Betty and her two older brothers singlehandedly. Typically, Mrs. Ford remarked, "If you have to do it, you have to do it." (William Bloomer, Jr., seven years older than his sister, Betty, lives in Wayzata, Minnesota, where he has a Chevrolet dealership; Robert, who is five years older, had been in the tool-and-die business before his death four years ago.)

Someone came in just then with some old photographs of Mrs. Bloomer and the two boys formally posed at a very young age, and we pored over them together. When I asked to see a picture of her with her mother, she laughed and said these had been taken before she was born, and by the time she came along the family had stopped taking formal mother-child pictures. "It's just like baby books," she said, smiling. "Mike has a complete baby book, Jack has a halfway baby book, but Steve and Susan . . ."

Hortense Bloomer as a young woman bore a striking resemblance to her daughter—a beauty, with the same shape eyes and face, the luxuriant, soft brown hair, the expression at once gentle and steady. And her eyes, her daughter told me, the same deep blue. Mrs. Bloomer, however, was a bigger woman, with a larger frame. Her daughter, particularly now, is a slender size six and carries herself like the model and dancer she was: carriage erect, no unnecessary movements, all graceful lines. As a youngster, though, she was, she says, "rather plump." She recalled one summer at the resort where they often spent vacations, a place with a hotel, a picnic area and many friends' homes, "where there were always cookies or candies or something, until finally Mother got to the point where she hung a sign on my back, 'Please do not feed this child.'"

"She tended to teach through humor, rather than pressure," said Mrs. Ford. "She had a very good understanding of people, and brought us up with a feeling of love . . . and yet we knew we were expected to produce. We knew what was right and wrong. She taught us that. She expected the right. But it was not a nagging sort of thing. I don't remember any disagreeable things in our house except that she spanked my brother once and broke the hairbrush." Mrs. Ford laughed. "He must have done something awful. No, she never spanked me."

I wondered if she had ever spanked her children, and she said, "No."

Had the President ever?

"Oh, no, he wouldn't lay a hand on them!"

Was there ever a time when she was afraid to tell her mother something? "No," she said, "we always shared our secrets. When I came home at night, she was always waiting, and if I'd been out to a party or a dance, she was al-

ways up and reading, and I went in and told her what kind of a time I'd had—there was a sharing." When I asked if she ever felt that her mother wanted to know too much, she smiled. "Well, I told her what I *wanted* to."

Does Mrs. Ford wait up for Susan?

"Heavens, no." But what she does do, she confessed, was leave notes for her daughter in her bed: "Where have you been? Do you realize you have to be up for class at nine o'clock in the morning?"

Mrs. Ford tried to explain to me that there was a difference here between her and Hortense Bloomer. "My mother was very, very . . ." She searched for words. "For example, when I was downtown shopping with her, from this age [motioning] up, I had to wear a hat and gloves."

Really?

"Yes, I did."

You didn't ever rebel against it?

"No, I was brought up that way."

Did you do that to Susan?

"No, I remembered," said Betty Ford, with a wry smile.

Since Mrs. Ford hadn't talked much about either her brothers or her sons, I asked her if there had been a difference in the way boys and girls were treated in her family. She said, "I think my mother thought I was rather special because my brothers were older and they were boys, and I'm sure she felt that having a little girl was special. I think that most women feel that way. I know I felt very fortunate having a girl on the fourth go-round. I'd almost given up after the third boy. In fact, I expected that probably the fourth one would be a boy because my husband came from a family of four boys and I thought . . . his genes are so strong and his mother's genes are so strong . . . that it's just going to be. Then, of course, I was lucky and Susan was born."

Were there times in Mrs. Ford's life when she thought, If only my mother were here, I'd ask her this . . . ?

"I have those times even to this day . . . a need not for her support so much, but for discussion, perhaps for her advice about raising my daughter . . ."

We talked about parents who give conflicting advice to their children about certain situations and values: for example, a parent who says, "sex is beautiful," but then has a fit when she finds her daughter kissing a particular boy. And Mrs. Ford said that her own mother "always gave me the feeling that sex was beautiful, but she never gave me the feeling that sex was anything but related to marriage," then added, "I'm talking about sex; I'm not talking about kissing."

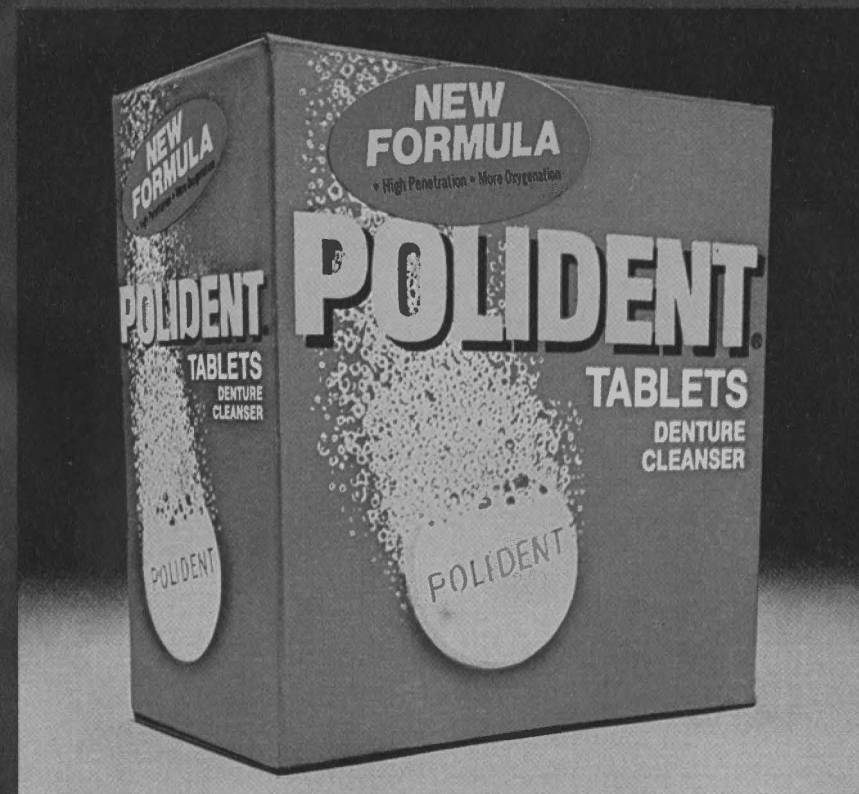
Where would she have drawn the line?

"You draw the line *right there*. I mean, you're talking about sex as an act in itself and kissing as an act. I kiss many people, but it has nothing to do with sex."

What would your mother have said if you had gone to her after you'd

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continued

had four children and said you felt you already had all the children you could manage and were planning to have an abortion because you were pregnant again?"

"She would have said this is the way God has planned your life; this is the way you live it," said Betty Ford.

Suppose Susan had said the same thing to you under similar circumstances? "I don't think it would be my place to advise her. I think it would be her husband's and her own decision."

Although Betty Ford appears to be more open to changing patterns of life than her mother may have been, it was her mother's tolerance of others that set the example she has tried to live by—and live up to. And she has tried to pass on this feeling to her own children. "Even my son Mike who is studying

for the ministry [at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary]—he and his wife have friends who have tried marijuana or maybe even smoke marijuana, but that doesn't mean that they disapprove of them just because *they* don't do it. They feel it's their friends' lives."

Did you smoke cigarettes as a teenager?

"My parents promised us each five hundred dollars if we didn't smoke before we were twenty-one. That was during the Depression, so it would be like offering five thousand dollars today. My brother Bill was the only one who collected. When I was about fourteen, I disqualified myself. I tried a cigarette, and I remember I passed out. Fortunately, there was a couch right behind me. I guess I must have inhaled or something. I thought it was terrible and that was enough to convince me that I didn't want to smoke, because I

had a lot of friends at that age who *were* smoking. I didn't pick up a cigarette again until I was twenty-one.

"I didn't drink, either, and, frankly, the only way I handled that when I attended parties at college was to accept a cocktail—to try and appear sophisticated—and then either to give it to my date or find a plant and dump the drink in it. I couldn't stand a date who would get drunk."

It must have taken a great deal of courage, and perhaps some feeling of rebellion, for 24-year-old Betty Bloomer to make that first marriage to William Warren, a man her mother and stepfather hadn't even approved of her dating and felt would never settle down. Warren was exceedingly handsome, a salesman for a Grand Rapids furniture company, who traveled a great deal. And Mrs. Ford has said she married him hoping to change some of the things about him that made her unhappy.

"I was young and stupid," she now says. But it is not unusual for a woman to marry a man who bears some resemblance to her father. Both William Warren and William Bloomer were salesmen who were away from home a lot. It is possible that Betty Bloomer was attracted to a quality in the handsome Warren that her father shared, hoping to get from him the kind of love and attention she missed from her father, who had, of course, died when she was 16.

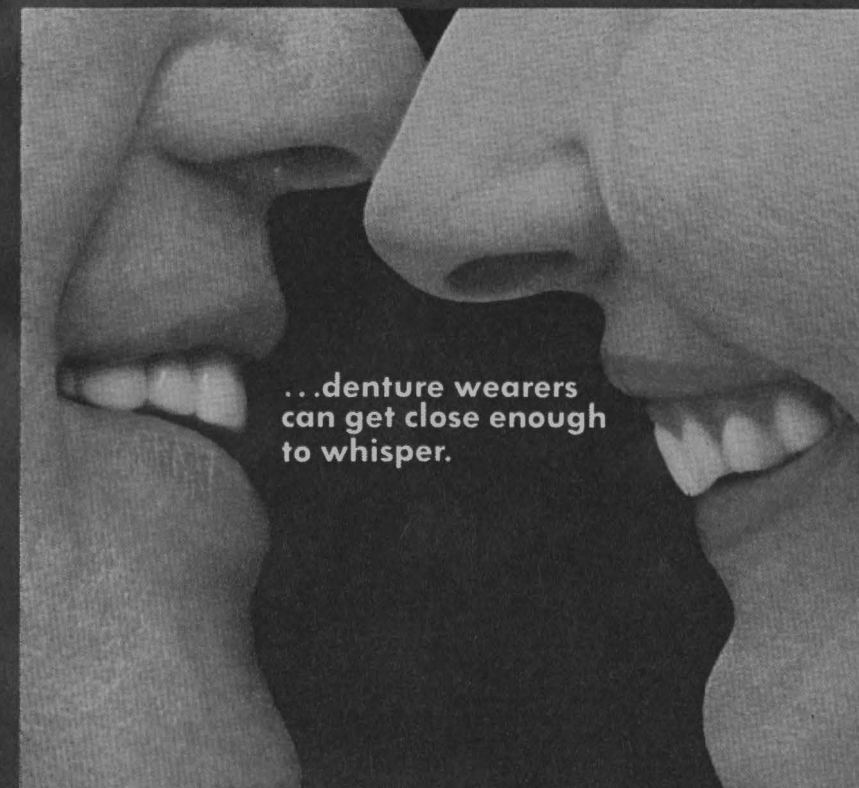
"I respected my mother and stepfather highly," Mrs. Ford said, "because when I did decide to get married, they never said another thing against him."

When the daughter was ready to call it quits after five years, it was "very difficult" for her to tell her mother, whom she expected to say, "I told you so." But her mother (who had married Arthur M. Goodwin when Betty was 21) surprised her. "She just said, 'Come home to us . . . you're perfectly welcome here . . . don't worry about it.'" So Betty Bloomer Warren did go back home, and remained there for a few months until she took her own apartment and then, within that year, married again.

When she married again, of course, she married another traveling man, a 35-year-old lawyer running for Congress, named Gerald Ford. Mrs. Bloomer was "crazy about" Gerald Ford, who "made a hit" with both her and her husband when he was brought home to meet them. When asked whether she had wished "if only my mother had been here to see me" when she entered the White House as First Lady, Mrs. Ford said she'd felt that "not so much about myself but about my husband, because they were so fond of him and thought he was such a fine man. I felt badly they couldn't see him and the progress he's made."

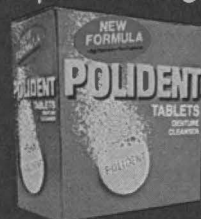
There seem to have been enough loving satisfactions in this marital relationship to make it thrive. And she had guidance from her mother here,

continued on page 104



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WALNUTS TAKE THE CAKE

continued from page 103

For the glaze royale. (This is easiest to make in a small bowl with a portable electric mixer.) Start beating the egg white, lemon juice and a cup of confectioners' sugar, beating in more until you have a thick white paste. Beat in a teaspoon of flavoring; then continue beating several minutes, until frosting is thick, smooth, and stands in peaks—you may need to beat in a little more sugar if frosting does not thicken enough, but do not do so until you have worked the mixture several minutes and given the egg white and lemon time to do their job of stiffening.

Note: If you are not using it immediately, or have leftovers, scoop into a jar, lay four thicknesses of damp paper towels on top and cover airtight.

Frosting the cake. Spread a thin layer of frosting over the glaze on top of the cake. If you wish to make decorations or write messages, mix a little melted chocolate into about an equal amount of frosting; or use drops of food coloring, and squeeze the colored frosting through a paper decorating cone.

Decorated cake will keep nicely for several days under refrigeration, covered with an upside-down bowl. ■

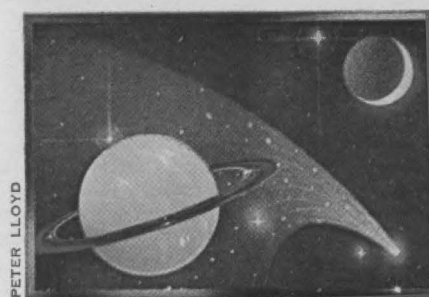
BETTY FORD TALKS ABOUT HER MOTHER

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too. Mrs. Bloomer had discussed with her daughter "what a wife's duties were" and admonished her "to always be faithful" to her husband. "She was a woman who was always dedicated to her husband, who always put him first, as far as feelings were concerned. These things she explained to me and tried to instill in me, and I hope that I have followed that course," Betty Ford said. Recently, she told an interviewer that "the role of the politician's wife, in my mind, is to be a very understanding woman who stands behind her husband and supports him in every way she possibly can." She seems to have been raised for the role.

"You know," she said, "my mother was a very strong woman. I wanted to be as strong as she was." Betty Ford's very high expectations for herself, her yearning to be as strong, supportive, kind and giving, as perfect as her mother, took its toll a few years ago, when, as she put it, she "lost her sense of self-worth." She had been ministering, often singlehandedly, to the children, supporting her husband's career, but neglecting to nurture herself. Finally, after visits to a psychiatrist, she began to think more of her own needs as a person apart from her function as a wife and mother. Then, of course, she found herself in a challenging new job, and many, many people became interested in her thoughts and feelings.

When I asked that afternoon at the White House how she felt she differed from her mother, it was heartening to hear her answer, "I don't think I differ a great deal from her, as a matter of fact." ■



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TAURUS April 21-May 20

Candice Bergen, Henry Fonda and Glenda Jackson are your star-mates. Your symbol is the Bull, epitome of strength, solidity and stubbornness, but you are ruled by Venus, goddess of love. If love and marriage are your goals, consider a Pisces, Cancer, Virgo or Capricorn. No money problems; no health problems if you stick to your diet.

GEMINI May 21-June 20

If you live alone and hate it, this month, with its varied social doings, is made for you—just try and be where the action is.

CANCER June 21-July 21

Invite or visit elderly relatives (including parents) that you may have been neglecting. Their joy will be yours, too.

LEO July 22-August 21

A distinguished job with a so-so salary may be offered you. How will prestige-conscious Leos react? Ponder it!

VIRGO August 22-September 21

A business trip could result in a pleasant friendship, which could result in something much more than that. Interested?

LIBRA September 22-October 22

Money could be a problem this month, but don't let it interfere with your summer vacation. Plan it now!

SCORPIO October 23-November 21

No money, health or family problems. W-e-l-l, maybe a bit of in-law tension. Pretend it isn't there; maybe it won't be.

SAGITTARIUS

November 22-December 20

No travel. Little romance. Finances and health sound, as usual. So what's new? Politics! You're made for it. Wait and see!

CAPRICORN December 21-January 19

For Goat people, the past is often more alive than the present. Do enjoy the Now this month. It will be the Past all too soon!

AQUARIUS January 20-February 18

Employers may welcome your suggestions this month—if you don't include politics!

PISCES February 19-March 20

A very important friendship may be threatened this month. Be supportive and don't lose your Piscean optimism.

ARIES March 21-April 20

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