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Kentlands is one of the first, and probably the best known, of the archetypal towns and villages of country and city which are actually built by architects who design, not just buildings, but entire communities and the towns in which they exist. Lakelands is a similar, adjacent, community with a character of its own.

## Feature Series - Part I

### How Do “Our” Spouses Cope?

by M. H. Perry

If you have a relative running for office, it's their job, their business, and if you're the spouse, you should stay out of it—right? Wrong! Like it or not, there is no way the family can stay out of it, especially the immediate family. Some elected officials successfully manage to keep their children out of the arena, but the spouse will be dragged in regardless of efforts to avoid the limelight. When the candidate is particularly dynamic and popular, their political opponents shy away from directly attacking the candidate, but try to get to him through the spouse. This was the case with both Ronald Reagan and Bill Clinton. Both men had plenty of political savvy and were not fooled by the tactic when their wives were criticized. Each defended his wife to the hilt.

Nancy Reagan understood perfectly the part that she had to play. During the swearing in, she held the Bible and looked up at Ronald adoringly. When George H.W. was a presidential candidate, a number of people wondered how his wife could manage in this age of obsession with designer gowns and hair styles. It turned out that she, as well as her daughter-in-law, was the perfect political spouse. They simply play *The Supporter*. Betty Ford was openly at odds with the positions of her husband's party, but she was so affable that no one cared. Hillary Rodham Clinton, on the other hand, broke the political wife mold, and people have yet to figure her out. Many adore her; others dislike her simply for being a spouse turned politician. Demonstrably the best educated of any of the Presidents' wives, she still forges a path in the frontier of the territory “Spouse.”

Our friends beyond our northern border demonstrated just how significant the politician's spouse is when their prime minister, Pierre Trudeau, at the age of fifty-two married twenty-two year old Margaret Sinclair. The young Mrs. Trudeau was happy with her position when it involved the chance to hobnob with the princes from across the sea or to command performances at her splendid home by such popular figures as Gordon Lightfoot, but she chafed at her lack of freedom and whined about the family not being able to go out for a hamburger whenever she wanted. By being the opposite, she provided single-handedly the 101 course on the importance of an extremely mature spouse for someone who wants smooth sailing on political waters.

Most people are not held responsible for the antics of their adult relatives, but a political figure better not have an uncle who grows funny plants in his basement, a daughter who can't get home sober before dawn, or a son who enjoys participating in barroom brawls. While national figures have managed to survive familial embarrassments, the more local the office, the deadlier the impact family impropriety can have. The position of the minister's daughter, the rabbi's wife has been well-chronicled. Garrison Keillor's popular fictional town of Lake Wobegon includes Pastor Inqvist and his wife, Judy, who has to deal with being the town's example of perfection. Other people can ride out a rebellious teenage child, but Judy must remain a paragon parent and like

Caesar's wife be above reproach as a wife and mother. Consequently, she desperately needs to go to the conference of Lutheran ministers and their wives every January to get away from the pressure, sit in the sun, and be among other women who also live in the glass house—trouble is, the church board is extremely tight-fisted and either denies approval of the funds or delays the decision to grant approval until the last minute. While Judy Inqvist is fictional, she is the exemplar of a legion of very real people.

Things can get even more interesting when the public official is the wife, and the spouse is the husband. For the duration of human history, men have been genetically selected to defend their wives—yet when she's the official, if they jump into the fray with sword flashing, they kill her career. She has to be able to stand on her own feet and demonstrate that she can. Elected officials and their spouses have to learn very quickly, if they are to survive, that you can't please everyone. The course on how to be a politician's husband was created and taught by Sir Denis Thatcher. During Margaret Thatcher's dozen years at Number 10, we barely heard from him, and she was challenging enough to be attacked plenty. Adapting the words of Mark Twain, he once quipped, "It's better to keep my mouth shut and be thought a fool rather than open it and remove all doubt."

Like it or not, *elected official* is a team sport, and if you don't have a team, you can't play. The elected official doesn't absolutely have to be married, but there is usually someone on the tightrope that the spouse has to walk. They: 1. must not interfere 2. must never say anything that can be construed as speaking for him 3. must never look bored 4. must give the appearance of being completely interested and knowledgeable about everything 5. must never appear to know anything of a confidential nature, and so on.

*Maryland 20878*<sup>™</sup> is going to talk with Gaithersburg's spouses about what it's like to be the partner of our officials. How do they handle being out in public where people will often want to talk with the official about concerns they have that the city can address? What is it like standing by while their husband or wife discusses issues with concerned citizens? Those many dinners they have to attend can't be all that interesting especially when their spouse is engaged in conversation with citizens and they are sitting by themselves. We will find out how they handle those situations and how many times important family events have been interrupted by pressing city business.

Next month, we will be talking with Sally Katz, wife of Gaithersburg's Mayor Sidney Katz.