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Judy Agnew, vice president's wife and Md. first lady

She preferred role of homemaker to that of political wife

By Frederick N. Rasmussen, The Baltimore Sun

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Elinor Isabel "Judy" Agnew, who as the wife of former Baltimore County Executive, Maryland Gov. and Vice President Spiro T. Agnew preferred quiet domesticity to that of the political limelight, died June 20 in Rancho Mirage, Calif. She was 91.

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"She passed away very peacefully with all of her children at her side," a daughter, Susan Sagle of Palm Springs, Calif., said Thursday. "She died of natural causes and had been in failing health since 2005."

"Judy was truly a lady and a very outstanding second lady. She loved her family, kids and grandkids," said Helen Delich Bentley, former congresswoman and federal maritime commissioner.

"She was loyal to the end," said Mrs. Bentley, a longtime friend. "And despite all of the horrors that she went through, she always kept her chin up and was graceful."

In 1973, Mrs. Agnew's husband resigned from the vice presidency after pleading no contest to a charge of federal income tax evasion in Baltimore.

The daughter of William Lee Judefind, a chemist and vice president of Davison Chemical Co., and a homemaker, Elinor Ruth Judefind, Elinor Isabel "Judy" Judefind was born in Baltimore into a French-German family.

She was raised in a home on Woodhaven Avenue and later Chatham Road in Forest Park.

Mrs. Agnew, who shared the nickname "Judy" with her father, graduated in 1940 from Forest Park High School, where her future husband had graduated three years earlier.

Even though they lived four blocks from one another and had attended the same high school, they did not meet

until both were working at the old Maryland Casualty Co. at Keswick Road and 41st Street — she as an \$11-a-week file clerk.

"He says he tripped over me in the file room," Mrs. Agnew once told The Evening Sun of their first meeting.

On May 23, 1942, she married Mr. Agnew, a freshly minted second lieutenant who had just graduated from Officer Candidate School.

After the war, the couple moved in with Mrs. Agnew's parents in Forest Park before purchasing a two-bedroom home in Lutherville. After the arrival of more children, they moved to Loch Raven and finally to the Chatterleigh neighborhood in Towson.

Mrs. Agnew celebrated her life as a homemaker.

"I majored in marriage," Mrs. Agnew liked to say.

Mr. Agnew completed law school, opened a legal practice and became chairman of the Baltimore County Board of Zoning Appeals.

He was elected county executive in 1962 and governor in 1966.

When Mrs. Agnew moved to the governor's mansion in Annapolis, she told The Evening Sun that she hoped to do some cooking.

"Ted loves my spaghetti and meat sauce ... and crab cakes," she said. She was also known for her Greek Avgolemono (lemony chicken and rice) soup.

She liked going on Saturday afternoons to the state trooper's recreation room on the ground level of the mansion and give it a good cleaning — "just to keep my hand in," she told The Baltimore Sun in 1968.

A modest woman who stood 5 feet, 4 inches tall and had striking brown eyes, an infectious smile and carefully coiffed brunette hair, Mrs. Agnew struggled to maintain as normal a life as possible as the first lady of Maryland and later as vice president's wife.

"I'll still make brief remarks, at luncheons and teas and so on, but I'm not a speech maker. I'm not a real campaigner," she told The Evening Sun in 1967.

She often told reporters that making speeches was "Spiro's job."

"She was all about family and supported my father's political aspirations," said Ms. Sagle. "But she would have been just as happy leading a quiet life."

In 1968, Mrs. Agnew was propelled from her closely guarded obscurity to the national spotlight when Richard M. Nixon chose her husband to be his vice presidential candidate at the Republican Party Convention in Miami.

"It was a complete surprise to both of us," she told The Washington Post at the time. "I don't think I said a thing. ... We were both holding on to each other for a while."

When well-wishers and Republican politicians jammed the apartment the couple had rented for the convention, Mrs. Agnew, who took all the chaos and excitement in stride, told a reporter that she was "just trying to keep the ashtrays clean."

During the years her husband was vice president, the couple lived in a \$1,700-a-month four-bedroom suite at the Sheraton-Park Hotel in Washington.

There were moments — few and far between — when Mrs. Agnew departed from her usual characteristic reluctance to comment on current events.

She explained in 1971 that she wasn't moved by the goals of the women's liberation movement.

"Some of the things they do are silly," she told the Associated Press. "I'm fine, I don't think I need to be liberated."

On the day of her husband's resignation from the vice presidency, Mrs. Agnew broke down at a luncheon and cried, overwhelmed by the personal and political tragedy that had engulfed her husband.

After drifting back into private life and away from public scrutiny, the couple sold their home in Kenwood and then moved to Arnold. In 1977, they moved to Rancho Mirage.

The Agnews returned to [Ocean City](#) each summer, staying in an 11th-floor apartment they owned in the English Towers.

Even though her health had been in decline in recent years, Mrs. Agnew kept in touch with old Baltimore friends, some of whom went back to her days at Forest Park, her daughter said.

"She was a warm and caring person who treated all people the same, whether it was a head of state or a mailman," Ms. Sagle said.

"She was just interested in people, and they opened up to her. People would come up to her in the mall and talk to her. Her former Secret Service agents came to visit, and three attended her memorial service," her daughter said.

Mr. Agnew died in 1996 and was interred at Dulaney Valley Memorial Gardens in Timonium, where Mrs. Agnew will also be interred. Plans for Mrs. Agnew's interment were incomplete Thursday.

A private service was held Sunday at Forest Lawn Mortuary in Cathedral City, Calif.

In addition to her daughter, she is survived by a son, James Rand Agnew of Fort Myers, Fla.; two other daughters, Pamela DeHaven of Hagerstown and Kimberly Fisher of Cupertino, Calif.; six grandchildren; and eight great-grandchildren.

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