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Judy Agnew, Wife of Vice President, Dies at 91

By **DOUGLAS MARTIN**

Judy Agnew, who went to Washington after Richard M. Nixon plucked her husband, Spiro, from relative political obscurity to make him vice president and who later stood by him when he resigned in 1973 because of criminal charges, died on June 20 in Rancho Mirage, Calif. She was 91.

Her family announced the death.

As Vice President [Spiro T. Agnew](#) seized America's attention with hot, alliterative rhetoric — calling Nixon's critics "pusillanimous pussyfooters" and "nattering nabobs of negativism" — Mrs. Agnew radiated the practical, plain-spoken perspicacity of a superbly competent suburban housewife. Magazines and newspapers flocked to interview her.

As the nation's second lady, Mrs. Agnew, a former PTA president and an assistant Girl Scout leader, continued to cook kettles of spaghetti, buy her clothes off the rack, pack her husband's bag and do needlepoint, just as she had previously done in Annapolis when her husband was governor of Maryland.

She was fluent in the language of the "silent majority," the bloc of middle-class, mostly conservative, mostly white voters whom Nixon courted. When a reporter asked what she was up to, she said in an accent she called Baltimorese, "I've been trying to keep the ashtrays clean."

"I don't take stands on anything," she said in an interview with Parade magazine in 1970. "I stay out of the political end of it. When people ask what I majored in, I proudly tell them — 'I majored in marriage.'"

She did have opinions, however, and they occasionally slipped out. She rejected feminism as "silly," saying she was already liberated. She told The New York Times that she had "no use" for hippies, "although I don't know any, really."

And she could fight to protect her reputation. During the 1968 presidential campaign, after newspapers reported that she had scandalized Maryland society by serving martinis in peanut butter jars, she went on television to rebut the accusation, displaying her shining crystal glasses.

After Mr. Agnew resigned in 1973 in the face of extortion, tax fraud, bribery and conspiracy

charges — he pleaded no contest to income tax evasion — and went into business, he and his wife dropped out of the public eye. The two emerged in 1994 to attend Nixon’s funeral, though Mr. Agnew believed that the president had thrown him to the wolves during Watergate to divert attention from himself. Mr. Agnew died in 1996.

Elinor Isabel Judefind was born on April 23, 1921, in Baltimore. Her mother called her Elinor, but pretty much everybody else called her Judy. In an interview with Parade magazine, Mrs. Agnew said her father, who had a Ph.D. in chemistry, thought a college education was wasted on women. Judy did not disagree, and took a job for \$11 a week as a file clerk at the Maryland Casualty Company.

There she met the man everyone called Ted — his middle name was Theodore — who worked in another department and went to law school evenings. She preferred to call him Spiro. They had grown up four blocks apart but had never met. Their first date was a movie, followed by chocolate milkshakes. They were married on May 27, 1942, and had four children.

She is survived by her daughters Pamela DeHaven, Susan Sagle and Kimberly Fisher; her son, James; six grandchildren; and eight great-grandchildren.

Mrs. Agnew told McCall’s magazine that she learned to shrug off criticism of her husband, lest she “be upset every day of the week.” McCall’s reported that it did not faze her when a feminist wrote to tell her that she had “set Women’s Lib back a hundred years.”

It pleased Mrs. Agnew to be a homemaker, she said. In 1969, she hosted a reception for 75 reporters, all women. Vice President Agnew played the piano, then said he had to leave to preside over the Senate.

“Have steak ready for dinner,” he said to his wife as he departed. She nodded.