

As prepared for delivery

**Eulogy for Nancy Reagan
By James A. Baker, III**

We gather here today to say goodbye to Nancy Davis Reagan . . . a beautiful, smart, and gracious woman . . . a woman who captured the heart . . . of a man . . . who loved his craft, his country and his countrymen . . . and most especially loved this remarkable woman.

A woman without whom Ronald Wilson Reagan would never have become the fortieth president of the United States or succeeded as well as he did.

The Cold War--that President Reagan did so much to end--brought them together.

In 1950, the name "Nancy Davis" appeared on a list of communist sympathizers. Would the Hollywood blacklists know this was a different person, not the young actress? She took her problem to her union boss, the president of the Screen Actors Guild, Ronald Reagan.

They met at a Hollywood restaurant. The dinner would be brief, they agreed, because each had an early casting call.

In fact, neither had an early casting call. An early casting call was the standard Hollywood excuse to put a quick end to unpleasant dinners.

But when "I opened the door . . .," she wrote later, "I knew . . . he was the man I wanted to marry." Their meeting lasted through dinner, then into the wee hours at a nearby club.

The third age in Shakespeare's seven ages of man is "the lover, sighing like a furnace, with a woeful ballad."

Shakespeare is gently mocking young lovers. Their passion always burns hot, he says, then it fades.

Well, the Bard never met Nancy or her Ronnie.

They could hardly bear to be apart. When he was on a movie set or on the road for General Electric or as a candidate, or as governor, or as president, he wrote her every night. When they were together, he hid love notes around the house for her to find.

One Christmas at Pacific Palisades he wrote:

"Whatever I treasure and enjoy, all would be without meaning if I didn't have you. I live in a permanent Christmas because God gave me you."

Nancy saved his love letters in a shopping bag in her closet. She reciprocated by slipping little notes and jelly beans in with the clothes in his suitcase. And while he was away, she said, "I'd drive home feeling very lonely and very sad, and I'd knit him socks."

She also reciprocated by dedicating her life to him. "I was, I suppose, a woman of the old school," she wrote. "If you wanted to make your life with a man, you took on whatever his interests were and they became your interests, too."

"If Ronald Reagan had owned a shoe store," Mike Deaver wrote, "Nancy would have been happy pushing shoes and working the register."

Ronald Reagan's interests turned in a different direction, of course—to politics and public service. Nancy, who might have preferred a more private life, became the consummate political wife and first lady.

He owed much of the success of his presidency to her.

She had an instinct for reading people that the president knew he lacked. "Nancy," he wrote, "sees the goodness in people but also has an extra instinct that allows her to see flaws."

Nancy was the president's eyes and ears on personnel. She could see who was paddling their own canoe and who was loyal to the president. And she was as tough as a Marine drill sergeant--as many of us found out when things didn't go well.

The President's advisers learned to keep her informed and seek her support. If she trusted them and agreed, she would add her voice to theirs. But she was without a doubt his closest advisor.

She's the one who said, "You need to do this, Ronnie. You need to find a way to negotiate with Gorbachev."

The only time I saw her lose her composure was the day the president was shot. She was devastated, and she fell apart. Even in his condition, he did his best to give her strength. "Honey, I forgot to duck." That was his way of comforting her.

President Reagan left the hospital convinced that God had spared him for a special purpose. And the First Lady left with a fierce determination to protect him in every way she possibly could.

Ronald and Nancy Reagan were defined by their love. They were as close to being one person as it is possible for any two people to be.

When the president made his slow exit from the stage, she dedicated herself to his memory and his place in history. Now she too has exited this stage to join her beloved Ronnie in eternity.

I can just imagine how Saint Peter let the president know she had arrived.

"A beautiful lady is at the gate asking for you," he said . . . "with a jar of jelly beans . . . a shopping bag full of letters . . . and a suitcase filled . . . with hand-knitted socks."

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