

Election '79

The women behind the candidates



Midge Philbrook

Travelling broadens mind

For just over six years, Dr. Frank Philbrook worked in mission hospitals, first in northern India and then Pakistan. He was accompanied on his mission work by his wife Midge, and three young daughters. The family lived in small poverty-stricken towns. Money couldn't buy clean water. The infested water was boiled each time before using. For Oakville-born-and-bred Midge Philbrook, it was a life totally unknown to her. "I grew up in this delightful village of Oakville where I had a very secure life. I didn't feel the war as a child." At the time of their travels in the 1960's, Vietnam was at its peak and Chinese forces were invading the Himalayan Mountains. The war and its horrors became very real for her. "I was horrified with what the Americans were literally being dragged into," she recalled. Her life abroad was an experience that opened her eyes to world politics and economics. She treasures the experience. "I'd go back and do it all over again. "I came from being a non-political person to becoming an extremely aware person," she explained. On their trip back to Canada, the family spent three and a half months travelling through Asia and also made a trip to Russia. Their final stop was a visit to Expo in Montreal and then home to Oakville. It took approximately a year for Midge to readjust to Canadian life.

"Changing from a housewife there to here was something else," she remembered. "I was delighted with Canada and the whole country. I suddenly realized the luxuries. People take so much for granted, even such a basic as clean, running water." Her 21-year-old daughter Marnie agrees. "It is nothing you can pinpoint, but the experience of living away from home gave you an appreciation of the better things in life." The experience triggered Midge's decision to enroll in McMaster University and pursue her interests in anthropology, political science and economics. "We live in an age of economics and I wanted the tools to keep up with everything that is going on," she explained. She is halfway through her studies for a Bachelor of Arts degree. Her combined interest and dedication to the study of politics has also paved the way for a deeper involvement with her husband's career as a politician. She is now a veteran of two federal elections and loves every minute of it. "I don't feel the dutiful wife role," she pointed out. "We share a common interest in politics and I am involved to a very high degree." "I help Frank canvass and I want to be around him as much as possible." The couple's three daughters Marnie, Cathy, 20, and Jackie, 15, are not to be forgotten. They spend many hours with their Dad, be it canvassing, or painting signs or working at campaign headquarters. A federal election campaign gives one a

chance to get involved in the "whole electoral process" and to "keep democracy going," continued Midge. My husband is a very hardworking individual and I am really proud to work for him," she said enthusiastically. "I do appreciate it when I ask questions on specific subjects and he is able to give me a wealth of education."

In addition to her academic interests, Midge manages to find time for other hobbies. She quilts and enjoys upholstering furniture. And she knows the best garment factories to find good deals for her sewing interests. Like any other housewife, she can be found at the kitchen sink getting the dishes under-way or planning breakfast following a morning jog with her husband.

MIDGE PHILBROOK, 43, has more than a natural interest in politics after spending six years with her husband in India and Pakistan. She is now pursuing a Bachelor of Arts degree in political science, anthropology and economics at McMaster University. Born and raised in Oakville, Midge is the mother of three daughters.



LEATA JELINEK, 29, entered the world of politics when she decided to move from Vancouver to accept a job for a Conservative MP in Ottawa. For the Calgary-born native, the new job also led to the meeting of her future husband. An enthusiastic traveller, she enjoys seeing as much of the world as possible.

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The adage "Behind every successful man is a hard-working woman," is still true. Behind the three principal candidates seeking office in Halton during the federal election are three equally able and determined women.

The trio are Midge Philbrook, Leata Jelinek and Mary Black. Reporter Linda Kirby interviewed all three and discovered what life is like being a candidate's wife. Her interviews conclude the second of a two-part series on the candidates and their families.

Leata Jelinek

Met husband through politics

Leata Jelinek doesn't care for rainy weather, particularly the climate of Vancouver. It was for that reason in 1972, the 24-year-old, attractive, blond secretary, then working in Vancouver, decided to accept a job with Progressive Conservative MP John Reynolds in Ottawa. It was her initiation to the world of politics but more importantly, an encounter of the most romantic kind. Working on the next floor up in the same building was an enthusiastic PC party worker, Otto Jelinek. The two became friends after bumping into each other at various office social functions.

Following a two-year courtship, the couple married. Five years and two federal elections later, Leata has become an accomplished politician's wife. Her full-time job right now is looking after Otto, she explained. She keeps the records, types speeches, attends all the necessary functions and tries to keep things running as smoothly as possible for her husband. But, she pointed out, she is not a "political animal." "I enjoy politics," she said, but carefully added, "it is not something I personally want to become totally involved in."

"With politics, you can have blinders and not see anything else." A keen globe-trotter, Leata Jelinek has attempted to see as much of the world as possible in the past few years. The Calgary-born native began her travels at the age of 20 when she took off for a hitchhiking trip across Europe with a girlfriend for six months. Great Britain, Ireland, France, Belgium, Austria, Portugal, Turkey and Greece were among the spots visited. It was the best education of its kind, she recalls, in terms of learning to appreciate other cultures and their way of life. But the greatest impression the trip left on her was the realization of Canada's greatness and immense potential she noted. In recent years during travels with her husband, she has come to appreciate her home country even more. "I don't think Canadians as a whole realize what we have. We have so much going for us."

She explained she is grateful for her husband's job. It has enabled her to accompany him on many travels, the most recent being Taiwan. "To me, the most important thing in politics is the friends we have around the world." An enthusiastic traveller, she treasures however, a private and quiet home life. A politician's life demands a ceaseless schedule of social dos and appearances, and the couple make every effort to set aside some time for themselves. Both love the outdoors and many weekends are spent working in the garden. Swimming, skiing, tennis and squash are among Leata's favorite sports, in addition to her love for crafts, including macramé and candle-making. As a housewife, her concerns include food prices. "I go shopping and check the prices just like any other housewife," she said, noting she is a careful food shopper. She finds prices in a variety of industries are controlled, including air travel.

"It is still cheaper to fly to Europe than within Canada," she complained. "If more people could travel more cheaply in this country, it might help us understand our country more," she said. The Jelinek couple are hardly likely to be travelling any great distances in the next while. For now, both have their hands full with the final campaign days and the organization of the couple's new Lakeshore Rd. home. They plan to make Oakville their permanent home and keep an Ottawa apartment as their secondary base. The start of a family is also in the near future plans. Leata hopes to become involved with "Big Sisters" after the election is over. "I like children very much, and the way the world is today, there are many children in need of help and guidance."



Mary Black

An experienced campaigner

Newlywed Mary Black is no newcomer to politics. The 31-year-old blonde has 15 years of door-pounding and campaigning behind her. She first began door-knocking in her early teens, when her dad ran for school trustee in Oakville. Today, the experience is paying off, as she makes the rounds with her NDP candidate husband, Doug Black. As well, she devotes much of her daytime hours to secretarial duties in campaign headquarters. The mother of two daughters by a previous marriage, family life is a top priority for the quiet, soft-spoken woman. "To be home with my family and work side by side with my husband is the most important thing right now," she said. It is for those reasons she recently left a comfortable banking position to dedicate more time to her family and the federal election. And she is finding home hours even more demanding, she said. "Instead of putting in a nine-hour day, and calling it a day, I put in a 15-hour day." Born in Brussels, Belgium, she arrived in Canada at the age of two. Her father was a Canadian soldier working

overseas and for the first two years of her young life, she travelled in England, Luxembourg, France and Germany with her parents. Hamilton, Ontario, was home for the family until Mary was eight and then they moved to Oakville. A student at Oakville-Trafalgar High School, she married her first husband shortly after leaving school. She worked as an assistant manager in a catalogue store for a year before joining a banking firm in 1973. Now, for the first time in many years, she is at home and enjoying it. She became the bride of Doug Black a year ago. Her daughters are Bonnie Sue, nine, and Wendy, 14. While family life remains a number one item, Mary Black is pursuing a variety of career interests with the hope to branch into something new for herself in the future. An enthusiastic student, she is now working on a business administration certificate. She has enrolled in business law and accounting courses and is planning to begin Spanish lessons with her daughter Wendy, soon.

"I think if I have one regret, it is that I don't have enough time to learn everything," she said. A volunteer with the Children's Aid Society, she devotes several hours a week to a 14-year-old teen girl. "It's very rewarding work, and it makes me feel better about myself," she explained. "It is sort of in the nature of being a big sister." As well, she has taken a course in sign language, a benefit she has found useful in a number of situations. She has specific concerns, having been a mother with several years of experience as a single parent. "I am concerned about women's issues, including equal employment opportunity with equal pay." She cited banking as one area where women suffer discrimination. Promotions are offered to men first, she maintained. Professional day care facilities are a vital necessity she continued. "We need reliable day care places, so women who must work can relax, knowing their children are well cared for." One of her biggest concerns now, as she

watches her two daughters grow, is with future employment opportunities. Mrs. Black suggests individuals should be encouraged to retire with a pension at 60 years of age, to make way for young people in need of work. When she isn't busy with home life or school studies, she enjoys reading. The shelves of books in the cozy high-rise Oakville apartment are evidence of the couple's love of reading. Historical novels and poetry books nicely balance the volumes of law books and political readings. Despite her love for the city and high-rise living, she admits to enjoying biking and hiking through the countryside. Her favorite spots include Rattlesnake Point and Elora and the family frequently takes off for a day of sunshine and country air. Bike trips and family picnics must now take a back seat with only a few days left for election campaigning. "It's very challenging and exciting," she says of the election drive. "The second vote getter next to the candidate is the candidate's wife," she stated.

MARY BLACK, 31, has a few years of political campaigning behind her in addition to being the newlywed bride of NDP candidate Doug Black. As well as dedicating herself full time to campaign duties, she is working on a business administration certificate and hopes to launch a new career for herself.