

News from Senator

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MAMIE

Her friends, and that included everyone who ever met her, called her Mamie. She supported one of America's authentic heroes, through a world war, and two distinguished terms in the Oval Office.

With Mamie, family came before politics. But let no one doubt her commitment to public service. She gave liberally of herself as Dwight Eisenhower's life partner, and she brought to the White House a charm that was both quiet and irresistible.

She was 20 years old when she married a young lieutenant named Ike Eisenhower in 1916. In the years to come, the couple would know both tragedy and triumph. They lost their first child in 1921, and would experience the pain of separation for much of the general's overseas military career. But their love never wavered. Neither did their determination to serve the country they loved.

In 1952, he wrote that "Mamie and I are both determined to give our best to the task that lies before us. It is not easy; we simply never allow ourselves to think of the serene, peaceful life that could be ours if I had not allowed friends and others to persuade me as to my public duty."

Mamie and Ike kept that pledge all their lives. The White House under Mrs. Eisenhower was like the woman herself -- gracious, warm, beckoning as a genuine homestead. She infused it with her verve and style. No one ever left one of Mamie's parties feeling anything less than an old friend -- or a new admirer.

After 1961, the nation's attentions were focused on another First Lady, but Mamie was content to retire at last to the relative serenity of Gettysburg. There, she and Ike passed eight peaceful years until the general's health began to fail.

"I've always loved my wife," he said at the last. "I've always loved my children. I've always loved my grandchildren. And I've always loved my country."

The same virtues applied to Mamie. In a few days, we will take her back to Kansas, to lie beneath the prayer that Ike spoke at his first inauguration in 1953. And the place of meditation will be consecrated anew -- to a woman who matched her husband's heroism with courage, his leadership with grace and elegance.

We will remember her. And, if we are wise, we will keep her example close to our heart, where it can never die.