The Extraordinary Life of Rosalynn Carter

Grades 8-12
Program Overview

Rosalynn Carter

- Early Life
- In the Navy
- Back to Plains/Politics
- Washington Years
- Post-Presidency

Left: Mrs. Johnson, President and Mrs. Carter, President and Mrs. Ford, President and Mrs. Nixon, President and Mrs. Reagan, President and Mrs. Bush Attend Dedication of the Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, 11/4/1991 (National Archives Identifier: 5730822)
Early Life

Rural Beginnings

• Born Eleanor Rosalynn Carter, August 18, 1927, Plains, GA

• Visited by future husband, Jimmy Carter on DOB

• Father passes away at age 13

Right: Main Street in Plains, GA, ca. 1925 (Carter Library)
Early Life: 1940 Census

Rosalynn Carter, at about age 13 (Carter Library)

Population Schedule recording Rosalynn Carter in the Sixteenth Census of the United States, 1940 (Carter Library)
About the Census

• Minors & ineligible voters still count towards allocation of U.S. House Members & their state’s number of Electoral Votes for President

• Participants provide crucial data to policymakers, economists, farmers & many others that impact our daily lives

• Being counted in the Census is probably the easiest Civic Duty for anyone to fulfill

Right: An Enumerator collects a family’s information for the 1940 U.S. Census (National Archives Identifier: 6200775)
Early Life

Conclusion of Childhood

• Works to support family, raise three younger siblings
• Jimmy Carter not around, “just a picture on Ruth’s wall”
• Turns down Carter’s first proposal to fulfill promise to her father to finish college before marriage
• Graduates from Georgia Southwestern College, 1946

Learn more about Georgia Southwestern State College affiliate, The Rosalynn Carter Institute For Caregivers

Right: Early portrait of Rosalynn Carter, at about age 17, ca. 1944 (National Archives Identifier: 593564)
Courting Carter

Jimmy Carter gave this compact with ILYTG engraved on it to Rosalynn Smith on Christmas morning of 1945; ILYTG stands for: I Love You The Goodest, a Carter family term of endearment (Carter Library)

Ensign Jimmy Carter gets help with his epaulets from his fiancée Rosalynn, at left, and his mother Miss Lillian, right, on the day of his graduation from the Naval Academy, 1946 (Carter Library)
Uncertain Return

• Jimmy makes “unilateral” decision to return after father’s death, 1953

• “Not having any assured income, we applied for and were assigned an apartment in the new housing project in Plains”

Right: Apartment 9A, Plains, Georgia (National Park Service)
Expanding Their Community

- **1963**: Journalist uncovers voter fraud, Carter wins GA State Senate seat
- **1970**: Carter wins GA Governor’s race on second attempt

Left: Campaign poster for one of Jimmy Carter’s successful runs for the Georgia State Senate. (Carter Library) Right: Jimmy Carter shaking hands with voters while running for Georgia governor (Carter Library)
Georgians On Her Mind

• As First Lady (GA), served on Governor’s Commission to Improve Services to the Mentally & Emotionally Handicapped

• Brings heightened public awareness to the needs of Caregivers

Right: The Carters pose for a family portrait with their three sons Jeff, Jack and Chip during his inauguration as governor in January 1971 (Carter Library)
The Carters go to Washington

First Lady of the Nation

- Continues advocacy of Mental Health
- Represents U.S. abroad
- Maintains status as Carter’s “closest advisor”
- Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) Advocate

Left: Rosalynn Carter, Jimmy Carter and Amy Carter pose on the White House lawn (Carter Library)
Duties of the First Lady

- There is nothing whatsoever in the Constitution regarding the role of the First Lady
- Unmarried/widowed Presidents have designated a First Lady or “Hostess of the White House”
- Role has evolved over time, each making it their own
- No First Gentleman/Host to date

East Wing Presence

- Carter was the 1st First Lady to have a dedicated office space in the East Wing of the White House

- Personal Assistant Madeline McBean was Rosalynn’s “Protector” & had a connected office space (as did administrative assistant)

- Full staff of 18, with offices nearby

Right: Rosalynn Carter with her personal assistant, Madeline McBean, 3/17/1977 (National Archives Identifier: 174076)
Equal Rights Amendment

Advocate for Change

- Joins former First Ladies Betty Ford & Lady Bird Johnson in publicly supporting ERA
- Speaks at the National Women’s Conference, 1977
- Passage of ERA according to Article V continues to be debated today

Left: Rosalynn Carter speaks at the National Women’s Conference, 11/19/1977 (National Archives Identifier: 176939)
Mental Health Champion

At Home and Abroad

- Appointed Honorary Chairperson, President’s Commission on Mental Health
- Helped ensure passage of Mental Health Systems Act of 1980
- Efforts resulted in private funding increase for family aid, aging, youth, and ADA-accessible buildings

*Left:* Rosalynn Carter addresses the Medical Society of the World Health Organization in Geneva, Switzerland (National Archives Identifier: 184855)
1977: Latin America Trip

- Two weeks, seven nations
- Discussed issues ranging from human rights to nuclear arms control with each leader
- Improved dialogue between the U.S. and Latin American neighbors

Right: Rosalynn Carter is received by Costa Rican dignitaries after her arrival on Air Force One, 1977 (Carter Library)
Most Trusted Advisor

Rosalynn Carter on Attending Cabinet Meetings (C-SPAN)
Getting out of Debt

- Farm business sold after being in blind trust during presidency
- Carters begin literary careers, climb out of debt
- Free to pursue humanitarian initiatives

The Carter Center


- Rosalynn Carter Symposium on Mental Health Policy
- Establishes annual Georgia Mental Health Forum
- Travels to promote peace and health programs in more than 80 countries

Left: Rosalynn Carter testifies before U.S. House of Representatives subcommittee in favor of the Wellstone Domenici Mental Health Parity and Addiction Equity Act (Carter Center)
Medal of Freedom

- Receive highest civilian honor in U.S.
- Honor shared with Jimmy President Clinton:

"Jimmy & Roslaynn Carter have done more good things for more people in more places than any other couple on earth."

Right: President and Mrs. Carter receive the Presidential Medal of Freedom from President Clinton at a ceremony at The Carter Center in Atlanta, 7/9/199 (Carter Center)
Still in Plains

Enjoying Retirement

• Grandson Jason Carter now Chair of the Board of Trustees w/Carter Center

• Recently hosted 300 guests at Plains High School for 75th Wedding Anniversary

• Longest-married Presidential couple in American History

Right: 2016 presidential candidate and former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, former first lady Rosalynn Carter, former Presidents Jimmy Carter and Bill Clinton at their 75th wedding anniversary celebration (Carter Center)
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