



0. The Iron Lady - Story Preface

1. ABOVE the SHOP in GRANTHAM
2. MARGARET and DENIS
3. MARGARET THATCHER, MP
4. THATCHER'S WAR - THE FALKLAND ISLANDS
5. LIFE at CHEQUERS and DOWNING STREET
6. LOSS ... of POWER and DENIS
7. IRON LADY - FINAL YEARS

Margaret Thatcher, Prime Minister of Britain (1979-1990), in an undated portrait. Image online, courtesy Margaret Thatcher Foundation. License: [CC BY-SA 3.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/)

*Don't look back.
You're not going there.*

Cynthia Crawford

Personal Assistant to Margaret Thatcher

Trying to convince potential backers she'd make a good candidate for Parliament, Margaret Roberts could "present" for half the night. After dinner, she was expected to "retire with the ladies."

Undaunted by the way post-war women were treated - including patronizing or dismissive attitudes - Margaret Roberts Thatcher became a Member of Parliament (MP) in 1959. She rose through the ranks to become Britain's first female Prime Minister (PM) twenty years later.

Serving longer than any other PM of the 20th century, she was often the only woman in a room filled with leaders. Trusting her instincts, and her ability to persuasively make her points, Margaret led her country for 11½ years. Then ... she lost power when her own colleagues - not the British electorate - turned against her.

How did this girl, from England's East Midlands, rise to such heights in her class-conscious, male-dominated culture?

See [Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:](http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/The-Iron-Lady)

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Questions 2 Ponder

How Do We Overcome Gender Discrimination?

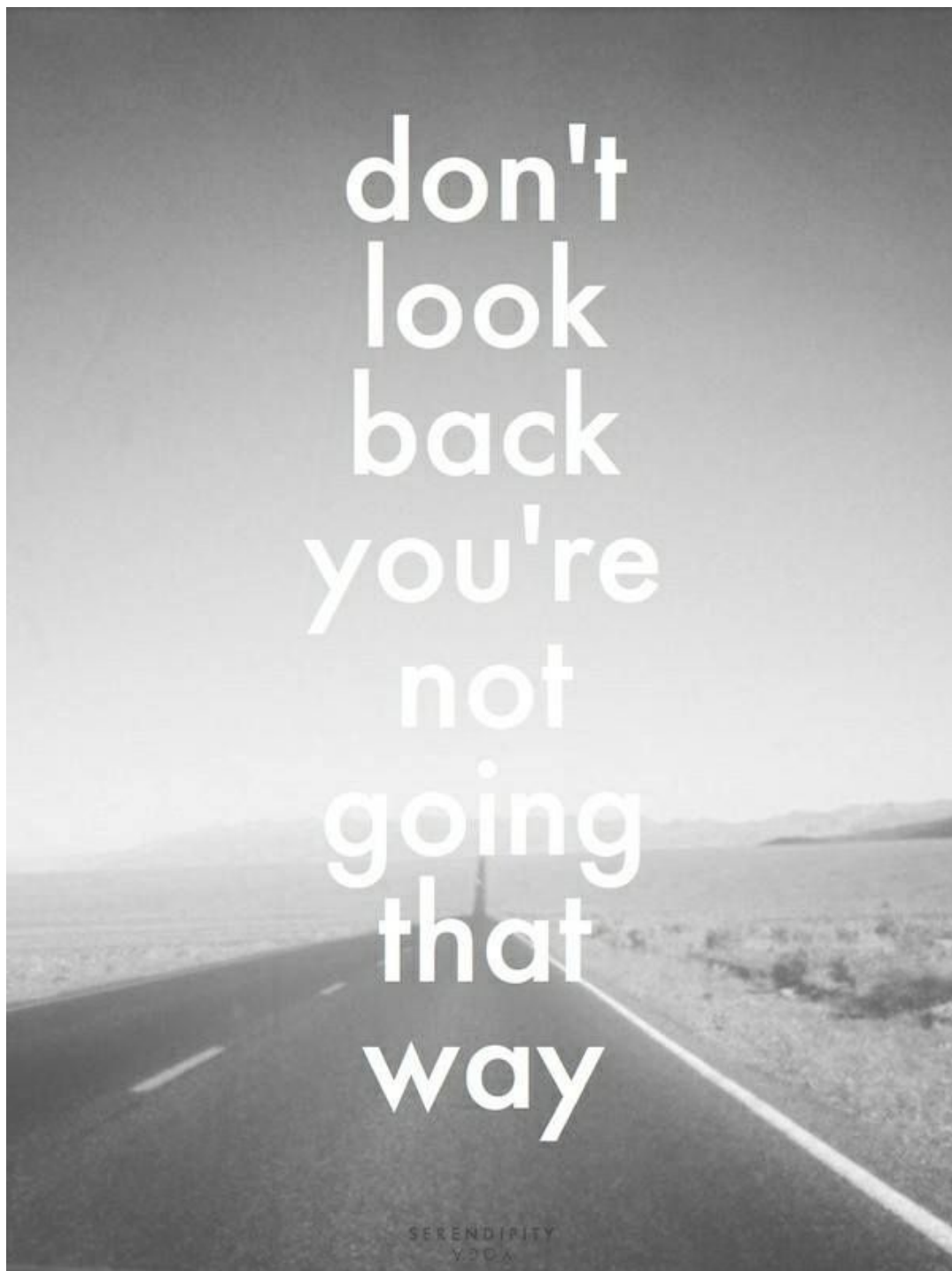
Margaret Thatcher has been dubbed "The Iron Lady" for her refusal to back down in the political arena and for her efforts to show that a female leader could be effective. Not everyone in the United Kingdom agreed with her political viewpoints, however, and she was often a polarizing force in her country.

Thatcher began her quest to become a Member of Parliament in the early 1950s. What character traits would help her to overcome the significant prejudice against women-in-power at the time?

Would she need to build upon, or modify, those character traits as she climbed the ladder to power? Explain your answer.

If she modified her character traits in any way, in order to climb the political ladder, could she be accused of "selling out?" Why, or why not?

What Makes Us "Look Back" Instead of "Looking Forward?"



Growing up in a class-conscious, male-dominated culture, Margaret Roberts Thatcher overcome much in her life before reaching the highest levels of political power in Britain. Still ... she sometimes looked back on events which may not always have been helpful.

Her personal assistant, Cynthia Crawford, had to remind the Prime Minister: "Don't look back. You're not going there."

Do you think Crawford's advice makes sense? Why, or why not?

If we "look back," to earlier events which were hurtful or harmful to us, does that have a tendency to keep us from moving forward? Explain your answer.

Sometimes it is tempting to rehash old events, even with people we care about, which tends to work against "forgiving and forgetting." How can we heal if someone we love keeps bringing up our past mistakes?



Cynthia Crawford - "Crawfie"

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East Midlands - Margaret Thatcher's Birthplace

Map locator, of England's East Midlands, online courtesy Wikimedia Commons.

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MARGARET THATCHER, PM

By the time Brits went to the national polls, in 1979, they had been through a "Winter of Discontent." Strikes, causing garbage pile-ups, and high unemployment were just two of the country's major problems. The image depicts a poster favoring the election of the Conservative Party (led, at the time, by Margaret Thatcher). Image online, courtesy Wikimedia Commons.

When [Margaret and Denis Thatcher](#) moved into [Number 10 Downing Street](#), Britain was in - and had been through - a period of [national chaos](#). (Don't miss this BBC "Archive Hour" radio broadcast with slideshow.)

Although the country had sustained heavy damage during World War II, the effects were not so devastating that industries had to start anew. As a result, British factories were neither as modern nor productive as competitors in other war-ravaged countries - like Germany - where entire industries had to retool.

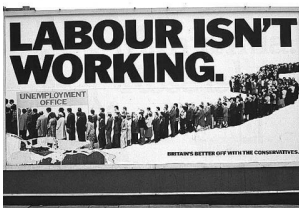
Inflation was averaging 22%, [in 1979](#), which meant the British economy was sluggish. Tax rates were high, productivity was low and local union officials could order strikes whenever that seemed the best way to help workers.

Garbage collectors and gravediggers were simultaneously [on strike](#), in the early part of 1979, causing a [most unpleasant situation](#). Garbage was piled so high in Leicester Square, in January of that year, that the place was dubbed "Fester Square."

Adding to [the misery](#) - during "[the winter of Discontent](#)" - people endured ongoing brown-outs because electricity workers were part of union-ordered work slow-downs. Lack of regular power cut the work-week to three days, caused television stations (such as BBC2) to [go off-air](#) and required students to [write their papers by candle light](#).

Thatcher did not assume the reigns of power with a landslide victory when she first became Prime Minister. She had called for [radical reforms](#), in her election campaign, and such measures were not supported by everyone. Among other disputed things, she wanted to restore much of British industry to private ownership (instead of government ownership).

To understand why so many British industries were controlled by the government, we have to step back in time - to 1945. Having won the war under Churchill, the British people were ready to move on. About two months after Germany surrendered, voters removed their war leader and replaced him (and his Conservative party) with [Clement Attlee](#) (and his Labour party).



Labour had campaigned against Churchill with a very specific mission in view. Set forth in their plan, entitled *Let Us Face the Future*, they proposed that government would take over - and nationalize - the power and fuel industries; inland transport; the banking business; iron and steel industries; civil aviation; telecommunications. In other words, everything in those categories - coal, gas, electricity, railroads, the Bank of England, mining, shipbuilding, airplane-building, airplane-flying - would be taken over, and managed, by the British government.

Post-war Labour leaders argued that private ownership, of major industries, was harming the United Kingdom. Churchill warned that Labour's views would irreparably damage the people:

I must tell you that a socialist policy is abhorrent to British ideas on freedom...

...There is to be one State, to which all are to be obedient in every act of their lives...How is an ordinary citizen or subject of the King to stand up against this formidable machine which, once it is in power, will prescribe for every one of them where they are to work; what they are to work at; where they may go and what they may say; what views they are to hold...where their wives are to go to queue up for the State ration; and what education their children are to receive...

A socialist state...could not afford to suffer opposition...no socialist system can be established without a political police...They [the Labour government] would have to fall back on some form of Gestapo. (Churchill, [Campaign Speech](#), June 4, 1945.)

When the electorate agreed with Labour and Attlee - by their [votes in 1945](#), and again in 1950 - Britain became a socialist country.

Thatcher, and her fellow Conservatives, believed those changes had significantly [harmed Britain](#). They argued - and a slim majority of [the 1979 electorate](#) agreed - that Unions were effectively controlling too much of the country.

It was time, Thatcher said, for the United Kingdom to have private money paying for new technology. That could not happen, however, while key industries were still government-owned.

*Starting with the government itself, Mrs. Thatcher was determined to [cut 100,000 civil-service jobs](#) within five years. She believed that government employees are public servants not privileged workers. She set out to "de-privilege" the Civil Service. (See Campbell, *The Iron Lady*, page 173.)*

By November of 1981, [Nigel Lawson](#) - Mrs. Thatcher's Chancellor of the Exchequer - [announced](#) that more government-operated industries would be privatized:

No industry should remain under State ownership unless there is a positive and overwhelming case for it so doing. (House of Commons, 5 November 1981 [vol. 12. Columns 440-41].)

Radical change requires time and patience, and not everyone in Britain even supported the Prime Minister's approach. [By 1981](#), it was looking like Margaret Thatcher might be [a one-term PM](#). Then ... something happened in the Falkland Islands - 8,000 miles away - which changed her fortunes.

Margaret Thatcher became a war leader in 1982.

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The Iron Lady

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