



0. MARGARET THATCHER, MP - Story Preface

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As a member of Parliament, Margaret Thatcher visited her hometown of Grantham, in 1964. In this photo, she is visiting with a nurse at Grantham Hospital. Image online, courtesy Grantham Matters.

MT - as Denis called his wife (when he didn't refer to her as "The Boss") - was an ambitious Member of Parliament. She worked hard at her job, hoping one day to become a cabinet minister (although she was concerned that too-few women were given that chance). As she repeatedly told interviewers, she did not believe a woman would become Britain's Prime Minister during her lifetime.

Like many politicians, Margaret used pictures of her family to show voters scenes from her personal life. She also did a television program, in 1973, which seems like a "day in the life of Margaret Thatcher" (during which she answers questions put by children).

Her daughter Carol - who has written books about her parents - gives us some insight into life in the Thatcher home:

First my mother had been a chemist, then she was a barrister. Now, she was an MP - one of only twelve women compared to three hundred and fifty male Conservatives in the Commons - and our lives would now be on a political rollercoaster ...

She still organized the household and gave daily instructions to our nanny. We still went on family holidays to the Isle of Wight and Switzerland. She made all our birthday cakes, often shaped like trains or cars and intricately iced; she attended parents' evening and speech days at school...She even knitted...Both she and my father had always worked, always been busy, so we didn't yet have a sense of the remarkable journey we were all about to make... (Carol Thatcher, A Swim-on Part in the Goldfish Bowl, pages 30-31.)

As Margaret's influence in the House of Commons increased, so did her radio interviews and television appearances. Some of her colleagues began to think she could become leader of the Tory party. They also believed, however, that a few things about Margaret had to change before that could happen.

Following a televised debate, in 1975, commentators assessed her performance:

Margaret Thatcher knows her main problem is her image. The Heathmen caricature her as the apostle of middle class values who would lose the industrial vote.

One big item, begging for assistance, was Margaret's voice. It was fairly high and sounded screechy when she got excited. Another item was her hair. Those soft waves (in the minds of some) had to go.

Ronald Millar (an author and playwright who could "voice" Margaret's ideas) helped MT write her speeches. Aiery Neave (a fellow Tory and friend) and Gordon Reece (a television producer) helped to change her image.

The image-changers received a significant tip from Laurence Olivier (the famous actor) who suggested that Margaret work with a tutor at the National Theatre. We can assess the results of her efforts, in lowering her speaking voice, by listening to a "before and after" video clip.

With her new image, MT attracted more attention. Denis, meanwhile, was also working hard, both on the job and pursuing his favorite sports: rugby (as a referee) and golf (as a player).

Although he'd sold his family business, Denis was offered a job by the successor company (and the successor company after that). At one point, he was so exhausted he needed to leave England for awhile. He traveled to Africa - one of his favorite places in the world - to rest.

Continuing to rise through the ranks, with the help of friends like Aiery Neave, Margaret became leader of the Opposition in 1975 (when the Labour party was in power). Then ... tragedy struck within her inner circle.

Ever since Henry VIII and Elizabeth I set their sights on Ireland - finding it a wonderful place to support Britain's needs - Irishmen wanted to be free of British control. By the 1970s, members of the IRA (Irish Republican Army) were making their points by blowing-up cars and buildings in, and around, London.

One of those bombs targeted the "Shadow Minister for Northern Ireland" - Margaret's friend, Airey Neave. No stranger to adversity, Neave had been a German-held POW during the war and was the first Brit to escape from Colditz Castle.

On the 30th of March, 1979, Neave got into his car at Westminster. Although he'd left his vehicle in the government-offices parking garage, where his car should have been safe, he left with a bomb aboard. As Neave drove up the exit ramp, the bomb exploded. The force ripped-off both of his legs; Neave died shortly thereafter in a London hospital.

Devastated, MT had lost one of her closest allies.

The campaign, however, went forward in full force. Following a spring election, Margaret Thatcher achieved what she had considered impossible: She was Britain's first female Prime Minister.

On the 4th of May, 1979, she had the right to move into Number 10 Downing Street (the link is a virtual tour) and to brief the Queen (on a weekly basis).

See [Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:](#)

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/MARGARET-THATCHER-MP-The-Iron-Lady>

See [Learning Tasks for this story online at:](#)

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/MARGARET-THATCHER-MP-The-Iron-Lady>

Questions 2 Ponder

What Is the Point of an Image Change?

People in high-profile positions, or who wish to achieve a high-profile status, sometimes decide to change their image. This seems to be especially true in politics where image matters (or seems to matter) to political candidates.

Margaret Thatcher, for example, went through an image change where, among other things, she worked hard to change the sound of her voice. She worked with a tutor at the National Theatre.

What are some of the reasons why a person might want to change his/her image?

Is changing one's image an honest attempt to improve - or - a dishonest effort to hide the truth about oneself? Could it be both? Explain your answer.

Media Stream



Margaret Thatcher - Young Mother

Photo of Margaret Thatcher, with her two children, online courtesy Margaret Thatcher Foundation.

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Margaret Thatcher - Family Holiday

Thatcher family photo, online courtesy Margaret Thatcher Foundation.

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Ronald Millar and Thatcher's Famous "Assisi" Speech

Photo of Sir Ronald Millar online, courtesy Margaret Thatcher Foundation.

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Airey Neave - Iron Lady Advisor

1975 photo of Margaret Thatcher with Airey Neave, online courtesy Margaret Thatcher Foundation.

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Gordon Reece - Iron Lady Advisor

Image of Gordon Reece, online courtesy Wikimedia Commons.

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Airey Neave - Car Bombing at Westminster

Photo of Airey Neave's car on 30 March 1979, online courtesy BBC. Copyright, BBC, all rights reserved. Image provided here as fair use for educational purposes.

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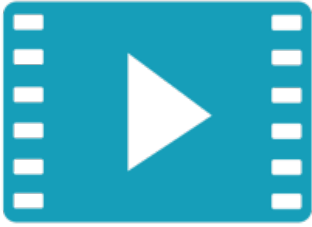


Margaret Thatcher - Ministry of Pensions, 1961

Video clip from ITN's archives, online via YouTube.

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<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Margaret-Thatcher-Ministry-of-Pensions-1961>



Margaret Thatcher - "The Trouble with Men" - 1962

Historical video clip of Margaret Thatcher interview, in 1962, online via YouTube.

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<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Margaret-Thatcher-The-Trouble-with-Men-1962>



Day in the Life of a Young Margaret Thatcher - 1973

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Day in the Life of a Young Margaret Thatcher - Part 2

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Margaret Thatcher Interview - 1974

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Iron Lady - Thatcher's Comments on Airey Neave's Death

Historic footage of Margaret Thatcher's remarks, following the death of Airey Neave, online via Margaret Thatcher Foundation.

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Iron-Lady-Thatcher-s-Comments-on-Airey-Neave-s-Death>



Briefing the Queen - Duties of a British Prime Minister

Video clip online, courtesy the Prime Minister's Office, via its channel at YouTube.

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<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Briefing-the-Queen-Duties-of-a-British-Prime-Minister>