

An excerpt from “Women: Biology Culture and Literature” by Howard Schwartz

Dr. Blasey Ford’s Story

Although both women – RBG and Ford--married solid, high-achieving men who have supported them in their lives and aspirations, Christine Blasey Ford’s early life could not have been more different than Ruth Bader Ginsburg’s. After much on-line research, the most comprehensive description I’ve found—and the one that makes most clear both the differences in their upbringing and the similarities between their high achieving lives—is excerpted below, from The Washington Post (Sept/27, 2018):

“When Donald Trump won his upset presidential victory in 2016, Christine Blasey Ford’s thoughts quickly turned to a name most Americans had never heard of but one that had unsettled her for years: Brett M. Kavanaugh.

“Kavanaugh—a judge on the prestigious U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit—was among those mentioned as a possible replacement for Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia, who died in 2016. When Trump nominated Neil M. Gorsuch, Ford was relieved but still uneasy.

“Then, Justice Anthony M. Kennedy announced his retirement, and Ford, 51, began fretting again.

“Her mind-set was, ‘I’ve got this terrible secret.... What am I going to do with this secret?’” her husband, Russell Ford, 56, recalled.

“To many, Kavanaugh was a respected jurist. To her, he was the teenager who had attacked her when they were in high school. Ford had already moved 3,000 miles away from the affluent Maryland suburbs where she says Kavanaugh sexually assaulted her at a house party—a charge he would emphatically deny. Suddenly, living in California didn’t seem far enough. Maybe

another hemisphere would be. She went online to research other democracies where her family might settle, including New Zealand.... These were the lengths that Ford, a professor and mother of two, once considered to avoid revisiting one of her most troubling memories—one she'd discussed only in therapy and with her husband. Instead, her deeply held secret would come to dominate the headlines, putting her and her family at the center of an explosive debate about the future of the Supreme Court....

“Growing up, she was just ‘Chrissy,’ and in the way of younger siblings, was often described by her relationship to someone else: sister of Tom and Ralph, daughter of the older Ralph, a golf course regular who would go on to become the president of the exclusive, all-male Burning Tree Club.... Like many affluent families in the area, the Blaseys sent their children to single-gender private schools. For Ford, that meant six years at Holton-Arms, where students wore blue plaid skirts they would try to persuade their mothers to hem shorter. Her classmates included the daughters of the king of Jordan and members of the J.W. Marriott clan....

“Weekends were spent shopping at the White Flint mall, flashing fake IDs at Georgetown’s Third Edition club—the drinking age was 18 then—or flocking to the house of whoever’s parents were out of town to drink six-packs of Hamm’s or Schaefer.

“Every summer, the ‘Holton girls’ would pack into a rented house for Beach Week, an annual bacchanal of high-schoolers from around the region. The prep schools that formed Ford’s overlapping social circles usually gathered at a Delaware beach town each year. Kavanaugh, in his senior-year yearbook, cited his own membership in the ‘Beach Week Ralph Club.’

“Like Kavanaugh, Ford was part of that alcohol-fueled culture. But those unchaperoned parties, at beach rentals and Bethesda basements alike, frequently left the girls feeling embattled.... In

her Post interview, Ford said a group of boys from Georgetown Prep was at one of the beer-drinking sessions in an unsupervised house near Columbia Country Club, possibly in the summer of 1982. One of them was Kavanaugh, whom she described as an acquaintance. At the time, she was 15, and he was 17.

Kavanaugh and his classmate Mark Judge had started drinking earlier than others, she said, and the two were ‘stumbling drunk’ when they pushed her into a bedroom. She alleges that Kavanaugh lay on top of her, fumbling with her clothes and pressing his hand over her mouth to keep her from screaming. Only when Judge jumped on top of them was she able to run from the room and hide until she could flee the house, she said. Her biggest fear afterward, she recalled more than 35 years later, was looking as if she had just been attacked. So, she carried herself as if she wasn’t. Down the stairs. Out the door. Onto the rest of her high school years, she said. On graduation day, she wore the required white dress and carried red roses. She told no one. [Coincidentally I have chosen the cover for this book titled “Woman with Roses.”—H.S.]

“It was during Ford’s junior year [at UCNC Chapel Hill] when [her friend] Goldstein, who now works as an English teacher in Japan, gave her the advice that would change the course of her life. ‘He said, “You’re really smart, and you’re just like totally [messed] up,’” Ford recalled.... If she was going to graduate on time, he said, she ought to major in psychology. The major didn’t require students to take classes in a specific order, so Ford could take them all at once.

“That was how Christine Blasey Ford came to spend her life researching trauma and if it is possible to get past it.”¹

¹ “Kavanaugh accuser Christine Blasey Ford moved 3,000 miles to reinvent her life. It wasn’t far enough.” Contrera, Shapira et al; washingtonpost.com, September 27, 2018.

Blasey did turn her life around in California. She became a clinical psychologist, learned to surf and loved it, moved to Hawaii to complete a Ph.D., met a fellow surfer who would become her husband, switched from clinical psychology to an academic career at Stanford and—perhaps most importantly—freed herself from the country-club life and politics of her parents. She was able to tell her husband she had been physically abused. Her appreciation of the trauma she suffered—my view—led her to seek a master’s degree in epidemiology at Stanford where her thesis “explored the relationship between trauma and depression,” another highly adaptive way to turn passive into active mastery. She taught graduate students at Stanford and at Palo Alto University that you could recover from trauma and be stronger than you were before. Despite misgivings, she stood tall and agreed to testify face-to-face with the man she felt could have killed her; enduring the hostile interrogation of senators and a hired-gun interrogator; showing herself, her husband and the students she had taught how to be strong; facing a hostile President—himself an admitted and unrepentant abuser of women—and a worldwide audience of millions, including this author—what a Hero looks and sounds like.

Judge Kavanaugh was elected to the Supreme after a POTUS influenced cursory investigation of the charges and remains a controversial figure to this day. (The Washington Post) “The Senate confirmed Brett M. Kavanaugh as the 114th Supreme Court justice on Saturday by one of the narrowest margins in history amid mass protests, ending a vitriolic battle over his nomination and solidifying a conservative majority on the court. As a throng of angry demonstrators stood on the steps of the Capitol, the Senate finalized on a near party-line vote of 50 to 48 what will certainly be one of President ’s most enduring legacies: two Supreme Court justices in two years in an increasingly polarized nation.