

Nixon Family Endures Final Hours in Private

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Almost until the end, it had been Richard Nixon's family who urged him to hold tight to the presidency he had won in 1972 by the largest mandate in history.

They clung to the belief that his fight to stay in office should be waged constitutionally, through the entire impeachment process in both houses of Congress.

Some White House sources believed it was Julie Nixon Eisenhower who took the forefront as strongest advocate of that position. But nobody really knew for certain.

Contributing to the agony of Mr. Nixon's decision, according to one source, was his realization that his wife and daughters still believed in his innocence.

Since Wednesday night until late yesterday afternoon, Mrs. Nixon's White House staff had been unsuccessful in trying to communicate with her or others in the family. Notes sent up to the second floor quarters went unanswered. Telephone calls from long-time Nixon family friends were not accepted.

On the surface, though, it was a business-as-usual stance for Mrs. Nixon's East Wing staff.

Mail and telegrams, almost totally supportive, according to one aide, came in at the rate of 500 pieces a day early in the week. By yesterday, that number was received just in one of three daily deliveries.

"We're inundated," said one spokesman. "And this the then-forthcoming resignation announcement) creates lots of problems. How in the world, for instance, will we be able to answer all this mail today?"

Sequestered from view, Pat Nixon, her daughters Julie Eisenhower and Tricia

Cox, and their husbands David Eisenhower and Edward Cox, were reportedly never far from one another in the final days since Mr. Nixon's announcement Monday that he had withheld information on the Watergate cover-up.

On two occasions, each daughter and her husband conferred with Mr. Nixon in his Executive Office Building office, sessions one White House aide described as "rather unusual."

Manolo Sanchez, Mr. Nixon's valet, emerged early yesterday outside White House gates, telling newsmen who recognized him that he was not resigning. "I

wife, we keep everybody happy."

Other reports from inside the mansion told of the family's "serenity," "strength," "good spirits," indications were that up until Mr. Nixon's decision had finally been made, at least, there was a united front and determination that he should not resign.

That, last May, had been the message from Julie Eisenhower, her father's strongest public defender on behalf of the family.

"If the (House Judiciary) Committee votes a bill of impeachment, if the House goes through with it, if it goes to the Senate, he's said that if there is only one senator that it's going to be a constitutional process," Mrs. Eisenhower told reporters then at a press conference in the East Garden of the White House.

She later told an interviewer that the Nixon family had been brought closer than ever before by Watergate.

Long-time friends of Mrs. Nixon saw her as a major source of family strength.

Mrs. Gerald R. Ford, wife of the Vice President, told The Washington Post recently that Mrs. Nixon is "one of the strongest" members of the Nixon family.

"She does not talk about her despair . . . she would never do that. She would keep it within herself just as Mamie Eisenhower never brought forth her grief in public. Any man who gets as far as the President has, has to have a strong woman behind him."

Mrs. Jack Drown of Rolling Hills, Calif., close friend of Mrs. Nixon since both were teachers 35 years ago at Whittier High School, yesterday declined to say whether she had spoken recently with the First Lady.

"If I had, I wouldn't tell you," she said in a telephone interview.

"I would assume that your great publisher Katherine Graham and members of the Washington Post will be having a large celebration,"

Mrs. Drown continued, "because you've contributed so much to the demise of possibly the greatest President and First Lady in this century. You may quote me on that."

She had "no comment about anything," she said when asked if her views were shared by Mrs. Nixon.

"Your calling me is possibly like the man who murdered somebody and called up his wife later to say 'How do you feel?' That is my gut reaction," she said.

Another friend from Mrs. Nixon's days as a hospital technician in New York in the early 1930s said she had not been in touch with the First Lady recently.

"But if she is like I remember her, throughout all of this she is the rock of Gibraltar," said Mrs. James Charlton of Eastchester, N.Y.

The Nixons' story, Mrs. Charlton said, was a "great one of American enterprise—two people who had nothing and rose to such heights."

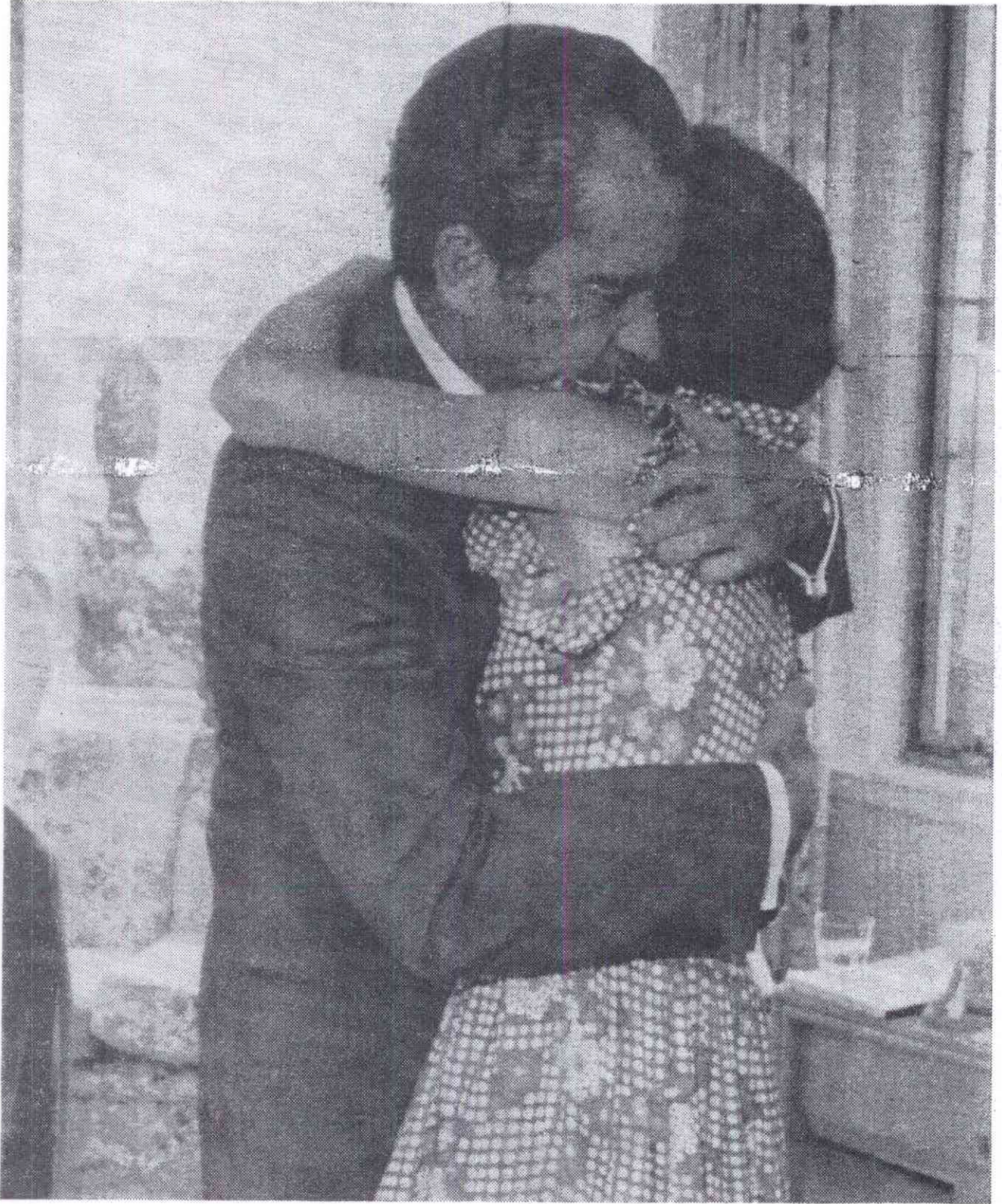
She remembered Mrs. Nixon with "the highest admiration, a wonderful, wonderful girl with a great sense of responsibility. I've never known anyone so willing to assume responsibility as she was."

"I know it's a funny thing to bring up, but when Pat was at our house, there often were many house guests sitting around the dining room table, and afterward Pat would do the dishes, make the coffee and wash everybody's stockings."

Among Mrs. Nixon's White House staff yesterday, the mood was one of despair and tragedy but certainty that it had been the First Lady "who held the family together."

Said one aide, "The family felt the President had done so much and still had so much to do. And they were early in the week anyway, reassuring us that everything would be all right."

As for direct word from Mrs. Nixon, "Well, I don't know what she can say," said a staffer. "It's a very private time."



White House Photograph via Associated Press

President Nixon embraces his daughter Julie before announcing his resignation.