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'He Didn't Want to Stay In Yorba Linda'

election. "In politics," Nixon would write in "Six Crises," "victory is never total." And total victory is what Nixon desired.

Congress was different from the campaign and Nixon from the first strove to understand its customs and peculiarities and to fit into the mold. He joined the Chowder and Marching Society, that friendly group of Capitol Hill jocks and imbibers, along with the other would-be athletes. But Nixon's friends in the House soon learned that he had little taste for fun and games. He already used the yellow legal pad to sketch long serious speeches. He was insecure when other congressmen talked about "good old Jerry," who was then Voorhis and not Ford, and he expressed a determination to prove himself in the congressional arena.

Nixon suceeded in this aim. As in Whittier, those who became Nixon's friends in Congress came to like him. Later, after Nixon became Vice President, these former congressional friends, such as James Utt, Joe Holt, Oakley Hunter, Edward Hiestand, Bob Wilson and Craig Hosmer, would sometimes have a party at the Nixon house at Spring Valley or meet with him in his third-floor Capitol office for a drink and a discussion of political problems. All of these men were fond of Nixon, but they used to mock his seriousness. One of the apocryphal stories that came out in this group concerned the master of ceremonies who was going to introduce Nixon and called Rose Mary Woods asking for funny stories about him. "There are no funny stories about Nixon," was the reply.

AND THERE weren't many funny stories about him. Everyone spoke well of Nixon, but not too well. He was quiet, studious, hard-working, rarely outgoing. He saw less and less of his old California friends but they were always welcome when they came to Washington. Sometimes, after a scotch or two at parties, Nixon would play the piano.

But the people he became closest to were those who shared his seriousness of purpose. One of these was Bob Finch, then a 21-year-old administrative assistant for a Los Angeles congressman next door to Nixon's office in the Longworth Office Building. Nixon was then 34. "I had lost my father as a young man," remembers Finch. "He was like a father or an older brother to me." Sometimes the two men would talk politics for hours on end.

As with many Americans who grew up in the Depression and served in World War II, there is an intense patriotic streak to Richard Nixon. The view of Robert L. King, a former vice presidential assistant and onetime FBI agent, typifies the attitude of many of Nixon's friends. "Fundamentally, he's a decent, gutsy, intelligent, patriotic guy, an apple-pie, Fourth-of-July patriot, a square," says King. "And this frustrates the hell out of the intellectuals because they don't believe him. And it's his strength."

Nixon had campaigned against Voorhis in his lieutenant commander's uniform, until advised that it was no magnet for the votes of enlisted men. He was genuinely proud of his naval service, which apart from Green Island, had not been without its hazards, and he was a captive of the national mood. "The mood at that time," recalls a congressman of the day, "was intensely anti-Communist and Nixon responded to it, as many others did. But it was nothing personal."

What changed that was Alger Hiss. The liberals and the Eastern newspapers laughed at Nixon in the early stages of the Hiss case. He has never been able to take that, for all his spunk and competitiveness. When Dick Nixon perceived that Whittaker Chambers, all fat and ugly and terribly bright, was right and that Hiss with all his brilliance and moneyed ways was wrong, it ratified an inner feeling for him. He became Chambers. The Ivy Leaguers, the better people with money were Hiss. In his own autobiography Nixon would write of the Hiss case: "The issue at stake, to put it starkly, is this: Whose hand will write the next several chapters of human history?"

Hiss was a watershed for Nixon, because it ratified the conspiracy view of history that he unconsciously shares with those whom he opposes. That conspiracy is not limited to Communists, but includes the press, the liberals, "the better people." Perhaps it explains why Nixon deals so effectively with the rulers of Communist countries who are apt to share his conspiratorial takeoff point, and so poorly with the American people, who do not.

One of the people closest to him in the White House believes that this conspiracy theory, when wedded to Nixon's shyness and preference for isolation, goes a long way in explaining why Bob Haldeman became the Oval Office gatekeeper and why Watergate became possible. "Nobody is our friend," Nixon said to John Dean, "let's face it." And, also to Dean: "We are all in it together. This is a war."

The Nixon who made those statements and who proclaimed that his adversaries "are asking for it and they are going to get it," was also a Nixon capable of great and repeated personal kindnesses. This was as much the real Nixon as the architect of conspiracy theories and, to those who knew him, a more real Nixon.

His friends tell a story of telephone calls to persons ill or dying, of a hundred kindnesses, of birthdays and anniversaries remembered, of thank you notes where none were needed. Herb Klein recalls when Nixon, then a private citizen in New York, rushed down to the morgue on a holiday to perform the distasteful chore of identifying the body of a friend who had died on a

trip.

White House special counsel Richard Moore remembers the last weekend of April, 1973, when Nixon fired Haldeman and John Ehrlichman, a weekend that another aide calls "Nixon's dark night of the soul." The President was shaken, as all who saw him that April 30 on television know, but Moore remembers the weekend as one of especial consideration. Nixon had summoned Moore while he was preparing the speech, only to learn from Moore's secretary that he was en route to New England for the wedding of his son. The President left instructions that Moore was to go on to the wedding. And on the same distraught weekend that he fired Haldeman, Nixon remembered to dictate a personal telegram of congratulations to the groom.

It would be difficult, his close aides say, to count the personal letters that Nixon has written in the middle of the night. He wrote to old friends and to servicemen and to people he read about, like the Georgia woman who put herself through college while supporting a family on a salary of $3,000 a year. Sometimes he wrote on yellow pads when he had trouble sleeping at night, sometimes he sandwiched in the letters between the dictation of memoranda.

Few of the letters and still fewer of the kindnesses, found their way into print. Nixon did not trust the press to begin with, and he was obsessed as President with the necessity of creating the image of a cool, confident and isolated leader. His press aides rarely reported on the genuine kindnesses, if they knew about them, and they were instructed to issue such inanities as the statement by press secretary Ronald L. Ziegler that the President did not watch television or read the newspapers.

Nixon, who had the greatest public need for communicating his humanity, did the best to conceal it. He was like the unpopular ballplayer who agrees to visit a sick child in the hospital only on condition that no one reports it.

Nixon's idealism had an equally difficult time breaking through the Nixon mask. Even on issues where his idealism was largely accepted, he managed to raise serious doubts about his motives. His endless litany of "peace with honor" about a war that had not ended came to bother even those who celebrated the Vietnam peace agreement which secured release of American prisoners. But his private expressions showed a keener sensitivity. In 1971 he received a poem from a 15-year-old girl, Debra Fisher of Laurel, Miss., whose father was missing in action in Vietnam. He sent her a handwritten letter in reply.

"Dear Debra," the letter said. "At Camp David last Sunday I was reading again the moving poem you sent me with regard to your father. I want you to know that all our men who are missing in action are uppermost in my thoughts each day and that I am pursuing every possible means to secure their release by the enemy.

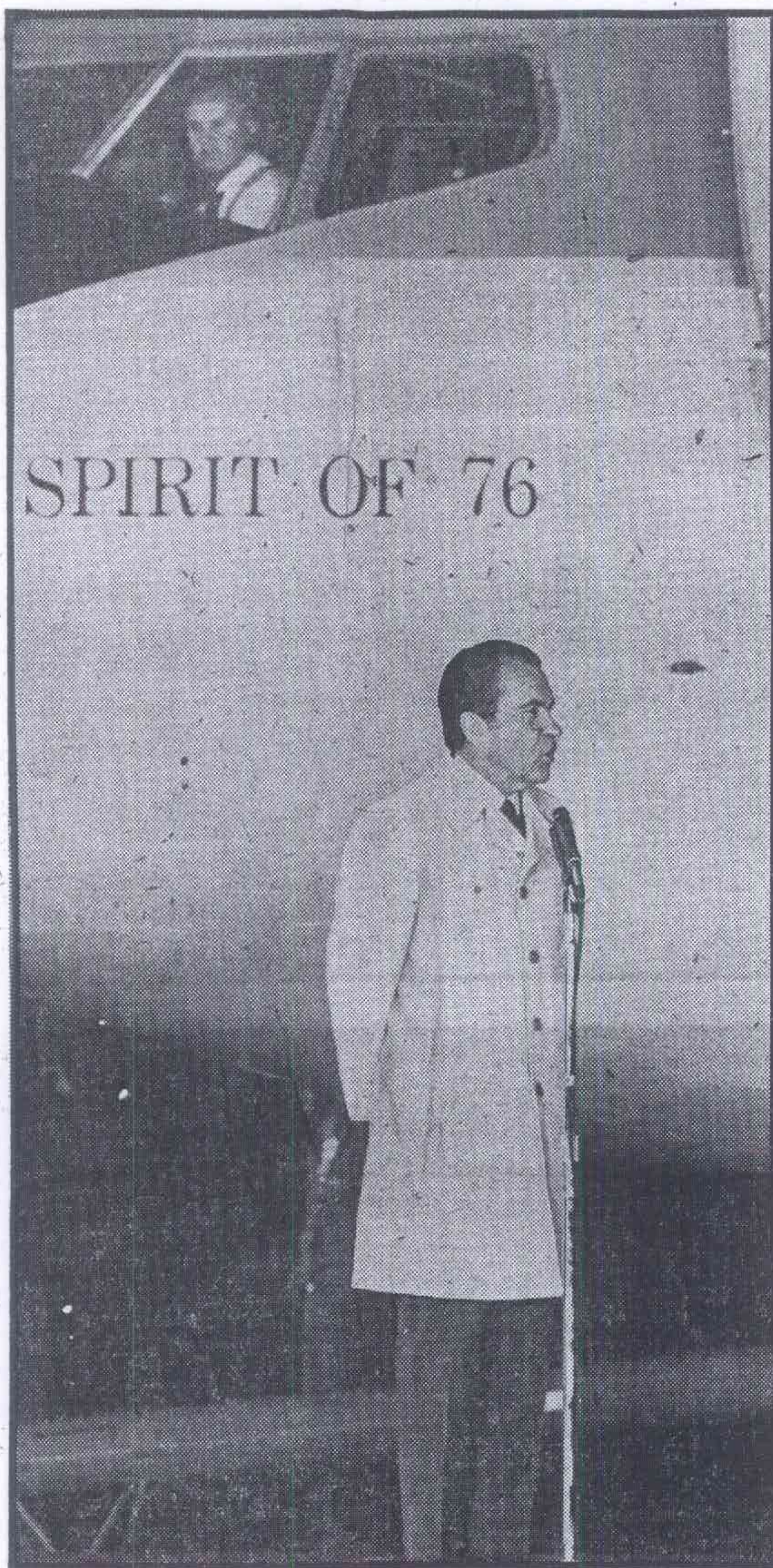
"Your father must be very proud of you—first because you love him so much and second because you have a rare ability to express your love so eloquently. God has given you a great gift of expression and I hope that through the years ahead many others will have the opportunity I have had to know the poetic beauty of your thoughts. Mrs. Nixon and I will be praying for you and your father."

RARELY COULD NIXON express his own love for others or for country in a way that similarly aroused the emotions of others. But some times, in private, the reserve broke down and the human Nixon came through. Law associate Waller Taylor remembers one day in the early 1960s when he and Nixon were driving in Nixon's Oldsmobile convertible in Orange County and Nixon spontaneously put the top down and drove to Los Angeles at 80 miles an hour, yelling and laughing all the way. "Isn't it great to feel the air of America in your hair," he said. "Isn't it great to feel free."

"And then I remember," continued Taylor, "a couple of times we were flying east and he would start to lecture, above the checkerboards of the farms. There, he would say, is the heartland of America, and he would rehash the beginnings of the law in this country where there were 640 acres to a section. 'That,' he would say with a thump, 'is America. That is the heart and strength of America.' "

The most misplaced quality of this private, public man was that he lacked the gift to say on the stage what he saw in his heart. He did not know this about himself, rather imagining himself a better public person than a private one. "In a small group or cocktail party he's not at ease like the ordinary fellow," observes Earl Adams. "But you go to him and say the microphones are all ready and 80 million people will be listening to him, and he's in his glory." He spoke better, of course, in the cocktail party, but then Nixon has only rarely been a good judge of himself. In fact, it may not be too much to say that he was ruined by qualities he perceived as virtues while suppressing the humanity that enabled him to survive.

He was always difficult to work for, because he never relaxed, frequently allowed himself to become angry, always kept up the pressure on himself. He tried to hire people who would work as hard as he did, but he couldn't bear to fire those who didn't. "He's chicken-hearted," says an aide from his vice presidential days. "He can't recruit. He can't fire. He doesn't like per-



sonal confrontations."

He would have been better off in the White House if he had permitted himself a confrontation or two. But the "last press conference" had taught him not to risk losing his temper. And he was consumed with the idea that he was running out of time.

"They had a five-year plan," says Earl Mazo. "Nixon really wanted to do two days work in one." And a former aide says that Nixon in the White House "really thinks he can go over into that little office in the Executive Office Building of an afternoon and solve a world problem by a feat of concentration and thought . . . And sometimes he can."

This ex-aide recalls the early Nixon days:

"It was like being next to a Bessemer furnace for the staff. The President would have all those notes he had written out on his yellow memoranda pad, and he would say 'Bob, you do this and this and this and I want it done by 9:30. John, you do this and this. Bryce, you do this and so-and-so.' It was toughest for the guys who lived next to the Bessemer furnace, which means Bob and John. It was like getting a hypo in your fanny every day. It was challenging, but it would make your insides boil. He knew so much, he had thought about so many things, he had put down so much on paper. He wanted to do everything he could in the time he had allotted to him . . . If you didn't produce he simply turned to someone else because he didn't fire anyone. Maybe that was one of the reasons the staff grew as large as it did."

The pace was accelerated by Nixon's personality. He never learned to relax, and the White House proved a poor place for learning. As an alternative, he tried to escape whenever he could, preferably to San Clemente or Key Biscayne. "He likes the ocean," says an aide who recalls turning blue while talking with a contented President in the cold current off San Clemente. "It

works for him. And he likes to take long walks on the beach." Frequently in those walks he would be joined by Bebe Rebozo, whom Nixon liked because Rebozo respected his privacy. A White House intimate remembers two hours in which Bebe walked with them along a San Clemente beach and said not a single word. He was the perfect companion for the President.

Rebozo and Robert Abplanalp, the aerosol spray king, were Nixon's closest friends in the White House during the first term. They thought him a great President and master politician and he regarded them as the epitomes of self-made men. Additionally, their delusions about Nixon's political ability were shared by most people of importance in the White House entourage.

This judgment about Nixon the politician was not the view on Capitol Hill, where Rep. John Rhodes' belief that "Richard Nixon's supposed political acumen is one of the most overrated qualities in Washington" was widely shared by Republican congressmen. Many of them believed that Nixon had lost one election he should have won and lost another race he should never have entered. They knew that he had never learned to deal with Congress. But these views were rarely, if ever, expressed to the President's face. Long after the firing of the first Watergate special prosecutor, Archibald Cox, Nixon nourished the belief that he was a better politician than his adversaries.

What Nixon really was, rather than a master politician, was a master student of politics. He learned diligently but he never demonstrated the natural inclination for politics of his immediate predecessors in the White House. In Nixon's case the learning was mechanical and politics was an acquired rather than a natural skill.

He credited his beloved debates with Voorhis for his victory in 1946 and this in turn prompted him to challenge Kennedy in 1960. After his disastrous experience with JFK, he refused to debate Hubert Humphrey in 1968, and he even quit campaigning too early in order not to repeat the mistake he had made against Kennedy of tiring himself out. The success of the 1968 campaign in turn became the basis for Nixon's non-campaign of 1972. Always, Nixon made judgments on the acquired wisdom of the past campaign rather than the requirements of the new one.

"I contend that Nixon is a person to whom the ends justify the means, and the ends were the presidency so the means had to be political, and he learned the rituals of politics," says Stephen Hess. "But it wasn't instinctive. And when one doesn't learn something instinctively, it is easier to unlearn it."

AS ALWAYS, THERE was another side to Nixon.

Hess remembers the day in California during the 1962 gubernatorial primary when he prepared a position paper on a flagrantly unconstitutional ballot proposition that would have outlawed the Communists. The issue was a touchy one because Nixon was opposed by a hard-right conservative named Joe Shell, and Hess' paper for Nixon skillfully skirted any definitive stand. "He read the statement," remembers Hess, "and he's got a little john in the office, and he's got to go out and make a speech and he goes into the john to shave, and he says I can't do this. I have to be against this thing. I have to look at myself in the mirror."

Nixon's decision to run for the governorship was a shock to his old friends in California, many of whom regarded the office as a trap from which no politician could rise to the presidency. Some of these friends still are puzzled as to why Nixon decided to run, but there are some suggestons that he was thoroughly bored with the practice of law. One day on a Saturday soon after he returned to California, Nixon was working in the Los Angeles law office alone and he called his old friend Patrick Hillings at poolside to ask him to come down and keep him company. Hillings came after gently reminding Nixon that he was supposed to be living the good life now and didn't have to work on Saturday. It was too late to tell Nixon that. He was so used to a 14-hour workday that he found living too easy for his tastes in Southern California. After his defeat in 1962, he quickly accepted an offer to practice law in New York. and Dick Moore and other attorneys remember that it was the challenge which lured him there.

But it did not work out for Nixon in New York. In Los Angeles, at least, he was accepted for himself, perhaps because rootlessness itself provides a certain kind of roots in Southern California. He was not similarly accepted in New York. One person who knows him well from those days is convinced that Nixon was snubbed in the "best circles of the legal profession and the swankiest clubs. "He was very sensitive to that sort of thing, and once talked about 'Ivy League bastards' and other things of that sort," says this friend. "He felt he was as good as anyone but here he'd been Vice President for eight years and all that and he wasn't quite an equal. . . . I think Dick got the idea he was laughed at sometimes, even though he did brilliantly as a lawyer, and he couldn't stand that. Maybe that's why he was drawn to John Mitchell, who never snubbed him. It was a class thing."

When Nixon left California he pledged in writing to his wife that he would never enter politics agan. There

is every indication that this was one time when he said what he meant and meant what he said. But the lure of the public arena often is irresistible to men who have climbed as close to the pinnacle as Nixon had. With a few exceptions—notably a historic right-of-privacy case involving Life magazine which Nixon ably argued before the Supreme Court—the law was less challenging than public life. Nixon had lost the presidency by the narrowest margin in America history. After the disastrous defeat of Barry Goldwater in 1964, Nixon's old friends began to tell him that he could make it again.

New York, however, had changed Nixon's style. Or perhaps it is more accurate to say that Nixon changed his style in New York by a direct and difficult act of human will. He had been deeply embarrassed by the results of the 1962 campaign and by the reaction to his "last press conference," and he was unwilling to again expose himself to ridicule.

"When he said you weren't going to have Nixon to kick around anymore, he really meant it and he wasn't just talking about the press," says Finch. "There is real sensitivity under his scar tissue and he wasn't going to put himself into a position where he could be hurt anymore."

In Finch's view this desire not to be hurt led directly to Nixon's change from a politician who had been accused of being his own campaign manager into a prospective candidate, later a President, who celebrated his own isolation and wanted to "staff everything out." From now on, others would risk the firing line. Nixon would be within—cool, reserved, totally in command. From this decision came Bob Haldeman, the great staffer-outer. From this decision also, Finch suggests, came Watergate.

Watergate, of course, derived from more than one decision alone or even from the series of decisions which arose from the unfortunate choice of Haldeman as chief of staff. The roots of Watergate go deep into the character of Nixon himself, that shy, suspicious character of a man who believed his enemies had tried to destroy him and who could never forgive them for it. "Bigamy, forgery, drunkenness, insanity, thievery, anti-Semitism, perjury, the whole gamut of misconduct in criminal activities—all these were among the charges hurled against me . . ." Nixon had written in 1962 in describing the campaign against him after the conviction of Alger Hiss. Now he was more certain than ever of the purpose of his enemies but he knew that he could never again after the "last press conference" risk another public display of temper. Haldeman permitted Nixon to retreat into the isolation he preferred and, for a time, to screen his own vengefulness from public view. Haldeman became, in some important ways, an extension of Nixon's own character.

His old friends in California and in Congress perceived this change dimly, if at all. They had been Nixon's friends when he did not have the option of isolation and it had been possible for some of them to protect Nixon from himself by making him more accessible than he wanted to be and by talking and arguing as equals.

"And then," says one of his former top aides, "He outpaced his friends and went to the Senate and to the vice presidency. In all these transfigurations he left behind him a small band of confidants, creating a mutual bond and a mutual dependency. It is easy to degenerate into all for one and one for all. And then you are at a new level with a new group of confidants who may not know as much, and you are still mutually dependent. You are President now. You depend on the bad advice of these confidants to rescue you from the bad advice they gave you."

It might be more accurate to say that in the crisis of his presidency Nixon relied on no advice at all. The names of Finch, Klein or Melvin Laird are conspicuously missing from the Watergate transcripts. The transcripts show that when Bryce Harlow is suggested by the President for an unsavory task, Haldeman sneers that Harlow would be unwilling to perform it. Nixon accepts the judgment without comment, and Harlow is never called.

Perhaps this unwillingness to rely on those who might have advised him better is the single most important flaw in Nixon's character. He did not like confrontations, and he consistently relied on those who mirrored his own limited views of his enemies' intentions. "He doesn't really trust himself," says one Republican who has been close to the White House. "He doesn't really have the traits he admires in other men, which is to say he's not strong physically, graceful, coordinated, handsome. He is impressed by people who appear to be tough or know the answers, like the pipe-smoking Mitchell or the decisive Haldeman."

One former White House staff member recalls that Nixon always watched John Connally in Cabinet meetings to see how Connally reacted to what he was saying. "Connally seemed so sure of himself," says this aide. "The old man liked that. He wanted to be like Connally."

The contrary manifestation of Nixon's need for self reassurance was his increasing reliance on younger, inexperienced men. Some of Nixon's friends had noticed this as long ago as the 1962 campaign, when Haldeman began to bring in people like Ron Ziegler from his advertising staff. The young men treated Nixon with respect and with awe. They were, said one Nixon friend, "loyal to the notion of loyalty," which is not quite the same as being loyal to the President or even to Nixon.

"Nixon wanted to have people around him who were his own temperament and who would do pretty much what he wanted them to do," says Earl Adams. "But loyalty is more than do-

ing what someone wants you to do. The truly loyal person will tell you when you're going to do something wrong."

Nixon had no such person around him—at least no one that he would listen to. His need for reassurance was too great. Unsure of his own resources and his own goals, he tried to convey a toughness he did not possess. There is much to commend the view of Douglass Hallett, the former Colson aide, that Nixon "always wants to be a Kennedy" and that for all the administration's dislike of the Kennedys and their ways it became "their most fawning mimic."

BUT THE NIXON tragedy goes beyond the imitation of Kennedy. From his first political utterances, Nixon has always seen himself in terms of some historical figure other than himself. He wanted to be a Lincoln, an Eisenhower—most of all a Woodrow Wilson—and he has usually been most comfortable when clothed in the oratorical robes of some dead President. "Nixon is still trying to please his perceived betters," observes former Nixon administraton aide Howard Phillips. "Gaining their approval and regard is important to his self-esteem. In order to get that approval he seems to go through a process of redefining himself to be someone of whom they will approve. In doing so, he denies the worth of his true self which has been lost and layered over."

Nixon must have known that his own character would be the determinant and that there were ways in which it was found wanting. That is the message of the important introduction to "Six Crises," where Nixon, writing about himself, said, "We must spare no effort to learn all we can and thus sharpen our responses."

He did not learn enough. Though intellectually he was at least the equal of his predecessors, he never overcame the desire to please others that had been inculcated in boyhood and which had carried him further than the boy listening to those train whistles in Yorba Linda had ever dreamed. It had, in fact, carried him too far.

"A long time ago he was an underdog," says a Republican who has observed him closely, "and he still behaves like one. He has all the classic sociological traits of an underdog even when in the majority position. As President, he still acts like a minority. And when people oppose him, it's like when he was on the third-string football team every afternoon and he had to let the first string run over him. It's like when his family was broke. Even when he had achieved the ultimate success he could never be quite secure in it or believe fully in it. It's a damn shame."

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