



MRS. HALDEMAN SPEAKS HER MIND

In an exclusive interview, Jo Haldeman, the wife of Richard Nixon's top aide, H.R. Haldeman, talks for the first time about the White House years. How did her marriage change after Watergate—and who are the people she can, and cannot, forgive?...
By Thomas Thompson

Joanne "Jo" Haldeman's husband, H.R. Haldeman, was the second most powerful man in America when he served as President Nixon's chief of staff. Now Bob Haldeman works in a sewage plant at Lompoc Federal Prison north of Santa Barbara, Calif.—a casualty of the Watergate scandal that ultimately forced Nixon to resign. To this day Jo Haldeman says she does not know exactly what caused Watergate, nor what the final implications of it will be. She leaves it to some future historian to determine who did what to whom.

Jo Haldeman refuses to say much of anything about the charges that her husband was part of a conspiracy. "I have the natural bias of a wife," she says. "I am prejudiced toward my husband because I believe in him. I think it inappropriate for me to comment further at this point in time." (Yes, she really does use that phrase—and often.)

For the moment, Jo can deal with waiting for her husband's release—Judge John Sirica, in his last act before retiring, cut Bob Haldeman's sentence to one to four years, making him eligible for parole in June.

Fate deals strange cards to people. By all rights—bloodlines, family tradition of service, social credentials—Jo Haldeman should be in her civic prime as she approaches 50. She is the kind of woman—tanned, tailored, thin—who does volunteer work through the Junior League.

Toward the end, when the Nixon presidency was toppling, she kept thinking: "This *can't* be happening to us. We respect tradition and we honor our system of justice." Perhaps these beliefs contributed to the one substantial disagreement that Jo and Bob had in the final hours of the scandal. Bob told his wife that he was going to ask President Nixon for a pardon—for himself, for all the Watergate figures, and for the Vietnam dissenters—"to take every albatross off of Gerald Ford's neck." Jo remembers the moment well:

"Bob was and is a pragmatist. Naturally, he didn't want to go to prison. I didn't want him to go to prison, either, but I was not in favor of even *asking* President Nixon for a pardon. I felt we had to stand on our own record and let the people judge. And to me, it would have been very un-

comfortable to live with a pardon."

Recently, a friend suggested to Jo that she beseech Jimmy Carter for a pardon for her husband, or at least ask for executive clemency.

She refused. "It would be putting another burden on this President's shoulders. Why should he go out on a 'political limb' for the Watergate defendants? During Bob's absence, each day will seem like forever to me. But at least the end is in sight. I

can wait." There is, she believes, "more dignity in serving time and accepting punishment than in asking for a pardon."

That is Jo Haldeman's old-fashioned, almost severely moralistic point of view. "I have tremendous faith and respect and love for my husband," she says. "He is a good and decent man. I think our lives will speak for themselves. They didn't begin with Nixon and they won't end with Nixon. But if people want to judge us and remember us by Watergate, then so be it. I can live with that, too."

Joanne Horton was a third-generation Californian and a popular member of the exclusive Marlborough School in Los Angeles when, at age 15, she met her husband-to-be. He was two years older, serious and a little stuffy. Her father was a prominent lawyer; his, the owner of a prosperous air-conditioning and heating business. Their families had the same friends, the same clubs, the same religion (Christian Science). When Jo and Bob were both at UCLA, they fell in love, and Bob's Beta pin found a place next to Jo's Kappa key.

When Bob pressed her to marry him before her graduation, she agreed. "I was not career-minded," she recalls. "I was expected to get married, raise children, keep a nice home and work in the community. I did *exactly* that. It seems so archaic now, particularly compared to what our children believe. For example: our oldest daughter told us that she intends to keep the Haldeman name when she gets married."

With his customary discipline—the rigid posture that would one day have the Washington press referring to him as a Teutonic commander—Bob Haldeman made a thorough survey of the business scene after his marriage and graduation. He wanted a career in (continued)

Photographs by Charles W. Bush

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advertising and he finally determined that the top of the line was J. Walter Thompson, Inc., in New York. He applied for work at the agency, was hired and settled into the executive position that would be his professional home for the next 22 years.

The Haldeman family grew in orderly fashion to include two sons and two daughters. Their home base was Los Angeles—specifically, the very proper section of Hancock Park. During the years in California, Bob Haldeman became interested in, and then committed to, the career of Richard Nixon. In 1962, Bob became the campaign chairman for Nixon's California gubernatorial campaign, and in the 1968 election, he worked as Nixon's chief of staff.

On Election Day, 1968, Jo and Bob voted early in Los Angeles, then flew with Pat and Dick Nixon to New York's Waldorf-Astoria Hotel, where they watched Republicans gain control of the White House. It had been under Democratic control since 1960, when John Kennedy shattered Nixon's dream. The next day, the victorious candidate and his entourage flew to Key Biscayne, Fla., on a plane loaned to Nixon by President Johnson.

As their husbands worked with the new President, organizing a government, Jo and Jeanne Ehrlichman, wife of Nixon aide John Ehrlichman, took a long walk on the beach at Key Biscayne. Both now knew that they would have to live in Washington. "Bob had high hopes about what could be accomplished. He really felt Nixon would be a great president. As controversial as his personality was, he had the makings, the potential for greatness."

But Jeanne Ehrlichman was more hesitant about moving to Washington. John had worked very hard getting his law practice started in Seattle. Jo sensed that Jeanne would have preferred to stay there.

The Haldemans took a furnished apartment at first in—of course—the Watergate complex, and later moved into a colonial house in Chevy Chase. The Nixon era began.

Jo Haldeman learned quickly that for the wife of a man who was chief of staff, political life requires a kind of total surrender. She gave her husband to the President. A White House car picked up Haldeman each morning shortly after seven A.M. and deposited him home again 12 hours later. There was usually an attempt at a family dinner—Jo insisted on this—but only Sunday nights were dependably private. On these special evenings, Bob cooked a California barbecue and the family dined *al fresco*—sometimes on the front porch in drizzling grayness.

The President's wife seemed rather insecure and lonely. "I don't feel that the President gave her much support," Jo says. "He was so involved in affairs of state." Jo remembers one moment of genuine warmth and tenderness between the Nixons. That was at their daughter Tricia's wedding, which was "perfect in every way."

Jeanne Ehrlichman, in particular, fretted about Pat Nixon's apparent loneliness. Pat seemed to have few friends, other than those in California who were rarely present. "Jeanne decided Pat needed more in her life," recalls Jo. "I always assumed that Mrs. Nixon was doing

what she wanted to do. But Jeanne, who is very gregarious and enthusiastic, kept saying, 'What can we do for Pat?'"

Jeanne came up with the idea of asking her to join some of the wives on an outing to a country fair, "just to get her out of the White House, and do something unofficial and casual." The idea never worked out, though.

The same fate befell one of Jo's ideas, which at the time seemed to have exceptional promise. Jo looked around her and decided there were a dozen or so attractive and bright young women whose husbands worked for Nixon. Why couldn't these women be used as guides for certain functions at the White House? They could learn the history of 1600 Pennsylvania Ave. and dispense it to, say, special visitors from the U.S. or from abroad. "It never got off the ground," says Jo. Perhaps the administration, being so 'image conscious,' was afraid to use us. And it was clear that somebody was afraid we wouldn't give the Nixons enough credit."

But no one could stop Jo Haldeman from keeping a meticulous history of her own experiences in Washington. She filled thick scrapbooks with the intimate photos she took, and included her comments. And later she filled up

hundreds of three-by-five recipe cards with anecdotes of people and events.

Both as photographer and amateur diarist, Jo had a good eye for minute detail and character:

"Bob's staff party aboard *Sequoia* [Presidential yacht]. Met John Dean first time, 9-16-71. Interesting man. 'Swinging' bachelor. Administration needs more like him."

"Camp David. Twenty trips, spent total of 54 days. Much to do there. Bowling, skeet shooting, volley ball, tennis, bicycle paths. We would use all these facilities freely unless we knew the President was coming outside. Then we'd scramble to remove ourselves!"

"Presidential helicopters: In Florida, Nixon would often begin a trip by personally driving his golf cart to the waiting helicopter. And once, in San Clemente, we lifted off in a storm.

The 'copter shook so fearfully that we put down again, and Henry Kissinger said, 'If it wasn't for the honor, I think I'd prefer to take the bus.'"

"6-13-71. Ellsberg and the Pentagon papers. John Ehrlichman and Bob intrigued. Lunch aboard the *Sequoia*. Bob helped himself to plate of roast beef from buffet, caught his leg on the piano, lost his plate. It sailed clear across room like a Frisbee... a steward, walking through door, calmly caught the plate, keeping all food intact except for a shower of peas. Returned it to Bob. What service!"

Her scrapbooks contain provocative and amusing photographs. One shows a White House wife calmly reading a paperback aboard Air Force One. The title is clearly visible: *The President's Plane Is Missing*.

Another shows the Haldemans happily munching on an elaborate buffet of cold cuts and salads at Key Biscayne. This was not White House largesse; rather, it had been a gift sent to the President by friends and supporters. "Wherever the Nixons went," Jo says, "people sent food. For security reasons, the Secret Service wouldn't allow the President to eat it. So occasionally, (continued)



"Lompoc Prison has lines that Bob cannot step across until his release. But the walls at San Clemente are inescapable."

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they sent it over to us." The king's tasters.

Jo Haldeman liked most of the women whose husbands worked for Richard Nixon, but Martha Mitchell caused mixed feelings. "I only saw her once or twice at parties. I thought of her sympathetically as a 'character.' Basically, though, I believe she was an embarrassment to the administration. At one party, Martha started flirting with Bob; I think she considered him a challenge. But when she tried to sit in his lap, I knew that Martha had struck out. Nothing would turn Bob off more quickly. Overall, John Mitchell's attentions were really sweet toward her. He would just puff his pipe and look at her with admiration. He seemed totally devoted."

An outsider would surmise that Martha Mitchell breathed a little fresh air into the Nixon Administration by saying what she damn well pleased. Jo disagrees. "I think she was contriving to say what she thought the press wanted to hear. Martha enjoyed the attention and the publicity. Once she was visiting across the street from our house. Our youngest daughter, Ann, happened to be selling lemonade. When Martha heard about it, she came over and bought a glass of lemonade. But she also brought a photographer with her. Naturally, she got her picture in the evening paper."

All this, though, was relatively harmless. The days to come were difficult—and more dangerous for everyone. The first time that Jo can remember being worried about Watergate was on October 25, 1972, when *The Washington Post* ran a front-page article by re-

porters Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein under the headline, "TESTIMONY TIES TOP NIXON AIDE TO SECRET FUND." It claimed that Bob Haldeman had supervision over a \$700,000 secret slush fund. Hitherto, the *Post* articles on the Watergate break-in had not caused much concern, other than Jo worrying about their "public relations effect" on the Nixon re-election campaign, then in its climactic moments.

"I was really concerned," remembers Jo. "I pressed Bob for an answer. He was amazed. He totally shrugged the story off. He said he might well have such authority to sign checks, but if so, he was totally unaware of it."

As Watergate grew darker, and a climate of concern enveloped the White House, the issues were discussed openly by the Haldeman family in a realistic, nonemotional way. "Bob was always frank with me. He is totally direct and honest. Bob really thought (continued)

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Watergate was a minor issue compared with the other things the administration was accomplishing. He simply underestimated the magnitude of events. We kept thinking it all might pass. . . . At least until the Ervin committee hearings started. I remember Jeanne Ehrlichman asking Bob during those hearings, "Do you really think we'll have to leave Washington?" And Bob nodded yes. He knew the end was approaching."

One of the first names to emerge as being under investigation was White House aide Jeb Magruder. Jo's heart went out to the young man and to his family.

"I had never been to Gail Magruder's home," Jo says, "but I decided to drop by and take her some violets and tell her how sorry I was for what was happening and how much I supported her. Soon after that, Watergate fragmented all of us. When the press zeroed in on one person, everybody else had to stay away. So many fine families, who had been united by a cause, were now left alone, defending themselves."

Open letter written

At the height of the scandal, Jo sat down and wrote an "open letter" to all the Watergate wives. They were the forgotten victims, she believed. "My heart was aching for all these women. They had suffered so much by surrendering their husbands to the White House. Now their lives were being destroyed. My letter was a statement of support and compassion for these women. I guess you could say that I was ready to use, for the first time, my position, such as it was."

Jo almost mailed the "open letter" to *The Washington Post* without showing it to her husband, but at the last minute she decided he should read it. Bob appreciated what she had written, but suggested that she check it out with his lawyer. When peppery, red-faced attorney John Wilson studied the letter, he said, "Absolutely not! The moment this letter is published, then you are linked with the break-in. You are tying yourself to people you don't know and with whom you may not wish to be connected." Jo put the letter away.

The biggest blow to Jo came when the tapes of Oval Office conversations were released. She was upset—not only by the profane nature of the dialogue, but because the tapes seemed to represent the sum total of the Nixon presidency, when "so much else" was now being forgotten.

On Easter weekend, 1973, the Haldemans were at Camp David, and both knew that it was their last visit to the lovely compound. A leave (continued)

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of absence or an outright resignation seemed to be Bob's only options. Haldeman had been given a letter from Ray Price, Nixon's speech writer, suggesting reasons why Bob should resign.

"I was somewhat resentful of that letter because I wanted Bob to make up his own mind. I took a long walk by myself along the asphalt road on the perimeter of Camp David. The tulips were out; the day was beautiful. I made up a list of the pluses and minuses of Bob's staying. The pluses outweighed the minuses, so I argued for his staying on. I felt that if Bob's resignation would serve the presidency and the nation, then well and good. Our wishes would naturally have to bend. But I didn't think Bob's quitting would accomplish anything except to give the press another statistic. And to temporarily take the pressure away from the presidency."

The trial of H. R. Haldeman lasted three months, and on New Year's Day, 1975, Jo made her last entry in a journal she kept. The jury was out deliberating when she arrived at the courthouse. "In court by 8:45 A.M. It's a holiday. No traffic. Empty halls. No elevator or escalator working. Walked in with Judge Sirica and his marshal. First time that's happened. Camaraderie here in 'our' rooms. We all know each other after so much time together. Lovely day. Sun and clouds. Up to 50 degrees . . . 9:45: Lawyers go to judge's chambers for meeting. We wait. Marshal suddenly announces, 'We have a verdict.' My mind is blank . . . grab my purse and hankie before taking my place in the courtroom. I'm between Jeanne Ehrlichman and Pam Parkinson. Thank heavens Jeanne has with her her notes on that fabulous lesson, 'God, the Preserver of Man.' I felt very uptight. . . . Cold and shaky. An unforgettable sight to see Bob standing before the judge. . . . My eyes are closed . . . tight . . . when the verdict is read: *Guilty!* I knew it would be, because it was reached so quickly. . . . Dorothy Mardian [wife of Robert Mardian] very resentful. Gives Bronx cheer. I'm concerned the press might think I was the one who did it."

"Dorothy points finger at the (continued on page 149)

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prosecutor and says, 'I'm going to get you.' We return to 'our' rooms, but the camaraderie has vanished. Once again we are fragmented. . . . Outside, a freak windstorm has come up. Rain blows against the windows. . . . I must call our beloved families in California. . . . How strange this is. . . ."

The Haldemans returned to Los Angeles and bought a smaller Tudor home in the Hancock Park section. Jo decorated it with little enthusiasm. "I was in limbo and still am," she says.

A stranger who comes to the home would not immediately know that a man who had been the second most powerful man in Washington lived there. Only a few souvenirs of the Nixon years are on display in the downstairs area, some scrapbooks are stacked in a corner of the den, and a tapestry of the Great Wall of China hangs above a sofa. There are no photographs of Richard Nixon downstairs, although an upstairs office is filled with them. Downstairs, Jo has put out photographs of her children, her parents and her in-laws.

Financial burden shifts

On the last plane ride home from Washington, Jo assessed her family's situation and realized that the financial burden was now on her: Bob's immediate future clearly would be spent working on legal appeals. And, if they failed, he faced a prison sentence. She reviewed job possibilities. But when Bob gave her a real-estate course as a gift, that became the solution. Today, Jo has an association with a dynamic woman named Lucy Bell, who is a very successful realtor.

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Then, last June, the Haldemans faced the day they had most dreaded. On a Tuesday, before the photographers began gathering on her lawn, Jo Haldeman backed the family station wagon out of the driveway and drove her husband to the Lompoc Federal Prison. To break up the three-hour drive, they stopped at a McDonald's for a hamburger. Jo felt "the only way to get this behind us, really behind us, was for my husband to go to prison and satisfy those who felt he should be punished."

At the prison's administration building, they kissed and Jo attempted to smile. She watched Bob disappear inside. He carried only a paper bag containing his shaving kit and some Christian Science books. Later, the prison sent home his pants, his belt and a pair of toenail clippers. They were forbidden, she was informed.

When Jo returned home from taking Bob to Lompoc, the telephone was ringing, and Henry Kissinger was on the line. He wanted her to know that his thoughts had been with her on this difficult morning. "I can't talk now, Henry," she apologized, breaking down and sobbing for the first time. She remembered that Kis-

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began talking about President Nixon," she says cautiously. "As far as Watergate goes, I certainly don't admire the President's actions. However, I—and I mean this with tremendous sincerity—I think what happened to Bob, to John Ehrlichman and to John Mitchell has been very hard on Richard Nixon. I feel that it has affected him emotionally. . . . deeply . . . it's just that he's not able to express these feelings openly. . . . What to say? . . . 'Gee, I'm sorry'? . . . Often people wonder why I'm not bitter. . . . But I'm not. Bob served a cause and, if he could turn back the clock, he would consider it a privilege to serve again. . . . Maybe this sounds Pollyannish—but it's how I feel. . . ."

Richard Nixon has telephoned "a few times" since his downfall. Once, to wish Jo and Bob a happy anniversary; the other times to check facts he needed for his book. But as to their fate, Jo has never heard a word, either from the former President or his wife.

Some of Jo Haldeman's friends find this appalling, but Jo does not. "There are lines at Lompoc Prison that Bob cannot step across until he is released," she points out. "But the walls at San Clemente are inescapable. There are all

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singer had also been the first to call after Bob's resignation.

A few months later, when school began, the children dispersed, and Jo, left alone, was faced with the reality that her husband would be a federal prisoner for perhaps as long as eight years. Now came the time for sorting out her feelings about people who had shared the Watergate drama with her.

The broken marriage of John and Jeanne Ehrlichman is particularly saddening to Jo, for she believes that Watergate destroyed a very tender union. "They are among the most poignant casualties," she says.

And John Dean

And then there's John Dean. "He lacked loyalty and acted totally in his own behalf." She can find only a few major inaccuracies in either his Watergate appearances, or in his book. However, "His revelations were self-serving and distorted the presidency and the events."

What about Richard Nixon?

When Jo Haldeman thinks of the fallen President, and speaks about him, it is with considerable difficulty. Her normally lucid sentences become almost inarticulate, and she frequently pauses. Curiously, there is no bitterness, at least none that she has shown to anyone.

"It's so difficult to even (continued)

kinds of prisons. I'll take Lompoc. . . ."

Friends often ask Jo what she and Bob will do when he is released. What scar will their ordeal leave on their marriage? Jo sums it up candidly and gracefully:

"There was more strain on my marriage from being a Washington wife than from enduring Watergate. The funny thing is that Watergate strengthened our relationship and our love. In Washington, Bob Haldeman was very much married to the White House. Now Bob Haldeman is very much married to me. And I like it."

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