

Plumbers' Helpers

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THE WOMEN OF WATERGATE.

By Madeleine Edmondson & Alden Duer Cohen. Stein & Day. 228 pp. \$8.95

"MO": A Woman's View of Watergate. By Maureen Dean with Hays Gorey. 286 pp. \$8.95

By ANNE CHAMBERLIN

IT MAY SEEM hard to imagine, as we wallow knee-deep in Watergate books, but there are vast riches still untapped in that fabled mother lode. When the men have been heard from, there are women with tales to unfold . . . and children, nannies, pets and spear carriers waiting in the wings. Not since Camelot have the publishers glimpsed such gold.

Think of the riveting insights to be gleaned if the wives of the burglars would tell all they knew; or if the wives of "all the President's men" would settle some of those nagging questions still twisting slowly in the mind; or Rose Mary Woods tidied up the loose ends of tape we keep stumbling over in the dark. A few home truths in print from the wife and daughters of the Boss could detoxify 14 hours of the David Frost show before it even gets on the air . . . And what if Katharine Graham gave her personal account of the pressures, threats and predawn decisions she faced at The Washington Post as a whole administration came unravelled on the front pages of her newspaper? Or if Jill Wine Volner described the intriguing backstage details of her work on the Special Prosecutor's staff, while Barbara Jordan and Elizabeth Holtzman recounted the off-camera maneuvers of the House Judiciary Committee? And for dessert, they could dim the house lights and wheel in the "Definitive Version of the Adventures of Martha Mitchell" . . .

The prospect of a feast like that could get you trampled to death at the local bookstore. And it is roughly the menu that *The Women of Watergate*, by Madeleine Edmondson and Alden Duer Cohen and "Mo": *A Woman's View of Watergate*, by Maureen Dean with Hays Gorey purportedly offer to serve.

The truth-in-packaging people haven't got to the book blurbs yet, so the jacket of *The Women of Watergate* with a direct quotation next to each name implies that 19 pivotal "women of Watergate" have indeed confided their thoughts to the authors. The authors' own "Acknowledgement" page reinforces the impression with Nixonian ambiguity: "We want to thank the women of Watergate

who granted us interviews. . . Without the cooperation of all these primary sources, we could not have told the full story of the women of Watergate."

Well, by my count, about a third of the 19 women did *not* grant them interviews — beginning with Dorothy Hunt, who died in an airplane crash long before they started to write, and including such crucial witnesses as Pat and Tricia Nixon, Rose Mary Woods and Maureen Dean. Even Martha Mitchell is strangely silent. And don't think this statistic was easy to come by. The authors keep blurring the distinction between what

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these women said directly to them, what they are said to have said according to old newspaper clippings, what they said to friends or to other reporters who shared with the authors their unpublished notes, and what was said, live, to Barbara Walters on her NBC program, which the authors did or did not actually tune in on at the time. (Even that detail is not entirely clear.)

They discuss Jill Wine Volner's miniskirts and whether or not her husband feels threatened by her success. They debate if Pat Ellsberg is happy in her present life, "lying as it does in the lee of history." They wonder "What failure of nerve or imagination" led Pat Ryan to marry Richard Nixon. By the time Elizabeth Holtzman tells them that "I read a great deal. . . . Talking with my friends about personal problems interests me. And there are a lot of things that engage my emotions," I began to wonder what kinds of *questions* they asked when they *did* see people.

In chapter after chapter, the unforeseen pitfalls emerge Deborah Sloan apparently allowed no direct quotes, and remembers her Watergate days as "a confused jumble of people and events." Gail Magruder "admits that she has a great deal to say, and suggests that she will eventually speak out" (but not in time for this book). Patricia Colson was "fully informed" of her husband's activities, but mostly contributes the news that "Chuck feels, as a lawyer, that perjury is a real no-no." Suzanne Krogh let them in her house long enough to describe the blue toile wallpaper and gold shag rug, but sheds little light on Topic A because she and Egil Krogh were separated during those eventful months.

Then came the collisions with rival books: Frances Liddy was busy on her autobiography. Martha Mitchell was saving her disclosures for memoirs of her own. They were so stonewalled by Maureen Dean that they are reduced to describing her "bland, blond, egglike face" and conclude that her life story "is not merely insubstantial and tenuous; it seems intentionally so." In fact, they confide, she is thought to be "not

quite to the manner [sic] born.

I guess when you consider the frustrations they endured, you can only marvel that they got the thing written at all.

Maureen Dean, on the other hand, is a genuine "primary source," and even though "Mo" has mostly hindsight wisdom to impart, it somehow makes the whole Watergate picture depressingly clear. From her childhood in Mar Vista, California, "the hole in a doughnut of affluence," to her marriage to John Dean and through all the events beyond, she unfolds an obtuse and murky tale in which appearance and reality and right and wrong are as dimly perceived at the end as they were at the start.

She is "simply miserable" without a clean house and changes her clothes six times a day if they get the tiniest spot, but she has trouble keeping the basics straight and a curious ethical jet-lag keeps afflicting her inner clock. Before she met John Dean she had married one man and discovered six weeks later that he already had a wife. So she left him to marry a second, whose family threatened to disinherit him, so she went back to her first husband, to whom she was still married anyway, then left him for the second husband again, who was eventually killed in an automobile accident. As she says, "I was beginning to feel like a yo-yo."

Anyhow, by the time she met John Dean, on a blind date, she had cleared the decks, so to speak, and was selling insurance in Beverly Hills and driving a Thunderbird for which the down payment had come from selling an \$18,000 diamond ring which a "horrible national weekly gossip paper" claimed she had stolen from a former suitor, and dating actor Hugh O'Brian ("But it was not my habit to swoon over celebrities"); who took her to places like the Ontario Motor Speedway or Las Vegas or "to parties with lots and lots of fun people."

She had worried that Dean might be 60 years old or weigh 250 pounds, but her "apprehensions dissolved like ice cubes dropped into a volcano" when she saw him. "There he stood: handsome, medium height, slender, Brooks Brothers glen plaid suit, blue shirt with a button-down collar, wing-tip shoes, a slight tan." They were holding hands in the restaurant by the end of dinner, "exchanging tender, meaningful kisses" by the time he took her home, and he was soon writing letters ("I love ya — more than anything in the world . . .") which he dis-

creetly didn't sign, being, among other things, not entirely free of the then Mrs. Dean.

He announced their engagement in a light-hearted White House memo: "Having had my decision-making/implementation/and follow-up procedures stropped and honed by the Haldeman management team — I plan to marry Maureen on October 13th. . ." (Haldeman wrote back: "Reconsider.") Then he took \$4,850 in cash from a White House fund on their honeymoon in Key Biscayne, where they stayed in a \$90-a-day government-leased villa, and drove about in Julie Nixon Eisenhower's Mercury Monterey with stereo, air conditioning and automatic windows.

They vow that their marriage will "last forever" if they are "completely truthful with each other," but he never mentions Watergate. "It was just one of the many elements of his work for the President," she explains, "and neither of us wanted to talk all night about what he had been doing all day."

So, although Watergate crises interrupt their honeymoon, their holidays, their weekends and their evenings at home, and although they go rocketing from Key Biscayne to Washington, San Clemente and Palm Springs and back as John Dean tries to stave off disaster, she is too thrilled by the perks to complain. "I was much prouder of his importance than I was disturbed by all the impositions being made on our lives." She sees five movies at Camp David while Dean tramps in the woods, wrestling with his soul ("That decision by John Dean will come to be regarded as one that saved the nation from a President and an administration that could have wrecked it. Absolutely wrecked it.") When he is fired from the White House, the effect on their lifestyle looms large in her mind. ("Sell the Porsche — John's most prized possession?")

But luckily her mother came through with \$2,000, "so I would not have to sell my jewelry" and John signed a fat book contract for a novel about the first black woman to be named to the Supreme Court, and Judge Sirica has released him from jail before his term was up, so there is light at the end of the tunnel after all. . . . But, if you are a Watergate buff my advice is to stay out of the bookstores until the publishers sign up Deep Throat. □