

That 'Manhandler' Of Martha Mitchell

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IF MARTHA MITCHELL had her way, Stephen King's name would be mud.

But the security agent she accused of "imprisoning" her and roughing her up in a California hotel room, it now develops, is a devoted family man with three children and a record reportedly as clean as Ivory soap.

In fact, King has told friends he was not even present when Martha allegedly was mistreated.

The 31-year-old former FBI man and senate investigator is low-key, intelligent and conscientious. He mows the lawn and putters over "do - it - yourself" jobs around his suburban split-level home.

Some solid citizens are atesting that King is no "strong-arm manhandler," as branded by Martha in an outburst to the press. Leading the list is Martha's husband, John, who disagrees with her about King. One of Mitchell's last acts before resigning as Nixon's campaign chief was to promote the tall, nice-looking agent

to director of security at the headquarters, according to Clark MacGregor, Mitchell's successor.

"When I took over, I asked John if there should be any personnel changes, and he said 'None,'" MacGregor said. "John told me the recent stories (generated by Martha and attacking King) were inaccurate."

The bizarre episode acquired broader significance when Martha referred to "dirty work" connected with her husband's job. Her attack on King contained a hint that she was on the verge of spilling damaging secrets.

Nervous GOP officials immediately clamped a wall of silence around the subject. King became a mystery man, saddled by Martha with a "thug" image and unable to defend himself.

Reached at home, King was polite but uncommunicative.

Without exception those who have known him over the past ten years believe he was maligned.

"He is a fine young man," said Senator Edward Gurney (Rep-Fla.) for whom

King worked a year as a \$17,000 legislative aide. "There is nothing in his background, make-up or personality that would fit Mrs. Mitchell's description of him."

"King was always mild and gentlemanly," said Chief Counsel John Constandy of the senate permanent investigations subcommittee, who worked with King more than a year. King drew a \$19,500 salary there, held a top security clearance, and was credited with helping corral several notorious gangland figures.

Charles Mangers, an official of the National Park Service, and Gurney's top aide at the time King was hired, said, "I never met a more refined gentleman. He did a splendid job."

A good friend of King, who asked not to be identified for fear of administration reprisals, said, "John Mitchell treated Steve like a son. They had a close, warm relationship and still do.

"But there was no love lost between Steve and Martha. From what Steve has indicated, she was a most difficult person to be asso-

ciated with."

Born in Indianapolis and reared in Chicago, King holds a B.A. in education and an M.A. in political science from Western Illinois University.

He taught social science in a Rushville, Ill., high school for three years and was termed by the superintendent of schools there "talented, well thought of, respected. I don't think he would have done anything out of line."

King left Rushville to fulfill a lifelong dream to train as an FBI agent. During almost three years with the agency, he was assigned at one point to masquerade as a student on a Southern campus. Occasionally he disguised himself as a hippie.

From the FBI King went to Gurney's staff, then to the senate investigations subcommittee.

In May of this year John Mitchell, after checking with his good friend Senator John McClellan (Dem-Ark.), chairman of the senate government operations committee, offered King a job at Nixon headquarters.

Mitchell named King director of security on July 1, about two weeks after Martha publicly accused her guard of ripping out her phone and forcing her onto a bed while she received "a shot in the behind."

King, according to a friend, was "flabbergasted" when she recently singled him out as the villain, blasting the hitherto obscure aide into the headlines.



SENATOR GURNEY
It doesn't fit



MRS. MITCHELL
Her husband disagrees