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Gerald

Warren:

Man in

The Middle

"If there was any question in my mind about the President's integrity, I would leave," said Gerald Warren, deputy press secretary



Washington

It is nearly 7 p.m. and Gerald Warren has come home from work early, trying to fight a cold. His two youngsters, who are almost always asleep by the time he returns from the White House each evening, are exuberant at his presence.

Euphemia (Mia), his 4-year-old daughter, is being especially impish, and begs him to light a fat red candle she gave him for Christmas. He does, but extinguishes it a short time later.

"I'm saving it for the office," he tells her, and then turns to his wife, "I'm going to light it a half-hour before every briefing."

He smiles again, but there seems to be an undercurrent of truth in his banter, particularly when he talks about facing the White House press corps every morning: "How can you describe that empty feeling in your stomach that keeps gnawing away at you?"

Gerald L. Warren, deputy press secretary and former San Diego newspaperman, inherited these daily 11 a.m. exchanges with reporters last summer when Watergate exploded full force upon the nation, and Press Secretary Ronald L. Ziegler moved more deeply into the White House as a presidential assistant.

Warren, 43, whose horn-rimmed glasses and pipe give him a serious, thoughtful air, is a contrast in personality to the boyish, public relations-oriented Ziegler. Warren, a former assistant managing editor of the San Diego Union, seems to relate more directly to the problems of the press.

"Ron was spokesman when all of this broke, and

'Ron's borne the brunt of it'

he's borne the brunt of it," Warren said during an interview in his fashionable Georgian style house in northwest Washington.

"It's going to take some time for people to realize that he's not to blame. When all the facts are out, it will be shown that Ron was — I don't like this word and I may try two or three others before I find the right one — victimized. He was provided information that we all believed. Based on that, he represented himself and the President and the White House to the best of his ability."

Many White House reporters describe Warren as a



RONALD L. ZIEGLER
"Victimized"

likeable good guy who wants to present the truth. Words like "decent" and "kind" come up frequently when they talk about him. Others, however, say that their once high regard for him has been somewhat tarnished because of the Watergate atmosphere.

Robert Pierpoint, CBS White House correspondent, said his personal feelings about Warren and their friendship have suffered as a result.

"My wife and I can't even see them socially any more, we feel so badly about his being used and not doing anything about it," Pierpoint said. "I think he realizes it himself, and I suspect he's a very troubled man. It's depressing to see someone you both like and respect destroyed like this."

Warren is unequivocal, however, when he explains his reasons for staying on as a presidential spokesman.

"If there was any question in my mind about the President's integrity, I would leave," Warren said. "But I have none. It's due to the belief and trust and knowledge that I have. As the year went on, and the facts of Watergate became known, I became more and more determined to stay because I was performing a service. As long as I believe I am performing a service to the President and the press corps, I will stay."

He says he has access to the President and laughs about a story that he had complained to Ziegler about not seeing the President. The story said Ziegler drew Warren to the door of the Oval Office, opened it for a second to let him look through, and then closed it, snapping. "There — today you can say you've seen the President."

"I took that story as a joke," he said. "I have no problems seeing the President. No one is a barrier."

Warren says he and Ziegler have a healthy working relationship, although Ziegler has been witnessed snapping his fingers at Warren for a match during a briefing.

Warren shrugs. "I just don't let those kinds of things worry me."

What does worry him, however, are the errors he says he sometimes makes. For example, he was recently criticized for saying that he believed White House speech writers had nothing to do with Vice President Ford's speech to the American Farm Bureau Federation last month in Atlantic City. The day after, it was revealed that the White House had indeed helped write the speech.

Warren said he had never inquired within the White House about the origin of the Ford speech. "It never oc-

'I suspect he's a very troubled man'

curred to me to ask the question, so when it came up, I said, 'I don't believe so,'" Warren said. "I realize now I should have said, 'I don't know — but I'll ask.'"

Both Warren and his wife Euphemia (Phemie) say that it has not been an easy year for them. Since Warren's new status, their son Ben, 6, has been teased by some of his classmates, and the Warrens are concerned about the well-being of some of their closest friends who have been directly implicated in the scandal.

Warren came to the administration at its start, at Ziegler's request.

Warren first met him in California more than a decade ago, while Ziegler was working with the state's Republican central committee, and Warren was working at the San Diego Union.

He had mixed feelings about leaving the newspaper, where he had developed a good rapport with the young reporters during an earlier stint as city editor.

After he received the offer from Ziegler, however, Warren found he could not turn it down. "It was a challenge that doesn't come along very often," Warren said. "Not too many people have an opportunity to work for a president."

Since Warren's job has become so time-consuming, he and his wife have had little opportunity for socializing. They entertain occasionally, and spend most of their free time feeding their passion for backgammon, or sitting in front of the fireplace, talking.

"We try to spend some time around the fire in the evenings, chatting about the day, and unwinding," Warren said. "There's rarely time anymore to chat on the telephone during the day. We used to during the first few years, but it's out of the question now."

The biggest disadvantage is that the children are usually in bed by the time he returns home after 8 p.m. and too sleepy in the mornings before he leaves for him to be able to play with them.

"If I had one day off, I think I'd like to just take the kids wherever they would like to go," he said.

The Warrens say they are behind in music, theater and films, because there has been so little time to pursue them.

He says he intends to stay on at the White House, representing the President until all the answers have emerged.

"I have no regrets, other than those I have mentioned," he said. "I regret the events of the last year and a half—I think everyone does. But as for my own personal well-being and state of mind, I have no regrets — and I won't have as long as I think I am serving a purpose."

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