

A 'Watergate Wife' Tries to Look Ahead

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LOS ANGELES—Gail Nicholas Magruder is a slender woman of 35 with soft brown hair and hazel eyes. These days the eyes are more likely to be thoughtful than to sparkle the way they did the day five years ago, when she and her husband stood on the balcony of a magnificent beach house in Malibu, guests of honor at a farewell party.

Then they were heading for Washington, where Jeb Stuart Magruder was to become a special assistant to President Nixon. And then Watergate happened and Mr. Magruder became one of a group of young men whose futures no longer stretched glowingly before them.

"What I am trying to work out right now," Mrs. Magruder said in a rare series of interviews during a visit here and by telephone from her home in Washington, "is what I will do if Jeb has to 'go away' for a while."

"I am not a career-type woman," explained the mother of three sons, whose ages range from 6 to 13, and a daughter, 9. "I don't like to leave my home and I don't like to leave the rearing of my children to a nanny or someone like that. Ideally, I would like to find some sort of job I could do during the day when the children are gone, then be there when they come home."

Set of Contingency Plans

Mrs. Magruder said that she and her husband "fully recognize the heavy responsibility" of his going to prison. Mr. Magruder, who was deputy director of the Committee for the Re-election of the President, pleaded guilty Aug. 16 to charges of conspiring to obstruct justice. His sentencing has been deferred and he is cooperating with the special prosecutor's office.

"We've made a variety of plans to cover any problems that would arise," Mrs. Magruder went on, "and I know that our friends would help, too. They have been wonderful in offering to do anything they could."

Mrs. Magruder said that while she feels "very calm" at the prospect of her husband going to prison, she knows that if that time comes, "I will hate it and I will be miserable inside."

"Our children are good strong children who will come out of this all right even if Jeb goes to jail," she added confidently. "They will have to live with that all their lives, and it will shape their lives; I know this, but I feel they are strong enough."

Gail Magruder, a fourth generation Californian, attended Marlborough, a private girls' school in Los Angeles, then went to Dana Hall, a boarding school in Boston, then to Vassar and finally returned to the West Coast, where she changed her major at the University of California at Berkeley from child studies to political science.

"It's ironic that my major in college was political science," she remarked with a barely audible chuckle. "But I do enjoy politics; I feel it is really important in life. But I am not a career woman myself. . . I'm a mother."

She said that she knows people will laugh to hear her say it, but insisted: "I think the thing we need more than anything is good, honest people in Washington now."



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Gail Nicholas Magruder

been some changes for the better.

"We live the same family style we did before," she said, "but Jeb is home a great deal more, which is wonderful. And we have rented a house on the Pennsylvania border not too far from where our regular home is. We go there on weekends and do more of the outdoor kind of thing than we have done here in the city.

"The big change is that I don't run around doing a lot of things I used to do that seemed to be more important at that time, but which weren't. I'm trying to do things that are more meaningful to my family and to me."

The Magruders' social activity has been cut back—partly out of choice and partly, Mrs. Magruder said, because they found that they had their share of fair-weather friends.

Good Cheer at Christmas

"But we have a lot of wonderful friends in Washington and in our church [the Magruders attend the National Presbyterian Church].

"The children have friends that have been just wonderful to us, and other friends appeared out of the woodwork when we needed them," she continued. "Our neighbors came at Christmas time, and also at Christmas there were letters and wonderful notes from all over the country. They gave us faith, courage and a sense of peace."

Mrs. Magruder said she misses Southern California.

"It's in my blood," she reflected. "I love the gardens and the fresh fruit. We had a home with a fantastic lemon tree, an avocado tree, fresh tomatoes, a lovely garden. In Washington you get lots of rain, dark weather, other things.

"But as for going back, we will go where Jeb has a job. We will go where the children will be happy and where we will have good schools for them. We have lived in enough places that I feel any place could become home."

Mrs. Magruder said her children "are coming along beautifully" and added, in relieved tones, that they had not been harassed at school.

"I think they have learned a lesson that many people live and die without ever learning," she said. "It is the lesson of loving and compassion. I think they will be far less quick to judge their friends and they will be far more loving with their friends when they have problems, because they can see how much it meant to Jeb and me to have friends come and help us."

'Caught Up in Something'

"I feel my husband is honest," she said. "I feel most of the men involved with this whole thing were honest men. They just got caught up in something that grew and grew and they were all overworked. The pressure is so great that I can understand how it evolved."

The pressure of life in Washington is tremendous, she noted, "because everyone runs all the time."

"I know these men try to keep their jobs in perspective, but it becomes very hard to do," she said, adding, "It is a very unreal world. It's kind of fun for a while, but not for any length of time."

Despite the wreckage that her husband's involvement in Watergate has created, Mrs. Magruder said there have