

Cherrygate Scandal: Getting to The Root Of Evil

By Art Buchwald

In a few days we will once again honor the birthday of George Washington, the first President of the United States who could not tell a lie.

Because of recent events I got to wondering what would have happened had the young Washington cherry tree incident taken place in a Watergate-type atmosphere.

This is how the story might have gone.

When George Washington was 6 years old he was given a beautiful hatchet by his father. A few days later George's father was walking through the garden and, much to his dismay, discovered someone had cut down his favorite English cherry tree. George's father went into a rage and sought out the culprit.

He shouted for his son but George was nowhere to be found. Then he ran into George's best friend, Ron Ziegler. "Ron," the father said, "Do you know who chopped down my tree?"

Ron blanched. "I refuse to comment on a third-rate ax job of a cherry tree."

Squire Washington said, "I will get to the bottom of this if it's the last thing I do."

Squire Washington confronted his son. "George, do you know who chopped down my cherry tree?"

At first George pretended he didn't know what his

father was talking about. But when Squire Washington took George by his collar and showed him the tree lying pitifully on the ground, George said, "it appears to me that some overzealous playmates of mine were involved in this shocking incident."

"Well," said Squire Washington, "I want to know who did it so he can be punished."

"Father," said George, "while I do not condone the cutting down of this cherry tree, or any other cherry tree for that matter, I would remind you that people have been chopping down cherry trees since long before I was born."

"George, I refuse to accept the excuse that just because other people have cut down cherry trees it is all right for someone to cut down mine. Now I'm going to ask you a question point blank, and I want an honest answer. Did you chop down this cherry tree?"

George licked his upper lip. "Father, as you know, someday I'm going to be the first President of the United States. I think it would be a serious mistake in principle for me to admit whether I did or did not cut down your tree."

"I am not thinking of myself but of future Presidents who may someday be asked by their fathers if they cut down a cherry tree. It would be breaking faith with them

and would be setting a terrible precedent if I agreed to be questioned under oath about what happened to the tree."

George's father was livid. "Where is the hatchet I gave you? I want to match it with the marks on the trunk."

"I've been advised not to let you see it," George replied.

"I'll give you the licking of your life if you don't produce that hatchet!"

George went into a bush and reluctantly produced the hatchet.

The father inspected it carefully. "What is this? Eighteen and one-half inches of this hatchet is missing. Where is the rest of it?"

"I think Squire Woods' little girl Rose Mary stepped on it."

"George, for the last time, did you chop down the cherry tree?"

"Father, I cannot tell a lie. I think we've devoted entirely too much time to the subject of your cherry tree. I've given you all the information you've asked for. I've cooperated to the fullest extent, producing everything including my hatchet. It's time that we put this cherry tree incident behind us and got on with the business of running this plantation."