

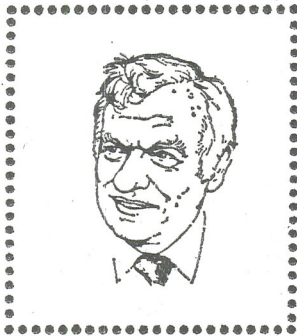
Charles McCabe Himself

'Gee Whiz'

IF THERE IS anything to the old idea that the best way to reveal is to try to conceal, and I think there is quite a lot to it, the tapes presented as a defense by Mr. Nixon surely must rank right up there with such confessional literature as the works of St. Augustine and Rousseau.

Nothing any further tapes may reveal will ever equal the brew produced by the facts Mr. Nixon meted out, the evasions which are overwhelmingly accusatory, and the yeast of the reader's imagination. We saw the rector with his pants down.

Even the widely reported view that the favorite of those Nixonian expletives is the blunt synonym for an unnatural act performed on the male, is not as destructive to the Nixonian image as those implacably repeated expletives.



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BUT I AM A thorny number. I constantly hiss against the wind. I am perverse by nature. When everybody is listening to a different drummer I turn back to John Philip Sousa and his bombinating brass.

With an industry which would be admirable if applied to a worthier project I spent hours on those tape transcripts, a devoted and eager exegist. I knew, if I persisted long enough, I would find the real Nixon, the Nixon I know, the Nixon made and wrapped in government offices, at government expense, over these long years.

You know the Nixon: the church goer, when church going seemed right; the pious old fraud telling the Girl Scouts and the Four-H kids how to grow up and become good consumers; the guy who called every winner after each winning game, from Joe Namath to whoever might have won a spin-the-bottle contest in Des Moines; the lad who shanghaied his daughters into his defense when the going got tough, the dear boy who put the knock on Harry Truman for using trooper's language.

You know, that Nixon.

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ONE OF THE difficulties about the edited transcripts is that occasionally Mr. Nixon seemed AWARE of his secret electronic equipment. On these occasions we sensed the old, rotund, Presidential Tricky Dick, not the curiously vulnerable fellow who talked to the Messrs. Dean, Haldeman and Ehrlichman.

One time when the President was really old Nixon, and seemingly well aware of the tape's existence, was not unnatural. It was when he was talking to John Wilson and Frank Strickler, nominally lawyers for Haldeman and Ehrlichman, but actually also Nixon's own wily defense counsel.

There is an old saying in Washington, "If you commit murder in the District, wipe all fingerprints and call John Wilson." When the President met with Wilson in the Oval Office on April 19, 1973, he was at his period, clubby best. Mr. Wilson said politely he had never been in the Oval office before.

"My gosh," said the President.

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STILL SPARRING conversationally, Wilson mentioned that he represented the Marriott family, who are heavily into hotels. He had been the Marriotts' friend for 40 years. They were "the sweetest people in the world."

The President could not have been in more enthusiastic concord. "P — Well, they are really fine Americans, and you know. — And gee whiz, they don't drink themselves but they make a lot out of selling it." (Laughter) was dutifully reported.

Now this is the Nixon I like to meet, the one I feel at home with, the one we have all grown up with. I had to go through 746 pages of the Bantam-New York Times edition to find him; but it was worth it, if only for that single, boyish heart-filled Gee Whiz.