



# A Happy Break From Watergate

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PEOPLE make a foolish fuss about being a blood donor — as I now am for my brother Stewart. It is entirely painless. The company is most agreeable, at least in the laboratory where I give blood at the National Institutes of Health. It has indeed, only one serious drawback.

Being a blood donor makes you into a sort of Siamese twin, in the sense that you cannot be separated for more than a few days from the person who needs your peculiar brand of blood. But like so many seeming-difficulties in this weary world, Siamese twindom has now turned out to have its own advantages.

For going on forty years as a reporter, in brief, I have always tried to follow every really big story until the bitter, or happy end — at any rate within my own reportorial area. To leave a big story makes me feel downright wicked. Yet Siamese twins cannot choose their own vacation-times. Their vacations are chosen by the doctor.

The fortnight allotted begins tomorrow, so these reports will cease for that period. Even so, I might have puritanically refused the vacation if I were not as stale as an old bun.

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BUT TO be honest, I was also overjoyed by my vacation's imposed timing, although the Watergate horror is the biggest single political story I have ever seen in thirty-plus years in Washington.

I have been accused of being a Nixon "apologist." I have always believed that Richard M. Nixon was the most unlikely president we have ever had, in the sense that he strongly resembles a plumbing fixture.

For any sensible person, the test of a flush-toilet is whether it flushes. Since his

election in 1968 (which I voted ardently against, unlike so many present Nixon-haters), I have regarded the President as a reliably flushing plumbing fixture. I have so written, in just those words. If this makes you a Nixon apologist, make the most of it!

The next point is simple enough. If you have reliable plumbing, does any sensible person want to exchange it for the great unknown? The answer is, obviously: "No, unless it is fatally infected in some unseen manner." What we are learning from the Watergate horror is that the White House was indeed infected, not fatally, but in a way that could have been fatal.

It was infected because what has always been done in every White House (or at least every strong White House) was turned in the Nixon white house into an elaborately administered system.

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I DO NOT think the system, as it formerly existed in the Nixon White House, was seriously threatening. As the record clearly shows, the managers of the system were such a set of fools, paranoids, brown-nosers, and incompetents that the main threat was to themselves — and to the President.

Destroying the system in its incompetent infancy is the great achievement of the exposure of the Watergate horror, mainly by the Washington Post. But that has been done. The question, now, is whether it is also desirable to destroy the President himself.

If the President's destruction is not truly desired, however, we are now engaged in a frivolous, self-destructive exercise. I dislike self-destruction. So it is wonderful to be going to the mountains, almost by doctor's orders.