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Memories of an Agent For the CIA

By Carolyn Anspacher

I first met Margaret Ruddock, then Margaret Falter, on June 4, 1953, two hours after I had returned to San Francisco from a five-month, eight-country trip abroad.

She simply appeared in the luggage-strewn foyer of my apartment, all majestic six feet of her.

She was awesome, the more so when she announced, "I am with the CIA. I am here to debrief you."

With her, no delaying tactics were possible. The "debriefing" began that day and went on for the next six weeks — mornings, afternoons, evenings, while she chiseled away at my memory, extracting impressions I had not realized were there. Much later, I learned that the bits and pieces had been assembled and sent on to the State Department and the so-called "intelligence community."

That was 22 years ago. In the intervening years, Mrs. Ruddock has been divorced twice (first from the noted artist John Falter and, two years ago, from San Francisco financier Merritt Ruddock) and she has retired as a contact specialist and reports officer of the Central Intelligence Agency.

She is deep now into interior design and associated with one of the city's top firms, but her heart remains with the CIA. She has reached retirement age and thinks her security clearance may have lapsed but still, almost auto-

matically, she speaks of the head of the local CIA office as "chief".

Was she ever an honest-to-God, bona fide spy?

Mrs. Ruddock says no. "I never was trained for covert work. Anyway, I don't think I would have been brave enough."

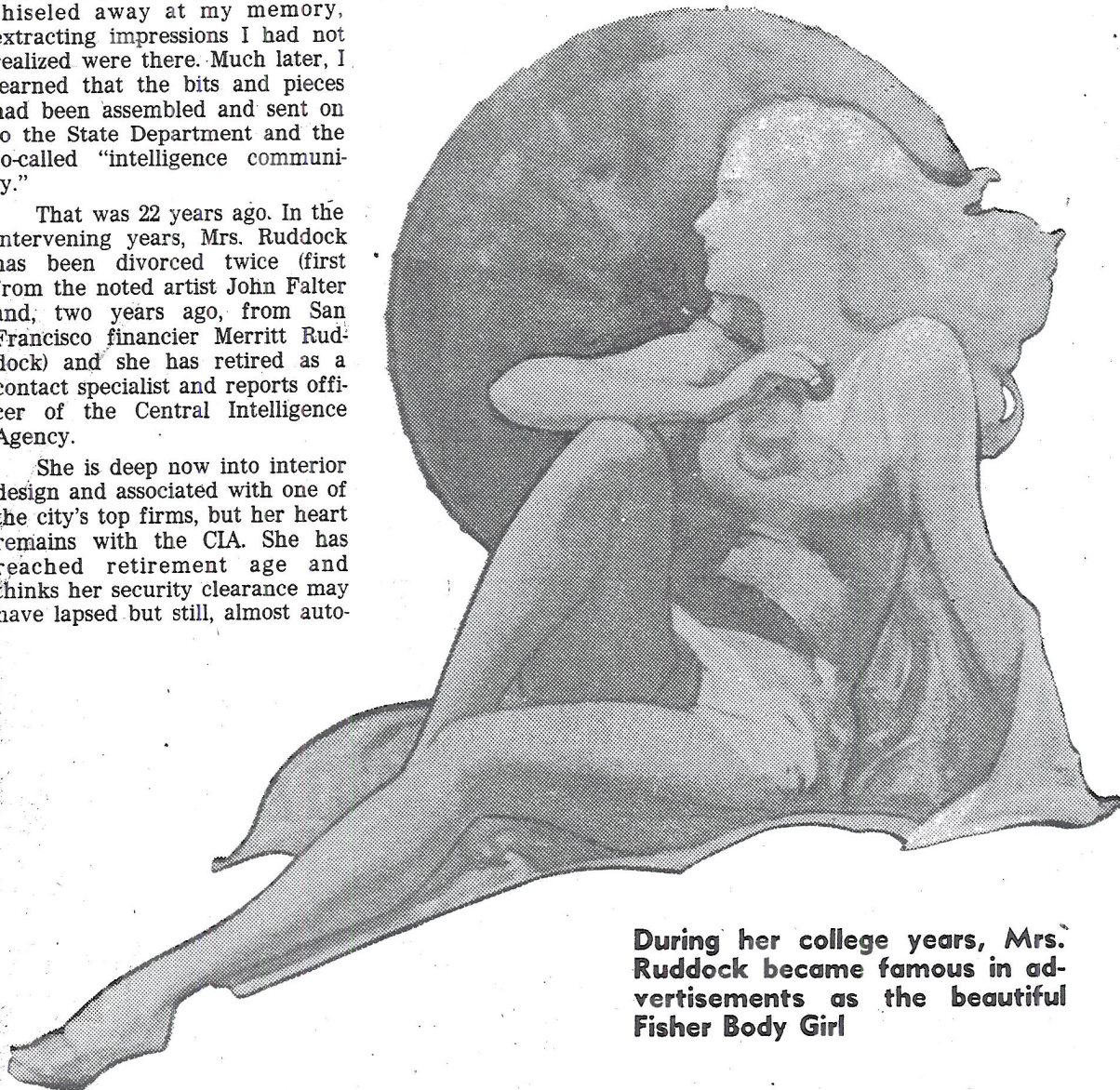
The trick of Mrs. Ruddock's job was to let others unwittingly do the spying for the CIA.

Her "subjects" were chosen carefully — not the "grand tour" travelers who bounced from London to Paris to Rome and then home again, laden with purchases, but those who went boldly into

Iron Curtain countries, or nations where there was sub-surface ferment.

What Mrs. Ruddock sought, and found in the Bay Area at the rate of about five a month, were reliable observers — news reporters, professionals in every field — who might have had unusual contacts abroad.

No one was asked in advance



During her college years, Mrs. Ruddock became famous in advertisements as the beautiful Fisher Body Girl

Margaret Ruddock's job was to find reliable observers with "unusual contacts" abroad whom she would "debrief" when they got back home



By Art Frisch

to record information that might be of value to the intelligence community. "Too dangerous for the traveler," she said. "Everything we got was after the fact."

Mrs. Ruddock claims that her job was merely to "collate" material and leave the evaluation to higher-ups in Washington.

The fact is that she was a cross between a Freudian analyst and a prosecutor, dredging for just one more piece to fill out an international jigsaw puzzle.

What was a nice Kansas-born, upper middle class woman like Margaret Ruddock doing working as an operative for the CIA? She is a little vague about details.

World War II had something to do with it. She was living very stylishly in New York. Her then-husband, John Falter, was in the Navy. Their best friends were writers Corey Ford and Alastair MacBain, both in the Air Force and both with the Office of Strategic Services.

She went frequently to Washington to visit her Navy officer brother, toyed briefly with the notion of enlisting in the Marines and instead wrote a successful novelette.

Before long she found herself

doing intelligence work and in 1949, two years after its establishment, was recruited for the CIA.

After a couple of years of training in Washington, she came to San Francisco.

She recalls her years with the CIA as the most exciting of her life, more so even than that summer holiday from the University of Kansas when McClelland Barclay, spotting her beside a resort swimming pool, asked her to pose for a series of paintings and she became nationally known as the "Fisher Body Girl."

Now, many years later, Mrs. Ruddock has none of the Barclay paintings and, perhaps because of protocol, says she sees none of her onetime CIA colleagues. But she remains fiercely loyal to the agency and passionately defends every facet of intelligence collecting.

The national paranoia about the CIA and other intelligence-gathering agencies sickens Mrs. Ruddock and it is easier for her to blame the so-called media than Watergate and excesses in the Nixon White House.

"Russia has the greatest intelligence apparatus in the world," she said flatly. "Our future depends on our maintaining one that is at least equal."