

Is Rose Mary's Baby Legitimate?



Arthur Hoppe

DEAR PRESIDENT: I, Joe Sikspak, American, take pen in hand to remove a fly from your ointment. Don't can Rose Mary Woods.

First, I thought you should. "Any secretary," I tell Paddy down at Paddy's Place the other night, "who pushes two wrong buttons on a tape recorder and then talks 18 minutes on the telephone during company time without saying a word should get the axe."

"You are leaping to conclusions, Joe," says Paddy.

"They are leaping on me," says I. "Look. It is three days after Watergate, see? Haldeman, Ehrlichman, Mitchell and Dean have their very first conference on this distasteful subject. Then Haldeman goes in to report to the President. And what do they talk about on that erased tape? They are talking, Rose Mary tells the judge, about the President's schedule and tourism. Like, I figure, what country to flee to."

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"**Y**OU GOT to have faith in Rose Mary, Joe," says Paddy.

"Faith," says I, "and begorrah to you, Paddy. One week she tells the judge she was 'very carefully instructed' not to erase any tapes and she 'very carefully didn't touch that side of the machine.' And the next week she says when she turns to answer her phone, she very accidentally pushed the red 'record' button and then very accidentally pushed the black 'start' button — all in one swell swoop.

"We all have our bad days, Joe," says Paddy.

"So the machine is now recording while she is on the phone 18 minutes," says I. "Only all it picks up is a hum. 'Maybe it was a high intensity lamp,' says

the White House. You know, one of those ear-splitting light bulbs."

"The White House is wrong there, Joe," says Paddy. "The clue is: who was calling?"

"Okay," says I. "Who?"

"The President," says Paddy. "He spends 18 minutes telling Rose Mary what a great country this is."

"I will buy that," says I. "But what about the hum?"

"That is Rose Mary, Joe," says Paddy. "She does what she always does when the President addresses her: She hums The Star-Spangled Banner."

"On one note?" says I.

"She has a very narrow range," says Paddy. "And when she silently hangs up and silently discovers her mistake, she goes straight to the President. 'Sir,' she says, 'I have accidentally destroyed the crucial tape that would have proved your innocence.' 'No problem,' says he. There's plenty more where that came from.' So you see, Joe, she's a cool, silent, honest secretary who keeps things humming. Which is the best kind."

"It's a fine story," says I. "But . . ."

"If you don't have faith in the President's personal secretary, Joe," says Paddy sternly, "who can you have faith in?"

"The President?" says I.

"Well, Joe," says Paddy. "You got a point there."

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SO DON'T sack Rose Mary, President. When it comes to helpful secretaries, like you once said, "she's one in a million." And I'll buy that. Which shows the faith I got in you.

Truly Yours,
Joe Sikspak, American