

Why Appled-Cheeked Young Sought Permission to Eat in the Where the Air Is Rarefied and

By Zan Thompson

CARMEL VALLEY, Calif.—I'll never ride the Orient Express, nor get the emeralds through to Zagreb in a crushed chamois pouch. Like every little girl who saw Charlie Chan on Saturday afternoon and watched Greta Garbo in Mata Hari, I wanted to be, among a lot of other things, a spy. Now, the Watergaters have made spy a slimy word. They've even killed the small and foolish dreams.

Watergate has been studied, investigated, written about, treated both as cause and effect, analyzed, pontificated upon. The faces of the principals have become as familiar to us as cousins we see once a year and don't like.

So anything said about it covers twice-plowed ground. It does, indeed, but it was my very own ox that was gored and I have no cool and distant objectivity. I have a churning disdain.

For the last twelve years, I have been a Republican professional, in communications and campaign management. According to my peers, I was good at the job. Now, these amateurs have dirtied up the arena, and when I am asked what I do, I feel my eyes sway a little, as though I were in work not quite honorable, shabby, better hidden. I don't like it, I am a victim.

When the extent of the dingy little deeds was first becoming known, Herb Klein, who was the White House director of communications, said, "Too much responsibility was given to too many people with no experience."

It was the day of the deadly amateur. The White House was full of people who had "never run for sheriff," who knew nothing of politics, who were snifty little snobs and who had perfectly marvelous teeth. Young men, whose qualifications for White House service were limited almost entirely to blowing up balloons at campaign rallies and seeing that the happy volunteers had buses that ran on time, were suddenly seen striding through the Executive Office Building and the west wing of the White House as though the weight of Government were on their shoulders. Sadly, it was. And what they were all trying to figure out was how to get permission to eat in the White House mess, where

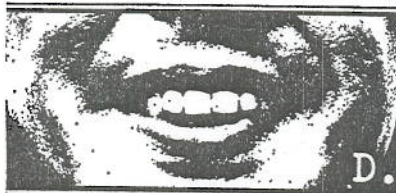
the air is rarefied, and they have the Mexican plate on Wednesdays.

When I was special assistant for California to Republican National Committee Chairmen Rogers C. B. Morton (now Secretary of the Interior) and Senator Bob Dole of Kansas, the chairman later, I met a number of White House people in my job, which was making interview arrangements with the print and electronic media for Administration figures and putting together news conferences.

One time, it was for Dwight L. Chapin, then appointments secretary for the President. We were doing a breakfast interview with a reporter for The Los Angeles Times, a black Rhodesian. Chapin and the Rhodesian were a wildly disparate pair. And maybe there was mischief in the assignment-desk man who put together the silent, level-eyed Rhodesian and the contrivedly ebullient Chapin.

We were sitting in a coffee shop and the interview was limping along. It was shortly after President Nixon's trip to China. The reporter asked if Chapin had also made the advance trip.

"Timmy Ellbourne made that trip,"



said Dwight. "And did you know that Timmy and Ron Ziegler and I were all at U.S.C. together?"

Dwight presented this information with the air of a wonderfully bright Springer spaniel who had just made a difficult retrieve. I didn't feel that this bit of eagerly offered item would really be the lead of the story.

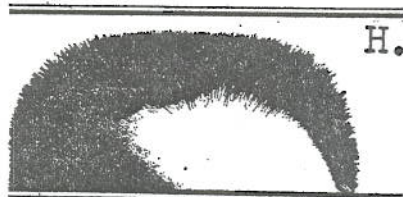
Dwight sat back and waited for the wonder of it all to wash over the reporter whose face was blank with noninterest: The Trojan Boys in Washington, or, How I Spend My Allowance. There were a couple of side-splitting anecdotes about Timmy and Ron and Dwight. I was mutely grateful that he had not also said Ronnie.

Chapin called me the next day when a matter-of-fact story appeared and

complained bitterly about the reporter's antagonism. This was the knee-jerk White House reaction to any story that wasn't a panegyric.

There was a play-school quality to many of these men. As though these Ken dolls were really planning a sock hop instead of serving on a Presidential staff.

When I first heard Jeb Stuart Magruder's name, I made a very small



jape: "Does he play Dixie on the bagpipes?" It was in 1968 and I was communications director for the Nixon-Agnew campaign for California and Jeb was doing some leg work for the man who was chairman for the greater Los Angeles area.

In 1969, Jeb found his way to the White House and to the Bob Haldeman cadre. He was assigned to Herb Klein's office and from there went to the Committee to Re-Elect the President as John Mitchell's adjutant.

One day, shortly into the campaign, I received a telephone call from Herbert L. Porter, then the Committee's scheduling director, telling me that Jeb, thenceforth, would be too busy with matters of moment to talk to me and that I would, in the future call him, Bart Porter, for guidance.

Fortunately, I never found it necessary to call Mr. Porter and take any time from his high-level commitments. Actually, I couldn't remember what he looked like until I saw him on camera at the Senate hearings last summer and recently when he peered from the newspaper when he was indicted.

What was the evil worm eating at these apple-cheeked boys that caused them to lie, slander, malign, condone thievery, be the first to tattle?

In a talk to Cambridge undergraduates, C. S. Lewis once said: "The most compelling of all temptations is the temptation to the inner circle. Men will lie, betray their wives for admission to the circle. . . . The charm of the inner circle lies in the fact that others

Men in Gucci Loafers White House Mess, the Food Mexican

may not enter, that only a select few are admitted."

Along with their lack of experience, that was the trouble. The game of being in the inner circle became more important than anything else. It became the end.

There was a Graustarkian flavor to their comings and goings. The trappings were the thing. Dozens of dauphins playing tennis on the White House courts, more interested in bettering their positions than in governing. They seemed to have had no conceptions of what their jobs really were. It was all kind of a big, pregame bonfire.

The important thing was to fit the pretty pattern. There was a sameness to these men and their picture-book, detergent-ad families. They ate in the same restaurants, wore the same suits, wore Gucci loafers.

After the 1972 election, Jeb decided that he would make a swing through California with an eye to running for California Secretary of State. He had been working for the Presidential inauguration committee and thought he might get newspaper space and air time in connection with his job.



The horrors of Watergate were beginning to unfold and it seemed a singularly ill-considered plan for Jeb to expose himself to the sharp questions of the newsmen.

I said as much to him when he gave me the list of the news people he had made arrangements to see. One of these was a television correspondent, tough, aware, intelligent and highly respected.

I suggested that we cancel that interview lest Jeb be cornered into saying something embarrassing. Then I didn't know that he was involved in anything except king-of-the-mountain games at the Re-election Committee.

His answer: "Oh, he won't embarrass me. We go to the same church." That seems to me the distillation of the

mentality that brought about Watergate. There is no wrong but being caught and if we don't talk about it it isn't there.

I asked Jeb if he wasn't afraid that questions about Watergate might be awkward. "Oh, no, I've got that all worked out. There's nothing to that." And so there wasn't, in that two-dimensional, paper-doll world.

Part of the tragedy of Watergate was youth worship. Ron Ziegler, before he assumed his present post, had enumerated the number of young men near the President who were under thirty. Not once, but dozens of times.

But the young men are not alone in their culpability. The loftiest posts in the White House and at the Re-election Committee were filled with men who seemed to have lacked the simplest awareness of good breeding, of simple good manners. It is as though there was a mortal flaw that made lying, eavesdropping, tattling—the grubby little sins—all acceptable. Just rudimentary decency would have saved us all from Watergate.

There are a lot of old-fashioned ideas about honor and decency and good manners that are still operational. My mother used to say, "It isn't done." Meaning nice people don't. We do not steal. We do not brag.

There was no class in these people. Watergate was not brought about by great evil. It came about through the piling up of small vulgarities.

From the embarrassing, early-on decision to dress the White House police in *opéra-bouffe* to the most recent tape erasure, and latest indictment, the matter is of a piece. It is without integrity, without taste. It isn't done.

There is no forgiveness in me. The trespasses were too calculated, too chill, too passionless. It is hard to forgive cold sin.

I learned politics—I know it as an honorable profession—from Bob Finch, Herb Klein, Rog Morton—men of good counsel and integrity.

I am ill-used. And so are all the people of honor who have had their lives wrenched out of courses they had set when they were small.

Zan Thompson is now directing a re-election campaign for Representative Burt L. Talcott in California's 16th District.