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Tragedy of A Watergate Wife

By Vera Glaser

Washington

Mrs. Charles Colson, a former beauty queen who dated the late John Kennedy when he was a senator, is the most recent casualty in the trail of lives scarred by Watergate.

Her face appeared on the nation's front pages last week, when her husband, President Nixon's former counsel, made his sensational plea of guilty to a felony count of obstruction of justice.

The move is regarded as a major turning point in the case against Colson and John Ehrlichman for conspiracy to burglarize the office of Daniel Ellsberg's psychiatrist.

Mrs. Colson's picture shocked those who knew the former Patty Hughes before her office romance with controversial Chuck Colson.

In the 1950s, Patty was a competent and popular young aide to Republican Senator Ralph Flanders. She was chosen as Vermont's cherry blossom princess.

One of the town's most eligible bachelors, Senator John Kennedy, often dropped by Flanders' office to chat and ask her out on dates.

Now Patty Colson's hair is white. The sparkle has left her eyes, and her figure has gone to fat.

"I eat when I'm upset," she says.

During months of tension,

as the Watergate noose tightened around her husband, Patty loyally proclaimed his innocence.

But she ate compulsively, sitting glued to the television set between trips to the kitchen, and topping off her weekly visits to the beauty parlor with an ice cream treat.

Colson appears to have kept his cool. He made page one news last year by reportedly "finding Christ." Now Patty, a Catholic, attends prayer meetings with him.

The Colsons have no children.

The recent release of presidential transcripts must have been shattering to Colson, long regarded as a member of the White House inner circle, extremely close to President Nixon and chief of staff H. R. (Bob) Haldeman.

But the transcripts reveal they sometimes spoke privately of Colson with contempt and fear.

The list of lives drastically changed by Watergate, as the Colsons' have been, is seemingly endless.

Burglar Howard Hunt's wife died in an airplane crash. Former Attorney General John Mitchell's marriage is on the rocks. Former White House aides John Ehrlichman and John Dean face possible disbarment.

Youthful aides Egil Krogh, Dwight Chapin, Donald Se-



AP Wirephoto

Patty and Chuck Colson talked to newsmen shortly after his indictment in Washington

gretti and Jeb Magruder have gone to jail.

Mrs. Colson's case is especially poignant, because "she was and is a lovely person," according to a former co-worker.

"When Patty left Flanders to work for Senator Leverett Saltonstall, she got to know Chuck, who was Saltonstall's top aide.

"Everyone loved her, but detested Chuck. He created

a lot of dissension on the staff, which we had not been used to. At one point, the entire staff almost mutinied," the former colleague said.

Colson, then the youngest administrative assistant on Capitol Hill, studied law at night and later managed Saltonstall's 1960 reelection campaign.

Patty Hughes may have been lonely. In her home-

town of Springfield, Vt., her father had died and a teenage brother was killed in an accident. Her widowed mother died after moving to Washington to be with Patty.

In 1963, Colson divorced his wife, Nancy, who now lives in Boston with their three children.

Co-workers cautioned Patty about Colson's attentions, but she only joked, "I al-

ways seem to go for the heels."

"She loved the guy, that was clear," the friend said, adding, "They have both made a great effort with Chuck's kids and have had them down here a lot.

"Patty has tried to make a good home and is a charming hostess. She tries to do what is right, but how in hell she has lived with this situation is beyond me."