

**T**he trauma of the resignation is a year behind them now. Since that tearful takeoff from the White House lawn, Richard and Pat Nixon have suffered and survived in isolation at San Clemente. Eddie and Tricia Cox live as quietly as you can in New York City. But Julie and David Eisenhower have stayed. "Washington was the scene of it all," David says, "and there are constant reminders of what happened. It's on Julie's mind and mine, and sometimes we think we might do well to go somewhere else. But we've decided to face up to it and resolve it here."

Julie and David have drawn closer since the resignation. "We didn't know too many people when we came here from the Navy," David says, "and that was when Watergate started up. I have never sought a wide circle of friends, and Julie doesn't meet too many Washington people in her work. We just don't see too many people."

They do visit relatives a lot, mostly Eisenhowers. Mamie. Milton. David's married sis-

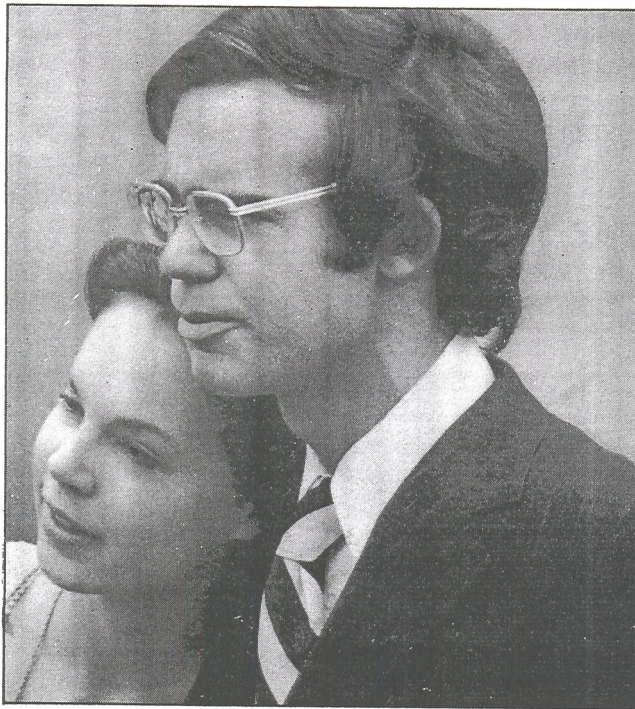
ters. And sometimes Eddie and Tricia. They have visited the Nixons twice since the resignation. "One of the most important aspects of our life is the fact that her name is Nixon and my name is Eisenhower," David says. "We are bound to our families in a way that other people are not, whether we like it or not."

To bear the name Eisenhower is to carry the memory of one of America's great heroes, a President of unquestioned integrity whose reputation has grown with the years. But David is also stamped "Nixon," and thus had to share the erratic and finally tragic fortunes of his father-in-law. All through the Watergate ordeal, the likable, friendly, jug-eared husband of Julie Nixon demonstrated a remarkable candor about what was happening, painful as it was to his wife's family—and to himself.

While he remained loyal to Nixon, he also showed a great deal of the Eisenhower carefulness, toughness and sense of command. If anything, Watergate made David more of an Eisenhower.

He feels that the family's background made it easier for them to deal with the situation than it would have been for him: "I never felt personally threatened by the criticisms launched at the Nixons. If my situation had been more like the Nixons', with their popularity going up and down over the years, I probably would have taken the whole thing far more personally."

On the last weekend before the resignation\*, however, Nixon's suffering was so intense that he could not bear to



WIDE WORLD

## DAVID EISENHOWER: "OUR HARDEST YEAR"

Ike's grandson talks openly about Watergate, his marriage, his future—and those agonizing months in which the Eisenhower morality had to live with the anger and the bitterness of a wife named Nixon

BY NICK THIMMESCH

David remembers, "I was sitting with a friend in the coffee lounge at school discussing Watergate, and it suddenly occurred to me that this had become a way of life. So I just made a resolution that I was going to try to resolve this in my own mind and not discuss it any more. I think we've toughened up a bit. There aren't many bad situations that I can think of that would make things seem a whole lot worse than they were last year."

These days the Eisenhowers live in a two-bedroom apartment (\$409 a month) in a fairly new building near campus. Julie earned \$15,000 a year as assistant managing editor of the *Saturday Evening Post* until recently, when she decided to reduce her schedule and work part time as a contributing editor. David occupies himself with the law—working in a law firm in summer and studying through the year. They try to dine out once a week. They go to the movies; they play bridge; they drive to Baltimore to pursue David's passion—baseball—by seeing the Orioles play. Occasionally they have another couple in for dinner. They are not, by any means, on Washington's social circuit. But even while deliberately keeping their lives as private as possible, they can never escape their names or their background.

For David that means being born into a family whose clan leader enjoyed not only immense popularity in the United States, but across the world as well. When David was born, March 31, 1948, Eisenhower had been sought out by both the Democratic and the / turn to page 26

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Republican parties to run for President. "I'm not objective about grandfather," says David. "He's my hero. He doted on me and spoiled me. I really don't know much about him, though. I was fond of the grandfather I did know, however. I never really changed my opinion of him as I grew up. He remained, to me, a powerful, self-confident man. He had unbelievable command of a room full of people.

"My father and I were much closer. We had a peculiar relationship in that we were colleagues, both looking to the center of attention, the Chief of the Clan. It's funny how we both felt his problem of being the son of a famous father. Sometimes I wished I had been born poor, and my father did, too. But we made the best of it."

**M**aking the best of it is what John Eisenhower and his son really believe in, and also what Ike taught them. Ike believed in self-discipline, reaching for fulfillment, orderly advancement in life, and David was also expected to live up to these standards. "They say character is formed by age five," he says. "This determines your personality pretty early in your life. My early life dealing with politics was a very happy one. People didn't nit-pick my grandfather. He was admired. He was powerful. A figure who left the Presidency as popular as when he entered it."

The facts bear this out. The Gallup Poll cited Eisenhower as the most admired man in the world two years before he became President, and he held this position again after eight years in the White House. "So you can see," David says, "why I accepted politics and didn't even feel threatened by people who criticized my grandfather. That was my experience in politics before getting involved with the Nixons."

David got involved with the Nixons because of his grandmother. When David was a freshman at Amherst, Mamie suggested that he look up Julie at nearby Smith College. David never went with any other girl.

Their romance was certainly no conspiracy, but it did serve Nixon well in 1968 to have an Eisenhower at his side when he campaigned in the Republican primaries. Their wedding, one month after his victory over Hubert Humphrey, capped a fantastic year for Nixon, elected when everyone said he could never even be nominated.

Asked whether he would have been happier had Nixon not been elected, David puts the question in Nixon's terms and agrees with what he thinks would be Nixon's answer. "I'd speculate that if one were to ask Mr. Nixon whether he wished now that he'd been defeated in 1968, or had never run, his answer would be, 'No,'" David says. "Better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all. I take Mr. Nixon very literally on certain things, and in 1968 when he polled the family about going back into politics, his attitude was that it was exciting to get involved, that it might involve a lot of pain and might hurt us. As I sat there, listening to him, I thought

of 1960 and 1962; and I was skeptical about his chances.

"My attitude going into the 1968 campaign, throughout the first administration and into the second, was that getting involved in a Nixon political organization was like tying yourself to a roller coaster. The potential of having an unhappy outcome was just as great as the potential of succeeding in conquering the world. I remember thinking that it was exciting and that it might end in defeat, but I can be grateful for the great experience. I hoped it would last. Not that I expected it to."

David doesn't think the family expected it to last, either. "If they had expected good fortune to smile on the Nixon administration forever, they could not have coped with Watergate. The Nixons have been toughened by things in the past and could take it."

In the beginning, of course, things went smoothly, and David began to feel he was as much a Nixon as an Eisenhower. David and Julie were a wholesome appendage to the controversial President. Nixon learned that young Eisenhower was bright, thoughtful and concerned. He solicited his views to the point where, David says, "he was very generous with the office of the President. I got to know Mr. Nixon better than I did my grandfather when he was in the White House. Mr. Nixon had a trait of being almost boyish about the Presidency. He had a hard time believing where he was. He was so excited about it that he shared it with me, almost carelessly. He invited you to be a decision maker, to play the game.

"He was careful, though, about who he shared it with. Almost always it was Haldeman, Kissinger, Ehrlichman and John Mitchell. Mr. Nixon didn't reveal himself to George Schultz or Alexander Haig, no matter what you read. Mr. Nixon was in awe of the Presidency, and too much of that attitude filtered down, through Haldeman, so there wasn't enough spontaneity.

"Mr. Nixon was a unique President in many ways. He is a very, very shy man, but he was one of the most aggressive Presidents we've ever had."

David was winding up his Navy duty when Watergate broke. He was planning on fulfilling a "blood" promise to his grandfather to enter law school, but the timing was bad, in terms of getting his applications in.

"Watergate interested me in the law more than anything else," he says. "As I watched those hearings, I wanted more and more to be accepted at law school."

Meanwhile, David found Nixon and the family talking about Watergate as analytically as possible. The President "spoke of it, well, in a kind of third-person way, as if it was something that was happening down the street. He invited us to discuss it on that level, rather than getting down to the basics—which were that Watergate, from March, 1973, on, challenged Nixon's moral and personal qualifications for the Presidency. Therefore, it was personal. But we always talked about it very objectively and dispassionately."

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As the going got rougher, however, Julie's expressions about Watergate became more passionate while David remained stolid. "Being analytical was my defense mechanism," David says. "We had to avoid confronting the dimensions of Mr. Nixon's tragedy. If you permitted your emotions free rein in a situation like that, it would destroy you."

From the beginning, David was convinced that Watergate would have to be dealt with head on. "Once you have circumstances where burglars turn up in the Democratic National Committee headquarters under the glare of national media and there's a link established to the White House, well, Congress can't ignore that. Once the issue was raised, it had to be resolved. There's no way the government could brush it under the rug.

"One incredible aspect was that it was so public. Mr. Nixon's finances all over the papers. Friends testifying before committees. Criminal indictments. Mr. Nixon was never afforded the ability to get away from it all. He was constantly putting on a public face for everyone. It became a habit.

"In the long run, this is going to make it harder for Mr. Nixon and perhaps the family and other people involved to get over Watergate, because at the time they were denied the catharsis of letting their emotions take full play. Even when Julie and I went out to San Clemente several weeks later, we never really admitted to ourselves that this is a disaster, personally, politically. We never admitted that."

David believes the refusal of the "Nixon people," as he calls them, to meet Watergate head on was rooted in the 1960 election. "They felt the election process was corrupted in 1960 and that their 1972 campaign was run on a standard purer than the driven snow," David says. "Once the results were in, the Nixon people, and maybe Mr. Nixon himself—who knows—couldn't concede that something could have gone wrong in 1972."

Thus Nixon did not come to grips with Watergate even after the 1972 election. David says the February 28, 1973, tape was the calm before the storm. "Nixon is focusing on the problem," Eisenhower says in a tone of voice that a teacher would use, "but he's not very realistic about it in many ways. It's kind of the old view, well, this is a public relations problem. The idea that Watergate involved issues that would bring down the administration was the farthest thing from his mind."

**B**eing in law school, David took a particular interest in the legal aspect of Watergate and became skeptical that the administration would survive. Julie kept fighting for her father, which caused many people to wonder how much she really knew.

"She didn't have all the Watergate facts," David explains. "but her defense of her father was human, not political. The only difference between us was that when it came to specifics, when certain questions cropped up in our public

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appearances that she didn't feel capable of handling. I was more able to because I had followed the hearings. I was able to advise caution to her in some areas and to go ahead in others.

"By the summer of 1974 I was fatalistic. There was no way the thing could be turned around politically. The country had made up its mind. He was powerless.

"The good reason for seeing it through was that the question of his being innocent or not innocent should have been resolved through procedures designed for that. The people who wanted the President removed should have had to submit to the process. But, on the negative side, how long could the country stand it? Watergate had gone on for a year. By the middle of 1973, the recession had begun. One reason given, true or not, was that the downturn began because the government was cut loose, awash, that nothing was happening in Washington. He was perceived as paralyzed, which in itself is important—whether he was or not."

Eisenhower said the final disclosures and resignation did not change his estimate of his father-in-law. "What I felt about Watergate," David says, "was a very private opinion and did not reflect on what I felt about Mr. Nixon. I thought it was possible that Mr. Nixon had made a mistake. But I thought I understood the reasons that made it impossible for him or anyone else to admit it."

According to David, his own father was among the most distressed over the ordeal. "It depressed him deeply. He couldn't understand why he was so upset. I guess it was he still feels a sort of personal contact with the Presidency. That's something he had."

As for David and Julie, they manage to keep their lives private. Their friends tell how they are devoted, love each other very much and blend as a splendid team. Julie is intense, frets and frowns, and exudes feeling. David is reserved, reflective, given to the measured statement rather than the emotional outburst. After nearly seven years of marriage, they still leave love notes for each other in the apartment. Friction takes the form of Julie barking at him and David sulking. Theirs is a solid marriage.

Both want children after David graduates from law school in 1976. "In the absence of children, you don't learn how to be selfless or think of others," David says. "Without children, you are unmarried. Julie and I want children. It is a denial of a basic instinct not to have them. One reason that marriage is under attack today is that many young couples don't believe it is meaningful to have children.

"Our generation has been greatly influenced by the population question. Paul Ehrlich's book *The Population Bomb*. The issue now is not how many, but whether to have a family at all. Of the four young married couples we are close to, only one has a child.

"Everybody I know is either legally married or living together. I would find it hard to live with a woman without a

commitment. I would have to ordain the relationship with something higher. That's the way I was raised and trained. To put women on a pedestal.

"But does this carefree life-style, living together, violate human nature? Apparently not, though I was confused when I first saw it, and my instinct was to be against it. But a lot of them do get married; it's really a substitute for marriage. Marriage can't be fortified or dissolved easily. The institution will come back and its values rediscovered."

Ask David even a personal question, and you'll likely get a candid answer plus a careful essay on the topic in general. He loves to intellectualize and thinks this will somehow lead him into journalism. He did a sports column for the Philadelphia *Bulletin* and has written "think"

pieces for the *New York Times*. He is preoccupied with thought.

"I'm a moody individual," he says. "I have time to dwell on big issues. Whether I eat or can get a job has never been a problem, so I can afford the luxury of brooding."

He thinks about how attitudes of his contemporaries have changed from rebellious-idealism (mid-'60s) to a kind of political skepticism. "There's a Truman revival among young people because he was direct and single-minded, not cosmopolitan. You would also be surprised to learn how Wallace has gained acceptance among young people, including young professionals. I think Wallace as President would war against talent and expertise, against the way the

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country is organized, against restraint. But a lot of young people are against those elements, too.

"The Vietnam war, the youth movement, the drive for environmentalism—all are behind us. When environmentalism became institutionalized, it fell into the hands of lawyers dealing in legalisms."

Eisenhower says his "awakening" came when he was in the Navy in the early '70s. Conservative by nature, David's sensibilities had been assaulted at Amherst by "the ludicrous excess of protest."

Once in the Navy, however, he found that "I began to wonder if I had been too isolated in the White House. I was in Washington during the Cambodian incursion and read Joint Chief of Staff reports on the high morale of the troops. Three months later, I got the grunts—sailors—view. And I learned that idealism wasn't on the minds of soldiers going into Cambodia; it was fear of getting shot up. I developed a cynicism about generals and admirals. I told myself, If the Joint Chiefs of Staff don't know, how can the Nixon administration know?"

David has closely watched the Presidencies from Eisenhower through Ford, and believes there are two ways to assess them. "The charitable view is that the President becomes isolated the way board chairmen do," he says. "The uncharitable view is that Presidents become emperors, surrounding themselves

with young, uncritical, super-loyal staffers who isolate them and elevate them to imperial status. Even Congress has a reflexive deference to the President because of his national security role, especially with nuclear weapons."

This sounds like Eugene McCarthy, or maybe Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., but that doesn't bother David. "Because he has the power to annihilate the world in the short span of two or three hours," he goes on, "the President has become a human god, with more power over life or death than any figure in history. Since he possesses godlike powers, it's not surprising that people around him regard him as a kind of god."

It is "noncompetence," David says, that toppled Presidents Johnson and Nixon, their inabilities to handle Vietnam and Watergate. People put Johnson out because he hadn't resolved or won the war. And public opinion put Nixon out because he let Watergate get the best of his administration.

Kennedy, because of his tragic death, was not put to the test for his own actions. "I've always wondered," David says, "what the great promise of the Kennedy Presidency would have brought in reality. How would he have dealt with the problems he had a hand in creating, like Vietnam? Would he have been diminished or grown in stature?"

"Kissinger is really the same thing all over again. Kissinger was a myth in his role with the National Security Council

and in his early days as Secretary of State. Now the myth is meeting reality. I mean it is different from Kennedy, because he was killed and left the scene. Kissinger is still here."

Eisenhower sees Ford as attempting to project a commanding style, and "to put a Ford stamp on foreign policy." But, says David, "Kissinger is still Secretary of State. So this implies that Kissinger is either going to play a different role or that the administration is moving away from the earlier tendency to let Kissinger run foreign policy."

One of David's intriguing theories is that when a nation goes internationalist, it becomes pessimistic. And when it turns inward, it becomes optimistic, because people feel they can get a grip on problems around them.

"For most people," David says, "these are pessimistic and realistic times. People my age are not the pessimists, though. We have shed our idealistic illusions. The late 'sixties and early 'seventies turned out to be a really pessimistic, destructive period. Drugs, dropouts, crazies, violence, people ruining their future careers. By 1971 you could tell it was over. American industry had moved in and subjugated youth by selling them radical T-shirts."

David loves to mull problems, but sometimes he wonders how it would have been if he had been born into a simpler station. "That crosses my mind a good deal," he says. "Anybody who was

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born into it, rather than going into it by choice, would choose the advantageous circumstances. It's exciting.

"But when things aren't going well, well, I once thought about becoming a longshoreman, or living in the south of France all by myself, anonymously. But you put that sort of thing out of your mind after a while."

For years Republican politicians have looked covetously at David Eisenhower as a future candidate of a party that has been short on talent. In 1974 David was

approached about running for Congress, and he put the notion aside with the explanation he is inexperienced and that the time is long off. In a way, though, Watergate has taken the glitter from David Eisenhower, and he is grateful for that.

"There are good reasons not to attempt to recruit me into politics," he explains. "I have more reasons now than I did a couple of years ago. I'll always be interested in Washington and government, though. What I don't see in the cards is me going up and seeking something in the next couple of years. It's not

going to fall into my lap, the way it might have had things worked out differently with the Nixon administration.

"One improvement in the Nixon-administration image, due to Watergate, is that Mr. Nixon is no longer considered an unqualified goody-goody. I never liked that idea. The image of the Nixon administration is part of my heritage as well, and I don't think I am a goody-goody either. I am a contentious person in a lot of ways. I am glad that to a certain extent this ministerial cloak can be lifted from my shoulders. I'm not just a goody-goody." ■