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Frank Gannon —

He's Researching

Nixon's Autobiography

by Lloyd Shearer

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LOS ANGELES.
When Richard Nixon wrote his first book of memoirs, *Six Crises*, in 1962, he employed as his chief researcher and assistant, Associated Press reporter Alvin T. Moscow, who earned \$20,000 for the job.

This time, for his second book, for which Warner Paperback Library is paying him \$2 million, Nixon has employed a small (5 feet 6), young (32) historian, Frank Gannon.

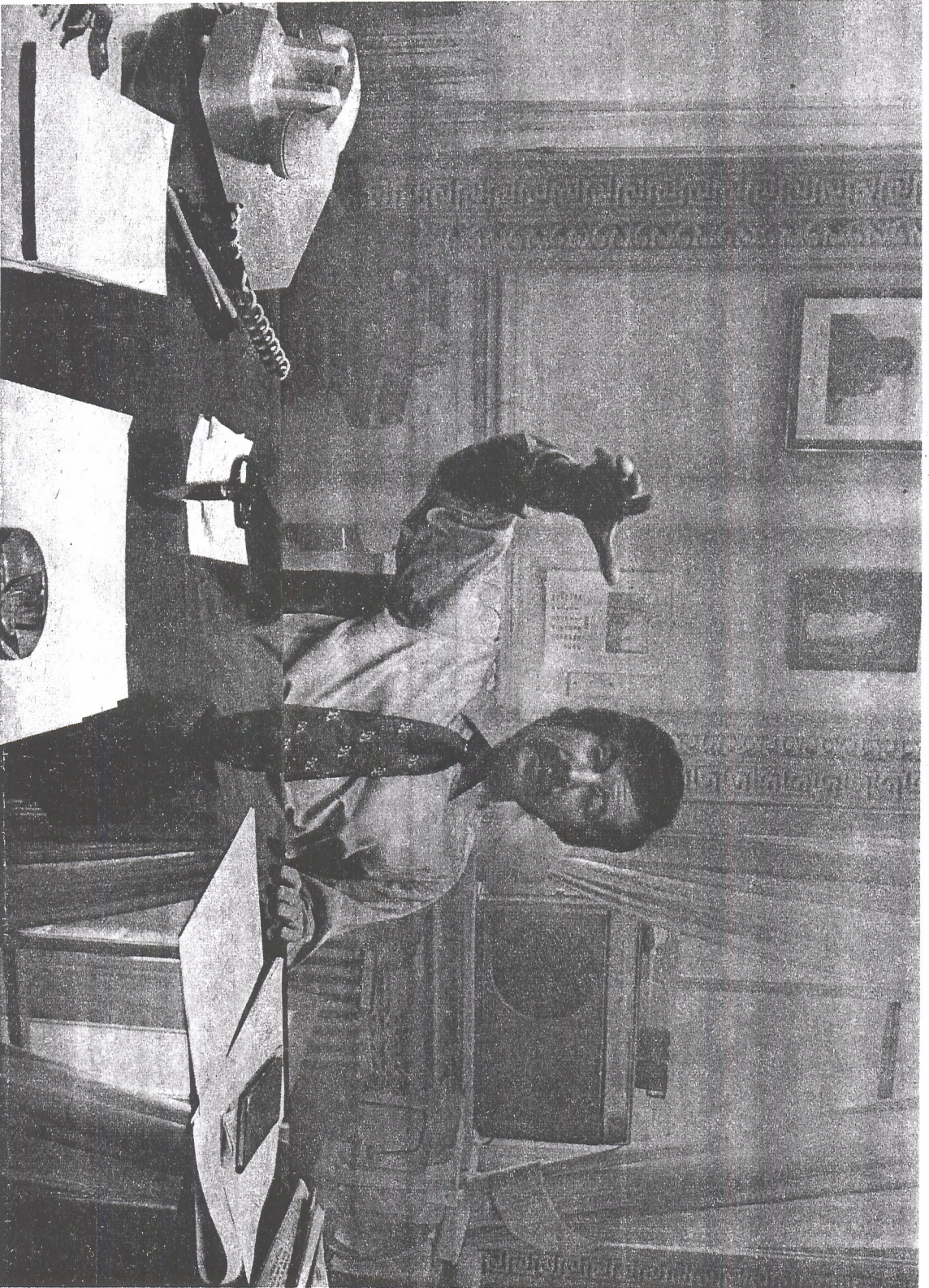
A former White House Fellow (1971-72) and Presidential staff assistant (1972-74), Gannon currently resides in San Clemente, not far from the ex-President's compound, where he interviews Nixon from 3 to 6 almost every afternoon, taking notes, conferring, exchanging ideas, and trying to determine the structure of the Nixon memoirs, which will probably be published in 1977.

When Gannon, originally from Bellmore, Long Island, N.Y., was a graduate student working for his Ph.D. at Oxford in 1968, he was employed in a similar capacity by the late Randolph Churchill, who hired him for research and writing assistance on the Churchill papers. Gannon also has a B.S. degree from Georgetown (1964) and a Master's from The London School of Economics (1965) so that he is, despite his youth, pretty

much of an experienced hand at collecting, collating, and writing papers. He is also the author of *The British Press and Germany: 1936-1939*, published by the Oxford University Press in 1971; a former book reviewer for *The Wall Street Journal*, and a former contributor to a TV series, *Survival*.

The pay question

In a sentence, this young historian is well qualified as a researcher, writer, and "first drafter," which is undoubtedly why Nixon placed him on his personal payroll at a salary Gannon testily declares is "nobody's business but mine." Also on Nixon's personal payroll as consultant-researcher were Ron Ziegler his ex-press secretary, and Dianne Sawyer, Ziegler's assistant who describes herself as "Frank Gannon's Berlin Wall." All three were working on Nixon's autobiography until this month, at which time Ziegler and Sawyer departed San Clemente for greener pastures or at least announced their intention to do so. One of their replacements is Ken Khachigian, another former Nixon staffer.



Frank Gannon, 32, at his desk with a photo of Mr. and Mrs. Nixon on the wall (upper left). He is the chief researcher on Nixon's autobiography, for which the Warner Paperback Library has agreed to

pay the ex-President \$2,000,000. Gannon has been assisted on the project by Dianne Sawyer and Ron Ziegler, two other former White House staffers who decided to work with Nixon in San Clemente.

Gannon has been working as chief honcho on the Nixon literary project since February, 1975, "immersing myself in a tremendous amount of Nixon material, going all the way back to 1913 when he was born."

From August, 1974, to February, 1975, Gannon worked as a Nixon staff man on the Presidential transition from Washington to San Clemente.

He now labors in an office on the old San Clemente Coast Guard grounds adjacent to Nixon's residence and in a guest cottage on the Nixon estate. "I use that as a library of-sorts," Gannon explains, "and see Mr. Nixon in his office or his house—usually in the late afternoon—practically every day.

Limited access

"At the moment we don't have access to the Presidential papers—they're tied up by a panel of three judges—and my job involves a lot of reading and interviewing.

"What Dianne, Ron, and I have done is to produce research packets, manageable, I hope, on particular periods of Mr. Nixon's life. He has a fabulously retentive mind, and the purpose of these packets is to stimulate and jog his memory. He then goes over the packets and dictates into cassettes.

"I'm not ghost-writing his autobiography," Gannon emphasizes. "Even my friends make that mistake. I am simply researching it. For me, an historian, it's a labor of love. I believe only seven former Presidents of the United States have written their memoirs, and to take part in one of these projects is an historical opportunity. I've admired and supported President Nixon from my college days onward, and my admiration for him has grown.

"President Nixon will write a book that will 'grab' people, and I want to be a part of it."

His friends wonder

Gannon's friends, and he has many, are divided as to why Gannon is devoting the next two or three years of his life to the Nixon autobiography. Kay Halle, the Washington hostess and writer in whose house Gannon lived for three years, says, "You must remember that Frank was a poor boy in New York, that he worked his way through school, that he's a young man of great energy and enthusiasm, and that being around Nixon, an ex-President, is pretty heady stuff for a young man of his background.

"I suspect," she offers, "that it compensates for what may have been the drabness of his early youth. I know he enjoys his work immensely. He has a great appetite for life. He's a musician, he's a theater buff, he reads omnivorously, he cultivates people of stature

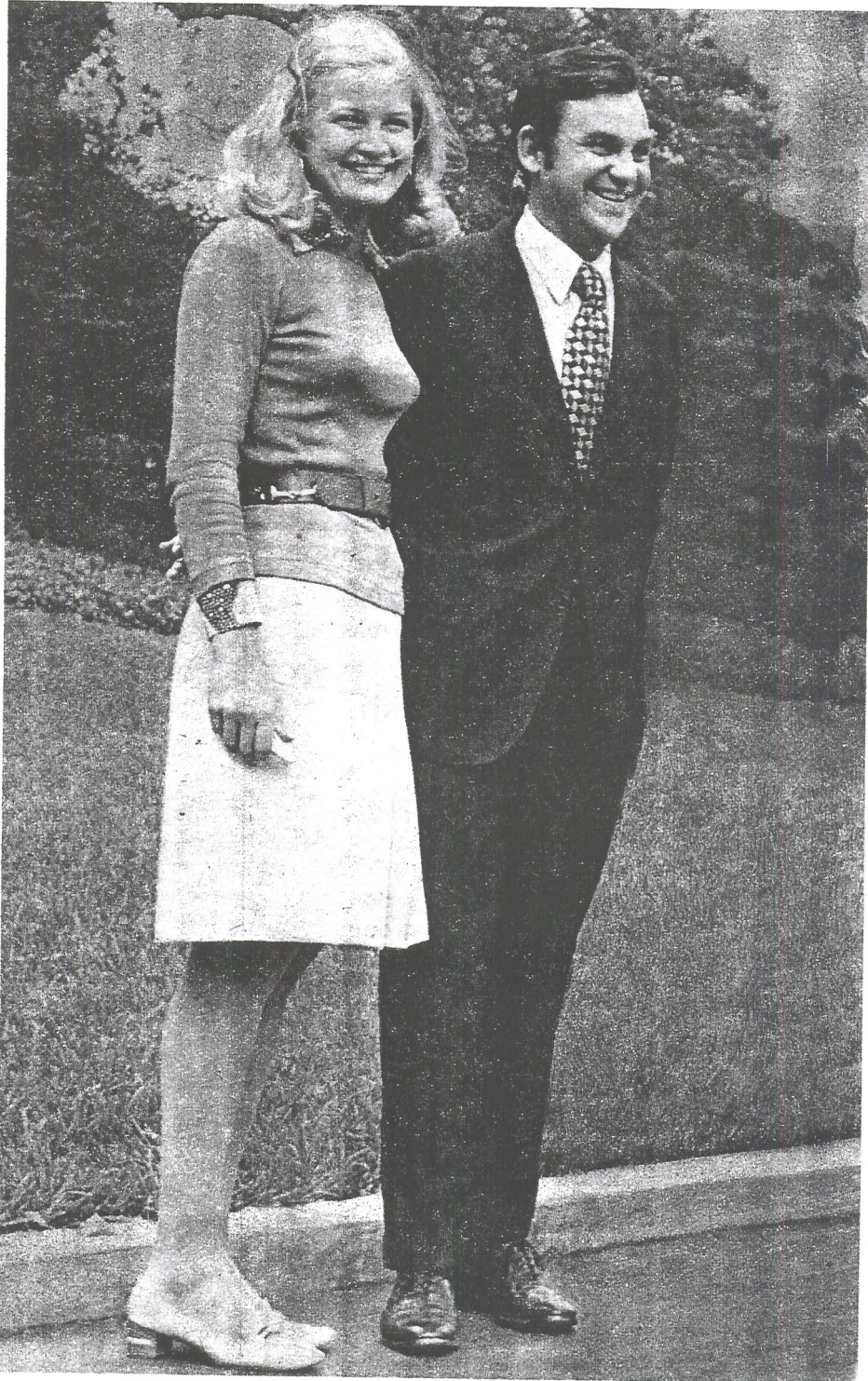
and talent. He has every good reason for staying on with Nixon. I know he will do a fantastic job."

Kevin Connell, who attended Georgetown with Gannon, describes him as "a politically conservative Renaissance man who loves music, clothes, girls, literature, especially history—he has one of the best collections of war posters you've ever seen—but most important of all, I think, Frank, because of his Catholic background, has a great deal of faith in established authority, and perhaps that's why he preferred to con-

tinue with Nixon."

Gannon is a product of the New York parochial schools, St. Barnabas and Power Memorial Academy, from which he was graduated to Georgetown University, working his way through by playing piano in the 1789 Club and doing odd jobs in a local clothing store.

A girl who claims great fondness for Gannon believes he erred in signing on for the Nixon autobiography. "To begin with," she explains, "more biographies, more essays, more books have been written about Nixon before and after



Dianne Sawyer with Ron Ziegler. She was graduated in 1967 from Wellesley where she wrote and starred in college theatricals. Later she worked as a television "weather girl" in Louisville, Ky., then went to Washington where she became an assistant to Ron Ziegler, Nixon's press secretary. Ziegler, a charter member of the so-called "Haldeman Gang," was appointed press secretary in 1969. Previously, he had worked for Haldeman in the Los Angeles office of the J. Walter Thompson advertising agency.

Watergate than practically any other modern politician. Nixon is discredited.

"What is Frank Gannon going to come up with?" she asks. "Some great new evidence which proves Nixon innocent? It's going to be the same old rehash of Nixon and his family and his California background and his political career with maybe a fresh nuance or two thrown in. But it's not going to change anything. And for Frank who's now in the full flush of his creative years—what's he going to get out of it? I think he's made a big fat mistake.

Alternative explanations

"Maybe," she goes on, "he can't pull away from what he regards as the seat of power? Maybe he had no other place to go? But he's a versatile, erudite, terribly well-educated individual. I'm sure he could teach at half a dozen universities, go back to J. Walter Thompson [the world's largest advertising agency], do any number of things and probably earn much more than what Nixon is paying him. Maybe he's obsessively loyal? Maybe he wants the log of history to record him as the last man who left the Nixon ship. But as someone who has admired Frank, I think he should have left the White House when Nixon did, that he should have gone and done his own thing. Now he's still a Nixon appendage, the last of the Mohicans. Frank Gannon, in my book, is too good for that."

Although classified as a dedicated Nixonian, young Gannon has a plethora of friends who are Democrats or Nixon-disillusioned Republicans. Gannon apparently gets on well with all of them. Gannon's father, a retired brick salesman, is a Republican but says, "My wife is not." Gannon describes his mother as a "liberal."

Avoids a trap

Unlike other Nixonians who equated dissent with disloyalty, Frank Gannon is much too intelligent and objective for that sort of emotional self-entrapment. He intends to excavate all the Nixon history he can. This in turn he will offer to the former President. How much Nixon chooses to use, hide, assuage, explain, expand, shade or make public is no decision this moustachioed, behind-the-scenes researcher can make. His job is to burrow, dig, and unearth treasures that will tempt Nixon to recall.

Whether Nixon will be candid and truthful, open and honest, is beyond Gannon's control. He is merely a hired hand. The Nixon autobiography will not carry Gannon's by-line or "as told to," nor will he share in the authorship.

His job is to work in the dark so that Nixon can produce enough literary light for which the public will pay off the publisher's \$2 million advance.