

# Adding a Macabre Dimension To the Art of Autograph Hunting

By Maxine Cheshire

Robert Colbert, a Philadelphia machinist who attracted global publicity earlier this year with a hoax that he uses on world leaders, has improved his ruse with a macabre twist.

Colbert is the man who writes to United States Presidents and Vice Presidents and other important personages to tell them he admires them so much he has just named his son for them. Almost all respond with valuable letters and autographed photographs that have been signed personally, not by secretaries or auto-pens.

Flattered recipients have included Palestinian Liberation leader Yasser Arafat, Cuban Premier Fidel Castro, Secretary of State Henry Kissinger and President Gerald R. Ford.

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## VIP

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Mr. Ford, as Vice President, was so pleased that he even added a touching, handwritten postscript to one letter addressed to little "Gerald Ford Colbert":

"Let me pass on to you a legacy which my Dad instilled in me: Work hard to make something of yourself, speak the truth and never be late for dinner."

After becoming President, Mr. Ford was distressed to receive a letter telling him little Jerry Colbert had died. Again, a warm and sympathetic per-

sonal message of condolence was penned to the father of the fictitious baby.

Colbert's newest gimmick came to light recently when his Ford correspondence, authenticated and appraised at hundreds of dollars, was sold to another collector.

Colbert, who now has an unlisted telephone number to keep other irate autograph collectors from calling to complain about his tactics, acknowledges the Ford letters and refuses to say if other VIPs have been notified that their namesakes have "died."

## Potpourri

Any politician staying awake nights trying to figure out a way to get Vice President Nelson Rockefeller's job could end up with more-or-less permanent insomnia. Happy Rockefeller says her husband has decided to give his \$35,000 Max Ernst bed to the nation to be used by his successors. The surrealist artist's creation features a tree growing out of the footboard and revolving tinted mirrors. "I hope," says Mrs. Rockefeller, "that Nelson's successor has a sense of humor" . . . Another Watergate couple has separated. White House "plumber" Egil (Bud) Krogh, whose wife drove 180 miles every weekend with their sons to see him when he was imprisoned at Allenwood, Pa., confirms that they are now living apart . . . Everytime Indiana Rep. Andrew Jacobs Jr. gets on a House elevator these days, someone asks him if he is going to marry Kansas Rep. Martha Keys. "No," Jacobs

responded good-naturedly the other day, "but if only Bella Abzug were free, we'd make congressional history!" There has never been a husband and wife in Congress at the same time . . .

Despite published reports that Rosemary Woods was planning to retire on July 31, friends in Washington don't think it is true. Miss Woods' longtime \$23,000-a-year secretary, Marge Acker, working for a time without salary, was flown out to San Clemente in May and has been there ever since on a mission for which she receives only a \$25 per diem, according to the GSA . . . A startled passerby glanced up at Secretary of State Henry Kissinger's drawing room window one day last week and saw a woman doing her ironing. No, it wasn't Nancy. It was the Portuguese laundress the Kissingers inherited from columnist Joseph Alsop when he sold his house. When you have the most chic laundress in Georgetown, she does not iron in the basement. . . .

When actress Deborah Raffin married Michael Viner, they promised each other they would never spend a night apart. Now Viner is about to break that promise to have lunch with President Ford at the White House. Deborah, on location in Florida, can't get away. Viner, a new favorite of the Fords and a friend of White House photographer David Hume Kennerly, has already had lunch recently with the First Lady. They shared tuna fish sandwiches on trays.