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Nixon's New Life



Top of the Week

Nixon's New Life Page 21

He materialized like a ghost on the suave greens of a California country club—a graying, thickening memory of the man who wrote the unhappiest passage in U.S. political history. The occasion was a Teamster golf tournament, but in fact it marked Richard Nixon's first decisive break from the hermitage that San Clemente has become since his fall. With files from John J. Lindsay in San Clemente, Jane Whitmore in Washington and bureau reports, Peter Goldman tells the story of Nixon's new life and his dream of convincing the country that he is a *former* President, not a *deposed* President. The Update section reviews the fate of the victims of the Saturday-night massacre. Newsweek's cover photo has a special signifi-



Cover photographer Sanchez

cance; it was taken by Nixon's longtime valet, Manolo Sanchez, on the Nixons' 35th wedding anniversary last June and is reportedly a particular favorite of theirs.

Nixon's New Life

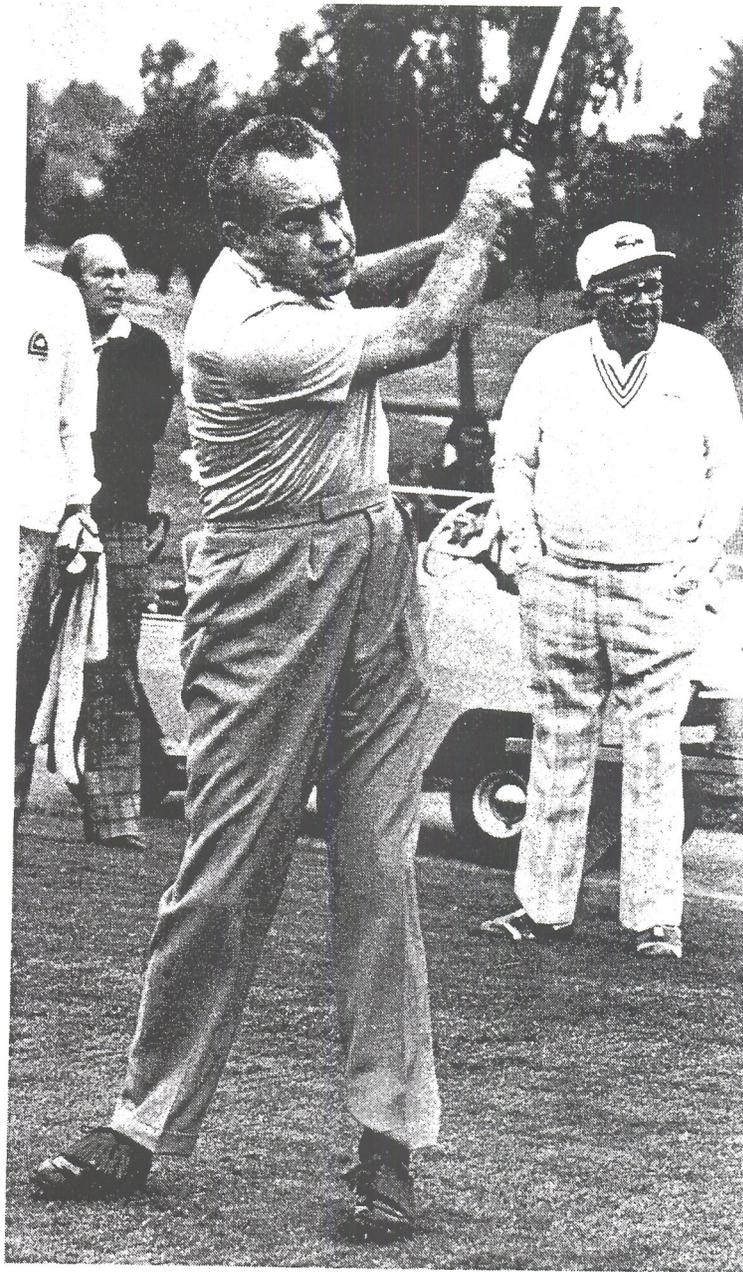
He materialized like a ghost on the suave greens of California's La Costa Country Club—a graying, thickening memory of the man who wrote the unhappiest passage in U.S. political history. The occasion for the outing was a Teamster charity golf tournament, the players mostly men with Teamster titles and, in some few cases, police records. But Richard Nixon seized the iron-gray day for his own gingerly step back on camera and into America's national consciousness. He bantered with his hosts, talked up his game, handed out a box of Presidentially signed and sealed golf balls—for distribution, he said, to the "poorest golfers in the tournament." "How many [shots] are you gonna give me?" he grinned at the first tee. He hit four drives before he found one he liked.

The outing marked a turn in Nixon's long exile—a break from the hermitage, or the prison, that San Clemente has become for him since his resignation fourteen months ago. He began that exile sick, depressed and near financial ruin, and at its depths last winter nearly died after an operation for phlebitis. But now friends and family* almost without exception report Nixon's mood revived, his body mending, his spirit stubbornly resistant to yielding either the trappings of his old station or the honor he believes is due him still. He accepts the fact of his fall, not its justice. He is, says one old friend who saw him recently, "playing the role of a former President, not a *deposed* President"—and his dream now is that America can be made to see him that way.

Nixon has accordingly got impatient for his return to the world, and now, friends say, he is preparing to attempt it. His few dress rehearsals thus far have been discreet and widely spaced—some strolls on the beach, a house party in Palm Springs, a first dinner out in August, the round of union-label golf with the Teamsters last week. But intimates believe the tempo of his re-emergence will quicken in the weeks and months to come. He has let on that he wants to get out and around more with the turning of the year—to re-establish himself, according to one business chum, as a "public presence." He is sorting invitations and feelers from abroad, and may start accepting them after the 1976 election. He is booked into a six-figure television series co-starring David Frost as interlocutor.

And he has plunged with furious seven-day-a-week energy into his memoir-in-progress—the book that may be his final claim to the kind regard of history. Nixon needs the money, given his five-figure pension and his six-figure debts, and the book by some headier estimates could bring him \$2 million or more for the hardcover and paperback editions. He hungers for his redemption more desperately still. He is likely to rest his case for it heavily on his achievements in foreign policy; he realizes, intimates say, that he cannot stop there—that he will have to answer for the Watergate crimes as well, more honestly than he has ever done. "His Administration is an open book because we haven't heard from him," says one intimate. "He has to answer his critics. It's his last chance."

*Dozens of acquaintances of Nixon's, ranging from casual to intimate, were willing to discuss his situation with NEWSWEEK and did—on the understandable condition that their names be withheld.



Larry Armstrong—San Diego Union

Teeing off at La Costa: A trial step back into the world?

Yet there was a touch of the surreal in Nixon's determined effort to rehabilitate his reputation; the trauma of Watergate was still etched in the public mind. One measure of Nixon's difficulty was the expected release this weekend of the closing-out report of the Watergate special prosecutor's office—288 blue-bound pages that threatened to spread the scandals across page one yet another time. The report was said to be an act of bookkeeping rather than judgment, with "no fireworks" about Nixon or anyone else. But sources said one key section will deal with the issue of Nixon's "indictability" in the thick of the scandals—and will thus reawaken the specter of a President who, except for his successor's forgiveness, might well have been brought into the dock.

Nixon thus remains the prisoner of his ghosts; the extraordinary fact of his new life at La Casa Pacifica is that he has begun to make some sort of private peace with them. In the earlier days of his exile, says one family intimate, "everything was tentative—Nixon wouldn't even make plans to play golf three days in advance." He moved haunted through his fifteen-room mansion on the Pacific bluffs, visibly



Deris Jeannette—Sigma

Golf-carting with Julie: 'Dad, there are still people who like us'

missing the old glory, desperate for acceptance and approval, fearful that his own family circle might be slipping from him. "He used to call family friends on the phone," this source said, "trying to please them—win them back." Some of his associates wondered if he could survive his despond; at least one doubted that he would live out a year.

He did, and, so frequent visitors reported, he learned to live with his wounds. "That sense of agitation—of more heights to scale—is no longer there," says one. "The whole atmosphere is more relaxed. His objective circumstances have been reduced to zero, yet he's maintained a considerable amount of pride and self-respect." His golf games are part of the routine now, and when he calls friends, according to one family intimate, they talk about sports and stock prices, not crime and punishment. "I think he's making it," this source says. "He's not exactly fishing off the wharf, but he's got a California-sunshine look—and he's tougher than hell."

An aura of unreality nevertheless lingers over the Nixon compound—a kind of time-capsuled sense that the Imperium still lives and that exile is only a temporary aberration. Nixon still dresses for the languid California mornings in banker suits, white shirts and ties; still gets his weekly White House intelligence briefings; still chats occasionally with Gerald Ford and monthly with Henry Kissinger. To visit him, said one recent caller, is like "stepping back several years in time . . . He's still locked up in that study where in the old days he was on the telephone running the world."

The ghostly protocols survive, even when the visitor is an old associate and nothing really is happening behind the study door. "I felt sort of—*chilled*," said one comrade who made the pilgrimage. "I was sitting in the outer office with Ken Khachigian"—a former White House aide now on Nixon's research staff—"when suddenly the buzzer sounded on his desk and he picked up the phone. He straightened up and said, 'The President wants to see you.' It was downright eerie—just the way it was in the White House. I went in and there he sat in a sparkling-white starched shirt, looking every inch a President. He could just as well have been wearing a T shirt—who would know?"

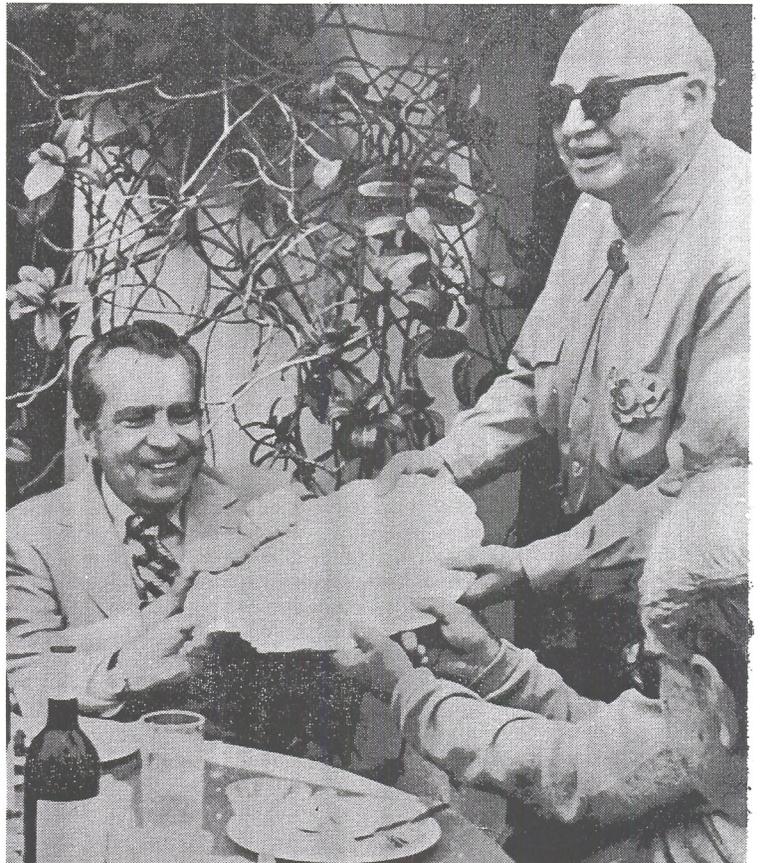
He walks to the office at 9 most mornings, a solitary 300-yard stroll across grounds carpeted riotously with pansies, poppies, lilies and Castilian roses, and holds court surrounded by the memorabilia of the good years. The one-way stream

of pilgrims has been steady, the two-way telephone traffic profuse. Ford is an irregular caller ("It's a non-relationship," sniffed a White House man), but Secretary Kissinger and his deputy, Brent Scowcroft, stay in touch. The Shah of Iran sent caviar and sympathy and, on occasion, his ambassador. China's U.S. emissary, Huang Chen, dropped by with a warmly flattering message from Mao Tse-tung describing Nixon as "the most significant Western leader of this generation." Clement Stone, the millionaire ex-bankroller, day-tripped in from Chicago to "inject Nixon with PMA"—Positive Mental Attitude—and believes that it took. John Mitchell of the old crowd has been through, and so has Chuck Colson; H.R. (Bob) Haldeman has not—not, at least, since a chill seemed to settle over their relationship last winter.*

Almost uniformly, callers report the ex-President alert, upbeat, absorbed in his work and extremely well informed about current events at home and abroad. He has turned suddenly and oddly reticent in groups; one intimate remembers Nixon hanging silently at the edges of a heated four-way talk about Kissinger, joining in with a spare few monosyllables—and then only when asked. But in one-to-one encounters, he monologues as he did in the old days, as if, this friend said, he were "afraid of silence" and felt obliged to fill it with his own voice.

Sports remains one staple of his conversation, politics another. He chats avidly about Ford, though rarely critical-

*Haldeman insists that they are still friends—it is just that each is engrossed in his own memoirs and has nothing to talk to the other about. But Nixon, within his own circle, has taken to blaming Haldeman for a misstep fatal to both of them: wiring the White House to record *all* the President's conversations—not, as Nixon claims to have believed, just the important ones.

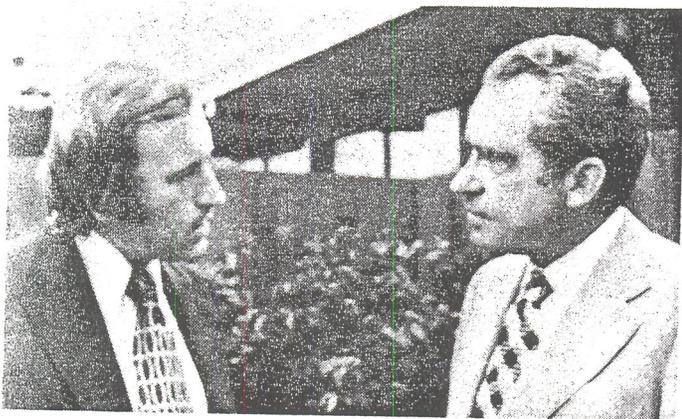


Hack Miller—Desert News

Entertaining: 'He's got a California-sunshine look'

ly—for fear, one associate says, that it might be taken as sour grapes. He speaks of his own White House years, often referring to himself across some inner psychic distance as “the President.” But he comes positively alight discussing foreign policy, his best métier in the good times and his sustaining hope for recovery from the bad. California’s ex-Rep. Pat Hillings, who visited last week, said that Nixon had lamented that there was “no role for a living former President” in the American system; Hillings came away with the impression that he would like to get actively back into foreign affairs—“maybe be helpful in negotiating settlements and things.”

There are still black days when Nixon gets depressed—“Who wouldn’t?” one staffer asks reasonably—and moments when he indulges a twinge of self-pity. To one recent visitor, he groused about politicians—particularly Republicans—distancing themselves publicly from him. “If they want me, fine,” he said. “If they don’t, fine. I just wish they’d keep quiet about it. They don’t have to go around talking about it all the time.” He clings with equal fervor to any evidence that he is not entirely lovelorn outside his compound walls. Harry Dent, a onetime political adviser, remembers Nixon aglow with pleasure telling about how his Julie had visited Dent’s

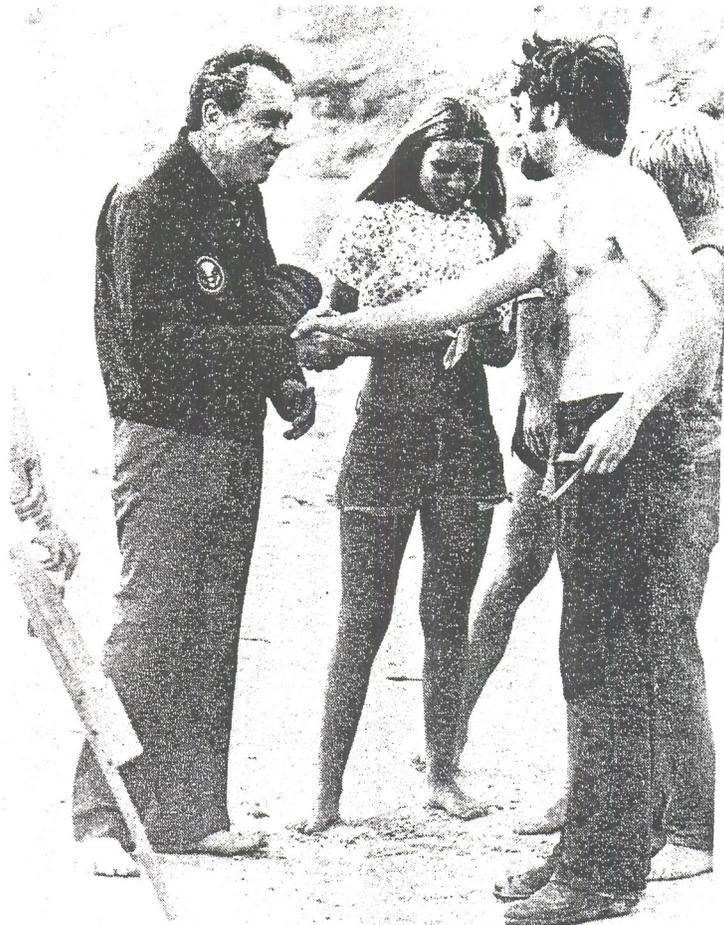


With Frost: Two characters in search of a broadcaster

native South Carolina last month to a princess’s welcome and had bubbled over the phone afterward: “Dad, there are still people out here who like us.”

But mostly, callers leave San Clemente struck by how much repaired Nixon seems, in spirit and in body as well. It is true that exile has aged him—has shadowed his eyes, grayed his hair, slowed his step, accentuated his stoop. It is likewise true that his phlebotic left leg still troubles him, with intermittent stabs of pain—particularly in dank weather—and with the graver long-term danger of renewed clotting. He must take anticoagulants three times a day, a course that means a tiny razor nick may bleed for 45 minutes or an hour. His blood pressure fluctuates sharply at bad news, and must be kept under regular watch. Yet with it all he seems visibly restored just a year after his brush with death during postoperative shock. He can stand for two hours without visibly hurting, paddle about daily in his heated pool, even (so one San Clemente regular swears) “charge” like a surfer into the chill Pacific waves.

He has, to the delight of friends and physicians alike, rediscovered an appetite for play—particularly golf. His game languished badly in the White House years, and hovered in the duffery 100s on his first outings in exile with his resident chief of staff, Col. Jack Brennan. But he vowed to break 90 and recently did, with the help of grit, practice and “winter rules”—that gentlemanly indulgence that permits a player to move his ball from a bad lie to a better one. Nixon’s enthusiasm in turn inspired friends to restore his own backyard three-hole course, which had gone to weed with the depopulation of the Nixons’ household staff. For the price of



Deris Jeannette—Sygma

Barefoot on the beach: Also golf, surf and a shot of PMA

a few cases of beer, Brennan enlisted a crew of volunteer greenkeepers to do the manicure. They ran into an obstacle when Pat objected to the watering bills, \$100 a month by her calculation; Brennan’s crew accordingly took to turning on the sprinklers at 1 a.m.—well past the Nixons’ bedtime.

Yet golf remains no more than a diversion from the real business that fills Nixon’s days: his book. In his brooding early months in retreat, he seemed unable to come to grips with it, partly out of distractions, partly—as he often complained—because the government would not let him at his papers and tapes till their ownership is settled in the courts. As a result, he wasted much of the time he did put in on a random hopscotch through his pre-Presidential years from boyhood on, the least crucial and—as his agent Irving (Swift) Lazar among others is said to have told him—the least marketable part of the work. Lazar, having sold paperback rights to Warner Paperback Library for a six-figure advance, needed something grabby—something from the Presidential if not necessarily the Watergate years—to interest hardback publishers.

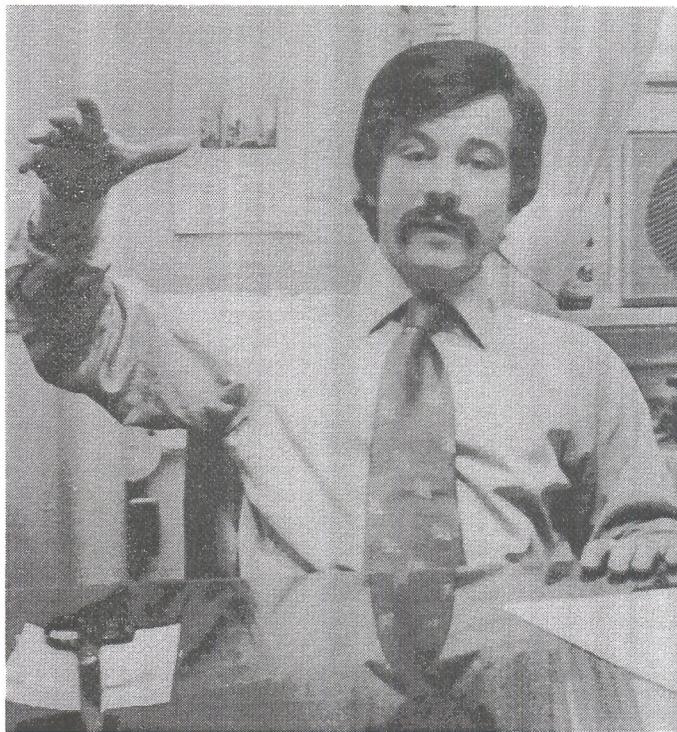
That an ex-President should be required to submit samples was itself an index of Nixon’s lost credibility. But if the demand was a slight, Nixon accepted it and, beginning perhaps two months ago, knuckled down seriously to work on producing perhaps 25,000 or 30,000 words (of a target 300,000) for inspection by Lazar and Warner’s chairman William Sarnoff late this month or early next. The stream of visitors was slowed down, the tempo of work stepped up to six to eight hours a day every day—and some evenings as well. A research staff of three headed by Frank Gannon, 32, an Oxford Ph.D. and a former White House brain-banker, carved up the Nixon Presidency in segments and, in the absence of files, milked every other available source: published records, reminiscences of friends

and associates, Nixon's own petitpoint memory for detail.

The little group communes regularly with Nixon, jogging his recall with their findings. Visitors chip in fragments of memory, sometimes with a staffer sitting unobtrusively by scribbling notes. Julie suggests ideas daily—and, some say, decisively—by long-distance phone. But, they all agree, it is Nixon alone who will write the book, Nixon alone who will answer to the judgment of his contemporaries and of history. He curls daily over his yellow pads, resting his bad leg on a hassock at doctors' orders, occasionally kneading it when it pains him. And out of his scribbles, the book has begun taking shape, "mosaic" rather than rigorously chronological in structure—and, by the advance advertising from San Clemente, unflinchingly tearless in tone.

His first aim, says one close-in source, will be "to fix himself in historical perspective"; he is accordingly likely to accentuate the positive in his pursuit of "a generation of peace"—détente, the opening to China, the painful efforts toward order in the Middle East. But as friends and collaborators alike tell it, Nixon knows he must answer for Watergate as well—that his memoirs will go nowhere as merchandise or as history otherwise. If he is not prepared to tell all, these sources say, neither will he try to pass off Watergate as wholly trivial, or political, or somebody else's fault. "Essentially he accepts what the critics put forward," says one intimate, and another echoes: "He knows that history will not accept a whine of 'You shafted me for something everyone else did.' He knows where the fault lies and he will deal with it directly. He will take responsibility without groveling in a giant mea culpa."

The sample chapters now taking form are crucial to establishing his credit; he quite literally cannot afford a dud. Nixon is by no means broke; he is real-estate rich in Key Biscayne as well as San Clemente, and his paperback advance from Warner's is said to have greatly eased the cash-



Marianne Pernold

Researcher Gannon: The object was historical perspective

flow problems that plagued his earlier months in St. Helena West. But Nixon's financial picture, in the word of one friend, remains "uneasy." The Congress whacked more than \$50,000 off the \$263,000 maintenance budget he asked, with Ford's backing, for this fiscal year. And the tireless philanthropies of Rabbi Baruch Korff and his National Citizens Committee for Fairness to the Presidency have retired barely half of Nixon's \$500,000 in legal bills. There are massive further debts as well—perhaps \$50,000 for his doctors, possibly \$226,000 to an unnamed angel who bailed him out on a final mortgage payment on La Casa Pacifica last winter, and \$148,000 obligated by promise (though not by law) on his 1969 income taxes.

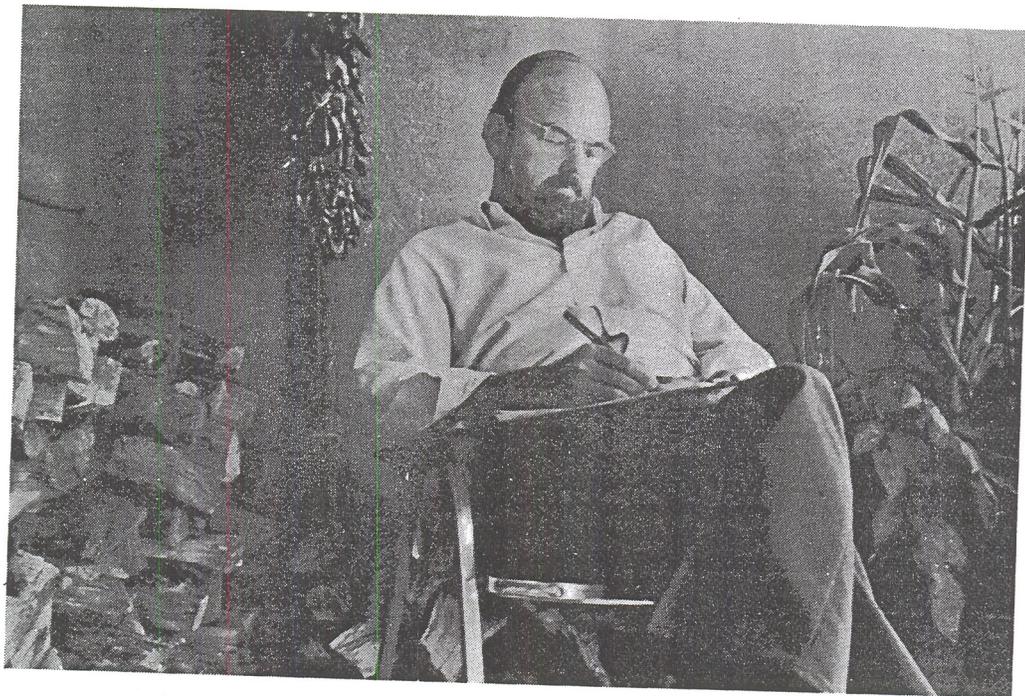
One proposed solution in the worst days of the pinch was selling off Nixon's two houses in Key Biscayne, worth \$400,000 to \$800,000 together on the current market. A prospective buyer quickly emerged—an instant Nixon Historical Association, whose parentage was unannounced but whose headquarters was suggestively next door to Nixon crony Bebe Rebozo's bank. The association hung out a plaque, hired a former Boy Scout official named John E. Leatherwood III to mind the storefront and announced plans for a \$500,000 grass-rooted fund drive. That was spring; by summer, the plaque was taken down, the phone disconnected, the office padlocked—and the project, according to Leatherwood, "in a manner of speaking mothballed until the core group sees fit to revive it."



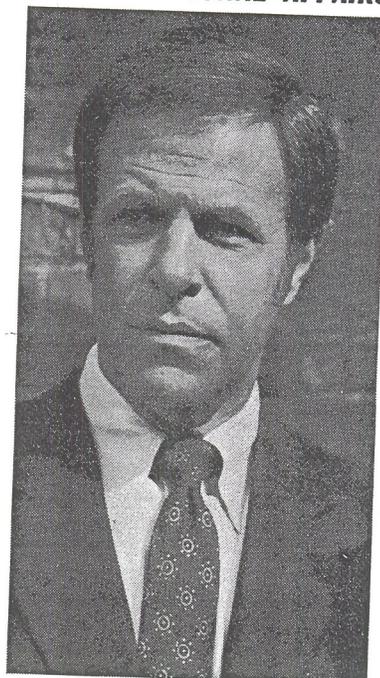
Agent Lazar: The subject was marketability

Windfall that did materialize was Frost's down payment on the six-figure price of Nixon's TV reminiscences—a nick-of-time offering after negotiations with the three major U.S. networks had broken down over format and money. Frost's backing was as closely held a secret as the Historical Association's, leading at least one counter-cultural magazine, Rolling Stone, to propose that some flush friends-in-need like Rebozo and aerosol millionaire Robert Abplanalp had covertly put up the cash. Frost laughed off the speculation last week, insisting that he had paid installment No. 1 out of his own pocket. He plans to begin shooting next August and finish in time for broadcast after the election. Who would do the broadcasting remained unsettled: Frost has yet to line up a U.S. outlet.

Frost's problem in one sense was Nixon's: America, in the



Jeff Moscow



CBS

The fall of the house of Nixon: Ehrlichman in the life in Santa Fe, Haldeman in exile in Los Angeles, the ex-President alone at his St. Helena West

year of his exile, has made him a kind of nonperson, and has yet to evince any great interest in what he has to say short of a confession. The invitations he talks about, as he contemplates his coming-out, come largely from abroad; his own party by contrast chose Kansas City over Los Angeles for its 1976 convention in part because Kansas City was 1,600 miles farther from San Clemente. The irony is not lost on Nixon, for all his dreams of absolution. "It puzzles me a bit," he told a friend, "and I suppose it is a natural thing, but I think I would get a good reception abroad—perhaps even as good a reception in the Middle East today as when I was President. But not here. Not here in the United States."

His problem is that the price of readmission is one he has been unable to bring himself to pay—an authentic act of contrition for the crimes that poisoned American politics and government during his Presidency. His nearest known step toward penitence came in a conversation last April with the Rev. Eugene Coffin, his Quaker pastor from East Whittier; Coffin remembered Nixon saying, "I made a big mistake. I did wrong, but I'll live with it." Yet the mistakes he speaks about most often to this day are mistakes of calculation, not moral choice. To one caller, he wrote off Watergate as "a lot of stupidity on the part of certain people"; he blamed himself only for having trusted them. To another, a man dragged down with him by the scandals, he mourned: "Why didn't we get it all out, clear up the record when we knew it had to be done?" He resisted the compelling answer of the tapes—that it did not happen because he himself would not let it.

And so Nixon lives in a shadowland between his dreams of redemption and the unanswered judgment of the world. His Presidency lies in ashes. He himself is free by the pardon of Gerald Ford. Some of the men who ran the United States with him have been to prison; others live in its shadow—Haldeman laboring over his memoirs in Los Angeles, John Ehrlichman gone bearded and bohemian in Santa Fe, John Mitchell haunting the New York-Washington shuttle at work on his appeal. It is cold terrain for Richard Nixon, inhospitable to his quest for respect or early forgiveness. It will not be easy for him to recover the acceptance he seeks; it is too soon for too many Americans to forget the unhappy past and his role in it.

—PETER GOLDMAN with JOHN J. LINDSAY in San Clemente, JANE WHITMORE in Washington, MARTIN KASINDORF in Los Angeles and bureau reports



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