

# Children and Gossip -

By Gordon Chaplin  
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## Washington

Every year a handful of the kids who are brought into the Child Development Center at Georgetown University come with a parent (or the spouse of a parent) whose name has been bouncing around town under what are delicately called unflattering circumstances.

They might have a petite problem with Old John Barleycorn, it is whispered. They might have been caught in a Mexico City hotel with the ever-so-handsome head of some high-powered government agency. Maybe they've simply been charged with criminal behavior or left an important job under a cloud.

For a good many of the parents, the whole interlude in the Child Development Center — sitting there on the stiff little benches watching the secretaries watching them and waiting for their kid to do something that will show exactly how disturbed he or she is — is intensely distasteful and embarrassing. According to Center Director D. Phyllis Magrab, the gossip, innuendo and rumor that helps keep the Washington Merry-go-round spinning weighs most heavily not on its subjects but on their children.

Most children form a strongly positive image of their parents, she said. Stress begins when this image is contradicted by another, and the more contradictory the images are, the greater the stress.

After a while, the child's actions will begin to reflect the stress according to his personality. If he is naturally aggressive, he might find himself constantly fighting. He could develop vicious feelings toward his parents — the cause of the

trouble — or turn to anti-social, delinquent behavior.

But if the child is withdrawn, Magrab says, he will probably find it harder and harder to face his classmates. He might start playing hookey. He will almost certainly tend to tune out of the classroom.

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G. Gordon Liddy, convicted in 1973 for his part in the Watergate break-in, the Daniel Ellsberg break-in and a contempt of Congress charge, has five children ranging in age from 17 to 12. They live with Mrs. Liddy, a sixth grade teacher, in a small development near Washington, D.C., where they have been since 1970.

Liddy's jeep is still parked in front and people still drive past slowly on a Sunday afternoon taking pictures of it, the house and the family, but Liddy himself — the only Watergate conspirator never to talk — won't be eligible for parole until 1981.

Liddy's three sons — Jim, 15, Tom, 13, and Ray, 12 — are the aggressive type. "In 1973, when all this stuff was first coming out, we'd get in fights all the time," Jim remembers. "Kids would come up to us and tell us they were happy our old man was in jail.

"There were all these unbelievable stories about him that we'd hear, so weird I can't even remember them. And so we'd fight. We've never lost a fight yet, none of us, because we never give up. They never say anything to our faces anymore."

But the Liddy children seem to have survived. The two girls, Sandy, 17, and Grace, 16, say they have enough friends in school that nobody dares to say anything bad to them. And when Jack Anderson wrote that Liddy had been plan-

ning to kill him, Tom took the column to current events class at the school "to show everybody how funny it was."

The Liddy family is busy circulating a petition for their father's release and still seems to accept completely the only explanation he ever gave them about his Watergate involvement: that he was serving his country the best way he knew how.

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Jeb Stuart Magruder, Nixon's special assistant who spent seven months in prison for his involve-



G. Gordon Liddy's sons fought classmates who said they were glad Liddy was in jail



## - How They Cope



ment in the Watergate coverup, writes in his book "An American Life" that fallout gossip from the affair caused his 9-year-old daughter Tracy to become "quiet and withdrawn, as if she was trying to understand what is going on around here," and his older son Whitney to have been tagged "Watergate Whit" when a seventh grader at St. Alban's.

The Watergate gossip surrounding Jeb Stuart Magruder caused his daughter to become quiet and withdrawn, while his son Whitney was tagged "Watergate Whit" at school



## 'They say my mom's a bitch and a big mouth'

Jamaica hotel with a friend from the 1964 Johnson inaugural.

In a recent article Bader was quoted as saying, "I've had people come up to me and tell me she's a bitch and a big mouth. Friends have had to hold me back to keep me from killing them ..."

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Ever since the time a few years ago when Speaker of the House Carl Albert crashed into two cars outside the Zebra Room in Washington, there has been talk that the powerful congressman has a drinking problem. David Albert, his son, is now a junior at Harvard and says that the rumors about his father are harder to deal with there than at St. Alban's, where he went to prep school.

"There are so many people at St. Alban's with famous parents that they don't really notice you," he says. "Up here you stand out more. Anything that's talked about or written, I mean about a man's social habits or how he behaves with his secretary, you're constantly being confronted with it."

The way he deals with it, he says, is to "explain what I think is going on, even though it might seem a little defensive. Everyone is different, though. Henry Richardson (son of Elliot Richardson, the secretary of commerce) is a friend of mine. He's gone through a little stuff about his father's drinking and driving habits.

"But Henry, probably, would come back with less of an attack than I would. Now I'm fairly aggressive and if somebody throws things at me, I go on the offense."

Has he ever physically defended his father? "No, I just try to explain things to them. If there's a fallacy told I just have to try to straighten them out."

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Stress from the effects of gossip on children can leave permanent scars, according to Magrab, even though at the time the children seem to be coping adequately enough. "It could make the person permanently insecure, unwilling to acknowledge their own competence, even though they might be quite outstanding," she says. "I know at least two people who have essentially been crippled for life."

He describes this incident involving his 11-year-old son Justin:

"Gail — Magruder's wife — asked him what he had written (in an admission test to Sidwell Friends School in early 1974) and he told her that his essay began: 'As the car pulled out of the driveway, I waved goodbye to my brother, who was being taken away in a police car ... He had been convicted of mass murder. He was being taken to Joliet to die in a gas chamber ...' Gail was shaken because it seemed to her that Justin was really writing about his father.

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The rumors, gossip and innuendo that surrounded the 1952 McCarthy hearings on Communist infiltration of the government were more subterranean than Watergate's and as a result might have been even more damaging. One woman, whose father was targeted, fired from his government job and then finally rehired after painful publicity, will only talk anonymously about the experience.

Fourteen at the time, a junior high student and just beginning to date, she became a "social pariah" around school because some of the parents of my friends were the ones who had turned my father in." She worried about bringing friends

home, she said, because the neighbors might be watching and would report their names to the grapevine.

Once, she remembers, she caught someone in her class changing a grade on his report card. "At least I'm not a Communist," he answered when she called him on it.

The worst part of the experience was meeting new people: "You'd try to figure out whether they knew who you were, sort of a guessing game you know, and if they knew then you'd try to figure out whether they were on your side, whether they were friends or enemies."

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Barbara Howar's racy memoir of her heyday in the Washington world, "Laughing All the Way," was published in 1973. Shortly afterwards her daughter Bader decided to leave the Washington area for boarding school in Connecticut. "I liked the idea of going someplace completely new and starting over," 15-year-old Bader says now. "But that kind of stuff follows along with you."

Among other things, "Laughing All the Way" described how Howar was caught in flagrante delicto by private detectives in a