

Gail Magruder's 'gift of love'

By Joan Zyda
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The Jeb Stuart Magruders had forgotten in their preoccupation with left and right, that there was an Above and Below.

Yet once Magruder was nationally disgraced and jailed for his part in the Watergate scandal, the former Nixon aide and his wife, Gail, found themselves being gripped by something stronger than themselves.

According to Mrs. Magruder, God suddenly took a personal interest in their lives — an interest in everything from providing them with supportive friends to keeping their usually leaky basement dry.

To tell us of their religious awakening, Mrs. Magruder joined the rest of the post-Watergate authors. In her book, "A Gift of Love," she writes melodramatically about the long ordeal of her husband's prison term and how she kept her family intact through months of personal anguish amid national scandal.

"Jeb and I came to understand that the Lord puts gifts of love in our path to see us through traumatic times," Mrs. Magruder said in an interview in her Chicago hotel suite.

"A Gift of Love" is the Magruder family's second Watergate book. Two years ago, Magruder, who had been No. 2 man on the Committee for the Reelection of the President (CREEP), wrote the story of his own involvement in the scandal, in which he lied to a grand

jury about advance knowledge of the Watergate burglary.

His White House cronies largely perceived the 41-year-old Magruder in the role of the junior white-collar hustler as a political motorist who tried driving 90 miles an hour in the 55 m.p.h. zone of life — and had a horrendous accident.

Magruder served seven months at the Allenwood (Pa.) Federal Prison Camp after pleading guilty to charges of conspiracy to obstruct justice and defraud the United States.

After prison, Magruder joined the staff of Young Life, a nondenominational Christian organization based in Colorado Springs. He has been its vice president for administration and communications for 10 months.

In the small Colorado community nestled under Pike's Peak, Magruder has found peace and quiet, away from the social and political rat race.

"If (Young Life) doesn't go for the jugular," said Mrs. Magruder, a tall, lean woman with soft blond hair. "Instead," she added, "its members try to work out their misunderstandings patiently because they are motivated more by fellowship than competition. Whatever their differences, they are united by their common goal of service in the name — and love — of the Lord."

She denied they are doing some form of penance for Watergate by becoming religiously active. Rather, she thinks it all was some kind of cosmic destiny.

"We don't feel a sense of guilt," she said flatly with a direct gaze from her icy blue eyes. "My husband was the first man to walk in the door and say, 'I'm guilty.' He has served his prison sentence and now we're making a new life for ourselves."

One day in January, 1972, she said, Magruder made a remark that left her wondering. It was a typical husband-wife conversation — something like, "What went on at the office today, dear?" — but the substance of the answer was bizarre.

"Jeb was talking about some far out schemes to sabotage the campaigns of the Democratic candidates for the presidential nomination," the 38-year-old woman said. "He told me about Gordon Liddy's suggestions, which included such things as prostitutes, blackmail, and kidnaping."

"I was sick with disgust. This is what men close to the President spent their time talking about! I couldn't believe it! He was so caught up in Bob Haldeman's man-

ia to get information about everyone and everything that I don't think he ever gave a thought to the fact that such activities were illegal and unethical."

When Magruder saw how much he was shocking his wife, he clammed up about business. Mrs. Magruder said she noticed that her husband's personality changed, too. He began drinking a lot and was irritable to her and their four children.

Magruder finally confided everything to his wife shortly before federal prosecutors got interested in him. Under the circumstances, Mrs. Magruder was very forgiving. "I knew my husband was very unhappy and it seemed that he was losing control and couldn't cope," she explained.

But she thought about divorce. She said the months her husband spent in jail were the toughest for the family. She said she prepared her kids for the ordeal by involving them in nightly Watergate discussions and making the eight-hour



Gail and Jeb Magruder like life in the mountains

drive with her kids to the prison to visit him every weekend.

She said Watergate indeed was a "painful incident," but that people need to look beyond that. "Watergate was God's way of trying

to say there can be corruption anywhere," she said. "There can be cutting corners in corporations and unions, too. There are many areas of life where people wrongly feel that the ends justify the means."