



# Bubble Gum Digest

By Bob Greene

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CHICAGO—John Ehrlichman, who used to sit imperiously behind the walls of the White House when he was the third most powerful man in the United States, has had to face some changes in his life.

There was a time when Ehrlichman could punch the "hold" button on his telephone, and make the correspondents from Time and Newsweek and the nation's great newspapers cool their heels. He could refuse to talk with the heads of the country's giant television networks. He was at the center of power, and the news media clamored for a word, a sentence from him. He called the shots.

Times have changed, though. On Thursday, Ehrlichman showed up at The Chicago Sun-Times—Daily News building, looking for someone to write a story about a novel he has written.

I met Ehrlichman in the reception area.

I told him that I really had no questions that I wanted to ask him. But, I told him, there was someone else I wanted him to be interviewed by.

I led Ehrlichman into a conference room.

Waiting for us was Jacob Weisberg. Jacob is 11 years

old. He is the "political editor" on a Chicago children's television show called Bubble Gum Digest. I had called Jacob the day before, and told him that, since I had nothing I particularly wanted to say to Ehrlichman, perhaps he would help me out.

So Ehrlichman, who used to "stonewall" the Walter Cronkites and the David Brinkleys and the John Chancellors of this world on a daily basis, walked into the room.

"Mr. Ehrlichman, this is Jacob Weisberg, political editor of Bubble Gum Digest," I said. "He'll be conducting the interview." Ehrlichman's eyes snapped to attention as he peered down at the 11-year-old.

"Uh . . ." Ehrlichman said, "Why aren't you in school?"

"Summer vacation," Jacob said, motioning for Ehrlichman to sit down. "Are you sorry for what you and your associates did to our country?"

Ehrlichman stared at Jacob. Jacob stared back.

"Well," Ehrlichman said,

"Well . . . well, Jacob, I'll tell you . . . you can't be associated with anything unsuccessful without having regrets . . . I don't agree with some of the things you loaded your question with . . ."

Jacob nodded. He offered his next question:

*John Ehrlichman then, left, and now, right-mer vacation,' Jacob said, motioning for your associates did to our country?'*

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## vs. J. Ehrlichman

"Mr. Ehrlichman, you have said that the President in your book, 'The Company,' is fictional. Why, then, did you allow New York magazine—which excerpted your book—to use drawing of President Nixon to accompany your fiction? And to run a character-by-character translation from your novel to real-life characters?"

Ehrlichman looked at Jacob again. Jacob returned the glance, ice on ice.

"Well," Ehrlichman said: "You understand, when you sell serial rights, you . . . you . . . you try to keep them from distorting it . . ."

And the interview was on. Jacob had 20 questions for Ehrlichman. Before five minutes had passed, Ehrlichman had resigned himself to being grilled by the 11-year-old reporter. Ehrlichman began to nod and grimace and gesture exactly as he had during the televised Watergate hearings. Jacob remained composed.

"Do you feel at all guilty about profiting from the notoriety you gained because of Watergate?" Jacob asked.

"No, no," Ehrlichman said. "Not as long as it's a good book. Now if the people who bought the book were buying it because I was some kind of freak . . ."

At one point, Jacob and Ehrlichman clashed.

"Can you really tell me that the entire publicity campaign surrounding your book is not based on the knowledge that every reader will presume it is really Richard Nixon you are talking about?" Jacob asked.

"Yes," Ehrlichman bit off. He paused.

"Have you ever seen the book?" Ehrlichman asked.

Jacob turned around and flipped open his briefcase—and there was Ehrlichman's novel.

Jacob said, "During your time in office, it was said you didn't get along with Henry Kissinger. What do you really think of Henry Kissinger?"

"Now where did you get that?" Ehrlichman asked.

"I read it," Jacob said.

"Never believe what you read," Ehrlichman said.

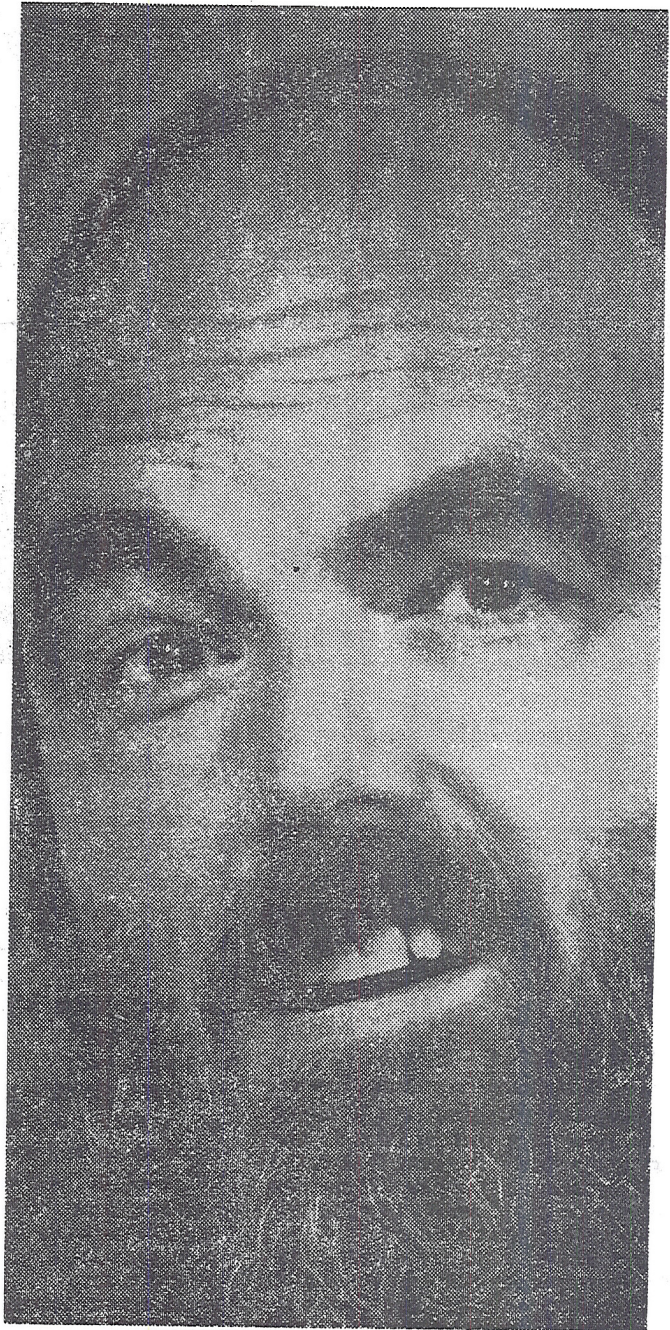
"Friends of yours were quoted as saying that," Jacob said.

"Who are you endorsing in the current presidential campaign?" Jacob asked.

"Nobody," Ehrlichman said.

"I'm not commenting on it."

The interview ended soon after. Jacob stood up and shook Ehrlichman's hand. The John Ehrlichman-Bubble Gum Digest interview was over. Ehrlichman went on to his next promotional appearance. Jacob went out to play with his friends.



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*"'Why aren't you in school,' Ehrlichman said. 'Sum-Ehrlichman to sit down. 'Are you sorry for what you and Ehrlichman stared at Jacob. Jacob stared back.'"*