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San Francis

John Ehrlichman — The Good Life At Long Last

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John Ehrlichman, his 18 months of imprisonment behind him, is preparing to re-enter the world of Washington, which must mean that we are finally ready to — as they say — “put Watergate behind us.”

Ehrlichman, settling into the life of a novelist in a remote adobe house on a dirt road outside Santa Fe, will begin doing a daily news commentary over Mutual Radio in July. He expects to be in Washington “about once a month” in the course of the new job, which will make him the fourth former aide to Richard Nixon — John Dean, Patrick Buchanan and William Safire are the others — making a living in the journalism trade they always regarded with such contempt when they held power.

“As somebody who sat with the Council of Economic Advisers and in Cabinet meetings,” Ehrlichman says, “I have some insight about budgets and how things work, and I want to put it to work.” He hopes to wed his Washington experience with his new circumstances, living off the beaten path with neighbors who have a more average perspective on what goes on in government.

As Ehrlichman talks, relaxed and good-humored, a very elaborate television antenna can be seen over his shoulder atop his own house, a single-level affair on a hillside. Actually there are two houses attached, one serving as an office and the other as living quarters. He shares them with his old friend, Rep. Pete McCloskey of California, who Ehrlichman says will join him as soon as Congress adjourns this year.

Ehrlichman is unwilling to talk about the past but insists he was one of the more accessible White House aides in the Nixon administration and will be accessible again “when I get my feet on the ground.” In the Nixon



days, he saw most reporters who sought interviews “except for those on the embargo list.”

This was a list, he says now, of those blackballed from any access to anyone in the White House by the press office under Press Secretary Ron Ziegler. The list was constantly changing, Ehrlichman says, and although it came from Ziegler, “I would guess Nixon did it himself.”

Ehrlichman says he is just finishing his second novel, the story of a lobbyist who is brought into the White House. Unlike his best-selling first, “The Company,” whose main character was a Richard Monckton who bore a striking resemblance to Richard Nixon, this one does not draw so specifically on his own experience, he says.

There is one section, however, in which the main character testifies before a Senate committee, “and I know a little something about Senate committees,” he says wryly.

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Having served his time, Ehrlichman at 53 is not inviting visitors but he insists that he has no intention of being a recluse, hiding away in the Santa Fe foothills.

From outward appearances anyway, he remains the same affable, self-confident man he was as Nixon’s campaign tour director in 1968 and as number two only to Nixon himself in domestic affairs in the White House years that ended so ignominiously for him with his forced resignation in 1973.

If, along with the visible old affability, the old arrogance that often accompanied it in those White House days is also a part of him, it does not surface in a brief encounter. To look at and talk to John Ehrlichman today, you could never guess that he was a central figure in the most denounced political scandal in the nation’s history.

But with his prison term out of the way, a second novel nearly completed, presumably a fair piece of change accruing to him from the first novel and its television spinoff, and now this new network radio opportunity to peddle his opinions to the country, life is not all bad for him.