

## Pardon me, Mr. Ford

nancy stohs  
second thoughts

Since President Ford granted Nixon his "free, full and absolute pardon" Sunday, talk in Washington has been flying.

Nicknames have sprung up, like "Forgive-'em-hell Jerrv." Bathroom draftiti reads: "Booked today, overlooked tomorrow."

But the public must be fair. Somewhere underneath all the gossip is a legitimate Presidential reason for pardoning Nixon (I think) I went to Washington myself today to find out.

Poolside, The White House—"Pardon me, Mr President—"

"What? Pardon?" His eyes brightened. "Certainly! Where do I sign?"

"No, no. I'm a reporter—"

"That's okay. I'll forgive anyone." He grinned.

"Yes, Mr. President. That's just what my readers are wondering about."

"You want to know why I pardoned the former President, I bet. Well, let's see. It's time we forgive and forget the ugly passions of Watergate... We need to work together now on more pressing problems... The President suffered enough already... But between you and me, it made me feel good to do it.

"In fact, I felt so good—and this is strictly off the cuff—I've just appointed a National Pardon Commission to blue print an entire series of pardons for my first term in office. I'm going to make this country spotless!"

"This is quite a surprise. Who do you have in mind, Mr. Ford?"

"Oh, Ehrlichman, Dean, Agnew, ITT—you name it. They're all on the list somewhere. Right now I'm kind of tired of Watergate, so I may go back and pardon Lt. William Calley first for the My Lai massacre.

"And then I guess I'll grant the draft evaders amnesty before they get all riled up. Unconditional, of course."

"What about Agnew?"

"I'm saving him for Oct. 10, in commemoration of his resignation as Vice-President a year ago that day. It's a surprise."

"That's all very noble, Mr. President, but what about equal justice under the law?"

"You're absolutely right. That's why in 1975 I'm going through all the files at the FBI and pardoning everybody in one clean sweep.

"Then for the Bicentennial celebration in 1976 I plan to posthumously pardon some of our great Watergate forefathers: Bededict Arnold, Warren B. Harding, the king of England... Think how much their descendants have suffered all these years.

"By that time I might feel so good I'll even pardon my former press secretary, Jerald F. terHorst, for quitting on me.

Suddenly the President started to cry. "What's wrong?"

"Sorry, I-I just get all choked up when I think about the former President. You know what he sent me for pardoning him? A \$50,000 gold plaque inscribed with my favorite saying, 'A friend that's freed a friend is a friend indeedd,' to hang in the oval office. Kind of a shame, though."

"Why's that?"

Now now one will ever see that beautiful watercolor portrait again. You know, the one of George Washinton chopping down the cherry tree?"

## The 'muffin-man'

Perhaps they expect the nation to emit a rousing cry of "tra-la."

Otherwise, why would the national wire services release reports which read like a laboratory manual on President Ford?

Ford's latest escapade—an apparently newsworthy one—involved toasting his own muffins in the White House kitchen. It seems the President exhibited uncanny prowess in sticking two English muffin halves—probably Wonder Bread—into a toaster, then waiting for them to pop up.

Photographers recorded the occasion. Reporters cornered Mrs. Ford to obtain suitably trivial quotes. The story made page one of a local daily newspaper.

Not only did the President toast his own muffins. He also poured himself some orange juice, sliced a cantaloupe and heated a pot of coffee. Due to the taxing nature of these feats, the President performed them in his shirt sleeves. (The article failed to mention why Ford was not wearing the rest of his shirt.)

The headline accompanying the article touted Ford's versatility. Perhaps our "versatile" President can tie his own shoes as well.

If so, newspaper readers probably will see a photo of his left foot encased in a Hush Puppy (after all, he is an unpretentious leader) on tomorrow's front page.

Ho hum.

## Signs on the horizon

Once again, billboards threaten to obscure the few open vistas from America's highways.

Although the 1965 Highway Beautification Act banned billboards along major rural highways, this year's House version of the Highway Construction Act includes some amendments to the 1965 law that would open up several loopholes.

The House amendments also would halt the de-billboarding process, which has removed some 265,000 highway signs since it began in 1971.

The 1965 law prohibited signs within 660 feet of the right of way. Advertisers responded by placing jumbo signs just beyond that limit. Not to be outfoxed, the Senate Public Works Committee recently countered with a bill extending the ban to the limits of legibility.

The amended House version of the Highway Construction Act, however, provides for control of signs beyond the 660-foot limit only if they are "erected with the purpose of their message being read from the main traveled way."

Advertisers easily could slip a billboard between the lines of this vague phrasing. Signs ostensibly could be erected on secondary roads, yet placed so they would be visible from nearby interstate routes.

The House bill also would permit six "directional" signs per mile. As the amendment is worded, "directional" is an umbrella term covering "rest stops, camping grounds, food, gas and automotive services, lodging, natural wonders, scenic and historic attractions."

The amended version of the Highway Construction Act awaits consideration by the full House Public Works Committee.

Members of that committee should resist the billboard industry's blandishments—which can be as smooth as the messages their signs carry—and remove the amendments before the bill moves any further.

Jane Owens

