

# Web of Watergate entangled Lincoln native

**Editor's note:** The following article was written by Daily Nebraskan staff member Ivy Harper for a depth reporting class at UNL. She is a senior majoring in journalism and political science.

**By Ivy Harper**

His rise in the legal world was fast. At 35, G. Bradford Cook became the youngest chairman ever of the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC).

But his downfall was faster. After two months as head of the prestigious commission, Bradford Cook resigned.

He did so voluntarily—not because he wanted to, but because on April 19, 1973, Cook lied to a federal grand jury investigating illegal contributions to the Nixon re-election committee.

The native Nebraskan and 1962 University of Nebraska College of Law graduate changed his perjurious testimony one month later—but by then the damage was done.

## Web of deceit

By then he had become entangled in a web of deceit woven, he says, by Maurice Stans, John Mitchell and Robert Vesco.

By then, his reputation and credibility were questioned and his respect for the friends his father had introduced him to was crumbling.

His lie, told to a grand jury to protect Stans, family friend and former chief fund-raiser for the Committee to Re-elect the President, resulted in Cook's resignation from SEC, personal disgrace and possible disbarment in Nebraska and Illinois.

**"By then, his reputation and credibility were questioned and his respect for the friends his father had introduced him to was crumbling."**

Today, Cook awaits judgment by the Nebraska Supreme Court on his fitness to remain a member of the bar.

A judgment that his father awaits anxiously.

His father is George Cook, multimillionaire president of Bankers Life Nebraska, a man who today exudes the pain of a father who has introduced his son to bad company.

## Father, son look-alikes

Look-alikes with balding crowns and intense eyes, both Cooks say they are optimistic about the future, but both would do things differently if they could.

Currently, Cook acts as a consultant in

Washington, but so that no further conflicts arise he has not practiced law for the last two years.

Cook, who left Nebraska in 1962 for Chicago, began working there in the firm of Winston and Strawn. He worked in corporate finance law and had moved from an associate to a partner when he left in 1971 to become general counsel to the SEL. He and his wife moved to Washington, D.C., where on March 3, 1973, Cook was sworn in as chairman.

The chairman of the SEC is appointed by the president, and that makes it "somewhat political" Cook says, but "I feel I got it because I was competent."

It was while he was general counsel that Cook first became familiar with the SEC investigation of Robert Vesco, who was allegedly looting hundreds of millions of dollars in investor money. And it was then Cook met Maurice Stans for the first time.

## Missing money

Later, on a hunting trip to Eagle Lake, Tex., in November 1972 when Cook asked Stans if the missing Vesco money had gone to the Nixon committee, Stans replied that he did not know, but that he would find out, Cook says.

During the trip, Cook says, the discussion centered on "elevating me to SEC chairman." Stans never brought up the subject of the missing money and "I wasn't in a position to cross-examine him," Cook says.

The subsequent lawsuit, where Cook was chairman, against Vesco, did not explore Vesco's contributions to former President Nixon's re-election efforts.

The decision not to mention the money wasn't his, Cook says. He says he went along with it willingly because Stans told him the grand jury investigation was a witchhunt.

When he was confronted by Stans during a "conversation that never takes place," Cook had not had any contact with Stans.

## 'Wouldn't have gone'

"If I had any idea of what was really going on," Cook says, "I would never have gone along."

He said he did not know at the time that \$200,000 in missing funds in the SEC's investigation were in fact illegal contributions to CREEP.

And when Cook did find out what was going on, according to his attorney Johnathan Rosner of New York City, Cook reacted sharply and incredulously.

Rosner suggested to Cook that Stans had perhaps dangled the chairmanship in front of him so that

Cook would refrain from revealing the contact he had had with Stans during the Vesco investigation.

In a hearing, Rosner quoted Cook as saying, "If I thought they were trying to buy my silence by offering me the chairmanship of the commission, I wouldn't have taken it. I think I'm competent to have had that position on the merits."

## Many merits

Cook's merits, as described by friends, are high. One former fellow law student said, "Cook has always been an ethical, honest person. I think he just got caught up in the Watergate web."

The Watergate web, which resulted in the downfall of many young lawyers, and in which Cook got entwined, is slowly fading.

But too slowly for Cook, who has been waiting almost two years.

"It's like someone following you in the dark, and you don't know whether he is going to hug you or shoot you," he says.

"But you have to be optimistic or you eat yourself up alive. There is a tremendous amount of anxiety. It is very disconcerting."

## Better man

Cook says he regrets his actions but that he thinks he is a better man because of what happened.

He does not know what the future hold for him, but "I always hope time heals."

"People say to me, 'you reached the pinnacle' and 'where do you go now?'"

But Cook says there are different ways to measure success.

His ambition is to open a law office in Washington—he has the building but he is waiting to see how the Nebraska Supreme Court rules in his disbarment case. Currently, Cook has an application pending with the District of Columbia Bar Assoc. to practice law.

## Ethics important

"Ethics are playing a larger part in life," Cook says, "and they should."

"I lied," Cook says, "and I admitted it, but then I bent over backwards to be helpful. I did my best."

Cook's father, active in the 1972 Nebraska CREEP campaign, says he is proud of the way his son acted.

But about Stans he says, "I am very, very disappointed. I think Stans feels bad, too, about what happened."

His father is not the only one who thinks Cook did his best. Cook received letters from more than 50 lawyers and businessmen telling him they would vouch for his integrity. Among them are:

Continued on p. 7

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