

THE OTHER NIXON TAPES

Hofstra prof producing film of home movies — featuring **Johnny Cash, Raquel Welch** and, yes, **Haldeman** and **Ehrlichman**

BY PAUL LAROCO

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Richard Nixon's chief of staff, H.R. Haldeman, bounds up a driveway, a wide smile on his face and a Super 8 movie camera in his hand. In another scene, chief domestic adviser John Ehrlichman glances impatiently over his shoulder at the meal he's about to be served.

Enduring images of Nixon and the Watergate conspirators — ruthless, defiant, stone-

faced — won't be completely wiped out by a planned documentary by a Hofstra University law professor and his wife.

But "Our Nixon," culled from obscure home movies shot largely by Haldeman, Ehrlichman and special assistant Dwight Chapin, fills a historical gap, proving that even notorious political figures goof off, unwind and take in the sights.

"They don't look nearly as sinister when they're wearing Bermuda shorts and smiling," said Brian L. Frye, who along with wife Penny Lane, is turn-

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ing more than 200 Super 8 reels from 1969 to 1972 into a feature-length film.

Frye, 37, a visiting assistant professor at Hofstra Law School, learned of the movies through a friend with ties to the National Archives. They had

been stored at the Nixon Presidential Library & Museum in Yorba Linda, Calif., mostly inaccessible to the public. Transferring all 27 hours to video promised to cost \$17,000.

A 10-minute snippet was all it took to make Frye and Lane, a visiting assistant professor of film and electronic arts at Bard College, put up the money. There was Johnny Cash performing at the White House, and Nixon being treated to a private preview of the musical "1776."

After the 2010 transfer, the couple found a wealth of mate-

rial, including footage of Nixon's trip to China and less historic moments as aides filmed the food on their dinner trays, and Ehrlichman, Chapin and Henry Kissinger relaxing in lawn chairs, wearing swim trunks and sunglasses.

In other scenes, actress Raquel Welch dances in a shiny silver pantsuit, anti-war demonstrators gather for the 1971 May Day protests at the National Mall, and cabinet members break focus from meetings to look directly into the camera.

"It's sort of like someone's



GOTTA HAVE HOPE The president laughs it up with comedian Bob Hope at the White House.



MATTERS OF TASTE Secretary of State Henry Kissinger enjoys a meal.



I WALK THE LINE Johnny Cash is among the show-biz celebrities appearing on the reels.



diary being confiscated," said Lane, 33. "While it doesn't tell you very much about Nixon, it tells you a lot about the people around Nixon."

No narration will be used in the documentary, the couple said. Audio will come from archived talk show and lecture appearances by the central characters.

The president, Frye said, serves as "the sun by which everyone else revolved," though not the star. When he appears, it's often in shots filmed through a doorway or a crowd.

Nixon's 1972 re-election

campaign jingle ("Nixon Now! More than Ever!") scores a trailer with the feel of a campy '70s show intro. Freeze frames capture Haldeman running up the driveway, Chapin grinning and Ehrlichman stopping in a crowd, a pained look on his face as he glances behind him.

Support for the documentary has come from \$15,000 in private donations and grants from groups including the New York State Council on the Arts and the Tribeca Film Institute.

Frye and Lane, who split time between homes in Brook-

lyn and upstate Claryville, will soon complete a rough cut of their film and search for distributors, with art-house theaters or TV as potential venues. Lane said she thought "Our Nixon" would contrast the relaxed images of Haldeman, Ehrlichman and other aides — many of whom attended Southern California colleges like UCLA and USC — with the public image they developed through Watergate.

The goal, she added, is to humanize them, while making no excuses for their actions. Haldeman and Ehrlichman, both of whom died in the 1990s, were among the Nixon staffers sentenced to federal prison for their part in the Watergate cover-up. Nixon resigned in 1974 and died in 1994.

Stanley Kutler, a University of Wisconsin professor and author of several Nixon books, said he doubts the film can change opinion of the convicted aides.

"If they mean that 40 years later, they want to remind us these were just fun-loving, jolly guys — well OK," he wrote in an email. "But I would add that it was reminiscent of their fraternity humor and pranks of their USC days."

But Frye said seeing Nixon and his staff in their lighter private moments has value. He speculated that the silent

FACE THE MUSIC

The home movies show a decidedly different side of Nixon — here at a piano in a undated image — and his presidential aides.



PHOTO BY LES STONE

REEL DISCOVERY

Brian Frye, a Hofstra law professor, and his wife, Penny Lane, learned of the home movies through a friend with ties to the National Archives.

Super 8 movies never received much attention because they're not ripe with investigatory intrigue, like the well-mined Oval Office audiotapes that the FBI seized with them nearly 40 years ago.

"The heartbreaking irony is that their desire to document everything was their downfall," Lane said.

CARNIVAL SUED FOR WRECK

Combined news services

Carnival Corp., the world's largest cruise-line owner, was sued for at least \$100 million over the wreck of the Costa Concordia near Italy's coast, which killed at least 17 people and left the vessel half submerged on its side.

The complaint, alleging negligence and breach of contract, was filed Friday in federal court in Chicago by Gary Lobaton, a member of the Costa Concordia crew who seeks class-action status to represent all victims of the Jan. 13 disaster off Giglio Island. The captain, Francesco Schettino, has been accused of causing the accident by steering too close to shore and then abandoning ship as it sank.

"The defendants failed to properly and timely notify all plaintiffs on board of the deadly and dangerous condition of the cruise ship as to avoid injury and death," Lobaton said in the complaint.

Meantime, divers yesterday found the body of a woman on the half-sunken ship, officials on the island of Giglio said, bringing the total number of bodies recovered to 17. Local media reported that indications were she was a crew member and that she had not been wearing a life jacket. There are still 17 people unaccounted for, according to a list published by the prefecture of Grosseto.

The Costa Concordia, owned by Carnival's Costa Crociere unit, was carrying about 3,200 passengers and 1,000 crew when it ran aground. The lawsuit, which also names the Miami-based Costa Crociere unit in Italy, seeks damages for alleged violation of the Athens Convention for safely carrying passengers at sea, breach of contract, negligence and unjust enrichment.

A message left with Carnival wasn't immediately returned. A Costa spokesman declined to immediately comment.

Costa said yesterday that it reached agreements with consumer groups in several countries to pay damages to passengers.



HAPPY DAYS Before he was mired in the Watergate scandal, chief of staff H.R. Haldeman shot some of the movies.