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EDITORS' NOTE

Interviewing an
Accused Spy

The two spy stories that are the lead in this issue broke almost simultaneously in Washington last week. In our bureau there, teams of photographers and reporters assembled to divide the story, and one interesting and difficult assignment fell to a correspondent named Susanna McBee. It was up to her to get the first interview with William Whalen, a former lieutenant colonel in the U.S. Army charged with plotting to betray his country, or with his wife. She got it.

Susanna is an experienced reporter who joined LIFE last year. Ten years ago she became the first girl ever to edit the University of Southern California's *Daily Trojan*. She has traveled in Europe and the Orient, earned a master's degree in political science at Chicago, and worked as a general assignment reporter on *The Washington Post*. John Neary, now a LIFE correspondent but then her rival on *The Washington Star*, recalls: "She was little and cute—but awfully tough. She'd come into the squad room in horn rims and a pigtail looking for all the world as though she'd lost her bike. Then, most of the time, she'd scoop your ears off."



SUSANNA McBEE

None of her experience led Susie to believe that she would have much luck with Mrs. Whalen, much less with the colonel himself. She could not imagine that the wife of an accused Soviet agent would talk—or that the two would even be found at home. When she arrived at the house, a first look confirmed her doubts. The blinds were pulled, the doors were locked. Expecting nothing, she knocked and waited. Just as she turned to go, Mrs. Whalen opened the door. "She looked dreadful," says Susie. "Her hands were trembling and her voice quivered. She told me she hadn't been able to hold down any food since the arrest 20 hours before."

Susie talked her way in and learned that the colonel was down in the basement watching TV. "I can talk, but he won't," said Mrs. Whalen. Soon, however, the colonel emerged from the basement and Susie introduced herself. "I told him I wanted to check some facts his wife had given me and he said, 'Sure, come on down.'" In the basement, he began talking of his Army career. "I asked about the spy charges," says Susie. "He was wary at first, but each time I brought up the subject of his arrest he came closer to an answer. For a man accused of a crime that carries the death penalty, he was pretty direct."

"There were some eerie moments that evening," she says. "A crank caller had threatened to bomb the house and we could see the lights of police cars passing the window. I kept wondering about this colonel. Did he really give the Russians only harmless information as he said? Or was this another Rosenberg case? The death penalty was very much on my mind, even though Whalen kept saying the whole thing was crazy. When it was time to go, the Whalens' little daughter, Kathy, went to her mother and said, 'Mommy, I don't understand.' 'I don't either,' Mrs. Whalen replied, turning to me. 'As the wife of an intelligence officer I've learned not to ask questions.'"

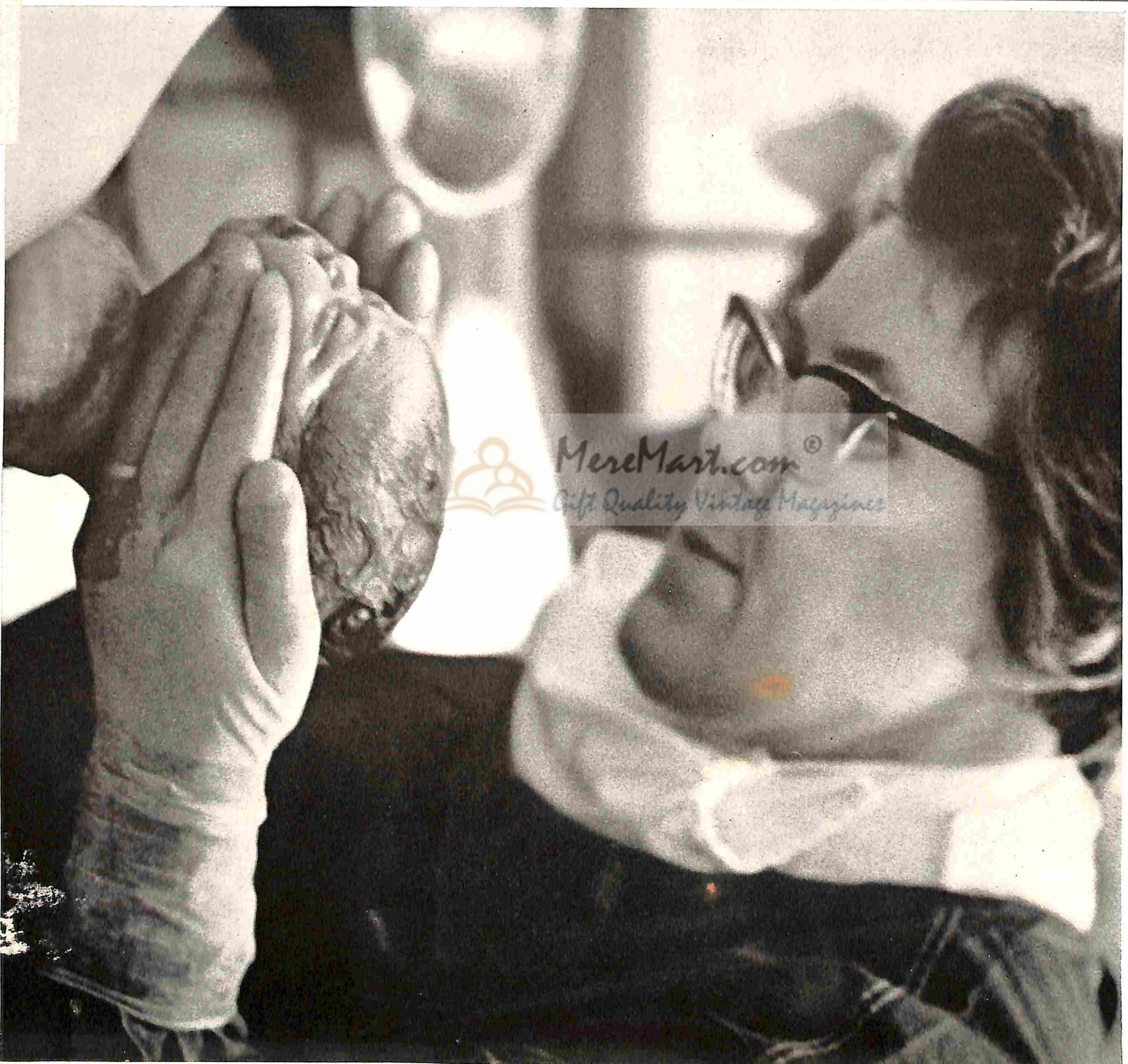
George P. Hunt
GEORGE P. HUNT,
Managing Editor

LIFE

Unforgettable Moments of Pregnancy and Birth

by LENNART
NILSSON,
photographer
of LIFE's
award-winning
'Drama of Life
before Birth'

Richard Falk
at the age of
one second



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