



## A White House 'fairy tale' with no happily ever after

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As he left the White House, Christopher Beauregard Emery tried to remember every step.

"I wanted to take it all in," he says. "I knew I'd never be back. I wanted to go out with my head up."

The lifelong Howard County resident had just been fired from his \$50,000-a-year job -- working behind the scenes for first families for eight years. The conditions of his dismissal demanded that he not tell anyone.

"I have so many friends in the Secret Service," he says. "I pretended like everything was normal. It was very difficult -- leaving so many friends I'll never see again" and not being able to say goodbye.

Three weeks later, Mr. Emery, 36, doesn't know the "real reason" he became the first White House usher fired in the 103-year history of the little-known office. Since 1891, only 18 ushers have served in the executive mansion.

Until news of Mr. Emery's firing became public, the five people in the usher's office -- the chief usher, an administrative usher and three assistant ushers -- labored in obscurity, attending to the personal needs of the first family and their guests. "Our primary function is to make the White House feel like a home rather than a museum," he says. "I'm more fortunate than most people. For eight years, I got up every morning eager to go to work at a job I loved. It was a fairy tale."

For Mr. Emery, midnight came at noon March 3. "My boss called me into his office and told me the first family -- Mrs. Clinton -- was uncomfortable with me. Friday, the next day, would be my final day. I told him I would leave now rather than wait. He was visibly upset, saying he had not wanted to do this, that it was the hardest day of his career. I told him it was the hardest day of mine, too."

Later that afternoon, someone from the White House called Mr. Emery at home, telling him that if the press called, he was not to talk and was to refer all calls to Neel Lattimore, Hillary Rodham Clinton's press secretary.

For a week, no one called.

Mr. Emery, a Republican whose wife has been active in area politics, sat at home wondering "what on earth it could have been" that caused him to be fired. "I had what I thought was an excellent relationship with the first family," he says. "I am a professional -- apolitical. This [a firing] has never happened in the history of the usher's office."

Not a 'steppingstone'

Indeed, when he applied for the usher job, he was told that "people do not use the office [of usher] as a steppingstone. They either die or retire here."

Although he would not comment on the specifics of Mr. Emery's firing, Mr. Lattimore says party politics had nothing to do with it.

"I had no idea he was Republican," Mr. Lattimore says. "No one has ever gone around here to find out" what people's party affiliation is. "It is not an issue." "Whoever serves in the office [of usher] has to have the utmost sensitivity -- that is paramount. For us to discuss any specifics [of Mr. Emery's firing] is not appropriate, not fair. We've sought to be very fair, very respectful" of Mr. Emery.

To think of the usher job or any other household employment at the White House in terms of a career is unrealistic, Mr. Lattimore says. Although the 89-member staff of butlers, calligraphers, carpenters, chefs, cooks, curators, doormen, electricians, florists, gardeners, maids, painters, plumbers and ushers are not presidential appointees, all "serve at the pleasure of the president," he says.

Things change when new first families move into the White House, Mr. Lattimore says, such as the current restructuring of the usher's office. "We had 63,352 people at White House events last year," up from 17,531 the last year of the Bush administration, he says.

An usher at Blair House, a guest house for heads of state across the street from the White House, has been brought in to help and has replaced Mr. Emery, at least until August, Mr. Lattimore says.

Gail Bates and William Thies, area Republican leaders who hold politically appointed jobs in the Howard County government, say the thing they found surprising about Mr. Emery's firing was that it occurred so far into the Clinton presidency. Ms. Bates and Mr. Thies know Mr. Emery socially, but they say he has never talked to them about his work at the White House. They, like many other Howard County Republicans, assumed his job was political.

#### Calls to Mrs. Bush

Mr. Emery is on the payroll through April 4 and was given eight weeks' severance pay after that. His firing became public when a Washington Post reporter called to ask him for a comment about assertions by Mrs. Clinton's office that he was fired because of two phone conversations he had with former first lady Barbara Bush. "That did it," he says. "I couldn't keep silent [with the press] after they brought her into it."

Mr. Emery says he returned two calls to Mrs. Bush from the White House to help her solve some problems with software he had installed on her computer. He said he didn't think anything of it because the usher's office frequently takes calls from former White House occupants.

"I've talked to Jimmy Carter, Luci [Johnson] Nugent and Lynda [Johnson] Robb," he says. "It's the nature of the office to take calls from people who lived here. To make an issue of it just doesn't make sense. I never felt we [he and the Clintons] had anything but a comfortable, cordial working relationship."

Mr. Emery has been besieged with dozens of requests for interviews. Seeking out the former usher have been the Wall Street Journal, Today of London and the National Inquirer from the print media, along with NBC, CBS, ABC, CNN and the syndicated television show "A Current Affair."

Mr. Emery politely tells callers that he will say nothing about life behind the scenes at the White House. Two organizations have told him they would pay for his story, but a price has never come up, he says, because he tells bidders he is not interested.

Mr. Emery joined the White House staff in 1986 after responding to a newspaper advertisement calling for a computer specialist to do automation-type work at the executive residence of the White House. "I applied not because I thought I would get the job, but because I thought it would be fun to have a rejection letter on White House stationery," he says.

#### No practical joke

When a White House staffer called to set up an interview, Mr. Emery thought a friend was playing a practical joke -- until the staffer quoted from his resume. Mr. Emery was hired in January 1986.

Fourteen months later, an usher who had joined the White House during the Kennedy administration retired, and Mr. Emery applied for the job. Along with his other qualifications, Mr. Emery was the right age, fitting in between two other ushers. The usher's office didn't want everyone retiring at the same time, he says.

From the day he was hired until the day he was fired, his job was better than anything he could have imagined for himself, Mr. Emery says. Scrapbooks at his North Laurel home are filled with pictures and mementos. Nearly all show him with world leaders and celebrities. There are Christmas photographs in which Mr. Emery, his wife and children are pictured with President and Mrs. Reagan, President and Mrs. Bush and President and Mrs. Clinton. All are signed with the first families' good wishes. There is a photograph of Mr. Emery's 8-year-old-daughter, Katie, playing with the Bush grandchildren in the White House at Easter time. There are humorous pictures -- such as the one of Mr. Emery and other White House staffers wearing surgical masks as they welcomed Mr. Bush back from a trip to Japan during which he had become sick at dinner. There is a picture of Mr. Emery wearing a white wig and one of him dressed in Colonial garb, walking through the White House arm-in-arm with a smiling President Clinton and Mrs. Clinton, in Colonial attire. "Halloween," Mr. Emery explains. There is a birthday note from Mr. Clinton. "I hope your day is filled with all the joy and happiness you so greatly deserve," the president says in the note, signed "Bill."

In every photograph except those in which he is seen in public with the first family -- such as one that appeared in newspapers around the country in which he is holding an umbrella over Mr. Reagan as he stands in the rain with Mrs. Reagan and Mikhail S. Gorbachev and his wife, Raisa -- Mr. Emery is smiling. Not a "say cheese" smile, but a genuine "boy, I'm having the time of my life" smile.

With the unexpected deluge of calls from the media, he has not had time to get depressed or to "organize a serious effort" for a job search, Mr. Emery says. "There were four nights last week when I couldn't have dinner with the family" because of the calls, he says.

Not all have been from the media. He was popular at the White House, and friends and family have called to wish him well. "There have been incredible calls of support," he says. "There are a few that I haven't heard from that have kind of hurt. Maybe they're afraid I'm so upset I can't talk about it." & Sometimes that's true.

#### Anxiety and frustration

"I wake up anxious at 3 a.m. thinking I need to be out there pounding the pavement," he says. "It's frustrating. I'm not used to sitting home two weeks. I have my ups and downs. When I get depressed, I try to remember the experiences I've had. I try not to waste any time being nonproductive."

For now, the calls and the media attention help. "The average person who is fired never gets these calls," he says. "Sometime, there will be no more. I have to be prepared for that."