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Family With Many Troubles At Center of Espionage Case

The following article is based on reporting by Stephen Engelberg and Jane Perlez and was written by Mr. Engelberg.

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NORFOLK, Va., June 9 — At the center of what the authorities have called one of the major spy rings in American history is the troubled family of John A. Walker Jr.

It was family ties, the Federal Bureau of Investigation says, that helped Mr. Walker obtain some of the classified information he sold to the Soviet Union. And it was family turmoil, punctuated by a divorce nearly a decade ago, that apparently sowed the seeds of his downfall.

Crosscurrents of the Family

Six months ago, Barbara Joy Crowley Walker, who had been left by her husband one year before the divorce, and left with four teen-age children to raise, turned her former husband in. With her 25-year-old daughter, Laura W. Snyder, Mrs. Walker told an F.B.I. agent on Cape Cod of her suspicions that her husband had been selling secrets to the Russians for about 16 years.

Mr. Walker was arrested last month. Then came the arrests of Mr. Walker's son, Michael, a 22-year-old enlisted man aboard the aircraft carrier Nimitz, and his brother Arthur, a 50-year-old engineer for a local military contractor. A fourth man, Jerry A. Whitworth of Davis, Calif., was also charged in the case.

As the details of the espionage case have unfolded in the dry prose of prosecutors' affidavits, the private crosscurrents of the Walker family have become painfully public.

Mother has been pitted against father. Michael, the only son, shunned both parents when he was in Baltimore recently to appear in court. He did not speak with his mother and did not look at his father, who stood beside him in court.

"It's a horrible, hellacious thing," said Margaret Walker, the 27-year-old commercial artist who is the couple's oldest child. "This has got to be the worst thing that anyone could ever wake up to."

Nomadic Military Life

Mrs. Walker has said she would not have turned in her husband if she had known it would implicate her son, described by family members as the favored of the four children. "I believe she did not know her son was involved," said Mrs. Walker's sister, Annie Nelson of Anson, Me. "She's not the type of person who would hurt her kids."

Friends and family members said in interviews that until now the problems the Walkers faced appeared traumatic, but relatively ordinary.

They lived the nomadic military life, moving from coast to coast as Mr. Walker's career went from Charleston, S.C., to San Diego to Norfolk. There were instances of adolescent rebellion.

A Geographic Split

The 1976 divorce split the family geographically. Mrs. Walker moved with her four children to Skowhegan, Me., a mill town near where she had spent her adolescent years. While John Walker was developing a reputation as a flamboyant private detective and electronics expert and would fly his own plane to pick up the children for vacations, she worked in a factory cementing shoes, and struggled to pay bills for her children, a grandchild and her mother.

While settling in to her new life in Maine, Mrs. Walker was becoming troubled by her husband's activities, according to a friend. Beginning in 1969, the F.B.I. says, Mrs. Walker suspected her husband was earning extra cash by selling classified documents. According to F.B.I. affidavits, Laura Snyder learned of her father's purported double life as long ago as 1979, when she told the F.B.I. that he tried to recruit her as a spy while she was in the Army.

Sometime last year, Mrs. Walker decided to talk with the the F.B.I. Nobody has been able to say exactly what motivated Mrs. Walker, who had moved to Cape Cod to join her daughter, Cynthia, to get in touch with the F.B.I. when she did. Those who know her well suggest it was an agonizing decision that balanced the possible harm to her family against what she thought was right.

'Not Easy to Answer'

"If the charges are true, how many mothers in this situation would be able to make the decision," asked Margaret Walker, another daughter. "How can anyone say if their Dad were a murderer, a Mafioso or a rapist whether they would turn him in? People should ask themselves that question to see where my mother is coming from. It's not easy to answer."

"How far do you go for your family?" she asked.

Shalel Way, a self-described psychic who reads tarot cards and lived in an apartment behind Mrs. Walker in Skowhegan, said Mrs. Walker had consulted her in January 1984 and had told of her suspicions about her husband.

Her sister, Mrs. Nelson, hinted she may have known something of Mrs. Walker's dilemma. "Barbara and I have shared a lot of things," Mrs. Nelson said in an interview in the kitchen of her farm in Anson, Me. "Barbara held a lot of things inside. It was something she couldn't handle any longer."

But most of her family and friends knew nothing of Mrs. Walker's inner turmoil.

Margaret Walker says she did not know of her father's activities, and Pat Crowley, Mrs. Walker's sister-in-law in Skowhegan, said, "None of her family knew that she had held this in."

One of Seven Children

Barbara Crowley Walker, one of seven children was born in East Boston on Nov. 23, 1937. Her father, George Warren Crowley, was a shipyard welder who died in 1946. A year later, her mother married Oscar Knight Smith and took the family to Mercer, an isolated hamlet in central Maine. The stepfather eked out a living in the local paper mill. Barbara Crowley returned to the Boston area before her high school education was completed. Years later, in 1980, Mrs. Walker passed the high school equivalency test at the same time as her daughter Cynthia, who had also dropped out from high school.

They Met in Massachusetts

It was in Massachusetts somewhere — family members interviewed were not sure where — that Barbara Crowley met John A. Walker Jr., a young Navy man who was stationed aboard the Johnnie Hutchins, a destroyer.

Their wedding, in Durham, N.C., on June 4, 1957, was not a celebrated family affair. Several of Mrs. Walker's siblings said they did not know where she married or how she met her husband.

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Annie Nelson, her older sister, described him as "egotistical." Her sister-in-law, Pat Crowley of Skowhegan, said Mr. Walker came to her home after the marriage and derided children. "He said they shouldn't be born until they were 16 and had brains," Mrs. Crowley said. "I never liked him."

One of Barbara Crowley's brothers said he also disliked Mr. Walker.

John A. Walker Jr. was born on July 28, 1937, in Washington, D.C., where his

father, John A. Walker, was a publicist for Warner Brothers. The family moved to Scranton, Pa., in 1953.

The senior Mr. Walker drank a lot, according to his son James, and left his wife in the 1960's and has since remarried. He lives Temperanceville, Va.

Mr. Walker's mother, Margaret, is known as a pious, hard-working woman who, at 73, still works for a photography company. She has declined to discuss the arrest of her two sons. "She said she didn't want to see the papers," said James Walker. "She said she didn't want to know."

John Walker Jr. joined the Navy in 1955, after being caught trying to burglarize a business, his brother James said. He was apparently given the choice of jail or the armed services, his brother said.

John Walker seemed to have an aptitude for the Navy. By February 1962 John Walker Jr. was assigned to the Andrew Jackson, a nuclear-powered submarine. In 1965, he became part of the first crew of the Simon Bolivar, another nuclear-powered submarine.

Bill Wilkinson, who was later to become Imperial Wizard of the Invisible Empire, Knights of the Ku Klux Klan, said he and Mr. Walker became acquainted and used to go drinking in bars that catered to sailors.

He said Mr. Walker viewed himself as something of a "playboy" who was nonetheless serious about his career and took correspondence courses to improve himself.

At the time, Mrs. Walker lived in Charleston, tending their four children and working in a bar and restaurant they had bought nearby.

Pat Crowley, Mrs. Walker's sister-in-law, said the husband's long deployments took a toll on the marriage. "She was married to him, but I don't think they lived together," said Mrs. Crowley. "He'd be gone for 30 days and back for 10."

Mrs. Walker, who has confirmed she was informer to the F.B.I., has told the bureau that she believes her husband was recruited by the Russians sometime in the mid-1960's, according to an F.B.I. statements about its informers in the case.

Next, the family came to Norfolk, where Mr. Walker was communications watch officer in the message center of the Naval Submarine Force.

From there, they moved to San Diego as an assistant director of the Navy Communications School. He met Jerry Alfred Whitworth, the fourth man charged in the espionage case.

After two and a half years aboard the combat stores ship U.S.S. Niagara Falls, Mr. Walker returned to Norfolk in 1974 as communications systems officer on the staff of the commander of the Amphibious Force, Atlantic Fleet. His last post was as communications officer of the Naval Surface Fleet.

When they returned to Norfolk, the family bought an attractive house in Ocean View, a working-class neighborhood near the Navy base.

Joyce Bastian, the Walkers' next-door neighbor, said she seldom saw Mr. Walker. "He wasn't around much," she said. "All the kids seemed kind of lost."

Gordon Peeler of Norfolk, who was a friend of Margaret's, the oldest daughter, recalled: "It always seemed to be a somewhat tense atmosphere in the house. It seemed more tense than it should have been." He also does not recall seeing the father very often.

Margaret, Mr. Peeler said, liked to go to parties and to the beach, which was nearby. Mrs. Bastian said the three girls could regularly be seen pounding rugs and doing chores. One time, she said, Laura and a teen-age friend ran away for several days to the home of the friend's grandmother.

Less than a year after they had bought the house at 8524 West Ocean, the Walkers separated.

Albert Teich Jr., the lawyer who handled the divorce, said the discussions between the two about the property settlement were amiable. "I thought it was a case where husband and wife just couldn't get along and so he moved out," Mr. Teich said.

Mrs. Way, Mrs. Walker's friend in Skowhegan, Me., said Way helped Mrs. Walker make decisions by reading tarot cards for her.

The original divorce settlement had called for Mrs. Walker to get the family house, but when the decree became final, she decided instead to move to

Skowhegan, where three brothers and a sister lived. "Some people, when they get divorced, just want to run as far and fast as they can from bad memories," said Mrs. Walker's daughter, Margaret. "It wasn't unusual for her to want to be with her family."

All four children initially moved to Skowhegan with their mother. After about six months, Margaret left to live with a relative in Boston and later moved back to Norfolk. Michael never liked Maine, according to a friend of Michael's and Cynthia's, Eric Tracey. Michael was a "cocky" student in the junior high school, always trying to get attention, said Paula Nickerson, one of his teachers.

He returned to Norfolk and lived with his father while attending private school.

Cynthia stayed in Maine raising her infant son, Tommy, and attending a vocational school. Laura left the state soon after high school to enter the Army.

At some point since then, her mother did not hear from Laura for a year and a half, said Lawrence Vigue, a neighbor in Skowhegan, and Pat Crowley, Mrs. Walker's sister-in-law.

There was a sharp contrast between the life styles of the two parents. John A. Walker, after running two businesses that failed, was becoming more successful with his private detective agency, Confidential Reports Inc. He had a plane and a houseboat and was developing a reputation as a flamboyant investigator. The Federal Bureau of Investigation has charged that some of the money supporting this way of life was provided by the Soviets.

In the neighborhood, some questions were raised about Mr. Walker's new bachelor lifestyle. There was at least one confrontation between an older neighbor and Mr. Walker.

Margaret Walker said her father's financial status had been much exaggerated by news accounts. "The house has got the same carpeting it had ten years ago," she said. "He considered his microwave a big investment." In recent court filings, Mr. Walker reported a net worth of about \$175,000, an amount not unusual for a man his age, Margaret Walker said.

Mrs. Walker, however, was earning considerably less money. She held a job at the Dexter Shoe Company, cementing shoes together on a piecework basis. The work was hard and messy, but she volunteered for extra shifts. Her mother lived with her for some of the time.

"She passed out at work one day," said Pat Crowley. "They took her to the hospital. She worked too hard at that place. We kept saying 'you're going to kill yourself.' I'd go over to see her and she'd say 'I hope you don't mind my laying on the couch,' and she'd fall asleep."

There were reminders of the difference in financial status between herself and her ex-husband. Eric Tracey, the friend of Cynthia's and Michael's in Maine, said Mr. Walker flew to Maine in his plane five or six years ago and

took Cynthia and Michael away for a vacation.

Mrs. Way, the neighbor who read tarot cards, said Mr. Walker sometimes called his former wife. "He'd be verbose and had a few drinks," Mrs. Way said Mrs. Walker had told her, "and that's when he'd get bragging that he was selling military secrets to the Soviets."

Michael appeared to have the most difficult time adjusting in Maine. He had some minor scrapes with the local police. The principal of his junior high school, Royce Knowles, said that because Michael was a sophisticated city boy in a rural town, he was placed in an alternative school program for his junior high school. He worked on the farm owned by his teacher instead of paying tuition for the alternative program, Mr. Knowles said.

When Michael returned to Norfolk to live with his father, he was enrolled in one of Norfolk's better private schools, the Ryan Upper School.

Michael worked hard to please his father. Neighbors recalled that when his father left town on business, Michael would manicure the lawn for his return.

Robert Bastian Jr., Joyce Bastian's son, said Michael had worn long hair when he was 14 years old. When he came back from Maine, though, he was clean-cut. His high school class voted him best-dressed.

"Mike had great respect for his father," said Mr. Bastian, who was a friend of Michael Walker's at the Ryan School. "He looked up to him like he was an idol."

Michael is listed as one of the part-time detectives at his father's investigative agency.

Shortly before graduation, Michael surprised his friends by enlisting in the Navy. "It was right out of the blue," Mr. Bastian said. "Personally, I didn't think Mike was the kind of guy to go into the Navy."

He met his future wife, Rachel, in December 1982, just before he was to enter the Navy. He had second thoughts about joining, Mr. Bastian said, but began his four-year tour.

Michael apparently did not care much for Navy life. In April of this year, he wrote to his father, whom he identified by the codename Jaws, that he had been designated Sailor of the Month. "If only they knew how much I hate this carrier," he wrote.

When his bunk in the Nimitz was searched, 15 pounds of classified documents were found beneath it, the Government has said.

While Michael Walker was adjusting to life aboard the Nimitz, his mother was preparing to leave Maine. Her mother had died in 1984, and shortly afterward she moved to Cape Cod to join her daughter Cynthia.

Mrs. Walker took a job as a clerk at the Christmas Tree Shops in West Dennis, a small Cape Cod town on the eastern bank of the Bass River.

When she decided to get in touch with the F.B.I., her landlord, Chester Buck, said he called an F.B.I. agent he knew in her behalf. Mr. Buck said she did not tell him what she wanted to discuss,

only that she felt torn between obligations to family and country.

"She is a very patriotic woman with strong loyalties to her country, but she also has strong feelings about her family," Mr. Buck said.

Mrs. Walker, in discussing her decision with The Cape Cod Times, said: "Why in the name of all that's holy did I wait so long? You have the answer. It's because of what's happening to my family and my children.

"Was I seeking vengeance? Well, a part of me wanted to see him get what he deserved."

Since the news of the arrests, members of the Walker family have been besieged by television and newspaper reporters. Margaret Walker tells of a landlord in West Dennis, Mass., who rented an apartment to a photographer so that he could aim a lens at the drawn blinds of the window of her mother's home.

The camera crews of three networks have camped on Mrs. Walker's doorstep. A family member said Mrs. Walker valued her privacy and was unhappy with all the attention.

The press's dragnet for Walker family members has stretched from Virginia, to Pennsylvania and Maine. Many no longer answer their telephones or doors.

The other day, Margaret Walker sat in front of a small flickering color television, waiting for an announcer to intone the day's revelations in the Walker case. She decried the "sensationalism" of many of the news accounts.

Asked if the recent reports about the family had helped her to better understand its past, she paused and said: "I understand my mother's being reclusive and not getting out much. She certainly gave her life to her children. Maybe she did that because she had so much else on her mind.

"People seem to keep asking me questions as if they want me to take a side. How are you supposed to do that? This is my family."