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## Irreconcilable Rockefellers

When blonde, virginal Amy Whittlesey, 22-year-old daughter of Reagan's ambassador to Switzerland, married 39-year-old artist George O'Neill, great-grandson of John D. Rockefeller Jr., it seemed she'd found the perfect combination of father figure and Prince Charming. Instead, she was headed for years in the gated Wasp enclave of Mountain Lake, in central Florida—and what she describes as a nightmare of infidelity, perversion, and guns that led to her hospitalization for depression. Now, as Lisa DePaulo reports, America's most famously wealthy clan faces the scrutiny of divorce court, threatening the long-held secrecy of the Rockefeller trusts.

BY LISA DEPAULO

**L**ike most Rockefeller family occasions, the christening of little George Dorr O'Neill III on New Year's Day 1995 began quite sedately. After a morning ceremony at the Holy Spirit church in Lake Wales, everyone drove through the rigorously patrolled gates of Mountain Lake—the old, established Wasp enclave in rural central Florida—for the customary lobster-Newburg luncheon buffet catered by the Colony House club at the home of the proud parents, Amy and George D. O'Neill Jr.

The affair might have ended quite calmly, too, had one of the guests not wandered into the kitchen and, he says, found George junior, the 44-year-old father of the newly christened baby and the eldest of the fifth generation of Rockefellers, pressing a 19-year-old red-haired baby-sitter up against the refrigerator door.



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“I was just looking for orange juice,” says the guest, Cosmo Cremaldi, a Cambridge, Massachusetts, businessman who had been friends with the O’Neills for years and godfather to their first child. “I sort of retreated out of the kitchen” after seeing George, he recalls, with one hand on the baby-sitter’s breasts and the other “down below.”

Back in the living room, George’s wife, Amy, who at 27 had just produced the third of their children, was mingling with the guests. Beside her was her mother, Faith Ryan Whittlesey, the former ambassador to Switzerland and director of public liaison under Ronald Reagan, who had fought her way up through conservative Republican circles to be the only woman on Reagan’s senior staff with a West Wing office. On a sofa nearby sat George’s mother, Abby “Mitzi” Milton O’Neill—the eldest of “the Cousins,” as the fourth generation of Rockefellers are called—who would soon become the most powerful living Rockefeller by taking the reins as chairman of the family’s investments and philanthropies. While her son was allegedly untangling himself from the baby-sitter, Abby was graciously chatting up the priest who had performed the christening. The fact that George and Amy had recently espoused Catholicism would turn out to be the least of the Rockefeller family’s concerns that day.

Later, when Cremaldi left the christening party, he told his wife that he had just seen the darnedest thing in the kitchen. “You’d better tell Faith,” his wife advised. But Cremaldi didn’t think it was his place, and besides, George O’Neill Sr. had recently helped him in a Cambridge real-estate deal. Perhaps it would be better to remain silent. But he says he couldn’t forget what he had seen—or George’s reaction when he walked in on him: “He had a smirk on his face. Like ‘Hey, I’m scoring here.’”

Two children and five years later, Amy Whittlesey O’Neill, the ambassador’s daughter, and George O’Neill Jr., the Rockefeller heir, are embroiled in a most unseemly divorce and custody battle that threatens to expose a great many family secrets. Only a few have emerged from the 200-plus hours of testimony recorded over the past 18 months in an Orlando courtroom. The case has received very little attention in the press, probably because the name O’Neill is quite common, and in spite of the fact that one of George’s attorneys at one point reminded the judge, “This is the great-grandson of John D. Rockefeller [Jr.]”

The courtroom process so far has been an exhausting and futile effort. Failing to resolve fully even the issues of temporary custody and support, it has already gone through three Orlando judges, is scheduled for a fourth, and, according to Amy’s side, could go on forever, owing to the “limitless” resources of the Rockefeller family. George wants full custody of the children and seems unwilling to share his stake in the Rockefeller fortune, which, by all accounts—except his—is staggering. As the case heads to trial—an event that has been scheduled for March, apparently so as not to interfere with the social season in Mountain Lake—the sordid details of George and Amy’s marriage are just a part of what may be revealed.

That part could be enough: allegations of John D. junior's great-grandson's diddling everyone from baby-sitters to the local funeral director's wife, employing a harem of big-breasted young women in his business, trying to force his wife into threesomes with the help, and—as if there could be anything worse—supporting Pat Buchanan. In a nine-year marriage during which, his wife alleges, he became a sexual pervert, George was best known publicly for his vigorous support of the far right and its pro-family causes. He worked tirelessly for the right-wing Buchanan, as well as for Phyllis Schlafly, the pro-life zealot famous for spearheading the defeat of the Equal Rights Amendment. (George always had a much greater political affinity with his now alienated mother-in-law than with the limousine liberals of his family.)

Already, *O'Neill v. O'Neill* has weathered a paternity dispute—George didn't believe he was the father of Amy's fifth child until DNA testing proved it—and an unusual request in custody litigation: once it was ascertained that George was in fact the father of little Phoebe Elizabeth, he wanted his wife to pump her breast milk and have it delivered to him on weekends so that he could bond with the infant. A judge in Orlando granted his request last August, at which point Amy O'Neill, having trouble with the breast pump, switched to formula.

In court testimony, George emphatically denied having had any adulterous affairs. Meanwhile, the case is rife with accusations that his 32-year-old wife and the mother of his five children is hallucinating about all that kinky sex, and that insanity runs in her family. Exhibits A and B have been the suicide of Amy's father 26 years ago and the illness of her older brother, a star student and squash champion who, in his sophomore year at Harvard, in the 1980s, was diagnosed with schizophrenia. Exhibit C is a parade of former employees of George and Amy's who have described her as, among other things, “a crazy bitch” and “looney as a tune.”

Currently, Amy and the children, ranging in age from eight to one, are living in a modest pink house which Faith Whittlesey owns, near George Bush Boulevard in Delray Beach, Florida. Whittlesey has also covered a good part of her daughter's attorney's fees and car payments, the children's tuition at the Gulf Stream School, and their nannies' salaries. Strange as it seems, the situation has come to this: Amy's mother, the gung-ho Reaganite who made a career of infuriating feminists—from the days when she handed out pot holders during her campaigns for the Pennsylvania state legislature to the time she advised Reagan that the gender gap was “overblown”—is now championing the rights of her daughter against the “oppressive” Rockefeller empire. Meanwhile, Amy's mother-in-law, who as chairman of the Rockefeller philanthropies embraces such fashionably liberal causes as economic justice for women, is being accused by Amy and her mother of allowing “the family” to turn its back on a mother and five children.

“It's enough to turn me into a socialist,” snaps Faith Whittlesey.

It was Ambassador Whittlesey herself who introduced her only daughter to George O'Neill Jr. In early 1988, Whittlesey was finishing up her second term in Bern as ambassador to Switzerland. Between her two diplomatic assignments, Reagan had summoned her to the White House for two years to fill Elizabeth Dole's shoes as public liaison when Dole became secretary of transportation. Whittlesey, who had started life as the daughter of a railroad worker and graduated from the University of Pennsylvania Law School, thus became the most senior woman in the Reagan White House, and was often described as its last true conservative. “When Faith went to the White House,” a pro-life activist kidded admiringly, “they changed the rest rooms from Men's Room and Ladies' Room to Men's Room and Crazy Right-Wing Extremist's Room.”

Her tenure as ambassador—during which she helped sell the American M1 tank to the Swiss—was due payback for her loyalty to Reagan, which dated back to 1976, when, while serving as the highest-ranking elected woman in Pennsylvania, she supported him over Gerald Ford, urging her delegates at the convention to hold out and, according to one source, telling people, “Look, Ford is a loser. If we nominate him, we’re going right down the chute.” Four years later Reagan rewarded her, even asking her to deliver the defense plank at the 1980 convention.

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In 1988 a G.O.P. friend called Whittlesey in Bern and asked if she would meet with George O’Neill, a sculptor, photographer, and right-wing Rockefeller who wished to produce a book of portraits of leading American conservatives. Whittlesey welcomed him at the embassy and posed for him. “Oh, the picture was hideous,” she recalls. The book never did get published, but Faith and George soon found a common ground in politics.

At the time of the photo shoot, Whittlesey’s 20-year-old daughter, Amy, was traveling in Israel—a break from her main occupation, which was helping her mother. “Typically, ambassadors have wives,” Amy explains, “who fulfill the role of hostess. Mother was trying to juggle both. So I helped her, really, to complete the role of wife.” “Amy was this tall, stunning ingenue, five feet eleven, blonde, and with this *radiance*,” says Susan Graf, Whittlesey’s social secretary at the embassy. “She would float around the room at embassy parties, speaking fluent French with all these diplomats and aristocrats and Swiss bankers.” Most of those parties featured a mother-daughter act: Faith would play the piano, and Amy would sing Cole Porter. “She has a voice like Joan Baez,” says her mother.

Friends in Bern remember Amy as both incredibly “worldly” and incredibly “naïve.” “She was like from the 18th century,” says Philibert Frick, an asset manager in Geneva and a member of the Swiss banking and vineyard family. “Not like a person of our generation. She was very idealistic, *very* pure. She would blush at the mention of anything sexual.” One Swiss friend remembers when Amy was “kind of dating a dashing young student” with a Porsche. “So we assumed they were, you know &hellip; But in fact they weren’t. He was just taking her around Switzerland showing her museums.”

“She had a lot of suitors,” says another friend of Amy’s. “But she was very elusive. I would really hate to be quoted on this, but I think she was”—her voice drops to a whisper—“a virgin when she got married.”

She was also, says her friend Matthew Mellon, an heir of the banking family, “overwhelmingly rock-solid. She looked like she was running for office, like somebody who should be an ambassador herself. When I heard she was marrying George, I thought, This is an ideal, perfect marriage. It’s who you’d *expect* her to marry—a Rockefeller, a Kennedy, or,” he adds with a laugh, “a Mellon.”

As Frick puts it, “He looked good on paper.”

Faith Whittlesey's term was up in the summer of 1988, and she and Amy moved to New York. George O'Neill called to invite the ambassador to an Election Night party at his loft. Of all the invitations Whittlesey received to witness George Bush's victory, she chose George O'Neill's. And took her daughter along. The loft where George lived and had his sculpting studio was on a street near Madison Square Garden. He called it "the Roach Tower"—to tweak his parents, who lived lavishly in Oyster Bay, on Long Island, but kept a pied-à-terre at the Ritz Tower in Manhattan. It was a new experience for the Whittleseys. "I think there were actually drug dealers on the corner when we arrived," says Faith. Inside, scattered amid George's sculptures of nude women, was a crowd unlike any they'd seen at the embassy. There were artists, photographers, models, and Rush Limbaugh, whose fledgling New York radio show was still relatively unknown, but who had at least one fan: Amy Whittlesey. "I spent most of the night talking to Rush. I thought he was very funny," she remembers. "I didn't really pay much attention to George."

Two months later, at a dinner before the inaugural ball, Amy was seated next to George. That night sparks apparently flew, although scarcely anyone noticed. "We were all very surprised a month later," says G.O.P. supporter David Barron, a close friend of George's who hosted the dinner, "to realize that George was not just being nice to Faith's daughter."

Faith was vacationing in Antigua about a month later when a friend telephoned to inform her "that George was romancing my daughter," she recalls. "Well, I was in a panic!" It was one thing to hobnob with the token right-wing Rockefeller, but quite another to think of him seducing your precious child. Faith says she worried that George was "too old" and too much of "a ladies' man" for Amy. So she promptly called him. "And he told me, 'Oh, no, I'm not trying to seduce your daughter. I want to *marry* her.'" Then he sent flowers to Faith. "I thought, Well, O.K., his intentions are honorable."

Eight months after the inaugural ball, in September 1989, George and Amy were married at St. James Episcopal Church on the Upper East Side, with 350 guests and eight bridesmaids. She had turned 22 four days earlier; he was 39. By all accounts her new husband doted on her. "He absolutely adored her," says one of her friends. "He wanted her with him *all* the time," says another. (He also liked to coach her—telling her what to wear, where to sit, what to eat. Back then, her friends thought that was cute.)

For the first two years of their marriage, the couple split their time between the Roach Tower and a small hotel in Pietrasanta, Italy, which is surrounded by marble quarries. There George pursued his sculpting. "It was where Michelangelo sculpted," Amy says proudly. "It was so very romantic." In Pietrasanta, George carved marble hearts in honor of his new bride. Later even his Republican friends told him, much to his dismay, that his sculptures looked more like asses than hearts. "They did, but they were beautiful," says Amy.

"He was"—she pauses—"my first love." Amy Whittlesey O'Neill is sitting at a small café in Delray Beach with her hands folded in her lap. "I really didn't have any other, you know, boyfriend to speak of before George."

As she reaches for her coffee cup, her hands are trembling. "This is so hard for me to talk about." In shorts and without makeup, her nails bitten raw, she is quite stunning, but she apologizes for the way she looks. "I still have a few pounds to lose," she says. She gave birth to her fifth child less than a year ago, having spent much of her

pregnancy living in a \$68-a-night motel room with her four other children. Shortly before the baby was born, she moved to Delray, partly to be with her mother but mostly to escape Lake Wales and the hissing of the locals, who had been told by her husband that the baby she was carrying wasn't his.

Her new friends here say that they had no idea she was married to a Rockefeller until a newspaper article about the case appeared. "We just knew she was a single mother raising five kids by herself," says one, a parent at her children's school. "She never said a word about who her husband was."

"My friends ask me, 'If you were to do it over again, would you have married him?'" she says as her eyes fill with tears. "And my answer is: Absolutely yes. I was head over heels in love with him. And I can't imagine our life without these beautiful children. I think they have brought him a lot of joy, and I am glad for that. So it was meant to be."

Even while testifying in court that her husband was having sex with the help and forcing her to do "perverted" things, Amy claims to love George still and to worry about him. In the course of several interviews for this story, she often defended him, saying that he didn't grow up with a lot of affection and that his "inappropriate" relationships with young women sprang less from malice than from his need for attention. (George and his lawyers declined repeated requests for comment.)

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"It was so hard for George," she says, sipping her coffee. "He felt tremendous pressure to live up to these very high standards of achievement of his forebears. As an artist, I think he felt as though he had to be a world-renowned success or he wasn't going to do it at all. Because, to him, it was either you're at the very very top or you're a failure. So he went from one project to another, trying to find his place in the world and in the family."

**W**hen Amy married George, she was automatically included in the regular "family meetings" at Pocantico, the fabled Rockefeller estate in New York's Hudson River Valley. In particular, her attendance was requested at the "in-law meetings"—which were more commonly called the "outlaw meetings." "They were like encounter groups," says Amy. "We'd spend infinite amounts of time at these meetings discussing what it is to be a Rockefeller and what a tremendous burden it is." At one family meeting, Amy learned, "a sacred Indian stone was passed around, and everyone had to take turns holding the stone. When it was your turn, you had to talk about your vision of the family and your role in the family."

The two annual outlaw meetings, like most family powwows—including the "intergenerational meetings" and the Christmas family lunch—were held at "the Playhouse," the enormous Tudor-style manor in the middle of Pocantico that John D. Rockefeller Jr. had built for his sons, the generation known as "the Brothers." The Playhouse has a bowling alley, swimming pools, squash courts, an ice-cream parlor, and a main room used for meetings. There, under oil portraits of the six children of John D. junior—David, Winthrop, Laurance, Nelson,

John D. III, and Abby (George's grandmother, who was considered one of "the Brothers")—the weighty issues of the legacy would be discussed. The topic has grown more prickly in recent years as the family's place in America, once an untouchable position of power and wealth, has been usurped by the entrepreneurs of Silicon Valley.

Amy remembers that Peter O'Neill, the youngest of George's five siblings, who is vice president of the Rockefeller Family Fund, would sometimes address the group about what he referred to as "inherited-wealth syndrome." At one point he flew an expert on the subject from California to share insights with the family. Many of the Rockefellers, Amy found, were well versed in *The Golden Ghetto: The Psychology of Affluence*, by Jessie H. O'Neill (no relation), a book that compares the psychological effect of inheriting wealth with that of growing up in poverty. She dutifully rushed out and bought a copy.

Most of the outlaw meetings were presided over by Dick Chasin, a psychiatrist from Cambridge who was an outlaw himself, having married Laurance Rockefeller's daughter Laura, one of the "Cambridge cousins." Amy was usually silent at the meetings, but once she spoke up about how much it bothered her that, even though her husband's name was O'Neill, "somehow everyone always knew he was a Rockefeller."

George, on the other hand, seemed to find being a Rockefeller named O'Neill more of a drag than a blessing. "He certainly let you know, if you were a stranger, within 30 seconds," says a former political ally. "There was a lot of conversation about 'Uncle David.' He brought up the connection incessantly."

**I**f Amy wanted her husband and herself to be judged on their own merits, Republican Party politics was probably not the place where that would happen. George was becoming so devoted to the conservative right wing—much to the delight of his mother-in-law—that he soon abandoned Pietrasanta for a cause greater than marble hearts: Pat Buchanan.

George signed on big-time to the Buchanan for President campaign of 1992—which was really more a crusade on behalf of the populists (read "angry white males") of America than a serious bid for election. That changed, however, when Buchanan made an unexpectedly strong showing in the New Hampshire primary.

George was very much a part of the victory brigade—even moving with Amy for three months to Concord, New Hampshire, to organize Buchanan's database. George was very skilled with computers. "We were in chaos before they got here," says Caroline Douglas, a Concord divorce lawyer and the ex-wife of former New Hampshire congressman Chuck Douglas, who ran the New Hampshire effort for Buchanan. "They were like the miracle couple. They were so organized and knew so much about campaign work, and were just *so charming* together. Of course, at first we thought they were spies.

"They knew too much about the Reagan White House," Douglas explains. For weeks she and her husband, unaware of Amy's mother's ties to Reagan, were convinced they were spying for the Bush campaign. But soon they learned the truth, as the scuttlebutt spread through the office: the O'Neills weren't spies, they were Rockefellers!

Political friends of George's say his time with the Buchanan camp ended badly. He apparently left in a huff, complaining to friends that after he had totally reorganized the database other Buchanan operatives "fucked it

up.” He also had ongoing scraps with Bay Buchanan, Pat’s bulldog sister and campaign manager. “I think they took advantage of him,” says Douglas. “They felt that he should just donate everything.”

Still, he remained devoted to Buchanan, taking Amy and Faith to the convention in Houston, where Buchanan made his infamous Christian-family-values speech, a screed that was widely viewed as, if not downright racist, at least hate-filled.

**I**n Houston, George found an even more appreciative audience for his talents, in Phyllis Schlafly, who remembers how grateful she was when he called to respond to a fund-raising letter she had sent for help in organizing her Republican National Coalition for Life’s efforts. “He said, ‘You don’t need all this money—let me do it for you,’” says Schlafly. George set up her computer database, which kept daily track of the delegates who were supportive of the pro-life cause. “And at night he’d take me and all the hardworking pro-life volunteers out to dinner,” she says.

George also served as chairman of the Rockford Institute, the paleoconservative think tank in Illinois that is a voice for the old right (immigration is bad, states’ rights are good). The institute publishes the conservative magazine *Chronicles* and for many years put out a monthly report called “The Family in America.” *Chronicles*’ editor Tom Fleming considered himself a close friend of George’s—he even visited the O’Neills in Pietrasanta—“until the night he sat in my living room until two a.m., bullying me and threatening me and trying to get me to quit. He said I was being too critical of Republican conservatives.” The night ended with Fleming’s throwing George out. “George is capable of being very unpleasant when he doesn’t get his way.”

If Amy was a strange mixture of innocence and sophistication, George—who used to brag about knowing both Andy Warhol and Rush Limbaugh—presented a dichotomy of quite a different sort. On one hand, “he seemed to have nothing but contempt for anyone who wasn’t rich,” as Fleming puts it. “It was ‘the rich have a right to rule’ kind of thing.” On the other, he was drawn to those who weren’t rich. In his New York loft days, he became fascinated with a couple in the building who made their living by performing in live sex shows. Years later, in Lake Wales, he would develop a similar interest in the girls who came to work for him—almost all of whom had grown up in trailer parks, were just finishing high school, and knew one another through the First Assembly of God church, where some of the congregants speak in tongues.

**W**hen George met Amy, he was 38 and rather sickly. From the age of 12, he had suffered from Crohn’s disease, an inflammation of the intestines and joints that required an operation to remove a large part of his intestines. The disease flared up often, particularly in times of stress, forcing him to keep to a strict diet and, Amy says, preventing him from participating in sports. When he was a teenager, it kept him out of St. Mark’s and, later, Dalton for months at a time—periods during which he stayed at Columbia Presbyterian Medical Center in New York. According to Amy, he never made it through his first semester of college. As an adult, George was six feet two, broad and lean, boyishly handsome, and carried himself with an aristocratic air, but whenever he was ill he looked haggard and jaundiced.

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Amy says that over the years, he had periodically been sent to Lake Wales to recuperate at his parents' home, and he became comfortable in Mountain Lake. When he was about 20 he went to Arkansas to live on the ranch of his great-uncle Winthrop Rockefeller, the famously eccentric Arkansas governor who was generally regarded as the oddball in the family, the only one of "the Brothers" who didn't seem to care much for blue chips or blue blood. There, Amy says, George toyed with the idea of becoming a cowboy.

When Amy met George, she was young, beautiful, and grieving. Her brother Henry, an honors student at Harvard and her closest friend, had begun to exhibit the first signs of schizophrenia. The illness developed quickly and cruelly. One month the family was celebrating Henry's admission to Harvard's Porcellian Club, the next they were getting calls from the campus police. "It was worse than a death," says Amy. "He was still here, but the person I knew was gone." One date with George that she remembers was the time he drove her and Faith to Cambridge in the middle of the night in response to yet another call from the university.

"I think," says Amy, "George was a type of father figure to me."

**A**my's father, Roger Whittlesey, was a Main Line Philadelphia adman, socialite, and Republican operative who made a name for himself heading Richard Nixon's 1968 effort against Nelson Rockefeller in Pennsylvania. Whittlesey, who hobnobbed with John Eisenhower (Dwight's son) and Arlen Specter (then Philadelphia's district attorney), was once described by a society columnist as "the handsomest man in Philadelphia." ("George looks a little bit like him," says Amy.) In mid-1973, Whittlesey's advertising business failed at the same time that his major stockholdings plummeted. The following March, while Faith, then a state legislator, was in a late-night session in Harrisburg, he pulled his car into the garage and left the engine running. He was found by a baby-sitter. Whittlesey was 37. Amy, whom he called Princess, was six.

Faith was in the throes of her re-election campaign—a race her husband had been managing, as he had managed her whole career ("It was Roger's idea to hand out pot holders"). Although she went through with the election, and won, she found herself at 35 a widow with three children—seven, six, and 17 months—and a bankrupt estate.

Faith never entirely got over the loss, and she never remarried. She threw all her energy into conservative politics. "Mother was always working so hard," remembers Amy. "I used to do my homework in her office at the White House."

"Both Amy and George," as a friend of the couple's puts it, "were in a sense robbed of their childhoods."

**A**my's girlfriends from private school—Shipley in Philadelphia, the Pensionat de la Chassotte in Switzerland, and Pomfret School in Connecticut—say that all she ever wanted was to marry and have children. "My ultimate fantasy," Amy says, "was to have a minivan full of kids, a couple of dogs, and a house that was warm and inviting." She says that in her eight-month courtship by George they talked often about having a large family ("He wanted six"). When he proposed—he gave her a family heirloom as an engagement ring—she dropped out of Fordham, where she was studying philosophy and classics. "When George got married," says David Barron, he made it clear to his friends that he "didn't want to be a jet-setter or a party

boy or in the limelight anymore. He was old enough that he'd done that already. He wanted to be a full-time husband and father."

To their great disappointment, for two years Amy couldn't conceive ("Hard to believe now," she says), and when she finally did, she miscarried. At the same time, her brother Henry fathered a child with a woman who was also mentally ill. For the first year of the baby's life, he was shuttled between foster care and his mother's family home. Then George and Amy decided to adopt him.

"George was the knight in shining armor to this family," says one of his former friends. "He even adopted the kid." In fact, according to Amy, of all their children, George is closest to Paul Henry, who is now eight. "There's really a very special bond between them," she says.

By the time the adoption was final, Paul Henry was two years old. Three months later Amy gave birth to a daughter, Catharine. Twelve months after that, George III was born. George and Amy had already moved to Mountain Lake, which comprises some 120 houses on 3,000 acres. It is a tranquil, if somewhat eerie, place, full of Spanish-moss-covered oaks, where the residents, mostly seasonal, tool around in golf carts. One day recently, the only signs of life were security guards patrolling the grounds for intruders.

Though George's parents have two grand homes in the compound, George and Amy moved into a large, dilapidated house on the lake, a short walk from the elder O'Neills. An old Spanish-style house that rented for \$1,100 a month and hadn't been lived in for years, it lacked modern kitchen appliances and air-conditioning. Amy called it "the dungeon." "It's old, dark, and roach-infested," says one of their former housekeepers. "But they did get rid of the rodents."

**I**f anything ever represented George's lifelong tug-of-war between embracing his family and rebelling against it, it was this house in Mountain Lake. He did not get around to air-conditioning the place fully for three years—a period during which Amy was pregnant most of the time. However, he soon put one of his huge nude sculptures on view. "I was in shock," says Alyse O'Neill (no relation), a longtime supporter of conservative Florida Republicans, who was often invited to the house for fund-raisers and strategy sessions. "At the front door was this full-size nude woman, which was a little overwhelming. I mean, I've seen those things in museums but not at somebody's front door."

There were greater shocks for visitors inside, where the paint was peeling off the walls, the dogs peed on the carpets, and the rented furniture had mildew stains.

"It was going to be temporary," says Amy, "but then all the babies came, and I got stuck there." As she testified in court, "George wanted to have a grand home like the one he grew up in. And I was concerned about the expense. And he said that money wasn't a problem, that when we decided where that was, that he could get the money from the trusts." George, on the other hand, testified that "Amy was always asking about money and trying to take it out of the trust. I said that they won't do it."

Amy's friends were aghast that a young woman who had traveled the world, had grown up in an embassy, and spoke three languages was stuck in a retirement community in the middle of central Florida. As one friend asks, "Have you *been* to Lake Wales?"

Lake Wales, the town outside the gates of the old-money bastion of Mountain Lake, is blue-collar farmland and orange groves, sprinkled with churches and trailer parks. the home of florida natural orange juice! say the signs. The main road into Lake Wales crosses miles of rural countryside and leads to the new Wal-Mart Supercenter and Fat Boys' Bar-B-Q.

"We couldn't *believe* where she was living," says one of Amy's friends from Shipley. But Amy kept assuring them that it wouldn't be for long. Seven years later, in June 1997, when she left her husband, it was through the vaulted gates of Mountain Lake. She says she never expected  to tell anyone about any of it—the guns, the girls, the sex, the porn—but later she would describe the scene: How her husband stomped around with a semi-automatic gun in his hand, threatening to blow his brains out if she didn't retract, in writing, her accusations of adultery. How, the next day, she gathered the children in the minivan and sped off. George testified, "She said she was going to SeaWorld." Her account has yet to come out in court.

She would not stay away for very long. For by that point Amy O'Neill had been in and out of a mental hospital herself, and she was about to become pregnant with George's fifth child.



my's friends used to tease her by calling her the Princess of Lake Wales. Now, as they think back, it doesn't seem so funny. For though she once resembled Diana in looks and height and in her virginal wedding to a man she considered a prince, darker similarities developed: humiliations, alleged infidelities, self-mutilation.

What did happen over the years in that dreary house in Mountain Lake? It depends on which side you believe. Did a woman grow increasingly mad and delusional? Or did a spoiled man develop talents for torment and psychological abuse that could rival those in the movie *Gaslight*? Or was it a bit of both?

The first signs of trouble appeared when the couple got what they had wanted most—kids, and lots of them. Amy, who delivered all her children by cesarean section, became an exhausted wreck, says Shirley Hare, the children's former nanny. "My heart went out to her," says Hare, who is 66 and was known in the household as Miss Shirley.

Amy was no longer the statuesque ingenue either. Owing partly to the medical condition known as toxemia, she gained 78 pounds with Catharine. And she had yet to drop all the weight when she got pregnant with the next child.

George has testified that the weight did not bother him: "I grew up in a family of women [who were], shall we say, Rubenesque." But during Amy's first pregnancy, Hare and others say, they noticed that George treated his wife in a more and more demeaning way, referring to his once precious bride as a pig and a slob. "He would tell me, 'She has the Whittlesey slob gene,'" says Hare, adding that suddenly Amy "could do no right." George, according to Hare, "though he let the dogs urinate on the carpets," developed certain fetishes for cleanliness. He employed a

“personal laundress”—the wife of the assistant pastor at the First Assembly of God church—to wash his clothes so that they wouldn’t be mixed with the dirty laundry of his wife and children. He would “come down to inspect” and “fly into a rage” if the dishwasher wasn’t loaded a certain way. He also complained about Amy’s shopping habits. “She spends money at a fantastic pace,” he testified. “I did spend a lot on fabric,” admits Amy, who began to sew her own clothes. Though the classiest store in Lake Wales was Wal-Mart, George believed that she was spending too much money there, and he took credit cards away from her, instructing the help that when they were sent out for groceries they were “never to give her the change.”

**F**riends of Amy’s say that there were other red flags, but that for some time Amy didn’t recognize them. The earliest apparent sighting of George’s risqué behavior occurred at a dinner party near Seal Harbor, Maine, where the Rockefellers vacation in August. Amy was eight months pregnant with Catharine and by all accounts very large. She and George were invited to dinner at the home of a 90-year-old social maven who has known George’s family for years and who “would die on the spot,” according to one of her longtime employees, if her name were to be mentioned.

This employee says she was aghast at the events that took place—mostly under the table—that night. It started at the cocktail hour (“though at the missus’s age, we like to call it the cocktail 40 minutes”), when George took a fancy to one of the only other guests under 80—a stunning woman who attended as the paid companion of one of the elderly guests. The two slipped away to the dining area, where, “tittering and giggling and whispering,” says the employee, they switched place cards in order to be seated next to each other. “Then, as I served the dinner, I just couldn’t believe what was happening.” Somewhere between the roasted-pepper soup and the halibut—“with his eight-months-pregnant wife across the table!”—George and the woman apparently found a common interest under the table. The employee says she almost dropped the fish when she saw them groping each other. “They even had their shoes off.&hellip; Such blatant disrespect to the hostess!” she snaps.

The next day George returned to take the woman for a walk in the woods. Later they also went for a boat ride, along with several others, including Amy. A Philadelphia Main Line socialite described to the judge in Orlando how “painful” it was to observe what happened: Amy sat on one end of the boat with Paul Henry in her lap, and George was on the other, flirting and laughing and making a movie date with the young woman. The socialite, who had known Amy since she was 12, says she asked her afterward, “How can you *stand* it?”

Catharine was born six weeks later, and within three months Amy was pregnant again. By then she had turned to Catholicism, which she had studied after her brother became ill. When she converted, her father-in-law, George O’Neill Sr., the reigning Catholic of the Rockefeller family, was her godfather. George junior, like his siblings, was raised Catholic by their father, though his mother, according to Amy, remained a “generic Protestant.” He has become devout since Amy left him. He currently attends 9:30 a.m. Mass daily in Lake Wales, a fact he has brought up in court more than once. He has even brought his rosary to the courtroom.

**W**hile Amy was pregnant with her third child, Georgie, she decided she needed a baby-sitter. Miss Shirley worked from 7:30 to 3:30, but Amy wanted someone to help out in the evenings. Terri Nelson, who was married to a local funeral director and had taught Amy how to sew, recommended Jennifer Acreman, whom she knew from the First Assembly of God church. Jennifer was a friendly girl of 19 with long red hair.

At first Amy was fond of Jennifer. But by the end of her pregnancy with Georgie, she says she had started to “notice things” between Jennifer and her husband. As she later testified, “He would stroke her hair, rub her shoulders, give her backrubs. There was a lot of hugging that went on.” Amy told George that she was “offended” by their behavior, “that I wanted her dismissed and replaced.” But George, she says, insisted that Jennifer stay. Another baby-sitter testified that Jennifer Acreman would parade around in George’s boxer shorts. Amy and others say she also took naps in George and Amy’s bed. Acreman denies this and says the boxer shorts were her own.

In court, Amy would also learn that her husband paid for Acreman to have a nose job. Both George and Acreman strongly deny that anything sexual went on between them, and she claims that Amy “is a very sick individual. She acts like this innocent mother, but you don’t know. She’s *crazy!*” As for the nose job, Acreman says, “I paid him back.”

Georgie III was born in late October 1994. Several weeks later, Faith Whittlesey was diagnosed with cancer, a rare melanoma of the eye, and her right eye had to be removed. Amy flew to New York with Georgie to care for her. The christening of little Georgie III was postponed until January so that Faith Whittlesey, wearing an eye patch and about to start chemotherapy, could attend. That was the day Cosmo Cremaldi says he went into the kitchen for orange juice and found the baby’s father in a compromising position, allegedly with Jennifer Acreman. “It didn’t happen,” George O’Neill Jr. has testified.

**D**iagnosed with postpartum depression, Amy slid into a state of such despair that employees say there were days when she could barely get out of bed. They would take her meals, and her babies, to her room. When she did get up, she seemed to be in a daze.

Amy realized that she had a serious problem. As she later told the judge, she turned to George. “I don’t want the children to see me this way,” she told him. “I said, ‘I desperately need your help, would you please help me find a good doctor?’” Her husband’s solution, Amy testified, was to “take out the bottle of vodka and pour it and make me drink it and then try to have relations.”

In February 1995, a month after the christening, Amy says she went down to the kitchen at 10 o’clock one night and found her husband and Jennifer Acreman in “what I would call a sexual embrace.” As Amy recalled for the judge, “He had one hand inside of her pants and the other hand up inside of her shirt.” She says she covered her face and ran upstairs. After hearing Jennifer’s car pull out of the driveway, she confronted George: “How could you do this to me after everything that I’ve been through in the last year?”

He told her she was imagining things. She went upstairs and locked the door to the bedroom suite. He followed her up in a rage, she says. “He beat in the door and came in screaming at me, ‘You mother-fucking bitch, don’t you *ever* lock me out of our bedroom.’ He told me that I was seeing things, that I was crazy like my brother.”

Nothing could have hurt her more, Amy says. Yet instead of getting angry with George, she says that she groveled, asking him what she could do to make him love her again. The next night, she claims, George told her explicitly

how. He “wanted to make [Jennifer] our sexual play toy,” Amy testified. “He wanted for me to engage in sexual activity with her.&hellip; I was revolted.” Life with George, she said, had “become intolerable.”

A month later, Amy hit rock bottom. Her husband was in Palm Beach at a business meeting with his father. She had been up all night with the children, two of whom were getting over pneumonia. She felt “thoroughly exhausted.&hellip; I just was overwhelmed with the number of burdens that were facing me. I &hellip; seemed to have uncontrollable tears.” She called a friend in Lake Wales and asked her to drive her to a psychiatric facility in nearby Winter Park.

When they arrived there, she had neither an insurance card nor a credit card. Her husband kept all those. The hospital “wouldn’t take me,” she says, so her friend drove her back home. That night after she put her children to bed, she says, she “just [kept] crying uncontrollably and getting more and more upset.&hellip; I knew that I desperately needed help, I needed professional intervention. I needed to be in a hospital. And so I did something which I deeply regret.”

She sat down at the kitchen table, picked up a steak knife, and slashed her feet and hands. Taken bleeding by ambulance to the hospital, she was finally admitted.

**T**he day before she slashed herself, Amy says, she went to see George’s mother, who was in Mountain Lake on vacation. Amy begged her to help her. Abby was “cold, indifferent, and dismissive,” Amy says sadly, as though the last thing she needed to hear was that her daughter-in-law wished to check herself into the local mental institution. (Abby O’Neill declined requests to be interviewed.)

George sometimes referred to his mother as Acid Abby, a nickname she had acquired in boarding school. At his wedding-rehearsal dinner, one of his best friends, in a toast to Abby, called her “the *Reichsführer*.” His bride was horrified. While Abby is considered imperious by many, she had—until the afternoon Amy showed up pleading for her help—a staunch defender in her daughter-in-law, who felt she “always tried to be kind,” and who is still grateful for the fact that, when she and George adopted Paul Henry, George’s parents “treated him as their own flesh and blood.”

After Amy was hospitalized, Abby, according to Amy’s testimony, instructed her son to lose the baby-sitter. Jennifer became history. However, Amy recalls, “when I got home from the hospital, she kept calling him on the phone, late at night, when we were in bed.”

“He didn’t really fire me,” Acreman, who is now 24, says in a telephone call. “He said, ‘Jennifer, it would be best if you weren’t here when she came home.’ But I kind of figured I wasn’t coming back.” She says she returned to the house only once, to get her toothbrush from the bathroom.

**W**hen Amy returned home from the hospital in the spring of 1995, she found a husband who seemed willing to put their marriage and their family back together. He even agreed to counseling. Amy saw a therapist and went on antidepressants. She says she also got a special dispensation from a priest to use birth control.

As she tried to get a handle on her own problems, she came to realize that part of George's problem was that he didn't have much to do. Since they had moved to Mountain Lake, he had been less interested in his sculpting, and spent most of his "workday" helping out Republican candidates, particularly central Florida's Charles Canady, who is considered by liberals to be a new Jesse Helms. When George wasn't raising money for Canady, he was often at the shooting range he had built down the road from their house, indulging his interest in guns. "I wanted to get him out of politics," says Amy. "I felt it was a waste of money and that he wasn't being fulfilled." George also held the title of vice president of the Meriwether Capital Corporation, one of the Rockefeller-family interests, and had an office with his name on it at Rockefeller Center. But, as he told the court in the fall of 1998 when asked what his duties were, "for years I've done nothing. I don't know whether I still am [vice president]. I used to be—I just don't [know]."

Amy encouraged him to start the Lost Classics Book Company, which would reprint children's books from the late 19th and early 20th centuries. "Dear Fellow Parent," wrote George in an introductory-offer letter. "Do you struggle to find good, *moral* reading for your children?" He told how the idea for Lost Classics had come to his wife and him when they started looking for books to read to their first child. "What a shock! Much of what we found was inappropriate, badly written and, of course, politically correct to the hilt." He enclosed a photograph of the O'Neills: "From our family to your family."

To staff the company, Amy and George turned once again to the local churches, where they found a rich supply of women from 18 to 24 years old with high-school degrees at best, who were thrilled to leave their current situations (such as working at McDonald's) to work for a Rockefeller in Mountain Lake starting at from \$6.50 to \$8.50 an hour. Their job was to sit with George in his office in the house and read and typeset 19th-century children's books.

Amy liked them at first. She saw them as girls "who needed a break in life."

Shirley Hare and other household employees say that the Lost Classics Girls, as they came to be called, wasted little time in making themselves at home. Some brought their dirty laundry to do at the house, showered there, and arrived "dressed in highly inappropriate outfits," as Hare puts it, "tube tops and short shorts." At any given time, there were from four to seven of them in the house, including Kimberley, Becca, Becky, Erica, Joy, a set of identical twins, and one named Amy Fisher. They all seemed to have a look—"the skank look," says one employee. A carpenter who did work at the house remembers that they were all chubby, "with big bosoms."

George seemed to enjoy their company from the start. Household employees say that the girls had a routine. They'd get there in the morning, fix something for themselves in the kitchen, then go up to the office. At about 10:30 they'd all return downstairs with George for what was known as Wafflerama. A housekeeper says she would be instructed to "start the waffles," and then the girls would sit with George around the table "and he'd entertain them with stories. . . . They'd hang on his every word. He'd tell them about Italy and France and England and Africa." This would go on for hours. Once, one of the girls was overheard asking George if it was true that "his family had as much money as Oprah." "No, more!" George replied. "They were like a paid audience," says Amy. Wafflerama was suspended only when George's parents were in Mountain Lake. "There was no Wafflerama when Abby was around," says an employee. (The book company—which is owned by George and his parents—continues to publish, though it has never turned a profit.)

During Wafflerama, Amy was usually in her room. She soon reverted to what the Lost Classics Girls call her zombielike state. Later several Lost Classics Girls would testify that she was “overmedicating her children” in an effort to quiet them down. (Amy denies this.) They said they became so concerned that they would sometimes pour the children’s medicines down the drain and replace them with other liquids, including Gatorade. (“I was horrified by that,” says Amy.) Meanwhile, according to witnesses, George took charge of Amy’s medication, which comprised a cocktail of antidepressants. “During this time,” Shirley Hare says, “Amy wasn’t even the same person anymore.”

Visitors in the house during the Lost Classics Girls era remember that Amy—who not long before had hosted embassy parties in Bern—was a mess. “I was invited to a dinner party at their home,” says one friend of the couple’s. “There was *one* other guest, but they had a chef, two servants, and Faith putting this on. And Amy was in a dither because she couldn’t handle the pressure. She’d put the hors d’oeuvres down and lose it.”

Another friend remembers taking the couple a gift of homemade granola. George snapped “Barf!” and threw it across the table. During one dinner party, a guest recalls, George was outraged to find that the husband of one of the housekeepers had parked his car in the driveway, “so he deliberately sideswiped it, then told the woman her husband would have to pay for the damages.”

**T**he Lost Classics Girls, however, could do no wrong. “He treated them better than he ever treated his wife,” says another employee. “But he treated the dogs better than Amy.”

George later testified that Amy was again spending recklessly at Wal-Mart. Often when she shopped, one of the Lost Classics Girls—who held the credit cards and signed the sales slips—would escort her. According to Amy’s testimony, sometimes George “did give me money,” but “it was based on a system of reward and punishment.&hellip; When he was pleased with me,” she said, he would give her a few dollars. “And when he was displeased, the money was withheld and I had to beg.” Household staff members say she often borrowed from them. Meanwhile, the Lost Classics Girls were rewarded with \$100 bills and gifts such as cameras and linens from Paris.

Amy says that when she asked George what she could do to “fix” things between them, he would tell her that she had no control over her life and that she didn’t “appreciate” him the way the girls did. “He said that I wasn’t a very good wife and that I didn’t support him, and I was so crazy that any other man would have slapped me around by now. And that I should be very appreciative that he hadn’t.”

“I wanted to do whatever it took to make him happy,” she says. That included having breast implants and liposuction.

The Lost Classics Girls were also in charge of picking up the mail from the post-office box in town. George took away Amy’s key to the box, he testified, because he suspected her of “swiping checks” and misplacing his mail “underneath the bed.” (George lived on an allowance sent to him by his parents, which totaled \$795,794 in 1997. Amy claims she had no idea how much he received.) Amy’s girlfriends say that she stopped getting their phone messages, so they resorted to writing her letters, but they believe she didn’t get those either. According to Amy,

the Lost Classics Girls were instructed to throw out any catalogues that came for her in the mail, in order to keep her from spending money on “frivolous things.”

Sometimes George took the girls to the shooting range he had built. George, who slept with a loaded pistol by the bed and took great pride in being a National Rifle Association instructor, had always been into guns, says his wife. (He admitted in court to teaching Paul Henry to count with empty bullet shells at the kitchen table.) George says his guns are a sportsman’s hobby, but, Amy testified, “there was a distinct change in the number of ammunition and guns that he had. And it was around the time of the Waco and Ruby Ridge tragedies. He was concerned about the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms confiscating his guns. And so he wanted to accumulate as many as he could.” He also, she says, “made me watch videos, many, many videos, concerning the activities of the A.T.F. and how they violated people’s First Amendment rights and broke into homes and shot people and stuff.”

For several months, household employees say, George’s method of controlling Amy’s “erratic behavior” was to make her wear a notebook around her neck, even in public. George admitted in court that the spiral notebook on a chain was something he “made for Amy” so that she could keep track of her daily activities. “He insisted that I wear it,” Amy testified, “because he said that I couldn’t remember anything.” “I never forced her,” George testified. “It was her idea.”

Amy with her notebook became a figure of fun for the Lost Classics Girls, and Wafflerama soon evolved into a trash-Amy session, during which the girls would refer to her as the M.F.B. (motherfucking bitch) and the Dragon Lady, with George, according to other employees, egging them on. George denies this: “I always defended her,” he told the court.

A household employee claims that one day George took one of the Lost Classics Girls into the pantry, giggling “and with his arms around her,” and closed the door. Another morning when a housekeeper showed up early to start her five o’clock shift, she says she saw one of the Lost Classics Girls coming down the stairs. “Oh, working late, I see,” the housekeeper said.

In April 1996, Amy gave birth to Roger Whittlesey O’Neill, the couple’s fourth child.

One year later, Amy O’Neill finally left her husband. The last straw, she says, came one night at his parents’ house in Mountain Lake. Terri Nelson, who had recently left her funeral-director husband, as well as her job at the funeral home, had started working for George. (She would later testify that she wasn’t a Lost Classics Girl but rather helped George with Buchanan affairs on the computer.) Amy testified that she walked in on them and “saw Terri Nelson performing oral sex on my husband.” Nelson, in her testimony, denied ever having had sex with George, but she admitted that they had spent the evening smoking pot in his parents’ living room—Amy included. But “she passed out,” said Nelson. Shirley Hare claims she recalls a morning in Seal Harbor, Maine, when she found George in shorts and a jacket and Nelson in her bathrobe by the fireplace rubbing each other’s feet. (Amy had hired Terri to help her with the children while the family was on vacation.)

Amy claims that, after the alleged oral-sex incident, George admitted that he and Terri had been involved for four years, but that it wasn't "really adultery," because they never "crossed the line." (In court, George denied having had any relations with Terri, but he admitted he gave her money to send her children to private school.) Amy promptly called Barrett Nelson, the father of Terri's four children, and informed him of what she says she had witnessed.

That night, says Amy, George "went into a rage and demanded that I retract what I said in writing. And he said to me, 'Don't you know I'm going to have to pay off Barrett Nelson \$50,000 to keep this quiet?'" (Barrett Nelson laughs at this. "So, where's the 50 grand?") George testified that the first time he heard about the \$50,000 was in court.

That was the scene that ended, according to Amy, with her husband stomping around with a gun and threatening to kill himself. The fear that her children were in danger, she says, made her walk out the door.

**N**ine months later, in March 1998, Amy and George attempted to reconcile. "Because I love him," Amy explained to the judge.

Amy demanded that the Lost Classics Girls be let go. Her in-laws apparently concurred. According to family members, George O'Neill Sr. had already flown to Florida and instructed his son to get rid of the girls. In court, George spoke about "the big day" when he showed up at an apartment in Lake Wales where two of the girls lived. "He told us that he wanted to get back together with Amy and the only way he could is if we were fired," says one of them. There was a lot of hugging and crying, according to the girls. In the end, George gave them each a "severance" payment, in cash. Most of the girls got between \$3,500 and \$5,000. They were asked to keep it quiet.

Amy returned to her husband. The two-week "cease-fire," as George later called it in court, resulted in the conception of their fifth child, Phoebe. It also entailed, Amy has confided to friends, a trip with George to a restaurant in Winter Haven where he tried to coerce her into having "three-way sex with him and the female bar singer." (This story, too, has yet to surface in court.) In any event, the period of reconciliation was soon over.

Two months later, Amy discovered she was pregnant again and called George. "He said, 'You're lying, I don't believe you,' and hung up the phone." Then he stopped taking her calls. In July 1998, Amy filed for divorce. She and the children were then living in the \$68 motel room in Lake Wales, where they stayed for five months, during which, Amy says, she repeatedly tried to contact George. "I asked him to submit a list of names. I told him it was a girl. And I haven't heard from him. That was, I believe, at least a month and a half ago," she said in court when she was seven months pregnant.

Phoebe Elizabeth was born three days before Christmas in 1998. Amy named her after the phoenix rising from the ashes. In the weeks before her birth, George petitioned the court with an unusual request, given that he was then denying paternity: he wanted to be at the hospital when the baby was delivered. The judge denied his motion. Before she was a month old, Phoebe had her mouth swabbed for DNA. It matched George's, and Amy sent her husband an invitation to the christening.

**A**s the case of *O'Neill v. O'Neill* finally heads to trial after a bitter, year-and-a-half-long battle, money will become a major issue. George says he doesn't have much. Amy's lawyers say that's not true, and want to prove it by opening to the public sacred, highly confidential family documents, among them the famous 1934 trust formed by John D. Rockefeller Jr. for the Brothers, the Cousins, and their heirs.

The only time that even the slightest clues to the 1934 trust and other family assets were revealed was in 1974, during George's great-uncle Nelson Rockefeller's confirmation hearings to become Gerald Ford's vice president. The family was so upset then that, as Rockefeller biographers Peter Collier and David Horowitz wrote, "they would rather that Nelson was not Vice-president if the central trusts were exposed."

What George O'Neill is actually worth—or will be when his trust funds kick in—is a matter of intense speculation. Some individuals who are familiar with the family documents believe that his stake in the Rockefeller fortune may be as high as \$200 million.

George often refers to himself as "the oldest of the oldest of the oldest." His grandmother Abby "Babs" Rockefeller Mauzé was the first child born to John D. junior, but, partly because she was a woman, she inherited less than her five brothers. However, as family friends say, she didn't spend very much. When she died in 1976, her fortune was believed to be far greater than that of her brothers, who spent and donated liberally. They also among them had 21 children, whereas Babs's money was divided between her only two heirs, Abby, George's mother, and Marilyn, George's aunt, who died young of diabetes.

"George is the black sheep of the family, and he comes from the black-sheep line of the family," as one close family friend puts it. "But when his mother dies, he will be fantastically wealthy, and he'll have control of the money in a way his mother does not."

**W**hen Abby Milton O'Neill, who is now 71, dies, the 1934 and other trusts, according to the terms laid out by John D. junior, will be liquidated, so George O'Neill Jr. and his five siblings stand, in the view of family friends, to inherit an enormous sum. Because of the way one of the trusts is spelled out, no matter what George does, his mother cannot disinherit him.

George's argument to the court that he is cash poor may be accurate for now, for his wealth is still controlled by the trustees. "But that's beside the point," says a family friend, because he will inherit a bundle, some "without inheritance tax." (John D. junior intentionally drew up the 1934 trusts before dramatically raised gift taxes went into effect.)

In court George admitted that his income in 1997 was close to \$800,000, but he said that since then he has received much less. Amy's lawyers hope to prove that he is hiding his assets.

In another odd twist, however, Amy isn't asking for much. The last settlement offer proposed by her (and rejected by George) asked for permanent alimony of \$7,500 a month—only \$500 a month more than she is currently receiving under a temporary court order. The court has also ordered George to pay \$5,800 a month in child support. In addition, Amy wants one lump-sum "equitable distribution" payment of \$775,000 for the purchase of

a home, and a “family van” which would be upgraded every five years. And she wants George to agree to pay for the children’s education through graduate school and for “weddings for Catharine and Phoebe.”

“No one can understand,” says one family friend, “why he doesn’t just pay up now and get this over with.” But George, according to others, refuses to lose, even if he has to humiliate his family.

Nancy Palmer, the court-appointed lawyer for the children, whom George has fought unsuccessfully to have removed, wrote in a 34-page report submitted to the judge that George was an emotionally abusive husband, who “disparages [Amy’s] mental health to most everyone,” including his employees, most of whom “are uneducated” and “seem mesmerized by the Rockefeller name.” “I suspect,” wrote Palmer, “these young women have boosted his self-esteem (which is sad).” She concluded: “I believe [his] primary focus in this case is to either gain control over [Amy] again or punish her for wanting a divorce.”

**I**n the end, even the airing of the amount of the trust may prove to be anticlimactic. For the tawdry revelations that have so far come out in court and in depositions in Orlando are nothing compared with what might follow.

Amy O’Neill claims to have been “so humiliated and embarrassed” by her husband’s behavior in the marriage, and so worried about “protecting his reputation” and hers (“and my mother’s”), that she says she didn’t tell even close friends what was happening in her home. Only after George responded to her leaving by seeking full custody of the children, Amy says, did she begin to share her side of the story.

It is a story that can only get uglier. In diaries Amy kept toward the end of her marriage, she writes in great detail of lurid episodes in which her husband allegedly tried to coerce her into three-ways and of his tormenting her by allegedly boasting of various sexual conquests with his employees. In a lengthy letter she intended to send to her mother-in-law but decided not to, Amy describes how she spent the last year of her marriage: fending off George’s “immoral and deviant” demands, which “included sodomy, participating in group sex with prostitutes, household employees and friends, watching hardcore pornography &hellip; attending strip clubs, [and] repeatedly urging that I wear a remote control sex toy.&hellip; I suffered in silence. I did not want to disgrace my husband.&hellip; Overwhelming shame prevented me from fully articulating my experience, even in therapy. I was too embarrassed to go to confession.”

In the letter she never sent, Amy continues: “He offered to take me away for vacations, just the two of us.&hellip; Much to my despair, these ‘vacations’ turned out to be weekends at seedy hotels in Kissimmee where we watched endless pay-per-view hardcore pornography at night and roamed local smut shops during the day in search of things ‘I wanted.’ &hellip; Unless I joined him in this interest I could never hope to please him as a wife. He even insisted that I rent these videos so that should I ever expose him, I could be discredited as the one who likes it.&hellip; During these weekends I would retreat to the privacy of a motel shower where, doubled over in anguish, I cried silent tears.”

Details of these alleged adventures have so far only been hinted at in court. They came up, vaguely, when Amy explained to the judge why, in the spring of 1997, she confronted George “on the issue of these young women in

his employ.” She testified that she told him “that our living conditions were intolerable and demanded that he change his behavior or I couldn’t stay in the marriage anymore. And I also told him he was a hypocrite and I couldn’t go to church with him because of the requests that he was making of me.”

“What requests?” her lawyer asked.

“Well, for what I consider, as a Catholic, to be perverted sexual activity.”

“What would that be?”

“Group sex, pornography. And this would take place on &hellip; the Saturday night before [church]. And the next morning we would all go into church. And I found that extraordinarily difficult, to reconcile the two.”

“What do I want?” asks Amy O’Neill, holding little Phoebe and looking out over the beach in Delray. “I want him to get past his anger.” Her other four children come tumbling toward her with their grandmother Faith, who is running to keep up. “And to help me raise these children. I *need* him to help me raise these children.

“And I love him,” she says. “He was my husband.”

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