

I. Introduction

II. Theme: Mr. Truman is now viewed as a common citizen who lacked visions of grandeur, yet still rose to the nation's highest level of power, without that power changing him. The Trumans attempted to live as "regular" people, and their home provides evidence of that. The Truman family's lifestyle was in some ways virtually unchanged by the presidency, while in other ways their lives would never be the same.

III. Theme Development

A. Front Gate

1. Truman was a common man
2. 219 North Delaware was not his house
3. A gift to the American people

B. Back Porch

1. Desire for privacy
2. Refused endorsements

C. Kitchen

1. A Common Kitchen
2. Adjustments
 - a. No White House staff
 - b. No Secret Service
 - c. No pension

D. Dining Room

1. Madge Gates Wallace
2. Presidential China

E. Study

1. Love of reading
2. Common/Uncommon books
3. No college
4. A family place with interruptions

F. Foyer

1. Phone call and Harry's hat
2. A weak staircase
3. Margaret's portrait

G. Music Room

1. Bess' portrait
2. Piano
3. Glass owl vs. glass love birds

H. Living Room

1. Harry's portrait
2. Gift from a queen
3. Gift from a grandson
4. A place of mischief and dignity

IV. Conclusion

A. Harry's walks

B. Quote

C. The Home's Significance

Universal Concept: Ordinary people can do great things.

Theme: Harry S Truman, despite being president, was a common person.

Goal: For the visitor to achieve an appreciation that Truman lived the American dream, anyone in this country can go far.

Objective: Compare and contrast how President Truman was both common and uncommon.

Introduction: “I tried never to forget who I was and where I came from, and where I was going back too.”ⁱ¹

Harry Truman is often referred as “a most Uncommon Common Man”², someone like you and I who went on to do great things. By exploring this national treasure we can achieve an intimate understanding that this world leader was both common and uncommon.

Front of House:

When observing this beautiful Victorian house, one may conclude that Mr. Truman may not be so modest. It appears he was quite wealthy, but for many years this was not his house. It was built by George Porterfield Gates, the grandfather of Bess Truman. In 1885 he adds an \$8,000 grand addition to the home. A seven room house becomes a 14 room mansion. That same year his granddaughter Bess Wallace is born. When she is 18 her father dies. Within the year she, her mother, and 3 younger brothers move in with their grandparents. She lives in this house for the next 78 years. When she marries Harry Truman in 1919 he moves in- in with his new mother-in-law, and lives here for the next 52 years of his life. Harry and Bess are the last two people to live in this house. When Bess Truman passed away in 1982 in her will she left this house to the American people. In a real way you and I own this historic treasure. Help us to take care of this special treasure.

¹ Home to a People's President. Schafer, David D. 1997 pg 1

² Home to a People's President, Schafer, David D. 1997 pg 1

Back Porch:

Take a moment to look around. You can imagine why Harry and Bess would love to spend much of their time here with Harry reading his newspapers and Bess playing her bridge games. However, on returning home for their retirement in 1953 this was not always a very pleasant place to be. If they would off looked out along the fence sometimes they would see swarms of people. They are armed with cameras and binoculars wanting to see the local celebrity. Harry was flattered at first but soon this became old. Like you and I the Trumans treasured their privacy. So they allowed their backyard to grow like a jungle, full of mock orange and bridal spirea to give them that privacy. Before the fence was built in 1949 by the secret service there was nothing to stop people from coming on to these grounds and taking a souvenir. Fearful that people may access the back porch the side steps were removed. The fence did not give full protection from their neighbors. As you may notice in their backyard the people living behind them in the green house could invade their yard but that was okay. The people who lived there were George and May Wallace. George was a brother of Bess. The house beyond was the home of brother Frank. Not only did they share the property they shared the driveway that led to the old barn turned garage. If you look inside you will see Harry and Bess's very last car, a 1972 Chrysler Newport. Through endorsements Harry could off owned anything from a Lincoln to a Honda for free. Even though the former president could off used the money he turned down all endorsements. He did not wish to cheapen or sell the name of the presidency. He stuck to his Chrysler's. If you notice he did have personalized plates. The number 5745 stands for May 7, 1945, a famous date when he was president. It is VE day. If it was a nice day the Trumans may have their breakfast or lunch out here if not they would eat in the kitchen and that is where we shall go next.

Tangibles: Bushes, fence, car

Intangibles: Bushes and fence so a need for privacy while the type of car shows modesty.

Universals: Modesty, privacy, peace

Kitchen:

What is the first thing you think of when you entered this kitchen? Find anything familiar? The Truman's had a lot of adjustments when they came back from Washington in 1953. They had no secret service. Not until John F. Kennedy is assassinated would secret service protect former presidents and first ladies. For almost eight years the Truman's lived in the White House/Blair House where all their everyday needs were met. He had a staff of about thirty, cooks, maids, and butlers. Now, coming back home in 1953 one would find Harry at this sink washing the dishes, cooking his bacon for breakfast, and preparing his toast.³ What a change it most of been for Mr. Truman to go from a \$100,000 salary to his military pension of around \$100.⁴ It is not until five years after he leaves the White House when Congress passes a presidential pension. For most of his life Harry Truman would worry about his financial security. They lived a very frugal life as noticed by the repairs done to the linoleum floor. Notice the wallpaper. This pattern was picked by Harry Truman in 1971. It is of poor quality as evidenced by the scratch marks made under the pull cords. These scratches were made in eleven years, from 1971 to 1982, the year Bess Truman died as shown from the calendar that is still on the wall. In their later years the Truman's did have financial security thanks to the pension and writing his memories. Despite this they still maintained their frugal lifestyle. No major upgrades where done except for minor ones. Such as the can opener on the door frame to the electric can opener on the table. At this time we are going to leave the most modern and informal room in the house

Tangibles: Sink, appliances, linoleum floor

Intangibles: The appliances and sink so everyday tasks and chores that where done with modesty and humility. Linoleum floor and wallpaper shows concern and frugality over finances.

Universals: Modesty, humility, fear

³ Home to a People's President. Schafer, David D. 1997

⁴ Truman. McCullough, David pg 928 1992.

Compare and contrast between common and uncommon: Level of service and salary as president compared to retirement.

Dining room:

From the most informal room in the house to the most formal, dinner time in the Truman home would reflect the old Victorian lifestyle of how the Truman's were raised. Ladies wore dresses, men wore coat and tie. Truman's mother-in-law was very much in charge. She would sit at the head of the table and never accepted Harry as her son-in-law, even after he becomes president. He is a debt ridden farmer who marries her only daughter of a prominent upper-class family. Tension was in this family just like any other. Despite their formal approach toward dinner the former President and First Lady never dined here with visiting dignitaries nor did they do much entertaining. Throughout the house there is little indication to show that Truman was president. One item we do have is the set of presidential china in the built in cabinet. This very china was used in the formal State Dining Room in the White House.

Tangibles: Dining room setting and china.

Intangibles: Dining room setting represents family tension while presidential china shows modesty.

Universals: Modesty, tension

Compare and contrast between the common and uncommon: very formal dining room setting but the Truman's would rarely entertain, no dinner parties despite their status.

Study:

Instead of continuing with the former dinner receptions and engagements the former President and First Lady would prefer to spend their evenings reading in the study. Here Harry and Bess would retire to pursue their favorite hobbies, reading and listening to music. Harry enjoyed reading history and biographies while Bess enjoyed reading mysteries. One would find in here titles of books we are quite familiar with such as "Huckleberry Finn" and "Hamlet".

Something we would find in our own homes. You would also find books such as the 1966 Congressional Directory. One thing you and I don't have but a former president would. Just one way he was common and uncommon. Reading was very important for Harry Truman. Our only 20th century president without a college degree, he largely became self-educated through his vast amounts of reading. Despite the luxuries of living in the White House he wished to be with his family as much as possible. He visited as much as he could while President, often spending evenings in this room with the family. His visits were interrupted, however, such as the time when he received a call from his Sec. of State announcing the invasion of South Korea. This important call took place in the foyer.

Tangibles: Books and records

Intangibles: The books and records show a typical leisure activity and a desire to be with family. The fact that he made frequent visits home as president also shows a desire to be with family.

Compare and contrast: Little formal education yet still became president. Also, the Truman book collection has familiar titles. Everything from "Gone with the Wind" to "Huckleberry Finn", but it also has titles like the "Congressional Directory". Something you and I probably don't have but a former President would.

Foyer:

Around the corner was a phone where Truman received the news about South Korea. Also here are Truman's hat and coat; they were left here by Bess after Harry passed away in 1972. If you look above you will see a very long yet practical pull string for the upstairs light. Much more practical compared to what the grandfather had installed in the early years at the bottom of the staircase. One way the Truman's may not have been so modest is this prominent portrait of Margaret Truman. This portrait hung in the White House upstairs family quarters. Their only child, she was their pride and joy.

She was born in an upstairs bedroom. We do not take people upstairs because of safety. This staircase was built in 1885 and with no underneath support it was not made to accommodate the 30,000 visitors that come through in a year. We have another portrait of a family member which is in the music room.

Tangibles: Hat and coat. Portrait of Margaret.

Intangibles: Hat and coat so modesty while portrait shows pride.

Compare and contrast: while Grandfather Gates added the beautiful statuary light on the staircase, the Truman's added the "longest pull string of any presidential home".

Music Room:

Here in the music room we have the original portrait of Bess Truman painted by Greta Kempton. Every President and First Lady has their official portrait in the White House. The original painting was accidentally shipped home with them and Harry had it placed here. A number of years later The White House calls asking for the portrait back in exchange for a copy. Do you think this happens? No. If you ever go to the White House and find the portrait of Bess Truman you will be looking at a copy. Now you are looking at the original. Unlike the portrait there are times you do not always get what you want. This happened to Margaret on her eight Christmas. She asked for an electric train set. Instead she got this baby grand piano and she was not very happy about it. Harry himself loved to play the piano. As a young boy it was his dream to become a concert pianist. He would practice two hours every day before or after school. He was good but not that good. The piano symbolizes you never know where life's path will lead you. Before leaving this room notice the small round table to the right. On top is a glass owl a steubinware a very expensive piece of glass. Next to it is the glassware of two love birds. On the bottom it says made in Taiwan.

Tangibles: Piano, Portrait of Bess Truman, glassware

Intangibles: Piano symbolizes you don't always get in life what you want or expect. Portrait symbolizes pride and stubbornness while glassware shows modesty-you display in your home whatever you like.

Compare and Contrast between the common and uncommon: the two different types of glassware.

Living Room:

Above the fireplace is a portrait of Harry Truman. The portrait was commissioned by Truman's Senate colleagues to commemorate his years in the Senate. Bess loved the painting so much she had this copy created for her. In this room are items given to the Truman's not only from heads of state (such as the Delftware Jars from the Queen of the Netherlands) but also items from their grandchildren. On the mantle is a chrome balancing man that was a gift from one of the grandsons. The living room was the scene of mischief. Such as the time the grandsons would shoot little red pellets from their toy guns at different targets in the room. The room was also the scene of more dignified events. Here the Truman's entertained former presidents and celebrities, such as Herbert Hoover, Lyndon B. Johnson, and Bob Hope etc. They would have been seated at the blue couch. These visits would not take place very long, only twenty or thirty minutes. They would not stay for dinner or spend the night.

Tangibles: Pictures of family, chrome balancing man, delftware jars, couch.

Intangibles: pictures and the balancing man show love of family, couch symbolizes Truman's status but also modesty as visits by dignitaries would be short.

Compare and Contrast between the common and uncommon: gift from a queen along with gift from a grandson. The grandsons causing trouble vs. visiting dignitaries.

Conclusion

It was out this front door that the former President would escort out the visiting dignitaries. It was also where he would leave for his daily morning walks. Truman made himself very accessible on these occasions. He would shake hands, sign autographs, and allow people to take his picture. Truman said "it was a pleasure to exchange greetings with my neighbors and be able to do so in an informal way."⁵ It is these kinds of images we have of Harry Truman driving his car, pumping his own gas and placing coins in the parking meter that give him this reputation of an uncommon common man. By coming to his house today I hope you are able to see firsthand how someone like you and I can do great things. Maybe someday we will go into one of your homes and seeing how you lived in 2010!

⁵ Mr. Citizen. Truman, Harry S. pg 25 1960.

-choose objects in the house and show how the presidency did not change him. Show the national significance and how it relates to the presidency.

Study- the books and phonograph. Despite the state dinners in the White House in their retirement the Truman's were not big on entertaining. They would entertain themselves by reading these books and listening to records on this phonograph.

Back porch- bushes, symbolizes he is no longer in the public eye. The back porch would make a perfect speakers platform but it is not.

Dining room- presidential china is not located in a very prominent location. It shows that despite being at the head of power he kept his modesty on his retirement.

Music room- the television. President Truman was the first president to have a TV in the oval office but came home and would hardly watch TV. Despite all the technology and perks he had as president he came home and lived "old fashioned".

Universal Theme: It is possible to succeed in life despite great obstacles.

Theme: Harry Truman overcame great obstacles to become President of the United States.

Introduction: We remember Harry Truman as an accidental president in a very fragile time in world history. He faced many obstacles not just as president but throughout his own life.

Front yard:

One of Harry Truman's first great tests was his nine year long courtship with Bess Wallace. The cake plate story.... and how Truman was at a disadvantage because of his social standing, (a struggling farmer vs. an only daughter of a prominent family). Dogged persistence and optimism paid off.

Back Porch:

Kitchen:

Harry Truman lived a frugal life. Notice the repair to the linoleum floor and the common everyday appliances. Harry Truman faced debt much of his life. He struggled as a farmer, investments in zinc mine and oil fields put him \$23,000 under (McCullough, 101). No presidential pension until 1958 had to sell portions of the family farm.

Dining Room:

Harry lived here with a mother-in-law who never accepted him even after he became president. She died in 1952 at age 90 Not until he comes back from the White House will this house be owned by he and Bess. Madge Wallace died with no will so her estate is divided equally between her and her three brothers. To have ownership of the home they brought out the brothers for \$18, 750. Not until Harry is 67 years old and Bess is 66 will they own their own house.

Study:

Harry wanted to go to college but his family could not afford it. He did have a high school education but then was greatly self educated.

Music Room:

Piano symbolizes you don't always get in life what you want or expect. Margaret wanted an electric train set; Harry wanted to be a concert pianist.
