

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

WITH

LADY BIRD JOHNSON

JUNE 24, 1997

INDEPENDENCE, MISSOURI

INTERVIEWED BY KENNETH E. APSCHNIKAT

ORAL HISTORY #1997-5

HARRY S TRUMAN NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR





**Jennifer Robb, Lady Bird Johnson, and Lynda Johnson Robb
in front of the Truman home**

June 24, 1997
(National Park Service photo by Carol Dage)

EDITORIAL NOTICE

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Jim Williams reviewed the draft of this transcript.

RESTRICTION

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ABSTRACT

Lady Bird Johnson visited Harry S Truman National Historic Site on June 24, 1997, with her daughter Lynda Robb and granddaughter Jennifer Robb to view the park service's interpretation of the Truman home for possible application to the management of Lyndon Baines Johnson National Historical Park in Texas. This is a transcript of her tour of the home with park superintendent Ken Apschnikat, chief ranger Karen Tinnin, museum curator Carol Dage, and other members of the park staff. Throughout the tour of the home, Johnson and Lynda Robb ask about particular strategies the park service uses at the Truman home during tours. They also shared stories of previous visits and encounters that they had had with Harry and Bess Truman.

Persons mentioned: Bess W. Truman, Margaret Truman Daniel, E. Clifton Daniel, Lyndon B. Johnson, Herbert C. Hoover, Roberta Vinson, Carl Vinson, Fred Vinson, Hale Boggs, Greta Kempton, Daniel MacMorris, Albert K. Chow, Clifton Truman Daniel, Giovanni Papini, Pierre Salinger, Dumas Malone, Joseph P. Lash, Pearl Buck, Thomas Hart Benton, Madge Gates Wallace, Prince Michael of Greece, King Paul of Greece, Vietta Garr, and Joseph Gray.

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KENNETH APSCHNIKAT: . . . because of the off season, but during the summer it's filled just about every day.

KAREN TINNIN: Eight per tour, and we run them every fifteen minutes. We do a first-floor tour. We don't do the upstairs because of Mrs. Truman's will.

APSCHNIKAT: Mrs. Truman willed that the upstairs would not be used during Mrs. Daniel's lifetime, her daughter. Bess Truman's daughter, Margaret Truman Daniel, said that she didn't want anyone going on the second floor as long as she was alive, and of course she still is alive in New York City.

LADY BIRD JOHNSON: And how is she? Because she came down to see me about two years ago, and we had such a nice visit.

APSCHNIKAT: Well, I haven't had a recent update, but I know that she has been in ill health in recent years, but nothing extremely serious.

JOHNSON: Then she went back and wrote the book that she had interviewed me about, and then we asked her to come down to some event and she . . . Her husband responded, and he said, "She is too sick. She cannot."

TINNIN: And that's about the last time we saw her here, also. She would come back about every other year. They had a Bess W. Truman Award, and she would usually try to come back for that, but about two years ago is about the last time we saw her.

APSCHNIKAT: Right. We saw her in '95, the first year I was here. So normally what we

do, and Karen can tell you more about it, but we have our eight visitors gather outside the fence, and the ranger talks to them briefly and points out some features in the neighborhood from the front step area, the front gate, and then they lead them around the back side. Karen, you might tell why we do that.

TINNIN: The reason we do that is . . . I have been here from the beginning, and when we first opened the site we did come through the front door. But it seemed that what we found out is that the friends and family that would come to visit the Trumans would usually come through the back way. So we kind of made that change, and it seems to flow better. We also, when we first started, we were kind of . . . with all the original artifacts inside, we were kind of concerned about people taking things, and so we would have a ranger behind and a guide giving the tour. And we decided to change that and come through the back, and we feel that one person can do it now, and we feel that we have, with the small group, and we can kind of keep them all together and watch what they're doing, too.

JOHNSON: Did you say eight people at a time?

TINNIN: Yes, ma'am.

LYNDA ROBB: So you bring the tour now through the back?

TINNIN: Yes.

L. ROBB: Now, how do you get on this tour? Do you call up and you just appear at a certain hour?

TINNIN: No, we have a ticket center five blocks to the east, and they have to go there and pick up a ticket, and the ticket will have a time on it. And what

we have is a board that has golf tees in it, and when the people come in we pull those pegs and they know exactly what time they will come up here to go on their tour. They will have in hand a little ticket that gives them the time, and then they come up here to the front and then we take them in then. Now, from the beginning of being here, a lot of people were upset because they did have to go to a different location, but over the years it's worked out. And with it still being in the neighborhood and everything, we were trying to keep it still that neighborhood and not make those changes.

APSCHNIKAT: See, if you'll notice, this pretty much looks like it did when Truman was alive. You may not remember some of the details, but it hasn't changed very much at all. And we didn't want to build a visitor center or put anything that would make it change that much, and so we like the idea of visitors going somewhere else and then coming here, parking as if they were visiting the Trumans, and then going on the tour. Because the view they get, other than a few modern differences, it's pretty much the same. And that's important to us, to make it look as close as possible the way it did. I know you're thinking about this with your house. Is that correct?

JOHNSON: That's exactly right, because I'm now eighty-four years old and I have a life estate in my house, and so I want to look forward sensibly to the time when it will go completely to the government, and I presume, some few months later after my death, it will open to the public. I want to see the goods and the bads of how other people have done it. You know, the gingerbread is so pretty!

TINNIN: It is, isn't it?

APSCHNIKAT: It's a beautiful house.

JOHNSON: I hadn't remembered it as quite this elaborate and elegant. I just think it's wonderful.

TINNIN: But not ornate.

APSCHNIKAT: Do you remember coming through the front gate, being let in the front, that iron gate, through there?

JOHNSON: Yes, that's the way I came in every time. I'm not sure when the first time was. Perhaps it was with Lyndon at some political visit. But the most memorable time actually, for me, was the time when we wrote and asked President and Mrs. Truman if I could come down and get them to tell me of the early stages of setting up *their* presidential library, and what they were glad about and what . . . It's very hard to ask what went right and what went wrong, but that's what I wanted to learn. And it was very clear that what went right with him, at least what he enjoyed and thought was important, was talking to the groups of young people who came through. And I just rejoiced in that. And he had, as we walked through, he noticed me sort of looking over at a letter which was lying on his desk, open. And he said, "Oh, you're looking at it, pick it up and read it." [laughter]

APSCHNIKAT: Was this at the Truman Library you did that?

JOHNSON: This was in his office at the Truman Library. And what it was, it was a letter from President Hoover to him, thanking him for restoring him, Hoover, to the only job he had ever . . . *aspired to* were his words, I think, and that was public service, to return to public service. Because a big

commission had been formed by Truman on a tightening up or reform of the many, many . . . I cannot describe it, but anyhow a very sizeable government reform bill, a tightening up of all the agencies and commissions and everything, and he had asked Hoover to be sort of the engineer in charge to make the thing run. Then he gave me what he called a five-dollar tour [chuckling] through the library, which was quite wonderful, and I loved it. And after when we had just walked and walked and asked and asked, eventually he said . . . What did he call her, Mother? “Mother and I are going to take you to lunch.” Mrs. Truman. He may have said, “Bess and I,” but I remember his expression as both affectionate and country, which was what I would like to think of myself as having that type of background. So we went to a place called The Apple Farm.

TINNIN: Oh, Stephenson’s! Yes, it’s still here.

APSCHNIKAT: Yes, it’s a very popular restaurant. One of the best. [chuckling]

JENNIFER ROBB: Well, we want to go there for lunch, so you’ll have to tell us how to get there.

APSCHNIKAT: Oh, we’d love to do that.

TINNIN: I can get you there, no problem.

APSCHNIKAT: Yes. Oh, you bet. That’s a great place.

JOHNSON: So if you tell Carter [?], why, we will go, if we have time. Unfortunately, when you’re taking a trip like this, if you make any dates ahead of time, it’s not a good plan because you’re going to keep somebody waiting. And that makes me uneasy. And we have made a date at the Nelson. Yes, yes.

L. ROBB: You caved in?

JOHNSON: I caved in.

L. ROBB: Oh, you didn't tell me that. I heard only the protest of, "No, no, no. Thank you so much. No, no, no, no, no." [chuckling]

TINNIN: Mrs. Johnson, I don't know if you know the story where Truman . . . how he and Bess first met.

JOHNSON: In Sunday school is what I've always thought.

TINNIN: Yes, right, and then they went to school together, and they graduated in 1901. But this house across the street, which is now the park service, the cream-colored one, well, Mr. Truman's aunt and uncle lived there. They were the Nolands. And one time he came out to visit them, and they asked him to return a cake plate over here to this house, and he came from Grandview. And he hadn't seen Bess in a long time, but he always had a crush on her. And when he got across the street that day, he knocked here on the front door, and Bess was the one who answered the door. And that's when their courtship began of nine years. And he actually did not move into the house here until 1919, and it was her family's home.

JOHNSON: Mhm, eighteen years after they had graduated.

TINNIN: Yes.

JOHNSON: By the way, I want to say quite clearly, I think I see some more visitors coming. And for Pete's sake . . .

APSCHNIKAT: Well, let's go in, okay? Let's do.

JOHNSON: You all take up to your own limit of eight or whatever it is.

APSCHNIKAT: Oh, we're fine. Let's go ahead in.

JOHNSON: I don't mind a bit, and they are here.

APSCHNIKAT: Oh, that's okay. They have tickets for the next tour, I suspect.

JOHNSON: Is that right?

APSCHNIKAT: Yes, ma'am. [footsteps as group enters the home] We have something very special we want you to see in here before we get into some other things, if you can step this way. And watch, the carpet's a little wrinkled right here. But there's something I think is very special here on the piano. See if there's anybody you recognize on that piano.

L. ROBB: She can't see. She has to be over here. Nini?

APSCHNIKAT: Carol [Dage], can you help her?

JOHNSON: The noise . . . me, my vision level is very poor.

APSCHNIKAT: Carol is going to fix you up. She needs to put on her white gloves, which we have to . . . You notice I didn't touch it. I know better. [chuckling] That's what we have our curator staff for.

L. ROBB: One of our children worked at the archives, and she says those white gloves are much overrated. She says that they, in fact, all of you all touch things.

APSCHNIKAT: Oh, no. [chuckling]

CAROL DAGE: This is a gift, and it is the president's house, and it reads, the inscription: "To President and Mrs. Truman, who left a great legacy to this well-loved house. Lady Bird and Lyndon Johnson, Christmas 1966."

JOHNSON: [chuckling] Yes, we took pleasure in sending a lot of old friends of the White House. It was very nice. Tell me who the others are.

DAGE: This is Roberta Vinson, who was a friend.

JOHNSON: Oh, goody-goody, and a great storyteller.

J. ROBB: Who was she, exactly? I don't really . . .

JOHNSON: She was the wife of a justice of the Supreme Court. I think maybe at one time he might have been Chief Justice.

L. ROBB: Carl Vinson?

JOHNSON: No, not Carl. He was a fellow from Georgia.

L. ROBB: Oh, that's right.

JOHNSON: This was a senator.

L. ROBB: Fred Vinson.

JOHNSON: Yes. Somewhere in his career he was a senator from Kentucky, was it? And then went to the Supreme Court.

DAGE: And we have another photograph here.

L. ROBB: I have never seen that picture.

DAGE: "For my dear and true friends, Bess and Harry Truman, with affection and great respect, Lyndon Johnson, May of 1968."

L. ROBB: I have never seen that picture. Are you familiar with that, Nini?

JOHNSON: Yes, I am, darling, and I like it.

L. ROBB: Well, it's a little late for me to get my copy made. [chuckling] Signed anyway.

APSCHNIKAT: That's a special picture.

DAGE: Yes, and we have one more.

APSCHNIKAT: And we have another one that's even more special, I think.

L. ROBB: Are you telling me that y'all have those up there all the time?

APSCHNIKAT: Yes, ma'am. We did not put them up there for you. The visitors see those, too.

DAGE: These are as the Trumans left them.

APSCHNIKAT: That's right. Is this the one of both of them?

DAGE: Yes. [reading] "For President and Mrs. Harry Truman, with our admiration and devotion always. Lady Bird and Lyndon Johnson, Christmas 1968." That's beautiful.

JOHNSON: I think that's one of my favorites.

L. ROBB: Me, too. I love that one. You know what? I don't have that of you and Daddy. That's the one . . . Wouldn't you like that, Jennifer?

J. ROBB: I would love that.

JOHNSON: Well, maybe they have the negative in the library. We can at least see.

L. ROBB: Well, I know they do. And Daddy looks so thin.

J. ROBB: He does look drawn in that picture.

L. ROBB: Mother does, too. Now wouldn't it be nice if you had a mother that looked that good? [chuckling]

J. ROBB: Do not say such things about my mother.

L. ROBB: Remember we want those pictures. I like that one.

JOHNSON: You know, I like the way they have retained the old, but it certainly is . . . You all do a splendid job of showing it.

APSCHNIKAT: Well, we want the visitors to see it as the president left it and as the first lady left it. That's what's special about it, among other things.

TINNIN: And one of the other things, too, is that our normal visitors do not get in here to these rooms. We have, rather than putting up barricades, we have

dark gray carpet. We ask that folks stay on the dark gray carpet so we don't wear out the original floor coverings here.

APSCHNIKAT: You know, a lot of historic houses will have barricades and plexiglass and things like that. Because our tours are small, we're able to be intimate with our visitors and see every move they make. Knock on wood, I won't knock on the piano, but knock on wood, we've lost one reproduction piece of silver in fourteen years, which is phenomenal.

JOHNSON: Lynda, mark this. The general public, you just told me, does not enter these rooms. They've just got a velvet rope up?

TINNIN: No, we just have this dark gray carpet. The dark gray carpet right here goes right into the lighter carpet, which is theirs, and so this is their spot that they have to stop at.

JOHNSON: And so you just say to the public, "Will you please stop here"?

TINNIN: Well, what we do is out on the back porch we ask folks to follow the dark gray carpet throughout the home, and for kids, we call it our . . . rather than our yellow brick road, we have a gray brick road that they have to follow. And they actually do pretty well. But we're right there, too, that if we see that somebody may go too far, we just ask them to step back to the dark gray carpet. When we come in, we're bringing folks in, and we kind of let them come over here. And for the most part, they catch themselves and they stay on the dark gray.

APSCHNIKAT: And there's an alarm right about where Karen is standing, so if they do step in, there's a little reminder.

TINNIN: Yes, but we don't have it on for you all, but there is an alarm that kind of

have little pinpoint lights.

L. ROBB: Okay. Well, as long as we're asking all these questions, let me ask you, was that water damage done in her lifetime, and did y'all choose not to fix it?

DAGE: That is correct.

JOHNSON: I don't see it on there. What?

APSCHNIKAT: And we probably wouldn't.

L. ROBB: Over here. Pardon me for pointing.

TINNIN: It was back, actually, in the late '60s. There was an ice storm that had hit, and at the time there was a slate roof on the house, and it did damage to the roof and inside. My understanding was Mr. Truman's health was not very well at that time, and they decided to go with the asphalt roof, which would be cheaper and I think also quicker to be done, and then they didn't have to . . . They never worried about inside here.

JOHNSON: And that was in '68?

TINNIN: In the late '60s, yes. I'm not for sure exactly what date.

JOHNSON: Because I remember President Truman's funeral was one of the last occasions that Lyndon went to the White House. As I remember it, it was sometime around Christmas in '68.

L. ROBB: That's correct.

JOHNSON: Wasn't it Christmas of '72?

TINNIN: Yes, he died in '72, actually, December 26th.

JOHNSON: I remember in January because we went to three sets of funerals, all significant, all devastating, for different reasons. The first was the

president's, the second was Hale Boggs, our congressman.

L. ROBB: Hale Boggs. Memorial service.

JOHNSON: An old friend who was lost over Alaska in a plane accident. And so that is a pretty dreadful departure from this world. And then the worst of all was a funeral of about seventeen young high-school-age young people who had been on a bus trip to a religious retreat in New Mexico. And all day, y'all went in, there were all those coffins lined up in the auditorium. Well, anyhow, it . . .

APSCHNIKAT: Well, I don't know if there's anything else in this room that's particularly special. Is there anything you might want to comment on?

TINNIN: Well, I think Mrs. Truman's first lady portrait is hanging here above the fireplace. She didn't really ever care about her photograph being done, and this was the original first lady portrait.

JOHNSON: Was the painter Greta Kempton?

TINNIN: Greta Kempton is the one. She sure is. She also did the one out here of Margaret.

JOHNSON: I'm trying to remember, because in our time in the White House we wanted to get that for the White House. [chuckling] But Margaret said no. I do not know what we have in the White House.

APSCHNIKAT: A reproduction, isn't it, Karen?

TINNIN: Yes, a reproduction was made. Actually, Mrs. Truman did not want to sit for another portrait, and the story goes that she told them that they had the painting here, and she still had the dress, that if she wanted to come and make copies of it they could. And so a copy went to the White House and

at the library here in Independence. So this is the original, though.

JOHNSON: And there are two copies?

TINNIN: Yes.

L. ROBB: So the one at the White House is . . . ?

TINNIN: A copy.

L. ROBB: It's just a copy?

JOHNSON: But it's made by the same artist, I think.

TINNIN: Right. Yes, Greta Kempton did it.

APSCHNIKAT: We have some very special artifacts in this house, no question about it.

L. ROBB: Was this one done when she was first lady? [inaudible, all talking at once]

JOHNSON: Well, let me not hold you up too much.

APSCHNIKAT: You're not holding us up.

L. ROBB: Let me ask, did you say that she sat for this as first lady, or was this before she was first lady?

TINNIN: When she was first lady she sat for this one.

L. ROBB: She did sit for this one? I see. Okay. That's her official, personal one. The White House historical . . .

TINNIN: This was supposed to stay in D.C., and the story goes that it was accidentally crated up and brought back here. And then they called Mrs. Truman, wanting it to be sent back, and she said . . . My understanding was that she said no, that she really didn't want to, it wasn't her mistake, or something like that. Then they asked her if she would sit for another one, and she said, "No, but I've got the dress. I've got the painting. You

can make copies from it.” Now that’s my understanding of the story.

DAGE: It was a very pleasing portrait.

L. ROBB: In other words, this was a private painting. They had paid for it, and so therefore it was not something that belonged to the government or something?

TINNIN: Well, it was the official first lady portrait, as they did probably for your mother.

JOHNSON: Mhm, they did.

TINNIN: So it was the official one. And Mrs. Truman not being a very . . . wanting to take very many photos, as she was not very photogenic, so there is not a lot of pictures of her, of Mrs. Truman.

APSCHNIKAT: Now the room over here may have been the room that you were entertained in when you were here.

JOHNSON: I think we were in here.

TINNIN: Yes, this is the living room, if you’d like to step in here. A lot of people remember in here [unintelligible] sitting down on the sofa. Do you remember . . .?

JOHNSON: I think Lyndon and the president, when I was here with him, did sit on the sofa, and I sat in one of the chairs, as did Mrs. Truman. So, for three times at least, and my time alone was the most learning time because we had more . . . I could not impose on Lyndon and the president’s time together, President Truman’s, and so I [unintelligible].

L. ROBB: So you came one time here with Daddy, and that was to talk about the . . .?

JOHNSON: The library? No. Some kind of a political meeting. I do not remember. I imagine it was when Lyndon was campaigning. He would just come by to pay his respects.

L. ROBB: Probably in '64.

JOHNSON: And whenever we signed the . . . You remember that?

J. ROBB: Social Security?

L. ROBB: That's right, Social Security tax. No, it was Medicare.

TINNIN: Medicare! That's what it was, yeah.

L. ROBB: I was just debating this.

DAGE: Well, I think we can straighten that up.

APSCHNIKAT: That's the one that's been adjusted, too, isn't it?

DAGE: That's another Greta Kempton, yes. And the two side portraits were done by Daniel MacMorris, who's a Kansas City artist.

APSCHNIKAT: Who collected all the ivory?

DAGE: Truman gifts, we believe. There are quite a number of pieces. We know that they received a number of things from Max Chow, who my understanding was the unofficial mayor of Chinatown.

APSCHNIKAT: There's a lot of jade.

DAGE: Yes, a number of pieces.

L. ROBB: Now let me ask you, how did you decide . . . You have a lot of little silver pieces and a lot of little things like that, knickknacks. Do you choose not to polish them, or is it that you just haven't had time?

DAGE: The time factor.

L. ROBB: Okay. I'm really asking these questions because one of the things that

we're looking at . . . And to some extent you and I are at cross purposes. I'm going to be honest about this, because Mother wants to leave it like they lived there. But she's got two daughters and seven grandchildren and two great-grandchildren, and if my children don't hurry up and reproduce I'm going to really be left out of this deal. [chuckling] But, anyway . . .

J. ROBB: That's not my fault. [chuckling]

L. ROBB: She's too young, but she has a sister who's going to be twenty-nine, and I think it's high time. So what do you leave? And one of the questions, of course, is if the visitor can only stand right here, and I guess can peer around there and look at that, they can't read the inscriptions. For them, they have no idea whether it's a copy of the original, whatever it says on it, and so therefore you have to balance it against the family's desire also to have things that belonged to Grandmother and Granddaddy, or Great-grandfather.

APSCHNIKAT: That is a bit of a problem. Here we have this special opportunity to have everything pretty much the way that it was. We know that because pictures were taken, and so we know it's pretty close. And you're right, there are things in this room that no one would ever see except our staff.

L. ROBB: Because you have that door shut.

APSCHNIKAT: No, it stays like that. In other words, they'll never see it.

L. ROBB: Oh, you mean because they can't see it.

TINNIN: All around.

APSCHNIKAT: Right. But what's special about it is that we are able to preserve it as it really was, as opposed to what it really wasn't.

L. ROBB: And as it was when she died, not when he died?

TINNIN: Well, we pretty much know, though, that a lot of things were not changed after he died. In those ten years, Mrs. Truman did not make very many changes. So I think if he came back today, he would be pretty close to seeing it the way it was.

DAGE: I think that's an offering too for the public, when the tours come through, that we can share their original artifacts that were given by the Trumans, and they see that commitment made by the family to share the whole story and to share it as completely as possible. And for us, that's a wonderful addition to be able to share with visitors.

L. ROBB: And of course, you see, we're also balancing it, Nini, against the fact that you will have lived . . .

JOHNSON: Such a long time.

L. ROBB: Thirty years after he died, after Daddy died. You're going on a little while, as opposed to recently. You and I have changed that house a lot, nor would we want to leave it with all those sofas with the split cushions and stuff. [chuckling]

APSCHNIKAT: Well, we'll see some flaws later in this house. But you make a good point, because what time period are you going to pick to represent? We have a time period here, a time capsule of '72 to '82 time period. You have a bit of a problem in that regard. I would hope, though, that you could work with the park service in terms of reproductions or things that are pretty close.

JOHNSON: Absolutely. That's where we're at.

L. ROBB: We're talking about that. See, for instance, Nini, I think a real good question is the ceilings, Nini, they have lots of cracks . . .

JOHNSON: I can't see them, and what does it matter?

TINNIN: Well, you know, I guess the thing is that it becomes a part of the story, that people understand that the Trumans were just like anybody else, that they did not, you know, maybe care to make those changes. They were getting older, and those things don't become important to you anymore. But it's part of the story.

APSCHNIKAT: Excuse me, the crack above us, the one right above the fireplace, I don't think was there.

TINNIN: There was, I think, a small one there.

APSCHNIKAT: We've got some structural problems we're trying to address, and we will repair that, because that happened after '82. What you saw in the music room is an original, and we will leave that. It's kind of an interesting thing to deal with, but if we were to have a water leak now we would repair that as quickly as we could.

JOHNSON: Darling, I think for us the time period will inevitably be the time of Lyndon's years in the White House, probably, maybe going all the way from '60 to '75. I do not know, but we must talk about all those things. The thing is, I want it to be a lived-in house and have some warmth. And I see this house is . . . I have seen a great many of the presidents' homes, and some have warmth and some don't. I know dealing with the light level is a hard problem because light deteriorates rugs and drapes and everything. I personally, Lynda, would rather have them deteriorate and

fade [chuckling], because already they have faded from the time of your father's life. Are they replaced? Well, let's go on.

L. ROBB: I hear that, Nini. Let me ask you, how long is your tour?

TINNIN: Fifteen to twenty minutes long. We only, like I said, just show the first floor, so we move it along. We are not object-oriented either. We tell the story about the life that they lived in their home. You touched on something, Mrs. Johnson, that I think our people see when they come into this house, that it is still a very family . . . It looks like the Trumans have just stepped out. They step back into the kitchen, and they smell the old smell that brings back those memories in them.

DAGE: Mrs. Truman's grandson returned, was it two years ago?

TINNIN: Mhm.

DAGE: And one of the first things that he said was, "It smells like Grandma's kitchen." It still had it. [chuckling]

L. ROBB: It still smelled like that. [chuckling]

DAGE: Still had it.

JOHNSON: Now which one was that?

TINNIN: Clifton, the oldest son.

JOHNSON: Is he the one that wrote *The Life of Grandfather*?

TINNIN: Yes.

JOHNSON: He came down to the LBJ Library and talked to us. We have evenings called "An Evening With . . .", and the speaker may be from all sorts of fields of endeavor of American life, but very much related to the presidency.

L. ROBB: Now, Nini, in this bookshelf they have . . . You know President Truman was a big history student, and right in the middle they have *The Vantage Point*.

JOHNSON: Nice!

L. ROBB: Isn't that nice?

JOHNSON: I want to tell you all, one of the things that President Truman told me on a long, long plane ride to Greece, to the funeral where he was the official representative, and I was one, I went alone, funeral of the king of Greece, he said, "By the time I was nine, I had read every book in the Independence library." So that is important, to leave books out that have meant something to either Lyndon or me.

L. ROBB: Well, Mother, they have *White House Profile: Bess Truman*, they have *Jefferson, the President*, by Dumas Malone. We really recommend that one. They have *Abigail Adams*; *The Life of Christ*; *With Kennedy* by Pierre Salinger, and it's in a leather case, by the way . . .

JOHNSON: Did you say *The Life of Christ*?

L. ROBB: *The Life of Christ* by Giovanni Papini.

JOHNSON: And Salinger's was something else.

L. ROBB: Oh, yeah, that's his second book. *A King's Story: The Memoirs of the Duke of Windsor*; *Bismarck*; *And So, Victoria*—that's another one—and then they have two of the Lash books on Eleanor: *the Years Alone* and *Eleanor and Franklin*, *The Secret Diary of Harold Ickes: The First Thousand Days*, and Pearl Buck is right next to Daddy, *Imperial Women*. It's interesting to see . . .

TINNIN: But you haven't seen anything yet.

L. ROBB: Oh, well, I'm sure.

TINNIN: The study over here is nothing but books, from floor to the ceiling. And you know she liked murder mysteries.

JOHNSON: [chuckling] No, I didn't.

TINNIN: Yeah, and he liked the histories, and she liked the murder mysteries.

L. ROBB: Now, Nini, you would think this is fun. I want to ask you about this. See, I think this is hilarious. Over here they have a photograph of the board of directors and senior officers of Riggs National Bank. This is one of the few photographs in this room, and it says "May 10, 1977." So Mrs. Truman must have hung this because her daughter is in it. Isn't that funny? Not a personal picture, but—

JOHNSON: I will tell Joe that when I see him next. [chuckling]

L. ROBB: I know. That's why I thought you would be a good talking subject.

JOHNSON: I think he will be very pleased. [chuckling]

L. ROBB: She is the only woman in this picture.

TINNIN: There is also a very, very small picture right behind this lamp right here that is a Thomas Hart Benton, just a small one.

L. ROBB: He did so many lovely things at the Truman Library.

J. ROBB: And this is the only one we've seen in here.

L. ROBB: Nini, you've forgotten, but I came here with you.

JOHNSON: Goody, because you can help remember, and please correct me if I say something that's not what I should.

L. ROBB: Do we get to go in here?

TINNIN: Now this might be a little room that you did not see.

JOHNSON: No, ma'am, I did not see it.

TINNIN: It's the bedroom and bath that was on the first floor.

L. ROBB: Whose bedroom was it?

TINNIN: This was where Mrs. Truman's grandparents would have moved down here, and then Mrs. Wallace, Mrs. Truman's mother, and then Mr. and Mrs. Truman eventually.

JOHNSON: This was their last bedroom then?

TINNIN: Yes, and we think that this room actually had been changed, because we do know that there was a hospital bed in here that was removed before the park service came in, that type of thing. But there are still things sitting out on the dresser, little pictures, and just all kinds of things.

L. ROBB: Who is this lady over here? I don't know her.

DAGE: That is Clifton Daniel, her eldest grandson.

TINNIN: With long hair. [chuckling]

L. ROBB: Oh, really?

DAGE: Yes. When he came through he was quite shocked. That was a publicity photo from years ago. He said, "I can't believe Grandma kept that."
[chuckling]

L. ROBB: This is a beautiful picture, framed, which . . . I don't know, it's press photography, of the president looking at Margaret and maybe her first born?

DAGE: Yes, that is Margaret and Clifton.

JOHNSON: Isn't that nice?

L. ROBB: Do you have any ideas of maybe sometime running another one of these runners across here so you could open this?

TINNIN: Well, one of the things that we got into is that in our fifteen, twenty minutes in the house, it's kind of over here in the corner, as you see, and it would be hard to get people back there and get them back out without . . . and we're right here in the center of everything.

L. ROBB: Space-wise?

TINNIN: We show it on a slide program that we do present down at the ticket center, so it's not like they don't see it. It's a quick one, but . . .

JOHNSON: Mhm. I think this is just really nice.

TINNIN: Now there's something very special that we don't want you to miss before you leave this foyer area, and that is . . . there's Mr. Truman's hat and coat still hanging over here on the coat rack, underneath the stairs here.

JOHNSON: [chuckling] Both of their coats.

TINNIN: Yes, her coat is hanging there also.

JOHNSON: That's a nice coatrack. We used to have a deer head, with many points, visitors, maids, everybody who hung their hats. I think that reposes in somebody else's collection, and it doesn't matter, because I aimed to replace it as soon as I got time and could persuade Lyndon. As a matter of fact, I didn't replace it until after.

TINNIN: Is that right?

JOHNSON: Darling, when did that happen? When did I take down that deer head?

L. ROBB: Gosh, I think . . .

JOHNSON: It doesn't matter. It doesn't matter. It was not something I was attached to. [chuckling]

TINNIN: Well, something that's kind of interesting, I guess this is where they had a telephone at one time. There is a little list right next to the door there that's just pinned up, and with the old prefixes before they changed it over to the numeral system—it used to be the alphabet system—and I thought that was always kind of interesting that they did not take that down or anything like that. And the phone books, they're like Virginia and Maryland that are sitting there on this little . . . It's kind of interesting.

L. ROBB: What year do you have those for?

TINNIN: I don't know what years those are, but . . . When did you say?

J. ROBB: Seventy-seven.

L. ROBB: So, in other words, it's long after he died.

TINNIN: Yes.

JOHNSON: He died in '72, just the last week of '72, and she died in '83?

TINNIN: Eighty-two, October.

APSCHNIKAT: This is the access to the second floor, which is a series of bedrooms and bathrooms and closets and access to the attic. It's a very large section of the house, but we do not show that to the public because of the will that Mrs. Truman . . . When she left the house, it basically said that—and Margaret ensured that this be the case—that that area would not be open to the public while she was alive. So you might wonder what's up there, but . . .

L. ROBB: Oh, Margaret's life?

APSCHNIKAT: Margaret's life, correct.

L. ROBB: So now do you anticipate opening it up afterwards?

APSCHNIKAT: No, we don't believe we will. We have access problems with safety. We've got structural problems on the floor.

J. ROBB: Is this the only stairway?

APSCHNIKAT: That's the only access. Well, there's a back stairway which we would never take visitors down.

JOHNSON: You're saying I can take my brass bed.

L. ROBB: Yes, you can take your brass bed. [laughter] We have all the same problems.

APSCHNIKAT: I wondered if you did.

L. ROBB: And this, Mother, I don't know if you can see it, but these steps are smaller . . . Well, actually they're very much like ours. We might as well see the rest of the tour, but I don't know . . .

APSCHNIKAT: It's up to you. If you want to go upstairs we'll be glad to take you up there. We can do that. We just don't allow the public up there. It's up to you. It's just bedrooms and so forth. See, another thing is we don't.

J. ROBB: Are they kept how they were when . . .

APSCHNIKAT: Yes, it looks just like down here. It's just exactly the same.

J. ROBB: I mean, were they touched up to look how they would have been?

TINNIN: No.

J. ROBB: I mean, were they?

TINNIN: They're the same. I've been here from the beginning, and they're the very

same thing. We've not done anything.

JOHNSON: One of the best things is to have somebody here from the beginning. I think, for those of us who have such homes, the interpretation is enormously important.

APSCHNIKAT: Yes, it is extremely important. This is an interpretive park. Our visitors have to come in here to really get a feel for the story. And that's what I was going to say. They don't gain anything else really by going upstairs that they don't get down here. All they see upstairs is bedrooms and bathrooms. There's no story up there, really, other than more of the same of what you could see down here. If we were going to do that, we could open up this room you all were just in, where she died and so forth, and the bedroom and bathroom back there. If we had to show a bedroom and bathroom, we could show that rather than go upstairs.

TINNIN: The other thing is, too, part of the story is [that] in the time that the Trumans lived here, you know, bedrooms were not important. People did not take . . . It was a very private area. People did not take their guests to the bedrooms. And Mrs. Johnson, I was going to ask you, did you go upstairs when you were here?

JOHNSON: No, ma'am.

TINNIN: See? And it was just a very private area. And you know once you tell people that, they really do understand.

JOHNSON: Is that another Kempton there?

TINNIN: Yes, this is Greta Kempton here. This is Margaret when she was twenty-three, starting her singing career, Hollywood Bowl in California.

APSCHNIKAT: So you all have the same dilemma, in terms of what to do with your upstairs of the house, no doubt.

L. ROBB: For the very reasons you talked. Access is going to be very difficult because you've got two stairways . . .

APSCHNIKAT: That's what this one is.

L. ROBB: You have two stairways, neither of which are good. One is very steep and . . . I mean, I would not recommend anybody coming down it unless you're very familiar. It's dark, and it's very difficult. Kids do it, but the rest of us don't do it very much.

J. ROBB: It's very steep and it's . . . Yeah, I mean exactly, it's about this big. It is from here down, and maybe you have twenty steps in between, they're about that big each, and they're . . .

TINNIN: Well, I think the other thing is, too. . .

L. ROBB: This stairway is going to be easier than ours because ours turns . . . Let me see, I think it . . .

APSCHNIKAT: This one makes a turn.

L. ROBB: Well, ours makes two turns. Both of these . . . It's comparable.

J. ROBB: It makes another turn. Oh, it does do the same thing.

L. ROBB: It's comparable, but this has a lot of good holding space on both sides, whereas . . .

APSCHNIKAT: Well, that's another issue, Mrs. Robb, and that is you then impact the resource that much more, too.

L. ROBB: Oh, sure, you have to hold on here.

APSCHNIKAT: See, we don't even like people touching the wallpaper or anything here.

So we've tried to preserve it. Because if we had fifty thousand people touching this right here, it would eventually look bad, see? It wouldn't look like the Trumans left it.

L. ROBB: Oh, of course. I mean I am being very practical.

TINNIN: This is Haviland, American made, and we set the table to look as when they had formal dinners. Now, would you have gotten to eat in the house when you came?

JOHNSON: No.

TINNIN: Just a short period of time you were here?

JOHNSON: No, we did not. The only meal I remember is the one in the Apple House, because we were so busy looking and seeing and talking and, in the case of the two men, reminiscing.

TINNIN: You know something I think you might like, Mrs. Johnson, is that we have a floral fund in the honor of Mrs. Truman, and we have a fresh bouquet of flowers each week put on the table by the Junior Service League.

JOHNSON: How nice!

TINNIN: So that is kind of nice. And you know what's so interesting about this room is it's all family things in here. They're not presidential gifts or anything like that, because the Trumans did really keep that fine line between their political life and private life, and so they are family things around in here. There is a place setting of the presidential china here in the lower part of this cabinet. Can you see this?

JOHNSON: Yes, I can.

TINNIN: Well, this is the presidential china, which would have been Mr. Truman's.

L. ROBB: That's interesting. When did that come?

TINNIN: Actually, I think this came when they came back. And then there was another place setting that was presented to the Truman Library.

DAGE: They were presented by the Lenox Company.

TINNIN: Yes.

L. ROBB: Because I remember distinctly when I went over and President Truman took me through, that . . . Well, I don't want to put words in his mouth because he sure wouldn't like it, but I got the feeling very much that there was some animosity, because when President Eisenhower . . . They didn't want to give the White House the Truman china, a set of it. So I'm interested to hear that, because I wasn't in this room. I was only in the entrance hall and in that . . . where we sat on the sofa where you were talking about.

APSCHNIKAT: You never came back here, obviously?

L. ROBB: No, I never came back here.

TINNIN: That's what we kind of understand, that a lot of people didn't get beyond this front part of the house.

DAGE: We do have a photograph of Truman accepting the gift of the Lenox.

L. ROBB: Well, it was Lenox, though. It didn't come from the Eisenhowers.

TINNIN: No.

L. ROBB: I mean from the White House.

JOHNSON: Darling, I don't know that it traditionally does come from the in-office

president.

L. ROBB: Well, how did you take yours with you? I mean the one that you have at the library?

JOHNSON: It was officially given to the library . . .

L. ROBB: From . . . ?

JOHNSON: I guess from the White House. I do not know.

L. ROBB: Well, that's what I mean. It's interesting. I mean, I may be absolutely wrong, and I'll try to look back in my notes.

JOHNSON: I wasn't in on that, because we had . . .

[End Side A; Begin Side B]

L. ROBB: So, in fact, as far as you know, this set and the library set were both given by Lenox, and they were both given when?

DAGE: That I do not know. I'd have to look up the photograph.

L. ROBB: So you don't have on tour the Trumans' bedroom at all, is what you're saying, any of the bedrooms they lived in.

TINNIN: No.

L. ROBB: Any of the bedrooms they lived in. They used to live upstairs, and then after he died . . . [tape turned off]

JOHNSON: And so this is his study?

TINNIN: This is his study. Just be real careful there because there is kind of a little space there.

L. ROBB: Now people see that?

TINNIN: Yes.

L. ROBB: They stick their head in here?

TINNIN: They stand out there on the dark gray there and look around.

L. ROBB: And so you have like two people who come and sit, and then they come back, and then two more go in and look?

TINNIN: Right. What we do is we're bringing the people in from this way. So what we do is we ask them two at a time to step out there and take a look.

L. ROBB: Do you tell them before? While you're standing here you say, "Now you can go in and see this"?

TINNIN: Yes.

L. ROBB: "And be sure and look and see the miniatures on the wall, and you can see how many books he had, and . . ."

TINNIN: Basically what we talk about in there is we say . . . I mean, people can just step in there and see that the man was a reader.

JOHNSON: I do think, blind as I am, I see a whole bunch of *Congressional Records* right there.

TINNIN: But we also talk about . . . say that they were both avid readers. We know the story of him sitting in front of the window there in the big chair.

APSCHNIKAT: Music.

TINNIN: Music is very important. There's a . . . What is it?

DAGE: It's the stereo system. It's just right here.

J. ROBB: Do you think this was used after he passed away? Did she come in here and use this a lot?

TINNIN: Yes.

J. ROBB: Because I notice that the calendar on the wall says October 1982.

TINNIN: That's when she died.

J. ROBB: Right. She did come in here and would have used it, and I was wondering why it would have that date.

TINNIN: Yes.

J. ROBB: Or if that was done again as kind of that's when she died, so . . .

TINNIN: We do know also that Mrs. Truman spent a lot of time up in the living room where his portrait was because she missed him so much, and she could sit there and admire his portrait. But there were times that she would spend in here.

JOHNSON: You know you could have predicted this. *Andrew Jackson* is the book that appears to have been the latest read.

TINNIN: Yes. [chuckling]

JOHNSON: I remember him telling me a story on this trip to Greece to the funeral of the king.[chuckling] We were met by a member of the royal family, and recalled an event long ago when relations between Greece and our country in the Civil War days. [chuckling] Anyhow, the country of Greece had had sympathy for the South, and this member of the royal family said something about all that they'd done, and President Truman stopped him and said, "Young man, as far as this young lady here and I am concerned, your ancestor was on the wrong side."

L. ROBB: You just said he had sympathy for . . . That Greece had sympathy for the South?

JOHNSON: Yes.

L. ROBB: No, they didn't. I mean it was just the opposite, because he was on . . .

JOHNSON: He had sympathy for the North. I'm sorry, that Greece had sympathy for

the North, and President Truman was saying as far as he . . .

L. ROBB: It was Prince Michael, and he was kind of trying to . . . as you try to do when you travel, show your connection with this group, so to speak—you know, “I’ve been here before, I read about you when I was little,” that kind of thing. And so he said, “My relative was an aide-de-camp to General Grant.”

JOHNSON: Is that the way it was?

L. ROBB: That’s right.

JOHNSON: Good for you, darling! [chuckling]

L. ROBB: I mean this is what you told me he said, because I wasn’t on that trip, but he said, “Young man, as far as this lady and I are concerned, your relative was on the wrong side!” [chuckling]

JOHNSON: Which, of course, is just the way it was. The trouble is, you ought to stop me as I tell these stories and tell me.

L. ROBB: No, no, no, to me, it is just what happens when you’re trying so hard, but you don’t know the internal politics. And this was, of course, going over for King Paul’s funeral.

JOHNSON: Okay. Now, I think we had better make our departure and let somebody else have a chance to get in.

APSCHNIKAT: One more special room.

TINNIN: Well, we’ve got to show you the kitchen out here.

JOHNSON: I’d be delighted.

L. ROBB: One thing about it, he also has one of those clocks like we have in the library.

JOHNSON: And it shows everyplace in the world, what time?

L. ROBB: Yes, exactly.

JOHNSON: Now this calendar dates to . . . Lynda, this is the sort of touch I mean. Here is a calendar, and I expect if I could see it, it would show that it was one of the last years of his life or her life.

J. ROBB: Her life. "October 1982," it says.

TINNIN: We've got another one in here in the kitchen.

JOHNSON: And I think that is the sort of touch that I think should be left around.

TINNIN: Mr. Truman was a Baptist.

JOHNSON: I could have bet that. I do not really remember. And she was probably Episcopalian?

TINNIN: Yes, that's right, and they were married in the Episcopal church. Well, here is their kitchen! And this is the first thing that people see when they come in here, and this gives them the feeling about Mr. Truman being that very common person, the very down-to-earth person he was.

JOHNSON: I like this just fine.

TINNIN: We know they ate their breakfast and lunch . . . We know that Mr. Truman even helped do dishes. [chuckling] You know, they did not have like a lot of in-house help. They had a cook, Vietta Garr, went with them to the White House, but other than that they really didn't have a lot.

JOHNSON: And did she come back and stay with them until she grew too old?

TINNIN: Well, she did, and then she passed away in a fire in her own home. So she wasn't long here after they came home. I think she passed away in the '70s. I think that's when it was.

APSCHNIKAT: That's the staircase, the only other means of egress from the second floor.
So you can see why we've got a bit of a fire problem.

L. ROBB: Oh, yes, very much like ours.

J. ROBB: But this one turns as well.

TINNIN: Yes.

J. ROBB: This turn is at the very bottom.

APSCHNIKAT: Oh, yes, and you really need two means of egress for a public building.
So that's another big excuse. I don't know how much we can get away with, but we're going to try real hard. But we've got to be prepared for it.

JOHNSON: Well, how much can you prepare for?

APSCHNIKAT: Well, not taking visitors on the second floor. Because the question will come when Mrs. Daniel passes, "Why aren't you going on the second floor, or how soon are you going to take people on the second floor?"
And we've already made up our little statement as to what we're going to say based on what we talked about, with egress and fire hazards. Structural stability is very important, the fact that it doesn't give us anything else for the story, people don't benefit that much from it.

JOHNSON: And I think you will have on your side the cost factor, how much staff can the park service afford in these stringent times which exist now. I don't know how long they will . . .

L. ROBB: Well, I think so, too. See, I'm thinking the same thing is going to be true of our house, Nini. Now let me ask you, do you allow any special . . . Do you have any special occasions that you have here?

TINNIN: No.

APSCHNIKAT: Absolutely not.

TINNIN: The only thing we do is we do have occasional groups that we take through, school groups, and we do take more than just the eight people per tour because they're usually such a large group. We have Truman scholars that we make special arrangements for to let them in, and travel writers. But other than that, we don't have anything on the grounds, no big tents, or anything like that. It's very . . . still keep it the way that it was.

APSCHNIKAT: Now across the street, the Noland house that we pointed out, one of these days there's potential new things like that over there, but not in this house, no.

JOHNSON: Now at the Lincoln home, there are several adjoining blocks that the park service has acquired where there are quite a number of residences on them. I'd better not quote them, because obviously my memory is not too good.

TINNIN: Actually, some of our staff is out here—well, it's actually all of our staff—and they sure would like to meet you. Would you mind walking through the back porch?

JOHNSON: Believe me, I would like to meet them.

APSCHNIKAT: Thank you very much. They'll appreciate that a lot.

TINNIN: Okay. Well, here we go. [Mrs. Johnson greets the staff]

JOHNSON: Hello, y'all.

L. ROBB: Now did they use this back porch to sit out on it and everything?

DAGE: Yes. That was their opportunity to enjoy the outdoors without having the

intrusion of folks staring and gawking at them.

JOHNSON: [Some of Mrs. Johnson's conversation with staff is inaudible, and therefore not totally transcribed.] I would say that the National Park Service keeps in mind that it passes to the visitor a sense of place. We saw the folks working there, grew up there, and knew the way the town operates, knew the lore and culture and stories of the town. I think we've been lucky at the Johnson Center to have a whole lot of folks born and raised there whose ancestors could remember Lyndon and his family.

[Staff introduce themselves to Mrs. Johnson]

JOHNSON: I'm followed by my daughter, Lynda Robb, and my granddaughter, Jennifer Robb.

GRAY: Joseph Gray, nice to meet you.

TINNIN: Now we're going to come out here.

JOHNSON: And what is this, a grapevine?

TINNIN: This is a grapevine.

JOHNSON: Muscadine?

TINNIN: It's actually Concord, and they smell *wonderful* when they get on here. There is a little spot here, so be careful.

JOHNSON: Are there lilacs anywhere?

TINNIN: Yes, a lilac bush in the back here, a mock orange, rosebushes, and these right out here are all spirea bushes, and they really smell wonderful in the
...

JOHNSON: Now, is that a sleeping porch, by any chance?

TINNIN: Yes, it is, upstairs.

JOHNSON: Good!

TINNIN: And you know what? To get out there you had to crawl through a window. They never put a door on it. [laughter] And we'll go on and walk around to the front, if that's okay with you from this point?

JOHNSON: Mhm, certainly.

TINNIN: Just hold on here.

JOHNSON: I will. And Lynda, I want to be sure and ask any questions before we leave. Lynda?

L. ROBB: Yes, ma'am? We're coming.

JOHNSON: As we drive away, I know we'll wish we'd asked so and so.

TINNIN: Well, you can always contact us.

JOHNSON: Well, we'll think of so and so and . . . [miscellaneous conversation not transcribed as preparation is made for photograph and Mrs. Johnson's departure] [see appendix item 1]

TINNIN: Mrs. Johnson, we didn't get a full picture. Can we get another picture of you out here in front?

JOHNSON: Certainly.

DAGE: Thank you so much.

JOHNSON: In fact, in front is where I . . . I remember the front of the house the best of all.

DAGE: I was just wondering if we should gather our staff and do a full picture, if I can get them quick?

TINNIN: Yeah, go get them quick.

DAGE: Ken, I'm going to go grab our staff. Mrs. Johnson said she would be

agreeable to the staff and she having a picture.

APSCHNIKAT: Oh, that'd be wonderful.

DAGE: In front?

L. ROBB: Now I know right now you have that traveling exhibit of exercise equipment, but what is normally . . . Do you know what they have at the Truman Library, what changes they've done since Mrs. Truman died?

APSCHNIKAT: Oh, a number of things, a number of things. I couldn't say, yeah. I wanted you to have this. This is a pin representing the park, as a remembrance of your visit with us.

JOHNSON: Thank you, sir. Thank you very much.

APSCHNIKAT: We sure appreciate it. We've got to get some pictures if you've got a few moments.

JOHNSON: Yes, I have entirely enough time.

APSCHNIKAT: Thank you.

L. ROBB: Mother, right now at the Truman Library I know there's an exhibit now on exercise equipment. They have your bowling ball. [chuckling] It's a traveling exhibit.

APSCHNIKAT: I've seen it. It's quite nice.

L. ROBB: They have your bowling ball and Daddy's golf shoes.

TINNIN: So you were a bowler, huh?

JOHNSON: Yes, ma'am. You know, you'd get back from one of these trips across the United States and you'd be *bone tired* . . . Have fun, y'all!

TINNIN: Well, they're going to get a picture with you.

JOHNSON: Oh, is that it?

APSCHNIKAT: If you have time, we'd like to have a picture. [remaining bit of conversation not transcribed]

END OF INTERVIEW

APPENDIX

1. National Park Service photographs of Lady Bird Johnson at the Truman home, 24 June 1997. (Photos courtesy of Carol Dage)



Lady Bird Johnson on the back porch of the Truman home with park staff (left to right) Dave Shafer, Christie Thurston, Becky Railey, Norton Canfield, and Jenny Hayes.



Lady Bird Johnson with park staff on the steps of the Truman home. Kneeling: Karen Tinnin and Ken Apschnikat. First row, standing: Teresa Valencia, Johnson, and Jenny Hayes. Second row, standing: Keith Drews, Norton Canfield, Carol Dage, Joseph Gray, Michael Mann. Third row, standing: Dave Shafer, Christie Thurston, Randy Harmon, Eastern National employee, and Becky Railey. Back row, standing: Mark Robertson, June Murray, and Larry Sandarciero.

2. The Lyndon Baines Johnson Library provided a copy of Mrs. Johnson's "White House Diary" recording for her visit to the Trumans on Friday, July 17, 1964. What follows is a transcript of that tape. Note that this transcript varies somewhat from the published version in Lady Bird Johnson, *A White House Diary* (New York, 1970), 312-315.

Friday, July 17, 1964

A very special day—my day with Lynda. It began with the presentation of the one millionth copy of the White House guidebook to an astonished tourist family—a husband and his wife and two children who were, like several thousand others, making a visit to the White House on a summer day. And suddenly they encountered, as they purchased their volume at the entrance desk, a volley of cameras, newspaper folks, and me. We went out to the Rose Garden and had a picture taken together. How much these million copies are helping in the restoration of the White House, but even more so, far more so in making homes across the country acquainted with the tradition, and the beauties, and the history of this old place.

We were all packed, and Lynda and Simone [Poulain of the press office] and I left for Friendship Airport for our long-planned trip to President Truman's Library in Independence. Lynda Bird and I had been talking about the trip for two years now, and when I was with President Truman on the trip to Greece he promised me that "Come sometime and I'll give you the five-dollar tour myself." So here we were and part of the joy was just being with Lynda.

We got to Kansas City humming, "Everything's up to date in Kansas City,/They've gone about as far as they can go," and feeling gay and silly. There was no crowd at the airport. We really felt we were deliciously alone, maybe a photographer or two. And then we drove out to Independence and there, at the entrance to the Library, which sits on a beautifully landscaped hill, a very simple contemporary structure, with signs that would be as good a century from now as today we met President and Mrs. Truman and quite a large crowd of townspeople and tourists and the press. Here the photographers were in full array, but not the least bit bothersome. We went into the President's office and the photographers at his invitation asked us a few questions about why we had come and what we expected to see, just a nice little innocuous beginning and lots of pictures and then we said good-bye. And had the most wonderful trip through the Library anybody could hope to have. I loved especially the cartoons—those caustic or humorous capsules of history. He told me how many hundreds he had, the originals of course, but I don't trust my memory.

From each President there was a picture and an original document signed by the President. I loved the choice. From Thomas Jefferson was a request to Congress for the Lewis and Clark Expedition; from Andrew Jackson, there was a pardon issued to Sam Houston for having assaulted a Congressman, for which offense he was supposed to pay a five-hundred-dollar fine; and from Franklin D. Roosevelt it was the Pearl Harbor Message, written in his own hand, a good many words scratched out and rewritten; and from President Truman himself, the Victory Day Proclamation.

Something any lover of the White House was sure to notice was the mantel removed from the State Dining Room in the White House during its renovation—the one that has the inscription of John Adams: "I pray heaven to bestow the best of blessings on

this house and all that shall hereafter inhabit it. May none but honest and wise men ever rule under this roof.” And it has the heads of buffalo on each side. Because Theodore Roosevelt who designed it wouldn’t permit the lions that had been planned by the sculptor to go there. He said “It’s got to be an American animal.”

There was a great mural by Thomas Hart Benton, called “Independence and the Opening of the West,” which I liked very much, except I thought the colors were awfully bright. MY West is gray, and brown, and green, and blue, and white. And then there was also an exact replica of the Office of the President. How many succeeding Presidents may copy this?

The most delightful thing of all, I think is the fact that in the auditorium President Truman meets and talks to busloads of school children who come all summer long. He says he spends several hours, some three or four days a week, in the summertime talking to the students about the Office of the Presidency. In a reading room we saw some dozen or so students who were using papers from his library, presumably to write their theses. And finally, there was a big storeroom, full of all the odds and ends that one accumulates. I can already visualize how full such a room would be for us. One of the most poignant things I saw was a letter from former President Hoover to Truman, thanking him for appointing him to some commission. And he spoke of going back to the work he knew how—public service—after a long interim of not having been called upon in the preceding Administration. Oh, let me remember that lesson. It was really a delightful tour, not to be equaled by many. At the end of it, I gave him a flag that had stood in Blair House in the study during the years that he was there.

And then I went with Mrs. Truman to the old-fashioned white house, freshly painted, comfortably settled among the trees, with a wrought-iron fence around it. How many like it up and down the Main Streets of America. And we had a soft drink while we looked at pictures of Margaret and their three grandchildren, and the Greta Kempton portraits of Mrs. Truman, Margaret, and President Truman. So little does their house seem affected by the years they spent in the White House. Mrs. Truman was serene, happy, assured, rather gingery. We talked of Roberta Vincent and Faye Gardner.

Then we drove back to the Muehlebach Hotel, where I had time to get the latest news from Lyndon. Before I had left the White House it had been uncertain whether he would go to Texas for the weekend or stay in Washington. The news was that he had left the White House in the early afternoon, was already at the Ranch, and wanted me to come on the courier plane about nine o’clock.

At about 6:30 President and Mrs. Truman arrived at the Presidential Suite and we had a drink—Mrs. Truman, too—and it was a delightful moment when the President put his drink down, arose, went to the piano, and played for a few moments. Chopin I think it was. He repeated to me that he wanted to do whatever he could do to help Lyndon. I am so proud that he likes him.

He told us one ridiculous story about a priest who got lost on a walking trip through the Ozark Mountains, stopped at a cabin, and asked a farmer if he could have some supper. The farmer looked at him rather angrily and said, “No. I don’t like your religion.” The priest explained that he had walked a long time and he was very hungry and he felt surely that the farmer would be kind enough to give him something to eat. The farmer felt a little abashed and said, “All right. Come on in.” Sat down at the table, had his supper, and he looked up at the mantel. There was a picture of Pope Pius! So the priest said to the farmer, “Would you please explain to me, sir, why, if you dislike the

Catholic Church so much, you've got that picture of Pope Pius up there above the mantel?" The farmer looked at him incredulously and said, "Do you mean that's who it is? Well, I'll be gol-durned—the salesman that sold it to me said it was Harry Truman in his ceremonial Masonic clothes."

Finally we had a delicious dinner and talked about the reconstruction of the White House that took place during his years. He said he used to have his lunch brought to him on a tray in the Oval Room, now the Yellow Room. And the tall, heavy butler was bringing it in one day when he looked up and saw the floor literally shaking under the waiter's feet. He picked up the phone and called the architect, I'm not sure just who, of some government department. He came over immediately with his staff, did a lot of probing of the old mansion and before night told President Truman that they must get out immediately. It was literally unsafe to live in.

The Trumans said good-bye at 9 o'clock. I had enjoyed the visit so much, and the nicest part was having Lynda Bird enter into it so fully. It was time to go to the airport to catch the courier plane en route to the Ranch to join Lyndon. And the problem was whether to send Lynda Bird back commercial and she would arrive about 4 o'clock in the morning, or take her to the Ranch, which is always a rather uncertain place to be. That is for knowing exactly when you will get away from it. But she decided to fly with me, and it was two swift and pleasant hours—and then down the runway to the hangar where the white golf cart waited for us. Lyndon had arrived in time for an afternoon with A.W. and most importantly with John, who spent the night with us.