# President Jimmy Carter with Bess Truman's household and nursing staff in the living room of the Truman home, September 2, 1980

**Photo courtesy of the Jimmy Carter Library**

Examiner



# Independence people value Truman recollections

## 'One of us'

By Richard A. King

I last saw Bess Truman in May of 1975 when I accompanied Leon Jaworski, the Truman Public Service Award winner, on a courtesy call to the Truman home. I was certainly nervous in anticipation of the visit and I think it is safe to say that Mr. Jaworski was a bit on edge as well.

Mrs. Truman met us at the door and immediately put us at ease. Using a walker, she escorted us to the den and visited in an easy and sincere fashion, which caused me to know immediately she was truly a lady of the people.

Her deep interest in Independence and what city government was doing in 1975 belied her extremely low public profile following the president's death. I was very surprised at her questions to me regarding events and personalities in City Hall and very pleased to learn that a former first lady was still very much a "girl from Independence."

These last memories of Mrs. Truman are consistent with my earlier experiences of seeing her around town as I grew up. I remember waiting on her as a clerk in BB Super Drugs in Maywood in the early 1960s. I thought I recognized her as she approached the counter. I began to doubt that she was really Bess Truman as I waited on her. She was so entirely natural and unassuming it didn't seem possible she could have been a former first lady. I will always remember the pleasant smile and thank you that followed the transaction over the drugstore counter.

RICHARD A. KING

...'she was one of us'

I will always count it among the greatest experiences of my life to have lived in Independence, Missouri, when the Trumans came home. Their comfortable participation in the Independence community after so many years in Washington, D.C., has always reassured me that this is truly a government of the people, by the people and for the people. Every contact I ever had with Bess Truman proved that she was one of us, and wanted it no other way.

## 'Her eyes just sparkled when she was happy'

By Velma A. James

I began my employment with Bess Truman in June 1980 and continued working for her until October 1981. I thank May Wallace and Ardis Haukenberry for that memorable 16 months.

I made arrangements to meet Mrs. Truman with Valerie LaMere, Mrs. Truman's companion who was always very kind to me. As I walked through the gate and up to the big double doors, I first couldn't believe it was happening to me.

Valerie gave me a brief tour of that beautiful home and then took me to the back porch to meet Mrs. Truman. She spent most of her days, when the weather was nice, on that porch. She extended her hand to me when we were introduced. She asked about my family. I told her I had six children and I asked if she would like to see their pictures. She took each picture, studied it carefully, and remarked they were "very nice looking."

My children, Ron, Lori, Robin, Lenise and Laine, had an opportunity to meet Mrs. Truman. My oldest son, Rick, and his wife, Lillian, didn't. But I did take my granddaughter, Eva, who was 3 at that time, to meet her. Mrs. Truman was eating a piece of chocolate pie at the time. Eva still talks about that big piece of chocolate pie.

I cooked Mrs. Truman's meals for her, as well as being a companion two days a week. I loved preparing her meals because she was always so appreciative. She seemed to enjoy anything I fixed and I did try some new things. She had so many interesting cookbooks.

I read to her in the afternoons. I think the book she enjoyed most was "Souvenir," written by Margaret Truman. I think I read it through three times in my 16 months there. I also read mysteries to her. Among them, of course, Margaret's book "Murder in the White House." She also enjoyed it very much. She also liked hearing the jokes in the "Reader's Digest." She had such a jovial laugh and such a cute sense of humor. Her blue eyes just sparkled when she was happy.

I was attempting to take her blood pressure once, and I couldn't hear her heart beat. I discoverd I had not put the stethescope in my ears. When she noticed this, she just roared with laughter.

In the morning she read her paper and looked over her mail. For the first several months I was there, she read over and signed all of the replies typed by her secretary.

I think probably the most memorable day at the Truman home was the day the staff met President Jimmy Carter. Mrs. Truman invited us to be there when the president came to visit her. It was also very exciting when I met Clifton and Margaret Truman Daniel. They are very nice people.

Mrs. Truman was always so gracious. When I would ask for an autograph in a book or on a piece of paper, she always said, "Of course." She always asked me about my children. She seemed interested in their activities.

She was a very kind and gracious lady — an ordinary person and very much loved by others.

Because of my experience of being nurse-companion, I have decided to enter the field of nursing. I knew this was what I wanted the first day I worked for her.

Thank you, Mrs. Truman, for the most memorable 16 months of my life.

# OBITUARIES

### MELVIN L. DOTSON

Melvin L. Dotson, 76, Kansas City, died Monday at University Hospital. He was the father of Melvin G. Dotson, Timothy Roger Dotson and Teresa Hall, all of Independence.

Services will be 2 p.m. Wednesday at the Passantino Chapel; burial in Mount Washington Cemetery. Friends may call from 6 to 9 tonight at Liberty.

### MRS. MILDRED MYERS

Mrs. Mildred Myers, 78, Kansas City, Kan., died Monday at Bethany Medical Center. She was the mother of Louis Myers of Independence.

Services will be 11 a.m. Thursday at the Maple Hill Chapel; burial in Maple Hill Cemetery. Friends may [illegible] Shouse, Raytown; a stepson, Richard Holcombe, Independence; a daughter, Donna M. McKenney, Winston-Salem, N.C.; four stepdaughters, Mary Robison, Jarbalo, Kan., Betty House, Kansas City, Virginia Couts, Houston, and Pansey Morrl, Washington state; his stepfather and mother, Mr. and Mrs. Ray Snidow of the home; 23 grandchildren and six great [illegible] before he retired eight months ago, and earlier he was a construction worker and a member of the Iron Workers Union, the San Diego Building Trades Council, the San Diego and Imperial Counties Labor Council, a trustee of the California Iron Workers Trust and was appointed to the California State Occupational Safety and Health Standards Board in 1973. [illegible] Latter-day Saints; burial in Glen Abbey Memorial Park Cemetery, Bonita.

### MRS. HOWARD SUMMERS

Mrs. Jennavie M. Summers, 70, of 205 N. Huttig Ave., died Monday at the Independence Sanitarium and Hospital.

She was born in Kansas City, had lived in Hardin, Mo., before returning