

# ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

WITH

JAMES W. SYMINGTON

MARCH 18, 1992

WASHINGTON, D.C.

INTERVIEWED BY JIM WILLIAMS

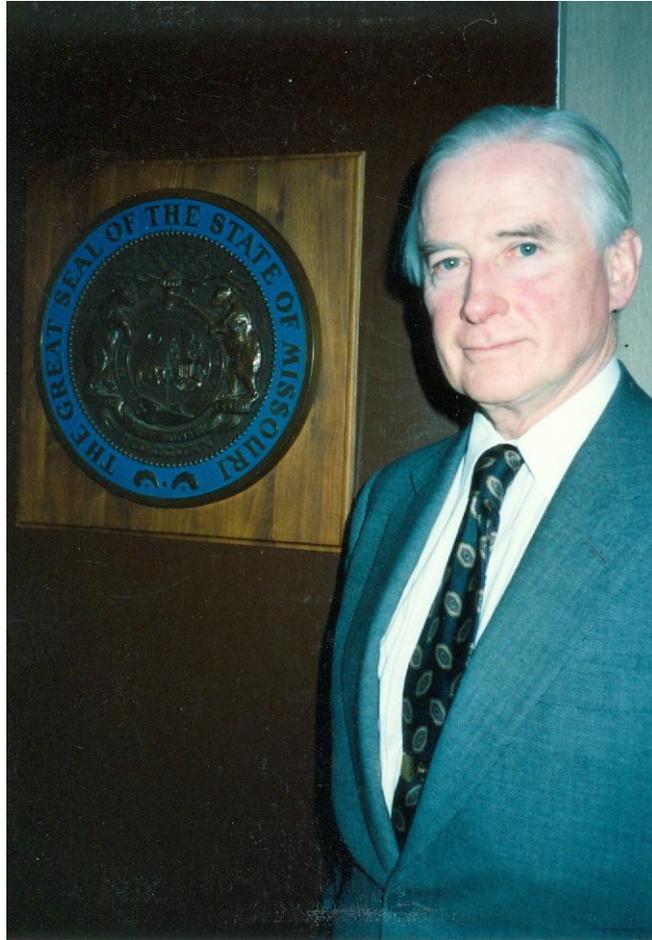
ORAL HISTORY #1992-1

HARRY S TRUMAN NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR





**James W. Symington**

March 18, 1992

(National Park Service photo by Jim Williams)

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Jim Williams reviewed the draft of this transcript.

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## ABSTRACT

From 1969 to 1976, James W. Symington (born September 28, 1927) served four terms in the U.S. House of Representatives from the state of Missouri. As a candidate in the Democratic primary for the U.S. Senate from Missouri, Symington visited Bess W. Truman twice in her home in Independence, Missouri, in 1975. Mrs. Truman agreed to serve as honorary chairperson of his campaign. In this interview, Symington discusses his family's relationship with the Truman family, particularly his parents' close association with the Trumans during and after the Truman presidency. He vividly recalls his visits with Mrs. Truman and his impressions of her as the elderly widow of President Truman living alone in Independence. He remembers her refusal to see the play *Give 'em Hell, Harry!* that had debuted in 1975. Symington ends the interview with reflections on his gratitude to Mrs. Truman, Harry S Truman as president, the Truman legacy, and the reasons to preserve presidential homes like the Trumans'.

Persons mentioned: W. Stuart Symington, Harry S Truman, Margaret Truman Daniel, Bess W. Truman, William S. Knudsen, Henry H. "Hap" Arnold, Wright Patman, Alben Barkley, Carl Vinson, Clark Clifford, Tommy Corcoran, W. Stuart Symington, Jr., William J. Randall, James Olson, J. E. "Buck" Taylor, Randall S. Jessee, E. Clifton Daniel, Jr., Evelyn W. Symington, James Whitmore, Joseph Allbritton, Richard M. Nixon, Gerald R. Ford, Jerry Litton, Warren E. Hearnes, John C. Danforth, George Lear, Lyndon B. Johnson, Stanley Woodward, Sr, Stanley Woodward, Jr., and Joseph McCarthy.

## **ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW WITH**

### **JAMES W. SYMINGTON**

HSTR INTERVIEW #1992-1

**JIM WILLIAMS:** This is an oral history interview with James W. Symington in his office in Washington, D.C., on the morning of March 18, 1992. The interviewer is Jim Williams from the National Park Service at Harry S Truman National Historic Site in Independence, Missouri. First of all, I'd like to ask you about your family's relationship with the Trumans, your earliest memories.

**JAMES SYMINGTON:** Yes, well, of course, my earliest memory is my father testified before the Truman investigating committee during World War II. I think that he demanded to testify because some rumors were flying around that his name was among other corporate leaders who were charged, or it was intimated that they were profiteering from the war. Then Senator Truman chaired the committee that looked into those things, and my father insisted on being heard, and he brought all of his books, opened them up, and showed how he operated his company, which actually got Es for excellence throughout the entire war. I think the senator was sufficiently impressed with his testimony that when he became president

in '45, one of his early appointments was to bring my father into the government as Surplus Property Administrator, or Chairman of the Surplus Property Board. Then he became the administrator and handled that stuff.

Then, at that time, I was graduating, I guess, from Deerfield and going to Yale accelerated summer session. I enlisted in the Marines that summer, I think in '45, and then of course my father had moved to Washington and was living in the Shoreham Hotel then, my father and mother, and . . . let's see, became Assistant Secretary of War for Air after that, and about four or five other positions under President Truman during the president's tenure.

I think my first vote cast was in '48 when I was twenty-one, for President Truman. I had not met him myself, but he and my father were close friends, played poker together, you know, and they got on well. In the '48 campaign, many people were nervous about Truman's reelection chances. Some of them faded from the picture, and my father stayed with him, told him he'd win, and he did win, and then had two more years of service for him, I think culminating in Chairman of the National Security Resources Board and then Chairman of the RFC.

Then he ran for the senate. I mean, he didn't mean to. He just was going home to take on Emerson Electric, which was the company he worked for when he first met Truman, but he was met at the airport by some leading citizens—Jake Lashley and others—who said, “You have to run for the Senate, with your experience.” And he did. President Truman had already endorsed Buck Taylor, who was an old friend of his, I think, in return for Taylor staying out of the previous race that Truman was interested in. Couldn't break his word, had to for him, but he only came in the state once for him. It was awkward for the president, I think, not to be able to give his full support to my father. Of course, we won that primary against Buck Taylor in 1952 and then went on to win in the general election against James Kem. He was the sitting senator from Macon, Missouri, a Republican.

So Dad and Truman were close. Now in that—and I personally had *still* not President Truman. But in 1956, in the second presidential race, that Eisenhower was involved in, President Truman came through on the train, and that's when I first met him. I got on his observation car, sat with him and Margaret Truman and Mrs. Truman, and had a great time with him.

WILLIAMS: Came through where?

SYMINGTON: He came through . . . let's see. He came through . . .

WILLIAMS: What part of the state?

SYMINGTON: Well, I'm trying to remember where the dickens this was.  
[chuckling] I think it was, it wasn't St. Louis, that's for sure. It was either Springfield or Kansas City. It was out in the western part, I think, or even Jefferson City maybe. But rode with him a while across the state, and he was joking with his daughter because they all wanted to see her. Everybody wanted to see Margaret. He called her Skinny. "Come on Skinny, they want to see ya." [chuckling] I had a movie camera that was shaky. I still have the top of the president's head that I took in there. He said, "You'll break that thing taking my picture." I said, "No, sir, I don't think so." So that was the first chance I had to meet a very natural man. We had a great time.

WILLIAMS: And that was in 1956.

SYMINGTON: Fifty-six, yeah.

WILLIAMS: What part of the state is your family from?

SYMINGTON: Well, we went to St. Louis . . . Dad did, actually, in '37, I guess, to see if he could this company on its feet, and then brought us out in '38, or maybe '38, '39. He lived out there—because the company was broke. We were from, you know, Dad was from Baltimore, Maryland. He got going in Rochester, New York, in business, then Buffalo, then New York City. I was born in Rochester and followed

around that track until New York City. I was about eleven or twelve when we moved to St. Louis. He found he could get the company on its feet, got labor and management talking to each other. They fired the communist union leader and got profit sharing, and brought the company up fast before the war.

Then the war, you know, that's what got him interested in air power, because Bill Knudsen sent him to England to see how they made some little electric motors for the turrets of bombers so you could pull your guns around and not just have to do it manually against the wind, which was awkward and difficult. Emerson made electric motors for fans and refrigerators, I guess, so it was the logical company to do it. He went over, got the plans, took two engineers. One of them, I think, went nuts in a bombing raid, and the other survived. They got the plans and came back and built a big plant. And he worked that plant. He was turning out turrets for the B17, Liberator bombers, the B24. People like Hap Arnold would actually call long distance and say, "Stuart, I gotta have some more turrets *today!*" Terrific morale. He slept at the plant, you know. If he did come home, I remember, I was at country day school in those days, and he'd just walk in the door and fall on his face on the couch at seven o'clock or eight o'clock at night. Wouldn't move, you know, and my mother wouldn't let me wake him up.

But he ran that company well. They were very, they all loved him. I remember he knew it. He took me down there once to the line and I got to see them making these turrets and firing their guns in the pit to test them. He knew everybody by their first name, their children. He really . . . It was a big family. When I ran for Congress in '68, hundreds of people that had worked for him came up and said, "We remember that wonderful dad of yours." Of course, he was in the senate at that time. Anyway, that's when I first met Truman, in '56.

WILLIAMS: Why did it take so long for you to meet him?

SYMINGTON: I don't know. I guess . . . Wait a minute. I made one mistake. I did meet him once before that. In 1948 there was a big party given here by, I think . . . It was honoring Wright Patman, and it was given by Alben Barkley, I think. It was a terrific—brought in all the great Truman figures, and Chief Justice Vinson, Clark Clifford, Dad. Dad said they needed some entertainment and how about playing the guitar for them? So I was at Yale at the time. I think it was during a vacation. The president was a guest. And I came and sang, you know, cowboy songs, Western songs. That's when I first met the president, now that I think of it. I'd forgotten about that. That was well before '56, of course.

But, you know . . . I was away at school most of the time. My father wasn't trying to push me forward in that way, or my

brother. Mind you, '45, '46, I was still in the service. In '47 I was at Yale, and '48, '49 . . . Forty-eight's when I first met the president.

WILLIAMS: And that was here in Washington?

SYMINGTON: Here in Washington, yeah. I think Barkley had a house. He had married Mrs. Hadley, remember? Good looking younger woman. So it was a terrific party, because it really had the old guard. Tommy Corcoran was there, and when I was playing the guitar, I remember he came up to me, he said, "That's the Renaissance thing. You gotta be a musician, and you gotta write poetry, and you gotta practice law." These are all the things he did. Tommy Corcoran was a great lawyer-lobbyist here for many years, a great friend of Truman's.

But every time I saw the president, which was infrequent of course, he was always the same genial, open, simple, natural guy.

WILLIAMS: When did you meet Mrs. Truman?

SYMINGTON: Well, I guess I met her at the party for Wright Patman. He was a Texas congressman, he was a powerful guy. Then my brother was married around 1951 or so, and I believe Mrs. Truman came to the wedding. I think he didn't because he didn't want to mess it up with Secret Service and that kind of stuff. You know, she was just the nicest woman, quiet, considerate, thoughtful. And I didn't see her again until 1976 when I was running for the senate. She became my honorary chairman, and I called on her out in Independence and had a great visit with her, but that was much later.

WILLIAMS: Your brother is Stuart ,Jr.?

SYMINGTON: Yes.

WILLIAMS: For the record.

SYMINGTON: Yes. He's Stuart Jr., and he's out there in St. Louis right now practicing law and would be happy to share his memories with you. I'm sure he was thrilled to have Mrs. Truman to the wedding.

WILLIAMS: Do you recall any other meetings with Mr. Truman after he was president? Did you ever visit him in Independence, at the Truman Library or anything?

SYMINGTON: I've been to the Truman Library but not when he was there. No. I never really did. I never saw him again.

WILLIAMS: I noticed your father was listed as present at the groundbreaking and the dedication of the library.

SYMINGTON: Yeah, that figures.

WILLIAMS: You didn't go along?

SYMINGTON: I didn't go on either one of those.

WILLIAMS: It was in the mid-fifties.

SYMINGTON: One thing I did do—yeah, I was at law school or something. I was the co-sponsor in the house, along with another Missouri member . . . Bill Randall, of the Truman Scholarship Fund. I argued for that, and we got it. You know what that is.

WILLIAMS: I tried to get one of those once.

SYMINGTON: Did you? Well, it looks like you didn't need it, but I'm sure it would have come in handy.

WILLIAMS: Did Mr. Truman help you in your campaign to the house?

SYMINGTON: No, I don't know that he was . . . you know, he was on the other side of the state. He had his own races all around him, and I didn't appeal to him that I can recall for help. Funny you should ask. It never occurred to me. You know, I was just slugging it out on the east side of the state.

WILLIAMS: What district did you represent?

SYMINGTON: Second district, St. Louis County, part of it.

WILLIAMS: And you were elected in '68?

SYMINGTON: Mm-hmm.

WILLIAMS: How long did you stay?

SYMINGTON: Eight years, that's four terms. Then I ran and lost the senate primary. That's when Mrs. Truman was my—

WILLIAMS: How much did your family, your parents especially, keep up with the Trumans?

SYMINGTON: Well, I think Dad . . . you know, he just adored Mrs. Truman and the president. The Trumans were not . . . you know, they went home to Independence. Now, I think probably Dad saw a lot of him out there when he'd go out that way during his senate term, but I don't have the records of that. It would be odd if he didn't because, you know, he was close and respected him greatly, admired him, and I think

learned a lot from him. But exactly how they got together in those years, I'm not sure. Maybe some correspondence would show that. I sent a lot of Dad's papers to Jim Olson, former chancellor of Missouri University, who's maybe doing a book about him. That may appear in that book.

WILLIAMS: They probably would have sent Christmas cards.

SYMINGTON: Oh, definitely did that, yes.

WILLIAMS: Phone calls.

SYMINGTON: I've seen cards back and forth, yes. I've seen the Trumans' cards coming in.

WILLIAMS: And your father remained in the senate for quite a long time after—

SYMINGTON: Yeah. He was there twenty-four years, four terms.

WILLIAMS: So he was a senator from Missouri while Mr. Truman was vice president. Do you think Mr. Truman ever offered advice or asked for advice?

SYMINGTON: Well, I just remember one thing. You mentioned in that first race, I remember . . . not to take away from Buck Taylor, but I remember he said, "Stuart Symington has more ability in his little finger than Buck has in his whole body, but I gotta support this fellow." You know, you had to admire the president, because he couldn't break his word. I suppose Dad would have talked to President Truman. You know, he got off . . . My father left the agriculture committee. That was a tough decision. He went into armed services and foreign

relations. Many people in Missouri thought he maybe should have stayed on agriculture to be more close to the issues of such a large portion of the state's income and activity. He may have had a chat with Truman about that, I don't know, could have. There's a fellow . . . Is Randall Jessee still living out there, do you know?

WILLIAMS: I don't think so.

SYMINGTON: He was Truman's closest confidante and friend. He would remember so much about my father's visits and everything out there. Margaret could remember something about it. She's in New York.

WILLIAMS: You and Margaret are about the same age?

SYMINGTON: I think so, yeah.

WILLIAMS: She was born in '24.

SYMINGTON: Okay. She's got me by three years. I met her at that party in '48.

WILLIAMS: You were never Washington pals or anything?

SYMINGTON: Not really, because . . . Well, you know, I never saw Margaret Truman kind of here and about, you know, in Washington. I mean, I think she had her own circle of good friends. And I wasn't getting around that much myself in those early days. But we've become really good friends . . . Well, she helped me a lot in my senate race and gave me a breakfast, a reception in Kansas City, brought in a lot of people. And she and I served together on the board of the Riggs Bank here. I always try to see her when she comes into town. We're really good friends now. She's got a lot of her father's just plain

common sense and no nonsense, a good sense of humor, and she sees around corners, you know, what's going on. She's fun to know. I only know Clif Daniel just in a cursory way. He's just a fine gentleman. But I've seen a lot of *her* over the years. She's now left the board, so she's back in New York a lot of the time. We talk sometimes, because things come up and we call each other.

WILLIAMS: Of course, she's still very much involved in Truman-related things in Independence.

SYMINGTON: Yeah. She would have some answers maybe, to you about how Dad and Truman conducted their relationship after Truman had left the presidency. She probably can remember the times when they were together.

WILLIAMS: You said you'd visited the Truman Library. He wasn't there?

SYMINGTON: He was not there, I don't think.

WILLIAMS: He would often give tours of the library. I was just wondering if you—

SYMINGTON: Yes.

WILLIAMS: —were lucky enough to—

SYMINGTON: No, no. I don't think that's the way it was with me. I think Randall Jessee gave me a tour. I like the Truman Library a lot, because it was just so down to earth and easy and simple and believable.

WILLIAMS: The main reason I'm here of course is to talk about the Truman home, which is in the park system now. And in the collection there, we found a letter from you to Mrs. Truman.

SYMINGTON: Mm-hmm.

WILLIAMS: Along with a book that apparently you gave—

SYMINGTON: Gave her.

WILLIAMS: To . . . Will you verify that that's your handwriting?

SYMINGTON: You bet. [chuckling] "From all the Symingtons." Look at that. Oh, yes. It's the book about my mother. [see appendix, item 1]

WILLIAMS: This is the letter.

SYMINGTON: I assembled a lot of my mother's poetry. So this is taken from the book, isn't it? Yeah. Oh, yes. That's after I visited her.

WILLIAMS: That was in May of 1975. [see appendix, item 2]

SYMINGTON: Yes.

WILLIAMS: Was that when you were trying to get her to become involved in your campaign? Because there was another visit in December—

SYMINGTON: Was there?

WILLIAMS: —when you announced that she was honorary chairman.

SYMINGTON: I don't know that I had asked her at this point to do that. I can't remember. I just think I, I probably just was paying a courtesy call on her the first time. This would have been too early in the season, because I hadn't . . . I didn't announce until '76.

WILLIAMS: The article said you were going to announce later, but you announced that she was your honorary chairman.

SYMINGTON: Yes. Okay. That's fair. I think this was just a courtesy call, and the December visit, if there was one, was the real thing.

WILLIAMS: Can you tell me something about your mother and that book of poems?

SYMINGTON: You have the book, don't you?

WILLIAMS: The book is in the home. It's still in the home.

SYMINGTON: Because I've got . . . I wonder if there are any here.

WILLIAMS: I was just curious about the story behind it.

[NOTE: At this point in the interview, the tape recorder malfunctioned and there is a period of static in which the voices cannot be heard, from approximately 19:40 to 23:30. During the missing four minutes, Symington discussed collecting his mother's writings together after her death as a remembrance, especially for his father. He looked at the photocopies of the front pages of the book and the letter, reproduced here in the appendices. The tape resumes at the point at which Williams asked how his first visit with Bess Truman in May 1975 may have been arranged.]

SYMINGTON: I'm going to be in Independence on such-and-such a day. Do you think it would be possible to make it Thursday with Mrs. Truman? Oh, yes, fine. Or, I'll call you back, or whatever.

WILLIAMS: Were you aware at all of the Secret Service being around?

SYMINGTON: I hadn't even thought of them being around, and I don't remember seeing any. I realized . . . they used to huddle in the building across

the street. If she made arrangements to receive someone, you know, you didn't have these guys standing in the doorway and giving you the eye. They were looking at you through a second-story window of this house across the street, and if you were the right person, they'd buzz you through the first little iron gate. And then you're on your own, kiddo. You walk up to the door, and you, nobody comes to the door, you ring, and then some little voice inside says, "Come on in!" [chuckling] Yeah, this is it. I remember walking into the dark front hall . . . "I'm over here." Because, you see, I think when you go in, you see the front hall. If you turn right, there's something like a dining room, or at least a room . . . is it that room, on the right? It's not that room?

WILLIAMS: Living room.

SYMINGTON: That's the living room, all right. Then there's kind of a corridor that leads back into the back of the house, and that's where she would sit, in the library.

WILLIAMS: I've got a picture of the—

SYMINGTON: You do? That's sensational. Yeah, that's it. And then that's her chair. They've neatened it up pretty good, because she had books all over the place. I would sit, you see, somewhere around here. Maybe I'd pull up this chair.

WILLIAMS: Near the phonograph.

SYMINGTON: Yeah. She was sitting here.

WILLIAMS: In the left chair.

SYMINGTON: In the armchair. And I guess I'd sit in this chair. I remember there was a . . . by the time of the second visit, a play was being shown called ["Give 'Em Hell,] Harry" with James Whitmore. In the play a couple times . . . which is a great play. It would show the president sitting there looking at those [inaudible phrase due to interference on tape]. I think a couple of times he used a very mild four-letter word. When I saw Mrs. Truman, I said, "Mrs. Truman, have you seen "Harry," the play "Harry"? "No, and I don't intend to go." I said, "Why not?" "Well, the president never used language like that." [chuckling] And I said, "Well, Mrs. Truman, when you take an entire lifetime of cussing and compress it into one two-hour play, a couple of words are all right." [chuckling] "No, I don't think so." I'm sure she heard him do that occasionally. You know that old story about manure. You've heard that one before. I think she kept a pretty close rein on any such tendencies he might have had.

WILLIAMS: Margaret claims that she never heard any of that, either.

SYMINGTON: I see. Well, then, maybe that's true.

WILLIAMS: That they cleaned it up when women were present.

SYMINGTON: I think maybe the word *damn* appeared twice in the whole play. That was the word. If they never heard him, then that's probably right. He probably wouldn't do it. And then that would be very much in character with him. So I guess someone reported to Mrs. Truman

that he'd said damn. She said, "Well, I won't see this play."

[chuckling] Too bad, because I think she would have enjoyed the play in other respects, because I think it captured . . . This fellow Whitmore was pretty good in the play.

WILLIAMS: You recall just knocking on the door and—

SYMINGTON: I just knocked on the door.

WILLIAMS: And hearing her call—

SYMINGTON: I heard a voice inside say, "Come on in." Opened the door, you know, and stood alone in the front hall, not knowing where to go next. There were no servants.

WILLIAMS: No one else but Mrs. Truman.

SYMINGTON: No one but Mrs. Truman was in the house.

WILLIAMS: Do you recall Margaret's big portrait hanging in the front hall?

SYMINGTON: Yes, Margaret's portrait.

WILLIAMS: Margaret greeting you as you come in.

SYMINGTON: Yes.

WILLIAMS: Did you spend any time in the living room, the room to the right?

SYMINGTON: I wanted to, but I realized I wasn't there for a house tour. I took a peek. That's this room.

WILLIAMS: The room with Mr. Truman's picture.

SYMINGTON: Yes. I saw that picture. Good picture. My dad got a picture of . . . a wonderful photograph of Truman, which I got talked out of by Joe Allbritton, the chairman of the Riggs Bank, who has a room

dedicated to President Truman in the bank. It's a marvelous little dining area. This portrait reminds me of that, because the picture must have been taken at roughly the same time.

WILLIAMS: So she hollered out to you—

SYMINGTON: Hollered out.

WILLIAMS: —and you made your way through the music room.

SYMINGTON: There you got it. Yes. Yes, I walked through this room, yep. See, there's lots of light on these beautiful things. Mind you, it was dark as the dickens when I walked through there. I don't remember seeing a piano.

WILLIAMS: So she beckoned you back, and you had a seat.

SYMINGTON: Yes. She said, "I'm in here. This way." So I walked through the rooms. It seems like there was one little corridor. And bingo, there she was. And she just said hi and sit down.

WILLIAMS: She was ninety years old at the time.

SYMINGTON: Was she? Yeah.

WILLIAMS: Did she seem that old?

SYMINGTON: Oh, I guess she could have been eighty or ninety. You know how it is. She wasn't the kind of . . . very, she wasn't as plump as she was as a woman, so she was tinier, and I guess her hair had gone pretty white. Her face was very clear and nice. She was fragile looking, I think. But that reminds me, you know, when I left the second time— or maybe it was the first time, I don't know—I asked Randall Jessee

. . . I mean, I wanted to give her something. “What can I give her, you know, just as a remembrance?” He said, “You know, she doesn’t have a television set.” So I gave her a little tiny portable.

WILLIAMS: Oh, really?

SYMINGTON: He said certainly in her bedroom there was no set. And I did send that out to put in her bedroom.

WILLIAMS: That’s helpful for us.

SYMINGTON: Yeah.

WILLIAMS: It’s probably still there. There is a small portable upstairs in the bedroom.

SYMINGTON: I don’t know that she kept copies of letters that she wrote, because she wrote in longhand. I have to tell you, I got a letter from her, which I either deliberately destroyed or . . . I couldn’t have done that. I must have just lost it. When I announced, when I told her I wanted . . . Yes, I did ask her at some point if she would be my honorary chairman, and she wrote back and said, “I would be delighted to do it.” I think she very much wanted me to win. So . . . I lost that letter.

WILLIAMS: In this letter of May 15, you mention the beautiful home.

SYMINGTON: Yes.

WILLIAMS: Did the home surprise you at all? The furnishings?

SYMINGTON: Well, it just seemed totally apt and proper. I mean, it was a lovely . . . Look at that house. Anybody would love that house. And it was

furnished—perhaps it was . . . it was furnished very elegantly in a kind of antiquarian way. And to me, it suited their dual personalities just perfectly, and what they lived through and everything. It seemed to be just the right piece in the right place. It was just a great, it was a gingerbread memory house.

WILLIAMS: Did you see any other rooms that you recall?

SYMINGTON: Only the ones I've mentioned. The room on the right, and on the left there was a portrait, I guess, as you walked in.

WILLIAMS: It's kind of straight ahead.

SYMINGTON: Is it straight ahead? Well, maybe I was turning, not looking the right—

WILLIAMS: That's Margaret.

SYMINGTON: That's Margaret, and then there's an exit from that room kind of into the upper left side. That's the direction I took to go and see her.

WILLIAMS: Through the music room.

SYMINGTON: Okay. Those are the only rooms I did see.

WILLIAMS: I have some other cards here.

SYMINGTON: Do you?

WILLIAMS: That's in the foyer, but you probably didn't remember the coat tree and hats.

SYMINGTON: Didn't remember the coat rack. I didn't remember the dining room like that.

WILLIAMS: Right off of the study. Of course, the table wouldn't have been set.

SYMINGTON: Yeah. That's a beauty. The kitchen. Beautiful porch. That's the great thing about that house. It has a lot of features, it's a lovely house.

Look at that fan.

WILLIAMS: So how was she as a hostess?

SYMINGTON: Well, she was a perfect hostess. I think, you know, she couldn't offer me anything. I don't recall that we . . . There was no one there to get it, I don't think. I hope I'm not misrepresenting that. It could be that she had tea set or something like that. That's possible. I remember just talking with her. I don't remember eating a cookie or sipping tea, but I'm sure that's the last thing I needed at that point. And she couldn't have been more gracious. And after, you know, a visit of, I don't know, thirty minutes or so: "It's great to see you. Back to my labors and thanks for coming. Remember me to your father." I remember that kind of conversation occurring.

WILLIAMS: You also mentioned in the letter talking about politics.

SYMINGTON: Mm-hmm.

WILLIAMS: Do you recall anything in particular? You say something about hearing her views on the political situation. In '75, what likely would you have talked about other than . . . ?

[At this point in the tape, around 34:30, there is another forty seconds of static that prevents the conversation from being heard.]

SYMINGTON: . . . would be Democratic about what was going on. When did Ford take over?

WILLIAMS: Seventy-four.

SYMINGTON: So he was president. She may have echoed one of her late husband's sentiments about Nixon possibly, because of that administration. I just can't tell you. That's why people should keep diaries, I guess.

WILLIAMS: Now that I think about it, this was a week after Mr. Truman's birthday. Do you think that had anything to do with your visit?

SYMINGTON: No. I don't think so. Maybe just, maybe someone said, "Hey, this is a good time to go see Mrs. Truman, if you can."

WILLIAMS: I think it's also about the time that Henry Kissinger visited. Do you recall any—

SYMINGTON: I didn't run into him or even hear about him.

WILLIAMS: I think he received the public service award that year.

SYMINGTON: Did he? Good for you. I didn't know that. No, I can't remember what it was that she said that evoked this comment of "most instructive to hear your views on the world scene." Holy smoke. What did she say?

WILLIAMS: She was up to date on—

SYMINGTON: Oh, that's for sure, yeah. That was clear. She was reading the papers, listening to the news, had opinions. It might have been Missouri politics.

WILLIAMS: And you decided yourself when it was time to leave? She didn't get up?

SYMINGTON: Yes, absolutely. No, I just sensed about a thirty-minute visit was testing the outer limits. I would have loved to hang around, but I think you get a feeling that you've said enough, and she's shared about as much of herself as she comfortably can [unintelligible phrase].

WILLIAMS: So was this really the first time that you had had a serious conversation with her?

SYMINGTON: Yes, absolutely.

WILLIAMS: And you came back in December, December 20 to be exact.

SYMINGTON: Mhm.

WILLIAMS: The newspaper said that you were accompanied by Randall Jessee. [see appendix, item 3]

SYMINGTON: They did? Great. Okay, then he set that up.

WILLIAMS: And this was when you, after you visited you announced that she was going to chair your campaign.

SYMINGTON: Mhm.

WILLIAMS: How did that come about? Some more of the details.

SYMINGTON: Well, I think it just occurred . . . Someone must have suggested that she would be happy to do that. I don't think I would have had the nerve to ask her unless I knew what the answer would be, or was likely to be, because it was such an imposition, even though—I mean, to give her name, and that's all we were asking for, which was a lot but it didn't require any effort, but it was an exposure. So

maybe Stanley might have thought of it and may have mentioned it to Randall, and Randall might have said, “Yeah, I think she’d be happy to do that.” You see, because she and Dad and Mom were friends. I’ve seen Christmas cards that she’d sent saying, “I’ll never forget your friendship” and that kind of thing, “how kind you were to us,” that type of thing. She really felt kindnesses, and she really responded. I think that was one of the reasons she was glad to help the son of her friends. I think she felt also that I might, you know, do a good job, so that was why she did it. I can’t exactly recall the sequence of events that led up to it. I did ask her. That’s for sure. I did ask her. But I don’t know how I got set to do that or who told me I could get away with such a thing.

WILLIAMS: Did you think it was unusual at the time that she would involve herself in politics that way?

SYMINGTON: Well, I thought it was questionable that she would be willing to. I wouldn’t say unusual because it could go either way. I mean . . . [chuckling] She had been married to a president and married to a senator, knew a lot of guys in the senate and the house. Dick Bolling, you know, the congressman out there, he was a great friend of mine. I’m sure she enjoyed his company and his leadership, and he was campaigning like the dickens for me out there. Just wonderful what he would do. I think she probably felt, you know, in a way, it was like being in the swim again with old friends in the

Democratic Party. And I think she felt pretty comfortable doing it. The letter that she wrote me was very strong. She said, “You *must* win this primary.” [interview interrupted]

WILLIAMS: Well, as far as I know, this was the only time that she really endorsed someone.

SYMINGTON: Ever did that, yeah.

WILLIAMS: Especially after Mr. Truman died. It just seemed remarkable to me.

SYMINGTON: Yeah.

WILLIAMS: And it showed, obviously, that she thought something for you.

SYMINGTON: Yes.

WILLIAMS: As a ninety-year-old—

SYMINGTON: Yes.

WILLIAMS: —widow of a president, that she would kind of go out on a limb that way.

SYMINGTON: Well, when you asked me was it unusual, in that sense, of course it was unusual to have someone so far on in years take a step in this direction, and I was, you know, enormously grateful. There’s no way I could repay that.

WILLIAMS: Do you think it helped?

SYMINGTON: Oh, my yes! Yeah. You know, I did pretty well in that part of the world, and I think that had a lot to do with it. I remember I won the Young Democrats straw vote in Kansas City. Because, you see,

Jerry was from that part of the world and spent a lot of time back there.

WILLIAMS: Jerry Litton?

SYMINGTON: Yeah. And he was working it very hard. And . . . I think she just wanted me to win it. I felt awful when I didn't, for her sake more than anything. I think she took that in stride, you know, as we all try to do. I didn't see her again after that, I'm ashamed to say. The circumstances of that were pretty extraordinary. Jerry was killed in a plane crash on the night of that primary, and I closed my office, and a couple of days later I withdrew from the race. I gave it a lot of thought. I felt Jerry didn't want to go to the senate that way. People were saying, yes, you can just go to the state committee and ask and they'll give it to you, but that didn't seem to be quite the way to do it, once you've had a primary. If they'd have had a runoff election or something, but there was no time for that.

WILLIAMS: He had won the primary.

SYMINGTON: He had won the primary, so when I, in those circumstances when there's no time for the runoff, and I don't think they made a provision for a runoff. There is a provision for going to the Democratic State Committee and closeting yourself with them while they go over your credentials and intentions, and then decide if you're their choice. And I stepped aside from that process. Warren

Hearnes, a former governor, was accepted in that way and ran, ran a pretty good race, came fairly close to Danforth.

WILLIAMS: After you left Mrs. Truman that day, you were quoted in the Independence paper as saying, "Her chairmanship was a great uplifting for me. I needn't tell you that."

SYMINGTON: Is that what I said? [chuckling]

WILLIAMS: That's what they said you said.

SYMINGTON: Yeah. I'm sure I said that. That's exactly how I felt. [chuckling]

WILLIAMS: You said, "It's the most wonderful news, and I'm sure I don't have to tell you how gratified and proud I am."

SYMINGTON: Yes.

WILLIAMS: Was the second visit roughly the same as the first? In the same room?

SYMINGTON: Is that article after the second visit or the first visit?

WILLIAMS: This is after the second visit.

SYMINGTON: Yeah, okay.

WILLIAMS: I don't have any newspaper articles after the first visit.

SYMINGTON: Okay. Fair enough. I just want to be sure I wasn't off base there.

WILLIAMS: There might be one.

SYMINGTON: I don't think there was. I think the first one was very private. I wasn't running. I didn't want any press. But I think that sums up the way I felt all right.

WILLIAMS: You were with Mr. Jessee. He came in with you?

SYMINGTON: Yes. He came in with me, so I think the conversation I reported was the first . . . was the May '75, about the, you know, *Harry*, the play *Harry*. Because I don't remember Randy Jessee being with me when I mentioned that, but he was with me.

WILLIAMS: On the second visit?

SYMINGTON: On the second visit, yes. So I guess I just had a shorter conversation with her the second time. I think it was shorter, I don't know. It depends how Randall . . . What do you think?

WILLIAMS: The newspaper said you were in there about thirty minutes.

SYMINGTON: Okay. Well, then, it's about the same time.

WILLIAMS: They seemed to time you.

SYMINGTON: Yeah, I'm sure they do. [chuckling] I'll accept that.

WILLIAMS: That means something, I guess.

SYMINGTON: Yeah, I guess so.

WILLIAMS: So on this visit, you were probably more likely to discuss her involvement?

SYMINGTON: Well, probably, or what my plans were to . . . because her involvement, I think, is still understood to be limited to letting me use her good name as my chairman. Then, you know, I think just around that time, or shortly after, Maggie gave me a reception out there. Since Mrs. Truman couldn't really host such a thing, Margaret Truman did. I think that was kind of in the same timeframe, so I might have been thanking her for Margaret's help, her help.

WILLIAMS: Mrs. Truman released a rather glowing statement about you.

SYMINGTON: Did she?

WILLIAMS: And her sponsorship that was quoted. Did she do that herself? Or did you help her? [see appendix, item 3, *Star*]

SYMINGTON: I know nothing about it. Let me see it. I can't remember. I know I wasn't carrying it around with me.

WILLIAMS: It starts here with "Missourians."

[End Side A; Begin Side B]

WILLIAMS: Do you remember that?

SYMINGTON: I do remember this language now. I don't, I can't tell you that Mrs. Truman sat down with a pencil and wrote this out, but I don't remember how, you know . . . I didn't yet have people who were producing this kind of language. It could have been Randall Jessee? She would have never said anything he didn't want her to say.

[chuckling] And he might have prepared this statement.

WILLIAMS: Certainly she would have looked over it.

SYMINGTON: Yes. This came from outside of our campaign, I think.

WILLIAMS: Do you agree with it?

SYMINGTON: Oh, gosh! If I could live up to this I'd be in the senate today, or president, or pope, or something. [chuckling] I don't know. That's a great article. I'd love a copy of that. I don't believe I—

WILLIAMS: That's from the *Examiner* and this is from the *Star*.

SYMINGTON: Jeepers creepers. You look at these things and think how did I lose?  
[chuckling] Randall Jessee.

WILLIAMS: She understood that she really wouldn't have to do anything.

SYMINGTON: Yes.

WILLIAMS: Other than what she did this day.

SYMINGTON: Yes. As I said about my father, [reading from the *Star*] "His rise has been more rapid than mine." I'll say. I'm still playing catch-up ball. That's funny. I'd love to Xerox those things, unless you can get copies for me. I've never seen either one of those articles. You know, when you're running, you're just chasing from pillar to post and you can't keep up with your own publicity.

WILLIAMS: Do you remember anything in particular about that visit, if it was in the study again?

SYMINGTON: Same thing in the study. Of course, she and Randall are such pals, you know.

WILLIAMS: You mentioned earlier that the picture that I showed you of the study, they'd cleaned it up a lot.

SYMINGTON: Yeah, they cleaned it up, because I'll tell you, those two visits sort of meld into one as far as the look of the study. She was reading about twenty books at the same time, as far as I could tell, and they were all scattered about. And some of them were opened to a certain page, and some of them had bookmarks in them, and they were at all angles, and they piled up on that table. And I think there were a few

on the floor, if I'm not mistaken. I could be wrong, but I think there was. She would just surround herself with books and whack away at them.

WILLIAMS: Did you talk about Mr. Truman at all?

SYMINGTON: Yes. I seem to remember talking about Dad's . . . what a thrill it was to work with President Truman, because of his steadiness, character, perceptions. Yes, I think, I'm sure we talked about President Truman. When did he die?

WILLIAMS: It was the end of 1972. So it would have been about two and a half years.

SYMINGTON: Just missed him then. How old was he?

WILLIAMS: Eighty-eight.

SYMINGTON: He was up there, then, wasn't he?

WILLIAMS: She was ninety-seven.

SYMINGTON: She lived to be ninety-seven?

WILLIAMS: The longest of any first ladies. You said you didn't have any contact with her after . . . or, any personal visits.

SYMINGTON: No. I'm sure that I wrote her a final thank you for her help and all that it meant. I mean, if I didn't, I should be drawn and quartered, but I'm sure I did because I seem to recall taking a good bit of time thanking my principal people personally. There were hundreds and thousands of people you wanted to thank. So I think eventually I had a kind of boiler plate thank you, too. I hated to think I sent that to

anyone I ever shook hands with, but that's the nature of the beast, I guess. At least the thought is there somehow. But her, I would have . . . Funny that you have had access to her letters, I guess.

WILLIAMS: Well, actually, no.

SYMINGTON: Okay.

WILLIAMS: We have this letter because it was stuck inside of that book. Her correspondence—

SYMINGTON: I may have copies of letters that I . . . Seems to me that I've got a lot of letters in connection with my senate race, including the dismal results. And then it would have been condolence letters to me, my answers back. I may have a copy of the letter that I wrote her, but I hope and pray that her files show such a letter.

WILLIAMS: They may.

SYMINGTON: And I would have probably said something—

WILLIAMS: Her papers, apparently, are at the Truman Library in some sort of limbo waiting to be opened. [see appendix, items 4 and 5]

SYMINGTON: I see.

WILLIAMS: When that happens, it very well could be . . . She did have secretarial help kind of to take care of things like that.

SYMINGTON: Good.

WILLIAMS: It wouldn't surprise me.

SYMINGTON: I would have said something like “the worst part is letting you down,” or something like that. I could have put it that way, but I can’t recall what I said. Then when did she die?

WILLIAMS: Nineteen eighty-two.

SYMINGTON: A while then.

WILLIAMS: Your father was still alive then?

SYMINGTON: Yes, indeed. He died in ’88. I went and called on Jerry’s parents in about ’80. You know, they lived in this little house. They sold everything for his campaign. They mortgaged the works. I think they’ve both died since. They lived in Chillicothe. Why I didn’t go back, you know, I—to see Mrs. Truman . . . Every time I went I had the feeling that, you know, you are really imposing on this lady. It isn’t—sure she’ll see you, but does she *need* to see you? And perhaps that’s why I didn’t go back. I, you know, I spent a lot of money on the race, and most of it was . . . I mean a lot of it was mine, because you couldn’t, you couldn’t get more than a thousand dollars under the law. You could spend your own fortune, so you could sell things, mortgage things, and spend the money, and so I was very anxious to try to get back to work and raise the money. And people in Kansas City wanted to give me a fundraiser after I lost. That was . . . George Lear gave me a fundraiser after I’d lost. I went to it, and of course I was enormously grateful, but it hurt so much to think that these people would do that. I just decided that I

will not do this again. I mean I just couldn't think . . . Sure, they'll say, "Look it. We were for you. We want to help." It's not the same. From my perspective, I just thought it's, it's beggary. And before it was a kind of an investment in jointly felt causes and things. We need that money in order to get exposure, and everything. But when it's over, you have nothing left to offer. And you may share the same dreams, but you don't have a place to stand, like Archimedes, you know, to move the world, and you're standing on Pluto or something. So . . . And that is the one time I could have perhaps gone to see Mrs. Truman, when I went back for that fundraiser. Maybe I couldn't face her. You know, maybe I was so ashamed of losing. [chuckling] Not losing, but letting her . . . losing when she had given me her girding to go on with. That's possible.

WILLIAMS: What you said about feeling like you were imposing on her when you visited her, I've heard that from other people, too, so it doesn't surprise me.

SYMINGTON: That, I think, is pretty close to it. There was so little redeeming material to discuss, having lost the race, you know. You go to see her the first time and you impose because you think that there is, that it gives her a little spark to think that she's involved in a race of that magnitude and that I still have a chance to win. Having lost it, to go back and say, well, thanks again, I thought was maybe putting

more of a burden on her resilience and her good nature than was necessary.

WILLIAMS: But nothing she did made you feel that way.

SYMINGTON: Oh, *never*, never, never, no. Totally generous person. You know, I probably erred on the wrong side of the thing. To have her make such a statement as that and not go back and see her is reprehensible. But you never quite know how to weigh these things at the time.

WILLIAMS: Now that you look back on the Trumans, and from your perspective as a former congressman and a Missourian, for the thousands of people that visit the Truman home each year, what do you think they should go away feeling or thinking about the Trumans? From your perspective of somebody who knew them.

SYMINGTON: Well, I would like them to go away thinking that there was a standard set of an American couple rooted in the finest values and principles that the country has to offer, and never stepped an inch from, away from those roots and all that they required of them in public and private life. A standard of commitment to country, God, decent values that I think, that should be a guide to anyone trying to make his way in public life. A shrine of American excellence. You know, he was an enormously well-read man, much of it self-generated. I mean I don't recall ever hearing that some great teacher forced him into these. He just picked it up. Taking the whole that

America has to offer without having it given to you, but taking each step, you know—the education, the opportunity, the jobs that he'd had, going into the army when he did. He had bad eyes, but that didn't stop him. Everywhere he went, he just shown and would have been a wonderful example wherever he was. And that I'm sure that in his presence, people who had a tendency to persiflage would suppress it because they didn't want to test him. I'm sure he didn't have any patience with fraud, you know, misrepresentation, and I don't—his very person was a reproach to that anything but a true and proper handling of any problem that he commissions and what he'll do. And you wouldn't want to fool him, try to fool him. So I think what you take away is just this shining standard of personal, professional, and public conduct. Character, in the highest sense of the word.

And then to marry a woman like Bess . . . well, it was natural for him. He wouldn't settle for anything less. He was lucky because she came along pretty early in his life, you know. Lucky guy. The two of them. And if he had faults, which I'm sure all men do, you had a feeling that she was there to correct them. They were warm friends, too, with each other.

WILLIAMS: How would you describe their personal relationship . . . [interview interrupted by telephone; recorder turned off].

SYMINGTON: You were asking, what were you asking?

WILLIAMS: I think I was going to ask how you'd describe the Trumans' relationship personally with your parents?

SYMINGTON: Oh, with them. They were just . . . They became, I think, really warm friends.

WILLIAMS: Was it just the men?

SYMINGTON: No, the women, too.

WILLIAMS: So they had occasion to—

SYMINGTON: Yeah, I think Bess and Mom were good friends. And Mom had a great respect for her, of course, but she also respected the quality in people, and I think that enhanced her friendship with Bess Truman. I do recall seeing notes that Bess would write, saying how happy they were to have been together with them and how much they value their friendship, et cetera. So I got a feeling it was pretty, pretty close and good.

WILLIAMS: And your mother died quite a bit earlier?

SYMINGTON: She died in '72, Christmas.

WILLIAMS: That's right when Mr. Truman died.

SYMINGTON: Yeah.

WILLIAMS: He died the day after Christmas.

SYMINGTON: Did he? Well, Mom died Christmas Eve. Is that possible? In the same year?

WILLIAMS: Seventy-two.

SYMINGTON: Yikes.

WILLIAMS: So I was going to ask if maybe Mrs. Truman had attended the services, but that's not likely at least at that time.

SYMINGTON: No. No.

WILLIAMS: I didn't realize you were the chief of protocol.

SYMINGTON: Yes, under Johnson.

WILLIAMS: Looking up there on the wall.

SYMINGTON: Yes, that was Johnson.

WILLIAMS: Before you ran for Congress.

SYMINGTON: Yes. I was chief of protocol from '66 to '68.

WILLIAMS: I run across a lot of references through the years to Stanley Woodward.

SYMINGTON: He's still living. Have you talked with him?

WILLIAMS: No. We've written to him, but—

SYMINGTON: Well, you know, he is elderly now. But I had a great lunch with him, and he remembers back, protocol in that period of time. You really ought to call and say that you and I have talked.

WILLIAMS: Maybe I can get his number. One of his son's paintings is hanging in the music room in the Truman home.

SYMINGTON: Really?

WILLIAMS: People are often asking about it.

SYMINGTON: I think it might be in a thing called the green book, which is out here, and I'll get it for you. But that's a very good idea. You should

go see him. He's a very charming and wonderful guy. He's got pretty much total recall still. Very elderly, but still pretty strong.

WILLIAMS: I know you're a historian also.

SYMINGTON: Well, amateur.

WILLIAMS: Well, that still counts. How do you think history will treat the Truman administration?

SYMINGTON: Well, I think he will always be near the top, top five, because of the qualities I mentioned. They just shine through everything he did, every relationship he had, and that he lived in great troublous times and took over the country at a crucial juncture, brought it through the start of things like civil rights and stuff like that on the unfinished domestic agenda, in addition to all of his wisdom in foreign affairs. So, you know, the things that he took on are what brought us to this pass today, a totally fractionated communist world, which is no longer communist in its fractions. Without NATO and the Marshall Plan and the Truman Doctrine, one wonders. You know, and his steady purpose through all those years. Even had guys like McCarthy sniping from the far right saying you're not going fast enough, and you're riddled with commies. And he knew how to maintain our society in a decent framework and at the same time attack the real enemy, or at least hold firm against it. The Korean War, I think he dealt properly with that from beginning

to end. That was the first big effort from communism to enlarge its hold.

WILLIAMS: You were out of the service by that time.

SYMINGTON: Yes. I went back . . . I got out in '47, I guess.

WILLIAMS: How do you think he would feel to see candidates from both parties using him as a campaign tool?

SYMINGTON: I think he'd be amused. He'd be amused. He'd probably say, "Well, good thing, too. They're right." [chuckling]

WILLIAMS: When you were in Congress, if somebody had written you a letter saying don't waste taxpayer money by saving the Truman home, or any other president's home, how would you reply today—

SYMINGTON: To such a letter?

WILLIAMS: To the people that come up to 219 North Delaware and say this is a waste of taxpayer money.

SYMINGTON: Well, I'd say if anybody who doesn't want to preserve memories of our best citizens, if they'll explain to me how else do we collect the best of the past and invest it in the future, and if they can tell me a better way, I might even consider that. But since they're a long way from any such explanation, I will settle for keeping the shrine of the presidential home and his papers and his letters and all the initiatives that he took, his reactions to crises, and they should all be preserved because it's part of the legacy that I feel I owe my children and my descendants on into time. I would expect everyone to feel the same

way and sorry if they don't, but history doesn't just come to a stop at any moment, nor does it suddenly begin. It's all part of a process, of which memory is the key.

WILLIAMS: I think you share an interest with Mr. Truman. He was very interested in the Civil War. I believe you are as well.

SYMINGTON: Yes, that's true.

WILLIAMS: Were you aware of that?

SYMINGTON: Well, I guess I knew something about his comments on the Civil War, but I wasn't, that had little to do with my interest. I was already interested because my family was on both sides of the war.

WILLIAMS: As opposed to his, which was on one side.

SYMINGTON: Yes, on one side, right. [chuckling] How are we doing?

WILLIAMS: I'm finished.

SYMINGTON: Are you? Well, I've enjoyed this enormously. I wish, I'm sure there's a lot more we could touch on, and as you can see, I didn't have that steady or constant relation with President Truman. I wish I'd had it, but every contact I did have and every surrogate contact through my father just built up the same respect and affection for the memory of that man. And I like to see these candidates say, "This is, I'm going to do like Harry Truman did, you know." [chuckling] Good! And that's the answer to that individual that says, you know . . . or your hypothetical letter writer.

WILLIAMS: There are a lot more people that come up and say we need a president like Harry Truman.

SYMINGTON: Yeah, you bet. Well, let's hope we get one. [chuckling] Thanks a lot.

WILLIAMS: Thank you. I appreciate it.

END OF INTERVIEW

**APPENDIX**

1. Photocopy of half-title page of *Eve*, inscribed by James W. Symington.  
(HSTR catalog #6140)

*EVE*

For Mrs Truman  
from all the  
Symingtons!

1975

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2. Autograph letter signed, James W. Symington to Bess W. Truman, May 15, 1975, found in the book *Eve* in the Truman home. (HSTR catalog # 6141)



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
WASHINGTON, D. C. 20515

JAMES W. SYMINGTON  
SECOND DISTRICT  
MISSOURI

May 15

1975

Dear Mrs. Truman,

What a treat it  
was to see you in  
your beautiful home!

It was delightful  
to have the chance  
to visit — and most  
instructive to hear

your thoughts on  
the world scene.

My father is very  
envious of my good  
fortune and will probably  
soon ask for "equal time".

I know he would  
be as pleased as I  
am to know you had  
seen the little booklet  
I prepared on Mom's writings.

Most Respectfully!

Jim Grington

6/11/2

3. Press coverage of Symington's visit to the Truman home on December 20, 1975. (*Kansas City Star*, December 21, 1975; *Independence Examiner*, December 22, 1975)

KC Star

# Mrs. Truman Supports Symington for Senate

DEC 21 1975 PM

By Charles W. Hucker  
Staff Political Writer

Mrs. Harry S. Truman, widow of the former President, will be the honorary chairman of the Symington for Senator committee, the group promoting Rep. James W. Symington (D-Mo.) for the U.S. Senate next year.

Mrs. Truman's action was announced yesterday by Symington at a news conference at the Radisson Moehlebach Hotel.



James W. SYMINGTON

Symington, the son of Sen. Stuart Symington (D-Mo.), who is retiring, has not formally announced his candidacy. He said yesterday that would come early next year.

After the news conference Symington went to Independence and visited Mrs. Truman at her home for about 30 minutes. He was accompanied by Randall Jessee, former broadcaster and a Truman family friend.

During his 2-day campaign trip to Kansas City Symington also held a luncheon meeting with Harold Holliday, Jr., leader of Freedom, Inc. The support of the black Democratic organization is considered important in the contest for the Senate in Jackson County.

He later attended Christmas parties at the homes of Robert P. Lyons, 1016 Huntington, and of Mrs. Kay Waldo, 811 W. 69th Terrace. Lyons, a Kansas City lawyer, and Mrs. Waldo, a member of the Jackson County Legislature, will be cochairmen of his Senate campaign in Jackson County.

Symington came to Kansas City after Congress ended its work for the year on Friday. Symington has been devoting considerable attention to Kansas City by making frequent trips here during congressional recesses over the last six months.

In next year's Democratic Senate primary Symington is expected to face Warren E. Hearn, former governor, and Rep. Jerry Litton (D-Mo.). Hearn has filed for the post and Litton is expected to announce his candidacy early next year.

At his news conference Symington read a statement of support from Mrs. Truman.

"I support Jim Symington enthusiastically for the United States Senate in 1976 and want very much for him to be a candidate for that office," Mrs. Truman said in her statement. "I am happy, therefore, to serve as the honorary chairman of the Symington for Senator committee."

Mrs. Truman also said that Symington was eminently qualified to carry on the tradition of public service wanted and demanded by Missourians.

"Missourians have become accustomed to being represented by senators of great character, responsibility and national stature; I'm sure that none of us would want now to settle for less," said Mrs. Truman, whose late husband once served in the Senate. "I believe that he (Symington) is the one candidate for the Senate who meets those standards."

Symington said he was grateful and proud to have received Mrs. Truman's support.

He recalled that both he and his father, who's completing four 6-year terms in the Senate, went to work for President Truman in 1945. The younger Symington entered the Marines as a private a few months after his father took a federal post.

"His (Sen. Symington's) rise has been more rapid than mine," Rep. Symington said. "I'm still playing catch-up ball."

**Old Gl**  
**Bureau**  
FEB 20 1976

By Steve Fehr  
A Member of the Staff

In Independence, a corner that wears its individual contentiousness like a badge, Hugh R. Mitchell is... it in real well.

After moving to 401 N... from Memphis last month... noticed something awry... places, the home of Mrs. B... man, 219 N. Delaware, ... only 1,000 feet away.

"We just noticed that the..."

acted as chief spokesmen for the 13-member OPEC.

*Independence Examiner, December 22, 1975, p. 1*

# Symington Gets Support from Bess In Race for Senate

By CHARLES BURKE  
(Staff Writer)

Mrs. Bess Truman will serve as honorary state chairman of the Jim Symington for Senator Committee.

The candidate, who will seek the seat now held by his father, Stuart Symington, made the announcement at a press conference Saturday at the Muehlebach Hotel.

"I support Jim Symington enthusiastically for the United States Senate in 1976," the wife of former President Harry S. Truman said in a written statement released to the media, copies of which were distributed at the press conference.

"Missourians have become accustomed to being represented by senators of great character, responsibility, and national stature," the statement continued. "I'm sure that none of us would want to settle for less. Jim Symington's experience in government, his strong sense of values, his effectiveness as a Congressman, and his concern for the problems of average Missourians

eminently qualify him to carry on the tradition of public service we want and demand. I believe he is the one candidate for the Senate who meets those standards. As Jim's friend, I urge him to run, and as chairman of the committee, I will do whatever I can to help him be elected."

Symington Saturday described the acceptance as "the most wonderful news" and said that "I'm sure I don't have to tell you how gratified and proud I am." Later, he went to Independence to thank the former First Lady.

"I remember many kindnesses of the Truman family to my mother and father," he said. "Both my father and I went to work for President Truman in 1945." He went into the Marines then and his father took a federal position. "I remember many evenings at the White House in the late 40's."

"But my father's rise has been much more rapid than mine," he added with a smile. "I'm still playing catch-up."

Mrs. Truman's acceptance of the  
(See SYMINGTON, Page 2)

## Symington—

(Continued from Page 1)

chairmanship was described as "a great uplifting for me. I needn't tell you that."

Symington hasn't officially announced his candidacy yet. In reply to a question as to whether the press conference should be considered as the "announcement," he said, "No, I will make that early in the year. This is another step toward it. I want to wait until I get everything lined up. We first have to have time to put a committee together on a statewide basis."

So far, former Gov. Warren Hearnes has announced, and Congressman Jerry Litton is expected to.

Asked who his strongest opponent might be, Symington said, "They all look pretty tough to me."

4. Typed letter signed, James W. Symington to Bess W. Truman, undated, with suggested public statement for Mrs. Truman. Note: These items were released by the Truman Library twenty years after this interview was conducted and were thus not available during the interview. (Papers of Bess Wallace Truman, Correspondence File 1953-1982, box 43, folder "Symington, Stuart," Harry S. Truman Library.)

Dear Mrs. Truman,

I am, of course, delighted that you have agreed to serve as the honorary state chairman of my campaign committee, and I look forward to seeing you on Saturday at 3:30.

I plan to hold a press conference on Saturday at 1:30 to release the good news of your support, and I am attaching for your approval a statement to be issued in your name.

Naturally, we will make any changes you suggest; and if this does not meet with your approval, or if you have any questions, you can reach me at my Washington office (202-225-2561) or my St. Louis office (314-425-3096). Otherwise, I will await with pleasure our Saturday visit.

With much gratitude and warmest regards,



James W. Symington



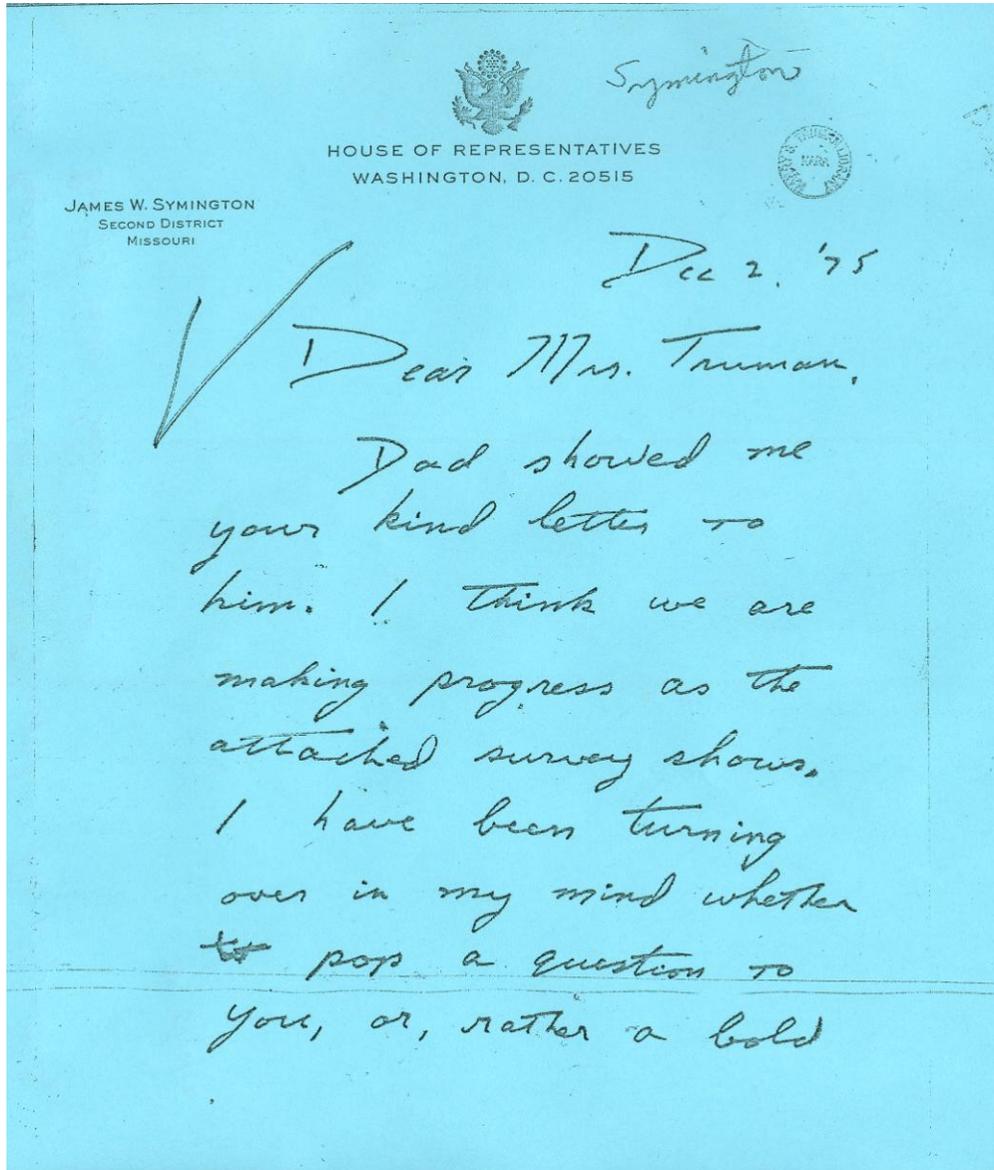
PROPOSED STATEMENT FOR MRS. TRUMAN:

I support Jim Symington enthusiastically for the United States Senate in 1976 and want very much for him to be a candidate for that office. I am happy, therefore, to serve as the honorary chairman of the Symington for Senator Committee.

Missourians have become accustomed to being represented by Senators of great character, responsibility, and national stature; I'm sure that none of us would want now to settle for less. Jim Symington's experience in government, his strong sense of values, his effectiveness as a Congressman, and his concern for the problems of average Missourians eminently qualify him to carry on the tradition of public service we want and demand. I believe that he is the one candidate for the Senate who meets those standards.

As Jim's friend, I urge him to run; and as chairman of the Symington for Senator Committee, I will do whatever I can to help him be elected.

5. Autographed letter signed, James W. Symington to Bess W. Truman, December 2, 1975, and typed letter signed, Stuart S. Symington to Bess W. Truman, August 10, 1976. Note: These items were released by the Truman Library twenty years after this interview was conducted. (Papers of Bess Wallace Truman, Correspondence File 1953-1982, box 43, folder "Symington, Stuart," Harry S. Truman Library.)



request. I do so,  
hoping you will forgive me.

My Senate Campaign  
Committee will list members  
including an Honorary  
Chairman. My number one  
hope would be that you  
would agree to "be  
Honorary Chairman. While a  
"yes" would send me half-  
way to heaven, I would  
fully understand and appreciate  
a different response.

With respect and  
great admiration.

Jim Cymington

Stuart Symington  
Missouri



*Symington*

United States Senate  
WASHINGTON, D. C. 20510

August 10, 1976

Dear Mrs. T.:

How can I ever thank you adequately for all your kindness and help in Jim's race.

Many things conspired to hurt him in the last several weeks; but he can hold his head high because of the nature of his campaign.

There is no way I could ever thank you and I know he feels exactly the same way.

My love to you, always,

Sincerely,

Stuart Symington



Mrs. Harry S Truman  
219 North Delaware  
Independence, Missouri