

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

WITH

LISA BOSSO HOUSTON

AUGUST 31, 1990

LEE'S SUMMIT, MISSOURI

INTERVIEWED BY JIM WILLIAMS

ORAL HISTORY #1990-7

This transcript corresponds to audiotapes DAV-AR #4141-4144

HARRY S TRUMAN NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR



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Lisa Bosso Houston and Jim Williams reviewed the draft of this transcript. Their corrections were incorporated into this final transcript by Perky Beisel in summer 2000. A grant from Eastern National Park and Monument Association funded the transcription and final editing of this interview.

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ABSTRACT

Lisa Bosso Houston served as a museum aide in the first three and a half years of the Harry S Truman National Historic Site. Houston helped the curator prepare the home for the dedication in May 1984, then continued to inventory, clean, catalog, and preserve the artifacts within the home. As an early employee of the park, Houston discusses the park's developmental process and the persons involved in its evolution.

Persons mentioned: Harry S Truman, Bess W. Truman, Thomas P. Richter, Steve Harrison, Jean Svadlenak, Margaret Truman Daniel, Susan Kopczynski, Roger T. Sermon, Jr., Norman J. Reigle, Joan Sanders, Clay Bauske, Pat Kerr Dorsey, Elizabeth Safly, Grandma Moses, Millie Carol, Clifton Truman Daniel, Palma Wilson, Rick Houston, Karen Tinnin, Edward Hobby, Rick Jones, Constance Odum-Soper, Jody Adkins, Chrissy Barker, Natalie Ott Wallace, Denfred "Dink" Watskey, Linda Joseph, May Wallace, George Porterfield Wallace, Frank Gates Wallace, Ardis Haukenberry, Doris Hecker, Rich Raymond, Linda Clement, Sarah Spearman, Jackie Holt, Cindy Draney, Mark Newport, Skip Brooks, Mike Healy, Fawn Thompson, John Battie, and John Hunter.

**ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW WITH
LISA BOSSO HOUSTON**

HSTR INTERVIEW #1990-7

JIM WILLIAMS: This is an interview with Lisa Bosso Houston. It's being conducted in her home in Lee's Summit, Missouri, on the afternoon of August 31, 1990. The interviewer is Jim Williams, a park ranger at Harry S Truman National Historic Site, and also Mike Shaver, a museum aide at Harry S Truman National Historic Site. Lisa, where and when were you born?

LISA B. HOUSTON: Kansas City, Missouri, May 24, 1961.

WILLIAMS: Did you ever meet Harry or Bess Truman?

HOUSTON: No.

WILLIAMS: How did you hear about the National Park Service and the Truman home?

HOUSTON: When I was in college I knew that the park service was going to be possibly getting the Truman home and administrating it. And that was my senior year in college. I was in a somewhat museum program at the University of Missouri, and I contacted the chief ranger, Tom Richter at the time, and basically bugged him for about six months until he gave me a job. [chuckling] He said that the museum aide position was going to be open, and so I applied for it and got it, and started with the park . . . I think it was March 6th of '84.

WILLIAMS: Did you hear about the home being transferred from someone, or just reading it in the paper?

HOUSTON: Yeah, just reading the newspaper, and I just contacted . . . I first contacted the Truman Library. I've had contact with the library folks through my parents, and growing up in Kansas City you can't help but know the scoop on Harry Truman, and I saw . . . There was an article in the *Examiner* about Tom Richter, and so I just contacted him in . . . I think it was like January of '84, before the home actually opened.

WILLIAMS: So is Tom the one who hired you?

HOUSTON: Yes.

WILLIAMS: So the curator wasn't on when you—

HOUSTON: No. Steve [Harrison] started like a week before I started, in March.

WILLIAMS: Were you hired as a temporary museum aide or as a permanent?

HOUSTON: Right, a temporary one-year appointment. Then the next year I had to apply for it because it was converted to a permanent position, and I applied, and I got the permanent position. [chuckling]

WILLIAMS: What was the allure to you of working at the Truman home?

HOUSTON: It was the fact that I had studied museum work and textiles at the University of Missouri, and it was wonderful to be able to apply my degree to work, as opposed to a lot of people who just get any type of job. Again, growing up in Kansas City, it was interesting working with something that I knew about: Truman. My mother had had quite a bit of contact with the Trumans, working in Independence and . . . It was just real exciting to be able to do something basically with my degree, was what was most exciting.

WILLIAMS: What was the nature of your mother's contact with the Trumans?

HOUSTON: She is the director of school food service for Independence public schools, and in her top desk drawer she had the plans for the funeral for years, because they were going to have to use the cafeterias for all the National Guard. Truman High School was where all the National Guard people camped out, and her cooks had to provide all the food for the National Guard people. So she had the plans, his funeral plans, gosh, for years in her desk drawer.

WILLIAMS: So she was in contact with the Truman Library about that?

HOUSTON: Yeah. Right, exactly. Right.

WILLIAMS: Is that the only contact she really had with them?

HOUSTON: Yeah. And then my dad has always been a real Truman buff. You know, it was like, "Here, read this book." [chuckling]

WILLIAMS: So when Mr. Truman died, she was involved in the funeral?

HOUSTON: Right. Yeah, I mean, it was the day after Christmas. It was a mess for her because she had closed all the kitchens down for the Christmas vacation, and she had to get everything back open and get her staff there. And I can remember her being at Truman High School for hours and days. We had company. I mean, I can remember that very vividly.

WILLIAMS: You were just a youngster then.

HOUSTON: Yes, I was ten, I believe, ten or eleven.

WILLIAMS: Was your job at the Truman home the first with the park service?

HOUSTON: Yes, it was.

WILLIAMS: Where did you go on your first day of work?

HOUSTON: To the Truman Library. I met with Steve Harrison, who was the curator,

and basically read a bunch of books. [chuckling] There wasn't anything to get to the home yet, because they were still trying to figure out exactly what we needed to do. So that first week I was just basically reading technical books and reading books about Truman, just to get a little more information on the home. But my first time in the home was before I applied. Tom Richter took me through. That must have been in January of '84.

WILLIAMS: What do you remember about your first visit?

HOUSTON: Susan Kopczynski. [chuckling]

WILLIAMS: I've heard that one before.

HOUSTON: Yes, [chuckling] the infamous Susan. And I was very worried about working in this situation with her. But anyhow, it was real interesting. I can remember it was very cold, and it was really cold in the house, and Susan was working in the dining room, and there was just . . . everything was just all over. But it was real interesting because Tom took me upstairs, and it was just . . . It was exactly like when I walked in in March, and so it hadn't changed a whole lot. But that was the first time I was in it.

WILLIAMS: What was Sue doing there at that time?

HOUSTON: She must have been trying to catalog the first-floor objects. I mean, that was her mission, to catalog everything on the first floor. I think she was working on something in the dining room. I don't know if it was the silver things she was trying . . . I can't remember exactly.

WILLIAMS: So did you have an unpleasant experience with her?

HOUSTON: Oh, she was a little different. [chuckling] She wasn't very warm to me, and I was quite concerned that I was going to have to be working with her.

Thank God it was Steve instead. [chuckling]

WILLIAMS: How did Steve explain your duties when you came to work?

HOUSTON: Basically, our mission was to get the home open on whatever . . . May 8th, come hell or high water. That was our goal, and we busted our bucket to get it open. I mean, it's amazing the things that we did in . . . let's see, what? March, April, May . . . in two and a half months to get the home open for public. I mean, it was amazing. From taking up all the carpet, the original carpet, and getting down the new carpet, making sure that the grays were just right, and moving the furniture. I mean, that in itself was . . . Set all the furniture to one side while we'd get the carpet in, and then we had these men bringing in these huge rolls of carpet, and Steve and I were panicking that they were going to scrape the lin crusta. I mean, our fears, because I think we were so, so protective of it at the very beginning . . . I mean, I'm sure the staff still is, but I think there was a special . . . you know, "*Don't touch anything!*" And to get the back porch just perfect so nobody would be upset if the . . . [interview interrupted]

WILLIAMS: The back porch?

HOUSTON: The back porch, thank you. That we had to get all the flowers just right, and all the furniture look so-so, and everything would be clean. The house wasn't just spick-and-span, and that isn't how we wanted it to look, but it did need the dust removed and certain precautions . . . you know, taking some safety precautions, as far as is somebody going to crash into the epergne, and just different things. Getting the things back that had been sent out for conservation work.

One of my first big jobs was on the newel lamp. There was a bracket that needed to be made, because the original one was very thin and broken. I went to umpteen different places to see if they could make this bracket, because we couldn't put the globe on the lamp without the bracket. I think after three weeks of fooling around with that, we finally . . . That took call after call, taking the bracket to different places, and I think the first person that made it didn't make it just right, it didn't fit, so we had to take it back. And that was one of the things, the newel lamp had to be together for opening day.

I mean there was just, you know, getting all the window shades—that was another nightmare—with Roger Sermon, who wanted all the window shades just right. We replaced some of them before the home was opened, because some of them were pretty badly torn or stained, and we wanted to get those. I mean, it was just little things that needed to get done so the house would appear to be nice.

WILLIAMS: Well, the public impression is that we could have just thrown open the doors and opened it up right then without a lot of preparation. But the way you say it, there were things that needed to be done.

HOUSTON: Right. I mean, I think that one of the main things was the carpeting. And I think that was probably the . . . There was a lot of controversy on it, as far as to take up the carpeting or not take it up. But how many visitors to date, do we know?

WILLIAMS: Of what?

HOUSTON: How many visitors have been through the home?

WILLIAMS: Oh, three hundred and seventy thousand or something.

HOUSTON: Yeah. I mean, imagine that on the carpet. But just the preparation just to get that carpet up and out and the new carpet in. Because that was historic carpeting. Let's hope that fifty years from now somebody can put that back in and . . . Because we didn't want to put plastic runners down and have . . . I mean, you have to look at the safety standpoint. So I think the dark gray and the light gray carpeting have worked out wonderful.

WILLIAMS: Were you involved in the decision-making, or did you just pretty much go along with them?

HOUSTON: Yeah. A lot of the decisions were done even before Steve was there. It was just a matter of just making sure that somebody was there to get everything organized. Let's see, was it March? Also there was the big ice storm in March of '84 before the home opened.

WILLIAMS: You were there?

HOUSTON: Yeah. That was a real mess. Here's water dripping from the attic all the way down into the foyer. I mean, we were panicking. We had buckets all over. Geez! And that morning, Norm Reigle had a terrible nosebleed in the house. I mean, it was just like what else could happen? [chuckling] It was pretty bad. We had been there maybe a week, two weeks, actually, Steve and I on staff, and just to get all that cleaned up, that took time. It got the paper in the first-floor bedroom/bathroom wet, and we had to take all that up. And we had buckets and mops, and the facility manager wasn't on staff yet.

So Steve and I were basically doing everything, getting windows

washed, porches washed, making sure the sidewalks were nice and clean, you know, just doing things to help preserve the home, as far as getting all the doorknobs waxed, to help that little hands, grimy hands [chuckling] won't deteriorate things. Things like . . . there was the curtains in the vestibule doors. They were very taut, extremely taut, and we had to move up the curtain rods. Because if somebody would have touched that, it would have just torn. Gosh, I mean there were just all kinds of little details that we had to do before the home was opened.

WILLIAMS: So it sounds like you just went through and tried to think of kind of the worst case of what could happen.

HOUSTON: Well, yeah, exactly. Because we didn't know how the people were going to come through the home, whether they were going to touch everything. We had it very strict: eight on the tour, a trailer. Like that first couple of years there was a trailer to make sure nobody touched anything. We just didn't know what the people were going to do. And especially since that first, what, week or so when the home opened, we were having evening tours and all these special tours, and God knows, all these other people coming in, you know? [chuckling]

WILLIAMS: Were you at the Truman Library much after that first week?

HOUSTON: We had our offices up there.

WILLIAMS: Could you describe the atmosphere at the Truman Library?

HOUSTON: Well, the office situation was very small and tight. [chuckling] The lunchroom was nice. [chuckling] But it was definitely cozy up there, especially . . . Let's see, there was Norm and Joan and Steve and I, and

Tom, basically in two very small offices. The funeral home that we were going to have, Steve and I had gone over there. Our office was great, because we had the big double doors where they were going to wheel in all the bodies in and out. [chuckling] I can't remember exactly when we were supposed . . . We were supposed to be in there before opening, I believe, and then it burned. Somebody had left something on the roof. So that, of course, was a disaster. So we had to extend our stay at the library.

But the staff up there, most of the staff was very supportive of the park service taking over the home. I'm sure there was a little . . . I don't know, maybe people not as acceptable to the fact that the park service was there, but mostly they were very, very nice to us, real nice.

WILLIAMS: Who did you have the most contact with at the Truman Library?

HOUSTON: Clay Bauske, who's the curator, and Pat [Kerr Dorsey]. Pat gave us a lot of information. Liz [Safly] gave us oodles and gobs of information, I mean just historical stuff, which was really nice. But basically Steve and I just . . . we were most concerned about getting the home ready and the interpreters dealt with—Tom and the rest of the staff—and information up there.

WILLIAMS: Were you aware from the beginning what had taken place in the house just before Mrs. Truman died and then just after?

HOUSTON: Yeah, I had been given a rundown by Tom, and then Clay let us see all the secret rooms. [chuckling] Which was kind of . . . we really didn't know exactly . . . We saw the big inventory, but we really didn't know exactly the whole story probably a year later. And then the project that I just did at

the Truman Library as a contract, I even found out more information, as far as what exactly happened before the park service came in and after Mrs. Truman died.

WILLIAMS: What did you find out?

HOUSTON: I mean, it's just amazing the things the Truman Library has. The clothing collection that they have that came from the home is . . . I mean, it's marvelous. Mrs. Truman's things from early 1900 up until her death. I mean, there's this wonderful whole series. When I was going through these things with Jean Svadkenak, who I was working with, I was just trying to imagine all of these things back in the home in that second-floor bedroom, all of Mr. Truman's things up in the attic, and I kept telling Jean, "Gosh, these smell like the attic!" It was interesting to her that I was making these references, because it just smelled like dirty old attic clothes. I kept going, "This is the attic smell." And it was. It was very interesting, because I was just imagining what the whole closets would be like. Mrs. Truman's dressing room basically was all hangers. I could just see all these clothes in there. It would be really neat if we could have seen it that way. And all of Margaret's things. I mean, there was just tons of stuff that was removed from the house, trunks just full of stuff. And just the way that the attic was tidied up by the library staff so you could walk through, and how the storeroom was tidied up and things were thrown out so you could walk through. The way they describe it and the things that are up at the library would be . . . It would just be so neat to have seen exactly how that was in the house.

WILLIAMS: Do you think the house is significantly different in appearance now than it was just before Mrs. Truman died?

HOUSTON: No, I think it's pretty much the same. I think it's just maybe cleaned up some.

WILLIAMS: So the material that they removed doesn't really affect the appearance much?

HOUSTON: Maybe not the appearance, but the whole feeling for interpretation maybe. And I think that's what would be really important, to see how it was, to better interpret it. It really gave me a neat feeling to see all these clothes. I could pretty well imagine what they would be like, you know, stuffed in the closet. I mean, there were hangers that were bent up, and these clothes that were falling all over. You know, that's how the Trumans were.

I can remember inventorying the things in the attic, and opening up suitcases. Here these suitcases were chock-full of stuff of all kinds. Towels and soap from the hotels. I mean, it was just like these little pack rats. It was great! How many times do we take soap from hotels, the little shampoo? If we're going to stay there for three or four days, we keep taking the shampoo so we can get more shampoo to take home. And I just think that's how the Trumans were. To me that's what's sad, is that those things were . . . The things that are at the library were removed, and pictures weren't taken, good pictures.

WILLIAMS: Did you have any opinion one way or the other of what the Truman Library had done early on?

HOUSTON: An opinion?

WILLIAMS: A strong opinion?

HOUSTON: Yeah, I think there was a real grudge. I don't know, it was just like, first of all, why did they do it? We know that in the will it says "to the United States," and I think the Truman Library really wanted it, which is understandable. That would be really nice, but . . . You know, everything that was taken for "safekeeping," I don't think anybody was really thinking about exactly what they were doing, which is unfortunate. The inventory that was done was nice—I'm glad that they did it, because it's interesting to see maybe where the things were, in what rooms—but it needed to be done a lot better. Even when I was working on the project at the library of the things that were supposed to have been numbered, everything was just all kind of chaotic, kind of a mess. And I think that's how they went about it. It's like, let's go in there and get all this stuff out real quick before anybody else can get it. Which is sad, and I think now the library thinks that they maybe could have had . . . Let's do this on a loan kind of thing. Let's ship everything back and have a great big loan and not worry about it. Because they don't have the space to store it. I mean, it was nice and cozy at the home. I think that's what . . . they should have kept the things there, but . . .

WILLIAMS: Do you think Steve Harrison shared your view?

HOUSTON: Oh, yeah, most definitely. We had a lot of discussions about the things that were taken, the Grandma Moses, the icon. I guess I can say all this. [chuckling] You know, it's those things that it's unfortunate . . . Like the Grandma Moses is gone, so let's hang this one in its place. It's those kind of things that . . . You know, was it necessary to have those for safekeeping

up there? I don't think so. Or in a private museum collection?

WILLIAMS: So no one ever really convinced you that what the library had done was necessary?

HOUSTON: No, and I don't think they ever could convince me, because it wasn't necessary. Now, if the attic had been flooded and the second floor had been flooded and they needed to get the things out because they were going to be destroyed, okay. But it just wasn't done with any thought behind it whatsoever. I think there's maybe a few pictures taken by Millie [Carol] up at the library, which I don't think are worth a whole lot, but I mean they're pictures. But just to have seen it how they describe it. I mean, Liz has described it to you, Jim, and you know exactly . . . It's just unbelievable. Could somebody really live with all this stuff just chock-full in that house?

WILLIAMS: In the time before the dedication, were there any other things that really had to be done that you haven't mentioned?

HOUSTON: The carpet was the biggie.

WILLIAMS: Who was moving all this furniture around?

HOUSTON: Steve and I were.

WILLIAMS: You didn't trust the carpet people?

HOUSTON: No. [chuckling]

WILLIAMS: So how did you manage these big dining room chests and sideboard?

HOUSTON: We just kind of hoofed it out. I remember we put all the chairs in the living room and we were joking that we were going to have a concert. Margaret was going to give us a concert, because all the dining room chairs were . . . they were just all lined up. I mean, here was like fifteen chairs in the living

room, and Margaret was going to give us a concert in the music room. Oh, the alarms, I guess. The carpet . . . the underneath alarms, the little ding-dong things.

MICHAEL SHAVER: Whose idea was that?

HOUSTON: Well, it was Steve's idea to do the carpet alarms, but there was a lot of . . . Margaret was very concerned about people first of all going upstairs, going into the rooms. She was very concerned about that. I mean, that was the big thing: Nobody is going upstairs. She wanted a gate across the steps upstairs, and we were going, "You can't put a gate up there. That'll look terrible." So we got these little tension rods, and covered them real nicely. And the carpet alarms, that was . . . I mean, it did its business. Is there still one in the dining room? There is, isn't there? And it works. But just to get all that together and coordinated . . . It was just the little things. You know, somebody wouldn't show up, or it was this or that. It was a lot of waiting. The guards were still there twenty-four hours, too, and we had to deal with them, make sure that they were okay and didn't touch anything.

WILLIAMS: Were there any problems with the guards?

HOUSTON: Oh, yeah, gobs of problems. I think probably the best one . . . Well, there's a couple of them, but in the kitchen, where the light is above the kitchen table, there's two grease spots on either side where the guards would sit. It was the Afro-sheen that would rub off on the kitchen wall. I can remember people commenting, "Oh, look, Harry Truman's greasy head!" And you're just like, "No, it's Afro-sheen from the guards." [chuckling] Because they admitted . . . I would wipe the phone off every day, and I'm like, "What is

this junk?” And one of the guards, I think his name was Wesley, he said, “Oh, that’s my Afro-sheen I put on.” I’m like, “Oh, okay.” Unfortunately we couldn’t control that, because the guards were there and that was where their head marks were.

Let’s see, I guess the other guard story was Dan, and this was the first summer, I think. Dan had ghosts in the attic. And he believed that there were. As I came in one morning, because I was always the first one to the home to get it ready to open, and Dan was sitting out underneath the back porch. I’m like, “Dan, what are you doing?” He goes, “There’s ghosts in there.” And I’m like, “Dan, there are no ghosts. I’ve been in the house a million times.” And he says, “No, they keep asking me to go upstairs in the attic and party.” And I’m like, “No, they don’t.” [chuckling] He goes, “Yes, I saw them up there, and they were telling me that if I didn’t come up and party they were going to burn the house down.” Of course, I thought he was just nuts, and he wasn’t there . . . That was his last day. [chuckling]

WILLIAMS: So, even when you were preparing the home and there were staff members in the house, the guards still were there?

HOUSTON: Yeah, I think until the end of that first summer they were there. I can’t remember exactly when, but they were just there in the . . . They would come on like at 5:00, and would be there until 8:00 the next morning. We probably had more problems with the guards than anybody. The chair in the study, the supposed Mr. Truman chair, it would always be out of kilter. The things on the table would be kind of moved back. Obviously, you

could tell that somebody was sitting there. Then we had this one guard who was rather large, and for three or four mornings in a row there was a pillow from the sofa moved into the music room sofa, on the silk settee. I was going, “What is going on?” And we eventually confronted him, and he’d been sitting on the silk settee with this pillow, to use it, because it has the wood around it, for his head. Of course, the silk settee wasn’t in real Tom-terrific shape in the first place. [chuckling]

WILLIAMS: You mentioned that some things had been sent off for conservation.

HOUSTON: The portrait of Margaret in the foyer. That had to be re-stretched back on the canvas. It was real bubbly. And since that was the first thing . . .

[End #4141; Begin #4142]

WILLIAMS: Why was it a shame that the epergne was replated?

HOUSTON: Um, because the pictures I saw, I mean it was all really, nicely tarnished and you know, that’s a normal thing for silver to do, I don’t think Reverend Hobby kept everything all, you know, nice and shiny. I mean, it’s pretty obvious some of the things aren’t real nice and shiny. But it’s one of those things that . . . you know, this was the Gates’s wedding gift, and this is one of those nice pieces, so let’s make it look nice because the Trumans wouldn’t have anything that wouldn’t be nice and shiny. We had a lot of problems with the lacquer finish peeling off, and it probably still is peeling off. We took it down there to have it re-lacquered because we couldn’t . . . I mean, it was just flaking. And I just think it would have been really nice to have kept that nice and tarnished, because that’s how the Trumans had it.

I know it's nice to have the table set in the dining room because it shows off the dishes, but the pictures that I have seen in the dining room, there is this big planter in the center of the dining room table. And I think, who keeps their table set, their dining room table set at home? I don't. It's those kinds of things, unfortunately, I think politics and Margaret play a big role in, and you have to kind of go with the flow.

WILLIAMS: You were talking earlier about Margaret wanted this and Margaret wanted that. How did you know that Margaret wanted it?

HOUSTON: Margaret would tell Norm that, you know, "The dining room table has to be set." And originally what we were going to do was just put a tablecloth on the table, and then we could just put an alarm underneath the whole table. So if somebody would pick something up, we wouldn't have to worry about that. But no, she wanted these special pineapple cloths, place mats and such on the table, because they were her mother's favorites. Well, I don't think they'd ever been used, but that's what she wanted on the table. And everything had to be just perfect.

I met Margaret before dedication. She and Clifton came to the home, and Steve and I and Norm went to the home, because we wanted to make sure that everything was just *perfect*. And I can remember Margaret going into the dining room and pulling on the place mats and saying, "Mother would not like that," because they were like a half an inch away from the table edge. "Mother would have to have these down to the edge." And our other big concern was the salad fork, because I guess she had been through on a photo shoot back in February, or November I guess, and . . .

[interview interrupted]

WILLIAMS: You were talking about Margaret and the dining room table.

HOUSTON: Oh, the salad forks. The earlier photo shoot, the salad forks had to be on the inside, close, like you would set a dessert fork, because that is the European style. And that was just like, ah! And so we didn't set it like that. We put the salad forks on the outside, because we figured visitors would come through and question why the salad forks are on the inside of the plate. And that's one thing we figured that the interpreter did not need to explain, or have the time to explain. You know, most people put their salad forks on the outside. And also that the salad plate was in the center of the plate. Well, we didn't want that because of the abrasion on the plate, so we sat that on the outside. Oh, everything was just fine, except that the place mats needed to be at the edge of the table.

I was real surprised with Margaret when she came through. I thought she would be . . . I don't know, a little more caring, but it could have been the hubbub of the dedication and such. Clifton, her husband, he was just a charmer. He comes walking down the steps with the straw hat that's in the guest room on top of the dresser. He comes walking downstairs with that, going, "Oh, now Harry would have never worn a hat like this!" And Steve and I were going, "Oh, God, we can see him walking out the front door with this. Take it back upstairs, Clifton." And we heard the drawers opening up there, and he comes down with a shirt that obviously was his, it had his initials on it, and I think that did leave. But what do you do? Steve and Norm and I were going, "Whatever." That was

kind of . . . you know, you wanted to say something, but then it was like you really can't. But it was interesting to meet her and to see how she really was.

SHAVER: Did you see any interaction between her and her husband?

HOUSTON: That was very interesting. Clifton was talking to Steve and I while Norm was talking to Margaret. And I guess I had put Margaret up on a pedestal—you know, understandably. Here's Margaret Truman, daughter of Harry Truman, and I was going to meet her, and I was all excited. I had my Class A uniform on. I mean, I was rearing to go. And she was on her mission of trying to find anything that was out of place or not looking good. Clifton was just . . . I mean, he was just a charm. He was just wonderful. He had this little black checked suit on with this pink shirt and French cuffs. He was so neat! So he was chatting with Steve and I. And after he had come downstairs with this stuff, Margaret was still, I'm sure, rooting through stuff upstairs. Then they both came down and we were talking. And I can't remember what Margaret had said, or Clifton had said to Margaret, but Margaret turned to Clifton and said, "Oh, Clifton, just stay out of this." And I'm just going, "Huh!" It was just real . . . I mean, because Clifton just seemed like a sweetheart! And it really . . . Margaret wasn't on her pedestal anymore. [chuckling] I was real shocked that she . . . He seemed a little henpecked. But I'm sure that's probably how Bess would have talked to Harry, in a sense. And Clifton didn't have much to say.

WILLIAMS: What did you talk about with Clifton all this time?

HOUSTON: We talked about his boys, where they were at the time, and his stay at the Alameda Plaza. [chuckling] He was just telling us things, that he can remember coming to the home, and he would stay in the guest room and Margaret would stay in the master bedroom. I mean, just basically idle chitchat until Margaret and Norm got their business done.

WILLIAMS: Any other stories like that, memories of the home, that he told you?

HOUSTON: No, not that I can remember.

WILLIAMS: How would you describe Margaret's attitude toward people other than Norm? Did she say hello or . . . ?

HOUSTON: She said hello, I shook her hand, but that was about it. It was just like: Norm is the superintendent, and that's the only person I'm going to talk to. Because he had some clout and nobody else did.

WILLIAMS: She didn't take any particular interest in the fact that you would be the one actually taking care of the home?

HOUSTON: No, no, no, no, no, no, not at all. [chuckling] No. And Norm tried to get that point across to her, I remember: "Lisa and Steve are the ones that are taking care of the home." And I think she just had too many other things on her mind.

WILLIAMS: Before the home opened, did the interpretive staff help you at all prepare for the dedication?

HOUSTON: What did they, I don't know, I can't remember basically before the home opened, but I know that they did . . . They would help us throughout the year. Like during the winter when the visitation was down, they'd help us vacuum the curtains and . . . I can't remember what the . . . Because they

were pretty busy just learning this stuff, because it was such a short time to have to give tours, and staff didn't come on real quick, that I think it was just like a month. Because I don't think the interpreters didn't come on till like April. So it was basically Steve and I . . . There would be a few things that we'd ask them that everybody would have to help do. You know, in the yard, I remember we had a cleanup day on the outside to make sure everything was really nice, and they helped wash the porches and washed windows and things. But basically I can just remember the staff helping after we had opened and had a routine going.

WILLIAMS: So the interpreters weren't in the house much before it was opened?

HOUSTON: Not a whole lot. I can remember them up in the office reading and doing as much research as they could to get their own tour going.

WILLIAMS: Did you try to absorb the information, too?

HOUSTON: Oh, yeah, because I was the "fill-in." And it was interesting, because I remember interpreters would say, "You know, you have a totally different viewpoint of it." And you have to. My big point was: Don't touch anything. [chuckling] It was fun giving tours. When I had to, I guess. I mean, a whole week of it I wouldn't want to do, but an occasional tour I would help out if they were shorthanded.

WILLIAMS: This was in the first summer?

HOUSTON: Mm-hmm.

WILLIAMS: So, even from early on you understood that you might be called upon to be a ranger?

HOUSTON: Yes. I mean, that was kind of . . . Yeah. I think somebody was sick one

day, and I can remember Tom saying, “What do we do?” And Steve said, “Well, maybe Lisa could give a tour.” [chuckling] And so then that’s when they’d cross-train me to give tours.

WILLIAMS: Had you ever done interpretation before?

HOUSTON: No. No, it was a whole new experience. But it was fun.

WILLIAMS: How involved were you in the preparations for the dedication, the formal things? The ceremonial?

HOUSTON: As far as decisions? I can remember being up there. I was a door holder, I think, for somebody.

WILLIAMS: At the home?

HOUSTON: No, at the library. Steve and I were both at the library. At the home it was Palma [Wilson] and Tom. They were the ones down at the home. Which I think if you talk to Steve, we were both kind of confused why we weren’t down there. [chuckling] But basically I think it was stationed interpretation, I think, or maybe even walk-throughs. But Steve and I passed out programs at the library. We weren’t involved at all at the home.

WILLIAMS: What was your daily routine after the dedication, that first summer?

HOUSTON: I worked 8:00 to 4:30. At eight o’clock, I would go to the home, open it up, turn the lights on, vacuum, because we vacuumed every day, water the plants, made sure everything was just okay, do a walk-through through the house, from basement to attic, making sure that everything was okay after the guards had left. And pretty much that was the routine just about until I left. It was vacuum every day, and then on Fridays I would clean the house. It used to take me two days to dust, and then I got it down to a day. And

then we'd have projects. I developed the housecleaning schedule, and then we would do projects from that, like wash the windows, whatever, every two months, or vacuum the curtains once a year. And then we would try to do special projects, like in the winter months when the visitation was down.

WILLIAMS: What were the division's main concerns after the dedication?

HOUSTON: Our division? Making sure that the house was . . . that the objects were safe, and that the things would . . . I mean, it was amazing the amount of dust that people bring in, and the dust will deteriorate things, and we just wanted to make sure that things would stay clean because everybody would be up close to it. I mean, if you have a table that's dusty, it was like, "Oh, did the Trumans keep their table dusty?" I mean, it was these questions that you were going, "No, the Trumans did not keep their table dusty, but . . ." [chuckling] Just to make sure that everything was safe in the home.

Everything on the first floor was cataloged. And then we did a major inventory of everything, just assigning a number to everything. Gosh, that probably took a year to do that. Doing some re-cataloging, redoing some numbers. One of our big projects was to catalog all the books in the study. And that was real interesting, to see exactly hands-on what the books were, and all the writing that was in them and such.

Let's see, what were our other projects? I remember painting the reproductions of the porch furniture. That was one of my projects. Another great project that we did was one summer, and don't ask me why we picked the summer, but we inventoried everything in the garage. And that was a real fun thing. We cataloged everything in the basement, all the umpteen

soda bottles, and took them up to the library. We had a storage room in the library. [interview interrupted]

WILLIAMS: You were talking about projects? Cataloging the study, I think, is where you were.

HOUSTON: Yeah, we did everything in the study, all the books in the study. Oh, we had a storage room up at the Truman Library where we would take the things from the basement and move them up to the library, because there was a whole new furnace system and air conditioner put in, and we wanted everything out of the basement before those things were put in. Plus, that was the only place the staff had to eat. [chuckling] That was always fun, sitting downstairs wrapped up in blankets. That first winter, it was so cold in the basement—I mean, you could see your breath. [chuckling] I would sit down there and catalog with my gloves on. I'd have my white gloves on, and I would catalog. I mean, I was cataloging with that and my parka on. We had the little space heater, and I would just set that down there, and that's how we . . . We had the sheets hanging up, so when the cold air would come in . . . It was very cold. It was just Rick and Cindy and Rick and I basically there most of the time, and Karen [Tinnin], that first winter. It was, it was miserable. You'd try to eat your soup before it got cold. It was terrible! You know, you'd bring your hot soup in your thermos, there wasn't a refrigerator, and it was not a good situation. [chuckling]

WILLIAMS: What were the particular problems of not having air conditioning?

HOUSTON: As far as for the objects, one day it would be 100 degrees and humidity would be terrible. You could really tell in the portrait of Margaret. I mean,

that's how basically we knew if it was too hot or too humid, Margaret would start to buckle. [chuckling] I'd call up Steve, and like, "Steve, Margaret's portrait is terrible." We'd take fans. The visitors were miserable. We had little screens. We couldn't just open up all the windows and let all the bugs in. I think for about a month we experimented with the big attic fan, would turn that on in the morning. I mean, if we could have kept that on all day, that would have been great.

SHAVER: Was it noisy, or ineffective?

HOUSTON: It was very noisy. I'm sure the Trumans probably would have had it on, but we didn't know how safe it was, and we'd be concerned about fire and all those other safety things. So we got fans, and we'd set one up in the dining room and one in the music room, and that seemed to help, at least for the comfort of the visitors. It was terrible for the staff because there wasn't anywhere to go. The basement would get just clammy down there, and it would be hot. We had to use the kitchen sink upstairs. We used the Trumans' kitchen sink because we didn't have any water. We used Reverend Hobby's bathroom, which is very primitive. Is there a toilet paper holder down there yet? No. [chuckling]

SHAVER: It's just sitting on a box next to it.

HOUSTON: Yeah. It was just, you know, you try to put out a few things and make it nice. The door doesn't even shut. It's just like, oh! You know, I can remember on Mondays you'd go down there, and all the workmen would be down there doing the furnace, and it was like, "I'm going to the bathroom." I think we had a sign on a coat hanger once, you know: In Use.

I can't remember when we got the refrigerator, but at least that helped. And the coffee pot, we could use that *only* for hot water, because the smell of coffee might go upstairs and it might destroy the interpretive value.

WILLIAMS: Was that a Tom Richter command?

HOUSTON: No, that was a Norm Reigle command. That's the reason we couldn't have a microwave, too. Because what if somebody would bring liver and onions and warm it up in the microwave? You know, that smell would go right upstairs. We were like, first of all, A, who's going to bring liver and onions? [chuckling]

WILLIAMS: Did you have to change your cleaning routine once the air conditioner was installed and you didn't have that problem?

HOUSTON: Yeah, we didn't clean as often, because we were cleaning like twice a week during the non-air-conditioned days. Because it would, it would just get filthy. And then when the restoration work was going on, then that was constant cleaning. I mean, there would be certain tabletops that would just be *filthy*. But you can only do so much cleaning. You just feel like you were just scraping that dust on top of the furniture. So a lot of times we'd just . . . you know, if things were dusty, we'd just tell the staff, "Make sure that you explain that to the folks."

WILLIAMS: What else about the exterior restoration concerned Steve and you?

HOUSTON: Fire, [chuckling] because they were using the heat guns. That was probably our main concern. And I think it interrupted the flow. People would be so interested in what's going on that it was tough for the interpreters to get them back on actually what the Trumans were up to. When they were

working on the second floor, there always had to be somebody up there with them. If they were redoing windows, somebody had to be with them. If I had my schedule planned out, what I was going to do, Steve would call down, "Oh, so and so needs to do that." Then I'd have to rearrange my whole schedule. I mean, it was tough working with all the . . . because I mean there were tons of them, it seemed like. And so it was just tough trying to get everything done, plus watch them. Basically that's what we had to do.

WILLIAMS: Can you talk some about the original staff, the interpreters, and your impressions of those days?

HOUSTON: Of that first summer? Let's see, there was Linda Joseph, who was an absolute crackup, who was a TWA flight attendant, who didn't really like routines. But she was a good interpreter. And then Karen, who's still there. John, and gosh, I can't remember his last name. He was excellent.

SHAVER: Hunter.

HOUSTON: Yeah. He was excellent. Who was the other . . . ? There was another woman.

SHAVER: Jody?

HOUSTON: Yeah, Jody and . . . A young black girl.

SHAVER: Chrissy?

HOUSTON: Chrissy, yeah.

WILLIAMS: Any impressions of them?

HOUSTON: Impressions? No. I think we're all pretty much like . . . I think a lot of people, and I'm sure they still do, after a while it's like, "My gosh, do I

have to give another tour?!” You know, to think of new things to say which is tough when you have a very . . . I don’t think people want to change their tour every two weeks, because you just get into the swing of one thing and then it’s like, “Oh, let’s talk about something else.” But I think the staff was really good. Rick and Cindy, they were always fun. And then Rick, he was fun. [chuckling]

WILLIAMS: Rick Houston.

HOUSTON: Yes.

WILLIAMS: And did you meet him at the Truman home?

HOUSTON: Yes, I did. Yes. Love in the Truman basement. [chuckling]

WILLIAMS: Would you say that there was more of a feeling of camaraderie in that first summer?

HOUSTON: In that first summer? Oh, most definitely. Because we’d get together and do stuff—I mean everybody would—and it wasn’t just . . . Yeah, I think everybody was friends. There wasn’t any competition for this or that. And I don’t think I saw that in the next couple of summers. It was more people were doing their own thing, and . . . You know, some of the routine by the middle of the summer got really old, and I think it was all new that first summer. It was real fun.

WILLIAMS: Well, I know how different it is now not to have a regular lunch crowd eating out under the back porch.

HOUSTON: Yeah. I mean, that was always nice to have somebody to eat lunch with. Because what do you have? Do you go up to the . . .

WILLIAMS: It’s staggered now. There’s usually no one eating together.

HOUSTON: Yeah, because you can at least, “Oh, gosh, could you believe that visitor?!” I mean, the infamous Rick Jones story, where the lady had a clear plastic bag and was throwing up inside the house. You know, and Rick came running down going, “Lisa! Come up and follow behind me.” I’m like, “Rick, no!” And that was a real concern. That was that first summer, and that was just terrible. You know, the poor woman was on chemotherapy, and she couldn’t help it, but . . . you know, it’s like, what do you say?

WILLIAMS: That was before radios came into play.

HOUSTON: Yeah.

WILLIAMS: How did you communicate?

HOUSTON: [chuckling] A lot of times in the winter we’d pound on the floor. We’d take our foot . . . you could hear real easily. Or at the kitchen you could just bang your foot on the floor, and that would be the signal for somebody to come upstairs. There was always a trailer on the tours, and you could kind of always give them kind of little high signs. But yeah, it was, it was a real trick.

WILLIAMS: What do you remember about the day when there was a small fire during the renovation?

HOUSTON: I think I was up at the office. I remember the bomb scare. I don’t remember the fire. I must have been up at the office.

SHAVER: What about the bomb scare?

HOUSTON: The bomb scare was real interesting. I was in the attic doing work, and all of a sudden I can remember Steve going, “Where’s Lisa?” And I’m like, “I’m up in the attic!” Because he was hollering, “Lisa! Lisa! Where are

you?” and I was like, “In the attic!” He said, “Get out of there!!” I was just like, God, what is going on? I was posted in the back alley, to see if there was anybody. I mean, it was like scattered. It was kind of exciting. The dog came in, and he was sniffing around. I think it lasted maybe an hour. I think somebody called to the fire department and said that there was a bomb at the Truman home.

WILLIAMS: Was this the first summer?

HOUSTON: I think it was, yeah.

SHAVER: But your boss valiantly volunteered to go in with the dogs.

HOUSTON: That’s right. Yes, Steve did. Steve, the dog, and the dog handler. And the dog did get a drink out of the second-floor toilet. That was the big yahoo.

[chuckling]

WILLIAMS: You don’t recall the . . . ?

HOUSTON: The fire? I don’t remember.

WILLIAMS: Up in the attic?

HOUSTON: I don’t think I was . . . I don’t remember. I mean, I remember the fire, but I don’t remember being—

WILLIAMS: It was pretty much put out before anything happened.

HOUSTON: I don’t think I was down there.

WILLIAMS: I thought I remember you going up with buckets and mopping up a little bit.

HOUSTON: Oh, maybe I did. I can’t remember that.

WILLIAMS: You don’t have any vivid memory?

HOUSTON: Huh-uh. You do. [chuckling]

WILLIAMS: I was giving a tour at the time.

HOUSTON: Was I going upstairs with buckets?

WILLIAMS: No, I mean when it started I was giving a tour.

HOUSTON: Oh, when it started?

WILLIAMS: Constance and I were outside. Were you still around when the alarm system and the fire system were installed?

HOUSTON: Oh, yeah. Yeah, that was, that was real upsetting to Steve and I. Here they were making these big drill holes in the plaster in the dining room. And it was, it was just like . . . That was probably the hardest thing for Steve and I to get through to somebody that would come in to work, is that you just can't set your toolbox down on the silk settee or on top of the TV. And that was what was really hard, because Steve and I would make sure that we'd put out a mattress pad for them to set something on, and they'd set it somewhere else. You're like, no, no, no. And that's probably one of the most difficult things, to get people to realize that . . . The home is so comfortable, but it's an historic home. You just don't go in and set things down. But testing all the alarms and getting all that, that was a mess. That was a real mess. And the rewiring of everything. That was done before the home . . . or that winter maybe? I can't remember. That was a long project.

WILLIAMS: So you were around when they were doing the electrical?

HOUSTON: Yeah, Floyd and his son. We finally figured out why . . . There would be days when Floyd wouldn't show up. He was a fireman, so he worked like a twenty-four-hour shift and then he was off. And his son wasn't a whole lot better. I think that's why Floyd had the business, was for his son. But, that was a mess. I mean it was just . . . You know, they would be

crawling around, doing this and that. And, that was one of our things, we wanted them, if they needed something to move, we wanted to move it. We didn't want them to move it. And that was difficult to say, you know, "Don't move that chair," because we want to move it.

WILLIAMS: So you just had to be on call when these projects were . . .

HOUSTON: Yes.

WILLIAMS: How [unintelligible]?

HOUSTON: Yes.

WILLIAMS: For the renovation that's quite . . .

[End #4142; Begin #4143]

WILLIAMS: When did you first meet Mrs. May Wallace?

HOUSTON: Gosh, probably that first summer. I don't think it was before the home opened. I don't think I met her. But that first summer I'd go and get information. [chuckling] I would be sent over for information, as far as how things were, what things she had that belonged to the home. We became real good buds. She's a neat lady.

WILLIAMS: Who chose you for this mission?

HOUSTON: I think Tom did. And I can't remember, the first time that I went over there I think it was just to get general information, if she knew . . . Maybe it was even before the home opened, to get some stories for the staff to tell, as far as things that happened in the house.

WILLIAMS: Was she receptive to the park service?

HOUSTON: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah, she loved us. She thought it was great. I think she viewed it as it was her own personal little guard system up there. If she

needed anything, she knew exactly where to go, and I think it probably made her feel a lot safer. The guards were there twenty-four hours that first spring. They were there in the evenings, and if she needed anything, she had it.

WILLIAMS: How did your relationship develop?

HOUSTON: I would just go over there and chat with her to get information, because we wanted her to feel that . . . Because she could have been a real problem. She could have put up her six-foot fence and didn't want to deal with anybody. We didn't think that was going to happen, but it could have. To make sure that the tours weren't interrupting her schedule. And she loved it. She thought it was just wonderful. She'd sit out on her front porch and chat with the people. I think I did get good information from her. She was just full of stories, *wonderful* stories.

WILLIAMS: So would you go back and write these down?

HOUSTON: Write them down, would tell the staff members. I'm sure some of the stories have come . . .

WILLIAMS: What are the ones that come to mind that you got from her?

HOUSTON: She would tell a lot of the same ones each time, and it took a while to get her off of her favorite stories. Like, you know, Harry Truman sitting down in the chair where the dog was, and he would get up and have dog hairs all over him. Ha, ha, ha.

WILLIAMS: In her house.

HOUSTON: In her house, yeah. And it would just be just daily things of what would happen. I don't think there was a whole lot of interaction. She would tell

me stories on Margaret, that Margaret was a spoiled brat—I mean that’s what she called her—and she said, “And we did it. The Frank Wallaces didn’t have any kids. We didn’t have any kids. Margaret was the only one to spoil, and we spoiled her good.” The blue stuff in the master bedroom on the dressing table thing, Aunt May had made that for her. It was just daily things that they would do. You know, “I could park in Mr. Truman’s garage.” And that’s how she would refer to him. She would refer to Bess as *Bess* and refer to the president as *Mr. Truman*, never as *Harry*. She would tell us they would come over for dinner, or they would go up to the “big house” for dinner. And she described Frank Wallace as *haughty* and that her George was the sweet one, and that George was the one that found his father dead. He was the first one that went into the bathroom and saw him dead, and he was eleven at the time. Her life, I think, is really interesting. One day I asked her why she didn’t have any kids, and she goes, “Well, Lisa, I knew the right doctors to go to.” And I’m like, “Oh, okay.” It was interesting. Here’s this woman that was ninety-plus . . . She’s a neat lady. Real neat.

WILLIAMS: So she didn’t want to have children?

HOUSTON: No, because she had too many things to do, as she told me. She had her bridge club and her study group, and she just had too many things to do. She didn’t start really traveling until after her husband died, and that was in May of ’63. I was going, gosh, he’s been dead just about as long as I am old, and she’s been alone that . . . for almost thirty years! Geez!

WILLIAMS: Did she talk any about Mrs. Truman’s later years, being up there by

herself?

HOUSTON: Some, not a whole lot. She said she would occasionally visit her. It didn't seem very often. I think Aunt May had her own life and her own doings and a very busy social schedule. I'd ask if she would call Mrs. Truman to see how she's doing, and I don't think she did. I think maybe if she needed the information, she'd get it from the Secret Service or from the nurses.

WILLIAMS: When you first met her, how active was she then?

HOUSTON: Oh, very active. I mean, she had bridge on Tuesdays, bridge on Fridays, study group on Wednesdays. She had church meetings on Wednesdays also. It was just like every day of the week she had something to do. She always went to church on Sunday. She'd walk to the bank, walk to the beauty shop. I think Wednesday mornings is when her beauty shop appointment . . . I mean, she was very active. She'd putz around the house and bake cookies for the boys. For the boys in . . . I think in Joplin. That's where the other nephew lives, Bill Carnes.

WILLIAMS: How often would you go visit with her?

HOUSTON: I made it a point to either call her once a week or to visit with her—that was kind of the ritual—just because we wanted to keep real good relations with her for maybe someday it might pay off, and I think it has. [chuckling]

SHAVER: Did she ever talk about her husband much?

HOUSTON: Some. She would always say that George was a sweetheart, that they had a bridge club, that he was very active. And he would get a ten-dollar gold piece, is what he got paid for once a week from . . . I can't remember where he worked. He would bring that home to her. I think he was a pretty active

person. But then his bedroom was that back bedroom, and she said that they had to rig up a rope so he could pull himself up. They put the shower in for him, because he couldn't get down into the bathtub. He had to stand up to take a shower. He had a lung removed, and he still smoked, and she said . . . She goes, "I loved George dearly, but basically he committed suicide from smoking." He had lung cancer.

SHAVER: Did she ever talk about Frank or Natalie, other than the fact that Frank was somewhat haughty, Frank Gates?

HOUSTON: Yeah. Natalie was a little person. I would ask if they would do much with them. She said occasionally they would. But I think Aunt May was so much more social and had all these friends, and I don't think Natalie had that many friends in the area.

WILLIAMS: Did Mrs. Wallace point out things in her home from the Trumans?

HOUSTON: Oh, yeah. There was quite a few things that were brought from the home—this was after Mrs. Truman died—down to Aunt May's for safekeeping: the fudge plate, which is on her little corner thing.

SHAVER: Did she ever talk about where the fudge plate originally was, or have any notion?

HOUSTON: Hmm-mm.

WILLIAMS: Some other things?

HOUSTON: The chair. There was a red chair that I think the home has back now, some wine decanters, and some other things that I know that I think were at the house that were eventually sent down to Aunt May's, but before even Mr. Truman had died. There's Grandpa Gates's dining room chair that she has.

Oh, gosh, what else was there? There are some pictures, I think, that they had taken and given to them.

WILLIAMS: Did she talk like these were on loan, or were these like gifts from Margaret and she was glad to have them?

HOUSTON: No, that they were just there for safekeeping and that eventually that they would go back to the house.

WILLIAMS: Did you know Doris Hecker very well?

HOUSTON: No. I would just know her enough to say hello.

WILLIAMS: What was her relationship with Mrs. Wallace?

HOUSTON: The last couple of years she would do her laundry, took care of all of her bills, take care of all her financial stuff. She really looked after Mrs. Wallace real well.

WILLIAMS: What was Mrs. Wallace's condition when you left the Truman home?

HOUSTON: She was still really in good shape. Right before I left, she had had a cataract operation, and I was commissioned to put eyedrops in her eyes twice a day. [chuckling] She was still doing really good. She was still walking to the post office. And I think it was just in the last . . . I went to visit her last summer, last April, and she wasn't well . . . I guess a year ago. To me, she didn't seem well at all. She didn't really remember who I was. And then the stories that she was telling me were her same old routine stories.

WILLIAMS: Did you know Mrs. [Ardis] Haukenberry?

HOUSTON: No, not at all.

WILLIAMS: You never met her?

HOUSTON: Huh-uh. I may have saw her in the yard working.

WILLIAMS: Did the park service make the same effort to keep her friendly as they did with Mrs. Wallace?

HOUSTON: I think they tried with Karen and Palma, but I think Mrs. Haukenberry had a whole different outlook. Mrs. Wallace was family. I mean, she was very warm and wanted to help . . . anything, and I don't know about Mrs. Haukenberry. I didn't really have any conversations with her. I think Mrs. Haukenberry thought it more of a . . . this was a new novel thing, and I don't think she might have been as healthy as Mrs. Wallace either.

WILLIAMS: So your impression was that you were assigned to Mrs. Wallace and other people were assigned to Mrs. Haukenberry?

HOUSTON: I guess I was assigned to her at the very beginning, but then it was more or less we developed a really good friendship.

WILLIAMS: That went beyond your employment.

HOUSTON: Right, assignment. Right, right.

WILLIAMS: Did you know any of the other neighbors around the Truman home?

HOUSTON: No.

WILLIAMS: What are your impressions of Dink?

HOUSTON: Dink?

WILLIAMS: Was Dink there in the first year?

HOUSTON: No. I don't think he was, not that first summer. We just let the roses do what they wanted to.

WILLIAMS: Was there much concern then about the yard, the first summer?

HOUSTON: No, not at all. Because our thing was we wanted everything exactly the

same. And I don't think that same . . . I don't know, that same philosophy is still there as much as . . . I mean, Steve and I would go, "Oh, we have to keep that exactly like that." Which is unfortunate. I think that maybe has kind of shied away a little bit. Yeah, there was real concern with the roses, any digging in the yard, or . . . There's what, two new trees in the front yard now. Yeah, the Trumans probably would have replaced them, they would have been dead, but . . . And the roses, I'm sure Mrs. Truman would have said, "Oh, let's put some new roses out." I'm sure the visitors like them. You kind of have to draw a line, you know: What are we going to do?

WILLIAMS: Did you have any dealings with Dink?

HOUSTON: Yeah, he would tell me what the roses' names were. That was about it. Not really any strong . . .

WILLIAMS: How would you describe your supervisor, Steve Harrison, as a boss and a person?

HOUSTON: Steve was excellent. He knew his stuff. He was very technical, and if he didn't know the answers, we'd try to find a source that would. He was great to work with, very easygoing. If you had a problem, we'd sit down and talk about it. We'd get into discussions about certain things in the house. He was really neat. He was a neat supervisor to have worked with.

SHAVER: Can you describe a philosophy or an ethic or his approach to the house? If you had to explain how he saw it, how would you do it?

HOUSTON: Basically, I think we both saw it . . . you know, here was this time capsule, and we wanted to keep it as properly preserved as we could and not go in

and change a bunch of stuff—you know, start putting lacquer on everything, or just . . . If we didn't have to put up barriers, let's not do it, because that isn't how the Trumans did it. If the plexiglass . . . People wanted to plexiglass the whole bookcases in the study. It's just like, let's not do that because that isn't how the Trumans did it. That's how we would think about things, and that's what Steve really stressed: Look at it how the Trumans would do it. Would they have plexiglass? This is a home, and let's preserve it as a family house, a lived-in house.

WILLIAMS: How much did he get his point across to the other divisions?

HOUSTON: I think it was pretty good to the interpretive staff, from what I gathered.

SHAVER: Any battles that he lost?

HOUSTON: Oh, I'm sure there probably were. I can't think of any right offhand.

WILLIAMS: Did he want to keep the old furnace, or anything like that?

HOUSTON: [chuckling] Yeah. I think, yeah.

WILLIAMS: And we don't have it.

HOUSTON: Don't have it, no.

WILLIAMS: Things like that, that was Steve.

HOUSTON: Yeah. Right. [interview interrupted]

WILLIAMS: You said your first contact was with Tom Richter. How would you describe your relationship with Tom?

HOUSTON: He certainly had his opinion about things, let's put it that way. And if it didn't go exactly Tom's way, in trying to convince Tom it should be one way and he thought it should be the other, that would always be a battle. But pretty much it was, he always enjoyed it when I would offer to help

out. My assistance was always welcomed in the interpretive division when they would be short-handed. But all in all Tom was pretty easygoing, as far as trying to get things . . . Because he had the same idea as Steve, you know: Let's keep this as close to how we found it, and not go in and change a bunch of stuff.

WILLIAMS: And the superintendent, Norm, how much did you have contact with him?

HOUSTON: I didn't have a whole lot of contact with him at all. I would "Hi," chat with him a little bit. But as far as any dealings with the home, not really.

WILLIAMS: What was your impression from the higher-ups or other people of his management, or him as a person?

HOUSTON: I think he had a pretty good handle on management, as far as the actual running of the house. There were some dealings with Margaret and some other things that I think that he could have stood behind the staff a little bit more instead of maybe bowing down to Margaret, as far as sending things to her, things from the home. Which they weren't hers to have. I think he needed to stand up to Margaret as a park superintendent, that, "You know, Margaret, this isn't your house. It's the United States of America. It's not yours." And I think Margaret still thinks that it is her house, which is sad. I mean, if my father were President of the United States, I would think it would be great to open up this house and have everybody see it. And I think that's one thing, because I always stressed this on my tours, that Margaret moved away from that home when she was ten years old and basically didn't stay there. I mean, that was it. And you think about it, when you were ten years old, could you even remember exactly how your

house looked? Maybe if you were twenty and still living in that same house you might have a different opinion.

WILLIAMS: Well, it sounded like earlier you didn't really trust her stories or the way she wanted things to look.

HOUSTON: Margaret? No. I mean she wanted the house pristine. She wanted the lamp shade . . . wanted the new lamp shade. It had a tear in it, and it was great. The Trumans didn't mind. She wanted new this and new that. And that would be fine if we were going to have a designer showcase and have whatever, Roger Sermon come in and deck it out. But that isn't what the intent was for the park service. We wanted what Harry Truman lived in.

WILLIAMS: When did you leave the Truman home?

HOUSTON: In October of '87.

WILLIAMS: So you'd been there more than three years?

HOUSTON: Yeah, about three and a half.

WILLIAMS: Did you leave feeling anything was left undone that you could have done? Was it a transition period?

HOUSTON: Oh, there were certainly ongoing projects. Our big goal was to finish the inventory of all the objects, and I think that was one of the things we finished the end of that summer.

WILLIAMS: Did you have help with that?

HOUSTON: Yes, some other temporary museum aides. There were three, I think. Two or three. I can't remember. And that was a nice feeling, to have everything accounted for in the house, and a number assigned to it. And then we did, I did a dry-cleaning project, as far as cleaning all of Mr. Truman's suits,

getting them out of the attic, put on proper hangers, and getting them ready for storage, proper storage.

SHAVER: Do you have any recollections of any of the other folks that helped you, the other museum aides?

HOUSTON: There was Rich. What was his last name?

SHAVER: Raymond?

HOUSTON: Raymond. And the woman from Mesa Verde, Linda Clement, and Sarah Spearman, and Jackie Holt. Oh, Cindy Draney.

WILLIAMS: There was a Mark, the first summer?

HOUSTON: Oh, Mark?

WILLIAMS: Newport.

HOUSTON: Newport, yeah. Poor guy. Poor Cindy, too. It was tough, because I knew what needed to be done, and I had my way of doing it. It may not have been the right way, but it got done. And I think Steve appreciated the fact that I could take charge. He didn't have to be down there every day going, "Okay, Lisa, this is what you're going to do now." I knew what I was going to do. It would always put a kink in my schedule when Steve would say, "Lisa, why don't you come up to the office and work on this?" "No, I want to get this project done."

It was difficult when there were . . . say, Cindy Draney just didn't really have a handle on cataloging. And it was tough to help her out. I mean, there is a knack for cataloging, to handling objects. There's a knack to it, and I just don't think you can just go . . . I think if you show somebody how to handle an object, but you have to have a special . . . I

don't know, something that you just can't teach them how to do.

WILLIAMS: Any of the other people that you have strong memories of? [chuckling]
What was Mark there for, if you can remember?

HOUSTON: I can't remember. I think Mark was basically there to . . . There was money that needed to be spent, [chuckling] I think, is kind of what it worked out to be. He was an art student at the institute, and that was supposed to help them, as far as income. And I think he could have, but I think maybe he was a little . . . He was an artist and not a historian or museum person, and it just didn't work out. He vacuumed well.
[chuckling]

WILLIAMS: I remember borrowing his library card one day. That's about all.

HOUSTON: Yeah, and he rode his bike from the plaza to the home every day, which I thought was amazing, when it would be 100 degrees.

WILLIAMS: There was an intern there that first summer, too.

SHAVER: A tall skinny guy?

HOUSTON: Oh, yeah, Jim? Yeah. Yes, I don't exactly remember what he did.
[chuckling]

WILLIAMS: Not much of anything. I was at the library.

HOUSTON: Yeah, you didn't help out with the home.

WILLIAMS: I tried to watch, absorb things.

HOUSTON: Yeah. And then Jackie Holt, she worked for two seasons, I think. She was good.

WILLIAMS: So did Steve pretty much tell you to keep an eye on them or show them the ropes?

HOUSTON: Yeah, basically that was it, but since I wasn't in a supervisory position, it was always real frustrating. Because I would see something that wasn't just up to snuff, but then officially I couldn't say anything, and that's when it got really frustrating. I would say, "Steve, we've got to do something." And he'd say, "Well, just tell them." You know, "I'm not a supervisor, so I can't do that." So that would be real frustrating. Again, I would have what I wanted to do, my projects, and I couldn't tell Cindy, "This is what we're going to do today. I want you to do this." It would have to come from Steve. And it just got real frustrating. I think that was frustrating for Steve, too, because he knew that I could get it done, but then we had to involve another person to get it done.

SHAVER: With these other people, did you feel like you were appropriately graded? Did you feel like you had the appropriate responsibilities with these other folks coming on line?

HOUSTON: You mean, like should I have supervised them?

SHAVER: Or had more of a lead position?

HOUSTON: Yeah, that is what it should have been, you know, Steve up there pushing papers, and then another person who could supervise. If they were going to have temporary people come in and work for three-month stretches or a summer stretch or whatever, that's what they needed. Because I was at the home probably 95 percent of the time, and so were these other people, and it seemed foolish for Steve, a GS-9 curator, to come down and go, "Okay, you help Lisa do this." It was frustrating. Why don't I just tell them, "You go mop the porch today. I'm going to do this."

WILLIAMS: Are there any other frustrations in that similar vein?

HOUSTON: No. But then if somebody wouldn't do it, I'd just go ahead and do it, and that's pretty much how I got things done.

WILLIAMS: Were you or was Steve ever frustrated with government regulations?

HOUSTON: Oh, all the time. I mean it was just, you know, we can't do this because we don't have money, and we can't do this because of that. I mean, that is. It's . . . And I don't think the government looks at, you know, here's this artifact that needs something done to it, and, you know, "We can't do that because there isn't enough money." And you're just going, "Geez!" That's what's frustrating.

WILLIAMS: How would you describe Skip Brooks's ethic toward historic preservation?

HOUSTON: I don't think he had one. [chuckling]

SHAVER: Did he have one when he left?

HOUSTON: I think he tried. I think Steve had tried to change him. But Skip had . . . he was the maintenance person, and that's what he had. It was like, "Oh, let's just put new on here." New this and new that, and, "Why are you doing that?" But we tried to teach him. [chuckling] I don't know if he learned anything. But yeah, I can remember there would be . . . He and Steve would go bouts about like the furnace deal and the alarm thing. It was like, "Oh, let's have this high-tech alarm system." You know, it was like, geez, you can't do that.

WILLIAMS: And you were there still when Mike Healy was facility manager?

HOUSTON: Yes, yes, yes.

WILLIAMS: Did you have any different impression?

HOUSTON: Mike's pretty much laid-back. Again, I think we taught him. We had to teach him how to be a preservationist and not . . . to conserve things and not to be a restorationist. Whatever you do, that you have to reverse it. I think that eventually he learned, [chuckling] kind of like Skip. I think that's where they come back from the maintenance standpoint. You know, "Let's build new. It will be better."

WILLIAMS: If you could change anything in the way the Truman home was now, would you?

HOUSTON: As far as . . . ?

WILLIAMS: The way it's operated, or the collection, or the priorities?

HOUSTON: I don't know what the priorities are now, but it seems like . . . I don't know if the home is still . . . As far as the preservation of the actual home, I think probably the big goal is now: Numbers, numbers, numbers, let's get those people in there. And I think that's real sad. Granted, yes, you have to have the numbers so you can get the money, so it looks good, da-da-da-da, all that red-tape junk, but we just really need to look at the things in the house. Is there still talk of removing the things from the second floor?

WILLIAMS: I don't think so.

HOUSTON: No? I definitely think the things in the attic need to be removed. It will be sad if they are, but—

WILLIAMS: They almost all are gone now.

HOUSTON: Are they? Because that was so neat to see all these things in the attic. Geez, and you just knew those Trumans . . . Bess would go, "Harry, take this up there!" You know, they'd just kind of chuck it up there. And that's

what's kind of neat. But whoever the next you know, group of interpreters aren't going to see that.

WILLIAMS: As a neophyte to the park service, what do you think of the organization?

HOUSTON: Um, I think all in all it's a good organization. It's I think. . .

[End #4143; Begin #4144]

HOUSTON: . . . you're not going to have the things for the park service . . . for the interpreters to talk about.

WILLIAMS: Did you get sent to curatorial methods?

HOUSTON: Yes, finally. [chuckling] I think I was there two years before I got sent there. Which is terrible. I mean, I should have gone that first season I was there. And then I was very disappointed in it, because it really . . . everything that they were telling us about would have been *wonderful* that first winter I was there, that first season I was there. That's when I needed to know it, not when I had been there two years and Steve had taught me everything, or I'd read about it. That's one thing about training. You know, when you need the training isn't after you've already learned it. You want, need new things.

SHAVER: Do you feel like a lot of it was redundant by the time you got there?

HOUSTON: Oh, most definitely. Everything.

SHAVER: Do you feel like you had a better grasp of the material than some of your classmates?

HOUSTON: Yeah, classmates and instructors.

SHAVER: [chuckling] Were you tempted to get up there and instruct the course

yourself?

HOUSTON: Well, it was a two-week class, and you were like, geez, I wish I could get something . . . The only thing, and as I said, one of the only things I got out of it was from Fawn Thompson, who was the textile conservator. She taught us how to put numbers on using the Rapidograph and the clear ink, you know, making sure . . . That was one of the best things that she taught us. I had been putting numbers on objects, and nobody else in the class had. I mean, I think there was one or two other people of a class of what, twenty, twenty-five people. Then I met John Battie, who was the assistant registrar for the National Trust in Scotland. He was a great contact.
[chuckling]

WILLIAMS: Did you have any contact with the people in the regional office?

HOUSTON: Occasionally I'd talk with the curator.

SHAVER: Hunter?

HOUSTON: Yeah, John Hunter.

WILLIAMS: Any impressions of the regional support?

HOUSTON: As far as at the home, it wasn't much. You know, again I think it was big paperwork: The more paper you've got, the better it is. Anything else you want to know, dying to know? [chuckling]

WILLIAMS: Do you have any plans to return to the park service?

HOUSTON: I did apply for the curator's position. But since I was a 4 and the position was advertised as a 7-9, they didn't feel I was qualified, which is again government. [chuckling] Yeah, that's one of the things that's bad. When we moved to Denver, there was a position at Bent's Old Fort [National

Historic Site] that would have been wonderful. But we were living in Denver, and that was in Pueblo or south of, and it was like, oh, let's have a two-and-a-half-hour commute. And it is, it's just tough to have a park service career, because the only way to move up in the park service is to move out, which there's no inter . . . To move up, you can't move up in the same park, very well.

SHAVER: Did you get any indication or feeling that your position might be reevaluated at some point in time in the future, and upgraded?

HOUSTON: When I was there?

SHAVER: Mm-hmm.

HOUSTON: Oh, yeah, I got that all the time. Yeah.

WILLIAMS: But it never happened.

HOUSTON: It never happened. And it probably will never happen. I mean, I think there at one time when Tom left there had been a discussion that his position . . . that it would be like a 9-11, and then the curator would be curator/chief ranger, and then there would be like a GS-5 supervisory museum person. But that never came to pass. And the park's so small that I think it easily could have handled that.

WILLIAMS: Thank you.

HOUSTON: You're welcome.

END OF INTERVIEW