

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

WITH

MARY SUE LUFF

JUNE 21, 1991

INDEPENDENCE, MISSOURI

INTERVIEWED BY JIM WILLIAMS

ORAL HISTORY #1991-3

This transcript corresponds to audiotapes DAV-AR #4317-4319

HARRY S TRUMAN NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR



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Mary Sue Luff 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

Mary Sue Luff, a long-time resident of Independence, discusses growing up, attending school, and interacting with the Truman family from the 1930s to the 1970s. Through her group of friends and eventual marriage to Jack Luff, Mary Sue Luff “watched history” at 219 N. Delaware Street from across the street in the Luff home. Luff was in the first class of Truman Library tour guides and was involved in the Jackson County Historical Society’s bus tours of historic Independence including the Truman home.

Persons mentioned: Harrison Benjamin Brewer, Maude Pauline Stephenson Brewer, Harry S Truman, Bess W. Truman, Margaret Truman Daniel, John W. Luff, Mamie Luff, Carl Brewer, Charles Brewer, Mona Allen Blank, Elizabeth Safly, Pat Roney, Mike Westwood, Bev Burrus Pendergast, Thomas J. Pendergast, Jr., Harvey Burrus, Rufus Burrus, Eleanor Carlson, Noreen Norris, Esther Williams, Elvin K. Luff, Ernestine Horner Luff, Adlai Stevenson, Laura Frances Pendleton, Martha Ingram, Hazel Graham, Rose Conway, George Porterfield Gates, Harry Waggoner, Jack Luff, Jack Benny, John Luff, Jr., John Wendell Luff, John William Luff, Carl Knoepker, Charles C. Bundschu, Charles Allen, Agnes Luff, Dorsy Lou Warr, Barbara Allen Gard, Helen Lucky, Benedict K. Zobrist, Philip C. Brooks, Millie Carol, Pat Kerr Dorsey, May Wallace, Ardis Haukenberry, Fleming Pendleton, George Marquis, Reginald Smith, Walter Evans, Sue Gentry, Jimmy Carter, and Thomas Crick.

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JIM WILLIAMS: This is an interview with Mary Sue Luff at the Truman Library on the afternoon of June 21, 1991. The interviewer is Jim Williams, of the National Park Service, Midwest Region, and the audio technician is Leslie Hagensen of Harry S Truman National Historic Site. First of all, I have to ask the impolite question of when and where you were born.

MARY SUE LUFF: That's all right, that's no problem. I was born August 22, 1931, in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, on Lake Michigan.

WILLIAMS: Oh, so you didn't grow up, or you were not born in Independence?

LUFF: We were on a fishing trip. I came early. I was the third child born, and I got here impatiently and early.

WILLIAMS: So where was your family living at that time?

LUFF: Marshall, Missouri. They moved as soon as they could get home with me. My father was the engineer that laid the beacons from Houston, Texas, to Kansas City, Missouri, after the First World War, and we were in the process of traveling up. I was two years old when they . . . No, not quite, I hadn't had my second birthday, but I had had my first birthday in Marshall, Missouri, and then I came up here.

WILLIAMS: So you've lived in Independence most of . . .

LUFF: Well, since before my second birthday, so . . . And I'll be sixty in August, so . . .

WILLIAMS: Nearly all of your life. What are your parents' names?

LUFF: Harrison B. Brewer, Harrison Benjamin Brewer was my father, and Maude Pauline Stephenson Brewer was my mother.

WILLIAMS: So your maiden name was Brewer?

LUFF: Yes.

WILLIAMS: Just like up in Milwaukee?

LUFF: That's right, that's right. Dr. Boley delivered me that owned the Milwaukee Brewers.

WILLIAMS: Where did you live here in Independence growing up?

LUFF: First on Spring Street, and then we moved to 511 East College, and that's where I grew up.

WILLIAMS: Where on Spring Street?

LUFF: I can't remember the address. I'm not even sure the house is still standing. It was kind of down behind the Vaile mansion.

WILLIAMS: So it was North Spring?

LUFF: Yes, and I attended Ott Elementary and Junior High School, and William Chrisman High School.

WILLIAMS: The old William Chrisman?

LUFF: The one that's there by Truman is the one I went to.

WILLIAMS: On Maple.

LUFF: I watched the other one burn, though.

WILLIAMS: Which other one?

LUFF: Which they rebuilt and made a junior high out of. That was the one that President Truman and . . .

WILLIAMS: Oh, Palmer, where Palmer Junior High is.

LUFF: Yes, and I watched it burn. That was exciting.

WILLIAMS: Do you remember about what time that was?

LUFF: Oh, heavens, I don't. You could look that one up. I have pictures.

WILLIAMS: Pictures of it burning?

LUFF: Yes, the walls falling and everything. I didn't take them. My brother took them.

WILLIAMS: How well did you know the Trumans?

LUFF: All right. I personally didn't know them that well because I'm so much younger than Margaret, until after the presidency, and then I got to know them, but not . . . It was more like standing on Grandpa's front porch and watching things go on. My big brothers, my oldest big brother, had a mad crush on Margaret. And I got my feelings hurt one time here at the library because I asked her if she remembered Carl and Charles Brewer, and she didn't.

WILLIAMS: Those are your brothers?

LUFF: Yes, and she didn't remember them. And Carl used to ride his bicycle and almost camp over there on her porch. He thought she was the most wonderful thing in the world. But Carl, when the war broke out, the Second World War, they had a . . . The seniors, men that were high school seniors, or the boys, if you had enough grade points or grade something or other—I'm not quite sure how they worked it—you could leave and not stay to finish your senior year and go into the armed forces, and Carl left for the Air Force in 1943. He would have graduated in May of '43, and he left in January of '43 for the Air Force, and he was killed in February of '45

over Hanover, Germany, in a bombing raid. But he thought Margaret was wonderful. He spent a lot of hours on his bicycle in their front yard. And of course, Charlie, my big brother that's still living, he went steady with Mona Allen all through junior high and high school, and he has better memories—you know, closer contact with them—than I did.

WILLIAMS: And Mona Allen was a neighbor of the Trumans, right?

LUFF: Yes, she was one of the Henhouse Hicks.

WILLIAMS: So your older brother Carl was born about 1925?

LUFF: Well, Charlie . . . Yes, I guess. Yes, I don't know the years.

WILLIAMS: So he was approximately Margaret's age?

LUFF: Well, yes, I guess so. That would explain some of that. But see, he died in '45, he was killed, and, see, I was fourteen when he was killed, so I'm enough younger that I . . . I just remember he was big and tall and blond and kind of nice.

WILLIAMS: Before Mr. Truman became president, what did you know about them?

LUFF: Okay, I have memories of going out to Swope Park. The bandstand in Swope Park is over here where the parking . . . Well, we're on Swope Park—Slover Park, rather. We're on Slover Park, and there was a bandstand down here, and my father, because he worked for the government, was very involved in observing all political things—I presume that's why, maybe he just was—and he was a very strong Shriner, and he knew Truman through that. And my parents knew them, but I didn't personally. We used to go sit and watch Truman when he was running for senator. I can remember sitting on a blanket, and Daddy would wear the

white suit and the flat, straw hat, and Truman would be down there giving speeches in that general area. And then when the bandstand was built, he made speeches down there for other things, but that wouldn't have been senator unless it would have been when he was re-running. I don't know the year the bandstand was built, and I don't know the year they tore it down.

WILLIAMS: So that was probably the 1940 election?

LUFF: It would have been, yes.

WILLIAMS: For senate?

LUFF: Yes. I would assume so, yes.

WILLIAMS: Do you have any other memories of before the Trumans became really famous?

LUFF: Before the presidency? Well, Jack's grandfather moved in the house across the street from the Trumans in '42, the little red brick house. And we had a group that we all ran around together. The girls were all "As-You's." You know, Liz [Safly] was an "As-You's," and the boys all kind of ran around together—I've known my husband all my life. And so Grandpa, who was president of the school board then, would always send the invitation out, "Come on down and watch history." So we'd go gather in his front yard and watch everything that went on at the Truman home, and he would serve us root beer floats and soda crackers. Those were the refreshments Grandpa always served. So, from 1943 until 1958 when Grandpa died, we just kind of stood and . . . He had a little square screened-in porch, kind of off to the side, and we would be in the screened-in porch, or off to the side,

or looking out the living room window and doing what Grandpa called “watching history.” So, from a distance, I saw a lot, but I mean, you know .

..

WILLIAMS: What are the “As You’s”?

LUFF: Oh, there were three sororities in Chrisman High School: the Shakespearean, the Nautilus, and the “As You’s,” the As You Like It’s. And the really cool girls were “As You’s.” The ones that couldn’t make “As You’s” were Shakespearean or Nautilus—I mean, they went on down—and of course Liz and I were “As You’s.”

WILLIAMS: Liz Safly?

LUFF: Yes.

WILLIAMS: Who works here now.

LUFF: Yes. And one time, when Margaret gave her concert in Kansas City, I can’t in my mind know why we did it, but the “As You’s” took her a bouquet of roses. Pat Roney and I walked out on the stage and handed her the roses. And we were selected not because of any merit, just because we had transportation downtown. I mean, that was the process of elimination. That’s how we got to do it.

WILLIAMS: So was that while you were still in high school?

LUFF: Yes, oh, yes, and I think that would have probably been ’47 or ’48. I graduated from Chrisman in ’49. We watched them put the fence up from Grandpa’s front yard.

WILLIAMS: So all those years that you were going to William Chrisman right around the corner, did you walk back and forth in front of the Truman home?

LUFF: Yes, as a matter of fact, we did.

WILLIAMS: And so many times without the fence?

LUFF: Oh, a lot. We used to chase through the yard. That was a big game, you know. Mike Westwood I've known all my life—that was President Truman's security—and we would get too close and cut through the yard or something and Mike would come out and yell at us. You know, it was a fun thing.

WILLIAMS: Did you ever have any Secret Service agents chase you off?

LUFF: Well, yes, I think so. Security chased us. I did not know they were Secret Service, but, oh, yes. And another game we had was we'd run down the . . . The Allens owned both houses, the one on the corner and the house behind it, and we'd chase down the alley and then cut over in the Allens' by their garage and irritate them. We tried that a lot. One time when I was in Brown's Drugstore out in Englewood having a Coke with Pat Roney—then they had a soda counter and you could sit up on a stool—Margaret had ditched the Secret Service, and she came racing in, and she got down behind the counter and hid. And the men came in and said, "Have you seen . . ." blah, blah, blah. "No," and she was squatting down behind there the whole time.

WILLIAMS: Well, you think she would have been grateful to you for . . .

LUFF: Yes. No, not Margaret. [chuckling]

WILLIAMS: Well, who were some of the other "As You's"?

LUFF: Well, Bev Burrus was one. She's now Mrs. Tom Pendergast, Jr., and her father was Harvey Burrus, who was Rufus Burrus's . . . Were they

brothers? Yes, I think they were brothers. Harvey's the one who went to prison. Well, that's the reason . . . No, income tax evasion, that's the reason, being married to Tom Pendergast, Jr., that Bev said, you know. All right, she's still a good friend of mine. Who were the others? Eleanor Carlson was an "As You," and my sister-in-law was an "As You," but she's a lot younger than we are, and then Mona was. That's one reason Charlie didn't quite. Noreen Norris was her name. She was an "As You."

WILLIAMS: Were all of the Allen girls "As You's"?

LUFF: Oh, yes. I think the As You Like It Society was started . . . I found an old *Gleam* [yearbook] in some books that Sue Gentry gave me, and I think it was started in 1923 to sit around and read Shakespeare and become literarily enriched.

WILLIAMS: Did it work?

LUFF: No, it disintegrated into snobbisms and parties and fun. But we had school sponsors. I think they've eliminated that now. I'm not too sure.

WILLIAMS: Well, how did you get involved with the Luff family?

LUFF: I knew Jack all my life.

WILLIAMS: That's your husband?

LUFF: Yes. He was my very best friend. He taught me how to ride a bicycle. When I wanted to see if a boy was home and flirt with him, Jack was the one I called up to come drive me by the boy's house. He was my very, very best friend. And how we started going together . . . Well, we started going together, he called me up one day, and he said, "What are you doing?" because he always called me because we were very, very

good friends, and I said, “Oh, I don’t know, nothing much.” It was during the Christmas holidays. I had just flunked out of Missouri University and he was home from KU. [chuckling] I did that. So he said, “Well, I’ll call the guys, and if they’re not doing anything, I’ll come by, and I’ll take you to see that Esther Williams movie up at the Granada.” And I said, “Okay.” And he called, and he said, “The boys are bowling, and I don’t want to do that. I’ll be by to pick you up.” So that was And I don’t know, somehow he tried to kiss me goodnight, and I socked him in the face and went in and told my mother what Jack had done. He said he got in the car, and he got to thinking about it, and he thought, “Gosh, you know, huh . . . ?” And that was Christmas holidays. He was a Sigma Nu. We were pinned at the White Rose the next February. And I wouldn’t take his fraternity pin because I knew how many girls had had it and where it had been. And he knew I usually carried one fraternity pin showing and one on each bra strap hid, and I’d rotate them for whatever boy was in town. So he made Mother check my bra straps, and I made him get me a jeweled pin, which I still have. The next December we had an engagement party at Grandpa’s house across from the Trumans, and he gave me my diamond, and we were married the next March.

WILLIAMS: What years were these?

LUFF: Well, March 7 we’ll be married forty years, so it was ’52.

WILLIAMS: So, in December of ’51, you had an engagement party at . . .

LUFF: Grandpa’s house, the Christmas . . . yes.

WILLIAMS: At 224 North Delaware?

LUFF: Right. And the reason—it was the family engagement party—and the reason we had it and the reason things rushed so quick is that Korea broke out, and Jack was called up for Korea. He was an instructor at the armored school at Fort Knox, Kentucky, and that’s where our son was born.

WILLIAMS: And what are his parents’ names?

LUFF: Elvin K. Luff was his father—they’re both dead, too—and Ernestine Horner Luff was his mother. Elvin and Truman were very good friends. President Truman gave the first books he put out, the two-volume memoirs, he gave Elvin a copy of those. In one volume he wrote . . . on the front of one he wrote, “To Elvin K. Luff . . .” because the Luffs were historically stout, strong Republicans, and he wrote, “To Elvin K. Luff, whose salvation lies in the fact that he’s a better Mason than he is a Republican.” [chuckling] Isn’t that great? My son has the books now out in California.

Oh, that’s something else funny about Grandpa. He, being a Republican and a very conservative Republican, would go over . . . When they put the fence up, he had great fun in tying Republican posters to the fence. He would go over in the dark of night, so when the Trumans went out to get the paper there would be Republican posters all over the fence. Or Grandpa would hire someone to go do it. And one time we were at a family dinner. We usually had Sunday dinners at Grandpa’s, and we didn’t go to every one but there was always a Sunday dinner at Grandpa’s, and one time we heard this scratchy noise out on his screen door, and he got up to go see what it was, and there was Truman tying an Adali Stevenson

poster to his screen door. [chuckling]

WILLIAMS: So they were good neighbors to each other?

LUFF: Very good neighbors, very good friends. Of course, they were friends before. Again, back then being a Mason meant . . . See, my father . . . This was a . . . It doesn't mean that now. My husband's a Shriner, and all he does is pay his dues. He doesn't do diddly, but back then it held a significance to it. And Rotarians. They were all in the Rotary. You know, I don't know that Truman was a Rotarian, but if he wasn't he went to a lot of meetings as a guest.

WILLIAMS: So Grandpa was John W. Luff, right?

LUFF: Yes.

WILLIAMS: And you said he moved into that house when?

LUFF: That's one of the things I wrote down so I'd remember it for sure, and I called Aunt Frances and checked: in 1942, and he lived there till he died in 1958. He was eighty-six years old when he died. And he's the one that John Luff School is named after here in Independence [see appendix, item 1].

WILLIAMS: Oh, so he did see a lot of history from across the street there.

LUFF: A lot of history, right.

WILLIAMS: Before Mr. Truman was president or even vice president, what was the attitude of the neighborhood toward having . . .

LUFF: I remember one time when we were at the drugstore that is now where the theater was, LuVahk's Theater up on the square, you know where that is? There used to be a Woolworth's Drugstore there, and I remember one time

we were all lined up at the counter again, having black and white sundaes probably, or cherry Cokes or cherry floats or something. He came in and sat down beside me, and we visited a while. But I mean, I didn't even think . . . He was a senator. So what? You know? I didn't think anything about it, except he did pick up the tab. I remember that, and that impressed me more than the fact that he was a senator. But I mean he was just a very nice man. He was a regular person. I think that's one reason I have . . . Of course, my father raised me to be a Democrat, but I don't think that had any bearing on it because politically I wasn't . . . Young girls don't care about politics usually, at least not then. I think that that's one reason I put in all these years here at the library as a volunteer. I mean, he was . . . And Mrs. Truman! I mean, you could not find a nicer lady than her. She was just so, so nice. I mean, they were just good people.

WILLIAMS: When did you see Bess Truman before the White House years?

LUFF: Oh, well, she was just kind of always there at teas and coffees, at Milgram's. Heavens! I stood with her in the shopping line at Milgram's a lot of times. I've seen her argue over her Gold Stamps or Green Stamps, or those food stamp things. Not count her change when they gave it to her, but argue about the stamps. The last time I saw President Truman, I was parked beside him in Milgram's parking lot, and I had my first Norwegian elkhound with me. I had a station wagon then, and I was bringing . . . And she was in there, and I had seen her in there, and I had come out to my car . . . I didn't know I was . . . I wasn't parked behind him when I parked there, but he had pulled up beside me, and he was that very old, withered man that

he was toward the end, and he was in the back seat. And I heard this tapping on the window, and I looked over and there he was, and I waved and said hi, and then he tapped again and I . . . The Secret Service man got out that was driving the car, and it was one I did not recognize, and he yelled over the top of the car and he said, “He wants to know what kind of dog that is.” My elkhound was not quite a year old then, and I said, “It’s a Norwegian elkhound.” I said, “He’s supposed to be my ears.” So he bent over, and he looked at him [President Truman], and he said, “He says he’s an impressive looking animal.” It was in the winter, and the windows were all up, and I smiled and said, “Thank you.” But that’s the last time I saw him. Now, the last time I saw Mrs. Truman was when I took Lady P. over for a libation and a visit.

WILLIAMS: Who’s Lady P.?

LUFF: Laura Frances Pendleton, Mrs. Fleming Pendleton.

WILLIAMS: And she was a friend of Bess Truman’s?

LUFF: Yes, she was. She and her husband Fleming both were. Fleming was with the Bank of Independence up on the square. Lady P. lived across the street from us in the house we’re in now. I grew up with her daughter Laura Frances. She was one of my friends in school. Laura Frances did not stay in the public school system long enough to be an “As You” because she went to Barstow. But she did go junior high to our school.

WILLIAMS: So do you live near Bess Truman’s birthplace?

LUFF: Yes. Main is here, and it’s there, and we’re here. I’m on East Ruby. It’s on West Ruby.

WILLIAMS: Okay. So you said something about you took Lady P. to see Bess Truman?

LUFF: Yes. Frequently I would drive her over to visit with Mrs. Truman.

WILLIAMS: At the house?

LUFF: Yes.

WILLIAMS: Did you have to prearrange that?

LUFF: Yes, she would call and tell them we were coming, and we'd pull up to the back gate and honk the horn, and they'd come open the gate and we'd pull in and park, and if May [Wallace] saw us she'd come over and join us, but not always.

WILLIAMS: The gate on Truman Road?

LUFF: Yes. We'd go in the back door, usually sit in the kitchen, and I'd have tea, and they would have something else.

WILLIAMS: Coffee? [chuckling]

LUFF: Yes. That's the reason I drove Lady P. over is because her daughter would say, "Don't let Mother drive." [chuckling] But Lady P. drove a lot.

WILLIAMS: So she and Bess would visit back there in the kitchen?

LUFF: Yes.

WILLIAMS: And you were allowed to sit there and . . .

LUFF: I wasn't *allowed*. Heavens, that's not a way to say it. I mean, it was just, you know . . . Mrs. Truman was very interested in the tours and the educational program here at the library, just very interested, and of course she was interested in why the school buses weren't coming by. This was in the earlier years, though. In the later years she wasn't. They just kind of gossiped and talked about who had divorced who and whose kid had gone

bad and, you know, the price of groceries.

WILLIAMS: So Mrs. Truman, you said, was interested in why school buses weren't going by?

LUFF: Yes, that was the school tours I told you that I did. I don't know if, of course the tape doesn't know that. My father-in-law Elvin Luff was on the school board, and in 1963, the Independence School Board . . . Martha Ingram—and I'd like to see her name written in history, bless her heart . . . She was my Girl Scout leader, but she was also one of the best fourth-grade teachers Independence ever had. Martha Ingram asked, brought to the school board's attention that they study Missouri history in the fourth grade, and there's so much history here in Independence, and nobody was talking about it. So my father-in-law asked me if I would work up a school tour or educational something for the fourth-graders. I went to Hazel Graham, who was the executive director of the Jackson County Historical Society, and I was on the board for the historical society, and I'd been volunteering up at the old jail for years, so he knew I was a history buff. And we, under the auspices . . . You needed an umbrella, so the Jackson County Historical Society was our umbrella. We gave an hour-and-a-half bus tour of historic Independence, and I stood in the front and narrated it. I did it two days a week in the mornings, from 1963 till 1969, mornings or afternoons. If I was giving a morning tour here, I did it in the afternoon. And the Trumans . . . We went by the Truman home. We did not include the library because that was usually a separate field trip. This was Missouri history, and they ended up at the 1859 jail museum, and they toured it. In 1959, the Junior

Service League took it over as a service, and the young matrons took over giving the tours of the jail as a service, so I got relieved from that completely. But anyway, we would stop in front of the Truman home and tell them about the origin of the Truman home and that it was built by George Porterfield Gates and all that stuff. Well, when you have two buses a morning full of school children and you haven't had any, so the Trumans got curious about it. I don't know how they found out to call Hazel, but they called Hazel, and she told them what was going on. So we went over a number of times and talked to them about the school tours, and drawings of the home we would show them, and they were very interested. And they got to where, if it was pretty weather and they were feeling good, they would even come out on the porch and wave at the students. I think it was Tuesdays and Thursdays I did the tours.

WILLIAMS: So they weren't annoyed at all?

LUFF: Oh, they were thrilled to death! They were pleased. And when a lot of times, when they couldn't come on the porch, we would see them sitting—President Truman especially—and reading in those bay windows on the Truman Road side, and we would tell the children to watch for them. And if Mrs. Truman thought about it, she would even come pull the curtains back so they could see him in there. They were very flattered. No, I think they were very pleased. History and learning and studying history, that was his thing, you know, and the fact that they were getting exposed to it. I told them what I was telling them and it was okay, so . . .

WILLIAMS: Did the Trumans treat other tourists or people anxious to see them in the

same way?

LUFF: I have no idea. I have no idea how they treated other tourists or anything, I really don't.

WILLIAMS: But they were particularly interested in the school education group?

LUFF: The school tours. Of course, he was interested in the tours we were giving here at the library. He would come to the auditorium and visit with the students. We were told by Rose Conway, "Never interrupt him." If we were giving a tour and we saw him walking through the museum with someone, never go up to him or interrupt him or call attention to the fact that it was him. But you didn't have to go up to him because he came up to you. You know, he'd usually come up and say, "Hello there, students, and I hope you're enjoying . . ." He'd say something. One time he told one of my boys to get a haircut, and gave him a quarter, which wouldn't have gotten a haircut then.

WILLIAMS: One of your sons?

LUFF: No, not my son. My boys in the tour, in my group. He did look like he needed cleaned up.

WILLIAMS: Well, what was the route that you would follow through Independence?

LUFF: For the school bus?

WILLIAMS: Yes.

LUFF: You couldn't take it now. The roads have been closed, and they've been made one-way. Things have been torn down. We showed the old blacksmith shop down by Trinity Episcopal Church, and it's gone. We took them all the way out to Wayne City Landing where the bend in the

river used to be and had them get out and stand on old Lookout Rock and imagine what it was when Lewis and Clark came through. It was slanted toward early Independence history. It did not go up through the presidency.

It was early Jackson County, early Independence history.

WILLIAMS: So did you drive by the Vaile mansion?

LUFF: No.

WILLIAMS: No? The Bingham-Waggoner?

LUFF: Bingham-Waggoner, yes, but not the Vaile mansion. See, I lived so close to the Bingham-Waggoner . . . Harry Waggoner, I knew the Waggoners. And Harry was still alive. Harry would have probably come out and thrown a bottle at us. "What are we staring at," you know? [tape recorder difficulty]

WILLIAMS: It seems to be having spasms, but I think everything's okay now.
[chuckling]

LUFF: I have that effect on people and things.

WILLIAMS: Just for the record, what Milgram's are you talking about?

LUFF: It was the one on 24 Highway down here, you know, right down 24 from Truman Library and on the other side of 24.

WILLIAMS: At River?

LUFF: Yes, that's the one I used to see her at. And also, sometimes when she was going up to get her hair done, I would see her. I didn't get my hair done there, but I would just see her going up there to get her hair done at the Crown Beauty Shop.

WILLIAMS: When he became president, what did the people of Independence think

about that?

LUFF: Well, it was really interesting. Immediately everybody loved him and everybody voted for him. They said they did, you know: “Well, I voted for him when he ran for vice president . . .” Everybody except my father-in-law, you know, and Grandpa. I’m sure Grandpa didn’t claim to have voted for him. But it was real funny. Everybody celebrated. They blew the power plant whistle. It was a big celebration. School closed. We never knew whether we were out to mourn Roosevelt or to celebrate Truman, but we were out, and that was the main thing that happened. They had a little . . . I was in junior high at the time—this was before I was in high school—and at the Memorial Building across the street where we had all of our assemblies and things they had a special assembly and there was a big . . . You know, it was a celebration. And after that, it was just sort of like everybody was here asking questions. And I don’t care what age you were or who you were, the news media, “Are you from Independence?” If you were, they wanted to talk to you. It was just ridiculous. And anybody could say anything, and it would go in print as total absolute gospel, and of course it wasn’t, most of the time.

WILLIAMS: Did you ever get interviewed?

LUFF: No.

WILLIAMS: I believe you were probably out of school by the time Mr. Truman returned for the first time in June.

LUFF: In May we got out.

WILLIAMS: But were you around the house?

LUFF: Oh, I was at the train station when he came. Oh, that was when he finished, when he came home. I remember when he came home. Would that have been in June?

WILLIAMS: Well, I think he returned for the first time as President in June of '45.

LUFF: Was that when everybody met him at the train station, or did he fly in that time?

WILLIAMS: I'm not sure.

LUFF: I remember when he came home for good, but that's not the one I mean.

WILLIAMS: That was at the train station, but that would have been in January.

LUFF: Yes. There was a dinner at the First Christian Church. I went to that to celebrate in his honor.

WILLIAMS: But you weren't yet involved with the Luff family in '45 enough to be over across the street?

LUFF: Sure.

WILLIAMS: You were?

LUFF: I attended history . . . "watch history in the making" from all my junior high and high school on Grandpa's front yard. Because Jack and I were . . . I don't think you understand cliques in small towns. [chuckling]

WILLIAMS: Well, maybe not.

LUFF: If you had a party, the same people kept showing up at the same parties. We were terrible. We even would dress alike when we went out so people would know. All the boys wore blue slacks and white shirts, and the girls did too. We were terrible.

WILLIAMS: I think we need to change tapes.

[End #4317; Begin #4318]

LUFF: Cliques in small towns. It's not a thing I'm proud of. It just happened. I mean, if you had a party you had to invite everybody, because somebody would get angry if you didn't. And that's not a good thing necessarily, but in a way it is. Think of what the kids . . . You don't have that . . . The group that watched history on Grandpa's front yard still comes to our house when they're in town, because Jack and I are the only ones that are still in town. They come in from all over and . . . I mean, we get phone calls from all over. It's our house, if they go see their parents, and sometimes they come to our house when they don't see their parents. That's why we have to have such a big house so we have enough bedrooms to take care of all these people. It's a real interesting thing. Our son was born in . . .

Oh, there's a cute thing about our son and Truman. It's semi-naughty. Is that all right? Now, who is going to see this tape?

WILLIAMS: Oh, it's hard to say.

LUFF: Everybody, huh? My son would not like it.

WILLIAMS: Okay, we were talking about when Mr. Truman became President and then watching history from across the street. Do you remember any particular occasions that you watched from over there?

LUFF: Margaret's wedding reception, people coming and going from it, and dignitaries coming, Jack Benny. That impressed my mother that we got to see Jack Benny. She was very taken with that. I didn't know a great many of the dignitaries then, but I mean, I knew the crowds were there and that was fun, and I was invited over, so of course I went. And I enjoyed the root

beer. I learned to like root beer.

One time the newsmen were set up, and Grandpa was upset about something, and I'm not sure what, but it was something to do with news coverage, and they had their movie cameras on the tripods up on his stone wall. Grandpa was a very gentle man, but he got his broom out, and he swept down the sidewalk and then started sweeping his stone wall. And they had to get off, and he made them get off. And I guess they knew not to get in the yards. They didn't have clearance for the yard, but they thought maybe they'd push it and be on top. I remember watching Grandpa out there sweeping that off, and I kept saying, "I can't believe he's doing that!" It was before he was Grandpa to me. It was when he was just Mr. Luff.

WILLIAMS: How did he handle all the attention?

LUFF: Who, Grandpa? Grandpa was a very easygoing, gentle . . . Nothing bothered him. He was on the school board for twenty-five years and president of it I don't know how many. That's why the school is named after him. He was just a very gentle, easygoing . . .

WILLIAMS: As long as people stayed out of his yard, it was okay?

LUFF: But he had beautiful roses, and the flowers around that house, it was just a showplace.

WILLIAMS: It's too bad it's not that way anymore.

LUFF: Isn't it, though? It really is. One thing, Grandpa had a bit of orneriness about him. Our son was born September 16, 1953, I guess it would have been. So his name is John Luff, Jr., John E. Luff, Jr. Grandpa really thought it should be John W. Luff, Jr., but Wendell already had a John . . .

Jack's uncle already had a son named John Wendell, not John William, which was Grandpa's name, and so we didn't want another one of those, and Jack kind of wanted his son named after him, so John was. But Grandpa called him "Little John," or John Luff III. He would not call him . . . We called him "Little John." Grandpa called him John Luff III. And John had a slight speech problem when he first started talking, and he couldn't make his snake sounds, and so Grandpa would jiggle his hands in his pockets and make penny noises, money noises, and say, "What's your name, little boy?" Our son would brace himself up, and he'd say, "Little Johnny"—"Little Jack." That's what we called him, "Little Jack." And he'd say, "No, no, what's your name? What's your name?" And he'd say, "I'm John Luff de Turd." [chuckling] And Grandpa would give him money. And so he took him over one day and showed this trick to Truman. So those two men took this little boy . . . I didn't know it. We were off, and Grandma and Grandpa were taking care of John. They took this little boy up around the square, and old Carl Knoepker, and Herm that had Herm's Store that's no longer there, old C.C. Bundschu, all of them, jiggling the money and had this little kid, "What's your name, little boy?" "I'm John Luff de Turd." And our son when he got older and people called him this, he was . . . Our son is extremely conservative. He's like his father. He's not like me, and he did not . . . This tormented him for years because people that knew this told this story. And in high school they'd say, "Hey, there's John Luff de Turd." Of course, his speech impediment cleared but . . . [chuckling] That's one you can't tell tourists.

WILLIAMS: Well, I remember a story you told me earlier about your brother delivering the mail.

LUFF: Oh, when he was in high school. When I called Charlie and talked to him, he said he figured it was '42 or '43 that this happened. During the Christmas holidays, back then we got two mail deliveries a day—which is unheard of now—you're lucky if you get one—but we got two a day then, and the job that the big old burly guys from high school usually had was delivering the mail. This was their Christmas job. So Charlie was a big boy, he was on the football team—he was on MU's football team—and he had his mail sack on his back, so combined it was a pretty weighty proposition. But anyway, he fell through the Trumans' porch. And again, if it was '42, I would have been, what, eleven years old? And I was back home with Mother, and I remember the phone call Mother received and got all excited when Mrs. Truman called her to say, "Now, Maudie, Charlie's not hurt. He fell through the porch, one leg, and his pants are torn, and I'll pay for the trousers." But of course Mother didn't have her pay for the pants, but his right leg did go through the porch. But the house was in such rundown condition, it's no surprise. As big as he was and with that heavy mail sack, you know, it isn't like some little banty weight kid running on it, so he went one foot through the floor. And the mailbox was near the front door, he said, so he was up near the front door when it happened.

WILLIAMS: Did you notice growing up that the house was in pretty sad shape?

LUFF: Yes, but, you know, either we weren't judgmental or people weren't judgmental then, you know. It was an old, dirty, grayish, greenish color,

and it was just . . . you know, it wasn't very attractive. It was a big old house. Especially the Allens' house was always absolutely pristine—Doc Allen. You know, it was just everything. The contrast got a little overwhelming sometimes, but . . .

WILLIAMS: How did the bushes in the yard and the trees look?

LUFF: All right, now the only memory I have is overgrown. And when Aunt Frances gets you a print, a video print made of Grandpa's . . . When I talk to Aunt Frances about some of these things, to make sure my mind hadn't adjusted reality . . . You know, this can happen. You start remembering things, and they become lesser or greater. And Aunt Frances told me that Grandpa was a photographer nut and he took movie pictures, and he has home movies that he stood on the porch and took of the Truman home and things going on over there, so Aunt Frances is having a video copy made for you guys and you can tell then. But I just remember overgrown-looking, but again, I could be in error.

WILLIAMS: What business was Grandpa in?

LUFF: He had a stove foundry, Independence Stove Foundry.

WILLIAMS: Did he own it?

LUFF: No, he was one of the owners. He owned stock. He was the vice president. Crick was the president, Grandpa was the vice president, and Elvin was with the stove foundry, as was Elvin's younger brother Wendell was with the stove foundry.

WILLIAMS: That's the Independence Stove Foundry?

LUFF: Yes. It's no longer in existence.

WILLIAMS: Where was it located?

LUFF: On Hayward Avenue.

WILLIAMS: Where is that?

LUFF: Down behind the RLDS Auditorium at the railroad tracks, over by Gleaner's, down by Gleaner's. The building's still there.

WILLIAMS: So not far from the Waggoner-Gates Mill?

LUFF: Not far at all.

WILLIAMS: You said that your mother, when she answered the phone, Bess said, "Maudie . . ."

LUFF: Yes.

WILLIAMS: So did they know each other?

LUFF: Yes, through Eastern Star or Shrine or something.

WILLIAMS: Knew her well enough to be worried about . . .

LUFF: Yes, but I was too young. Now it sounds funny to say I was too young for anything, seeing as I'll be sixty in August, but I was. You know, I knew them, but I didn't know them, if you know what I mean. I knew who they were and they, I thought, knew who I was, but . . .

WILLIAMS: Do you think that the stove in the Trumans' kitchen was installed by . . .

LUFF: It was put in by the gas company, in all probability, but Jack said he . . . My husband has just retired as manager of the gas company.

WILLIAMS: Where?

LUFF: Here in Independence.

WILLIAMS: Okay.

LUFF: Jack said the foundry made them for the gas company, and his father

designed them, and that's why he sent that for you to see, that literature on it. But he said the gas company would have installed it, and he even told me who the manager was then. But they would have installed it, not the foundry. The foundry produced [see appendix, item 2].

WILLIAMS: So it was a common stove that was meant for homes at that time?

LUFF: Yes, nothing special about it, for heating.

WILLIAMS: So your grandfather didn't bring it over and install it or sell it to the Trumans?

LUFF: No, Grandpa wouldn't have. No, Grandpa didn't install it. I'm sure Grandpa oversaw the installing, and I wouldn't be surprised if he didn't get it for them, but I can't say that because, you know . . .

WILLIAMS: You don't know that for a fact.

LUFF: I don't know that for a fact.

WILLIAMS: And there's no family story that . . .

LUFF: No. Well, no.

WILLIAMS: Was there a Grandma Luff?

LUFF: Grandmother Luff? Yes. The one that he lived with across from the Trumans was the second Grandmother Luff.

WILLIAMS: And what was her name?

LUFF: Agnes was her first name. They got married the year they moved in the little house across the street.

WILLIAMS: That was '43, you said—'42?

LUFF: Yes, '42. He met her, she was a clerk up at Knoepker's, and he met her up there, and he was her fifth husband. [chuckling]

WILLIAMS: And that was his second wife?

LUFF: Yes, Mamie was his first wife's name.

WILLIAMS: After he died, what happened to that house?

LUFF: Well, of course it went to her, and her heirs rented it to the Social . . .

WILLIAMS: Secret Service.

LUFF: Secret Service, yes. The Secret Service, and then it was sold, as I understand, a number of times.

WILLIAMS: So it was Agnes Luff's heirs?

LUFF: Yes, that rented it to the Secret Service.

WILLIAMS: So that really wasn't your family?

LUFF: No. No.

WILLIAMS: Well, let's talk some about how you became involved in the Truman Library.

LUFF: Okay.

WILLIAMS: When was that, the first involvement?

LUFF: When it opened. President Truman, through Dorsy Lou Warr, I think—but I'm not 100 percent sure of that, but I think—approached the Independence Junior Service League if they would be in charge of an educational program, because again, he was so bent on education and the young people and them reading and studying their history here for the museum area. And I was not a member of the Junior Service League yet, but my best friend . . . because I had a little boy I was playing with. But my best friend Barbie Allen Gard was. And because we had . . . well, we'd grown up together, she knew I would enjoy this sort of thing. She knew me well enough, so

she said, “Why don’t you come on over?” And they didn’t get enough volunteers in Junior Service League to do it, so I . . . and I had been put on abeyance. I had been invited to join, but I had what they called gone on abeyance. That means you say, “No, thank you now, but ask me later,” type of thing. And so I came over, and I was trained by President Truman and was with the first group to be a guide here. He was very insistent on what we say and what we do and that we not . . . There was a dress code. We didn’t even know to call it that then, but no slacks. And Rose Conway would tell us what to say. We reported to Helen Lucky in what’s Mary Jo’s office here on the end of the hall now and we came in the north door. Helen Lucky really didn’t care what we said as long as we looked good saying it. You know, she wanted us to . . . She always kind of ran inspection on us, then we gave the tours. Then the Garden Room was not open yet, the mural had not been finished, and of course the educational wing, this part, had not been built, and the tours mostly centered around the mural. Then, when the Garden Room opened, why, that gave us a little bit more to talk about. The slide show in the auditorium was longer, and again, if he came out and talked to them, why, just, you know, forget the museum. And I’ve been here ever since.

WILLIAMS: When did they stop giving these tours?

LUFF: They still give them.

WILLIAMS: They still do?

LUFF: On a very limited basis. I quit giving them. I personally retired from giving them in . . . three years ago, and I took a year off and I traveled. My

husband and I traveled, and we got . . . [audio difficulty] . . . releases that he kept in the loose-leaf binders in his office, and I went through those and put them in the filing cabinets and did the finding [aids] on them. Now they have four different . . . Well, that's Truman Library business, you don't need that. I'm still here, anyway, every Wednesday.

WILLIAMS: How well-acquainted did you get with Mr. Truman as a guide?

LUFF: Not that well-acquainted. I always had the feeling, and Rose Conway always stressed, don't bother him, you know, not to intrude upon his space. Because, after all, he was here . . . I was here to do my job, and he was here to do his. It wasn't a social time. He was always very polite and very appreciative, and he never gave me that feeling, but, you know, I just respected his space, so I didn't give him that much trouble.

WILLIAMS: How did your groups feel as he emerged and approached and they actually got to see him while they were visiting the library?

LUFF: A lot of the students . . . You mean the students? A lot of them didn't recognize him in reality. You know, seeing a photograph in a book is one thing, and another . . . But they got very quiet, usually, and very, very impressed. And of course the teachers got flabbergasted. They just kind of got befuddled and they . . . all over themselves. I don't remember anyone asking him for an autograph.

WILLIAMS: Back in the fifties, and maybe early sixties, what were the chances of him coming out for a group?

LUFF: In the later years?

WILLIAMS: In the early . . . when he was still active.

LUFF: Oh, in the sixties?

WILLIAMS: Fifties and early sixties. Would it be . . .

LUFF: Oh, yes, very probable.

WILLIAMS: Most every group?

LUFF: He was *very* interested in this place, and he wasn't always in the auditorium because he had other obligations, and then the tours weren't as frequent. For a while there when we first got started, they kind of were slow, and then they seemed to pick up in the late sixties, early seventies. There seemed to be a greater interest. And then after his death—I guess, everybody gets famous after they die—they really developed an interest. Like during the centennial of '84, that was a really big thing, but it was . . . I gave a lot of foreign tours here, too, through an interpreter, and we expanded the tours.

In 1971, I developed a hearing difficulty, and I had six surgeries in two years. I used to give a tour here, go check into Saint Luke's that afternoon and have surgery the next morning. And it left me with a profound hearing loss, and I became suddenly very aware of the limitations of the handicapped. So I went to Dr. Zobrist, who was director by then. I would never approach Dr. Brooks with this, by the way. I call Dr. Zobrist Ben, and always have, but Dr. Brooks was . . . I wouldn't have called him Phil if my . . . you know, if my life depended on it. It was Dr. Brooks. But anyway, I asked Ben if we could develop a handicapped tour, and we started giving them for the . . . Well, it was an easy thing for the deaf. I just used a sign interpreter like I had for the foreign tours, and for the blind I developed a blind tour. Mrs. Truman wrote me a note of appreciation on

that. She had heard about it some . . . Well, they wrote me up in *Whistle Stop*, that little thing, and she wrote a note telling me what a grand thing it was. And we developed a tour for the visually handicapped, impaired, and totally blind. And it was so funny because I gave them for the Kansas School for the Blind . . . This is Truman Library stuff. Do you want to use your tape up with Truman . . . ?

WILLIAMS: Sure.

LUFF: Okay. Anyway, it was really great, because they were *so* appreciative, and I got a thank-you note typed in Braille on a Braille typewriter, with a translation that I could read and understand. So Ed—I've forgotten his name—the photographer that was here at the library then, he wanted to take a picture of my Braille letter, and he lost that sucker. It's the only thing I've ever known the library to flat-out lose. Nobody knows where my Braille letter is, and if anybody saw it, they couldn't read, "Dear Mary Sue . . ." [chuckling] It's nothing but a page full of bumps.

Well, anyway, we did good with the school tours, and so when the Association for the Blind had their convention here in Kansas City, they wanted to come take a tour. I was feeling awfully all full of ginger from my success with the school tours, so I said, "Sure, why not?" And Millie Carol and Pat Kerr helped me, and John Curry, and I did the talking and they were going to help guide these full-grown people through. And we knew there might be a few guide dogs, but we divided them up . . . It was in the summer and hot as it could be, I remember. We divided them up into three groups, approximately twenty-three in a group, and they all showed up with

guide dogs. [chuckling] I mean, this was total panic, because that many adults, which are harder to manage than students anyway, and then that many dogs! But by the time we did the third one that day, we kind of learned how to do it, but we were out of people to take through by then. That was a fun thing.

WILLIAMS: How much contact did you have with Mrs. Truman in the post-presidential years? You've mentioned dropping by or taking over Lady P.

LUFF: Yes, this was after he died.

WILLIAMS: Did you ever talk to her on the phone or have any reason besides the school groups driving by?

LUFF: All right, I called . . . one time I received a question with a school tour here. There's a portrait—I've forgotten who painted it—of President Truman, and he has the gray suit on and he has his American Legion pin in his lapel and . . . I should remember, but I've forgotten. Anyway, the student asked was that a wedding ring he had on his finger, because it showed, and I said, "I don't know. I'll see if I can find out." So I called Liz [Safly], and Liz didn't know, and I said, "Well, give me your name, and we'll find out about it." So I thought, well, who can I ask about it? So I asked May, and May said she didn't know—May Wallace. I'm a better friend with May, because I grew up in the First Christian Church with May, and so May said, "Call Bess," and I said, "Oh, I kind of hate to do that, you know." And she said, "No, call her. It's okay." So I called Mrs. Truman, and she said, "No, he didn't hold with such things. That was his Masonic ring."

WILLIAMS: "He didn't hold with such things"? So he didn't wear a wedding ring?

LUFF: No. That's what she told me.

WILLIAMS: The next time you saw him, did you look?

LUFF: No, this was after he died. He wasn't alive then, so . . . I remember one time taking Mrs. Pendleton and Fleming, just before Flem died, over to see them. And poor old Fleming was . . . He had gout, and he had poor circulation, and he had trouble walking, and President Truman gave him one of his canes to lean on. And I have no idea what happened to it, but probably their daughter has it.

WILLIAMS: You sat back in the kitchen during these visits?

LUFF: Yes.

WILLIAMS: Did you see any other part of the house?

LUFF: Oh, yes, not always in the kitchen, but usually in the kitchen.

WILLIAMS: Where would you sit at other times?

LUFF: In the parlor, off to the . . . the room off to this . . . When you approach down the hall from the kitchen, the room to your left?

WILLIAMS: What we call the living room, the big front room?

LUFF: Is that the living room? Yes. Not where the piano is.

WILLIAMS: The one where Mr. Truman's portrait is?

LUFF: Well, I can't remember that, but yes.

WILLIAMS: You haven't been in the home lately?

LUFF: Yes, I've been in it. I just don't remember that. [chuckling]

WILLIAMS: Oh, well, some people . . .

LUFF: I haven't been in it for a year or two. I helped with Junior Service League when we had charge of the party before the opening to set up the Bess

Wallace Flower Fund.

WILLIAMS: I see. Do you remember anything about the interior? Did Mrs. Truman talk about things in the house?

LUFF: No, no, I really don't. We bought the Marquis home, and when we bought that it was in settling the estate, and I found some papers in the basement, communiqués between George Marquis and President Truman, and I gave them to Truman Library. In one of the letters President Truman had written to George Marquis, he told about going . . . Bess and Margaret were home painting the kitchen. And one time I asked her if that was the paint job that she and Margaret had given it, and she didn't know what I was talking about. So I explained it to her, and she laughed, and she said, "Well, I guess it is." So that was the only thing that I know of. [whispering] That hideous color.

WILLIAMS: The green?

LUFF: Yes.

WILLIAMS: You said that you know May Wallace better than . . .

LUFF: Well, I grew up knowing May through the First Christian Church.

WILLIAMS: Let's talk a little bit about her, because we may soon acquire her house and it will be a part . . .

LUFF: Oh, I was in there lots and lots and lots of times.

WILLIAMS: It will be a part of the park also, so we're also trying to gather some information on the Wallaces.

LUFF: Is May at all comprehensive?

WILLIAMS: I don't know. I think the last I heard she's in and out.

LUFF: Sue [Gentry] said she wouldn't know if I went to visit her. That's why I asked.

WILLIAMS: On what occasions would you see May? Church?

LUFF: Yes, and of course we had her home on that first Truman tour that I was one of the co-chairmen of for Junior Service League. May opened her home up and we had her . . . Ardis [Haukenberry] opened her home up, too. I knew Ardis real well, too. But what about her home?

WILLIAMS: Did you know their husbands?

LUFF: Yes, but you don't know men as well as you do women, women don't.

WILLIAMS: How would you describe May to someone who didn't know her?

LUFF: Oh, if I were to have a great aunt that was sort of the most kind and gentle person in the world, it would be May Wallace. I don't have a great aunt. I'm safe in saying "if I had a great aunt." She was just a nice . . . always patient, always good. Growing up I have no bad memories of her. I could sit next to her in church and wiggle to my heart's content, and nobody bothered me. Ardis, on the other hand, was always calling me up to make sure I voted. [chuckling]

WILLIAMS: I've heard she was rather stern or strict.

LUFF: She was. She was.

WILLIAMS: The schoolteacher in her.

LUFF: Oh, yes, yes, and she was always trying to keep me in line, and now why did I say this, and why did I do that. I was on the heritage commission when the Baptist church was wanting to build their extension, and Ardis called. I resigned from the heritage commission because my husband was

manager of the gas company and they had to close an alley, and I was on the heritage commission and they were trying to get him to close the alley, [Baptists], and the heritage people were trying to keep him from closing the alley. We had all this conflict going on, and it seemed prudent that I just resign from the heritage commission. Ardis called me, and she said, "I see what you did, and I'm sorry you did it, but I love you for doing it." She took it that I was standing up for the Baptists by doing it, and I just didn't like the conflict. [chuckling] I just wanted out of there. I couldn't stand the heat. I wanted out of it.

WILLIAMS: How often were you in their houses visiting?

LUFF: Oh, gosh, a lot. A lot.

WILLIAMS: Just for friendly visits, or . . .

LUFF: I was very active, see, in the historic society all those years. Ardis was secretary, and when rhubarb would come in season, I would take her rhubarb, and she'd make rhubarb . . . She loved rhubarb pie. I would make her rhubarb pie. I wouldn't make the pie. I'd cut the rhubarb or buy it at the city market and take it to her. I'm not a cook.

WILLIAMS: Did either one of those women talk much about their association with the Trumans? Did it ever come up?

LUFF: No, it was just a warm, family feeling. I mean, you don't talk about your association. It's just family, you know?

WILLIAMS: I have an article here that I dug up. I'm not sure when it was written, but there's something about Mrs. John Luff and a party they were having. Maybe you were there.

LUFF: [chuckling] That would be Agnes. That would be the second Mrs. John Luff.

WILLIAMS: You can read it and . . . Apparently, someone came up to their house and was mobbed by reporters because he looked like the president.

LUFF: [pause while Mrs. Luff reads article] [chuckling] I remember this story. I remember this story [see appendix, item 3].

WILLIAMS: Were you there?

LUFF: Yes, but I was trying to think of who it was. I think it was Uncle Babe.

WILLIAMS: Babe?

LUFF: Yes, I think it was Reginald Smith, but he doesn't look like President Truman. But I think he's the one they mobbed. You know, crowds get hysteric, and they do dumb things. [reading] "There he is. There he is!" It says, "Walter Evans, now deceased, was a gray-haired man."

WILLIAMS: Could it have been him?

LUFF: Yes, it must have been. It says so. [chuckling] He said he was frequently mistaken for the president. Must have been him. I remember the night that happened, though. They were great bridge players. They played a lot of bridge, and they played bridge with the Trumans some, and they played bridge with May Wallace. May was a great bridge player. Sue Gentry's a great bridge player.

WILLIAMS: Oh, so this was during the election night?

LUFF: Yes.

WILLIAMS: In '48.

LUFF: Yes.

WILLIAMS: And you were all across the street waiting for . . .

LUFF: I remember one time Truman was coming home, and there was a big crowd, and Grandpa couldn't get out of his driveway, and he just started backing out and honking his horn. [chuckling]

WILLIAMS: Did he slow down?

LUFF: Well, Grandpa would get on Truman Road and drive from here to Kansas City without stopping once, regardless of the signs or the light colors or anything. [chuckling] That's just the way he's always done it, that's the way he did it.

WILLIAMS: I've heard that they would close Delaware Street when Mr. Truman was there.

LUFF: They did.

WILLIAMS: Did that inconvenience the neighbors across the way?

LUFF: They let the neighbors come through. It wasn't quite *closed*, it was . . . No, you could get through. We got through to Grandpa's house.

WILLIAMS: Just fine?

LUFF: Yes.

WILLIAMS: I've also read that when President Carter visited in 1980 that the Secret Service shooed a crowd of children off of Ardis's lawn, and she objected because she said, "Well, I've always had guests over to sit on my lawn and watch these events." Nothing like that ever happened when you were over at . . .

[End #4318; Begin #4319]

LUFF: Nobody would have told Grandpa what he could do on his lawn, I'll tell

you. [chuckling] Nobody. The only time we got shooed was when we were playing tag in the alley and running toward the Allens' garage.

WILLIAMS: I believe you brought some photos and other things, so we can look at those now. Leslie, do you have any other questions?

LESLIE HAGENSEN: No, none right now.

LUFF: [chuckling] She's Mr. Mechanic. But Jack thought, having heard so much about Grandpa, you might like to see. Sorry you can't meet him. Let me take that microphone off. Thank you, Jim. Oh, that's heavy.

WILLIAMS: I hope that didn't dig into your neck too much.

END OF INTERVIEW

APPENDIX

1. Photograph of John W. Luff with clipping from the Independence *Examiner*, 9 April 1990.
2. Independence Foundry Company brochure showing stove model now in the Truman home kitchen.
3. Pauline E. Kemp, “When Harry Truman Dropped In,” undated newspaper article.

Items 1 and 2 are from a group of newspaper clippings, photographs, publications, and memorabilia that Mary Sue Luff loaned to be photocopied by the National Park Service. For more information on the Luff family and the Independence Foundry Company, see the permanent file for this interview.