

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

WITH

ELIZABETH SAPPER

JULY 22, 1991

INDEPENDENCE, MISSOURI

INTERVIEWED BY JIM WILLIAMS

ORAL HISTORY #1991-12

This transcript corresponds to audiotapes DAV-AR #4345-4346

HARRY S TRUMAN NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR



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ABSTRACT

Elizabeth Sapper grew up on North Delaware Street in Independence as a contemporary of Margaret Truman. Sapper relates several stories about plays and other activities which filled the days of Truman neighborhood children. After Harry S Truman became president, Sapper joined the rest of the area in the favorite pastime activity, watching famous people visit 219 N. Delaware. After her marriage, she and her sister opened a china shop on the Independence square. As a shop owner, Sapper maintained a supply of Bess W. Truman's cards and was frequently asked to send gifts to various people on Mrs. Truman's behalf. Sapper's shop then obtained the rights to sell the only authorized memorial plate with Harry S. Truman's image and signature during his lifetime.

Persons mentioned: Pearl Bush, Poindexter Bush, Virginia Bush, Margaret Truman Daniel, Jane Barridge, Raymond Necessary, Marie Allen Blank, Mona Allen, Sue Ogden Bailey, Harry S Truman, Bess W. Truman, Madge Gates Wallace, Ethel Noland, May Wallace, Carl Sapper, Jerry Lewis, Henry Kissinger, Mary Paxton Keeley, Pete Picard, Philip C. Brooks, Rose Conway, Gerald R. Ford, Betty Ford, Lyndon B. Johnson, Lady Bird Johnson, Floyd Carson, Richard M. Nixon, Louis L. "Polly" Compton, R. Luke Choplin, Maxine Choplin, Allegra Luff Smith, Cora Murphy, Fountain Allen, Tom Twyman, Sallie Sawyer, Helen Burrus, Olney Burrus, and Rufus Burrus.

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ELIZABETH SAPPER**

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JIM WILLIAMS: This is an oral history interview with Elizabeth Sapper. We're at her house in Independence, on July 31, 1991. The interviewer is Jim Williams from the National Park Service, and Scott Stone from the National Park Service is running the recording equipment.

Well, first of all, I'd like to find out a little bit about your family. Could you tell me when you were born and where you grew up?

ELIZABETH SAPPER: I grew up in Independence, Missouri, and I was born October 27, 1923.

WILLIAMS: And what was your name back then?

SAPPER: Last name Bush, B-U-S-H.

WILLIAMS: Where was your family living when you were born?

SAPPER: Well, we've lived actually in three different homes, all on Delaware Street. When we were born we lived at 707 North Delaware, and then later we moved to 603 North Delaware. Now that home has been demolished—it was a number of years back. But while we were still there, then we moved to 310 North Delaware, and we've been there ever since. With the exception . . . I lived in Kansas City about six years and then moved back out with my mother and dad.

WILLIAMS: How long was your family in Independence before you were born?

SAPPER: Oh, gee, I imagine . . . Well, my dad was originally from Kentucky, but he probably came here . . . oh golly, hard to say. Well, this is 1991? Probably around 1920. I'm guessing at that, but I'd say that's pretty close.

WILLIAMS: What were your parents' names?

SAPPER: Well, my mother's name was Pearl and my dad's real name was Poindexter. Nobody knew him by that name, though. They always either called him P.D. or Deck. Most of them did not know his real name. And I don't blame him. I didn't want it known either. [chuckling]

WILLIAMS: And the Deck came from Poindexter?

SAPPER: Yes, Poindexter was actually a family name.

WILLIAMS: And how many siblings did you have?

SAPPER: None.

WILLIAMS: Okay. Did your mother . . . was she from Independence originally?

SAPPER: No, not originally. She lived in Lafayette County as a girl and then moved to Independence.

WILLIAMS: What business were they in?

SAPPER: My mother never worked. My dad was with the Southwestern Bell Telephone Company, and for quite a period of time he was manager of the Independence office out here. And he retired in . . . oh, about '42.

WILLIAMS: And you said you had a twin sister?

SAPPER: I had a twin sister, uh huh.

WILLIAMS: What was her name?

SAPPER: Virginia Bush. Nickname of Nin.

WILLIAMS: Nin?

SAPPER: Which is about the only name most people knew. Odd, but that was it.

WILLIAMS: Who was the oldest?

SAPPER: I was fifteen minutes older than she was. [chuckling]

WILLIAMS: Did she live with you all the time?

SAPPER: Well, for a number of years, yes. She did. In fact, she moved to that home with my mother and dad, oh, in the '40s sometime.

WILLIAMS: Where did you go to school growing up?

SAPPER: I went here in Independence. I went to Bryant School, grade school, and then junior high school, and then William Chrisman High.

WILLIAMS: What year did you graduate?

SAPPER: Nineteen forty-one.

WILLIAMS: And I assume your sister graduated the same?

SAPPER: Yes.

WILLIAMS: Were you in any clubs in high school?

SAPPER: Oh, yeah, if I can remember them. We belonged to one called the Shakespearean Literary Society, and the M Club and the Pep Club and, I don't know, different ones.

WILLIAMS: You're about the same age as Margaret Truman.

SAPPER: Yes, just a little bit older than Margaret. We were one year ahead of her in

high school.

WILLIAMS: Did you know her very well?

SAPPER: Oh, yes. Yes, we grew up right there in the neighborhood, used to ride our bicycles together and all that. Had a play or two that we performed. Funny, but we did it. We did it, really, for the Penny Ice Fund. Didn't make much, but back then you didn't make much anyway.

WILLIAMS: What was the Penny Ice Fund?

SAPPER: Oh, it was just for the poor people, you know, that could not afford to buy ice in the summertime, hot summer.

WILLIAMS: And everyone needed ice.

SAPPER: Yes, they did. Sure did.

WILLIAMS: How long did these plays go on?

SAPPER: Oh, not very long. We didn't really do but maybe a couple of them.

WILLIAMS: Do you remember any of the plays, what they were?

SAPPER: I can only remember the name of one, and they called it the . . . I think they called it "They Captured the Clever One." And as I recall, Margaret was the villain because she was taller than the rest of us. [chuckling]

WILLIAMS: Where would you perform these plays?

SAPPER: In Trumans' back yard.

WILLIAMS: Okay. Did you have a big audience?

SAPPER: Just the local neighborhood.

WILLIAMS: Would adults come, or was it more . . .

SAPPER: Oh, it was adults, mainly mothers and fathers.

WILLIAMS: Including the Trumans?

SAPPER: Yes.

WILLIAMS: How much were you in the Truman home growing up as a girl?

SAPPER: Well, growing up we used to be there quite a bit, you know, but . . .

WILLIAMS: What would you do inside?

SAPPER: Well, sometimes we'd go in the music room and maybe Margaret would play a tune or something. But we were mainly outdoor people, you know, and it wasn't dolls and stuff like that.

WILLIAMS: Do you remember anything in particular that happened growing up at the home, besides the plays?

SAPPER: Oh, no, the only thing . . . and this really dates back, and you've probably heard of it anyway, but it was a time when some man called Bryant School when Margaret was attending there and told the teacher that Mrs. Truman had sent him to pick up Margaret. And of course, in return she called and found out that wasn't right, and from then on, she started taking Margaret to school and picking her up. So, of course, going right by our house, we got a ride, too. But that's about the only thing going back that far that, you know, would have any significance, I think.

WILLIAMS: Who were some of your other friends, growing up in the neighborhood?

SAPPER: Oh, gee, Jane Barridge and . . . oh God, I don't remember all of them. A fellow named Necessary, Raymond Necessary, and . . . I don't know, we

had them all up and down the block. We had our gangs, if you want to know.

WILLIAMS: Gangs?

SAPPER: Well, yeah, you know, we were roughnecks. Sort of kicking footballs across the street and maybe a tennis ball, something like that.

WILLIAMS: Did you know the Allen sisters?

SAPPER: Yes, Marie, Mona, and Harriet. Sure did.

WILLIAMS: And I guess there were the Ogden girls. Did you know them very well?

SAPPER: Yes, there was a girl named Sue Ogden.

WILLIAMS: What were the Trumans like, Harry and Bess, as neighbors or as parents of a friend of yours?

SAPPER: They were great. I tell you, I'll never say anything bad about either one of them. I think they were the most wonderful people I ever knew.

WILLIAMS: Did they seem to like having all the kids around playing?

SAPPER: Yes, I'd say they did.

WILLIAMS: Did you know Mrs. Truman's mother, Madge Wallace?

SAPPER: No, I didn't.

WILLIAMS: You don't ever remember seeing her?

SAPPER: No, I don't really remember ever seeing her.

WILLIAMS: Would you play in the basement of the house or up in the attic?

SAPPER: No. No, mainly outdoors.

WILLIAMS: Were the neighborhood kids in your house as well?

SAPPER: Well, yes, they were when we lived at 603. Yes, the neighbor kids . . . we were playing baseball out in the side yard, breaking windows, and doing all kinds of things. But that was at my parents' request because we were supposed to . . . trying to be around close. I think they were afraid we'd get in trouble if we weren't, so it was sort of open house. In fact, we'd open up the living room window, rather than going in the door, and go through a window. [chuckling] And they put up with us.

WILLIAMS: In high school, what did you do for fun in those years?

SAPPER: Oh, golly, I don't know, we just seemed to entertain ourselves. I mean, we aren't like the kids today that have to have a place to go. We had a place to go. We all had homes. And my parents were always real good about permitting our friends to come to the house anytime they wanted. But we were quite tennis players back then, my sister and I both, and we'd go down . . . where the Truman Library is, when they had the park down there and the tennis courts. In the summer we lived on those courts. But that was mainly our activity.

WILLIAMS: Did you spend much time around the square?

SAPPER: No. We weren't allowed to go to the square unless we had a purpose to go.

WILLIAMS: Why was that?

SAPPER: Well, I think actually the whole thing, my mother had heard about some of these kids going into the dime stores and just seeing what they could shoplift and get by with, and she probably figured, "My kids will try it,

too.” So she just said, “There’s no reason to be up on the square. What would you do?”

WILLIAMS: Were your parents pretty strict?

SAPPER: Yes, they were. They ran a pretty tight ship.

WILLIAMS: Everybody in the neighborhood seemed to have a church that they belonged to. Did your family?

SAPPER: Yes, we belonged to the First Christian Church from the time we were little, little kids.

WILLIAMS: Did you know the Nolands at all?

SAPPER: I just knew Miss Noland, to wave and say hi. But personally, not really, no.

WILLIAMS: What about Mrs. Truman’s brothers, the Wallaces on the other side?

SAPPER: No. Now, May Wallace, of course she went to our church, too, and we have known her all those years, and a great lady.

WILLIAMS: What was it like living in the neighborhood of a United States Senator? Did that seem to matter very much?

SAPPER: No, that didn’t matter. What changed was when he became president, and that really changed.

WILLIAMS: Could you describe that change?

SAPPER: Oh, well, of course, activity and the press, and the TVs and a lot of activity. We could always tell if some dignitary was visiting because first of all you saw either a roadblock or you saw the TV cameras. We knew something was happening. And we rubbernecked. You know, we got right in the act.

WILLIAMS: By that time, were you living at 310?

SAPPER: Oh, yes.

WILLIAMS: When did you say you moved into that house?

SAPPER: Well, I went there about . . . oh, probably 1944 or '45, because I previously had been in Kansas City.

WILLIAMS: What did you do in Kansas City?

SAPPER: I worked for the telephone company.

WILLIAMS: And when were you married?

SAPPER: Which time? [chuckling]

WILLIAMS: Oh, well . . .

SAPPER: Carl and I were married in 1955.

WILLIAMS: And so you were living on Delaware then?

SAPPER: Well, I was living there, see, when we were married, and so I told Carl the thing to do is just move in, which he did. And after we were married, and the night of our honeymoon, my dad had a heart attack and died. So it was good that it worked out like it did because I was able to take care of things.

WILLIAMS: And then you lived with your mother for a while?

SAPPER: Yes, Mother lived downstairs, and she died about . . . oh, five years later.

WILLIAMS: Do you remember anything in particular when Mr. Truman was president, things going on around the house?

SAPPER: Oh, I do remember one thing. And this I don't know if I should even say, but I remember when Jerry Lewis came to Independence to see him. He

got up to that gate, and some little kids were just thrilled to see him. He treated those kids like dirt. I've never had any use for him. "Get away and don't bother me!" and all that. And I couldn't believe it, that he would act that way. Yes, we'd see Kissinger, and, oh, golly, I don't know who all used to come up to see him. It was interesting, it really was.

And then when I had my shop up on the square, Mrs. Truman would come in. Oh, golly, she was so great. Never demanded anything special. She always wanted either my sister or me to help her. And fine, that's all right. But if we were busy, she'd wait for us.

WILLIAMS: What did you sell in your shop?

SAPPER: Well, my shop was mainly china, silver, and crystal, but I had gifts, cards. I had about, as you'd say it, seventeen shops in one room, and that's about what it was.

WILLIAMS: How long was that store open?

SAPPER: We had it twenty-five years.

WILLIAMS: From when to when?

SAPPER: Well, we bought it in '61, bought the business in '61, but we were formerly down on South Main. And then when we moved up on Liberty and bought that building . . . So we've had two locations there.

WILLIAMS: And that's on the west side of the square, right?

SAPPER: Yes, it is.

WILLIAMS: Why would Mrs. Truman come in? What would she be looking for?

SAPPER: To buy wedding gifts.

WILLIAMS: What kinds of gifts would she buy?

SAPPER: Mainly silver. In fact, I used to stock one particular silver tray for her—I'd just keep them, you know—and she'd call. And I had her cards, you know. She'd call and say, "Well, send one to so and so . . ." And then I finally changed that. The company that made them was sold, and the tray itself got a little bit on the junky side, and I told Mrs. Truman, I said, "We can't send this tray anymore." I said, "About the time they polish it twice, there's not going to be any silver on it. And we've got to make a change." And that was great.

WILLIAMS: Did she spend quite a bit of money on gifts, or . . . ?

SAPPER: Oh, I'd say in between. [chuckling] Well, it depended on who she was buying for. Now, she had a group of friends at Christmas, like her beauty operator, this lady down in Columbia, Missouri, that was such a good friend of hers . . .

WILLIAMS: Mary Paxton Keeley?

SAPPER: Keeley, yes. She was one of them, and she'd come in and we'd look at different things. And as I say, she was easily pleased, no problem. And that was a ritual every year at Christmas that we went through.

WILLIAMS: She was a good customer.

SAPPER: Yes, she was. She sure was. Then, you know, as time went along, and then she wasn't navigating too well, it would be a telephone call.

WILLIAMS: And you said you had her name cards?

SAPPER: Yes, her printed cards.

WILLIAMS: And you would just . . .

SAPPER: Yes, we'd just insert them in the gift. And you know what she could do, see, she had free mailing privileges. All she had to do is sign her name in the corner of the envelope. She wouldn't do it. And a lot of times when I'd take them over to the post office to mail them, the men over there would always say, "This is just great. Gee, she wants to pay just like everybody else, even though she has a free service that she could take advantage of." That's kind of neat, isn't it?

WILLIAMS: Mm-hmm. Well, we seem to get the impression that she was, in some ways, frugal, so that's why I was asking about . . .

SAPPER: Well, you know, I don't want to say what a customer spends, so that's what I say, it was . . . It just maybe depended on who she was buying for. Well, I'll tell you what she did do one time. She called and wanted to know . . . The Women's Democratic Club or something in Washington was having a fund-raiser, and she wanted to know if we would mail this piece if she brought it in as a fund-raiser for them to sell. And I told her, "Sure, bring it in." Well, it happened to be a piece of Lalique, a very nice piece.

WILLIAMS: Crystal.

SAPPER: Yes. And I called her, "Mrs. Truman, do you know what we're sending back there?" And, "Oh, well . . ." I said, "Well, it's a pretty nice piece."

“Okay, go ahead.” “Well, we’re sure going to pack it good.” [chuckling]

WILLIAMS: So she didn’t seem to know that it was worth quite a bit, or . . . ?

SAPPER: Well, I think that they received so much that you couldn’t put a value on what somebody gave you. I doubt that she was that interested in it. If she had been, she wouldn’t have given it to me to send back there.

WILLIAMS: But she sounds like just a fairly typical customer.

SAPPER: That’s right.

WILLIAMS: Not unusually lavish or cheap.

SAPPER: Well, when she was . . . as I say, when she was getting older, and our shop, we had some steps at the entrance of the parking lot, and I would put her at a table—we had a table and four chairs—and start bringing out silver and bring it over to the table. It was kind of rough for her to stand and look at it, you know, it was kind of strung along. And after I . . . I bet I didn’t bring over six pieces, and she said, “Don’t bring any more. I can decide what’s here.”

WILLIAMS: These would be like serving trays?

SAPPER: Yes, bowls, things like that.

WILLIAMS: Dishes.

SAPPER: Yes.

WILLIAMS: Would the Secret Service come with her into the store?

SAPPER: Sometimes they did, but not until later on. Well, when I was on South Main at that address, we had parking out in front. After I moved, we had a

mall. But when I was at the old address, they usually sat out in front in the car. But she got to the point where she wasn't just in the best of shape to come in.

WILLIAMS: Would you then just send her a bill and then she'd pay it?

SAPPER: Yes, we'd just charge it to her.

WILLIAMS: Sometime along the way, I have a newspaper clipping about the Truman plate that . . .

SAPPER: Yes.

WILLIAMS: Could you tell us how that came about?

SAPPER: Well, actually, the way it came about was when we had our shop you had to have permission to do a Truman plate. And we were getting calls, of course, from people, tourists and this and that coming in, and so I call Mrs. Truman one day and told her, I said, "You all have to authorize this before we can proceed. And I think we're a natural to do it." And she said, "Well, I don't see anything wrong with that. Go ahead." So we knew we had to stay with an American company. You know, Mr. Truman was really opposed to imports. Anything you bought, it should be made here in the United States. So Picard China in Antioch, Illinois, was famous for making limited edition plates, and they did them for all your fine stores in Chicago—well, all around the country—and we handled their china line to begin with. So we contacted Pete Picard, and that started the ball rolling.

The first plate that we got back did not have this green motif here.

It just had his picture and the gold band. Well, Mrs. Truman had called me—well, I might have said that first—and said that she wanted to select the picture that went on the plate. Now I told her, “I’m glad you said that because I wanted you to.” And so after we got the first plate back, just for approval, I called her and told her, “We’re ready to show it to you and Mr. Truman. It is not completed but it will give you a general idea.” So we went over, I think the next day, at four o’clock in the afternoon. I said to her, “Am I going to have any trouble getting in that house? Do I climb the fence or what?” And she said, “Just ring the front doorbell and I’ll let you in.” We went in and Carl showed the plate to Mr. Truman, and he said, “Well, that ought to stop ’em.” The cutest remarks, you know? And they liked it. And then when the green and the gold were put around the rim, I tried to get back with them to show them, “Now this is going to be it,” and we couldn’t make connections. He was going to a dentist and to quote Mrs. Truman he had to wait just like any other patient, so finally she called and said, “You have just as good a taste as I do, go ahead with it. We don’t need to see it.”

So then we started in. Of course, we had an incorrect date on thirty-six of them—and not what the paper said. It really was the best thing that ever happened to us, but Picard corrected the date, which we had never . . . Well, I’ll say Mrs. Truman has one of the corrected plates, the numbered plates, and we do, but I don’t believe there’s any out on the market. We

kept, I believe, five of them. Just kept them.

WILLIAMS: What was wrong with the date?

SAPPER: They had the date that he went into office, I believe it was, incorrect. I can look that up and make sure. Do you want to turn that off? I've got something over there I can show you that may be helpful.

WILLIAMS: Okay.

SAPPER: I'm sure I brought it with me. You won't believe the things that I can't find.

WILLIAMS: We don't want you all tangled up here.

SAPPER: Hang myself.

WILLIAMS: Well, you have a scrapbook.

SAPPER: Yes. Let's see . . . All right, [reading] "The back of the plate shown here notes the dates in office as April 17, 1945, to January 20, 1953." The correct date was April 12th, '45. And of course it says that 3,000 plates would be corrected. Heck, we only had thirty-six of them. But the *Kansas City Star* had the plate, and that's how they got the picture of it. If I'd have had it, they wouldn't have gotten it.

WILLIAMS: Just for the record, let me say that was in the *Star* on March 10, 1971.

SAPPER: Yes, right. Now, let's see, just . . . I doubt that there's anything else in here. This is the one you have there. Well, this was Pete Picard, and Dr. Brooks that was down at the library, and these are just more pictures of Pete and Mrs. Truman.

WILLIAMS: Why did you decide on the green border?

SAPPER: Well, we just thought that had a more elegant color, and they were coming out with a Lincoln plate later that would have been in blue. Blue wouldn't have really complemented the color of his picture.

WILLIAMS: Well, the Trumans' White House china, I think, is green. I just wondered if that was one of the reasons.

SAPPER: No, it really didn't have anything to do with it.

WILLIAMS: And there at the beginning you have a card signed by Mr. Truman. Was that how you got the signature?

SAPPER: Well, yes, we wanted a current signature on the plate here, so that was the card that we got from him.

WILLIAMS: So that was specifically for the plate.

SAPPER: Right, it was. See, we had an invitational reception at our shop. Mrs. Truman accepted the plate, and that morning that it was coming out, golly, we had Secret Service all over that place coming in. Even our employees couldn't come in without looking back at Carl and he'd say, "Okay, yes, she works here." But they were really checking. They had been in before looking things over. I don't blame them. I mean, it was announced that she would be there, and they did have to be careful about it.

WILLIAMS: When you went to the house to show them the plate, where was Mr. Truman? Do you remember which room?

SAPPER: Well, yes, both of them, they were in what I call the living room, the room

to the south.

WILLIAMS: The big room?

SAPPER: Yes.

WILLIAMS: Would this have been in about 1970 then?

SAPPER: Yes.

WILLIAMS: How was Mr. Truman that day?

SAPPER: Fine. Fine.

WILLIAMS: And he seemed interested in the plate?

SAPPER: Yeah. And I think Mrs. Truman was well pleased. I told her when we started this, "We will stay with the best. It won't be a cheap plate." And I might mention this: afterward, after the plate came out, and of course we had some nice publicity on it, some outfit did a Truman plate, about a bread-and-butter size, which would be six-inch, and then a salad size, which would be a seven-inch plate. Same picture. It must have been awful. And she called me, and she said, "I want you to put a stop to this plate." They couldn't do it, shouldn't do it without his permission, like we had permission. And so I said, "Mrs. Truman, I can't do anything about that. You know, I can't call the company and say, 'Look, you don't make a Truman plate now. Mrs. Truman doesn't like that.' But you can do it." And so she called me back later, and she said, "I put a stop to it. I called Rose Conway." And I don't know what Rose Conway did, but that plate never surfaced. And she told me this, when they sent it to her one of them

had a price tag of \$4.50 on it. She said, “They even left the price tag on it.”
A little tacky. So that was stopped.

We had a call from Spode china—well, their representative came by. Spode was made in England, and they had tried to do a Truman plate. And this fellow came by our house, and he said, “I have a stack that thick of correspondence.” He said, “I can’t even get it off the ground.” And I said, “It wouldn’t do you any good. Mr. Truman wouldn’t okay England doing his plate.”

WILLIAMS: So, as far as you know, you’re the only one who’s ever had a Truman plate?

SAPPER: Oh, once the president is dead, then anybody can do anything that they want.

WILLIAMS: So you were the only one to do it while he was alive.

SAPPER: Right. And actually I always felt if we hadn’t have known the Trumans, we would have never gotten this thing to fly. You know, it was just that they agreed to do it.

WILLIAMS: Well, and it sounds like Mrs. Truman trusted you.

SAPPER: I hope so. [chuckling]

WILLIAMS: And you were the exclusive dealer for these?

SAPPER: That’s right. We sewed it up. Well, we had this with Picard China, that they could not let one of their other dealers have it unless we agreed to do it. They did get bogged down in production, and I think we had about five people on our list for Truman plates that died by the time we got them. But

they finally picked up on it. We agreed to let them just release a few, and then Carl and I bought the rest of them.

WILLIAMS: I think we need to change tapes, and I'll have a few more questions.

[End #4345; Begin #4346]

WILLIAMS: Well, how well did you know Mr. Truman?

SAPPER: Mr. Truman? Oh, of course not as well as Mrs. Truman because I had more contact with her, but as I say, for sixty-seven years, why, you're bound to pick up a little knowledge about the man and know him.

WILLIAMS: I assume you'd see him around the neighborhood?

SAPPER: Yes. You know, he was a walker, and of course Carl would be out early in the morning before he went to work, in the yard, and Mr. Truman would yell at him. When Hawaii became a state, Carl was out working that morning early, and Mr. Truman went by and he said, "Well, I see we have a new state." [chuckling] And Mr. Truman said, "Well, they could have done that a long time ago if they'd gotten off the pot." [chuckling] You know, that was just the way he was.

I know Carl said one time he used to make a number of trips to Colorado Springs and New York and all with his job at AT&T, and he got on the plane one day, and Mr. Truman was on there, and he said to him, "Hi, neighbor!" Carl said, "I didn't even know he was around." So, you know, he never forgot people that he knew. He wasn't so high-powered that he couldn't speak to a neighbor.

WILLIAMS: Were they ever in your house?

SAPPER: Well, yes, over the years they were. Mrs. Truman was there . . . well, the day after my dad died. She came over and spent some time with us.

WILLIAMS: You said that was in '55?

SAPPER: Yes, '55.

WILLIAMS: Were there any other events or special occasions?

SAPPER: No, not really. No.

WILLIAMS: I guess they knew your parents pretty well.

SAPPER: Yes, they did. She really knew my mother better. Mother was a stay-at-home, kind of like she was.

WILLIAMS: Did your mother play bridge or anything like that?

SAPPER: No, she did not.

WILLIAMS: After Mr. Truman was president, did it seem to change much when they came back to town, the neighborhood?

SAPPER: No, I don't think it really changed. You mean, did they change or did it affect the neighborhood as changing?

WILLIAMS: Did they change, and also the neighborhood?

SAPPER: No, they never changed. [chuckling] The only thing that might have changed, parking became a problem, you know, and they had the Secret Service across the street, across from them. And Mrs. Truman always seemed to be concerned that they did not create a problem with the neighbors.

WILLIAMS: What would she do to avoid that?

SAPPER: I don't know. At one time, I guess they wanted to take parking off the streets, which they did on the west side in our block and down, but she just didn't want any neighbor inconvenienced by them.

WILLIAMS: Did you ever have any problems with tourist traffic, anything like that?

SAPPER: I can't say we did, no. You might have trouble parking in front of your house, but then you . . . [chuckling] to be expected.

WILLIAMS: And you have a four-car garage.

SAPPER: Yes, but we didn't have it back then. [chuckling] No, I wish we'd had it, yes.

WILLIAMS: Well, you're so close to the home that I suspect you did get some traffic, and when the barricades went up . . .

SAPPER: Yes. Yes, I'll tell you, the night that . . . or morning, whatever it was, when Mr. Truman died, we looked out. Here's these TV people out there, and they were running their lines up to our power out by our fountain in the back yard. We just had new plantings, and the yews. Stomping them. Oh! So never asked, just took over. So Carl went out and told them, he said, "This is new, and we can't have these things just stomped down. You all didn't ask." Oh, they'd be more careful. Well, pretty soon I looked out and I said, "They're going out there any minute. They're walking all over them." And so Carl told them, he said, "Now, either that or I will disconnect the power out there." So they changed. But a little nervy. But

that's your press.

WILLIAMS: Were there other times that you were in the Truman home? You described once with the plate.

SAPPER: Oh, we used to be, in years back, but there wasn't any reason to be in there, other than to discuss the plates and things like that.

WILLIAMS: Were you at Margaret's wedding reception?

SAPPER: No. I was there. I wasn't invited. I was across the street. [chuckling]

WILLIAMS: Did you keep up with Margaret through the years?

SAPPER: No, not really. She dropped by our shop several times when she'd be back here visiting, but that was the size of it. I'd see her at maybe some function down at the Truman Library when she came back, but that was it.

WILLIAMS: Did Mr. Truman ever come into the shop?

SAPPER: No, he didn't. A lot of times when we were at the old store address he'd stay in the car out in front, but she was always came in.

WILLIAMS: What kinds of things would you go to at the Truman Library? You said receptions.

SAPPER: Oh, it was just different events that were going on there. Oh, when they had the dedication of the Truman statue up on the square, President Ford came back, Mrs. Ford. That was nice. And then the yearly May affair we usually went to.

WILLIAMS: Do you recall any other dignitaries visiting the home? You mentioned Jerry Lewis and . . .

SAPPER: Well, that's not really a dignitary. [chuckling] Oh, golly, there were so many of them. I don't know, whoever was an active politician during that time they were . . .

WILLIAMS: The Johnsons were there several times. Do you remember that?

SAPPER: Well, when Mr. Truman died, all of them came back, all the Johnsons, Mrs. Johnson, the daughters. Of course, at that particular time Nixon came by, a short visit. And, well, that's about it. That funeral was rather quiet. And the day that they went to the Truman Library with his body, Floyd Carson was driving that hearse, and I'm not kidding you, I asked him if he thought he was in Indianapolis. He was driving so fast. I said, "How come you did that?" And he said, "I was told to do it."

WILLIAMS: And they drove down Delaware.

SAPPER: Down Delaware to the Truman Library. But I mean he was making time.

WILLIAMS: So you didn't get much of a view.

SAPPER: Huh uh.

WILLIAMS: Did your sister have much contact with the Trumans?

SAPPER: No more than I did. No, not really. I'm glad I'm not pretending to be dead here. [chuckling]

WILLIAMS: Well, how would you describe what it was like living two doors down from a former president?

SAPPER: Interesting, really. It was interesting.

WILLIAMS: And if you had to describe Mrs. Truman in just a few words, how would

you describe her to somebody who had never met her?

SAPPER: I'd just describe her as one great lady.

WILLIAMS: And Mr. Truman?

SAPPER: A great man. Both of them. I think they've always been most concerned about their friends and their neighbors and all in Independence, Missouri. They never lost sight of any of them. And that's commendable, I don't care what you say.

WILLIAMS: Did you visit Mrs. Truman any after Mr. Truman died?

SAPPER: No.

WILLIAMS: But she would still come into the store?

SAPPER: Yes. As I say, in time that did taper off, but she still came in until she got a little bit, you know, bad.

WILLIAMS: She was pretty well into her nineties at that point.

SAPPER: Yes, she was. She sure was. But as long as she could make it . . .

Oh, I will tell you something funny. After he was gone . . . My sister was quite a cut-up, and Mrs. Truman came in for some things. And so Nin said to her, "Well, Mrs. Truman, we're handling this new line of cologne." And she said, "You splash that on and they'll chase you up and down Delaware Street." [chuckling] And she'd just laugh about it. You know, she thought all that was funny. And then she said to me one time, when the Secret Service was with her, one of the men, and she was going to see Margaret. That was during a strike with the airlines. So I told her, I

said, “Well, Mrs. Truman, are you still planning on going to see Margaret?”
“Yes.” “And you have your ticket?” “Well, yeah, I think so.” And I said,
“Well, now if you have any trouble, you just tell them you know me.” And
of course she laughed, and that Secret Service man said, “I don’t think she’s
going to have any trouble.” And she turned around, and she said, “Oh,
good Lord, she’s only kidding.” [chuckling] But you could cut up with
her. And she got a kick out of it, she really did.

WILLIAMS: I’d like to talk a little bit about your neighbors. Polly Compton lived on
one side?

SAPPER: Sure did.

WILLIAMS: Could you talk about him a little bit, what he was like as a neighbor?

SAPPER: Well, he was a great neighbor, you know. We never really socialized, so to
speak. See, I went to school with Dorsy Lou, but she wasn’t over there then
that much. So Mrs. Compton was a nice lady. She and my mother visited,
and once in a while they would do something together. But Mr. Compton
was kind of a busy yard man, keeping it up very nice.

WILLIAMS: And on the other side there were the Choplins?

SAPPER: Yes, Luke and Maxine Choplin. Two characters, and they were fun.

WILLIAMS: Are they about your age, or your parents’ age?

SAPPER: Oh, no. No, they’re older than I am. Yes, Maxine, I believe, possibly is in
her eighties.

WILLIAMS: And you say she still works?

SAPPER: Part-time. Yes, she's in tourism or something downtown, but she doesn't work full-time. But that's good. She does not look her age. She doesn't act it either, and that's good.

WILLIAMS: Across the street in what we call the Secret Service house, was the Luff bungalow?

SAPPER: Yes, not unless Allegra Luff, who later became Allegra Luff Smith, she was a dancing teacher many years back. I knew her. I think there was a connection in the Luff family there, but I'm not just sure what it was. So I can't say that I really ever knew the Luffs.

WILLIAMS: Do you know who lived in your house before you did?

SAPPER: Her name was Cora Murphy, and she had been married to a Dr. Murphy who was a dentist, I think, and he had been gone for a number of years.

WILLIAMS: Did you know the Allens who had lived in the house before?

SAPPER: In our house?

WILLIAMS: Mm-hmm.

SAPPER: No.

WILLIAMS: I guess this is from the city directory in 1924. It said Fountain Allen lived there. I just wondered if you knew anything about that.

SAPPER: No, I didn't. At one time the Allens lived in the 600 block on Delaware.

WILLIAMS: Across the street there were some ministers, right?

SAPPER: Yes, Proctor. I never really knew him. I remember Mrs. Proctor just because at one time she rented out some apartments in the home, and one of

our friends and her mother lived there. I never knew Mrs. Proctor real well.

WILLIAMS: Did you know the Twymans, people further up Delaware?

SAPPER: Yes, Tom Twyman. Yes, in fact, Dr. Twyman, Dr. Tom was our doctor when we were growing up.

WILLIAMS: Where was his office?

SAPPER: As I recall, it was up on Maple, right upstairs over one of the buildings on the square.

WILLIAMS: Any other neighbors that particularly stand out from Delaware Street?

SAPPER: Most of them had moved. The ones when we were really growing up, little kids, was Mrs. Sawyer that lived on down. She had an old electric car. [chuckling] We used to, when we were little kids, she couldn't make it up Farmer Street, so we'd go down there and walk down the hill and get in that old car, and we'd eventually get home. She guided it with a stick, and it was more fun. And she looked like the kind that should be driving it. [chuckling]

WILLIAMS: That's the Sawyer-Jennings home?

SAPPER: Jennings? Yes. Well, Mrs. Jennings, sure. She was a customer of ours. A nice lady. Very nice.

WILLIAMS: Did you know the Burruses very well?

SAPPER: Sure. Helen Burrus was our fifth-grade schoolteacher. And of course her dad, Oloney was an attorney. Also sons Rufus and Harvey—both attorneys—and two other daughters, Sybil and Ann.

WILLIAMS: Rufus did you know?

SAPPER: Yes, sure did.

WILLIAMS: Was Farmer really the place to go in the wintertime?

SAPPER: Well, they used to close that off. The city would take a barrel and then barricade it. And you could take your sleds, and if you started at Delaware and got a good start, you'd go clear up Pleasant and come back the same way. [chuckling] Yeah, and it was nice. We had more snow, I think, back then.

WILLIAMS: Living on Delaware, did you know people over on Pleasant much or, say, on Union?

SAPPER: No, maybe some on Union, but that was usually later on, you know.

WILLIAMS: So most of the people you would have known were right there on Delaware.

SAPPER: Right.

WILLIAMS: Did you have any contact with people on Maple Street down that far?

SAPPER: No, not really.

WILLIAMS: Well, I think I've about ran out of questions. How about you?

SCOTT STONE: I haven't got anything to ask.

WILLIAMS: Okay. Well, if not, I thank you very much.

SAPPER: You're welcome.

WILLIAMS: And thank you for letting us come to your house.

END OF INTERVIEW

APPENDIX

1. Scrapbook items representing childhood activities of Virginia and Elizabeth Bush with Margaret Truman during the 1930s. Courtesy of Elizabeth Bush Sapper.
2. Photo of Bess W. Truman with the limited edition plate of Harry S Truman inside Sapper's Gift store, Independence. *The Kansas City Star*, 1971.