

Oral History Interview
with
ANTOINETTE F. STEWART

Wife (1946-77) of Martin L. Friedman, Special. Assistant in the White House, 1950-53. Mrs. Stewart, an attorney, has served in the office of Senator Ernest Gruening (Alaska), 1959-69, and later in the General Accounting Office, and in the Department of Energy.

Washington, D.C.
July 22, 1980
by James R. Fuchs, Harry S. Truman Library

The Harry S. Truman Library
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FUCHS: I think we might just start out by asking you to give a little of your personal background, to put things in time and place context a little better for researchers. I don't know whether you want to say when you were born, but you might want to say where you were born.

STEWART: I don't mind.

FUCHS: Okay. When and where you were born and something about your education and how you came to Washington.

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STEWART: I don't mind a bit. I was born in Mexico City, July 8, 1922. My father was a Presbyterian missionary in Mexico. We lived in various places in Mexico and my parents returned about 1924. I immigrated to the United States in 1924 as a baby. At that time the Mexicans really did not want Protestant missionaries there. And so we came back and lived variously in West Virginia, South Carolina, North Carolina, Florida. My parents were from North Carolina; they were North Carolinian Presbyterians. Later, when I married Marty, who was Jewish, we all got along together very well.

FUCHS: What year was that?

STEWART: We were married in 1946.

FUCHS: You met in Washington then?

STEWART: Yes, we met in 1942 when I came up for a Government job. I just took a Civil Service examination during my senior year at college and was recruited by the War Department.

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FUCHS: Where did you go to college?

STEWART: Florida State University. I took a Civil Service examination, and I met Marty, and for all he was Jewish and my family were Presbyterians, we all really were a very happy family. I have no sad thoughts about it, really.

FUCHS: Your parents didn't think anything about it either?

STEWART: Well, they didn't like it, they really didn't like it, and neither did his family; but, nevertheless, it worked out just fine.

FUCHS: Let's see now, he was in the Department of Defense at that time?

STEWART: At that time it was the War Department. He, at a very young age, had a very good job in those days. He was an Assistant Director of Civilian Personnel, in the Department of the Army -- well, then it was the War Department. So we were married in 1946 and were married for 31 years until he died in 1977.

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We saw President Truman and Mrs. Truman quite often. During and after the war was over he became a very good friend of General Dawson, Donald Dawson.

FUCHS: Well, he was working for Dawson...

STEWART: At the White House.

FUCHS: But before that when Dawson was in the Air Force wasn't Mr. Friedman connected with him then?

STEWART: They worked together, yes.

FUCHS: Was all his career in the Army spent in Washington? He went into the Army, didn't he?

STEWART: He was drafted into the Army, later transferring to the Army Air Corps, Air Transport Command. As a matter of fact, he had a very interesting Army career, but not entirely in Washington. One of his first duty stations was in New York City on Wall Street. His mother, who lived in Jersey City, would never put a service star in her window, because she didn't think he was really in the Army. He just commuted from home in Jersey City to New York during that period.

FUCHS: She didn't acknowledge that he was in the Army.

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STEWART: It was a family joke that she didn't consider that Marty was in the Army, since he actually lived at home during that rather brief period. Later he was stationed in Montgomery, Alabama with the Army Air Force Command, It was in the Air Force that he met Donald Dawson and then became good friends, After the war Donald went to the White House with President Truman and he wanted Marty to come along with him, and he did. And it was a very interesting, exciting sort of time, really.

FUCHS: Where were you working at that time?

STEWART: Well, the White House years I call my debutante period, because for much of the time I wasn't working. We were just newly married and so I felt, you know, like newlyweds, that we would have children. Well, I wasn't able to. I simply wasn't able to have children; and so we never had any, but we frankly had a very good time. Later Marty suggested I really ought to go to law school. This was after he went to law school. He went to law school first and he thought I ought to go, and so I did, and I'm very glad I did.

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FUCHS: Did you go to George Washington?

STEWART: GW, George Washington University Law School. In any event, after I had passed the bar, here in the District of Columbia, I decided to be a lawyer, too. I worked for ten years for Senator [Ernest] Gruening of Alaska.

FUCHS: That would have been from about...

STEWART: From 1959 to 1969. That was the most exciting job I ever had.

FUCHS: What was the first job you had in the Government when you first came here?

STEWART: When I first came here I worked in civilian personnel, in personnel classification, classifying civilian jobs.

FUCHS: What department was this? Was this Civil Service?

STEWART: The War Department. That was where I met Marty. It was much later on I went to work for Senator Gruening after he was elected.

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FUCHS: This was in '59 you say, this was after the Truman period.

STEWART: Right.

FUCHS: So you didn't work while your husband was in the White House?

STEWART: I did work for the United Nations Relief and Refugee Administration and then the International Refugee Organization until some time in 1950. Because Marty was out of a job on the 20th of January, 1953, and somebody had to make a living, I worked briefly at the Navy Department while he was deciding what he was going to do. He had his law degree, he was a member of the bar, and he decided to go with Oscar Chapman, the former Secretary of Interior. He worked with the Chapman firm, soon becoming a partner, up until -- I'm sorry, I can't remember the exact date. But he was mainly with the Chapman firm. Meanwhile I went to Law School, worked at the Senate and then at the General Accounting Office and most lately at the Department of Energy.

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FUCHS: This was all as a lawyer in those three departments?

STEWART: Yes. The most interesting part was working for Senator Gruening.

FUCHS: What were your impressions of Donald Dawson?

STEWART: He's a very good friend, a very good friend.

FUCHS: We call him General Dawson, I believe.

STEWART: Yes. He stayed in the Reserve Corps, in the military, and became a Reserve Major General. I haven't seen him recently, frankly, because we've both been traveling quite a lot. I have known all three of his wives.

FUCHS: Let's see, he was married to...

STEWART: First, to Alva A. Dawson, which ended in divorce. Then, to Ilona Massey, who died several years ago, and he is now married to Mrs. Virginia Dawson, a very lovely, lovely woman. So many things have happened, our paths have somewhat separated. I

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regret it, I really do. The Dawsons travel quite a lot, as we do; we've (Ward Stewart and I) traveled for the last year.

FUCHS: It sounds wonderful.

STEWART: It is. Yes, it is. We're lucky. We're lucky. But as to Donald Dawson I'm very fond of him. You know, he was the first person at the hospital at the time Marty died. The morning after Marty became very sick Donald was there, and he kept coming back.

FUCHS: He hadn't had any prior illness?

STEWART: Marty had had a lot of illness; but Donald would always come over to see him. He was always there, and still would be if I needed anything from him, which I don't, happily; but if I did there would be no questions.

FUCHS: In other words, he was completely a good friend and he was a competent public servant? Perhaps you can say something about the charges and

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insinuations about him?

STEWART: I would say that the most troublesome thing that happened was that Senator Fulbright published a report about Donald Dawson and the RFC before the Senator ever held hearings on the issues he raised, and that wasn't fair.

FUCHS: I think President Truman remarked about this, didn't he, that it was the wrong way to do something?

STEWART: I don't recall the President's remarks. I remember how all of a sudden we woke up and saw a story in the *Washington Post* about a number of people who were supposed to be connected with some vague allegations of corruption, although there hadn't been any hearings at all.

At that time I was not working so I was sent up to the Hill to hear what went on at the hearings subsequently held by the Senate Banking and Finance Committee. I listened, and the first day I was

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there, the main thing I worried about was that I didn't have a decent dress to wear. I just felt awful. I didn't have a good coat and it was raining; it was miserable. I went up there and I started hearing Senator Fulbright and the other Senators asking questions. I've forgotten who was testifying the first day. I don't remember who testified, but I called Marty at the White House and said, "Look, you're in trouble."

He said, "Well, you better come down and tell us about it."

I was so embarrassed by the way I looked, I hated to go. Anyway, I did go, and I found Marty and Donald and Bill Boyle, who was director of the Democratic National Committee. They were walking around drinking coffee and worrying, like something was really wrong. So, then they began to decide what they were going to do.

As for Marty, I would say his main capacity in those hearings was, in effect, defense counsel behind the scenes. He cross-examined Donald Dawson the worst way possible, asking him every question

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that could possibly come up in the hearings, so that he wouldn't be surprised. He went over the records; he worked until 4 and 5 o'clock in the morning. And Donald came through like cream. In the end it was all right.

FUCHS: How many hearings did you go to?

STEWART: Every day, I went every day.

FUCHS: Who proposed that you go up there?

STEWART: Well, I think Marty did, because the Senators wouldn't know me. Obviously nobody from the White House could go, because they'd be recognized. So I went every day.

FUCHS: Who would have okayed that? Would that have been Donald Dawson and the President, or who would have said, "Well, let's do send her?"

STEWART: Well, I guess Marty did. Of course, any citizen can go to hearings.

FUCHS: But you were there in kind of a pseudo official

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capacity then?

STEWART: The Senators didn't know that. I would describe my presence as an informal arrangement, having no official status at all.

FUCHS: They didn't know that. That was the idea.

STEWART: Years later when I worked up on the Hill, Senator Fulbright used to see me and he would look at me as though "I must know you like a distant cousin from somewhere," because he had seen me there every single day.

And I remember well the ranking minority member on that committee, Senator Capehart. One day he asked somebody who was testifying, "Do you have a White House pass?"

And the man said, "Yes, I do."

And he said, "You know, I'd like to know what it looks like."

FUCHS: That was important, wasn't it?

STEWART: It didn't mean a thing in the whole scope of

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the investigation. It seemed to be important to Senator Capehart.

FUCHS: You know what Mr. Truman called Fulbright?

STEWART: Yes, I know what he called Mr. Fulbright. "Half bright?"

FUCHS: Well, yes, he called him that, but he also called him an overeducated son of a bitch, or something like that.

STEWART: He did. He did, indeed.

FUCHS: Well, was there any substance, that you can think of, to any of these charges where you think there may have been some malfeasance?"

STEWART: Well, apparently there was in the case of one person.

FUCHS: Who was this?

STEWART: There was a Merle...

FUCHS: Merle Young

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STEWART: No, I didn't. I didn't know him.

FUCHS: His wife was Loretta -- I believe she worked for, did she work for Donald Dawson or for Steelman?

STEWART: I don't know. I really don't know; I didn't know either one of them. But I think the funniest story about the whole matter was one of the accusations that Loretta Young had gotten a mink coat from Gunther Jaeckel's in New York, at wholesale price. And so Senator Fulbright summoned the manager of Gunther Jaeckel's to the hearings; and he asked for the sales check, and the manager of Gunther Jaeckel's was able to produce it -- that wasn't any problem -- and Senator Fulbright in all his majesty said, "Well, you mean if I went to buy a mink coat for my wife, at this price, you would charge me \$5,000 more?" And the manager of Gunther Jaeckel's said, "Oh, no;" he said, "We would do the same for you. Nobody in New York buys a fur coat at retail price. You always buy them wholesale."

FUCHS: That was supposed to have been a \$9,500 fur coat

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or something; I don't know whether that was wholesale or retail.

STEWART: Oh, I don't know the exact price. I've forgotten. But anyway, the manager from Gunther Jaeckel's said, "Nobody ever buys a fur coat at retail," which is true; still is true in New York.

FUCHS: Now, General Vaughan, I imagine you've met him.

STEWART: Oh, yes.

FUCHS: Some of the charges of course, of the so-called Truman scandals, were related to him. I know some of those were as early as '46 and '47, which was before your husband was in the White House, but I wonder if you have some observations about some of those things -- the deep freeze, the five percenters; John Maragon, of course, was one that was in the papers a lot.

STEWART: Well, my favorite story about the Vaughan freezer was an exchange at a Presbyterian ladies luncheon. Somebody turned to Mrs. Vaughan -- in the

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middle of all the publicity about it -- and asked, "Do you have a deep freeze, Mrs. Vaughan?" And she said, "Doesn't everybody in the world know I have a deep freeze?" But that was before some reform groups became, I believe, overly sanctified about these things.

FUCHS: Do you recall your husband remarking about some of these things? Did he take it with humor, or did it ire him up? How did he feel about these charges? He knew the truth, of course,

STEWART: He told me very little, on purpose, because I said, "I don't want to know. I really do not want to know." And the things that he did tell me, I say I put in a "forgettery," because I literally could forget.

FUCHS: Did you talk much about his activities in the White House though, generally?

STEWART: Oh, sure. Oh. sure. Most of them were a lot of fun. Most of them he enjoyed very much, and, as I say, as to any of the so-called scandals, I

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never knew anything about it. Or if I did I, forgot.

FUCHS: I know your husband in his interview said that he was, "sort of an unofficial defense counsel," for people on the White House staff who were being accused of various things by congressional committees, especially McCarthy's committee.

STEWART: That's true.

FUCHS: You think that's a fair statement? Do you remember that?

STEWART: Yes.

FUCHS: You remember that? You've already indicated that he cross-examined Donald Dawson so he would not be surprised by anything.

Did you know anything about the so-called charges against Bill Boyle? The Hooey Committee I believe accused him of...

STEWART: No, I don't, don't remember a thing. I really don't.

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FUCHS: And then there was, of course, Steelman. I believe there was some minor talk about John Steelman even at one time.

STEWART: I don't remember a thing about that. I really don't.

FUCHS: Did he ever talk about the congressional liaison man, I believe it was Maylon, who was White House liaison to the White House, and Joe Feeney, who was to the Senate? And then later on it was John Carroll, who later was a Senator.

STEWART: The only one I knew was Feeney, and not well, not well at all. The others I didn't know.

FUCHS: I guess, according to what I've read in your husband's interview and other places, the liaison between the White House and the Congress wasn't as formalized as it was in later President's administrations, but...

STEWART: Yes, that was true.

FUCHS: But they did have this Maylon, I believe it was

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General Maylon, and then Joe Feeney.

STEWART: I don't remember General Maylon at all.

FUCHS: Not many people do know that name.

How about the Little Cabinet, which they formed -- do you have any knowledge of that -- to select qualified personnel, especially late in the Administration? I think maybe this was formed around '50; you know there was Zuckert and Davidson, the Assistant Secretary of the Interior, and...

STEWART: Jebby Davidson?

FUCHS: Was it Davidson? I'm trying to think. The Little Cabinet, Zuckert, who was then the Assistant Secretary of the Air Force; later on -- no, H. Graham Morison, I'm sorry. Did you know him?

STEWART: Oh, yes. Oh yes.

FUCHS: The Little Cabinet had Zuckert and Morison, and Phil Kaiser, Assistant Secretary, and Humelsine from State; and these people they got together to help select qualified personnel.

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STEWART: Yes. I remember -- I could not be absolutely correct in my recollection -- but Marty was very much involved in a project which the President wanted which was to try to select the very best. This was like Jimmy Carter says, "Why not the best?" And they combed through all the records they could find of universities, of businesses, of the Government, everywhere, to find the very best people they could to run the Government departments.

FUCHS: For the Presidential appointments.

STEWART: For Presidential appointments. Because you know there were then about 500 Presidential appointments every year.

FUCHS: I never did know the figure; that's interesting.

STEWART: Well, it's certainly many more now.

FUCHS: There has been such a great increase in Cabinet departments.

STEWART: There were at least 500 people to be appointed

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by President Truman and Marty was one of the people who worked on trying to select these.

FUCHS: Well, the President would certainly need something like that, because he couldn't go out...

STEWART: Well, no other President has that I know of. I don't know of another one who has systematically undertaken a serious search for the best people available for appointments.

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