

Oral History Interview
with
A. J. STEPHENS

Kansas City entrepreneur and friend of Harry S. Truman since the early twenties.

Paradise Valley, Arizona
January 6, 1966
by James R. Fuchs, Harry S. Truman Library

The Harry S. Truman Library
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FUCHS: Mr. Stephens, would you give me a little background of your life?

STEPHENS: I'll be pleased to do so. I was born in Versailles, Missouri, and lived there as an infant for three or four years, and then my family moved to Bunceton, Missouri, where we resided for about ten years. My father was operating a drugstore in Versailles, and then Bunceton and then moved to Sedalia. I left home when I was about twelve years old and went to Kansas City where I lived with an uncle for a while named Wyan Nelson, of the Nelson Grain Company. I arrived in Kansas City in 1903.

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Later my parents moved to Independence, Missouri -- about 1906. They purchased land and a home at 900 South Liberty, and I lived with my parents for a number of years, working in Kansas City and commuting between Kansas City and Independence, mostly by the Missouri

Pacific Railroad. I worked for the Missouri Pacific in Kansas City in the roundhouse in the east bottoms. I used to ride the train out to Independence, every evening and morning.

My acquaintance with Mr. Truman dates back about that time. As I recollect, he was a county surveyor; I do not know the exact dates.

FUCHS: He was a road overseer around 1914, for a short time. His father had been road overseer and then when he died he took the job, but he was living on the farm at that time.

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STEPHENS: Didn't he become county surveyor...

FUCHS: He became county judge in 1922.

STEPHENS: He became county judge in 1922, and I became acquainted with him about that time. In fact, I had some contacts with the county judges over different various matters.

FUCHS: Were you engaged in some other business at that time?

STEPHENS: I became engaged in the tire business and I used to call on the county judges, in fact sold them tires. I recall one nice visit I had with Mr. Truman after the judges had been on duty; and he sat on the edge of his desk, on the opposite side of his chair and sat with his legs dangling from the desk, and joked with me over various things in a general conversation. We became great friends. I

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met him many times after that and, in fact, the girl I married went to school with Mrs. Truman in Independence.

FUCHS: Who was that?

STEPHENS: Her name was Mary Hutchison, and she...

MRS. STEPHENS: She was a niece of the famous Missouri artist.

STEPHENS: She was a great-niece of George Caleb Bingham, the artist. Her mother was Elizabeth Hutchison, who was a niece of Mr. Bingham.

FUCHS: What year did you marry her?

STEPHENS: I married her in 1907 in Independence, Missouri. The Hutchison family was connected with the Baptist Church, in which Mr. Hutchison was an elder; the same church Mr. Truman was a

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member of.

Later on, when Mr. Truman became involved in public positions, I had occasion to meet him many, many times, and found him to be one of the most agreeable, most wonderful personality of any man I've ever known in my life. He always was friendly with me. I never asked a favor of him in my life, but he was always cooperative and would give me advice. Later in life, during World War II, I had a factory and Mr. Truman was then Senator. I was anxious to get into war work as I was classified 4F for the draft and I desired to turn my factory over to Government work. Mr. Truman wrote a personal letter to Andrew Higgins of the Higgins Shipbuilding Company in New Orleans about me, and gave me a big boost to Mr. Higgins, and I was given a most courteous reception because of that introduction which later resulted in some

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work for my factory.

FUCHS: Where was this factory?

STEPHENS: My factory was located in Kansas City, Missouri, at 14th and Chestnut.

FUCHS: What did you build there?

STEPHENS: I built parts -- well, I forget the exact word, but I got into Government work and employed several hundred people manufacturing products for the Government. I recall putting in about a hundred sewing machines and making duffel bags, and similar things that were put through on sewing machines; and I put in my woodwork department, many orders, probably running into millions of dollars, making things for the Commonwealth Aircraft Company and Pratt and Whitney and similar concerns, which took my entire output. Those were some of the things

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that resulted from Mr. Truman's cooperation and assistance when he was in Washington.

FUCHS: Did you first meet him, though, in court?

STEPHENS: I first met him when he was county judge, and I got very well-acquainted with him, and I do not recall the exact details of what brought us together, but it was something pertaining to real estate and zoning and similar things at that time.

FUCHS: Were you involved in any of his early campaigns for judge?

STEPHENS: I became involved because I was always a Democrat; I was a relative of Governor Lon B. Stephens of the State of Missouri., who was one of the strongest Democrats and I always followed that particular faction.

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FUCHS: Were you a "Goat?"

STEPHENS: I was a Shannon Democrat. Later I leased an apartment from Joe Shannon and lived under the same roof with Joseph Shannon, a "Rabbit" Democrat, for seven years. Mr. Shannon also spoke to me, wanting me to run for city councilman, and my only reason for declining was that I had too much to do in my work. But Mr. Truman, after he became a Senator, often talked to me and cooperated, and I became a very close worker in the Democratic organization; and the Democratic county committeeman, the chairman of Jackson County, James B. Nourse, appointed me and Roger Sermon, who was then Mayor of Independence, Missouri, to have charge of a big meeting in the Mormon Temple in Independence, and we worked hard and got a big turnout to honor Mr. Truman at that time.

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FUCHS: Was this when he was President?

STEPHENS: No, that was when he was Senator before he became Vice President. Later when he became Vice President, I was often called in to cooperate and help. One time, I don't recall the exact date, but they had a big parade and gathering in Independence, and I was co-chairman with Roger Sermon on that event. I recall "Champ" Clark was the main speaker at the meeting we held. We had a big parade. We all met at Mayor Sermon's office in the City Hall, and I recall such outstanding people there as "Champ" Clark, as well as Mr. Truman, Roger Sermon, Bill Sermon, Alvin Hatten, Judge Ridge, and many, many others at that time.

FUCHS: Did you ever hear Mr. Truman speak about "Champ" Clark? This was Bennett, the younger Clark.

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STEPHENS: Yes, this was Bennett "Champ" Clark.

Yes, Mr. Truman was very fond of him at that time, I'm sure. He was a great man on the platform and could make a terrific speech. Mr. Truman seemed to admire him immensely and everybody that met Mr. Clark seemed to have the impression that he was one of the greatest orators of the time.

But time went on, and when Mr. Truman became President I became better acquainted with many of his friends there like Eddie Jacobson, Ted Marks, and Tom Evans.

FUCHS: You met most of these people after he was President?

STEPHENS: I met most of these people after he was President, and worked with them in anything they undertook. I recall many, many little incidents, for instance, at the Harpie Club, one time at Roger Sermon's house, the room was

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full of Mr. Truman's friends, including Judge Ridge, and Eddie Jacobson, and all these men I mentioned, some twenty or twenty-five men -- Eddie Hinde, Alvin Hatten. I would say about thirty people were there. Everybody was standing up. President Truman said to Judge Ridge, "Why don't you boys sit down?"

Judge Ridge said, "Mr. President, none of us will sit down until our President sits down first."

FUCHS: Where was this meeting held?

STEPHENS: In Roger Sermon's residence; it was a stag party, more or less.

FUCHS: But this was mostly members of the Harpie Club?

STEPHENS: Well, the Harpie Club was represented there and many of his friends like myself.

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But I attended many meetings out there of that nature, other than the Harpie Club. Now I mention the Harpie Club, because I have attended many meetings of the Harpie Club. My brother-in-law, John D. Hutchison, now deceased, was a member of the Harpie Club, along with Mize Peters and all the Independence group, and they would meet at various times and play cards. I was invited to play poker with them one evening, and Mr. Truman was way ahead. He had a big pile of chips and a Secret Service man tapped him on the shoulder and said, "Mr. President, it's time to leave."

The President jumped up hastily and said, "Good-bye boys," and shot out the door, leaving all those chips, which were cashable for money. I wonder to this day who got the money. I won thirty-five dollars that evening.

FUCHS: Do you remember where this was?

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STEPHENS: That particular evening was at Roger Sermon's residence. But we met in many different places.

During my acquaintance with Mr. Truman while he was President, I wrote to *Life* magazine and asked them if it would be possible to obtain original photographs of the many scenes and pictures that they had had of Mr. Truman while he was in office, that I wished to use them in the Kansas City Museum, of which I was on the Board of Governors. They came back and said they would be glad to furnish these pictures, and would prepare them. They later sent at least ten heavy wood cabinets full of big 15 by 18 and 9 by 12 actual photographs of scenes of Mr. Truman in different positions. I presented these to the Kansas City Museum and they had them on display for many years, in the original frames, and what has become of

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them I do not know; but I heard they're still stored in the archives of the Kansas City Museum. This was one of the: outstanding displays they ever had.

Also, I visited the Truman farm at Grandview and got ahold of Vivian Truman, Mr. Truman's close brother, and asked him if he would supply me with some of the old logs, lumber and wood off of the Truman farm for the purpose of having a wishing well for the Kansas City Museum.

Mr. Vivian Truman agreed to do this and supplied me with the timber; and I had my cabinetmen build a wishing well in my factory which was put at the front entrance of the Kansas City Museum and became a typical wishing well where one drops a coin and makes wishes. And they had a card on there stating that this was from President Truman's farm. That well took in thousands of coins, as I

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recollect, which went into the Museum funds.

FUCHS: Is that still there?

STEPHENS: I understand that old wishing well has been moved into the attic and archives of the Museum; but it was a wonderful thing and it really worked wonders as a money raiser.

Some of the incidents that I recall while Mr. Truman was President, was this: He had a very, very close friend who was United States Marshal located in the Federal Courthouse in Kansas City at Eighth and Grand by the name of Fred Canfil. One time Mr. Canfil called me from Washington and he said, "A. J., I've been with the President all morning and one of the requests he made was to find out if you would accept a position as Industrial Chairman," or some similar title, "to be located in Washington?"

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MRS. STEPHENS: Industrial Relations Director.

STEPHENS: Director of Industrial Relations as I recollect. He said it would carry a lucrative salary and expenses, but I would have to be located in Washington, I said, "Fred, it would be impossible for me to leave my business here. It's a one man business, and I'll have to turn it down; I just couldn't accept it."

Fred was a little bit hurt because he thought I would do anything that he asked me to or Truman requested, but I could not conscientiously drop my business management and go to Washington.

However, in later years, President Truman appointed me as one of the governors of the Reconstruction Finance Corporation in Kansas City, where I served under David Powell. I was on that several years, which was a complimentary position -- there was no compensation -- but I considered it a great honor to have Mr. Truman appoint me to it.

He often wanted to do something for me, apparently, but I wanted no job or favors, but I wanted to help him any way I could.

One little incident: When he was running for office, Eddie Jacobson, his close friend, who was also a very close friend of mine, called me and said, "A. J., the Chief is in trouble." He always called Mr. Truman the Chief when he talked to me. Did you know that?

FUCHS: I know that a lot of them call him the Chief.

STEPHENS: He said, "He has a train leased," and I believe he said it was the Union Pacific -- "he has a train leased and they're arriving tomorrow morning in Omaha and they owe \$6,000!"

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FUCHS: This would have been what year, now?

STEPHENS: When he was running against Dewey.

FUCHS: Yes, 1948.

STEPHENS: He said, "It looks like he has lost and here's a chance to show whether you are a real friend or not." He said, "Do you have any cash?"

I said, "You can have every dollar I can scrape up." The banks were closed, but I found that I could scrape up by borrowing money from my brother and my secretary -- about two hundred dollars in cash. I called Eddie back and said, "About all the money I can scrape together is two hundred dollars."

He said, "I'll be right out." And he got the two hundred. He said, "My brother and other friends, mostly Jewish, have put up the balance of the money and I have the six

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thousand dollars. I'm going up there tonight and meet the Chief tomorrow morning." Later he told me that Mr. Truman was very happy about it; in fact, I had a note from him thanking me for my kindness and cooperation; but at the time it looked like he had lost.

FUCHS: Do you remember who some of the other persons were that contributed to the train?

STEPHENS: I do not know who they were, except the brother of Eddie Jacobson, A. D., contributed as much as he could get together, which I think was a very considerable amount.

FUCHS: Was Tom Evans involved in that, do you remember?

STEPHENS: Tom Evans often called me for money for other things, but I don't know whether he was involved in this particular one or not;

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but Tom has called me many times, and I always helped him out. Mr. Truman appreciated these things and never forgot favors. He was a real friend and that was the reason I helped him, and I felt at that time that he was the loser, but I was for him as a friend just the same. When they announced that he had won -- I think he spent the night in Excelsior Springs -- he came over early to the Muehlebach Hotel, and I was one, with some fifty others, that met him in the penthouse at the Muehlebach, and it was one of the most joyous occasions of my life, because of the big smile and handshake that Mr. Truman gave me that morning.

FUCHS: Was Vic Messall there, do you know? Do you know Vic?

STEPHENS: Vic who?

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FUCHS: Vic Messall, who served as his secretary when he was Senator?

STEPHENS: Well, I won't say...I don't recall all the men that were there but I do recall many from his war days. It seems like most of them were his war buddies. But that was one of the most joyous occasions of my lifetime, to be present when he was announced President after the statement came over the wires from the great radio commentators at that time that Dewey had won. I was about as happy as Mr. Truman.

FUCHS: I guess a lot of people were.

STEPHENS: I think he's one of the most lovable men that ever lived -- one of the biggest-hearted fellows.

FUCHS: I believe you went to the inauguration then,

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didn't you?

STEPHENS: Oh, yes, I went to the inauguration in a special car with Eddie Jacobson, A. D. Jacobson, Jim Lillis...

FUCHS: Who was he?

STEPHENS: He was the owner of the Lillis building and a nephew of Bishop Lillis...he's dead now.

FUCHS: Was he a good friend of Mr. Truman's?

STEPHENS: Very close, Catholic friend. In this special car...

FUCHS: This was a railroad car?

STEPHENS: A railroad car -- a special Pullman -- there were about thirty or forty people. There were Catholics, Jews, and Gentiles, and we were a very happy group. I have kept all these special

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invitations and things of that kind.

Minnie Connell who is now working for Alvin Hatten at the courthouse, was one of those who attended the inauguration. You ought to talk to her. I have a photograph of Minnie with a few

others taken at a dinner given for Mr. Truman that night. The place was packed for the dinner at the inauguration and Mr. Truman and Mrs. Truman and Margaret and Alben Barkley and all the dignitaries were at the head table. I went up and shook hands with the President and Mrs. Truman and he personally thanked me for all I'd done for him at that time.

FUCHS: How did these special cars get organized?

STEPHENS: I think that car was sponsored by Eddie Jacobson, and I think there were quite a few other cars; and a lot of people went back there

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by plane, such as Louie McGee and people like that -- a lot of them flew back. I've been back to Washington many times since that and I always was received with the greatest type of warm reception.

Later on, I was county chairman of the Jackson County Infantile Paralysis and they arranged a national broadcast with Shirley Temple and her husband, John Agar; so Mrs. Truman and Margaret were there and they invited us over to the White House to be present for this national broadcast over the Nation. Mrs. Truman stood by me and talked to me personally during the entire time I was there in spite of the fact that there were probably sixty people in that room. Mrs. Truman was so glad to see somebody from Independence.

FUCHS: You attended most of the inaugural events, then?

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STEPHENS: Oh, yes, I attended all of them. Eddie Jacobson, of course, threw some private parties and Nat Milgram of the Milgram stores who is since deceased -- and so is Eddie Jacobson -- but Nat was a great believer in Mr. Truman, and he was present, and he and I spent much time together in Washington.

FUCHS: Do you recall any anecdotes concerning Eddie Jacobson and Mr. Truman; anything that he said about him in the early days?

STEPHENS: Eddie used to talk to me quite a bit about how he loved Mr. Truman and what a wonderful pal and companion and business associate and square-shooter that Mr. Truman was. Eddie said that they went broke in the haberdashery business but that Mr. Truman paid all the loss back in later life, I mean, he and Mr. Truman paid back all the losses that they had and no

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one lost a cent.

An incident that might be worthy of telling you, Jim: The Truman farm at Grandview some 200 or 300 acres, was quite a topic about the time that Mr. Truman was Vice President. He had borrowed from the County School Fund some \$35,000 on that farm. Mr. Truman was a man who could have gone to any union or big company or outstanding power, and they would have advanced him the money to have paid that off, but he wouldn't do it. He was so square that he

was bullheaded. No one could ever give Mr. Truman a dime, not a red penny for a favor. If he thought you were right, he'd stay with you; if he thought you were wrong, he'd tell you so and he'd still love you. This farm -- I doubt if Mr. Truman or anyone else ever heard of what I'm going to tell you now -- was indebted to the county school fund for \$35,000. A man

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by the name of Leonard C. Miller, who worked under a committee headed by Carleton Benton -- Mr. Carleton Benton was chairman of the land trust committee with two other men...

MRS. STEPHENS: And my father's business partner...

STEPHENS: ...that's right...hired Leonard C. Miller as secretary. Miller called me one day and said, "A. J., I can get you the Truman farm by you taking over this note, a first mortgage, for \$35,000 and I can get the court to waive the interest which has been accumulating for several years." He said, "It's a good buy. If you will put up a deposit, a cash deposit, I will arrange to sell you this property and get it approved by the county judge of the county court." And I thought a lot of Miller and he said, "You can't lose because it will bring it." So I went down and put up a five hundred

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dollar deposit on that farm, and signed the papers.

FUCHS: What year would this have been?

STEPHENS: I think Truman was Vice President at the time, and I cannot recall the exact year. He said Mr. Truman can't pay it and the court is going to foreclose, and this will save the day. So I purchased the farm and put up a \$500 deposit and it was approved. And while waiting for the legal procedures, such as drawing up the papers and making arrangements to put up the money and take it over, I, got a call from Miller later and he said, "Some of Mr. Truman's friends want to put up this money for him and let him keep it."

I said, "What friends?"

He said, "I don't know, but Charles Curry and Tom Evans and some Jewish fellows are

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back of the group." Lou Holland was one of them.

He said, "I think it would be a good gesture on your part, if they'll put up the money, to let Mr. Truman have the farm back."

I said, "All right, let me have it back."

He said, "I will refund your \$500," which he did.

So, I. gave up the farm that I had purchased through the land trust and, in fact, I hadn't taken title to it anyway, and I wasn't sure it was really worth \$35,000, at the time. But that actually happened, and I gave it up because of the fact that I heard that Mr. Truman was going to get it. These men put up the money and I understand the property sold later for two million dollars or so.

FUCHS: Yes, it was pretty valuable.

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STEPHENS: Anyway, that's some of the incidents that happened during my lifetime and some of the experiences I've had.

Eddie Jacobson worshipped Mr. Truman and the feeling was mutual. I don't believe there was a closer tie-up of men anywhere -- the true friendship of those two square-shooting men. Eddie Jacobson was the type of man that if he liked you he believed in you, and Mr. Truman was the same way. If he believed in you he liked you. They both had the ability to size people up and knew how to read character.

FUCHS: How did you become acquainted with Eddie?

STEPHENS: Eddie had me build fixtures for him. I made store fixtures for Eddie and he had a place at 39th and Main, and one day he called me up and ordered a complete set of fixtures for his brother to put in North Kansas City. And the

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conversation was like this:

"A. J., my brother, A. D. Jacobson, and myself are going to back up my brother, and you go over there and build his store fixtures for us and you give us the best price you can; I won't even ask you for a bid. You've got the business. We believe in you."

That was the kind of fellow he was. So he had me build them. I kept cost on them exactly and added a small brokerage fee to it, because that man believed in me and left it up to my honesty and squareness to give him a square deal which I gave him. He didn't even ask the price on that big order. That's the kind of fellow Eddie Jacobson was. His brother today, A. D. Jacobson, is one of my closest friends and spent a couple of weeks here in this residence. There's some presents in there that he gave me.

FUCHS: Had you been in their haberdashery back in 1922?

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MRS. STEPHENS: When you were thirty years old you were worth what, three million dollars?

STEPHENS: Well, now, you're saying that...

MRS. STEPHENS: No, but I mean you told me that when you were in the tire business...

STEPHENS: Yes, I had -- before Western Auto Supply and Sears and Roebuck and Montgomery Ward and some of these people started stores in the country I had as many as 256 associated stores myself before the Western ever started one.

FUCHS: What were they called?

STEPHENS: Stephens Associated Tire Stores. My scrapbooks in Kansas City show all that, has a list of all of them.

MRS. STEPHENS: I want to write a biography of him one of these days.

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FUCHS: Quite a career.

MRS. STEPHENS: You had an order from Montgomery Wards.

STEPHENS: Montgomery Wards gave me an order for a million dollars, and it was signed by R. E. Wood, who was then the merchandise department superintendent of Montgomery Ward and vice president. He is now chairman of the board of Sears and Roebuck -- General R. E. Wood, Robert E. Wood. I have that order and can show it to you in my files in Kansas City.

FUCHS: Whose tires did you handle?

STEPHENS: We manufactured our own tires.

FUCHS: Oh, you manufactured your own tires.

STEPHENS: That's why I went broke. Montgomery Ward gave me a million dollar order, and I

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went out and bought \$600,000 worth of rubber and fabric and the bottom dropped out of prices. Rubber went from 67¢ a pound to 8 cents a pound. Fabric -- your long staple cotton -- went from two dollars a pound to fifty cents and there was a \$450,000 loss, yet I had to pay for that stuff and Montgomery Wards cancelled the order. They didn't want a high priced tire. So, that's what broke me. I've had a lot of experiences. I'm trying to recall many things.

When my wife died in 1964, one of the most outstanding bouquets of flowers was from Mr. Truman. It had a card on there "Mr. and Mrs. Harry S. Truman." Nothing else.

MRS. STEPHENS: Bess Truman used to have her annual bridge club meetings at Basswood.

FUCHS: Oh, she did. The Tuesday Bridge Club.

STEPHENS: Oh, yes,. I have scores of letters from her.

MRS. STEPHENS: Well, you have this beautiful Navajo Indian

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rug which as part-time residents of Arizona we know are just so valuable, and it's under glass.

STEPHENS: I made a special glass cabinet 6 feet by 9 feet -- it's up at Basswood.

FUCHS: Maybe I saw that.

MRS. STEPHENS: You might have. There are pictures all around it, of her bridge club.

FUCHS: I think you did show me some of those up there.

STEPHENS: Have you been up there?

FUCHS: Yes, I was up there with the Field and Stream Sportsmen's Conservation Club.

STEPHENS: Did you belong to that?

FUCHS: Yes, I was one of the board members for a while.

STEPHENS: I started that.

FUCHS: Yes, I know; it's quite a deal. I still

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belong. I don't get over very often. They started to have their meetings down south of town.

STEPHENS: Are you still a board member?

FUCHS: No, I asked them to take me off because I just had so much to do.

STEPHENS: They put me down as honorary director or something, just like the Ad Club. I helped build that up from 200 to 1500 members. They gave me a life membership in that.

FUCHS: I think you presented Mr. Truman with an honorary life membership one time.

STEPHENS: Yes, as the outstanding salesman of the world.

FUCHS: Because of the campaign.

STEPHENS: Yes.

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FUCHS: When did you meet Tom Evans?

STEPHENS: Well, Tom used to have a drugstore at 22nd and Prospect, and as a youngster I used to go in there and trade with him. John Watkins had a drugstore at 15th and Prospect and Tom Evans at 22nd and Prospect, and I lived at 2030 Benton which was just a couple of blocks away. I used to get my prescriptions from Tom. A wonderful fellow, Tom Evans is. And I belong to many things with Tom. He belongs to the Ad Club and he belongs to the Merchandise Mart; he's a director in that and so was I; we sold it not long ago. And Bob Ingram was another director and Lou Holland...

FUCHS: Bob who?

STEPHENS: Bob Ingram.

MRS. STEPHENS: He's putting up that big building across

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from the Commerce Towers down on Main.

STEPHENS: He was a director in there. And then, Tom and I belong now to the Wine and Food Society and the Kansas City Club.

FUCHS: I've heard about that. Tom's told me about the fabulous wines and dinners...

STEPHENS: I belonged to it before he ever joined it.

FUCHS: About Lou Holland -- do you know how he became a friend of Mr. Truman's?

STEPHENS: First, do you want me to tell you about Lou Holland?

FUCHS: Yes.

STEPHENS: Lou Holland was the superintendent of the Teachenour-Bartberger Engraving Company and I had a little retail tire store in those

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days -- that was in 1908. Lou used to come and loaf at my place when he was superintendent, and he told me he wanted to quit his job and go in business for himself. In the meantime, Lou had a lot of patents; he had a lot of things he'd worked out with chemicals. One thing he worked out was a material to stop leaks in radiators; another was to increase the power in the motor car; and he worked up a formula with ether and oil of citronella and coal oil and another chemical that gave it an odor to disguise it, so you couldn't smell the coal oil. Today the patent that he had is called ethyl and is sold in all filling stations. In those days, he invented ethyl. We put it on the market, Lou and I. We formed a company called Holland and Stephens Manufacturing Company, and he and I were partners and we manufactured in his garage and shipped it all over the

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United States and called it Engine Tonic. It would actually take the carbon out of your car when mixed in with your gasoline -- and it gave you more power. That was the first beginning of what is now known as ethyl, to my recollection. But anyway, Lou and I sold lots of it but we never made anything big out of it.

FUCHS: Was he a graduate chemist?

STEPHENS: No, he was a self-made chemist. He read a lot on it, too. Lou later said he wanted to go into business for himself and he didn't have any money, so I suggested that he form a company which he did and called it the Holland Engraving Company. In 1916 he formed the Holland Engraving Company, and I was secretary of that company and he was president. We capitalized for \$20,000 and Lou took the controlling interest

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without putting a nickel in it because he didn't have any money, and he took stock for his experiences and designs and formulas and things like that. I only put a few hundred dollars in it but I took out thousands of dollars later, and sold my interest to him not many years before he died.

But Lou met Mr. Truman at Independence because Lou lived near Independence. Just when they met, I don't know, but they became fast friends, good friends. Lou Holland was a wonderful man and much like Mr. Truman -- both square-shooters and honest with each other and with the world -- and a clean-cut fellow, just like President Truman was. He was a great leader. He was later elected the president of the Chamber of Commerce in Kansas City and instrumental in bringing the airport, the air travel to Kansas City. He was a great friend

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of Lindbergh's. Today, as you know, there's a big monument to Lou Holland over at the airport, all due to his interest and vision. Now he got acquainted with President Truman and Mr. Truman, of course, appointed him to some office, as you know, in Washington -- Small Business Administration and they were fast and life-long friends, you might say. When they first got acquainted it was just because he lived out in Independence. Lou lived at Holland Station which was a suburb of Independence, you might say, Holland Station was a stop on the old electric line out there.

FUCHS: Was that named after the Holland family?

STEPHENS: Yes, after the Holland family. It doesn't exist now because they've dismantled the electric line. But Lou was a great citizen; he later moved to Lotawana where he died. But Mr.

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Truman thought a lot of him and appointed him to the Small Business Administration job and he did a, good job there.

FUCHS: Well, Mr. Truman, you know, sold memberships, it is said, in the Auto Club of Kansas City after he was defeated for eastern judge in 1924. Would Lou Holland have been associated with that auto club at that time?

STEPHENS: What kind of a club was that?

FUCHS: The Auto Club of Kansas City.

STEPHENS: Was it a political club?

FUCHS: It was like the forerunner of your AAA.

STEPHENS: Oh, Lou Holland was in it, not Mr. Truman.

FUCHS: Yes. Well, Mr. Truman is supposed to have sold memberships in that and I wondered if that was how they became acquainted.

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STEPHENS: No, I don't think so. I didn't know .that Mr. Truman sold any club memberships. I never knew that.

FUCHS: Then, in a year he came back and ran for presiding judge.

STEPHENS: I don't think Mr. Truman sold many. He was never much of a salesman, you know, in that respect. I don't think he went out pushing memberships to any great extent. He might have sold a few. But that was the thing that Lou Holland headed and became international president of it later on. I belong to that now. But that was the growth of the AAA-Triple A. I didn't know anything about Mr. Truman being connected with that.

FUCHS: You don't think that's how they became friends?

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STEPHENS: I can't recall anything about it.

FUCHS: Do you recall anything about the Community Savings and Loan Association?

STEPHENS: No, I don't recall that.

FUCHS: Mr. Truman was in that with Spencer Salisbury starting in around 1925-26, and Lou Holland was an officer in that also.

STEPHENS: I knew nothing about that, but I do know that he was a great friend of Spencer Salisbury.

FUCHS: Did you know Spencer Salisbury?

STEPHENS: Yes, Spencer Salisbury -- his brother-in-law was Kenneth Bostian.

FUCHS: Yes.

STEPHENS: Yes, that's right. I remember him. Still living.

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FUCHS: They had a falling out.

STEPHENS: Mr. Salisbury and Mr. Truman?

FUCHS: Yes.

What about Bill Boyle. Do you know anything about that relationship?

STEPHENS: Yes. I was chairman or co-chairman of a big dinner we threw for Bill Boyle in the Municipal Auditorium and there were probably 5,000 people at that dinner, and I have an autographed picture of Bill Boyle and one of the menus. I was one of the leaders in that event. Bill Boyle was a ,good friend of mine and a secretary, of course, to Mr. Truman, wasn't he?

FUCHS: Yes, for a while.

STEPHENS: And he was secretary, of course, to Otto Higgins at the Police Department in Kansas City.

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Bill Boyle was a fine fellow.

FUCHS: You don't know how he and Mr. Truman became...

STEPHENS: Through politics and through Pendergast and the connection there, they became close friends. Truman thought a lot of him.

FUCHS: What about Fred Canfil? How did he become so close to Mr. Truman?

STEPHENS: Fred Canfil was a man who worshipped President Truman. He worshipped him and was for him when he ran for the Senate. And Fred Canfil was just a close friend and a loyal friend all his life to Mr. Truman. Fred Canfil was a man who advised Mr. Truman in my estimation on many important things. Mr. Truman liked him and he was kind of a favorite with Mr. Truman. Fred Canfil's weakness was eating a pound of

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chocolates every day -- did you know that? He ate a pound box of candy every day.

FUCHS: Is that right?

STEPHENS: He just loved it.

FUCHS: That's a lot of candy. They say he was married but nobody ever seemed to see his wife.

STEPHENS: I didn't know he was ever married. She must have been hid out most of the time.

FUCHS: What about the 822 Club? Were you a member of that?

STEPHENS: No, but I've been there many times. Tom Evans was a member of that, and Ray Niles and the man who was in charge of the Reconstruction Finance Corporation -- one of the right hand men, from the First National Bank. I can't think of his name to save me --

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Abernathy, wasn't it?

FUCHS: I don't know.

STEPHENS: I don't remember, but Mr. Truman was invited to join. I think he was given an honorary membership as I understand it.

FUCHS: You didn't play poker there with Mr. Truman?

STEPHENS: I understand he was a champ at it, but I didn't know he belonged.

FUCHS: I think they gave him, a membership after he became Vice President.

STEPHENS: Tom Evans was a member and always inviting him there and that's where he loafed. They liked to go up there and relax. I've been there many times for lunch.

FUCHS: Did you have the impression that Mr. Truman was playing an active role in Jackson County

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politics when he was Senator?

STEPHENS: Well, he had to play an active role because that went along with the job.

FUCHS: Do you think he was pretty much of a leader in county politics?

STEPHENS: There's no question but what he was looked on as one of the great leaders in politics. Yes, he was a definite influence on the Democratic party and still is -- always was and always is -- always has been. Everybody respected his judgment. He put out a lot of advice to the politicians and told them how to win -- how to fight, how to go out and get the votes, how to work the precincts. Yes, he was a man of much experience and intelligence, and you knew the political game. He was a great factor in local politics.

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FUCHS: You earlier mentioned an incident when you were in Indiana?

STEPHENS: No, that was in Chicago.

FUCHS: That's right, Chicago.

STEPHENS: March 17, St. Patrick's Day, 1945. I met him at the Stevens Hotel, later it became the Conrad Hilton, largest hotel in Chicago. I met him there in his headquarters and he introduced me to Mayor Kelly. He was talking to a union meeting -- I forget which union -- but he was addressing them that evening. That's the day I got married at Aurora, Illinois and invited him to come over and be my best man. Invited him to attend the wedding -- said he couldn't do it. I have a photograph taken with him and Mayor Kelly and myself that day that was in the paper.

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FUCHS: He was too busy.

STEPHENS: Yes, he was booked up.

FUCHS: Well, unless you have some other anecdotes you can think of, I guess...

STEPHENS: No. I don't have anything that I can recall exactly. I've always been a friend of Mr. Truman and he's always treated me as a great friend. Mrs. Truman, of course, attended Basswood Springs with her bridge club year after year and always wrote me a nice letter and thanked me. I probably have a dozen letters from her. And Margaret Truman was often there. I have pictures up at the lake of Margaret -- this was before she was married -- and Mrs. Truman fishing with poles. She loves to fish.

FUCHS: Yes, I heard that. You mentioned a bar you constructed.

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STEPHENS: Yes, I made a bar shaped like a "T" for Truman. It was five feet wide at the top and narrowed down, and it had a lid that opened up like a desk; and when it opened up, here was a stainless steel bar and it had a glass top with illumination coming up through the glass and this is where the glasses sat. It had revolving doors down on this little narrow part which turned around, and on the back of the door would be the place for the beverages, and a man could stand in one position and reach the revolving door and get his beverages and bottles and reach up on the shelf on this illuminated side and get the glasses and here is this lid that opened down and made a bar like this. I have a duplicate of it in my home. If you ever want to see it or get a picture of it, her mother, my mother-in-law, Mrs. Baldwin, lives there and it's in the

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basement and you could take a picture if you ever want a photograph.

FUCHS: You don't know what happened to the one that...

STEPHENS: Well, all I remember is that we took it out to him and he said, "Let Mayor Sermon take care of it for me. My mother-in-law wouldn't let me take it to Washington or in the home here." (Mrs. Wallace) So, the last I know we left it over there. Whatever became of it I don't know. It cost me several hundred dollars to build it. I sold one like it for \$300 to some man who read about it in California.

FUCHS: Oh, it was written up?

STEPHENS: Yes. Then everybody wanted to know what it looked like so I made one for myself and

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I have it in the basement; so it will be a museum piece some day because it was made for Mr. Truman. Quite a clever thing -- it had little plexiglass mirrors all through it. It's illuminated with fluorescent light underneath the glass.

FUCHS: Sounds very nice. Well, that's about all I have.

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