

Oral History Interview  
with  
HAROLD M. SLATER

Reporter and city editor, St. Joseph News-Press, 1927-1979; executive secretary to Congressman Phil J. Welch, 1949; and longtime friend of President and Mrs. Harry S. Truman.

St. Joseph, Missouri  
June 2, 1982  
by Niel Johnson, Harry S. Truman Library

The Harry S. Truman Library  
Independence, Missouri  
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#### NOTICE

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JOHNSON: I would like to start, Mr. Slater, by asking you to tell us when and where you were born, and what your parents' names were.

SLATER: I was born in St. Joseph, March 28, 1907. My father was Pembroke Slater, and my mother was Mary Josephine Slater.

JOHNSON: So you have lived in this area all your life?

SLATER: My entire life, yes.

JOHNSON: Did you go to the public schools here?

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SLATER: I went to the Cathedral grade school and then to the Christian Brothers High School. Then I went to work for the [St. Joseph] News-Press.

JOHNSON: After you graduated from high school?

SLATER: From high school, yes.

JOHNSON: What did you do there to start?

SLATER: Well, I was southside reporter. That's sort of a region of the city, and I was responsible for the news that broke down there. After that I was police and fire reporter. Then I served briefly as a business reporter, and for awhile I was sports editor. For twenty years, from 1929 to 1949, I was courthouse reporter for the News-Press.

At the start of 1949 I went to Washington as executive secretary to Congressman Phil J. Welch, I took a leave of absence from the paper and served as Mr. Welch's secretary for six months. Then I returned to the News-Press, July 1, 1949, and became city editor. I held that position for 30

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years until my retirement, July 1, 1979.

JOHNSON: At this point I want to ask you when you first met Mr. Truman. Do you recall the first time that you met him?

SLATER: I think it's one of the greatest breaks I ever had in my life. It was in May of 1934, and I was courthouse reporter at the time, covering politics. The chief of police, Charles A. Enos, was at the courthouse that morning, and he said, "There's an awful nice little fellow down at the St. Francis Hotel. I think he'd like to have a story; he's running for the United States Senate."

Mr. Truman had given no advance publicity about coming to town, and he hadn't been a candidate very long. But I went to the St. Francis Hotel in St. Joseph, and he was in the lobby. I introduced myself and we became friends; we stayed that way until I sorrowfully stood at his grave in December of 1972.

I remember that interview as if it was yester-

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day. I asked him, of course, about his Pendergast association. They'd had a real hectic election in Kansas City that spring. I believe that four people were killed in that election. There were all kinds of reports about Pendergast's crookedness, and the things that were going on there. The opposition was already shooting at Judge Truman because of his Pendergast association. He told me, "I just got through spending \$10,000,000 of a Jackson County bond election, and I've got patches on my pants." He said, "I've never taken a penny, and nobody can say I ever took a penny."

He was very friendly. One of the things that he showed me were his eyeglasses, and they were peculiar things. He had a sort of a flat pupil. He explained that right in the middle of his glasses there was a little thing that looked like a half peanut, and that was necessary for his vision. He laughingly said, "On account of my poor sight, I couldn't play very much ball when I was a kid." Then he laughed and said, "I

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couldn't play because I couldn't see, so they made me the umpire."

After that he told me that he was well-acquainted with St. Joe. He had been a delegate to the Democratic State Convention here in 1928; he had many Masonic connections in St. Joseph; and he knew a lot of the Democratic politicians from his work for the state in the different recovery programs up to that time.

JOHNSON: To pick up again on this 1934 interview that you did with Mr. Truman, where was that conducted?

SLATER: At the St. Francis Hotel in St. Joseph--a hotel that has since been razed.

JOHNSON: This was during the Senatorial campaign. Do you remember the date of that visit here?

SLATER: No, but I remember it was in May. I remember that somehow or other his birthday figured in it, and his birthday of course was May 8. I do remember that, and he was right at the 50-year mark at that time.

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JOHNSON: Do you recall who he had with him on that trip to St. Joe?

SLATER: No, as far as I know he was by himself. When I saw him in the lobby of the hotel, I know that he was by himself then. Charlie Enos, the chief of police whom I mentioned, was a Democratic figure here, and they had a dinner for Mr. Truman that night at the same hotel. I remember Mr. Truman spoke at the dinner.

JOHNSON: What kind of an impression did he make at that time as a speaker?

SLATER: Well, he never claimed to be a real good speaker, but his sincerity was such that he came over strong. And there was this ease with which he met people, and the friendliness that he showed. He couldn't have been nicer to me if I was a millionaire and ready to put money into his campaign fund. He was always friendly, and right from the start.

JOHNSON: Was that the first article that you had written

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and published on Mr. Truman?

SLATER: Yes.

JOHNSON: In 1934. Where did that end up in the paper? Was it front page?

SLATER: My guess is it probably made front page. We were pretty political-minded then and were very interested in all things political, because it was, as you know, the beginning of the New Deal. The Roosevelt administration was just a year old and we were watching things. I do not remember for sure, but if I would make a wager, I'd wager it started out on page one.

JOHNSON: Your editor at the time was whom?

SLATER: Arthur V. Burrowes.

JOHNSON: He had already come out in support of Judge Truman?

SLATER: No, as far as I know we had not taken any part in the election at all. In those days the filing

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deadline was In June, about two months before the primary. There probably were other people coming in. I imagine that the paper, if anything, leaned a little bit towards Congressman John Cochran from St. Louis, because he had a real good reputation. Truman was pretty much an unknown up here, although he was tremendously well-known in the Jackson County area.

JOHNSON: Now the important race was the primary . . .

SLATER: Yes.

JOHNSON: . . . which was in August.

SLATER: In August, yes.

JOHNSON: Because that would more or less determine the winner in the fall election.

SLATER: Yes. Everybody knew it was going to be a Democratic sweep in the fall, and the big thing was how the primary came out. Mr. Truman did a tremendous job in Jackson County, and he came

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through--my recollection is--by a fairly good margin.

JOHNSON: Did he come up again to St. Joseph during that campaign?

SLATER: Oh, I'm sure he did, and he also went to some area towns. I remember going to hear him speak up at a northwest town, I think it was in Trenton. I made it to several of his speeches.

That was the day before television, of course, and even radio was not used much by political speakers. It was not unusual to have speeches an hour or so long. Mr. Truman could make long speeches with the best of them, and he could also make an awful lot of speeches in one day.

JOHNSON: So you heard him speak around Trenton?

SLATER: Trenton. I probably heard him talk three or four times.

JOHNSON: Were you covering the campaign of all the candidates for the News-Press?

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SLATER: All of them, for the News-Press, yes; the Republicans and the Democrats alike.

JOHNSON: So you were traveling quite a bit then?

SLATER: No, not too much. We didn't go very far. I'd say probably as far away as we got would be 70 or 80 miles.

JOHNSON: Do you remember the reactions of the crowds to Truman in these Senate days?

SLATER: No. No, I don't.

JOHNSON: Was that sort of the beginning of his whistlestop-type tour?

SLATER: It was. It was his first statewide campaign, and he was completely frank about everything. I mean he even answered questions, and he made a lot of stop.

JOHNSON: Where would he usually speak in these small towns? What kind of a setting would they have for him?

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SLATER: They would usually come into the courthouse or a public park. In St. Joe they used to have rallies at Bartlett Park, a neighborhood park, where they had a limited number of seats. Ordinarily they would come in, though, and talk at the courthouse or the city hall.

JOHNSON: From the steps, you mean, to the people assembled in front?

SLATER: On the steps or in the yard.

JOHNSON: So they didn't have any platform?

SLATER: There were no platforms. I can't recall them even having any public address systems.

JOHNSON: That's what I was wondering too. Did he really have to project?

SLATER: He had to project power.

JOHNSON: Did you meet any of the other people that were with him by the end of that campaign? Did you meet Fred Canfil for instance?

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SLATER: I knew Canfil. I'm not sure that's where I met him or not. We had some WPA troubles up here shortly after Mr. Truman went to the Senate, and Canfil came up as sort of a troubleshooter. That was before he was United States Marshal.

JOHNSON: What was he doing before he was Marshal, do you know?

SLATER: I always thought he kind of chauffeured for Mr. Truman, who was then Judge Truman.

JOHNSON: Yes, he did chauffeur Mr. Truman.

SLATER: Yes, I think he was kind of a chauffeur, a loyal assistant, and general errand boy.

JOHNSON: We may have the information somewhere but I can't recall offhand how they got acquainted in the first place, but he certainly was a help.

SLATER: Oh, a tremendous help. I know Mr. Truman told me one time that Canfil was with him when they had made the trip to Louisiana. They modeled the

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Jackson County courthouse pretty much like the parish courthouse in Shreveport. I remember he said that Canfil was with him at that time. I might add, very frankly, that Canfil did not like newspaper reporters. I was included in that group I'm sure.

JOHNSON: He was skeptical of them?

SLATER: Yes, Ordinarily they are kind of smooth. I think he was more of a bodyguard type fellow in those days.

JOHNSON: Did you have any incidents, any problems, covering that campaign with any of the candidates?

SLATER: None whatever. I can say truthfully that in all the political campaigns I covered I can't remember anything disagreeable.

JOHNSON: Were you involved in Democratic politics here at all in the county or the city?

SLATER: No. I think everybody knew I was a Democrat. I covered the Republican side and had no trouble

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that way. Incidentally, one of the things that I worked with Mr. Truman on, handling some publicity, was in 1944. It's strange the way the fates toss you around. Phil Welch was then Mayor of St. Joseph, and he was a real good friend of Senator Truman. They worked together on a number of area projects. They decided to have a big Democratic rally here. It was in April of 1944. They wanted to get Robert Hannegan to be the speaker. So Mayor Welch called Senator Truman, and Truman said, "Yes, I'll arrange it."

And he said, "Okay, will you talk, too?"

Mr. Truman said, "Yes, I'd be glad to; I'll talk." He said, "Sam Rayburn has been asking me to make a speech promoting his candidacy for Vice President, and I'll make it in St. Joe." And so they had Truman, Hannegan, and Rayburn. They brought in Democratic candidates for Governor, and for other state offices. They had a mammoth rally here. It was strange the way things worked out. That was in the latter part of April 1944. A year

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later Mr. Truman not only had been Vice President himself, but was President.

JOHNSON: You say there was a mammoth rally here in St. Joe?

SLATER: Yes. They had it at the auditorium, and the place was jammed.

JOHNSON: This would be ten years later, ten years after you first met Mr. Truman?

SLATER: Yes.

JOHNSON: How about meetings between 1934 and 1944,

SLATER: I would see him every time, I think, when he was in St. Joe. I remember particularly the time that he made one of his major speeches in St. Joseph, in 1940, when he had his real tough campaign for United States Senator. He was running against [Maurice] Milligan and Lloyd Stark. He really had a tough battle. Stark had a lot of patronage here, like the head of the

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police department, which was political. It had a police board named by Stark. There was the State Hospital which probably had three or four hundred workers who were all expected to vote Democratic; they were pretty well controlled by the party in power, and Stark had all the blue chips up here. Mr. Truman made a very effective campaign; I remember that.

JOHNSON: You mentioned Phil Welch was Mayor in 1944 here in St. Joseph.

SLATER: Yes, he was Mayor from 1936 to 1946.

JOHNSON: I see. So he was Mayor in 1940. Was he supporting Mr. Truman?

SLATER: Very strongly, yes sir. At that time the City Hall was in patronage politics, and Mr. Welch saw that Mr. Truman got very good support.

JOHNSON: Do you recall how the county voted in 1940?

SLATER: No. But if you want to stop this just a second, I can look it up for you. I have a blue book here.

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JOHNSON: All right. I think you have the figures there don't you?

SLATER: All right, in that August 1940 primary, Senator Truman lost Buchanan County to Stark. Stark had roughly 1,200 more votes than he did, but Maurice Milligan, who was running for Senator, was far down the line; he had 4,100. Stark had 8,900; Senator Truman had 7,700. In the fall election that year, Senator Truman carried the county by more than 7,000 votes over the Republican, Davis.

JOHNSON: Did your newspaper support Senator Truman?

SLATER: No, they were very, very strong for Stark.

JOHNSON: But you managed to maintain a kind of neutral attitude?

SLATER: Mr. Truman knew I was a Democrat; he even talked to me about it. One time he told me that he couldn't be mad at the News-Press, although they had blasted him editorially. He said, "I always get fair treatment on page one, and that outbalances any editorial comment." No, the News-Press was very strong for

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Governor Stark.

JOHNSON: Were you writing the articles that were appearing on page one?

SLATER: I was writing the news stories. I had no connection with any of the editorials, and of course, when you're a reporter you don't put any editorial slant into your articles. Sometimes it's kind of hard to avoid it.

JOHNSON: But you did interview Senator Truman in 1940?

SLATER: Oh, yes, I'm sure a number of times. He made one of those campaigns where he hit all over; he was here a number of times. I do remember that he said that he was giving one of his major campaign talks here.

JOHNSON: Well, of course, on a statewide basis, whatever votes he could get here were helpful.

SLATER: Oh yes.

JOHNSON: So, editorially the newspaper took sides with

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Stark, but as far as news coverage is concerned it gave them equal treatment?

SLATER: Yes. I'm certain it gave them both complete news coverage.

JOHNSON: Did you consider yourself a friend of Senator Truman at that time?

SLATER: I sure did. And the office knew that I was a friend of Senator Truman, although I was not unfriendly with Governor Stark. I knew him and I'd covered him, but my friendship was primarily with Senator Truman. I guess Stark is better described as an acquaintance.

JOHNSON: Did you ever see Senator Truman in Washington in that first term? Were you out there at all to Washington, D.C. between 1934 and 1940?

SLATER: No.

JOHNSON: You didn't go to Washington?

SLATER: No.

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JOHNSON: You met him either in St. Joseph or . . .

SLATER: Met him in St. Joe or in this general area

JOHNSON: You didn't go down to Kansas City to cover any of the events there?

SLATER: No, none.

JOHNSON: Did you correspond with Senator Truman at all?

SLATER: Yes. I remember one thing he tried to get for me. I have lost the letter. I have tried hard to find it. The most famous draft dodger of World War I was a rich Philadelphian named Grover Cleveland Bergdoll. He was an international case, and as a draft dodger he fled to Germany. He finally came back, and they sentenced him to Leavenworth penitentiary. I had heard that he was getting out--it had been in all the papers--and so I wanted to go down and get an interview from him the day that he was being released from the prison. I wrote to the

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warden, and got turned down. So I wrote to Senator Truman and Senator Truman interceded, but the warden still stood firm and I did not get to see Grover Cleveland Bergdoll.

JOHNSON: Was that the only letter that you can recall from that period?

SLATER: No. I probably had a number. I'll tell you what I did. We have relatives in England, and they have done some nice things for me. I sent them occasional letters from Senator Truman and also a couple of letters he had sent me as President because I knew it meant so much to them. Incidentally, it paid rich dividends. When my cousin died over there, and he was a Truman admirer, he willed to me a picture of my grandfather with eight "greats" in front of it--a portrait that was painted in 1720 and is in wonderful condition.

JOHNSON: So that's what's on the wall. It sure looks like a classic English portrait.

We have very little correspondence from the

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first term of Senator Truman. Those papers apparently were burned or dumped sometime during World War II.

SLATER: I do remember he had a reputation during his first term, as being very good in handling his correspondence. Later on, I learned that the prime reason for that was Bess Truman, who was working in his office at the time, and apparently handling correspondence, and seeing to it that they answered everything. It was in contrast with the other Senator from Missouri who didn't answer letters at all.

JOHNSON: Do you recall offhand what is the earliest date of a letter from Mr. Truman that you have in your possession?

SLATER: I'm certain I've got some in a bank vault during his Presidential administration, because he sent me a letter when he sent me an autographed picture. I have several things that I've kept in a bank vault on the advice of an attorney friend who

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said I ought to keep primarily the letters in which he had postscripts on them written in longhand.

JOHNSON: Did you have some correspondence then during his second term as Senator, from 1941 to the time he was elected as Vice President?

SLATER: Yes, I'm certain I did, because I wrote a number of stories about him relative to his Senate committee investigating war expenditures. He came here and would make frequent visits in town. He would be in town here, and he would have stories. I remember that he discussed at length what they were doing on the committee and all the things they were finding out to curb waste and everything. That picture that I showed you of him at the Hotel Robidoux--I'm certain that was on the subject of the Truman war studies committee.

JOHNSON: Did you put a date on the back of that?

SLATER: Yes.

JOHNSON: I believe that was '42.

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SLATER: '42, yes.

JOHNSON: So you started covering the committee's activities as soon as it was established?

SLATER: No, not covering it, except when Mr. Truman came to town. Everytime he came to town he would be interviewed, and he liked to talk about that. It was very interesting.

JOHNSON: Did he talk about the Fort Leonard Wood situation, do you recall?

SLATER: No. Of course, that's pretty far away from here. He would talk primarily about what we were interested in. He had strong American Legion connections at St. Joe. The Legion boys usually came out and supported him real well.

JOHNSON: Was there a major war industry here?

SLATER: No, he tried to get us one. We thought we had one once and were almost ready to have a victory banquet, but the thing fell through. We didn't

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get a single major war industry. We got some little contracts, but nothing big.

JOHNSON: So, from '41 when he was sworn in for his second term, until the time he became Vice President, most of his time did involve the investigating committee?

SLATER: A lot of it involved the investigating committee. Then he also supported a man for Governor, Roger Sermon of Independence, and he had some political work up here trying to help Sermon.

Incidentally, I had wonderful contacts with Mr. Truman during the 1944 Democratic National Convention. I covered it for the News-Press. The Associated Press was pretty short of manpower so they asked me to cover it for them too. This is the convention of '44 in Chicago. The day before the convention opened they had a luncheon, and Senator Truman, as head of the delegation, was presiding at a luncheon. He kept saying that he did not want to be Vice President, but the group

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said, "Well, everyone wants you to be Vice President. We're going to back you as Vice President whether you want it or not." He took it good naturedly. A Springfield attorney, named Sam Wear, took over and got the group together. They voted unanimously that they would now support Franklin D. Roosevelt and Harry S. Truman. They started campaigning, even though [Henry] Wallace had a tremendous edge. They worked all the delegations. On the morning of the

day Senator Truman was nominated, Arthur Burrowes and I bumped into him in the lobby of the Hotel Sherman and said, "Well, are you going to be nominated tonight?"

He said, "I think so, but I don't want it. I've already got the best job in the world. I'm a Senator of the United States." He was there with Jim Pendergast, and they invited us to have breakfast with them. I knew they had private things to discuss, and Mr. Burrowes did too, so we told them we would see them later in the day. And we did. That night, when he was nominated--I believe it was on the third ballot--the photographers were

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clamoring around Margaret and Bess, and Mr. Truman in a box up there. And they said, "We want a picture of you kissing Margaret."

He said, "Men, in our families we don't do things like that in public." It was just so very typical of him. He went on to be elected, of course, as everybody knows.

JOHNSON: So you were there from the beginning to the end of that convention?

SLATER: Yes.

JOHNSON: Covering it for the News-Press, and the Associated Press. Was that your only encounter with Mr. Truman during the proceedings, that morning?

SLATER: Oh, I would see him around, because the Missouri delegation would have caucuses. I'd see him there. They would probably caucus at least twice a day. The conventions ran longer in those days. They weren't controlled by television, and they ran

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longer. I would see him. I don't recall any particular conversations with him.

JOHNSON: You know he was campaigning for [James F.] Byrnes. He went there with the intention of promoting the nomination of Byrnes.

SLATER: Yes.

I was at the press conference where Hannegan came in and told in the exact words what the President had told him. At the press conference he said that "What the President told me was 'Get the lead out.'"

There was wartime security. President Roosevelt came through there with no announcement that he was coming through, and nobody got to see him except the people he wanted to see. He talked to Hannegan and Hannegan got the ball rolling. You remember that was the convention that the President accepted the nomination from an unannounced location; I think it turned out later that he was on a battleship in San Diego. I remember he was

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on a battleship, and he announced he was accepting. I still remember that I got awfully, awfully tired of hearing everybody saying, "Don't change horses in the middle of the stream."

But then on the convention things, I covered the '48 convention. I was there when Mr. Truman took a dead convention and, at 2 o'clock in the morning, changed it into a live, fighting, spirited convention when he made his famous Turnip Day speech, and said how we're going to beat the Republicans, and we're going to beat them bad. He called on the 89th Congress to come back into a special session, knowing full well that they wouldn't do anything.

I have never seen such a listless convention. They had the big civil rights fight, and the convention had been dragging on since about 8 o'clock in the morning. By the time he accepted the nomination it was around 2 o'clock in the morning and I still remember he looked like an evangelist of Zion. He came out in a sparkling white suit, and everybody else just looked dead. Boy, he brought

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that convention to life, and everybody knows what happened after that.

You recall that the Roosevelts were against him. I believe at that time the Roosevelts, some of them, wanted McCarthy, and . . .

JOHNSON: One was supporting Eisenhower. James, I believe, was supporting Eisenhower.

SLATER: That was the convention where the Southern delegations walked out. Hubert Humphrey had that red hot civil rights plank in there. They just fought like cats and dogs. Incidentally, a month earlier I had been covering the Republican National Convention in Philadelphia, and the fellow next to me showed me his lead that he had written. He was just as proud as he could be of it. It was June 25th, and his lead was, "Thomas E. Dewey today got his Christmas present six months early--Presidency of the United States." He was real. proud of that lead.

JOHNSON: You covered both conventions, in '44 and '48?

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SLATER: I covered the Democratic convention in 1940, too. I covered both the Republican and the Democratic conventions in '44, and I covered both of them in '48.

JOHNSON: In the '48 convention, did you get to talk to President Truman?

SLATER: No.

JOHNSON: You had to stay awake, till 2 in the morning to hear his stemwinding speech.

SLATER: Yes. I still remember one of the weird things that Sam Rayburn was having trouble with. They wanted to release some doves of peace; I always thought they were pigeons, They would come swooping down, and Sam with that ideal landing spot of a dome. They would come

in and he was shoving back. He was getting a little bit short tempered about 2 o'clock in the morning. It was a hectic session, with the walk-out on civil rights. Then Dick Russell ran against him, but Mr. Truman defeated him badly.

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JOHNSON: There were quite a few controversial issues, civil rights being probably the most important. What was the feeling during the campaign of '48? How about your newspaper, for instance? I suppose you supported President Truman for election.

SLATER: No. I was ready to support Truman. They let me write a story about four or five days before the election. I wrote that there could be a tremendous surprise, in the sense that the little guy is gaining support, and he's going to come in at a peak of his popularity. I pointed to the crowds in populous centers, including particularly Chicago, that would turn out when he came into town. I wrote the thing. They didn't think he had a chance, and nobody did. Then after the election, a day or two afterwards, why Mr. Borrowes re-ran my story--mine was a news story, but he re-ran it on the editorial page.

JOHNSON: Burrowes was your editor?

SLATER: Yes.

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JOHNSON: And his editorials did support Dewey?

SLATER: Oh yes.

JOHNSON: Has this newspaper been traditionally Democrat?

SLATER: No, they call it Independent. They switch back and forth; sometimes they didn't support anybody. They did not support Mr. Truman.

JOHNSON: Do you know why the paper supported Dewey?

SLATER: I guess they thought he was a cinch, and a lot of people were screaming it was time for a change. Walter Winchell said in the morning paper that in Omaha they were betting 20-1 on Dewey's victory. I was courthouse reporter then, and we pooled all the money we could. A fellow named Johnny Smith was a county judge and had contacts in Omaha. He took the money up there; there wasn't any 20-1 money, but there was 8-1. I had \$75. I remember I got \$600 and some dollars back, and we got venetian blinds and a gas furnace for the house.

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So I was always indebted to Mr. Truman for getting us away from stoker type heating.

JOHNSON: Was this among reporters?

SLATER: No, this was courthouse people. I had \$75; that was all I could get hold of. I had \$75 worth of confidence.

JOHNSON: Did President Truman campaign here in St. Joseph?

SLATER: No, he did not. I made one whistlestop trip with him, and it was through an area pretty close to Chillicothe, but north of there. I went out and rode on the train, just probably twenty or thirty miles. In the 1952 election, I came through Iowa with him down into St. Joe, when he was campaigning for Adlai Stevenson.

JOHNSON: Back in '48, do you recall the crowds at those whistlestops? Do you recall any reactions?

SLATER: No. I don't. I do remember that he would get out and shake hands with them.

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JOHNSON: Being very specific about issues.

SLATER: Oh yes. Of course, largely about the do-nothing 80th Congress. Oh, he kicked it around. Finally, he made a little speech towards the end, and said that he thought that was the worst Congress that ever was. Then, checking through his history again, he found out that Andrew Johnson had a worse one.

JOHNSON: I suppose that is a matter of opinion, too.

SLATER: Yes.

JOHNSON: They attributed Dewey's defeat in part at least to his "glittering generalities" and his refusal to deal with specific issues, and offer any specific solutions to them.

SLATER: I covered a Dewey rally in Kansas City about two weeks before the election, and the way Dewey talked there wasn't any contest. It was all over. The Western Tablet Company in St. Joseph printed tens of thousands, maybe hundreds of thousands, of

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tablets with a picture on the front of it of our 34th President, Thomas Dewey. They are collector's items. Mr. Burrowes had one. I never did get one, but I got a picture. I still have the picture that was on the cover, on the front, of Dewey.

JOHNSON: They had to tear a lot of covers off, didn't they?

SLATER: I guess they did. I imagine they ripped that the next morning. One of the things that is a pleasant memory of Mr. Truman is when I went down to the dedication of the Library. They had a batch of probably ten or more Governors there. President Hoover was there, along with Chief Justice [Earl] Warren. In the Latter Day Saints Auditorium, they had this tremendously big luncheon, and one clergyman came in late. President Truman left the head table and came

down and escorted this clergyman, who seemed kind of lost, to a place at the head table. The clergyman was Bishop John P. Cody, of Kansas City, who later became the Cardinal.

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JOHNSON: Oh yes. That was quite a coincidence.

Let us take you back again a little ways, let's say to the death of Franklin Roosevelt and Mr. Truman's sudden ascendancy to the Presidency. Do you recall that day and reactions to it?

SLATER: Yes, it was just sort of disbelief. I was at that time covering the legislature in Jefferson City and I was coming up home on a Missouri Pacific train. The conductor got off at Warrensburg and came back on and said, "President Roosevelt has just died." We were only about 60 or 70 miles away from Mr. Truman's hometown, so we came up to Independence and got off the train there for awhile.

JOHNSON: Did you interview any people, or write an article?

SLATER: Wrote an article. I wasn't there long enough to do much interviewing. This little article told about how a town's favorite son suddenly became the most powerful man in the world, and what the reaction

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was. Then we did articles for the paper, the next day, about who the people of St. Joe were that were closest to him. One of those who was closest to him was Theo Quinnn the Postmaster, who had him at his home as a guest many times.

Then, about two months after Mr. Truman became President, he had a press conference down in Independence. I went down to that. My recollection is that he announced the resignation of Secretary of State [Edward] Stettinius, and talked largely about what was going to happen in the United Nations out in California.

JOHNSON: So you were in the Memorial Building in Independence where he had his news conference?

SLATER: The news conference, yes.

JOHNSON: Did you get a chance to wave at him or shake his hand, or say hello?

SLATER: Just shook hands. The President. . .

JOHNSON: He's a little more protected.

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SLATER: Little more protected. But I do remember being down there and how gracious he was, as always. At the 1949 inaugural, the Missouri delegation was having a big party and he and Mrs. Truman came over and shook hands with everybody. I think he made four or five of

these inaugural parties, but he made a stop there. And I always liked what he told his Battery mates that morning; he had a breakfast for them. He told them, "I want you guys to stay sober. Don't get drunk until the parade's over." He said, "I don't want you disgracing me. Nobody gets drunk until the parade's over."

JOHNSON: This was in January 1949. How about in the intervening period here from 1945 to '49, in that first term? Did you ever get a chance to see him or talk to him, or did you write to him, have any correspondence with him?

SLATER: I wrote to him. I wrote to him and asked for an autographed picture, and I got the picture and the letter back. I still have the picture. I

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don't know what's happened to the letter. We've moved twice since then, and I imagine it's in some box. I know neither one of us would destroy it.

After Congressman Welch was elected in November of 1948, Vivian Truman came up one day and talked to me over at the Post Office, and said that the President wanted to see Congressman Welch and myself when we got to Washington. I still remember the date; it was January 10, 1949. With all the worries had about the cold war, the economic condition, the threat from Russia, he sat there and he talked to Phil Welch about some patronage up in this district, including the Postmaster at Cameron, a town of 3,200. With all those worries, he was still thinking of politics, and he told Welch, "You're going to name the Postmaster." Welch had heard that Fred Canfil was trying to butt in, and they'd get some friend of his appointed, but Mr. Truman squelched that. I remember he gave me some pens inscribed, "Stolen from the Desk of Harry S. Truman." Then he had little autograph cards,

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and he gave me those for our children, our two children.

JOHNSON: Do you still have the pens?

SLATER: I don't know.

JOHNSON: Ten days before the inauguration.

SLATER: Missouri ran a tremendously big train. There must have been 400 or 450 people on it, and they came back to Washington. All the Governors, Colonels, and everybody--they had three or four days of heavy partying while Mr. Truman was there.

JOHNSON: You went out a little bit early didn't you? You went out for the convening of Congress?

SLATER: I went out there the day after Christmas.

JOHNSON: And you were there then up through the inaugural?

SLATER: Yes, I went out there early to help set up the office for Congressman Welch.

JOHNSON: Was that the first time you had been to Washington, D.C.?

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SLATER: I had been there in 1940. We came out to the World's Fair. Nobody was there; the Congress was in recess.

JOHNSON: So there was no chance to visit Senator Truman?

SLATER: No, we didn't even go to Senator Truman's office.

JOHNSON: So this was the first time, and perhaps the last time, that you visited Truman in Washington.

SLATER: To visit Truman, yes. I have been to Washington since then. Our daughter and son-in-law lived in Springfield, and he worked in Washington.

JOHNSON: But this was the only meeting that you had . . .

SLATER: With him in the White House, yes.

JOHNSON: Well, you probably remember that day to some extent even now, don't you?

SLATER: Well, yes, it was a big deal. You know,

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over the years he's done so many nice things for us. My daughter went to school at Duchesne College in Omaha. She wrote a paper as a graduate senior, and she took the Marshall plan as the subject. I wrote Mr. Truman and asked him--this was after he left the Presidency--if he would write the introduction for her.

So he said, "Well, send it on." He wrote the introduction for her paper, and she still has that, of course. He wrote her some kind comment on her remarks on the Marshall plan and what it had done. When she was going to get married, I wrote Mr. Truman a letter about it, and then we sent an invitation. He called me up and said, "We'll refuse the invitation, and I'll tell you why." He told me a story about Mrs. Roosevelt. On her wedding day, according to President Truman, she lost the spotlight entirely. Her cousin, Theodore Roosevelt, then president, came to the wedding, and he was a closer relative of hers than he was of Franklin's, but nobody paid any attention to the

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bride. All of the attention went to the President, and Mr. Truman said that Mrs. Roosevelt had told him that she always felt badly about that, because her day of glory passed her up. So they sent our daughter, and son-in-law, a beautiful silver bowl.

JOHNSON: Do you remember the date of that wedding?

SLATER: Yes, August 17, 1957. I'll tell you why I know, because they're getting ready for a 25th anniversary.

JOHNSON: That's an interesting story.

SLATER: So many memories, when he first came back. He sort of encouraged people to visit him, in the Federal Reserve Bank Building. He had us down there. We'd call up and say, "Could we come down and see you?"

He'd say, "Oh yes, come down."

We'd come down,. and my recollection is there were only two girls in the office. There wasn't even any name on the door. You've heard the story about why he put the name on the door?

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JOHNSON: Go ahead and tell us.

SLATER: Well, he put the name on the door, he said, because some people came in, thinking it was the men's room.

I do remember that he had two pictures on his desk. They were very small; the pictures were of Averell Harriman, and Simon Bolivar, the savior of South America.

Another Truman memory concerns the 1956 Democratic National Convention in Chicago. He was trying to sway the convention, get them for Averell Harriman. He had a press conference in which he said, "Adlai Stevenson won't carry any more states than he carried in 1952. He cannot beat Ike; Averell Harriman could beat Ike."

So I asked him at the press conference, "Don't you think he might carry Missouri this time?"

He said, "If he does, it's because this old man's going to campaign his heart out for him." He did, and Stevenson did carry Missouri in '56, whereas he lost it in '52.

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Incidentally, I had general talks with him, largely at his office in Independence. And then, before that, in Kansas City. He had kind of mixed emotions about Ike. One time he was just as sore as he could be about Eisenhower. He said that when Eisenhower wrote his series for Life magazine, that he personally saw to it that they put it in a capital gains thing that would save him considerable money. But when Mr. Truman wrote his Presidential memoirs, the Republicans put him in the toughest bracket possible. He felt awful bad about it.

Incidentally, one time I was talking to him at the Library and he said, "You know, Ike isn't a bad guy, but he doesn't know any more about politics than a horse does about Sunday."

JOHNSON: Do you remember the Harry Dexter White case not long after Truman left the Presidency? President Eisenhower's Attorney General, Herbert Brownell, was trying to tag President Truman with incompetence and softness on Communism.

SLATER: I remember it well, although I didn't cover it.

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It broke at the same time as the Hall-Heady trial for the Greenlease kidnapping murder. I remember being in Kansas City to cover that trial, and also that Harry Dexter White and Truman were involved in a "red herring" thing.

JOHNSON: He made a nationwide TV broadcast on it.

SLATER: When he first left the Presidency, the New York Times kept a man in Kansas City just to cover it. One time I heard the fellows say that Mr. Truman had written the reporter's boss, telling him what a good job he was doing and said he ought to have a raise. The reporter said, "I got one."

JOHNSON: After that visit to Mr. Truman in the Oval Office in 1949, did you see him again before he left the Presidency?

SLATER: Oh yes. He used to come over to the Capitol occasionally, and would come over and visit his old cohorts.

JOHNSON: That was when you were over there serving

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as secretary for Congressman Welch?

SLATER: Yes. And he would come over to the Capitol occasionally. A couple of times I saw him at ballgames. Incidentally, when he went to the ballgame they had a reserve catcher sitting next to him. He'd sit on the first baseline, and the catcher had his mitt on in case a foul ball came that way. I never did see one come close to him; there was screening in front of the Presidential box far enough down the first baseline, but they kept a catcher in the box with him.

JOHNSON: Well, that's something I didn't realize. He had his catcher's mitt ready to catch . . .

SLATER: Oh yes. They pulled him out of the bullpen and sent him in there I guess.

JOHNSON: He came to pay just a social call on Congressman Welch, or did they discuss politics?

SLATER: Oh, no, you would go out there actually in the halls. He never came to Congressman Welch's office,

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at that time. Welch did have a dinner for the Missouri delegation that President Truman attended. We had a tremendously fancy steak producer here, Dugdale's, and Phil had the Missouri delegation together for a dinner. They ate in the basement of the Capitol, and President Truman came over and ate with them. A couple of times Mr. Welch had breakfast with him; they invited House members over.

JOHNSON: Did you write any articles on these events, and send them back here?

SLATER: Yes, in order to keep my seniority on the paper I served as Washington correspondent.

JOHNSON: So you were wearing two hats.

SLATER: Yes; I was wearing two hats. I couldn't go to Presidential press conferences. There was a rule, probably by the Press Association, White House correspondents I guess, that anybody that worked in the Legislative Branch could not go to a press

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conference. So I didn't go to press conferences. You had to get up early in the morning to see him on his way around the White House; he'd come out and walk around town.

JOHNSON: Did you walk with him on some of these occasions?

SLATER: I never did in Washington; I had to work. But I did in Chicago, and Kansas City, and Independence.

JOHNSON: Those were a very interesting six months.

SLATER: Yes, and I served at a very nominal salary as Washington correspondent. Then I came back. I got my promotion as city editor while I was in the Pentagon.

JOHNSON: In the Pentagon?

SLATER: Yes.

JOHNSON: What were you doing in the Pentagon?

SLATER: Congressman Welch sent me over as his errand

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boy. He sent me over to talk to the Army Corps of Engineers about something he would like to have done. He was tied up, and I was over there. I got a call from the office; they had a telegram, and told me I had been named city editor.

JOHNSON: Did you get any exclusives, so to speak, on Truman while you were there?

SLATER: No.

JOHNSON: Were you at that steak dinner?

SLATER: I wasn't invited.

JOHNSON: Oh, you weren't there.

SLATER: Just confined strictly to the Congressional delegation.

JOHNSON: No staff members at all.

SLATER: I got nothing exclusive; I would like to say I did.

JOHNSON: Did you get back into the Oval Office?

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SLATER: No.

JOHNSON: What did he say to you on that one visit to the Oval Office? Do you remember at all what he had to say to you while you were there? You mentioned that he was talking to Congressman Welch about some of the patronage here in this area.

SLATER: I imagine he talked family to me, something like that.

JOHNSON: You got to see him and talk to him again after he left the Presidency, after he'd come home to Independence.

SLATER: Yes.

JOHNSON: And at his office in Kansas City.

SLATER: Federal Reserve Building.

JOHNSON: Do you remember when you first got to see him there at the office?

SLATER: Seven days after he left the Presidency. I

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remember what the conversation was about. He got to talking, and I asked him, "It's all over now. You've announced the end of the war in Japan and the end of the war in Europe. What's the biggest thrill you ever had in your life?"

He told me, "The biggest thrill I ever got in my life was when I came home to Independence and there were 10,000 people down at the depot waiting for us." He said, "I never will get over that. That's by far the biggest thrill I ever got in my life." I think he was sincere on the thing.

JOHNSON: I think he said that on other occasions too.

SLATER: I got a story then that had not been given any general circulation around here. I was talking to him about what he said to Eisenhower as they were riding from the White House over to the Capitol on inauguration day. He said that Ike was sort of petulant. He said, "Who brought my son home for my inauguration?"

And Truman said, "I did. I'm still Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces."

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He said Ike didn't say another word.

JOHNSON: It was almost like Hoover and Roosevelt when they went down Pennsylvania Avenue.

SLATER: I don't believe Ike relaxed very many people.

Incidentally, Mr. Truman used to come up here when he was a Senator and played a lot of poker around town. He had three places where he played. There was the Democratic Club; Phil Welch was the operator of the Democratic Club. He also played at the Elks and the American Legion. I've played poker with him a couple of times, and well, he wasn't a killer. He lacked that instinct. I think he played just for the fun of the thing, and probably rather hoped he would lose. But the most unusual draw I ever heard of was in a game in which I did not participate. We have a sheriff named Stony Shepherd; Truman was dealt four Queens and Shepherd had a 4 and a 6, and an 8 of hearts. Shepherd drew and drew the 5 and 7 to make a straight flush and beat four Queens. Mr. Truman called him a name.

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JOHNSON: You played a couple times in a poker game with Mr. Truman?

SLATER: Oh yes, I played a couple times when he was Senator.

JOHNSON: Did he take you, or did you take him?

SLATER: I don't remember too much. But I do remember the idea that he was never a grabby guy. He wasn't the kind of fellow that would reach out and say, "That's my pot," or anything like that. And he just played because he enjoyed it.

JOHNSON: He kept his humor?

SLATER: Oh yes, he kept his humor, and he was completely relaxed.

JOHNSON: Did you play at the Democratic Club?

SLATER: The only place I played was the Democratic Club.

JOHNSON: He played there and he played at the Elks

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and . . .

SLATER: And at the American Legion. As I say, he probably didn't play either one of them more than two or three times. If he played more than that it would be at the Democratic Club, but he used to come up there and play.

JOHNSON: While he was Senator?

SLATER: Yes, when he was Senator; never after he became Vice President.

JOHNSON: I notice that we have a file of what we call "pinks;" they are pink carbon copies that start in 1960. We also have a box of material that covers the period from 1955 to 1965, that is, material that you had sent to Mr. Truman at the Library, including editorials and articles.

SLATER: That would be editorials and articles, or any kind of commentary. He would occasionally ask you to do little things for him, sometimes look something up. One time he sent me a letter and asked

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if I could get a City Directory. Somebody out West had written to him, asking him to get him a City Directory of St. Joe. Mr. Truman said he did not know if I could get one, but we obtained one easily and got it to him. He thanked me.

JOHNSON: Yes, I think I noticed that on one of these carbons.

There was a Judge [Richard M.] Duncan. Would you identify him? I notice that Mr. Truman read an editorial on Judge Duncan in 1968 and said that he deserved the praise that he received. Do you recall what connection there was between those two gentlemen?

SLATER: Yes. Judge Duncan had been a City Counselor for St. Joseph; he was elected to Congress in 1932 and served five terms. When he left Congress they tried to give him several different Federal jobs as a lame duck, but he wanted to be a Federal Judge. Francis Fiddle, the Attorney General at the time, was very much opposed to it. Roosevelt was trying to sort of pass it by and try to pacify

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him on another job, but Truman hung on like a bulldog and he finally got him the job. Judge Duncan was sworn in as a Federal Judge on July 25, 1943, and Senator Truman was here.

JOHNSON: In this district?

SLATER: For this district, Federal Judge, Western District of Missouri.

Incidentally, when they dedicated the present Post Office in 1940, Senator Truman was here, but he was treated as sort of a lesser luminary, and got very little publicity out of it. Most of the publicity on the thing went to Jim Farley who came here as Postmaster General.

By the way, I'd like to interject a typical, nice little thing about President Truman. Theo Quinn retired as Postmaster in 1960, and his son-in-law and daughter, Mr. and Mrs. William Enright, Jr., had a cocktail party for him at their home. They were tickled to death when he signed the guest book, and he signed it "Harry Truman, retired farmer."

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One of the little Enright girls, about 11 or 12 years old, went up to Mr. Truman and said, "Would you give me an autograph?" She said, "We want to raffle it off for our Girl Scout fund."

He said, "I'll do better than that." I still remember; he sat on the steps leading upstairs and he had a long sheet of paper, probably about 12-14 inches long, and he wrote his name ten times with a space in between. He told the little Enright girl, 'Now, you can cut those out and you can raffle off ten of them.' He said, "I wrote them far enough apart that there's room to cut them out."

Incidentally, just a few years ago, the Enrights gave one of those signatures to a society bash here, one of those auctions to raise art funds, and it brought \$250.

I gave one of Mr. Truman's letters to a small Catholic high school here, our only Catholic high school. It's small--about 450. They had an

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auction of a few things of famous people. This was about two months ago, and it sold for \$130.

JOHNSON: As time goes on the price is going up.

SLATER: Well, somebody told me one time that roughly they are around \$200. I'd never sell any of them, naturally.

JOHNSON: I notice in 1960, apparently in December, there was a dinner here.

SLATER: Yes, that was the dinner for Theo Quinn, the Postmaster, and there was a cocktail party before the dinner. That picture right there, with the reflection of the mirror, was taken that night at the Enright home.

JOHNSON: Did Mr. Truman make remarks at the dinner?

SLATER: Yes.

JOHNSON: Did he give a speech?

SLATER: He gave a speech. I can't recall exactly;

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it probably was about what a fine guy Theo was. The two speakers were Roe Bartle--you remember Roe Bartle--and President Truman.

JOHNSON: You wrote an article did you for the paper on that?

SLATER: Yes, I covered it.

JOHNSON: Was that the only time you recall him coming to St. Joseph after he left office?

SLATER: Oh no. No, he came here a number of times. One time he came here and he spoke at a testimonial for Probate Judge A. D. Duncan, retired, who was an old man and longtime friend of . . .

JOHNSON: Another Duncan?

SLATER: Yes, he was uncle of Richard M. Duncan, and he spoke at that time. Mrs. Truman had a cousin who lived here and they used to come up and visit him. I remember one Sunday afternoon a filling station operator called me and said, "Harry Truman just

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came in and got, gasoline, and," he said, "I saw him go into the Hotel Robidoux." So I went over there and Mr. Truman was down in the Elks headquarters, enjoying Sunday afternoon while his wife was visiting the kinfolks.

JOHNSON: But you got to talk to him?

SLATER: Oh yes, I got to talk with him. After he got out of the Presidency, he was the easiest guy in the world to talk to. I never tried talking to him when he was President, except that one occasion I told you about.

JOHNSON: Did he ever comment to you about Mr. Nixon? Any comments that you recall concerning Vice President Nixon as Presidential candidate in 1960?

SLATER: Well, Mrs. Truman had a comment on that that was real cute. You know the piano that Nixon gave the Library? Marguerite and I were visiting her one day, and she said it actually wasn't his; that Steinway still owned it. And I said, "How

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did he get it?"

And she said, "He stole it."

JOHNSON: Now who said this?

SLATER: Mrs. Truman.

JOHNSON: You mentioned your wife's name, top, didn't you?

SLATER: Marguerite.

After Mr. Truman's health began to break, he announced that there would be no more interviews, and that he was dropping out of the public picture. I called him one day, and said, "I would like to come down and just visit you."

He said, "Yes, I would be delighted to have you come down."

So I came down, and after that I'd say I visited him probably three times a year. We had a complete understanding. Never did he say, "This is off-the-record." He knew though, that I wasn't going to use anything, and he talked very

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freely about everything. There was an understanding without words. I never did use anything, and he discussed personal things; some of them kind of surprising. He was telling me one time about his nephew who started to become a Jesuit priest, but did not stay. And he'd talk about things like that that would be very newsworthy.

Another nice thing. I took our oldest granddaughter down there; her name is Susan Harris. I took her down to Mr. Truman; he was at home after he generally had retired from the public, and she was about eleven or twelve years old. He talked to her not like "Hello, little girl," but just as if she was an adult, the same as he was. He wanted to know particularly what she was studying in the way of history; she was in grade school. She said that they had had American history. He told her, "Just on your own, start reading the history of the Roman Empire. You'll find it tremendously interesting." And he said, "What happened to Rome is pretty much like what's happening to the United States to-

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day." Then he went on and talked about being alarmed over the decline in patriotism. "In World War I and World War II, young men wanted to, get into the service," he said, "wanted to fight for their country. Then the Vietnam war came, and most of them wanted to duck out of service, and not do it." He expressed general alarm about that.

JOHNSON: Do you recall what year that visit was?

SLATER: I can figure it up from her age. It would have to be about 1970. He was home; it was after he got out of the office.

JOHNSON: In his very late years, then.

SLATER: You know, one of the nice things, I had an appointment to see him, and we had had a tremendous snow storm. I couldn't get out, afraid I couldn't get out, so I called the Library and he answered the phone. So I asked him, "What in the world are you doing," and he said, "Oh, we're having a blizzard down here. I just called the

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office staff this morning and told them they could stay home, not to come in, that I would take care of the store." Here he was answering the telephone himself.

JOHNSON: That's something.

There's one other thing I wanted to ask you about. There's a book by Steinberg, The Man From Missouri, and apparently Mr. Borrowes had reviewed it for your newspaper, and I know that Mr. Truman had reservations about this book.

SLATER: I have a letter about it if you're interested. It's in the group there, He said, "It's a bunch of damn lies." Somebody else had reviewed it, one of the Federal Judges had reviewed it, and it's in with the letters I have ready for you there.

JOHNSON: Did he say anything else to you in particular about the book or anything in particular in the book that he took exception to?

SLATER: No, just said it was a whole bunch of damn

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lies. He and Borrowes fought quite a bit, and he said, "Borrowes is the same kind of editor, but you and I are still friends." He never let his fight with the News-Press go over to the hired hands.

One thing I covered in which he went out of his way to speak to me was over at Liberty. This would be about 1946 or '47 and they gave him a degree. I was down there to cover the thing. He came up in the academic procession and he saw me and called me by name.

JOHNSON: At William Jewell?

SLATER: At William Jewell College, yes.

JOHNSON: But you didn't have a chance really to talk to him?

SLATER: Oh no. We were good friends. He called my name, and that was enough recognition for me.

JOHNSON: Did you know Charlie Ross, his Press Secretary?

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SLATER: No. I'd heard of him. I knew who he was, but I did not know him.

JOHNSON: Of course, the Post-Dispatch had taken editorial positions that were rather critical of Truman, Senator Truman, and yet he retained his friendship with Charlie Ross.

SLATER: They graduated from high school together. I did not know Mr. Ross.

JOHNSON: Are there any other anecdotes, or stories, before we close that come to mind?

SLATER: Let me look.

Oh, I was at his press conference on July 2, 1960, when he announced that he was resigning as a delegate to the national convention because it was controlled, and he thought the Democrats should have an open convention. He said that he had nothing personal against Senator Kennedy. He admired him. He thought he was young, and he thought he ought to be patient. I made some notes

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on this thing. And he said that he's a victim of circumstances. He blamed the kind of campaign, practically delegate buying, on the people around Kennedy. He also at that time at that press conference said he thought that serious consideration should be given to Lyndon B. Johnson.

One story I remember was when he was talking about drinking Scotch whiskey, and he said, "You know everytime you take a drink of Scotch, you're putting a quarter in the pocket of old Joe Kennedy." He didn't think much of the Kennedys on the whole. He said some rather curt things about Joe and then Bobby.

JOHNSON: But then after Jack Kennedy had won the Presidency

SLATER: He supported him all-out, yes.

JOHNSON: And visited him at the White House.

SLATER: At the White House, yes.

JOHNSON: Do you think he really did change his mind

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about John F. Kennedy after he was elected?

SLATER: No.

JOHNSON: Did he gain a little more admiration for him because this policies? Did he feel his policies worked?

SLATER: Never heard him say so. I always thought he kind of felt the Kennedys were exercising too much control over the Democratic party.

JOHNSON: He felt the family was still too much involved in the process?

SLATER: Yes. Incidentally, he made it clear to me a couple of times in piecemeal conversations that he was no great admirer of Roosevelt. He mentioned to me and it's been in every book I know, that Roosevelt did not even tell him about the A-bomb. The first he knew about the bomb was after he became President, and Stimson, the Secretary of War, told him they had it. Roosevelt made it a one-man war.

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JOHNSON: Roosevelt was at Yalta too during part of that time that Truman was Vice President.

SLATER: Parley made it clear through his interviews that he was all right politically, but socially, no.

JOHNSON: Did you ever talk to Mr. Truman about Roosevelt in the later years? Did that come up as a subject?

SLATER: Oh yes, I talked to him about him. He didn't like the third term idea, but he had to keep quiet because that was the year he was running for reelection as United States Senator.

JOHNSON: He was against going beyond two terms?

SLATER: Yes, but he couldn't say so publicly. He didn't believe in violating the two-term thing.

Once he was kidding when they passed the bill knocking out the third term, in which they excepted him. He was the only man in the world excepted by the law. He could run again. He

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pointed it out, and said they were "leaving a loophole for the old man." was always struck by his great admiration for Mrs. Truman. I remember he talked to us one day and I said, "Well. I hope you get well."

He said, "I'm doing all right. I've got the best nurse in the world--the boss." He said, "She's the best nurse in the world." And he bragged to us one time that she was the best shortstop they ever had in Independence.

JOHNSON: Did he comment about Mrs. Roosevelt to you ever? What were his feelings toward Mrs. Roosevelt?

SLATER: I don't believe he ever said anything to me.

JOHNSON: She was one of them that he escorted through the Library that day of the dedication.

SKATER: I had forgotten that. Of course, anybody that amounted to anything in Democratic politics was there.

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The day that they broke ground for the Library he invited Marguerite, her father, and myself to the party. We went to the party over at the Truman home. A party after the groundbreaking. I remember I had a tremendously interesting conversation with Paul Butler. Nobody paid much attention to him. I got to talking to him. He was at that time chairman of the Democratic National Party, and a real friendly guy. I had met him before, of course.

JOHNSON: Did you talk to Mr. Truman briefly at least during the party and the groundbreaking?

SLATER: Oh, yes. I talked to him at the actual groundbreaking.

JOHNSON: At the groundbreaking.

SLATER: Yes. Especially if he knew you, he was always the same, he never . . .

JOHNSON: He was very happy about that Library finally getting to the stage where it was going to be

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built.

SLATER: I remember going over there, and they were tied up by strikes, which threatened to delay the opening. He talked to me and said, "If they delay this thing, it's the greatest case of ingratitude in my memory. All I've done for union labor," he said, "and they delay this thing."

I had a good "in" over there. A fellow I had gone to school with was one of the architects, Claude Gunn. He used to go over and watch the construction a good number of times. Mr. Truman took me on a tour through it before it was completed, and pictures were taken then.

JOHNSON: Right. In fact I've got an article here that you wrote in which he conducts you on this tour and you quoted some of his comments.

Thank you, Mr. Slater.

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