

Oral History Interview

with

John P. Cosgrove

Journalist; speechwriter for the National Republican Congressional Committee, 1940; assistant in the office of Senator Hiram Johnson, 1940-41; service in the US Navy, 1941-46; speechwriter in the Speakers Library, 1946-48; Director of Publications, Broadcasting Publications, Inc., 1948-68; member and sometime officer in the National Press Club since 1946.

Washington, DC

June 9, 1987

Niel M. Johnson

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JOHNSON: Mr. Cosgrove, I'm going to start by asking you to give us some information on your own background. Would you tell us when and where you were born and your parents' names?

COSGROVE: Thank you, Mr. Johnson. My name is John Patrick Cosgrove. I was born September 25, 1918 in Pittston, Pennsylvania; it's in the anthracite region. My parents were Raymond Patrick and Alice (Gilroy) Cosgrove. I went to the public schools there, and graduated from Pittston High School in 1936. In the following year, I worked as a reporter for the Wilkes-Barre Record, writing mainly obituaries and covering sports.

JOHNSON: Wilkes-Barre Record.

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COSGROVE: Wilkes-Barre Record. I came to Washington to seek my fortune just 50 years ago this September, September 1937. Washington was a far different place, as any place would be, including ourselves; it has changes radically in 50 years.

One of my first recollections of the White House was to walk through the gates, which were rarely closed to the public, and to walk under the portico. Many used this as a shortcut from Pennsylvania Avenue over to what was then the State, War and Navy Building. That building which housed three Cabinet offices is today the Executive Office of the President. Today, of course, the fence is higher, the gates are more secure, and you don't go to see the President unless you are properly labeled with the White House correspondents' credentials or visitors' credentials.

JOHNSON: You mentioned, before the interview, an episode about President and Mrs. Roosevelt going to Virginia?

COSGROVE: One Saturday morning in 1937, as part of my sightseeing of Washington and the White House, I walked down West Executive Avenue into what is now the southwest gate. I was the only one on the street; it was maybe 10 o'clock in the morning. The White House gate (southwest gate) opened, and an officer, a White House policeman, said, "Would you wait just a minute?"

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I did, and out drove President and Mrs. Roosevelt in a convertible touring car, with a lap robe over both of them. They were driving down to Charlottesville, Virginia to visit their son, Franklin, who was a student at the University of Virginia. The President and Mrs. Roosevelt had

driven a number of times to Charlottesville, with only a station wagon following behind. The station wagon had the Secret Service, maybe one or two agents, I guess, besides those riding in the front seat of the limousine. Usually two or three wire service reports would accompany them.

JOHNSON: That was just a two-car caravan?

COSGROVE: Two cars; it was a very simple movement. But shortly after that a vehicle went through a traffic sign enroute to Charlottesville, and barely missed crashing into the car in which the President was riding. Shortly after that the Secret Service decided the need for more security, and added a car to the entourage, and put the station wagon as the lead car. Now, today when you see the President moving around town, you would think they're moving a part of Fort Knox. Life was much simpler in those days.

JOHNSON: What was your job? What brought you to Washington in '37?

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COSGROVE: Well, I was from the "original depressed" area up in Pennsylvania, the anthracite region; the Depression cut deep up there. I came to Washington to seek my fortune, and luckily I got the job as a dictation operator at the Associated Press - Washington Bureau. It was quite a unique job for me to hear the distinguished and well-known correspondents who covered the White House, or the Hill, the Supreme Court or any of the offices around town--to have them call in and dictate their stories. It was a fascinating experience. I learned how to type fast and accurately; it helped tremendously in my writing later on.

JOHNSON: You mean you typed as you listened to them on the phone, or did you take shorthand?

COSGROVE: No, I typed right at the typewriter the reporter's voice coming through earphones. There was a button on the floor operated by foot which would preclude the noise of the typewriter while the reporter was dictating; then, if he got ahead, you lifted your foot off the button so he could hear the sound of the typewriter and he knew that he should slow down until you caught up. It was an extremely interesting job.

JOHNSON: Where was your office?

COSGROVE: In the Star Building, Suite 330--where the

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Evening Star was published--the Washington Bureau of the Associated Press. To make ends meet at that time, I moonlighted. I was working days in the Publications Division of Brookings Institution, which was then located at 722 Jackson Place, just a short distance across Lafayette Park from the White House.

So I was a White House watcher for many years. Running up and down Pennsylvania Avenue from Brookings to the Star Building, I saw many, many interesting and exciting parts of history during those early years. Later on I left the Associated Press and went to work for the National Republican Congressional Committee, which had headquarters here in the National Press Building. I worked in the speechwriting part, preparing material for Republican Congressmen.

JOHNSON: What year was that?

COSGROVE: That was 1940; during the Willkie campaign. My legal residence continued to be in Pennsylvania. I registered in Pittston, my home town, to vote. At that time my father, who was a Democrat. If he heard I registered Republican probably would have sold my bed if I had been living at home. I clearly was against Roosevelt running for the third term; I thought that two terms would be sufficient. My boss [J. Frederick Richardson] was a friend of Representative Joe Martin,

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then Chairman of the Republican National Committee, who later became Speaker of the House. We worked closely with him, preparing material for the Willkie campaign train, although I don't think much was ever really used. Russell Davenport ran that part of the campaign, and our material, I think, was just a part of a large supply of material that was prepared and never used. Davenport probably never showed it to Willkie.

JOHNSON: In '40.

COSGROVE: That was 1940. After that I worked with Senator Hiram Johnson, the great progressive Republican Senator from California, mostly on lend-lease material. I worked for him, in his office, then located on the ground floor in the Capitol Building. The other 95 Senators, including Senator Harry Truman, were located over in the Senate Office Building. This was a unique experience, working directly with Hiram Johnson. He had a very small staff, and he was a very interesting man. It was while working in his office that I met the Attorney General of California, Earl Warren, who later swore me in as president of the National Press Club in 1961.

JOHNSON: What was your title with Hiram Johnson's office?

COSGROVE: Oh, we had no titles. I was just an assistant in

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his office. We didn't have anything like legislative aides or clerks, or public relations titles. It was a very small office, but a very interesting office, because we all did a bit of everything in those exciting times leading up to December 1941..

JOHNSON: Did you help write speeches then for him?

COSGROVE: Well, Hiram Johnson knew what he wanted to say, but he wanted me to find and verify the facts--material and quotes. We would prepare the material for him, and also handle a lot of correspondence. We didn't have the traffic of a Senator's office which exists today, because the heavy business then was Veterans' problems, Military Academy appointments, local water supply matters, and things of that nature. Today you have a myriad of public and individual problems that constituents are concerned about and interested in getting a Senator's attention.

JOHNSON: When did you first take notice of Harry Truman, as a Senator?

COSGROVE: Well, again, being right in the Capitol Building, I would have the privilege of going up to the floor to bring notes or messages. I saw Harry Truman around then, on the floor and about the hallways of the Capitol. Particularly at that time, visitors would

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say, "There's Harry Truman. You know, he's the chairman of the Truman Committee." Many people didn't know what the Truman Committee was; it was a special defense contracts investigating committee. So he was making a name for himself as a man who wanted to know what was going on in defense contracts and defense activities. We, the USA, were being called the "arsenal of democracy," at that time. Britain was already at war, but we weren't. Then, of course, when Pearl Harbor came, everything changed.

I enlisted in the Navy, the day after Pearl Harbor, and left shortly thereafter to go into the Navy. First I was assigned to the Office of Communications at the Department of Navy located on Constitution Avenue; later on I was "loaned" to the Office of Censorship. Byron Price, the executive editor of the Associated Press, was appointed Director of Censorship by President Roosevelt. Ted Koop, who had been my boss--the "early" editor--at the Associated Press, was named deputy director. I worked closely with Ted while on loan to the Office of Censorship, a civilian office. I felt like I was masquerading in a sailor's uniform, landlocked in a Federal bureau, and could hardly wait to get out into the more Navy-like seagoing action. We were at war and defending democracy by doing all those things that we felt we

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should do after being attacked by the Japanese at Pearl Harbor. It was an experience I valued more after accomplishing my desire for sea duty.

After 15 months there, I was transferred to a destroyer-escort. It was built by Bethlehem Steel in San Francisco. We left San Francisco and did not return to the States until the war was over, having gone to Pearl Harbor out to Midway, Guam--you name them--all the well-known places that the Navy participated in.

JOHNSON: Were you in some of those battles?

COSGROVE: We were in the biggest battle, at Okinawa. We went through the whole campaign.

JOHNSON: What was the name of your ship?

COSGROVE: U.S.S. Gendreau. It was named for a medical doctor killed at Guadalcanal in the early part of the war. He was a medical doctor of French-Canadian ancestry, operating with the Marine Corps. The ship was number DE639. We escorted troop ships into Okinawa, and participated in the shore activities for 30 days and more, through the securing of Okinawa. We were attacked by many of the kamikazes and, fortunately, were able to dodge them. We shot down six kamikazes. Then one Sunday morning, June 10, 1945,

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when things were relatively secure, we were struck by a shore battery. Two men were killed and two seriously wounded. We had some other damage in our wartime sailings.

JOHNSON: Do you remember the U.S.S. Missouri?

COSGROVE: We saw the U.S.S. Missouri there in Tokyo Bay. We went first into Wakanoura Wan. We were to escort troop transports into Wakayama, the northern entrance to the Inland Sea. But again we encountered typhoons and the troop ships didn't rendezvous with us. We were instructed--three destroyer-escorts--to go in and make our own landing, so to speak. We didn't know what to expect from the Japanese. They were just as concerned about us. We had one officer armed. With no more than eleven men at a time, we were to go ashore at Wakayama. The first day we went into the fishing and vacation village; it was Wakayama. The only people around were the older women and men, and very young girls, but very few. The young men were all at war; the young girls were barricaded behind the boarded-up shops and stores. We had chocolate and cigarettes. They didn't have much to offer us except some of their family heirlooms. They would take out portraits of the family, or some of the very personal objects, that would be their prized possessions, and they thought that they would be worth

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cigarettes and chocolate, as I said. What they would take first day was two cigarettes, but sailors weren't interested in opening a pack of cigarettes to take two cigarettes out. They'd say, "Here, take two packs." Within a week, when we went ashore, there wasn't anything like two packs of cigarettes; it was more like two cartons of cigarettes. The price went up, and they soon learned to establish the rates of barter. I think that's a trait of the Japanese we see quite in evidence today.

JOHNSON: Yes, I think so.

When did you come back to the States?

COSGROVE: Appropriately enough, the ship was sort of a holiday ship. It was commissioned on March 17, St. Patrick's day, 1944, in San Francisco. We left San Francisco on Palm Sunday

and arrived in Pearl Harbor on Easter Sunday. All the important engagements were on the holidays. Okinawa itself was April 1, April Fool's Day. It was also Easter Sunday, and it was D-Day for Okinawa.

We came back to the States, appropriately enough, on Thanksgiving Day, 1945, and arrived at Portland Oregon. Shortly after that I got me leave and came back to Washington. While I was in Washington, I had sufficient points after my 30 days leave that I did not

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have to return to the ship. I was reassigned in Washington to the Potomac Naval Command, and was returned to civilian life in February 1946, just four years after entering into the service.

After that I did some free-lance writing in Washington--ghostwriting and things of that nature, until I accomplished a more permanent job. That was with Broadcasting Publications. Broadcasting magazine was located here in the National Press Building--it was founded here--and I was director of publications for Broadcasting Publications, and continued in that capacity for 20 years.

JOHNSON: When did that start?

COSGROVE: That was 1948. I got involved with Press Club politics and served in various capacities on different committees--on speakers' committees, and various other committees--and on the Board, and was elected president of the Press Club in 1961.

JOHNSON: In those years, '46 to '48, when you came back here to Washington, D.C., were you free-lancing during those two years?

COSGROVE: I was free-lancing and also working for an organization called Speakers Library. It was an established speechwriting organization. There were

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three of us, all of us veterans of World War II; one from the Air Force, and one from the Army, and one from the Navy. We bought this business that had been established twenty-five years earlier, and wrote speeches. They were called "canned" speeches; we wrote specific speeches too. That brought me up to working for Broadcasting Publications, which was more reliable and more secure. Shortly after that, I married Patricia O'Hara, a native Washingtonian, and we have lived here all our lives. I've been in Washington ever since 1937.

JOHNSON: In this period from '46 to '48, were you covering politics at all?

COSGROVE: No. I never had any role in covering politics, as such. I did write, during my early years in Washington, those pieces for the Wilkes-Barre Scranton papers about some observations here, what mainly were background pieces, or . . .

JOHNSON: Did you write anything about Harry Truman, about President Truman? Of course, when you came back he was President, and you probably said, "Harry Who?"

COSGROVE: No, I didn't say "Harry Who?" I heard that "Harry Who" a number of times on the ship. The death of President Roosevelt--I always think of it as April

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13th; I think it was really April 12th, but we were over the Date Line. It was a very dark day, and a number of my shipmates said, "Oh, my God, Harry Truman. What are we going to do?" The feeling was that the whole leadership was Franklin Roosevelt and we never have done anything without Franklin Roosevelt. Many times, I must say, while I was out there I thought, "Well, I'm glad that Willkie wasn't elected." I think it was fortuitous that Franklin Roosevelt was elected to a third and to the fourth term, and as we look back at the fourth term, to me, it was even more important because that brought Harry Truman onto the national scene as Vice President.

I must say that I agreed 100 percent with Harry Truman's decision to drop the bomb. We were out there on the firing line. We had been through hell, through kamikazes, and while our ship survived and we were very fortunate, we had seen ships burning and ships kamikazied a short distance from us. We also heard about it on our TBS--ship intercommunications; there were ships that we had been alongside the night before, the day before, and then witnessed their complete demolition and burning, and it was just horrible. I don't know anyone on our ship, or anybody that I knew in the Navy at that time, who ever had any hesitation whatsoever that President Truman's decision was a

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correct one. I think he must have considered all the angles, and he was never one to hesitate to make a decision. Once he had the facts he made the decision and he stuck by it. I think he knew the circumstances.

JOHNSON: Where were you on August 6, when Hiroshima was bombed? (Ironically, the very same date on which Senator Hiram W. Johnson died in his sleep at the U.S. Naval Hospital, Bethesda, Maryland.)

COSGROVE: We were at Okinawa.

JOHNSON: When was the first time you saw Harry Truman, President Truman?

COSGROVE: Well, the first time I saw President Truman was when he was around for dinners and activities, for White House correspondents' dinners, and things of that nature. Some of the nice memories I have of President Truman were his coming to the National Press Club. He knew so many of the reporters and they knew him from his time in the Senate, and there was great respect for him. There was always a great feeling for Harry Truman by the press. There were

reporters such as Tony Vacarro, who covered him on the Hill, and that wonderful story of Tony standing outside the apartment house on Connecticut Avenue when President Truman was driving down to the White House on his first day as

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President. He saw Tony standing along the curb, and he had the car stopped and Tony got in and rode to the White House with him. I guess that day, the Associated Press, in its wisdom, appointed Tony Vacarro to be the White House correspondent. Tony was a good man I had known when he first came to Washington. Tony later served as president of the Press Club. John Cauley of the Kansas City Star was another favorite of the President. At different times, President Truman would see John Cauley and John Cosgrove together and would say, "Well, there's a pair of Johns," and somebody would invariably say, "Yes, it takes Jacks to open." Although neither of us was called Jack, very often people with our name get called Jack.

JOHNSON: When did you join the Press Club?

COSGROVE: In 1948. Unfortunately, I didn't have the money to join before World War II. I always enjoyed coming to the Press Club. President Truman had many highlights at the National Press Club. He was always welcome here. He was a dues-paying member, he paid his dues on time, and he enjoyed coming over here.

JOHNSON: In other words, in 1948, you began attending the functions of the Press Club, and that is when you saw Truman--first saw Truman as part of those observances?

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COSGROVE: I guess that's when I first met him and talked to him just as you would another club member. He was very easy to talk to, very friendly, and you didn't have to wait to be introduced to him. You just walked up and talked to him and he was very fine and very friendly.

JOHNSON: Do you recall if you attended the 40th anniversary dinner, I guess it was March 29, 1948 that Truman attended? It was described as a big stag party for its hundreds of members.

COSGROVE: I wasn't at that reception. Joseph H. Short was National Press Club president. I think there was a remark in there about the biggest stag party because at that time the Press Club was a male members only. It's coed now. There were two clubs, the National Press Club and the Women's National Press Club. They were rivals, I guess, in many ways for speakers and activities, but the National Press Club was always dominant because we had the facilities; we had the building here. We had what some people called the second best address in Washington, 14th and F Street, the National Press Building. The National Press Club occupies the top two floors. I think it's appropriate for me to mention today that we're doing this interview right here in the corner of the National Press Club and are within six feet of the piano that was well-pictured and made famous when President Truman, as Vice

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President, came over to the canteen and was playing the piano, when some public relations man picked Lauren Bacall up and sat her on the piano. At that time the photographers and different ones started to call to Vice President Truman to turn around to get the picture taken. Well, he was wondering what all the activity was because he was looking at the photographers while they were putting Lauren Bacall on the piano. He told many stories about this later on, about how everybody had a good time, but he said, "I didn't when I got home, because Bess wasn't too pleased with it." It was all done in jest and good fun.

This room is now called the First Amendment Lounge, but there is some talk that we should call it the Truman Lounge or the Truman Room, and I think that with the pictures of President Truman that are in this room, I think it would be more appropriate to call it the President Truman Room. Who knows, we might.

JOHNSON: Also in 1948, and maybe this was the first dinner that you attended, it was the father and daughter night. Maybe you didn't have a daughter.

COSGROVE: I didn't have a daughter.

JOHNSON: So you weren't eligible to attend that.

COSGROVE: That's correct. Even though you had the price of

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admission, to buy a ticket you had to have a daughter to come. It was members bringing their daughters, and President Truman brought Margaret. He played the piano and she sang, and it was a great night, a very memorable night. I think that people who weren't there said, "My gosh, if you ever have an opportunity to go to father-daughter night at the Press Club you had better go." That was the beginning of the real wonderful father-daughter nights that we had for years; the tradition carried on.

JOHNSON: On March 30, 1949 they had a Founders Day buffet supper. Would that have been something you attended?

COSGROVE: The big activity was the 50th anniversary of the National Press Club and President Truman came to that. We had it at the Wardman Park Hotel, the Sheraton Hotel now. President Truman came to that, and it was a great night.

JOHNSON: So that would have been 1958. Was it 1908 that it was founded?

COSGROVE: That's correct.

JOHNSON: So it would have been 1958. That's your first clear recollection of Truman at a Press Club dinner?

COSGROVE: Oh no. No, there were other times before then,

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at Congressional activities or founders luncheons, or Founders Days at the Press Club. He came over then.

JOHNSON: Yes, like Founders' Day, April 26, 1950, when John Snyder, and Charles Sawyer . . .

COSGROVE: Yes.

JOHNSON: . . . and Francis Matthews were the newest members of the Club. Do you remember those?

COSGROVE: Yes. Francis Matthews was Secretary of the Navy then. That was a fun night. We had a good number of founding members still with us and enjoyed the evening.

JOHNSON: Radford Mobley of Knight newspapers was your president?

COSGROVE: Yes, Rad Mobley was a fine man. I think he was one of the ones who cherished that evening, having his daughter here at the father-daughter night.

JOHNSON: He wrote to the President, "Everyone agrees it was the best one we have ever had," referring apparently to the Founders' Day party. "It was your presence that made it so successful and all of us in our club are very proud of you."

COSGROVE: Well, that same expression, those same words could be used for practically all of the appearances

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that President Truman had at the Press Club.

JOHNSON: Do you remember him unveiling a plaque listing 25 American and Allied correspondents who were killed in the Pacific theatre? There was a plaque unveiled in '50.

COSGROVE: Yes. I think we had that plaque hanging on the wall down there for many years. It's still around. In the renovation and rebuilding of the Club, the whole building has been entirely rebuilt; we have new places for some of these treasured plaques and memorials.

JOHNSON: How about Joe Short. He was president in 1948 of the National Press Club.

COSGROVE: Joe Short was one of our great presidents. I first knew Joe when he was at the Associated Press. Joe Short succeeded Charlie Ross as Press Secretary. Joe Short's widow, Beth

Short, also worked at the Associated Press. She was Beth Campbell before they were married. Joe Short was one of the fine members of the club.

JOHNSON: What do you remember about his personality or character?

COSGROVE: He was a real quiet southern gentleman. He left the Associated Press and worked for the Baltimore Sun

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as I recall. Beth Campbell Short used to come to the Press Club quite a bit as a guest. Later on, I think she came over because we treat our widows very well. I think she was given a widow's card, and a widow's card amounts to paid-up membership at the Club. They would be free to come at any time, and she would enjoy it. Beth did come over quite regularly to many activities, the Thursday night buffets and some of the luncheons.

JOHNSON: You mentioned that President Truman knew everybody by their first names and so on; when would you say that you did first become acquainted with Truman?

COSGROVE: I think the first was at one of those Founders' Day, when he came over to the Club. Later on when I was on the Board, the Board members usually would meet in advance of different activities as a welcoming or a reception committee. It was during those years I got to see and meet him.

JOHNSON: When were those?

COSGROVE: Those were from '53 to '61 when I finally served as president.

JOHNSON: Periodically he would come back to Washington in those years and attended parties?

COSGROVE: Oh yes, he would come back to see Tony Vacarro

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and Bill Lawrence and the different ones. Whenever he came to town he usually had an open invitation to come over, and he would come over.

In 1961 when I was elected president, I felt he would be coming to the Inauguration of President Kennedy. I wrote him and asked him if he would be coming, and he said he wouldn't be here at the Press Club at that time, but would be back later in the year. He said he wouldn't have time to visit if he did come to Washington. I suggested it would be nice if he came, and if he ever wanted to speak he could speak at the Press Club. At some of his earlier meetings here at the Press Club he always said how much he enjoyed coming, and said, "I would like to make a comment," and "I always enjoyed the news conferences." And he said, "I tried to have them as often as once a week." At that time President Eisenhower wasn't having very many news

conferences. Truman said, "I learned more at those news conferences than you thought. I learned what America was thinking. I learned what the constituents were concerned about through your questions, and it was your questions that provided a feeling of directness with the people that I might not have enjoyed, with you being close to it as you are out there every day." He wrote me a nice letter of congratulations when I was elected president.

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JOHNSON: This was what date?

COSGROVE: January 11, 1961. He said, "I will not be able to stay until January 28th." He did say he was coming to inauguration week. However, he said, "I am hoping to come back sometime in the not too distant future, and perhaps then we can get together. I congratulate you on having been elected president of the National Press Club. It's a great organization, and one to which I am proud to belong." True to his promise, he came back in November 1961, and spoke at the Club. He wrote me later on and said, "I don't know when I have had a happier day than I did with the Press Club in Washington." That was November 13, when he wrote that to me.

Also, sitting at the luncheon that day, he was asking about my family. I said my mother was in the hospital. She just was recently taken to the hospital. He picked up the place card at the table and he said, "What's your mother's first name?" I said, "Alice." And he wrote, "To Mrs. Alice Cosgrove, with kindest regards, and a hope for early and complete recovery. Harry Truman." I must say that when I brought that card out to my mother, I don't think that any medicine the doctor had prescribed or any that she had taken, had done more to give her the lift that she needed at that time. She was suffering from a series of small

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strokes; this was a very stabilizing and exhilarating experience for me too. But my mother received the full direct benefits of it and she was really a great supporter of President Truman.

JOHNSON: Through documentation and tradition, we know he had respect for most working newsmen, although he could be rather vitriolic toward certain publishers, and I guess some editors. Do you remember him commenting about the press and his opinions of certain publishers, or individuals in the publishing business?

COSGROVE: He didn't lose much of an opportunity whenever he saw John Cauley to say, "There's my favorite reporter, but he doesn't work for one of my favorite papers," and things of that nature. But he always said it with a smile. We know of his feeling towards some of the publishers, and I think from his own viewpoint he was absolutely right. They were biased against him. He knew what his goal was and knew that if you try to see their viewpoints he'd never accomplish his own. Harry Truman was a man to accomplish his own viewpoints. That was one of the ways he did it.

One of the things I might say when he was at the Press Club in 1961--I think that was his fifth appearance as a luncheon speaker--we had arranged to have copies of the tape recordings of the four speeches

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he had made at the Press Club since 1954. There was a complete text too. I mean the Q's and A's and the whole program. So we had a little box made, a carrier, with the plate on the box, and four taped speeches were put in there. And at that time he also autographed several books written by him and about him, that the Club had in its library. I am reading from the Press Club Record that reported on that meeting, that luncheon meeting.

JOHNSON: What's the date on this issue?

COSGROVE: This is October-November 1961, Volume 12, Number 6, and it says that the autographed volumes were number one, Memoirs by Harry Truman, Year of Decision, and volume two of his Memoirs, Years of Trial and Hope.

JOHNSON: He autographed these for the Club, is that right?

COSGROVE: He autographed those and they are in the Club library. Also at that luncheon he was very happy to see Earl Warren; he paid special tribute to Chief Justice Warren, who was among those at the head table that day. Also among the guests, I think you'd be interested to know, was Associate Justice Tom Clark; former Attorney General and former Defense Secretary Louis Johnson; former Agriculture Secretary, Charles Brannan; and, General Harry Vaughan. Those were just a

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few of the names. Beth Short and Roger Tubby were also there. It was really a reunion of the Truman administration, and a very happy one at that.

JOHNSON: This wasn't the last time, was it, that he appeared at the Club?

COSGROVE: There might have been one more in between, but I know the last time was 1964. Joe Dear was president, and I think Truman just spoke and we didn't have questions that day. It was just a talk of this experiences and reminiscing. He had a cane. On the way out I was part of the group that met him--we always escort our guests back to the street into the car, which is usually on the 14th Street entrance--and I said, "Mr. President, you were great today." He said, "I had to be. If I slowed down, or wasn't up in spirit to you guys, you'd say, 'There's old Harry, he's getting old, he's not like himself. Look at him, he's an old man,'" things of that nature. But he really gave us a memorable luncheon.

JOHNSON: I think that really was the last year that he did much traveling at all--in 1964. He went to the World's Fair that year in New York.

COSGROVE: I think you're right. I think he went from here to New York. That was on his schedule.

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JOHNSON: I notice in your library you have photographs of Mr. Truman, and of Dear and I guess some of the others who were present there that day. In fact, you do have, it seemed to me, at least a dozen, or between a dozen and 20 photographs of Harry Truman and Press Club activities, in your archives.

COSGROVE: Oh, yes, and we also have run them in our publications, and we have some original cartoons back in our main dining room. They are excellent cartoons. I don't think you even have copies of them out in the Library.

JOHNSON: Yes, there were at least a couple of them that I haven't seen before.

COSGROVE: We had those cartoons given to us, and we had no place to display them for years. They were just accepted and put in a file. Now that we have this new club, which is a seven and a half million dollar renovation, in this renovated building, these cartoons can be displayed. But I think that two in particular are back there and you should have copies in the Library. If I can possibly do so I will get them. At least you will know they are here and maybe sometime they should be there. But we like our Truman memorabilia; we like our piano that's here, we like the pictures, we like the cartoons. He was a good member

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and a very unique member, and a very unique President.

So I think we're going to keep those things. We might send you copies. By the same token, you might send us copies of some of the things here for the students of Press Club history, and particularly that part of the Press Club which President Truman was so much a part of.

JOHNSON: When did this renovation take place?

COSGROVE: Well, it took place over a period of three years. The entire building was reduced to only the floors and the uprights. We have an entirely new surface on the outside, or new skin as some call it. The interior has been rebuilt. The Capitol Theater had been dismantled some years earlier. The new office space was torn out, and we have, on the first three floors, shops, very elegant attractive shops, which tie right into the adjacent National Place at the Marriott Hotel, which is adjacent to us on Fourteenth Street. The character of the whole newspaper row, which is Fourteenth from E Street to F Street, opposite the Willard Hotel, has changed dramatically, but so has the whole news business. The Press Club had been here since the Coolidge administration. The current renovation and rebuilding will be the anchor of this block for years and years to come.

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JOHNSON: You mention Truman being a dues-paying member. Was he the first President who was a dues-paying member?

COSGROVE: Oh no, they all were dues-paying members.

JOHNSON: From 1908.

COSGROVE: They all paid their dues. President Taft, I think, came in as Chief Justice, but from Wilson on they paid dues, and they participated in many of the activities.

JOHNSON: But that isn't true now. Who was your last dues-paying President?

COSGROVE: I guess John Kennedy was. Eisenhower came over, but he never paid dues, because he never could use the Club. At that time, the Board voted that they would have all the privileges of a member, but wouldn't have to pay dues. President's press secretaries who are active members pay dues. President Kennedy paid dues. He didn't get a chance to enjoy the Club. He spent more time over here before he was President. He came over to my inauguration, and we had a very interesting evening with him before the activities started. They came over early in the evening. President Reagan has been over for some inaugurals. President Reagan was over for a news conference, a luncheon news meeting.

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JOHNSON: How about Eisenhower? You say that he really wasn't that active or interested in the Club?

COSGROVE: Not really. He got along well. Jim Hagerty was a member of the Club. Eisenhower came over the last day in office of Jack Horner, of President Horner, and gave a very fine talk, and it was very interesting. I think it was the first live television from the Club.

JOHNSON: What was your occupation, besides being president of the Club one time, and on the Board? What was your main occupation?

COSGROVE: During the 20 years from 1948 to 1968, I was director of publications at Broadcasting Publications. Broadcasting [magazine]--the printed voice for radio and TV. It corresponds to what Editor and Publisher magazine is to the newspaper field. Broadcasting championed, as Sol Taishoff, a co-founder, editor, and publisher used to say, "We champion every worthwhile development in the field of electronic journalism."

JOHNSON: How about television? Was that just radio?

COSGROVE: We went right into television, and today it carries television and cable as part of its coverage.

JOHNSON: It must be a larger journal then.

COSGROVE: It's about the size of Time magazine and it comes

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out every week. At one time we had a separate magazine called Television, which is a monthly feature type of magazine, on the business of television. Then there were various publications, the Broadcasting yearbooks, and the special publications put out on certain developments in the broadcasting business, particularly on the television side when television started to expand and revolutionize journalism in every phase. Television as we know it has probably done as much to change the habits of America, and the life of Americans, the life of citizens all over the world, as much as the automobile did in the twenties.

JOHNSON: Truman was really the last of the almost exclusively radio Presidents, who depended on radio rather than television to get his message out. You referred to somebody who commented about his gesturing when he was speaking.

COSGROVE: Well, the coverage of television was very difficult. For camera placements, for lights, for a variety of things, you had to move all of this equipment. There was nothing that we have today in the hand-held camera, which makes it mobile and makes it much easier. We had fixed positions and the lighting had to be fixed, and the sound--they had to have a boom many times hanging overhead to get the voice properly.

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It was very difficult.

One thing about President Truman was that his hand gestures were pretty routine, as I recall. He would just take his two hands, and just like someone said, he would chop the air, but others said, "No, it's not chopping air, he's measuring fish." But his message got across anyway. He wasn't a performer for the arts, television or whatever. He was more intent on delivering his message and the importance of the message, and the contents of the message, than show. He wasn't interested in show. Maybe today you have to be a showman; maybe you have to be an actor, maybe you have to have all the visual things to attract and hold attention. I think President Truman had the people listening to him, watching him, but they were more concerned about what he was saying and what he was going to do and what he wanted to do, rather than how he looked and how he behaved, and what he . . .

JOHNSON: Do you think it was sincerity, his sincerity that came across clearly?

COSGROVE: I think that it was his sincerity. He had a very hard act to follow--if you want to continue the show business vernacular--Franklin Roosevelt was a master of radio, and it was his voice and his whole way of presenting things. He expressed himself better than

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some actors maybe. People all got to know him through the thirteen years of seeing President Roosevelt, of hearing him, that he was the President. He was the only President we knew, and he was Presidential in every way. In fact, standards today are still measured by Franklin Roosevelt's appearances. Harry Truman and his style were altogether different. And I give it to him; he didn't try to imitate Roosevelt, he didn't try to imitate anybody, he was only himself.

JOHNSON: He didn't try to imitate the Fireside Chats, did he?

COSGROVE: Not at all.

JOHNSON: Why do you think that was?

COSGROVE: Because that wasn't his way. He was true to himself. I think he was true to himself, that when he was finished in Washington and he didn't have a Federal job here, he went home where his heart was, where he knew people. I think even while he was Senator here he always valued his visits home and being back in his home country, in Independence, in the land where he knew his people and he could be with them, and enjoy it. The world almost beat a path to his door. He didn't have to be in Washington to be in the limelight. He brought the limelight and the spotlight and the

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focus of world attention right to Independence, Missouri, to his office. And I think his office there in Independence is every bit as historic and important as the office he had here in the White House. The historic events and people who beat a path, if you want to say that, to his office in Independence, and who were privileged to be there and to go to his office, and to be with him under such relaxed conditions, and not the pressures of the Presidency, made him equally as important, and continued his status as a world figure.

JOHNSON: Did you go to any of the political conventions, party conventions, in those years?

COSGROVE: Not during his years. I have been to conventions later on, but not during those years.

But I remember watching the convention from Philadelphia in 1948--thanks to television--when he was sitting outside Convention Hall in Philadelphia, waiting for the time for him to come and for him to select Senator Barkley as his Vice President.

JOHNSON: Did you know Barkley at all?

COSGROVE: I met Barkley, again through the wonderful things at the Press Club. He would come down and participate in our Congressional debates on Congressional Nights.

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Alben Barkley was a remarkable Senator with wonderful stories. He was a man who was well appreciated in Washington. He was, as you would say today, an old-fashioned politician, but everybody is old-fashioned 50 years, or 40 years, or 25 years later.

JOHNSON: Did he make use of radio to any extent, do you recall?

COSGROVE: I don't recall what impression he made.

JOHNSON: Was he a good speaker though?

COSGROVE: He was on the circuit, on the political circuit and he was very good. I don't recall any impression about radio talks. I don't think I listened to him that well. I guess I didn't, or if I did I don't recall any highlights; but he was a treat to see in person. Any place Alben Barkley was speaking, you would enjoy and appreciate--his way of presenting things and his way of telling what was going on in the Senate.

JOHNSON: Any other impressions here before we close up?

COSGROVE: Somebody wrote this in the Press Club Record, the October-November issue of 1961. I quote the last two paragraphs. It said: "When Club political pros finished savoring the sharp humor mixed with philosophy

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in Mr. Truman's talk, they concluded that he had made few converts to his political outlook. On the other hand, he certainly had lost none. But he was, after all, not running for anything. He had been invited to come and reminisce, which he had done in full measure. And both he and the Club had enjoyed it hugely. It was said then, and we say now, 'Thank you, Mr. President.'"

JOHNSON: Well, maybe one last comment since we have another document here. This was an event that occurred in 1975 at the National Press Club luncheon honoring James Whitmore, and you had some recollections about that, and who was there.

COSGROVE: Well, James Whitmore to many people was Harry Truman reincarnated; at least some people said he was, and some people wanted to know whether he was or not. He was here in a play entitled "Give 'em Hell Harry," at Ford's Theater. Ford's Theater had recently reopened. You recall this was the historic theater where Abraham Lincoln was assassinated. It had fallen into just being a museum, and a Government office building. Later on it was restored as a theater, which it is today, and it is available for evening performances. It's always open to the public to visit the theater, as well at the Peterson House across the street where President Lincoln died.

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But we invited James Whitmore to come to the Press Club and tell us about the program, "Give 'em Hell Harry." It was a wonderful luncheon at the Press Club, in the true spirit of President Truman. There was something magic there, as Hugh Sidey wrote in Time magazine later. He said, "It had been 25 years since they had assembled like that, but they lined up at the head table. The old feeling of exhilaration seized them all. Once again they felt that for only a few moments in their imagination that they were doing a job for a man of purpose, courage and honor. Whitmore claimed he knew less about Truman than anyone else there, that he had got the part because of bone structure. He said, in confession, 'There was a bit of Harry. I have no story about Mr. Truman,' he said, 'I have never met him; in fact I voted for someone else. But the most eloquent moment in the Truman portrayal,' said Whitmore, 'is the little bit where the President writes a letter to his daughter, and then takes a three-cent stamp out of his wallet, puts it on the envelope, and very often the audience applauds,' said Whitmore. 'When you think about that, and I have, we have a hunger and a thirst for simplicity, and for people of integrity.'" That's Hugh Sidey writing about that wonderful day, and again there was all of the Truman Cabinet, the Truman people, who were still in

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town. It was a wonderful afternoon, a most enjoyable luncheon.

JOHNSON: I think Clark Clifford was there.

COSGROVE: Oh yes, Clark Clifford. And Bill Broom, then with the Ridder Papers, who is now at the Philadelphia Enquirer in Philadelphia. He was president of the Club. It was a wonderful collection. Harry Vaughan was there. Beth Short spoke; Jim Webb. Jim Webb was Truman's Budget man, and Averell Harriman.

JOHNSON: They were all there.

COSGROVE: They were all there, and they all told their stories. It was a wonderful thing. We really did a great favor for James Whitmore, because he, having never met President Truman, said he got a wonderful feeling of just what this man was like. He said, "I think I can now portray him even better than I thought, because of hearing these wonderful stories." They were wonderful stories.

JOHNSON: We have a transcript here, apparently of that meeting, that you're going to give to the Library.

COSGROVE: I don't know if you have it.

JOHNSON: I don't believe we do.

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COSGROVE: It was April 24, 1975. I'll get a copy, or give you this copy because I think it's an important part of understanding President Truman from the people who worked with him closely, who knew him, who told some wonderful stories about the President that never were officially recorded. Probably this was the first time that they were recorded, or when each heard the other tell the stories. And there were no stories that didn't ring true, or had some questions about them; there were no people saying, " It didn't happen that way, it happened this way, or I can improve upon that, and here is the way it was." It's an important part of understanding President Truman. [See the Truman Library's Miscellaneous Historical Documents Collection item No. 674, for a copy of this transcript and the article by Hugh Sidey.]

JOHNSON: Well, thank you. I think we've covered it fairly well, and if there's anything you want to add later on, just send it along with the transcript.

COSGROVE: Thank you very much.

JOHNSON: Thank you.

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