

Oral History Interview  
with  
MRS. JOSEPH H. SHORT

Correspondence Secretary to President Harry S. Truman, September 23, 1952 to January 20, 1953.

Alexandria, Virginia  
February 16, 1971 by Jerry N. Hess, Harry S. Truman Library

The Harry S. Truman Library  
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#### NOTICE

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HESS: To begin this evening Mrs. Short, will you give me a little of your personal background? We need not go into this too far as we have found a very nice resume of your background at the Truman Library in the official files. But tell me a little bit about your background, some of the jobs that you've held, and then moving up to the position that you hold at the present time.

SHORT: Immediately after graduating from the University of Oklahoma (Oklahoma was the state where I was born), I went to work on a newspaper in Missouri, the *Springfield Leader*. I moved from there to the

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*Daily Oklahoman* in Oklahoma City after five years. After two years there I joined the Associated Press Washington Bureau. At that time there were eighty-seven men on the AP

general news staff, and me. I covered Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt, who did not permit men at her press conferences. Unlike Ruby Black, who covered Mrs. Roosevelt for the United Press on a part-time basis, I had a general assignment beat in addition.

I was married a year later to Joe Short, who then was an editor on the AP day desk. I continued covering all sorts of things in Washington until I resigned and we had our first child in 1940. We have three children. And during the period when they were small I did some freelancing. A couple of times -- after Pearl Harbor and President Roosevelt's death -- I got a trained nurse and went back to work briefly, but the first time that I had held a full-time job again was the one at the White House as President Truman's Correspondence Secretary from

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September 1952 until January 20, 1953.

After that, from 1953 to 1956, I was the first publicity director, then acting director of the Democratic Senate Campaign Committee. I had found a housekeeper the children liked so that I could be away. Then in 1957, January, I went to work for Senator A.S. Mike Monroney as his press secretary. I stayed ten years. Often, the Senate was in session late and hours were long, but they could be adjusted to chauffeur children to the doctor or for other emergencies. I loved it. I resigned -- or transferred really from the legislative over to the executive branch -- in November 1966. And that is the job I have now. By that time, the last two children were in college. I am the Special Assistant to the Assistant Commissioner of Social Security for Research and Statistics. And my particular assignment is research development and training. And that is it.

HESS: What are your earliest recollections of Mr. Truman?

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SHORT: They are very vague really because somehow, perhaps I had a small baby at the time, I missed his outstanding performance as chairman of the committee which investigated the war industry problems. I later came to understand what a marvelous job he had done there. But I didn't know it at the time and I just -- I saw him as you do when you live in Washington.

The first time I met him was under really rather amusing circumstances. My husband just before he was Press Secretary, had been a Washington correspondent for the Baltimore *Sun* for eight years. He traveled on the campaign train when the then Senator Truman was running for Vice President. As a matter of fact, Joe was the one who, against odds, arranged for correspondents to cover that trip. But he didn't know Senator Truman very well. He had covered the House of Representatives for the Associated Press, and the White House for both AP and the *Sun*, but never the Senate, so had missed

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him.

At any rate, he did travel on the 1944 trip. At Providence, Rhode Island, Senator Truman had a press conference for the newsmen on the train, and those in town. And when there was sort of a lull, Joe said, "Mr. Senator, what is the difference between those nine isolationist Senators that

you've been trying to get Tom Dewey to repudiate across several states, and Senator [David I.] Walsh with whom you rode across the State of Massachusetts today."

And Senator Truman said very quickly, "Well, there isn't any difference, but Dave Walsh has four more years to serve and we have a chance to reform him."

Well, this created havoc every place. The chairman of the Democratic National Committee -- and I don't know who else -- met Senator Truman in New York as soon as the party got in there, and apparently there was a great deal of excitement over his comment.

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Eventually, President Roosevelt, who hadn't planned to go outside the White House, made a trip to Massachusetts, and himself appeared with Senator Walsh. But at any rate, when I really met Vice President Truman and shook hands with him for the first time, he said to me, "So you're the wife of the guy who asked me that question at Providence, Rhode Island."

HESS: And got him in all that trouble?

SHORT: Well, he was Vice President then, and I met him at several other parties. Invariably the conversation would get around to the fact that I was the wife of the guy who had gotten him in trouble in Providence, Rhode Island.

HESS: All right, moving on in time, how did your husband become Press Secretary?

SHORT: Well, I...

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HESS: That's December of 1950.

SHORT: I don't know exactly. I know that Joe called me and said, "I have made my first important decision since our marriage without even discussing it with you, and I hope you don't mind too much." He said, "President Truman asked me to be Press Secretary, and," he said, "I'm sure that you would feel as I do, that if the President of the United States asked you to do a job, and you think you can do it, you have to say yes, and," he said, "I did."

Actually they were not close personal friends then. Joe had covered him for five years by that time, and admired him. I know that President Truman had real respect for Joe as a newspaperman. He was the first Press Secretary, first White House Press Secretary, ever appointed directly from the press corps covering the President to the job.

I remember Joe said, "You know he didn't even

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ask me if I was a Republican or a Democrat." Of course, Joe had asked him questions, and in press conferences and interviews, I'm sure Presidents get an impression of the men who ask questions just as the newspapermen get impressions of any President. Joe also had seen him on

some social occasions. And Joe had come to respect him very much. He had gone immediately to the White House for the *Baltimore Sun* as its correspondent when President Truman took over as President after President Roosevelt's death. And he had been there covering everything that had happened since. And every single day his estimate of the President went up. Every single experience. It was really amazing, when he'd come home at night, and whatever part of the day that he would tell me about, it would be something else to prove that Harry Truman was a great man, or a good President, or an honest man, or a fine boss.

HESS: Do you recall anything in particular that he said that might help illustrate this point? Anything

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that he saw the President doing, perhaps improving upon, perhaps doing in some way that he had not expected him to do?

SHORT: Well, I can't think of a good illustration. I can give you generalities. One was that he, President Truman, had been described as a little man. Joe often said, "That's not a little man, he is one of the wisest men I've seen in public office." Or he would say, "I don't know how in the world I, as a newspaperman, and all of us could have known so little about this man. He has such courage."

I think Joe worried when President Truman first took office, as I did, about the Pendergast thing. But at some point along the line, while still a newspaperman, he talked to President Truman about that and told me; "That machine doesn't need to worry you any more, or me either," he said. "He never was -- they supported him, but he didn't run

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their errands, he was always his own man."

We were on vacation in Springfield, Missouri, in June, 1950, when President Truman decided to send planes and ships to South Korea. Asked by the local paper if he thought Truman was a wise player in the deadly serious game with Russia, Joe replied: "I think he's the best man we could have up there right now."

After he became Press Secretary, Joe's esteem for the President continued to grow. He spoke of the way he handled an appointment, the accuracy with which he sized up men. Joe had to speak to him many times a day, as a Press Secretary (not every day, but lots of days), and Truman had to make a decision about what to tell the press. Remember this was right as we were in the Korean war. Joe was impressed with his ability to handle decisions -- to listen to arguments pro and con, make up his mind and take the consequences himself. If convinced later he was wrong, Joe said he would try to

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correct it, but if there was nothing to do about it, he was able to dismiss it -- not to worry -- but to admit that he just made a mistake and go on.

HESS: Now the man that your husband replaced was Charles Ross, who died on December the 5th of 1950. He and Mr. Truman had been boyhood friends. They were in the same class in high school, had known each other for years. Did your husband ever express anything along the lines that he felt that he had somewhat less rapport with the President than his predecessor Charles Ross had had because they had been friends for so long, whereas your husband had not been a friend of the President before the time that he had been called into the White House? Did he say anything along those lines?

SHORT: Yes. He didn't say what you said. When he took the job he thought there might be difficulty, because he knew Charlie Ross very well, when he was the head of the St. Louis *Post-Dispatch* bureau here and an

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editorial writer. And Joe said, "You know, I never could build the kind of a lifelong relationship with the President that Charlie had, and I wonder if I'll be able to be as useful to him." But then later he said, "You know, the President is such a direct man it doesn't matter that he hasn't known me forever. We seem to transact business very easily."

HESS: So he felt that he had established the same rapport?

SHORT: Well not the same, but one of his own that was just as useful.

HESS: Fine. Good.

All right, how did you come to be Correspondence Secretary to Mr. Truman?

SHORT: Well, Joe, my husband, had a heart attack on September the 18th, 1952, and two days later I had a call from the White House, Matt [Matthew] Connelly,

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saying that President Truman would like for me to take the Bill [William D.] Hassett job as Correspondence Secretary. I hesitated, you can imagine what it was like. I had three small children. I was shocked and lost. Joe's death was very sudden. But I did say, "Matt, I feel like Joe did, that you take a job when the President of the United States offers it to you, but I can't if he doesn't really mean for me to do the job. If he wants me to really do that job, and it's a hard one, then I will take it, but if it's some kind of a way of honoring Joe, I can't do it, because I couldn't be a figurehead."

And he called me back and said the President said that you must know that he wanted you to do the job or he wouldn't have asked you and that he needs you very badly and needs you right away because everybody else at the White House is going out on a "whistlestop" tour in a few days and you have to get your feet wet before we leave. So,

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could you come tomorrow or the next day? And he said, "If you'll think, you'll remember that Joe has been trying to help the President replace Bill Hassett who resigned last July, but it's been

a difficult spot because we want someone of top caliber, but we don't want to take anyone away from a good job for only four months. So, the President asked, will you do it?"

And I said, "Yes."

HESS: What do you recall about the first few days on the job and just how did you go about equipping yourself? What did you do to find out what were the requirements of the job?

SHORT: Well, I hoped to talk to Bill Hassett immediately, I had to wait I think about a week, because he was up in Northfield, Vermont where he had gone to retire. But I did re-read, before I went to the White House, one of my favorite books on President Truman, *Mr. President*, which has another man as

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author, but which was written principally by Harry S. Truman. I read that book because it had wonderful examples of his writing style and I discovered that he was an excellent writer, whether he was writing a sort of a sophisticated thing like the *New Yorker* in a description of his lonely lunch one day, or a pastoral thing like a [David Henry] Thoreau, in a story of his watching the ball game with Mrs. Truman from the balcony. This was the first way; I tried to understand how he wrote.

Now, I had visions of doing a lot more writing for his signature than it turned out that the Correspondence Secretary did at the time. Almost all of the letters that went out from the White House were signed by the Correspondence Secretary, who had been Bill Hassett, William D. Hassett, Secretary to the President. And after I was there I signed about 500 a day, "Beth C. Short, Secretary to the President."

I found out a great deal from Bill Hopkins, who

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is the Executive Secretary -- the continuing person at the White House. He'd been there under four Presidents and followed Rudolph Forster in the top job. As a Civil Service employee he carries over and sort of knows what is going on and I found out from him what was expected of me. And I spoke to Mabel Williams who was secretary to Bill Hassett, and who was still there and going to be my secretary. She was very helpful. Everyone in the White House was helpful: Charles Murphy, the Special Counsel; Matt Connelly, Irv [Irving] Perlmeter, and Roger Tubby, who were carrying on for Joe as the Acting Press Secretaries, everybody was nice.

HESS: A couple of questions about Roger Tubby and Irving Perlmeter. Do you know why your husband selected those two men as his assistants?

SHORT: I think I do. I hate to ever speak for Joe when he isn't here to speak for himself, but I do know that he -- we both -- worked with Irving Perlmeter at

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the Associated Press. He had been a very able newspaperman, very accurate, very careful, very competent with a good deal of imagination too. He had gone to the Treasury from the AP to rewrite the income tax forms that we all fill out every March as I remember.

And Joe did something new. They had only had one person for an assistant, at least that's my memory.

HESS: Mr. Eben Ayers.

SHORT: Yes. And Joe felt that he had two needs there and that he needed two different people: One for domestic affairs, and one for foreign affairs. He thought one of the big holes in the White House relationship with the press was the fact that they didn't have anyone there to give enough background to White House regular reporters on what was going on in the world. This was the area where most of the reporters were least informed, and he wanted

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Roger, who had been the Assistant to the Press Secretary at the State Department, and was well informed, currently, on foreign relations, to be able to give background briefings. He was not to do only that, but that was a particular urge that Joe felt.

Irv, in addition to other things, made the arrangements for the trips out of town, for the buses, for the hotels. He dealt with the people who did the communications, the Signal Corps, or Western Union, or whoever else was needed. And he tried to make the newspapermen as well taken care of as they could be. I remember Joe particularly valued what Irv did for him in that line, because a great many newspapermen had fussed for years about the kind of arrangements that were made for them. Joe had been one of them and he knew. It worked out very well, at least from what I heard and from what he reported. There were always people who griped about something or another. But in

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general, many, many newspapermen told me that Joe removed practically all of the little irritations that they had had in covering the White House. If they got into any kind of a big hassle, that was something else entirely. It wasn't because they were mad at something little that they began jumping on the President.

HESS: Do you recall if your husband said why he did not retain Eben Ayers?

SHORT: That was a long time ago.

HESS: All right. What were some of the innovations and changes that your husband tried to bring to the press office; some of the improvements?

SHORT: Well, the first thing he did, I remember, was to cut down the red velvet cord which was like a gate to keep newspapermen out of the office of the secretary to the Press Secretary. I think he did that practically within a few minutes of being

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sworn in.

Of course, he did a lot more important things like the one I just mentioned about trying to make arrangements comfortable for the news, radio, TV, all of the communications people. And he tried to get (and I think maybe he would think this was one of the most important things he did), people to let the President talk the way he talked. He had heard so many of the off-the-cuff speeches, as they called them in President Truman's day, and he felt that President Truman came through to people better off-the-cuff than he did in a written, and then read, speech. So, that was one thing.

Some people would think that the most important thing (and I would love to know what President Truman felt about all these things), was the fact that they had really good briefings before a press conference. President Truman gave a great many, you remember, over three hundred in the time he was President. And Joe and his staff worked like dogs to get every single question asked of the President

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beforehand so that he could think. And Joe used to be very proud on press conference days when he came home and said that the newspapermen did not think of a single question that he...

HESS: That they hadn't anticipated.

SHORT: That they had not thrown at him in pre-press conferences so that whether his answer was exactly the way he wanted it or not, he at least had had time to think about it. Joe had a great respect for the office of the President, and so did President Truman, of course. Joe did not want him to be put in a position where he would be drawn into speaking too quickly on something where the safety of the United States was concerned. Of course, the President didn't either. Joe felt that if he could be forewarned -- and have a chance to maybe talk to the Secretary of State (and Dean Acheson, of course, was a pretty good one), or even just to think about it or thrash it out there in the pre-press conferences,

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since sometimes there wasn't much time between those and the actual press conference -- that the President would feel better about his answers, and Joe would feel better, too.

He was, I think almost anybody would tell you that there was never anybody more honest than Joe. This isn't one of the great things he did. But I was very amused at some of the ways he handled favor-seekers who sent him presents. There was somebody who sent him at Christmastime a big bushel of gorgeous fruit, with a little note saying that fruits were going to arrive every month.

Well, a basket of fruit is hardly enough to throw back at anybody. So what Joe did was to write the man a letter and thank him very much for his fruit and say he had sent it to the veteran's hospital, Mount Alto Hospital, and that the veterans there had been so appreciative, and he



thought maybe Mr. So and So, in the future, instead of sending fruits to the White House for Joe, to send to Mount Alto, might just as well send them directly to the hospital.

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Well, as I say, that's not a -- but the bigger thing was that he opened up the flow of news from the White House as much as he could. And at the same time he tried to protect the President from being pressured by the press. He tried to use everything he knew about news (and that was a great deal), to help the President reach the public with what was going on.

Does that give you something of a picture?

HESS: It certainly does. One question on Mr. Truman's tendency sometimes to shoot from the hip, and to answer a question without due reflection. Do you recall an incident, a time during the time that your husband was there, when Mr. Truman may have done that during a press conference?

SHORT: I can't remember an instance. There were early morning letters, you know. We do have a *Star* cartoon that hung here for quite a while. The President is looking at headlines: "PRESIDENT WRITES ANOTHER LETTER" and saying to Joe, "Why didn't you tell me

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that was the [Theron Lamar] Caudle that I knew all about?" I don't remember the circumstances, but at any rate, my children always got a kick out of that newspaper cartoon. There were quite a few of them.

Another new thing Joe did at the White House that other people have taken credit for since, I think, was that he organized a "Little Cabinet" committee to keep him advised of what was going on in various departments so that he could keep the President advised. And from the standpoint of the President, he could keep them advised as to what speeches the President was going to be making, what moves he was going to be taking so that he could have (if they desired), Cabinet support. But it was not the sort of thing that we've seen. at least once since, in which departments are told that they were not to release news until it went to the White and that perhaps the White House might want to

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take credit for it and release it. There was nothing of that kind. It was simply to keep a regular communication going. But that was the first time there had been that kind of a relationship between -- this was the Little Cabinet after all, not the Cabinet members -- the Under Secretaries, or Assistant Secretaries and the White House.

HESS: One more question covering your husband's career. In April of 1951, in the middle of the night, there was a special press conference called to inform the press about the dismissal of General [Douglas} MacArthur. Do you recall in particular why that was called in the middle of the night, why that announcement was put out so late?

SHORT: Well, as I remember it, they had been working on this thing over the weekend and all afternoon and evening, and Joe had called me and told me that he was going to be late and that they were in the middle of doing something. And I think that they --

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oh, dear, I did know why it didn't wait till the next day -- perhaps it wasn't finished until 1 o'clock -- or one newspaper had it. I do know that Joe warned the President how violently he would be attacked in Congress and the press, although he agreed with the President that the firing was necessary.

[Later Note: I said the above off the cuff. After Margaret Truman's book was published, I dug into the press conference transcripts and interviewed some of those present. When I can find that research, I will send it and hope it will be cross indexed here.]

HESS: All right, moving back to your own job, what were some of the difficulties that were entailed in your position, in your job as Correspondence Secretary? Any particular difficulties that you may have faced?

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SHORT: I found none in the way that I was treated at the White House. I mean President, Counsel, other staff members were all very cooperative. The work itself had difficulties, because during the time that I was there we had from about 6,000 to 15,000 (oh, I think 20,000 was the most while I was there the last week), letters every week, and some of them involved important messages. We had hundreds or thousands of requests to the President for a message to a convention, a national convention, or about the death of someone, or the election of someone to the presidency of a big organization, or a meeting of all the businessmen in an area, or some other occasion. The sponsors very likely were friends or supporters of the President, or if not, they were leading citizens and they wanted a message. Now, of course, the President can't write that many messages. Nor would it be wise for the White House to send so many. So, choosing which ones,

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and preparing them was quite a challenge to me. I enjoyed putting together a tribute to Phil Murray, who had been so important in the labor movement. Another challenge was a birthday wire to Winston Churchill. I mean, what do you say? For the President's signature.

HESS: Something more than, "Happy Birthday!"

SHORT: The biggest problem was the abusive mail, although most of these fifteen or twenty thousand letters every week were lovely letters.

Now, I was there for the marvelous opportunity of getting to hear the outpouring of American sentiment for the President, in spite of the fact that his party had just been defeated. I had been almost insulated from what happened out on the campaign trail. Where I was, I was reading hundreds of wonderful letters from janitors' wives and bank presidents, maids and society women, and just all the kinds of people that there are in the United

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States, saying, "You've been a great President, Mr. President, and I thank you with all my heart."

But contrasting to that, every week there was what I called the "con mail". I kept it in a special place on the left-hand side of my desk. It was a kind of a challenge, because those letters were the ones regular staff people at the White House thought were impossible to answer. They either called the President a name or they just were so tragically unhappy with him. Every week I found a few that I could answer. I remember one where the woman was a widow whose husband had just been killed in Korea. And although I knew that I mustn't start a debate with anyone who was mad at the President because this never helps either one, I felt that if there were any way that I could contrive to say something in the way of acknowledgment of her letters, and show a little bit of feeling for what she was feeling, without getting

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into an argument, it was important to do, because the President himself was so concerned about each individual American who lost somebody in the war. I guess that was my biggest challenge, to see how many of those letters that everybody else said couldn't be answered, could be. And I never got into a debate that brought more nasty letters.

HESS: Did you write all such letters like this for the President's signature?

SHORT: No, mostly for my own.

HESS: For your own.

SHORT: Almost all the letters, these thousands I'm talking about, were for my signature as Secretary to the President. Now, I discover when I glance through some old drafts, that I must have written quite a few for the President to sign, but compared to the 500 to a thousand that I signed every day, the

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ones that I prepared for his own signature were limited.

HESS: How did you make that determination? Was it easy or difficult?

SHORT: He himself received and I didn't even see letters from his family and close personal friends. I'm sure the White House had a list of people who were close to him whose letters went directly to him. But often I did get letters from people whom I knew he knew well, former friends in Congress, or Governors, or chiefs of state whom he had met.

Then, in spite of all of my newspaper years, I have a little sentimental streak, and I think he did too. If some letter were really just great, if some child wrote a letter that either made the tears come to my eyes or made me sparkle because of the kid's joy, and the way that he felt about the President, I might select it from the hundreds

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of letters from children over a period of a week. One of them would hit me so hard that it would seem like the President ought to sign a one sentence letter. And he did. It was the same way with adults, if somehow they had managed to hit a chord that was really unusual, I would take replies to letters like that in for him to sign. Just a few. And then, of course, he had to sign letters involving compacts with states. Those were a problem for me, not for him. A funny problem, once the Budget Bureau called and said they were bringing over a letter that had been referred to him for preparation of a reply. And I said, "Well, could you figure on spending a little time with me and filling me in on all the background for it so that if the President asks me any questions I'll be ready for him?"

I was told, "Oh, yes, we will of course send someone to brief you."

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So, one of these nice, very informed budget people came along and gave me all the background on this letter relating to a compact between two states, about how they were going to share their water, since a river ran between them. So, as I took the letter in to the President, when he was free to see me for a minute, I was ready to answer questions. He looked at it, and, "Oh. Oh," he said as he read. "I remember that up on the Hill and later. Now, what's happened? I remember it as far as this." All the fill-in he needed was what had happened in the last six months. He knew the history perfectly.

Well, this was the sort of thing President Truman was apt to do to me. Whenever I got all educated on some project so I could educate him, he always knew more about it than I did.

HESS: One question on the abusive mail, if you would receive a letter that had a threat in it, did you

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turn that over to the Secret Service?

SHORT: Oh yes.

HESS: Was there very much of that?

SHORT: Oh, wait a minute, somewhere here I've got a record of the mail. Here's a week, let's see, Friday, January the 2nd, 1953. There were 341 letters of appreciation for the President's service, comments in regard to Margaret Truman 86; and about MacArthur, Eisenhower, Korea and so forth, 7; abusive and threatening, 154.

HESS: Pretty high.

SHORT: Not as many as the people appreciating his service. But when I say that the ones that were really abusive and threatening were turned over to the Secret Service, I don't mean a wire that just said something like, "How low can you get?"

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which indicated simply that somebody was awfully mad at a speech the night before.

HESS: Did you also help with the wording on Executive orders and proclamations and things of that nature?

SHORT: No, that is done by the technical people who are there all the time -- Bill Hopkins' office when I was there, and Rudolph Forster's for forty years before that. They had to do with all formal documents of that kind. I wrote the letters saying the President could not proclaim a special day or week.

HESS: Was the President interested in the content of his mail? Did you ever sit down and discuss this with him?

SHORT: Well, I never discussed it with him, like that. But every day, you see, he had a staff meeting, and sometimes mail was discussed, I had a report every

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week on what was in all the mail. As soon as we had as many as twenty letters on a given subject, the mail room kept a running count. And so I could give him a brief summary of what the mail that week had been. Also, if a special letter was a way to give him a laugh at his staff meeting, I might mention it. As far as the numbers, or how many people were lobbying for or against something, he didn't seem interested at all. When the feelings of letters seemed to mirror how American people were reacting to policy, he seemed to be very interested.

HESS: Did you collaborate with any of the other staff members on the writing of the letters that you answered?

SHORT: Yes, mostly on messages. On letters, the procedure was this. The mail comes in. Part of it is immediately sent to the Government departments to

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which it directly relates. If someone has written about a pension or about a service-connected disability, or something of that kind, it goes to the departments so the President has the information for the answer. If it's fairly routine, the department is asked to answer. Some of it comes back to my office, to the Correspondence Secretary's office, to be answered therewith the information which the department has dug up. But messages to organizations, the ones that he decided, or I decided (sometimes with advice of people who had been there longer than I), to prepare, were done in a number of different ways.

I remember there was a businessman's group in New England, I had the Commerce Department prepare some material on it as to how long it had been in existence and its history before I wrote the message. But if a request related to politics or a problem that was before the country, it was done

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in the White House. Philleo Nash, for instance, was then our expert on minority groups. If a message was to one of the groups that he dealt with all the time, I would ask him for a draft. David Lloyd had had wide experience during the years when I hadn't been in the White House -- he was one of the speechwriters -- and he might prepare a draft. I sometimes wonder how I had the temerity to edit people like that -- David, a lawyer and economist had published a successful novel, and a wonderful play -- but you know, writers find that they can edit somebody else's copy and somebody else can always improve your own.

But at any rate, special messages quite often, the first drafts at any rate, were done in one of the other offices, maybe if on labor, in John Steelman's shop. But then, many of them I just did myself, with research. They take research -- in the first place you want to be sure that this outfit that's after

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the message is one that the President of the United States properly should recognize and, too, that all your information is correct. It's a good old newspaperman's job all right.

HESS: Some of them you would choose not to answer, or you'd choose not to send a message to?

SHORT: Yes.

HESS: Just how would that be determined?

SHORT: Well, you just can't -- no President can take all of them. Bill Hassett had left me a kind of a checklist. Well, for instance you didn't send people congratulations on a 47th wedding anniversary, but beginning with the 50th you could, as I recall. There were other guidelines. You didn't send them to local, organizations, but national organizations you would. If there was something you knew the President was personally interested in, even though

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it might not fit the criteria you were using, you would consult with him and see if he wanted to send a message. But there were more turndowns than there were messages naturally. Which reminds me of a very funny story.

After I had left the White House and there was a new administration, my secretary, who really was an assistant -- she'd been there with Bill Hassett for 19 years -- stayed on. She had not come from any government agency to go back to. Usually at the end of the administration people go back to Defense or whatever but Mabel [Williams], who was very nonpartisan, just did her good job. And after about three months she called me up, I may be wrong on the time, and said, "Mrs. Short, you know what, they've asked me to do the turn downs on messages, myself." And she said, "It frightens me because I've never forgotten that you said it was much more important to do a good job on turndowns than

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it was on messages, because if they got a message they didn't really care much what it said, but if they were turned down, the letter had to be terribly well done, or they would be mad."

HESS: They probably go over those with a fine toothed comb don't they?

SHORT: Yes.

HESS: Word for word.

How would you compare your handling of the job with that of Mr. Hassett, did you do it any differently than Mr. Hassett had done?

SHORT: Well, one thing I'm told I did differently, and although I admired Bill and loved Bill as a friend, he was a bachelor of 74 at the time that he retired as I recall. And when letters began coming to me for signature from the correspondence section, which had been written on the basis of forms which he had

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originated, for children, I didn't think what I was doing, but I always rewrote them. And finally someone, I guess it was Rena Ridenour, who was head of the correspondence section, asked me if I didn't want to write some new forms for children, and I did. But see, I was a mother of three children and I just knew better how to write to children than Bill Hassett did.

HESS: Than a bachelor would.

SHORT: And one of the regular, permanent secretaries there came in once and said with really bright shining eyes, "I just love your letters to children," and that made me feel as good as anything anybody said to me at the White House, because you have no idea how many thousands of letters the President gets from children on all kinds of subjects. Some of them are silly and they just want one of his ties, or some other possession, but many

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of them are so knowing for a youngster who says he's ten or twelve, you know, and he really has an appreciation for, one, the Presidency, or often, less often, but interestingly enough, some times, the political acts of the President. These children, they may be mirroring what their parents say on the political things, but they react so differently. They say what they say so differently and so cleverly sometimes.

Anyway, I did change all of the children's forms while I was there. But many of the basic letters which had been given to the correspondence section, from which they could write individual letters to correspondents based on the kind of a letter that had been written before, were excellent. I mean, Bill Hassett had done what he advised me to do when I finally did have my long, long, long talk with him about, "How do I do this job Bill? You have to help me." He told me a long story about

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which I won't go into in detail, but the essence of it was that people who received a letter from the White House, even though it wasn't signed by the President, in answer to one that they had written to the President, needed very much to feel as if the letter in reply had come from the President. So, I always tried. And he had done it and done it as well as anyone could, to write letters for the President, putting himself into the President's shoes, so that the person who received this letter really felt, and half the time didn't know for sure it wasn't the President who signed the letter. It said White House on the front, you know, of the envelope.

And I tried to do that too, and I did it differently than Bill. He had been a correspondent all over the world, for more than one wire service, for more than one newspaper, he was one of the most erudite men I've ever known. His knowledge

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of history and literature was simply superb and far beyond mine. But he wrote in the -- a little bit more elegant fashion than I, and I'm sure if any of them are still at the White House, or in the files someplace, that you would see that the letters which I drafted, the original responses too, would be much more direct, shorter sentences, but with the same intent, to make the person feel like he had heard from the President, who really would have liked to have answered every letter himself.

HESS: You mentioned that during your first few days on the job that you looked through *Mr. President* to get a sense of the feel of the way that Mr. Truman spoke. Did you also review the letters of Mr. Hassett to see how he had written and perhaps some of the language he had used?

SHORT: Oh yes, I looked at a number of the letters on a number of different subjects, and quite often

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followed the pattern. If I didn't have a reason for changing his pattern, I just used it.

HESS: Do you recall at this date, just how many replies that you would write in an ordinary day's work?

SHORT: I'm sure this varied with the length of time it took me to write them, how hard they were, how -- since some of the messages took me several days, they would cut down the number of letters I wrote a day. I'm sure that I dictated 20, 30, 40 letters in a day, or had written -- I both dictated and wrote my own drafts. As an ex-newspaperwoman, I felt better, in anything hard, if I had my own hunt and peck typewriter. But on the short easy ones, it was of course, quicker and I had two secretaries I could dictate to, so I did both. I don't think there would be a usual day.

HESS: When you had a number of letters and messages

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ready for the President's signature, did you take those in to him and did he read them?



SHORT: He did read them. I took some of them in, some of them were taken, the majority of them were taken. Every day somebody from the correspondence..

HESS: Just through the White House mail system?

SHORT: Yes, would come and get what I had for his signature and take it in to him. But if there was anything that I wanted to call to his attention to be sure that he caught some particular point that I might have covered up very cleverly, I took it to him on these daily staff meetings. And I never remember telling him about more than three letters, and they were always brief. If it were a long thing, like this letter I mentioned awhile ago about something as important about treaties or compacts between states, I made an appointment with him and he read it very carefully, in each

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case. And the stories I told him, the ones that I sometimes took to staff meetings, were either funny or poignant and they were very brief and everybody on the staff got a little break and laugh out of them, and enjoyed them.

HESS: Tell me about the President's staff meetings. Did you attend those and how were they conducted?

SHORT: Well, this was the thing that scared me the most, I guess, after I had decided that I would do the job. I didn't know anything from what I had learned from Joe or what I had read in the papers, that made me think President Truman would suddenly like to start having a woman in his staff meetings every day. You realize that (a lot of people don't), that I was the first woman to hold a top staff job at the White House, and therefore, the only woman to go to these staff meetings. And I had heard that President Truman, in spite of the fact that he had done a

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great deal for women in his administration (long before I went there he'd appointed women to all sorts of jobs, and good ones), liked to be with men. I kind of thought of the staff meeting as something that was his own personal way of handling his business, and so the first day after I went to work there, at 10 o'clock the telephone rang, or maybe five minutes till, and Mabel said, "They say they're ready for you to come to the staff meeting."

And I said, "Please thank them." Then I said to her, "I'm not going, because -- unless the President sends for me, because it just may be that he would prefer, although he wants me to do this job, he may want me to do it in this room and not in there."

She looked kind of doubtful, Ten minutes later the phone rang and she said, "Mr. Connally said the President said he's waiting for you to come to the staff meeting." So, I went and I went every

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day after that when he was in Washington.

I thought his staff meetings the best device I had ever seen in a big organization, for an administrator to be in touch daily, with the feel from every part of his staff. Those staff meetings

lasted from five minutes to two hours. Every one who was on the top staff, and I can't remember whether there were eight or twelve, had an opportunity to take up whatever he thought was important enough to take up with the President.

Now there were certain things that had to be done every time, appointments for instance. He had to decide who he would see and who he wouldn't see. But staff members didn't waste his time. Everybody knew that unless they really had something important that they didn't take it up. And if there wasn't anything important, the staff meeting was over, like that.

Other times the President would have two members

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of the staff -- I remember one time John Steelman took one side of a labor dispute and Dave Stowe took another. And one presented the arguments for and the other one against, the people for, the people against. And when they finished (and they took quite a long time), the President asked if other staff members wanted to comment. After a brief discussion, he said, "We'll do this." He made up his mind immediately on the basis of what he had known before, and then on the presentation by two staff members.

Another useful thing that the staff meetings did was to let staff members know what other people were doing. Everybody was so busy that they couldn't go trotting around and checking on what other people were doing, but the President assigned people things. He said, "You do this, you do that." As things came up he asked for people to make reports or he'd ask for people to do a draft on this, that, or the other. This way he didn't have competing coteries of staff members wasting their time thinking they

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were going to be called on to do something or prepare something, two different groups or maybe three, because it was always clear who was going to do it. I think he was a really great administrator, and I learned much of what I know about President Truman through those staff meetings. And I think -- I thought he was not only a good administrator but a great man.

HESS: Did you attend most of the staff meetings from that time on?

SHORT: Every one.

HESS: Every one.

SHORT: Of course, he was out of town on whistlestop tours a lot of that time.

HESS: That's right, on the '52 campaign, for a good deal of that time.

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SHORT: Yes, I sent reports to him while he was out of town. I was the only top staff member in town during that campaign trip. So...

HESS: Now that's a good point that I want to get to in just a second. But finishing up on this, did you, or did you not, come to feel that your presence at the staff conferences, being a lady, did you feel that that impeded some of the free flow of conversation among the men or not?

SHORT: I don't believe it did. This was what I had feared. I, you know, just thought maybe they just wanted it to be just a bunch of men, but it was, as it had been with me in the newspaper business, people, you know, if you're doing your job they just take you as another staff member. And of course, as far as there being any kind of language that I couldn't put up with or wouldn't like, there wasn't any, and the business was just as normal as could be. I don't believe I disturbed

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the staff meetings. I asked several people and they didn't think I did.

HESS: Who did you ask?

SHORT: Oh, Charlie Murphy, Roger, Irv, just staff members, you know, who were there, if they were any different than they used to be before I came. And they said as far as getting business done they didn't think that it was.

HESS: Mr. Murphy was Special Counsel at that time, did you work with Mr. Murphy at times or ask his advice?

SHORT: Yes, I did. I asked his advice I should say more than anyone else there. I knew from my husband that he was a wise counselor, that he was not apt to go off on a limb, that he really thought before he spoke, And that he had had wonderful experience before he came to the White House. You know he had been in the Legislative Drafting Service for the

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Senate where he had worked with both Republicans and Democrats on every kind of legislation over a period of many years, and he was so thoughtful and wise, and so pleasant to work with. I didn't ever take up anybody's time that I didn't have to, but if I had a -- and I really respected his job, I thought he carried so much of the load for the President. But if I had something that I had to ask somebody and I didn't want to ask the President, I asked Charlie quite often, and he was so, you know, he was very thoughtful and kind and considerate and had such good judgment.

HESS: Now, as you mentioned, Mr. Murphy had been on the Hill and was used quite a bit in White House-congressional legislative liaison matters. Just a general question: In 1949, two men were brought into the White House and given the title of legislative assistant to the President, Joseph Feeney and Charles

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Maylon. Do you recall those gentlemen?

SHORT: No.

HESS: Did you ever see them around the White House very often? Were they in on the meetings, do you recall?

SHORT: I hope I'm not, you know, not remembering somebody I should, but I don't remember either one of them. I probably knew them and just don't remember.

HESS: All right, you mentioned your duties, or you mentioned that you were the top White House staff member in Washington during the 1952 campaign.

SHORT: Well, when the President was away.

HESS: When the President was out, when they were out on the campaign, just what were your duties? Just what do you recall about those times?

SHORT: You mean different from any other day when they

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were in the White House?

HESS: Yes, what was different?

SHORT: Well, first we didn't have a staff meeting. Too, if there was a problem that had to do with mail or a message or anything that had to -- if I couldn't settle it happily myself, feel right about it, then I had to get in touch with somebody on the train. Every day I got a typed report of the news of what the President had just said. Usually it was something from one of the newspapers, or two or three of them, giving an assortment of the news, and I tried to relate that to the kind of things that were coming in the mail. I also knew in general what his speeches were to be, but honestly I don't remember a lot about it, I would have to have my memory jacked up as to exactly what was different except for the fact that when you have to deal with people at a distance, or

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over a long distance telephone, or you're wiring rather than talking, it is different and it was sort of lonesome, I remember that.

HESS: Speaking of the President's speeches: Did you help with the wording or the writing of any of the President's speeches in '52?

SHORT: No. I didn't ever work on a speech.

HESS: All right, we have mentioned the pre-press conference, but mainly...

SHORT: I provided memos to one or the other of the men who was acting in the job as Press Secretary as to anything that came to my mind that might be a question at the press conference, so I had input although I didn't regularly attend.

HESS: Did you attend any of the press conferences themselves?

SHORT: Yes I did. I always went to those.

HESS: You did, each week, as the President had them on Thursday of each week?

SHORT: Yes.

HESS: What do you recall about them? Anything particular, anything come to mind about the press conferences that were held during the time that you were there; the handling thereof? Now at this time they were in the Indian Treaty Room in the Executive Office Building, is that correct?

SHORT: Yes, and I think that was my sharpest impression because with the Associated Press I covered President Roosevelt's press conferences...

HESS: In his office.

SHORT: ...from time to time in his Oval Office, with the people crushed in there as tight as they could

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get, and awfully informal. The press corps wasn't very big then, you know. President Roosevelt could have them in his office and he could know the reporters all by their first names. And then I went over to the President's press conference in the Executive Office Building, which I still call the Old State Department.

HESS: The Old State, War and Navy Building.

SHORT: And it was a staid old room, you know, and high ceilings, and...

HESS: And chairs.

SHORT: ...and here are these people all lined up like an audience, it was just a very odd feeling for me the first time I went, and I don't think I ever got over it. It seemed so different, and...

HESS: Do you think the informal way of holding it in the President's office is better?

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SHORT: Well, if we had that size press corps, but we don't, and I think it's terribly important...

HESS: Can't pack that group in the Oval Room any more.

SHORT: No. And I don't think a pool of reporters ever is as satisfactory as making it open for everyone who has the proper qualifications to attend. So you have to make it bigger and get a bigger room every time. But it isn't nearly as satisfactory. And then, of course, televised press

conferences (which they didn't have at that time), are not as natural as the old press conferences, either Roosevelt's or Truman's, were.

HESS: All right, as a former news lady, I'd like to ask just a general question about that: Now, the press conferences that are held now and for the last few years in front of the television cameras, quite often the person who is asking the question

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just asks a single question, the President answers rather at length, and then points to someone else, which does away with the chance of...

SHORT: Continuity, developing.

HESS: That's right.

SHORT: I can see what you mean and I hate it.

HESS: Of follow-up questions.

SHORT: That's right, this is...

HESS: That's right.

SHORT: This means you don't get nearly as much depth. It's -- I expect Presidents like it because they can maybe get off...

HESS: They keep away from the probes.

SHORT: ...of a limb if there is one that they might get out on, because they can maybe just toss off a

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very brief answer and turn to someone else, you know, and unless the press corps persists, the subject changes. The press corps can avoid this. But they -- I don't know, it would be awfully hard, unless when the President points over here, he just happens to hit again on someone who's holding up a hand who does know a story when he sees it, and pursues it until he gets a story. And that can happen, I've seen that happen, when a number of newsmen in the room do follow-up on the first man's attempt.

HESS: What was your general opinion of Mr. Truman's ability to handle questions at the press conference, at the press conferences that you attended?

SHORT: I thought he did a very good job. Sometimes he was inclined to be awfully quick, and I might have wished that he had given a, you know, thought a minute before he spoke. I don't mean that he made a mistake, I mean, he was -- and some of the times

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when he was quick, were his very best times. He could handle a real difficult subject with one line that made everybody laugh or gave them their lead and they said, "Thank you, Mr. President," and ran out.

HESS: What was your relationship with the Press Secretaries, the Acting Press Secretaries, at the time that you were there as Correspondence Secretary?

SHORT: Well, it was a very wonderful one really, because both of them had been appointed by my husband, and they, I think, admired and loved him. They also were friends of mine before I went. I had worked with Irv, for instance, at the AP, so I knew him very well long before. And they quite often came to my office to chat for a minute, or to talk about something that was going on, so that I, although my particular job didn't keep me up with the news of

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the day, they knew that's what I had been involved in, and thinking about all these years both as a newspaperwoman and during the time Joe was Press Secretary. So, they played like they asked my advice even sometimes, and I think they were just making me happy.

HESS: Did you have any particular relationship with the Democratic National Committee at that time?

SHORT: Not very much, not as much as I should have had in that job. In a sense that I thought that they would have been very wise to have made more effort to make contact. I don't remember their, you know, calling regularly, for instance. Now maybe they were getting this from somebody else in the White House whom they'd known a long time, but...

HESS: Information regarding the drift.

SHORT: The mail, the drift of the mail, might have been very helpful to them, but I don't remember their

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calling me. I could be mistaken.

HESS: But if they received that information they received it from someone else.

SHORT: Except a time or two when I think I called up and told somebody something, but if there was regular communication, I know it wasn't with me.'

HESS: There were times during the Truman administration when he'd get up early in the morning and write a letter to someone rather hastily, and perhaps not well thought out before it was sent. Did you have any problems with Mr. Truman in that regard?

SHORT: No. I didn't and I think it's really all sort of amusing because my husband had quite a few. He was the one who was there as Press Secretary and had to take the flack from all the

newspapermen with the Paul Hume letter and the quote about Drew Pearson and various things that caused trouble for the

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President. But when I first went I can't remember what the circumstances were, maybe it was at my swearing in, maybe it was at some other time, very early, I said to him, "Mr. President, you know you've caused Joe a good many difficult times by some of these letters that you wrote early in the morning before anybody else got to work, and please remember that I'm new at this job and don't do this to me. I don't know what I'd do." And you know, he didn't ever write one that got any news attention or anything in the time I was there.

HESS: Do you recall his comments when you made that statement?

SHORT: I don't think he said either yes or no. But actually because I'm sure he wouldn't have promised. You know, he would have done it if he had felt like it, because he still wrote letters early in the morning, little handwritten letters that got

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off before anybody else got there at 8 o'clock.

HESS: Were those mainly to the family, or who were those to?

SHORT: Well, during the years they were to a good many different kinds of people. I mean before I went, the ones that Joe ran into were, you know, it might be to another newspaperman, or to a music critic, or to a Senator, or a Congressman, or -- but they were the kind of things that he could do quickly and dash off. And don't think they weren't thought out because a lot of them were. Many people didn't like what he said, but I wouldn't -- your question indicated that sometimes they weren't thought out, and I think he thought them out pretty well. Maybe he wasn't very wise sometimes from the standpoint of public relations, but they were what he felt.

HESS: You mentioned that you did not contribute to the

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speeches, the writing of the speeches, but did you attend any of the speechwriting sessions?

SHORT: No.

HESS: Okay. What do you recall about the transition from the Truman administration to the Eisenhower administration?

SHORT: Well, if you'll let me I'll tell you two really good stories about that, entirely different.

The President, if you will remember, announced immediately that he would be very glad to try to make the transition as easy as possible, that he would set up someone in the White House who would be sort of the coordinator, and if President Eisenhower would do that with whomever he



wanted to be his representative, it would be made as easy as possible for the new people who were coming in to get whatever they needed from the old people who were going

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out. And this was not only for the State Department, where of course it was terribly important, but just anyone, his official family. And he sent around, he didn't just announce it for the press, or write a letter to President Eisenhower, I mean to President-elect Eisenhower, he told us. And we had a memo about this that we must be ready at any time to do anything that we could for whomever in the new administration needed to find out what our particular jobs were. We were to do anything to help.

So, I was all ready, I was feeling very important. About this time we were getting a deluge of mail and I was very, very busy. It seems so important when this is what you do all day long and stay late nights and sometimes work weekends without the President knowing. So, I waited for somebody to come and ask me so I could help in the transition on the correspondence. After all there was about -- it runs you know from maybe, 10, 15 to 100 thousand

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letters a week. During the MacArthur thing (that wasn't while I was there), they had about a hundred thousand. And it seemed a very important part of the job and I thought it was very well organized under President Truman, before I went. I wasn't giving myself any credit. But anyhow, no one came.

So, one day finally, about oh, it must have been before Christmas, but still quite a little while after the election, one day the door opened, and there was no announcement of who was coming or anything, and three men walked into the office. And the first two I didn't recognize, except one of them I thought I, you know, from his picture I knew. And then I saw Arthur Vandenberg, who was the third one. And I did know him, I had known his father as a Senator. And so I got up from my desk and walked over to the door and welcomed them and asked if there was any way I could help them. It was Sherman Adams and I believe the man's name was

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Roger Steffen, who had been appointed as the Eisenhower contact, and Arthur Vandenberg, who was to be on the staff. And Mr. Adams said, "Mrs. Short, can you tell me whether that door back there by your desk opens?"

And I said, "Well, I'm sorry, I don't know."

"Would you mind if I tried it?" he said.

And I said, "Not at all."

So, they went over and tried the door and sure enough it opened, but it just opened into a place about a foot deep and the width of the door, and then there was another door. So, they tried that door and it didn't open, it was locked on the other side. And one of them said to me, "Do you know where the door enters into?"

And I said, "I suppose it's Mr. Connelly's office. From the outside layout I would assume he's next, but I've never tried it. I've never been in that way and I go in the front door of his office,

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and if he comes in mine he comes in the front door, so I just don't know."

Well they said, "Thank you very much," and didn't mention the mail and left, And apparently Sherman Adams was going to use that office and he was trying to find out what his communication would be with other parts. Well, that was one kind of transition.

Now, the other story is about the last day, that was inauguration day. The mail had been so heavy that previous week, and I thought it was vital that as many of those thousands of letters that kept coming in every day should get answered while President Truman was President and could sign them as the President, the ones that he was going to have to sign, or that they could still come from the White House while he was President, because so many of these letters were letters thanking him for his service and telling him what a great President he had been. And they came from everybody from the top

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historians of our time to the little people. I wanted so to get everything answered, and I figured out forms which could be used, and they had to be very short. We didn't use, you know, there was no autopen, robotype, things like that. We had been doing personal letters to everybody. But I would find two hundred letters that my little answer would suffice for, or maybe a thousand, and worked the entire weekend to do it.

And then came inauguration day and the letters were still coming and I realized that I couldn't do every one of them. The President had come into my office and said, "I'm going to have to be out here waiting for the General to come, but you can keep sending letters to me as long as you can write them."

And I had several that were from top people, you know, a Governor General and a President and a Premier that needed to be answered by the

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President as President, not as an ex-President, And the ones that I could I got off just as fast as I could and there was a wonderful old messenger who was aged, but who kept running back and forth between me and the President over there.

I had two that were really tough. Each of these people was a chief of state and each had sent his regards to Mrs. Truman, and I had to know whether in the President's reply he should send regards to his correspondent's wife. And on something like this, you don't guess. I didn't know of my own knowledge about either man. And all the files had gone, there was nothing there. I called the State Department, everybody at the State Department had gone somewhere, to the inauguration or wherever they went. I could find no one.

Well, eventually I did, because I got the letters answered and the last one he signed after the guests had arrived to join in the parade down Pennsylvania

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Avenue. So, as soon as that happened, I couldn't do anything more. As I say, the files were gone, everything was gone. My children were waiting for me and had been for a couple of hours out in the circular room for the public. And they wanted to see the inauguration, they were little and wanted to see it. Sandy was twelve, Steve was nine and Vicki was barely five. I checked with Mabel, my secretary, and she said, "Mrs. Short, there aren't any tickets for the inauguration." Somehow I hadn't even thought about that, I had just supposed the White House always had tickets to everything.

And so I said, "Well, we'll just do the best we can. The public goes to an inauguration and we have one advantage. For a few minutes, until 12 o'clock, we still have a car." Because one of the privileges of my fine top office was the use of a limousine. So, our driver, who was a wonderful

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friend as well as driver, appeared and we got into this fine big car which was just like the President's except ours had chrome instead of gold fittings, and I said, "Bill, we don't have any tickets to the inauguration, but the children want to see, and so will you take us as close as you can get?"

"Oh," he said, "yes, and I can get awfully close, Mrs. Short."

And I said, "How is that?"

He said, "You see, I have all of the inaugural stickers to cross police lines." Sure enough, on the windshield there were a half a dozen of those things.

And I said, "Where did you get them?" They came with tickets I knew, because I had had them when I was with the AP.

He said, "Oh, you know, after I leave you at the Capitol, I drive General [Wilton B.] Persons back to the White House, so I have all of his stickers."

So, he took us very close. We got through all of the lines, and we were right up near the Capitol building, except we couldn't get in, there was a rope there and we didn't have seats. There we were, a woman and three youngsters. Nobody was looking forlorn though, because everybody was excited at the occasion. Suddenly the head of the Senate press gallery, Bill Donaldson, said, "What are you doing out there, Beth?"

And I said, "Well, we are trying to watch the inauguration."

"Well," he said, "don't stay out there on the other side of the rope, come here and I'll get you some seats." And sure enough he had some seats left in the press place and we sat there and saw the inauguration.

So, after it was over, there had been some announcements over the loudspeaker about the inaugural parade, and the children said, "Where are we going to

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watch the inaugural parade?"

And I said, "Well, I don't know. We'll just go out and stand along the street someplace."

And about that time Link -- Carroll Linkins, with the Western Union at the White House for many years -- came over and asked where we were going to see the parade. I told him we were going out on the street someplace, and he said, "You're not, you're going to go sit on my desk in my office at Western Union in the National Theater Building, and have a perfect view."

So, we went underneath the Capitol, so we wouldn't hit the traffic too soon, and picked up a streetcar on the other side of the Senate Office Building, near Union Station, and went down to his office and watched the parade. But somehow that business of coming back on the streetcar with the children (and we were having a wonderful time, of course), was to me about as good an example of

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the way power changes in a Democracy, as you could have.

HESS: From a limousine to a streetcar.

SHORT: From a limousine that could go past all the barriers, to a streetcar. You go one way to the inauguration and you come back the other. And I like the way a Democracy works.

HESS: During the time that you, were at the White House, did you assist Mrs. Truman and her social secretary, perhaps...

SHORT: No.

HESS: ...on the letters that they had to write?

SHORT: No. No, I had a contact with Mrs. Truman though that you might be interested in because it plays a little part in history, or rather it might have but it didn't. Mrs. Truman had not given press conferences, as you know. And she had -- she was very much misunderstood by a great many people because

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she had -- kept her own life private. She had done all of the things that were expected of a first lady and done them gracefully. She had entertained, both at the formal official functions, for the Cabinet and the diplomats, and this kind of thing, and also at big parties for organizations and such groups of women or men who came to Washington and expected to have a tea at the White House. But as far as letting herself be opened up to interviews, she had said no.

So, I had -- I was a member still of the Women's National Press Club and I received a telephone call from one of the people who covered Mrs. Truman who said, "We are really stuck Beth, we all of us feel that Mrs. Truman is going to be cheated in history because people don't know enough about her. She just never has talked. We don't even know how she reacts to being first lady. And so many people have guessed and these guesses probably aren't true at all. But we can't get her to let us have a press conference.

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Would you try to persuade her? And if she won't have a press conference, would you see if she would let one newspaper reporter like Bess Furman of the *New York Times* (whom she seems to like), interview her as a pool representative for all the newspaperwomen and then report to the others. And as a last resort, if she won't do this with a newspaperwoman, would she let you interview her and be the pool even if she retains some control over what is given out from the interview?"

I agreed. I had felt for a long time that people needed to know her and that an interview would clear up misunderstandings. And so I tried, I tried my very best. I called Mrs. Truman and I got the answer, it was no. Going down as carefully as I could in the succession they had suggested. All refusals. I finally got the President to help me and he came back the next day and said, "I didn't do a bit of good with the Madam, she is not going to have an interview with anybody."

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And that was that.

HESS: What do you recall about the Alexander the Great wine-drinking story?

SHORT: Well, that was my favorite story for a long time. It happened before I went to work at the White House. I'm not even sure that Joe was there as Press Secretary, but I think he was, but it had nothing to do with either of us on the job. Bill Hillman was the author, along with photographer Alfred Wagg, of the book *Mr. President*, which really was an accident, I don't know whether you knew that. They thought it was just going to be just a picture book with descriptions of each picture in cut lines. But Bill began interviewing the President and going early in the morning and getting him before he got into his busy days and he got such interesting material, and he talked him out of a lot of memos and copies of letters in the White House, so that

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book really tells a great deal about the President.

But no matter how he got it, whether he interviewed the President about history or government, he wanted to be sure that he was not taking advantage of the President. So, Bill made an arrangement with the Library of Congress. He told me (this was at breakfast at the Mayflower one morning), "You know, I don't think I'd want the President to know this, but I really felt that to safeguard him, I should have the Library of Congress check the historical accuracy of the

things that he tells me. So, every week I send them my interviews with him and I have told them to let me know if they find anything that isn't accurate."

He said, "One day one of the men over there called me up," he probably told me his name and I've forgotten, and said, "Mr. Hillman, Mr. Hillman, that story that the President told you about Alexander the Great. We've looked through every book in the

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Library, it's just not here. And we have tried to find someone who could be an independent source for that story, and there just isn't one. And so I'm afraid you'll have to tell the President that he must be thinking of some other great man, not Alexander the Great."

And I said, "Bill, what was this story you're talking about?"

He said, "Well, the President told me when we were talking about Hitler's invasion of Russia that Alexander the Great made the same mistake of expanding and conquering. And then he said the people around him made him think he was immortal, And he found that thirty-three quarts of wine was too much for any man and it killed him at Babylon," Well, Bill said he kept trying to get up his courage to go tell the President he was wrong, and the Library of Congress was checking all this, he hadn't told him that yet, and that they couldn't find anybody who

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ever...

HESS: He'd have to make a little confession there wouldn't he?

SHORT: That's right. So, two weeks went by and he couldn't get up his nerve to go mention it, and in the meantime he was interviewing the President and seeing him briefly, you see, different days. And he said, "And one day I got a telephone call and the man at the Library of Congress was even more excited than he had been when he called before."

He said, "Mr. Hillman, Mr. Hillman, you haven't told President Truman yet that we said he was wrong, have you?"

Bill, said, "No, I haven't gotten up my nerve."

He said, "We've found it. It was in a monograph that was acquired by the Library in 1867 and it's only been checked out three times since, once to Senator Harry S. Truman of Missouri."

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HESS: That's pretty good.

SHORT: So, you see that that story is in the book and it was checked by the Library of Congress and President Truman does know his history.

Bill said the thing that really amazed him was that this was the only time there was even an argument, and the President turned out to be right in that one.

HESS: And fortunately he hadn't told him that they were checking on it.

SHORT: That's right. Which reminds me of another thing that's interesting about the President, if someone else hasn't told you.

Joe told me that he interviewed the President on the first trip they made out of Washington after he was President, when Joe was with the *Sun*. He talked to him in his stateroom on the train, and one of the things he asked was, "Mr. President, what

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is the thing you miss most in being President? It must be awfully hard to suddenly become President in a crucial time like this with the wars in the east and in the west, and with so much reading to do."

And the President said, "That's what I miss most. I had read a book of history every week for forty years until I took this job. And, of course, now I have to read, until 1 or 2 o'clock in the morning, papers from the State Department or other current business. I just can't read my book of history," and he added, "anything that you have done that long becomes a terribly important part of your life, I miss it very much."

HESS: Well, the decision was made before you started to work at the White House, but what do you recall about President Truman's decision not to run in 1952, anything in particular?

SHORT: Well, I remember that Joe told me that down at

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Key West on one of their trips they had had everybody, the President had told everybody to make his guess as to whether he was going to run or not. And they wrote it down. I think Joe told me that he thought he and Charlie Murphy were the only two who didn't want President Truman to run. Now, I could be wrong, you know. I'm remembering things from too many years ago. But I know that Joe felt that he had already served seven, wasn't it seven, hard, long years with great distinction, and that somebody else ought to have to take on that burden. And Joe didn't have the feeling that some people do that, "Wouldn't it be wonderful to be President?" Anybody who has been close to the job thinks it is a man killer. It has great satisfactions, of course, but it's also such a struggle day after day. I think Joe just loved President Truman too much to want him to serve again. Now I could be wrong about Charlie, but I thought that

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that was what Joe told me, And of course, it turned out Joe was one of the right ones. He had written down on his paper that he didn't think the President would run.

HESS: Well, President Truman told a number of his staff members, your husband being one, on November the 19th of 1951, while at Key West, that he did not intend to run in 1952. When did you first find out for sure that Mr. Truman was not going to run? Do you recall?

SHORT: I don't remember. I'm sure that...

HESS: Did you know before the announcement at the National Guard Armory at the Jefferson-Jackson Day Dinner on March the 29th of 1952?

SHORT: Well, it was a...

HESS: In other words, was he telling secrets around the house?

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SHORT: ...very closely kept secret, yes.

HESS: I just wanted to see if Mr. Short was telling secrets around the house, but I didn't trap you.

As the lady who held the highest position in the White House during the Truman administration, what is your opinion of Mr. Truman as President and as a man?

SHORT: He's a delightful man. He was, I think, a very great President. I think that I would agree with some of the people whose letters I read, that any man is great who could work out Greek-Turkish aid, who could set in motion the Marshall plan, who could lead the country in a decision like Korea, who had the courage when one of his commanders disobeyed his orders to let him go, even when he knew it was a completely unpopular thing to do. Oh, just a series of things. I think he was a very fine President.

And I think it is interesting that although the

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State Attorney General and several other important people in Missouri, who wanted to defeat him, had tried everything they knew to find out something crooked that he had done, some way to tie him to improprieties of the Pendergast machine, which was not a good organization in my opinion, they failed. I was a newspaperwoman in Missouri and I just didn't like the way the machine operated. But the fact that he was able to hold, to keep his own integrity, and his own dignity, in the face of all sorts of crazy accusations that were made at him, was an important side of his character.

The greatness had to do with his decisions and his actions as President, but I think that to do it under the kind of attacks that were made on him at the same time, and still hold up his head and know that he was honest and he was all right, was great.

There were more personal things, too. Not only was he wonderful to me as a boss, a very



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wonderful person to work with, but as a human being. In his tribute to Joe, I remember he said that he felt like he was one of his own family. And then the many things that he did even after leaving office, most of these to do with my children, show what a great human being he was.

One of them occurred the day that Joe was sworn in as Press Secretary back in 1950. He had called me the night before and said, "The swearing in is going to be at 8 o'clock in the morning and Chief Justice [Fred M.] Vinson is going to do it, and the family has been invited."

So, I rushed Sandy and Steve (we had two boys, 10 and 7, and a little girl, Vicki, about 2 1/2), down to the barber shop and the boys had hair cuts. Fortunately they had clean suits and I got shirts clean for them. Anyhow, they were already to go the next morning, but 7 year old Stephen disappeared after getting dressed. So, I went looking for him and found him leaning over the lavatory in a very very perilous position, with long shears, cutting his hair. I said, "Honey, I thought we had your hair cut last night."

And he said, "I'm trying to cut it like daddy's," and showed me. He was trying to cut a receding hairline.

I thought that had him all straightened out, but suddenly he said, "I'm not going. I'm not going to see the President of the United States with two front teeth out. I won't go." That was the tall boy you just met. He has all his front teeth now.

But we talked him into going and down we went to the White House. And when we walked into the President's office, Vicki and I were first, she was so little, and Stephen was right behind us, about this tall. After I had seen the President and said hello and shook hands, I looked behind and Stephen wasn't there. Neither was the President.

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And there were other people coming in, you know, to have their hands shaken, but both of them had disappeared. I watched, naturally, and pretty soon they both came out from behind a drapery on those curved windows, but of course, things were going on and I couldn't find out what had happened.

On our way home I said, "Stephen, what happened to you and the President when you disappeared?"

Oh, he said, "He just took me back behind that drapery to show me that he had a front tooth out too."

And I said, "Oh, he did?"

He said, "Yes, of course he said he was going to get his capped that morning at 10 o'clock and mine have to grow back," but he said, "you know after that, I didn't care whether I had two front teeth out or not."

Well, this was a lovely thing that the President had done for this child. Nobody had told him that

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Steve didn't want to go because he had two front teeth out, but somehow he understood and he took this little -- well, he was just wonderful.

Another time, this same child -- Stephen -- was supposed to write a term paper, well, some kind of a paper in the fifth grade or sixth grade, about one of the Presidents. And they had to draw Presidents from a hat. He drew George Washington, but he traded for Harry Truman. He didn't ever think he was much of an artist, but he had to do, in colored crayons, you know, a picture of Harry Truman.

And so at the next PTA meeting these were on the walls, you know, a big exhibit. And Steve came in while I was in there with a lot of other people looking at the pictures and heard someone say about his crayon drawing of President Truman, "Oh, it looks a good deal like Harry, but it looks like he has the mumps."

This upset my son very much. He wanted to

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do his very best and make President Truman look wonderful, because by that time he just loved the man, you see. Sometime later, I just mentioned it casually to the President. Two or three days later, Steve got a letter, which I didn't write, and didn't know about, a short letter from President Truman. "I hear you painted a picture of me, and I appreciate it very much. They say it made me look like I had the mumps. I did have the mumps, and nobody else painted a picture of me at the time. I am very grateful to you. Harry Truman."

HESS: Very good.

SHORT: And also after he had left the Presidency, when ever he came back to Washington he normally went to the Mayflower Hotel. One time he was at Blair House, but whenever he came back, usually, someone would let us know that he would love for me to come and bring the children.

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Well, we did this a number of different times as they were growing older. The last time my oldest boy, Alexander, was in Amherst College and a history major, Stephen in high school, and Vicki in grade school. At each of these meetings we just went to call and didn't stay a very long time, he talked to each of the children separately about history, which I guess has always been just one of his real concerns. And he talked to all of them on the level where they were, so that it was different each time. It was different with each of the three of them one time, and then the next time, when they were a year older or two years older, it was again different. And they just couldn't believe that the President understood whatever history they were studying, you know. And he told them as he has in many things that he has said and written, that he thinks it's important if you're to learn how to behave in the civilization you are

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living in, and the time you are participating in, to know history and what happened before, or you're apt to go out and jump off the wrong end of the diving board or something. And this has made a great impression on them. Two of them majored in history in college and it has been a wonderful challenge to them.

Well, he's just a great man. I've talked too long about it, but I could talk a lot longer.

HESS: What is your opinion of Mr. Truman's place in history? Just two or three hundred years from now, if the world lasts, how will he be regarded by historians and members of the general public?

SHORT: I wonder if I may tell you something that I'm sure he wouldn't want printed or known until after he isn't here? Can I do that?

HESS: You certainly can, and we can...

SHORT: Illustrating what I think...

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HESS: ...and we can close it for a period of time.

SHORT: Well, I'll say first what I think. I think he'll have a very important place in history.

I'm no expert, I don't know what my judgment means, but that's what I think.

And this is what he wouldn't let me tell anybody. I wanted to give it to the Press Secretary to issue a press release on. Then I wanted to do something about it after he left office and he said, "Oh, no, you know, it'll come out in time."

Among these complimentary letters to the President which I had, and saved copies of, were letters from two of the outstanding historians of the country at the time of his service as President, Henry Steele Commager at Amherst and Allan Nevins of Columbia. Both of them wrote to the President and I'm sure those letters are somewhere there in his files. They told him that they thought he would have a top place in history, and they were

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speaking with a lot more knowledge than I have. And because they were the eminent historians, the people who other historians looked toward, I wanted to use it, you know, I mean with their permission. I wouldn't have done it ever with anybody's letter without their permission, but I'm sure they would have given it, because they weren't being coy or anything about it. They just wrote him and said, "Dear Mr. President," and gave their views. And sometime when you work at the Library you can look up those letters because they are interesting.

But I think the fact that they thought he would have a great place in history is interesting. Also the fact that President Truman would have nothing to do with getting any credit with the public

for what a couple of historians thought, is another facet of his character you know. I wanted the recognition for him because they were outstanding and because I was upset when people said

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that the election showed a renunciation of President Truman. Of course, all my people who wrote to the President said, "Don't pay any attention to that election. It had nothing to do with you. Everybody knows you're a great man."

Oh, the letters those last few weeks after the election were marvelous. People could hardly wait to get in there and be counted, to tell him what a great man and President he had been. But those particular two letters I thought wouldn't hurt for other people to know about. The President said, "Oh, you know, it'll come out in time."

HESS: Do you have anything to add on Mr. Truman or in your job as Correspondence Secretary?

SHORT: Yes, there is one other thing that I think ought to be in the record somewhere and that is the fact that because of my personal situation at the time I was appointed I don't think President Truman got near enough credit for appointing a woman to a top

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job. Normally, there would have been a terrific lot of publicity about a thing like that. The National Committee would yell about, "The Democrats are doing great things for women," and other people would applaud the President's choice of a woman for a top staff position. The Women's Lib of the time, if there was one, and certainly the Women's Suffrage movement warmed over. But there wasn't any hullabaloo. In the first place, people had respect for -- local reporters had respect for -- my grief for Joe. Everybody knew that we enjoyed each other an awful lot and it was a hard thing for me to do, to work at all so soon, and they didn't press me. But it saved me! That job. If I hadn't gone to work I don't know how I could have stood it. Just having to put one foot in front of another and one finger over the typewriter was good for me.

But at any rate, I couldn't. I couldn't help the people who did ask for interviews and want to

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make something of it, magazines particularly, because the newspaper people just wrote it straight about the appointment and so forth. But the kind of thing that sustains interest in an appointment of that kind is mainly the magazine or feature kind of thing. And I said no to all the people who asked to interview me. At first, physically I just couldn't do the job and also come home at night and take care of the children and give people interviews. And then too, I just had no desire. I had no feeling of accomplishment. I mean, the President had asked me to do a job, he said he needed me, I had done it. This was exactly the attitude Joe had had in an entirely different situation, he hadn't lost anybody, but it was just something you don't make a big thing over. I had that feeling also. I suppose news writers who have had to ward off publicity seekers have a natural aversion to personal publicity, too.

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At any rate, it didn't get written about very much. And like Joe when he was Press Secretary, I did not take speaking engagements. I made one talk at the Women's National Democratic Club on the White House mail, with the President's permission, but the other kinds of invitations you get to go places I turned down just as I did interviews.

But I think it was significant for women that President Truman did appoint me and did let me do a job. And I hope it won't be forgotten. I really do. I met India Edwards who was longtime top gal for the Women's National Committee just last week, and she said, "You know, I almost didn't put you in my book." She's writing a book right now and she said, "And then I remembered, and I said Harry Truman made you Press Secretary, you were the first woman ever to hold a top White House job."

And I said, "Yes, but I wasn't Press Secretary,

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I was Correspondence Secretary," But you see, she and other people misunderstood because there was no to-do about it, and there weren't a lot of stories saying first woman this and first woman that, it was just a job to be done and get done, I hope. And as far as the President was concerned he didn't care, and as far as I was concerned for myself I didn't care. Now as time has gone on and I've seen other people described through the years as the first people, first women to have top jobs, I think he ought to get the credit, I think he did help create a climate which helped in the appointments of other women later.

HESS: Should more women have been appointed to higher jobs back in those days, could they have been appointed?

SHORT: Well, I assume that...

HESS: What was the difference really between the

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atmosphere of today and back in that day?

SHORT: I'm not a very good person to ask that question of I'm afraid, because I have never felt discriminated against as a woman in any job that I've held. And I never have been. I mean, not from the standpoint of salary, or from the standpoint of getting to do comparable work.

In the particular newspapers I worked on, the men who ran them treated women just like they did men in making assignments. And they figured, as I've known always there are some places where being a woman is a good thing in getting a newspaper story, and sometimes where it's not. But a good reporter will manage to handle both, you know, a good man reporter will somehow get the story that maybe a woman could have gotten easier and a woman reporter will do the same.

And so it has not been very difficult for me. I know that the situation has existed, that other

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women in the newspaper business who started as I did back in 1929, and that's a long time ago, happened to hit newspapers where they were given nothing but drivel, just society or luncheon clubs, and never had a chance at the big stories. But you see, it didn't happen to me so I can't resent it for myself, I just resent it for other people and that's never quite as deep a thing.

Another reason, and in frequent clamor, whether it's the present Women's Lib or whether it was the people who have been fighting for the equal rights amendment through the years, I can remember Mrs. Roosevelt and Miss Frances Perkins, then Secretary of Labor, telling women reporters at that time what a great mistake equal rights would be for women. You know, it would rub out all the good legislation that they had worked for years to get on the books for women, rub it right out.

Well, of course now the people who are supporting

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it, say that already that legislation has been made applicable to both men and women, the parts of it that were good about limits on hours and so on, so that isn't applicable anymore. But in both times people forget that most women want to be wives and to make their work fit in with that of their husbands. The percentage of women who work has increased. It's multiplied many times since '29, or even since 1952 when I was at the White House. More women do work, but most of them still want whatever jobs they have to fit in with those of their husbands. Now there are a few women who can manage, you know, their husbands either have the kind of work that can be done just as well in Washington as in Keokuk, Iowa or wherever it is, but for Government jobs, which require moving to Washington, whether it is to be in Congress, or whether it's to take a top job in the White House or in the Government departments, you have to have such a special kind

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of woman. Not only a woman who can do the job, whatever it is, but a woman who can move into a job easily without disrupting a family's life.

So, I think this is a part of the reason why there haven't been, you know, equal numbers of women in top jobs in Government. You have to have a sort of a special situation. One of the new Congresswomen who's here now, I heard them the other night, commutes. She happens to live in Connecticut so she can go home on the weekends and see her husband and family when she's at home. And she doesn't have small children, they're grown. But all these things limit. You take out the women with small children, and you take out the women who want to be with their small children pretty regularly and don't want the irregular hours, any kind of a top job requires more than the regular office hours, as you know. And women can't do it as easily as men.

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I think there should be equal pay for women, I don't think there should be discrimination against them because they are women and I hope that wherever it is it can be eliminated, but I don't think you will ever have equal numbers of each sex in top jobs.

HESS: Anything else to add tonight?

SHORT: Did I -- You didn't ask me all that. I got all wound up. Yes, you did ask.

HESS: I certainly did. Thank you very much.

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