

Oral History Interview
with
MARY JANE TRUMAN

Sister of Harry S. Truman

Grandview, Missouri
1975

by Stephen and Cathy Doyal and Fred and Audrey Truman

The Harry S. Truman Library
Independence, Missouri
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STEPHEN DOYAL: What was that first car of Uncle Harry's, Mary Jane, do you remember?

MARY JANE TRUMAN: Uncle Harry?

STEVE: Yes.

MARY JANE: The Stafford. That was his first car.

STEVE: I was thinking he had one before that.

MARY JANE: No. He had a Stafford. He took it down to Fort Sill, and then when he left for France, the boys and whoever was there broke it down when they were hauling tools. Too heavy loads [were] in it, and I don't know whatever became of the final thing. I don't know whether they saved any of it, or if it just went for junk; actually I think it just went for junk.

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STEVE: It just rotted down before he got back probably.

MARY JANE: It's a good old car. I learned to drive in it. It was about 1914 I think.

CATHY DOYAL: Aunt Mary, you've driven ever since then?

MARY JANE: Way long ago.

CATHY: When was it, 19.. .

MARY JANE: Well, I've had my car since 1919.

CATHY: But you knew how to drive before then.

MARY JANE: Yes, I knew how to drive.

STEVE: That Dodge you had was the second car you owned then, wasn't it? That Dodge Coupe?

MARY JANE: No. That was the first.

STEVE: Was that the first one?

MARY JANE: That's the first one.

STEVE: I thought you had a later model than that.

MARY JANE: No, it was 19 ...

STEVE: About a 1918 model?

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MARY JANE: Yeah, about a 1918. And I drove that for ten years.

STEVE: Yeah, I knew you drove it for a long time.

MARY JANE: And finally it got so I couldn't turn the steering wheel, it got so tight.

STEVE: Was it that Nash you had next?

MARY JANE: Let me see. Yes, I believe it was a Nash. I got it from Harold. They wouldn't let me drive for a while after I had appendicitis. And so when I bought a new car I got that Nash from Harold. I think I had two or three Nashes.

STEVE: Let's see. Two anyway I'm sure of, Aunt Mary.

MARY JANE: The first one I think was when we still lived down on the farm.

STEVE: That was that big one with the long hubcaps on it.

MARY JANE: I don't remember.

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STEVE: That bird dog was the best dog you ever had.

MARY JANE: Oh yes, that bird dog was a dandy. One of the neighbors killed him.

STEVE: Yeah, what did you call him. Pep?

MARY JANE: Pep.

STEVE: He could climb every fence in the county.

CATHY: Oh, really.

STEVE: Just like a ladder.

AUDREY TRUMAN: The last dog Aunt Mary had was named Barkley. After the Vice President.

CATHY: Oh really.

STEVE: What kind of dog was it?

MARY JANE: A chow.

STEVE: He was part chow and part shepherd I think. He didn't have any of the chow characteristics.

MARY JANE: But Harry told Mr. Barkley, and he said, "You tell her she could have named me after something better than a dog." And I said, "You tell him how nice that dog was."

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AUDREY: The Secret Service men had the little dog, didn't they?

MARY JANE: No, I had him.

AUDREY: Well, they were the ones that named him, weren't they?

MARY JANE: No, I named him. Let's see, I had three or four chows. [There was] Center. I called one of them Tinsin and he never bothered anybody but everybody was afraid of him and he was just the best dog with Momma you ever saw, and I had him about six or seven years.

One morning Momma and I was having breakfast, and Vivian came in the kitchen and stood in the dining room door and Center was sitting between Momma and me. He'd sit there and pat you for a piece of toast, and so he got up when Vivian came in and never barked at him. When he [Vivian] came in, he sat down in front of Vivian and stuck his paw up and he wanted to shake hands. And Vivian petted him from then on, but Vivian was afraid of him. He was just afraid of him. And he never bothered Harry at all. Harry never paid

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a bit of attention to him. And when Harry was home and had breakfast with us some times, why he'd sit between Harry and me. He thought he got a bigger bite from Harry. I've had a lot of pets that have been lots of fun.

Then, I had an old [cat] -- well really he was Vivian's cat -- and when they moved over to the Good place they left him with Momma and me. We were still on the farm then and he came home one morning with a great big hole in his neck. I don't know what did it, someone or something got him. So Momma and I ended up taking care of him and he washed himself in the sitting room, climbed up in the old rocking chair we had, and there he stayed. He'd get down maybe and drink a little milk and then he'd go back to his chair. And Momma and I worked with him and doped his neck and took care of him. He got all healed up and then they put out some poison for the rats at the barn.

STEVE: The only thing it killed was the cat.

MARY JANE: And that's all it killed was the cat. By that time Momma and I thought as much of that cat as we did

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any we had ever had. Then, when we lived over here by the railroad, one morning -- I think Momma and I had eaten up practically everything; there wasn't a thing that a cat would want -- I heard a cat crying in the backyard, and he was the sorriest looking black cat you ever saw and just about so thin. Somebody had gone and left him and he was just starving. I thought well, what in the world would I do; we didn't even have any milk. This is how hungry he was -- I just got a slice of white bread and gave it to him and he ate every bit of that bread. Now that was how hungry he was. 'Cause cats won't usually eat bread like that. Well, we took him in. We didn't take him that day but the next morning he was sitting on the banister of the front porch; he had come to stay. So by that time I'd roused up a little more food and we fed him and he just stayed. Somebody killed him, but we had him, oh for several years while we lived there, and Momma thought a lot of him too. He was just an awfully nice cat and he would get in that old chair. It was sitting near the radio; we had a radio then. So Mr. Shannon came in, and he usually sat in that big chair and I said, "Oh, Mr. Shannon," and he just jumped up, but he was

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almost sitting on the cat, and he would have just been crushed. Mr. Shannon weighed over 200 and Momma got to scolding me. I said, "Well, I didn't want him to sit on the cat." Oh, we had so many things happen with the pets we had.

CATHY: They are so much joy really.

MARY JANE: And then I had a dog, I think he was a shepherd wasn't he? That nice dog I had, don't you know? Well, I believe he was part chow wasn't he?

FRED TRUMAN: I don't know.

MARY JANE: Well, anyway Vivian had the mother. That shepherd dog was his mother and I think he was part chow if I remember. And I moved him over here. He was just a little puppy about that big. I carried him home and, of course, the Secret Service men were always fooling with him and teaching him a lot of things, and he loved to play ball. So I guess I had him about two or three years before I moved over here. I was a little uneasy about moving him over here for fear he would try to go back home or somebody would do some-

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thing to him but I finally got him to realize that this was home.

STEVE: Oh, that painting must have been taken from that.

MARY JANE: Yes it was. But that's not very good. See, the eyes don't look exactly right.

CATHY: Eyes are very hard to do. Eyes carry so much personality. They're not just like your nose. It just sits there. It's kind of hard to capture, really. I tried to paint a few portraits from time to time and it's always the hardest part.

MARY JANE: I imagine. Well, he painted that from this picture, I think.

AUDREY: I always thought that picture was a pretty one.

MARY JANE: Momma gave me that for my birthday when I was 12 years old. The original frame was broken and so then I had the frame put on.

CATHY: Well, that's beautiful.

MARY JANE: The frame that was on it when she bought it was about this wide. It was an old-fashioned frame, kind of

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gingerbread like. And so then, it was broken. I liked the -- it's a Chandler picture. Chandler was a quite popular painter at that time.

CATHY: Yes, I noticed that right away.

MARY JANE: And that picture, that's not a painting. That's just a print, but it was given to me up at north Missouri where I was to hold a chapter one night and they gave me a present. It was a yellow rose -- the flower I had chosen -- and that painting over there, the pansies, Ethel Noland painted.

CATHY: Oh, did she?

MARY JANE: Yes, she was a pretty good artist. But she had to give it up because painting made her sick.

CATHY: Oh, did it really?

MARY JANE: Yes, the paint I guess.

CATHY: Well, for goodness sake.

MARY JANE: Yes, we have a little landscape somewhere that she painted.

CATHY: She is a nice lady. We used to see her every once

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in a while because she lived next door to our church and we used to see her on Sundays.

AUDREY: You know that house is still just like it was, I assume. It was always so interesting wasn't it?

MARY JANE: Yes.

AUDREY: Their living room; they had two living rooms, and the first one wasn't as big as this, not much over half this big. Then you went into the other living room.

MARY JANE: It went across the house; it was a pretty good size.

AUDREY: And their chairs were all needlepoint, beautiful, beautiful needlepoint. I was just fascinated with them.

MARY JANE: It was an interesting place. And the dining room was larger than either one of the front rooms. But they finally cut some off the back, and there was a kitchen in back of there.

AUDREY: That lamp, Uncle Harry gave that to Aunt Mary Jane.

MARY JANE: Well, he gave it to Momma when we first got the electricity down at the farm.

AUDREY: I knew there was a little story behind it.

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CATHY: When was that?

MARY JANE: Oh, that was back in 1929, when we got it down at the farm. We had to use lamps until then. So Harry gave it to us the first Christmas after we got there.

FRED: Pop pulled a horse trade with me and Harry. See, they wanted right-of-way across the place. Pop gave them the right-of-way if they would put in the electricity, and then he didn't use the right-of-way.

MARY JANE: That's right.

CATHY: Well, that was a smart move.

MARY JANE: Of course, it gave Vivian's house and ours to electricity.

CATHY: Well, that's great.

FRED: We got that out of the Kansas City Power and Light [Company]. We were in another territory, in Missouri Public Service territory.

MARY JANE: It was a long time before the lights up here would have come to the farm. They just never made any effort to come down. So we had Kansas City lights and they were far more reliable. Well these are pretty good.

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FRED: These are pretty good, now. But they weren't then.

MARY JANE: No they weren't. Mine went off, I think one night last week, or the week before. I guess it was one of those rainy times the lights went off. I waited a long time and they didn't come on so I called them and they said they were working on it. And in about thirty minutes they came on. They're much better than they used to be.

FRED: I think they do pretty good now.

CATHY: We had some trouble out in Blue Springs, oh, about six or eight months ago. They were putting all the phone lines underground instead of up on the poles and somehow the phone company managed to cut the Missouri Public Service line which shut off the generator that pumps water all over town. So everyone got up one morning and nothing, no water, nothing. We thought it was just temporary, or building or something, and we called some people on down the street and no, they didn't have any water and we called a friend who lives across town and he didn't have water and there was no water anywhere in town till about 10 or 11 in the morning.

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MARY JANE: My goodness.

STEVE: You had to get up in the morning and shave with what ice water you've got in the refrigerator. That's not too great either.

CATHY: That was funny. We were just like little chipmunks or something, because that night we saved water for about three nights. We'd run water into a big pan just in case something happened in the night, we'd at least have something to drink.

AUDREY: Well, I bet there were some people who didn't have any water to drink, because you never think of that happening.

STEVE: Well, I think it was even before that we had had a bad experience. Blue Springs grew so rapidly that it's taken the city a while to catch up with its people. We live north of the freeway, I-70, and most of the growth before that had been south of I-70, so there was a very small water line

out there. It had really just served the country people. Now, there's five or six developments out there and at the peak of

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the summer when everyone's watering their yard and taking a bath and getting ready for bed, water pressure drops down to just nothing. Well, we live on the third floor in our building and the people on the second floor had water but we didn't because the pressure wasn't enough to get it upstairs. And so, the night we discovered that, we had planted a planter box and we had planted a plant. We were just dirt all over everywhere and we went to the sink to wash and nothing came out. So we had to go wash at the faucets outside in the parking lot. We're careful with our water.

CATHY: We're very cautious with our water. We have little stashes of it everywhere.

MARY JANE: It's a great life if you don't win.

AUDREY: It does make a believer out of you.

MARY JANE: I'll tell you this is true, you don't miss water till the well runs dry.

CATHY: Aunt Mary, you were talking about Ethel Noland's house and I don't know if any of you can answer this, but it used to be in houses you had the sitting room and you had the parlor, and I kind of wondered what you

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did in each room. I never understood quite the function of the room.

MARY JANE: Well, when we lived in Independence we had a parlor, sitting room, dining room and kitchen on the first floor and usually the parlor was kept pretty much for company. But we had folding doors between the parlor and sitting room and they were open most of the time. We practically lived in the whole thing. The sitting room was more where everybody landed, and brought the newspaper and read in there and so on. And we had the piano in the parlor and things of that sort, and gentlemen came in when they were invited in. We had a hallway where you came in from the front door and the parlor was just off from the hallway and the sitting room was in back of that. And our dining room in the house that I'm talking about was a little off to the side of the sitting room. Then, the door from the dining room came into the kitchen, and then we had a pantry off the kitchen and an enclosed back porch. That was where we lived last. [Waldo Avenue.]

CATHY: Well, now, I'm glad to know that because you read

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in books about the parlor and the sitting room and I never really knew the difference.

MARY JANE: And some lived in the whole house, and some didn't. A lot of people would shut off the parlor and never use it for a week or two at a time. But our doors were always open because we had the piano in the parlor and, of course, we had to practice the piano.

AUDREY: Fred had to make calls for his church and he was making some of them at home. He'd been trying to get a hold of this man. Well, yes, the parlors used to be...

MARY JANE: I think now they are just company places as a rule.

AUDREY: The sitting room now is what we call our family room, I guess.

CATHY: Well, I'm kind of glad to know that.

AUDREY: In older homes some of them were small.

MARY JANE: Well, some of them were. We had pretty goodsize rooms in the sitting room and parlor both. Then, we moved down on North Liberty, we had a sitting room

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and dining room and kitchen but not exactly the same pattern we had at the other place. There was a little bedroom off from the sitting room and then the parlor. That was the funniest thing; there was a little hallway and you had to come in through the sitting room and this parlor was over here to the left as you came in through the front door, and unless you just went in there and made use of it you never would go in because you would land in the sitting room. I never could understand why they had to have a door out of this little hallway into this parlor, the same as they had coming into the sitting room. But it was just closed off to itself.

STEVE: You didn't know it was there.

MARY JANE: You didn't know it was there at all. We just kept the door closed in fact, as I remember. We hardly was ever in the parlor. I don't know; it was funny. But it was a cute old house. I kind of liked it. I think it's still there. It's an old, old house. It was old when we lived there. The kitchen floor was about to fall out of it. We only lived there six months and then moved to Kansas City. But it was a nice old house. There were two bedrooms upstairs,

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and the stairway went up out of the sitting. The sitting room was the...

CATHY: I also always wondered what parlor games were.

MARY JANE: I don't know exactly myself.

STEVE: Whatever you play in the parlor is a parlor game.

MARY JANE: I guess so.

My cousin who did real nice woodwork -- he refinished it for me. Grandma said she didn't know how old it was, but she had brought it out here from Kentucky. It had been in the family through the time she got it.

CATHY: Well, for heaven's sakes.

MARY JANE: I don't know, it could be 200 or 300 years old. I don't know exactly. Well, anyway we know it's over a hundred years.

CATHY: That's really something that it has been kept nice so long.

MARY JANE: Fred, will you go get off of my chest of drawers? I don't know how dusty it is. Now that's my one antique [a doll].

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CATHY: Well, it is a beauty.

MARY JANE: Isn't that pretty? My cousin finished it so nicely. Tighten it there so it will go clear back.

CATHY: Well, isn't that the sweetest thing. I bet you had fun playing with it, too, and other dolls.

MARY JANE: Oh, yes I played with it for years when I was little. And then it was after we moved back out here that my cousin finished it for me. Oh, he offered me \$50 for it. I said you couldn't get it for twice that.

CATHY: Well, it is really something.

MARY JANE: It's heavy too. Isn't it?

FRED: It's pretty heavy for the size of it.

MARY JANE: It's solid walnut and mahogany.

STEVE: You don't really see a whole lot of walnut pieces either. Older furniture -- an awful lot of it was made out of oak. I guess because oak was easier to come by.

MARY JANE: He said it was mahogany when he got into it. He

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said it was mahogany and the veneering was walnut. It's heavy. Thank you, Fred.

CATHY: Well, that was really something. I know Mother always said that she had kept a doll for years and years. Do you have a doll that they may have played with?

AUDREY: No, I don't think I have.

MARY JANE: When they came for the doll, its hair had all come off. It had a skin body, and the arms would move like real arms; just bald headed. So don't store anything in the basement.

CATHY: No, I guess not. The dolls that they had back when you were a little girl, were they the ones with the china heads or cloth and rag-like bodies? What were they like?

MARY JANE: This one's a beautiful doll. It had a china face; she wore my baby clothes. She was that big. She had curly blonde hair and blue eyes. I guess it was a china face; it could be broken without any trouble, but I managed to save it. Then I lost it.

STEVE: Did she have a name?

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MARY JANE: I've forgotten what I called her. I believe I called her Martha, for Momma. I'm not for sure. It seems to me that is what I called her.

CATHY: It's a lot classier name than Poofy. That's what my first doll was called. Where I got that name, I don't know.

MARY JANE: I'm not for sure if that was it. I don't know whether I called her for my Momma or my Grandmother. Seems to me I called her Louise. Grandma's name was Harriet Louisa. It seems to me I called the doll Louise.

CATHY: Not having any brothers or sisters at all, I always wondered what it would be like to grow up with a couple of older brother or sisters for that matter.

MARY JANE: Well, I had two older brothers. They were pretty lively at times. I expect I was just as much a pest to them or more maybe.

CATHY: You probably had to learn to defend yourselves, pretty well.

MARY JANE: I'd take about so much and then I'd get mad and then they were just delighted when I was mad. I'd

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kick their shoes or anything I could. We had good times together. I had pretty nice brothers.

CATHY: Well, I'd say so.

MARY JANE: They were nice to me always.

AUDREY: Uncle Harry was the one who used to rock you, wasn't he?

MARY JANE: Yes, he rocked me to sleep. He'd rock me to sleep till I was four or five years old. I can remember. We had a big old willow chair. It was big enough for him and me both to sit in the seat, and he'd put a pillow behind me and rock and rock and sing "Bye Baby Bye." Momma said I'd just get to sleep, and he'd try to stick his arm out and I'd bob up and he'd have to go through the whole process again. Then she said that he'd go out and play and then he'd get to thinking I couldn't breathe, so he'd come back in and check on me to see if I was breathing.

It's funny how you're cute when you're kids. But he and Vivian were awful good to take me places and play with me and take me anywhere I needed to go.

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CATHY: A lot of times fellas don't like to be bothered.

MARY JANE: They were both awful good to me. Well, as they were both home, Harry would come by, well Vivian too, if I needed them. I had to go down to the income tax office one day and I asked Vivian if he wouldn't go with me. He knew some of the folks down there. So he went with me and he got a bang out of it because they told me my tax wasn't paid, and I had two receipts showing that the first and second quarters were paid. When the fella came out I said, "I understand you think my tax isn't paid." "Yes, that's right." I said, "Oh, no it isn't. I got the receipts here." And he just looked like two cents. Anyway, I didn't have anymore trouble with my tax.

CATHY: I'll bet not. It kind of pays to keep track of things.

MARY JANE: Yes, I keep too much stuff. I'm scared to throw anything away for fear I may need it.

CATHY: Well, you never know.

MARY JANE: I was so glad Mr. Burrus came today, because

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it kind of cleared things up with me going in to see Dr. Graham next week.

AUDREY: He couldn't have picked a nicer day.

MARY JANE: Oh, it was lovely wasn't it. We had such a nice time. We had a good dinner and then we had quite a little visit.

AUDREY: What time did they get here, Aunt Mary?

MARY JANE: Oh, they got here about 5, a little after 5 I guess. And of course, you see, he was out here before and we went over everything and then he took it to the income tax man and got it all straightened out. And then I just had to sign the things today. So it didn't take very long.

CATHY: It's good to have that all out of the way. It's kind of a good feeling.

MARY JANE: If some of it would just come back. I don't think it will. It hasn't for the past few years.

AUDREY: Well, they were probably just checking before, just because. If your name had been Smith, they probably wouldn't have checked.

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MARY JANE: Well, we've been told by some of the girls that work down there that they take the Truman files out ever so often and check them. That was before Harry died. Trying to find something.

STEVE: They wouldn't know who we were to look us up. We don't have to worry about that.

MARY JANE: It seems funny that Truman is a handicap, doesn't it?

STEVE: I would imagine it's got more pluses than it does negatives.

MARY JANE: It doesn't bother us too much.

CATHY: We certainly do enjoy talking with you. You always have so many interesting things to say.

MARY JANE: I don't know; sometimes I think I'm just an old fogey.

STEVE: No.

CATHY: I wouldn't think so. I have always been so interested in -- well you know -- before I was born, anything

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that happened. I don't like to feel left out of things, you know; I like to know about the -- I've always been so fascinated by what children did when you all were little. I know what they do now. They sit around with so many toys they don't know which one to play with and they get frustrated. I used to play with an old spoon and bucket of rocks most of the time or something like that. But you know I would be interested in kind of knowing things you used to do when you were little.

MARY JANE: Harry and Vivian and I played a lot together, the three of us, and I remember one thing we did, at that first place we lived in Independence [on Crysler Street]. It had, oh, about seven or eight back steps. When it was going to rain, we had a great big old umbrella, a big old black umbrella, and we draped some old lace curtains around the umbrella and the three of us got under the umbrella and stayed there until it began to rain pretty good. Momma was always afraid of lightning. She was scared to death to have us out there, but we'd get out there and have more fun and, of course, we pretended things were going on. I know one time we were doing that, and

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Momma was watching the clouds and she called us in. She saw there was a storm coming and sure enough, after we came in, there was a wind storm that went clear across the back yard and blew the hen house down and something else that went right across where we'd been playing at the bottom of the steps. I heard Momma tell that. I remember being under the umbrella, but I don't remember too much about the storm, you know. She was watching for it and I do remember the hen house being blown away cause we went out and inspected everything. I think I was about four or five. That's been an awfully long time ago.

CATHY: Well, that was kind of a close call.

MARY JANE: Yes, I guess we would have been either killed or seriously hurt if she hadn't noticed it. It blew the hen house away and all sorts of things.

AUDREY: Where did you go to school, Aunt Mary? I don't think I ever did hear.

MARY JANE: I went to school at Columbian School, for grade school. And then we moved to Kansas City, and I went to Irving School there for a while; then we moved

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back out here, and I never finished school.

CATHY: Columbian is still there isn't it?

AUDREY: Yeah, I think it is.

MARY JANE: But it's not where it was. Columbian, where I went, would be up on the lot where the Mormon temple is...

CATHY: Well, in school then, I guess it would be more of a city school and then a country school-type thing. How were the classes?

MARY JANE: Oh, it was like a regular school just like it is today. Only, of course, not as up-to-date. But it had all the grades, up to eighth grade.

CATHY: Now you lived on Crysler for a while didn't you, on Crysler Street?

MARY JANE: Yes.

CATHY: Because I think we lived there when I was little; we lived at 703 S. Crysler. Was the depot there?

MARY JANE: No.

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CATHY: That was one of my favorite places to go when I was little. Mother and I would walk down there and watch the trains go by.

MARY JANE: Oh, yes. You mean the Missouri Pacific? Yes, it was there. That was in back of where we lived. And let me see, we lived there the first six years we moved from Grandma's [Crysler Street], and then we moved over on Waldo, 909 Waldo. And our house was on the corner of Waldo and River. Then we lived over on Liberty [902 or 903] for about six months, and then moved to Kansas City and lived in Kansas City for two years [2108 Park Avenue].

CATHY: I bet the city has changed a lot since then.

MARY JANE: Yes, it's changed a lot. But I don't like it as well as when we lived there. It's not nearly as pretty.

CATHY: No, you know it sure isn't.

MARY JANE: You know, I think they just ruined the Square. Mr. Burrus and I were talking about that this evening and he said he did everything he could to keep them f

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rom tearing up the Square. He said it was just a group opinion that they didn't know anything about the town and they wanted to tear the courthouse down and put a parking lot there. So they got together and did manage to keep that, but he said he doesn't know how long it will last.

CATHY: Oh, that will be sad.

STEVE: I don't think they'll do too much over there because the project they've done has been such a dismal failure.

MARY JANE: Oh, it's terrible.

STEVE: People can't find anything.

MARY JANE: If they would have left the old Square like it was and repaired the buildings, it wouldn't have cost nearly as much. And it would have still been Independence.

CATHY: That's true. They did all that when we were living in Hawaii and when we moved back, Mother said, "You'll have to go up town. You won't even recognize it." I couldn't even get around it. They changed all the

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streets and I was in back alleys and everything else. I couldn't figure out where I was going.

MARY JANE: You can't, on the Square anymore. They just ruined it.

CATHY: It used to be I could remember...

MARY JANE: It was pretty with the courthouse the way it was and the lawn fixed nicely. It was a nice place. Mr. Burrus said they had a time keeping them from putting the parking lot there and tearing the whole thing down.

CATHY: I think they would have had a lot more success if they would have, like you say, restored the store fronts and maybe even made it look more like earlier times.

MARY JANE: Sure, I think it would have been appreciated.

CATHY: Well, it's such an historic area.

MARY JANE: Well, yes, you know Independence is one of the oldest towns in the country.

CATHY: A lot older than Kansas City. A lot of people

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don't realize that.

MARY JANE: Yes, that's right. And most of the business used to be tended to here, and the wagon trains that went West .

CATHY: Is it Mr. Burrus or someone else that is working with the people who are restoring that

beautiful, old home on Liberty? That is a senior citizen's home, right now, but they are going to go ahead and restore to the time period it was built and let the people still live there.

MARY JANE: This Mr. Burrus is a lawyer. He might be connected with it.

CATHY: I believe I read in the paper that he had something to do with it.

MARY JANE: He probably is because he is interested in that sort of thing. He might have something to do with it.

CATHY: I was happy to hear that the homes there on Delaware between the President's house and the Library had all been put under national protection so then they would

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always be kept up. Because those are beautiful homes.

MARY JANE: Yes, some of them are awfully nice old homes.

CATHY: When I as going to school there at the Junior High that used to be the High School, our art classes would always in the springtime go and sketch various houses because they were kind of gingerbreadery and I always thought they were so pretty.

MARY JANE: Yes, there are some pretty old homes in Independence.

CATHY: Grandview has really grown too. I'm surprised everytime I go out there.

MARY JANE: That's right. It's grown a lot just in the past two years.

CATHY: I can remember we used to come out to Steve's folks, and, why, that whole corner there, that is Truman Corners...

STEVE: Was part of the country. I should talk; having not grown up in Independence, I can't talk about the streets on the Square. But what businesses were on the Square when you were growing up?

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MARY JANE: Well, there were store buildings and mostly dry goods stores. Well, Bundschu's was the main dry goods store on the east side of the Square and then there were jewelry shops and groceries and other dry goods places smaller than Bundschu's. I think, if I remember, there were quite a few saloons.

STEVE: I think in almost every town where there is a square. I know it's that way in Lexington; three sides are business and one side is saloons, in almost every town I've seen.

MARY JANE: That's the way it was in Independence. It was kept up, you know. The stores were kept up in the Square. Well, it was kind of a gathering place in a way and I think it's just a shame they did away with the Square.

CATHY: I do too. It's too bad.

AUDREY: That is one of the beauty parts of an old town, the way the Square in Independence is, and if Independence had been left the way it really should have been...

MARY JANE: Well, I think so too. You know, that was where

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all the main business was years ago. It is much older than Kansas City. I think it's just too bad they didn't leave it the way it should have been. But Mr. Burrus was saying this evening you just couldn't talk to them; they wouldn't listen. And he said they had to work like a Turk to keep what they did keep.

CATHY: That's really something because I imagine...

MARY JANE: And what was it; he told what he thought, and then they wanted to know what Mrs. Truman, Mrs. Bess Truman, thought. And he said, "She thinks a lot like I do." So, they didn't have the nerve to call her. He told her what he thought; she said, "Well, you tell them the same thing for me." He got a big bang out of that. He said he didn't tell them. But she objected just like I did. It tickled Bess...

CATHY: Well, I imagine that that whole area was kind of a place where people had brought things to market, to a certain extent.

FRED: How many horses was it Poppa Truman traded down there, and rode the same one back?

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MARY JANE: I don't know, Fred.

FRED: Wasn't it ten or fifteen horses he traded and rode the same one home?

CATHY: Oh, really.

FRED: Yeah. He went up there on the Square one day and traded ten or fifteen horses and rode the same horse home.

CATHY: Well, that's pretty good.

MARY JANE: And if they had wanted that one bad enough he probably would have traded it.

FRED: Yeah, he would have walked.

MARY JANE: He was always doing something.

CATHY: Now that's what I call a dealer.

MARY JANE: He was a dealer. He traded horses and cattle.

CATHY: He must have always had quite a few around from time to time.

FRED: Yeah, Aunt Mary had a couple of pretty good driving horses.

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MARY JANE: And then we always had a horse we could ride. I learned to ride when I was so little my feet stuck out like this. So Harry had a pony he called Beauty, and he was gentle. But he got to the point that he knew I was on him and he'd go just so far and then he'd turn around and go back home. I couldn't pull the reins hard enough to make him keep going.

So, I thought, "I'll fix him;" so I put on spurs. I was about seven years. We got down to the corner where he always turned and I gave him a little kick, and he went on and went by some folks we knew up on another street and they asked me about my riding and all. I told them about my experience with him and turning around and I wasn't going to turn around this time. I don't know whether I got kind of show off or just what, but I gave him too hard a kick with the spurs and he ran. So I could see Mr. -- and he came out with his arms just like this just scared to death - - and I was hanging on for dear life; I couldn't ride. So I hung on to the reins and to the saddle horn too, I finally remembered right. And when he got to our gate he stopped. But you know he never did try to turn

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around on me again. I could ride him anywhere. But I thought I was going to go off into the street. I was really scared. I won't tell you that I wasn't scared because I was really scared. But I'll never forget that it liked to tickle the neighbors to death when they got -- I can see their faces yet. They were just scared to death. They just knew I'd go off and I had to go around a corner even. When my feet wouldn't go in the stirrups, there I was just sitting like this. Oh, it was fun.

CATHY: Oh, I bet. Well, golly, you had a team of horses then.

MARY JANE: Well, it was my father's team, but I drove it and what did we call them. Molly was one, I think, and what was the other one -- little black ponies, and one of them had a lot of white spots on it. And what was her name? I thought I'd never forget, but I guess I have. Then, Uncle Harrison had an awfully nice horse, and when we'd come out to Grandma's he'd let us ride

him. He called him Don. He was a great big horse. Well, Uncle Harrison weighed over 200;

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he had to have a big horse. But that horse was so gentle and nice, and he was just like he wouldn't drop a hat. And I could ride him all over the place and he never did offer to do anything. Several people, I know, when Uncle Harrison would put me on him, would think he's an old "Don Thumb;" he won't do anything and he didn't. He would just know who was on him. He would behave himself all over.

CATHY: I bet you did look tiny on top of a great big horse.

MARY JANE: Well, he was a big one. Uncle Harrison had to have a big one because he was big. He was over six feet tall, or just about six feet, and he weighed 200 or more.

AUDREY: Remember when the buggy turned over with you? You were just a young girl then.

MARY JANE: Yes, that was during the First World War. We were driving old Bill; he was an old buggy horse we had. And he was another one that wanted his own way. You couldn't get him out of a nice little trot to save your life. He pretty much went where he pleased. We had been down to a cousins; I called Momma and asked her if she needed anything and she said, "Yes,

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get a loaf of bread." Things aren't like they are now. I had to come back up to Grandview to get a loaf of bread and everything was going just fine. The two Duvall girls and Lucille Bosley and I were in the buggy. Lucille was sitting on some of the girls' laps, and I was sitting on Eileen's lap to drive. We just had a buggy. And when we left Grandview, the lights were just beginning to come on; it was just about dark. We got about half way home, and I saw the rim of automobile lights and I remember giving the right line a pull and trying to get old Bill off. Well, he gave his half but he would: not get past his half of the road.

CATHY: He knew where he was supposed to be.

MARY JANE: And, so, this automobile hit the front hub of the buggy and threw all four of us girls out into the road. Lucille was just about 14; she was the youngest of the bunch, and she landed on her feet and ran to the house on the side of the road. I was on top and had the lines, you know. Well, fortunately, we were driving old Bill and he went the length of the lines and the line wrapped around my wrist. If

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he had run I guess I would have been killed. But they said I kept saying, "Oh, I hurt my back terribly." I kept saying, "Oh, oh," and he thought I was saying "whoa." He went the length of the line and all the harness came off of him and the buggy broke loose. You see, if he'd been inclined

that would have scared any horse to death. But they said when I kept saying, “oh,” he turned around and snorted at me and went off to the side of the road, and ate some grass.

Of course, the people in the automobile got out and came to see. One of them said, “Who in the world have I hit?” They said, “Mary Truman.” He said, “Oh, my God, I’d rather hit anybody than Mary Truman.” It was so funny the girls started to laugh. And I still hadn’t come to yet. So he picked me up and found that there were no broken bones. We got awfully shaken up. One of the girls got an awfully bad skinned knee. And I believe I got a skinned knee, too, if I remember. He had worked for my grandfather years and years ago and thought a lot of him. He had come over in the beginning from Germany, just way back when. He thought I was part of the family, you know, but he said he’d

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rather hit anybody than Mary Truman. So he got us all into the car then and it was beginning to get dark by that time. We were all in a mess, but traffic wasn’t like it is today so that saved us. So he took us home and he had the buggy and harness and everything fixed. Of course, it was in the First World War and some of them were awfully hateful about our German people you know. Well, my goodness, he worked for my grandfather before I was even born; I wouldn’t sue him for anything in the world. Besides, he did everything he could. He had the harness fixed and the buggy fixed and just did anything he could. He offered to pay any doctor bill, but we didn’t have a doctor out here. No doctor.

So we had to wait till the next day and the girls did have a bus by that time. So we got on the bus and I took Lucille home because she was so much younger than the rest of us, and I wanted to explain to her mother, what all had happened, and as long as she wasn’t hurt why it was all right. Well, Mrs. Bosley was awfully nice about it. Lucille wasn’t a bit hard to take care of. We had a good time. But anyhow that was one of my experiences.

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STEVE: It’s an exciting loaf of bread.

MARY JANE: Yeah, I don’t know what happened to the bread.

CATHY: It was probably the last thing you thought of, too.

MARY JANE: So we were all banged up, and Momma doctored us the best she could. The girls, of course, had their doctor after they got back to Kansas City.

CATHY: They will probably remember that visit for quite a while.

MARY JANE: I was treasurer of the 129th Field Artillery Auxiliary then. I don’t think I went to a meeting that day, but the last time I went, or didn’t go rather, I had a wisdom tooth pulled. I got home and didn’t think anything of it. The next morning I got dressed to go into the Auxiliary

meeting, and I fainted at the breakfast table. I had had too much dope and didn't realize it. So I called in and told them I would have to make my report later. I called Harry; he was home, then, and I told him to call in the report for me, so he did. Then, finally, that was when they were getting rid of the books and things anyway. I've forgotten

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just what I had, but I think it was \$1,031.65 or something like that. So, the president of the club and somebody else went with me to the bank; I guess they were afraid to let me check it out by myself. So anyway, the girl in there knew me cause I had been doing it for three years. I told her how much I had, and so she went to go check. And she came back and said, "How much did you tell me?" I said, "I have one thousand," and whatever it was. And she said, "That's it to a cent." I said, "Well, that's what I thought." So they didn't have anything to criticize.

CATHY: Well, what did the auxiliaries do?

MARY JANE: Oh, they did war work, you know. Made bandages and did Red Cross work and whatever came up. We managed to send things to the regiment from time to time. We sent Christmas boxes and things of that sort.

CATHY: That sounds like a real nice thing to do.

MARY JANE: And then if I remember correctly, I think we sent money, and the Christmas gifts were bought over where they were.

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CATHY: Did you meet once a week?

MARY JANE: I think we met about every two weeks. We didn't meet every week.

CATHY: Well, that's really great.

STEVE: Did you meet in a church?

MARY JANE: No, we usually met in a hall or someone's home; very often we met in the homes. It wasn't as big as it is now. How many men are there to a battery, Fred?

FRED: I'm not sure, Mary. I think around 150.

MARY JANE: I think so. Well, then there's six batteries to a regiment and, then, of course the officers. I don't remember just how many but we had a nice organization.

STEVE: Isn't that about right, just about a thousand?

MARY JANE: Just about a thousand, or maybe 1,200. We had a nice auxiliary and we did quite a bit of war work.

CATHY: You lived out here then?

MARY JANE: I lived on the farm then.

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FRED: Aunt Mary ran the farm.

MARY JANE: I ran the farm.

CATHY: Did you really?

MARY JANE: Yes, I ran the farm while Harry was gone.

CATHY: Well, then you were a gentlewoman farmer instead of a gentleman farmer.

MARY JANE: The farm then was 600 acres. We had 300 in pasture and 300 in cultivation. We had wheat; we were shipping wheat before Harry had to go to Camp Doniphan. Then, I had to finish things up and see to it that the wheat was sewn in the fall. I remember I was a worrier to death. We had a good man, an honest soul, but he was as slow as Christmas and I thought I just knew we were going to get the wheat in too late for it to make a crop. But, you know, it turned out the next summer we had a real good wheat crop.

CATHY: Well that's great. Well, how on earth did you manage that farm like that?

MARY JANE: Well, of course, I had worked in a way with

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Harry and Vivian. I knew pretty well what went on, but I had never had the responsibility of the shipping and all of that. But I must say that all the neighbors were just as nice as they could be, and I couldn't have gotten along if they hadn't have been. Then, Mr. Blair was the banker of Belton; we didn't have a bank here. He was sort of used to the farm country and their problems and all. So if I got a little puzzled, I'd go to him. He'd help me. Mr. Boxley was our lawyer, so when the thing was over, Harry and I went to see Mr. Boxley and tell him how much we appreciated it and offered to pay him. He said, "Oh, that was just my part during the war," and he never charged me a cent. He said, "Besides, Mary never did need any advice; she always knew what to do. She just needed some moral support." I said, "Well, thank you, if that's the way you feel," because I didn't feel that way.

CATHY: Well, did you have gas-powered equipment?

MARY JANE: No, mules and horses. We had all the machinery that was necessary at that time. Now it just wouldn't be anything. Everything is machinery. We had all the necessary farm machinery.

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CATHY: It was all made then so it would be operated with a horse or mule.

MARY JANE: Yes, it was mostly to pull it. But we had to have horses and mules.

CATHY: Did you send crops into Kansas City after they were harvested then?

MARY JANE: Yes, we had a boxcar come to the station there and then they'd fill it. They would haul the grain to the car in a farm wagon. I was just real lucky.

STEVE: You know that they say that at that particular time there was a simpler way of life. It might have been simpler but you had to work harder.

MARY JANE: You worked harder and we always had a big bunch of men at threshing time. We had as many maybe as 25 or 30 for dinner. In the wheat shucking and at the threshing time. You see, you had to have drivers for the wagons and then to load the wagons and it just took more.

CATHY: What on earth did you feed thirty people?

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FRED: If you see what they feed a company in the Army that's what you feed 24 harvest men.

MARY JANE: Well, you always had to have plenty of meat and plenty of potatoes and plenty of vegetables. Usually you had three or four vegetables and then plenty of meat and bread. Sometimes you could get the bakery bread and sometimes you couldn't; then you had to make biscuits or cornbread or something like that. Then [there were] the machine men; there would be five with a machine and they stayed overnight. So you had breakfast, dinner, and supper for them. Then at the noon meal the neighbors would come in; they traded work. We would have anywhere from 25 to 30, and we always had company besides. We always had a houseful.

CATHY: Well, I imagine it was a lot of fun too. I mean that's a lot of work there.

MARY JANE: And Harry, when he was home. You know he wasn't married until after the First World War, and so before he went away he would get up lots of times and get breakfast for the men. 'Cause maybe Momma and I would be washing dishes 'til 10 or 11 o'clock at night.

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AUDREY: Did you have lots of deserts and things like that?

MARY JANE: Quite often we had pies or cake or cookies or something. But we didn't always have desert. We had preserves, though, and jelly. But, oh, we couldn't do all of that.

CATHY: That's quite a lot of work, really. You and Mother had to do all of that?

MARY JANE: Yes.

STEVE: Just the amount of food amazes me. And right now, if you wanted to feed 24 people, you would go to the grocery store to buy enough for 24 people. But you couldn't do that then really. You just had to open the cupboard .

MARY JANE: No, you see the places to get the food were sometimes difficult to get [what] you wanted. Of course, we had the main groceries and all. But it wasn't easy.

CATHY: Did you have a little vegetable garden?

MARY JANE: Yes, we had a garden but the garden didn't amount to much with that gang.

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CATHY: It wouldn't take long to clean the bean patch with all those people. And I get into a tizzy over six. Of course, if you put six people where we live, it looks like 24 in some other places.

STEVE: Only because we have five chairs.

AUDREY: Well, when they take them [chairs] in the wagons from Virginia or some place like that, as far as Missouri, or even farther, why that was always a mystery to me how they could do that.

MARY JANE: It is a mystery about how many things they move that way. Well, Grandma, before the old house burned, there were a lot of things she had brought from Kentucky. Some solid walnut beds and some dressers, and Momma said this little dresser there was a little stand that that sat on, and my grandfather had his shave in this little drawer. That's where he shaved, in front of this little mirror.

AUDREY: That was your grandfather...

MARY JANE: Grandfather Young.

CATHY: I guess your mother was quite a lady.

MARY JANE: This is her picture and that was taken after

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she was ninety. Don't you think she looks well preserved? She was about 92 when that was taken. She lived to be 94. She died in July; if she would have lived 'til November she would have been 95.

AUDREY: That picture of her with Uncle Harry in the other room, there, I think she looks so gentle.

MARY JANE: I had taken her to Washington; that's when we got off the plane. I was on the other side of her and they cut my picture off. Some of those people were the limit, and I guess they thought I was the maid. They just cut me off. One woman over at the Library in Independence, about four or five years ago, maybe longer -- somebody introduced me to her and told her I was the President's sister. She looks at me and says, "I don't believe it." I said, "I don't care if you don't believe it or not. That's the way it is, but I don't intend to prove it to you." You'd be surprised about some of the things that have been said. They just won't believe my relation with Harry. And there's nothing in the Library that would tell I was his sister.

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CATHY: Well, what did your mother think of Washington?

MARY JANE: Well, she enjoyed the visit but, of course, she didn't get out very much; she stayed at the White House. There was the nicest old Negro maid there. She had been there since 1900. She was a nut; she took care of the "chillun," she called them. She said, "Now, Miss Mary, you go on and have a nice time. I'll take care of your mother, and you don't have anything to worry about," and she did. And when Harry announced that he wasn't going to run, he came home and - what was her name -- anyway she met him at the door and had her apron up to her eyes crying. She says, "Oh, Mr. Truman we can't get along without you." She didn't want him to give up running again, but she was an awfully good woman.

CATHY: The people she must have seen come and go.

MARY JANE: And she really was the one who looked after the children. And then there were two other maids, Julia, and I don't remember the other one's name. There were two other maids that would come and take care of it. They were awfully good maids. But Bess was awfully good to them, when one of them had quite a serious

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accident. One of the maids said to me, "I hate to see Mr. Truman go; oh, he's been so good to us." They just couldn't do enough for Harry and Bess, and they were certainly wonderful to Momma and me. They'd been there for a number of years, too. I don't know how long, not as long as this older one. They said that they just couldn't do enough for Harry and Bess, because they had been so good to them. Well, Bess has had maids all of her life and she knew how to treat a servant.

They couldn't get very far with her. She did what was required, but she didn't do a lot of extras. She didn't want to, and I think she was right.

CATHY: I think you kind of have to set your own tone.

MARY JANE: She and Harry just didn't turn out to be themselves and act natural.

CATHY: I think it would be unusual living in the White House. Would you feel like you were living in a museum?

MARY JANE: At least, I didn't. Of course, I wasn't there very much. There's a certain amount of tension about it. You're so afraid you might do the wrong thing, or at least that's the way I felt. Maybe others didn't

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feel that way about it. I think it's just a little bit different. And you have to mind your "p's" and "q's" all the time, on account of the criticism you get, you know. But I couldn't have been treated nicer and I could go anywhere I wanted to. There wasn't any restriction where I was concerned. But I hesitated to just push ahead like some people do.

I never will forget one day; I think it was the first time I was there. I went back and I was going to cross into Harry's office. This fellow stepped out and said, "Where are you going?" I said, "Well, I'm going over to the President's office." He looked at me, and I said, "Well, I'm the President's sister." Well, he just looked. He just looked like he had been hit in the face and he said, "Oh, Miss Truman, I knew you were here but I just hadn't seen you." I said, "Don't worry about it. How would you know who I am. You have never seen me before." Well, he was so embarrassed he just nearly died.

I went over to Harry's office and marched in as though I belonged. One thing I enjoyed there was the newscast. The newsmen would come in; they usually

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met in the Oval Room. They would be lined up in front of him, not much further than that away from him, clear back to the wall and all around you know. There was a little sofa off back to the side from where Harry stood, and I usually sat there. It is more fun to watch that news thing. The questions just come thick and fast. And there's just not hardly any pause between it. Once in a while, when two or three would get up at the same time, Harry would point to the one he wanted to talk. I went several times to the newscast because I enjoyed it.

CATHY: You would really have to be paying attention because they don't give you much of a chance to think.

MARY JANE: No. And I don't know how Harry answered so quickly. It just didn't seem to me

that they gave him anytime at all, and all of them got a big bang out of it. You could tell that the reporters were enjoying it just as much as I was. Once in a while he got kind of a smarty question. But they didn't get very far. He had just as smarty an answer.

STEVE: When they lived in the White House, did they take

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things from their home here?

MARY JANE: Only things they actually needed. Everything is furnished; only some personal thing they might want. And then, you see, they lived in Blair House part of the time and that was just as interesting. It was just as interesting as the White House. Some beautiful furniture was there. I visited more there than I did the White House. I think I was at the White House maybe three times altogether, because they were rebuilding. Then I was at Blair House, I don't know how many times, four or five maybe. I didn't go too often but I was there several times. The last summer that Harry was there, I was on a trip to New York with a friend of mine, and Harry told me to come by. In the meantime, Bess came home to Independence so Harry was there by himself. Mrs. Harry Potts that went with me to St. Louis, she was assigned to the Lincoln Room and I was...[end of tape]

Momma couldn't get into the bed. She had had her hip broken previously. The maid's room joined this room, and so she said, "Mary, you will have to get into the Queen's bed; I can't get into it." So she took the

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maid's room, and she could get in and out of that bed. So I had that room everytime I was there except once. I think I was assigned to a room back by Bess' office the last time I was there.

FRED: You mean they didn't put you in the Lincoln room?

MARY JANE: No, they put Momma in there. No, I mean they put Mrs. Potts there. I was assigned to Queen Marie's room.

FRED: I went there and slept in Lincoln's bed once.

MARY JANE: Did you? Yes, it was a great, big long bed you know; it was beautiful furniture. The dresser had a center mirror and then a smaller mirror. It was an old-fashioned walnut dresser. That was the room where Lincoln signed the Proclamation. Margaret had a room just as you came up the stairs to the right. She had a sitting room and a bedroom. Harry's room opened up off of the Oval Office.

STEVE: Did you travel by train?

MARY JANE: Yes; I believe I drove once. I went to St. Louis and we drove from there. And then Mrs. Reppard

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and Miss Woodward went with me. We drove from here that time, I believe. And then they assigned us a different car in St. Louis, and it broke down in Ohio. They assigned us another car and it wasn't as big. We went to the Grand Chapter in Washington, D.C.

We did go on to New York. I've forgotten why; that was a special reason. I think that was the time we got picked up. Mr. Stone was driving. It was marked everywhere no faster than 45 and it was 35 in the towns. And I said, "You're driving too fast; you are going to get caught." Well, he forgets, I guess. He was used to driving fast. And Mr. Bennett said, "Stone, why don't you pay any attention to what Miss Mary says?" Pretty soon we heard the siren, and we got pulled off. And I was so mad at myself, I don't know why I didn't think faster. I told Mr. Bennett to go in there and tell Mr. Stone not to tell who he was driving for. But he had already told that he was driving for Miss Truman, thinking that would help him. Well, we were in a Republican situation. The fine was about twice as much as what they would charge anyone else. But, anyhow, I didn't have much trouble keeping him down after that about driving.

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I said, "Oh, Mr. Stone, why in the world did you tell my name?" Oh, he thought that would help. But it got into the papers. And Harry really had a fit. They were going to fire Mr. Stone. Well, I guess he deserved it; I think he would have known better. I said, "Oh, he didn't do it intentionally." It was the first time he had ever made such a mistake. But, oh, the men there in the office were so mad at him. And, oh, some of the folks wanted to have me in the paper, and they told them that I was joy riding with a Secret Service man. Of course, Harry just threw a fit. But I had Mrs. Reppard and Mrs. Woodward with me. They never did mention that. But to tell you the truth, the car had been brought in by one of the men and it had a Texas license on it. The car he was driving had a Texas plate on it; it didn't have Missouri. I tell you, I like to never lived it down. I was Lady Grand Matron then, and that was even worse, of the Eastern Star of Missouri. And there I was out "joy riding with two Secret Service men." Two of them, mind you, and from Texas.

CATHY: Oh, I'm sure that was a subject of discussion.

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MARY JANE: Of course, I had pretty much of a reputation of being dignified till then.

CATHY: A little tarnished around the edge, maybe for a time.

MARY JANE: Yes, I remember when I first got into town, I don't know where they got the idea but they thought I was terribly dignified for some reason. When they got better acquainted they

found out I could laugh and have just as good a time as they could. Anyway it was really something.

CATHY: You've really had a lot of experiences with the Eastern Star haven't you?

MARY JANE: Well, Harry and I became charter members here in Grandview in 1913. Anyway, I went in as an associate conductress. That's the first one in the elected offices. And that put me as Matron in 1917. At the end of my year, our [Eastern Star] home was burned and we lost everything we had had. We reorganized right away and when we finally got started again, it was along in February of the following year after it burned. The year after I was out as Grand

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Matron, I was appointed Grand Representative to Pennsylvania, and that means I represented Pennsylvania in Missouri. In 1935 I was appointed Grand...

Then I thought that was the end of things. In 1945 I was appointed Grand Adah from Mrs. Wolfe in St. Louis. In that year I was elected Associate Conductress. I was installed in October 1950 as Worthy Grand Matron [of Grand Chapter, Order of Eastern Star in Missouri]. So then I served as Grand Marshal for about five or six years in a row. And then I got crippled. I began to get crippled and I couldn't march.

STEVE: The Grand Marshal works herself all night long.

MARY JANE: So I had to step aside and I served as one of the members on the committee. They put me on a committee here, but I haven't done anything in these last few years because I can't do it.

CATHY: Well, I would say that over the years you have put in quite a bit of service.

MARY JANE: Well, and then I install our chapter here at Grandview nearly every year. I don't know how many

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times I have installed my own chapter and I most always install at Pleasant Hill.

CATHY: Did you travel quite a bit with different groups?

MARY JANE: Yes, I'm an honorary member in Texas, Louisiana, Oklahoma, Montana, Wyoming, Kentucky, Nebraska, and I always leave some of them out. There's ten or twelve of them where I'm an honorary member. I've never been sure if I'm an appointed Grand officer in Kansas or not. I've been over there a number of times but I'm not sure if they made me an honorary member.

CATHY: I'll bet you have met so many nice interesting people.

MARY JANE: Yes, I have.

STEVE: When you were Grand Matron, did you dedicate the year to something? My sister was a Rainbow Girl and I know she dedicated the year to something and I was curious if you did the same thing.

MARY JANE: I had my Grand Chapter in honor of my two brothers. But of course, I went in on their membership to become an Eastern Star. The colors were green and gold and the sheep was my emblem. Judge Bigler chose that he was

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my Grand Patron; he was past Grand Master and he was very fond of the Boy Scouts. The yellow rose of friendship and that's what it turned out to be. Now that's my installation dress. Judge Bigler...

STEVE: Is that an Eastern Star necklace? Or is that a star in the necklace?

MARY JANE: Yes, but they are green little emeralds. One of my Grand Officers gave them to me for a gift. They are all little stars. Yes, it is pretty. I forgot I even had it. The yellow rose was my flower. I chose the yellow rose. It had never been used before, and it hasn't been but once since and that was the year before last.

CATHY: The yellow rose has always been my favorite rose.

MARY JANE: I like those colors too. Because you can just decorate so nice with them. I never had any trouble with decorations. We had a little trouble getting yellow roses at first; before the thing was over, yellow roses were beginning to appear. So we had a good time.

CATHY: Gosh, it's beginning to get dark on us. It's all

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dark outside. It's almost my bedtime.

STEVE: We have to go pretty quick. I don't know if we are keeping you up or keeping ourselves up.

MARY JANE: Oh, no, I stay up till midnight every night. If I go to bed early I can't sleep. So I hardly ever go to bed before midnight. Then I wake up about 4 or 5 o'clock in the morning.

CATHY: She sounds like my mother doesn't she? My mother is that way.

AUDREY: Aunt Mary, you know that gold dress, when did you wear it?

MARY JANE: It was the one I had on for the installation. It's lace and the flower is outlined in gold braid and it never has tarnished.

AUDREY: It's the most beautiful thing I have ever seen.

MARY JANE: Well, I can get it if you would like to see it. Would you?

AUDREY: Well, I think they would like to see it, but can I get it for you?

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MARY JANE: No, but you can come help me.

CATHY: It looks so pretty in the picture, and it never has tarnished?

MARY JANE: Here it is in the front room.

AUDREY: Everytime I see it I get goose pimples all over me.

MARY JANE: And then the other dress I wore for my Grand Chapter is older, but this is the one I was installed in. But I've been mighty careful with it.

CATHY: Well, now that is truly beautiful.

MARY JANE: Down on the Plaza there was a little shop, Jesse's Shop. The belt is made of lace and it has streamers made of this green. It has a little green train around the waist and then the train drops down. Jesse designed it all. She was very talented. It was awfully pretty when it was new. But isn't it amazing how the gold stayed. You know, I bought the material in St. Louis, and they sent the bolt out to her and told her to use what she wanted and then send it back.

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They sent it to California so someone else could make one just like it. This is what I had for the procession.

STEVE: My goodness.

MARY JANE: And my Grand Officers had one like this.

STEVE: That's pretty material too.

CATHY: Where on earth do you find such pretty material; and it has roses in it too.

MARY JANE: And the belt is just like this, but I can't find what I did with the belt. Jesse's made this too. And she gave me a price. I couldn't afford all of her prices. But the one I wore to Washington was a red lace dress. She charged me \$200 for it.

STEVE: She gave you a bargain on one, but made up for it on another.

AUDREY: And you've worn this one more than one time, haven't you?

MARY JANE: Oh, yes. I've worn it quite a few times. But it's so long now, you see. It stretches when you hang it. I always was kind of thin, and I'm even thinner now.

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All of my Grand Officers had one. This was the color for the Grand Officers on the floor, and a shade darker was for the District Grand Matrons. We had 50 in the state. They all had a shade darker than this. Then, the Grand Representatives had another shade, but it was all this material and they were awfully pretty on the floor.

STEVE: Think of all the yards of material.

MARY JANE: Mine was made a little different from the rest of the Grand Officers. Jesse decided I shouldn't look just like my fellow Grand Officers. So she did a little touching up and did it her way. But they were all the same material and pretty much the same pattern. But just a few added touches and the belt was like this.

As we go through the line, we have to get everybody's colors. For instance, the first year I think I had a blue dress. And then I think we had pink and yellow and a little bit of everything. But you can't keep wearing the same ones you've worn for the previous years. So you just buy a whole mess of stuff.

CATHY: I was going to say you probably have a massive wardrobe of elegant dresses.

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MARY JANE: I was kind of lucky. I didn't buy as expensive as the other girls did, but when I was Grand Matron I did put more into it. Anyway it was fun.

CATHY: These states that you are honorary members in, have you traveled to most of them?

MARY JANE: I've been to most of the places. The red dress [was] when I gave the tribute to the American flag for the general Grand Chapter, and that was in Washington, D.C. It's red lace over white satin and it's really pretty. That's the one she charged me \$200 for.

FRED: Is that when you gave the tribute to the Canadian flag and the American flag both?

MARY JANE: In Wisconsin. You give it to five flags all at the same time. It was the American flag, the Canadian flag, the Wisconsin flag, the Eastern Star flag, and the Christian flag. Then, I made a tribute to the American flag to give in Washington at the general Grand Chapter.

Harry's office was downtown when he was home from being President. I said, "Harry, I've written a tribute to the flag that they want me to give at the general Grand Chapter. Will you listen to it to see if it is all right?" He said he would. I can just see him now,

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sitting there calm and still listening to it. He said, "It's beautiful but you have one grammatical error in the last paragraph; you better correct it." So I corrected my grammar. The Lady Grand Matron, in which I gave it per her request, said it was lovely. So I thought it was worth paying \$200 for the dress. I wish, if I could just walk better, I could still do a lot of things.

CATHY: I bet things like that would be kind of hard to write.

MARY JANE: The writing of the tribute to the five flags was a little more difficult than the other one because I was limited to time, and we have to be careful not to take too much time on any one of them. I don't know if I've got that tribute anymore or not. I've got the tribute to the American flag.

CATHY: When Steve was in the service, he was in the information office and they kept making him write speeches for this general, for Veteran's Day and Memorial Day, and what was that other one?

STEVE: Veteran's Day, Memorial Day and the dedication of

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the Waukewa Community Center.

CATHY: But he kept saying, I don't know what on earth I'm going to write for this speech. I don't know what the general is going to want to say. But I guess the general didn't know either. So Steve would sit there and worry over it and worry over it and so then he would give it to his colonel.

STEVE: Well, when you take a young man directly out of college and you write for a man in his 66-65 range who has been through battles and wars, the frame of mind is completely different. When I would write something, I would think that it was going to choke me to death because it was so patriotic. But it's because I knew or thought I knew what he wanted to say. Right until I knew I couldn't stand it any longer, I would send it to be approved.

MARY JANE: Usually when I had something to be memorized I could do it but I didn't think I would ever get it written. I was a little embarrassed. I thought a tribute to the American flag was

a tribute to the flag. Well, the girl who gave the tribute to the Canadian flag mentioned the American flag and I had never heard

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of such a thing. I was a little embarrassed because she was a nice girl. We had a nice little friendly visit.

I love to visit Canada. I've been up there three or four times. They've been awfully nice to me. When I was writing the tribute to the five flags, I went on up into Canada and so I asked for some material. I told them I would like to get some information about the flag. And, oh, they brought me how many books. I didn't say who I was or anything. So I jotted down the notes I wanted and as I left I took the books back and I told them thank you for being so nice to me. I said, "Maybe you would like to know who I am," and that was when Harry was still President. I said, "I certainly appreciate how nice you've been." And he said, "Well, Miss Truman, would you like something more?" I thought well maybe it was a mistake telling him who I was. But I still think he would have liked to know. I very seldom say who I am but I thought under the circumstances it would be nice for him to know. And they didn't have a Canadian flag at the time. They used the English flag but now they have one of their own. The maple leaves are in it. But then they used the Union Jack.

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CATHY: I think flags are so interesting because they almost always have some kind of history behind them.

AUDREY: The flags that they have there at the Library, I'm sure that there is a story behind each one of them.

MARY JANE: I bet there is.

CATHY: When we lived in Hawaii, their state flag is so beautiful. It's the stripes, the red and white stripes from the American flag, and in the corner the inset is the red, white and blue Union Jack. It makes for a beautiful flag. The reason they have it that way is that back in the late 1800s when there was still a queen both the British and the Americans were kind of vying for the territory, and control kind of went back and forth as far as shipping, business, military and everything, and so when...

STEVE: When David was coronated he wanted to have a flag.

CATHY: He wanted to have a flag like his two nations. I guess not knowing what to draw from, he drew from each of the two powers.

STEVE: I don't think he wanted to offend either one of them.

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CATHY: But it really does make a beautiful flag. A lot of people think at first that it looks familiar but you can't place it. Then you realize that it looks like the British flag.

MARY JANE: I think flags are pretty and they make pretty decorations.

CATHY: Well, how many times have you been to Canada?

MARY JANE: I think three.

CATHY: What parts did you visit?

MARY JANE: I was in Toronto first. And then I've been across over into Canada to Windsor. And then Quebec. That is where I got the information about the flag. And I've been to Ontario I think twice.

CATHY: I understand that Canada is quite pretty.

MARY JANE: Then, Edna Spencer and Mrs. Jacob from St. Louis and I went up into Canada. We went up through Seattle and we went up on boats, and then went back on the train. We were in Vancouver.

CATHY: I don't know my geography too well.

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MARY JANE: I don't either, though I never did. But anyway we were there. Then we went to Lake Erie.

Miss Catherine Spangler was the Grand Ester in 1933. I came up the slow way; I came up the hard way. I didn't pull many strings. Some of my friends did. I didn't have any campaign; you weren't supposed to. I used to say that if I couldn't have it without bribing people to vote for me I wouldn't have it. So I ran for the Social Grand Conductress three times before I was elected on the third time. There were two of us running for both offices and Mrs. Fred Martin from Junction City was elected on the second ballot to be Social Grand Conductress. Then, that made the third ballot for me and so then I was elected, and then some of the girls on the committees came in and said, "Mary Jane, we are so glad you were elected on the second ballot." I said, "I wasn't." And they said, "Well, they didn't collect any third ballots from us." They said, "If you hadn't been elected we would have challenged the vote." But that's how close I came to getting in. It's not anything to be proud of but I made it.

CATHY: It's almost like a regular political convention.

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MARY JANE: Oh, yes, it's just exactly. Why, I wouldn't have tried some of the stuff they do for anything in the world. I don't think it's worth it.

AUDREY: What time is it?

FRED: Ten minutes to 10.

AUDREY: Is it really? Why this has been the shortest evening.

STEVE: I would like to come back some time and have you read that tribute to us.

CATHY: I think that would be very interesting.

MARY JANE: Well, you are always welcome. It's kind of put together but it's all in one. I've read it several times but I don't think I could give it by memory anymore. I think it's harder to memorize something you've written than it is from somebody else.

CATHY: Well, you usually write it several times before you get finished and you learn it.

MARY JANE: I never will forget Harry when he was listen-

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ing to it and then he said, "Oh, it's beautiful." Then he said, "But you made some grammatical errors; you will have to write that last paragraph over."

AUDREY: You had a lot more confidence after he said that didn't you?

MARY JANE: Well, I like to have someone listen, and when they do to correct me, if I need to be corrected.

CATHY: Well, I know he was a good judge too.

MARY JANE: I just didn't have any idea it was that time. I should have fixed some refreshments.

STEVE: With that meal we had we didn't need any refreshments.

MARY JANE: It's hard for me to get things together and organized. I'm so glad you came.

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