

Oral History Interview
with
REATHHEL ODUM

Secretary in the office of Senator Harry S. Truman, 1936-45; personal secretary to Mrs. Harry S. Truman, 1945-53, including correspondence and other duties for Margaret Truman during concert tours, 1947-49; and in the years after 1952, secretary in the office of Senator Stuart Symington, secretary for the American Coke and Coal Chemicals Institute, and secretary to John W. Snyder.

Independence, Missouri
October 8, 1988
by Niel M. Johnson, Harry S. Truman Library

The Harry S. Truman Library
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Summary Description:

Topics discussed include the following: bank receiverships in the Depression; activities and procedures in Senator Harry S. Truman's office, Truman family life in Washington, D.C. during the Senatorial years; Moral Re-Armament; Blair House; life in the White House; duties of the Social Secretary in the White House; Mrs. Truman and the press; social events in the White House; Spanish class in the White House; Margaret Truman's singing career and trips to Europe; John W. Snyder and the Overland Corporation; American Coke and Coal Chemicals Institute; and book, *Plain Speaking*.

Names mentioned include: Joe Horton, Guy Hitt, Hollis Haggard, John W. Snyder, Harry S. Truman, Fred Truman, Mildred Dryden, Victor Messall, Catherine Bixler, Bud Farris, John Griggs, Harry Salisbury, Sadie France, Laura Treazare, Madge Gates Wallace, Margaret Truman, Clara Boyd Wheeler, Harry Vaughan, William Boyle, Fred Canfil, Loretta Young, Bess Wallace Truman, Perry Hogden, Merle Young, May Wallace, Guy Reeves, John Nance Garner, Matthew Connelly, Edith Helm, Irene Orondorff, Ida Andrews, Adrian Tolley, Sandy Fox, Doris Fleeson, William Hassett, Edward McKim, Charles Claunch, Drucie Snyder, George Williams, Benlou Murray, Sue Gentry, Ruth Montgomery, Mrs. Clarence Goodwin., Mamie Eisenhower, Ramon Ramos) Howell G. Crim, Wilson Searles, J.B. West, John Pye, Alonzo Fields, Lillian Rogers Parks, Preston Bruce, John Griggs, Joe Guilfoyle, Helen Traubel, Margaret Strickler,

Vietta Carr, John Foster Dulles, Leonard Warren, Roy Leifflen, Bruce Mitchell, Georgia Neese Clark, Betty Monkman, Charles G. Ross, Bill Gantt, Stuart Symington, Virginia Laird, Stanley Fike, Fran Hallberg, Catherine Blanton Roberts, Estelle Milner., Mrs. Carnegie Miller, Greta Kempton, Mary Jane Truman, Mrs. Louis (Margaret) Truman, and Louis Truman.

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JOHNSON: I would like to have some background. If you would tell me when and where you were born, and what your parents' names were.

ODUM: Well, I was born in Benton, Illinois in Franklin County. My father's name was Thomas (Britt) Odum, and my mother's name was Myrtie Powell. They were born in Williamson County, Illinois. You're from Illinois aren't you?

JOHNSON: Yes.

ODUM: Well, this was down where they had all that coal mine

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trouble. In fact, some of the miners fought across one of my uncle's properties in Williamson County, Illinois.

JOHNSON: Would this be down around Centralia?

ODUM: No, on down, near Marion, Illinois and Herrin. Remember Herrin?

JOHNSON: Yes, sure. Your father's occupation was what?

ODUM: My grandfather was sheriff of Franklin County (and served in the Civil War), and my father once served as deputy sheriff. One of my uncles was shot and killed while serving as sheriff. After being deputy sheriff, my father had what would now be called a taxi service; he had a so-called span "bus", drawn by two horses. He would pick up traveling men who came by train from St. Louis. He would take them on their selling missions, and then return them to the train. He died when I was four and I never knew much about my father. My mother had their five children to care for, and she had a rather rough time of it.

JOHNSON: So your mother had to raise a family on her own?

ODUM: Yes, she did.

JOHNSON: And she never remarried?

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ODUM: She never remarried, and she never had to work outside the home. My older brother, who is dead now, started to work when he was about 15, and brought in a little money. My sister; when she completed two years of high school, worked in the courthouse, and brought in a little more money. So we all seemed to get along. There was nothing like child support in those days.

JOHNSON: This was five children you say?

ODUM: Yes.

JOHNSON: And you were what?

ODUM: I was the youngest.

JOHNSON: And this was in Benton.

ODUM: Yes. I don't think I ever went to St. Louis until I was about 18.

JOHNSON: Then your education was in...

ODUM: Just in high school, and then when I did go to St. Louis. I took a business course. One of my brothers had gone to the University of Illinois, and that exhausted whatever spare cash we had at that time. He always said he would come home, get a job, and then put

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me through college. What did he do but come home and get married. So that ended my chance of higher education, and I had to find employment.

JOHNSON: Now did we get your birth date?

ODUM: September 29, 1908.

JOHNSON: So after high school graduation, you went to St. Louis?

ODUM: No, not immediately. I worked in the First National Bank of Benton. But prior to that, Marion Hart had what was called the Franklin County Title Company, and he put me to work for about \$10 a week. Then, there was a vacancy over in the First National Bank and Mr. Hart recommended me for the job. They gave it to me. I don't think I ever did anything but handle

school savings, and do filing and post books, and things of that sort. But I was about the only one kept on when the bank went into receivership, you know, during the Depression.

JOHNSON: Okay, so we're talking about the late twenties, or 1930.

ODUM: Yes, the early thirties.

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JOHNSON: You graduated from high school in what year?

ODUM: In '26, 1926.

JOHNSON: From the Benton Township High School.

ODUM: Yes.

JOHNSON: Then you worked for a title company, and then a bank. How long did you work for the bank?

ODUM: Well, for about at least four or five years. It closed in '33 when many banks were closing all over the country.

JOHNSON: It hung on to '33.

ODUM: Yes, and then a receiver by the name of Joe Horton came in and he hired me along with the others from other areas. He had about five little banks in receivership there in southern Illinois, so we were all very busy. Then I had the opportunity to go to the First National Bank in East St. Louis with Guy Hitt, who later became a president of the Federal Reserve Bank in St. Louis. He was the conservator of the First National Bank in East St. Louis, and he took me along as his assistant.

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JOHNSON: You must have been very good at this, whatever you were doing.

ODUM: Oh, I don't know. I never felt particularly brilliant or anything, but I had learned to work hard, and was able to aid my mother financially. They managed to reopen that bank, and then I was going to be out of work. So Mr. Hitt sent me over to Hollis Haggard, who was with the chief national bank examiner in St. Louis. Hollis was very kind to me, and he said, "Well, you just come over here and work with us. We'll find you something." I was awfully scared; I had only been into St. Louis to eat or shop. Then, I still lived over there in East St. Louis at the Buelah Club, which was a place for women to stay.

JOHNSON: So you had to commute across the river.

ODUM: Yes, the Mississippi River. Then Hollis said, "Well, John Snyder still has the Grand National Bank, and I think he had the Vandeventer National Bank, and a little bank down in Washington, Missouri." So I went out to see him and he did have a vacancy in the Grand National Bank receivership, so I worked there until I moved on to Washington.

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JOHNSON: This is how you first met John Snyder?

ODUM: Yes, I first met him in the Grand National Bank.

JOHNSON: Do you remember what year that was?

ODUM: That would have been probably late '35, or early '36, because I went to Washington on October 1 in 1936. So it must have been sometime in '35. Somewhere in the course of changing addresses, I have misplaced a schedule of dates of my employment.

The then-Senator Truman came in the office one day, and he said one of his employees, a Jane Taylor -- I think she was from either Independence or Kansas City -- was going to be married, and he needed someone to come to the Washington office in her place. So Mr. Snyder said, "Well, I have three women here; you may interview them." I think I was 25 or 26 by that time, and he talked to me, and said to Mr. Snyder that he'd like me to go to his Washington office. I said, "Well I'll have to go home to southern Illinois and ask my mother." They thought that was very funny.

JOHNSON: Well, now, what kind of work were you doing for Mr. Snyder at this time?

ODUM: Well, by that time he was paying small dividends, so I

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was addressing envelopes and figuring interest. I had never figured interest, but I soon learned how to do interest and figure dividends on deposit accounts, and then type dividend checks for mailing to depositors of the defunct bank.

JOHNSON: This is general office work, in a sense?

ODUM: Yes, I can't remember too many details, but we were very busy, even in a closed bank. In the old Grand National there, there was a Mr. Ed Mays, who had what was, I guess at that time, one of the tallest buildings in St. Louis.

JOHNSON: You were right downtown then.

ODUM: Well, it was on Grand and Olive. He had erected this tremendously tall building and had a penthouse on the top. But in the meantime, the bank got into trouble, and they went into receivership.

JOHNSON: So then John Snyder's position at this point was...

ODUM: Was a receiver.

JOHNSON: And so there were three girls?

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ODUM: Three girls, and I think there was a young man; I've forgotten their names, actually. I know there was a Miss Robinson.

JOHNSON: But Harry Truman, Senator Truman, at this point just needed one person.

ODUM: Yes, the Senator had one vacancy in his Washington office. There were four others working for him at that time.

JOHNSON: Did Mr. Snyder say that you were the one that...

ODUM: No, he said that the Senator could talk to all three of us, and make his selection.

Well, Miss Robinson was planning to get married, or was married, so that sort of eliminated her. I don't know why I was selected, but anyway Senator Truman said he would like me to have the job, if I could go to Washington.

JOHNSON: Do you remember your impression of Senator Truman?

ODUM: I was scared to death. A Senator -- I had never talked to a Senator before!

JOHNSON: Did he put you at ease?

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ODUM: Yes, he did.

JOHNSON: In other words, you were impressed with his demeanor?

ODUM: Oh, yes, indeed.

JOHNSON: So you got off to a good start, so to speak, with Senator Truman?

ODUM: Yes, that's right. Now, when I finally went to Washington, he wasn't there. He was still back in Missouri.

JOHNSON: This was October of 1936.

ODUM: Yes. He said he'd like to have me, and I said, "Well, I'm going to my home in Benton over the weekend; I'll ask my mother." And they thought that was very funny, a girl of my age having to ask the permission of her mother. But I had never been away from home except for that stint in East St. Louis, and I knew how much I would miss my Benton home, even though by that time I had an apartment in St. Louis with a girl who had also lived at the club in East St. Louis. We had an apartment on Lindell Boulevard where I could just walk around to the Grand National. So I went home, and

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mother said, "That's a long way to go, but if it's something you want to do." I said, "I think I'd like to try it," because after all we were working ourselves out of a job there and I would soon need work again. A receivership could just last so long. And later Mr. Snyder went over to the Union National Bank over in East St. Louis, but I did not work for him there. As to a receivership, just as soon as you take care of the assets and pay off as much as you can in dividends, why then you close operations. Mr. Snyder was, I think, worried about what the rest of us would do.

JOHNSON: How long was it you worked for Mrs. Snyder?

ODUM: From about 1934, I think, until '36.

JOHNSON: About two or three years there?

ODUM: Yes, about two. I think Mr. Snyder was perfectly happy for me to move along to a more permanent job.

JOHNSON: So right in the middle of the Depression, you were to go to Washington.

ODUM: Yes, that's right.

JOHNSON: And so you took the train, I suppose, to Washington.

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ODUM: I took the train, yes. I stayed in a hotel right near the station, which was on Capitol Hill, and the next morning I was timid about walking over to the Senate Office Building.

Well, Fred Truman was there that summer, and there were Mildred Dryden, Vic Messall, and Catherine Bixler, and I think Bud Farris was on the staff.

JOHNSON: So these were the first people that you met when you arrived there?

ODUM: The first ones, yes.

The Senate stationery shop used to have little gifts for staff members; well, the first thing they gave me was a hairbrush, and I thought, oh, they're sending me some kind of message. It was a slack time, and the office staff sent me sightseeing with Fred Truman. I remember he had high-top shoes. He took me all over Washington, and then they gradually began to tell me what kind of work there was to do; and I had to find a place to stay. That was the last easy summer we had.

JOHNSON: So where did you finally decide to live?

ODUM: Well, fortunately John Griggs and Harry Salisbury (Harry lives at Warrenton, Missouri) were on Mr.

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Truman's patronage in the Post Office, and they lived in a boarding house right across the street from the Senate Office Building. Mrs. Jones, their landlady, said that she didn't think I would want to live there because of so many young men living there, but her sister lived out on Harvard Street and whereas she didn't take in boarders, she thought after meeting me that we might be happy with each other. So one Sunday morning, I went over to Harvard Street. This lady opened the door -- in the meantime Mrs. Jones had called Mrs. France and her sister -- and she said, "Well, we're going to church (they were Methodists); why don't you come to church with us." I said, "Well, I'll be happy to," because I was so lonesome. And I went to church with them, and to Sunday dinner in their home.

JOHNSON: This was Mrs. France? What was her first name?

ODUM: Sadie France and her sister, Miss Laura Treazare. They were an old Washingtonian family. Mrs. France had been married twice to ministers.

JOHNSON: Were you Methodist back then?

ODUM: No, I belonged to the Christian Church, but I went to

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the Methodist with them, until I finally worked my way downtown to the National City Christian Church.

JOHNSON: So you had got a good impression then of Mrs. France?

ODUM: Oh, they were lovely. And Miss Laura, like myself, had never married. I just fell in love with her. Now, at the time, I thought they were very old, but they sort of took me under their wings. Mrs. France said, "Now, a lot of girls come to Washington, and it's their first time away from home, and they get into trouble." So they watched me very carefully. I don't think I got into any trouble.

JOHNSON: You were fortunate I guess.

ODUM: I lived with them until the weekend when the Trumans went up to the Roosevelt funeral. I stayed with Mrs. (Madge Gates) Wallace, while they were gone, in their apartment. When they came back -- I think it was a Sunday evening -- they came in and I prepared to go home to Harvard Street. They said they'd have one of the Secret Service men take me home, but before I left they wanted to ask me something, and I thought, "Well, I don't know where I stand at this point." I'm getting a little

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ahead of myself, but anyway, they asked me if I'd like to be Mrs. Truman's secretary. And I said, "Yes, I certainly would."

JOHNSON: So that meant a change of residence, didn't it?

ODUM: Yes.

JOHNSON: For eight years you were living there on Harvard Street.

ODUM: Right. And I worked with Senator Truman and then when he became Vice President I was his secretary during those days.

JOHNSON: Okay, but during the years say from '36 to '44, what were your duties?

ODUM: Well, you see Mildred and Catherine were still there; Mildred Dryden was from Independence. I think you have an oral history from Millie. I was doing correspondence, trying to help constituents, and taking them sightseeing when they came to Washington.

JOHNSON: Yes.

ODUM: Later, Mildred started to working for a Mr. Ferguson; I think he was from Springfield, Missouri. I can't

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remember what kind of work he was doing, some kind of public relations, I think.

JOHNSON: You mean she transferred to this?

ODUM: Mildred got into a little disfavor, as I recall, and when she decided she'd get another job I think they were pleased to have her transfer.

JOHNSON: In other words, you were taking her place?

ODUM: Well, no, Catherine Bixler was still there (who just died recently, by the way). She had been with the Senator from the beginning of his term. Then Catherine went to work at

Continental Airlines, and by that time, the Senator had asked Rose [Conway] to come to Washington. Millie and Catherine and I remained friends until their deaths.

JOHNSON: You're talking about when he became Vice President?

ODUM: Yes, when he became Vice President.

JOHNSON: But in those seven or eight years until he became Vice President?

ODUM: Well, I was just kind of the last girl on the totem

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pole for that period, but when Mildred and Catherine left, I moved up the ladder.

JOHNSON: Doing clerical work in the office...

ODUM: Yes, and by that time, taking the Vice President's dictation, typing his speeches, etc.

JOHNSON: Filling in wherever necessary.

ODUM: Yes, and we were all working hard in those days -- sometimes at night.

JOHNSON: Handling correspondence?

ODUM: That's right; and we did a lot of the letters without having them dictated. As I said, I learned to write as if a man had written the letter. Then when I went with Mrs. Truman, I had to write like a woman. Of course, the Senator, later the Vice President, would either approve or change the letter. He signed all the mail. We typed and collated a great many speeches and reports.

JOHNSON: In other words, you did draft replies for the Senator during those years?

ODUM: Yes. Well, we worked on what we called case work; a lot of Missourians would write in with problems that

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perhaps we could work out, like a lot of Post Office work. We became very friendly over the phone with girls who worked in the Post Office Department, because, as I remember, Truman had much to do with appointing Postmasters and Postmistresses. We worked on veterans cases, and appointments to West Point and the Naval Academy.

JOHNSON: Did you have form letters that you worked with?

ODUM: Well, we began to learn how the Senator would reply to certain letters, and if he approved of the letters wrote he would sign them.

JOHNSON: Yes, but you didn't have any of what we would standard form letters?

ODUM: No, except so many of the letters were on the same subject, they almost became form letters.

JOHNSON: Were Miss Bixler and Mrs. Dryden still working at this point?

ODUM: Yes. They were over me, as I was saying; I was last one hired. I think they left shortly before Truman became Vice President. Of course, by that time

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Rose Conway and Loretta Young were working in the office.

JOHNSON: Okay. I wanted to ask you about your recollections of some of these people, Victor Messall, for instance, who was very much involved not only with the office, but with the election campaign in 1940.

ODUM: Yes, Vic supervised the running of the office, and worked in the campaigns. During that time, they left me in the Washington office to run things and Mildred and Catherine came out to work in Sedalia, Missouri, campaign office.

JOHNSON: So you were kind of by yourself, when they were campaigning out here?

ODUM: Right.

JOHNSON: What were your impressions of Victor Messall, what kind of a personality was he?

ODUM: Well, Victor was gone a lot out of the office. I always recall when one of us was going on vacation, or planning to be off for some reason, all of a sudden he had his desk full of work, and we'd caught up on our own work; then he wanted to get caught up on his. But

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otherwise, he and Irene, his wife, would often have us out to their home to eat. They lived at the Kennedy-Warren apartments; she, I think, was rather well-to-do.

JOHNSON: Apartments?

ODUM: Yes. One apartment in the Kennedy-Warren on Connecticut Avenue. Later they moved to a rather large estate in Wheaton, Maryland.

JOHNSON: So you did visit up there?

ODUM: We'd go up there to dinner only, yes.

JOHNSON: Did you ever visit the Trumans in their apartment?

ODUM: Yes, Mrs. Truman would invite us there to dinner. I used to "babysit" with Margaret, so I would ride out to the Truman apartment with Senator Truman, after work.

JOHNSON: When did you start babysitting with Margaret?

ODUM: Shortly after I went to Washington -- and Margaret was, I guess, around ten, and at the time he was Senator.

JOHNSON: In other words, after you got hired to help in the office you also got hired to babysit.

ODUM: Well, I wasn't hired; I did it for pleasure. She

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liked me. When she'd come in the office she would drop paper clips down my neck. Our desk chairs were on wheels and she'd roll me around, and tease. Then, she liked to be with Catherine and me. The Trumans were very careful, naturally, of Margaret. I know sometimes if we'd go to a movie, and then Margaret, Catherine and I would go for ice cream and be a little late getting back to their apartment either Mrs. Truman or the Senator would be watching from their apartment window to see us bring Margaret home.

JOHNSON: They moved several times.

ODUM: I only remember they lived at Sedgwick Gardens, and then moved to 4701 Connecticut. They may have lived elsewhere before I moved to Washington. I remember staying more often with Margaret at "4701."

JOHNSON: After they moved to 4701?

ODUM: Yes. We'd drink a lot of pineapple juice, and then she'd play the piano and sing for me, and entertain me. So I enjoyed the evenings. They would always drive me home.

JOHNSON: Did they have a grand piano there then, or an upright?

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ODUM: I think it was an upright at that time.

JOHNSON: They apparently kept her piano here at the home, didn't they, the one that he gave her for her birthday?

ODUM: Yes, I believe so.

JOHNSON: That stayed home here in Independence.

ODUM: Yes. I am rather vague on this subject.

JOHNSON: Did you play the piano at all?

ODUM: No, I never did.

JOHNSON: Were you musical?

ODUM: Margaret tried to teach me to play the piano when we lived up in New York; you know I went to New York with her on her concert tours. She would try to teach me, and then she just gave up. I did learn a lot of music appreciation from her, because we went to many operas and musicals in New York.

JOHNSON: Did she try to teach you any singing?

ODUM: No. I would upset her, because her songs were so familiar to me, that I'd go around humming one of her songs or whistling one, and she would say, "Reath, I

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wish you wouldn't do that." She said, "You get me all mixed up, and you're off-key." I didn't really realize what I was doing, but those tunes were all in my head. I loved to sing, but I never had much of a voice.

JOHNSON: You had a problem with pitch?

ODUM: Yes. I still sing to myself, but nobody listens, of course.

JOHNSON: Well, you were kept occupied, it seems, many evenings with the...

ODUM: I don't know how often, but it was enough. I enjoyed those evenings with Margaret.

JOHNSON: We have a few photographs of them in their apartment. Did you ever take snapshots or pictures of the Trumans?

ODUM: Not many. I didn't have a camera, but I have a few snapshots.

JOHNSON: In fact, since we brought the subject up, we might just quickly mention that there are some snapshots here.

ODUM: Well, there were some made.

JOHNSON: That was a little later on, I suppose, with Margaret in between.

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ODUM: Yes.

JOHNSON: And you're on her right.

ODUM: I'm here, and Catherine Bixler.

JOHNSON: And that's Catherine Bixler on her left.

ODUM: Yes.

JOHNSON: They are arm-in-arm going down the street.

ODUM: Yes. Margaret liked to be with Catherine and me, and get away from parental supervision. Catherine was a very bright girl. In fact, when Mildred, Catherine and I went up to New York to the fair, Catherine was on a program, and won one of those quiz programs; she won \$15, and we just thought she was wonderful.

JOHNSON: This was 1939 then. You're talking about the World's Fair in 1939?

ODUM: Right.

JOHNSON: And these snapshots here of Bess Truman, with these ladies grouped around her, you say, are probably PEO?

ODUM: I think PEO women, yes.

JOHNSON: Washington, D.C. These were taken in Washington.

ODUM: Yes.

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JOHNSON: Is there anybody there we need to identify besides Bess Truman?

ODUM: Well, this is Clara Boyd Wheeler.

JOHNSON: She's the one with the hair braids kind of up around the top there?

ODUM: Yes. Both of us kept in touch with her a long time, because she ran the USO where Mrs. Truman and I worked one day a week. We peeled carrots and did whatever to help entertain soldiers away from home.

JOHNSON: What was her name?

ODUM: Clara Boyd Wheeler. I may know some others, but just can't remember their names.

JOHNSON: Now, here's one that is in the snow, a snapshot in the snow.

ODUM: Yes, that was Catherine and Mildred and me.

JOHNSON: Mildred Dryden?

ODUM: That was back in '37, yes. And I think that's a picture of Vic.

JOHNSON: Vic Messall in the center and you're on his right?

ODUM: Yes, and Catherine.

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JOHNSON: Wait a minute, are you on the left?

ODUM: Let me see, I can't remember. No, I'm on his right, and that's Catherine on the left.

JOHNSON: Yes, they're nice to have. I don't know that I've seen Vic Messall before.

ODUM: Well, Vic was quite popular there on the Hill. He and another Senator's secretary, "Mac" McMain, kind of liked to eye the girls a little. Fortunately, they never paid any attention to any of us in the office, or we would have been in deep trouble.

JOHNSON: Since we're talking about Vic Messall, and he was apparently very much involved with the '40 campaign, and was a valued member of Truman's staff, what happened to him, do you know? I guess after Truman became Vice President, he sort of fades out of the picture, doesn't he, Vic Messall?

ODUM: I never knew what happened. I think Vic did something that they weren't too pleased with, and I don't know the details. If Mr. Snyder were here, he could probably tell you. I don't know the story so there's no use for me to try to tell it. I think Vic went into public

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relations work later.

JOHNSON: Sure. But Harry Vaughan, you got acquainted with him I suppose.

ODUM: Yes. Yes, I liked him.

JOHNSON: Was that during the campaign of '40 that you got acquainted with him?

ODUM: After he came back from the war.

JOHNSON: Oh, it was after the war.

ODUM: I think he came in after Bill Boyle, who was in the office. He followed Vic Messall.

JOHNSON: Bill Boyle.

ODUM: Bill Boyle, do you remember that name?

JOHNSON: Oh, he took Messall's place?

ODUM: Yes. And Matt Connelly worked in there for a while. Harry Vaughan came back from the war and he worked there.

JOHNSON: Did you ever meet Lloyd Stark?

ODUM: I never did meet him.

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JOHNSON: Fred Canfil?

ODUM: I met Fred Canfil, yes.

JOHNSON: And what as your impression of Fred?

ODUM: Well, really no comment. He was friendly to all of us in the office. I just always remember he loved garlic, and every time he'd come to Washington he'd go somewhere and eat a lot of garlic and then he'd want to come in and want to kiss us hello.

JOHNSON: You knew he was coming then?

ODUM: Yes. Oh, he was a friendly, outgoing fellow.

JOHNSON: Was he gruff? You know, he is pictured as a fairly gruff type.

ODUM: Yes, he was, but I think that was mostly put-on.

JOHNSON: So you think that was more on the outside than inside?

ODUM: I think so, yes. I really do.

JOHNSON: Well, you have mentioned Mildred. I suppose they called her Millie.

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ODUM: We called her Millie -- or Duchess (or at least Catherine and I called her that). She called me "Titmouse" because she said I was like a shy little bird.

JOHNSON: She was an efficient secretary?

ODUM: Yes, she was and she knew everyone in Independence. She was a Latimer and she used to entertain Catherine and me with stories of her family and people in Independence. She told us about the Rabbits and the Goats, and the political factors in Independence. Then she'd tell something and say, "That's the truth; I hope to drop dead if it isn't so."

JOHNSON: How about Bud Farris? I've come across his name.

ODUM: Well, Bud was a handsome fellow.

JOHNSON: Did he work in the office?

ODUM: Yes, he did; I think as a second to Vic. I don't know whether Bud is still living; otherwise, I'm the last leaf on the tree.

JOHNSON: Were there any people working in the office that we haven't mentioned so far?

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ODUM: Later on, Loretta Young came in, but she didn't do much. In my estimation, I think Loretta was kind of a lightweight, although she was likable and willing to be of help. Then Rose came to work in the Washington office, after working for Vivian Truman. Loretta did go over, I think to help Rose when they went over into the Executive Office. I don't know who recommended Loretta, but maybe Mr. Truman did that as a favor to someone in Missouri. I just really don't know.

JOHNSON: Yes, I was listening to some of your conversation with Bob Ferrell and Andy Dunar, on that tape they made.

ODUM: Oh, I see.

JOHNSON: And you mentioned that there were some hangers-on around the office.

ODUM: Yes, there were. And her husband was one of them.

JOHNSON: Merle Young was one of the hangers-on?

ODUM: Yes. He would come, saying he was coming to take her home, but he would always come too early. He was underfoot a lot. All of us got a little weary of Merle.

JOHNSON: How about any others that seemed to hang around without any obvious duties?

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ODUM: Well, there was a Perry Hodgden, who was there a lot. But Mrs. Truman seemed to like Perry, and I don't know where we picked him up. I don't know; I shunned him. I don't think Mrs. Truman realized the kind of language that Perry used; I'm sure she would not have approved, and none of us told her because she seemed to like Perry for some reason. I don't know where he came from or where he went afterwards.

JOHNSON: You mentioned Mrs. Truman. Did she work in the office at all?

ODUM: She did come down, but she wasn't there too much. She worked with him at the apartment. I never had any complaint about her, because she did help him at night, and all of us liked her. She, of course, was the "light of his life."

JOHNSON: According to an article in *Colliers* magazine, she apparently was on the payroll in 1941.

ODUM: Well, I didn't know for a long time that she was on the payroll.

JOHNSON: Did you remember her becoming more regular, after '41?

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ODUM: I think she came to the office more often, but she always came in and out a lot.

JOHNSON: Before Pearl Harbor, or just about that time?

ODUM: She was in and out all the time. She used to have us come out to the apartment, and she would cook dinner for Mildred, Catherine and me.

JOHNSON: You met her the first time you babysat, I suppose, for Margaret.

ODUM: Yes, but it may have been earlier in the office. I can't remember when I first met her, although it must have been in the fall of '36.

JOHNSON: What kind of impression did you get in those first meetings with Mrs. Truman?

ODUM: I liked her. She was friendly and a very nice, straight-laced person. She used to go bicycling with us; we'd rent bicycles and go around the tidal basin. I know I almost rode into it one day; only a bush caught me. She sat down and just laughed; she thought that was so funny. Then, at times, she'd fix a picnic lunch, and we'd go down to Haynes Point to eat it.

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JOHNSON: So this was one of your leisure-time activities.

ODUM: Yes, after work. In the late, very late afternoon.

JOHNSON: Any other leisure time activities that you were involved in?

ODUM: No, that was about all, I think. During the war Catherine and I plotted planes. And I did volunteer work one night a week for the Red Cross, as a "Grey Lady," for 26 years.

JOHNSON: Did you go to movies, and plays?

ODUM: We would take Margaret to the movies and ice-skating. I later went to many plays, concerts and movies.

JOHNSON: Did you ever attend any plays with the Trumans?

ODUM: Not until after we went into the White House. We would go to many concerts in Constitution Hall and sit in the Presidential box.

JOHNSON: I believe you probably were one of the few that were in their apartment regularly.

ODUM: Perhaps, yes, because Mildred was married and Catherine lived quite far from their apartment; actually, I was just sort of across the park.

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JOHNSON: Did they furnish that apartment? Was that their furniture that they had?

ODUM: I believe it was, yes.

JOHNSON: Do you have any idea what might have happened to some of that furniture or if it ever came out to the home?

ODUM: No, I don't remember.

JOHNSON: Did you recognize anything in the home that might have been in the apartment in Washington?

ODUM: Pictures, and I think that some of the furniture may have been in their Washington apartment. I think they shipped part of it back to Independence when they went in the White House. I'm a little hazy on that.

JOHNSON: Do you think that some of it may have ended up with May Wallace?

ODUM: Well, she might know, I don't.

JOHNSON: You were in May Wallace's home this morning weren't you?

ODUM: Yes.

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JOHNSON: You didn't happen to recognize anything that might have been in the apartment?

ODUM: No. She showed me some things that they had given her from the house, but I don't think she showed me any furniture.

JOHNSON: Did you do any work for the Truman Committee?

ODUM: No. Although I get this mixed up with Symington, because I worked for Symington a couple of years, later on after the Administration. No, I didn't work for the Truman Committee. We were sort of go-betweens the Senator and committee employees.

JOHNSON: So you didn't have to do any traveling when he was going around the country.

ODUM: No, I didn't.

JOHNSON: You pretty much stayed in the Washington office while they were out campaigning?

ODUM: Yes. They did ask me to come to St. Louis in the last campaign when the campaign train came back there. They were all so tired and kind of grumpy; I got on the train and rode back to Washington. I know we stopped off in

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Louisville.

JOHNSON: In what year, in what campaign?

ODUM: Well, that would be the '48 campaign.

JOHNSON: And so you got on the train in St. Louis and went to Washington.

ODUM: Yes, got on the train in St. Louis and rode back to Washington.

JOHNSON: Was that the only time you were ever on the campaign train with them?

ODUM: Right. Otherwise, I was in the Washington office.

JOHNSON: How about the campaign in '44? You know he went out and really did most of the campaigning for Franklin Roosevelt, too. He was the Vice Presidential candidate. Did you have any work to do, anything special to do when he was campaigning in 1944 for the Vice-Presidency?

ODUM: No, I don't think so; I just kept on with my work in the office.

JOHNSON: In other words you were still doing these senatorial type duties.

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ODUM: That's right.

JOHNSON: Also I wanted to ask you; you know we don't have too much of the material that was accumulated during the first six years, his first term as Senator. We've heard that these files were stored maybe in an attic in Washington and that was the last ever seen of them during the war.

ODUM: I didn't learn anything about that until later. I can't imagine what happened.

JOHNSON: You don't have anything in this folder here from those years?

ODUM: No. I had nothing more to do with the files, after Truman became President. When he called me to come over to the White House, after his first day in office, I knew that I was going to be Mrs. Truman's secretary, but at first I went on down to the Senate office. Then the President called me and asked me to bring some mail over, which I did. Then he sent me on back out to the apartment to be with Mrs. Truman and Mrs. Wallace, and I never went back to the Senate.

So then, when they moved to the Blair House, I was in the Truman apartment and we all moved to the Blair

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house together. I lived with the Trumans in the Blair House and the White House for almost a year.

JOHNSON: So your work and your duties remained pretty much the same from the time you came in '36 right up until he became President in April 1945.

ODUM: That's right.

JOHNSON: The office that he had in the Senate Office Building, was that the same office that he had had since you came?

ODUM: Well, at one time we had 240 and then 248.

JOHNSON: Oh, he moved from 240 to 248 sometime in the late thirties?

ODUM: I think it was the early forties. And then old Senator Greene got our old office, and I think that was 240. Then we moved to 248.

JOHNSON: Would that have been after the reelection in 1940?

ODUM: Yes, I think so. But when he became Vice President I think he just stayed in the same office.

JOHNSON: You just put a sign above the door, I guess.

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ODUM: Right. As I recall.

JOHNSON: So you had the same office number for quite a number of years.

ODUM: Yes. He probably had an office over in the Capitol by that time, but didn't want to move from 248.

I remember when John Nance Garner was Vice President he had a fellow named Guy Reeves. He'd call Catherine and me and ask us to come over and have a Coke in the afternoon, rather than go around to the little restaurant there. But they had rather a large suite of rooms; I mean John Nance Garner did. I think that Truman preferred just to stay where he was.

JOHNSON: Well, Wallace replaced Garner, didn't he in the election in 1940?

ODUM: Yes, he did, and Catherine and I lost our friend, Guy.

JOHNSON: So after '40 then Wallace had the Vice President's office?

ODUM: Yes. Then we had a room in the office that we called the "Dog House." Have you heard about the Dog House?

JOHNSON: Yes. Was that a back room there?

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ODUM: That was a back room.

JOHNSON: That's where Truman would often meet with members of his committee.

ODUM: Yes, and he could go in, back there, or into his office, without our knowing, or he would call to let us know he was in. At one point we had Moral Re-Armament men -- I think that

was while Millie was still in the outer office, because Catherine and I were in a back office together -- and she'd say, "Senator Truman isn't in." "Well, we'll wait." And she'd say, "I think it will be quite a while." "We will wait." And they sat there and waited and waited, and a lot of times, Mr. Truman -- if he wanted something from his office -- would go in without coming through the reception office.

JOHNSON: Okay, so he had his own entrance.

ODUM: Those were nice clean-cut men, but they were persistent.

JOHNSON: The Moral Re-Armament people.

ODUM: Yes.

JOHNSON: They were being kind of persistent, kind of like a lobby?

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ODUM: Yes, that's right. I'd forgotten what they wanted him to do. I think at first he went along with them, but then they became such pests.

JOHNSON: Yes, how about special interests, the lobbies? They're always supposed to be working on the Senators, you know, to get legislation.

ODUM: Well, you know, back in those days we didn't have them like, say, later on in Symington's time. Or I wasn't aware of them, maybe.

JOHNSON: Well, were there others besides Moral Re-Armament who tended to be persistent in their efforts to get to Senator Truman?

ODUM: Well, I don't remember any particular group.

JOHNSON: There weren't any farmers groups, or Chambers of Commerce, or...

ODUM: There may have been, but as I said, Catherine and I didn't work in the reception office and weren't too aware of the groups coming in.

JOHNSON: They didn't bother him that much then?

ODUM: No, I don't believe so.

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But getting back to those files, I can't imagine what happened.

JOHNSON: It's too bad they disappeared.

ODUM: I know I went up once with someone just to see where things were, and it was a dreary old place.

JOHNSON: Oh, you mean you did go to look at the files?

ODUM: One time I went up, I think with Bud Farris; now I'm not sure, just to see.

JOHNSON: Where did they keep the files after he...

ODUM: In kind of an attic place.

JOHNSON: Okay, in an attic. Do you remember what building?

ODUM: In the old Senate Office Building. It may be that they were cleaning out to make room for other Senators files, and they might have just dumped them.

JOHNSON: But you did see these files in boxes?

ODUM: Well, I don't know if they were those particular ones, but I did see files up there.

JOHNSON: Do you remember what building that might have been?

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ODUM: I think it was the old Senate Office Building.

JOHNSON: Okay, in the attic of the building that he had his office in?

ODUM: Yes.

JOHNSON: That was the last you ever saw of them?

ODUM: Right. I didn't go back to help pack any of the files.

JOHNSON: Well, we did get the second term, much of that; I think that was shipped out to the University of Missouri-Columbia, but somehow the first term material seems to have disappeared, a lot of it.

ODUM: Well, I just don't know what could have happened.

JOHNSON: What was the first that you heard from the Trumans after he was notified that President Roosevelt had died, and of course, he'd have to take the oath of office? When did he get hold of you? When did he first contact you?

ODUM: Well, I don't think he did that evening. As I remember, he was in Sam Rayburn's office, when they found him to notify him of the President's death. We

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were stunned when we heard of President Roosevelt's death, but went on home at the regular time.

JOHNSON: Okay, it wasn't that evening.

ODUM: No, I went on down to the office the next morning, and that's when they called me and asked me to come over to the White House.

JOHNSON: Was this Bess or Harry that called?

ODUM: No, it was his office.

JOHNSON: Okay, his office.

ODUM: Someone, probably Matt Connelly.

JOHNSON: At the White House. Okay. Called you and...

ODUM: And asked me to bring whatever mail I had and come over.

JOHNSON: Right up to the Oval Office?

ODUM: Yes, I was frightened to death.

JOHNSON: Your first visit to the Oval Office.

ODUM: Yes, I shook more then than I do now.

JOHNSON: So that was your first visit to the Oval Office

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then.

ODUM: Yes.

JOHNSON: On Truman's first full day as President. And you came in to...

ODUM: And he came into the Oval Office and asked me if I could go out and stay with Mrs. Truman -- he used to either call her "the Madame" or "Boss" -- and I said, "I'd be happy to."

JOHNSON: So you went out then to the apartment on the 13th of April.

ODUM: Yes.

JOHNSON: And Margaret, wouldn't she have been in school at this time?

ODUM: Yes, I guess she was in school by that time.

JOHNSON: But you went up to the apartment. Was Bess Truman there when you got there?

ODUM: Yes. Yes.

JOHNSON: And what were you supposed to do there?

ODUM: Well, just sort of answer the phone or the doorbell,

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and things of that sort, and just be there. Then I think I must have gone on back to my Harvard Street room; I've forgotten what date we went to the Blair House.

JOHNSON: When they were at the funeral of President Roosevelt you were kind of holding down their apartment?

ODUM: Yes, I stayed with Mrs. Wallace.

JOHNSON: Okay, her mother was living with them.

ODUM: Yes, she was there at that time.

JOHNSON: In the apartment.

ODUM: Yes.

JOHNSON: Oh, I see, so you had her mother as well as Margaret more or less to tend to.

ODUM: Yes. It really wasn't "tending," but again I answered the phone and visited with Mrs. Wallace. Margaret went to Hyde Park with her parents. By that time she was old enough not to need a babysitter -- or companion.

JOHNSON: Yes, she was 20 years old. Sure. So it was kind of like "granny sitting."

ODUM: Right. And then as I say, when they moved to the

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Blair House, I drove down with them and then I never went back to my place again except to pack, and bring my things down to the Blair House.

JOHNSON: Bess Wallace's mother, did she ordinarily stay in the apartment when they were in Washington?

ODUM: Not in the early days; but later on she would come to Washington with Mrs. Truman during the session.

JOHNSON: When you babysat with Margaret was Mrs. Wallace there too?

ODUM: No, she wasn't there at that time; she still lived back here (Independence).

JOHNSON: Okay, but she at some time did come out and start staying in the apartment?

ODUM: Yes. Yes, she was there when they went up to Hyde Park, because otherwise why would I have had to stay there.

JOHNSON: She had become kind of a regular there, a member of the household so to speak?

ODUM: Yes. And then she moved to the Blair House with us, and she liked a certain little room there, we called the

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Glass Room. Mrs. Truman and I shared a little office on the fourth floor, but when they would be gone, I'd go down and chat with Mrs. Wallace and sit with her. I lived there a month with them.

JOHNSON: Now, what floor was she on in the Blair House?

ODUM: Let's see, I was on the fourth floor; the President and Mrs. Truman were on the second, so she and Margaret had rooms on the third floor. I can't quite recall how that worked out.

JOHNSON: When did you really first get acquainted with Bess Wallace's mother, Madge Gates Wallace?

ODUM: Well, I guess when she came to stay with them at the apartment. I don't remember the first time I ever met her.

JOHNSON: But you started getting pretty well acquainted with her on the 13th of April when you came over to Blair House?

ODUM: Yes. She accepted me, as someone who enjoyed being with her. We were across the hall from each other, when "we" moved from the Blair House to the White House.

JOHNSON: Do you remember her reactions at that point to her

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son-in-law becoming President?

ODUM: No, I really can't remember at that point. But later, when she and I would be together in her room at the White House, the President would put his head in the door to inquire as to her well-being, and she would hardly reply. She did say to me, on one occasion, that she did not approve of the changes being made at her home in Independence -- like the high fence being erected around the house, etc. She just didn't seem to understand the need for such changes.

JOHNSON: Did she ever talk politics, Madge Gates Wallace?

ODUM: Not to me. She would tell me, oh, about things in Independence. Mostly, when we were at Blair House, in the little glass room we talked about the beautiful glassware and the history of the Blair House. She liked to go out to a place called Mrs. Kaye's for lunch. It isn't on the edge of Washington now because it's all grown up out there. It was like going to the country, and she liked to drive out there. That was her special treat to those of us who accompanied her.

JOHNSON: Did she have a chauffeur then? If she wanted to go could she call somebody to chauffeur her out there? How

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did she get around?

ODUM: Yes, although she didn't have a special chauffeur, one of us would call for a car for her.

JOHNSON: One of the White House drivers?

ODUM: Yes, right. It was usually "Hardy," Mrs. Truman's driver. She liked him, and he was so kind to her.

JOHNSON: And you'd go along.

ODUM: Yes, she'd ask me. I will say she liked me because sometimes after we moved in the White House, and they'd want to be together, or eat as a family, she'd say to me, "Oh, you're going to eat with us aren't you?" I'd say, "No, I'm going out," or something, so as not to be underfoot all the time.

JOHNSON: But you did eat with them sometimes?

ODUM: Oh yes. I ate there most of the time, but this was a Thanksgiving when all the family was there, and she said, "Of course you're going to be with us." I said, "Oh, no, I think that's more just a family affair." I was always welcome back on Harvard Street.

JOHNSON: Well, you know, in the Truman house, I think they

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say she sat at the head of the table, and I think maybe Harry Truman was at the other end. I suppose in the White House there was a place for the President at the head of the table. Do you remember how they did that?

ODUM: Yes, it was a round table in that family dining room. There was no head of it. I often ate lunch and dinner with them.

JOHNSON: A circular table.

ODUM: Yes. I used to eat lunch with them or have a tray in my office. I remember a day when Margaret had a dog named Mike. I'd let Carter -- we always called him Carter, who was in the storeroom -- take Mike out with him. I don't know why he had Mike, but Mike jumped over the fence at Carter's home, and, I think, bit a neighbor. They came in to me at the noon luncheon table and whispered for me to come to the usher's office, and I had to excuse myself. I was frightened to death; I thought that if that neighbor complained -- whether the neighbor knew it was the President's daughter's dog or not, I don't know -- I would be in real trouble, because I had let Carter take Mike home with him just to have a change. Everyone liked Mike, and so many employees petted and patted him on the head, that I think he

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didn't know who owned him. But we didn't get into trouble at that time. Finally, they kind of got rid of Mike some way. He just didn't adjust to White House living.

JOHNSON: I think Margaret in her book wrote about White House pets...

ODUM: She wrote that I jumped in the pool after him, but I don't know.

JOHNSON: You don't remember jumping in the pool.

ODUM: I may have. I was a conscientious kid.

JOHNSON: So you ate noon luncheons with the family.

ODUM: Yes, and then when they ate up in the solarium, I was often with them there.

JOHNSON: Was that part of the porch, the new porch that they built?

ODUM: It was on the third floor -- not part of the Truman balcony. I remember eating there with them and then Margaret and Mrs. Truman would stop and play ping-pong. I'd go on down to my office.

JOHNSON: Oh, they played ping-pong.

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ODUM: Yes, they had a great time together. I had an office, and a bedroom, which opened up from the office there.

JOHNSON: What floor was that?

ODUM: Well, the second floor. Then, the ushers' office and all the public rooms were on the first floor. The bedrooms were on the second floor.

JOHNSON: In fact, here's a drawing that was in *Life* magazine.

ODUM: Yes, and J. B. West's book, *Upstairs at the White House*, charts the second floor.

JOHNSON: Here is the second floor, and here's the main floor.

ODUM: Yes.

JOHNSON: Now, you were on the second floor?

ODUM: Yes. I was, I guess, right in there, and then Mrs. Wallace was across the hall.

JOHNSON: Oh, you mean between the social secretary's office and Margaret Truman's bedroom, that little cove, right here?

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ODUM: Yes. Right. We had a little office there.

JOHNSON: Oh, this is your little office right here.

ODUM: Yes, Mrs. Truman and I shared this small space, and it opened up into my bedroom.

JOHNSON: Oh, the social secretary's office, it was called, in '45.

ODUM: Yes, but I wasn't a social secretary; I was a personal secretary. Mrs. Helm, the social secretary, had her office in the East Wing.

JOHNSON: Okay, in this guest room is where Madge Gates Wallace stayed, Bess' mother.

ODUM: Right. Then the Queen's Room, and all of that was down here; the Lincoln Bedroom, and the Monroe Room.

JOHNSON: The President's bedroom was back here?

ODUM: Yes, and Mrs. Truman was back there. Yes. When I moved there with them the ushers said, "Why don't you ask for Missie LeHand's former apartment?" She lived there for a while, but that was on the floor above, and the Trumans didn't want me to live alone on the third floor.

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JOHNSON: On the third floor. Now, how about Margaret's room?

ODUM: Right over here in the northwest corner of the second floor.

JOHNSON: Oh, this one over here. I see.

ODUM: She had that large room there.

JOHNSON: And that's where that piano was?

ODUM: Yes.

JOHNSON: Madge Gates Wallace -- did she ever move up to the third floor?

ODUM: No.

JOHNSON: She stayed there.

ODUM: Yes, that would be on the second floor.

JOHNSON: So she stayed on the second floor as long as she lived in the White House?

ODUM: Right.

JOHNSON: And she was probably on the third floor in the Blair House.

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ODUM: Yes, she and Margaret had rooms there. I had a bedroom at the back, on the fourth floor.

JOHNSON: In the Blair House from '48 to '52; that was about three or four years that they lived in the Blair House.

ODUM: I don't think it was that long, because Mrs. Wallace died at the White House -- and the Trumans lived there at the end of the administration. I didn't live there all the time. Let's see, we lived in the Blair House first; then we moved to the White House, and I lived there several months. Then Mrs. Truman called me back in her bedroom one day and I thought, "What have I

done now," or something. She said that Margaret was going to start her last year at GW, and they would like to spend a lot of time alone, just the family together. And I said, "Well, that would be fine. I'd been thinking maybe I would take an apartment." We just kind of came together with our ideas at the same time. So I took an efficiency apartment at the Dorchester House on 16th Street. Mrs. Truman bought me a little coffee table. I still have it, and also a little nest of tables she gave me. Mrs. Helm gave me a couple of lamps.

JOHNSON: You lived in that apartment for a number of years?

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ODUM: Yes. I lived there until the riots of, I think, '66 or thereabout.

JOHNSON: Up into the mid-sixties.

ODUM: Yes.

JOHNSON: So you lived in the White House then only for, you say, a few months?

ODUM: Yes. I believe it was about eight or nine months in the Blair House and the White House.

JOHNSON: After they came over from Blair House.

ODUM: Yes. Then when they had to move back to Blair House, I kept a little office there.

JOHNSON: Okay, but you didn't have an apartment in Blair House after that?

ODUM: No.

JOHNSON: Just your office.

ODUM: Just my office. Of course, I could use my old room, but I didn't. I may have stayed all night there if I stayed with Mrs. Wallace while they were gone, but by that time, after Margaret graduated from college, we

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went up to New York and lived at the Carlyle.

JOHNSON: In New York.

ODUM: Then we would come down weekends.

JOHNSON: Okay, on your first White House job I guess you actually became secretary to Mrs. Truman. And Mrs. Helm remained as social secretary just as she had for Mrs. Roosevelt?

ODUM: Yes. Right. Now, Mrs. Helm was a rather wealthy woman and by that time she didn't want to work a full day. So she only made about \$3,000, and I think my top salary was only about \$7,800, with my starting salary much lower. So you can imagine what kind of pension plan I have. That's why I came back to Illinois, in order to live within my means.

JOHNSON: You mean by the time President Truman left office you were making \$7,800?

ODUM: About \$7,800 a year, yes. Now, the girls in the same position make about \$50,000.

JOHNSON: You started out at what salary, by the way?

ODUM: I started out at \$1,800, in the Senate Office

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Building. When I went to the White House, my starting salary was about \$3,800.

JOHNSON: In '36.

ODUM: Yes, and then my salary was increased to about \$5,000, as I remember, after a few months, and then to \$7,800. Of course, prices weren't so high, and I had no expenses while living with the family -- except personal ones.

JOHNSON: So Mrs. Helm donated some of her time, it looks like.

ODUM: Yes. Well, she made about \$3,000 a year, but she didn't need the money. I guess they looked at her salary and said, "Well, look here, the social secretary only gets \$3,000. What are you paying Miss Odum for?" But anyway, as I said, the cost of living was lower then, and I had not acquired expensive tastes.

JOHNSON: That wasn't a fair comparison was it?

ODUM: No, but I got along all right and I'm not complaining. I don't want you to think I felt cheated, because the whole time I felt privileged.

JOHNSON: The both of you were working fulltime.

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ODUM: I was working fulltime. Mrs. Helm was working mornings, and, of course, attended evening receptions, etc.

JOHNSON: Was this a 40-hour week? Or how many was it?

ODUM: Oh, it almost seemed to be 24-hour days most of the time.

JOHNSON: Did you have to come in on Saturdays sometimes too?

ODUM: Oh, yes.

JOHNSON: You did?

ODUM: And then when I went up to New York with Margaret, we'd come home over the weekend and I would come down to the White House and try to catch up on work there, still trying to be Mrs. Truman's secretary.

JOHNSON: Yes, when you were not there with Mrs. Truman -- you were with Margaret. Who actually did a lot of that work that you had been doing?

ODUM: Well, I had a small staff (most of them had worked for Mrs. Roosevelt), and on it was a Miss Orondorff; a very quiet, knowledgeable person. She helped me in many ways.

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JOHNSON: What was her name?

ODUM: Irene Orondorff. I told her one time when I came back to Washington, "Irene, you're doing a lot of the work, and I still have the title; and I get to attend all of these lovely functions and teas and receptions." She said, "I don't want any part of that. I am not an outgoing person." But I said, "You're doing so much, you should have some honor." "I don't want it," she said. "I wouldn't have your job." So Mrs. Truman said in one of her letters to me how valuable Irene was, but she said, "I don't think she's ever had any fun."

JOHNSON: And she was unmarried.

ODUM: She was unmarried, and we kept in touch, well, afterwards until she died.

JOHNSON: In those days I suppose it wasn't expected that wives would be working fulltime.

ODUM: Well, I think there were several married women working full-time on Mrs. Helm's staff. I think she had Ida Andrews, and there was a Miss Rowley. Then she had Mr. Adrian Tolley and Sandy Fox, whom I saw last year (1988). There was an old White House staff reunion and I went to that in Washington.

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JOHNSON: Last year.

ODUM: Yes. Sandy Fox, who was the calligrapher -- I always hope I say that right -- sort of organized it. In fact, Betty Ford gave a party for him when he retired and I went to it. I have pictures they autographed for me.

JOHNSON: So that meant you got back into the White House under the Ford Administration.

ODUM: Yes, and then Mrs. Reagan let her social secretary invite to a luncheon those of us who had worked as social or personal secretaries to First Ladies. (Mrs. Helm was dead by then). There were two there who worked for Mrs. Hoover; they came all the way from California. But I thought that was a very nice gesture because Mrs. Carter never said "boo."

JOHNSON: How did Bess Truman explain the job to you? Do you recall how she put it, what she said she wanted you to do?

ODUM: Well, as I recall, we just learned together. Mrs. Helm was a great help, and we worked everything out as we went along. I think Mrs. T [Truman] just wanted someone she knew and trusted to be her personal

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secretary.

JOHNSON: You worked well together apparently, with Mrs. Helm.

ODUM: Oh, we did, yes. Many times I visited with her in her apartment. When Mrs. Truman wouldn't have press conferences, Mrs. Helm and I did it, and Doris Fleeson, I think it was, wrote that we both (Mrs. Helm and Miss Odum) looked as if there was a better way to earn a living. Then when I went to New York, Mrs. Helm had to carry most of the load.

JOHNSON: I guess she stayed there at the White House until the end of the administration.

ODUM: Yes, she did. She used to come all the way over from the East Wing to the Blair House. Mrs. Truman liked her and praised her, but a lot of times she said, "There's no use for Mrs. Helm to come over here. We can do it; we can talk on the phone." Mrs. Helm finally began to ride over, but in good weather, she'd just walk over, from the east side of the Executive Office.

JOHNSON: You helped handle the mail that came into the White House?

ODUM: Yes.

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JOHNSON: That was addressed to Mrs. Truman.

ODUM: Right.

JOHNSON: Did you have anything to do with the mail addressed to Mr. Truman?

ODUM: No, no. The mail I guess was sorted over in the Executive Office. I know we had old Mr. Charleton, and he would walk slowly over with the mail. We'd always groan every time he came up to our small office. Some of the people on Mrs. Helm's staff and my staff were on other payrolls like perhaps the Navy Department or other government departments. They were "on loan" to the White House.

JOHNSON: On detail, sort of.

ODUM: Yes. On assignment to the White House. I know Mr. Charleton always wanted to talk and we wanted to get him out of there. But we'd get the mail then, and Mrs. Truman and I'd go through it together.

JOHNSON: How about Mrs. Helm; would she get in on that?

ODUM: No. The social office mail would go to Mrs. Helm. Or maybe some of Mrs. Truman's mail would go there too, and

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they would sort it and send it over to us.

JOHNSON: I notice there was a letter here to you. Who signed his name "O", just "O?"

ODUM: Well, that could have been Miss Orondorff.

JOHNSON: At any rate, it refers to forwarding letters. This is Mr. Latta, "Inasmuch as he [that is, Mr. Latta] understands, Mrs. Truman does not want to become involved with the departments. Instead of referring things directly to the departments and agencies, we make a brief acknowledgment and then refer the letters with a copy of the acknowledgment to the Executive Office. They will refer them out with their own letters and thus relieve Mrs. Truman of appearing to intervene in any way in official matters." I guess if it was something that should have gone to another department, then they'd just send it over to the Executive Office and they...

ODUM: Yes, Bill Hassett was very helpful. He was over, as you know, in the Executive Office. Mrs. Helm and I both just adored him. He was clever and if we had a difficult letter, he would sometimes draft an answer for us.

JOHNSON: But you did use form letters didn't you?

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ODUM: Well, not exactly form letters.

JOHNSON: But in your papers you do have some samples.

ODUM: That's right; Mrs. Helm had samples of replies to similar requests, etc.

JOHNSON: How many hours a day do you think you would have to spend replying to correspondence?

ODUM: Well, it's difficult to say; a lot of times, if Mrs. Truman went out in the morning, I went with her. It would be for shopping or going over to the Democratic Women's Club, or luncheon or something of that sort, or if she had promised to go somewhere as one of her official appointments. I often went with her. Then we worked one day a week at the USO. When we had teas in the afternoon, Mrs. Helm would pour tea -- and I, coffee. We also attended the official receptions in the evenings. So it's not easy to say how much time I spent on correspondence.

JOHNSON: Does this mean you'd get a White House driver then to take you wherever you wanted to go?

ODUM: Yes. Mr. Hardy drove her. She used to want to drive herself but it became so that she couldn't.

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JOHNSON: What was his first name, do you remember?

ODUM: Tom; Tom Hardy. He was Mr. Truman's driver, when he became Vice President.

JOHNSON: But Mrs. Truman would drive once in a while.

ODUM: She used to like to drive, and then sometimes Margaret and I would take a car, and she would drive. I know we'd go down toward Mount Vernon, that way. I think Mrs. Truman didn't want to lose her ability to drive a car and sometimes she and Margaret would drive out alone. But there came a time, and I think that was after the shooting, that she couldn't drive alone. So Hardy would take us over to the USO or wherever we wanted to go.

JOHNSON: So now you had the letters to take care of, and then you had these press conferences.

ODUM: Yes.

JOHNSON: Those were your two major duties, would you say?

ODUM: Yes, right.

JOHNSON: Mrs. Truman apparently asked you and Mrs. Helm to meet the press and sort of be a buffer, I guess, between

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her and the press.

ODUM: Yes

JOHNSON: Was that something that you expected to have to do?

ODUM: Indeed not, no! But unlike Mrs. Roosevelt, Mrs. Truman just didn't want to hold press conferences, and the press girls were used to talking directly to the First Lady, but Mrs. Truman didn't have to conform with whatever Mrs. Roosevelt did. Mrs. Roosevelt enjoyed it, you know; she was such an extrovert.

JOHNSON: Well, do you remember the first time that Mrs. Truman, as the President's wife, as First Lady, did meet with the press? Did she meet with them, for instance, just shortly after he became President?

ODUM: Well she took them through the White House after it was renovated, and she was on friendly terms with many of them.

JOHNSON: Of course, that would be way back in the fifties?

ODUM: And they liked her; they could see her. I think some of the representatives of the press could come to the large official receptions that they had.

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JOHNSON: But that was after the renovation.

ODUM: Right.

JOHNSON: Well, how about back in '45?

ODUM: No, I don't think so, unless they saw her out on one of her official engagements.

JOHNSON: I guess in October 1945 was when you and Mrs. Helm started to met with the press women and you would give out the schedules?

ODUM: Right. Her engagements, yes. And if there was some sticky question that we didn't know the answer, we'd write it down and take it to Mrs. Truman and get her reply, and then we would pass it on to the news women.

JOHNSON: You'd get a written reply from Mrs. Truman?

ODUM: Sometimes, yes.

JOHNSON: Or you could call her on the phone. She wouldn't be there to talk to them.

ODUM: Oh, no, not directly to them. I think in my papers there was a question-answer sheet where she said "Yes," "No," and "No comment." Later I gave a copy of that to a woman in Owensburg, Kentucky, who was wanting to write

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about First Ladies and their secretaries. She wrote back and said, "I didn't get much out of that; can't you tell me any more?" I said, "Not much." I had never wanted to talk about Mrs. Truman; people have urged me to write a book and I said, "No, I don't know anything that would be tantalizing or gossipy."

At one time Martha Kearney, a news girl, wanted to write a story about me -- an article to be titled, "From White Collar to White House." She was to receive \$500 for it. I went to Mrs. Truman to tell her about it. She said that no, indeed, she didn't want such an article written. I then had to ask Martha to kill the story -- which she was kind enough to do. So that killed any desire I had to try to write a book.

JOHNSON: Well, now, the questionnaires, did you develop a questionnaire? You mentioned this briefly.

ODUM: Yes. The newswomen would submit questions, which we would put in writing to Mrs. T.

JOHNSON: But did you ever develop a more elaborate questionnaire where she...

ODUM: I don't know whether Mrs. Helm did or not, but I just remember finding this one, where she said, "Yes," "No,"

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and "No comment," or "None of your business." Just a funny thing -- we would be sitting there in that little office and the phone would ring and it would be someone like Austine Cassini or one of the press girls. They would say, "What is Mrs. Truman going to wear to the reception, or the party?" I'd turn to her and I'd say, "What are you going to wear to so and so?" She'd say, "Tell them it's none of their business." I'd say "She doesn't know exactly what; she hasn't decided." She'd be sitting there laughing at me, and I'd be red-faced trying to make up an answer.

JOHNSON: Did she say "damn business."

ODUM: Well, she might have.

JOHNSON: Why do you think she was so shy? I guess she was shy with the press.

ODUM: I think she was a reserved, private person. Mrs. Truman was not really a shy person, because she would speak out when anything displeased her. That time that Eddie McKim came over, did you know about that?

JOHNSON: No.

ODUM: It was in the paper. Doris Fleason, I think, wrote

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the article. He came over and was checking our side of the offices -- he covered Mrs. Helm and mine -- and then he went back to the Executive Offices with some suggestions. Mrs. Truman called Mr. Truman as I recall, and said, "What was Eddie McKim doing over here? We run this ourselves." You know, that all got out in the paper, and who told it I do not know. I know I didn't, but it sounded as if I had told it.

JOHNSON: And she knew that you hadn't.

ODUM: Yes, she knew that I hadn't. Eddie McKim didn't stay too long after that. I don't know what decided him to go back to Omaha.

JOHNSON: Do you think that episode might have had something to do with his departure?

ODUM: I don't know whether it did or not, but he left shortly thereafter. But Mrs. Truman told the President to just keep Eddie McKim over on his own side; we'd run our side.

JOHNSON: But they hadn't had words with each other?

ODUM: Oh, no. Eddie McKim and the President were old war buddies, and Mrs. Truman must have known him a long

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time, too. He was probably perfectly innocent; he was probably just checking up on what we were doing over there on the East side, and didn't think it would cause trouble.

JOHNSON: She did have a lot of luncheons, receptions...

ODUM: Right.

JOHNSON: ...with wives of Cabinet members, diplomatic mission people.

ODUM: Yes, and with local people. We used to have those notes, "From the Desk of Miss Odum," and "From the Desk of Mrs. Helm," and if I had something, I would make duplicates and send it over to Ms. Helm. Then she would send over a copy for me and a copy for Mrs. Truman and the Executive side, of the engagements, formal engagements, which they made. Of course, they didn't entertain too much during the war years. We had teas for veterans organizations and teas for local groups.

JOHNSON: But they had a big season there in '46-47, that first year, and then they cut back in '47 and '48 because of food shortages, and so on. What was your personal involvement with these luncheons? I think Mrs. Helm mentioned that you'd serve coffee, or pour coffee

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at one end of the table, and she poured tea at the other.

ODUM: We'd always argue what was more important, coffee or tea. But tea was a little more difficult, with cream and sugar, lemons, etc., and all of that. I could just take one pot and pour, and let the person add cream or sugar.

JOHNSON: Whereabouts would this be?

ODUM: In the big formal dining room where they held State dinners, etc.

JOHNSON: The State Dining Room?

ODUM: The State Dining Room. If there was a small group, or one or two friends, Mrs. Truman could meet them in the Red Room, or in the West Hall (Room) on the second floor.

JOHNSON: How about the East Room; did they ever do this in the East Room?

ODUM: No, but the East Room would be used at formal receptions. The White House aides would help us at teas, and after the teas Mr. [Charles] Claunch always bragged that he could clear the State Dining Room in two

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minutes; and he almost could. Sometimes, musicals were held in the East Room.

JOHNSON: Did you see our mantel out here in the museum from the State Dining Room, the buffalo head mantel?

ODUM: Oh yes. I think I did yesterday. There was so much, I could spend hours in those rooms.

JOHNSON: Sure.

ODUM: After the large teas Mrs. Truman and I would go back sometimes to the red or green room and have tea with the White House aides. They were always fresh and sassy, and I think Mrs. Truman enjoyed them.

JOHNSON: The White House aides.

ODUM: Yes.

JOHNSON: Would this be Truman staff?

ODUM: No, it would be the White House aides, the men from the Army, Navy, etc. under Colonel Lowry's direction.

JOHNSON: So, this was the military people?

ODUM: Yes. Because they helped move the people in and out at large receptions. Drucie Snyder and Margaret called

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them "the potted plants."

JOHNSON: Okay, these were uniformed people.

ODUM: They were from all services. Colonel Lowry selected the young men who would come over to help us.

JOHNSON: Then you would have a little get-together with them.

ODUM: I know there was a Lieutenant Williams, or George Williams, and he liked to tell tales. Mrs. Truman would laugh, and seemed to enjoy these young men. Drucie married one of them. Sometimes, if Mrs. T was busy after a tea, they would ask me to join them at the Hay-Adams across the park, and I'd go over and we'd have tea or coffee or a cocktail.

JOHNSON: Oh. So she liked to socialize with these young fellows.

ODUM: Yes, she seemed to enjoy them, and, they her. And, of course, they helped; they called themselves "potted plants" at the big diplomatic receptions.

JOHNSON: Did you get in on those diplomatic, or even the State, dinners? Did you ever attend the State dinners?

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ODUM: Yes, Mrs. Truman was very kind to me. A lot of times I did attend some of those. I was probably below salt, or whatever you call it, but Mrs. Helm and I were included in most White House affairs.

JOHNSON: Now, occasionally, I guess the photographer could take a picture of them shaking hands with Ambassadors or whatever, but didn't they ordinarily keep photographers out of the State dinners?

ODUM: Yes, they did.

JOHNSON: So there were no photographs to speak of.

ODUM: There were few photographs, but as far as I know, there were photographs of their shaking hands in the beginning of a visit of a foreign diplomat.

JOHNSON: I wonder why they were so intent on not having photographs.

ODUM: I don't know. There were photos taken at Cabinet meetings, etc.

JOHNSON: They do photograph State dinners now, don't they?

ODUM: Oh, I think so, yes.

JOHNSON: There would be a formal dinner and just

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conversation, kind of informal conversation?

ODUM: Yes.

JOHNSON: After dinner, would there be dancing?

ODUM: Yes. Sometimes they'd go back in the East Room where they would dance.

JOHNSON: But the State dinner itself would be in the State Dining Room.

ODUM: Yes.

JOHNSON: And I guess they had to divide that up because of the numbers.

ODUM: Yes, they did. Miss Helm, I think in her book, tells of that.

If I were in Washington, I was invited to functions, and Mrs. Helm, too.

JOHNSON: What would be your function during the State...

ODUM: Just sit there, and chat with dinner partners and try to look smart or something. And when they were just receptions, I'd sometimes stay in the ushers' office and chat with them.

JOHNSON: But you didn't mingle with the guests much then?

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ODUM: Not too much, no.

JOHNSON: Do you recall the Hazel Scott Powell controversy?

ODUM: Oh, I just remember hearing about it, yes.

JOHNSON: And I think there was a little press conference after that.

ODUM: Probably so, I don't remember the details.

JOHNSON: But you didn't get much involved in that?

ODUM: No.

JOHNSON: How did you handle unwanted visitors?

ODUM: If they were invited, they were wanted. What do you mean unwanted?

JOHNSON: Well, I guess those who persisted in trying to get to Mrs. Truman?

ODUM: Oh, well, either Mrs. Helm or I would try to put them off. There was a woman called Benlou Murray, I think that was her last name, and I think she was from Warrensburg, Missouri. But she'd just come to the gate, and say she was there. She would be allowed to come in, because she was an old friend of the family.

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JOHNSON: They didn't have to be scheduled necessarily? If somebody showed up at the gate that was a friend of Mrs. Truman, would they just say, ordinarily, "Come on in?"

ODUM: Right; if Mrs. Truman was in, it would be. Yes, let them come on in.

JOHNSON: There's something about a Miss Jean Rogers.

ODUM: Yes.

JOHNSON: Being ostracized after writing about the Trumans. Probably she was there when you were there.

ODUM: Yes. I asked Sue Gentry about her last night, and she told me Jean had died. Yes, she was a lovely girl, I thought. I felt sorry for her. When she came to Washington the Trumans tried to help her, but after she wrote that long article they had very little communication with her, afterward.

JOHNSON: What did it appear in, do you know?

ODUM: I think the *Evening Star*.

JOHNSON: She had been, I think, a young friend of Mrs. Truman out here in Independence, hadn't she?

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ODUM: Yes, but the article didn't please them.

JOHNSON: The way she divulged certain things?

ODUM: Yes. So she was a little unwelcome around there later. I think, finally, she just came on back here.

JOHNSON: They never would have anything to do with her after that, I understand. Of course, she went to work for the *Times-Herald* which didn't help matters. The *Times-Herald* was virtually a copy of the *Chicago Tribune*.

ODUM: Oh, yes.

JOHNSON: Do you remember those cartoons? Did Bess Truman ever reveal how she felt about some of these cartoons that were being published?

ODUM: Never to me. No, never to me.

JOHNSON: Or about any columnist that she especially didn't like?

ODUM: I don't recall. She did like Bess Furman and others.

JOHNSON: Well, how about the columnist Ruth Montgomery, for instance? She wrote something...

ODUM: Well, she wrote a rather nasty article about Margaret.

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JOHNSON: About you and Margaret...

ODUM: About Margaret and me when we went to Europe.

JOHNSON: That you were being paid by taxpayers, but you were not in the White House.

ODUM: But, yet, to our faces, I remember her saying, "Oh, isn't that just wonderful; you're going to Europe," and so sweet, about everything. I never liked her after that, because it wasn't my fault; they invited me to go as a companion to Margaret, and the taxpayers did not pay our fares.

JOHNSON: Do you remember anything about Mrs. Luce being excluded from the White House, Mrs. Clare Booth Luce?

ODUM: No, I don't. Mrs. Helm might have known about it.

JOHNSON: The Spanish class has gotten some publicity, and that went on for a number of years I guess.

ODUM: Yes, Mrs. Truman and I were members of the Spanish class.

JOHNSON: And she apparently got some award from the Cuban Ambassador, because of that.

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ODUM: Oh, I'd forgotten that.

JOHNSON: According to this article in *Colliers*, they were so impressed with her being involved in a Spanish class. So you learned Spanish in the White House?

ODUM: Well, not too much. Now, Mrs. Truman studied hard, and I tried to study. But some of those ladies couldn't even say, "I see the cat." Mamie Eisenhower couldn't. But they didn't have time to study. I know Rosemary McMahon, who later became Baroness Silvercruys, was a beautiful woman but, again, I guess she didn't have time to study. Now, Mrs. Patterson was a very bright person, and Mrs. Saltonstall was in it; she too was very sharp.

JOHNSON: Do you remember this picture?

ODUM: Yes, I do.

JOHNSON: In 1946. Mrs. Eisenhower is in there.

ODUM: Yes.

JOHNSON: Mrs. Robert Patterson.

ODUM: Yes, she was most intelligent.

JOHNSON: Mrs. Hugo Black.

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ODUM: Right. And I think that was Jessie -- was her name Sullivan?

JOHNSON: Yes, Mrs. John Sullivan.

ODUM: Yes.

JOHNSON: Mrs. Clarence Goodwin; Gussie wasn't it?

ODUM: Yes, Gussie used to drive me up the wall, because she was the instigator. Then, finally, Mrs. Truman had her move the Spanish class away from the White House.

Did you read about the big luncheon we had? I think when Mr. Truman came over for lunch that day, he said, "What is that terrible odor?" This Ramon Ramos [had sponsored it]. We'd all had a hand in cooking this Spanish luncheon. I have a picture of the group. I may have put it in with the papers that I sent to the Library, because I couldn't find it the other day.

JOHNSON: So you had a Spanish lunch at noon, and he comes in...

ODUM: Yes. Gussie had other Spanish classes, and all her classes, or his [Professor Ramos] classes, were invited to the White House for lunch. Everybody had a part in either waiting tables, or stirring that concoction he

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mixed up, and the aroma went all through the house.

JOHNSON: Did Harry Truman try it? Did he try any of it?

ODUM: I don't think he ate any of it. He smelled it. The ushers' office told me he said, "What was that awful odor in the White House?" I used to have fun down in the ushers' office, because we'd talk and rehash all the events.

JOHNSON: Was this Howell G. Crim? He was the head usher, wasn't he?

ODUM: Yes, Crim was head usher and then [Wilson] Searles, and Claunch, and J. B. West. Mr. West would come to the second floor every day, and work out menus and plans with Mrs. Truman. Sometimes, the housekeeper would come along, too.

JOHNSON: And John Pye, was he another one?

ODUM: Pye was over in the Executive side's luncheon room, and he and [Alonzo] Fields had a friendly run-in as to whether Mrs. Truman liked to eat with Pye or whether she liked to eat with Fields over in the House. Then, Margaret and I occasionally would go over and eat with Pye, and that would supposedly make Fields jealous.

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Oh, by the way, I saw Fields at that party, the White House staff reunion; he used to be a big fellow, and he's just very thin, but we embraced each other and talked of former days at the White House.

JOHNSON: He did the book didn't he on *Backstairs at the White House*?

ODUM: No, Lillian Rogers Parks (a White House maid) wrote that book.

JOHNSON: In fact, it was made into a TV movie.

ODUM: Yes, it was Lillian's book. I was invited to luncheon at the Mayflower Hotel in Washington for the cast, followed by a showing of the movie. Many of us mentioned in the book were invited.

I did meet Preston Bruce who said he regretted that I had left the White House as he came in. He was at the White House staff party and sent me an autographed copy of his book; which was titled *From the Door of the White House*. Bruce Preston took John Mays' place as a doorman.

JOHNSON: You were just saying about Truman?

ODUM: Oh, I was saying that when Mrs. Truman would come back to Independence in the summertime, the Senator would come over

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from the Senate floor after the mail had been delivered and he'd put his head in the office door and say, "Is there any mail from the Boss?" He said, "If there isn't, I'm going to fire every one of you." And he'd say that every day; that was a standing joke with us. Then, when we had one, oh, we were all happy to lay that one at him. He missed her so when she was gone.

JOHNSON: It seemed like there was an unusual affection between the two; it was one of those things that you really can't explain.

ODUM: And when he was alone he would, say, get John Griggs, Joe Guilfoyle, and Harry Salisbury ("Patronage boys") in the evening, and he'd tell them about the Civil War and World War I. The boys would then tell us in the office what they had talked about; the Senator would try to teach them the history of the United States.

JOHNSON: This was when he was by himself in the White House?

ODUM: Well, no he was still in the Senate. This was while he was Senator and later Vice President. All of this changed, of course, when he became President.

JOHNSON: Mrs. Truman would come out to Independence usually in the summer, stay for two or three months?

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ODUM: Yes, in the Senate days, and often when she became First Lady.

JOHNSON: And he'd have to stay in Washington, for at least a couple months.

ODUM: While in the Senate, they would drive back to Independence at times. (When I say "they" I mean Mr. and Mrs. Truman.) A time or two I would ride as far as St. Louis with them. Harry Salisbury drove us once. Then, let's see, we'd sometimes stay all night in Indianapolis at the Claypool Hotel. One time we stayed in, I don't know whether it was coming or going, in the Washington, Pennsylvania Hotel. After he became President, they dropped me off once at Scotts Field, before flying on to Kansas City.

JOHNSON: When did you first get assigned to Margaret Truman, to be sort of a companion to her?

ODUM: Well, when I first went with Mrs. Truman I handled the mail for both Margaret and Mrs. Truman. Mrs. Helm would handle mail on social activities. As I say, Mrs. Truman liked to write in longhand and she would say, or maybe write, "Tell them so and so." Or "Say no," or "Say yes." Then, when I went to New York with Margaret, Miss Orondorff who had worked through the Roosevelt Administration, knew

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pretty much how to write letters. She would often save mail for me to sign on weekends.

JOHNSON: Okay, so you went to New York.

ODUM: Yes, after Margaret graduated from college. I'll never forget the day we went up on the train, there was a blizzard, the worst one of the winter. But we went on. I think Pennington, a driver, took a small car up there and he would drive us around New York, and drive Margaret to her singing lessons. We lived up on the 29th floor of the Carlyle Hotel.

JOHNSON: So you had rooms adjacent to each other?

ODUM: We had an apartment, a two-bedroom apartment, with two baths, and living room. We sometimes fixed food on a burner in a hallway closet. Of course, there were no clothes in the closet. To me, it looked huge then, but the living room was perhaps the largest room. It had a grand piano in it. The view was splendid, especially at night.

JOHNSON: Oh, we're talking about expensive rent. Do you have any idea how much that cost?

ODUM: Well, I don't know how they arranged that. I think Mr. Snyder had something to do with getting this apartment

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through Robert Dowling, who owned the Carlyle, that is, the rental of it. I really don't know how much rent they paid.

JOHNSON: Do you remember what year that was?

ODUM: It was after Margaret graduated from GW [June 1946], but remembering the blizzard the day we left, it must have been in early 1947.

JOHNSON: So you left there after she graduated; she decided she wanted a singing career?

ODUM: She wanted to sing, yes.

JOHNSON: And she had a coach up there?

ODUM: Yes, Helen Traubel. Previously, she had studied with Mrs. Strickler of Kansas City.

JOHNSON: Yes. Helen Traubel was her coach in New York.

ODUM: And she wrote a book, *St. Louis Woman*.

JOHNSON: I see.

ODUM: Yes, she wrote a book, and Dr. [Robert] Ferrell sent me a mimeographed copy of the whole book including the chapter about Margaret. It was chapter 17 "L'affaire Margaret."

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JOHNSON: So you heard Helen Traubel doing a lot of vocal exercises.

ODUM: Yes, and she went with us on some of Margaret's concert tours. The Secret Service loved her, because when she'd throw back her head and laugh, you could hear her all over that hotel floor. She had such power. Now, I adored her, too. She and her husband, Bill (Bass) were most kind to me.

JOHNSON: I'll have to check and see if we have that book here.

ODUM: It's called *St. Louis Woman* by Helen Traubel. She said that she finally had to tell Margaret, to the effect that she couldn't waste anymore time, that she was losing money from her own singing. But, as I told Bob Ferrell when he and Andrew Dunar interviewed me, "I thought that Helen Traubel was perfectly happy to take Margaret over." At the time they were just lapping it up; she and her husband Bill would have us over to the apartment to dinner, and I remember what huge appetites they had. And then we'd meet down at the Plaza Hotel and there'd be Lauritz Melchior and his wife, and others mostly from the Met. Margaret and I just loved to be a part of that; Margaret, of course, was more involved. I was fortunate to be an onlooker.

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JOHNSON: So you got well acquainted with the Melchiors too?

ODUM: Yes, I enjoyed them and their stories. And I didn't know that Miss Traubel was unhappy. But you'll have to read that part of her book. I think she was right, in that she wanted Margaret to study abroad. Margaret did work with her in New York, and she worked hard, very faithfully.

JOHNSON: In other words, when she took her voice lessons, she would go visit Helen Traubel.

ODUM: Yes, in Helen Traubel's apartment. Then she had another voice coach, a Mrs. Zayde, and Margaret worked very conscientiously and hard with those two. A Secret Service man and I would drop her off at the Park Avenue Apartment and pick her up later. Once, when we were parked in front of Miss Traubel's apartment, Henry Fonda walked by. The Secret Service man yelled to him, "Are you still moving that damn plant?" Mr. Fonda, who was playing in "Mr. Roberts" at the time, just smiled and waved at us.

JOHNSON: Now, she must have been training, oh, like nine months or so before she had her first concert.

ODUM: I think so. But in Margaret's book *Souvenir*, she gives an accurate account of this.

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JOHNSON: Because her first concert was March, I believe, of 1947.

ODUM: She was with Mrs. [Margaret] Strickler from Kansas City.

JOHNSON: Mrs. Strickler?

ODUM: Yes. But again I refer to *Souvenir*.

JOHNSON: Another voice teacher?

ODUM: Yes, the first one from Kansas City. I think at first Mrs. Strickler and Margaret went on a tour through the South, and I didn't go along. Vietta [Garr] went along; they had a little trouble because of Vietta's color. Then, when I came along for the first time, Margaret was going to sing up in Detroit.

JOHNSON: Yes, in Detroit, in March of '47.

ODUM: And either Mrs. Truman or Margaret asked me to go along. I know the Stricklers were with us.

JOHNSON: I think she had a sore throat problem, unfortunately, that she had to work on before that first concert, before the Detroit Symphony.

ODUM: That's right, and I remember Dr. Graham went with us.

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JOHNSON: You went with her on that first tour?

ODUM: To Detroit. We just went to Detroit and came back. And then after we went to New York, I was with her on every concert tour from then on.

JOHNSON: Yes, I think there was a newspaper article that said that for two years you were with Margaret. Does that sound about right?

ODUM: Yes, and they probably complained about that too. But to ease my conscience and feel I was earning my salary, I would do work down at the White House, too. And I was taking care of all of Margaret's correspondence.

JOHNSON: So you were kind of shuttling back and forth then, too, to the White House?

ODUM: That's right.

JOHNSON: While you were in New York City.

ODUM: That's right, and as I stated, I was taking care of all of Margaret's correspondence.

JOHNSON: That came to New York.

ODUM: That came to New York.

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JOHNSON: I think you did prepare a reply to the press, and...

ODUM: I was sort of caught in the middle because I wanted to be loyal to the Trumans. I didn't feel that I was doing anything wrong. In fact, I wasn't making that much salary for anybody to complain about. It might have sounded big in those days. I know someone complained that I didn't have the background for such employment. The Trumans told me to just ignore the stories. They wanted someone they trusted and never did they complain about my ability to do the job.

JOHNSON: Now, you are quoted as saying that Mrs. Truman sent mail pouches from the White House.

ODUM: Yes, that's right, she did send mail up.

JOHNSON: Then you said you were still supervising your staff.

ODUM: Yes, I was.

JOHNSON: Now, you're talking about Mrs. Orondorff...

ODUM: Yes, she was part of my staff.

JOHNSON: And you say a couple of others; how many others would there have been?

ODUM: Well, on my side I think there was just Miss Orondorff and

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those two men, one whose name I don't remember, and Mr. Charleton who couldn't write letters. He just shuffled back and forth, I think, drawing his breath and his salary, until he could retire. At times, some of Mrs. Helm's staff helped with some of the typing.

JOHNSON: The Secret Service man was with you all the time up there?

ODUM: Yes, one sat outside our door at the Carlyle.

JOHNSON: So there would be three eight-hour shifts per day.

ODUM: Yes. Right.

JOHNSON: And they had to be in a room next to you.

ODUM: They had a room elsewhere in the hotel, but then they sat out in front of our doorway.

JOHNSON: They had to be out in the hallway?

ODUM: Yes.

JOHNSON: Do you remember the names of the Secret Service men?

ODUM: We had a young Mr. Thompson, and we had Emory Roberts (who later I think died). We had a Steve Skapinec at times, too, and a New York Secret Service man, who accompanied us to

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ballgames, plays, etc. Mr. Burke, Mr. Spaman and Andy Daigle went abroad with us.

JOHNSON: Mr. Burke, I think I've heard of him.

ODUM: He's still living, and he and his wife send me Christmas cards.

JOHNSON: So you were with her on most of her tours.

ODUM: Yes.

JOHNSON: And then she went to Europe. Did she make two trips to Europe, one in 1951?

ODUM: Yes, Drucie Horton went the last time. Margaret went as the President's daughter.

JOHNSON: Okay, the second time.

ODUM: Yes. I wasn't with her on that one trip.

JOHNSON: You weren't with her on that one, but you were with her on the first trip to Europe?

ODUM: Right. Again, I refer you to her book, *Souvenir*. I have a copy of it.

JOHNSON: And you met Churchill?

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ODUM: I didn't; I think that was when Drucie was with her.

JOHNSON: And the King and Queen?

ODUM: They were still Princess Elizabeth and Princess Margaret at the time I went with Margaret (Truman). They came to the Embassy to a dance one evening during our stay in London. I went out that evening; I don't think I was invited to the dance. I went out with the John Foster Dulleses and the others, I don't remember, that evening.

JOHNSON: Would that have been to Buckingham Palace that they went?

ODUM: She went over there later and I was not invited to that.

JOHNSON: Now, how about John Foster Dulles?

ODUM: He was staying in the American Embassy at the time we were there. I went out with friends and I think Mr. Dulles was along. Annette Wright, who went to Europe with us, did not stay at the Embassy, but took a room in a small hotel nearby. Annette was with me, when Margaret had some official engagement.

It's all in there; that's the story of our trip. We went to dinner. And when we got to Italy, I was entertained by Embassy personnel a lot, because at that

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time Leonard Warren and his wife were in Rome with her brother, Roy Leiffen, and Margaret was with them a lot. They stayed in a hotel, but they would be included in Embassy parties while we were there. Also in Paris, I mention in there that I would go out with Roy Leiffen and Bruce Mitchell of Western Union. So I would be entertained elsewhere when Margaret and Annette

Wright would go out. I know one evening they had dates, and the press followed them around Paris, and they were tired of being followed everywhere. They just returned to the Embassy early, I don't think I got in until 2 o'clock that night.

JOHNSON: So you were the one that had partied late.

ODUM: Yes, I was the partying one that evening. I was terribly embarrassed not to be there when Margaret returned; after all, I was on a working assignment.

JOHNSON: Anything else special that stands out on that trip? You've mentioned, of course, some things.

ODUM: Yes, India Edwards and Georgia Neese Clark, along with Bill McElvoy (Pan Am) were in Paris at that time (they also had been in Luxembourg while we were there with Perle Mesta) and I went with them to Gif, outside of Paris, to a party given for Margaret. Later on, while I was staying with Mrs.

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Carnegie Miller in Scotland, the Countess of Sutherland and I discovered we had been to the same Gif party. (How's that for name-dropping?)

It's in my diary that is being added to my papers. That covered the whole trip, and Margaret wrote of it in her book *Souvenir*.

Margaret did not want Annette and me to go with her for an audience with the Pope. So we were in an audience of about a hundred with the Leonard Warrens, Roy Leiffen, and the Secret Service men. So we did get to go.

JOHNSON: So you were in a group that went.

ODUM: Yes.

JOHNSON: But she had an individual audience.

ODUM: Yes, she had a private audience.

But I heard her say, on a phone call between Paris and Rome, that she did not want us included in her audience with the Pope, which, of course, should have been a private audience.

JOHNSON: That, no doubt, stands out in your memory, seeing the Pope.

ODUM: Yes, it does. It was an outstanding experience of my life, and we had a very wonderful time in Rome. In fact,

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the Secret Service said I was going to become a Catholic if I stayed in Rome much longer, because when I'd go out and I'd always want to come back and see St. Peters at night. I went into nearly every church in Rome, because they were so beautiful.

JOHNSON: That was certainly a wonderful break, a change of pace for you, wasn't it, that trip?

ODUM: Yes, it was a wonderful experience for me. It was a great privilege for me, that being my first trip abroad.

JOHNSON: You handled the correspondence that you received while she was there?

ODUM: Yes. People sent her notes, flowers and gifts everywhere we stopped.

JOHNSON: And I suppose her father wrote to her quite often.

ODUM: Well, yes, and her mother, too. I worked in London; I had a desk in the Embassy, and did all the negotiations to obtain pounds, francs, lira, etc.

JOHNSON: In the Embassy?

ODUM: Yes. I did some of the correspondence in the Embassy offices, and they helped me with necessary errands.

JOHNSON: Okay, I think I read where for security reasons your

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party would be housed in the Embassies.

ODUM: Yes, we stayed in the Embassies the whole time.

Now, in London Annette stayed in a hotel. I think it was called the Chamberlain.

JOHNSON: Harriman, you know, was with the Marshall plan there in Paris. Did you ever meet Harriman?

ODUM: Yes, we had kind of a briefing, and Harriman was there and Mrs. Harriman attended a luncheon with us, given by General Eisenhower. I get that trip and Paris mixed up with the time I went over with the Snyders. That was on the S.S. *United States*, and Margaret and I sailed on the S.S. *America*.

JOHNSON: You went on the *America*.

ODUM: Yes. One of our Secret Service men had sailed on it when it was used as a troop transport during World War II.

JOHNSON: How did Margaret react to music critics, you know, like Paul Hume?

ODUM: I think she tried not to read the reviews.

JOHNSON: She didn't read them?

ODUM: I don't believe she did.

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JOHNSON: But she was bound to hear, though, one way or another. Yet, it didn't bother her so much it seems.

ODUM: No, I think she just had determination to go ahead, despite the critics.

JOHNSON: How could she be so calm and poised, and determined?

ODUM: Margaret had a lot of poise and determination. She so wanted to do it. Sometimes, I used to stand backstage, and I admire her so much that I would have tears in my eyes in hearing her sing, when I knew she sang sometimes under very difficult situations. And particularly up in Maine after we heard that there had been the shooting [at the Blair House]. She still wanted to sing.

JOHNSON: Yes, how about that, that assassination attempt in November, 1950?

ODUM: That was when they called us and told us.

JOHNSON: You were with her at that point.

ODUM: Yes.

JOHNSON: And so she knew about it, but she knew, of course, he was safe.

ODUM: Yes. Right.

JOHNSON: And she went on ahead and sang.

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ODUM: I think Margaret was a very brave person.

JOHNSON: Did she ever talk to you about, or complain about music critics, or how she was covered in the newspapers or anything like that?

ODUM: No. She may have talked to her parents or her manager. Margaret and I tried to relax between concerts, so we tried to have some fun and eat in places which her manager selected. Kenny Allen would often be on tour with us and, of course, there was her piano accompanist, Herman Allison. We were always on trains as she did not like to fly too much. So we went nearly everywhere on a train or sometimes in a car. We would be together in a bedroom and know every gadget, how to pull down a bed, turn on the heat, how to turn off the heat, and whether we had music in the compartment. We had a lot of fun together in those days. I usually pressed her concert dresses, and, unfortunately, scorched one once.

JOHNSON: Did you ever talk politics together?

ODUM: Not particularly. I do know that we were out West when the President announced that he would not run again, and I think she was in bed and I was sitting on the foot of it. We listened to the broadcast and she said to me, "Rea, I'm

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just worried. I wonder what will become of you." And I was very brave and said, "Oh, I'll get along all right." But as it turned out, when I tried to get employment, they'd say, "Oh, you're too rich for our blood." I'd say, "Well, I need a job." I don't know whether it was before I accepted the position with Senator Symington, that the Trumans asked me to come out here. Now that I see this beautiful place, I'm sorry I did not come here, but by that time I had an apartment and I didn't know anyone here except the bridge club members. I just thought, "Perhaps I had better stay there," which I did, and I think they understood why.

JOHNSON: Did you have anything special to do in the '48 campaign?

ODUM: No. No, I had very little part in it. I stayed in Washington, except for a trip to St. Louis and back on the campaign train via Louisville to Washington.

JOHNSON: I think Margaret was on the train a lot.

ODUM: Yes, she accompanied her parents during the campaign. I was asked to meet them in St. Louis and take mail and some things. I think that they invited me out of the kindness of their hearts; they wanted me to have a little part in it. That's what I always thought; there might be a different

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reason, I don't know.

JOHNSON: So you just met them in St. Louis on their return to Washington. Did you ride in the *Magellan*, in the rear car?

ODUM: Yes, I did once or twice, but I don't think I did on that campaign trip, and on the train back to Mrs. Wallace's funeral, I rode just in the train proper with others.

JOHNSON: You were on the train going to her funeral?

ODUM: Yes, but I have ridden on the *Magellan*.

JOHNSON: You know, Margaret in her book about her father mentions a couple of instances where her father was in danger. She apparently received this information somehow from the Secret Service sources. I think one was at an Army-Navy game where they thought somebody might try something.

ODUM: I didn't know about that, and I did go up with them to the games occasionally, on the special train.

JOHNSON: Up to the Army-Navy games?

ODUM: Yes.

JOHNSON: But she also mentions some letter bombs from the Stern gang in Israel being received at the White House. Did you

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ever intercept any dangerous mail, or know of anything about letter bombs reaching the White House?

ODUM: No. I think that when packages came in, say like to Mrs. Truman, and people sent things all the time, those packages were carefully inspected.

JOHNSON: Was the Secret Service the first ones to check the mail?

ODUM: Yes, I know there were files on persons who had sent threatening letters.

JOHNSON: And they would even x-ray it?

ODUM: I think they did, yes.

JOHNSON: So all the mail that you received had probably gone through Secret Service hands?

ODUM: I believe so. But I never knew their process of handling all the mail received at the White House. And I don't remember reading about it.

JOHNSON: When they went back in the White House after it was renovated in 1952, did your duties change at all?

ODUM: No, I just worked with Mrs. Truman, helping with correspondence, entertainment of guests, etc. I had an

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apartment out at the Dorchester, I could walk, but they would send a car for me, and I had a special telephone line into the White House. Later on, and I don't know whether this is true or not, but I felt there was a tap on it. Now, I have no way of knowing, but I was very careful about whatever I said to anybody in the White House. I didn't know who it was, but I could hear something that led me to believe that. Mrs. Truman had our little office searched.

JOHNSON: Oh, she did, for bugs?

ODUM: Yes, because she didn't want that.

JOHNSON: They never found anything?

ODUM: They didn't find anything I was told, so I don't suppose mine was tapped either, but there was some mysterious clicking going on sometimes.

JOHNSON: Was that early in the Administration?

ODUM: Well, it was after things became, you know, more serious.

JOHNSON: Was that after the assassination attempt?

ODUM: Yes, I believe so.

JOHNSON: Did that change your routines at all? After the assassination they became more security conscious.

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ODUM: Yes, that's right, because at that point they wouldn't let the President walk back and forth over to the Blair House.

JOHNSON: How about your passes and so on, to get in and out, did they change that?

ODUM: Yes, we had to have our pictures taken and I still have my identification badge.

JOHNSON: You started using a picture card.

ODUM: Yes, and I had to go over to the east end to get my picture taken.

JOHNSON: What had you used before that time?

ODUM: I think it was just "Hello," or "How are you today."

JOHNSON: Oh, you didn't have a card even?

ODUM: No, not that I remember.

JOHNSON: To get into the White House, they just had to recognize you, the guards?

ODUM: Yes. When I was living at the White House, and I went out in the evening to visit friends, they could drive me through the Northwest gate up to the House -- or I would do the same by taxi.

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JOHNSON: When you went there to work in the morning.

ODUM: Yes. I could enter through any gate. Well, now I could be wrong. Mr. Snyder had told me to keep a diary during my White House days, but I thought, "No, I'm not going to do that, because if anyone found it they'd think I was snooping or maybe wanting to write a book later on or something." I just didn't. So a lot of the things from this distance in time now have become hazy. I still have my identification card, and it reads, "Date of issue -- December 7, 1949." Of course, it now bears the word "cancelled," with no date.

JOHNSON: Did you enter the White House grounds at, what do they call it, the East Gate there?

ODUM: After I moved to an apartment, a lot of times I would go to the East entrance and walk through the ground floor, and take the elevator.

JOHNSON: To get to your office.

ODUM: Yes.

JOHNSON: Across from Lafayette Park there.

ODUM: No, that would be the Treasury side entrance.

JOHNSON: But you usually went in the East entrance.

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ODUM: That would be East, yes. It was not the Pennsylvania Avenue entrance after I moved from the White House. A lot of times, Mrs. Truman and I would leave from under the diplomatic room - I called it the south lawn entrance - back there under the Truman balcony side.

JOHNSON: Oh, on that side.

ODUM: Yes.

JOHNSON: That would be the south side.

ODUM: Yes. Yes, we'd go out, and go through the gate on the old State Department side.

JOHNSON: Would that be the west?

ODUM: Yes.

JOHNSON: Okay, you'd go out through a west gate.

ODUM: Yes. I think we first would do that to avoid the tourists, because you see, they would come in from the east side to go through the White House. As I recall, they would walk up the steps to the first floor and they could look in on all the public rooms.

JOHNSON: You mean the tourists could?

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ODUM: Yes, the tourists, and then walk out the same way.

JOHNSON: They could go into the East Room, the Red Room, the Green Room, and then they would be brought back out?

ODUM: Right. So, when the tourists started coming in, a curtain could be drawn so if we went out driving or to some engagement, we wouldn't be seen by the tourists. Also, employees from the Executive offices could go to the map room, Dr. Graham's office, and the housekeeper's office, and not be seen by visitors. This curtain was put up across the ground floor passageway.

JOHNSON: This was before the renovation?

ODUM: No, afterward.

JOHNSON: There were a lot of tourists going through there at that time?

ODUM: Yes. It's of no importance but, of course, now they're lined up far out into the street.

JOHNSON: Oh, it's incredible.

ODUM: I went in once with the tourists, after I had left the White House, to see the Christmas decorations. There's a Betty Monkman who works in the curator's office, and she was

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out at the White House staff party. In fact, she drove me back into town, and said, "Now, anytime you want to come through the White House, all you have to do is call me." I was staying with a friend, and I called Betty later and said, "Betty, I just don't have time on this trip to see the

White House." She said, "If you ever come back, just call me because I'd like to show you the changes there." Again I didn't have time when I visited in Washington at Christmas, 1988.

JOHNSON: Not everybody gets that kind of invitation.

ODUM: That's right. But during "our" administration, if they were special guests of Mrs. Truman, I could take them through the White House as well as over to the Executive Office. And if Mr. Truman was out to lunch, they could sit in his chair and swing around you know, and say, "Well, I sat in the President's chair."

JOHNSON: In the Oval Office?

ODUM: In the Oval Office. You couldn't do that now, or even later in the Truman administration.

JOHNSON: That would be a treat.

ODUM: Yes.

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JOHNSON: Did you help compile the White House scrapbooks?

ODUM: No, that was done in Mrs. Helm's office.

JOHNSON: In the Social Office.

ODUM: Yes, I think Mr. [Adrian] Tolley handled that.

JOHNSON: Every three months they'd have a thick volume.

ODUM: That's good; I'm glad to know that. I just saved little pictures. We'd get notes from the Social Office and we'd just throw them in the wastebasket, after reading them, of course. I was too busy to collect things.

JOHNSON: What duties did Bess Truman seem to enjoy the most about her job? Or do you think she really enjoyed being First Lady? I suppose there were mixed feelings.

ODUM: I don't know what duties she enjoyed the most. After meeting so many people and shaking their hands at receptions and teas, she would often go to her room and soak her hand in paraffin. They asked in one of the press conferences if the President were elected for another term, would Mrs. Truman enjoy it, and I think she replied that she'd come through all right in the first two terms. But no, I think by her coming home in the summertime, that she was able to

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carry out her official duties at the White House. Of course, she loved Independence and she liked the people in Independence, and there was not as much pressure "at home."

JOHNSON: But she did really shy away from publicity?

ODUM: Yes, she did.

JOHNSON: And she certainly didn't do the kind of speaking that they do now.

ODUM: I know one woman, who was very active in a lot of organizations there in Washington, said to me, "Could you do something to get her to do more for women in the organizations?" I said, "I'm not going to; that's her decision, not mine. I'm not going to speak to her about that." I didn't because a lot of people admired her for not always being in the public eye, maybe more than the women who were complaining that she wasn't doing enough.

JOHNSON: You knew Charlie Ross pretty well?

ODUM: Oh yes. He was a nice man. He helped us a lot too.

JOHNSON: He would give you some advice on when you met with the press?

ODUM: Yes, and he would help us at any time we called on him.

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Eben Ayers was helpful too.

JOHNSON: You and Mrs. Helm were meeting with the press about every two weeks?

ODUM: I think so, yes. Mrs. Helm handled it all, while I was away with Margaret.

JOHNSON: There in '45, '46; how long did that continue?

ODUM: Well, I guess until the end of the Administration.

JOHNSON: As long as you were there in the White House, you were called upon to be part of those meetings with the press?

ODUM: Yes.

JOHNSON: Well, when you weren't there, it was just Mrs. Helm?

ODUM: It was just Mrs. Helm, yes.

JOHNSON: But when you were there, you were invited to be a part of that?

ODUM: Yes.

JOHNSON: And meeting with these newspaper ladies.

ODUM: But most of the time Margaret and I were gone through the week, and those conferences would be held on a weekday.

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JOHNSON: Did you ever have an office in the East Wing, or the West Wing?

ODUM: No, I was always right in the house, except when we lived at the Blair House.

JOHNSON: In the house, by the President's study?

ODUM: No, between my bedroom and the hallway leading to the elevator. And later Eisenhower, I think, used that room as a place in which to paint, so I was told. The President's study was across the hall.

JOHNSON: It probably smelled of turpentine.

ODUM: I think after the Nixons were there, that Julie had that room for her use. I'm not sure.

JOHNSON: So now in '52 he is winding up his second term; he says he's not going to run again. But you didn't go to Europe on that second trip with Margaret.

ODUM: No. Drucie Snyder Horton went with her.

JOHNSON: You stayed at the White House?

ODUM: Yes, I remember Mrs. Truman and I went to the ship to see them off. We were going to go down to Washington on the

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train, and she said she wanted to go into one of the restaurants there in the station. She said, "I want a cocktail." The Secret Service didn't want that at all; it was kind of a public place. She said she was going to do it, and we did it, with no one paying any attention to us. Then we got on a train, and went back to Washington. So I was down there the whole time the girls were abroad.

JOHNSON: But you had to get used to the Secret Service being around a lot too.

ODUM: Well, I didn't mind; they were helpful to me. We got along fine, and I had a wonderful time on shipboard with Guy Spaman and Mr. Burke, because Margaret wanted to be with the Warrens and Roy Leiffen. I was not at the captain's table during that trip although I was invited to be there. I just thought Margaret would have more enjoyment by not having me underfoot all

the time. Now, when I went abroad with the Snyders we were with Captain Fender on the S.S. *United States* at all his "public" appearances.

JOHNSON: So your duties remained the same right up to the end of the Truman Administration, and when the Trumans left the White House you left too. What about the last day?

ODUM: Yes. I remember I was down in the ushers office and I

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said, "Now, what if I order a car tomorrow?" I used to have to check through the ushers office if I needed a car to go anywhere, or to go home. "What happens if I need a car?" Mr. West said, "Well, Miss Odum, I'll say I never heard of you." They had a party later on for Mr. West over at the Carlton Hotel and I was invited to it, and each of the secretaries had to say something about him. I have never been comfortable speaking, but I got up and said, "Yes, I remember Mr. West, because when he told me that if I ordered a car the next day after the Eisenhowers came in he'd say he never knew me." Everybody, of course, tee-heed, but he and his wife were always good friends of mine. He died after the one White House staff reunion; he died about two weeks later. So he wasn't present at last year's reunion. And we didn't have one this year (1988).

JOHNSON: But you've had several reunions of these people?

ODUM: Yes, I remember that Bill Gantt from Annapolis took me over to one of the reunions. They were always held outside of Washington, in the Potomac area. He said he didn't want to go along, because he didn't want to dance and that I was busy kissing everyone. He worked for the Naval Academy and we were long-time friends. So I didn't even bother to invite him this last time. Some people who used to work

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at the White House picked me up, and then Betty Monkman brought me back to town. This was last year.

JOHNSON: When you left the White House were you looking for a job, or had you already lined up a job?

ODUM: No, I needed one.

JOHNSON: You needed a job.

ODUM: Yes. I went in with [Senator Stuart] Symington and he'd already hired a staff by the time I left the White House. So, again, except for Chris, a young, black girl, I was on the bottom rung. Chris and I became very good friends. We used to call her Chrissie, or Chris. And I was low girl on the totem pole again.

JOHNSON: In Senator Symington's office.

ODUM: Yes.

JOHNSON: But, of course, you had great references from the White House.

ODUM: Yes, I did. But he had brought Virginia Laird along with him from the Air Force and she was at the top of his staff. Then, there was Catherine Blanton Roberts; she already had been hired. Stan Fike was the administrative assistant.

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And then there was another girl, Fran Hallberg, who worked mainly for Stanley Fike.

JOHNSON: Then there was you.

ODUM: Yes. And this Virginia was not about to let me get anywhere, because she had already done the whammy on Estelle Milner, who used to be his secretary when he was Air Force Secretary. I think Virginia wanted to bring me down to earth after being in the White House.

JOHNSON: Virginia who?

ODUM: Laird. I hesitate to tell this, because Senator Symington never did know this. She would take his dictation and then she'd come to her typewriter and hurriedly -- he wrote brief letters -- hurriedly transpose her notes, and throw them on my desk to be finished off. Then she'd get the credit for doing all of the work, and yet she pretended to be my best friend. Catherine Roberts and I became good friends, and Catherine one day said, "Reathel, I believe you could do a lot better than this," and she knew I wasn't too happy there, although I greatly admired Senator Symington, and would be better off, financially, if I had stayed with him.

JOHNSON: Catherine Roberts was one of the other assistants?

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ODUM: Yes. A very lovely person. But she was a law unto herself; she wasn't about to be pushed around. I was pushable. She said she knew someone with American Coke and Coal Chemicals Institute, and so I went over for an interview and they hired me. I enjoyed that, and I stayed with them about 15 years.

JOHNSON: The American Coke and Coal Chemicals Institute, in Washington, D.C.?

ODUM: Yes. I was mostly on my own there, getting out newsletters and statistics to our company members. We would go to meetings at the Greenbrier every fall, and I helped get speakers and helped run the meetings. We'd go up to Chicago every February, and the Westchester Country Club in the spring.

JOHNSON: So you got more variety then.

ODUM: Yes. I enjoyed that.

JOHNSON: Not just clerical, but meeting people and making arrangements for meetings and that sort of thing.

ODUM: Yes. There again, someone was hired who received a greater salary, but I enjoyed my work. I got up to about \$12,000 a year, and that was back in the days when the girl

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secretaries were not paid much either. But my salary probably went far, because you could get a sandwich for a dime or fifteen cents, and I was on an expense account with the Coke Institute, when I attended meetings.

JOHNSON: So you were there for how many years?

ODUM: About 15. I retired from there. In the meantime, I could do work for Mr. Snyder on weekends, and about half the time I stayed out with Mrs. Snyder at the Sheraton Park where they lived.

JOHNSON: In other words, while you were working for the Institute you were also doing work for John Snyder?

ODUM: Yes, because I stayed with Mrs. Snyder after she became ill, and I gradually began doing some work for him, as I had Saturdays free.

JOHNSON: When did you start working for John Snyder, after you left the White House?

ODUM: Well, after I left Senator Symington's office, Mr. Snyder was in Toledo by that time, working for the Overland Corporation. Mrs. Snyder was not too well and remained in Washington. In fact, I was with her the night she had a stroke and died the following year. We had gone to a Junior

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League play that Drucie was in.

JOHNSON: Were they living in Washington, D.C.?

ODUM: Yes, at the old Wardman Park. He was working for Overland Corporation but kept his apartment in Washington.

JOHNSON: But he had an office in Toledo with Ward Canaday at the Overland Corporation.

ODUM: Yes, and he'd fly home weekends.

JOHNSON: Oh, I see, and you stayed then with Mrs. Snyder?

ODUM: I stayed a lot with Mrs. Snyder, but kept my own apartment there.

JOHNSON: This is after you left Symington's office?

ODUM: Yes, after I left Symington's office.

JOHNSON: You were kind of a live-in companion and so on, but you still had your own apartment.

ODUM: Yes, I kept my apartment.

JOHNSON: But you stayed with the Snyders much of the time.

ODUM: I stayed with her a lot. Then, he said that he would like me to come over to Toledo and work for Overland, and I was

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on their payroll for a while working out of Washington. But, after Mrs. Snyder died, he said he didn't think I'd be happy over there, because there weren't too many apartments and everybody seemed to live in houses. Mrs. Snyder had intended to move, too, to Toledo.

JOHNSON: What year did she die?

ODUM: I think '56.

JOHNSON: Oh, way back in '56.

ODUM: Yes.

JOHNSON: Then you went to work for the Institute about that time?

ODUM: Yes. I've had a "checkered" career! After I retired from the Institute, I worked for the Truman Scholarship Foundation for a while too, before I was invited to go to Scotland.

JOHNSON: But that's in more recent years.

ODUM: Yes.

JOHNSON: But now this trip to Scotland was when?

ODUM: I went first in '77.

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JOHNSON: And you went with whom?

ODUM: With Mrs. Carnegie Miller. She was the only child of Andrew Carnegie; they had a castle in Scotland called Skibo.

JOHNSON: So you were able to stay there.

ODUM: For four months, for four summers. Then, I went the last summer in 1981, with her daughter. We went through the castle and sorted out personal things prior to its being turned over to a Trust. So that was a great experience.

JOHNSON: You worked with John Snyder, what years then?

ODUM: I worked for Mr. Snyder off and on over a period of many years. The whole family were friends of mine -- Mrs. Snyder, Drucie, her husband and their three children (with whom I also baby-sat).

JOHNSON: It was after you left the Institute, that you began doing sort of fulltime work for John Snyder?

ODUM: Right.

JOHNSON: As a kind of secretary then to John Snyder.

ODUM: Yes.

JOHNSON: And at this time he was involved in what, the Toledo

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waterfront?

ODUM: The Overland Corporation.

JOHNSON: Overland Corporation.

ODUM: Later, the Overland Investment Corporation. He also did a lot of civic volunteer work for Toledo. I am sure this is all covered by Mr. Snyder's oral history now in the Truman Library.

JOHNSON: Did John Snyder keep his office in Toledo then all those years?

ODUM: Yes, as long as he was with the Overland Investment Corporation.

JOHNSON: But he also had one in Washington, an office in Washington.

ODUM: Yes, but usually it was a room in John Horton's office. (John was his son-in-law.) And he later worked out of the Truman Scholarship Foundation. I typed nearly all of the lists of records he sent to the Truman Library. He also sent things to Georgetown University; I typed all of those items and typed all his speeches.

JOHNSON: Yes, right. Let's see, you retired from the Institute

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then about...

ODUM: About '75.

JOHNSON: Drucie Snyder -- I remember that Greta Kempton, the White House portrait painter, did her portrait first, I guess. Was that one of the first portraits?

ODUM: That's one of them; I think the Snyders were instrumental in introducing her to Washington friends.

JOHNSON: So she became the official White House portrait painter.

ODUM: Well, they never did say so, but she painted Margaret's portrait -- that portrait is in the Truman house where I was this morning. Greta painted a number of officials around Washington.

JOHNSON: And also what they call the White House portraits of Mr. and Mrs. Truman.

ODUM: Yes. She painted Mrs. Snyder, and Drucie sent Mrs. Snyder's portrait here at one time. She didn't want to, but she finally sent it here for exhibition. That's what Dr. Zobrist was thanking me for the other day; asking me to thank Drucie, because she hadn't wanted to let go of it. They already had Greta's portrait of Mr. Snyder here.

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JOHNSON: Do you know Mrs. Kempton?

ODUM: Oh, yes, she calls me from New York and we will talk about an hour. I'll say, "Greta, my ear's falling off," to stop the conversation. I just let her talk; it's mostly about Greta's work and she'll tell me the portraits she's painting.

JOHNSON: About the good old days?

ODUM: Yes. We talk a lot about times past.

JOHNSON: What do you do for a hobby now?

ODUM: Well, not much of anything. I just meet friends, do some volunteer work, and run errands and work on my own files. I travel some too.

JOHNSON: Well, is there anything else you can think of?

ODUM: Yes. I felt it was a great privilege in my life to work for the Trumans. They were always thoughtful and kind, to me. They trusted me, or they never would have let me go to New York with Margaret, and through all the concert tours. Then, you can see that Mrs. Truman kept in touch with me while she still felt like writing.

JOHNSON: Oh yes, we have the post-Presidential correspondence.

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ODUM: And when they would come to Washington, I'd go over to the Mayflower to say hello.

JOHNSON: Well, now, before we talk about Merle Miller and his treatment of the Trumans, you did come out to the Library here once or twice.

ODUM: I came for the dedication, and my sister-in-law and I drove to Independence once.

JOHNSON: Oh, you were out here for the dedication in 1957, July '57.

ODUM: Yes, and I don't remember whether I flew or came by train, or what.

JOHNSON: You visited with the Trumans of course.

ODUM: Yes. And when he spoke I was in the section behind him.

JOHNSON: And then when else did you come out?

ODUM: Well, I came out with Margaret when she sang in Kansas City. We stayed at the Muehlebach, but I remember also staying up in the bedroom at the house, to the left, when you go up the stairs.

JOHNSON: You stayed overnight in the house?

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ODUM: In the bedroom there.

JOHNSON: The second floor.

ODUM: Yes. But I can't remember what that occasion or occasions were.

JOHNSON: That was another time that you were out here.

ODUM: Yes, I believe so.

Well, let's see, Margaret and I may have left the Muehlebach and came out here for a day or two.

JOHNSON: Was that the only time you were in the house except for this morning?

ODUM: I came when Mrs. Wallace died.

JOHNSON: In '52.

ODUM: But I did not stay in the house then. I came over, and stayed with Mrs. Twyman.

JOHNSON: But you were in the house, to see the house.

ODUM: During that time yes.

JOHNSON: Was that the first time you had seen the house in Independence in '52, at the funeral of Mrs. Wallace?

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ODUM: No, I had previously stayed all night there.

JOHNSON: You had stayed there several times during the Truman Administration?

ODUM: Well, I wouldn't say several; I would say perhaps three times. There is the time I remember staying in one of the upstairs bedrooms, and then I think during the time of Mrs. Wallace's death I stayed with Mrs. Twyman down the street. Then, I stayed with Margaret in the Presidential suite at the Muehlebach, when she sang out here.

On one occasion, I rode on the train to Independence, with Mrs. Truman and Mrs. Davis (her neighbor at 4701 Connecticut).

JOHNSON: And then what was the next time?

ODUM: Well, I guess that was when I came out here for Mrs. Truman's funeral. Malcolm McCormick, Mr. Snyder, and I visited Margaret at the house before the funeral.

JOHNSON: Mrs. Truman's funeral in 1982.

ODUM: Malcolm [McCormick] and Mr. Snyder and I stayed at Howard Johnson's I think, and that was the last time I saw Senator Symington and met his new wife. She never cared to live in Washington, so they lived mostly up in New Canaan. He

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always told anyone who would listen about the day I landed him in a cornfield. When he was Air Force Secretary, he said he was coming to St. Louis, and I said, "Oh, I live in southern Illinois." He said, "Come and go with us (Estelle Milner was also one of his passengers); I'll drop you off. Is there an airport around there?" I said, "There's one in Mt. Vernon, Illinois." He said, "I'll tell the pilot and we'll just drop you off there," which he did. But he said he could still see those cornfields coming up. On our return to Washington, he sent a special car down to Benton to bring me back to St. Louis to board the plane, because he said he wasn't going to land in a cornfield anymore.

(As I've said, Estelle Milner, his secretary, was on that same trip, and she and I became very good friends. And that's why I knew her story about being sort of let out because of Virginia Laird.) Oh, and he told the story that morning when we came down to breakfast at the time of Mrs. Truman's funeral; he told the whole group, "Oh yes, I'll never forget Miss Odum; she landed me in a cornfield one day."

JOHNSON: In Mt. Vernon.

ODUM: Yes, but getting back to that *Plain Speaking*, that book really made me angry. Now, Mr. Truman may have known all

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those words that he put in his mouth, but while we worked for him there on the Hill, I never heard any of that kind of talk. He put women on a pedestal. I know when war broke out, we all thought we might do something great for the war and maybe join the WACS or something of that sort, and he said that he thought we were doing important work there in the Senate taking care of the office, and then he had the committee. Well, I didn't do any work in connection with that, but we did take care of the office and had sort of a liaison between the committee and Mr. Truman. The only time I ever heard one swear word was when I started back to give him a message in the Dog House; we'd always knock and I heard someone say "goddamit" or something. I think it embarrassed him to think I had heard.

JOHNSON: Well, that was five or six Senators; the members of the committee were probably there with him.

ODUM: Right. But he never did swear in front of us girls. In fact, you'd go in to give him a message and I can still see him kind of swinging in his chair. He'd twist his ring and look up at you and kind of hurry you out. When you took dictation, you never lingered to make small talk. There were only four women in his life, Mrs. Truman, Margaret, his mother, and his sister, and the rest of us were just office

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workers.

JOHNSON: Oh, yes, Mary Jane. Did you get acquainted with Mary Jane?

ODUM: Yes, I knew Mary Jane; she came to the White House, I guess, with her mother and stayed there a few days. And she belonged to the Eastern Star, and they let me take her to their home (Eastern Star headquarters) in Washington. It has later become an historic home; I know Harry Allendorfer, one of the White House aides, had an office there later on.

JOHNSON: Oh, you took her over there because she was going to visit there?

ODUM: Yes, she wanted to visit the Eastern Star headquarters. Beautiful.

JOHNSON: Did she ever say anything about her brother to you, about Harry?

ODUM: No, but there was one time when she came to my office and she was kind of in tears; I can't remember what caused that. She was staying in the White House and she came to my little office to talk.

JOHNSON: You were acquainted with Olive Truman, I guess, too, weren't you?

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ODUM: Well, yes, I never knew her well.

JOHNSON: Let's see, Louis would be her son, Olive's son, or stepson.

ODUM: Yes, stepson; Lou and Margaret, his wife, would sometimes visit his father and Olive in Springfield, I think.

JOHNSON: Louis' wife?

ODUM: Yes. Her name also was Margaret Truman, and while he was in Korea, Margaret lived in the Dorchester House. We became great friends, and when Lou came back I was with both of them. In fact, Lou used to call himself a cellophane bachelor (whatever that meant) because Margo liked to shop in the afternoon on Saturday and Lou would call me and say "Come on up Rea and let's hear the ballgame." So we became very fast friends. Then when they were stationed at Ft. McPherson in Georgia, I'd visit them down there. Then, they went to Germany, and I visited them over there. Lou was commanding officer of Kelly Barracks near Stuttgart. [From 1963 to 1965 Louis Truman was Commanding General, VII United States Army Corps in Southern Germany.]

Prior to their departure to Germany, Margaret was crying in my apartment; she'd stayed all night with me, and was back in the kitchen in the morning. This was Margaret Stevenson Truman. I said, "Margo what on earth is wrong with you?" She said, "I'm a Stevenson; I'm not a Truman,

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and it gets complicated." She was very careful not to use her name because when someone said, "This is Margaret Truman," everybody would look at her and say, "She's not Margaret Truman." She had a lot of unhappy hours. The Trumans might not have known it, but she did, because she's cried with me several times. One time she came up to New York and I think Margaret was rehearsing for something, maybe the Ed Sullivan show, let's say that, and I took Margaret there and the other Margaret was not too cordial to her. That hurt her feelings a lot.

When I went over to Germany, I stayed with them in their lovely quarters. Lou was Commanding General of Kelly Barracks; I had a wonderful time. They gave a birthday party for Lou, and I have many pictures of that occasion. They gave all sorts of gifts to him and made speeches, etc. As you may know, Louis Truman was a Lieutenant General (now retired). He and Margo are a popular couple and always fun to be with.

JOHNSON: It sounds like Louis might have been a little more humorous than his father, Ralph.

ODUM: Well, yes, he could be stern, but when off duty, he could play hard. Lou told me once, "I wish you had known my real mother." I'm not too sure how friendly Olive was; I know

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she wasn't too friendly to my Marg. I used to call her "My Marg" -- and then she began calling herself "Margo" in order not to get mixed up with the other Margaret Truman.

JOHNSON: Margo.

ODUM: Now, I don't know how much the Trumans knew of how Margo avoided causing any embarrassment to herself or Margaret. It's all in the past anyway.

JOHNSON: Well, it was bound to cause some reactions, not all of which would be pleasant reactions.

ODUM: Right.

JOHNSON: Well, thanks again, very much.

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