

Oral History Interview

with

STANLEY R. FIKE

Jackson County, Missouri journalist; friend of Harry S. Truman; Administrative Assistant to Senator Stuart Symington, 1952-76.

Washington, D.C.

May 10, 1972

by Jerry N. Hess, Harry S. Truman Library

The Harry S. Truman Library

Independence, Missouri

December, 1979

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HESS: All right, to begin this morning, Mr. Fike, would you tell me a little bit about yourself; where were you born, where were you educated and what are a few of the positions that you have held?

FIKE: I was born in Warrensburg, Missouri on June 7, 1913. My father was a missionary for the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints. When I was born, he was at home but had been traveling in the West. Dad was born in 1883 in Missouri

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near Joplin. His father, a miner, took the family to Cochise County, Arizona territory, in the early nineties. Dad went to Graceland College, Lamoni, Iowa, joined the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, met my mother at Graceland. They were married at her home, Tabor, Iowa, in 1908, then lived in Cochise County for four years, became a missionary and brought my mother and my older brother and sister back to Warrensburg in 1912. I was born there in 1913.

As a further background, when I was born my mother was getting \$25 a month to maintain the home and take care of the two, then three, children. Six years later, when the sixth child was born, she was getting \$110 a month, but the church was having a hard time and she was six months behind in getting the \$110 a month. This background shows the comparative value of the dollar then and now, completely aside from the Harry S. Truman story, of course.

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But my father left church appointment in about 1920 or '21, and the family moved to the Independence area in the summer of 1923. I went to the Bristol grade school, now in Independence but then and now a part of the Kansas City school system. I was graduated from the seventh grade at Bristol in June, 1926. There was no eighth grade in the Kansas City schools; and then went to East High School in Kansas City, and was graduated there in 1930. Went for a year, and part of another year to Junior College in Kansas City in '31.

When I was a senior in high school I was editor of the high school paper, the *East High Echo*, and became very much interested in newspaper work because of my work on the high school paper which was printed at the Blue Valley-Inter-City News, later the Inter-City Press, Inc., only a mile from our home at 1401 Hardy Avenue.

The manager of the plant was a man from Independence, by the name of Harry Falk. I spent

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so much time at the newspaper taking the copy and checking proofs for our high school paper that in January, 1930, Harry Falk asked me if I would like to work for the paper. I was to do some writing for the paper, but principally as a printer's devil, sweeping floors, washing presses and so forth.

HESS: Do you recall the name of the principal of East High School at that time?

FIKE: Yes, the principal of East High School was Clifford H. Nowlin, a very fine gentleman whom I kept track of until the time of his death in the 1950's at the age of ninety-three or ninety-

four. I have in my library at home a copy of a book which he wrote, *My First Ninety Years*, a wonderful gentleman.

But Harry Falk asked me in January if I would like to go to work for the printing plant as-- writing as I say, and doing some proofreading and

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that type of thing and also sweeping floors and washing presses. I told him I would, then asked how much would it pay.

And he said, "Well, you work after school and on Saturdays and it would pay four and a half dollars a week." Which was pretty good pay in 1930 for that kind of job. I probably would have gone to work for him for no pay at all, because I was that much interested in newspaper work. I started in January, 1930, and worked with that organization through successor organizations until January, 1953.

HESS: Where was their plant located?

FIKE: The plant was located in the Byam Building in Fairmount. The building was named for, and owned by, a local political leader by the name of Frank Leslie Byam; everybody called him Les Byam.

HESS: Is that building still standing?

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FIKE: The building is still standing and our printing plant was located in the basement there at that time. Les Byam had a drugstore on the first floor and then there were doctor's offices upon the second floor; we were in the basement as I said.

Well, I started to work there and spent a lot of hours, I don't think I had any regular hours, just supposed to go there as soon as I got out of school and could get to work, then stayed as late in the evening as there was anything to do. The long hours were the reason that I later dropped out of Junior College. I enjoyed the newspaper work so much, I wasn't much interested in Junior College after I was graduated from high school in June 1930.

I continued at the Inter-City Press with added titles, responsibilities and partnership over the years until the 1st of January of 1953 when I came to Washington with Senator Symington.

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The business went through bankruptcy in the summer of 1931 when I was out of a job for three weeks while the paper was being sold at auction. I was hired by the new owners. After that it started to expand slowly, then changed a great deal during those years, added additional papers and expanded greatly.

HESS: A lot of people were going bankrupt at that time weren't they?

FIKE: That's right. The paper and plant were sold at a Sheriff's sale, in 1931, for twenty-one hundred dollars as I recall, about one-fourth of what was owed.

But I first met Mr. Truman either in the spring of 1930, or the summer of 1930, when he came into the office of the newspaper. At that time our newspaper was the *Blue Valley-Inter-City News* and it covered the unincorporated area between Independence, Missouri and Kansas City, Missouri,

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with additional circulation in what was called the Blue Valley of Kansas City, the area along the Blue River there.

HESS: The Sheffield Steel area?

FIKE: Yes, around Sheffield Steel and northeast Kansas City.

HESS: What was the occasion for his visit to the newspaper office?

FIKE: Well, he and Harry Falk had been friends for a number of years and he often visited the Fairmount district. The first time I ever heard him speak, I'm sure, was at a meeting of the Kansas City East Suburbs Kiwanis Club. Later the name was changed to the Inter-City Kiwanis Club.

HESS: Was Fairmount included?

FIKE: Yes, Fairmount included. The Kiwanis Club then met on Wednesday noons at the various churches in the area. It still meets on Wednesday noon,

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now at Jerry's Cafe in the Fairmount business district, about a mile west of the Truman Library.

HESS: About what year was that that you heard him speak?

FIKE: This would have been 1930.

HESS: In 1930?

FIKE: Yes, no later than the summer of 1930. The Kiwanis Club each year would invite the members of the County Court to come out, visit with the club, and Judge Truman would be the speaker.

HESS: This was, of course, at the time that Mr. Truman was Presiding Judge.

FIKE: That's right. Harry Truman would be the speaker and he would talk about the problems of the county at large and also what the County Court was doing as far as our area was concerned. This was unincorporated; therefore, the County Court would be the most important governing body, administrative

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body for this area. The Inter-City district was an area with twenty-five to thirty-five thousand population without any city government at all. It was a part of the Kansas City school district, but adjoined Independence---between the two cities, hence Inter-City.

HESS: When did you first hear of Mr. Truman?

FIKE: Oh, I suppose I'd heard of him as a boy going to school, but I really didn't know him. I had not been active in politics at all, and hadn't paid much attention until I went to work for Inter-City News in January, 1930, at the age of 16.

HESS: And he was first elected to the County Court in 1922, served until '24, and then he lost an election as you know in '24...

FIKE: That's right. He was first elected as Eastern Judge in 1922, then was defeated for reelection in 1924.

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HESS: ...and then came back in '26 with his election as Presiding Judge and served until '34 when he was elected to the Senate. He came to Washington in '35, and was elected in '34.

FIKE: That's right. He was reelected for his second term as Presiding Judge in November, 1930, the year that I went to work for the newspaper, and I'm sure that a part of his trip to talk to the Kiwanis Club that year was in connection with his reelection campaign, although this was sort of an annual affair. He came out there to talk each year, to make a report to this area. The area looked to the County Court for maintenance of its roads. As I recall Les Byam was a road overseer at that time as a part of his political activity.

HESS: Well, as you know, Mr. Truman considers that one of the high points of his administration of the county was the construction of the road system.

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FIKE: That's right. In 1930 there was a ten million dollar county bond issue as I remember, and a thirty million dollar Kansas City bond issue brought up to be voted at that time, to do a number of public works projects, roads a big part of it. He had started a ten million dollar highway--road program in Jackson County. The first bonds for roads were voted in '27 or '28 and then in 1930

the County Court came back and the people voted additional bonds for roads and courthouses in Kansas City and Independence.

Mr. Truman first gained statewide and national recognition I think as a result of the road program which he fathered for Jackson County. One of the goals was that no farm would be more than two miles from an all-weather concrete paved highway.

HESS: What is your personal opinion as to the value of those roads to the development of Jackson County at that time?

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FIKE: Oh. I think it had tremendous impact. Some of the roads built in the late twenties and early thirties are still in use. Some of them have been widened of course, considering they were twenty foot roads.

HESS: They still have good surfaces.

FIKE: Yes. It was an excellent job. Mr. Truman saw to it that a bipartisan set of engineers, Stayton and Veatch, General E. M. Stayton and N. T. Veatch, I believe it was...

HESS: That is correct.

FIKE: ...engineers, were named to supervise the construction of the work and see that the county got good roads and bridges for the bond money.

HESS: One of the reasons that such a commission was set up was that it was thought that there would be a little graft, a little rake-off, and Mr. Truman was very proud to say after that that there

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was none. One of the reasons for suspicion in some people's minds was the Pendergast machine. What is your opinion of Mr. Truman's connections, or association, with the Pendergasts at that time?

FIKE: I don't think there was any question but what Mr. Truman was given a big boost into public office because of the support first of Jim Pendergast and then later Tom Pendergast, Jim Pendergast's uncle.

Jim Pendergast and Mr. Truman were friends during World War I. That friendship lasted as long as Jim Pendergast lived and he was the one who introduced Harry Truman to his uncle as I understand it. I knew Jim Pendergast well later on; I never did meet Tom Pendergast, but knew of him, of course.

But Truman, when I first met him in the office, was impressive to me as a kid of sixteen. My impression was very good; he was friendly, brusque, not one given to idle chit-chat, but

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he was the most important public official I had met up to that time, and I liked him.

HESS: I understand there was a movement in 1930 to boost Mr. Truman for Governor, correct?

FIKE: Well, this was after, as I remember it was along in the summer or the fall, but his reelection as Presiding Judge was assured. In 1930 there was no question about him being reelected. The Pendergast "organization" as it was called by its friends, "machine" as it was called by its enemies, and we on the paper were friends of the organization, so we called it the "organization."

There was no inner-party warfare that year in Jackson County. The Goats and the Rabbits were together, the Goats headed by Tom Pendergast and the Rabbits by Joe Shannon, later Congressman Joseph Shannon.

HESS: Where did they come up with those names: The Goats and the Rabbits?

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FIKE: The Goats and the Rabbits were areas in Kansas City, as I've heard the story. One area where the Pendergast people were strong, had a lot of goats, Irish settlement largely, and another area where the Shannon people had their strength, there were a lot of rabbits there, actually. It developed back in the early 1900s maybe the late-1800s. But I had never lived in that area, so this was all hearsay to me then.

HESS: When did you first hear of a movement for Mr. Truman for Governor?

FIKE: Well, our publisher Harry Falk probably talked to me about it. I don't take any credit for the idea of writing the editorial, which I did, in 1930 while I was seventeen, urging Truman for Governor of Missouri. It was Harry's idea, or at least he suggested it to me while somebody...

HESS: Harry Falk's idea.

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FIKE: Harry Falk's idea, it may have been that somebody else suggested it to him. He was basically a printer, a linotype operator before he started. He was no an editor per se, practically no writing at all if any, and he suggested...

HESS: Did you handle most of the editorial writing?

FIKE: Quite a bit of it, yes. I think I wrote practically all of the editorials. I had a weekly column that I called "Luke the Office Boy," signed it as "Luke," that was a nickname that my friends in high school had given me; and I was office boy, printer's devil, copyreader, did some writing.

HESS: Did you talk to Mr. Truman before writing the editorial?

FIKE: I had met him, did not discuss...

HESS: I mean about the subject.

FIKE: ...about the editorial? No, I did not discuss it with him, no. Now, Mr. Falk may have

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talked to him about it, but probably it was Harry Falk and friends of Mr. Truman who maybe suggested it

HESS: To Mr. Falk.

FIKE: To Mr. Falk, and Mr. Falk suggested that I write the editorial. Looking back on it, I've read it two or three times since then; I've got a copy of it someplace in my files, and a copy of it is in the Truman Library in Independence, also at the Missouri Historical Society. Looking back on it it's not too bad an editorial, except I was wrong about the office that we picked out.

HESS: Did you ever hear Mr. Truman comment on that editorial?

FIKE: Oh, years later, not...

HESS: Years later, but not in close proximity to the time though.

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FIKE: Not at that time, no, although he was mentioned at the time that--I'm not sure that our editorial was the first suggestion in print for him for Governor of Missouri or not; it may well have been. Sometime I'd like to research that and find out for sure; it would be interesting to know.

HESS: That would be. I have understood that there were other areas around the state where the same thing was mentioned.

FIKE: A few, and I think some research has been done on that. I saw a paper on that 1930 boom for Truman recently by, I think, Professor [Richard S.] Kirkendall.

HESS: He's been working on this point, is that right?

FIKE: I think so. I think so. Philip Brooks also sent me a leaflet that some historian, some scholar out in California had done a paper on this.

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I've got that someplace in my papers--had looked at originally--and refers to this editorial, the paper on the 1930 boom for Harry Truman for Governor in the 1932 election.

HESS: What made you think he would make a good Governor?

FIKE: Well, we thought he was a very good administrator; he picked good people, he saw a job to be done and he picked the best people he could for that job. As he did in the selection of Stayton, and Veatch to supervise the highway project. There never was any question about Harry Truman's personal honesty. There were questions often raised about the Pendergast machine but never about Harry Truman's personal integrity.

I was not impressed originally with Harry Truman as a speaker, he was...

HESS: Yes, I was going to ask about that. What was your impression of his speaking ability?

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FIKE: He was not an orator per se. He got up and said what he had to say and sat down.

HESS: Did he appear nervous when he spoke at that time?

FIKE: Yes. I thought so then. I can remember even after he became United States Senator; I can remember a feeling of wanting to help him out, see him go ahead and speak. It was not until probably World War II when he really got involved in the investigative committee that he became an effective, good speaker. He never was an orator as such, but even in his County Court days, when he felt strongly about something he could make a very convincing presentation.

HESS: He mentioned in his *Memoirs* that many of the earlier speeches were very difficult for him to make.

FIKE: That was obvious; that was obvious to the audience I think. I think he built up an empathy

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with the audience. They had a sympathy for his problems as a speaker. Never any question about his sincerity in what he was saying, this I think was very valuable.

HESS: Who was Governor in 1930?

FIKE: We had a Republican Governor then, Governor [Henry S.] Caulfield, who had been elected in the Hoover landslide in 1928. In fact, we had had a Republican Governor from 1921 until 1933. Caulfield was the last of three Republican Governors. But in 1930 the Democrats made a sweep in Jackson County and pretty much a sweep statewide. With '32 coming up, we felt strongly that we'd have a Democratic administration then.

I heard Truman several times in the period of '30 to '34, in talks at various places in addition to his annual talks to our Kiwanis Club. I later was an officer in that Kiwanis Club, president and lieutenant governor. It was sort of a Chamber of Commerce and unofficial city council

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for our area, so we had a lot of contact with public officials and especially with the County Court.

In 1930 to '34 the Eastern Judge of the County Court was E. I. "Buck" Purcell. The Western Judge was Battle McCardle. He was a lawyer, much more of a speaker than the other two men, easier flow of language. He was the Rabbit on the court.

HESS: He was the Shannon man, is that right?

FIKE: And Buck Purcell and Harry Truman were both Pendergast men.

HESS: And then in 1934 Mr. Truman ran for the Senate.

FIKE: That's right, and in the meantime, in the summer of 1931, our paper had, as I mentioned earlier, been sold at a Sheriff's sale. Harry Falk couldn't keep up the payments on the mortgage and the bank foreclosed and it was sold and bought by a lawyer and big landowner from Lexing-

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ton, Missouri, Frank Catron, and a former newspaperman from Kansas City, Doug Meng.

I was still going to Junior College, but Doug Meng became the editor; he had been an editor of the *Kansas City Journal* and probably the best newspaperman I ever worked for up to that time and quite a writer, quite an individual.

But then later in 1931, or early 1932, I guess it was, that Otto P. Higgins, a lawyer in Kansas City bought Frank Catron's interest. Otto had been very active politically in Kansas City. He was a former Kansas City *Star* reporter, and had been war correspondent during World War I for the Kansas City *Star*. I continued working for the paper doing pretty much the same kind of work except that Doug Meng wrote most of the editorials from August, 1931 for about a year. I wrote very few if any during that time. Doug Meng was an experienced newspaperman and Otto Higgins did some writing too, because these were

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both newspapermen, writers, but I did much of the local news editing and the news reporting.

We supported Harry Truman in a mild sort of way, as I recall, late in '31 and early '32 for Governor, but Francis Wilson of Platte City had been the nominee in 1928 and he had the support of Mr. Pendergast and wide support over Missouri. Truman never filed for the governorship. This was in the middle of his term of Presiding Judge so he could have run, but the Pendergast organization was for Wilson and there was no point in Truman running without their support.

HESS: Did you ever hear Mr. Truman speak in later years about the possibility of running for Governor in 1930? Did that enter his mind?

FIKE: I think it entered his mind. I'm sure it did.

HESS: He saw the editorials.

PIKE: Yes, but it was never a big boom for him. The *Kansas City Star* in those years praised him for

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the good job that he had done on the roads. They supported the bond issues, not only for the roads but also for the new county courthouse: remodeling of the courthouse in Independence, and building a new courthouse in Kansas City. They supported various public projects, including the Municipal Auditorium in Kansas City. It was all part of an overall package in the city and county bond program. The bonds were available when the WPA and PWA, Public Works Projects and so forth came along under President Roosevelt.

In 1932 of course, it was a Democratic sweep. I think there were only three or four precincts in the entire county that didn't go Democratic as I remember; maybe one township that didn't go Democratic out of all the townships in rural Jackson County.

We saw Truman from time to time, then in 1934...

HESS: The big fight was in the Democratic primary, correct?

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FIKE: In '34 for the Senate.

HESS: In '34 for the Senate. Yes, that was between John J. "Jack" Cochran and Jacob L. "Tuck" Milligan and...

FIKE: That's right, and Harry Truman.

HESS: ...Harry Truman.

FIKE: Originally--I've heard the story many times and I have no doubt about it. Originally Mr. Truman did not want to run for Senator. A longtime friend of mine, Louis M. Bowman, who was editor of the King City, Missouri *Tri-County News*, until he died about three years ago, had told me the story many times of being at a meeting in Excelsior Springs, Missouri where a group got together from Tuck Milligan's congressional district to support Tuck Milligan for the Senate.

Bennett Clark (U.S. Senator) was going to support Milligan; they had been friends. Milligan

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was from Richmond, Missouri and Louie told me that Harry Truman was one of those at that meeting in support of Tuck Milligan for the Senate. And according to Louie Bowman, Truman said that he personally would be for Tuck Milligan; he didn't know how much he personally could do for him, but he would be for him because they had been friends in the Legion as I remember the story. But Truman wanted the job as county collector in Jackson County. He still had a family debt on the Truman farm.

HESS: I understand that job paid very well.

FIKE: That's right. The county court judge, I think, in the twenties and the thirties paid maybe six thousand, sixty-five hundred dollars a year, something like that and he may have had some other fees, minimal fees on other boards he was on, but I doubt very much if he ever had a net income of over eight thousand dollars when he was judge of the county court.

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He had had his reversals when he was in the haberdashery business, a men's furnishings store in Kansas City. He wanted to be county collector and build up some financial background of his own, in order to pay the debts. This was the most important thing personally for him at that time. Perhaps this was one of the problems he had faced in the possibility of running for Governor in '32, two years before.

But I also heard it from Otto Higgins that Pendergast had a meeting of his lieutenants. Truman was not there, Higgins was, and they talked about it, and Pendergast himself, probably with the advice of others, made the decision. He said that he had committed himself to George Harrington, a man who was in the produce commission business in Kansas City. Harrington had been treasurer of the Jackson County Democratic Committee for a number of years. Pendergast said that he had given his word to support George Harrington for county collector. The job at that time was worth thirty to forty thousand

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dollars a year counting fees. There were a great many foreclosures, forced tax sales, with fees on collection of back taxes and so forth, all perfectly legal and proper under the fees that collectors were allowed at that time for the job.

HESS: That was a great deal of money at that time.

FIKE: That was a great deal of money at that time. I had heard Truman's mortgage on his farm, I never checked, was thirty or forty thousand dollars, so that this would seem like a lot of money and would have enabled him to pay off the mortgage. He had borrowed the money from the county school fund and gave the mortgage on the farm.

But Mr. Pendergast said, "We're sorry, we can't support Harry Truman for county collector. We've already made a commitment--I've made a commitment." And they needed someone to run for United States Senator and they decided that Harry Truman was the man for the job.

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As I recall the story, Judge Truman was down at the Lake of the Ozarks at Warsaw. Someone called him. Tom Pendergast, I've heard, called him and told him he had been selected to run for the United States Senate. Now whether he was an active candidate, and wanted support for U.S. Senator as second choice if he couldn't be backed for collector, I don't know. But I am sure he did want to be collector in order to pay off his debts. Anyway he made the race, and we supported him in our papers, supported him all the way. We ran a number of editorials which we reprinted, sent all over the state. We also did the bulk of the printing for his campaign. We had a little print shop of eight or ten employees.

HESS: A little job shop.

FIKE: A little job shop, along with our little weekly newspaper, and we printed, I suppose, two or three million candidate cards, little cards 2 x 3 ½ in size. They were distributed by the hundreds of

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thousands. I remember we also printed about two hundred thousand placards, 11 x 14 and 14 x 22, to tack up on telephone poles and trees all over the state of Missouri. They stayed up not only during the primary and general election campaign in 1934, but quite a number were up for years.

HESS: Did you hear Mr. Truman speak at any meetings during that campaign?

FIKE: Yes I did.

HESS: Where were they held?

FIKE: The speeches I heard were in Jackson County, public meetings there. I didn't go out and travel the state at all at that time. I would have been--oh, I was twenty-one in June of 1934, but I

was personally spending too much time writing stories and editorials for the newspaper and seeing that we got the printing out and actually working on the printing. My younger brother, Wallace, and I took turns operating a hand power cutter

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in our printing plant, cutting up those candidate cards and placards. We also reprinted a great many editorials of our own editorials and other editorials from over the state, that we then shipped out for distribution.

HESS: So you were busy in the shop.

FIKE: Oh, I was very busy in the shop, and in the office at the typewriter, yes. Probably 70 or 80 hours a week minimum.

HESS: Concerning the speeches that you heard, how would you characterize them; were they anymore freeflowing, was this delivery improved?

FIKE: A little more freeflowing, yes; I don't remember much about the contents of them. He was traveling a good deal all over the state.

One time I called him to ask him a question about some rather minimal item on the printing and he said, "Stanley, you just go ahead and do what you think is right; you use your own judgement."

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It was something about a layout on a placard we were doing or something of that sort. I called him long distance on the phone, got him someplace at a meeting, which I should never have bothered him about. To me it was an important matter; actually it may not have made a bit of difference, but he delegated the responsibility to me.

HESS: His Republican opponent in November was Roscoe C. Patterson of Springfield.

FIKE: In the primary, as you mentioned earlier in your question or comment, it was a very tough...

HESS: That was a dog fight.

FIKE: Yes, it was a dog fight and there were later charges that there had been ghost voting in Jackson County, in certain wards in Kansas City as well as out in the county, and I think some of the precinct captains in the Pendergast and Shannon organizations undoubtedly did pad the

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vote. They were trying to roll up a tremendous majority. I always felt that Truman would have won if it had been a completely honest election.

HESS: But they got a little bit enthusiastic.

FIKE: They got overenthusiastic and counted votes that weren't there. And there were people that voted more than once.

HESS: Was that a big problem back in Kansas City during those days?

FIKE: Well, it happened.

HESS: Vote frauds.

FIKE: It happened.

HESS: It happened.

FZKE: No question about it. Yes, no question about it at all.

And it was not just in Kansas City and Jackson County. It was true in many small towns and

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at that time back in the thirties it was not unusual in some of the small towns for payments for votes. Citizens, blacks and whites, were paid as much in the small towns as in the city according to the stories I've heard.

HESS: Did Kansas City seem to have more difficulties...

FIKE: I never actually saw a payoff at any time, but

HESS: Yes, but you hear about those things.

FIKE: Yes, I was sure that it happened.

HESS: Just as an opinion, did Kansas City seem to have more of a history of occurrences of that nature than St. Louis?

FIKE: I don't think so. I don't think so. Back at one time when the Republican machine was dominant in St. Louis, why, they did a great deal of it.

The first campaign I ever worked on was in Independence in 1933, the spring of '33, maybe

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it--no, it was in the spring of '32, and I drove a car there in the election. The big talk there that day was that the black voters, a bloc of black voters in Independence, were waiting, while their leaders were bargaining as to how much they were going to be paid. Their spokesman, a black preacher, was bargaining as to how much were to be paid for each vote. Late in the afternoon it became clear that the Democrats didn't need the votes and the Republicans couldn't win with their votes, and so it ended up they didn't get very much, if anything, because they held out for so long.

HESS: They held out too long?

FIKE: Yes, and it was not limited to just the black voters. There were probably as many white voters then who also got paid, or expected to get paid.

But I think the big thing, the big control was with what was called the "pork chop" vote, that is for jobs, or to get their sidewalks fixed. In Kansas City they had a municipal water system,

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getting the water turned on and getting additional time to pay their bills if they got behind as a great many did then. It was a matter of jobs and how they ate in those days and not a matter of ideological differences. The big issue was who was going to provide the most jobs.

HESS: Things were a little more fundamental back then weren't they?

EIKE: They were very fundamental back in '32 and '33. Banks closed, of course, in those days and we went through that with the newspaper. When the NRA came along, I remember I got an increase from \$12 a week. I was editor of the paper and manager of the plant for \$12 a week, but I got an increase to \$14 a week because under the NRA if I were paid as much as \$14, I could be classified as an executive and wouldn't have to be paid by the hour, a minimum of 25 cents and time and a half for overtime. And by that time I was regularly working sixty or seventy hours per week, often longer.

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HESS: A couple of questions about Milligan and Cochran. Cochran was from St. Louis and Milligan was from Richmond. What kind of men were they; how would you characterize those two men?

FIKE: I never heard either one of them speak in '34, and I don't recall that I ever saw Jack Cochran. I heard about him of course, and knew about him later from Frank Karsten, who was his administrative assistant, or secretary at that time, later Congressman. But Tuck Milligan I did know fairly well in later years. We were both colonels on the staff of Governor Forrest Smith in 1949, which is how I really got to know Tuck Milligan. But I think probably either one of them was a better speaker than Harry Truman in 1934. But Harry Truman had the ability to meet people and to convince them that he was interested and on a man to man basis he was at least the equal of either of the other two. And he talked the language of most Missourians.

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HESS: And then in the general elections he ran against Roscoe C. Patterson.

FIKE: That was right. There never was any question how that was going to come out.

HESS: In those days once you won the primary, that was the big thing.

FIKE: Yes. Roosevelt was riding high and Truman ran on a campaign that he was going to support Franklin D. Roosevelt. This was the beginning and the end of his platform practically.

He was known all over the state through the County Judges' Association, of which he was president; because of his road building program; wide acquaintance through the American Legion; a very wide acquaintance through the Masonic Lodge, in which he had been quite active; through the road association. I think he was president of the National Old Trails Association, and he had a much wider acquaintance than most people gave him

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credit for throughout the state and at the local grassroots level, and this is where his organization built up. And he, of course, had a tremendous asset in the support of the Kansas City organization; without that he would not have won, but that was very much an asset. He was a much better candidate than most people thought he would be statewide, because of his many friends and acquaintances.

He got support--well, William Southern, who was then editor of the *Independence Examiner*. He got support from him, and in other most unlikely places. The *Cape Girardeau Southeast Missourian* for example supported Harry Truman although it was nominally a Republican paper.

Fred Naeter, who was the editor of the *Southeast Missourian*, whom I later became very well-acquainted with (I did not know him at all at that time), wrote a very fine editorial endorsing Harry Truman for Senator in 1934. I'm sure he had met Mr. Truman, and he knew him through

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Bill Southern. And they were very close friends; both were past presidents of the Missouri Press Association. And we reprinted tens of thousands of the *Independence Examiner* editorials and of the *Cape Girardeau Southeast Missourian* editorials and news articles; circulated them all over the state.

HESS: And Mr. Truman in '34 got out and actively campaigned. Do you recall how well he did downstate in the Springfield area, which now is usually conservative Republican? Was it back in those days too?

FIKE: Yes, it was.

HESS: The Joplin-Springfield area?

FIKE: Yes.

HESS: Do you recall how well he did in the Ozark area?

FIKE: No. No, I'd have to look it up. The records would show, but his biggest majority of course came from Jackson County. Even if it had been an honest

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vote, a completely honest vote, I still believe that he would have won both in the primary and in the general election. Now I don't think he could have beaten Jack Cochran if Tuck Milligan hadn't been in the race. I think Tuck Milligan took some votes away from Cochran, so it was a divided race.

HESS: And then after he was elected in '34, he then came to Washington early in '35. What do you recall about Mr. Truman's first period as Senator, from '34 to 40? He served on several committees. He was on a subcommittee for the Interstate Commerce Committee and they became heavily involved with railroad matters.

FIKE: That's right. He was a worker here the same as he had been back when he was Presiding Judge of the County Court; he dug in, he was a student. I don't know that you would call him a scholar, but he certainly was a student, and he steadily tried to learn more and more about his job and he was a

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good Senator. He had this reputation as being a good working Senator and he supported Franklin Roosevelt all the way.

HESS: Did you meet him or see him during that period of time?

FIKE: I'd see him from time to time; he came back two or three times each year during that period of six--well, that I saw him. He came back often to Independence, of course, and, oh, he was a neighbor, but I didn't have as much personal contact with him during those years, as when he was Presiding Judge.

HESS: Did he come into the paper during those years?

FIKE: Oh, once or twice, I think, but not often. I'd see him at the County Courthouse when he'd be back. He'd quite often sort of make that his office in Independence. I knew Fred Canfil, who worked for him. Fred worked in, well, he still

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for a while worked as superintendent of the Jackson County Courthouse in Kansas City and he was one of Truman's early campaign supporters.

I knew most of the other people who worked in his headquarters in Kansas City in the '34 campaign, and Otto Higgins was very active in that campaign helping to plan the strategy and so forth.

HESS: And in 1940 in the primary Mr. Truman ran against Lloyd Stark and Maurice Milligan, the district attorney.

FIKE: That's true. I have a friend, Judge William Becker, presiding judge now on the Federal bench in Kansas City, who always says that Harry Truman every night before he goes to sleep should say a prayer of thanksgiving for Tuck Milligan and Maurice Milligan. Bill Becker, who supported Lloyd Stark in 1940, says that if it had not been for the Milligans Truman wouldn't have won the

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primary in '34, and he wouldn't have won the primary in '40.

HESS: He just snuck in in a three-way race both times?

FIKE: Well, I wouldn't say he snuck in, he got in. But in 1940 it was really--it was really close. As I remember in the primary, and we supported him in the primary as we always did every time Harry Truman--I mean we, the newspaper, supported him in 1940. But he won by less than one vote per precinct. The change, as I remember, of one vote per precinct would have nominated Lloyd Stark.

And Stark incidentally had had the support of Tom Pendergast in 1936 when he ran for Governor, but then turned on the Pendergast machine later on. And if Stark had stayed at home and campaigned probably the last week or two of the primary campaign instead of going to the Democratic convention in Chicago in 1940, in hopes of being

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selected as a vice-presidential nominee, if he had concentrated on the Senate race in Missouri, and stayed home and spent those last few days of the primary campaign, he probably would have won it. At least that's the story that I have heard from some of the Stark supporters.

John Snyder had something to do with support for Mr. Truman, or Senator Truman, in St. Louis. And then Truman, of course, really got out there and fought all through that time and it was tough because Tom Pendergast was in the penitentiary at Leavenworth at that time on income tax charges; and the vote fraud cases in Kansas City.

Truman himself was never personally implicated in any of those problems. There has never been anybody that has said that Truman ever got any money out of any graft anyplace that I've ever

heard, and I'm convinced he never did. He was really a hard campaigner and he won that primary and that election, himself, with the support of his loyal friends, of course, but he did not have

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the tremendous majority out of Jackson County that he'd had in '34.

And in the fall election in '40, as I remember, if there had been a change of one vote in every other precinct from him to Cap Davis, I believe...

HESS: Manvel Davis.

FIKE: Manvel Davis, why, Davis would have won. And folks always point that out as a value of each vote...

HESS: That's right.

FIKE: ...in the Harry Truman campaign.

And then in '44 of course, I knew just by reading the papers and some of the reports, the developments and Truman's work through the years and he became nationally recognized as chairman of the...

HESS: With the Truman Committee.

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FIKE: ...Truman investigating committee, that's right.

HESS: How important do you think his chairmanship of that committee--that was the Senate Committee to Investigate the National Defense Program. That was the official title.

FIKE: That's right, I think it was...

HESS: How important was that to his receiving the Democratic nomination for Vice President in Chicago in 1944?

FIKE: I think it brought him national recognition. He did there the same kind of a job he had done on the roads program in Jackson County back in the late twenties and the early thirties. He saw a job that needed to be done and put his mind to it and got good people to work with him on his staff and handled it in the right way, constructive

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way, and got national recognition for it.

And then in 1944 I got active in that campaign on behalf of Roger Sermon, who was mayor of Independence, and he was running for Governor and I was president of the Blue Township Sermon for Governor Club. Blue Township included Independence, Missouri. And so this perhaps was the first personal contact I had with Harry Truman for years, but I wrote him a letter and told him we were forming this Blue Township club for Roger Sermon, his longtime friend and supporter, and asked him if he would take the first membership in the club. And he wrote back and sent his one dollar check as I remember. At that time he was very much in the picture for Vice President, being mentioned for Vice President, and I've forgotten when the convention was, must have been early July because I know that there was a reception for him...

HESS: In July.

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FIKE: In July, and there was a reception for Senator Truman, came back home, there at his home in Independence. I was there.

HESS: Before leaving for Chicago.

FIKE: No, after the Democratic convention in Chicago. Roger Sermon was there as the mayor of Independence, of course, and we got some publicity for Roger Sermon in his campaign for Governor. He lost the nomination; he came in second in that race, but this was one instance in many when Harry Truman picked the loser in a campaign, a primary campaign in Missouri. But he always spoke his mind and supported the best man in his opinion.

HESS: At the time that you saw Mr. Truman that July in--was in Kansas City?

FIKE: No, in Independence.

HESS: In Independence.

FIKE: At his home.

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HESS: At his home in Independence?

FIKE: On North Delaware, yes.

HESS: Do you recall any conversation at that time about his being a possible vice-presidential nominee.

FIKE: No, this was after he had been selected.

HESS: After Chicago, I see.

FIKE: After Chicago and he was back home and they had this reception there and a sort of a home-coming party there for the vice-presidential nominee.

HESS: Did he make any comments as to the procedure that he had gone through to get the nomination or what had taken place?

FIKE: No. No, we didn't get into that at all; I was just one of many there that day and shook hands with him and that was all.

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HESS: As most receptions are.

FIKE: That's right, it was a friendly yard party type of affair.

HESS: Were you surprised when the Democrats selected him as the vice-presidential nominee?

FIKE: Not really, no. No, because there had been a growing talk about the possibility.

HESS: There were a number who wanted it as you know. Henry Wallace wanted to remain in the position.

FIKE: That's right.

HESS: James Byrnes would have liked to have had it.

FIKE: Mr. Truman, himself, I understand, and all this is all just hearsay and what I read in newspapers, and have heard since then. Mr. Truman himself thought that Sam Rayburn, as I remember, would have been a good man for the job.

HESS: And he agreed, at James Byrnes' request,

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to place Byrnes' name in nomination at the convention.

FIKE: At the convention, but I had no firsthand knowledge of any of that.

HESS: All right, on April the 12th of 1945, a little less than a year, President Roosevelt died. Where were you when you heard the news of President Roosevelt's death; what were your impressions?

FIKE: Well, I was in the newspaper office when we heard the news, it was on a Thursday I remember...

HESS: That is correct.

FIKE: ...and I wrote an editorial about Harry Truman. I made a mistake in the editorial, which I--in the hurry to put it in, we were just getting ready to go to press with our weekly paper, and I made a mistake in there in saying that he had been born in Grandview, which I, of course, knew was not true.

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HESS: He was born in Lamar.

FIKE: Born at Lamar, that's right. But I remember back in the '34 campaign that Bill Southern in his editorial which we reprinted so many thousands of copies of, had commented on Harry Truman having grown up between the handles of a plow in Grandview, on the family farm in Grandview. In the haste of writing the editorial about Jackson County and becoming the President of the United States, I wrote he had been born in Grandview, and it got through. Other people on the paper had read it, set the type and so forth; they knew as well as I did that he had been born in Lamar, but in the rush and excitement and getting it into the paper, we--we were the first on the streets of Independence with any paper reporting that Harry Truman was President of the United States of America, the first native-born Missourian.

HESS: What kind of a job did you think he could do?

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FIKE: Well, I remember I was very active in the Kiwanis Club at that time and I remember the following week going to a Kiwanis meeting at St. Joseph. I had been lieutenant governor in Kiwanis. I remember riding from Kansas City to St. Joseph with a group, including the governor of Kiwanis in the Missouri-Arkansas-Kansas District. The discussion turned to Harry. I made the assertion that I thought he'd be a good man because I thought he had the ability to pick good people to work with him. Thinking back to his experience as Presiding Judge of the Jackson County Court where he had been a good leader and executive, the job he'd done as chairman of the Senate Investigating Committee, the fact that he was a keen student of American history, that he had studied the Presidents of America and learned a great deal from that, I thought personally, and so stated, that he'd be a very good President, had the ability to do a good job. And of course, there was a tremendous upsurge of public support for

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him, popularity went very high at that time, later down very badly of course in '46.

I was active some in the '46 campaign on behalf of reelection of Senator Frank Briggs, who had been appointed to take Truman's place. Governor Phil Donnelly had named Frank Briggs. Briggs lost as a part of the backlash against price controls and so forth.

And then in 1948, the Presidential campaign in 1948, one of the papers we had at that time was the *Independence Sentinel*, a weekly paper, and the *American Press Magazine*, a monthly

magazine for weekly newspapers, had written to me as editor of the *Independence Sentinel*, because of Independence, Missouri, Harry Truman's hometown, and asked me who I thought was going to be nominated by the Democrats and what the outcome of the election would be in 1948.

And I answered back very promptly and told them that Independence was going to support Harry Truman and we were convinced that he was going to be

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renominated and reelected. And this appeared in the *American Press* I think in May or June of 1948.

HESS: A month or two before the Democratic convention.

FIKE: Before the Democratic convention, I was convinced he was going to be renominated, but I wasn't convinced that he was going to be reelected. I did forecast it upon the record; it's published to that effect. Of course, our papers supported him all the way, but our papers, all of our papers: the *Independence Sentinel*, the *Jackson County Democrat*, the *Sugar Creek Herald* and the *Inter-City News* by that time.

HESS: Why did you think he would lose in 1948?

FIKE: Well, I thought there was a good possibility he would lose, because there was a great deal of opposition to the Democratic Party. There had

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been real problems and his standing in the polls was low. I did not really believe that he was going to win until maybe the last week or two before the election.

HESS: What changed your mind at that time?

FIKE: Well, it was the kind of a campaign that he put on and the fact that he was a fighter and I began to think that he would get enough people voting for him, not that they thought that he would win, but because he had put on such a courageous campaign that those votes, in effect sympathy votes or votes of people who liked a man who fought for what he believed, who would go out and work for what he believed, that I thought he would win.

HESS: Did you hear him speak in that campaign?

FIKE: Yes, yes.

HESS: Where?

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FIKE: It was in Jackson County; I don't remember where but he was back in the county from time to time in '48, not much, but he was much more incisive--decisive in his speaking manner. A man who believed in what he was saying, knew what he was talking about. He had always been a scrapper, but this came through in his talks very clearly, you know, a man of confidence and great respect for the Presidency. This came through very clearly in his talks at that time. His experience and contacts with leaders in the world. He was a man of deep conviction. He believed in the rightness of what he was trying to do.

I remember one humorous incident at that time. In one of our exchanges, Tilghman Cloud, who was editor of the *Pleasant Hill, MO, Times*, a weekly paper, gave another humorous reason why he was for Truman over Dewey; Truman had stopped his train and made a speech in Pleasant Hill, but when Governor Dewey's train came through Pleasant

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Hill, all that happened was that somebody flushed one of the toilets on the train as it went through Pleasant Hill and he said, "That's probably all we'd ever get out of Dewey if he became President." Of course Tilghman Cloud had been for Truman all the time, but it typified the campaign.

HESS: Quite a little bit of difference there wasn't it?

FIKE: Yes, it was in Tilghman Cloud's column, an effective paragraph he wrote. A lot of people thought of Dewey as Cloud dial. Louie Bowman who I mentioned earlier from King City, had similar comments in his columns as we did in ours, editorials, supporting Mr. Truman, that we felt he was going to carry the state. But Republicans were riding high; they were convinced they were going to win.

I worked at the Jackson County Board of Election in Independence, on election night, and I remember the Republican board members and

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workers were totalling the votes as they came in from the various precincts. They were very optimistic to start, but then their faces became longer and longer during the evening as reports came in, not only from Independence and Jackson County, but also by the radio from all over the country, that Truman appeared to have a chance. Then, long after midnight, the reports started coming in from over the country that he was winning. There was quite a change, a reversal of feeling for Democrats and Republicans.

HESS: Mr. Truman went up to Excelsior Springs that night and then he came back over to the Muehlebach early the next morning. Did you see Mr. Truman after he was elected, before his return to Washington?

FIKE: I don't believe I did. No, I don't think I did, Jerry. I was not really close to the Presidential campaign. I was more active in the state campaign. I was for Forrest Smith for Governor

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and the feeling was that Forrest Smith was not going to win as Governor. The Republicans were convinced that they were going to win the state gubernatorial campaign and also the Presidential campaign. But Truman won handily in Missouri, the home state man.

My first contact with Mr. Truman after he became President was when I wrote to him at the White House and sent him a copy of the editorial we had and the special edition of our paper and asked him for an autographed picture which he sent me and which I still have, a reprint from the St. Louis *Post-Dispatch*.

HESS: Was that the editorial that mistakenly mentioned that he was born in Grandview?

FIKE: Yes, that's the one.

HESS: Did he ever point out your mistake to you?

FIKE: No. No, not that I remember; I'd have to go

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back and look. I think actually I did--I'm not sure I wrote the President, I think I wrote Bill Boyle, whom I knew very well in Kansas City before he went to Washington and worked with Mr. Truman, Senator Truman.

I don't recall that I had any contact with him really then, until 1950 when he was supporting Emery Allison for United States Senator, Democratic nomination for Senator in Missouri and I was handling Mr. Allison's publicity. I had some contact with Mr. Truman then, and with members of his staff, Bill Boyle and others, working for Emery Allison. We didn't win for Allison; we carried 103 counties out of 114 in the state, but Tom [Thomas Carey, Jr.] Hennings carried St. Louis County by seventy-two thousand and we carried the rest of the state by sixty-eight thousand so Allison lost the nomination by four thousand votes. But he had been a Truman man all along, and Truman had supported him, and I had some contacts with the President at that time, mostly indirectly.

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Well, going back in '49 I did come to Washington for the inaugural, in '49. I was a colonel on Governor Smith's staff. I was president of the Missouri Press Association and so I saw the President here in Washington. I had known his brother Vivian Truman, sat in the reviewing stand in front of the White House on that day, on inaugural day, and visited with Vivian there and with the President, Mr. Truman, briefly. Not much more than to say hello. In fact he was back in Independence from time to time when he was President. I think when he came out I believe

maybe for the dedication of the Jefferson statue, I think Margaret Truman was there that day also as I remember in Independence. But I had very little contact with him during those years, and after the 1952 campaign when I supported Stuart Symington for the Senate, Mr. Truman supported Buck Taylor. In 1950 he was committed to Buck Taylor for the 1952 campaign on the belief that Buck Taylor would support Emery Allison in 1950. I don't know that Buck did much

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for Emery Allison, but Truman was always loyal to his friends, almost loyal to a fault, I would say. Loyal to friends sometimes when they weren't loyal to him.

HESS: Mr. Truman?

FIKE: Mr. Truman, yes. And I think he had given his word to Buck Taylor that he was going to support him in the United States Senate in '52, before Stuart Symington got into the race. Many people in Missouri didn't think that Buck Taylor could win in the fall, or could defeat Jim [James Preston] Kem, the incumbent, and strong support developed for Stuart Symington.

I got into the race and supported Stuart Symington because I thought he was the better man of the two and did a great deal of work for him in '52 and then when I came to Washington with Stuart Symington, after Symington's election, I met Mr. Truman at the White House, probably the first week that we were here in January of 1953

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and went in with then Senator Symington to see the President.

HESS: That was just before he left the White House?

FIKE: Yes, just before Mr. Truman left. And then over the years I had much more contact with him than I had had during the years he was President when he was back home.

HESS: What has been the nature of your contact with him since '52?

FIKE: Very friendly, and very fine. I visited with him a number of times over the years; and then in '59 and '60, during Symington's campaign for the Presidency, I talked with him on strategy and told him what we were doing and kept in touch with him frequently. He was a strong supporter for Symington in the 1960 Presidential convention.

HESS: Did he give you any advice on how a campaign should be run?

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FIKE: Yes, he told us he thought we were doing the right thing. It developed that we weren't but he thought we were, and we did too, obviously, or else we wouldn't have done it. But a fellow by the name of Jack Kennedy went out and built from the grassroots up, while we depended on

victory as a compromise choice. We ended up probably everybody's second choice, but the first choice for a majority on the first ballot was Jack Kennedy.

Kennedy put on an all-out campaign right from the start, from '56 on. We underestimated his ability to get the votes.

HESS: As you may recall, in 1960 Mr. Truman held a press conference at the Library in which he said in part regarding Jack Kennedy, "Are you ready for the country, and is the country ready for you?" This was at the time that he was coming out strong for Senator Symington.

FIKE: That's right. I think that was at the time of

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the convention or just before the convention.

HESS: Just before the convention, a week or two before the convention.

FIKE: That's right.

HESS: Did you speak with Mr. Truman near this time about trying to keep the Kennedy forces from snowballing through the convention?

FIKE: We'd talked about it, yes, a number of times.

HESS: What did he say?

FIKE: Well, he was always pretty confident, or at least he gave me the feeling that he was confident, that we were following the right course, right on up through the spring in 1960 and that we were going to win. I was in Los Angeles in June and July.

I also talked to him in 1956 when Symington was a favorite son candidate for the Presidency and Truman was supporting Averell Harriman. I met

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with President Truman in Chicago and he said, "Tell Stu to get on out here to the convention, we need him here." He did not think that Adlai Stevenson should be renominated; he didn't think he could win and he was supporting Averell Harriman. But I think he would have been very happy if Symington had gotten the nomination in 1956. But Symington hadn't campaigned for the nomination at all in '56; he was a favorite son candidate from Missouri. He got some support from a number of states, but Stevenson had it pretty well buttoned up by the time of the convention.

There was no confidence within the Democratic Party that Dwight Eisenhower could be beaten, actually.

HESS: Mr. Truman said in his book, *Mr. Citizen*, that the reason he supported Averell Harriman in 1956 was to allow Stevenson to completely break away, if he so wanted to, from him, from Truman's support.

All right, were you surprised in 1952 that

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Mr. Truman did not plan to run for reelection? As you recall, he could have run.

FIKE: That's right. That's right. No, I wasn't surprised, I was not very surprised.

HESS: Why do you think he did not try to run for reelection that year?

FIKE: Well, I think he recognized the problems that he faced in 1952, and I think he felt probably it would be better for the country if he didn't run for reelection.

HESS: What did you see as the main problems?

FIKE: Well, the problems, the big issues in the campaign that year were Korea and communism...

HESS: And corruption?

FIKE: ...and corruption. I think he had no personal connection with corruption, I think there...

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HESS: Do you think there was much corruption? The so-called "mess in Washington" was a very big issue in 1952.

FIKE: Well, the mess in Washington in 1952 was as nothing compared with some of the mess that developed after 1952. Some of the things that went on in the Republican administration were far greater in magnitude than the relatively minor things, as far as the volume of the amount of dollars involved in the scandals in the Truman administration, the mink coats, and the deepfreezes; these were very minute things as compared to the deals that were made in the Republican administration.

As for example, the George Humphrey deal where his company, Hanna Mining Company, made millions of dollars from a deal he put through just before he became Secretary of the Treasury, with no risk to his company at all on a nickel mine, this type of thing.

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But the things that were brought out on Truman were things that--on the Truman administration, not on Truman himself but on some of the people in the Truman administration--the mink coats and the deepfreezes, these were things that were easily grasped by the people. And the big business deals in the Eisenhower years had an aura of respectability back of them. I don't think it's ever been put into true perspective.

HESS: What is your evaluation of Mr. Truman's handling of the Presidency?

FIKE: Oh, I think he was a great President. I think he was right on the big issues.

HESS: What would you see as the accomplishments of the Truman years?

FIKE: Well, I think facing up to the role of international leadership the United States had after World War II, getting out of World War II, certainly the United Nations and this sort of thing.

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HESS: Would you see more success on the international field than on the domestic field?

FIKE: Well, it was a very difficult time in the domestic field because people were tired of the restraints; they felt there had been too much government control during the war. They voted against the price controls in 1946--that protest, and he did not have a friendly Congress at all during his term. At no time did he have the support, for example, that Roosevelt had had in the early years in Roosevelt's administration. The situations were not similar. Truman proposed some very far-reaching legislation, Social Security for example--not Social Security, but what was called socialized medicine, hospital care, and so forth.

HESS: Why in your opinion didn't that legislation get through; was it mainly the opposition of Congress?

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FIKE: Oh, I think it was a program ahead of its time. The demand was not great enough. We were in a period of considerable prosperity and then we got involved in Korea of course, and this took the emphasis away from domestic problems.

I doubt that he could have gotten support for those programs anyway, because the need was not great enough at that time to get the unanimity of Democratic support that they needed.

HESS: Another domestic program that is often mentioned is civil rights. What is your opinion of Mr. Truman's view of the rights of members of minority groups?

FIKE: This is a subject I don't believe I've ever discussed with him, so all that I would know would be secondhand. I do know that Stuart Symington was Secretary of the Air Force during Mr. Truman's time in office, and I've heard Senator Symington speak many times in conversation, discuss this many times; he went to President

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Truman and said, "Mr. President, do you really want integration in the Air Force?"

And the President said, "I do."

And then Secretary Symington said, "It will be done," and it was done, and it was the first of the agencies that were integrated.

HESS: Why would you think Mr. Truman had that view of civil rights? A man from rural Jackson County, and when he was growing up that was a pretty Southern place. Isn't that correct?

FIKE: That's right.

HESS: With Southern attitudes.

FIKE: His background was entirely Southern.

HESS: As you may recall, his grandmother once saw him in his blue Army uniform and told him never to enter her home again while wearing a uniform of that color.

FIKE: All of his antecedents were Southern. I think

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his feeling on this was a matter of the rightness as he saw it, the human dignity of man and I think probably he always had some feelings from his childhood. He grew up in a different type of world, but I think he felt the world had to move ahead and I think probably the international aspect had some meaning to him.

HESS: In what way?

FIKE: Well, I think due to America's role in the world he knew we couldn't treat minorities as we had treated them in the past, and were still treating them at that time, and not giving them a fair treatment. I think probably that had something to do with it. This is just my own extrapolation.

HESS: How would you characterize Mr. Truman as a man?

FIKE: A man of great conviction, strong belief, a man who had the ability to make up his mind and then move on that decision, a good executive, a student, a student of American history.

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I think probably one of the most important characteristics that he had, in my opinion, was the great respect for the Presidency, for the office of the Presidency, and the potential in the office of the Presidency. I think he always had much greater concern for the office of the Presidency, than he did for Harry S. Truman as the occupant of the office at the time he was there.

HESS: How do you think that he will be viewed in history? One or two hundred years from now, how will historians and the general public view Mr. Truman and his administration?

FIKE: Oh, I think very well, very well. A man who had the ability to take decisive action when it was indicated.

HESS: Do you have anything else to add, any reminiscences that you may have about Mr. Truman that we have not covered?

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How about Mrs. Truman? How would you evaluate the value of that particular woman to that particular man?

FIKE: Oh, I think she always gave very strong support, always in the background. I've heard Senator and Mrs. Symington both speak about the fact that never in the years that they were in Washington, did they ever hear anyone criticize Mrs. Truman in any way, shape, or form, and that would be true as far as I'm concerned in Independence, and Jackson County. She always played the role of wife and mother, never an activist as far as politics is concerned. But when I've been with President and Mrs. Truman on occasion as I have in recent years--my present legal address is 610 N. Delaware--I vote at the home of my cousin there, and they're good friends of President and Mrs. Truman. My cousin, Kenneth Graham and his wife, are active in the Jackson County Historical Society, and Mr. Truman is interested in that and they became great friends

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and friends of mine also, and I mean Trumans also, but she is a woman of personal opinion, strong opinion, but she stays in the background. He calls her "the Boss" or he'd call her that.

I remember when I visited in their home with Senator Symington soon after he retired and the President started to walk in front of a lady and Mrs. Truman said, "Harry, just a minute, let the lady go first." Of course, when he was President he always went first, this was the protocol. She was calling him back and reminding him that now he was a private citizen.

HESS: She had to remind him that those days were over.

FIKE: Yes, and you know it was just a completely unconscious action on his part because I'm sure that originally when he became President he had to be reminded that he was President, therefore, he should go first. But there it's--I think

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everybody that's ever known him that I've ever heard, and certainly from my own personal observation, that it's been an ideal marriage, mutual respect between the two of them, and the love that was between them, and with Margaret and the three of them, it was a wonderful family relationship. Never been any question in my mind or in the mind of anyone I have ever known, but that there was only one woman in Harry Truman's life and that was Bess Truman, Bess Wallace Truman. I knew other members of her family, George Wallace, and Frank Wallace, her brothers, and she had respect of everyone who knew her in Independence, and here in Washington, people who knew her here.

As I mentioned, or related to you awhile ago, he was often unsuccessful in picking candidates in primary elections in Missouri. I think almost without exception he picked the losers, but often I was on the same loser, so...

HESS: So you were both on the same side.

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FIKE: That's right. That's right, sometimes I won. I was with Stuart Symington in the 1952 campaign of course, and he was for Buck Taylor. In 1948 I was for Forrest Smith, who won as Governor, and President Truman was supporting Dan Nee, who didn't have a chance. But whether a man would win or not, I don't think that had so much bearing in Mr. Truman's mind as the man whom he knew and liked and felt he should be for because of longtime friendship or support when Truman was running or when they'd been together on other candidates.

HESS: Do you have anything else to add concerning Mr. Truman?

EIKE: I don't think so.

HESS: Well, thank you very much, sir.

FIKE: Thank you Jerry; if I think of anything else--Jerry, I do remember hearing back in 1935 when Harry Truman first came to Washington, to the Senate, and I was not here, but I've heard from

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several people who were, so therefore I think there's no question but what it's true. And that was that at a meeting in Independence where they were saying farewell to Judge Truman, he was coming to Washington to become Senator, that Judge E.I. "Buck" Purcell, who had been elected Presiding Judge of the County Court to succeed Harry Truman, said that he expected Harry Truman to come to Washington and end up becoming President of the United States.

This was either in late '34 or early '35 and Buck Purcell had been a bartender in Independence; very little formal education. I don't know that he went beyond high school, if that far, but he had great respect for Harry Truman with whom he served for four years as Eastern Judge and

succeeded him as Presiding Judge and served for four years as Presiding Judge of Jackson County Court.

Having worked with Truman he just had that much confidence in his ability and in his determination

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to do a good job wherever he was and then also respect for him I think as a student. Buck Purcell is a very poor speaker, but...

HESS: A good judge of character, nevertheless.

FIKE: Apparently he was a very good judge of character, and forecaster of history.

Another story in the folklore of Independence, was that a man by the name of Spencer Salisbury had been on the other side from Truman in the local politics, but he said that when Truman was elected Senator, "That man, if he fell into an outhouse he'd come up smelling like a rose." But when he was coming to Washington, he said, "I think he'll probably end up being the President of the United States." So, that was one of his friends and one of his enemies, and both made this same forecast. I'm sure such a forecast is made by a good many people, but this...

HESS: Salisbury was commander of one of the batteries

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of the 35th Division, 129th Field Artillery during the First World War.

FIKE: I knew him.

HESS: Salisbury?

FIKE: Yes, this is the same man; they had disagreed on local politics and--but he always figured Harry Truman was a very lucky man. I think he credited him more with luck than Buck Purcell. Buck, when he...

HESS: He thought it was ability.

FIKE: Yes, Buck thought it was ability. I really do think he felt it was ability. It would be interesting sometime, and maybe I'll do this someday, to figure out all the campaigns in which Harry Truman was involved, or where he made endorsements of people and those candidates lost. He was never one to hang back and not take a part in a primary. Some people, some elected

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officials don't believe you should get into primaries. I don't believe that a candidate should get involved in other primary races, but Truman was a man of conviction, and if he believed something, he spoke out on it. Now, that's all I have.

HESS: Well, thank you very much.

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