

Oral. History Interview

With

STEPHEN S. SLAUGHTER

Neighbor of the Truman family in Grandview, Missouri, and longtime acquaintance of the Trumans.

Raymore, Missouri

April 19, 1984

by Niel M. Johnson, Harry S. Truman Library

The Harry S. Truman Library

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NOTICE

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JOHNSON: Mr. Slaughter, would you tell me when and where you were born?

SLAUGHTER: I was born on our farm one mile south of Hickman Mills, on October 14, 1901. I was brought up on the farm and went to the local Hickman Mills schools.

JOHNSON: What are your parents' names?

SLAUGHTER: My father was Orlando Y. Slaughter, born in Jackson County, August 9, 1854. He was born over on the Rule farm, near an ice house in a valley.

JOHNSON: What was your mother's maiden name?

SLAUGHTER: My mother was Elizabeth Miller Havron,

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born in Bedford, Indiana, in 1863.

JOHNSON: Can we have the names of your brothers and sisters?

SLAUGHTER: My oldest brother was Homer Havron Slaughter. He was born on the Hedges farm when father was renting it. He went to West Point and became a colonel. He was in Ekaterinburg the day after the Czar was murdered.

JOHNSON: Yes, it is in the book.* He was in Russia.

SLAUGHTER: The food was still on the table.

My second brother was "Doc" William Miller Slaughter. He was also born on the Hedges farm. He was an osteopath in Kansas City. My third brother, John Marion Slaughter, was born on the Raytown farm that my father had bought about 1887. They lived at Raytown until 1900 when Father sold the Raytown farm and bought the Hedges farm and moved back. Seth was born in Raytown too. He went to the University of Missouri one year, then to Culver-Stockton one year, then to Drake University

*Stephen S. Slaughter, *History of a Missouri Farm Family: The O.V. Slaughters, 1700-1944*. Harrison, N.Y. : Harbor Hill Books, 1978.

[3]

in Des Moines. After graduation from Drake he went to the University of Chicago and got a master's degree. He became a minister. My brother John bought the controlling interest in the Hickman Bank in Hickman Mills. He died in January 1961.

JOHNSON: Do you have any sisters?

SLAUGHTER: I'm getting to it. There were eight of us in the family. You have to work through the boys first. The first five were all boys. Minor was born in Raytown, graduated from the local

schools, and went to the University of Missouri in engineering. He was in World War I. He died of TB in 1926 when thirty years old. Then there was my sister Ruth, the sixth child. Ruth was born in Raytown in 1898. She graduated from the University of Missouri and then went to New York to study music. She was a music teacher, and married Robert D. Barry.

I was next. I went to the local schools, to Hickman Mills and Ruskin. I went to New York,

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to Columbia University in 1925. I thought I'd go into the academic world with a degree in history. I was offered a job teaching in Long Island University in the summer of 1929 and didn't take it. It never occurred to me that the Depression was coming on. When I tried to get a job in 1931-32, there were no jobs. You just don't understand if you haven't lived through that time. There were no jobs. In the meantime, I became interested in different things, in art and pictures. I went into photography.

I was a late bloomer. I gained these interests later. And I became interested in writing.

JOHNSON: Have you named all of your sisters?

SLAUGHTER: No, I've got another sister, a younger one, Eunice. She's in Arlington, Virginia. She was born in Hickman Mills. She went to Drake University one semester, and graduated from the University of Missouri. She taught school. She married Joseph A. Logan in 1943. Her husband died in September 1981. They had no children.

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Eunice and I have no children,

JOHNSON: Have we named them all now?

SLAUGHTER: I've named them all; eight of them.

JOHNSON: Then you were the next to the last?

SLAUGHTER: Next to the last.

JOHNSON: Where did you go to school, grade school and high school.?

SLAUGHTER: I went to local schools, to Hickman Mills grade school and Ruskin high school. I got an A.B. from Drake University in Des Moines. I got a master's degree at Columbia University.

JOHNSON: In what field?

SLAUGHTER: It was American history but I never took American history classes at Columbia. I just took the exams. That was one problem actually. I took what I wanted -- sociology,

economics, psychology...I wrote a thesis in American history, and took the exams. I became interested in the Reformation, in the lives of the Protestant sects. It was a segment

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of the growing feeling for democracy actually, in local self-government, and the idea hasn't been developed fully even yet. But I became interested in it, and nobody else at Columbia was interested. I had been working on my own, and so that's another reason why I never finished my education.

JOHNSON: But you got a master's. When?

SLAUGHTER: I did get a master's. In 1928.

JOHNSON: Okay. Then what did you do after that? After you got your master's?

SLAUGHTER: I continued my work in history, and got whatever material I could. There was a lot of material at Union Theological Seminary, a certain section on the Reformation. I studied at the Harvard library one summer, and the New York Public, and Columbia library. I went over to England and studied at the British Museum, at the Records Office in London, and spent the winter, seven months, in Norwich, England. I studied Robert Browne, the father of Congregationalism. I took notes and came back.

And as I say, by that time the Depression was

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on, and I needed some money. I just backed into photography; there was some money in it. There was a chance for a job. It was interesting. It's fascinating.

JOHNSON: When did you get into photography?

SLAUGHTER: There was no definite date; I don't know when I bought my camera. I stayed in New York. I had been in New York from 1925 on, for 57 years, until coming back here in 1982.

JOHNSON: So you came back to New York City?

SLAUGHTER: Yes. Twenty-five years in New York City, and 32 years in Tarrytown.

JOHNSON: So you got a job in photography in New York City?

SLAUGHTER: Yes. I worked for other people, and worked for myself. I did almost all the work for Columbia University; I did work for all the pictures of the Manhattan Project, identification pictures, and things of that sort.

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JOHNSON: Do you mean the Manhattan Project to build an atomic bomb?

SLAUGHTER: Yes. Well, I had to take a picture of everybody that worked there at Columbia on this project. I took a lot of famous people, knew who they were.

JOHN'SON: Now they were at different places. Did you go to the University of Chicago and work there too?

SLAUGHTER: No. They had a local unit there at Columbia, and I think all the pictures I took were in the Columbia buildings.

JOHNSON: And you wrote up the captions and commentaries, whatever for your photographs? Did you manage to do some writing with your photography?

SLAUGHTER: Not in connection with the photography. My writing was all outside that.

JOHNSON: You didn't do photo essays, for instance?

SLAUGHTER: I was just a photographer as far as they were concerned.

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JOHNSON: I see. Were you free lance, or were you employed by the university when you were a photographer?

SLAUGHTER: They expected me to take the pictures but I had no contract with them.

JOHNSON: Is that right?

SLAUGHTER: Oh, no, I could refuse anytime.

JOHNSON: They just paid you for what you did do?

SLAUGHTER: I just knew them.

JOHNSON: You weren't on their payroll?

SLAUGHTER: No. Oh no.

JOHNSON: So you were free lance.

SLAUGHTER: I was free lance, sure.

JOHNSON: For how many years did you do that?

SLAUGHTER: Off and on until I went to Tarrytown in 1950. I don't know whether I kept my contact with Columbia, or whether I was more independent

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at that time. I did a lot of writing you know.

JOHNSON: On the side?

SLAUGHTER: On the side, yes.

JOHNSON: And you had it published, some of it published?

SLAUGHTER: Some of it published, yes.

JOHNSON: In magazines?

SLAUGHTER: Yes, You know, anything that didn't pay me anything, I could get published without any trouble. But I sent only one article to *The New Yorker*, the only thing I ever sent, and they sent me a check for \$200 for the thing.

JOHNSON: What year was that?

SLAUGHTER: I don't know; in the thirties.

JOHNSON: You didn't save the article?

SLAUGHTER: Yes, it's somewhere. I can find it.

JOHNSON: So you got published in *The New Yorker*.

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SLAUGHTER: Yes.

JOHNSON: Well, that's a real honor.

SLAUGHTER: Well, I wrote very well. It wasn't that. It was what I was interested in writing most people weren't interested in. I would have been a writer, but the problem was making a living at it.

JOHNSON: What was the subject you liked to write about mostly? What was the subject you wrote about for *The New Yorker*?

SLAUGHTER: I don't know the year, but I was curious about that Navy yard, the Brooklyn Navy Yard. So I went over there one morning and just walked in. Nobody stopped me. You know, after I was there prowling around, I began talking to a fellow. He seemed to be footloose, and he began asking me questions. He found I didn't have a pass. He was an officer, and he took me up before the captain and they queried me. Finally, they turned me loose, and I wrote up that episode. I sent it in to *The New Yorker*. Well, of course, they were

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interested in it, and they published it. But I never went back to the Navy yard.

Well, one of the comical things about it is that it was such a secret, and he told me all about that ship that they were building. I didn't know what ship it was, and he told me. It was a well-known ship, one of the important ships.

JOHNSON: Was it an aircraft carrier, or a battleship?

SLAUGHTER: I didn't know what it was. He told me it was the *North Carolina*, a big battleship.

JOHNSON: So you were there through the war years, in New York City, through the forties.

SLAUGHTER: Yes, I was there.

JOHNSON: And you probably were doing some photographic assignments related to the war effort, I suppose.

SLAUGHTER: No, I don't think so; it was just the Manhattan Project. Nobody knew what that was. The students at Columbia who had volunteered and were working in it -- they were scientists -- but they didn't

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know what they were working on.

JOHNSON: They were in the physics department I suppose.

SLAUGHTER: The only thing I knew, I took a picture of Urey.

JOHNSON: Harold Urey?

SLAUGHTER: Yes, I knew that name, and then this fellow who was head of the whole thing.

JOHNSON: Groves, Leslie Groves.

SLAUGHTER: Groves! Got into an argument with Groves.

JOHNSON: What about?

SLAUGHTER: I think I belittled the Army someway.

JOHNSON: And he reacted?

SLAUGHTER: I think so. And I apologized.

JOHNSON: Okay, so then in 1950 you moved to Tarrytown, New York.

SLAUGHTER: Yes. I bought a photographic studio

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there.

JOHNSON: You did general photography.

SLAUGHTER: Did everything.

JOHNSON: Did you do weddings and that sort of thing?

SLAUGHTER: Yes, but I took portraits mostly, and commercial work. If somebody had an auto accident, they would call me. I'd go and take that. I did a good deal of building photos, of progress on construction. Every month I'd go over to a building, and take a picture. It would take six months to build the thing or more.

JOHNSON: So you kept a photographic record of Tarrytown's history from 1950 to...

SLAUGHTER: Yes, until 1968. I took a lot of pictures. I turned them all over to Tarrytown before I left, to their historical society. I must have had hundreds of pictures I took.

JOHNSON: How long were you there in Tarrytown?

SLAUGHTER: Well, 32 years.

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JOHNSON: Until you retired.

SLAUGHTER: Yes, I retired in '68, But I stayed in Tarrytown until 1982, I lived in New York City from '25 to the fall of 1950. Wait a minute; I bought that studio and I commuted for a while. We moved up in July of '51, but I was there everyday from '50 on, and we moved up in '51. We rented an apartment until the spring or summer of '54 when we bought a house. We lived in that house until we left on April 29, 1982. My wife fell and broke her shoulder the day we were to move. So, we stayed with a neighbor a few more days and we got here May 5th. We were due May 6th, and an apartment was open for us and we had to be here.

JOHNSON: Right here, this same apartment?

SLAUGHTER: This same apartment. We would have stayed longer in Tarrytown, but we had sold our house and the people were moving in. My wife was in no shape to travel and it was the most miserable trip we ever had in our lives. I was as worn out as she was.

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JOHNSON: It's a nice place here, isn't it?

SLAUGHTER: It's a nice place. I'm glad we came.

JOHNSON: You're back in your home country, so to speak. Do you think of Hickman Mills as hometown?

SLAUGHTER: I came back a stranger.

JOHNSON: How about your brothers and sisters? Had they all moved away? Any of them still live in this area?

SLAUGHTER: They've all died, except for my younger sister in Arlington, Virginia. I have a cousin, one first cousin in Kansas City, S. D. -- Colonel S. D. Slaughter. I have some second cousins in Kansas City, Kansas.

JOHNSON: Are you related to Roger Slaughter who was involved in politics in the thirties?

SLAUGHTER: No. There are about twelve or more distinct Slaughter families and not related as far as I know. I've called up some of them.

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JOHNSON: We'll back up again. You said you were born in 1901. Can you pinpoint where you were born?

SLAUGHTER: On the farm. I could probably find the range number and the township.

JOHNSON: Okay, as related to the Truman farm.

SLAUGHTER: We had a common boundary of, I think, 7/8ths of a mile.

JOHNSON: In which direction?

SLAUGHTER: We were north; they were south.

JOHNSON: Okay, just north of the Truman farm.

SLAUGHTER: Yes. And we were half a mile from Grandview Road, to the east. There was just a fence between us and the Trumans, a rock fence.

JOHNSON: When did your father buy that farm, do you know?

SLAUGHTER: He rented that farm first, in 1880, I believe. Sol Young had the adjacent farm then,

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and I think Father first met Sol Young when he rented that farm. One morning he went out to the pasture and a fellow pulled up on horseback, on a beautiful horse, swung his horse around and

said, "Hello, Slaughter, huh? My name is Sol Young. You're from the Davenports? The Davenports are good stock." He turned on his horse and rode away. He didn't mention that father's father was a poor businessman, but the Davenports were good business people.

JOHNSON: Who did your father rent that land from?

SLAUGHTER: He rented it from George Hedges.

JOHNSON: I'm looking at an 1877 plat map; you maybe have seen this. I have outlined the Young land. Here's the Young farm and I don't see the Slaughter name.

SLAUGHTER: No, but the names Charles Miller and George Hedges are there on the north. Charles Miller; he's my great.-grandfather.

JOHNSON: Yes, here's the George Hedges farm. So this

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land right in here would have been the Slaughter farm.

SLAUGHTER: Charles Miller owned 270 acres east of the Hedges land. He deeded 110 acres on the west by the Hedges property to my mother. He deeded 160 acres on the east to his granddaughter, Mother's cousin, Cora Miller. The house I was born in, our farm house, was on the Hedges property and was enlarged by my father after he bought the farm. When my father met Sol Young he was a renter. He courted my mother when he was renting the farm. My mother had come from Indiana as a child.

JOHNSON: So Sol Young met your father right here on this Hedges land, at the boundary.

SLAUGHTER: Sure. This was a rock fence. Yes, this was a rock fence.

JOHNSON: That was a rock fence where it says Harriett L. Young; just on the north side of that was a rock fence.

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SLAUGHTER: That's right.

Sol Young also owned land west of the Grandview Road. It doesn't show it here. He owned land beyond this railroad, the Frisco.

JOHNSON: I know. So maybe that was purchased later; this was in '77.

SLAUGHTER: Well, I drew a map for Tom Heed, a correct map. I think you'll find I'm the only man that could draw a map for Tom.

JOHNSON: I suppose. So this was the first connection between the Slaughters and the Trumans -- your father meeting Sol Young.

SLAUGHTER: I think it was his first meeting with Sol Young, but he knew the Trumans much before that.

JOHNSON: Oh, he did?

SLAUGHTER: Oh yes.

My grandfather Elijah F. Slaughter kept a journal, a diary, and much of the material in it is in my published family history. A neighbor,

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Will Parrish, stopped one evening, February 15, 1879, and said Mrs. Truman had died. Two of Elijah's children, Ida and Steve, went to the funeral. That was Harry's grandmother; that was A. S. Truman's wife.

JOHNSON: Anderson Shipp Truman's wife?

SLAUGHTER: Yes.

Elijah F. Slaughter was born in Tennessee but spent most of his early life in Kentucky, as, I believe, Sol Young and the Trumans did.

JOHNSON: So Elijah attended the funeral of...

SLAUGHTER: His children did, Aunt Ida and Uncle Steve; they attended the funeral. The Trumans are mentioned a number of times in my grandfather's journal. They knew each other from the early days. The Davenports came into Missouri, Jackson County, in 1837, and they were the ones that Sol Young knew.

JOHNSON: I notice there is a mention here on page 70 of your book, an entry apparently by Elijah,

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February 26, 1874, "Bought of Will Truman clover seed. 1 bushel \$6.00."

SLAUGHTER: Yes, cost a lot didn't it?

JOHNSON: And then, August 13, 1879, "John Truman bought the hogs of Steve that he bot [sic] of his grandfather and is to give \$27.00." Yes, their connections go way back don't they?

SLAUGHTER: They go way back. That's why we felt close to the Truman family.

JOHNSON: Is this 1874 entry the first documented connection?

SLAUGHTER: I would think so.

JOHNSON: Are there any stories that your father or uncles told you, that aren't published in your book on the Slaughter family, that involved the Trumans. Any mention of them during the Civil War for instance?

SLAUGHTER: No, there's nothing about the Civil War

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that I remember, because my immediate family was not in the Civil War. Elijah was affected by Order Number 11, and he had to move. A lot of people were affected by that. They were southerners you know.

JOHNSON: Do you know where he lived at the time that he had to move out of the county?

SLAUGHTER: Yes, he moved out of the county, I think down to Cass County. That was where Uncle Steve was born. He always said he was born on the Grand River, and they all moved back to Jackson County after he was born. I do not know the exact dates Elijah bought his farm but it was after the Civil War, perhaps as early as 1865 or 1866 for the first 60 acres. Elijah was a poor businessman. He rented, he squatted the first years of their marriage.

JOHNSON: Elijah you say rented land?

SLAUGHTER: He rented land, yes. He squatted; he lived wherever he could. Grandma got a few

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dollars together and they paid \$400 for 60 acres there at 87th, just to the west of Blue Ridge Boulevard. There's a Santa Fe Trail marker right there at the Blue Ridge right-of-way. Just across there to the north and west was grandpa's farm. He bought 60 more acres there later, and twenty acres of timber, but they finally had 120 acres at 87th Street. The 20 acres of timber were about a mile to the east of the 120 acres.

JOHNSON: Would that be west or north of the Hedges?

SLAUGHTER: Oh, that's north. Oh yes, seven or eight miles -- almost half way to Independence.

JOHNSON: The Hedges farm, that became the nucleus for the Slaughter farm?

SLAUGHTER: Yes. I have a little pamphlet here I wrote.

JOHNSON: This is the *Historical Society Journal* of Jackson County, July-September 1983.

SLAUGHTER: And in the article I give much of the

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history of this farm. Sam Gregg owned it, and Hedges bought it from Sam Gregg. I mention Vivian Truman in there, because Vivian married Louella Campbell. I had given a poster dated about 1890 to the Historical Society.

JOHNSON: 1884?

SLAUGHTER: All right. And Dr. Bryant was mentioned in the poster. He was the chairman of a political meeting, and his daughter Anna Bryant was the mother of Louella Campbell who married Vivian Truman. So, the poster ties up the names of Hickman, Bryant, Gregg, Hedges, Truman, Slaughter and was the foundation for the article.

JOHNSON: Like I say, it's quite a thing that you were living there on the farm before Harry Truman went out there. Of course, he had lived there as a boy very briefly, about three years, but after working at the bank he came out to the farm in the spring of 1906. By this time you were already five years old. What was your first recollection of

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ever seeing Harry Truman?

SLAUGHTER: Oh, I remember it very well.

JOHNSON: Well, we want to be sure and get that down.

SLAUGHTER: Well, it was threshing time, and I was at the yard fence on our farm with my sister. Threshing is a big time for kids, and there was Harry Truman. How I knew it was Harry I don't know. I guess my older sister knew. Anyway he was there, and he was on a wagon, a team of horses. No team of horses that the Trumans had was ever very fat. They were thin horses. But Harry was standing up in a bundle wagon, and he had a white Panama hat on. It was a soft hat, but a Panama, white. I don't know why I remember that, but it was different; it was different from what most of them wore. Harry never looked unkempt.

JOHNSON: He was wearing this white Panama hat.

SLAUGHTER: Yes, white Panama hat.

JOHNSON: A straw -- made of straw?

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SLAUGHTER: Oh yes, it was straw. I don't know whether you've ever seen a Panama hat or not. It was softer than other straw hats. The brim was wider so you could just pull it down.

JOHNSON: When do you think this was? Could you put a date on that?

SLAUGHTER: It was the first time I ever saw Harry Truman, to remember.

JOHNSON: Do you have any idea when that was?

SLAUGHTER: I know I was young. I couldn't read, I'm sure of that. That was before I went to school.

We swapped work threshing with the Trumans for years. That's how I ate in the Trumans' house a number of times.

JOHNSON: He'd come over to work on the threshing crew?

SLAUGHTER: Yes. Now that's the only time he ever followed the threshing crew. He never did that again so far as I remember. I remember this distinctly, because I remember the conversation at the table. Harry Truman, contrary to what

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most people get from reading the paper, had a personality and charisma. People remember him. They talked about him at the table. Perhaps he was seated at another table in another room or he had eaten and left, but they talked about him. He was new in the neighborhood; they had never seen him before. It was all complimentary, everyone of them. I remember that. As a kid I listened.

JOHNSON: And you say this was before you were even going to school?

SLAUGHTER: I didn't go to school until I was nearly eight years old.

JOHNSON: So this would have had to have been before 1909, maybe the first or second year he was on the farm?

SLAUGHTER: I would say it was the first year Harry was on the farm.

I didn't go to school early, but I think I can remember the first day I walked.

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JOHNSON: Do you remember any of the other people that were there that day?

SLAUGHTER: They were neighbors.

JOHNSON: Who did you swap work with, that you remember?

SLAUGHTER: Well, Charlie Johnson lived just across the road, we swapped with him; we swapped with the Trumans; we swapped with the Babcocks; we swapped with the Hornbuckles, Roy and Bob. They were bachelors and later got married.

JOHNSON: Charlie Johnson also you say?

SLAUGHTER: He rented the Washer farm. He rented for some years; he had a daughter, Alma; a daughter Sarah -- Sarah Frances, we called her; and a crippled boy, Arlie, who died.

JOHNSON: They lived there a number of years then on that farm.

SLAUGHTER: Yes. Alma married Ed Young, a veterinarian. Sarah Frances married Harold Makin. Harold Makin

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died just a year or so ago. He had an auto agency in Grandview, and his son runs it now. Sarah Frances is still alive. And Ed Young, the boy that Alma married, was the veterinarian that came out to vaccinate those hogs when Harry came down and helped us that morning. It's in the book, but I don't think I mention Ed Young's name; I just mention Harry's name.

JOHNSON: Was this before Hall had the thresher?

SLAUGHTER: Oh, no. Hall had that thresher as far as I know from the very beginning. I don't remember anybody threshing for us except Leslie Hall.

JOHNSON: So it was Leslie Hall's machine that was there that day, his threshing machine?

SLAUGHTER: Oh, it was bound to have been. I would think so. And he had a relative, or maybe just a friend, named Eugene Myers, who often helped him. Leslie had some boys.

JOHNSON: Yes, I've got their names.

So your first recollection is on this threshing

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crew. That's early all right. He even seemed to be dressed up when he was working, you say?

SLAUGHTER: He wasn't dressed up, but he didn't look like the other farmers, that's what I mean.

JOHNSON: He didn't wear the bib overalls so far as you recall.

SLAUGHTER: I don't think I ever saw him in my life in bib overalls.

JOHNSON: And he didn't wear blue jeans. He wore work pants of some sort?

SLAUGHTER: Work pants, but I would say they were pants that he had bought for his social life but he later wore them on the farm. They were not pressed.

JOHNSON: What was the next instance that you can recall?

SLAUGHTER: So far as I know, he never was on the threshing crew again. I was not on the threshing crew until I was older. I would see him

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across the fence, plowing corn. Sometimes he'd drop down to see my father for something of mutual interest.

JOHNSON: Were you a water boy for the crew when you were there with Truman?

SLAUGHTER: Oh, I wasn't water boy then.

JOHNSON: You didn't take water out to them?

SLAUGHTER: I was only four or five years old, you see.

JOHNSON: But you did say something to him. Of course, you wouldn't remember what it was.

SLAUGHTER: Oh no, of course not. I was a kid.

JOHNSON: Did he kid you? Was he the type that would kid the little kids?

SLAUGHTER: No, I don't think so. He was a polite, courteous man. He never swore, not in our house. And Margaret, the other night on TV, said she had never heard him say a cuss word in her life. And

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I was glad to hear it, because it was sure the impression he gave to us, and he was in our house a number of times.

JOHNSON: What could you say about those visits? What do you recall about those visits?

SLAUGHTER: They always had something to do with the farm. Once I know it was about the road. We were wanting a macadam road built. We had only a dirt road.

Father thought that maybe Harry could help us on persuading the county court to build a macadam road. I remember that was one thing. There were informal things that you might need to see a neighbor about. We used the phone after we put it in. In 1906 we put the phone in.

JOHNSON: Was that when the Trumans got a phone, do you think?

SLAUGHTER: I expect so. That's when we put ours in, in 1906. They put it in about the same time.

We bought an automobile in 1912. I don't think they bought one until 1913.

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JOHNSON: These were, as you say, probably just involving some farm matters, informal?

SLAUGHTER: Not things that you would remember specifically.

JOHNSON: I notice you had a windmill installed in 1909, but the Trumans apparently never did put in a windmill. They didn't have one did they?

SLAUGHTER: Never did.

JOHNSON: Do you have any idea why they didn't put in a windmill?

SLAUGHTER: You know, they didn't have much spare money. The Trumans were always strapped. I would think maybe a little bit of that. I don't understand quite why they were so short of money.

JOHNSON: Did you know anything about the law suits? That apparently would have been one of the reasons; the lawyer's fees and so on.

SLAUGHTER: I maybe could tell you about that a bit, I mean my father was quite a supporter of Mat

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and Harry.

JOHNSON: Mat is Martha? Martha Ellen?

SLAUGHTER: Harry's mother. As a youngster I never knew her name was Martha. They always called her Mat. Father testified for them, and one of the jurymen said to father, "You know, if you hadn't testified this case would have gone against the Trumans."

JOHNSON: Your father.

SLAUGHTER: Yes, he told my father that.

JOHNSON: What kind of testimony was that, do you know?

SLAUGHTER: I have no idea, but my father was a persuasive man, and he knew he was right. They were good people; they were good neighbors, and why shouldn't we support them? As I understood it, the sons of Sol Young, who would benefit by a change in the will, were irresponsible, not the kind of people my father admired. Father much preferred to have the farm go to Mat and Harrison.

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JOHNSON: Did they have reputations as playboys?

SLAUGHTER: Well, I think they drank a bit, and maybe gambled a bit. My father was very strict.

JOHNSON: Strict about gambling, drinking and that sort of thing? Sol Young didn't seem to be that strict?

SLAUGHTER: No. Sol Young had a world of ability. And yes, he was a good businessman, and he was a dependable person, not a fellow that would play loose ends with anybody. He was a good man; whatever else he was, he was a dependable man. His word was good.

JOHNSON: How about John Anderson Truman, Harry's father?

SLAUGHTER: Oh, John Anderson Truman was a hard working man. My, he got up early, he worked hard, and he would wear overalls. He always came with the threshing crew, always ran a grain wagon. They always sent one or two bundle wagons, but John

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always ran a grain wagon. He was a little man, a hard worker, with skinny horses. They were good horses, but they only had one or two good riding horses.

JOHNSON: You were 13 years old when he died, so you're recollecting him being short, and so on.

SLAUGHTER: Saw him every summer. I'd see him across the fence. It was mostly pasture, that south part, back part of our place.

JOHNSON: Was he known to be calm or rather feisty, or...

SLAUGHTER: He reacted quickly; had a quick temper. Yes, I guess you would call him feisty; he acted quickly. There is nothing against the man. He worked hard and he was honest. He made a good neighbor. They all made good neighbors. It fell to my father's lot to keep the fences up; he just took that for granted.

JOHNSON: On that fence between the two farms. Is

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that rock fence still there, or remnants of that rock fence still there?

SLAUGHTER: Goodness no! Almost nothing has any resemblance to what it was then. When 71 was built, all the rock in the whole neighborhood, and even before that, was taken for other macadam roads. People needed the rock. None of that was left.

JOHNSON: Why do you think Harry wasn't on the threshing crews after that first time?

SLAUGHTER: I don't think he was ever on a threshing crew again. I don't think that he was on the crew at home. If he had been I would have remembered it. He worked in the fields from time to time but he was never a regular part of the farm work force. Not as I remember it. He helped his mother. He played the piano; he'd talk; he'd go around and oversee things a bit.

JOHNSON: Kind of a manager type do you think?

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SLAUGHTER: Especially after his father died, he was. I was surprised in his letters that he talks about the hard labor he did. I didn't see that much hard labor. He worked; he worked from time to time; he wasn't lazy, he worked. His mother said he could make the straightest corn rows in the state, and they were straight, I will say that. But he didn't spend all that time in the field; he had hired hands.

JOHNSON: Do you remember him before he had a car going down the road in a buggy, or carriage? Remember ever seeing him in a carriage or buggy?

SLAUGHTER: No, I saw him on horseback. He never came to see us in a carriage. Harrison Young came in a buggy with his mother.

JOHNSON: I wonder what ever happened to that carriage.

SLAUGHTER: I don't know. That was just a buggy that Harrison and his mother were in.

JOHNSON: Kind of a two seater?

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SLAUGHTER: No, just a buggy, one horse. To me a carriage has two seats and is pulled by two horses. A buggy has one seat.

JOHNSON: It wasn't one of these surreys with a fringe on top?

SLAUGHTER: Oh, it had a top on it, but no fringe. I believe Curt or Will Campbell had a carriage with a fringe on top.

JOHNSON: Do you think it was a surrey?

SLAUGHTER: It was my recollection that it was just a plain buggy. We had a carriage and we had a buggy.

JOHNSON: You had a kind of a surrey type carriage?

SLAUGHTER: Yes, with two seats, front and back, and took two horses. We used two horses on it. But the buggy just took one horse.

JOHNSON: But with Harrison Young, you just remember that one horse and buggy?

SLAUGHTER: I just saw Harrison Young that one time

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that I remember. Harrison lived out there on the farm a good part of the time, but his home, I believe, was in Kansas City.

JOHNSON: He was a large man, apparently, compared to say John Anderson Truman,

SLAUGHTER: Oh yes, he would weigh 75 pounds more than John Truman. He was a good-sized man.

JOHNSON: I notice too, you built a silo in 1911 and there's no silo on the Truman farm.

SLAUGHTER: They never had a silo.

JOHNSON: Again maybe because of the economics, the costs?

SLAUGHTER: I would think so. They just didn't manage that farm well. They didn't manage that farm well and I don't know why they didn't make more money from it. It was good land.

JOHNSON: It's said that in some good years they made

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quite a bit of money, but I suppose the expenses must be...

SLAUGHTER: Well, they always had hired men to pay.

JOHNSON: Didn't you have hired men on your farm?

SLAUGHTER: Yes, we had one.

JOHNSON: Just one hired man. Do you have any idea how many hired men might be working on the Truman farm?

SLAUGHTER: Oh, always two, but often three or four.

JOHNSON: I notice another coincidence. In 1911 apparently your hay barn was remodeled into a dairy barn, and you got into the dairy business.

SLAUGHTER: Yes, that's right.

JOHNSON: Apparently that was more profitable?

SLAUGHTER: Yes. My brother John came home for a few years after college and he thought there was more money in it.

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JOHNSON: That was about the same time that the Trumans built the hay barn, according to the letters. He talks about building a barn big enough for a barn dance or square dancing. Do you remember ever any square dancing on the Truman farm?

SLAUGHTER: No.

JOHNSON: Do you remember them building a barn on the Truman farm? You would have been only about eight or nine years old.

SLAUGHTER: No. There were two barns there I remember. And the big barn it seemed to me was always there.

JOHNSON: Yes, it was always there, but the other barn, the hay barn north of it, sat at a bit of an angle. There was a hay barn; it apparently was built in about 1911. You would have been ten years old.

SLAUGHTER: I swear, and it's embarrassing, but I don't remember them building that barn. I remember the barn very well. I've been in the barn. You could see it from our yard. How could they build a barn without me seeing it?

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JOHNSON: Do you remember any of the equipment that was used on the Truman farm -- anything that you can recall about the equipment that they used on the farm?

SLAUGHTER: I don't think they used it but one or two summers; they had a big hay field there, and they had some special equipment which we never had. I never saw it used anyplace else, to build a hay rick. It was as if it were a hay barn, and it would bring up the hay out of the wagon with this fork, and the fork was pulled by horses, and it'd dump it where you wanted it. Now that was special equipment, and I never saw it anyplace else.

JOHNSON: It used rails?

SLAUGHTER: Well, I don't remember the rails, but I'll swear that it had a long high pole and it was braced, and it would flip that hay up in the air, and whether they had a track or not, or just whether it was just swung from this pole over, just maybe twenty feet or so on the arm, or

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thirty feet, and dumped it that way, I don't know.

JOHNSON: You may be thinking about something that your brother John Slaughter said. This is an article in the *Prairie Farmer*, May 12, 1945. It's called, "President Truman: His Neighbors Tell His Farm Years."

SLAUGHTER: I never saw it.

JOHNSON: It says, "John Slaughter, cashier in the bank at Hickman Mills and whose farm adjoined the Truman place, recalls that Harry was always the first in the neighborhood to invest in labor-saving machinery. He put up the first derrick and swing for stacking hay...."

SLAUGHTER: Derrick, that's what I saw.

JOHNSON: And he adds, "Harry did something else that nobody had ever thought of in this neighborhood. After he had stacked the first cutting of clover, he covered it with boards for protection against the weather. When the second cutting was ready,

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he simply removed the covering and put that hay on top of the first cutting. The result was less weather damaged hay."

When did your father die?

SLAUGHTER: In April '35.

JOHNSON: Truman became a Senator just before your father died. He was sworn in in January 1935. I suppose that brought more attention to Grandview, and to the neighbors of Truman. Do you remember comments, recollections, of your father about the Trumans, or opinions about the Trumans?

SLAUGHTER: My father chaired the meeting when Harry first ran for County Court Judge.

JOHNSON: That would have been 1922. After he left the haberdashery.

SLAUGHTER: Yes.

JOHNSON: Gaylon Babcock said in his interview that O. V. Slaughter recommended Harry Truman for judge in a meeting at Hickman Mills. Do you remember

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anything about that?

SLAUGHTER: Yes, I attended that meeting. I was a youngster. Well, I was twenty years old. Harry made a very good talk. I remember one thing he said, "People say I'm too young." He said, "I'm 38; I'm two years older than necessary to be President of the United States." I don't suppose that he was thinking about it at that time, but he said he was old enough to be President of the United States.

JOHNSON: So he mentioned being President.

SLAUGHTER: And I've often thought since then that things were in Harry's mind. He had a very active mind. I think he got the idea soon that his future maybe was in politics.

JOHNSON: How did your father get involved in that first campaign? Do you know how they got together?

SLAUGHTER: It was just natural. It was just the

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logical thing. Who would have been better qualified than my father to chair that meeting? My father was well-known. He was always in public affairs. He was the first president of the Jackson County Farm Bureau, an organizer of it. He was an organizer of the Grandview Bank; he was the president of it. He was president of the Jackson County Red Cross in World War I. He was partly responsible for Hickman Mills and Ruskin High School being the first consolidated school district in the State of Missouri. We were down visiting my brother once in Washington, and I called on Harry. My father had just died. He said my father was a great man. He didn't mean in a world-wide sense; he meant as a neighbor, as a close, intimate neighbor. That was true. Sure, father was a man whom he would like to have chair that meeting.

JOHNSON: Your father was in favor of the New Deal?

SLAUGHTER: No. He died before the New Deal really. No, he would not have been for the New Deal. I

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think not, I'm not sure that father ever voted for a Democrat after Wilson. He was suspicious of the League of Nations. I believe he became more conservative in his older days. He died when he was 80, but I never knew how he voted. I'm reasonably sure he never voted for Al Smith.

JOHNSON: As far as local politics and county politics were concerned, did he follow Harry down the line?

SLAUGHTER: He was a Democrat.

JOHNSON: He was for all the bond issues. He wanted all the road building?

SLAUGHTER: I would think so. I was away from home you know during the most part of that period. I was in college at Drake in '21.

JOHNSON: Did your father belong to the Masons, or Modern Woodmen, or Eagles, or anything like that?

SLAUGHTER: No, he didn't belong to any of those.

JOHNSON: So he didn't associate with Harry Truman in

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any particular clubs or...

SLAUGHTER: No. There was very little entertainment, socially.

JOHNSON: Now how about church? Did your father belong to...

SLAUGHTER: The Christian Church, Hickman Mills. And Harry was in the Baptist Church at Grandview.

JOHNSON: And Vivian, I guess, joined the Christian Church.

SLAUGHTER: Yes, Vivian joined the Hickman Christian Church soon after he married Louella Campbell. We saw Vivian often, of course, and he worked out in the fields. He was always in the threshing crew. I knew Vivian and saw him frequently, much more than we saw Harry.

JOHNSON: When was that Blue Ridge Baptist Church moved away from there, do you recall?

SLAUGHTER: I don't know. The Baptist Church was there on the corner of Main Street and Grandview

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Road ever since I can remember. You could hear the bell Sunday morning.

JOHNSON: That building that's a garage on the Truman farm -- apparently it was the old Post Office in Grandview. Do you remember anything about the old Post Office?

SLAUGHTER: I was in the Grandview Post Office a number of times but I do not know anything about it being moved to the Truman farm. That must have been done after I left. I wondered about that garage. I saw it when I was there with Tom Heed this spring. I had never seen it before.

JOHNSON: Do you remember a coal house or smokehouse out there?

SLAUGHTER: Yes, there were several outbuildings. You know it's been a good many years...

JOHNSON: I've got a drawing of that layout there of the farm. Does that refresh your recollections at all? That's a layout of the farm. Here was a coal house, apparently. There was a smokehouse

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at one time. There's an old foundation, but nobody seems to know what was there though in that yard north of the house. Do you remember ever seeing any building, or little shed or anything here, north of the house?

SLAUGHTER: No. Where's the big barn? It should be right here.

JOHNSON: Here's the big barn here.

SLAUGHTER: Oh, clear back here.

JOHNSON: Yes, and here's the hay barn.

SLAUGHTER: I don't remember that hay barn. There's a barn back here.

JOHNSON: Now here's the big barn; this is the old barn.

SLAUGHTER: But there was a barn farther...

JOHNSON: No, there was a granary here in the corner.

SLAUGHTER: But there was a fairly tall building here;

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it looked like a barn and I believe it had a loft in it.

JOHNSON: Now that must be this barn here though.

SLAUGHTER: Oh, no, I remember the big barn very well. But there was a fairly good-sized building right here, which I thought was a barn; then some smaller buildings here, but I don't remember a barn out there. When was that built?

JOHNSON: Well apparently 1911, according to the letters. He talks about building this barn.

SLAUGHTER: I do not remember it, and I am surprised. If I had pictures showing the relationships of these buildings from our house it would help, as I cannot be sure from these drawings in just what direction from them our house was. And it has been 50 or 60 years since I stood in our yard and observed these buildings, but I am still surprised as my memory of the other two buildings is so clear.

JOHNSON: Well, you know there were buildings that

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have come and gone. For instance there was a root cellar apparently out here. You know they have done some archeological digging, and they discovered remnants of a...

SLAUGHTER: There was a hitching post.

JOHNSON: Yes.

SLAUGHTER: And the stile box for mounting a horse; that could be there. The chicken yard -- there's a little building out here. I think there's a little building out here.

JOHNSON: Yes, apparently there was, but nobody can remember ever seeing it. The foundation stones are still there.

SLAUGHTER: But the barn you place here to the north and west of the big barn -- that's what bothers me.

JOHNSON: It was at a little bit of an angle; we have pictures that show it. Apparently it was torn down in the mid-50's.

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SLAUGHTER: I think I watered the horse right about here; I don't know.

JOHNSON: Yes, see there's a cistern and pump; they had a cistern here on that northeast side of the big barn, the old barn, a trough.

SLAUGHTER: And here's a porch and covered place here, and you went in here, and you got in the dining room.

JOHNSON: Yes, what do you remember about the inside of the house? You said you visited there a number of times.

SLAUGHTER: I didn't get beyond the dining room. I didn't go through the house. There were more rooms downstairs than the dining room.

JOHNSON: Were you ever there for a meal?

SLAUGHTER: Yes, I ate there.

JOHNSON: What was the occasion?

SLAUGHTER: Threshing. We were there a number of

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times threshing.

JOHNSON: How would they get everybody around the table? Did they have to use two tables, or...

SLAUGHTER: Well, usually you would have two sets, two sets of diners.

JOHNSON: Oh, they would go in shifts; you had two shifts.

SLAUGHTER: Yes. But in our house, we had a big table in the kitchen, and a big table in the dining room. I should think we could seat over twenty people, and that would take care of most of them. Lets see, we would have about five or six pitchers in the field; three or four grain wagons, seven or eight bundle wagons. We'd have about twenty people. We could seat twenty people.

JOHNSON: But now in the Truman house, the kitchen was very small. You know they enlarged that later. Remember that being very small?

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SLAUGHTER: Yes.

JOHNSON: And they didn't seat...

SLAUGHTER: No, they didn't seat them out there.

JOHNSON: They sat them...

SLAUGHTER: Well, I'll tell, you, they ate fast.

JOHNSON: But they would have two shifts maybe.

SLAUGHTER: Yes, I would think that they would have two shifts.

JOHNSON: But you ate there several times with other threshers.

SLAUGHTER: Yes.

JOHNSON: And who was helping serve the food?

SLAUGHTER: Well, you see, when I was there, Harry was in the war. Mary was there and Mrs. Truman, and then they had one or two -- yes they had more women than we had. There were several women

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there to help, I don't know who the women were. I don't remember who they were; maybe I knew then. But my mother would have one person come over to help.

JOHNSON: Did you talk about Harry while he was in the war? Do you remember the conversation? What kind of conversation they had, or whether they ever talked about Harry, and what he might be doing over in France?

SLAUGHTER: Well, I don't remember any special conversation, but he would be of interest, because he was not an unknown quantity. He had a charisma. People knew Harry Truman.

JOHNSON: Once they met him, they remembered him.

SLAUGHTER: They liked him.

JOHNSON: He had a ready smile and grin, or what?

SLAUGHTER: Yes.

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JOHNSON: He showed an interest in everybody he meet I suppose.

SLAUGHTER: He did, and he was affable, but you know, I think in our house, he had a certain deference. Really I believe it was; I never realized. it. It comes out in his letters. It embarrassed him that he had not had a better education than he had, and he makes a snide remark about my father. Of course, my father never boasted about his education. If my father mentioned education, it would be just that he went to the University of Missouri. He always studied at home, and when he went to the university he walked from home in Jackson County. He had no trouble with his studies. His father was a teacher, had been a teacher, And my father had a good mind. He read a lot, and had many interests.

JOHNSON: But your father did attend the university? Did he get a degree?

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SLAUGHTER: Yes, he was there two years. He got a degree in pedagogy, for goodness sake.

JOHNSON: To teach school.

SLAUGHTER: He taught school. a year or two, and then he started farming. He made a lot more money farming than he ever would have teaching school...

JOHNSON: But his father, your grandfather...

SLAUGHTER: He was a teacher; he taught for a long time.

JOHNSON: It kind of passed down; this interest to education was passed down through the family apparently.

SLAUGHTER: My grandfather, sure he knew Greek and Latin. He knew surveying and he set out the lines of his farm with his instruments, by the light of the moon, by the North Star.

JOHNSON: This was John Slaughter?

SLAUGHTER: No, no. This was Elijah Slaughter, my grandfather.

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JOHNSON: But there was a John, Sr. wasn't there?

SLAUGHTER: No. I had a brother John. My great-grandfather was William, William Slaughter. He died in Independence in 1871. Anderson Shipp Truman and John Truman probably knew them both.

JOHNSON: Every one of your brothers and sisters, it seems, did go to college, beyond high school.

SLAUGHTER: Yes, they all went to college.

JOHNSON: That was very unusual, especially in those days.

SLAUGHTER: It was at that time, and I think that's what bothered Harry.

JOHNSON: But his mother had been to a Baptist seminary, or Baptist school for girls.

SLAUGHTER: But I don't think her education bothered her. She was a very down-to-earth woman, and she spoke her mind. She was an intelligent woman.

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JOHNSON: So you think that Harry was a little defensive or overcompensated.

SLAUGHTER: I would think. I really believe so.

JOHNSON: John Anderson Truman apparently didn't have as much education as his wife had, as Martha had, but he was rather self-assured and he was interested in political affairs.

SLAUGHTER: He was interested in politics. They weren't stupid people. They didn't make money. They didn't make money.

JOHNSON: Well, you know, he was supposed to have lost a big nest egg, or a good-sized amount of money, in the grain market in 1901.

SLAUGHTER: I have heard that, and I've never seen any indication of how much it was. I don't think he could have lost all that much. He could have made it up in those years.

JOHNSON: They moved to a smaller house in Independence.

SLAUGHTER: I know. I don't know how much they lost.

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JOHNSON: Well, what was your father's opinion of either John Anderson Truman or Harry Truman?

SLAUGHTER: Oh, the relationship was good, as far as that goes.

JOHNSON: Getting back to that rally in 1922, in Hickman Mills for Harry, what else did he do, do you know?

SLAUGHTER: I think that's the only time that he was in just that position. I mean, that was the only time probably Harry needed anybody to call on. After that he became fairly well-known, and whether he had local rallies, I don't know. I was not at home.

JOHNSON: Was your dad a road overseer, or become one?

SLAUGHTER: No.

JOHNSON: Did he ever want to?

SLAUGHTER: No, why should he? It would have been a nuisance. He had a farm to run.

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JOHNSON: And he ran that farm right up until he died, in '35?

SLAUGHTER: You see, my brother John came back and put in a dairy, and my father sort of receded from the business. John actually became the business head of the family about 1924 or '25 on.

JOHNSON: After you graduated from college, you went to Columbia?

SLAUGHTER: Yes. I went to Columbia. I went to Columbia in New York in '25. I was 18 when I graduated from high school. I was home one year after that. I got through Drake in the spring of '25, I remember.

JOHNSON: Was that a four-year program?

SLAUGHTER: Yes. So I would have started in the fall of '21. I didn't start to school until I was practically eight years old, but I knew how to read and write before I went to school. It just happened because my older sister got embarrassed

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about me. She said, "Why doesn't Steve learn to read and write?" So she got a book and she taught me to read and write; it didn't take long.

JOHNSON: Did your mother contribute anything?

SLAUGHTER: No, Ruth taught me. Mother thought it was a good idea. The first thing you know I was reading and writing on my own. You don't have to go to school to read and write. You don't have to go to school to become educated.

JOHNSON: You don't have to go to college to be educated. Harry Truman I guess proved that.

SLAUGHTER: That's so right. It's a great help, but it's not a necessity.

JOHNSON: There were no clubs or groups that they belonged to?

SLAUGHTER: No.

JOHNSON: But I guess Harry did get involved in the Farm Bureau.

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SLAUGHTER: Only moderately.

JOHNSON: How about 4-H? Was he involved in 4-H?

SLAUGHTER: Not actively. I would say not actively.

JOHNSON: Did your father get involved in any investments? Did he have anything to do with Truman becoming involved in investing, in zinc mining, in oil...

SLAUGHTER: Oh, no. Oh no. He thought those were poor investments.

JOHNSON: Perhaps he was conservative, so to speak. But he got into the banking business.

SLAUGHTER: Yes. My father was in banking.

JOHNSON: That was his main business interest?

SLAUGHTER: My father had other business interests than banking, other business interests than farming, but farming was always his main business interest. He was active in the Farm Bureau but that was not a business interest.

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JOHNSON: Do you remember anything about the equipment, the types of farm equipment used on the Truman farm?

SLAUGHTER: It was up-to-date. They had all the rakes and plows that...

JOHNSON: Did your father have a tractor before you left in 1921?

SLAUGHTER: No, because we knew we were going to leave farming. We didn't become farmers; John came back and helped father out. But he wasn't going to stay with the farm either.

JOHNSON: But he did?

SLAUGHTER: For a few years, yes, John bought the controlling interest in the Hickman Bank before father died I believe. I think so.

JOHNSON: Well, who did most of the farm work then?

SLAUGHTER: We rented it. We built another house south of the barn, a tenant house, and rented it. The

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railroad came through between the house and the barn, and when the Blue Ridge Boulevard was built through the farm, for goodness sakes...

JOHNSON: Cut it up like a puzzle.

Do you remember the farm sale in 1919? When Harry decided not to go back into farming they had a farm sale. Do you recall anything about that? Did any of the Slaughters attend that farm sale?

SLAUGHTER: I wouldn't know, because I don't remember any farm sale.

JOHNSON: That was in 1919.

SLAUGHTER: Well, I might have been at home then. Sure I was. But I don't remember a farm sale. You know there are some things I'm not too clear on. I'm not sure when Vivian left the farm. I don't think Vivian came back after the war at all.

JOHNSON: Well, I think he did help farm the land. He married in 1911 and moved away from the farm, to his own farm. But then in the twenties he apparently

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came back and helped farm the land there, although he lived somewhere else, but not very far away. Then in 1930 he built the house, that house near the old house. And then his sons farmed it part of the time.

SLAUGHTER: I lost track of Vivian when I went to college. I saw him at church once in a while. His kids were at church, but I didn't get acquainted with them. I knew Vivian of course.

JOHNSON: Talking about those meals out there at the farm, what would they serve? Do you recall at all what kind of food they would have?

SLAUGHTER: They would have roast beef, mashed potatoes, beans...

JOHNSON: Potatoes and gravy?

SLAUGHTER: Would have probably gravy. I think nearly always we had mashed potatoes; that's what I remember, mashed potatoes, That is what I would expect.

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JOHNSON: And then beans, and -- what about dessert?

SLAUGHTER: Oh yes, I was thinking about dessert.

JOHNSON: Pies?

SLAUGHTER: Yes. I would think they might have pies. They could be prepared ahead of time. Everybody likes pie, and frankly a heavy meal wouldn't bother them. They had good appetites.

JOHNSON: I remember those myself in the thirties. We had a threshing crew that came by when I was a kid, and it was not much different. I mean they had an old steam engine pull it up there, until they got a gasoline tractor.

Your recollections of Harry Truman were involved mainly with the threshing. Well, the first time was when he came out to your farm to thresh, and then the other times were when you were at the Truman farm helping.

SLAUGHTER: Yes. By the time I was helping he was gone.

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JOHNSON: Were there any other times when you saw him on the farm?

SLAUGHTER: Except when he would come down to talk to father about something, or when I would see him across the fence. He might stop and talk. But remember that in all of these cases I would just be an observer. I was much younger.

JOHNSON: Now he would ride his horse to get around.

SLAUGHTER: Oh, if he came down to see us he would ride his horse.

JOHNSON: And then he got a car, a Stafford car in 1913 I think it was.

SLAUGHTER: I saw that car a few times, but not often. I just happened to see it. I would be on Grandview Road when they drove by.

JOHNSON: I notice your family had a car in 1912.

SLAUGHTER: Yes.

JOHNSON: And you remember Mary Jane, you say, and of

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course Vivian. How about Mary Jane Truman? What are your recollections of Mary Jane, especially during those early years?

SLAUGHTER: Mary Jane, oh yes, but I did not see her often. Mostly at threshing time.

JOHNSON: But she had dates.

SLAUGHTER: She had dates, but I think she was not popular with the boys.

JOHNSON: Do you remember who she dated? You mentioned some names.

SLAUGHTER: My brother Doc took her out a few times.

JOHNSON: That's William? Your brother Doc is William, okay. He dated her a few times.

SLAUGHTER: I don't think over a couple of times. And then Val Brightwell. A little fellow. He was the son of the cashier in the Grandview Bank. And I think he went with her fairly frequently, but it didn't come to anything. As far as I know, I would say that was the last one. I'm not too

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familiar with her social life. We were not in the social life of Grandview and that's where I would have seen her.

JOHNSON: You went to Hickman Mills, because you were just a little closer to Hickman Mills. But you said Mary Jane taught piano to your sister for...

SLAUGHTER: We were closer to Hickman Mills but we, as a family, had been in the Hickman Mills community for 75 years. Grandview was a new community. My sister Ruth took piano lessons from Mary Jane one summer.

JOHNSON: Just one summer. Would Mary Jane come to your place, or...

SLAUGHTER: No, Ruth would go up there.

JOHNSON: And sit down and play the piano at the Truman farm.

SLAUGHTER: She probably would drive our old horse there. You could walk right across, not far,

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but she'd go to the Grandview Road and take that route.

JOHNSON: Do you remember that old piano? Did you ever see it when you were in the Truman house?

SLAUGHTER: I don't remember whether I ever did or not. I don't remember.

JOHNSON: That was in the north parlor so you probably wouldn't have seen it. You just got into the dining room you say?

SLAUGHTER: Yes, I don't think I went beyond the dining room.

JOHNSON: Do you remember the stove in the dining room?

SLAUGHTER: No. It was summer. There was no fire.

JOHNSON: Anything that struck you about the house? Anything different from any other house inside, the kitchen or the dining room? Anything that caught your eye?

SLAUGHTER: No, it wasn't as big as our house.

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JOHNSON: It seemed a little more crowded then? Do you remember a roll-top desk in that dining room off on the north side?

SLAUGHTER: I really don't. I really don't.

JOHNSON: You were interested in eating.

SLAUGHTER: I went in there to eat, and I was interested more in the people around me. And a lot of the people I didn't know because they were the Grandview crowd. Perhaps there would be some Babcock representatives. Gaylon would be there no doubt.

JOHNSON: Gaylon Babcock. What do you remember about him?

SLAUGHTER: Oh, I saw Gaylon more frequently of course. He was in the Hickman community and I knew the family, C. W. Babcock, They went to church very frequently and Gaylon married a girl that taught in Ruskin, and everyone called her Mac. I don't know what her first name was. Her last name was McPherson.

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JOHNSON: Do you know why he would be critical of the Trumans?

SLAUGHTER: No, I was surprised. I saw some of the things that he said about Harry, and I was surprised. Things I would never have said, nor did I believe. Gaylon saw the side of Vivian on these things, and Vivian may have gotten a raw deal. Harry was a favorite of his mother, there was no doubt about that. Vivian didn't have the outgoing personality that Harry had. You didn't think of Vivian when you looked at Harry. He was just another personality.

JOHNSON: They were brothers, and brothers can often be quite different from one another.

SLAUGHTER: Oh, they were. They were quite different. I had the feeling that Vivian resented Harry's place in the family.

JOHNSON: Do you recall ever seeing Harry Truman home on furlough during the war in uniform?

SLAUGHTER: No. If he was home he would be seeing

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Bess. He wouldn't be out here. I never saw Bess Truman in my life. You know when she was in the hospital, Research Hospital, my wife was in the hospital at the time, and I sent word up

through a nurse. I thought maybe Margaret would come in, but I understand that Margaret was out of the country at the time. So I didn't go up to see Bess. I would not have gone except to see Margaret.

JOHNSON: Did you maintain an acquaintance at all with Harry? I think you mentioned some letters, that you do have some letters?

SLAUGHTER: We had some letters from Harry.

JOHNSON: What years are we talking about?

SLAUGHTER: The first letter would be after I saw him in '36.

JOHNSON: Were you out of touch with Harry Truman and with the Trumans in general from the time that you left for Drake, say by 1921?

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SLAUGHTER: Especially after I left for New York.

JOHNSON: In 1925.

SLAUGHTER: Yes. I was home in the summers from Drake, but from then on I hardly saw any of them.

In 1936 I was in Washington, and for old family relations, Wilma and I called on Harry. It was the opening of Congress, in January, and Bess and Margaret were in Independence. They were to arrive the next week or so. So Harry gave Wilma and me tickets, and had us call at the office and pick up tickets to sit in the family section, in the Senate. I sent him some pictures when I got back to New York and he wrote me a letter.

JOHNSON: Your wife's name is Wilma. When were you married?

SLAUGHTER: We were married in September 1926.

JOHNSON: Where is she from?

SLAUGHTER: I met her at Drake. Her home had been in

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Savannah, Missouri, and then her folks moved to Des Moines, and I knew her in Des Moines.

JOHNSON: Were you majoring in history while you were at Drake?

SLAUGHTER: Yes, I had a history scholarship. Got \$200 for it. I wrote a paper as a part of the condition of having this scholarship, and then I expanded that same paper for my master's degree at Columbia. So I got through this history field without much extra work.

JOHNSON: Did you ever think about asking Harry Truman to help you get a job in the early thirties?

SLAUGHTER: No.

JOHNSON: He was on this Manpower Commission here in Missouri in the early thirties. He had some pull.

SLAUGHTER: No, I did not ask for a job.

JOHNSON: Okay, you say you do have several letters personally in 1936?

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SLAUGHTER: I had one letter from him in 1936 after I sent him the pictures. I had a letter from him in 1944 and another letter in 1945. I wrote him the 1945 letter when he was President. I wrote that on purpose. I wanted a letter back from the White House. I thought I would get it.

JOHNSON: Did he sign it?

SLAUGHTER: Yes. Oh yes, I have it here somewhere.

JOHNSON: How about your other brothers? Did they get letters from Truman or write to Truman?

SLAUGHTER: I don't know whether they wrote to him or not.

JOHNSON: He had a good memory for people, didn't he?

SLAUGHTER: He did have a good memory for people. I have other letters. He wrote a letter to a friend of my father's in Columbia, Missouri. Harry was Senator at that time and I have that.

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And I have, I would think, as many as three or four letters.

JOHNSON: Would you want to make xerox copies of those as appendices to this transcript? We could.

SLAUGHTER: Yes, I will do it. I gave copies to the Tarrytown Historical Society.

JOHNSON: You mean the copies of the letters?

SLAUGHTER: Copies. I have the originals, but I would have difficulty finding them. I mean Wilma will find them. They aren't thrown away,*

JOHNSON: For one thing we don't have much correspondence in his first term, because apparently those files were put away in Washington during the war and...

SLAUGHTER: Well, there's nothing special, except the one to this friend of my father, which is quite a different sort of letter from what Harry wrote to me. Mine were just nice, polite replies.

JOHNSON: You went to Washington, D.C.?

*See Appendices for reproductions of these letters.

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SLAUGHTER: That was in '36.

JOHNSON: Did you visit Senator Truman in his office there?

SLAUGHTER: Yes, in his office,

JOHNSON: What did you talk about?

SLAUGHTER: Well, we talked about my father who had just died. We didn't have a long conversation, but we would talk about our common backgrounds.

JOHNSON: Were you the only one in your family that visited him while he was in office?

SLAUGHTER: I think so. I don't think my brother Homer did.

JOHNSON: Was that the last time that you saw Harry Truman?

SLAUGHTER: That was the last time I saw Harry Truman.

JOHNSON: In '36?

SLAUGHTER: Yes.

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JOHNSON: And you talked partly about your father. Were you politically active?

SLAUGHTER: I didn't attend any political meetings in New York for anybody that I know of. I voted. I usually voted, and in Tarrytown I wrote a seven or eight-page piece on Harry for the Historical Society.* It was a nice piece.

JOHNSON: Getting back to the farm again. Do you remember any other events around the farm like picnics out there in that maple grove?

SLAUGHTER: I never attended any because we weren't in the social life with them. But I think I

remember one picnic out in that grove. Those were all maple trees.

JOHNSON: That was pretty impressive looking.

SLAUGHTER: Oh yes, it was, because there were so many of them, all, in straight lines, four rows, and the house was way back. The house was two or three hundred yards back, and yes, it was very impressive,

*See appendices

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JOHNSON: Do you remember ever seeing a tennis court? In the letters he said that he made a tennis court for Bess where they could play tennis. Do you remember anything about a tennis court?

SLAUGHTER: I don't remember them playing tennis and I don't remember if they did have a court.

JOHNSON: Did they play horseshoes? Was there a horseshoe court out there? Do you remember?

SLAUGHTER: If they had a horseshoe court it would be in the back anyway. There was good grass out in front; they wouldn't want to spoil it.

JOHNSON: They played croquet I suppose in those days.

SLAUGHTER: Oh, everyone played croquet; that would be in their front yard.

JOHNSON: But you newer played any games there?

SLAUGHTER: No.

JOHNSON: You were there on work assignments.

SLAUGHTER: I was only on work assignments. I was

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18 years younger than Harry, 17 or 18. I was a kid, and when I was old enough to work, Harry was gone, and Harry got married. He married a few weeks after he helped us vaccinate those hogs.

JOHNSON: Oh yes. You've written that up here in your family history. Is there anything in addition to what has been published that comes to mind? You said something about him getting there at 5 or 5:30 in the morning. That sounds awfully early. You had something like forty hogs to vaccinate. Did you come across any mention of that in his letters?

SLAUGHTER: No. Oh, no. He had other things on his mind at that time. In fact, he mentioned helping us vaccinate hogs in a letter to Bess, but that was in 1911 or '12. I don't remember him coming down then. And yet I must have been there. He got married just a few weeks, or a few days after we vaccinated the hogs in 1919.

JOHNSON: So it would have been June 1919. And that was his last job on the farm?

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SLAUGHTER: Oh, I would say so. I would say so.

JOHNSON: That was his farewell, his au revoir. He was married on June 28, 1919. Yes, that must have been one of his last jobs on the farm. In fact, we had hardly any evidence at all of what he did in those first few months after he was discharged. Did you hear anything about why he decided not to go back into farming rather than into the haberdashery?

SLAUGHTER: As I remember it, Harry made a talk at the meeting of the Ruskin High School Alumni Association soon after his return home from France. That would have been in May 1919.

No, We were not surprised that he didn't come back on the farm. I think we were rather thinking that he made the right decision. We hoped the haberdashery would do well.

JOHNSON: What was the thinking at the time as to the reasons why the haberdashery failed? Did they blame Harry? Did they blame the Republican

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administration, the recession, or whatever?

SLAUGHTER: When did it fail?

JOHNSON: 1922.

SLAUGHTER: I suspect you couldn't blame anybody, just the times, because it seemed like everybody was having hard times.

JOHNSON: Especially farmers. For instance if they mortgaged land during the war, and then prices of farm goods dropped, they would have debts to pay. But your father hadn't done that; he hadn't expanded during the war and didn't have a mortgage to pay on?

SLAUGHTER: My father always made more money in hard times than in good times.

JOHNSON: He was always prepared for them?

SLAUGHTER: I don't know why, but I heard him say that. That's the time when he made his money.

JOHNSON: That's usually the time to buy things up

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if you have the money.

SLAUGHTER: I wouldn't know how to analyze it, but I've heard him say that, and we were never hard up.

JOHNSON: You say he was one of the founders of the bank?

SLAUGHTER: The Grandview Bank.

JOHNSON: When did he do that; when was that founded?

SLAUGHTER: In 1907.

JOHNSON: It weathered the recession, I suppose, of the early 1920s.

SLAUGHTER: My father sold his stock in that bank of Grandview at a good price. It was not worth as much later.

JOHNSON: Maybe he sold it during the war then when the prices were up. The twenties were not good for farmers, isn't that right?

SLAUGHTER: That's right.

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JOHNSON: And yet your dad was putting several people through college. Is he borrowing to do that, or was that profits from the farm?

SLAUGHTER: He had a dairy. The dairy made better money than farming.

JOHNSON: That's a lot of work, dairying seven days a week.

SLAUGHTER: Sure.

JOHNSON: Did you have to help milk?

SLAUGHTER: Of course I did. Sure.

JOHNSON: Hand milking?

SLAUGHTER: Of course.

JOHNSON: How many cows would you milk?

SLAUGHTER: We had about 25-30 cows. I'd milk, ten or twelve cows, night and morning.

JOHNSON: Night and morning, ten to twelve cows, that's a lot of work, I milked a few in my day.

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SLAUGHTER: Yes, but you know, when you're on a farm you expect to work. You don't feel sorry for yourself.

JOHNSON: It kind of ties you down, especially cows that have to be tended night and morning,

SLAUGHTER: Well, yes, somebody has to be there every day.

JOHNSON: I know the Trumans didn't get into dairy farming.

SLAUGHTER: No.

JOHNSON: They didn't like to milk. Did you sell milk to them then?

SLAUGHTER: No, we sold cream to a dairy company that picked it up on the Grandview Road and they took it into Kansas City.

JOHNSON: Was it delivered in tin cans and that sort of thing, and then they'd take it by train?

SLAUGHTER: No. We sold the cream to the dairy company

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for a short time, then we took it into Kansas City ourselves in sterilized cans and sold it to the Savoy Hotel.

JOHNSON: It went directly to the Savoy Hotel in Kansas City for a number of years. When?

SLAUGHTER: So far as I know we did it until we stopped the dairying business. I don't know when they stopped.

JOHNSON: Well, you got out of the dairy business when you got into Columbia.

SLAUGHTER: I don't know when my father and John stopped because I was in New York. When I came back the first time, I think it was 1929, I believe that the dairy business was over by then; I'm not sure.

JOHNSON: What happened to your farm then?

SLAUGHTER: Well, we rented it out and we kept it until after my mother died in 1944. I think so. And then we sold parcels of it and we sold

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a good many acres.

JOHNSON: During that postwar building boom.

SLAUGHTER: We kept other parts of it. We finally sold the last of it after my brother John died in January, 1961. In 1964 we sold the last of it.

JOHNSON: How large a farm was it during the Truman years when the Trumans were on the farm? How many acres did the farm amount to in those days, say in 1910?

SLAUGHTER: We still had the 220 acres. But the Trumans had 580 or 590 acres.

JOHNSON: Close to 600. When the mortgage was foreclosed in 1940, there was 287. I wonder why the difference. Do you have any idea what happened to shrink that farm to 287 acres?

SLAUGHTER: Well, they must have sold parts of it for needed money.

JOHNSON: But the Slaughters never bought any land

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from them?

SLAUGHTER: No, we never bought land. Oh no, we weren't wanting farm land.

JOHNSON: You kept the original homestead and that was it.

SLAUGHTER: The old house burned, I forget when.

JOHNSON: You had a picture of that house in your book.

SLAUGHTER: Yes, I know.

JOHNSON: I think Babcock mentioned something about a barn burning down with cows?

SLAUGHTER: That's right; twenty-seven cows.

JOHNSON: And they all died. When did that happen?

SLAUGHTER: About 1917.

JOHNSON: Oh, while the Trumans were farming. Was there any help that they tried to give? Do you remember anything?

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SLAUGHTER: Oh, that barn went up just like that. In 15 minutes it was gone.

JOHNSON: Did you replace that?

SLAUGHTER: We rebuilt. Built a whole new barn for hay and for feeding cows, and then a new barn by the silo just for milking. We fed them grain and corn silage. But all the hay was in the hay barn because they got more strict on bacteria in the milk.

JOHNSON: Was there insurance on that sort of thing, or was that a total loss for you?

SLAUGHTER: No, it was a loss, the whole thing.

JOHNSON: That would hurt. That was supposed to be the golden age of agriculture 1900 to 1917, when farmers were getting a fair price. That's usually the basis for parity. Did it seem to be a kind of golden age for farming? The prices of land did tend to go up, and the price of the crops?

SLAUGHTER: We didn't sell any land.

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JOHNSON: But your milk prices probably...

SLAUGHTER: Milk prices went up, and the farm profits went up. We were never pressed for money. Father didn't need any money. The railroad paid him \$50,000 and they paid nobody else anything like that.

JOHNSON: This was for the right-of-way to come through there.

SLAUGHTER: I think they paid the Trumans less than \$20,000.

JOHNSON: Oh, the Trumans got money for the right-of-way for the railroad? About when would that have happened?

SLAUGHTER: In the twenties.

JOHNSON: I hadn't thought about that because I know they say they got no money for the highway or the road right-of-way, the Blue Ridge Extension. Is it true that no farmers got paid for the right-of-way there? Or did they?

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SLAUGHTER: I think we got paid for something, but I don't remember just what it was.

JOHNSON: You think you did get paid something for the road right-of-way?

SLAUGHTER: Well, it had to do with the pipeline. Had to move the pipeline. They had to move it, and I had a brother Doc who said, "Well, let's charge them something." And we didn't charge any great amount. I think we might have got one or two or three thousand dollars.

JOHNSON: But the railroad really did pay...

SLAUGHTER: The railroad paid us \$50,000.

JOHNSON: And you think the Trumans got maybe \$20,000?

SLAUGHTER: I think less than 20. Well, the railroad went between our house and the barn. And they didn't want to have a fight, a law suit.

JOHNSON: Well, that helped to pay for these educations, no doubt, the education of the Slaughters, the railroad.

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SLAUGHTER: No. We were through college by then. At least we were on our own.

JOHNSON: The farm wasn't paying that much in the twenties. It just wasn't that profitable. Of course, now you say dairying might have been a bit better.

SLAUGHTER: My father was a good businessman. We bought 200 Arkansas razorback hogs, made \$4,000 off of them in six months. Just a few months. They just put on fat like nobody's business. All you had to do was to keep them from jumping the fences and getting out.

JOHNSON: Did you trade mules, or horses? The Trumans did trade in some horses and some mule trading.

SLAUGHTER: They didn't work mules much on the farm. We just had one span of mules.

JOHNSON: When did you get the first tractor?

SLAUGHTER: We didn't get a tractor. We didn't put in a milking machine, and we didn't buy a tractor. We knew we were all going to leave the farm.

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Father didn't want to do it; he was retiring.

JOHNSON: How about cattle on the Truman farm?

SLAUGHTER: He had his back pasture filled with cows and steers. They were mostly steers, they were put there to graze.

JOHNSON: The back pasture; you're talking about...

SLAUGHTER: Well, he had about 200 acres back there east of the barn.

JOHNSON: East, across 71?

SLAUGHTER: There was no 71 then. There was no road running north and south through the Truman farm then except the Grandview Road. The north-south road past our farm, on the west and between the Hedges part and the 20 across the road in front of our house, went to the present Martha Truman Road and then went west to the Grandview Road and stopped there. Seventy--one was built about 1925 or 1926. The railroad through our farm and 71 were built, so I believe, between 1925 when I

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left for the East and 1929 when Wilma and I were back on a vacation. At the Martha Truman Road, where Truman Corners is now, our farm continued on south a quarter of a mile, and we had that quarter of a mile and the one-half mile to the east as a boundary. The Truman farm at Truman Corners was cultivated -- hay or grain. The Truman land to our south was pasture as was our land to the north of the Trumans across the rock fences.

The stock in the pasture to our south were mostly steers, put there to graze on the grass and gain some weight and then fed grain in preparation for the market. If the Trumans had registered cattle they were kept in the smaller pasture south and southwest of the barns.

So far as I know, prior to the building of 71, every road in Jackson County, outside of Kansas City and perhaps roads in some of the towns, was maintained and probably built by the county.

JOHNSON: Then there was no 77. and no highway and there was no underpass and no overpass.

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SLAUGHTER: That is correct, I think work was planned for 71 and some preparation for it may have begun but it went through after I left.

JOHNSON: That was a new road.

SLAUGHTER: I believe I first drove a car on 71 in 1929 when we came home. And that's the first time I saw that railroad.

JOHNSON: Would you have been paid for right-of-way for 71?

SLAUGHTER: No. The land would increase in value. We didn't sell. It was not farm land anymore; we knew that. Kansas City was growing and our farm would soon have value only as business and residential property.

JOHNSON: You foresaw that.

SLAUGHTER: We didn't sell the land; we kept it. We didn't sell any of it until after my mother died. We didn't need the money. We had all left home; my father didn't need the money. He had money

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out with interest.

JOHNSON: When was the last time you saw Vivian Truman?

SLAUGHTER: I can tell you exactly. It was at my mother's funeral. He was a pallbearer. That was the last time I ever saw him.

JOHNSON: How about Mary Jane? Were you fairly well acquainted with Mary Jane?

SLAUGHTER: Not that well acquainted but I knew her. I saw her at the Grandview Baptist Church when she had a date with Val Brightwell. I think that's the only time I saw Val Brightwell.

JOHNSON: Oh, they were at the Baptist Church in Grandview?

SLAUGHTER: One Sunday I was there at church and Mary played the piano; and Val Brightwell was there.

JOHNSON: You would have been about 16 if that was before Harry left for the Army. You were 16 when he left.

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SLAUGHTER: Yes, but I was home in the summers up until 1924. I don't know what time or year I went up there to that church that Sunday. But I think that my father had sold his stock in the bank to Val's father before that date. He sold his shares; my mother had some shares too. He kept those, and he sold his shares.

JOHNSON: None of your brothers or sisters were ever on outings or dates or anything like that with any of the Trumans?

SLAUGHTER: I don't think so, because as I say, there was not that much socializing.

JOHNSON: You never played cards with them. Sometimes farm families would play cards.

SLAUGHTER: We didn't play cards with anyone except we children played cards with each other and we played other games among ourselves. I played chess with my father. He loved to play chess. And sometimes we played cards with other children when they visited us but not at their home.

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We saw people at church; we saw them in school. There were parent-teacher meetings, but there was very little social life as I remember in that whole community. I saw John Strode once. He was with my father in the bank. I saw Urial Holmes twice in my life. He was a great friend of father's and we knew him so well. He lived over at Red Bridge. I went over there to see his son Russell once and Urial came to our house once on a business matter.

JOHNSON: On Saturday nights in town, you would go to Hickman Mills, and the Trumans would probably go to Grandview?

SLAUGHTER: Saturday night had no social significance to us. There was no town at Hickman Mills, only the church, the store, the blacksmith shop and a half dozen houses in the vicinity. It made a loose social center, but I don't think Harry had a busy social life in Grandview either except with the Masons, and with his Independence friends and relatives. But more than that, we were never

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lonesome at home. We worked, we enjoyed the farm, we enjoyed our family life. We had a large library, books and books -- complete sets of most well-known authors. All of us read -- books, magazines, the newspaper. We got up early and went to bed early.

JOHNSON: Did any of the Slaughters belong to the Masons?

SLAUGHTER: No, none of the Slaughters belonged to the Masons.

JOHNSON: If you want to send us copies of those letters we can include them as appendices. And if anything else comes to mind, why, don't hesitate to add to what we have on here. I appreciate your taking all this time, and we'll be sending you a transcript. I think there is one final story here.

SLAUGHTER: It was a hot summer day, and Vivian and John [his father] were on the same horse, one horse, and galloping down the dirt road -- you know, we had a dirt road in those days. They were going at a great rate, and Vivian had the reins. John was in the back. John Truman had

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a hatchet in his hand, and he was going to settle a little trouble with a neighbor over a fence.

JOHNSON: So he had a hatchet? I assume he didn't use it; he just maybe waved it in the air.

SLAUGHTER: No, no, it wasn't used.. No trouble came of it. But he was a quick-tempered man.

JOHNSON: He was on the same horse with Vivian riding off to see this neighbor. And you say you saw this?

SLAUGHTER: No, I didn't see it. I believe my father saw it, or maybe a neighbor.

JOHNSON: But he was the one that reported it, your father?

SLAUGHTER: The story came to the family...

JOHNSON: He wasn't going to slaughter a Slaughter, right?

SLAUGHTER: No. Oh no, it didn't involve us at all.

[107-110 are image files]

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AS I KNEW HARRY TRUMAN

By Stephen S. Slaughter

After the Civil War my maternal grandfather, John Havron, and Harry Truman's maternal grandfather, Sol Young, bought adjoining farms in Jackson County, Missouri. The Santa Fe Trail ran about three miles to the west, the county seat, Independence, was about sixteen miles to the north and a bit to the east. When Grandpa Havron bought the farm, 1869, my mother was six years old.

About 1880, my father, born in 1854 a few miles to the north, rented a farm just to the west of the Havron farm and it too adjoined the Young property. My father later bought the rented farm but while renting, and still a bachelor, he courted my mother and they were married and set up housekeeping on this rented property. Consequently my father and mother and the Young children, particularly Martha, or Mat as she was always called, and Harrison, her brother, were young people in the community together and grew up friends and neighbors. There was a common boundary between our property and the Young property of over three quarters of a mile, and from our house and yard we could look south and see the Young house and barns, the long lines of maples about the house and the expanse of land which made up their pastures. Many a time as a boy I sat on our back porch in the summer evenings and listened to the howl of the coyotes which had their dens in their back pasture.

It was shortly after 1901, the year I was born, that John Truman and his wife, Mat Young Truman, came to live permanently on the Sol Young farm. In the first volume of his *Memoirs*, Harry gives a brief

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summary of his early life, much of it spent in Independence, and it was not until four or five years after 1901 that he joined his parents on the farm. After high school he had remained in Kansas City and worked there in various jobs.

But to me there was never a time when he did not live on the farm, right up to the time of the First World War when he was sent to France. I knew Harry and his brother, Vivian, his sister, Mary, his father and mother, John and Mat Truman. I saw his uncle, Harrison Young, a number of times, and at least once I saw his grandmother. I also have a picture in my mind of Sol Young but I would need to know the date of his death to be sure of that.

Our relations with the Trumans were the usual ones neighbors had at that time in a farming community. We swapped work at threshing time, we called on each other in an emergency when special help was needed, we occasionally gossiped across the rock fence that separated the farms,

and we had the usual business dealings that brought us together. We always knew when they were cutting wheat, when they were planting corn, when they were putting up hay. They knew the same of us.

However, the joint property line was, in general, the dividing line between the Grandview and the Hickman Mills communities. We were on the Grandview rural mail route and had a Grandview address but we went to school and attended church in the Hickman community. The Trumans were more in the Grandview community and attended the Baptist church in Grandview.

That notwithstanding it brought no division between the two families. My sister took music lessons one summer from Harry's

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sister, Mary; his brother, Vivian, married a Hickman girl and Vivian and his wife were frequent attendants at our church, their children were regularly in the Sunday school. John Truman was our good friend and closet neighbor, the one we saw most frequently at work in the fields, the one we conferred with on any problem of keeping our stock separated, our fences repaired, and because of the long family association we felt a tie with the Truman family we felt with no other family in the community. When there was a dispute within the Young family over the disposal of the Young farm at the death of Mrs. Young, my father sided with the Trumans and he was of material assistance to them in retaining their claim.

When Harry first ran for county judge of the Eastern District in Jackson County, the part of the county outside Kansas City, Harry asked my father to arrange for, and preside at, the political rally that was held in the Hickman Mills church year. That was in 1922. I was at home from college that summer to work on the farm and I remember the meeting well. Harry spoke extemporaneously and made a most effective talk. One thing he said in the talk I remember most distinctly. He was accused by his opponents of being too young and too inexperienced to be county judge. In reply he said he had lived in the county practically all his life, as had his parents, he knew the county and its problems and he was thirty-eight years old, two years older than was required to the president of the United States. I can still feel the impact of that statement and the excitement that went through the crowd.

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He won the nomination and the election and he made a good judge. The judgeship was not exactly what the name implies. County commissioner describes the term better. The county judges had the oversight and maintenance of the roads and bridges of the county, the management and direction of the poor farm and any other property the county possessed.

After a two-year term as county judge of the Eastern District of the county, in 1926 he ran for presiding judge which office he held until he was elected to the United States Senate. But Jackson County was not the typical rural Missouri county. Kansas City was also in the county and while Kansas City had its own city government, the city formed a part of the Western District of the court and the county outside the city was growing rapidly in population. During Harry's terms as judge in the county court contracts of over sixty million dollars were voted for roads and hundreds of miles of road were laid. He granted the contracts, supervised the

construction through his engineers, made certain the money was well spent. There was never a complaint as to waste, inefficiency, or personal gain. Never in his whole public life was there a question as to his personal honesty and integrity.

After the meeting in the Hickman Mills church yard, I never saw Harry again until he was in the Senate. I was away in college after which I came East. Harry married after the war and lived in Independence where he had spent most of his early life and where he had gone to school. I have never met his wife nor have I met his daughter, Margaret. When he was a United States Senator my wife and I were in Washington and called on him in the Senate office

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building. It was the only time my wife ever saw him. She was impressed with his courtesy, his kindness, his concern for the family. He spoke complimentarily of the father who had recently died, and gave us tickets to the Senate family gallery for the opening of Congress the next day. His wife and daughter had been delayed in Independence.

We exchanged several letters after that. I usually addressed mine Dear Harry, it seemed the natural thing to do. His to me were Dear Steve. The last from him was from the White House after he became President.

I remember my first clear recollection of Harry Truman. It was wheat threshing time and as usual we swapped help with the Trumans, as we did with a number of other farmers. I was perhaps five or six years old and I stood with my younger sister near the fence in our yard watching the men and teams and wagons come in from the pasture gate and drive their teams past the barns to the fields. On one of the wagons, a bundle wagon, was Harry, standing in the wagon, light pants, old straw hat on his head. I have never forgotten it. I remember the color of his horses.

Another occasion, the last time I saw him on the farm. There was a sudden outbreak of hog cholera in the neighborhood and father decided we had to vaccinate our shoats, about forty of them, without delay. It was Saturday evening. He phoned the veterinarian to make sure he could come, and he phoned the Trumans. It was 1919 just after the war and I was the youngest boy left at home. The rest of our work force consisted of my father and the hired man. To handle the shoats it was best to have more help as my father

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was unable to do that type of work. Father phoned and talked to Mrs. Truman. The term Mrs. Truman was never used at home by my parents, it was always Mat, but here it is Mrs. Truman, a spunky and grand woman. Of the old school. The vaccinating of the hogs had to be done early as we had cows to milk and other chores to do, and we still had to get to Sunday school and church by ten o'clock.

At four-thirty the next morning Harry rode into the barn lot, tied his horse to the fence and we started to work. He was just out of the army, in a few weeks he was to be married, but we were not surprised it was Harry who came. If anyone has ever wrestled an eighty or a hundred pound shoat, he will know the kind of work cut out for us. It requires an active man to do the job.

Harry went at it like the old hand he was. We finished the job, brushed the dirt off our clothes, and Harry rode away. All part of being a neighbor.

To me, and to many throughout the country, Harry Truman's death marks the end of an era. It was also the end of a way of life, and it was a way of life that can never come again because the circumstances that made that life have gone forever. It was a simply life, sometimes a hard life, but it was a good life. It rested on rural and pioneer living and it had the rural and pioneer values. There was a personal relationship between people and between families, a spirit of trust and friendship, that is not so prevalent now. It doesn't seem so necessary. There was

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no great wealth but there was no hopeless poverty. Industry, thrift, honestly carried you through. Instead of the Madison Avenue "truth" and the Madison Avenue "morality", there was the real truth, the honest truth, and there was the honest integrity. That is the way Harry had been taught it, that is the way he understood it, and that is the way he lived.

[signed] Stephen S. Slaughter

January 1973

61 High Street

Tarrytown, New York 10591

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