

Oral History Interview with

REVEREND WELBERN BOWMAN

Former pastor of First Baptist Church, Grandview, Missouri, the church in which Harry S. Truman held membership for most of his adult life; pastor of the Grandview church, 1941-69; conducted funeral services for Mrs. Martha Truman, 1947; longtime friend and spiritual counselor of the Truman family.

Grandview, Missouri

February 4, 1981

By Niel Johnson, Harry S. Truman Library

The Harry S. Truman Library

Independence, Missouri

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NOTICE

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JOHNSON: I'd like to start, Reverend Bowman, by asking you for something of your own background. Could you tell me when and where you were born and what your parents' names were?

BOWMAN: Well, my parents' names were Jasper Bowman and Maggie Bowman. I was born in Cherokee, Kansas in 1904, July 31. When I was about five years old we moved back to north Missouri. That's where my parents originally had lived; in fact, they were born in Gentry County, Missouri and grew up

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there. I spent the rest of my time, through my schooling, in Gentry County, on a farm. My dad was a farmer.

JOHNSON: What town was that near, or close to?

BOWMAN: Our mail address was King City, Missouri, but we lived near a little town called Berlin. I went to the grade school and then to high school in the Grandview Consolidated Schools -- not the Grandview we live in now. It was a consolidated school in north Missouri. Later I went to Baptist Central Seminary in Kansas City, Kansas, and William Jewell College, and then back to Central Seminary again where I got my BD degree. In fact, I worked toward my doctor's degree, but I never did complete that. We got into a building program at the church; also right in the middle of my working towards this degree, the seminary split. It had been doubly aligned with the American Baptists and the Southern Baptists. It dissolved that relationship and became a Northern

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Baptist seminary, and they quit giving the doctor's degree. So that left me out in the cold, so to speak. Of course, at that time I was pastor here in Grandview; I came here in 1941. My wife and I moved here from Albany, Missouri where I was the pastor of the First Baptist Church.

JOHNSON: Was that your first charge?

BOWMAN: No, my first church was a little country church close to Princeton, Missouri. I was also pastor at Alanthus, Missouri. After leaving there, I went to Santa Rosa, Missouri and was pastor there for a number of years. In fact, I was pastor of two churches at the same time -- I preached one Sunday in one church and the next Sunday in the other. Besides Santa Rosa, I was pastor of the Freedom Baptist Church. Then I went to Albany.

I was at Albany for about two and a half years. Then I came to Grandview, in April of 1941. I was pastor here until I retired in '69, on the last day of July.

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JOHNSON: That was about 28 years?

BOWMAN: A little over 28. Twenty-eight years and three or four months, something like that.

JOHNSON: What brought you to Grandview, just an opening here?

BOWMAN: I had a letter from the church here and they asked me if I was interested. I came and preached one Sunday. Of course, the Baptists choose their preachers by having them come and they'll interview them, and have them preach, and then the church will vote whether they do or do not want them as a pastor. So the church called me and we moved here in April of '41. I was here until I retired.

JOHNSON: When was the first time you met any of the Truman family?

BOWMAN: I don't recall the exact date or time, but it was a short time after I came here, because Mary was active in the church at that time. She was

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among the first ones that I met when I came to Grandview.

JOHNSON: Was she teaching Sunday School when you first came?

BOWMAN: I don't think she was teaching at that time. She had been teaching before, but I don't think she was a teacher then. She did teach later during the time of my ministry. She had a group of young people; they called it the Young Married Couples class. I suppose there were 35-40 in her class. She taught this group for a number of years.

JOHNSON: You're not sure when you first met the Trumans, but what were the circumstances of the first time that you do recall visiting with the Trumans?

BOWMAN: Well, the first time I remember meeting with Grandma Truman, of course, she wasn't able to get out much even then, was in her home. She was a

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very outstanding person in a lot of ways, outspoken, and all of that. She had been a member of this church for a long time. I don't know the date -- it's in the minutes -- but a long time ago she had joined the Baptist Church here. But Mary was active in the church. Of course, the President's membership was still here, but he was in Washington at that time, as a Senator, when I came here.

JOHNSON: Do you know what year he took membership in the Grandview church?

BOWMAN: No, I'd have to check on that, but I think it was back in 1916. The date's on the plaque up there in the church.

JOHNSON: Do you know the church he belonged to previous to the Grandview church?

BOWMAN: No, I don't.

JOHNSON: Apparently he did belong to the Benton Boulevard Baptist Church...

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BOWMAN: In Kansas City?

JOHNSON: ...before he took membership here.

BOWMAN: I don't recall. In fact, I don't know whether he came by letter or by baptism. If he came from Benton he came by letter, a transfer letter.

JOHNSON: When you visited with his mother, Martha, do you recall anything that you conversed about? Did you talk about her son, Harry, do you recall?

BOWMAN: No, not at that time, because he was a Senator then, and really that's been 40 years ago, so I don't remember what our conversation was. But I know we did talk at various times about her son, and I know after he became President I did make the remark one day when I was visiting with her, something like, "You're proud of your son." And she said, "Yes, but I have another son that I'm just as proud of as I am of the President." In other words, she wasn't showing any partiality.

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JOHNSON: When did you first see President Truman, or was he still Senator or Vice President when you first met him?

BOWMAN: Well, I don't know. I may have met him when he was Senator, but I'm not positive. I know a short time after he became President his mother took sick, and she was very ill. He was here for about two weeks and...

JOHNSON: That was in 1947, March.

BOWMAN: He was out here at the home every day and I saw him almost every day for those two weeks, because we just lived about a block and a half from where the Trumans lived. So I would go over there most every day. Sometimes I would converse with him, and sometimes I'd just speak to him; he'd be there and I'd just step in and ask him how their mother was doing.

JOHNSON: Do you remember him attending any of the services, say, between 1941 when you came and this period until '47?

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BOWMAN: No, he didn't. He was not here in a service, to my knowledge, until he came when the church was dedicated. After the church was dedicated he was back by here a number of times. I remember one time I was in the church and he came by and stopped for a little while. Of course, that was on a weekday. Most of the time that he was here, it was during the week. He just wasn't here on a Sunday to come to church.

JOHNSON: You do have some correspondence apparently with Mr. Truman?

BOWMAN: Yes, I have a number of letters.

JOHNSON: When was it that you first wrote to him or he wrote to you?

BOWMAN: Oh, my goodness, I don't know. I know we corresponded back and forth quite a bit about the time the church was built. We started raising money back in 1948, but the building was not built until '49 and '50. We had quite

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a lot of correspondence at that time.

JOHNSON: Did you inform him of the fact that you were going to build a new building?

BOWMAN: No, I think the first that I remember about the church building was when Vivian, his brother, here in Grandview, was talking to Mr. Carr, one of the deacons. He said that he had either talked to Harry or he had had some correspondence with him, and Harry was asking him about the church. He said he would like to know more about it and wanted someone to get in touch with him. And so I made contact then with him and we corresponded back and forth and he invited us to come to Washington; he wanted to talk with us. So Mr. Carr and I went to Washington.

JOHNSON: About when would that have been?

BOWMAN: That was sometime in '49, but I don't remember what time of the year it was. We spent at least two or three days in Washington.

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JOHNSON: Could you give us a little detail on that trip?

BOWMAN: Well, like I said, when we arrived at the hotel, a note was there waiting for me and said to call as soon as we arrived. As soon as I could, I called the White House and they put me in touch with him, and he said, "I'll send a car over after you. It will be right over."

So, we went over there, and he was in the Oval Room. We visited with him for quite some time. Then, we were back in the White House a time or two before we came home.

JOHNSON: On this first visit to the Oval Office, do you recall the nature of the conversation?

BOWMAN: I don't remember other than the fact that he just wanted to know what kind of a church we were going to build and where we were going to build it and so forth. The church originally had been up on Main Street and Grandview Road. That is almost one half mile west of where it is now.

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Because of the fact that we didn't have enough ground there to build the kind of building that we wanted and we felt we needed to get out where we could have parking space, we purchased the property where the church is located now. Really, we had the plans for the new church to be built on the original tract, but after President Truman contacted us and told us that he wanted to make a contribution, we decided that we could really do what we had wanted to do in the first place, and that was to move out.

JOHNSON: So this statement that he had...

BOWMAN: The statement that he made that he wanted to make a substantial donation to the church was the thing that really caused the church to move. They had voted to stay on the old location, but they reconsidered and moved the location to where it is now. That came as a result of the fact that he said, "I want to give a substantial amount." He didn't say how much.

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JOHNSON: That was in the first meeting there in the Oval Office, that he said that he wanted to make a contribution?

BOWMAN: Well, I think we did that by correspondence. But he did commit himself there at that time. I think he said, "I'll give you at least 20 thousand dollars." He gave that and then I'm sure he gave some more later, but that was the main part.

JOHNSON: What kind of information did you have for him at that first meeting? Did you have a sketch of the proposed building?

BOWMAN: No, we didn't have it at that time. In fact, we didn't have anything, because we hadn't planned it. Then we came back home and started planning a little bigger than we had planned before.

JOHNSON: What was the membership in '41?

BOWMAN: Oh, about 350.

JOHNSON: What was it then in '49 when you visited the White House?

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BOWMAN: It was about 350 when I came here and then I suppose it was probably six or seven hundred at the time we were planning on rebuilding.

JOHNSON: The reason for building was to accommodate a larger congregation?

BOWMAN: Yes, we had to because we were getting to the place where we had reached our capacity in the old building. So we decided that we would have to have a bigger building. A short time after that, the church membership began to grow and after we got into the new building of course we increased much faster. I think at the time I retired there was something like 1700 members.

JOHNSON: In that first meeting you kind of briefed him on your ideas for a new church building?

BOWMAN: That's right.

JOHNSON: And then you did go back and visit him once again before you left Washington?

BOWMAN: Well, yes. Before we left Washington we

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were in the White House two or three times. But in that first meeting we just answered some questions that he had, and then he said, "I'll talk to you later," or something. Anyway, we were there...

JOHNSON: About how long of a meeting was it?

BOWMAN: Oh, I don't suppose we met with him more than a half or three-quarters of an hour the first time.

JOHNSON: Who was there beside yourself?

BOWMAN: A. L. Carr, one of the deacons in the church.

JOHNSON: What was his first name?

BOWMAN: Aubrey was his name, but he always signed his name, A. L. Carr. And he had known Truman long before I knew him, because even when Truman was here on the farm, Carr was here. He operated a lumber yard here in Grandview for the Jones Company of Lee's Summit. He had managed this

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lumber yard for years and years, and so he and Truman, I guess, were friends when they were fairly young men.

JOHNSON: Now anyone besides Mr. Carr and yourself? Just the two of you?

BOWMAN: Just the two of us there on that trip to Washington.

JOHNSON: Then you had correspondence about the project after you came back?

BOWMAN: Yes, we did. It wasn't too long after we were in Washington until we started breaking ground and building.

JOHNSON: He wrote a check and included it with one of the letters, and then he sent a second check. Is that the way it was?

BOWMAN: He sent two checks as I recall. I'd say that two or three weeks after we were there we got the first check for \$10,000. Then perhaps in

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another month, or six weeks, we got another check for \$10,000. That made a total of \$20,000.

JOHNSON: But then when did you decide to change the location of the church?

BOWMAN: We'd already decided to change the location. We decided that when he told us he would give us a substantial amount. He wasn't in favor of the church being built where the old one was because he knew that the situation was such that it couldn't expand there.

JOHNSON: No parking facilities?

BOWMAN: No parking facilities at all, and it was right there in the very center of the old part of Grandview. There wasn't much space to expand unless several houses would be torn down. What motivated the church to move was the fact that he said he would give us a substantial amount. He didn't commit himself as far as dollars and cents were concerned -- but he did

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say, "I'll give you a substantial gift."

JOHNSON: Maybe on the implied condition that you build where you have more room?

BOWMAN: No. He said, "You can build any kind of church you want to build and wherever you want to build it," but he said, "I'd prefer that it wouldn't be built in the old place." But he didn't clamp down and say you've got to do it or else. He didn't do that.

JOHNSON: I've heard the statement made that he had specified that he wanted stained glass windows. Do you recall any comment that he made about stained glass windows?

BOWMAN: I don't recall him ever saying to me that we have to have, or he preferred stained glass windows. Those windows weren't specified by any particular one. The church just voted to put stained windows in the building. He may have expressed himself that he would like to see

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stained windows, but I don't recall. I just don't remember.

JOHNSON: Did the previous church building have stained glass windows?

BOWMAN: Yes, it had some stained glass windows, but they weren't all stained glass. There were two, one on the south and one on the north, and they were a triple window, one tall one in the middle and then two small ones on the sides.

JOHNSON: Did you preserve, or salvage any of that?

BOWMAN: No, we didn't. Because the church was sold; in fact, Truman bought it.

JOHNSON: Oh, the old building?

BOWMAN: He bought the old building from the church and then in turn sold it to the Assembly of God, so it would remain there as a church. And the windows were left in it.

JOHNSON: Do you remember the price that was paid

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for that old building?

BOWMAN: No.

JOHNSON: I recall in his statements at the dedication, that he did not want to see the old site converted into a tavern, for instance. Do you recall his comments on that?

BOWMAN: No, I don't recall that. It sounds like him, but I didn't hear him say it.

JOHNSON: That building was torn down, wasn't it, your old building?

BOWMAN: Yes. It was torn down.

Well, let's see. We moved out of it in '50 and I would say it was there four or five years after that. Then some wreckage company came in and tore it down to build a filling station there.

JOHNSON: But now the Assembly of God did use it for those four years?

BOWMAN: They moved in a few months after we moved out of it. They used it for three or four years.

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JOHNSON: Do you recall anything being salvaged from that building that was wrecked?

BOWMAN: There is only one thing that I know of that was salvaged from it. When they knocked it down, I was standing up there on the north side of the street, and there was a ball on top of the steeple. When they hit the thing with those big hammers it fell and rolled across the street, and I picked it up.

JOHNSON: There had been a bell up there in the steeple?

BOWMAN: Yes, there was a bell.

JOHNSON: What happened to the bell?

BOWMAN: The bell is in the present building.

JOHNSON: Okay, they did salvage the bell.

BOWMAN: We salvaged the bell. It was taken out before they sold the building. We had an understanding that we were going to take the bell out. It's in the tower of the present church.

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JOHNSON: Well, how about the old altar, the communion service...

BOWMAN: The old furniture, the pulpit and the chairs -- the pulpit furniture -- was taken out and it was put in the new building in a lower basement. Then we started a mission at Martin City, and so the pulpit, and the furniture from the old church, the two chairs and the pulpit, were refinished and were put in the mission. Later they put in new furniture at Martin City, but what they have done with the old furniture I don't know.

JOHNSON: The previous church building, the one we are referring to, was built in 1907.

BOWMAN: Along in there somewhere.

JOHNSON: And the building prior to that had been the one that stood across the road from the Truman farm, and it was called the Blue Ridge Baptist Church. That building was moved into town, and then later it was torn down. What I'm wondering is if there were any objects that might have

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originated in that old building, the Blue Ridge Baptist Church building, when it stood across from the Truman farm.

BOWMAN: Out by the cemetery. I don't know; nothing to my knowledge. Now we do have the minutes, the minutes of all of the business meetings of that church since it was organized.

JOHNSON: How far back are they?

BOWMAN: That goes back to 1847 I believe.

JOHNSON: You have minutes for that whole period?

BOWMAN: Yes, we have the minutes for everything. There was a period of time during the Civil War that they didn't have services, but we have the minutes of the first business meeting of the church, and all of the records from that time until now. Every time they had a business meeting, their monthly records were recorded and we have the minutes. It even tells about how much the first church building cost to build.

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JOHNSON: Do you think there are any mentions of Harry Truman in that period from 1906 to 1917 when he was living out here on the farm?

BOWMAN: I don't know; there might be. It's probably somewhere in the records when he joined the church, because they have a record of all the people that joined the church. I suppose you could go back and find out just exactly when he did, but I don't know whether there is anything as I do not recall anything in the minutes. I read some of them, but I didn't read all because it was over a period of a hundred years and I just didn't read all of them.

JOHNSON: He moved out here in the spring of 1906 so I suppose if there is mention of it, it would be along early in that year.

BOWMAN: Well, I don't know how long he was here before he joined the church, you see. He could have been living here two or three years before he joined the church, so there is no way of knowing. Unless

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it's in the minutes.

JOHNSON: I'm wondering about the handwriting if a person tried to read those old minutes. Would it be very difficult?

BOWMAN: Well, you'd be surprised; it's better handwriting than some that you get now. Some of them I know are getting dim; they are pretty much faded, but...

JOHNSON: But they haven't been retyped?

BOWMAN: No, they're the original. Some of those old records, you know, are pretty fancy writing.

JOHNSON: Spencer style or whatever they called it? Those records are kept in a secure place in the bank?

BOWMAN: To my knowledge, that's where they were when I retired, and I think they are still there in the bank vault.

JOHNSON: This will probably be before your time, but

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I think I have read that he played the piano occasionally for church functions.

BOWMAN: He might have, I don't know; Mary did. Mary was pianist for a good long while. In fact, we still have a piano in the church that was used when Mary was pianist, It's an old Steinway, and she was on the committee that helped purchase the piano.

JOHNSON: Oh, yes, now didn't Harry Truman pick that out more or less? Didn't he go to Jenkins Music store?

BOWMAN: I don't know a thing about that.

JOHNSON: Something about they had to get a Steinway; do you recall...

BOWMAN: I don't know. Mary was strong on Steinways, I think, and she was on the committee that helped to purchase that particular piano. So when they moved from the old church to the new church, that piano was moved. We had other pianos in

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the church. I don't remember, but I think they were moved too. It still plays and is being used.

JOHNSON: It's a baby grand?

BOWMAN: No, it's an upright piano. The church does have a grand Steinway, but the church bought that after they built the new building -- and the organ that's in the church.

JOHNSON: I think that Mr. Truman did have something to do with one of those two Steinways.

BOWMAN: Well, it's probably the first one, if he did, because that was the one when Mary was on the committee. He didn't have anything to do with the second one, I know, because that was purchased after I came.

JOHNSON: Do you have an organ in the church?

BOMWAN: There's a Hammond organ.

JOHNSON: Did you have an organ in the previous church building?

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BOWMAN: Yes, we had one. The church bought an organ and put it in the old building; it was a Hammond.

JOHNSON: That was some time after you...

BOWMAN: I don't know; I suppose we had it in there about four or five years before the church moved from the old building.

JOHNSON: Was Mary Jane the organist?

BOWMAN: No, she was not the organist then. She has never been organist or pianist since I have been here, only to fill in some. But the time they bought this new upright she was the pianist, so I imagine that's one of the reasons she was on the committee to pick out a new piano, when they bought that Steinway.

JOHNSON: She and her mother were members here, when you arrived. Were there any other of the Trumans that were members?

BOWMAN: No. Well now, Vivian's oldest son was a

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member of the Baptist Church.

JOHNSON: J. C., I believe.

BOWMAN: Yes, He was a member of the church, but Vivian's other two boys and their daughter, all of them, were members of the Hickman Mills Christian Church. But their oldest son was a member of the Baptist Church. He lived in Independence when I came here, so he was never active in this church.

JOHNSON: Getting up to that 1950 dedication again. After your first visit to Washington and your conversations with President Truman, did you make a return visit on the same project?

BOWMAN: No, not to Washington.

JOHNSON: So then everything was done by correspondence up to the point when he came out to take part in this dedication?

BOWMAN: I had been in Washington earlier, but not for

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that purpose. I was in the White House earlier.

JOHNSON: When was that?

BOWMAN: Well, there was a church in Washington -- in fact I don't even remember the name of the church -- that asked me to come and speak in their church. I went back there and this preacher and I went to the White House. In fact, I always felt like he used me to get in to see the President, but maybe not. Anyway, we went to see and meet with the President while I was there. Then Mary and her mother -- this was before her mother died, so it wouldn't have been too long after Harry became President -- were there in Washington, and Mary gave this preacher and me a tour of the White House. We even went into their private personal living quarters.

JOHNSON: You say Mary's mother, Martha, was still living?

BOWMAN: She was still living. I remember talking to

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Grandma Truman while I was there because I knew her.

JOHNSON: That's when she was visiting the White House?

BOWMAN: Yes, she was visiting there; she was there for about two weeks with her son, she and Mary.

JOHNSON: She didn't talk about the Lincoln bedroom while you were there?

BOWMAN: No. I've seen the Lincoln bedroom, but she didn't talk about it.

The first trip I made to the White House was not too long after he became President.

JOHNSON: Yes, in fact I think that was a few days after VE-Day in '45 that she made her trip to Washington and stayed in the White House. Dr. Pruden, I believe, was pastor of the First Baptist Church.

BOWMAN: Yes, but he wasn't the one that I talked to. It was another preacher.

JOHNSON: Did you meet Pastor Pruden?

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BOWMAN: No. I met him, I think, here in Kansas City one time a number of years ago. He was back here, but I didn't meet him in Washington.

JOHNSON: How did you get in to see the President that first visit?

BOWMAN: Well, I just called, and of course Mary was there, I don't recall whether I talked to the President before I went.

JOHNSON: You and this other pastor, both went over?

BOWMAN: It was this pastor that I went to visit and preach in his church; he wanted to get in the White House and wanted to meet the family. Well, as I said, I think he used me to get over there.

JOHNSON: Was that the first time you had met Harry Truman?

BOWMAN: No, I don't think that was the first time. I think I had met him here, but...

JOHNSON: So you were to some extent, at least,

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acquainted with him?

BOWMAN: Yes, I didn't know him too well at that time. But I do know we were there and went in the White House and visited there.

JOHNSON: Did you go into the Oval Office on that visit?

BOWMAN: I don't recall whether I did or not. I think maybe we did because I think Mary took us through everything, just the three of us, this preacher and Mary and me. She took us through all of their living quarters and showed us the entire White House.

JOHNSON: You know there was a complete renovation there between '48 and '52 so you got to see it before the renovation.

BOWMAN: I guess that was before it was overhauled.

JOHNSON: Yes, alright.

Getting back to the dedication, events leading

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up to the dedication -- at what point was President Truman invited to make remarks here and lead a responsive reading?

BOWMAN: Well, we wrote to him and asked him if he would come and be here at the time of the dedication, and he said that he would be in Grandview, or in Missouri. He'd be back home over this Christmastime, and so the church was dedicated in December of 1950.

JOHNSON: That's right, December 24, at 2 o'clock in the afternoon.

BOWMAN: And so we asked him and he said that he would be here over Christmas and that he would be glad to come. So that's how it happened. We made that arrangement and he led the responsive reading. I think it's in that program.

JOHNSON: And he made some remarks that are in the public record, a kind of a short sermon, so to speak.

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BOWMAN: I don't think he had too much to say at that time. I think he made some remarks, but I don't remember now just what they were.

JOHNSON: In one of his comments from *Mr. Citizen*, which you may be familiar with, he says, "I had found that I could not appear regularly in church either in Grandview or in Independence without feeling like a showpiece or someone on exhibit, so I do not go as often as I want to. People ought to go to church to worship God and not to see some mortal who is there." Did he express that kind of feeling to you?

BOWMAN: Yes, he did. He told me one time, "One reason I don't go to church more than I do is that I don't want people to come to church to see the President. They ought to go there to worship God." He said, "I understand that when Calvin Coolidge" -- I believe it was Coolidge --

"was President that there was one particular church that he attended." And he said, "The people knew that he would go to church every Sunday,"

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and he said, "those people who were regular members of that church were practically crowded out by visitors." And he said, "Then when he ceased to be President they quit and it almost killed the church." And he said, "I don't want to do that."

JOHNSON: So there was a precedent that he was able to cite for this sort of thing.

BOWMAN: He said he didn't want that to happen, and he said therefore he was not going to be there regularly, and he didn't want people to know when he was going to go. He wanted to go when he wanted to go and that was it!

JOHNSON: Did he notify the pastor though ahead of time if he was going to be there?

BOWMAN: I don't know.

JOHNSON: We mentioned this gift of \$20,000 to the building of the new church. I think you mentioned that he also gave some other monetary gifts.

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BOWMAN: Well, he did. He made contributions which came through the general fund, and I wouldn't say how much he gave. I don't know, because I did not keep a record of the amount of money that he gave any more than I would keep a record of what anyone gave. That's between them and their God.

JOHNSON: After the dedication in 1950 did he visit the church at all?

BOWMAN: No, I don't recall of him being in a regular service from that time.

JOHNSON: There is also mention of a Bible that he gave and was presented by Mary Jane, his sister. Could you give us the story on that Bible?

BOWMAN: Well, he told me that he had a Bible that he wanted to give to the church. It was given to him by the World Publishing Company. They presented it to him, and it's the only one in the world like it. There's no other Bible like it.

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That's what he told me, that there were a number of Bibles printed at the same time, but this is the only one that had the red sheepskin leather back. The rest of them had black leather. But the print was the same as in the other Bibles. It's a large Bible. He sent that. In fact I still have the box, the crate, that it came in around here somewhere. Then after we received it, oh, I suppose maybe six months or something like that, he asked me to return it, because he wanted to have it engraved. So I sent it back and that's when he had put on the front of it an inscription that it was presented to the First Baptist Church in memory of his mother. Now for a number of years it's

been in a glass case. In fact, I built the thing the Bible sits in. It's covered over with plastic, heavy plastic, which is light resistant to keep the pages from turning yellow, and...

JOHNSON: It sits there more or less permanently in the front of the church?

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BOWMAN: Yes. It stays there on the communion table, lies open, but it's under this plastic cover. Mary presented it to the church on behalf of her brother.

JOHNSON: Is that in this picture up here?

BOWMAN: The Bible had been there for a little while, but that is when she made a public presentation of the Bible. We had this special service and she made the presentation. Now it's raised up just a little bit, with the glass cover over the top of it.

JOHNSON: But it's still on the same table, this communion table.

BOWMAN: It's still on the same table.

JOHNSON: Which is right in front...

BOWMAN: Right in front of the pulpit. And the only time it's taken off is when they have communion service.

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JOHNSON: Woodworking is a hobby of yours I gather?

BOWMAN: Of mine, yes.

JOHNSON: I suppose we ought to put in the record this other incident that you mentioned, when you lost two fingers. That wasn't in building this, is that right?

BOWMAN: No.

JOHNSON: You were building something for Vacation Bible School?

BOWMAN: Yes, for Vacation Bible School.

JOHNSON: And then how did Mr. Truman get involved in that?

BOWMAN: Well, you see, he was back home here at the time I did that. I think Mary was talking to him, and she made the remark to him that Brother Bowman cut some fingers off and was in the hospital. And when she talked to him the second day after that, he said, "I'm coming out, but I'm

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coming by the hospital to see Reverend Bowman before I come out." And he said, "Well, he came home yesterday." That was on a Sunday afternoon that he was coming out and I came home on Saturday afternoon. He said, "Oh, he did?" That's when in a few days I got this letter from him with a check in it that said, "To help you out with your hospital expenses."

JOHNSON: And flowers?

BOWMAN: Well, I did this early one morning, and I think she must have been talking to him early that morning because it was before noon that I got the flowers. So she had talked to him and told him about my accident, so he just called the greenhouse and told them to send the flowers.

JOHNSON: That was after the Presidency when he was living in Independence?

BOWMAN: Yes, he was at Independence.

JOHNSON: And what did he put in that card or note,

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or was it orally, this comment about admiring your grit?

BOWMAN: When we get through here I'll look and see if I can find it, a little note. He said something about how he admired me for being back in church right after that. [See Appendix.]

JOHNSON: The accident happened what day?

BOWMAN: I'd say it happened on about a Thursday. I went in there that morning and then I came back Saturday morning, that's about what it was.

JOHNSON: And so then you were in church that Sunday morning.

BOWMAN: Yes, I was in the church that Sunday morning.

JOHNSON: That is something all right.

I imagine that was, of course, noticeable. I suppose you had a large bandage on your hand.

BOWMAN: Oh, yes. I didn't preach that morning, associate took charge of the service; I was there

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and made some announcements.

JOHNSON: Well, if you have the note, I'll be glad to take a look at it.

BOWMAN: I'm not positive that I do have; I'll check.

JOHNSON: He said you are a man after his own heart?

BOWMAN: Yes.

JOHNSON: He liked to see people bounce back in a hurry, I guess.

BOWMAN: That's what he meant I think.

JOHNSON: I'm trying to recall if there was anything else that you had mentioned prior to us recording here, that we haven't brought up, to put on tape.

BOWMAN: I don't know of anything else.

JOHNSON: Any other incidents, whether you were directly involved, or whether they are secondhand, either way?

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BOWMAN: Of course, while he was President he was back here on various occasions. I remember two different times that they had some kind of a meeting for him at the Muehlebach Hotel. There was a banquet, and my wife and I were invited to the banquet. We sat at the President's table. In fact, I gave the invocation. Then another time we were at some kind of a meeting; he was to be the chief speaker and he had requested that I be there and give the invocation. I don't remember now what it was for, but I do remember...

JOHNSON: You had a chance for conversation with him at these occasions?

BOWMAN: Yes, I visited with him. In fact, we were back behind the stage and walked onto the platform at the same time. He and I came out with whoever was master of ceremonies of this particular meeting, but I don't recall what it was about. But he was the chief speaker and he asked that I give the invocation. He had requested that, and he addressed me a number of times when he was out at

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something like that and just said, "My preacher;" that's what he called me, he didn't say pastor, he just said, "My preacher."

JOHNSON: When he came out here for the dedication were you kind of the official greeter for him? Were you the one that met him here at the church?

BOWMAN: Well, yes, I think so.

JOHNSON: And briefed him on the procedures?

BOWMAN: Well, he didn't get here until just a few minutes before the service. And of course he had all the Secret Service men with him. We came in on the platform together and then we

went down the aisle when we were through, before the congregation was dismissed. There were two or three more that were on the program, and we all left together. He went out and got in his car and was gone before the congregation was dismissed.

JOHNSON: Is that why he apologized for not being

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able to stay around and shake hands with the others?

BOWMAN: Well, I don't remember.

JOHNSON: He turned the Christmas tree on, apparently from Independence.

BOWMAN: He probably made some remark; I don't know.

JOHNSON: But you didn't have time to converse at that point?

BOWMAN: Not too much, because we were in the back room there, probably ten, fifteen minutes before, but I don't remember what was said.

JOHNSON: You mentioned his citing Calvin Coolidge and his experience with this church in Washington. When was it he told you about that? Do you recall when that was?

BOWMAN: No, I don't know if it was when I was back there at Washington, or whether it was sometime here, that we were talking about attending church

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and he just says, "The reason I don't attend church more than I do is because," and he gave me that story.

JOHNSON: Anything else that you can recall him saying about religion or church, or the community?

BOWMAN: Well, all I know is that he had mentioned a number of times to me about Baptists, that he was glad he was a Baptist and that he believed as Baptists believe, and that he didn't have too much faith in some teachings of other churches. But he would never ridicule any church or anything like that.

JOHNSON: Were there quite a number of Masons in your church?

BOWMAN: Yes, we had quite a few Masons. Of course, he was a Mason.

JOHNSON: I noticed in one of his autobiographical sketches -- this is out of the President's Secretary's File -- he says, "I'm a Baptist because I think that sect gives the common man the shortest and most direct approach to God. I've never thought the Almighty is greatly interested in pomp and circumstance, because if he is

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he wouldn't be interested in the sparrow," alluded to in St. Matthew's gospel. Did he ever talk to you about the Baptist Church?

BOWMAN: Yes, he did, he mentioned some things at various times about that. When his mother was ill I would go over there and I have never seen anyone that was more sympathetic and more understanding. We'd get down on our knees together and pray.

JOHNSON: This was during the two weeks that he was visiting here in March of '47?

BOWMAN: This was when he was here before his mother died.

JOHNSON: And you were over there every day?

BOWMAN: I didn't miss many days.

JOHNSON: Well, this was a chance for you to talk at some length?

BOWMAN: That's right; there were times when we visited quite a bit. Of course, under those circumstances we were dealing with things of that nature, of the spiritual side. We talked about it, and I'd always say, "Well, let us have prayer together." And he would kneel down

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and I don't know how many times during that two weeks we were both down on our knees together in the living room praying. He was very sincere about it; there was no foolishness about him when it came to that. He was just like the rest of us; no one is perfect so far as that part goes.

I might say this. One time I was in his office over in Independence. There was a preacher here at a revival, and he was quite a Truman man, and he wanted to meet President Truman. So we made an appointment and called on him in his office. We were talking to the President and this preacher asked him -- why he did it I don't know; I thought it was out of order in every way -- but he said to him, "What about the time you wanted to punch that fellow in the nose when he criticized Margaret?" You probably know about the circumstances. And he says, "I didn't say that I was going to punch him in the nose."

And the preacher said, "Well, it was in the papers."

And Truman said, "Yes, it was in the papers, but I did not say that I was going to punch him."

He said, "Why didn't you make them correct it?"

Mr. Truman said, "You try to make them correct something and they'll make it worse."

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And he said, "I just passed it over."

JOHNSON: I think the implication was there, about the "beafsteak for the eye"...

BOWMAN: He didn't say that he didn't indicate something to that effect. But he did say, "I didn't say what the papers said I said."

JOHNSON: So that kind of ended the subject, I guess, the discussion on that subject.

BOWMAN: Yes.

JOHNSON: Well, you say his mother tended to be a bit outspoken. I suppose one might say that of President Truman.

BOWMAN: Yes, I think so.

JOHNSON: The "plain speaking" stereotype is pretty accurate, I suppose.

BOWMAN: I think so. I think that was one of the characteristics. Mary was very nice; you couldn't ask for a nicer person, and she was very thoughtful,

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very considerate. And her language -- there were never any shady off-color remarks of any kind that she ever said. I know that when it was put out that he had made some remarks, she didn't take too kindly to it. And I can say this; all the time that I was ever with the President, he didn't swear, he didn't say one word that was off-color or out of line. In all of our conversations -- now maybe he didn't do all people that way -- but he certainly didn't do it in my presence.

JOHNSON: She survived that crisis in March and so he went back to Washington, but then in July then she did pass away; of course, they came out for the funeral. Did you conduct the funeral?

BOWMAN: I conducted the funeral service.

JOHNSON: Did you have much chance then to speak to President Truman?

BOWMAN: Well, I talked to him some. In fact, he wrote the obituary, and he gave it to me. I

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brought it home, and I was there at my desk studying and getting ready for the service. In fact, that was in the afternoon, and I had another funeral service that morning. I was there studying and one of the reporters came to the door; he came in and he wanted a copy of the sermon that I was going to give at Grandma Truman's funeral service. I said, "I don't have a copy."

He said, "Well, I'd like it if you'd write me out something."

I said, "No, my sermons are pretty much extemporaneous." I said, "I don't write my sermons out."

And he said, "Well, will you tell me something you're going to say?"

I said, "No, I won't do that."

And he looked down and he said, "What's that?"

I said, "That's the obituary."

He said, "Can I have that?"

I said, "Now President Truman gave that to me and he wrote it himself and that's the only

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copy I have," and I said, "I don't want to have to go back and ask him to write it over."

He said, "Well, I'd like to read that to the Associated Press if you would let me have it."

I said, "Well, if you have it back here in just a few minutes."

He said, "I'll do that." So he took it. He came back with it in just about five or ten minutes. That's when he told me that he had said, "I made the remark that I quoted you as saying such and such." And he said, "I told them that you would say something," and he said, "I would like for you to write that down so that you will say it."

And I said, "Well, I'm not going to do it." He kept insisting. I said, "No." And so then sure enough when it came out in the paper, the Kansas City paper, and I guess it did everywhere, and it was in quotation marks: "Reverend Bowman said such and such." It was a good statement, very complimentary and nothing wrong with it, but it wasn't what I said.

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JOHNSON: He insisted that he had to have some quote in the paper?

BOWMAN: And it wasn't what I had said at all.

JOHNSON: Did anybody record what you did say?

BOWMAN: No, there are no records at all.

JOHNSON: Did you give a eulogy of sorts, or how did...

BOWMAN: Well, I preached her sermon just about like I preach most all my sermons. I don't eulogize anyone too much. The reason I don't do it -- this has nothing to do with the Truman family or anyone else -- because there's always someone there that knows that person better than

you know him. If a preacher gets up and brags on a person and people might say, "Well, he doesn't know him like I know him." So I just don't do that and I didn't. I made some remarks about her that were, I think, complimentary; I think they were good, but they were facts that I absolutely knew. It wasn't guesswork and it wasn't just

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making a show.

JOHNSON: They had moved into town here just a year before you arrived in 1940, that is from the farm, the old farm house.

BOWMAN: Well, they moved in here, lived in two different places in Grandview for awhile.

JOHNSON: Do you know where they lived when they first moved here to Grandview, before they moved to the house over there by the tracks?

BOWMAN: I was trying to think the other day, and I thought, "Well, where did they live?" I've been there and I'd been in their home, and I was in the home out at the farm; I was out there after I came here, but...

JOHNSON: Apparently she broke her hip in that first house that she moved into, and then they moved to this other one.

BOWMAN: Yes, but I can't for the life of me think just where it was.

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JOHNSON: Did she ever comment about leaving the farm and did she say anything about the old farm out there at all?

BOWMAN: You mean his mother?

JOHNSON: Yes, that you recall?

BOWMAN: No, I don't. I don't know.

JOHNSON: Did she ever reminisce, or do you remember any reminiscences?

BOWMAN: I just don't remember.

JOHNSON: You were out at the old farm house?

BOWMAN: Oh, I've been out there a number of times. Well, I didn't come here until '41 so she was living in town when I came; she had already left the farm, I don't remember the date when they moved over there to where they were. I remember when they moved, but I don't remember where they moved from.

JOHNSON: You were in the farm house very, early, right

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after you came to Grandview?

BOWMAN: I was there. I've been in the farm house to visit whoever was living there; it may have been some tenants or someone who lived there. I know I had been there to call on the people and invite them to church. Back then, I called on about everybody I could find to invite them to church, I don't even remember what their names were -- but it was a young couple that lived there. But if Mrs. Truman and Mary moved to Grandview in '40, then I wasn't in the old home while Grandma Truman was there. It was in their other house.

JOHNSON: You had the funeral for Mary Jane?

BOWMAN: Yes.

JOHNSON: So you conducted funerals for Martha Truman and also for Mary Jane.

BOWMAN: Yes, for Mary and her mother both.

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JOHNSON: Did you have any role in the funeral for Mr. Truman at the Library?

BOWMAN: No. I was in Virginia when he died. We have a daughter that lives in Virginia and we were back there for Christmas.

JOHNSON: Well, is there anything else that we haven't touched on that comes to mind?

BOWMAN: Well, there's another incident that perhaps we can put on the record.

During the illness of his mother, one evening about 5 o'clock, we had just had prayer and I was preparing to leave. We were standing in the dining room looking out; a number of people had gathered as they did every day. There were maybe 50, 75, 100 people. I made the remark, "You have quite an audience waiting to see you."

He said, "They're not here to see me; they're not concerned about Harry Truman, they're concerned about the office I represent."

I thought that was a very modest and humble

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remark for him to make. Most people in the same position probably would have thought, "They are here to see me."

JOHNSON: Once you start talking about things, some memories do come back that were submerged perhaps.

Well, I certainly appreciate your taking the time to talk to me about this subject and about Mr. Truman.

BOWMAN: Well, I'm happy to do it.

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