

Transcript of Mrs. Johnson's Audio Diary

Prepared by Staff of the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library and Museum

December 11, 1963

Wednesday, November eleventh [December eleventh]. The day began with Mary Ellen Monroney coming in and us discussing chintzes for Lynda's and Lucy's rooms, that Mary Ellen, bless her heart, had found with so much effort. It was easy to decide on Lucy's, because she had put her little foot down and said this one and this one only. Fortunately, it was a pretty Fortuny. Lynda's took a little longer.

Then there were hours and hours of just desk work: letters, secretaries, and decisions. And then, the nice part of the day began. Really, something I enjoyed tremendously. I went to D.C. General Hospital to visit the children's ward, a little engagement that Mrs. Kennedy had made some weeks ago and had asked me to keep.

I took Lucy and Beth Jenkins with me, and we had baskets of toys to distribute among the children. The people were lined up out front: Dr. Schultz was the head man, and his assistant Dr. Manigan, and the nice head of all the nurses, Mrs. Jenkins. They took us in, and we went from floor-to-floor, and I noticed, over my shoulders, the faces of so many familiar Washington news girls. I missed them. I like them. And always the T.V. and the radio was getting in there, trying to get a good picture.

There are about 110 children in the children's ward in this vast establishment. We actually saw, I would say--we went to a girl's bedroom, a boy's bedroom, the solarium, and then a rehabilitation center. At each one I handed out a toy, said a little word to the child, and sometimes I got a real sweet little smile, and at one moment, there was a little girl who rose up with great dignity and considerable poise, and said, speaking for all the children of the hospital, she wanted to give me a Christmas present, and would she respectfully ask that I open it now. It was, from the child, a copy of a Leonardo da Vinci book--and just real sweet.

It was interesting to see that so many of the nurses and interns, you could tell it on their faces and on their nametags, were from all parts of the world. I thought I saw an awful lot of Asian faces among them--and nearly all the children there were negroes. I don't remember seeing any white children.

I think one of the places that interested me the most was the rehabilitation center, where the children who had had bad accidents or had been born with some defect were being taught to get along anyway. For instance, there was one little boy who had been born with no leg from the knee on down, and they said, "Show us how you can bend your leg," and he did. That slow, laborious work, those therapists who teach them how to come back to life,

makes me feel like I'd like to nominate for my own private group of saints, women who work in therapy.

Now, when we left there, the rest of the day was brighter. Between 6:30 and 7:30 we met for cocktails up in the lovely Yellow Room, the combination of people in the room who worked for President Kennedy and now for Lyndon. The Kenny O'Donnells, the O'Briens, the Maguires, the Jenkinses, Bill Moyers alone, Jack Valenti. We just had a drink, watched the fire, talked about the day's events, the Congress, the problems, the actions, and I hope we got a little closer together. Lyndon took the ladies on a tour of the rooms. I'm surprised that they seemed not more familiar with this place. I gather they perhaps have not been up here before. The one whose face I watched the closest of all and who I somehow feel most drawn to is Kenny O'Donnell, because I will never forget the way he looked that night in the hospital on November 22nd.

After they left, our long-time favorite friends came for dinner. Upstairs, on the second floor, informal, no party. Senator Dick Russell of Georgia, the all-time head man in the Senate; Senator Talmadge and Betty, so pretty and capable, and she's lost about 30 pounds and looks adorable! Senator Smathers, with his sleek, patrician profile, and I think who perhaps is much more familiar with this place than any others. Charlotte Brooks, so fresh and young and pretty, and Jack Valenti, of course, and **[unintelligible]** too, somewhere we talked about when and what the Congress might do, the tax bill, the problems **[unintelligible]**

All in all, strictly because of the visit to D.C. General Hospital, and because in the evening I had the chance to sit quietly with people I love and value, I thought it was a good day.

The main things that bothered me about it was that recurring cough of Senator Russell's and the awareness that the adrenaline in Lyndon's blood, which had kept him going at such a terrific pace these 18 days, or whatever it is, was wearing thin, because I could sense it. He was becoming more worried about little things and oh, dear Lord, how I pray for pacing and for him to be able to help himself and for me to be able to help him. **[Recording ends.]**