

1964

FRIDAY, JANUARY 10

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Today began with Miss Genevieve Hendricks going through bushels of samples and it was rather frustrating because it seems that all of the effort I put in with Sally had been wasted, but we selected a number of lovely ones and she really promises to return next week with the answers to everything.

The big problem of today, and actually something that I have been looking forward to, is tea for the ladies of the press--about sixty-five of them--at four o'clock. I hope the time never comes when I feel I have to be afraid of them.

As I stood in the Yellow Room, I was surprised to see how many of them I could call by their first names and how many of them I am just genuinely fond of. . . Bonnie Angelo and Betty Beale and Christine Sadler Coe of McCall's Magazine, Nancy Dickerson of NBC. And when I saw Doris Fleeson come in, I almost said if I close my eyes Walter Lippman will be the next one. And Helen Baldwin of the Waco newspaper had come up because she wants to write a special article on me and to see me actually in action as perhaps the best way to go about it. Other familiar ones--my gardening friend Isabelle Griffin, ^{er} Gwina Gibson, Frances Lewine and Helen Thomas, whom I feel I know best of all, Florence Lowe, and Isabelle Mathis who I guess is sort of helping out her husband and probably the sweetest one of all, Dorothy Mc^{Candle}Archie.

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When I saw Sarah McClendon, I just thought, I hope I don't have to start flinching like so many people do when they see you. And that favorite of all gentlemen, Miss Marianne Means; the Speaker's old friend Hope Ridings Miller; Ruth Montgomery who is doing a book on me and was going over to interview Lyndon on what he thought about me very shortly; Josephine Ripley who I remember so happily from my trip to West Virginia and who writes for that rare newspaper that many people look to as one of the best, the Christian Science Monitor; Nan Robinson^{Arthur} and Isabelle Shelton. I think Isabelle did the first byline on me that anybody ever did. And Marie Smith and Mary Van Rensselaer Thayer and I'd a lot rather sat down and listened to her talk about the East than to listen to me talk about the White House.

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The purpose of the whole thing was actually to set the tenor of not having press conferences but to invite them into a relaxed and pleasant atmosphere and to offer them somebody else who was news. This time the person who was news was Esther Peterson, who had just been given a new job as Assistant to the President on Consumer Problems and the piece de resistance was to have Esther, who I introduced, stand up in front of the fireplace in the Yellow Room and tell us all about the mail she had been receiving about the consumer problems, about what her plans were for it and that was the real meat of the day. Then I suggested to the ladies that perhaps they would like to have a

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little tour of the Second Floor and they all seemed quite interested in the prospect, so out we put. The main things I found out about it was that sixty-five was too many to take through on a tour and the next time I am going to do it preferably with twenty and positively not more than thirty!

Fortunately I have had time to do about five rooms pretty thoroughly with the Curator and I could do them knowledgeably and I hope with some anecdotes. For instance, we started off in the Yellow Room where President Adams, the first to live in the house, used to receive in his velvet ^{breeches} ~~breeches~~ with his silver knee buckles and his wife Abigail, seated at his side, once a week he did it. The usual things-- I can't resist being amused as I point out the porthole portrait of George Washington by Rembrandt ^{Peale} ~~Peale~~, and commenting how the exceeding temerity ^{of} ~~of~~ parents ^{who} ~~name~~ an infant Rembrandt and then he turns out to be a famous painter! It was a particular joy to point out that all of the furniture in that long hall is the work of the greatest American cabinetmakers about the period 1810 in Hepp ^{la} ~~la~~white and Sher ^{aton} ~~aton~~ with their own touches added. You see, they were copying the English great of the preceding twenty-five or fifty years because with the turmoil of the Revolutionary War, we didn't catch up to doing things that were elegant and lovely until about 1795, and so this furniture was really made between then and about 1810 or 1815, and it is all the result of

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Mrs. Kennedy's wonderful taste and determination gathering it together.

Actually one of the most interesting moments was in the Treaty Room which was where Mrs. Franklin Delano Roosevelt used to hold her Press Conferences for women only and I asked those that had been there in those days to hold up their hands and there were--oh I would say--some ten or twelve of the sixty-four who were gathered there who had been there in Mrs. Roosevelt's day and I would rather have listened to what they had to say than what I had to say for the rest of the time.

Because I have lived openly and unafraid and quite candidly, I think, with people all of my life, I found this pleasant. I like to show them my way of life, but the next morning when I read Nan Robertson's story in the New York Times, it did occur to me that I must remember to put all books up that I don't want mentioned in stories. Of course, I had been careful enough to put all letters and really private things out of sight, but it hadn't occurred to me the really fine tooth comb with which four or five newspaper women can go through the house as they simply make a quick journey. We had drinks and a happy exchange and I enjoyed them and I do believe an afternoon well spent.

Then I began to see what was going to happen to my husband that night. It turned out to be one of those long, long evenings of many, many phone calls and many, many delays. I had dinner on a tray. He came home about 11:15 and had dinner and finally at long last to bed.

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I think the things they liked hearing about most are the little simple personal things, like the time I walked into the Treaty Room and found Luci Baines' Algebra and Latin and some frayed notebooks and some chewed pencils sitting there on that famous table. Obviously she had been doing her homework there for several nights. I did think I better put a stop to it. It's a little bit too much of a museum for that. And I wish I had had the nerve to tell them about the first night she moved in, when seeing that beautiful fire laid in the fireplace and remembering how nice it was at the Brick House to go to sleep by the flames dancing upward on the ceiling, and having "spend the night guests" with her, she decided to light the fire. It was about twelve o'clock, something was the matter with the draught, smoke began to pour out through the room and presently out into the hall and you would have thought the British were returning! I just hope she is as good a friend with Mr. J. B. West and the rest of the staff around here after that, but I haven't quite cleared that story in my own mind for telling yet.