

MEMORANDUM

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

Monday, April 20, 1964

This was another big day. Up early about 6:30, dress, read the speech two or three more times, join Liz and go the airport, where we got on a commercial United Airliner to Cleveland, to make the speech at the YWCA convention. Because we were going to see a housing development, especially planned for old people, we had asked Marie Maguire, head of the Public Housing Administration, to go along with us, and Dr. Trav^{elli}~~er~~, she's interested in the study of geriatrics, and Ann[?] Celebre^{ze}, her husband being Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare, -- And also the former Mayor of Cleveland. # It was a bumpy, seat-belt, grey-soup flight from beginning to end, and about an hour out of Washington, something happened, it's the most frightening thing I have known in an airplane. Suddenly there was a loud explosion, directly behind us. My mind went back immediately to November 22nd - I thought "this is it." I wondered whether we would go down fast, or whether we would have a chance to glide down, but I - and probably everybody else - remained glued to my seat, not wanting to be the first to cry fright. Liz, bounded across the aisle and snuggled up by Dr. Trav^{elli}~~er~~, exactly like a kitten, seeking the fire - and Dr. Trav^{elli}~~er~~'s smile was so broad and reassuring. Ann[?] reached for her beads and I reached for Ann's other hand. The little hostess came down the aisle, clutching the seats as the plane lurched along it's way, and said - "It was just lightning, we're alright." There was just 20 minutes more before we got into Cleveland,

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to find that the ceiling was 300 feet, the minimum - that the airport had been closed for several hours before we got there, until some 15 or 20 minutes before we arrived. With what eager relief our feet touched the ground, I wondered if anybody else's mind went back to November 22nd, at that loud crash of noise.

Afterwards, reports varied. Some said they saw a ball of fire roll down the aisle; others said they saw a flash of blue-white light that seemed to go through the plane; others said they saw it dancing on the wings. I think they finally decided there were two strikes of lightning, but that we were never really in any serious danger.

We were welcomed quickly by Mayor Locker, and walking through puddles of water, hurried into cars and set off for the Riverview Golden Age Center. Here I spent over an hour, learning what it's like to be old and poor, and live in a public housing development, and many of them, it's the best they ever had.

Opened last December, it was still raw and cold, and steely looking. But when the planting gets done, it will be softened considerably.

Mr. Ernest Gohen, director of the Cleveland Housing Authority, and Mr. Ned Lask, director of this place itself, took me through. At present, it houses about 600 ambulatory older persons. Many of them were lining the walls as we walked through and I stopped and shook hands

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with all that I could reach. ^a All, obviously dressed up for the occasion, women outnumbering men remarkably. We went to a craft room where there were woven articles, paintings (some of them quite good), ceramics, artificial flowers, passed by a cafeteria, that they are going to manage themselves. There was a little exchange with one old lady who said something like this. " When I go away to visit my children, I'm always so glad to get back here."

We stopped in the Recreation room, where the Golden Age Glee Club was rehearsing a song, When the Red, Red Robin Comes Bob, Bob, Bobbing Along. And then, they brought out a big birthday cake, which was for all the people having birthdays that month, in April. It happened that this very day, ^{20 CA} April 12, was Ann Celebreeze's birthday, and so she cut the cake while they sang happy birthday to her. And then, several more were introduced, three more whose actual birthday it was. I shook hands with them and gave them a little print of the White House and left some more prints on the table for the others. There was one unusual couple, a 97 year old negro woman, very placid, and ageless in the face, as so many elderly negroes are, and her daughter, who must have been, I suppose, in her seventies. And then when I went up to shake hands with the pianist, I simply stuck out my hands and, recognizing that she did not know who I was, I said, "I'm Lady Bird Johnson and we thank you for your music." Only then did I realize that

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she was blind. The whole thing was dreadfully pathetic, the room so colorless and bare, but then I do not know the life from which they came. I hope some Junior League or Woman's Club will get into the act and make it their project to brighten up this place. There are enough good magazines and books and pictures that many families have and can't use, that are such a surplus and could make such a difference here.

Next, we went to the Well Elderly Clinic, which is a joint endeavor between the Lutheran Hospital located close by, and the Golden Age Center itself, with excellent assistance from a HEW grant and the Cleveland Housing Authority. This Clinic will attempt to keep all the inhabitants of this building well, that is, check them regularly and give them all the help they can because when they are bed-ridden or require nursing attention, they can no longer live in this housing area. And what a shadow that must be hanging over them.

Finally I saw the most interesting thing of all. I went into one of the little apartments and met a Mr. and Mrs. Skipper there. Mrs. Skipper^{W. 121} in a wheelchair, in her 80's, but beaming broadly; her neighbor nearby from another floor, she explained to me that her neighbor came by every day and vacuumed and defrosted the icebox when it needed, and helped out in every way. And we talked about how good it was to have good neighbors, and she said, "Mrs. Johnson, this is a little bit of

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heaven to us. ⁹ We lived in our son's home before and it was so crowded. " When I looked at the sparseness of the furniture and the two small rooms, I thought, what a ² Grace of God that she could describe it as a little bit of heaven. She said that they had moved there with nothing, that everything, the furniture that is, was given to her. Her pastor, she said, had given her the sofa. Well, this is actually my first view into one of our biggest problems today. There are 18 million Americans who are more than 65 years old, and of them a great many have meager financial resources, and are going to be looking for a place like this to live.

From the Golden Age Center I went to the Sheraton-Cleveland Hotel for lunch, given by Mrs. Elizabeth Marvel, President of the YWCA, a very attractive luncheon, small, with only the National officers of the YWCA, ^t The President of the four regions, the wife of the mayor ¹ Mrs. Locker, and our own party, Mrs. Celebreeze, Dr. Trav^{ell} ^{all} ~~er~~, Marie Maguire, ~

One of the outstanding officers was a negro. This organization has had a drive of long ⁹ standing for real integration.

After the luncheon I went to my own special trial - that is, the moment when I was to make a speech. It was before the National convention of the YWCA, meeting in the city where it began 44 years ago, and there ^{W212} was some 2 or 3 thousand women filling the hall as I walked in. I would rate the speech about "B"; there were some good thoughts in it and it began with some good identification with the YWCA... Luci takes her lifesaving lessons there; and I opened the International Food Fair; and then

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to that World Fellowship Service at National Cathedral where young women from 70 countries marched in, carrying their flags. But I haven't really lived the YWCA so I couldn't talk about it as it deserved to be talked about.

I guess I went just because I assumed my presence was useful to them. To me, the center of the speech⁹ was a sentence that spoke about ...^{||} thirty years ago, a President could stand up and say, 'One third of us are ill-clothed, ill-fed, and ill-housed. Now today the statistic we fight⁹ has shrunk to one-fifth.'^{||} The center of the speech⁹ was Lyndon's war on poverty, and it's easy to make the YWCA a part of that. They've^[downward arrow] been a long time. And then, the only possible new aspect of the speech was some statistics on how our country is turning into an urban society; that the annual growth of the major cities in this country is 8% greater than the growth of the total population; that we are just becoming city dwellers. And if the city is a jungle, the child may turn out to be a wolf cub. So it's up to us - us is all the citizens, women in particular, to make our cities clean, functional and beautiful.

The theme of the convention itself,^{||} matched us to this hour,^{||} was a magnificent concept. I'd say I got through it fairly good - and met a lot of hard working people who are trying to make this a better country - and I'm glad if I served them.

We had to say a hurried goodbye to the YWCA in order to go to

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a 3 o'clock reception at the Hopkins Motel, which Ann^e Celebreeze was giving in order for me to meet the outstanding women-doers of Cleveland. It seemed there were some 3 or 4 hundred of them and as each one came by me, Ann^e, at my side, gave a general, quick, thumb-nail sketch of them. Underneath that placid exterior, there's a good deal of ability. One of the nicest things about this trip, was getting to know her better.

The moment the reception was over came the decision - How were we going back to Washington. ² The weather was still marginal grey, foggy, maybe we would land in Washington by a plane, or maybe we would have to go on to Richmond or Philadelphia. The United Airline representatives were encouraging but, by no means, persuasive that I take it by plane. I decided it would be a lot more of an adventure, and a lot more relaxing to go home by bus or car! and so Jerry Kivitt (bless him!), got the necessary four or five cars together, because there were still a great many newspaper women with us, borrowed some blankets and pillows from the motel, got a tray of sandwiches and other supplies, and we were ready to leave by car in about 20 minutes, getting off at something like 4:30.

I started out with Ann^e Celebreeze and Marie Maguire, and on the way, learned a lot more from Marie about the peculiar demands of the housing for the elderly, that there are a lot of safety devices, unused in ordinary housing, that instead of door knobs, they're likely to use levers because arthritic hands can handle them better. . . That they like the

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recreation rooms to be on the ground floor, rather than on the top floor, no matter how beautiful the view may be from up there. But the laundry room turns out to be one of the most convivial centers because everybody had to do their laundry - and even if they don't have a dress that they can feel dressed up enough to go to the parties, they'll always show up two places, ^{the} the laundry room and the room where you go to wait for your mail. Mail is one of the most important events of the day - sounds like girls boarding school.

Marie has spent her life in public housing and has gotten to be quite an authority on it, having produced in San Antonio, ^a a model public housing unit that brought her to national prominence.

Grey and dismal as the whole thing looks to me, from the vantage point of 50 and ^{plenty} ~~20~~, it is a segment of life that many of us must know more about and do more about in the years to come.

The trip back was fun. Whenever we would stop for gas, we'd switch passengers. I rode with Frances Lewin and Helen Thomas, with several of the newspaper people and finally wound up with Liz and Dr. Trav^{er}~~er~~, at which time I put the pillows behind me, cuddled under the blankets, got myself a glass of refreshment and settled down to a half sleep. But that was long after we had stopped at a Howard Johnson for dinner.

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— Quite an entourage we made - some 20 of us and we had gotten a private room. Later on I heard that when a reservation was made for Mrs. Johnson, and somebody told the waitress that that was the President's wife, she assumed that it was the wife of the President of Howard Johnson - and she gave us especially good service! While there I called Lyndon, told him we were alright. And he said, "I wasn't too happy to see that when asked what you thought about, you said that you were so glad that you had spent a lot of time on Sunday with Lynda and Luci - you didn't mention that I came in at 6:00 o'clock this morning to have breakfast with you, somehow because I had a presentiment that something was going to happen!" So he had. I had tried to spare him waking up early by staying in my own room.

Somewhere along the way, we began to have car trouble. The car began to wheeze and cough and we thought - this is the last straw - if the car breaks down and we have to take a bus! But - we stopped in a little filling station, I think it was in Breezewood, Pennsylvania, and all it took was replacing a fuel filter - and about five minutes time. And then drove on in, sleepily, to Washington, arriving about 1:20. So it all wound up by making just a good anecdote and learning to feel really closer to Ann Celebreeze and Mari Maguire, than I would have under ordinary circumstances.

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Lyndon too, ^g had had his adventures that day. He had been to New York, ^g and had taken with him, on Air Force Number One, the 88 year old father of Congressman Jake Pickle, for his first airplane ride - very much to the delight of the press. And a typical Lyndon gesture!

I'll have to write an extra nice thank you to whoever lent us those cars yesterday, to ride around in Cleveland. They probably thought the cars would be gone about an hour and travel about 20 miles. Actually they were gone some 18 hours and must have traveled some 800 miles. I guess I'll say - "A funny thing happened on the way to the tea party."

I'll remember April 20 as one of the big days.