

MEMORANDUM

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

Friday, May 8, 1964

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This was a relatively easy, relaxing day, after two days of tension and importance.

The morning was rest and desk work.

And then at noon I flew to New York with Warrie Lynn, Liz and Bess. We went to the Carlyle, to that beautiful suite, where I always feel that I'm intruding on the apartment of the fairy princess.

Jean Kintner, Mrs. Gimbel, and Mrs. Wilmot came over to have pictures made for publicity purposes, for the New York gala salute at Madison Square Garden on May 28th.

And then, just as I was getting all dressed, in my white chiffon, and made up by Eddie Senz, with a high hairdo to go ^{to} ~~with the~~ Il Trovatore, at the Metropolitan, in came a weary Lynda Bird, fresh from two days in five states, and about 14 speeches every day with her daddy, saying that she just couldn't possibly make it another step, couldn't have her picture made, couldn't go to the opera. We put off having her picture until the next morning and we told her just to join us in time for the opera, and to skip dinner.

And so we arrived at the carriage trade entrance to the old Met, about 7 o'clock. We met our host and hostess, Anthony Bliss and Mrs. Bliss. ^{who was in} ~~It was~~ My Sister Eileen, on the stage, long, long ago, and I saw it with so much delight - it was some time in the '40's. And manager Rudolph Bing and Mrs. Bing met me. We went in to a very small, private dinner, in

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one of the rooms of the Metropolitan. Mary Lasker was there; and a Mr. Lauder Greenway; and Mr. and Mrs. Roger Stevens, the "papacito" of art in so many respects; Mrs. Bliss' married daughter, only about nineteen; two young men who had been asked to accompany Lynda Bird and Warrie Lynn, Nick Opon^ati and Mike Guld^ain.

I was seated between a very suave and attractive Mr. Anthony Bliss, who, I gather, is a sort of a godfather and chief patron of the Metropolitan Art Association, ^gand its manager, Mr. Rudolph Bing.

Mr. Bliss told me that they were going to be in Georgia, ^gon Monday, May 11th; they'd always been in Georgia for several days in May, and always with the most wonderful public acceptance and great hospitality, which is going to be marred somewhat this year, because the great negro soprano, playing one of the leading roles, was not being invited to the lovely parties which hostesses of the city, ^ggive to the opera and all its members.... Too bad, because that city, which has such a magnificent record of achievement, and a hard row to hoe, will suffer from this ill-advised bit on some-
body's ^gpart.

Fifteen minutes in the dining room, ^gmade me understand why the Opera House was being abandoned, ^gwhy the old Met is going to come down and a new center was going to be built. It wasn't air conditioned; it was hot as could be, and I, who never mind the heat, was steaming!

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There was caviar, green turtle soup with sherry, roast beef and some elegant dessert, with wines and champagne.

And then we went into the golden horseshoe, which is all red velvet and gilt ornaments, rococo, baroque, and ~~the~~ extreme... Semi-circular rows of boxes, and above them, I think, about four rows of balconies facing the stage. I remember back in about 1938, when Charles Marsh had given us tickets to come to the old Met for a Sunday performance, how I had seen on the doors of the boxes, famous names of New York's 400 families - America's 400 families, at least the financial establishment of the day... The Vanderbilts, the Astors, the Goulds, all the great and important names. Now, I could no longer find the names on the doors but they were still the same little rooms, but the gaslight fixtures were not there any more. The gilt chairs were, and we seated ourselves to watch Verdi's Il Trovatore.

Handsome, young Franco Corelli sang the male lead; Gabrielle Toucchi, the heroine; Regina Resnick, probably the most outstanding part of all, the gypsy, who was the foster mother of the troubadour, who was, herself, finally burned at the stake. And Robert Merrill, our old friend, who had sung for President Sengi of Italy at the White House, played the duke who was determined to marry the beautiful, young, highborn heroine.

Lynda Bird joined us just as the opera was beginning, and I could see the flags flying, just as I can with her father -- that, "I'm too tired to enjoy this; " "I wish I was home in bed; " "I'm mad I've got to be here -- and I hoped it didn't

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show as clearly to everybody else as it did to me.

The house must have been 90 degrees temperature, the music was magnificent. I love the great, roaring anvil chorus against the backdrop of the gypsy fire, with the flames rising, and the crooked dead trees, sheltering the wierd company.

And then ^{"Il misere"}~~mi~~, when they know they're both condemned to death. The magnificent, enveloping sadness of that familiar melody, grips you and ~~xxxxx~~ ^{enthalls} you. . . .

And then in the last act, ^{"Il nostri mondi"}~~Il nostri mondi~~, ^{"home to our mountains"}~~home to our mountains~~, when they are both wishing they could escape and get back to gypsy freedom.

It's one of the one's I remember so fondly from mother's collection of records.

At one of the several intermissions, we went back to have a drink of champagne in the lounge. For a wonder, instead of having champagne, I asked if I could have gingerale, ^ginger ale looks very much like scotch and soda and so when several newspaper people came up and began to talk to me, I guess I should not have been surprised that later on it was reported I was having a scotch and soda, instead of champagne. That'll teach me.

But just to show you that pride literally goes before a fall, I had a good time talking to these same reporters about, how, when I was a very little girl, I had listened to my mother's accumulation of opera records., Madam Schumann-Heink, Francis ^alda, Scotti, ^Severini - always, always Caruso

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and more Caruso, Mary Garden, Tetr^ezzini - and that Verdi had been one of my favorites - Il Trovatore, La Traviat^a, especially Rigoletto.

Well, I was all primed for what happened! Feeling very pleased with myself and having a very good time in spite of the 90 degree temperature, I went back into the box, accompanied by Mr. Rudolph Bing. Most of the audience were already down in their seats below, and they began to stand and turn around, and sort of wave and give some recognition, and I was waving back at them, while Mr. Bing was pushing the chair up underneath me, and unfortunately I did not hear him explain, that perhaps it would be more comfortable if I had an armchair, which was just a few feet behind.

As he reached for the armchair, having removed the other chair, I sat down - upon the floor, probably the first, ⁹first lady to sit down on the crimson carpet of the old Met. My first thought was for poor Jerry, who reached and helped me up, and then for poor Mr. Rudolph Bing. There was nothing to do but laugh, which I did, heartily, until finally cute Mrs. Anthony Bliss, who used to be My Sister Eileen, laughed with me. It was too much to hope that nobody had seen it. How could anybody miss it?[?] I ought to think I got out light with the small headlines said the next day, "A wonderful evening, First Lady falls for opera."

When the opera was over, I left Liz and Bess to go on about ^{their} ~~that~~ gay night life with Carol Channing, and took the girls home with me to the Carly^yle, a very exhausted Lynda Bird, who hardly had strength to tell me about her wonderful Georgia welcome. She and Lyndon had been cheered

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by a crowd estimated at 500,000. in Atlanta on Friday during their southern visit, in which Lyndon had very boldly appealed for an end to race barriers.

And about how she had made a speech at every stop, how she had said that several people already had made complaints about "my father signing an education bill, and I am not in school today.

"I wanted to clarify that point. I thought I was getting a cram course in economics, sociology, history and geography - not the least to say, physical fitness trying to keep up with my father."

She sound likes she's done a good job from reading the papers. "I wanted to get out her today," she said, in Cumberland, "and learn, not from the books, but from the people."

I went to sleep in the fairy princess apartment, thinking that I'll have a very weary husband and daughter, for our busy day tomorrow.