

MEMORANDUM

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

Friday, June 11, 1965

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It was one of the longest and most memorable days I've spent in the White House. It began at 6:00. This time I was going to be on time at Mt. Vernon. Makeup and combing by Mr. Jean Louis, and he deserves some sort of battle medal after these early hours. And then leaving about 7:30. I always wonder why I don't get up earlier when I see how beautiful the world is in the early morning, and driving out to Mt. Vernon. And this time they were set up on the front lawn -- not the river side. Somehow or other the lighting had worked out poorly before, although it was a magnificent day. And we all felt so hopeful about it.

Once more Mr. Walz had coffee and sweet rolls set up for us in his office. And even the last of the strawberries from George Washington's garden, still practically dewy -- their stems on -- to be dipped in powder sugar. But it was an hour or so before we stopped in to refresh ourselves with them. The work went fast and we thought well.

The funny hazards we've encountered -- a fly landing on my cheek when I was in the middle of a script, the constant planes going over, the boat running aground. None of these happened today. From where I worked it seemed a smooth day. I didn't know that just an hour or so before that the assistant director was frantically trying to get Washington police to wake up the driver of the truck with all of

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the machinery. He had set his alarm clock for 5:00, but it had failed to go off. He had slept through. When we arrived none of the enormous equipment was on the spot. It had been just like the last frantic days of a campaign! But he had gotten out there -- ^{in a} mad, Paul Revere sort of dash -- I hope within the limits of the law -- everybody had frantically gotten the equipment up just as I walked in. It was the fastest day we had ever worked. And by 9:30 we were through and had gone in to have our second cup of coffee with Mr. Walz and to thank him for being so cooperative. He had routed the tourists around the front way. I tried to apologize to them for whatever they had missed of George Washington's home by giving them an extrawave and a smile as I passed. I told Mr. Walz there is one more thing I would like to do before I left -- my favorite thing at Mt. Vernon is the kitchen garden -- the vegetable garden. So he and I went over there and he called the head gardner -- a very elderly man bending over his work. John and Helen ~~Gea~~ ^Tean Secondari went with us. And several of the others -- "Indian Joe" I believe and Mrs. Rastick and the assistant director. I love the espaliered ^{red} pear trees and another little fruit trees that I don't even know the name of. And of course the grape vines and the fan shaped ^{espaliered} ~~espaliered~~ peach trees along the old brick wall of the garden. And the dinner plantation bell. And the fact that it looks used. And the river in the distance. And the round

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pool of water ~~rocked~~ up several feet high. I think it must have been there earlier for purposes of watering, and now Mr. Walz says his grand children go swimming in it. And the box are some of the most magnificent in this country I am sure. And the cameras kept on clicking as the gardener and I and Mr. Walz walked around. And then at the last moment Mr. Walz presented me with a great arm-load of magnolia blossoms smelling like heaven -- taking me right back to my childhood at the brick house. I was delighted. He must have seen how much so in my face because he offered me a magnolia seedling from one of the handsome trees on Mt. Vernon's lawn for the White House. I accepted at once. Mr. Williams will find a choice spot for this. I asked him to get in touch with Mr. Williams about it wishing to myself I had nerve enough to say, "And couldn't I have another one for our own Ranch in Texas?"

With very fond thanks we said goodbye and I was back at the White House by 10:20, ready to work on my mail.

Lyndon had planned to go to Texas for the weekend, and I earned my days off during the next few hours working at my desk and on all the household details. And then at a little past 2:00, Luci and Bill went with us. We choppered to Andrews and were off to Houston to meet the Astronauts.

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We thought of asking them to come up to the Ranch to spend the weekend with us. But it was decided that this would center the attention upon these three couples whereas it was better from the national standpoint to center the attention and ^{express} ~~praise~~ the homage of the country to the whole ^{manned} ~~man~~ space center because this is the work of hundreds and thousands of hands and not just the glorified few who actually fly in the space machine.

And so began a few hours that so barely skimmed the surface of a great experience that it left me dizzy. I wished I had seen what I saw! At Houston we went straight to the manned space center which ^{has} ~~is~~ mushroomed up, handsome, streamlined modern buildings, thousands of people with the greatest skills, all brought together there in a matter of months -- just the physical setup itself an achievement. Albert Thomas had been too ill to go. That means he must be ill indeed.

Jim Webb was with us, and Lyndon never lost an occasion to let the whole crowd know how much he admired him. And ^{amid} a great flurry of cameras and people we met the Astronauts -- Major McDivitt and Major White and their families and parents. And then in only a moment I found myself seated on a front row looking out on the assembled workers at the space center where Jim Webb said, "Ladies and Gentlemen, the President of the United States." And Lyndon gave the words of accolade to the first man to walk in space, to his partner

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in the ship and to their partner on the ground who was as responsible for its success as they were, and to all the thousands that had worked on it.

They were ~~a~~ delightful young couples-- McDivitt and White and their families -- sort of fresh scrubbed and normal and excited. I'd like to apply that rather over-used word, "Americans". I was as thrilled as anybody present except their mothers and their wives.

The part of Lyndon's speech that brought the most clapping was when he announced that they were being promoted to Colonels. And the picture of the day for me came a few minutes later -- Lyndon striding at the head of the group at a fast pace and the rest of us hurrying to keep up, and right behind him side by side, Major McDivitt and Major White racing along and suddenly reached over and hugged each other for all the world like two little boys. We told their wives how much we were looking forward to having them at the White House and we would make sure that the children saw everything from the most revered historical item to our dog "Him".

We went into a vast auditorium-like room where the mission control crew had dozens -- almost hundreds -- desk-like things in front of them, sort of like consoles in a TV room -- lots of buttons and flickering lights. We saw the EKG's of McDivitt and White in flight. There was some voice tapes of their conversation from space.

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We examined a space suit -- an enormous, cumbersome thing. ~~I don't~~ like what I vaguely remember seeing in science fiction some 10 or 15 years ago. And then in the ^{manner} ~~manner~~ of world we live in we too were off in a plane but headed for a much quieter destination. This time in the little plane for the Ranch. The big one had everybody else aboard, and it had gone on.

I was looking forward to this weekend particularly because Abe and Carol had come down with us -- Carol so afraid of airplanes but deciding to do it for once because this ought to be the biggest and safest of planes. And just sort as a gift to her husband -- ^{and} I hope a little bit because she wanted to be with us. Anyhow there ^{are} ~~is~~ no two I would rather have for a weekend. And to add icing to the cake, Bill Douglas, traveling in the Big Bend country for material on a book of "Mountains of the Southwest" had decided a few days ago to come to the Ranch and absorb a little of the feeling of our own hill country -- a sort of an extra chapter to his book.

Lyndon had talked to him and asked him to bring any friends and to make himself completely at home and to wait for us on the weekend. And so he had. He was traveling with a Dr. Correll -- a botanist -- and a Mr. and Mrs. Jim Bowmer and Mrs. Burleson whom he had met, delightfully enough, floating down the Rio Grande in the Canyon portion of the Big Bend country. He and Dr. Correll

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were established in the main guest room at the Ranch. And the Bowmers and their children and Mrs. Burleson had also been in the Ranch. I had sent word ahead to make them comfortable at the Lewis so the Fortas' could be with us in the Gay Room upstairs. The logistics -- bed and travel and meals -- do need some attention around this place.

Lyndon like a man of thirst in the Sahara was rushing us all to get on the chopper for the boats. And in a matter of moments I had equipped Carol whose suitcase wasn't here yet with a bathing suit but no flats for her tiny feet and a sun hat. And Abe and Carol and Lyndon and I and a few of the office staff choppered over to the Haywood where Bill Douglas and A. W. and Dr. Correll were already out in the boat. Bill, in that wonderful fashion he has, finding the most adventurous things to do in any region had already been to "Enchanted Rock" and I believe Hamilton pool and the "3 Springs" ranch and the site of the old Mormon colony and had learned unnumbered things about Texas wild flowers and odd trees -- even the madrona -- ^{from} and Dr. Correll.

For a while we watched Lyndon in the little boat with the demonstrating water skiers. And then we all lay~~ed~~ on the upper deck of the big boat -- as many of us as could stretch out with pillows -- and watched the moon -- the same moon I had seen begin in Caneel Bay. And such interesting conversation. Dr. Correll once worked

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for Laurence Rockefeller. Now he works for something called "Texas Research Foundation" which is cataloging the plant life of Texas, among other things. One of its aims -- and this we talked about -- is to find something to control aquatic growth in Caddo Lake which is ruining a once beautiful region -- picturesque, historical, delightful recreation spot -- also a long time source of income to all the fishermen and camp owners.

It was as interesting an evening as I have spent on the boat. Nobody is more fun to listen to than Abe and Bill and Dr. Correll proved a fascinating new addition.

They all shared my love of the long twilights here. And as the sunset -- great pink billows of clouds -- made the evening a delight. And then the moon turned from the faintest white shadow to brighter silver. And then we went back to the Haywood. There we met the Jim Bowmers and Mrs. Burleson. And it turns out that they are both law partners of our old-time friend Byron Skelton -- loyal Democrat through the thin days. They live in Temple and they are members of the Texas Adventurers Club -- the first thing I'll join when I'm out of this job. Next the Audubon Society. Next some good garden club.

The dinner on the patio under the full moon was delicious. And Dr. Correll told me a story about a trip he had made into the depths of the big thicket in east Texas when an old timer had led him to a spot

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and he saw two ^{Cape Jasmine} ~~cakjashmin~~ trees -- not bushes -- trees -- about 25 feet high in a spread of some 40 feet, he said, loaded with white blossoms. You could drown in the smell. He said the man knew he could probably bring some nursery man to them. Nobody but a native ~~man~~ could possibly find them in the big thicket. And maybe he could sell them for thousands of dollars, to be transported to some rich man's garden. He would just rather leave them there. Dr. Correll is very keen about Texas' future. He's transplanted from somewhere up East -- Massachusetts I believe.

Carol was so surprised with the lake and the life along it and the many wild flowers that are still in bloom although it is just the end of the season.

Having her here is a special treat for me.

Just as we sat down to eat I had passed by the great gardenia bush behind the Haywood house and picked a blossom for each of the ladies -- some dozen or so -- it was loaded. And that is what touched off Dr. Correll's story about the ^{Cape Jasmine} ~~cakjashmin~~ trees.

~~But~~ It was a day that began at Mt. Vernon with an arm load of magnolias and went on through space and ended at Haywood with a bouquet of gardenias -- a truly wonderful day to be alive.

And so Luci must have thought too because she had asked her Daddy in her very sweet way if she could use a car to go and

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"see a friend." Her Daddy had said yes, of course. She had smiled happily and said, "Oh Daddy, thank you. Which car may I use?" And Daddy had smiled equally and said, "You just use any one you want".

So when we woke up the next morning and found that Luci had chosen the best Lincoln and had departed to see the friend, I felt a good deal of a louse for not telling Lyndon that the friend lived in Lubbock -- almost clear across the State of Texas -- eight hours drive away. But that feeling was softened by my knowing full well that some of my best memories are of the silliest, gayest, probably wildest things that I did rather than of the stodgy things. And that you are only 18 once. Besides, I trust Luci, and she thrives on it.