

1965

Thursday, June 17th WHD

Was one of those incredible days that would make a book, ^a lifetime, not just a day.

I began by asking Lyndon if we shouldn't invite all the Astronauts' families, wives and children, to spend the night at the White House. We had such a friendly, nice time with them in Houston, and they had seemed eager at the prospect of coming to the White House. He said, yes, of course.

Next followed a quick hairdo with Jean Louis, and then into the Rose Garden at 11:20. That dear, split-second husband of mine I found was having a bill-signing ceremony, which closed only seconds before the garden was to empty and then fill again with the astronauts and their kin and the newsmen.

We were at the helicopter to meet them promptly, and who should emerge first but four-year-old Pat McDivett, followed by Mike, and then Ann, and then Colonel and Mrs. McDivett. As wholesome a family as ever you've seen. Mrs. McDivett, also named Pat, peppery, gay; Lt. McDivett scrubbed, almost crew-cut, nice smile; and then the Whites -- Bonnie Lynn in a pink dress that looked like it was made for Easter, darling child, and Edward III, as handsome a youngster as I have seen in a long time, and taller, slim, not an extra pound, Col. White. Pretty blonde Mrs. White,

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also Pat.

We went into the Rose Garden, Jim Webb gathering up the Matthews, managers of this project from the ground. There Lyndon pinned a NASA Exceptional Service Medal on the astronauts and ^{or} Mr. Matthews. McDivett parents, White parents (he's a General), a coterie of kinfolks, and a whole Rose Garden full of press looked happily on, ⁺ Keenly aware that this is a moment of America's triumph, a moment of high excitement, a moment to remember.

Lyndon used it as a pulpit to say once more peace, peace, peace. It seems that almost every day he is trying to take the peace offensive in any way he can. He termed the three "the Christopher Columbuses of the Twentieth Century and said their work had nudged the world to greater international cooperation.

I was glad he quoted from a speech he had made seven years ago before the United Nations. "Men who have worked together to reach the stars are not likely to descend together into the depths of war and desolation." He talked about how much we would all prefer to see men riding together in a space ship to new adventure, to conquer a new world, than to shoot down each other's planes as we had to last night. This time it referred to activity over Vietnam last night. He also said that we have

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now pulled even with the Russians, closed the gap in manned space flight.

After he had awarded the medals, they gave him something that will be the prime exhibit in the Johnson Library if ever there is one: a small framed American flag that they had carried on their four-day, 62-orbit flight. They had only been permitted some tiny amount of luggage, like 60 ounces, and this was part of it. What could mean more?

But the cutest part of the ceremony was when Lyndon leaned over, way over, to give a little medallion to the smallest of the McDivett children, Pat, and said, "We want you to eat supper with us and spend the night -- you and all your families -- because down home that's the way we show affection." I think everybody there liked it as much as I did.

I looked out in the crowd, and who should I see but Jaqueline Cochran! Nobody that flies has played a greater role in our lives than Jackie Cochran. Once she flew Lyndon to Mayo's at a crucial point in his 1948 campaign for the Senate, when he had a kidney stone and it hung on the thread of a balance whether he would go to the hospital for a six or eight week operation -- no campaign, no Senate -- or, as it turned out, have the good fortune to get it *the kidney stone*

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^{extracted}
1 by the rarest kind of an expert at Mayo's, who pulled it out with pincers or something like that, and ^{Lydon} he was on his feet in three days. I know I gripped her hand with special warmth. She is an ardent Republican now. I hope she still likes us.

And then, with promises to return with all their families for a quiet, personal showing of the White House, after they had finished parade and greetings at the House and Senate, and get installed as our overnight house guests, all the celebrities melted away.

And I went upstairs to untangle what had become a very tangled skein indeed. I got Bess and Patsy and Ashton, and we planned our day, because we had three groups -- the great celebrities, the astronauts, and our former ranch foreman and kinsperson, Corky Cox and his family, and Art Vicklund from Austin and his family. And then I had a group of all those who had worked so hard on the boyhood home for a thank-you party in the Yellow Oval Room. So it was logistics that was the subject of our meeting. Bess to handle refreshments all around, Patsy and Ashton and I to greet the astronauts and get them started off on their whirlwind, Patsy to welcome the Vicklunds and the Coxes to the West Hall, and Dorothy Territo very shortly afterward the boyhood home group to the Yellow

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Room.

Bedding down 13 guests of different sexes and ages can be quite a problem, not to mention the sudden realization that we had to pick up Dr. Jim Cain and put him somewhere -- where? Lynda's room, of course. Perfect. He's a member of the family.

And then suddenly I found myself quite sleepy. After several weeks of not feeling relaxed, of sleeping only six or seven hours a night, a fleeting, illusive, much-desired sleep came as a delicious boon. I only feel that it's cruel somehow that Lyndon can't do the same. So I curled up and had about an hour and a half's delicious oblivion.

Then up and dressed to greet the astronauts, all beaming, buoyed up by excitement, no doubt, take the Pat McDivetts to 303 and their little daughter Ann to the sitting room of that suite -- I called it, and quite properly, the "pink roses bedroom", nice for a little girl.

And then lovely, blue-canopied 301 was for Pat and Mike, hardly the two to appreciate it. While Patsy Derby, who is turning out to be very quiet and capable and swift, showed the Whites to 327, and their lovely little Bonnie Lynn to the sitting room next door where we had rolled in a bed. The Matthews had the country bedroom, renamed for the occasion lest it sound somehow less

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grand than the others, and, important as it is being the boss on the ground, there is something real glittering about astronauts. But their daughter made up for it by having what I think is the second most charming of all the guest rooms -- the red toile one. And Edward White and the Matthews son were roommates farther down the hall.

Then we started our tour, with Mr. Ketchum and me performing as a duo, supplying, each of us, the facts of history, the facts of warmth and personal anecdote, and never to a more interested audience. I put in as many stories about the Theodore Roosevelt children, John and Caroline Kennedy, and our own Lynda and Luci, as I could, because I thought that children might like them.

Then we planned either the choice of a nap -- and goodness, how the grownfolks should have welcomed that -- or a swim for all the children, supervised by a Secret Service man, or a Walt Disney movie for the children. And a simple, straight-forward question to the Mothers: how many of your children, aged four to fourteen, would rather just have a light supper, milk and sandwiches, and an early bedtime, with movie before or afterwards, or would accompany you at seven o'clock to the State Department for Secretary Rusk's buffet and the movie of the GEMINI flight, plus a reception afterward?

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Without fail the mothers very firmly said they would like their children to stay at the White House. So, happily about halfway through the tour, saw Bess coming on hand to pour and the refreshments in the Blue Room looking delicious, I asked them to make themselves at home while I went to join people from some other walks of life -- our accountant from KTBC and Corky Cox, who used to be our ranch foreman.

Running on the Vicklands in the hall as I started upstairs, it was irresistible. I had to take them in to meet all the astronauts. I hope they were as thrilled as I would have been.

Alas, the Corky Coxes were a few minutes later and I felt I couldn't go down to repeat it. Feeling a little bit like an orchestra leader, but knowing that Jim Ketchum and Bess were following our rather well-laid plans better than I could, I settled down for a happy little visit with Art and Corky. To talk about Ava in Johnson City and the ranch, ~~The~~ their three children, Debbie, David, and Mark, the one born at Stonewall, ~~The~~ Sam Johnson house, and, with Art, about the folks at KTBC. I miss them so much. No Christmas parties. Every one I went to from the beginning -- it must have been soon after 1943 -- until 1963. I did not go then, or since.

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For the second time that day, I showed the Lincoln Room, the Queen's Room, the Oval Room, the dining room. I tried to give them a warm family vignette, because in their separate ways they have meant a lot to us, especially Corky's Mother, Ava. And then at a little past 6, they left.

By this time seven little astronaut children were splashing in the pool, getting Ashton wet, her phone call told me, the meals were ordered for the Solarium, and a Walt Disney laid on.

Then I changed into my beige ensemble, the one I wore to the Convention, and went into the Yellow Oval Room for the party for all the people who had worked so hard on the Johnson City boyhood home. By this time it was time for a real drink. I at least felt the need of one.

On a big white cardboard I had some of the outstanding newspaper stories and pictures of the home, the opening, publicity in Texas and Washington, around the country, and a scrapbook of all the clippings, and color pictures of the interiors of the rooms.

We all settled down cosily. It was one of those parties where there's a rare feeling -- or so I sensed -- of genuine enjoyment and everybody being on the same beam.

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First I raised my glass to Juanita, who is the real genesis of all the Archive work, all the saving, the setting aside of memorable pieces of paper and objects for some future Library. And glad I was of a chance to applaud her. And then, most of all, to Dorothy Territo, who has been backbone and has done the most day-to-day work on it. She's our Archivist.

One I missed on: Mrs. Portner. To me she's the one who identified all the glass. I didn't realize she had actually been in our employ for several years, collecting items for some future Library. Dr. Grover, Archivist of the United States, was there, and we paid due homage to him and all his most cooperative group. Mr. Lysinger, who had arranged the exhibit; Henry Livingston, who had helped. I remember with pride that he said, "This is the first of all Presidential Libraries that ever started out with a real archivist on its staff: Mrs. Portner." Because somewhere down the line all of this will become a part of the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library.

And he paid quite a nice compliment to the house itself, the little Sam Johnson house. Sandy Fox was there, who has done all the beautiful calligraphy work for the exhibit, with his assistants. And, of course, Ashton, who has turned out to be my right hand in all dealings with Jessie, who is a very good correspondent.

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And most pleasing to me it was that Mr. Izac Avery, who has been at the White House for 32 years, beginning with Hoover, who has framed all the pictures for us. The sequence of old Johnson City, circa 1914, the family pictures, beginning with Lyndon aged six months, many old cars gathered together by Alice Brown and various friends. The years of campaign pictures from the House in 1937 through the Senate, the Vice Presidency, and the Presidency, the last one the Fall of 1964. Often I would hand Mr. Avery a picture in the hall about 4 P. M. and say, "I just wish we could take it to Texas, but we are going in an hour. But just get it framed, Mr. Avery, and we will take it down next time we go." When we boarded the plane an hour later it would be in the hands of my Secret Service Agent. And I think he enjoyed doing it that way -- the impossible.

Everybody had a chance to talk about his part in the house. There was shy, quiet, obliging Chief Knudsen, who had laid out with me and Dorothy Territo the hundreds of pictures on the big table in the Treaty Room. We had selected from them the 18 that made up the interesting montage with dramatic pictures of our lives, put them all together, made one negative out of them, and framed it. I do believe it is in front of this large montage the tourists stop the longest.

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I read them from Jessie's letter how in the month since it had opened on May 13th to June 15th, there had been 4,118 people who had signed the registry. Actually there had been more people because some signed, "Mr. and Mrs. Jones and Family," and some did not sign at all. From 43 States and 7 foreign countries. As far as Japan and South Africa. How all the mothers encourage their small boys to sit in the chair that was Lyndon's when he was in the Senate, and then say, "Now, son, maybe you will grow up to be President."

Dr. Goldman was absent. It was his birthday. He was back at Princeton. And it was Liz's 21st wedding anniversary, and she was absent. But the rest of us all said thanks and congratulations. And it was as happy a party as I remember in the White House.

A little before eight I left Dorothy in charge, said goodbye, and got ready to go to the State Department auditorium. Surprisingly, Lyndon had told me that he wanted to accompany me. He came striding in like a whirlwind with Beagle and, of all people, Governor Tom Dewey of New York! This was the first time I remember meeting Governor Tom Dewey, but not a day older than my memory of him in 1948. Polished, self-assured, cocky, and really quite charming. They had been talking about crime. He had given hours

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of his time -- and it's not the first -- to make plans to attack, eradicate crime in the District of Columbia, as sort of a model for the Nation. So it had been a two-fisted tornado sort of a day for Lyndon, one fist lashing out against crime, the other (or perhaps you should call it a hand) extended towards peace, offering the exploration of space through joint sharing of knowledge, ^{but} the benefits of the rich technology of our country to other countries, asking others to share the adventure with us. What use of energy, what change of pace!

I thought of his two bowls of soup for lunch, or maybe it was only one -- I had called up at 3:30 to see if I could send over something. No. He he had had soup. No, he never came over for a nap.

We went to the State Department auditorium to what must have been a most singular event. Chiefs of Missions and their families, along with many heads of the State Department, had been invited to view the movie of the astronauts' trip in space, described by the astronauts themselves. They narrated in a very soft, gentle, matter-of-fact voice. White, bulky in his space suit, stepped out into a bright blue void. Below him you saw a great spherical mass. You could see the umbilical cord which connected him. He said, "I wanted to be darned sure I didn't lose the lens cap on the camera. I knew I might as well not come back if I did that."

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McDivett in the craft was an excellent cameraman, too. White said, "I took some big steps. I stepped out on Hawaii and on to California and then I stepped right on Texas, Mr. President." It was a thrilling, incredible, heart-in-throat moment, our astronauts miles above the earth, one floating around in space. And it had been only 8 years ago, not quite that, one October night in Texas, when Lyndon and I had heard of the Russians' first shattering trip in space.

Once more, Lyndon used this chance for a peace offensive. "From that perspective, where the sun shines in all its purity, how small, how mean, seem the differences among men and Nations down below. Surely we on this earth -- heads of State, diplomats, private citizens, can find it within ourselves to search for and reach for those new perspectives which will enable us to understand one another better and assure peace among ourselves forever." And Rusk thanked all the Ambassadors present for the contributions of many of them to the space flight. Their ground stations had helped service and guide the flight. Some of them had vacated radio frequencies to help give clear air for the astronauts.

And then Lyndon delivered the shocker of the evening. He said, "I'm not going to be very popular with your families when I say this, but I want you astronauts to go again outside this country

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in the next few hours." While Pat McDivett and Pat White and the two Colonels sat open-mouthed, he asked them to go along with the Matthews and Hubert Humphrey to Paris to the American Air Show, leaving at 4 A.M. Then pandemonium broke loose! Staff members slithered over and knelt in front of Webb and later in front of Lyndon, making plans for the flight, for getting Muriel Humphrey, who was out in Minnesota, to fly back to join them in time.

But in moments we were upstairs on the top floor of the State Department for the reception, shaking hands with members of at least 60 foreign nations. It had been so hurried, many were out of town. But the Platzers of Austria were there, the Margains of Mexico, the Dobrynins of Russia, and it was of course for him that the camera flashbulbs went on endlessly. Sudanese, Senegalese, Burmese -- many of the Iron Curtain countries, Charge d'Affairs and Secretaries where there was no Ambassador -- and lots and lots and lots of children. A singular event in the lives of the diplomatic children.

After about 30 minutes we gathered up Governor Dewey and went back to the White House, still without dinner, and here began the funniest part of this great crescendo of a day. As the astronauts' wives peeked in, I took them back to my little office-dressing room

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and opened up the closet where my evening dresses are and called Helen, because what does any woman think about when she hears she's going to Paris -- clothes, even if she's the wife of an astronaut! The purpose of the visit was to show the French and the world the achievements of the United States in outer space.

Mrs. McDivett and Mrs. White were both size ten. That's great -- so am I. We called Helen and suggested that they have a style show and see what they could wear. They need one evening dress apiece, surely, just for insurance. Maybe Le Grande Charles might invite them to a reception. Then there was the coat problem. Mrs. Matthews was a size 14. Lynda's closet could yield up a 14.

I asked Helen to get the washing machines to going on what must have been a suitcase full of dirty clothes for them. And then told the kitchen to get some dinner on the table as quickly as they could for a starving, bewildered Governor Dewey. What a household he must think he's descended into!

Leaving the style show, I went to the dinner table a little past 11, and Lyndon, Governor Dewey, Hubert and I had dinner, with Colonel White and Colonel McDivett and Mr. Matthews willing for a second plate -- it had been a long time since that reception.

And Dr. Jim Cain sitting on hand -- he got roped in to go to Paris

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as the doctor! And Lloyd Hand moving quietly in and out and making plans.

Lyndon told Governor Dewey he must spend the night and they would finish their conversation in the morning. And I said, "The Lincoln Room, of course," and I would bring him pajamas and a toothbrush. How funny the pajamas must have fit! And there'd be somebody when he first called for coffee in the morning to supply other things.

It was during dinner that I realized the full extent of the discussion. We merely brushed upon it, the discussion that Lyndon and Tom Dewey had had during the day about crime. How determined Lyndon is to make a showing, how generous Tom Dewey has been in trying to help.

And it was also during dinner that the final act of the whirring circus took place. Lyndon called beautiful Mrs. Arthur Krim, asked her if she could fly to Paris in about 4 or 5 hours to act as interpreter for the astronauts. She speaks 7 languages. Just jump on a plane, or he'd send one for her, come down and spend -- we can't say spend the night, rather take a nap, in the Queen's Room, and then depart with the Vice President, the astronauts, and Jim Cain before grey dawn. She could. She did.

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Thinking about getting them off at that time, I was about to call Helen once more to the rescue. I could give her the day off, and servants who serve dinner at 11:30 you mustn't ask to serve coffee at 3. Luci, protector of servants, stopped me. "No, Mother, let me get up and give everybody coffee. I'd just love to. Mother, you just don't know -- Helen's been sick for a whole month." And I thought it would be great. I said, "Fine, Luci," told her everybody's room number, and left it with her.

Pat McDivett had my white crinkled crepe dress, and Pat White my white sari dress, someone my white evening coat, someone my red Spring coat and my yellow Spring coat, and Lynda's wardrobe had provided for Mrs. Matthews. Now I do hope the French give them a party!

I took Tom Dewey up to the Lincoln Room, and I think he thought the day had been just as hilarious as it had been to me. But I know when I've had enough, so I crawled selfishly into bed, leaving Luci to cope with the cock-crowing hour.