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Friday, August 27th

Lyndon's 57th birthday was oddly divided between a quiet morning (I actually lay in bed and did some recording) and hours of riding the nice edge of tension.

Some time during the morning I got a call from Lyndon, a hesitant, uncertain sort of call. What would I think if he didn't come at all?

Things were in turmoil. The steel strike was pressing on him. I quickly marshaled my thoughts and said if he didn't, I would go through with the park presentation, rush it up, if possible, and then catch the quickest commercial or anything back to Washington to be with him, even if it was midnight of his birthday. He said all right, he'd let me know.

And then a series of calls, one from Liz (she'd try to see -- the TIME-LIFE people were on their way, they were already enroute, no chance to postpone their meeting) and a call from Bill Moyers, which disturbed me. He said something had happened that he wouldn't go into, it was all his fault, that had upset the President -- it may have hurt their relations. The President might not come, and if he didn't Bill realized it would upset my plans very much for the park dedication and for the birthday party, and he wanted me to know he was sorry.

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There was something about his tone that worried me far more than either presentation or party. He said he took the full blame, that it was all his fault. And what it is I have no idea. But Bill contributes a certain quality of brilliance, of wit, and a mixture of aloofness from us, with yet enough devotion to us, that Lyndon needs, our organization needs. I could not bear to lose him, and his words about "it may have hurt my relations with the President permanently" fell like a stone on my heart.

So the next thing to face was the arrival of Mr. Mennen and Hardy and family. I felt completely incapable of giving them the feeling of the importance of the occasion, the significance of the hour, that Lyndon's presence would have lent, ^{but} ~~and~~ completely determined that when they arrived at the ranch in their plane, they would have all the warmth and courtesy and story of the ranch that I was capable of giving.

That they were interested in this was evidenced by the fact that Mr. ^{Linen?} Mennen was bringing along his daughter, Margaret Mennen Dawson, ^{Linen?} and his sons, John and Whittington Mennen. ^{Linen?}

There's nothing to do with uncertainty but to live through it and keep on with the business at hand. Which was, in a few hours, to advance what could have been well advanced by professionals in days.

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I suggested to Bess an announcement over the loud speaker at the rodeo, where the biggest crowd in Johnson City would certainly be gathered, that there would be a presentation of a park at 4:30 with Mrs. Johnson there and the heads of LIFE and TIME, and then later on we would give them a flash about Lyndon if we got the word he was coming; to tell Jessie Hunter to get the word around about the boyhood home -- that's the second largest crowd in Johnson City -- and then she had to leave to find such necessary equipment as a platform and a microphone and notify Mayor George Byers. I gave up my prettiest red yucca plant from the front yard, because the one we had bought from the nursery turned out to be bloomless. Pat Taylor planted it in a redwood tub, and, leaning gracefully over the watercolor sketch of the park of the future, it should make an attractive picture.

How marvellous Bess remains, serene in the midst of confusion and very peculiar demands!

Bill Moyers was to call me back when he got any firm word. Someone did call to say that it was announced to the press about noon that he would leave within the hour. But it was 1:30 our time before we got the word that he was actually in the air.

Lincoln?
At 3 Mr. Mennen, head of all the LIFE-TIME organization,

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and Mr. Hardy, President of LIFE itself, touched down, bringing with them the three ^{Linn}Mennen children and a very attractive lady named Miss Fowler. Mr. Pitt had arrived earlier. We came in the living room, this time by the side door and not the kitchen, and Mary brought in a large tray with cold drinks and sandwiches and cookies, and then I suggested that perhaps they would like to see the house. Most certainly they would, and I made it as glowing as possible, trying to stay within my schedule.

And then around over the ranch itself, and the house where Lyndon was born, the graveyard and the schoolhouse, with Jerry following to be my timekeeper and alert me 20 minutes before Lyndon would land, as planned, at the Winters strip.

It went like clockwork, and thank Heavens I remembered enough to autograph copies of A President's Country to the three men and of A More Beautiful America for Mr. ^{Linn}~~Mennen~~ and Mr. Hardy, the only copies I had.

To talk and listen at the same time is a difficult art, and almost everybody would rather tell some of their own experiences than listen without interruption. So I got treated to an hilarious tale of the time LIFE had the party for all of the people who had appeared

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on its cover during its days of publication, no doubt the most illustrious and varied guest list ever to be assembled.

We arrived at Melvin's strip about one minute before Helicopter Number One settled on the ground, and Lyndon emerged like a whirlwind, I gave myself an A for remembering names. And then he got in with us and we drove to the park, and it was a sight to see!

Our platform was the base of a float, decked with paper rosebuds, a band was playing in one corner, a motley crowd, half of whom I recognized as Johnson City folks, and about 12 or so of our birthday dinner guests, Federal Judge Homer Thornberry, oil man and sometime *Hel County resident* ~~Blancoite~~, Wesley West. The usual quota of towheaded, barefooted boys.

And I was suddenly struck with thinking how must this look to to sophisticated city people from New York. ² Pretty hopeless, with the backs of buildings that blatantly proclaim "Fish, 1961," and the wornout refrigerators behind the hardware store. Well, come back in a year and we'll see!

The five of us sat on the platform -- Mayor Byers, Mr. *Luci* ~~Mennen~~, and Mr. Hardy, and Lyndon and I. Someone quickly got a chair for Lynda Bird. And Luci, as usual, managed to stand down in the crowd.

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Lin
Mr. ~~Mennen~~ made a very nice speech about LIFE's 30 years dedication to improving the beauties of America, and how he wanted on the occasion of the President's birthday to express their appreciation for his beautification program, and also to their newest editor (laughing allusion to me), some nice words about the sensitivity and charm of my article. Which I swallowed whole!

The Mayor had welcomed us first, and then I made my words of warm thanks, adding a little description of what the park was going to look like one year from now, and asked everyone to step up and see the watercolor renderings of the park, which Mr. *Lin* ~~Mennen~~ gave me and we placed on an easel.

And it was not until that moment that I had been sure Lyndon was going to say anything. He has a certain reluctance about this whole thing. Could he think it is because these people are laughing at his little home town? He made an amusing, bucolic, reminiscent sort of little speech, about some of his memories of Johnson City. About two little boys who were having a fight in this very spot, and he, Lyndon, came along, aged about 6, and kicked them both over into the dust, and Olin Cox chased him all the way home. And then he told a story -- an old but very good one -- about Senator Wirtz's

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defense of Maury Maverick, who had received money from David Dubinsky's Union to buy poll taxes for the poor people in San Antonio. The evidence was so strong the Senator practically had to admit it, but he turned it all around the other way with the jury by talking about how the Yankees had always drained the South, drained Texas, and here this great patriot, this son of a man who had fought at the Alamo and settled Texas, had actually gone up and brought some money down FROM the Yankees, and what did he do -- keep it for himself? No, he gave it to the poor folks of San Antonio. Well, Maury got off.

And this was another instance, and told in a way that I think *Linen* ~~Mennen~~ was only amused, in which those rich Yankees had come down and brought some money to Texas!

Quickly, the ceremony was over. I made my grateful goodbyes to Mr. *Linen* ~~Mennen~~ and Mr. Hardy and Miss Fowler as we came down the steps from the float, we jumped in our car (and I had planned for them to go up and see the boyhood home, and a hurried word quickly gotten to Jessie Hunter to open it up -- it was pas' 4) when Lyndon called out, "Put them in. Bring them with us. Let's take them up to see the boyhood home."

West

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We piled them in -- as many as we could -- with Lyndon at the wheel, and went out for what really proved a tour on roller skates, with Lyndon in charge and me giving as many thumbnail sketches to whatever interested straggler I could keep up with.

And then I found myself out on the front porch with Lyndon and Mr. ^{Linen} ~~Mennen~~ seated in the swing, and the press and photographers swarming over the lawn. At that moment a most delightful thing happened, the sort of thing that often happens to Lyndon. Unplanned, unexpected, a small boy -- not quite 2, I would say -- in a red play suit, with a solemn, interested, amiable face, came walking up the steps, went over to Lyndon, put his hand on his leg, and looked up in his face. Lyndon gathered him up and asked him to kiss him, which the little boy obliged by doing. And then Lyndon began to try to give him a pencil. The little boy insisted on giving it back to him. It was a heyday for the photographers. The perfect little ham!

I asked Liz to take care of them from then on, see that they got home, had drinks, any hospitality they wanted. Lyndon grabbed up Jessie Hunter as another guest for the birthday party, and we left in a swirl for the two helicopters at Melvin's.

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Within the next hour we all assembled at the Haywood, by helicopter, car, from various points. The Moursunds and the Winters and the Wests, Jesse Kellam, the Thornberrys, Lynda, the Don Thomases, the Billy Baileys, the Bill Heaths (only later did I find he had walked out on a dinner given in his honor by another Member of the Board of Regents in Houston, chartered a plane and flown up to Johnson City to join us), John and Nellie Connally.

A little bit later we were joined by Bess and Liz and Busby and Vicky and Marie and Jake. I took the less adventures in the big boat, and Lyndon, leaving his cares on the bank, got in the speedboat. And it was then I saw the frailest little silver sliver of a new moon.¹ How I like the Indian method of counting time by the moon. It was three moons ago that I was in the Virgin Islands.

We wound up at Mary Margaret's beach house, where Birge and Lucia and Becky were waiting for us. I am so delighted to have them a part of Lyndon's life.

And then coming back, most of us rode in the big boat. Some of the staff went back by car.

It was the end of a tense day. I was utterly ready for the top deck of the big boat, a pillow, a drink, good companions, the sunset, and the new moon.

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As a birthday present, the press left us alone. John and Nellie were on the big boat coming back with us. He and Lyndon were talking about plans for John for the future, and John said he was not going to run again, unless he changed his mind. He would make his mind up in the next 3 weeks.

Lyndon said, "You're crazy. Think what you can do for the State. And then maybe you could be Vice President or President of this country." I wondered what sort of a forecast that meant for me and my plans for '68. I agree so wholeheartedly about John. He looks like Texas. He's the best of Texas, though too conservative, sometimes, for me and Lyndon. With education, with tourism, with a youth and dynamism and tough intelligence, he has already done a lot for his State.

He talked with excitement about a trip he had made through the Dupont Laboratories -- all their research. Much as he loves Coastal Bermuda, I do not believe the ranch can contain him, and I do not believe it should.

Nellie was happy, pretty, lively, flirting just a little bit with all the men, and everybody naturally gravitating to her.

Back at the Haywood, we had a fish dinner. Unhappily, it had

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waited about an hour for us, because it was 9:30 before we sat down to eat, or closer to 10, maybe.

And then inside for birthday cake and more coffee. For the pictures, first, of a really wonderful cake, produced by Bess's imagination and the White House kitchen's artistry and some of my suggestions. On the top of it, "You can have your cake and eat it too," was lettered.

And then a little rolled-up scroll, a Legislative Bill certainly, and a hypodermic needle (and that represented Medicare). In another place, some tiny modern houses and another rolled-up scroll -- Housing. Trucks and a roadway building represented Appalachia. "Major achievements" all over the cake.

And then came the presents. There were some paintings -- a wonderful one of horses hitched out in front of what looked like an old stagecoach Inn, with the light coming out of the window that you could almost see by.

Frightful pictures of Lynda Bird on her Western trip, one holding up a bite for a little chipmunk, who was standing within a foot of her, ⁵his hind legs, eagerly awaiting the bite.

A hilarious one from Bess: a framed poster, circa 1890 or 1900, I suppose, entitled The Management, informing the employees

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that they would show up at 6:30 in the morning, sweep out the store, get the fire started, and a few more such duties that went on until 9 o'clock at night, including some advice about their social life in between. Very prim it must be, what there was of it.

My own gift, the one I liked best, an album about Lyndon's Father's life in the Texas Legislature, including a very well-done copy of the Alamo Purchase Bill, which he passed, and some amusing photostats of newspaper articles about his service in the Legislature, particularly that during the war years, 1917-18.

Another, the history of this house, the ranch house, which Liz has so diligently researched. Begun about 1892. With wonderful pictures ranging from 1893 to 1965.

Vast boxes of ties from Wesley, a gargantuan box of candy, the best in the world but enough to put on 5 pounds for each member of us assembled.

It was a good evening with very special friends. It's so wonderful to see Homer and Eloise, happy, relieved, out from under the Sword of Damocles.

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Luci and Pat and Helene joined us, and the hit of the evening was a poem that Luci had composed for her Daddy's birthday, about On Becoming Fifty-seven. Her philosophy, her relations with him, a combination of perception and wisdom and laughter that was very appealing to all of us.

Lynda is so sterling, so companionable, so dear, but at this moment in our lives Luci has a knack for stealing the spotlight. It was not ever thus. It used to be Lynda, and will again.

It was after 12:30 when we got home, and probably 2 before we went to sleep. But whatever the strains and tensions and distresses of the day in Washington had been, they were not noticeable in Lyndon's manner. He was like a man riding on a crest of achievement and success, and he was also a happy and relaxed man. I shall remember his 57th birthday with happiness.