

MEMORANDUM

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

Saturday, April 2, 1966 WND

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Saturday morning, April 2nd, began early as we left the Tropicana Hotel and headed for the airport and then decided to stop for just ten minutes at the Alamo. How could you be in San Antonio and not go by the Alamo?<sup>2</sup> It was not open. There was nobody around. Liz banged with the heavy ~~marker~~<sup>knocker</sup> and called out, "It's the second siege of the Alamo."

Finally an attendant appeared with a key and we went into the damp stillness of this mission fortress that's left its mark on the history of this land. Rather irrelevantly, I marvelled, not so much at the bravery of Colonel William Travis and his 200 men, but at how they simply got along in the business of living -- all 200 of them -- with the supplies and a few cattle inside this small structure.

I looked around hoping I might find on the wall somewhere a record of Lyndon's father. He was a leader among several Texas Representatives who ~~enclaved~~<sup>saved (!)</sup> the Alamo bill not so many decades ago when it was about to be torn down. Mrs. Johnson had told me it hung on the walls of the Alamo somewhere -- his picture and the story of the bill. ~~It~~ I did not find it.

Then to the airport and off to the Big Bend country, landing at ~~Persidio~~<sup>Persidio</sup> at a little past ten.

~~Persidio~~<sup>Persidio</sup> had been known to me only as a place on the map that the weatherman said was the hottest in the United States -- usually around 103. And this airport had been billed by Liz as one where you had to buzz the runway to get the antelope off before you landed -- a virtually abandoned Army

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installation of World War II now sparsely used by the scattered inhabitants of this arid land. If Liz meant just to excite us, the truth of it was later proved when a departing private airplane -- on Monday, that is -- collided with an antelope -- <sup>with</sup> considerable damage and danger.

This time we did see a herd grazing peacefully within yards of the runway. And a crowd assembled around the little speaking stand -- some 3500 strong, a mighty lot of folks in this country -- more than half the population of all the towns and ranches from miles around. All the Mayors were lined up in a long receiving line for me to greet as we got off the plane. The wind was blowing mightily, and the <sup>Sul Ross</sup> ~~Sires~~ College band playing "The Yellow Rose of Texas", and all the little children grinning and waving homemade signs, "Welcome Lady Bird, Udall, and You All".

John Ben Shepherd <sup>paid</sup> was at my elbow escorting me everywhere.

And the keynote of the day -- the keynote of the country -- was set for me when the presiding Mayor made his little speech and said, "Ordinarily on an occasion like this, the Mayor presents you with a key to the city. But we don't have any key because we don't have any locks on our door." You're mighty welcome. Freedom, openness -- that is the spirit of this part of the country. Instead they gave us a sombrero -- quite nice ones for the Udalls and me -- and straw ones for every last one of the 70-odd newspaper entourage.

I shook hands with just as many as I could get to because one lady from Marfa had said, "Nobody ever stops here. All they do is fly over us."

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There was one hilarious moment when I spotted a 4-year old boy with a huge yellow button upside down. I turned it right side up and found to my horror that it said, "Support Sloppiness". So I quickly turned it over again.

There was a Sheriff's posse in quite authentic cowboy cloths, mounted, ringed around the airport, a backdrop of mountains behind them.

Stu and George <sup>a</sup>Hertzog and Congressman Dick White, who was with us everywhere, and I lined up with the wind whipping us in the face. We had our picture made. Then we were off headed toward Poncho <sup>Villa</sup>Via country -- the two hour drive to the Big Bend. Sometimes we crossed the famous old Comanche Indian Trail. The scenery was an ever-changing panorama of mountain and volcanic masses, swirls of tumbleweed, a few struggling blue bonnets and cactus and yucca. And finally great expanses of nothing at all except creosote bushes with littly tiny yellow blossoms on it. It's sad that they smell bad and they are hated by the ranchers because once started, they take everything over. No grass, nothing, grows around them.

It was a ~~x~~harsh, forbidding land, hostile to man, a land of arroyos and mountains barracaded by boulders and armored with plants that either "stick or sting or stink," as somebody had written.

I kept on looking at it with the eyes of the homesteader who had come through on a wagon about 1910 with his pregnant wife and three-year old child, a small load of supplies and one Mexican guide on a burro, looking for some health-giving mineral springs that he had heard about. For days and days he had crossed just such country, but he had described along the way the sweeping

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fields of grass and once a forest of blooming century plants, <sup>with</sup> and 4-foot stalks of ivory colored flowers, <sup>a</sup> ~~a~~ breathtaking spectacle! And I remember that during and after the first World War, somewhere I had read, the land was heavily over-stocked -- cattle and sheep and goats had simply eaten off every blade of grass. And later, rather cynically, this is how it actually came to be, the National Park and all for it was so poor -- ~~so~~ <sup>so</sup> low in value that a few public spirited citizens -- among them Amon Carter -- had begged and badgered for money and for Federal Government aid to save this wild stretch of wilderness as a Park.

Can it be that mankind can do this to a big piece of earth in just a half century? Or did the old homesteader remember right? It had been a charming book. ~~The~~ <sup>The</sup> memoirs of the man who had actually done it, helped out in writing by Fred Gibson, a very competent Texas writer.

Here and ~~down~~ <sup>There on</sup> the lonely landscape you could see a few cottonwood trees and a windmill that spelled mankind -- life. Somebody had had nerve enough to dig a well and to build a house and try to eke out a living.

The cottonwood tree is a very symbol out here to me. It says, here ~~man~~ man is.

Very rarely on this two hour trip along a really great highway we came to some settlement. Once a filling station. Once a little community. In each case I am sure every living human being was out by the side of the road waving, grinning, carrying a sign. One sign was so funny I had to stop and say, "Let's get our picture taken."

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Six young girls, all Latinos, had encased themselves in cardboard boxes, a hole at the top through which their heads stuck, a hole at the bottom for their feet, and on each box a big letter, so that when lined up they read, "MRS. LBJ". They were all jumping up and down yelling "Welcome, welcome."

For once I can say that <sup>I</sup> was the biggest thing that happened in a town. It looked like every business establishment had a sign and every person had a smile and a big wave.

A little after noon the terrain began to rise, and about 12:30 -- just as the mountains were beginning -- we stopped at Panther Junction at the headquarters of the Big Bend National Park. They have an indoctrination center -- a stone building that nestles very much at home on the landscape. And in it, exhibits that tells the story of its geology, its history, its plant and animal life. What a good graphic beginning for a family vacation to stop here and learn about what they are going to see. Its one of the many reasons I like the National Park Service.

This was our first encounter with the Odessa Chuck Wagon gang. Not first for me because I had met them at a political rally long ago in, I believe, a high school gymnasium in Odessa and they had given Lyndon one of their yellow shirts. But here they were -- some 25 or so strong -- serving us barbeque and frioles and slaw and iced tea. And I was never hungrier.

I have a fault to find with so-called banquets where <sup>one</sup> ~~one~~ <sup>the</sup> is to honor guests -- you don't get to eat. Just as I started to take a bite George Hartzog motioned to me to stand up please. There was a little ceremony. This was the time

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of course when I handed him the check. I had already made it out for \$7 for the pass that entitled me to go to all the National Parks I wanted to all the time in the year 1966. I have no fault to find with this. I couldn't spend \$7 better. But back to the table and one good bite and then there was a presentation of a painting. It was a landscape of the Big Bend country done by a local artist and given to me by a much loved local woman who had played a large part in bringing the Park into being. I was delighted to have it, but still hungry.

I got back to the table and other guests kept coming up being introduced -- actually many of them were good friends. The Bill <sup>Niels</sup> Knowles, Mamie Shepherd.

Meanwhile there was <sup>maryachi</sup> ~~music~~ <sup>with</sup> a tall, handsome Mexican in an enormous heavily embroidered hat with a sarape over his shoulder and singing the <sup>plaintive</sup> ~~plaintive~~ songs of Mexico -- "Guadalajara" <sup>"Tierra"</sup> ~~"Tierra"~~ <sup>"La Paloma"</sup> ~~"Lapa Loma"~~ and of course the "Rancho Grande".

And then the time came for me to stand up and have my picture made with him wearing his hat and his sarape draped over my shoulder.

Back at the table I ~~hungered and~~ wolfed large mouthfuls of the beans, barbeque, drafts of the iced tea, making believe there were no cameras clicking away. I made it, simply weighing in the fact that the pictures would be awful and deciding that one more bite was worth it.

But, alas, everytime I arose for some little ceremony the unceasing West Texas wind would blow away my ~~my~~ napkin or deposit a little more sand in my plate. One lady's plate simply rose up and swept away from in front of her.

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Then it was time to stand up and have my picture made with Stu and all the assembled group with the Odessa Chuck Wagon gang and tell them how wonderful the barbeque had been.

And back in the cars we were and off up to the Chisos Mountains to the Park basin which was our destination.

Here the land began to rise more sharply. We were leaving the endless, hostile desert country and going up into the Chisos Mountains themselves -- that is <sup>the</sup> word for ghosts. Why, I do not know. Could it be because they are so lonely? And to the vegetation was added the juniper tree -- so well known to me as "bane of the rancher's life". But two other kinds of junipers I have never seen before: the weeping juniper, whose branches droop as though they are about to draw their last breath of life; and the alligator/juniper, with a very rough, scaley bark. And the madrona tree, though not as plentiful as I had seen it on the Catto's Ranch.

A little after 2:30, we arrived at the Park Basin headquarters -- quite rustic facilities, completely suited to the terrain. I had a small but pleasant cabin and thought what a nice place this would be with about three other people that you love dearly -- <sup>to</sup> the walk and walk, the ride and ride, and maybe play bridge at night.

We had time to change into our cloths -- blue jeans and red-checked shirt and my sombrero. And then all of us -- Udalls, ~~the~~ Park naturalists, Secret Servicemen and some 70 or so newspaper folks, gathered at the beginning of "Lost Mine" trail for a two-hour hike. Here is where it became quite

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hilariously evident to me that we were in a way the victims of our own success. We had two diametrically opposed incompatible elements.

Surrounded by this wilderness, <sup>there</sup> ~~this~~ majestic towering crags, this aeons old graphic story of the geologic history of the earth, this solitude <sup>—</sup> Into it came the thundering <sup>motley</sup> ~~motley~~ crew of 100 or so!

As Isabelle Shelton put it, "At Big Bend you couldn't see the wilderness for the people."

There soon stood out one character -- a newspaper woman in bright red britches carrying a bright red umbrella, as she climbed the mountain. We all remember her. And I expect she got more words in print and more pictures than anybody on the trip with the possible exception of me.

Stuart and I set the pace and a naturalist came right along beside us to tell us about the wildlife. Actually we saw little <sup>Wildege</sup> ~~Wildege~~ but how could we? We probably frightened them all away. None of the panthers or rattlesnakes that Liz had promised us. He told us they were there, but rare. The bird life was enormously abundant. One, the Kalino <sup>Warbler</sup> ~~Warbler~~, found only in this area.

And most interesting to me, he described the relic <sup>by</sup> forest of maple and ponderosa pine, the huge trunks -- some strange mystery of nature, they were left over from a much earlier time when the climate was different here. On the other side of the mountain, they were reachable by horseback.

The naturalist, Perry Brown I believe it was, told us that when the weather was very dry and there was a fire, they were always scared because if a fire got to these trees and they went there would be no more. They are



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~~They~~ not reseeding themselves. They are simply a freak of nature left over from another time, hundreds of miles from any others of their kind.

The prettiest trees were the pinon pines, like my Christmas tree.

On the way up <sup>to</sup> at the marvelous vistas, Stuart and I raced to see who could first use the line "on a clear day you can see forever." And you can!

In one direction you see into Mexico. It's a wild free land and it does something to you.

Liz called it "Marlboro Country". I think "roll-your-own country" is better. I shall remember it hauntingly. But it is not for the luxury lover.

As for "Lost Mine" itself, it was a quick silver mine, if it ever existed. Perhaps it is a legend, though there is quick silver in the country nearby.

At the top of the trail we all stopped -- the newspaper folks got out their microphones or tapes or tablets and I gave a brief word-picture of the way I felt about the day. What an amazing crew we were! Life magazine was represented and TIME and NEWSWEEK and "Better Homes and Gardens" and Venture magazine and of course "National Geographic". There was Betty Beale, veteran of Washington drawing room who actually seemed to love it. And Nancy Dickerson who ~~xx~~ always managed to look like she just stepped out of "Vogue" and I'll assure you that the conditions were adverse. NBC and CBS and ABC were all there, and of course the wire services of Helen Thomas and Frances <sup>Star</sup> ~~Lewis~~ <sup>Lewis</sup>. Texas newspapers were heavily represented by Ft. Worth/Telegram, Big Bend Sentinel, San Angelo Standard Times, Houston Chronicle, Dallas News, El Paso Times, Andrews County News. And KTBC was there with Cactus.

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Nobody had a better time than Wauhilla LaHaye of Scripps-Howard. And I will never forget Fred Maroon going backwards up the steep, winding mountain trail carrying his heavy wonderful camera equipment.

Amazingly, <sup>Madame'selle</sup> ~~Madame Mazelle~~ was represented, but it certainly was no fashion show. And a sizeable range of local radio stations, Odessa, Midland, Ft. Worth -- one was delightfully labelled, Pony Express. I'm sure this is Liz' humor and meant that he simply somehow or another got the dispatchers out from this remote, vastness of the world down to a place where there is more than 1 telephone.

Then we walked down the mountain and had time for an hour's rest before that most delightful part of the day began.

About 6:30 we all gathered on a little mesa top, gay with the little red-checkered table cloths and a campfire glowing brightly in the middle of it. To the west was the most spectacular view -- "the window" -- a cleft between two mountains. Through it you could really see forever! There was another mountain range far in the distance. And to the east, right behind us, rose a gigantic mountain called the "Castle". Everybody was in a merry mood. <sup>There</sup> ~~There~~ was a water hole where the "water" was a purely secondary ingredient! And then a deliciously ample meal and plenty of time to eat it.

Everybody was gay. / High spirits were contagious. We all swapped tales about our experiences of the day.

To me, one of the happiest things was seeing a roommate, Kay Sullivan she had been then, Mrs. <sup>k</sup> ~~Walker~~ <sup>?</sup> Briggsley now, of Sanderson, Texas. We lived

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together in 1930-31 at the University, and I had not seen her in at least 25 years. It is mighty hard to go through Sanderson no matter where you travel. Even here she was 200 miles from me. But when we called her, she said, yes indeed, she and her husband would love to drive up for the barbeque. She has been a school teacher ever since, raised a daughter, lived a useful if rather narrow life, and is one of the sweetest people I know. We had so much fun saying "You remember when?".

All this time the most magnificent drama was happening in the sky above us. Sundown and twilight -- the unceasing play of lights and ~~shadows~~ shadows and the nuances of colors in the sky and on the sides of the mountains.

Sometimes I think the Lord made up in this western big sky country for what he didn't give us in rainfall, in verdant vegetation, with the glory of the sky. It was the most superb theatre. Fit subject for a symphony or a poem but for me just an hour of delight that was almost tangible -- of the heightened feeling of being alive.

And then the final, magnificent touch. Out above the "Castle" a full moon rose! It hadn't been in the plans. Not even Liz' plans. And as it rose the camp fire grew brighter -- the Ranger threw on chunks every now and then. It was down in a hole with big boulders around it, built very properly. And Navaho rugs began to be flung out onto the ground around the camp fire. And then there was another hour of magic.

First a young group of college boys from <sup>Lul</sup> ~~Sarah~~ Ross called the "Believers" sang folk songs -- fresh, wholesome faced/country boys who I'd lay a bet never

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joined a protest march, though would be quick if needed to join the Armed Services.

And then Joe Frantz, head of the Department of History at the University of Texas, in ~~xxxxxxxxxxxx~~ a rather quiet sing-song sort of a voice began to weave together a fabric of the place and the time we were in -- why the west, this part of the west, was what it was... Its history... The tribal plains Indians... The Spanish conquistadores, the westward thrust of the Anglos, wild tales of Poncho <sup>Villa</sup> ~~Via~~, of its economy, a determined homesteader, the cattle man, the Mexicans making candle<sup>el</sup>aria wax, the whole philosophy and feel of the West. It was a mood peace -- very subtly and delightfully done. All of a part with the evening.

Cactus Pry<sup>or</sup> naturally was the MC, and he himself in a long beard came hobbling in out of the dark with his own tall tales of Texas. And then he introduced Brownie McNeil, the President of <sup>Sul Ross</sup> ~~Seres~~ College, with the observation that you see nearly all our entertainment tonight is Ph. D.'s. Brownie had a guitar and sang frontier songs that ranged from the old English ballads originating in Appalachians to right-off-the-range ones like "Little Joe the <sup>W</sup> ~~R~~angler".

Meanwhile, the full moon rose higher and higher above the "Castle" -- the camp fire died softly -- everybody settled comfortably ~~xxx~~ on his Navaho blanket and fell into the spell of the music.

What a night to remember! It was sheer enchantment.

By 10:00 -- dead tired -- I was glad to say goodnight and go to my cabin,

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Full to the brim of the present satisfactions of the day, a high racy day, worth five ordinary days of living.