

MEMORANDUM

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

Sunday, July 23, 1967

Page 1

My July philosophy is in full sway. I am taking the biggest part of today -- even overnight -- to do something purely self-indulgent that I wanted to do for a year. I am going to the Palo Duro Canyon to see the outdoor pageant!

I was up early and dressed and driving alone to St. Barnabas' Episcopal Church. I hadn't been here since Easter at least or earlier, and I've missed it. But alas the Reverend McAllister was not there. A lay reader in his place. And it was a pleasant but uneventful church service. And then home to meet Roy White by 10:30 for a 3-1/2 very industrious hours of work on the house -- explanations, decisions, moving around our little mock-up of Lyndon's lavatory and his bath, walking around in the yard to see how much you could see inside to better gauge how we should drape the windows. We took time out for lunch, and then at 2:00 I said goodbye to him and turned myself over to my neighbor, Mrs. Frederick Burg in the hope of a miracle, because I certainly cannot go to Amarillo looking like I do -- especially not with Luci who is a severe critic.

Luci and Pat and Lyn and Miss Gfeller arrived at the Ranch about 3:45. We loaded onto the Kingair, complete with baby bed. Lyn was a perfect traveler. It's amazing to remember that it takes a long time to get to Amarillo from anywhere. I could not believe it when I was told that it would be a 2-1/2 hour flight from the Ranch. Why it only takes

MEMORANDUM

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

Sunday, July 23, 1967

Page 2

three hours to go to Washington! With good luck and good winds, we made it in two hours. And just as we approached Amarillo I looked down and saw this great gash ^{in the} earth, this tortured winding cut, that must be Palo Duro Canyon!

Ch w/ Lucie

We landed in an airport for private planes, and there was Joe all smiles with his very young looking mother and father. But it was not at their house we would stay. We drove straight to his grandmother's, the Neil Johnsons, arriving a little past 6:00. Much about Amarillo was a surprise to me. There were so many trees! You might almost have been in a New England town with elms lacing above the residential streets -- especially on the street where Joe's grandmother lived. It was a beautiful, elegant house. The garden was walled with a fountain. Joe himself had done the lighting in the trees. They had been planted 11 years ago in a formal squared pattern, and below them was a delightful sitting area with comfortable chaise longues. And after we had gotten little Lyn settled in his room, everybody bending over and admiring him, amazed at his size, at his serenity, it was here to the garden that we all came, and I spent a very interesting hour listening to Joe's grandmother. She had come to Amarillo as a child of four with her family from Missouri. Her father had brought his cattle and bought land -- a lot of land -- at \$1.75 an acre. But the first winter was almost a disaster. They had planned on keeping the cattle outdoors. There

MEMORANDUM

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

Sunday, July 23, 1967

Page 3

was only one barn. And there was blizzard after blizzard, and most of the cattle had died. She remembered that they had shovelled out a path from the house to the barn, and the snow had been piled up so high on both sides that she, a little girl of four or maybe five, could not see over the top of it as she walked down the tunnel. And then later on when she had grown up and married and she and her husband were living 17 miles out from Amarillo, her husband had strung up a telephone line on the top strand of the barbed wire fence. And it was by this way that he had telephoned the doctor when she was about to have her first baby. Much later her husband and one of their sons, then a young man of about 20, had been killed in an airplane accident, and it was after that that she herself had learned to fly a plane and a helicopter and had managed their big ranch. None of them ever mentioned how many acres ~~for one word about money. It was very obvious that there was a good deal of both.~~ I remembered Jay Taylor saying laughingly to me at the White House, "Lynda Bird ought to like that boy -- he owns half the panhandle".

It was a very interesting evening. We went into dinner. She had planned and I gather had cooked some of the dishes. It was the most wonderful fried chicken, sweet, fresh tender corn brought in from one of their ranches, fresh black eyed peas the same, ripe red tomatoes and ~~kabage~~ cabbage. This she had freshly cooked -- her own recipe -- and I have never tasted anything like it before.

MEMORANDUM

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

Sunday, July 23, 1967

Page 4

I ate with utter abandon, and there was a delicious homemade ice cream.

The ~~te~~ house was beautifully done, but I wished that it had told more the story of their pioneer days because 65 years ago in Amarillo one was a pioneer. Pictures, objects from those days, I wished for but did not see. Perhaps they are present at a house on one of her ranches.

It was still broad daylight a little past 8:00 when we started to drive out to Canyon, Texas and then on to the Palo Duro Canyon, with Joe at the wheel and as the raconteur. And once more I was surprised and pleased at the presence of trees all over Amarillo. Trees seem to be a valuable property. And then on the highway heading out I found it to be a four lane with a broad median strip in which, scattered every block or so, there was a group of trees -- four, five, six trees, then a long bare space and then another group of four or five. It broke the monotony of the flat plains. It was green and welcome to the eye against the landscape of barrenness, because it is a barren land except for deep wells and irrigation and then it becomes marvelously fertile. And at their ranches, fruit trees flourish, including apples of the pale yellow, delicious variety.

At Canyon, we drove through the campus. I believe it's called Western State University, and it was obvious that everyone was very proud of their museum -- quite modern in architecture, and handsome,

MEMORANDUM

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

Sunday, July 23, 1967

Page 5

particularly good for its Indian artifacts they told me, and its record of the civilization of Indian days, and its geology. And then as we approached Palo Duro Canyon we saw some of the heritage of the "CCC Camps". They had put roads there and a lodge or two for tourists. Everywhere across the land it seems to me I see tracks of those early Roosevelt days, depression borne, heading toward art and recreation -- very interesting -- but just a sort of a landmark, and those tracks have almost been washed out in the rush of events of the three decades since. Now as the road wound around the edge of this great Canyon we came upon marvelous views and ~~an~~ attractive "California like" houses clinging to the cliffs, taking advantage of the great panorama. And then we descended into the Canyon and just about dark reached the site of the pageant -- the Palo Duro Canyon State Park -- an amphitheater at the base of a great cliff -- an almost natural setting, amplified a bit by man.

As we got out of the car there were a few cameras, the Director of the Pageant, a city official or two, and a few youngsters wanting autographs. But a precious little fanfare. All of Joe's family had been so cooperative in wanting to make it just a quiet, personal visit. On the way in we met S. B. Whittenberg who runs the local paper -- a very conservative Republican I think, but a friend of Lyndon's. And ^{name?} surprisingly the contractor who is head of the whole national association

MEMORANDUM

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

Sunday, July 23, 1967

Page 6

of contractors and who will be leading the drive to collect money for Walt Whitman Park which is right out in front of their headquarters in Washington and which they will probably landscape if the drive succeeds! So I had the opportunity to thank him personally.

There were a sprinkling of Joe's friends and the Johnson friends in front of us and behind us, and introductions as we settled into our seats, but really about the quietest entrance I can remember making.

Mrs. Johnson had brought coats, and I couldn't imagine needing a coat in Texas in July, although I remembered the old ^{saying} ~~phrase~~ about "There is nothing between Amarillo and the North Pole except a barbed wire fence."

Later in the evening I found it very pleasant to slip into it.

The pageant began about 9:00 and lasted until midnight. It was too long. The script by Paul Green was disappointingly rather pedestrian, but God's own setting was magnificent, beyond words -- that great cliff towering into the dark, and above it at the very beginning an Indian on horse back suddenly spotlighted and you saw him standing there against the sky and it shook you.

From beginning to end the lighting was wonderful, especially a summer thunder storm that practically had me reaching for an umbrella with the thunder crashing through the canyon and the lightning flashing from side to side. And there was the lonely weird howl of a

MEMORANDUM

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

Sunday, July 23, 1967

Page 7

coyote. The young city girl was listening to it while she was being courted by the determined young farmer -- "sod buster" they called him. All of the actors were purely local with the exception of about four who had some Broadway experience. And the rest in a cast of about 50 or more were students at the small regional college we had passed through. They got credits in drama or in some department for their work here during the summer I believe. And Joe himself had done the lighting -- had actually designed it, rigged it up, and if I could guess had gotten the money for it from his grandmother.

During the intermission he took me up into the control room and introduced me to all the boys who run the lights, with whom he was obviously on very close and affectionate terms, and tried to explain to me something about the lights. It's only the effect that I understand. His mother had told me that when he was 10 years old he used to follow the electrician around the house, watching everything he did and helping him do it. And she used to worry for fear he was going to get electrocuted before he ever grew up. And also during the intermission the director of the pageant went to the stage and made a brief, graceful little speech, thanking me for my work in beautification across the country and presenting me with a golden triangle. At each performance they give a small iron triangle -- a sort of a miniature gong that called the ranch hands into dinner -- a common artifact on

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

Sunday, July 23, 1967

Page 8

most any ranch. They give this to the person who came from farthest away. Almost never did it get given to anyone within the boundaries of the United States, because at every performance there would be some travelling student from Pakistan or Iran or Greece. This gave me a little surge of pride, because though it was no great dramatic achievement -- this pageant -- still it had the pulse and the feel of our west and of pioneer days. And without a doubt an unforgettably magnificent setting.

Toward the end of the pageant the moon began to rise. And since we were down in the bottom of the Canyon, it was very interesting. It flooded us, rather like a giant flood light. But it had to get quite high over the horizon before we could see the moon itself.

At the end of the performance we filed into a big barn-like building, and there all of the cast was assembled. And I went around shaking hands with everybody. The children in their delightful costumes added especially to the gaiety and charm of it, making real the pictures of the pioneer family as they bounced along in their covered wagons or went to a square dance. It must have been nearly 1:00 by the time we reached the Johnson residence. But we sat out in the garden long enough to enjoy the ice cream I had passed up at dinner. And I heard Joe and Patrick making plans to get up at 4:30 and fly out to one of their ranches and have an early breakfast and fly back so we could leave at 8:00 the next morning.

MEMORANDUM

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

Sunday, July 23, 1967

Page 9

I too yearn to see their ranch. But not enough to get up at 4:30. I was satisfied that I had done this among Lynda's and Luci's friends. I am especially fond of Joe -- one of the most unassumedly eager to help, natural, funny natured young man I have ever known. And so easy to be around. And I found his whole family the same way. Apparently being ~~very~~ wealthy has not taught them to feel self-important or to behave guardedly. And I find it delightful that Joe works almost every night all summer long handling the lights himself at this pageant.