

1968

THURSDAY, JANUARY 4

(Includes part of January 5 also)

Thursday, January 4 began after midnight from the Governor's Mansion in Austin with John and Nellie. We had been to see Hello Dolly and came afterwards to their family quarters on the second floor, extremely modest for a Governor's family I thought. Young Johnny came in with his date. And Sharon, very cute and feminine--Luci and Patrick talked to them in the kitchen and Lyndon and John and Nellie and I settled down in the living room to talk about families, paintings and farming. The columnists would have been dumbfounded. The Politics hardly ~~intruded~~[#] at all into our conversation. We left after 12:30 and drove through the pea soup fog to the ranch. The next morning I awoke again to find the world still shrouded in a gray cloak, weather fit only to sit around the fire and tell tales, as Daddy would have said. The plane was coming down from Washington to bring Sarge Shriver, Charlie Schultze and Joe Califano. It couldn't land at the ranch. We decided rather late in the morning to drive into Austin and meet them at the Federal Building and have lunch there instead. So I was quickly on the phone to reach Gertrude in Austin to get her to the grocery store and up to that lovely suite to prepare lunch for somewhere between six and ten. It is really quite marvelous how people move with agility and good humor and very considerable efficiency I think--James and Mary and Gertrude. I arranged to send her one steward in, checked that off and turned to

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Lynda and Chuck. [#] Lynda has been really sick since Tuesday when she got back from skiing at Red River, New Mexico--two infected ears, congestion in the chest, a dreadful cold and fever. But Chuck must return and he is determined to. I lost the bout early this morning when I went in to try to persuade her once more not to go back, only to find the Doctor there telling her that yes he thought that if she went right back to bed, got a lot of rest and took her medicine it would probably be all right. So the three of us drove in through the gray and dreary countryside. But a few days of gold sun we have had and this will be our longest stay in Texas for a whole year. [#] I kissed them goodbye at Bergstrom at 12:30 and went on into the Federal Building to find a real humming organization--Mary Rather at the Reception Desk, Marie in close to Lyndon, he in conference with Sarge Shriver, and Charlie Schultze and Mr. Zwick in the outer office. I am going to miss Charlie Schultze. He has that wonderful ^{leaven} ~~level~~ of humor with all the heavy tough business of the budget. He inspires confidence in me and at the same time he amuses. [#] I had sent in the pickup a group of pictures ~~in~~ to be hanged. So I got the carpenter and busied myself in all the rooms that wouldn't interfere with Lyndon. A beautiful medieval religious painting that the Pope had given Lyndon, very handsome on the paneled wall of the living room, a framed Chinese scroll that I loved so much at the Elms, looked elegant in the reception corridor. I hung the Inaugural invitations from '61 and '65 in Marie's office and a [?] Bart portrait of

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Lyndon and a new landscape, a gift from the John Connallys, but the favorite we found here was a pen and ink drawing by Madame Chang Kai-Shek that I haven't been able to locate for ages. I hung it in the dining room--not as perfect a place as it deserves, and a portrait of me in Government House--a gift of the Australian Government--in Lyndon's small private sitting room. All in all, I was very pleased with my work. ~~I~~ I had a delicious luncheon. At Lyndon's suggestion I called Jesse and Pat. There were eleven of us at the table. I think it had been a tense and touchous morning probably. Sarge Shriver--he is a great advocate for all of the programs of poverty. But Lyndon, alas, has the hard job of finding where the money is going to come from and evaluating between that one and everything else. At this season of the year it is especially tough. Every department--the top man who naturally is an advocate for its work and its programs, and every department must be slashed and saying no is an exhausting, draining, unhappy job. So much of this job is unhappy.

After lunch he had sessions with the others. Zwick apparently is going to be the new Director for the Budget. A little after four we said goodbye to them all and drove out by Brackenridge Hospital to go in for a brief visit with Mrs. Ostrowidski and her daughter. They are the family of the Hearst newspaperman. The whole family was in a car wreck, I believe it was New Year's Day. They were seriously injured

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and looked quite bad and in a way I felt embarrassed to intrude upon them, but there was no doubt in their faces that they appreciated it.

We started driving home. John and Nellie were coming out to see us. We met at Oak Hill and they got in with us in the big long black limousine and we drove back out through the pea soup fog very slowly, taking nearly two hours to get to the ranch. There was one nice thing about the weather. It makes it so much more cheerful inside by a big fire and this day which had begun after 12 o'clock in the mansion ended after 12 o'clock here at the ranchhouse. Most of the time was spent talking with John and Nellie on what we should do, and if we are not going to run how and when do we say so. We took time out for dinner--Luci and Pat, and played with Patrick Lyndon, Marie and Jim, and Mary Rather--happy reminder of so many years past. It is so easy and comfortable to have her here--just as though she had never been away. # And then about 9:30 we went back to Lyndon's bedroom--the four of us--and talked without interruption for nearly three hours. John said, "You ought to run only if you look forward to being President again--only if you want to do it." I think he meant if there was an element of joy in the work, but you ought not to if the frustrations, the pain, the backbreaking work makes you dread it. You also ought not to run just to keep somebody else from being President. One of the most lucid and interesting words were spoken by Nellie who

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said, "You will probably find after you've made the decision, if you decide not to run, that there is sort of an ephemeral period when you feel like everything has stopped. You are sad. You almost feel like you are dead and then when that is passed there is a great wave of relief." And looking at John, I myself see no hint, no likelihood that he will reconsider and run as some of the columnists in Texas are saying. Lyndon spoke of the simple fact, but he feels older and ^{more} tired ~~and~~ than he did ten years ago, five years ago and what of the next five years? Suppose he runs and wins. Would he be able to carry the load in a way that he would be proud of and that the country deserves? For all of those years, most of all--always in the background--is that lowering shadow of nuclear power. Sometimes, somewhere will he have to make a decision on using that? Yet, if he chooses to get out, what will history say of him? What will his friends and those close to him who believe in him say of him? What will the soldiers in Vietnam say of him? We spoke of the possibility of making the decision, probably at the end of the State of the Union Message, but that, of course, would negate the whole message. John made one statement that went something like this.

"The only way to answer all of those arguments is to die in office."

And so we went round and round and I got some insight into how it felt from a very strong and good couple who had just made their decision and theirs was to get out. And I, as a citizen, cannot help but feel sad, regretful about what they did and yet for them there is certainly a measure of happiness in it. Who knows, who knows and so we went

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round and round on the same hot griddle, finding no cool oasis, no acceptable exit.

John was going to take Nellie down to their ranch and leave her to clean it up and drive back to Austin that night. It was after 12:30 when they left. The companionship is always good even if the product is not conclusive. #