

1968

SUNDAY, JANUARY 7

Sunday, January 7, dawned cloudy and cold. Barbara and Mary Kaltman were here early. They had spent Saturday evening turning the little work area right over the carport into a regular White House flower room, making about eighteen bouquets with Jewell's help, and this morning they disposed of them, putting one in each bedroom and the prettiest in the living room. Lyndon went to Mass with Luci and Pat and the baby and Marie. I declined and went instead to all the bedrooms to see if there were cigarettes and ashtrays, matches, fruit and candy and flowers and an extra blanket and pillow and recent magazines and some good bedside books. We are putting the Prime Minister in the master guest room above us and Mrs. Eshkol in the Gay Room. The Secretary of State in the Children's room, Ambassador and Mrs. Harmon in the two carnation rooms, and the three top ranking Israelis, Mr. Herzog, General Geva and Mr. Bitan, I believe in the Cedar House. A room for each, and the Prime Minister and Mrs. Evron down at the Guest House, Jamir and Patir, security and press respectively and two other Israelis. And the most delightful arrangement of all to me, Walt Rostow and Luke Barrow in the old Sam Johnson farm house. There are not many people I would put there. Walt I feel affectionate toward and sentimental about. Somehow I like to have him there and I feel he would not look down on it.

I have given James instructions to build a fire to welcome

Sunday, January 7 (Continued)

them when they came home from dinner about ten or eleven o'clock and to start a fire in their rooms the next morning when he brought in coffee and there was a steward to take care of any needs and breakfast at both the Cedar House and the Guest House.

We had a fairly early lunch, after which Luci and Pat were supposed to leave. Lyndon simply can't bear to see them go so I said "move the baby's bed down to my room and you all can sort of make it your headquarters" so then they could go in after they had greeted the Prime Minister and his wife in the late afternoon. While we were at the lunch table, a Jet Star landed with Secretary Rusk, and Walt and Secretary Battle. They had had a steak aboard, but they came in and had coffee with us and afterward the Secretary and Lyndon had a session and I took Walt and Mrs. Battle down to their place of residence. I had gotten the earlier message from Secretary Rusk that he certainly wouldn't mind staying there. In Cherokee County, Georgia, where he grew up it had been a longer walk to the bathroom than the one I had described at the old farm house.

A little past three, dressed as warmly as I could in my bright red ensemble by Marquis and an extra sweater, I flew in with Lyndon and the Secretary in the Jet Star to San Antonio. A sizeable crowd had braved the bitter cold with the platform and benches and long red carpet and a welcoming line in which I saw Mayor McAlister, Congressman

Sunday, January 7 (Continued)

Gonzales and Congressman Kazen and Reverend McAlister, who had married Lynda and Chuck, quite a group of city officials, Dan Quill, the Postmaster. And then the great plane rolled up in front of us and we stood at the foot and down came short, stocky, craggy-face Eshkol and his young chipper wife. I remember distinctly when I first met her on the platform at the arrival ceremonies in Washington and she told me she had been a Sergeant in the Army--the first First Lady who had been a Sergeant I had ever met. She is 34 years younger than he is. This she told me a little later, very solicitous and tender with him. Lyndon made a brief welcoming speech, flowers were presented to each of us, the Prime Minister answered. There were a few signs in Israeli, a small but eager crowd surged around him and there inevitably was Jim Novy. And then it was over and we were off, Lyndon taking the Prime Minister in the Jet Star and I taking Mrs. Eshkol and Mrs. Harmon, Mrs. Evron and two or three more Israelis in the chopper. Walt had told me that these were very bright ladies who were interested in the economy, the politics, the history of their country and also of ours though I was filling in as we went along about the crops that were raised in this country and there in the distance was one of the dams that had been built along the river, furnishing cheap power and flood control and those little ponds were called tanks and our rainfall was very low--only 28 inches a year. My whole Central Texas speech--they did seem quite eager and pleased to be there and they were very easy to be with, especially Mrs. Harmon, who is wonderfully

Sunday, January 7 (Continued)

adapted to the life of diplomacy.

We arrived at the ranch about 4:30. Lyndon already had the Prime Minister out in the car showing him the deer. I took Mrs. Eshkol to her room and Barbara and Jim Symington helped with the other ladies. We all arranged to meet in just a few minutes. They had said they had much rather do that than just sit around and talk. I drove--just the four of us in the car alone which seemed to impress them. They asked if it took much security to handle such a big place. We toured the Martin ranch, the South part and the North part and as happened so many times before they found many parts of comparison between our terrain and Israel's. The liveoaks reminded them of olive trees, the goats and the sheep were very familiar sights. Interestingly enough they said they had forbidden raising goats on quite a large part of the land of Israel because they were so hard on it. I asked them about the reforestation of Israel. I had heard so much about it. I think even Lyndon has a forest named after him in Israel in honor of some speech he made and I know many great philanthropists do. What sort of trees, were they used for a timber crop? No, they were used principally for soil conservation to keep it all from blowing away. They begun by planting eucalyptus, now mostly they were a species of pine that could take the lack of rain and some oaks.

Delightfully the next day one of the gentlemen added another reason for planting forests-- to make the land green, to make it look

Sunday, January 7 (Continued)

good instead of looking out on wasteland. I had thought of them as so intensely practical and this is a poet's reason, but I like it. Before they left they had met Luci and Pat and the baby who was performing amiably and showing off in a very satisfactory manner and then when we started out the door we said goodbye to them and told Mrs. Eshkol they would be leaving shortly.

We drove into Johnson City to see the Pedernales Electric Co-op, the trees Lynda planted, the hospital. They were especially interested in this and asked lots of questions. Then housing for old folks--this too, they were eager to hear about. They said they were just starting enclaves like this in Israel and for instance all the old German Jews wanted to live together because as they explained now that they were getting old they wanted to revert to a lot of the customs and companionship and language they had known all their lives. The most exciting experiment to me is to think that you can build a country with people who come from seventy-two nations, and as many languages, bound together only by the thread of religion and some knowledge of the Hebrew language. Of course, we in America are made of people from as many lands, but we have had a couple of centuries to melt together.

Then we went to Lyndon's boyhood home. Jessie met us at the back door and we went through with many explanations and eager interest expressed. They were in fact delightful guests. Dark overtook us and we started back to the ranch, with me describing on the way the several

Sunday, January 7 (Continued)

things we might do tomorrow. One, go into Austin, see the University, the Capitol and the Governor's Mansion, the site of the Lyndon Johnson Library. I had heard that Mrs. Eshkol was a librarian. She told me in fact she was an historian and had just gone into Library work to make a living, or we might go to San Antonio to see one of the old Spanish missions which had been founded in about 1720 and had flourished until around 1800. At this there was a little ripple of excitement which makes you know that a guest is pleased. The fog that had been with us for the last six days returned and we had been wrapped in it for all except today. We couldn't in fact go anywhere. When we got home lo and behold there were Luci and Pat and the baby. They explained laughingly that they had left and gotten over the dam and Lyndon had called and invited them back. He said why don't you sleep in your mother's room and she can move in with me. So that is what we did and thus Lyn got to eat his first State dinner. Of course, at six and one-half months he had been to other State dinners, but this was the first one he ate, not with us, but the same--breast of pheasant and vegetables.

We had a brief thirty minutes to change for dinner into simple cocktail dresses and then we met in the big living room, had a drink and a little past seven-thirty went into the dining room where Mary and Barbara had put three round tables with yellow cloths that came to the floor. I had the Prime Minister on my right, Ambassador Harmon on

Sunday, January 7 (Continued)

on my left, Jim Symington close by for lively conversation. Lyndon had Mrs. Eshkol and Mrs. Harmon. The Secretary of State and Luci were at the third table. I had gone to the kitchen one moment before to see a luscious fruit plate being concocted by Mary. One of the gentlemen we had discovered didn't eat any meat at all. We got a chef who Mary knew and could vouch for as a cook of Kosher food. It really was delicious. I feel sure they couldn't gain any weight on it--split pea soup, breast of pheasant, saffron rice, and fruit for dessert.

The Prime Minister was amiable. The conversation was heavy and I was glad that Luke Battle was on the other side. He was a great help and Ambassador Harmon was a very interesting guest, so knowledgeable and smooth. After nine years in Washington it was for us the smallest and most informal visit of a Chief of State we have ever had and for that reason distinctive and quite pleasant too. I am sure for the men it must have been heavy work because of the problems they face in the Middle East-- planes, refugees, boundaries. It's so much easier being a woman.

I asked the Prime Minister to sign my menu which he did in both Hebrew and English, had the toast and then we went back in the living room for coffee. The guests were absolutely thrilling. They had brought to me a collection of artifacts--about six--two of them dating about a thousand years before Christ, and one was a long hook, its strange purpose being to scrape off of one's arm or the legs the ointment that had been put on. I asked what the purpose of the ointment was. It seemed

Sunday, January 7 (Continued)

to be to make the skin soft and sweet smelling. I'm not quite sure whether it was a substitute for soap and water, a very strange custom it seems, but looked at down the long slope of history, perhaps no funnier than some of the stuff that we do on our eyes and lips and hair. There was some attractive jewelry. Maybe Mrs. Eshkol told me, but it seemed most unlikely from polished pebbles found on the beach. They were all shades of pale green and blue and I had thought they must be some sort of semi-precious stones and most delightful of all there was Noah in the Ark for Patrick Lyndon--a large, probably hand carved, ark with the very droll Noah who has an expression which says, why did I ever get into this, a lion, tiger, elephant, crocodile or some such sticking his head out of the porthole and other animals two by two arranged across the deck quite numerous and amusing. It will have a central place in his nursery.

Shortly after dinner I stood in front of the fireplace, the fire was now a cheery mass of coals, and introduced Jimmy Symington. He played a mixture of Jewish songs and American folk songs for us and just right, I thought, in low key, personal, warm sort of entertainment that maintained intimate atmosphere that the day had set. And then just a little past ten Mrs. Eshkol made a gesture to take her husband up to bed. He is quite elderly and it was after eleven by the time they were living on and so satisfied with the first day of the visit. I went to my



Sunday, January 7 (Continued)

room, had a massage, and read myself to sleep. I had gotten the weather forecast which was for a bitter cold wave gripping all of Central Texas-- ice and sleet and dangerous weather.