

1968

MONDAY, JANUARY 8

Monday, January 8 was a strange day. We awoke locked in ice. The retama tree in the front yard a fantasy of crystal, icicles hanging from the roof and the highways slick and frozen. Radio and TV were saying every few minutes don't travel unless it is necessary, wrecks piling up. There was no possibility of going by helicopter or plane, as Colonel Cross told me, to either Austin or San Antonio so what would we do? I called Mrs. Eshkol and Mrs. Harmon and Mrs. Evron and told them we were just going to take over the Cedar House and see movies of the country I had wanted to show them at first hand so down we went, slipping and sliding, over the brief quarter mile and we saw the President's Country and then Trail through Texas and Adventures in Learning in Apalachia. They were most appreciative and interested audience and made me feel quite at ease. I ordered up coffee and we had some popcorn and I told them we called it the Johnson bijou and the staff and occasional guests often settled down for a movie like this.

Sometime in the morning Bob McNamara and General Wheeler and an Israeli General flew in with ice on the windshield of their helicopter. About twelve thirty we went back to the main house to have lunch. The men were in session and were hard to budge. It was scheduled to be an informal buffet, but it was nearly two o'clock before we sat down. We had a quite

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delicious rack of lamb, and a variety of vegetables. This time I asked the Prime Minister to sit with the President and invited Ambassador Harmon to sit by me. Otherwise, no protocol. I thought I felt a certain tenseness, a stiffness in the air as though the meetings of the morning hadn't gone well and as soon as lunch was over, the men gravitated right back into a meeting and I took Mrs. Eshkol and Mrs. Harmon and Mrs. Evron into the yellow sitting room. Mrs. Harmon showed me a picture of her daughter, about twenty, doing her compulsory military service, an attractive girl dressed in sort of drab overalls with a rifle over her shoulder. How strange to us! I asked her what did she really do? She said most of the girls did clerical and office work for the military or went into the villages and taught. There was a heavy percentage of illiteracy. So many of these Jews gathered together from poverty stricken countries of Asia, she mentioned Yemen. The hope of Israel was in the children and these they must teach and soon. So actually instead of compulsory military service for the girls it was sort of a Peace Corps at home-- nursing, social work, teaching. There was sort of a racing feeling of self confidence in them I thought, almost a cockiness, an excitement, a spurge to get on with life. Once I asked them how big was Israel-- that is in square miles-- and they used some phrase about before last June with an obvious relish. Mrs. Eshkol told me the story of her marriage. She had known the Prime Minister's second wife, the whole family well. Then after his second wife died, his daughters--one or two of whom were older than she--had kept bringing her

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into family visits and had finally practically engineered the marriage.

Theirs, in fact, had taken place with as little notice as our own.

It was nearly four when the men rose and began to make a move to leave with the sky still gray and lowering and the roads icy. Lyndon had ordered up the big black limousine. They were to drive into Austin to Bergstrom then fly to New York. I felt a distinct lightening in the air, almost a joviality. This meeting must have gone well. Lyndon seemed relaxed and in good spirits. We said goodbye to all the Israeli party. General Geva had been an especially attractive guest I thought with the usual exchange about you must come to Israel sometime and then Lyndon and Dean Rusk and Bob McNamara and a few more of the Americans had a little further session in the living room and I went back to my bedroom and abandoned myself to the complete luxury of seeing Gun Smoke. Lyndon took a nap. The other guests, too, had left and that night feeling like a run down record we had a quiet dinner with just the staff. With some of them I saw a strange, revolting, thought-provoking movie called Incident about crime in the streets, determined at the beginning that I would write Valenti and tell him that such movies ought to be banned, but reversing myself before it was over when one decent young man stood up to the aggressors.

Then I did my exercises and went to bed. It had certainly been the most unusual meeting of a Chief of State, an easy one actually for my part, and one I will remember.