

1968

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 17

Wednesday, January 17 -- the day of the State of the Union and always one of such tenseness for me, quite out of proportion to any responsibility that I have for it. Lyndon spent much of the morning reading the supposed to be final draft--I think it was the eleventh--the State of the Union. Liz was on hand. He told me to get her and I think she helped him some. <sup>Liz</sup> It was quite a little while when I did not see him and I think he was in the theater. <sup>#</sup> Lyndon had asked George to draft him a statement based on what he had said to him announcing that he would not run. I believe it was around noon when he brought it in, his face calm, unrevealing, as it always is. It was a good statement, well said. My own, which Lyndon had asked me to produce, was feeble and if there was anything we ever ought to say--<sup>well</sup> words that have wings and fire--this is it. I keep the statement I had written in August of '64 when Lyndon was facing going to Atlantic City and did not want to go, in the right-hand drawer of my desk in my bedroom. I brought it out and we reread what I had said then and George read it. It sounded better now. Lyndon put George's statement in his inside pocket. It was not to be included in the text of the State of the Union. If he made it it would come at the end, beginning with a line something like this, "and now I want to speak to you about a personal matter." He looks from one to another of those close to him for an answer--for some wisdom--beyond anything he can have. There isn't any. There is nobody but him.

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At lunch time I had lunch on a tray and then there was a happy break. Brooke Astor and Lawrence Rockefeller had flown down from New York for the beautification meeting and I drove with them and Henry Diamond and Sharon out to Buchanan School. We had planned it just the afternoon before and this morning I had told Liz to be sure and cue in the principal of the school and some of the children if they wanted to and the press. We arrived about 1:15. Brooke and I had put on boots. There was Mrs. White, the Principal, the construction chief, an orderly but excited group of youngsters--fifth and six graders, I think they were, who had painted the panels that surround the construction--primitive funny things of a child's interpretation of what's taking place there. <sup>#</sup> We walked all over--Brooke and Lawrence and Mrs. White and the construction chief and I. Actually at this midpoint it is mostly a great gapping mudhole but you can see it taking shape and it is exciting. There is a <sup>sunken</sup> ~~second~~ basketball court, the seats or bleachers rising on each side, and spray equipment so that in the summertime little children can romp in the cooling spray and it will be a good setting for all sorts of dual purpose things like folk singing and plays and concerts or maybe a dance. Then there was an igloo, one of Brooke's special enthusiasms like she has in Carter, I think, or Jacob Riis. They had even hauled in a tree--about a thirty foot red oak I would think--and the chief of construction described to us where the trees would be and what the finished product would look like. At this point Brooke interspersed and said we just must have

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flowers--raised flower beds. Why not here and she pointed them out on the plans. <sup>She</sup> said, "I know you love flowers and I want us to have flowers." We were all talking at once, getting excited. It was really a delicious half hour. The long regular type effect housing the restrooms can also be used for dressing rooms if they do have plays. A concession for light refreshments and the office of any recreation director stretched across one end. The whole effect is to be a combination school-playground during school hours and a community center after school hours and in the summertime. <sup>#</sup> Then we went over by the fence and met a lot of the children and looked at the panels but this was the part of it that got short-changed and this was the best part, <sup>if</sup> we were to tell the story to the city through pictures, <sup>but</sup> TV, <sup>1</sup> this is a good constructive addition of the schools into the recreation life of Washington. Cynthia and Sharon were telling me it's two o'clock and we've got to go. All the Committee members will be there. So back we went to the White House and upstairs to take off boots and then down once more to the Red Room for the first meeting of '68, beginning our fourth and would it be our last year of the Beautification Committee.

We had a good attendance. Besides Brooke and Lawrence, were Stu and Lowell Bridwell, Kay Graham, Rudy Kaufman of the Star, Richard Hollander of the News, Libby and Nat <sup>Gurnings</sup> ~~Green~~, Mrs. Romig of the Garden Club, <sup>?</sup> Libby and Adam <sup>Romanowski</sup> ~~Romanowski~~ of API, Bill Schmidt of the GSA, Polly,

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Walter--a lot of our observers, Diana and John Walker and Charley Horskay--of course Henry Diamond and Nash Castro. Bill Walton came in late from his Commission's monthly meeting. And we missed most of all, Mary. <sup>JP</sup> Whatever the date, it seems to me to be the beginning of the new year when we return to Washington, especially when the State of the Union takes place. So I greeted them with a Happy New Year everybody and the suggestion that now in January was a time to look back on what we had done last year--for the last three years in fact--and forward <sup>t</sup> to what we ought to do with this year before us. For that reason, I would like for everybody to speak their piece. What do they think ought to be our aim? Where should we put our energies--our usefulness if any--and our money? Then I told them the happy news that Mrs. Post, since the last meeting, had sent us a check for \$10,000 to be used for street trees. Then I reminded them that it was only a year ago that Stephen Currier had been with us, had started Larry Halpin on a series of suggestions of what would lift the face of Washington. One of the suggestions had been a big amusement park by the water in Anacostia. Since then a Committee--Udall, Mayor Washington, and Larry--had worked further on how to implement that. I asked Stu to report. The report was full of the opportunities, potentials, but nothing really conclusive. <sup>JP</sup> But when we got on trees we got more steam up. Somebody made the suggestion, "let's have a tree committee and make Libby Rowe chairman of it." We talked of trying to use Arbor Day as a vehicle to get

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more interest and more contributions spread over a wider base. ~~Some~~ people who might contribute five dollars rather than five thousand. ~~All~~ of these Washington citizens who love these tree shaded streets, <sup>we</sup> came out loud and strong for one more trash pickup a week, if ever the budget could afford it and for more trash containers, although I felt cruel even mentioning it when I looked at Walter because he looked practically pale.

We talked about our work with the schools. I had given a brief and enthusiastic summary of our visit to Buchanan and the hope that in May we could have a real dedication celebration there. But the urgent need was to get a closer working relation with the new head of the Washington School System to cue him in on everything that we were doing. I asked Polly to have some preliminary meetings with Mr. Manningor, whoever else she thought might be helpful, and then possibly I could get together with them here at the White House on any plans that might further our usefulness with the schools. We talked for about two hours while the butlers passed the coffee and cookies. It was a rather good meeting.

Then back upstairs I worked with Ashton, rested, reviewed tonight, talked with Lynda. I knew that Lyndon was meeting the Democratic Leaders and the Republican Leaders by turn, probably in the Fish Room. I seldom interrupt meetings like that, but I had this memo in my keeping and I held it like a coal of fire--the statement from George Christian saying he was not going to run again and I wanted to get it back in his pocket so I took it over. I think it was about six thirty. He was rushed, standing

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in the door between the big oval office and his little one and said, "well what do you think? What shall I do"? I looked at him with that hopeless feeling and said, "Luci hopes you won't run. She wants you for herself and for Lyn and all of us being together. She does not want to give you up. Lynda hopes you will run. This she had told me this afternoon with a sort of terrible earnestness because her husband is going to war and she thinks there will be more chance of getting him back alive and everything settled if you are President. Me--I don't know. I have said it all before. I can't tell you what to do." It was hardly a conversation. It was just a few phrases with the sense always that the Fish Room was full of important Congressional Leaders waiting for him and that the Secret Service and Assistants just, I hope, out of earshot through the door. I have said it so often--it was not the will nor the setting to say it again. "One, either you make a conscious decision to run in the same state of mind of a man who is becoming a Monk or some such--just giving up your life saying here it is, I will take whatever happens--I will try to do some pacing and have some humor for the next five years. Or two, simply make the announcement at a time and in words only you can choose but as strong and as beautiful as we are capable of." He handed me a pice of paper. It was from John Connally with his recommendations that he go with the statement tonight because he would never have a bigger audience and thought the reaction <sup>directly</sup> to the bigger audience would be good rather than interpreted by the press.

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He thought this removed it from a political context and, as we all know, it was on a bit of an upward slope now. I think what John really meant was this was a noble time to do it.

I went back to the second floor. Mr. Per gave me a comb-out. I put on my red suit with the navy trim by Adele Simpson. Lynda was wearing the lovely navy blue dress with the white her Daddy had given her for Christmas. I studied the description of my guests for the evening for the last time and went over the seating chart. And then, a few minutes past eight, I went down to the library.

Choosing the guests for the State of the Union is always an important thing. This time it had been Liz' suggestion and I had bought it, that we try to honor, to highlight some of the programs of Lyndon's Administration into which he has put so much. We had done some investigating by phone and then I had asked her to go and see the suggestions herself and evaluate them. I did not want to arrive at this in a haphazard, unthought-out fashion. It turned out to be a thrilling experience. There they were in the library, Sarah Beth Walker, a twenty-four year old Oklahoman--a VISTA worker--actually working in Headstart helping to get volunteers. Susan Helmuth of some little town in New York who is a member of the Teacher Corps in the Washington Schools, teaching Remedial Reading, Paul Milner, seventeen, from the Job Corps Center in Washington, whose high IQ had caused him to be selected out of the Job Corps as a possible

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College potential. They were fresh and scrubbed and wholesome looking. And then there was Specialist Lawrence Joel, stocky, middle-aged, smiling Negro from Fort Bragg, North Carolina who had received the Medal of Honor from Lyndon in one of the most touching citations I had ever read. He was a Medic and although twice wounded he had gone on and on and on to save life after life crawling across the battlefield with his plasma and his medicines. They were all so easy to talk to. ~~I~~ I was famished. I hadn't had anything to eat scarcely all day and I fell to on the sandwiches and coffee, but I could hardly get them to eat a thing. It was all right because mostly I wanted them to talk and they did. They were all in their different ways, reassuring. Mark Joel so natural, so at peace with himself and the world and at ease. It was somehow a refreshing moment. Betty Furness came in--she was another guest for the evening. And then we were in the car and off once more to the Capitol.

This time we had planned my entrance better than last. We went straight up to a little room. I had tried to describe on the route up to the youngsters what a dramatic evening it was, how the House and Senate would already be in their seats when we got there and then with a loud booming announcement the Diplomatic Corps would walk in and then the President's Cabinet and finally the President. My guests were taken in two by two to their seats and then with precision, at the planned moment, Lynda and Chuck and I--they had just joined us in the little room--walked

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in. I paused and stood for a moment and Senators and Congressmen rose from their seats with a swelling roar of applause and I know it is just part of the drama, part of the excitement of being back, but I <sup>S</sup>avored it and I looked from one side of the Chamber to the other into the faces of many friends, smiled all around and then we took our seats. There we were on the front row. Walter Washington--I had particularly wanted to ask him and Benetta. Next to them the golden blonde Susan Helmuth from the Teachers Corps. Then Specialist Joel loaded with medals and Chuck in his uniform and very handsome. Lynda her hair piled high on her head, white bow and buttons, a good foil for her slim navy Geoffrey Beane dress. I, and next to me on the step seat cute, little Sarah Beth Walker and Paul Milner in right by Muriel who looked lovely in her pink satin suit. I had used my other step seats for Betty Furness and some of the staff members' wives who had worked so hard on the speech--Clay McPherson, cute little Trudy Califano, and my always admired Elspeth Rostow. And then on the two folding seats in the back George Christian's elderly mother and Sam Houston who had come ~~gloriously~~ <sup>laboriously</sup> hobbling in and no doubt enjoyed it as much as anybody in the Chamber. Fishbait Miller announced the President of the United States and Lyndon came in to a thundering applause--a different atmosphere somehow from last year. It lasted three minutes. He looked wonderful. The fifteen or more pounds he has lost shows and all to the good and I like his hair growing longer just a little bit and not slicked down any more.

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The speech--and there were changes even from the eleventh draft of it--lasted forty-nine minutes. There were about fifty applauses. By all odds the most spontaneous and loudest one was when he said, "the American people have had enough of rising crime and lawlessness." One of the changes was an insertion on conservation about continuing to work for highway beautification. I would not have sought it for the world and I appreciated it. Somewhere in it the teleprompter went out. I could tell although I am not sure that many people in the audience could because he handled it beautifully. I could see him leafing through three or four pages of the text in front of him while he interpolated--I thought it was magnificently done. A time or two he added a few adjectives that I would have left off. I like the spare bones better. As he approached the end I tightened up in my seat. Will he reach in his pocket? Did I want him to? Would I be relieved if he did or if he didn't? He ended on a strong high note and there was a great roar of applause and he did not reach in his pocket for the draft that I knew was there. He turned and walked down the steps. In a moment or two I rose to follow waving hello at the Cabinet wives seated, as I went. And then out in the hall said goodbye to Specialist Joel and Susan Helmuth and Sarah Beth Walker, Paul Milner. And then for the ritual visit to the Speaker's office and here was where I began to wonder if I had been off the beam. I had felt a surge in the Chamber, had listened to a roar of applause, but here with the Cabinet members, with the leadership there was no

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rush forward to say, "that was a great speech, Mr. President. We'll get to work on it. It is going to be hard, but it will be a good year".

The first little maggots of doubt began to erode the good feeling that I had. And then we were back in the car and headed for the White House-- as many of us as could pile in. And I rode with Lyndon. And upstairs on the second floor we began to assemble. I had asked close friends to drop by for drinks and a buffet, the TV show and a general rehash which always takes place after a State of the Union. It was Bob and Jean Kintner, of course the McPhersons and the Califanos, Doug and Libby Cater and the Rostows, the Bob Phinneys, Marvin and Marian and Jack and Mary Margaret, George and Jo Ann, the Levinsons and the Temples, the Goldsteins and the Wattenbergs and the Hardestys and the Barefoot Sanders and the Mike Manatoses fresh from their flocks and Liz and Bess and Ashton with their husbands and Jim Cain who was a house guest and Sam Houston, Bill and Jeanie Deason, and Bill and June White, Clark and Marney, the Reardons, the Becks, the McHughs, Abe and Carol-- briefly--and Charlie Schultze, who must be the happiest man in town, Marie and John Criswell. It was a good buffet in the dining room. I settled down with a drink in my bedroom because it was the only place we could get the NT show and it was a lively one. The room was full. There were about fifteen of us in there watching it and there was help from unexpected quarters by Shower and Mornahan and the most amusing remarks by Buckley. Bill Moyers spoke, and rather well I thought, and

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Arthur Schlesinger was so bitter I thought he was funny. Somebody said he looks like he is being milked though the product must have been gall. The Negro Mayor, Carl Stokes was, I thought, reasonable and articulate and mostly fair, I thought, but of course there is never enough money for urban affairs for the Mayors who need it. All in all it was a highly amusing and entertaining program and I thought we won more than we lost.

Lyndon in his bedroom was busy looking at other programs with a few. The hall was full and people drifted into the dining room. We had a fire lit in the Yellow Room for anyone who wanted comfort and quiet conversation. There was an air of elation, good will, relief, a brief short draft of the wine of success which we had tasted in '64 and '65 and so I evaluated it.

Sometime after twelve everyone drifted off and we were in bed by one.