

1968

THURSDAY, JANUARY 18

If we had tasted the wine of success the night before, it was a brief draft. As we looked over the papers at the reports on the State of the Union--at least in the major metropolitan papers we were reading--they were somewhat negative and unenthusiastic. It was like working very hard, putting out all you've got, settling back to hear the verdict and then finding it was not good enough.

I went over my guest list for the first Women Doers' Luncheon--our subject, "Crime on the Streets." The reason because the idea has lain itching in the back of my mind for a long time and I felt I haven't raised my voice to do what little I could because quite recently I accepted the invitation to be a member of the National Emergency Committee on the National Council on Crime and Delinquency. And our guest list--a very good one I thought--three of the officers from that Committee, Mrs. Curtis Bach, the National heads of five organizations, Mrs. Robert Claytor of the YWCA, Mrs. Grace Cox of the National Association of Women Lawyers, Mabel Clanahan of the B &PW, Mamie Reese, Association of Colored Women's Clubs, Mrs. Robert Stewart of the League of Women Voters--she had also been a member of the President's Commission on Law Enforcement and the Administration of Justice. And yes, a sixth President, Beatrice Warwood, of the AFL-CIO National Auxiliaries, one Cabinet wife, naturally Georgia Clark, wife of the Attorney General, two Governors' wives, Mrs. Warren Knowles, of Wisconsin, Mrs. Dick Hughes, of

Thursday, January 18 (Continued)

New Jersey--he passed the safe gun law--two Senators' wives, Mrs. McClellan--her husband had been head of the Committee that had investigated crime and Mrs. Carl Mundt and the wife of our new Chief of Public Safety here in the District, Mrs. Patrick Murphy. What a perfect name. Gay Vance, whose husband had worked so magnificently on the riots in Detroit and a group of social workers who were absolutely on the line at the grass roots level in neighborhood houses and the Teachers Corps as block leaders. A few members of the press--Bess Meyerson, Nancy Dickerson, Theo Wilson, Isabelle Shelton and enough other women, articulate and able, calculated to know and to do something toward safe streets back in their home towns. Just about an hour before the luncheon I had been able to do something nice--the sort of thing that makes me happy. Betty Hughes had phoned up. Her mother was driving down with her because she was on her way somewhere else. Was there a vacancy? Could she bring her mother? It just happened that we were down to forty-nine and we would love to have her. So at a quarter of one I went down to the Green Room and we had pictures of the three speakers with me--Mrs. Charles Coe, Katherine Peden, and Mrs. Margaret Moore. Then the receiving line. And then to the Blue Room where Sherry and orange juice had been passed. A few of the guests had been late and some of the staff ushered them up to speak to me--Eartha Kitt among them--a picture of her and Miss Peden with me and then we went into the family dining room for lunch, quite a delicious lunch I thought, a

Thursday, January 18 (Continued)

little on the sumptuous side--seafood bisque, chicken and peppermint ice cream. But alas, I couldn't really enjoy it because I don't ever like to be the one who has the chief burden of the speaking. I welcomed them. Crime is a grim subject for a pleasant meeting such as this, but I believe every citizen is increasingly determined to come to grips with it. None of us who read or hear the news can escape the shock of the headlines and so on. The most shocking to me is the incredible number of cases of cry for help which goes unheeded. Why? Those who heard it did not want to become involved. The myriad of crimes know no safe neighborhood nor income level. The costs are high, not only in the tragic loss of human life and property. One of the great costs to every citizen is his loss of freedom and ease in his own neighborhood. The existence of crime and the fear of it have eroded the quality of all of our lives. And then the gist of the meeting--why we were there. Within the limits of each of us there is something constructive that we can do and there are things responsible citizens are doing in crime control, and prevention and legislation. Three women are here to tell us the way they see the problems from where they live and work and what they are doing about it. And then I introduced Margaret Moore who six years ago had started a crusade in Indianapolis beginning with just thirty friends and now involving fifty thousand women. She talked rapidly, at ease, with zeal and with a lot of, what were to me, fresh ideas, gliding survey in your city. In hers, over six years, they had gotten nine thousand or

Thursday, January 18 (Continued)

something lights on the darkest streets in town, to bringing the policemen, the youngest, most articulate ones into the schoolrooms--not to the auditorium for a big lecture, but just into the classrooms--to talk to a group of thirty or forty Junior High or High School students to sort of bridge the gap between them and the law. The ladies had sat in on Court sessions and driven around with the Police on their beats and they were supporting higher wages and better training and pensions for the police. They had undertaken a campaign of helping one by one dropouts, finding Saturday or Sunday jobs for them, rounding up clothes. That was their problem. I liked the hopeful can-do tone of it.

The second speaker was Martha Coe, a VISTA worker in the slums of Atlanta, who recruited volunteers for nine Headstart centers. She looked very young and fresh and scrubbed and enthusiastic. To me the remarkable thing about her and many like her is that they walk out of their comfortable lives and headfirst--unafraid apparently--into the problems of the ghettos trying to learn and work with them. A few minutes earlier when Mrs. Moore was speaking, suddenly Liz had risen and said, "Mrs. Moore, will you yield to another speaker?" And in had walked Lyndon. I could see Ed Weisl and some other luncheon guests in the door. He spoke briefly calling for greater support of police and saying the place to start in combatting crime was in the home. And then a salute to the power of women and assuring them they could do something about it. When he thinks of tenacity he thinks of

Thursday, January 18 (Continued)

a bulldog and then he thinks of women. And when he turned to leave Miss Eartha Kitt, who had been seated at the table close to the podium, rose in his path and said, "Mr. President, what do you do about delinquent parents--those who have to work and are too busy to look after their children?" Lyndon paused a moment. Fortunately he had the answer. "We have just passed a social security bill that gives millions of dollars for day care centers." She moved, I think, a step more in front of him. "But what are we going to do?" she said. "That's something for you women to discuss here," turned and walked briskly out. She sat down, stubbed out a cigarette, tossing her long hair and from then on I watched her expecting something--I didn't know what. Apparently she did not eat, nor did she clap for any of the speakers. She smouldered and smoked. The last speaker was Katherine Peden, one of the eleven members on the Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders who had listened to a lot of witnesses on the subject of what to do about crime from the militant to the authorities. She was a good speaker. I wished she hadn't taken the occasion to pass several bouquets to the Johnsons. When she finished I asked the guests for their observations and discussions and Judge Simon, who had been on my right, was the first up. There were several more. I noticed Miss Kitt's hand going up and I knew I must, in turn, get to her. I did not know what to expect--only that it would not be good. When some speaker finished I nodded to her. She arose and began to talk swiftly and passionately beginning with anger that the fact that welfare checks were

Thursday, January 18 (Continued)

so small--just four dollars. "What can you get for four dollars?"

And then oddly an attack on high taxes. "The young people are angry.

Their parents are angry because they are being so highly taxed". Then

mounting to a crescendo she came to her real destination--to denounce

the war in Vietnam. "Boys I know across the Nation feel it doesn't pay

to be a good guy. They figure with a record they don't have to go off to

Vietnam". And then, advancing a step toward me and looking with intense

directness at me (she is a good actress) she said, "we send the best of this

country off to be shot and maimed. They rebel in the streets. They take

pot and they will get high. They don't want to go to school because they

are going to be snatched off from their mothers to be shot in Vietnam".

I am glad to say that I looked back just as directly, stare for stare. She

continued pointing her finger the paper said. "Mrs. Johnson, you are a

mother too, although you have had daughters and not sons. I am a mother

and I know the feeling of having a baby come out of my guts. I have a baby

and then you send him off to war. No wonder the kids rebel and take pot.

And, Mrs. Johnson, in case you don't understand the lingo that's marijuana".

How do you feel in a situation like this? First, a wave of mounting disbelief.

Can this be true? Is this a nightmare? Then a sort of surge of adrenaline

into the blood knowing that you are going to answer, that you've got to

answer, you want to answer and yet at the same time for a strange break

somewhere in the back of the mind that says be calm, be dignified. Somewhere

along the way--I think between the word gut and pot--I had a sense that maybe

Thursday, January 18 (Continued)

the feeling in the room was swinging to me. Miss Kitt stopped for breath to a stunned silence in the room and the second I was waiting to see whether it was a comma or a period. Mrs. Hughes of New Jersey rose to her feet and said, "I feel morally obligated. May I speak in defense of the war?" My first husband," she said, "was killed in World War II and I have eight sons. One of them is now in the Air Force. None of them wants to go to Vietnam. All will go. They and their friends. I think that anybody who takes pot because there is a war on is a kook. These young people are still juniors. They have to be regulated. I hope we adults are still in control". The room thundered with applause. I am not sure whether I spoke next or Benetta Washington. At least I felt a surge of gratitude that it should be a negro in a very responsible position, well grounded in experience, who answered. "I understand that Miss Kitt said she knew about anger. I also know a little about it, but we are here to release these energies in constructive rather than destructive channels". One paper said that I was pale and that my voice trembled slightly as I replied to Miss Kitt. I think that is correct. I did not have tears in my eyes as another paper said. "Because there is a war on and I pray that there will be a just and honest peace, that still doesn't give us a free ticket not to try to work for better things such as against crime in the streets, for better education and better health for our people. I cannot identify as much as I should. I have not lived the background that you have nor can I speak as passionately and well but we must keep our eyes and our

Thursday, January 18 (Continued)

hearts and our energies fixed on constructive areas and try to do something that will make this a happier, better educated land". Once more, there was thunderous applause. I felt that I must not let the meeting end here. I had seen the pencils racing across the pads of all the press ladies-- several more had come in as the program started and I didn't want it to seem like a riot. Several hands went up. There were three or four more observations. One from a Negro woman who said there was a double standard of justice and they would not be done with juvenile delinquency until that was changed. She meant that if a Negro kills a Negro it is not pursued as diligently and with the full force of the law as if a white person is concerned. I know there is truth in that. It was about five minutes of four. The luncheon had gone on for over three hours so I spoke some words about how busy they were and moved to the door with the intention of saying goodbye to every guest, including Miss Kitt. It took me several moments to get there as people stopped me on the way. I stood very composed I think and said goodbye to everyone who came along. Many said we were never so proud of you. You were magnificent. Some I think were embarrassed and anxious to get out at any cost. Norma McClellan was very warm in her admiration and I was comforted by it. I never lose that feeling of being a part of the Senate wives. I went back upstairs. My next two hours were a succession of small duties, a few moments with Bess Meyerson about a TV program, a photo for the March of Dimes in the Red Room with Anna Roosevelt Halsted beneath FDR's picture, a photo in the library for the Evening Star



Thursday, January 18 (Continued)

garden book, working at my desk and on my mail. Then about six o'clock down to the State dining room where there was a reception for the Commission on Federal Crime Law. The genial Chief Justice was already there when I arrived with Tom Clark and Governor Pat Brown, the Chairman of the Commission, and Ramsey Clark and Senator Ervin, former Ambassador Pat Harris, a big impressive Negro, Judge Higginbotham from Philadelphia and to my amazement Don Thomas and Judge Doug Singleton from Texas, along with a lot of staff members--Ernie Goldstein, Barefoot and Larry, Joe Califano, but Lyndon was later and later. It was awkward. Chairs were arranged in the State dining room and a podium. He was supposed to make a little talk to begin with. I slipped out and talked to Barbara and said could you take those gentlemen a drink. She thought we shouldn't until after the talk. I telephoned to hurry him, but I realized from his tone of voice that it was a cruel thing to do. I had interrupted him in the middle of some vital train of thought. He came on over practically in a gallop. Apparently somewhere it had broken down in letting him know that he was supposed to talk first and then the social part of the evening would take place, but his presence of mind was great so he covered his lateness with the apology that was due, made a brief terse speech, thanked them for their work and then we went into the Red Room where we shook hands with them. And then at long last drinks were served, together with ample hors d'oeuvres, much welcomed at this hour I am sure.

Thursday, January 18 (Continued)

I lingered awhile talking to several. Apparently the news of the luncheon had not gotten around yet because one man asked me in an innocent voice, "how did the luncheon go?" And I said, "explosively, although I am afraid the really useful things were covered up and won't be reported." I left him probably mystified. I was mentioning Mrs. Moore to another man and the very good down to earth suggestions she had with obvious distaste and he said something like this. "that she or her brother were authors of a book about crime. It was a real John Burchite book." I replied that there had been nothing Burchite about what she had said at lunch--good workable suggestions I thought.

Lyndon's stay was brief. He went back to the office and I left about 7:30 and went to the bowling lanes for two fast hard games and then back upstairs, by now feeling that I was coming out of the decompression chamber, getting a little work done. And close to 9:30 Lyndon came over, Ed Clark and Jim Cain and we had dinner with talk of Australia. Ed's collection of Texana and all of his family I had seen Sunday at the art show. If there had been any talk about Texas politics, it was not while I was there and I did not raise it because I had had my share of touchy questions for the day. Chief Mills gave me a massage and I went to bed.