

MEMORANDUM

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

Wednesday, February 7, 1968

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I spent part of the morning listening to old tapes of the few days I recorded between that day in November and December 7th, when we moved into the White House, and of the period around July 28, 1965.

These are the two times that Howard K. Smith, wanted me to review for him - the mood, some of the small, personal events, the background against which larger events of the day unrolled.

I worked with Ashton, had lunch on a tray, saw Mr. West about a new usher.

And then at two o'clock, went down to the theatre to meet the service men. We were planning this for sometime, Bess, and Liz, and I. We'd been wanting to do something to entertain them, to include them in White House entertainments - the returned soldiers at Walter Reed and Bethesda - but we didn't want it to get into the papers and we didn't want to make something out of it.

Lynda Bird gives us the distinct feeling that they are sort of trotted out and put on in review - and in a way, used. She had been to the hospital some, and for the first several times, it had been absolutely quiet - and she liked it and they had. And then it had surfaced - maybe there was some over-eager PR man - and she hadn't gone anymore.

First there was the wedding and then there was Christmas, and in January we went to planning in earnest, and here, on February 7th, was our first of what we hoped would be, a weekly event.

We thought we had a good recipe when we decided on brand new movies, but we found that was standard fair at the hospitals, so Bess came up with

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the idea of a cabaret-like setting in the theatre, little round tables with cokes and pizza, peanuts and pretzels, and a group of about ten attractive, friendly girls moving around from table to table, just chatting with them, and lively music by some portion of one of the service bands.

So here I was, standing in the corridor, as you approached the theatre. The hall was lined with shrubs, bright geraniums, and they came, about 30 service men, a heavy preponderance of negroes, three or four in wheelchairs, several on crutches; a pinned up sleeve, a claw, an empty trouser leg; and with ~~on~~ each new face, an uncertainty as to whether I should stick out my hand or not. If you're new on crutches, can you take one hand away with ease, to shake hands.

Lynda Bird slipped in beside me after about the fifth man had gone by, and she was terrific. Carol Channing could hardly have been better. She made the afternoon glow and come to life.

At the end of the line, we joined them in the theatre, which was already noisy, and who should it be but Tony Matarese, whom I'd known since the Elms. He said, "I want ~~you~~ to welcome you to Tony's Pizza Parlor." And then he was off into loud, brash music, that changed to sentimental, and then began to ask for requests - we had several planted.

I sat at a table about ten minutes and then moved on. It was not easy, one opening always was "Where are you from?" and the very first person whom I asked, was from Austin. There were a lot of southerners, and out

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of this, three were West Virginians. The hardest were at one table, where there were four negros, one, the worst case of all, was only half a man. He was bolt upright in his wheelchair, and his legs were amputated right at the hips. He and two others, were silent, unmoving, sort of stunned looking. One was lively and smiled, and he and I talked animatedly but when I asked the others a question, they answered in monosyllables.

One way to lead - ask "Can I get you another Coke?" "How about some more pizzas." And then pass things. I sat at about half the tables, I think, and never with Lynda, so I hope we covered the whole room.

One young man told me "They didn't tell us where we were coming. If they had, there would have been a whole lot more wanted to come."

One table full asked me for my autograph and I wrote it on the White House matchbooks.

About three, Lynda went to the microphone and said that she would like to take them around to see the house. And then tactfully, "anybody that wants to, can take the stairs, or they can follow me. I'm going to take the elevator." And so, I slipped away. The girls had been doing a good job - some from the West Wing, from Social Correspondence, from Liz and Bess' office, and Marilyn from mine.

My three o'clock appointment, Mrs. Harmon, had already arrived and was in the Yellow Room. I apologized, without telling her why I was late. She'd come to say goodbye, after nine years as Ambassador in the United States, they are leaving. It's quite the wrong way around, that I get to know

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them all, much better, in their farewell call, because this is the only time we really sit and talk for 30 minutes or an hour, just the two of us.

She is one of the most interesting, and I think, intelligent women I have known here. Very quiet voiced, and very forceful. Some interesting

Between
excerpts: ~~Some~~ 60 and 65% of the people of Israel are Oriental Jews, this word rather startled me, she used it, I think, as opposed to Occidental.

I asked her where were they from. She said "Yemen, India, Ethiopia, Iraq." She said, "Many think that the people of Israel are highly skilled, literate, European Jews. It is not so. Many of this 60 or 65% of the Oriental Jews, have never eaten with a fork or sat on a chair, much less a flush toilet. The people of Yemen, were absolutely cut off from civilization, about two thousand years ago, and they have remained in that same culture or economy. All that we have in common is some Hebrew, and the customs of our religion." Nevertheless, she said, the people of Yemen are very quiet and gentle and teachable, and are making great strides, whereas the Moroccan Jews (and she got a rather wry expression) were violent and argumentative and given to fighting with knives. When they returned to Israel, her husband was given the post as head of the University of Israel, one for which, I'd say, he's wonderfully fitted, and she to help him.

She spoke of the press, in the very ways I might have used. They were absolutely free in Israel, and gave poor Eshkol a great deal of trouble,

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in fact, all of the government, any government. I believe she said, there are 60 papers in little Israel.

Well, it was a very interesting hour and I was sorry to see her go. I hope we shall meet again.

Then I went in and succumbed to the luxury of a nap, nearly two hours and it's great balm. These nights I am not sleeping much and I dream, sometimes nightmares, sometimes just a long, long dream about I'm lost and going from room to room, and can't find my way.

But poor Lyndon - he turns out the lights, so late, and wakes up so early. Sometimes I think the greatest courage is just to get up in the morning and start tackling it again.

I put on the blue dress, I'd worn to Lynda's wedding, and went to Clark and Libby's reception, that handsome house on Massachusetts Avenue, where we have attended a good many of the receptions since Lyndon's days in the Senate. The first were for the speaker. I knew they'd be there and they were, the great raft of Texans, old Washingtonian Society people, and Ambassadors, chiefly Latin American.

Libby was lovely in lace and orchids, and Clark, kind and sweet, as always. It's the sort of thing that I never go to anymore, and it was really too crowded to do any real talking, ^{but} ~~xxx~~ because it was such a change from the life I lead, it was rather fun to have a wave of familiar faces bear down on me, each with a friendly sentence, probably incoherent, that was drowned out by the next.

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I stayed about 40 minutes, and then started for the McNamaras. They were giving a party for the Clark Cliffords, but Margie had not been able to leave the hospital.

I arrived a few minutes before Lyndon, Bob took me around. There was Barbara Jackson, and he said she was standing in for Margie. There were the heads of the services, the Rostows - Elsie told me about her visit to Dallas, to SMU, where she had been part of the seminar, something about women participating in public life. Her descriptions of the students were both exciting and hopeful, and a little frightening. I sometimes wonder how I happen to have two daughters who give me so little cause to be frightened about them, either they or their friends.

Barbara said she would be here in March for awhile and should she call me. Yes indeed, I want to keep in touch with her.

We stayed about 30 minutes, and then came back to the White House and called ~~xxx~~ Mary and Sam Houston, who ate dinner with us, quietly.

Then I got Chief King and did some exercises and had a rub.

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