

CLAUDIA TAYLOR JOHNSON

WHITE HOUSE DIARY TAPES

December 25, 1968

Wednesday. Christmas Day. We slept late and breakfasted leisurely. I called Zephyr. Sammie is still desperately sick. I talked to Matiana. Tony is to come out of the intensive care room today and before the day is over see his grandchildren, and this was my Christmas present. It was unbounded relief and release. He has a good chance to return to complete health, and maybe we'll have those wilderness pack trips and go to Aspen.

About eleven-thirty we went into the Lincoln Room, and there Father Kaifer held a mass. It was Luci's idea, and all of the Alexanders attended. The height of ecumenism and Luci and Olga and Patrick Lynn crawling around on the floor, and all of us concerned lest he grab hold of the white cloth which Father Kiafer had put on top of the bird's nest table before he placed his vessels and cross upon it. And Lyndon sitting there attentively, looking more and more like a patriarch. I wonder if it's my imagination that this flu has etched a few more lines in his face. And Lynda and I. It was an informal, idly sweet mass. Father Kaifer referred to Patrick as the child of us all and asked for special blessings for the two young men of our family.

When it was over we went into the yellow room and opened more and more presents. My lovely fur blanket from Tommy Corcoran makes me feel like Eleanor of Aquitaine, even without the baronial fireplace and the hot mead.

Close to two we drove out to the Clark Cliffords. Christmas Day is his birthday, and they had open house. There was one of their daughters there,

five of her family, and a secretary who's been with Clark more than thirty years. It's one of the most warmly welcoming houses I know, full of antiques and porcelains and paintings and casual shots of important people stretching over at least four administrations. We sat by the fire and had a drink and enjoyed a little quiet visiting, and then left soon. Patrick Lyndon nearly drove us wild on the way back trying to turn a somersault, his latest trick, on the floor of the back seat, which was occupied by four other people. Luci handed him his bottle to amuse him, and he tried to give it to Lyndon, who took it with gusto and pretended that he was drinking it. I hope that none of the cars that passed us recognized any of us. It would have been an unsettling sight.

Back at the White House Lyndon lay down. He's not really over the flu yet. And I made a few thank you calls, to Virginia Rusk, and Horace Busby for that wonderful sampler more than a hundred years old, and talked to Hubert and Muriel to wish them a happy Christmas. Hubert had just gotten over the flu and Muriel sounded like she was about to come down with it. And then we talked to the Trumans, and that for me was one of the high points of the day. They sounded brave and strong, but they made me feel good about calling. I think it meant something to them. Lyndon said to President Truman, "I've been looking over all these bills I passed, and I want you to know, over and over and over they began in your time, they were your ideas. I was just able to build on the good things you'd started." It was an extraordinarily generous display, warm and human and much enjoyed by both of them, and I watched with a broadening smile.

Then Lyndon did another of those things impetuous and warm and sweet that are typical of him. He had been talking to Bill Bundy, who said he was going out to Jim Rowe's for an open house, and Lyndon said, "Let's go." I reminded him that C. R. was coming to have dinner with us and it was really too late. And he said, "No, we won't stay but fifteen minutes." So in a hurry we dressed and drove out to the Rowe's house, much to the concern of the Secret Service, who did not know the address, and so I directed them. And the look on Libby's face when we rang the doorbell and she opened it made me real happy that we'd come. There were two young Rowes home, Clarissa and young Jim, and Bill Bundy and their son, who is studying government at Harvard under [Richard] Neustadt, and Mrs. Stroud [?]. Lyndon was in a mellow mood, amusing, jovial and gay. He and Jim had a banter going about their years in government that must have been pretty interesting to a young student of government. Lyndon made some extremely complimentary remarks on the way out about Bill Bundy, his capacity and his handling of his job, which pleased me very much, because I've always liked him and Mary. He took some buttons for a sport coat to Jim, one of his favorite gifts this Christmas, and a charm to Libby. It was the sort of evening that we used to have so frequently back in the Senate, and so scarce in the White House. And I was conscious that it meant something extra to Jim and Libby because Lyndon was the president, but I hope they and everybody also realize that we have our needs, too, for companionship and friendship and an evening out.

Then we were back on the second floor of the White House by seventy-three. Lynda had kept C. R. good company. The Alexanders joined us and

Marie Fehmer and the Shulmans. We all had a drink. And then quite early, about eight, we went in for a Christmas dinner in that beautiful family dining room, a jewel of a flower arrangement, tiny glittering balls among the deep reds and golds and bronzes of the chrysanthemums and roses, and the soft glow of candlelight. Mary Rather joined us. I said the blessing, from a very full heart, with Tony in my mind behind every word. And we had a delicious Christmas dinner, not cooked by Zephyr, but Mr. [Henry] Haller had come to our aid, a beautiful turkey and dressing. But nobody's can compare with the twenty-seven years of dressing that we've had from Zephyr. And sweet potatoes with marshmallows and green beans and hot rolls and cranberry salad and ambrosia and fruitcake. We all ate with abandon. Then we went down to the theater and saw "The President's House," the uncorrected print, and the photography of me, alas, convinces me it should not have been close-up, not at fifty-six. But the rooms were superb and I'm glad I've done it.

And then while Lyndon and C. R. talked business, Lynda and Luci and I went into my bedroom and collapsed in hysterical laughter. We had planned to record in the family Bible the birth of Lucinda, on this her two month birthday in the White House. As the days dwindled down to a precious few, less than a month now, and stands rise in front of us for the inaugural of President Nixon, it is almost funny how more and more you think of the things you ought to do while you're still in the White House. Ah, but so many we have done. This one, alas, eluded us. We could not write in the family Bible. There were no more spaces left under births. We'll have to

take it back to Dorothy Territo and get some more pages inserted. The only remaining blank page is a page of deaths.