

WAD

Friday, January 17, 1969

Page 1

The day began with headlines that said "U.S. and Hanoi Break Deadlock Over Tables, Begin Talking Tomorrow"--a note of cautious satisfaction on which to leave this office. Diplomacy is like wading through hip deep mud, slow uncertain progress, but we're grateful for any.

In the morning I worked at my desk with Helene and Bess; dictated phrases and word pictures and little memories for the New York party thank yous. And then Bob Knudsen came in and took a picture of Liz and Bess, and Ashton and me at work in our familiar huddles in my bedroom. How I'll love that picture on the walls in my room! And then Bess grabbed the camera and took one of Bob Knudsen and me. Liz stayed to discuss the wrap-up on how to handle the film coverage on the Monday luncheon at the Cliffords'. No TV in the house, emphatically, but certainly they could take pictures as we entered the house and we'd pause on the steps, if they liked, as the Cliffords greeted us. The fitter came and we tried on my Inaugural costume, peach pink wool coat and dress and a lovely fur helmet and muff. Alas, this costume has been plagued with bad luck from the beginning. First I decided on red only to discover that Mrs. Nixon's costume would be red, then I switched to yellow--too late, the sample they had shown me was no longer available on the market.

Next I went up to Ashton's office and there we had pictures with Ashton, Helene, Marilyn, and me. These too will be warmly

treasured. There's nothing like working together to cement comradeship.

My desk has been piled high every day for the last two weeks with pictures to be autographed. It seems that our departure from here reminds everybody that he, or his cousin, or his mother-in-law doesn't have an autographed picture--it is the phenomenon of departure!

At twelve I went down to the East Room with Lyndon for the Medal of Science Awards in what will be our last ceremony in the East Room, I suppose, so I listened with sharpened antenna to every moment and rather especially to the aide who announced as we approached the door, "The President of the United States and Mrs. Johnson," taking a certain relish in the hearing and then I took my seat in the front row far side. Dr. Donald Hornig introduced the program, Lyndon made brief, quiet remarks about the contribution of the twelve or so individuals seated on the opposite front row to me. They came from the physical, biological, mathematical, and engineering sciences--Dr. Detler Bronk's name the most familiar to me. And then one by one, rather solemnly, they filed by and Lyndon handed each one the medal and shook hands and congratulated him, and very quickly the ceremony was over. I invited everyone to the State Dining Room for sherry and crackers and stayed very briefly myself.

I joined Lyndon to go to the National Press Club, a sort of farewell to the press corps that's been so much a part of our lives

these five years, indeed for the last thirty-odd. And this indeed was a remarkable hour. As we approached the Press Club I saw, to my amazement, a big crowd--they'd come from nowhere and on practically no notice. I didn't know myself we were going until a little while before. They were pushing to get to Lyndon, holding out their hands over their heads, a good many of the ladies crying, "Oh, Mr. President, God bless you, Mr. President, we'll never forget you." It was a strange out-pouring. Lyndon was reaching over heads to shake hands, patting a child, occasionally scribbling an autograph--sort of rowing his way through the crowd with both hands, reminiscent of innumerable campaign crowds. And then we were finally in the elevator and I looked at one hand--and there was a bleeding scratch--that also a familiar phenomenon of campaign crowds.

Lyndon went directly to the podium and gave a delightful performance. He was quiet and relaxed and in good humor. A warm greeting to the press and then he said, "I have never doubted your energy or your courage or your patriotism--that is why I asked General Hershey to get in touch immediately with each of you." The speech was about three-fourths laughter and then toward the end quite sober and he said that his greatest unhappiness on leaving office Monday noon would be "that peace has eluded me." That the thing he wanted most was "to bring back every boy I sent out there to Vietnam." I looked out at the assembled faces of the press who have held in their power so much of the success or failure of these

last years and felt oddly detached. What they did or said was rapidly receding in importance to me and among them there were quite a few that I had a personal affection for. Mostly I was terribly proud of Lyndon who was playing this scene just to my liking--a mixture of dignity and grace and humor. Someone had asked if he had brought Lyn and he had answered that "No, Lyn was confined to quarters for recent rambunctious behavior." And then very quickly we were off--to a warm ovation--and he gathered up George Christian and Liz and they rode home with us in the big black car--to the Family Dining Room for a very late lunch. Merriman Smith was with us. He's been very ill and still looks very pale.

Afterwards I took Liz in my bedroom and we talked about her helping out on some of my projects later on in the spring, possibly for a week when we dedicate the little park across the road.

At four o'clock came the highpoint of the day. Mrs. Alice Longworth came to tea with her granddaughter, Joanna Sturm. During these five years, visits with her have been sparkling events. She's come to tea perhaps half a dozen times and to dinner once or twice a year, not to any ladies luncheons that I can remember, I don't think of that as her dish. Always before I have sought her. This time she had telephoned and said she wanted to pay a call and bring a present to the baby. I like her tremendously although I always have the feeling that I must gird my armour, not indeed to do battle, but to be ready, alert at least. I always try to meet

her down at the door, a deference to age and position and to just what I feel about her. I remember the last time she had come, I think it was last October, when she'd gotten out of the car with her big stiff brimmed hat and came toward me like a ship under full sail exclaiming, "Isn't it delicious, isn't it delicious?" She was talking about Jackie [Kennedy]'s remarriage and could barely wait to get within speaking range.

This time I met her in the Yellow Room and my feelings were indeed mixed, partly because the papers had reported the last few weeks that she had said some tremendously nice things about me, what a very good First Lady and so forth, and I felt self-conscious about that. And also I thought this could very well be the last time I would see her. It was a delightful hour. Lyndon came in briefly, hugged her. She gave him a book about her father's life and she brought the baby a silver cup and a pen. Lynda Bird--one of her greatest admirers came in and hung on every word. Mrs. Longworth told us an interesting story about her father's leaving office--in 1909, I think it was, March. There was no fanfare at all. They'd gotten onto the train, carrying their own bags, and her father had in his arms a jar of terrapin--it was one of his favorite things and some lady had remembered how much he liked it and had presented him "a jar" as a departing gift. I thought of my Iranian caviar! One of my last acts must be to get it out of the

refrigerator and perhaps leave with it under my arm. I don't know whether it was my imagination, but she seemed somehow gentler, a little less acid in her wit.

She told us about doing a TV interview for a British company-- it would be shown over there. It had been filmed in her own apartment and during it she had done her famous imitations of Eleanor and Mrs. Taft. We exclaimed at once, "We never have seen them-- would she do them?" And she did. It was astounding. It's as though she suddenly transposed herself into Eleanor with an adjustment of her big hat, a certain rigidity in her posture, her face assuming an expression so well remembered. What an actress, a really accomplished performance! And then she did Mrs. Taft. This was an afternoon of remembering, and she talked about Franklin and their youth and the gay things they did--all the young folks then. And then she said something serious and quite sad, I don't know who she was quoting, but they were speaking of Franklin and said, "He never loved anybody or anything except possibly the Navy."

Joanna seemed somehow definitely more at home in the world, happier. I'm glad they've got each other. It was a sparkling hour and close to five they said goodbye. Lynda had been hanging on every word, saying, "Save all the gossip, I'll come to see you when I get back!" She's been one of the stars of my time here. We said goodbye at the elevator.

A little later I went over to Lyndon's office to join him in receiving Mayor Washington and John Hechinger. We kept them waiting a long time, I'm afraid. They had come to give Lyndon a plaque of appreciation for his work for the city of Washington and a key to the city. There was quite an assemblage of press and some dear words by Walter, "What you and Mrs. Johnson have done for us over the years will be remembered long by all of us." And then Walter said that two of the things that Lyndon had expressed great interest in, the new town at Fort Lincoln, and housing for the elderly had actually gotten under way just within the last week--they'd broken ground on them because they wanted to get them started while Lyndon was still in office. And then some very appreciative words by Lyndon directed to all three of them, Walter and Tom Fletcher and John Hechinger. In the course of it he said one of his greatest disappointments was his failure to get Home Rule for the District. It was a brief, moving, happy moment and crowned a long association in which I had had a rather special share and the affection for the principals that comes with having worked together.

A little later I did something unusual in my life as First Lady--I back off from that title--and now that it will so soon be laid down, I can at least think of it in relation to myself--I went to a cocktail party! It was at the Bromley Smith's home on Massachusetts Avenue close to where Charles [Marsh] used to live. It was one of the many goodbyes to all the fellow troops--I would have liked to have gone to every one. And I know there must have

Friday, January 17, 1969

Page 8

been a lot of sentiment, a lot of intense feeling of comradeship as this vast complex of able people, called the Johnson Administration, reaches the end of its service and the close knit circles break up and the individuals go their own ways. I only stayed about thirty minutes but it was fun and all the more so because my hosts seemed surprised and pleased that I was there.

Back at the White House, I found Billy Graham whom Lyndon had invited for dinner, already in the West Hall. We talked while we waited for Lyndon and he said that President-Elect Nixon planned to have religious services in the East Room with a different minister each Sunday. He had been invited to do the first one. This would give them the opportunity to invite guests who have never had an occasion to be at the White House before, and then surprisingly, to me at least, it will be good from a security standpoint. Lyndon was very late coming. We saw the first of a movie, Shoes of a Fisherman, interrupted it for dinner and then as so often here in the White House, went back for another thirty minutes, but never saw the end of the movie. Twelve o'clock found me too tired after this long and busy day, and Lyndon who has had a cold which has lingered for weeks and weeks it seems, had long since gone to sleep in his chair.