

# ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

WITH

MARY H. TRUMAN

JULY 29, 1991

INDEPENDENCE, MISSOURI

INTERVIEWED BY JIM WILLIAMS

ORAL HISTORY #1991-11

This transcript corresponds to audiotapes DAV-AR #4342-4344

HARRY S TRUMAN NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR



## **EDITORIAL NOTICE**

This is a transcript of a tape-recorded interview conducted for Harry S Truman National Historic Site. After a draft of this transcript was made, the park provided a copy to the interviewee and requested that he or she return the transcript with any corrections or modifications that he or she wished to be included in the final transcript. The interviewer, or in some cases another qualified staff member, also reviewed the draft and compared it to the tape recordings. The corrections and other changes suggested by the interviewee and interviewer have been incorporated into this final transcript. The transcript follows as closely as possible the recorded interview, including the usual starts, stops, and other rough spots in typical conversation. The reader should remember that this is essentially a transcript of the spoken, rather than the written, word. Stylistic matters, such as punctuation and capitalization, follow the *Chicago Manual of Style*, 14<sup>th</sup> edition. The transcript includes bracketed notices at the end of one tape and the beginning of the next so that, if desired, the reader can find a section of tape more easily by using this transcript.

Mary H. Truman and Jim Williams reviewed the draft of this transcript. Their corrections were incorporated into this final transcript by Perky Beisel in summer 2000. A grant from Eastern National Park and Monument Association funded the transcription and final editing of this interview.

## **RESTRICTION**

Researchers may read, quote from, cite, and photocopy this transcript without permission for purposes of research only. Publication is prohibited, however, without permission from the Superintendent, Harry S Truman National Historic Site.

## ABSTRACT

An Independence, Missouri, native, Mary Higbee Truman lived in Independence until 1995, when she moved to Overland Park, Kansas, to be near her family. During her eighty years in Independence, Mrs. Truman met Harry S Truman when he was Jackson County judge, and she later married his nephew, John C. Truman. Truman shared stories about family activities such as Sunday dinners in Grandview at the Truman farm, inaugurations, vacations at the White House, and VIP tours of the capitol. Truman also tells about visiting with the elder Trumans in Independence after their return from Washington.

Persons mentioned: Agnes Fraher, John Curtis Truman, Charles Brady, John Brady, Ross J. Higbee, Loretta F. Higbee, Philip J. Higbee, Richard Higbee, Ross Higbee, Paul Higbee, Joseph Biter, Callie Louise Truman, Fred L. Truman, Martha Ann Truman Swoyer, J. Vivian Truman, Luella Truman, Harry S Truman, Mary Jane Truman, Bess W. Truman, Gilbert Hibgee Truman, John Truman, Karl Swoyer, Harry A. Truman, Gilbert Truman, Timothy Truman, Laura Hare Truman, George Hare, Loretta Truman DeLoach, David Truman DeLoach, Mary Margaret Truman Gracey, Paul Jay Gracey, Terri Lynn Gracey Hagerty, Rita Truman Moser, Jean Zimmerman, Doug Zimmerman, Rita Truman DeLoach, D. Frederick Wallace, Jim Swoyer, John Tyler Truman, Joseph P. Gracey, Rose Conway, Franklin D. Roosevelt, Ralph DeLoach, Margaret Truman Daniel, Nancy Reagan, Ronald Reagan, Madge Gates Wallace, Herbert C. Hoover, Eleanor Roosevelt, E. Clifton Daniel, Jr., Stuart Symington, Morris Tolan, Ralph Truman, Sue Gentry, Melody Ann McGilly, Jim McGilly, Jr., Ethel Noland, and Elizabeth Safly.

## ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW WITH

### MARY H. TRUMAN

HSTR INTERVIEW #1991-11

JIM WILLIAMS: This is an oral history interview with Mary Truman. We're at the Truman Library on the morning of July 29, 1991. The interviewer is Jim Williams from the National Park Service, and Scott Stone from the National Park Service is running the recording equipment.

Well, first of all, I'd like to know more about you before you became involved with the Truman family. Could you tell me where and when you were born and grew up?

MARY H. TRUMAN: I was born right here in Independence in 1915, and grew up here. I've been here all my life, which is a long time.

WILLIAMS: What was your family name?

TRUMAN: Higbee, H-I-G-B-double E. My aunt, my mother's youngest sister, was secretary to the president when he was Judge Truman. The office was in the courthouse up in Independence, and that's how I met my husband, through her.

WILLIAMS: What was her name?

TRUMAN: Agnes Fraher, and I met my husband, J.C. Truman, through her. Her fiancé was teaching at Palmer Junior High, and so was my husband at the time, so that's how I got involved with the Truman family.

WILLIAMS: How long had your family been in Independence?

TRUMAN: Oh, forever. A long, long time. My mother's mother was Hester Farrell

Brady . . . My grandmother's brothers were Charles Brady and John Brady, postmaster and assistant postmaster in Independence. Been here a long time.

WILLIAMS: So you're no stranger to Independence.

TRUMAN: No stranger, no.

WILLIAMS: Which part of town did you live in?

TRUMAN: I grew up in a home my father built north of the Independence square at 1000 N. Liberty. I now live about three blocks from the library, on North Liberty.

WILLIAMS: Have you always lived there?

TRUMAN: Always lived on the north side. My father built a home there, and we bought a home about a block away . . . after he died. He died young, a heart attack, so we began to look for a house that would be close to my mother.

WILLIAMS: What were your parents' names?

TRUMAN: Ross J. and Loretta Higbee. My mother was Fraher, of course, and then married Higbee. My dad was from Wichita, Kansas—Goddard, Kansas—grew up on a farm, same as my husband. They had a lot in common.

WILLIAMS: And did you have brothers and sisters?

TRUMAN: I had four brothers, no sisters.

WILLIAMS: Could you run down their names, for the record?

TRUMAN: Philip and Richard and Ross and Paul. Philip and Ross still live in Independence north of the square, and then I have a brother Richard in Texas, Houston, and Paul [deceased November 1991] in Orlando, Florida.

WILLIAMS: And they're all Frahers.

TRUMAN: Hmm?

WILLIAMS: Fraher is their name?

TRUMAN: No. Higbee.

WILLIAMS: Higbee.

TRUMAN: Higbee.

WILLIAMS: Your mother was Fraher.

TRUMAN: My mother was Loretta Fraher. She married Ross Higbee, right.

WILLIAMS: Okay, I've got it. [chuckling]

TRUMAN: Okay.

WILLIAMS: Where did you go to school?

TRUMAN: I went to school right here in Independence at Saint Mary's—we were all Catholic and I went to night school at Rockhurst College while I was working. I was a secretary for a director of the Farm Security Administration, Department of Agriculture.

WILLIAMS: In Kansas City?

TRUMAN: No, here in Independence, and then Sedalia and then Chillicothe. That's what I was doing when I met my husband, and then I quit working about two weeks before my marriage . . . You didn't work then. When you got married, you quit and stayed home.

WILLIAMS: Did that bother you?

TRUMAN: Not at all. [chuckling] I was glad. I had a good job. I made the same money my husband was making teaching school. They didn't pay teachers

very much in those days. They still don't pay them enough, but it was worse then, yeah.

WILLIAMS: So when did you meet him?

TRUMAN: In '37, the summer of '37, and we were married on October 28, 1939. We went together for two years.

WILLIAMS: And what was he doing at the time?

TRUMAN: He was teaching at Palmer Junior High in Independence.

WILLIAMS: Oh, that's right. But you said you met him through your aunt.

TRUMAN: Through my aunt, Agnes Fraher, yes. At a dinner party.

WILLIAMS: Was it arranged?

TRUMAN: It was arranged, mm-hmm. I was dating someone else who lived in Sedalia. This was arranged by my aunt and her fiancé, Joseph Biter. Right.

WILLIAMS: I guess it worked out though.

TRUMAN: It worked out fine. It worked out beautifully, right. He was a great guy. Died about . . . on September 4, 1989. He got cancer, but he lived four and a half years after he was diagnosed.

WILLIAMS: He was the oldest of . . . ?

TRUMAN: The oldest of the Truman children, yes. There were four boys and a girl in that family also. John was a twin and his twin sister, Callie Louise, died when she was about three years old.

WILLIAMS: I've interviewed Fred and Martha Ann, so . . .

TRUMAN: Yeah. Fred lost his wife not too long before I lost my husband.

WILLIAMS: I know a few things about Vivian and Luella's family.

TRUMAN: Yeah.

WILLIAMS: Did you know his parents very well?

TRUMAN: Oh, yes. We were out there a lot.

WILLIAMS: At the farm?

TRUMAN: Oh, yeah. My kids loved the farm. I was so glad they had the opportunity to . . . You know, they had a horse and . . . Well, they were there a lot. My husband had a garden out there and they went out and helped him with it. And it was a good place to go. It was wonderful.

WILLIAMS: When did he leave the farm?

TRUMAN: 1930 or 1931. He moved to Independence, Missouri, in 1936 upon completion of college. Well, of course he went away to school. He went down to Warrensburg for four years, and then when we married we lived here in Independence. We lived here the whole time.

WILLIAMS: When he was teaching school here?

TRUMAN: Yes, he rented a room here, went home on the weekends. He rented a room right across from the school, Palmer Junior High School.

WILLIAMS: It sounds kind of like the reverse of Harry Truman.

TRUMAN: Right.

WILLIAMS: Going from Grandview to Independence.

TRUMAN: Right. Well, you didn't drive home. You know, the drive, it was a long way in those days. We didn't have the freeway. There was no 435, so it would have been an effort to get to school every day on time, so he just rented a room and went home on the weekends.

WILLIAMS: And he liked to farm?

TRUMAN: Yes, but he . . . His two younger brothers are the only ones that stayed on the farm. His father was bright, and was not the strongest person physically. He hurt his heart playing basketball in high school—he was real good in sports, but he had some heart trouble. In fact, he had to take a year off of college. It took him five years because of his heart. Well, after we were married, he didn't have any more trouble with it, you know. But when we used to go to dances . . . I love to dance. [chuckling] You know, there was a limit to how long he could dance. You'd dance for a while and he'd say, "I'm sorry, I have to sit down now." So I knew he was fragile because of his heart. But, well, we were married fifty years, and he . . . You know, he was pretty strong. He wasn't sick very often or anything. He became very strong physically.

WILLIAMS: So did he grow up out at the farm?

TRUMAN: In Grandview, yes. Oh, yeah, right.

WILLIAMS: Here and there, it sounds like, from the other . . . his brother and sister, it sounded like they moved around a lot.

TRUMAN: Well, to go to school, but otherwise stayed home.

WILLIAMS: Where did he go to high school?

TRUMAN: In Grandview, Grandview High School.

WILLIAMS: So he was working out here teaching . . . ?

TRUMAN: He was teaching at Palmer, and my aunt's fiancé was teaching at either William Chrisman or Palmer.

WILLIAMS: What did he teach?

TRUMAN: History. He was a history major. He loved history, same as the president. And so he was teaching there for several years, and then he moved over to William Chrisman to the senior high school. But he didn't stay. We had our second child on the way, and he decided that he had to get out of it because the pay was so low. He thought if we were ever to send our children to school, we would have to do it not teaching. [chuckling] And he'd go to summer school every summer at MU working on his master's, so it was rough. He was a good teacher, the kids loved him, and he was very good.

WILLIAMS: Did he like American history?

TRUMAN: Yes. All kinds, yeah. I was glad he was a teacher. I didn't have to help the children with their homework. He was good at that. [chuckling]

WILLIAMS: How many children do you have?

TRUMAN: We had six. We have two sons and four daughters.

WILLIAMS: How would you describe Vivian Truman?

TRUMAN: Oh, he was a dear. Let's see, he lived to see all of his grandchildren, yes. He was a quiet man, very strong, loved the farm, and he was a good man. He was interesting. He had a good sense of humor and was just a good man.

WILLIAMS: A good father-in-law?

TRUMAN: Yes, very much. He was a sweet man. Tough. I mean, strict with his children, but he was a good grandfather and a good father-in-law. He was

good to me.

WILLIAMS: And Luella? How would you describe her?

TRUMAN: She was great, too. She was very family oriented. Devoted to her husband and children. Gosh, she was a wonderful cook. I was so terrified. I had never cooked anything, and I thought, “Oh, my Lord . . .” She was a fabulous cook. Of course, they had everything to cook with. I used to try to copy her recipes, and finally I realized that I didn’t have the right ingredients—you know, the pure cream and stuff right out of the garden and everything. I gave up on that. [chuckling] But she was really good to me and good to the children. They loved family. We were there, you know, every Sunday for dinner. During the war—my husband was in the war—he was on the battleship *Missouri*. And my parents, I moved in with them because my four brothers were all in the war overseas—three overseas—and I moved home with my parents because the house was empty. I had three children. Yeah, we had three before the war and three after the war. I’d go out to the farm and stay. If my folks wanted to leave town, I wouldn’t stay alone. I was uncomfortable. [chuckling] I’d never been alone, and I wasn’t about to start.

WILLIAMS: So you have some happy memories of the Truman farm.

TRUMAN: Oh, yeah. The kids had a blast out there. It was great.

WILLIAMS: You’d go out every Sunday?

TRUMAN: Yes. We were out there every weekend.

WILLIAMS: Would the whole family gather?

TRUMAN: Yeah, quite a bit. Yeah. Of course, J. was the oldest, and at first we were the only ones who were married and that had children. His youngest brother was only fourteen, I think, when we started dating. They were a good family.

WILLIAMS: So you had become acquainted with the family while Mamma Truman was still living.

TRUMAN: Yes, she was . . . She died . . . I was expecting our fourth child. It was after the war. It must have been '47. Died that summer.

WILLIAMS: Can you describe her?

TRUMAN: She was very intelligent, well read, had a good sense of humor and was extremely loyal. We used to go over there. They lived next door, she and Aunt Mary Jane, when we married, and we'd go over there on Sunday, a big old farmhouse. And they didn't have central heating; it was just a potbellied stove, I guess, or something. And I was pregnant with our first child, and we'd be sitting there and she'd be talking about things that I knew nothing about, old families that I . . . And I would be getting sicker and sicker because of the heat from the stove—you're sitting up so close to it. I couldn't wait to get out of there because I wasn't used to sitting that close to a stove. It was hot. So I was slightly miserable.

WILLIAMS: Being pregnant probably didn't help.

TRUMAN: Being pregnant didn't help. No, it didn't help at all.

WILLIAMS: Would you go over there every weekend?

TRUMAN: We'd go over to see her, surely. She was a great woman. She used to go

hunting with my husband. She had to be in her seventies, and he'd go over . . . The grandfather died, you know. She was a widow a long, long time. She'd get her gun and they'd go out rabbit hunting and whatever. She was a good shot. [chuckling]

WILLIAMS: Did you ever go with them?

TRUMAN: Oh, no, this was when he was a child. No, I wouldn't. I would not have made a good farm wife. His younger brothers married farm girls . . . I wouldn't have been any good at it. It just wasn't my cup of tea.

WILLIAMS: You're a city gal?

TRUMAN: That's right. If you can call Independence a city, which . . . small-town gal. But I like cities. My husband didn't care for the city at all. When we'd be on trips to go see my brother in Houston, we'd get outside Houston and he'd stop the car, "Here, drive." He hated the traffic and the whole thing, but it didn't bother me.

WILLIAMS: And how well did you know Mary Jane Truman?

TRUMAN: Oh, very well. She lived in Grandview, too, and she'd always be there when we'd go see their grandmother. And then of course she was alone for years after . . . I can't remember what year she died, but she stayed in the same little house when her health failed—she still stayed there. They hired a nurse for daytime and a nurse for night. She was a strong, dominant character. They were all strong, dominant characters. They were good people but they . . . You know, they were very . . . well, right was right and wrong was wrong. You know, there was not much in between. [chuckling]

WILLIAMS: No gray area.

TRUMAN: No gray area, yeah.

WILLIAMS: Well, somewhere along in there they were moved off of the farm. Is that right?

TRUMAN: Right. It had to be in the forties, and they bought a small house, and that's where Mamma Truman died and where Aunt Mary lived, yeah.

WILLIAMS: So after that you would still see them, but it would be—

TRUMAN: Oh, yes. Yeah, but it was in town.

WILLIAMS: Mm-hmm, in Grandview?

TRUMAN: Right.

WILLIAMS: Did you have much to do with the whole bankruptcy and all of that?

TRUMAN: No, I was too busy rearing children. Not really, hmm-mm. We went to the White House once and took the four children—it must have been in '52 when I was expecting the fifth child, Gilbert—and stayed at the White House for about a week. Mrs. Truman came home every summer, brought her mother home for the summer. And my husband's job took him to Washington once in a while, and he'd stay at the White House. But this summer we took the four children and went back, and we were there for about a week. It was very interesting. [chuckling] Had lunch on the *Williamsburg*, the yacht, and I had Aunt Bess's driver and the car, and he'd take us around sightseeing. They were working on the air conditioning. I don't think they had too much central air then. They were working on the air conditioning in the White House. It was hot! It was July. It was really

bad sightseeing in the heat.

WILLIAMS: That's not a good time in Washington.

TRUMAN: Yeah. Yeah, but the kids loved it. I know the Secret Service took my oldest son to the FBI, took him through it, you know, and explained it all to him. It must have been the FBI. He got Washington fever real fast. He was . . . Let's see, in '52 he would have been almost twelve, and my husband one day said, "We've got to get John out of here and get him back to Independence." [chuckling] "He thinks he's something else."

WILLIAMS: So there was a Truman that caught Washington fever.

TRUMAN: He got Washington fever. But he was young. He got over it. But we had the one son and then we had three daughters, and then we had another son and also another daughter. We were the only ones that had sons in the Truman family. J.'s brothers who live on the farm in Louisburg have daughters. Harry has three and Gilbert has one, and then his brother Fred didn't have any children. And his sister, Martha Ann, had a son, Karl, but their name is Swoyer. So we thought all our hopes to carry on the family name were pinned on John for a while, and then we got Gilbert, so . . . And they have . . . John has two sons and Gilbert has a son and a daughter. [Mrs. Truman notes: "In 1993 Gilbert had a second daughter"]

WILLIAMS: So John is your oldest son?

TRUMAN: John's the oldest. He's a lawyer in St. Louis. He has two boys, John Tyler and Timothy.

WILLIAMS: And who did he marry?

TRUMAN: He married a local girl, Laura Hare, here in Independence. Her father was George Hare, a lawyer.

WILLIAMS: There's some Hares on Delaware Street.

TRUMAN: That's it.

WILLIAMS: Is that them?

TRUMAN: That's the ones. John and Laura are divorced now, and the children live with her. [Mrs. Truman notes: In May, 1993, John married Linda Peebles and his two sons now live with them.] Well, the youngest one's out in Newton, Kansas, visiting. My daughter, Loretta, has a boy, David, about his age, takes him home every summer for a while. And I see the kids a lot, and John comes home every two weeks or so, so he gets his kids and brings them over to our house.

WILLIAMS: And the second child was . . . ? Yours.

TRUMAN: Of mine? Mary. Mary worked at the Truman Library for three summers during high school. She assisted Rose Conway, Uncle Harry's secretary. She married a local boy, Joseph P. Gracey. Well, he went all through high school with my son, and they had two children: a girl, Terri Lynn, and a boy, Paul Jay. Paul was killed about eight months ago in a horrible car wreck. So that's been really bad. And then we had another daughter after that, Rita. She lives over in Overland Park, and they have four children. She's got the third one in college. She is an assistant librarian in the medical library at Children's Mercy Hospital. She was a teacher, but she didn't like it and got out of it. Then we had World War II, so I had a break

from having children, and then we had Loretta, who lives in Newton, Kansas, and she has two children.

And then we had Gilbert, Gilbert Higbee, and he just had . . . They just had their second child. They live in Columbia. His wife Pam just graduated from MU. She's a vet now. They both have degrees in counseling or psychology. They don't pay counselors very well, so she . . . They just made a trip of a couple thousand miles. She's looking for someplace to go to work with another vet. There's a clinic in Wisconsin, and she's hoping for that. And I can't stand the idea of them being so far away, but, you know, they have to go wherever the job is.

Then our youngest daughter, Jean, she lives in Overland Park and she has a daughter, Kate, who teaches at Johnson County Community College. Her husband is Doug Zimmerman.

WILLIAMS: I didn't catch the husband's name, so . . .

TRUMAN: Oh, the last one? Rita, Rita Moser. She's the one that works at the hospital. Her husband is Carl Moser.

WILLIAMS: Then there's Loretta?

TRUMAN: And Loretta is DeLoach. Her husband, Ralph, is the clerk for the federal courts for the state of Kansas. Has the same job in Kansas that my husband ended up with for twenty years in Missouri, clerk of the federal court, and he got the same job in Kansas. He travels a lot. And then Jean, the youngest, she's married to Doug Zimmerman. He works at Ozanam Home for Boys, one of the administrators there.

WILLIAMS: So you're a busy grandmother.

TRUMAN: Busy. Yeah, real.

WILLIAMS: It's nice to be busy.

TRUMAN: I've got a dozen grandchildren and . . . Right. No, I'm busy.

WILLIAMS: Well, back when you first met your husband, did people call him J.C. or J., or which?

TRUMAN: His name's John, John Curtis, and he was about the fourth John Truman. So his mother didn't want him called John or Johnny, so she called him by J.C. But I called him J., and his friends did. Some places, you knew when people called where they knew him, because when he worked at the V.A. after the war, they all called him John. So you could identify right away where they'd known him. So we named our oldest son John, John Ross, Ross for my dad, and I think he's the fifth or sixth John Truman. It goes on and on. And he named his son John [John Tyler].

WILLIAMS: Well, it sounds like your other children have family names, too, at least some of them.

TRUMAN: They do. . . . Loretta put Truman in the middle of . . . David Truman DeLoach, Rita Truman DeLoach. And Jean, the youngest one, put Truman in the middle. The older children didn't, but the younger ones did.

WILLIAMS: When you started dating, you knew, of course, that his uncle was—

TRUMAN: Well, he was a judge then.

WILLIAMS: Did that mean anything special to you?

TRUMAN: Well, yeah. My aunt had worked for him, and I worked at the courthouse

for a while, secretary to the county extension agent, and I can remember when he was running for the senate. I would help, go to the meetings or help get out literature and stuff like that. No, we were very, very proud of him. It was great.

WILLIAMS: What was Mr. Truman like in those days?

TRUMAN: Oh, he had a temper.

WILLIAMS: He did?

TRUMAN: You mean the president? He had a temper. He couldn't tolerate incompetence and dishonesty. He would dictate a letter to my aunt giving somebody really . . . and giving them a fit. And then sometimes she'd follow him out when he'd be leaving, "Judge Truman, would you like for me to fix this letter up a little bit?" "Oh, go ahead. Fix it up, Agnes. Whatever, whatever. You fix it." But she wouldn't send it out like that. He'd be mad when he dictated it, and then he'd cool off.

WILLIAMS: Did she like working for him?

TRUMAN: Oh, yes. She admired him very much and thought he accomplished a great deal while he was judge. He was good to her. Yeah. She was on the first floor of the courthouse, and I was up on the second floor in the farm bureau. In fact, she probably got me my job. I'm sure she did. It was back in the Depression days. She got me on with the WPA as a secretary there, and then I got acquainted with people in the farm bureau and went to work for them. It was the Farm Security Administration. My husband used to kid me because we were paying farmers not to . . . [chuckling] not to raise

things or not to raise too much stuff, you know, and he thought it was ridiculous. [chuckling] But we were helping a lot of poor farmers. I worked for a year in Sedalia and then a year in Chillicothe, then got moved back to Independence in 1937.

WILLIAMS: It wasn't unusual in those days to get jobs like that, was it, through relatives?

TRUMAN: No, it wasn't unusual at all. Not a bit. Jobs, good jobs were very hard to get, though. It was nice if you knew someone.

WILLIAMS: So did you actually know Senator Truman before you knew your husband?

TRUMAN: Oh, I'd met him but hadn't paid much attention. My aunt remembers when Vivian Truman, J.'s dad, would bring the kids in on Saturday sometime when school was not going on in the summer, and she remembers seeing J. and the boys in the office, yeah. But I didn't. I didn't know them.

WILLIAMS: Vivian was working for the county at one time.

TRUMAN: Yes, he did. I can't remember what department. I think it was the road department, I believe. And then later he was at the Federal Housing. In fact, he was the administrator of the Federal Housing in Kansas City. He was a smart man.

WILLIAMS: One of the kids, either Martha Ann or Fred, said that they would come out to Independence on occasion with him, because he was doing business at the courthouse.

TRUMAN: Yeah. Right, at the courthouse, and they'd get to come with him. Mm-hmm, right.

WILLIAMS: So you courted for about two years?

TRUMAN: Two years, mm-hmm. Well, we had problems. I was a Catholic and he was not.

WILLIAMS: That was a problem?

TRUMAN: Back then, mixed marriages, it was a problem for him and a problem for me. So we had a lot of things to work out.

WILLIAMS: How did you overcome that problem?

TRUMAN: Well, he said he'd send the children to the Catholic schools and go to church with me. I promised I would not try to convert him to my religion. He died a Catholic. He joined the church, oh, three or four months before he died, which surprised his children and me. But he was very supportive and we taught them their religion, and he liked the Catholic schools. He liked the private schools, thought they were getting a good education, which they were. And I always thought he was a better Catholic than most anybody I knew for years before he actually joined the church, so . . .

WILLIAMS: I think he grew up in the same church that I grew up in out in Hickman Mills, the Christian church?

TRUMAN: Oh? Did you grow up in . . . His mother was in the Christian church. And his father joined that church when they were married. But J. joined the Baptist church, because that's where his friends from the high school went . . . He didn't attend regularly.

WILLIAMS: Okay. The Grandview Baptist?

TRUMAN: Mm-hmm. But he didn't . . . He wasn't going to any church when I met

him, and so he went . . . He went to Saint Mary's all his life, once we were married.

WILLIAMS: So it didn't really seem to bother him.

TRUMAN: Didn't bother him, no, not really.

WILLIAMS: What did his parents think of . . . ?

TRUMAN: I don't know. I'm sure it was a shock to them, of course, back in the thirties, and he grew up in a town . . . There weren't any Catholics out there. One Catholic family who was the county . . . Let me see, what do you call it? He was the county doctor. You know, when somebody dies they call him and . . .

WILLIAMS: Oh, the coroner?

TRUMAN: The coroner. Yeah, right. I've forgotten what his name was now. The only Catholic in Grandview. So he had no . . . He had no association with Catholics.

WILLIAMS: One of my uncles married a Catholic. This was in the fifties, I guess.

TRUMAN: Is that right?

WILLIAMS: But even then they were still reluctant to . . .

TRUMAN: Yeah. It's a lot better now. We loved Pope John, Pope John XXIII, who . . . masses in English instead of Latin, which was great, and he was just a wonderful pope. My husband read all about him and admired him a lot and thought he was great. He made things better.

WILLIAMS: But you were accepted into the Truman family?

TRUMAN: Oh, yes. Yeah. Oh, yeah, surely. And my oldest son would stay out there

in the summer a lot, and there was one Catholic church there. I think he rode the horse over there to Mass. No, they got him up and got him out to Mass and everything, mm-hmm. And Bess's brother, you know, married a Catholic and became a Catholic, one of the Wallaces.

WILLIAMS: Fred?

TRUMAN: Fred Wallace. He married a Catholic. They lived in Denver, and he joined the church, I think. I'm sure he did. But back then it was a serious . . . I had always sworn I would never get involved in a mixed marriage. My father was a convert, too. He was a Protestant from a farm out in Goddard, Kansas. He joined the church a couple of months before they were married. And all four of my brothers were married to converts, three of them before they were married. None of us married what we call a cradle Catholic. And my mother was such a strong Catholic, but she loved J. She and my dad thought he was wonderful. And he was.

WILLIAMS: Okay, we need to put on another reel.

TRUMAN: Okay. I thought maybe I was going to get to go home now. [chuckling]

[End #4342; Begin #4343]

WILLIAMS: That was his . . . He said, "I'm not interested. Everything I have to say has already been written."

TRUMAN: No, I can't imagine either Harry or Gilbert . . . Oh, they don't like all that stuff too much.

WILLIAMS: They sound like they just want to farm and . . .

TRUMAN: They just farm. They used to farm up close, right next door to . . . well,

right there at Truman Corners, and then they bought land in Louisburg. It got to where you couldn't farm at their Grandview place. The taxes were so high that they had to get out of there. Yeah, so they have a large place. They run it together. Married farm girls from Raymore, I think.

WILLIAMS: How much contact did you have with your in-laws, your brothers-in-law and sisters-in-law?

TRUMAN: Well, we saw them every weekend. We were at the farm almost every weekend for Sunday dinner and most of the time his sister and brothers were there. Yeah, every weekend, because they were just . . . They were young. They were home. They were in high school. And then Harry went . . . Two of them were in the war, Fred and Harry. Harry was overseas. He was in the army, and my husband was on the battleship *Missouri*. Fred didn't go overseas. I think he was . . . stayed in this country. He went to Officers' Training School. He was an officer. I've forgotten where he was stationed. I've forgotten more than I remember.

WILLIAMS: Do you go out to Oskaloosa much?

TRUMAN: Yeah. It's quite a little drive. They'd have us out on the Fourth of July. You could shoot firecrackers out there. [chuckling] The kids like that, yeah. She's a lawyer and her husband Jim is a lawyer. She also was a schoolteacher. She taught school first.

WILLIAMS: They seem like very nice people.

TRUMAN: They're really nice. Yeah, they really are, yeah. She met him at KU when they were both in law school. She graduated from Lindenwood College

first, I think, as a teacher, then decided to go to law school. Yeah, so they have their own law firm.

WILLIAMS: I think that's one reason I was surprised to get the reaction from Harry, because the older ones were so willing to talk.

TRUMAN: No. Well, you know how independent farmers are. [chuckling] They're farmers through and through.

WILLIAMS: I just wondered if the name has been a burden on any of the Truman relatives.

TRUMAN: Sometimes, but most of the . . . I mean, we're proud of it, but sometimes it is difficult.

WILLIAMS: I just wonder for Harry especially what that's like.

TRUMAN: I wouldn't think so. I wouldn't think so. Of course, everything . . . You know, I used to believe everything I read in the paper. But once Uncle Harry was president, then I didn't believe . . . Because we knew that what they were printing wasn't true. You know, they blow everything up. And I think it's worse, it's getting worse all the time. But when you knew that what they were writing wasn't true, well, pretty soon you begin to doubt most of the stuff you read.

WILLIAMS: When the war came along, was your husband drafted?

TRUMAN: No, he joined. No one in their family had ever been in the navy before. They were all in the army, and he said he was going to ride to war and not walk. And we had three children, and his mother, who never would butt into anything, said, "Have you talked to him about not doing this and

staying home?” See, he wasn’t teaching, and he was working at the Lake City . . . the armament plant. He’d gone to work out there on a production line, but he soon was foreman over the lead shop. And I said, “No, he says he’s going to do it, and, no, I’m not going to interfere with it.” I didn’t want him to go, of course, but he thought he might be drafted maybe and be in the army, and he didn’t want to do that. So I moved back home with my three children. They were very young. Rita was ten months, Mary was two, and John was probably . . . Well, he went in ’44. John would have been three and a half or four. It was hard. And he went to Farragut for basic training, then he was down in Gulfport. I went down there to see him before he went overseas. He got to come home at Christmas from Frisco. It was a real close call, thought he wasn’t going to make it home before going to the Pacific. He was in the quartermaster department on the battleship *Missouri*.

WILLIAMS: They were in the Pacific?

TRUMAN: Oh, yes. Well, the peace treaty was signed on that battleship. He was in the quartermaster, and he got in by a fluke. He was colorblind and you’re not supposed to be able to get in the navy if you’re colorblind—you know, the signals and everything.

WILLIAMS: Oh, okay.

TRUMAN: He got at the end of the line and memorized the signals as he heard others being tested while he moved up in line. And I’ve forgotten the story, but some way something about the test. I don’t know whether he memorized

something. Anyway, they passed him. Because later on some officer said, “How’d you get in this man’s navy?” And he said, “Well, I’m in.” But he just didn’t want to be in the army. Uncle Harry razzed him about it a few times, about being in the navy, but that’s what he preferred.

And when he came home he didn’t have a job, we didn’t have a car, didn’t have anything. I’ve forgotten, he went to work for TWA for a while, I think, and hated flying. Then he got on at the Veterans Administration in the farm . . . making loans for farmers, in the loan department. He always did real well. Wherever he got a job, he advanced rapidly. He was a good administrator and good with people, so he always . . . [Paragraph deleted at request of interviewee]

J. took an early retirement from the federal courts and then had time to pursue his hobbies. He had three gardens. He was a wonderful gardener. He had one at our house and one at our daughter Mary’s, and one out at the farm at his dad’s place in Grandview. He even had one in Louisburg. Of course, once you’re retired he could be there . . . I mean, when he was working and had the gardens, if it rained on the weekend he was shot down. And he supplied corn and potatoes and tomatoes to the children. Oh, they loved getting that stuff from the garden. He was good at it. He loved it. He’d have been farming if his health hadn’t been fragile as a teenager . . . He was a twin, and Callie Louise died when she was about three years old, I think.

WILLIAMS: That’s right. I have a little clipping here that . . . I guess, when he retired.

That was in '73?

TRUMAN: Seventy-three. Was that November of '73? Yeah. A long time ago.

WILLIAMS: And how old was he when he retired?

TRUMAN: Well, let's see, he was born in '12, 1912. Was he sixty-one? He was sixty-one.

WILLIAMS: So that was early.

TRUMAN: Oh, early retirement. He had not intended to do that, but he had a federal judge who was very difficult and he was making life miserable for everyone, so J. decided that he didn't have to do that, or put up with that. [chuckling] And he was older and it was . . . He wouldn't have done it. We still had two children in college when he retired.

WILLIAMS: Oh.

TRUMAN: Yeah. Yeah. Well, the last two took a little while getting through. They didn't just go straight through like the older kids. I think Gilbert took nine years. He attended Creighton for one year. Then he moved back home and went to UMKC and worked, worked nights at a record center and went to school during the day, and in nine years he had a degree. He didn't go to the graduation. He said, "Mail it to me."

And then Jean, I don't know how many schools she was in. She started at Saint Mary's where all the girls went in Leavenworth. Didn't like it. She was a drama major. And then she went to Maryville, and she didn't like that. Ended up at Avila, got her degree there in drama. And her dad kept saying, "You have to get a degree in something you can make a living

at.” She was good, a very good actress, good dancer and everything, but you can’t make a living at it. The competition. So she moved back home and went to Rockhurst night school and got her master’s in business administration, and it was the right . . . It was hard, but it was the right thing to do. And now she’s teaching, which she never intended to do, teaching business at Johnson County Community College, nights and days. And she’s a good teacher and she likes it, but I don’t know if she’ll stay with it forever.

She was property manager for the Westport . . . what do you call it? That’s the area, yeah. Is it Westport? Yeah. And made a really . . . had a really good job. But that thing has kind of gone down. They have such trouble with parking and . . . Well, they’ve got a lot of crime over there. So she got out of that and got into this teaching.

WILLIAMS: Now, your husband was the court clerk for twenty years?

TRUMAN: Twenty years. He went from the General Services Administration to the courts office.

WILLIAMS: What did that job involve, the clerk?

TRUMAN: Oh, he didn’t do that right from the . . . He worked for GSA for a while and was head of a record center. He set up a big record center in St. Louis and another one in . . . In fact, I thought we were going to have to move to St. Louis. All the records from the service, the servicemen and everything. It was a big job.

WILLIAMS: He set that up?

TRUMAN: Yeah. And he was down there a lot. So I thought, “Well, we’re going to have to move to St. Louis.” And some friend knew that the clerk for the Western District of Missouri in the federal courts was going to retire, and told J., he says, “Go after that job.” You know, there aren’t too many of them. There’s two for Missouri and one for Kansas where my son-in-law is. So he did, and he got it. It took about a year or so. The man took his time retiring—he was in his seventies, I think. J. was bored at first because the other job had been a real challenge and very exciting. And when he first went to work for the courts he’d come home and he’d say, “It’s so boring.” We got more crime, [chuckling] and we got more judges, and we got more business and he hired more people, and it didn’t end up to be boring. He traveled some. He had to be . . . They held court in Jeff[erson] City, Joplin, and St. Joe, and Springfield, so he was gone some. Under J.’s direction the clerk’s office had been entirely reorganized. The number of civil and criminal cases had doubled over the last twenty years.

WILLIAMS: He would travel with the judges?

TRUMAN: Mm-hmm.

WILLIAMS: Did he arrange all the dockets?

TRUMAN: Yeah, he’d arrange the dockets, and he had charge of the jury and everything. Because I used to want to get a silent telephone number, and he said, “I have to have the number in the phone book because the jury has to be able to get a hold of me.” And it was a responsible job. He worked hard, and he was very good at it. He dealt with the lawyers and everything.

WILLIAMS: I guess in the early years of your marriage you had Senator Truman for an uncle.

TRUMAN: Right.

WILLIAMS: And then he became vice president.

TRUMAN: Right.

WILLIAMS: What did you think of that?

TRUMAN: Well, I thought it was wonderful. He wasn't vice president very long, of course. And I didn't realize that Roosevelt was as sick as he was. I don't think anyone did. They hid it really well. And he hadn't even clued Uncle Harry in on the atomic bomb yet, which was unreal. The whole thing just landed in his lap.

WILLIAMS: How much contact did you have with Harry and Bess before?

TRUMAN: We'd see them at the farm once in a while. They'd come out for dinner sometimes, at Thanksgiving and different times, and I had them over for dinner a couple times. And we'd see them occasionally but, you know, we weren't running back and forth. Of course, he was in Washington a lot. J. taught Margaret when she'd be . . . That's when he was . . . you know, when they were back here in Independence. I guess she came home maybe with her mother, and when J. was teaching, Margaret was in his class, in his history class early on. She was very bright, a good history student. They were real nice to me. Uncle Harry was good to us. So was Aunt Bess. We used to go see Aunt Bess quite a bit after the president died. And [she] was lonely, and we'd go over and see her once in a while. She liked to read

mystery stories and so did my husband. They bored me to death, but she liked that, and so we'd go see her quite often.

WILLIAMS: Since you were the closest of Vivian's children to Independence . . .

TRUMAN: Right.

WILLIAMS: Did you spend more time with them than the others?

TRUMAN: I think so. I know we went to see them more than the others. They were busy farming and . . . Well, we just did.

WILLIAMS: How often were you in the Truman home before he was president?

TRUMAN: Before he was president? Not too much. Not too many times.

WILLIAMS: You said you would invite them over to dinner?

TRUMAN: Yeah, we had them over at different times, and then we were over there a couple times. I know we were over there one night. I guess he was making . . . Oh, maybe it was some election. Well, I don't know what it was. Anyway, we were all over there, had the Secret Service and everything.

I know when he died our house was kind of headquarters for J.'s family, and the Secret Service was there. They had the streets roped off and . . . My daughter Loretta was living in Colorado, working on her master's at the university out there, and she'd met the man she was going to marry—we didn't know about that—and he decided to come in. It was Christmas when Uncle Harry died, and he got out on Noland Road and was hearing all this on the radio, so he stopped and called her. He said, "Shall I come on?" She said, "Yes, you've driven . . ." you know, from Colorado. And said, "Sure, come on in." We'd never even met him. And I think it was the day

of the funeral, and so we went on to the funeral. The kids didn't go to the funeral. There was a limit to how many were invited. Well, it was right here in the . . . you know, in the Truman Library and everything. And so the day after Christmas I told the children, I said, "There's plenty of food. Fix lunch and have it ready for when we get back from the cemetery for J.'s brothers and sisters," which they did. [chuckling] I remember I asked them, "Did you eat?" No, they didn't eat. But poor Ralph, he was sitting in there in the family room and there was all this going on. [chuckling]

WILLIAMS: And he's your son-in-law now?

TRUMAN: No. Oh, no. He had just . . . That was the first time we ever met him, was the day of Uncle Harry's funeral.

WILLIAMS: So he didn't marry her?

TRUMAN: They did marry later.

WILLIAMS: But he wasn't your son-in-law at that time.

TRUMAN: Oh, no, no, we'd just met him. [interview interrupted by telephone call]

WILLIAMS: That's what happens when you use someone else's office.

TRUMAN: That's right. Yeah, right.

WILLIAMS: Well, how did things change when Mr. Truman, Harry Truman, became president?

TRUMAN: It was a little wild at first. He gave J. a fit. The president was going to New York because the battleship *Missouri* was coming around and going to go to New York, and it stopped in Norfolk, which was the headquarters there for the navy. And J. had called home, and I said, "Go on to New York and

I'll come and meet you there." I said, "They're going to have a big whoop-de-do," because that was where the peace treaty had been signed, on the deck there. And J. said, "I'm not going to New York. I'm coming home." I said, "Well, I think you're making a mistake, but . . ." And the navy, you know, they're ornery. He was not an officer. And he went to them and he said, "If I go to New York, because my uncle is there and my wife's coming, can I get off of the ship there?" And they wouldn't guarantee it. They said, "We're not making any guarantees that you'll get off of the ship." Of course, what he didn't realize was the power that Uncle Harry had. All he had to do was lift his finger and J.'d have been off of the ship in nothing flat, and he didn't realize it. And he didn't care. All he wanted to do was get on the train and come home. And the kids didn't know him. Rita didn't know him; John did. But, you know, she was only ten months old, so she wouldn't know him. But as Uncle Harry said afterwards, "You got off of the ship and didn't come to New York." J. said, "I wanted to go home. They didn't guarantee that I would get off." He was naive about that. But he really didn't care about going. He just wanted off that ship. He'd been on there long enough.

People on the ship caught on that he was the president's nephew, and his picture was in their paper and everything, and he was interviewed. I've got the picture. It's real good. And then he was interviewed once by somebody in the navy about his opinion as a seaman or something. [chuckling] J. told them, he says, "I'm a civilian at heart." He says,

[chuckling] “I’m not a sailor, I’m a civilian at heart.”

WILLIAMS: So he was ready to come home.

TRUMAN: Oh, my, yes. He was never sorry that he joined, though. I don’t think he was. I was scared to death. I was afraid he was going to be killed in the Pacific. They were right offshore of Japan, getting ready to go in and bomb the heck out of it. The thought of rearing those three children without their father, mmph! was scary.

WILLIAMS: How long was he in the navy?

TRUMAN: It was only a couple years, I think. He didn’t go in till the early part of ’44. He was out, I think, the last of ’45, so . . .

And my four brothers, they all started coming home. Let’s see, were any of them married? One married during the war. My mother and father just had a bungalow. It was cozy. It was just a few blocks from here—it was on the corner of 24 and Liberty—and we were desperately looking for a house and for a job.

WILLIAMS: So you had your mother and four brothers—

TRUMAN: My mother and father and my four brothers, J. and I, and our three children.

WILLIAMS: All in a little bungalow?

TRUMAN: All in this little bungalow. And I think the brother from Texas, and they had a daughter. My father had added on to the house so there were four bedrooms and a sleeping porch.

WILLIAMS: And there probably wasn’t a house to be found in Independence.

TRUMAN: No. Well, we finally found one out in Englewood, not too far. But we left

there when my father died, and found the house, a great big place, just a couple of blocks from here on Liberty Street. The man that had lived in it had thirteen children. It was a huge, six-bedroom home, a great place for rearing children. Everybody had their own room.

WILLIAMS: How well did you know Bess's brothers?

TRUMAN: Oh, we saw them. We went to the inauguration, stayed at Blair House, and they were there. But we didn't . . . we weren't around them too much. Just we'd meet them at things like that you had to go to, and things in Independence that you had to go to, but we weren't around them. They were older than J. and I, of course.

WILLIAMS: So the Trumans and the Wallaces didn't mix that much?

TRUMAN: Oh, we didn't hobnob, no.

WILLIAMS: At Christmas or things like that?

TRUMAN: Well, now, J.'s . . . I think Uncle Harry, Aunt Bess and Margaret came out to J.'s folks for dinner on holidays sometimes, but . . . And Margaret would come over to our house and bring Christmas presents from Uncle Harry and Aunt Bess for all the children. She was single then; she wasn't married. And we went back to the White House a couple times. On Uncle Harry's . . . it would have been his 100th birthday, they had a big celebration in Washington, and President Reagan invited us to the White House for lunch, and Margaret was there. So we went. We flew back and got to look at it from the outside instead of the inside. They were very nice. I met Mrs. Reagan and President Reagan. It was fun.

WILLIAMS: The Trumans never had like a big family Christmas at their . . . Harry and Bess, with like all the Trumans and the Wallaces?

TRUMAN: No, our Christmas was out at the farm with J.'s folks, and then at my folks'. No, they had their own with probably Aunt Bess's brothers. I don't know. I imagine.

WILLIAMS: Did you get the feeling that that neighborhood was sort of Wallace territory?

TRUMAN: Oh, they thought . . . Yeah, mm-hmm, as Mamma Truman said one time, "Delaware, a broken-down aristocracy." Hope nobody hears that. But, you know, it's odd. Well, they didn't know anything about farmers, and I don't think they thought farmers were . . . But he went to the White House, you know? Just because you're a farmer is no sign that you're not as smart as somebody that lives in . . . He was so well-read. Made a good president. And so honest. Which we could use a little of now.

WILLIAMS: Did Madge Wallace ever get over the fact that he was a farmer?

TRUMAN: Who?

WILLIAMS: Madge.

TRUMAN: Oh, I doubt it.

WILLIAMS: Did you know her well?

TRUMAN: No, I didn't know her at all. I guess I saw her. She was pretty fragile and pretty old, and of course she stayed at the White House, and then they'd come home in the summer and stay over at their house. No, I really didn't know her. I think she probably thought he wasn't good enough when he

came off of the farm.

WILLIAMS: So that was kind of the general Truman feeling and the Wallace feelings for the Trumans.

TRUMAN: Oh, right. And he was sort of self-educated. I don't know if he went . . . He went to Kansas City Business College, though –I mean, to the legal . . . I think he studied law over there some. But he was bright. Not a wonderful speaker, he was not, but you can't be everything. But I think he . . . Well, history is showing that he was a good president.

WILLIAMS: So you were in Washington for the inauguration in '48, '49?

TRUMAN: Mm-hmm. Yes, we stayed at Blair House.

WILLIAMS: You said you were there in '52?

TRUMAN: We were there in '52.

WILLIAMS: For a week or so?

TRUMAN: For the week, yeah. My husband was working.

WILLIAMS: And you were there in '84 for the centennial?

TRUMAN: Yes.

WILLIAMS: Were there other times that you were invited?

TRUMAN: Well, we didn't . . . J. was back there, but I was slightly busy. We didn't have a lot of money. But J. had to work in Washington some when he was with GSA, I think. So I know one time he checked into a hotel and then he called the White House, and Uncle Harry told him to check out and that whenever he was working there he was to stay at the White House. Which he did. Or Blair, whichever place it was, so he always stayed there.

WILLIAMS: It sounds like the Trumans were always welcome at the White House.

TRUMAN: Oh, yes. Oh, yeah, anytime.

WILLIAMS: Or even people from Independence.

TRUMAN: Right, and Bess's bridge club, and anybody that could get back there who wanted to go.

WILLIAMS: When you went to the inauguration, did you take the whole family?

TRUMAN: No. Loretta was only . . . not even . . . Well, she wasn't even a year old. I left her with my mother. And we left John with . . . out at the farm. I left them all home. It would have been rough taking small children. You know, they're not going to go to the inaugural ball and all that stuff. I liked to died at the parade. It was so bitter cold! Finally I got up and left. And I had stadium boots on and everything. But I got up and left during the parade, which was endless, and walked back to the White House and got inside.

WILLIAMS: Did you have to get all gussied up, I guess, for the inauguration?

TRUMAN: Of course. Well, there was a list in our room stating what activities we would be going to and what would be suitable to wear. This list, all you had to do was go look at that, you know, whether it was a cocktail party or whatever. So, no, you were told.

WILLIAMS: Did people warm up to you when they found out you were related?

TRUMAN: Mm-hmm, yeah. We had a lot of parties to go to and different things like that.

WILLIAMS: Did you get much press attention through the years?

TRUMAN: Yeah, mm-hmm. This one gal came over to me at one of the cocktail parties and wanted me to point out the different members of the family, which I did, and then she wrote up something about me in the paper, in the Washington paper. But you get a lot of . . . oh, when you sign your name, you know, everybody wants to know. And that still goes on, if you're related. That goes on all the time, yeah.

WILLIAMS: At the grocery store and everything?

TRUMAN: Yeah, right, stuff like that, yeah. And you get phone calls wanting to know if I'm the Truman Library. [chuckling]

WILLIAMS: Well, I imagine there is some . . . maybe not a burden, but some sense of . . . when you drive around Jackson County, especially when you see all these things named Truman.

TRUMAN: Right.

WILLIAMS: It must mean something to you.

TRUMAN: Oh, yes, certainly.

WILLIAMS: To have come into the family.

TRUMAN: Right, right. Of course, I had no idea that Uncle Harry was going to be president. I knew he was a senator, but I didn't know what was going to happen.

WILLIAMS: When they came back and retired, did you have much contact?

TRUMAN: We'd go see them. Yeah, he'd want us to come over and see him. He'd be in the library surrounded by books, and . . . See, this wasn't built at that time. His office was . . . He had an office downtown in the federal

building. I remember going by to see him a couple times. But, no, we'd go over to his home and see him. Then, after the library was built, of course, he'd be down here. And we were forever getting calls from people who wanted to go through the library, and come in the back door. See Uncle Harry's office. And we would oblige long-lost relatives or friends from navy and all. They came out of the woodwork. And I sent my son, the oldest boy, to do the touring most, you know, because I was real busy. John didn't mind doing it.

WILLIAMS: The one who had caught Washington fever?

TRUMAN: Yeah. And then he would take them around. Then he went off to college, went down to St. Louis, then I had to do it. The next child didn't want to be caught dead. She was shy, so I was it after that, which is something of a chore. I was pretty busy with a ten-room house and six kids. I wasn't looking for outside work.

[End #4343; Begin #4344]

TRUMAN: My oldest son, John, took piano and gave a gold medal recital. And he gave it here at the Truman Library, asked if he could give it here instead of at the school. And so that was a big day, a big night. It was right before he went off to college. His Uncle Harry presented his gold medal to him.

WILLIAMS: Were you around for Margaret's wedding?

TRUMAN: Yes, they had the reception in the home. Yeah, we were there.

WILLIAMS: What do you remember about that?

TRUMAN: Standing in line in front of their home, so many people there, going through

the reception line. That's about all I remember about it. Margaret liked J.. Of course, she knew him better than she did the others because he had taught her, and she liked him and he liked her. They got along fine.

WILLIAMS: Where was the receiving line? Inside?

TRUMAN: It was in the house, in the parlor.

WILLIAMS: Just a typical reception?

TRUMAN: A typical receiving line, wedding receiving line, yeah. Gifts were displayed upstairs on the second floor, I think.

WILLIAMS: Then did the crowd just mingle and visit?

TRUMAN: Right.

WILLIAMS: All over the house?

TRUMAN: Yeah.

WILLIAMS: You can't do that anymore.

TRUMAN: No, not really.

WILLIAMS: Was there food and drink?

TRUMAN: Yes. Yeah, right.

WILLIAMS: And did you attend things like the ground-breaking for the library here?

TRUMAN: Yes. Yeah, we came to everything like that that went on, and there was always something going on. Yeah, we did all that.

WILLIAMS: There was some kind of open house at the home after that. Did you go?

TRUMAN: Oh, Lord, I don't remember. I don't even remember.

WILLIAMS: That's when Herbert Hoover and Eleanor Roosevelt came.

TRUMAN: Well, I met Mrs. Roosevelt, I know that. I don't remember about that.

Uncle Harry invited J. and me and our children into his private office to meet Mrs. Roosevelt and Herbert Hoover. I know we'd been going to the . . . Well, Truman's birthday, you know, they always go all out. And we went to all those things and to the receptions and everything, until the last couple of years when my husband wasn't able. I go now with my oldest son to the concert and to the receptions here. They changed so. At first it was fewer people, the reception here, and it really got out of hand and they had to quit serving food. They ruined the carpeting and it got to be wild. And then the city got upset because they were having the reception for invited guests only, and they had to just open it up and let anybody come who wanted to because the city was paying for it, and so they made noises and got that changed. And then it was stand in line and wild. We went down, I remember—I don't know what for—to the Meuhlebach—something was going on—and met some of Uncle Harry's cabinet. I've forgotten what the occasion was.

WILLIAMS: Did you or your husband ever go to the birthday dinners, for instance, down there?

TRUMAN: Yes, he always went to the birthday luncheons. Oh, yeah, that's been going on forever. No, he's been to those.

WILLIAMS: The Talge?

TRUMAN: Yes, and my sons go now. They always go, John and Gilbert, and the son-in-laws, one of them goes. That used to be strictly a male thing; there were no women. Now there are women lawyers and everything. They still go

every year. Ralph comes in, because he works for the courts and the federal judges are there, and he enjoys it . . . J. would write to Talge and say, “Okay, I’ve got this young son who’s old enough now to go, you know, to the luncheons. I’d like for you to invite him.” Then he wrote and asked that Ralph be invited. And the other two son-in-laws, they go to work. They don’t care about that stuff. And their job doesn’t have anything to do . . . One son-in-law, Carl Moser, is head of payroll at Armco Steel. Joe Gracey is a senior engineer at Allied Signal.

WILLIAMS: How much contact did they have with Margaret as cousins?

TRUMAN: I don’t think too much. Not too much, just when they’d bring her out to the farm once in a while. But they weren’t that . . . They didn’t get together too much. And Martha Ann was the only girl cousin, and I don’t think they got together all that much. I really don’t know.

WILLIAMS: Margaret’s quite a bit older than your children, too.

TRUMAN: Yes. Oh, yeah, right. Her husband is really nice. He’s a real dear, Clifton. I don’t think he’s in very good health now. I don’t know, but I have the feeling he isn’t. Of course, he’s quite a bit older than Margaret.

WILLIAMS: How would you describe Bess?

TRUMAN: Bess? Oh, she was sweet. She was nice. She was charming. She was good to me. One time I invited them to Christmas dinner or something, and he fell right before, a few days before Christmas, fell getting in or out of the tub, which was disappointing. But she sent over this huge fruitcake or something, you know, and called me and told me that he’d fallen and was in

the hospital. We'd go to see him when he was in the hospital and send flowers and go over and everything.

WILLIAMS: How would you describe their relationship?

TRUMAN: Theirs?

WILLIAMS: Harry and Bess.

TRUMAN: Good. Oh, yeah. No, I think good.

WILLIAMS: You said that the Trumans were dominant people.

TRUMAN: They were, but I don't think anybody was . . . I doubt if he'd boss her around too much. He called her "The Boss," which would tell you something. Yeah. Well, he was more lenient with Margaret, I know, and she'd, you know, stop that or step in, but just they're all strong characters.

WILLIAMS: What differences did you see in Harry and Vivian and Mary Jane?

TRUMAN: Well, of course, J.'s dad was a farmer. He loved the farm, and I don't think Harry . . . Well, his eyesight was bad. Well, he did do farming, he did do some, but J.'s dad loved the farm, and . . . But J.'s Uncle Harry relied on his brother a lot, local politics and things. And J.'s dad was good. He knew everybody in town, and if Harry wanted something done, he would call him and he'd do it. Vivian had information about local people that uncle Harry didn't have. It would help Harry make his decisions. Or, if Vivian . . . a couple of times I know he called and said, "Don't appoint that man . . ." It'd be a local thing out here. Because he would know. And Harry would rely on him for . . . Mm-hmm, they were different but they were a lot alike, too. They just had different interests.

WILLIAMS: And how did Mary Jane fit in?

TRUMAN: Well, being the only girl, she was catered to by her brothers. Uncle Harry thought she was something else, [Mrs. Truman notes: "I mean by this that they thought she was very capable"]. Well, they both did. She stayed home and took . . . Well, she was postmaster. She worked at the post office in Grandview, I think, but then for years she stayed home and took care of her mother. She was very loyal to her whole family.

WILLIAMS: She was very involved in Eastern Star.

TRUMAN: Very. I know our children, when she was made whatever it is . . . What do you call the head . . . ?

WILLIAMS: Grand Matron or something?

TRUMAN: Grand . . . whatever.

WILLIAMS: I know what you mean.

TRUMAN: Yeah. Anyway, she wanted our children to be . . . I think Uncle Harry was going to be there, and it was a big whoop-de-do somewhere, and she wanted our children to be in it, John, Mary, and Rita. So we bought John a suit and made pretty dresses for the girls, and they were in this Eastern Star thing. And I walked into this thing. I had a hat on, because in those days you wore a hat. When you dressed up you had gloves and a hat. J.'s sister Martha Ann came up to me and she said, "Mary, take your hat off quick." I said, "Why?" And she says, "Eastern Star, we don't wear hats." That's one of the things they do. And we always wore a hat in church or anything. Well, if you went shopping downtown you wore a hat. I got it off in a

hurry. No one had told me, and I'd never been to an Eastern Star thing.

WILLIAMS: So your family wasn't involved as much in the Masons and Eastern Star as the . . .

TRUMAN: No, the others . . . I think Fred was. J. was not. J. didn't join the Masons. I wouldn't have liked that. No, he didn't join. His dad was in it, and maybe his brother Fred. I don't think the younger boys were. But no, J. didn't join.

WILLIAMS: It seemed to be a strong influence in the Truman family.

TRUMAN: The Masons?

WILLIAMS: Mm-hmm.

TRUMAN: It was for Uncle Harry, I know. I don't know how much for J.'s dad. I don't know, but I know for Uncle Harry it was.

WILLIAMS: When you would visit with Harry and Bess, what kinds of things would you talk about?

TRUMAN: World events, history, the war, stuff like that. Mm-hmm, just world events and just what they were both kind of interested in. The war and what was going on in the world, [chuckling] and what was wrong with it.

WILLIAMS: All throughout? Even after they came back from the White House?

TRUMAN: Yes. Oh, yeah. Yeah, Uncle Harry read all the time. He was very well-read. And so was my husband, J..

WILLIAMS: Did you see him much in his later years?

TRUMAN: Oh, we'd go over once in a while, yeah, to see him.

WILLIAMS: What would he be doing?

TRUMAN: He'd be sitting in the library with stacks of books around. And Bess would come in and sit down when we'd come.

WILLIAMS: So you'd visit there in the library?

TRUMAN: Yeah, it was on the north side of the house.

WILLIAMS: Have you been in the home since its . . .

TRUMAN: I went in once just out of curiosity. They never did remodel the kitchen or anything. It's just like it was.

WILLIAMS: The study's not quite as . . . or the library is not quite as cluttered.

TRUMAN: I imagine not, yeah. No, I went through one day, but it's just the same. The upstairs, you don't go up there. It's roped off. I think she might have thought Margaret would stay there, but she doesn't. When Margaret comes to town, she stays at a hotel . . . people don't even know she's here. She sneaks in, and comes in sometimes May the 8th for the meeting of the Truman Library board. I don't know if she came this year, because she didn't come to the wreath laying. Well, the other activities, she wasn't here, so I don't know.

WILLIAMS: When you would visit Bess after Harry had died, where would you visit then?

TRUMAN: In the bedroom and sometimes in the living room, but she had nice chairs in the bedroom. We'd visit in there.

WILLIAMS: In the first-floor bedroom?

TRUMAN: Yeah, the first floor. They had to move . . . They had to move her downstairs and the steps got to be too much. It got rough, though. She got

to where she . . . well, you couldn't understand her and she got really bad off. It was bad.

WILLIAMS: You said there were chairs in that bedroom?

TRUMAN: Yeah, they put some chairs in there, and sometimes we'd be in the living room and sometimes in the bedroom.

WILLIAMS: How many beds were in that bedroom, do you know?

TRUMAN: I think there were twin beds in there. [Mrs. Truman notes: "I think Aunt Bess was in a twin bed. But I don't remember if there was more than one in the room."] The nurse may have stayed in there, I don't know.

WILLIAMS: So were these chairs from the living room that they just brought in?

TRUMAN: Yeah.

WILLIAMS: Because there aren't any chairs in there now.

TRUMAN: Now there aren't?

WILLIAMS: Not that I remember.

TRUMAN: Well, I know we visited in there some.

WILLIAMS: They must have moved them in.

TRUMAN: Must have moved some small chairs there. They probably brought them down from upstairs, because I don't think they brought those big chairs in out of the living room. But she'd always be glad to see you. And I was always sorry I didn't go over more often, but I had a little bit going on at home, yeah.

WILLIAMS: Would she inquire about your family?

TRUMAN: Yeah, she would always want to know about the family and J.'s brothers

and sisters and them. I don't think Harry and Gilbert came once Uncle Harry died. They'd come visit him at the library when they'd come to town, but I don't think they went over to the house afterwards, not to my knowledge. I think J. and I were the only ones, but I'm not sure. They could have visited without my knowledge. Of course, we lived a few blocks from her.

WILLIAMS: Did you have to arrange these visits with the Secret Service?

TRUMAN: Oh, I'd always call. Oh, yeah, I would always call and find out . . . tell her when we were coming or ask her when we could come. She'd be glad.

WILLIAMS: But you'd talk to her and not to the Secret Service?

TRUMAN: Talk to her, mm-hmm.

WILLIAMS: They didn't really interfere?

TRUMAN: No, they did not. We knew they were there, but no. We'd go in the back door and through the kitchen.

WILLIAMS: They knew who you were.

TRUMAN: Oh, yeah, they knew who we were. Oh, yeah. I'd run into her at the grocery store, Milgram's on 24 Highway, and the Secret Service would pull up in front of the store and go in and follow her around. I happened to be in there, and I'd run into her once in a while. She'd be getting the groceries. She was much more able then. She got really feeble.

WILLIAMS: Well, I guess when you're ninety-seven you . . .

TRUMAN: Yeah, you have a right. You have a right, yeah. She was good for a long, long time, though.

WILLIAMS: So you would go visit all the way . . .

TRUMAN: Hmm?

WILLIAMS: You would go visit all the way up until her very last . . . ?

TRUMAN: Yes, right.

WILLIAMS: And so you were there when all the nurses and that staff . . . ?

TRUMAN: Yeah, well, I visited until she got to where you really couldn't understand her, got really bad, and then I didn't go over at the very last . . . We were out of town when she died. Loretta and Ralph and I and J., we were down in the Ozarks. Loretta and Ralph were married on our 34th wedding anniversary. J.'s mother and father, my parents, Loretta and Ralph, and J. and I were all married on the same day, October the 28th.

WILLIAMS: Oh, wow.

TRUMAN: Yeah, so we were down in the Ozarks celebrating our anniversary. And we were getting ready to leave and getting dressed, and it came over the radio that she had died. So we were ready to leave to come home anyway, so . . .

WILLIAMS: Did you ever pay much attention to when celebrities or presidents would visit them?

TRUMAN: No. Oh, no. No, we didn't.

WILLIAMS: You wouldn't stand outside and take pictures?

TRUMAN: No. Oh, no. No. [chuckling] No, we didn't do that.

WILLIAMS: I guess it doesn't have quite the luster if you knew a president as well as you did.

TRUMAN: No, and we'd met most of these people. We met all of his cabinet: Senator

Symington, who was a great guy; Morris Toban, was it? Uncle Harry called them the glamour boys of his cabinet, tall, dark, and handsome. But we had met most of those people at different things downtown at the Meuhlebach and so forth. No, and J. didn't really like . . . He didn't like all that stuff. He didn't like the political stuff. [Mrs. Truman notes: "J. was very well read and thoroughly enjoyed following and discussing the political scene, and helping out. He just didn't enjoy the social functions connected with it."] He would not have liked the social things and everything. He really didn't like it much. I'd say, "You know, they're having this and we're supposed to go." "Oh, okay." But it would be all right with him if he stayed home. But, you know, you felt like you should go. But he got tired of it.

WILLIAMS: You said he was razzed a little bit for being in the navy?

TRUMAN: Yes, mm-hmm, because everybody in the family had always gone in the army. You know, Ralph Truman, the general, his cousin, and Uncle Harry and J.'s brother, Harry [A. Truman]. His brother Harry was overseas in Europe in the war getting ready to go home when Uncle Harry went over there for a meeting. So they got a hold of Harry, brought him over to Uncle Harry, and then Uncle Harry put him on a plane and flew him home.

WILLIAMS: So there were two Harry Trumans.

TRUMAN: Two Harry Trumans, right.

WILLIAMS: Did you ever bring any of those vegetables over to Harry and Bess?

TRUMAN: [chuckling] No. No, never thought of that. I baked her a cake or baked her

something once when Margaret was coming, but no, we didn't do that. Sue Gentry—you know, the reporter at the *Examiner*—she said, “Mary, it's too bad J.'s so shy.” She said, “You all could be doing . . .” And I said, “Well . . .” It wasn't all shyness. He was doing what he wanted to do, and I said, “That's the way he is.” And he was shy. He just didn't care for it. Liked his job and loved his family, and that's what he was interested in, yeah.

WILLIAMS: I guess the president was never that way. He didn't seem like a shy person.

TRUMAN: No, I don't think so. J. was not shy at work or with the kids, his family or friends. He made friends easily and always put people at ease. Everyone who knew him loved and respected him. He was a firm . . . He was a good disciplinarian. He used to sit around the dining room table in the evening, line the kids up around the table to see if they had their homework.

WILLIAMS: [chuckling] Still the schoolteacher, huh?

TRUMAN: Yeah, he didn't have to help . . . He didn't help the last two. He got too busy, and they didn't need any help anyway, so . . .

WILLIAMS: Well, I have a few articles here that I'm looking through to make sure that I haven't . . . This must have been when Loretta was married.

TRUMAN: Yeah, that's Loretta and Ralph, right.

WILLIAMS: This is something at Saint Mary's [see appendix, item 1].

TRUMAN: What's this? Oh, Lord, that's horrible. I've got a picture of that. He went up to . . . Is Uncle Harry there? No.

WILLIAMS: No, I think this . . .

TRUMAN: Oh, Mary Martha . . . Oh, he went up to Saint Mary's College one time for

something after he was retired, and Jim McGilly, Jr., drove us up there. They were having some to-do at Saint Mary's College when my older girls, Mary and Rita, were there. They all started there and Loretta graduated from there. And he went up there, I rode up with him. I've forgotten what the occasion was, but some reception, and he went up, gave a talk, and . . . I guess Mary and Rita . . . Mary and Rita were up there at the same time. They're only about a year and a half apart, or fifteen months, so . . .

WILLIAMS: He seemed to be very good with children.

TRUMAN: Yeah. Yes, good with young people. He used to talk to them here when they'd bring the tours through. He wanted them to be interested in history and their country and everything and pay attention.

WILLIAMS: Do you think that's where your husband got his interest in history?

TRUMAN: I don't know. I don't know whether it was or not. It could have had an influence on him. He just liked it. I've got a granddaughter, Terri Gracey Hagerty, now that's a senior in college and she's majoring in history, wants to be a teacher just like her grandpa.

WILLIAMS: Where is she at?

TRUMAN: She's over at Avila. Well, she went to Warrensburg for a while and then she went . . . got her associate degree at Blue Springs, then fell in love and got married, and then said, "Why didn't you tell me to finish school? Why didn't I finish before we got married?" And Mary said, "We did tell you." So she's back in school. She's a senior now and decided that she had to finish, that two years wasn't enough. So . . .

WILLIAMS: This must be a wedding announcement for . . . or an engagement for one of your grandchildren.

TRUMAN: Oh, yes, that's Terri. She's the one that lost her brother in an automobile accident last September. That's my oldest daughter's [Mary's], son, Paul. He had just graduated the year before from Cornell University.

WILLIAMS: The Truman Library collects these things. You know that.

TRUMAN: Oh, I'm sure they do. Yeah, right.

WILLIAMS: I guess they try to keep up with all the families, so when people come in and claim—

TRUMAN: Right, I need to come down here. There's some mistakes on the genealogy thing that one of the . . . Ethel Noland. And I know about them and I should . . . I've forgotten who I would tell about that, but they should be corrected. I ought to look it up and do it.

WILLIAMS: Liz Safly, I think, keeps track of most of it.

TRUMAN: Liz? Mm-hmm. Can I go home now? [chuckling]

WILLIAMS: Are you ready to?

TRUMAN: Yeah. Okay?

WILLIAMS: Well, thank you very much.

TRUMAN: You're welcome.

WILLIAMS: It was a pleasure talking to you.

END OF INTERVIEW

## APPENDIX

1. "May Crowning," Independence *Examiner*, 2 May 1960.
2. "Engagements," Independence *Examiner*, 16 April 1988.
3. "U.S. Court Clerk to Retire," *The Kansas City Star*, 15 September 1973.
4. "District Court Clerk, J. C. Truman, Honored," *The Kansas City Star*, 15 September 1973.
5. "John C. Truman," *The Kansas City Times*, 6 September 1989.