ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

WITH

TRUDY JOHNSON

NOVEMBER 18, 1985

INDEPENDENCE, MISSOURI

INTERVIEWED BY PAM SMOOT

ORAL HISTORY #1985-5

This transcript corresponds to audiotapes DAV-AR #3075-3079

HARRY S TRUMAN NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

National Park Service photographs
of Trudy Johnson taken during her interview

Historian Pam Smoot and Trudy Johnson
in the living room of the Truman home
HSTR slide #267

Trudy Johnson in the living room of the Truman home
HSTR slide #268

Trudy Johnson in the living room of the Truman home
HSTR slide #883

Trudy Johnson in the living room of the Truman home
HSTR slide #888

Historian Pam Smoot and Trudy Johnson
in the living room of the Truman home
HSTR slide #889

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*, 14th 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.

Trudy Johnson and Jim Williams reviewed the draft of this transcript. Their corrections were incorporated into this final transcript by Perky Beisel in summer 2001. A grant from Eastern National Park and Monument Association funded the transcription and final editing of this interview.

RESTRICTION

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ABSTRACT

Trudy (Worden) Johnson was hired in October 1980 and served as a nighttime nurse and companion to Bess W. Truman until June 1981. She continued to visit Mrs. Truman at home and in the hospital until Mrs. Truman's death in 1982. Johnson describes Mrs. Truman's evening routine and the care given to her by the nightshift staff. Johnson discusses photographs from a birthday and a Christmas party given by employees for Mrs. Truman. Johnson also mentions Mrs. Truman's hip injury and subsequent illness, as well as her interpretation of the relationship between Bess Truman and Margaret Truman Daniel and the Trumans' grandsons. The interview concludes with a walk through the first and second floors of the Truman home, with Johnson describing what she remembers about each room and the objects therein. Throughout the interview, Johnson makes clear the significant effect that she believes Bess Truman had on her career as a nurse and on her life generally, including her decision to become the clown "Gumdrop."

Persons mentioned: May Wallace, Bertha Dowell, Joan McCracken, Mary Leutzinger, Velma (James) Simmons, Bess W. Truman, Margaret Truman Daniel, Edward Hobby, Valeria LaMere, Henry J. Talge, Harry S Truman, Robert E. Lockwood, Ludwig van Beethoven, Johannes Brahms, Claude Debussy, Jenny Johnson, Rosalyn Carter, Betty Ford, Nancy Reagan, Winston Churchill, Jimmy Carter, and Bob Hope.

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW WITH

TRUDY JOHNSON

HSTR INTERVIEW #1985-5

STEVE HARRISON: This is going to be an interview with Trudy Johnson, recorded in the Truman home at 219 N. Delaware, Independence, Missouri, on November 18, 1985. Conducting the interview is Pam Smoot, historian with the National Park Service at the Midwest Regional Office, Omaha, Nebraska.

TRUDY JOHNSON: I have two sets of pictures here: one's from Christmas, and one's from her birthday party.

PAM SMOOT: What year are the Christmas photographs from?

JOHNSON: This is 1980 Christmas, and then the birthday would have been her 96th birthday party. That would have been in February '81.

SMOOT: Who are these people in this photograph?

JOHNSON: This is Mrs. Truman. This is one of the Secret Service men [see appendix, item 2, photo C].

SMOOT: Do you remember what his name is?

JOHNSON: No, I don't remember. This is all the people we . . . May Wallace from next door, and all the people that worked here when I did. And I've got all their names here. It's been a while. This is Bertha Dowell [see appendix, item 2, photo B].

SMOOT: From right to left—

JOHNSON: Yes, May Wallace and Bertha Dowell. I think that was Joan, yeah, that was Joan and myself and Mary and Velma Simmons and Mrs. Truman in

her red dress. She always wore her red dress for parties, and her ruby ring with the diamonds around it. Beautiful ring. Her blue eyes always sparkled.

SMOOT: Do you remember what Joan's last name is, and Mary?

JOHNSON: Joan McCracken. I don't remember Mary's last name [Leutzinger]. I started working here like in October of '80, and I worked here till she fell and broke her hip. I guess she was also, I noticed I had a calendar, and she'd been in the hospital for most of the month of January that year, too. So I think she . . . She was in the hospital just after Christmas that year, so just after this party, she was in the hospital, and then she came back, looks like on the 23rd of January. And then I worked here about forty-eight hours a week and sometimes—there was a Thursday and Friday where I usually worked like a double shift. I worked the evening and the night shift and then went down to school and came back and worked some more. So sometimes I didn't go home until Saturday—be home Wednesday night and then go home on Saturday. And then, in May of '81, she fell and broke her hip, on May 6.

HARRISON: May 6, 1981.

JOHNSON: That was the day before—that was the day Margaret was to come and visit her. So, you know, I think, I was wondering—she never moved in the bed, ever. And I wondered if maybe, she just thought it was a different time and a different place—thought she could get up and walk around and get ready for Margaret, because she was so excited about her coming. And then she went to the hospital, I guess it was seven in the morning she

broke her hip, and she went off to the hospital and Margaret arrived later that day and was able to spend time with her. And then about six days later, she came down with pneumonia, and got real ill, and we didn't know if she was gonna come back or not.

So then, each of us were able to visit with her in the hospital. We each took one day a week and went over and spent some time with her in the hospital. And that was kind of a nice, nice time. And it looks like—let's see, I went up until the 16th of June, so she must have come home then. At that point, the Upjohn R. N. service took over and took care of her then because she needed registered nurses' care after that. But then, occasionally, my kids and I would come over and visit with her. They didn't seem to mind. I'd call over here and the nurses would say, "Well, check with the Secret Service," and the Secret Service would say, "Well, check with the nurses," and nobody seemed really to mind if I visited, so the kids and I would come and visit. We'd play the piano and sing songs for her and things like that.

There's some more of the Christmas party here. We each brought, it was kind of a potluck dinner, and everybody brought some goodies to share. This was one of Mrs. Truman's favorite little statues, the little kissing angels [see appendix, item 1, photo B].

HARRISON: Let me just describe it so it will be on the tape and I won't be racking my brain later. They are kissing angels on a wooden tray, I guess, with it looks like plastic holly and some pine cones on it. I think that's up at the top of

the stairs, up to the attic, if I'm not mistaken. Its seems like that's where I've seen it. It is. Reverend Hobby . . . [laughter]

JOHNSON: He's really, he's really great. He was here at the Christmas party, and we were all gathered around. He played Santa Claus every year for the Christmas party. So he would hand out the gifts and get everybody's gifts around to them [see appendix, item 1, photo D]. We all gave gifts to each other and that kind of thing. Christmas was a big deal here, too, because on—around, I'm not sure if it was exactly the Christmas day, but around that week, Mrs. Truman had a bonus check for each of us in on her dresser. But she wanted to make sure each of us got it, and so it was always left—usually our paychecks she would never, that was taken care of in the kitchen. We'd pick up our paychecks, you know, and that kind of thing, but the Christmas bonus check was in on her dresser, and everybody had one addressed to them on the dresser. So we'd go in there, and she wanted to make sure we received that personally. So that was . . . Christmas was really a neat time. And then Reverend, I'll just never forget that party, we sat down and after all the gift-giving was over and everything he sang "Silent Night." It was just beautiful. I wish I had had a tape recording about then.

That's Valeria LaMere. She worked here for—I guess she was about the one that worked here the longest. Mrs. Truman really didn't have anyone around for quite a while, and then, Valeria was kind of the chief in charge for everything for about four or five years, I think. And then just another picture of the group.

SMOOT: Mrs. Truman looks like she was really happy in this picture [see appendix, item 2, photo E].

JOHNSON: Yes. She always liked the parties.

SMOOT: Did Margaret ever come to any of these parties?

JOHNSON: No, she would usually call. It was usually a day like birthday or Christmas, or Thanksgiving, those kind of things. But Margaret kept in, she kept in touch with Margaret every Sunday afternoon. We'd give New York a call, and they'd always answer, "Well, hi Grandma," you know, and you just didn't think of Mrs. Truman as being somebody's grandma. [laughter] "Hi, Grams. How ya doing today?" And they'd carry on a good conversation with her on Sundays.

This is Joan and May and Val here in the kitchen getting the punch ready. Valeria was acting surprised. We had something hidden somewhere or other, some gift was hidden somewhere, so we were being kind of silly, and Mrs. Truman was laughing.

Here's the Christmas centerpiece—

SMOOT: The chandelier is lit up [see appendix, item 1, photo E].

JOHNSON: Mrs. Truman didn't like a lot of lights on in the house. That's the one thing, after she passed away, and we'd drive by the house, and all the lights were on in the house, and I thought, "Oh, Mrs. Truman would have a fit if she saw the lights on in the house!" Because I used to read to her in the, in her bedroom and sometimes on an eight-hour shift, I'd read for six hours, murder mysteries, and Truman history stories, and whatever she wanted to hear. I got in the habit of leaving this little light on, the little

sculptured light out in the hallway on. I told her that one night, after I'd been doing it about two weeks, because it was wintertime, and it was so dark, and you'd read a murder mystery in her room, and then you'd have to walk out into this black house thinking something was going to get you around any corner, so I confessed to her I had left that little light on, and she said, "Is that light really necessary?" I said, "No, Mrs. Truman." [laughter] So from then on, I'd go in the dark again around the corners.

She had a second sense about the house. She could tell if there were lights on in the house. If you were in the dining room—we were supposed to stay in the kitchen when we weren't in taking care of her. We'd go out in the kitchen, and we had a television, and we could turn the lights on out there, of course, but anything else in the house—I had the lights on in the dining room, I was doing something in there one night, and she asked me, "Are the lights on in the dining room?" Now I don't know how she knew. She was clear in her bedroom. No way she could see around two corners. [laughter] But it was like she knew when things weren't just like she wanted them in the house.

I think his name was Howard, the Secret Service man. I wonder if I had their names down. I don't remember. Lockwood would know all their names, though. I see him up at the bicycle shop all the time. Mrs. Truman talking to Valeria [see appendix, item 2, photo C]. Here's Reverend [see appendix, item 1, photo F]. He was neat. I really liked him. We had, when I was working here, my daughter had a birthday in April, and every year in April, we had this bush in our yard that would bloom beautiful pink

flowers. It was just a springtime bush. When I went to the funeral, I was telling Reverend that that was my special, my daughter's special birthday bush, and she brought some flowers over here to Mrs. Truman. The day that Mrs. Truman died, one flower on that bush bloomed in October. So we were telling Reverend about that, and he thought that was quite a sign because that was our birthday bush and Mrs. Truman had shared those flowers with us. That was kind of special.

Here's the party, and Valeria, and that's Henrietta there [see appendix, item 2, photo B]. She was the nighttime LPN. I think Mary was the RN. Here's Mary. There's Bertha. There's Mrs. Wallace, Mrs. Truman, and Bertha. I think Bertha was on duty that day. She had her uniform on, and the rest of us were in our party clothes, and then just a couple of shots of the house, I just thought it was—

HARRISON: This one—the wreath was over to the north of the front door. Is that usually, where was it, usually? [see appendix, item 1, photo C]

JOHNSON: I think that's where it was that year anyway, because we usually used the one door to go in and out of. I thought I'd take a picture of inside the fence because not too many people get to do that.

Here's Reverend in the cleaning closet [see appendix, item 1, photo F]. Have you had an interview with Reverend?

SMOOT: Yes. Wonderful interview.

JOHNSON: Oh, I bet. He is marvelous. I really liked him. This is Tim, I think, the Secret Service man. We were at the Christmas party—one of the Secret Service men, I can't remember his name—but they're real jumpy fellows,

you know, because they're always used to jumping and flying around and always watching things, and this was kind of a sedentary life for them to be stuck in Missouri with not a whole lot of things to do, and we were sitting in there around the Christmas party and everybody on a chair. One of the chairs the Secret Service man was on popped. It made a real loud cracking sound, and he thought he was being shot at. He jumped up out of his chair. His cake flew all over the living room. [laughter] That was really funny.

One of them was telling me too they had come into the study. They would usually sit in the study in that lounge chair, and he had fallen asleep, and one of the curtains behind him went up and started going ch-ch-ch-ch and he thought it was heavy machine gun fire, so he woke up and starts looking around to see who's shooting and said it was just the curtain.

There's Lockwood and Henrietta. [Note: This photograph apparently was not provided to the National Park Service for duplication.]

SMOOT: Who's Henrietta?

JOHNSON: She was the LPN that worked here. She worked nights. I was her, she worked the regular like five nights and then I worked the other two. And then I worked mostly evening shift quite a bit.

SMOOT: Do you remember what her last name was?

JOHNSON: Oh, I'm surprised I don't have her last name in here. No, I don't. I have her phone number. I can find out her last name [Allen]. I know who she's related to. Probably Velma would know. I think Velma worked here—I kind of worked evenings and nights, and I was usually by myself here with

Mrs. Truman. Most everybody else, the other people worked in the daytime.

She was kind of an evening person, because she would just kind of come awake in the evenings. On dayshift, I'd come in and they'd give me report and say, "Well, we're, you know, Mrs. Truman has been real quiet today. You know. We're kind of concerned about her," and, in the evenings, she'd just kind of brighten up, and you know we'd have a pretty good time.

SMOOT: Who are these other people in this photograph here? [Note: This photograph apparently was not provided to the National Park Service for duplication.]

JOHNSON: This is Henrietta's husband, and I don't recall who that was.

HARRISON: This is the birthday party now?

JOHNSON: Yes, that's the birthday party, and this is the cake that was sent over—there was a man who owned Rival Manufacturing Co., that was—

HARRISON: Henry Talge?

JOHNSON: Yeah, and he was a good friend of Mrs. Truman, and on her birthday he sent over this huge cake, heart-shaped cake and it said, "Happy 96th Birthday, Four Years to Go," to make a hundred, and had the little petit four cakes that matched this giant heart cake [see appendix, item 2, photos D and G]. The Secret Service men that brought it over—it was all wrapped up, and they said, "We're not sure what this is. We hope it's something to eat." [laughter]

SMOOT: Who put the decorations up?

JOHNSON: I decorated for the party because I was working the night before, so I spent my nightshift decorating around the room.

These were some flowers that she'd received for her birthday. It was beautiful in here on holidays. Everybody from all over would send her gorgeous displays of flowers. It was fun to receive them at the door and everything.

SMOOT: Look at those hybrid tea roses.

JOHNSON: This was the roses that Margaret sent. Yellow roses were her favorite flowers, so Margaret would always send a very large bouquet of yellow roses for any special occasion. This is just part of the decorations for her birthday.

And this is in her bedroom. I asked if I could take that because I wanted a picture of all the pretty flowers that she'd gotten for her birthday [see appendix, item 2, photo H]. This is the dresser and the orange chair usually sat around the other way. There was another chair that was Mrs. Truman's chair. That was in the bedroom. This was the Secret Service man that flew out of his chair at the Christmas party. Maybe that was at the birthday party, one or the other of them. Then the chandelier, I spent the evening cleaning that while I was decorating. That takes a while. These are some good shots of Mrs. Truman. Her eyes just never ceased to sparkle—sparkly blue eyes.

Here she was going into the little—in between the kitchen area, to receive a phone call from Margaret, who was calling on her birthday [see appendix, item 2, photo G]. This was—we had these little memo notes,

lots of those to keep around to write little notes on and I had copied out of one of the history books, one of my favorite quotes by Truman, "Keep working on a plan. Make no little plans. Make the biggest one you can think of, and spend the rest of your life carrying it out." That's from his autobiography.

This is just another quote that hit me when I was reading. We read a lot of history books, Truman history books. "I continue to be optimistic about the future. It's only fair to say, I am an optimist by disposition, but my confidence in the future is based more on my reading of history and the evolution of man's works. I've never seen pessimists make anything work or contribute anything of lasting value. It takes idealists to make the world work because eventually some of the ideas they develop are put into practice to help mankind." That's from *Mr. Citizen* by Harry S Truman. There's a first day issue stamp from here. Then we got paid, this is the—I made copies of the paycheck. I never had enough money to kind of hang onto one of the checks that Margaret Truman Daniel had written the checks while she was here.

HARRISON: This is from the Bank of Independence. It's a joint account apparently—Bess W. Truman and Margaret Truman Daniel.This was a check written May 7, 1981, to Trudy Worden, $32, and it was signed Margaret Truman Daniel.

JOHNSON: Then I made quite a few copies—

HARRISON: This was again on the joint account of Bank of Independence. This was November 1, 1980. Trudy Worden, $84, signed Bess Truman for nursing care, it says, on the memo [see appendix, item 3].

JOHNSON: Yes, she usually, she did sign her checks when I first came here, and then after the hospitalization in January, then she kind of had, someone else was signing her checks after that. Then when Margaret came, this was the day after she broke her hip, that Margaret had written this check to all of us to pay us, and then they continued to pay all of us while Mrs. Truman was in the hospital, just in case they'd need our services when she came back, but they had to hire registered nurses after that.

What do you want me to talk about?

SMOOT: First, I'd like you to state your full name and your address and tell me when your birthday is.

JOHNSON: Okay. My name is Trudy Johnson, Marion is my middle name, and I live at 302 South Hocker, Independence, Missouri, 64050. And my birth date is August 24, 1946.

SMOOT: Are you a native of Independence?

JOHNSON: No.

SMOOT: Where are you from?

JOHNSON: I was born in Tucson, Arizona.

SMOOT: How long have you been here?

JOHNSON: Almost twenty years, about half my life.

SMOOT: How did you come to work for Mrs. Truman?

JOHNSON: Well, I think I was destined to work here. I had—when I first moved to Independence, I was just fascinated by this house, and I'd walk by it and, you know, just liked to take pictures of it. I'd even had had dreams about what it looked like inside and when I came in for the first time, it looked exactly like my dreams. [chuckling] So when—I was working at Resthaven down the street, part-time, nights, and the lady in charge here at the Truman home had called down at the rest home seeing if they could recommend anybody to work part-time nights here. And they knew I worked just part-time there, so they recommended me and I came for an interview with Valeria LaMere and came over and met Mrs. Truman. And it was early in October 1980.

And then Valeria said they would get back in touch with me. She called me a few days later and said, "Well, we'd hired an LPN and we won't need you to work there." I was really disappointed. I thought, oh, gee, I'd missed my chance. About two weeks later, Valeria called me back and said, "We need you to start tomorrow night. Is there any possibility you would still like to work for Mrs. Truman?" I said, "Well, I'd be glad to, you know. Just tell me where and when." [chuckling] And I think I came to work that next night after she called me. That was about the end of October in 1980. And I worked part-time for just about a month, and then we had another person resign, and then I took up their fulltime schedule along with my part-time and worked about forty-eight hours a week.

SMOOT: How often were you paid by Mrs. Truman?

JOHNSON: I think it was every two weeks. I'm not sure, though. I can't remember.

SMOOT: How would you describe Bess Truman?

JOHNSON: Oh, now that's a difficult question. [chuckling] I would say that she had very vibrant, sparkling blue eyes, and she was a very intelligent lady, very organized, a very orderly—knew where everything was in this house. Could tell me which closet she wanted a certain color wool blanket out of, and it would be there. Tell me exactly which pictures she wanted me to bring down to get ready for Margaret's visit, and she would describe which wall they were on and they would be there. She just knew everything and was very organized. She was a very witty lady and never lost that sparkle and that enthusiasm and her intelligence, too. I think her body deteriorated around her mind, but her mind never, never quit. [chuckling] She would always sit there in her chair reading the newspaper, and you'd think maybe she'd fallen asleep, and you'd walk by and she'd lower that newspaper and look at you with those blue eyes of hers. You knew she knew everything that was going on. I'd say, it's hard to describe somebody like that. She was a phenomenal person. I think she loved people deeply. She was very excited every time Margaret would come to visit, and had very good conversations on the phone with her grandsons and Margaret's husband and Margaret.

I can remember a Sunday with her here in this room, and it was snowing. I always thought, "Gee, if I have to work there, you know, I want to work there one day when it's really, really snowing outside, because it would just be such a neat place to be in in the snow." And so it

happened one day. I got snowed in here with her on nightshift and the next shift couldn't come in, so she and I were here a whole Sunday by ourselves in the snow. I brought her out into the living room, and we were watching out the window here, and there was a little boy across the street building a snowman. We watched him for a while, and the snowflakes were just coming down real thick and fast. After he was done with the snowman, she said, "Would you turn me toward the portrait on the mantel so I can see Harry?" And I did. And I sat in this chair here where you're sitting and I watched her face as she watched the portrait of Harry for about thirty minutes. And she didn't say anything, but you could read her. You could see the power in the love that they shared and the magnificent relationship they must have had. I mean, it was humorous, it was intelligence, it was historical. I don't think Mrs. Truman ever was one down on Harry. I think they always held their own. I think each of them were extremely individual individualists. And you could tell that when she was watching that portrait. That was probably a really memorable experience for me.

And I think one of the things in the history books that we read that typifies their relationship was that Harry Truman had backed through the driveway one day and knocked the chrome off the side of his car. And she just raised cane about that for a long time, I guess, until one day Bess Truman backed through the gate and knocked the chrome off her car, and he says, in his own words in the book, that "chromium was never

mentioned in our house again." But it just, I think they had a lot to share with each other.

SMOOT: You mentioned how excited Mrs. Truman got whenever Margaret would be coming. Is that the only time that she showed this sense of being excited?

JOHNSON: She liked reading. She was always excited about reading murder mysteries, too. She would get excited about the Truman history books, and there was one particular book that everybody that has ever worked for her has read to her at least three times. That's *Souvenir* by Margaret. I think that was Margaret's first book. Marvelous book. It was from a vantage point of Margaret growing up through the White House years and very historical as well as, you know, a lot of sidelights on the family history and growing up in the Truman home, and that kind of thing. She really loved reading that book.

SMOOT: Which chair in the living room did Mrs. Truman sit in while she was reading the newspaper?

JOHNSON: The gold chair by the light.

SMOOT: When you worked the nightshift, who relieved you in the mornings?

JOHNSON: There were usually two or three people that came on in the morning, so whoever was here first would relieve me. Sometimes Valeria was the first one here, and then Velma worked here in the daytime sometimes, then Mary was the RN in charge when I was here. She worked here in the daytime.

SMOOT: What time did Mrs. Truman usually go to bed?

JOHNSON: She always went to bed at eight o'clock. Her bed preparations were started at eight. Every night except Friday.

SMOOT: What do you mean when you say preparations?

JOHNSON: Well, she had a certain ritual that we'd go through every evening for bedtime.

[End #3075; Begin #3076]

SMOOT: So what did you mean when you said "made preparations for bed"?

JOHNSON: Okay, well, she had certain things that we did every night to get her ready for bed: washing her and giving her warm wash cloths so she could wash her face and hands, and we turned the bed down in a certain way. She liked the bed covers folded down a certain way and arranged a certain way. And her glasses were cleaned, and she'd brush her teeth. She did most of her own preparation for bed. We just needed to be there to help her with that.

SMOOT: Can you describe how she like the bed covers, how were they folded?

JOHNSON: Well, I think you folded them down. You took them from the top and folded it down to the bottom once, and then the bed covers would have been about half way down, so then you took the corner of the top corner and folded it half down into the bottom half and then the half over so it kind of made a point on the bed about midway down and the bed covers—that was the first thing that we did getting ready for bed. I did the bed covers, and then her glasses would be washed, and she brushed her teeth and got herself ready for bed.

SMOOT: Did anyone read to Mrs. Truman once she was in bed?

JOHNSON: Not usually. Usually the reading was done earlier in the evening, like I say, about six hours out of the eight-hour time, sometimes I'd sit and read to her. She had an ear that she heard better out of one ear than the other, so I had to sit, oh, I'd say I would sit with my knees close to her legs and I would get real close to the one ear. Sometimes that was hard to sit there for six hours and read to her, and I would sometimes do isometric exercises with my legs just to keep my legs awake, you know, from falling asleep. She'd go, "Can't you just sit still?" [laughter] It was difficult to sit still that long of a time.

We'd usually, I think I'd come on around three o'clock, and I'd get report in the kitchen and I'd come into her room, and she would be in her room, and I would generally read from three till about six. Then, I would go prepare a light snack for her evening meal. She generally had a large lunchtime. That's why there was usually a cook here during the daytime, because her breakfasts were big breakfasts. Then she would have a great big lunch that would be like most peoples' Sunday dinners. Then dinnertime, when I was here, she would just generally have something that was a light snack like an eggnog or custard or ice cream. She liked ice cream floats, 7-Up and vanilla ice cream. She especially liked custard. The cook would make custard every week, and we'd have custard every night just about. Then she always would tell me every evening even though we were told we could eat, you know, here in the kitchen, she would generally say, "Why don't you have some custard tonight?" or "Why don't you have a piece of that apricot pie?" or "Help yourself to some ice cream tonight."

She was very gracious about that—making sure that we were included, and generally she liked to eat that evening meal without any help. And so she would have her paper and a little time to herself while I took care of myself in the kitchen. I'd generally polish the silverware, and we had certain little chores around, the household tasks that we took care of—made sure the dishes were washed and kitchen cleaned up, and things gotten ready for the next day. Then after she was done with her evening meal, she would ring for me, and then I'd come back and take her tray away, wash the dishes up, and come back to her room and we'd generally read until about eight o'clock, except on Fridays. That was the night she stayed up one hour later. We got to calling it our slumber party night because we would always stay up until nine on Friday nights. And I would try to pick a murder mystery that we could get through in one evening. We'd go from start to finish, and then at the end of the book, she would have her Russell Stover's candy box sitting next to her as she always did. She would take the box and take the lid off the box and bring the box over onto her lap and pull the papers back and offer me a piece of Russell Stover's candy. Then she would put the box back in its place. That was our slumber party [chuckling], so that was kind of fun.

SMOOT: Where did Mrs. Truman eat her meals when you were here?

JOHNSON: Well, in good weather, when it was spring or summer and really nice weather, she ate out on her porch, but most generally, she would eat in her bedroom in her chair.

SMOOT: Which porch did she have her meals on?

JOHNSON: The porch that's adjoining the kitchen, the screened-in porch. We were bird watchers, too. In the springtime, there was a cardinal that lived out in this one bush, and we'd go through how many eggs were in the nest, and we'd watch the little birdies hatch, and we'd talk about the cardinals. It's really neat on her back porch, because the Truman Road is kind of noisy. But when you're out there with the foliage on the bushes and the trees, you can barely hear Truman Road.

I always appreciated working here, because you could walk through that back door when you'd come in on your shift, and generally you felt like you just had walked back forty years and you could lock the whole world out 'cause she rarely ever had the television on or the radio, anything that contacted the present time, except for the newspaper. That's about the only thing that brought you back to present.

SMOOT: You said earlier about how Mrs. Truman had big lunches. What do you consider big lunch? Can you give me an example of what maybe one of those big lunches consisted of?

JOHNSON: Well, I remember them bringing just really neat kinds of fruit. She liked different things, like papaya and pineapple, so I can remember her having probably a fruit and mashed potatoes and gravy and maybe chicken and a vegetable, and maybe a small salad of some kind. Most generally I don't think she ate much dessert with her lunchtime. But it was quite . . . was probably not as big a meal as a hungry farmer would eat, but fairly good-sized lunch.

SMOOT: What were some of her favorite foods?

JOHNSON: Well, I'm not too sure of that, since I just worked evenings and nights. I know custard was one of the favorites and eggnog was a real favorite of hers, too. She loved eggnogs. I'm not sure during the daytime what her favorite was, but she did like fruit—different things like that.

SMOOT: Was Mrs. Truman a very talkative individual?

JOHNSON: No, she was rather quiet, reserved, but, you know, there would be different times when I wouldn't be able to understand her or there would be—especially like at night, when she was in bed and she would try to explain something to me or tell me the window—oh, that's one thing, too, the window always had to be open just a certain amount.

We had one certain board that was just the right height for the window and if that board got lost, we were in trouble, because we never could get the window open. It was either too far or too little, so we had to make sure we had this one little board all the time to prop the window open. I remember one night putting her to bed, and I had her all settled. I thought she kept saying something to me, and I could not understand what she said. I kept saying, "Mrs. Truman, I'm really sorry, but I really can't understand what you're saying tonight." And she'd go over it and over it, again and again, and I just couldn't get it. I'd say, "I know this is really frustrating for you, and I'm really sorry we're having to go over this again, but I really don't know, you know, whether you're wanting something or exactly what you're saying to me." Well this kept up, and finally she just got so exasperated, she yelled at me. She says, "Oh," she says, "you're just too dumb to live," and I just broke up, because I—I said, "Mrs. Truman,

I've known people like that myself, and I can understand how you're feeling right now." We just both laughed, but I never did figure out what she wanted.

But there was, too . . . She had a lot of plants in her bedroom, so part of the evening getting her ready for bed was to make sure all the plants had enough water. She was real concerned about watering the plants and keeping them looking nice.

SMOOT: And which window in the downstairs bedroom had to be kept open the wee little bit?

JOHNSON: It was the bathroom window. It was in the room there.

SMOOT: Did Mrs. Truman ever tell you any stories?

JOHNSON: I don't think so. She really didn't talk a whole lot. We would never get into—usually the conversations would be things that we'd talk about in the different books that we were reading. One time we both got to laughing, because we were reading a Truman history story and to me it's history, but to her she lived through that, you know. I was telling her, I was reading about the whistle stop train tour, the famous one. I think it was in 1947, '48, I think it was. One of the stops that she and Harry made was in Berkeley, California, and I told her "Gee, we could have met before." I said, "I was two years old and I lived in Berkeley, California, when you came through on the train." And we both just kind of got to laughing because it seemed so funny the different perspective that we had. Now I was helping to take care of her and we could have met one time

before when I was very small. During the time when she was making history, I was two. [laughter]

But she really never went on any long—she never explained things. What she had to say was short and sweet and to the point, and very matter of fact. What amazed me was that time she asked me to go get that wool blanket. It was getting to be cooler, and she was a little chilly and wanted a certain color wool blanket in a certain corner of this house, and she told me it would be folded up on the floor of Margaret's closet and it would be wrapped in a plastic sack, and it was just like she'd said. And so I was able to find it and bring it down to her.

SMOOT: What color was this blanket?

JOHNSON: It was kind of a cream colored blanket. Then I recall one time, too, out here in the living room, she had some little tumbling angels on the fireplace, and they were tumbling, so there was a flat part to every angel. So they were going over in different—one was on its head, and so the flat part where the statue would be was on its head, and the next one was on its back, and so the flat part where it was supposed to lay was on its back, then one was on its little—sitting down—and then another one on its feet. So there were four of them and they were tumbling, and she kept looking at those one day. [chuckling] She said, "I want to get up to the mantel." So I held her up because she wasn't able to stand by herself, and she put every one of those little angels on their seats. [laughter] They wouldn't, they didn't sit right that way, but I left them that way. So the next day, the dayshift came on and they said, "How come the angels are all sitting on

their seats?" I said, "Because Mrs. Truman did that." They said, "Well, how did she do that?" I said, "She wanted me to hold her up to the mantel while she fixed those little angels." [laughter] But that was kind of funny.

SMOOT: Did the angels ever tumble again?

JOHNSON: Well, somebody put them back like they were supposed to be. Then, I noticed after they came in and rearranged the house, I lost track of the angels. I guess they'd been moved.

SMOOT: Did Mrs. Truman ever watch television while you were here?

JOHNSON: For the World Series, that was it. Oh, and back on the back porch, sometimes in the summertime, she'd like to watch it, very infrequently, but about the only thing that she really got taken with, was the royal wedding in England, and we did spend a lot of time reading.

She usually didn't want anything else other than the newspaper that she got twice a day, and the Secret Service men would bring it in, and then she'd read her paper. That was a time that she like to spend by herself, was reading her paper. And I think she had heard about the royal wedding. So then I brought in some magazines and a lot of different things about that and we would talk about the royal wedding. And I think she almost thought a lot about how it must have been for Margaret dating and getting married during all the presidency years. I think that was something that reminded her of Margaret during that time of the royal wedding. So we did follow that pretty closely.

SMOOT: Did Mrs. Truman watch television on the back porch?

JOHNSON: Yes.

SMOOT: What kind of TV sat on the back porch while she was watching it?

JOHNSON: I think it was the portable TV set that we had in the kitchen. We did have one back there that we could watch when—I usually stayed up all—stayed awake all night and came in and tiptoed into the room here and peeped in the door just to do bed checks and make sure that she was alright and wasn't needing anything, and there was a TV out in the kitchen that we could watch then.

SMOOT: Did Mrs. Truman have a favorite baseball team?

JOHNSON: I'm not sure. I imagine it was the Royals, but . . .

SMOOT: Did Mrs. Truman receive a lot of telephone calls during the period that you worked?

JOHNSON: Well, the day that was her birthday, that was kind of a neat day. During that evening shift when I was on, after three o'clock, after we'd had her party, she did receive quite a number of calls from people in Washington, D.C., a lot of Democratic friends, and people in California. Gosh, I think we must have had twenty birthday calls that day.

SMOOT: Do you remember any of the names of any of the people that called?

JOHNSON: No.

SMOOT: Did Mrs. Truman talk on the phone on a regular basis?

JOHNSON: About the only time she did was when Margaret—when we'd put in a call to Margaret every Sunday afternoon. She would generally, most of the time we would answer the phone, and it was usually just the other people calling in. She would talk to Valeria LaMere when Valeria would call.

SMOOT: During the time when Mrs. Truman became very sick, not really very sick, but when she was sort of not feeling very good, very well, which room did she spend most of her time in?

JOHNSON: She most generally spent all of her time in the bedroom.

SMOOT: In which bedroom?

JOHNSON: In the bedroom downstairs. And she had one favorite chair that she usually sat in.

SMOOT: Which chair was that?

JOHNSON: It was a low blue chair that isn't any longer here at the house, I don't believe.

SMOOT: Can you tell me where that chair was located? Where did it sit?

JOHNSON: It sat right by the door, inside the door there. Right where the orange chair is sitting now. She had a lamp there beside the chair and a small table with Russell Stover's candy on it.

SMOOT: Do you know if Mrs. Truman took a nap during the day?

JOHNSON: I don't believe she generally did. I think she usually got up in the morning late, you know, and she did go to bed quite early. I don't believe she ever napped, that I know of. Occasionally, I'd think she'd fell asleep when I was reading to her and I'd stop a minute, and she'd open her eyes and peer at me. And I knew she hadn't fallen asleep. [chuckling] She could follow any mystery story line ever invented. [chuckling] I think she had them all figured out before I even started them.

SMOOT: Was the dining room ever used for anything other than Bess's birthday parties?

JOHNSON: No. The Christmas party, when I was working here, we had it in the dining room and her birthday party. It generally wasn't used for anything else.

SMOOT: Did you put up any Christmas decorations?

JOHNSON: No, huh-uh.

SMOOT: Did Mrs. Truman have a tree during the time that you were here, a Christmas tree?

JOHNSON: I don't recall if there was one or not.

SMOOT: Did Mrs. Truman ever sort of project the motherly image to you?

JOHNSON: No. She was—I just always felt in awe around her. I never felt like—she was just a stateslady, you know. She was somewhat reserved. She was interested in my children and the things that were happening at my house. Occasionally, I'd tell her different things. One time we were reading a *National Geographic* and I said, "Oh, gee, that's a neat picture of"—I think we were looking at dolphins or something in the *National Geographic* and she said—and I was telling her about how my little boy liked things about the ocean and dolphins and such, so she said, "You just take that magazine home with you and read this article to your little boy." I did that, and my little boy was so excited that Mrs. Truman had thought about him that he drew her a picture of the dolphin, and she sent it back.

I remember another time too coming over. I'm a clown. I've been a clown since the time I worked at Mrs. Truman's house. When I came to work here, it was kind of, this was kind of a neat job to have and to be able to be around Mrs. Truman, and it kind of got me motivated in other directions just in my personal life in thinking, well, life's really too short

not to do what you want to do in this life. I'd always wanted to be a clown, so for Halloween, I bought myself a clown wig and got myself a clown suit and marched—signed up in the Independence parade and marched for Halloween in the parade and just had a blast. Well, I've been a clown ever since then. The reason why Mrs. Truman is important in my clowning is that she gave me my name. I had a wig that I'd bought that was multi-colored and just really wild—the purple, pink, blue, everything colors, and I dressed up one day. I checked with Valeria, and she said that that would be fine. I dressed up in my clown suit and came over to visit Mrs. Truman.

And I came in and went into her bedroom, and she was sitting in her chair, and I talked to her. I said, "Hi! I'm a clown. How are you today?" She guessed who I was, I imagine, because she'd heard my voice for so many hours, it wouldn't be hard to tell. And she reached up and she touched my wig, and she says, "Your hair looks like gumdrops." And I thought, "Wow, that's pretty neat! I'll call myself Gumdrop," because at that time, I didn't have a clown name yet. So she gave me my clown name. So every time people ask where I got my name, I can tell them that Mrs. Truman gave it to me [see appendix, item 4].

SMOOT: So how often did you come around Mrs. Truman as a clown?

JOHNSON: Oh, I think maybe once or twice. Not too often. My father was impressed finally when I was able to give Mrs. Truman a concert on the piano in there. She loved music, and I don't think she heard it very often, so I would practice up on pieces to play for her. I would say, "Who do you want to hear?" I'd go home and pick out a piece of somebody that she

wanted to hear and I'd practice it up and I'd come back and play it for her. My father said, "Well, finally, all those years of music lessons, it was worth it. You got to play for Mrs. Truman."

SMOOT: Do you remember some of the songs that you played for Mrs. Truman?

JOHNSON: Well, she liked Beethoven, and Brahms, and I did play the "Moonlight Sonata." I also played Debussy for her. And just before she passed away, I was working on the "Missouri Waltz." I didn't quite get that finished before she left.

Some other times, too, I brought my daughter over, and my daughter sings. She was about five or six years old then, so we had some pieces ready to sing for Mrs. Truman. My daughter was—Bess was just so alive. You are around some older people that are just drained—they're already gone and they're still here. Bess was just always alive and just vibrant, and my daughter remembers singing for Mrs. Truman in the music room. [choked up] Mrs. Truman was in her wheelchair, and Jenny went to sing for her, and Mrs. Truman grabbed Jenny's hands and just hung on and wouldn't let her go. Jenny just sang right to Mrs. Truman. It was really an important experience for Jenny.

I think Mrs. Truman always was a very caring and loving person, but very respectable of other people's boundaries. I think she was quiet and reserved because she had certain boundaries. I can remember when I went to the hospital after she broke her hip and after she had gotten out of the ICU part of the hospital, we were able to go into her private room and visit with her. So every time I'd go on my week to go visit with her, I

would prepare a special story that I'd found that was meaningful to me so I could read something to her and then talk to her. And I told her that we'd been really worried about her, and I said that, you know, we were afraid that she wasn't going to live through this broken hip experience because it had been such a tragic thing for her and she'd been so ill, and then to have pneumonia on top of it. Plus being ninety-six and a half years old, not too many people would have made it, but Mrs. Truman made it through, and I was able to tell her in the hospital on that one certain day that I went—I read a story to her that was in the *Reader's Digest* about a trapeze artist family—about just a family that, you know, had a lot of power and a lot of showmanship in their lives and a lot of courage. And I told her that I read that story especially to her because I felt that she had a lot of courage, too, and we were glad that she was going to recover because I would have felt terribly bad if she had passed away and I hadn't been able to tell her how much I loved her and how much she meant to me. [crying]

I think my life changed a lot in this house being around a great lady like she was. It was really difficult when she passed away and we couldn't come back to the house. I really had a hard time parting with her. I was invited to the funeral and I went to the funeral, but there was so many photographers and people to meet and the first president's ladies, and Mrs. Carter, and Mrs. Ford, and Mrs. Reagan were there and Margaret and her boys and her husband, and there were generals—so many marvelous people there that the whole day didn't seem like a funeral. It seemed like just a party. And so it was hard to believe she really wasn't

here in her room or in her bed. That really concerned me for a long time that I couldn't let go, because I thought she was still here. I was able to come back in the house and was able to see that she wasn't here anymore, and it took me almost a year to close the death because it just seemed like she still should have been here.

She was important to me because she started me on a career. I'd never worked outside of the home for about ten years. I wanted to do something with my life and when I got the job here, I felt like I had to do something more than just be a nurse's aide. One day when I was here in the kitchen, I was trying to decide what I should do with the rest of my life. And I decided I wanted to go ahead and go to school and be a registered nurse. I really feel like it isn't anything that Mrs. Truman ever said, but it was what she did for my life that made a difference in me and it made me want to go on and do something that was a little more important in life like she had done. So I enrolled in school while I was still working here, and I started on my nursing degree, and I told Mrs. Truman that I was going to start working to be a nurse and she said that she was proud.

[End #3076; Begin #3077]

JOHNSON: I had told Mrs. Truman about my wanting to become a registered nurse, and she'd said that she was proud of my decision. I always was glad that I was able to start that here, and in many of the afternoon hours when she was reading her newspaper I would spend in the kitchen with my typewriter working on my assignments for school. I really think that just this house, just being here in this house gave me a lot of courage. It was

neat, too—there were times when I spent a lot of time in this house by myself, when Mrs. Truman was asleep and I was the only one here. We were allowed to sit in the library or read the books or go through anything that we felt we wanted to look at. There were picture albums here and a lot of family things. I noticed in the living room, or in the music room, all the pictures on the piano and the pictures hanging on the walls and everything, and I was really impressed by this one painting. It was a painting by Winston Churchill. And I was, it was so exciting always to just come in here and to be inside of history, to be somewhere where history had been made, where two people had lived and had brought up their daughter and had done so much to change the course of the United States and even the course of the world.

And it was, some of my neatest times were just by myself, quiet times where I would be reading a Truman history book or I would take the books down off the shelf in the library and read a Bible that Harry Truman had read in his home and look through picture books of trips to Hawaii and different friends that they had, and families. There were family snapshots sitting around of the boys, Margaret's boys, and it was exciting to me to be able to meet Margaret and her husband and her boys, at the funeral, because I had seen these boys grow up. I had seen the pictures throughout the house of when they were small, the portraits here in the living room of the little ones and then to be able to meet them and see what fine young people they'd become and how the Trumans had really made a big difference in their lives.

I was able to talk to the boys and just tell them how much fun I had really enjoyed taking care of their grandmother and how special she was to me, how much she had changed my life. I was able to tell her grandsons some of the happy times that we'd had here in the home and how excited that Mrs. Truman would get on Sundays when she'd call and how happy she would be to listen to their voices talking to her. I think maybe it was . . . There's lot of people that say, "Gee, it's too bad they didn't come and visit more often," but, you know, they did have a lot of contact with Mrs. Truman. They were a very close family. Sometimes you can be close without visiting a lot, without spending that actual time. I think their closeness was in other, larger ways that many of us never perceive. I think so many, that's the one thing I really liked about Mrs. Truman was there was nothing shallow about her [choked up]. Everything she did was great, everything she did was with her whole self, and she had a relationship with her family that was with her whole self, and she shared on so many different levels with people. That's why I feel like she was—I felt real close to her even though she didn't talk a whole lot. The closeness came through doing things together and reading murder mysteries together, and sharing some of the funny things and the things that we would find in the books that we would be able to share.

I remember in one of the books, she said that it said that Mrs. Truman had won first place in shot put when she was in school. And I told her that I had won first place in shot put in college. So we had that one thing that we shared—we both were pretty good with the shot put. Mrs.

Truman never lost that tomboyishness. There was a spunk about her. I really feel like the last year of her life must have been really hard for her because she had lost so much facility for speaking and being able to communicate with others, and she never lost any of her intelligence or her ability to express herself. But she was not able to communicate that anymore to the people around her. And I think that must have been a very difficult time for her to not be able to say what she meant or to say anything at all. I know the last part of her life—the last few months, I think she had a feeding tube and it's really difficult to talk when you have a feeding tube in.

There are so many memories here about her. I can almost see her sitting in her gold chair, reading her newspaper, and she would never miss anything. She would know if you were in the room or if you were passing through, or if somebody was going out the front door, she would generally know who it was. She could name all of the Secret Service men by their first names and never got them mixed up or anything. She was something else!

SMOOT: You had mentioned earlier that Mrs. Truman had some boundaries. Can you give me an example of maybe what one or two of her boundaries were?

JOHNSON: Well, it seemed like because you respected Mrs. Truman you never—she's not the kind of person that you'd go up and give a big hug to or pat, just a friendly pat. She was kind of reserved in those kind of ways. I would have felt very uncomfortable about giving her a hug every day. And I think she

would have felt just as uncomfortable about that. There was—she almost demanded time to herself. The newspaper time was her time, and she didn't want you to come in and disturb her unless she rang the bell for you. So she had a certain need to have people there to help her, but if she wanted the time to herself, you knew that you'd better not come in till she rang.

SMOOT: Did she read her newspaper every day at a certain time?

JOHNSON: That's true.

SMOOT About what time of the day was it?

JOHNSON: It was generally when she was having her afternoon snack, so that would be probably around five o'clock, five or six. It just depended on where we were in the book whether she wanted to stop or not. Excuse me. [blows nose]

SMOOT: You were saying that Mrs. Truman was not the type of person that you would walk up to and hug or pat. Would you say that she was not overly affectionate?

JOHNSON: I think that was part of the time in which she lived. I think Americans, in general, don't touch each other. It's kind of a thing we don't do, and I think the time in which Mrs. Truman was brought up, that probably open show of affection was just something that didn't happen. I think she was very reserved, and I think most people that would have lived in her generation might have had the same kind of reservations. But I can tell you, when she sat here and looked at that portrait of Harry for thirty minutes, how, even though maybe she was reserved outwardly, I think that

she had a very deep love for people and especially for her husband. I've never been able to share with anybody how great their relationship was. I was never here when Harry was, so I couldn't see the relationship, but I can understand after being around her, how magnificent their marriage and their relationship must have been.

I think that Margaret had an extremely special place in Bess's heart, too, and the boys. She was so proud of her grandsons. And it isn't anything I can say that she told me this. It's just that, you know, she had a very special spot for all the pictures in the home, and she remembered where every picture is in this house upstairs. There were certain things that when Margaret would come to town, Mrs. Truman would like certain things brought to her room, certain pictures that she wanted to share with Margaret. You could just tell how when we would run out of things to read, she'd suggest, "Let's read *Souvenir* again." That was one of the most special books she had in the house. As a matter of fact, that was the only book that was kept at her nightstand all the time. It wasn't allowed out of her room. I've always wanted to get a copy of that book. That would be neat.

SMOOT: You said earlier, that although Margaret and her sons didn't visit often, that they sort of demonstrated their love in larger ways. Could you elaborate on that a bit farther?

JOHNSON: Well, I think the boys have carried on the Truman tradition by expanding themselves in the best ways they can. They've had very good educations, of course they've lived in New York City, had a marvelous mother and a

marvelous father, and have done some great things in their lives. They're very well schooled and very intelligent young men and very well-spoken and very gentleman, very much gentlemen. I think maybe part of the reason they didn't come as often, is they were so involved in their own activities and the things that they needed to do. And I think that Mrs. Truman really had her own space and everybody respected it.

SMOOT: Did any dignitaries come to visit Mrs. Truman while you were here?

JOHNSON: Not while I was here. I think the year prior to my working here, President Jimmy Carter had come to visit and during the years [short section of garbled tape] and they were usually received in the living room here. This was reserved for company. The year that I worked here, she would have maybe the pastor of the Episcopal church and his wife would drop over every once in a while, and her doctor made regular calls here, Dr. Graham. And she would have not too many visitors.

SMOOT: Did Bess ever talk about her visits from Jimmy Carter and Bob Hope? Did she ever talk about what went on when they visited her?

JOHNSON: No, she never did.

SMOOT: Would you like to take a walk around?

JOHNSON: Yeah.

[End #3077; Begin #3078]

SMOOT: Trudy, are there any special objects in this room that Mrs. Truman, in the living room, that you remember, that Mrs. Truman particularly cared for?

JOHNSON: Well, she never really said anything about . . . She just always sat in the gold chair. I think, I think the Truman portrait over the mantle is very

special to her. This is the, the famous bedroom here. We spent a lot of time here. I asked her one day, I said, "Mrs. Truman, you really must like pink." I said, "The pink in here, the curtains are just beautiful." You know, I said, "My daughter likes pink. What is your favorite color?" And she looked at me and she said, "Blue." [laughter] She used to have a telephone that sat on the little stand there. And that's where we'd keep Margaret's book *Souvenir*, down on that bottom shelf there. And then the bathroom. [moving into bathroom] This was the, this was the window that we had to open just a certain amount. That even looks like the same board. [laughter] She usually had her nightgowns and towels and everything, getting her ready for bed. I always liked that closet. I thought that was a neat closet.

HARRISON: You would read to her in here a lot?

JOHNSON: Uh-huh. Yeah.

HARRISON: Okay, so this orange chair was more in front of the big dresser?

JOHNSON: Well, the orange chair was over here. Yeah, just kind of over here. And her chair was here, only it was a smaller chair. It was more the shape of that blue flowered chair there.

HARRISON: Okay.

JOHNSON: And her chair was, it was sitting like this. And then I would sit like here, and she would be right here. And then I would just talk into that one right ear of hers. That was a little better for hearing.

HARRISON: So her chair was kind of turned a little bit toward the doorway there?

JOHNSON: Right.

HARRISON: The back was still kind of toward the dresser?

JOHNSON: And it was a lot smaller than this chair and it was low, too. Because we had to help pick her up. You know to get her up into her wheelchair and help her transfer because of her arthritis and everything. And it was, it was a lot, you know, shorter and smaller chair. And she did have in this same corner, there was a little kind of a TV table here with candy on it and her. She'd put reading, little reading things here, and a letter opener maybe. And then, there was something here and she had a little trash sack arranged here. So, like one day she got the light bill and she thought it was too much and she ripped it in half and threw it in her trash sack. That way I had to pick it out. I think they paid it anyway. But, she didn't like to spend much money. I remember Margaret came one time and said, "Mother, this furnace just has to be fixed." And Margaret insisted that somebody come look at it. They had to change a filter and it was something like nineteen dollars and Mrs. Truman was very upset. [laughter] She did *not* like [laughter] to spend any money. [laughter]

And then she had the, I think the, the . . . diamond ring. The ruby ring with the diamonds around it. That was, there was a special place that they kept that, in the dresser. But just the, I think Valeria was the only one that really knew where that was. Generally, we didn't get into this dresser at all. We usually had all the things for Mrs. Truman in the big closet in the bathroom. And those pictures are all pretty much the same pictures that were always there.

I remember one night I came up to the door to do a bed check and I had opened the door and she heard me and she just screamed. [laughter] It

scared me to death. ’Cause you’re in here and it’s all dark, in the middle of the night, so I went in. [laughter] She was hollerin’ at me for waking her up I guess.

HARRISON: Did she usually sleep though, pretty well, during the night?

JOHNSON: Yeah. Generally I didn’t usually wake her. And, and there are certain places the floor creak. And I, I had learned how to walk where I couldn’t, I couldn’t make it creak. And there is a certain way you can turn the doorknob where it wouldn’t make any noise either. So I generally just check on her every hour, just to make sure she was sleeping. [laughter] Not needing anything. ’Cause she did have a bell that she would ring and we had to, we had to anchor it on the bedpost and down in her bed under her pillow. And she liked to have a couple of Kleenexes under the pillow too at night for . . . And I was always afraid maybe the bell would fall down on the floor and she’d be needing me and not be able to get a hold of me, so I’d come in and check on her.

HARRISON: You were, you were talking about turning the bed down for her and so on. And, and I can’t remember earlier you characterized her and I can’t remember how. But, anyway, was she, would, she was pretty precise?

JOHNSON: Oh, yeah, every, every evening the same, you did the same bedtime ritual. Everything had to be done in a certain order. And the glasses, I had to take her glasses and take them in the bathroom and wash them off with soap and water and wash ’em off and put them in a certain place so they’d be clean and ready for the next day. She just had, definitely a certain order.

I'll never forget her feet though were beautiful! I've worked in a nursing home with a lot of elderly people and they have crooked toes, and . . . But Mrs. Truman just had beautiful feet, her, you know she must have always just had the right size shoes and . . . [laughter]. I told her I hope my feet were so pretty when I was that age. [laughter]

HARRISON: Do you think that that precision was . . . I mean was that just a part of her? Is that something she probably had throughout her life?

JOHNSON: I think definitely. This house, I mean, the things that she had done in her life. The places that she lived. And being the wife of the president. She had to be organized. And, you know, I think maybe that's part of the reason why people say she's reserved and aloof and quiet and to herself, is because she, I think she was so organized she couldn't, she didn't have time, to take time to do other things, you know, that might have made her a different person. But she knew where everything was in this house. She had it very well organized. I can imagine what it was must have been like when she was younger.

HARRISON: There's the angels.

JOHNSON: Ah, there's the angels. Yeah . . .

HARRISON: We put them out at Christmas time.

JOHNSON: She took every one of them and put them on their seat. That's so cute. [bobbling angel] Oop. She just arranged all of them.

HARRISON: That's okay.

JOHNSON: But she, I mean, that's the kind of organization, you know. She couldn't see an angel laying on its head when it should be sitting down. [laughter]

Those are nice. Up in the attic there was a case that said "Harry S Truman Soap Company." We always tried to figure out, was that a joke, or something somebody had done for a political thing? Or did he really have a soap company?

HARRISON: Or it could have been another Harry Truman maybe. But I suspect that was just a joke. [laughter]

JOHNSON: We always wondered.

SMOOT: And here we are in the music parlor.

JOHNSON: Um-hmm. Yeah, I always, I always liked that story about Margaret running down for Christmas expecting a train and finding it was a grand piano instead.

HARRISON: Might be surprised.

SMOOT: Is anything changed in here?

HARRISON: Paintings.

JOHNSON: Yeah, the paintings are different.

HARRISON: Yeah.

JOHNSON: Yeah, this is, this is still the same though. And when Mrs. Truman would come in here she'd usually have her wheelchair and she'd sit right in this area.

HARRISON: Do you ever recall her watching this TV in the music room?

JOHNSON: I think just for the World Series is all I remember. That's a lovely portrait of her.

HARRISON: It's interesting. We've talked to the artist, Greta Kempton, on the phone. She's still alive in New York and painting and in her eighties or nineties

now, too. But she, I called her and, you know, she probably hadn't even thought about this for years and years and years. So I call out of the blue. She really didn't really have too much to say. And that afternoon she called back and says, "I just couldn't wait. I've just been thinking about this. I just had to call you." So she told us. That, because she had come out, because the White house wanted the painting, wanted this painting back because it was returned here by mistake. And Bess said, "No way. I like it." And said it was going to stay. So they sent Greta Kempton out to do, to make arrangements to have a copy painted.

JOHNSON: Um-hmm.

HARRISON: So she and Mrs. Truman were looking at it. Well, kind of getting back to that kind of precision thing, too. Mrs. Truman said, "Well now," she says, "I really like the way the hair is. And I really like the way the eyes are. And I like the nose. I like the mouth. And I like da-da-da-da-da." She went through everything. She liked it. It was perfect; don't change a thing. "If you want to paint another picture of me, here take this one. You know, I've still got the dress upstairs." And she ran up there and got it out of the closet. [laughter] And brings it down, "Here take this thing. Go paint a copy." And Greta Kempton says, you know, "Maybe we can change the dress. Maybe you would look good in black." "No." [laughter] But she, Greta Kempton was saying that it was just really odd. Because she had never had anybody, who had paid that much attention, who had obviously paid that much attention to all the details.

JOHNSON: Everything.

HARRISON: Usually somebody would say, oh, I really like the chin. Or you know, something. But never who just had gone through step by step by step by step and said I like this, I like that, I like that, and had just really paid that much attention to it.

JOHNSON: Yeah, she would have. Now this is one of my favorite rooms in the house.

SMOOT: The study, huh?

JOHNSON: Right.

SMOOT: Do you know if Mrs. Truman ever listened to this hi-fi?

JOHNSON: I imagine she and Harry used to, but not when, not when we were here. And she mostly, mostly just was in her bedroom or out on the back porch in the good weather.

HARRISON: Do you ever remember her coming in here while you worked here?

JOHNSON: No, huh-uh. She was, when I worked her, she was pretty much wheelchair bound. And . . . This is a nice room. It's such a cozy feeling in here.

SMOOT: Is there anything extra special that you remember about this room?

JOHNSON: Just the Secret Service men. [laughter] This was their room.

SMOOT: This was their room?

JOHNSON: Yeah. They'd come over, one would come over around midnight. Then I had to be relegated to the kitchen. [laughter] And they'd shut the door. One of them would block this passageway off because he didn't want anybody to get him in the dark. [laughter] I won't mention any names. This is the, the room where the parties were. The chandelier looks beautiful.

HARRISON: We've dusted it three times so far.

JOHNSON: That's difficult to do, I know.

HARRISON: Every time we have to move the table for some reason or another, then it's . . . Oh no, well, as long as we've got the table moved. . . . Then they were rewiring the whole house and they went to rewire that, it was only held on by a couple of wood screws, everything was just barely hung in.

JOHNSON: Oh, my goodness. [laughter]

HARRISON: It's more secure now.

JOHNSON: Oh, that's good.

HARRISON: Luckily it hadn't fallen.

JOHNSON: Yeah, I used to worry about that it looked like it wasn't too secure. And this, this silver piece here, I'd never seen that until they opened the house up and started giving tours.

HARRISON: Well that, that wasn't here when . . .

JOHNSON: It wasn't out.

HARRISON: . . . when you worked here?

JOHNSON: It wasn't out. It might have been somewhere else. I don't remember it being over there. I remember all these creaks though. They are all familiar. This used to be my favorite little piece here. I used, there was certain ways the light will hit this little crystal dish and it just really shines. So I, this is my favorite thing and I'd come through every night and take a look at it. So I was always glad to see it was still here when I came back.

HARRISON: And that always sat, that sat on the buffet?

JOHNSON: Yeah, uh-huh.

SMOOT: Did Mrs. Truman have a portable stereo?

JOHNSON: Mm, there was one here. That used to sit here.

HARRISON: In the, whatever you call it, built-in china cabinet.

JOHNSON: Yeah. There was a record player and radio, but nobody ever played it. I think I had it on once the night I was decorating for her birthday party. I think I had it on, but I don't remember it ever being on.

SMOOT: What kind of music were you listening to? [laughter]

JOHNSON: Classical. And the telephone. Mrs. [loud buzzing noise heard as the cabinet alarm sounds in the butler's pantry, followed by laughter, then another loud buzzing noise as another cabinet is opened] alarmed . . .

HARRISON: That one is, too.

JOHNSON: Used to fixed the . . .

HARRISON: Pam, you have to be careful with the tape player as well.

JOHNSON: I used to have the . . . [cabinet opening and closing] Here's her prescription. We used to keep her medicine, I think, out here. And then I used to fix her eggnog out here. And then we had a portable television over there for all of us.

HARRISON: That's by the, the white top table on the north side of the room.

JOHNSON: And then the pantry. I always liked the pantry. I always could get my kids to eat Wheaties because Mrs. Truman eats Wheaties kids. [laughter]

HARRISON: Did she?

JOHNSON: Yeah, there was always Wheaties in there, so the kids and my kids would always eat Wheaties. And we turn off lights in our house in honor of Mrs. Truman, too. "Now Mrs. Truman would have turned these off." So they always turn them off in honor of her.

I remember, I remember the first night I was here. It was, I came in and they said, you know, help yourself to something for dinner in the refrigerator. And, and I sat down and was sitting on the, on here was a sugar bowl with a sterling silver spoon in it and I thought, "Wow!" And then these little tiles by Grandma Moses. I always thought those were neat. And there was a painting in the living room by Grandma Moses, I think. And one by Winston Churchill. And I was amazed the Secret Service men had never noticed it. One of them, I pointed it out, "Do you know who that painting's by?" And they go, "Who?" "Winston Churchill!" "Oh!"

And then we had an air conditioner window unit in here for the summertime for us. And then the alarms were on at night. So at night you couldn't go out on the porch or anything because it would set off the alarms over at the Secret Service. And the Secret Service said nothing ever got past them. The surveillance was so, so good that no one ever broke surveillance except a forty-pound raccoon. They said that it took about three weeks to bag him. They moved him onto different quarters. But he, they didn't know what it was. Something was, would trip their alarm and finally after a rainy day they found little raccoon prints up the rainspout out there. And he'd go up the rainspout and into the attic and you could hear this lumping and bumping upstairs. Also, there were these bushes on this one side, by Mrs. Truman's window where they would always scratch on the window when it was windy. And so you add that to the creeks and the murder mysteries in the evening time and got a little spooky sometimes.

And there was the bell. The, you could always hear that real loud. There was a bell rigged up, up to the upstairs bedroom, to the upstairs bedroom that used to be Bess and Harry Truman's bedroom and the night people each, we each had our own bed upstairs and we were allowed to rest during the nighttime, but I never did, I always stayed in the kitchen. I was afraid I'd fall asleep and not hear the bell.

SMOOT: Which bedroom did you rest in?

HARRISON: We should, we should go up there I think. Because I, I want to have her look at a couple of chairs up there. They might be the ones from the downstairs bedroom.

JOHNSON: Oh, okay.

HARRISON: In regard to the window air conditioner and the heater, and the furnace, and so on. And Mrs. Truman's kind of frugalness, I guess, with money.

JOHNSON: Uh-huh.

HARRISON: How, how was the house kept in terms of temperature, do you recall?

JOHNSON: It was chilly. It was always chilly in here in the wintertime. I usually had to, you know, dress really warm, have a blanket to wrap up in, 'cause it was usually pretty breezy. At night when, we would always turn the furnace down at night to a certain temperature. And also, it was never allowed up past sixty-eight. It was just, you know. And her room stayed pretty warm, relatively. Except when she had the window open. [laughter] This is the same, the same curtains.

HARRISON: How about I let you go first, so, so if you stop. [laughter]

JOHNSON: You, I always like the little hat rack and Harry's hat and coat were always hanging there. I always thought that was kind of neat. One time it was raining they let me borrow the umbrella that was around there.

SMOOT: Oh, really?

JOHNSON: This was the light I had left on at night, the statuette light here. So I could come out of her room. Because *none* of the lights were on in the house. Just the one light, the one reading light in her room. This was the one she requested that I not turn on anymore [laughter] at night.

[End #3078; Begin #3079]

[on the second floor landing]

SMOOT: Who was it that brought some things down the steps? George? Who crushed and broke his leg? Was it a bed or a table or something?

HARRISON: [unintelligible].

SMOOT: Harry and one of the Wallace brothers.

HARRISON: Oh, that's right, yeah.

JOHNSON: There used to be a desk right here.

HARRISON: Yeah, [unintelligible] and a couch.

JOHNSON: Oh, and this was the bedroom that the night people were allowed to sleep in. This one was my bed. And then the other night gal, that was her bed. Then there was the bell, was down here.

HARRISON: Oh, okay, underneath that [unintelligible].

JOHNSON: And you could hear it.

HARRISON: That's on the north, base of the north wall is a little bell.

JOHNSON: I think there is a picture that was . . . one of the pictures, there was Mrs. Truman's mother—the picture of her was hanging on this wall.

HARRISON: Of Mr. Truman's mother?

JOHNSON: Mrs. Truman's mother. It was a younger portrait of the mother with, and she had glasses and her hair done up on top of her head.

HARRISON: [unintelligible].

JOHNSON: Yeah.

HARRISON: Was this the TV that was used downstairs by any chance, or . . .?

JOHNSON: Hmm, no, it doesn't look familiar. I'm not sure. That might . . .

HARRISON: This is one of the chairs I was wondering about.

JOHNSON: No, her chair was blue.

HARRISON: Okay, this is solid blue.

JOHNSON: Yeah. No, I don't think that's it.

HARRISON: This has stars on it, or something like that.

JOHNSON: It was just a solid blue color.

SMOOT: You know, in the storage room? I thought I saw one. Maybe I'm wrong.

HARRISON: No.

SMOOT: It's another chair?

HARRISON: There's another one.

JOHNSON: I guess that was the porch Margaret said in her book she used to sleep out there, take naps in the afternoon.

HARRISON: Is this . . . ? No, that's a striped . . . striped, oh well.

JOHNSON: I don't know whose bedroom this was. . . . [in Harry Truman's dressing room] And this room had, when Harry had gone to the hospital that

everything had been left in this room just as it was when he had gone to the hospital and passed away. I think it's been changed somewhat though. . . . And then the closet. We were allowed to just walk around the house. I had to get the layout of the whole house. I had been around every passageway and in every room so I would make sure nothing would jump out at me at night. One of the Secret Service men told me one time, oh, there was a, long before I had worked here, I guess. They had a Harry S Truman plastic blow-up doll that looked like Harry S Truman and it was stuffed down under the couch in the parlor there. And one of the Secret Service men had fallen asleep on the floor watching TV, and when he woke up he was face to face with this Harry S Truman doll. [laughter] And he jumped up and went running out of the front door. Thought he'd seen a ghost. [laughter] And this is the restroom that we were allowed to use, was this one up here.

HARRISON: [unintelligible].

JOHNSON: Yeah, I don't think so.

HARRISON: The blue bathroom up here. Did anyone use the one . . .

SMOOT: In the basement?

HARRISON: . . . in the basement?

JOHNSON: Well, occasionally when I didn't feel I could come up here, I would go down in the basement and use it. This is generally what we were supposed to use up here, though.

HARRISON: So the staff didn't use the one on the first floor? Off Mrs. Truman's bedroom?

JOHNSON: No, that was Mrs. Truman's private bathroom, so we weren't allowed to use that. The stairs to the attic.

HARRISON: The guest room, I'm not [unintelligible].

JOHNSON: This is Margaret's room and when she came home a couple of times, she would, they would get the room ready for her. And she would stay in her room. And I . . .

HARRISON: This is the master bedroom.

JOHNSON: . . . and this is where Margaret, Margaret's old bedroom. And she, the first time she came to visit that I was working here she stayed up till eleven o'clock 'cause she wanted to meet everyone that was taking care of her mother. And I thought that was really, particularly nice of her to be able to, you know, stay up till eleven, especially after she had just got in from New York City and everything. But she was concerned about meeting each one of us. I thought that was a real privilege to meet her. She's a fine lady . . . And I guess this, this other bedroom, Mrs. Truman's mother's bedroom?

HARRISON: I'm not sure. Had you heard that?

JOHNSON: That's what I had heard. . . . I never came in this room much, or Margaret's room. It was mostly the other couple of rooms.

It's always amazing to me to see so many lights on in this house. [laughter as the group descends the stairs to the first floor] I've been through it in the dark so much.

HARRISON: Things you have never seen before. . .

JOHNSON: Right. [laughter]

HARRISON: We don't always this, in fact, we try to keep the lights pretty dim, even, it's just a fairly dark house, I think . . .

JOHNSON: Yeah.

HARRISON: . . . even with all the available lights on it still doesn't seem to be over lit. By some people's standards, and I guess by Mrs. Truman's.

JOHNSON: Definitely by her standards, too many lights. [laughter]

[After the tape stops and resumes, there is a long pause with only background noise audible.]

HARRISON: Do you have the negatives for those photographs?

JOHNSON: I hadn't run across them.

HARRISON: [unintelligible].

JOHNSON: Right, I don't know if I still do or not. I'd found the photographs, and that was quite a monumental task. I don't know if I could find the negatives or not.

SMOOT: If not, would you let Steve borrow the pictures and maybe we can have them reproduced? Would that be a problem?

JOHNSON: Yeah, that'd be fine.

HARRISON: Some of those, not all of them necessarily, but I think some of them might be really of value for us to have copies of, just a kind of documentation.

JOHNSON: Yeah, that would be fine.

SMOOT: [pause] Oh, Trudy, who purchased Mrs. Truman's prescriptions?

JOHNSON: Hmm, I'm not sure how that was done. That was mostly done in the daytime.

SMOOT: And was Mrs. Truman your immediate supervisor, or did you have any supervision at all?

JOHNSON: I think Valeria LaMere was our supervisor.

HARRISON: I was going to ask something, but I can't remember what it was! Oh, okay. You talked about getting paid, because you got paid in the kitchen. How was that, how was that done?

JOHNSON: I think there was a little envelope in a drawer in the kitchen. A little white table, where the TV would have been on. I think there was a little drawer there and all of our checks were in there in an envelope, each one addressed to each person that was to receive a check.

SMOOT: So did you just reach in and get your envelope?

JOHNSON: Yeah, uh-huh.

SMOOT: Why do you think Mrs. Truman didn't like a lot of light?

JOHNSON: The bill. She didn't want to pay the bill. She didn't, you know, like to spend a lot of money. [laughter]

HARRISON: Are there any other examples of that, you mentioned one when we were in the bedroom, about her not wanting to get the furnace fixed.

JOHNSON: Yeah, I think she just wanted to conserve on everything as much as possible. It was probably just, you know, just from growing up in the era when she grew up. And also she was not frivolous. You know, she, I don't think, would ever spend anything unless it was absolutely necessary.

SMOOT: Well, Trudy, we would certainly like to thank you for your time and sharing all these deep dark secrets with us. And it's obvious that your experience with Mrs. Truman was a very memorable and emotional

experience. And I'm sorry that I didn't get a chance to share in that experience. And how long will it be before you finish nursing school?

JOHNSON: Oh, I graduated in '84, so I'm a registered nurse and now I'm working back at the same nursing home where I started as an aide when I was with Mrs. Truman.

SMOOT: Well, I am sure Mrs. Truman has been watching over you. And I'm sure that she is very proud of your accomplishment and that she has been a motivating factor in that accomplishment. So again, we would like to thank you very much for your time. Everything that you have done for us that will be a contributing factor in the interpretation of Harry S Truman National Historic Site.

JOHNSON: Well, I really enjoyed it. Thank you.

END OF INTERVIEW

APPENDIX

1. Photographs of a Christmas party for Bess W. Truman in December 1980 (provided to the National Park Service by Trudy Johnson).

2. Photographs of a birthday party for Bess W. Truman in February 1981 (provided to the National Park Service by Trudy Johnson).

3. Photocopy of a paycheck from Bess W. Truman to Trudy (Worden) Johnson, November 1, 1980 (courtesy of Trudy Johnson).

4. Trudy Johnson as "Gumdrop" on the front steps of the Truman home (National Park Service photograph).

APPENDIX ITEM 1

Photographs of a Christmas party for Bess W. Truman in December 1980 (provided to the National Park Service by Trudy Johnson)

May Wallace and Valeria LaMere
Photograph A

Photograph B

Photograph C

Edward Hobby and Valeria LaMere
Photograph D

Photograph E

Edward Hobby
Photograph F

APPENDIX ITEM 2

Photographs of a birthday party for Bess W. Truman in February 1981 (provided to the National Park Service by Trudy Johnson)

Bess W. Truman in the dining room
of the Truman home

Photograph A

Bess W. Truman and household staff
Photograph B

Photograph C

Photograph D

Valeria LaMere and Bess W. Truman
Photograph E

Photograph F

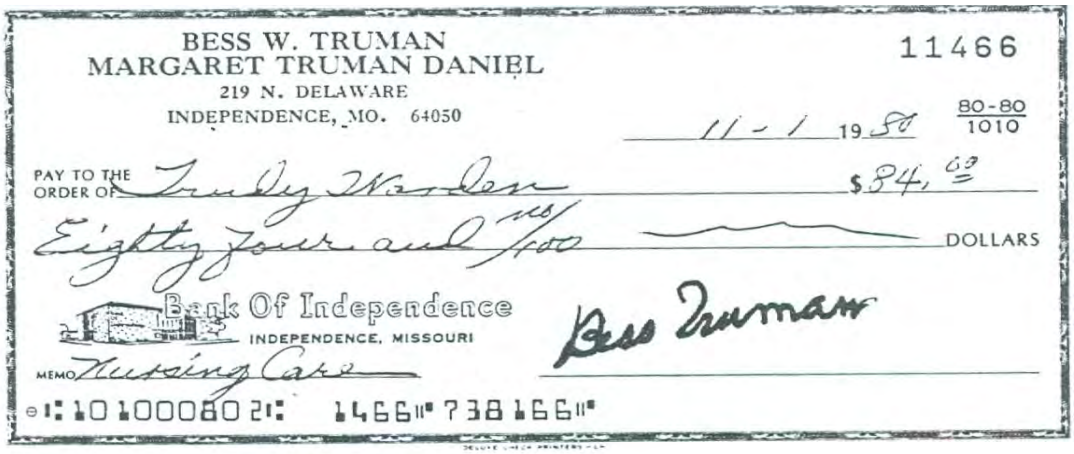
Photograph G

Birthday flower arrangements in the Gates bedroom

Photograph H

APPENDIX ITEM 3

Photocopy of a paycheck from Bess W. Truman to Trudy (Worden) Johnson, November 1, 1980 (provided to the National Park Service by Trudy Johnson)



BESS W. TRUMAN
MARGARET TRUMAN DANIEL
219 N. DELAWARE
INDEPENDENCE, MO. 64050

11466

11-1 1980

80-80
1010

PAY TO THE ORDER OF Trudy Worden $84.03

Eighty four and 03/100 DOLLARS

Bank Of Independence
INDEPENDENCE, MISSOURI

Bess Truman

MEMO Nursing Care

⑆101000802⑈ 11466⑈ 738166⑈

APPENDIX ITEM 4

Trudy Johnson as "Gumdrop" on the front steps of the Truman home (National Park Service photograph 317:2)