

This Man TRUMAN

by

FRANK McNAUGHTON

and

WALTER ~~HEHMEYER~~

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THIS MAN TRUMAN

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"I ask only to be a good and
faithful servant of my Lord
and my people."

Harry S. Truman

This Man
TRUMAN



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Chapter One

The Family

THERE WAS NO PARTICULAR CELEBRATION ON MAY 8, 1884, in the little town of Lamar, Barton County, western Missouri, north of the lead mining center of Joplin.

Word went up and down the street that the Trumans had a baby—a boy who kicked and squalled lustily and seemed to be singularly unmarked by destiny for anything greater than a life behind the plow or behind the counters of some crossroads store.

The first-born was promptly named Harry S., after a bachelor uncle, Harrison Young, the S. standing for nothing in particular. It was merely an initial adopted because it stood for each of the grandfathers: Anderson Shippe Truman and Solomon Young. In later years, the boy was to prefer the name Shippe, but the initial never bore other than nameless significance.

This birth in Lamar, Missouri, was perhaps not an inauspicious start for a future president of the United States. But the fact that Harry Truman arrived in the White House after sixty-one years is eloquent testimony to the miracle of the American government which reaches down

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into obscure hamlets to raise up men from the sinews of the people.

Lamar in 1884 was a pretty little village of some eight hundred souls. Its streets were rutted by wagons and buggies which the hill folk of the Ozarks, simple, sometimes ignorant but deeply sincere people, drove into town every Saturday to buy salt, pepper, sugar, calico, perhaps a bit of candy, and a few other essentials of life.

This is rolling country and its hills rise around a rugged, rambling terrain of deep and verdant green, furred over with stout oak, exquisitely beautiful and restful when mantled by the rainy mists that brush and scour along their tops. Life radiates from the post office in such hamlets, or from the grocery store, or the county fair. For it is at such places that the farmers and the townfolk gather to discuss crops, the local news, visits, births, deaths, and cracker-barrel politics. There is nothing here of grandness or classicism. The dance is still predominantly the old-fashioned square. The musical instruments are a piano for sounding chords, a "fiddle" for carrying the melody and, perhaps, an occasional guitar. Still favorite tunes are the old stand-bys like the "Irish Washerwoman," "Turkey in the Straw," and the ever-loved "Missouri Waltz."

The town is laid out in square blocks. The houses are mostly frame structures inelegantly built and deeply pitted and browned by the lashing rains and thunderstorms that sweep through the foothills. In May, this country is at its best, with spring crowding winter gently away, the grass

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greening beneath the freshet showers, the brooks plentifully supplied with perch, and flowers coming into full blossom.

This is not a dramatic country; rather a country of quiet hills and of simple folk who know and think not a great deal of the world outside. Some of them say "poke" for bag, "kin" for can, "hit" for it, and "injun" for engine. They discuss the crops and the local society but seldom indulge in high politics or world theories. Theirs is a lot circumscribed by their restful hills, the intensity of grubbing out an existence, and the joys and woes of their neighbors whom they know intimately and love generously. It is rural America, the northern edge of the Ozarks where, as has been said, the people "shingle the roof with a bullhide and use the tail for a lightning rod."

Most of the farms are small, forty and fifty and a hundred acres, devoted to pasture, hay, and some corn for "winter feeding." The ever-elemental question is, "How is your corn crop this year?"

Both sides of the Truman family fitted into these rural simple surroundings. Yet by all standards they were comfortably fixed, and the Young branch of the family might even be said to have been well off.

Anderson Shippe Truman, the paternal grandfather, and his wife, Mary Jane Holmes Truman, arrived in western Missouri, then a comparative frontier, at about the same time the maternal grandfather, Solomon Young, and his wife, Harriet Louise Gregg Young, freighted their belongings and traveled by river boat down the Ohio, up the

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Mississippi, then up the Missouri, finally establishing themselves at old Westport Landing, near Independence, Missouri, the eastern terminus of the wagon freight routes to the romantic West.

This was in the early 1840's and both families had come to Missouri from Shelby County, Kentucky. There is a story, often told about the Trumans of Kentucky, that Nancy Tyler Holmes, the President's great-grandmother, was scalped by Indians. As the savage's blade cut around her hairline, she lay absolutely motionless, knowing that the slightest movement indicating she was still alive would mean instant death. Thereafter, she always wore a covering to hide her glabrous and scarred head.

Anderson Truman settled on a farm in Jackson County that lay in the vicinity of what is now Thirty-ninth and Indiana Streets, Kansas City; and John Anderson Truman, their son and father of the President, was born there in 1851.

Grandfather Solomon Young set up an ox-team wagon freight from Westport Landing to Salt Lake City, thence to San Francisco. The venture prospered and Grandfather Young saved sufficient money to purchase five thousand acres in Jackson County, seventeen miles south of Westport Landing. As his wagon freight business prospered, Solomon Young kept investing in land and at one time he owned some Negro slaves and was a man of recognized means in west central Missouri. While he ran his wagon trains, often making the long, tortuous journey to Salt Lake City by him-

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self and then out to San Francisco, Grandmother Harriet Young looked after the farms and kept affairs in order. In 1868 Grandfather Young purchased six hundred acres near Grandview in Jackson County. There was no better land in all the state, and the soil was unmarked by plow and unsapped by tillage and perennial crops. It cost \$30 an acre. Earlier in 1854 he had also acquired a ranch in the vicinity of Sacramento, California, but the family never lived there.

While Grandfather Young was amassing considerable means, the Trumans were meeting with more modest circumstances. Grandfather Anderson Truman sold the farm in what is now Kansas City and moved with his family to Platte County, Missouri, farmed there for a few years and then returned to Jackson County and bought another farm of 160 acres east of Holmes Park Village, only three miles from the Solomon Young farm at Grandview.

It was in these western Missouri hills near the Kansas border, that the Truman family, and the Youngs, fiercely Democratic and staunch Confederates, lived through the war between the states, and it is an ignorant man indeed from this countryside who cannot recount almost endlessly the misadventures of the Civil War. They recall Quantrill's Guerrillas and Jim Lane, who carried fire and pistol along the Kansas-Missouri border.

Redheaded Grandmother Harriet Young, whom Harry Truman always recalls as "a grand old lady with the most beautiful hair I've ever seen," was also a woman who "stood for no foolishness." She gave alms freely, bore nine

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children of whom seven lived to maturity, cared for numerous slave children, neighbor orphans, and in her spare time raised two nephews. As a young housewife, she had experienced directly the horrors of guerrilla warfare.

Early one gray morning in 1861 while Grandfather Young was away in California, Jim Lane, the ruthless leader of the Union-sympathizing Kansas "Red Legs," rode into the yard at the farmhouse and ordered Harriet Young to make biscuits for his motley crew of raiders. She began mixing dough, fired up the kitchen stove, quieted the children and then began baking. She baked biscuits until her fingers blistered, while outside shots rang out and the hogs in the pens squealed as the marauders invaded the barnyard. After a hearty breakfast, the Lane raiders hacked hams from the four hundred hogs they had butchered, slung them across their saddles, set the barns on fire, and then rode away. After sacking the Young farmstead, Lane and his men raided Osceola on the Osage River, pillaging and looting the town, and killing some twenty inhabitants.

In reprisal for such raids as these, bands of Missouri robbers would ride into Kansas. Each side committed outrages against the other with many innocent people being murdered. The climax of this internecine warfare came in the summer of 1863 when Quantrill staged his famous raid on Lawrence, Kansas. Leading a band of nearly five hundred men, he rode into the town at daybreak with the intention of burning every house and killing every man. They rode

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through the streets, robbing and burning and shooting every man on sight, nearly two hundred in all.

The drastic Order Number 11 issued by the Union General Thomas Ewing followed the wanton attack on Lawrence. Almost all residents in Jackson, Cass, and Bates Counties in Missouri were ordered to leave their homes. They had to move out of the counties or to military posts. Grain and hay had to be yielded up to the military authorities.

The war years of 1861-1865 inflicted grievous wounds upon Missouri because the state was divided. She was both slave and free though virtually surrounded on three sides by states fighting for the Union cause.

Missouri sent 109,111 men into the Union armies and another 30,000 wore the gray—including William Young, an uncle of Harry Truman who served as a foot soldier in General Sterling Price's army. Truman's father was too young to serve. No other member of the immediate family joined the colors, but they were Confederate Democrats by conviction, believing they had enlisted in the cause of patriotism and independence and were fighting for the sacred right of self-determination.

There were few large plantation owners in Missouri although 115,000 slaves were owned in the state in 1860. The Confederate sympathizers were determined to preserve their agrarian economy and the institutions surrounding it, though most Confederates did not themselves own slaves. The whole weight of military might, economic strength, and

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geographical position in Missouri favored the North. The Federal Government had more and better trained soldiers who were able to prevent Confederate armies in the north and south of Missouri from joining. Moreover, Northern leaders were more resourceful and far-sighted. And most of all, the Federal Government possessed vastly greater resources of wealth and industry.

Missouri did not witness great battles during the Civil War, but the fighting was bitter and tragic. Families were torn apart as sons and brothers joined opposing armies. Friendly neighbors became sworn enemies—it was a cruel, ugly struggle of burning, pillaging, murder, injustice, bushwhacking and guerrilla engagements.

In spite of its superiority, the Union side never gained complete control of the state. General Price's men raided deep into the Union lines, alarming and hounding the Federal troops. There were bloody clashes at Booneville and at Wilson's Creek near Lamar where Harry Truman was born, and along the Blue and Big Blue Rivers where, many years later, he was to play as a boy. Stiff fighting was also seen at Westport Landing where Grandfather Young harnessed his wagon trains.

The Civil War left deep stains in the state. For months after hostilities had ceased, bandits and guerrilla bands continued their depredations, and peace was slow in coming. It was hard to reform after years of lawlessness. Bandits like Jesse James and his brother Frank, who had served under Quantrill during the war, carried on their plunder and rob-

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bing to give Missouri the reputation of the "bandit state" for decades to come.

But the riches and abundance of the opened frontier in the West had closed up the wounds of war by the time Harry Truman was born twenty years later.

John Truman and Martha Ellen Young were neighborhood sweethearts and grew up together on their families' neighboring farms at Grandview and Holmes Park Village. When the couple were married, they moved to Lamar, where John established a fairly successful business of buying horses and mules. They lived in a low, white frame house, the President's birthplace, which still stands. The Truman mule and horse barn was a sort of gathering place for farm folk who wanted to gossip, talk Democratic politics, or arrange a horse trade, for John Truman was always ready to "swing a deal." He bought and sold dozens of animals every week and was, as his sons recall, "the kind of a man who never passed a cow but what he stopped and tried to buy her." It was not a flourishing business, but one that sometimes turned a handsome profit, produced a fair living by Missouri standards but not a great deal more. Missourians are by nature sharp traders, unsentimental and proud of giving the other fellow a "skinning." John Truman learned this the practical way; but since he was also a farmer who had known nothing but horses, mules and cows, he managed to do his fair share of the "skinning" and remain solvent.

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St. Louis, Missouri, then as now, was the horse and mule market of the entire country, and the animals John Truman bought and did not resell to local farmers. he peddled to the buyers who came from the city.

Only Harry S. was born to the Trumans at Lamar. A second boy, John Vivian, was born on April 25, 1886, on a farm at Harrisonville, Missouri. The third child, Mary Jane, was born to the family on August 12, 1889, at Grandview.

Longevity is quite usual in the family, though there have been some early deaths. Anderson Shippe Truman, the grandfather, lived to be seventy-one; his wife Mary Jane, for whom the President's daughter, Mary Margaret Truman, was named, died at fifty-seven. Grandfather Young passed away in his seventies, and Grandmother Young lived to be ninety-one. Harry Truman's only living aunt, Mrs. Joseph Tilford Noland of Independence, Missouri, celebrated her ninety-sixth birthday on May 6, 1945. Truman's father died at sixty-four. His mother is an indomitable, surprisingly vigorous woman of ninety-three.

When Harry Truman was about four years old, the Trumans moved into the white, rambling, eight-room, two-story farmhouse of Grandfather Solomon Young at Grandview. There were two big hay and stock barns, a giant-sized granary, and a half-dozen hogsheds, all painted white like the house. It was a thriving establishment, watered profusely by clear, cool springs that bubbled up from the soil.

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There was an outdoor privy, some good Shorthorn and Hereford cattle, normally a couple of hundred head of hogs, and endless hard work. This farm may properly be said to be the beginning of Harry Truman's life. He remembers it intimately with a strong feeling of nostalgia, and he lived here until he was almost seven.

It was on the Young farm that he tagged along after his mother, then a woman in her middle thirties, while she gathered the eggs from under the clucking, protesting hens. He followed her as she picked strawberries, canned tomatoes, and performed all the endless farming chores.

He loved to carry the egg basket for his mother, to walk along with her as she gathered vegetables from the big garden, and to prod his toes into the black, coolly rich soil; to kick aside the weeds that withered almost instantly in the hot sun. He wore overalls, munched homemade sugar cookies, and liked to pull up the red radishes moist with earth, shine them on his overalls and bite into them so his tongue would sting.

He was like the people around him, undisturbed by matters of great pith and moment. He rambled through the yard seeking out birds' nests in the elm and box elder trees, finding a baby cottontail rabbit, watching the farm livestock, and admiring the sleek, butter-fat little pigs that squealed and scampered through the lots.

His mother, like Grandmother Young, was a strict disciplinarian and kept near at hand a slim switch or slipper

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with which to paddle her children. Harry Truman often said later, "We were taught that punishment always followed transgression, and my mother saw to it that it did." John Truman did not punish the children that way. He scolded them, but "that hurt worse than a good spanking."