

TRUMAN

And The Bomb

In 1944 a little known senator from Missouri was campaigning for the office of the Vice President of the United States. New Orleans, Houston, Portland, Los Angeles, Seattle, New York City, Washington DC, Pittsburgh, Saint Louis, he crisscrossed the nation.

One night he awoke in his private pullman car in a cold sweat. He had just dreamed that Franklin Roosevelt had died and he Harry S. Truman was President of the United States. In all his life, he later told a reporter, he had never had such a terrifying nightmare.

April 12, 1945 Vice President Harry Truman received a call urging him to come quickly and quietly to the White House. As he ran through the corridors of the capitol he refused to face what lay ahead. I thought I was going down there to meet the President, Truman later admitted, I didn't allow myself to think anything else. At 5:45 P.M. Truman entered the first lady's second story study. Eleanor Roosevelt put her arm around his shoulder, Harry she told him, the President is dead. Is there any I can do for you Truman asked; Is there anything we can do for you Mrs. Roosevelt replied, for you are the one in Trouble Now.

He was only a high school graduate, a farmer at 33, a haberdasher/small businessman at 38; No one in Washington DC had even heard of Harry Truman before he was age 50. Now at age 60 he was President of the United States.

For many people it was as if the Presidency had died, not just the President. Many people were shaken, not just at Roosevelt's death, but what did this mean to have such an unknown person step into such a powerful position. If Harry Truman can be President, americans everywhere were saying, so could my next door neighbor. Many felt that he was out of his element. Of all the men that had become president, Harry Truman was the least prepared. Vice President for only 82 days, he was excluded from Roosevelt's inner circle, he knew nothing about the war raging on two continents except what he read in the papers, and within four months, Harry Truman would have in his hands the most terrible weapon ever devised by man, and he would have to decide whether or not to use it.

Harry S. Truman was born on May 8, 1884 in Lamar, Missouri, the oldest child of John Anderson Truman and Martha Ellen Young Truman. His parents chose the name Harry after his mother's brother Harrison "Harry" Young. His parents chose

"S" as his middle initial to please both grandfathers, Anderson Shipp Truman and Soloman Young. The S did not stand for anything. A brother, John Vivian was born soon after Harry; they had one sister, Mary Jane.

His father, John Truman was a farmer and livestock dealer. The family lived in Lamar until Harry was ten months old, when they moved to a farm near Harrissonville. The family soon moved to Belton, and in 1887 to his grandparents' 600 acre farm in Grandview. When Harry was six, his parents moved the family to Independence, so he could attend the Presbyterian Church Sunday School.

As a boy, Harry had three main interest, music, reading and history, all encouraged by his mother Martha, to whom he was very close. He got up at five in the morning to practice piano for two hours, which he studied twice a week until he was fifteen. Harry was the kind of boy, a friend recalled, that seemed to do whatever his mother told him to do. He wore glasses and had a frail build. The popular boys in Independence were the ones that were good at games and had big tight fists, Harry remembered years later, I was never like that; without my glasses I was blind as a bat, and to tell the truth I as kind of a Sissy, if there was any danger of getting into a fight I always ran.

But in spite of the constant teasing Harry kept playing the piano. All his life Harry Truman would show this same dogged perseverance.

Like his father John, who was only five foot four inches tall, Harry was very stubborn but fair. He learned three very important lessons at an early age.....

- That a man never stopped trying until he succeeded
- That a man never admitted that he was afraid, and
- That a man had to speak bluntly and be prepared to fight

Harry was one of the few boys in town that went to High School, most of his classmates were girls. He spent his spare time going to concerts when he was not reading books. He once boasted that he had read every book in the town library. His heroes were George Washington, Andrew Jackson and Robert E. Lee. Harry was described as possessing native optimism and admired the simple old fashioned virtues in life. He once wrote in a school paper.....A true heart, A strong mind and a great deal of courage.....and I think a man can get through the world.

Harry was introduced to politics at an early age. In 1900, at the age of 16 he attended the democratic national convention with his father John, in Kansas City. John Truman was a life long Democrat. Most of the people around young Harry supported the Confederacy and it was said of his mother, that she thought John Wilkes Boots was an honorable man.

After graduating from high school Harry moved to Kansas City to find employment and to help his family. He was described as a tireless worker who worked all the time. He first landed a job as a time keeper for the Santa Fe Railroad, then as a mailroom clerk for the Kansas City Star and eventually as a Bank Clerk. He also joined the National Guard and after four years in Kansas City he was making good money and was well respected by his friends and peers. Then disaster struck, his father whom had been dabbling in the livestock futures market for years lost everything including the family home.

John Truman was compelled to accept an invitation from his mother in law to move back to Grandview and run her 600 acre family farm. He knew he could not do it without the help of his two sons, so he ask Harry to quit his job and move back home. Harry agreed without a single complaint.

Harry labored for eight long years on the farm. His primary motivation was to please his father whom had always shown partiality to his younger brother John Vivian. During these difficult years Harry began to court Elizabeth Wallace (Bess) whom he met in grade school and had always loved her at a distance. Bess was from a very prominent Independence family. He wrote her nearly every day. At age 26 Harry had never had a girlfriend. Bess's mother Madge discouraged the courtship as she thought Harry was not good enough for Bess. Finally, Harry summons the courage and proposed to Bess, in a letter. It took Bess three weeks to respond, she refused, Harry wrote her back in a letter thanking her for not ridiculing him. He stated that, you turned me down so easy I am almost happy, I never really thought that a girl like you could become interested in a guy like me. Harry didn't give up, he continued to court Bess.

In November of 1914 Harry's father John died of complications from surgery. Harry decided to leave the farm. He borrowed against his livestock and moved south to Oklahoma and invested in a Zinc mine. After losing this investment he invested an additional \$5000 in an Oil Well Company which also ran out of money. He later sold his interest to a new investor who eventually struck it rich. At 33 years old Harry had failed at everything he had tried.

When America went to war in 1917 Harry, like most red blooded American men enlisted in the Army and prepared to go to war.

Before going to France, he was sent to Camp Doniphan, near Lawton, Oklahoma for training. He ran the camp with Edward Jacobson, a Kansas City Clothing Clerk. At Fort Sill he also met Lieutenant James M. Pendergast, nephew of Thomas Pendergast, a Kansas City politician. Both men were to have a profound influence on Truman's later life.

Truman became an officer, and then a battery commander in an artillery regiment in France. His unit was known for its discipline problems. During a sudden attack by the Germans the battery began to disperse and desert; Truman seized the moment by screaming and shouting profanities he had learned while working for the Santa Fe railroad. Stunned by his rage and inspired by his courage, the men regrouped and rallied to his command. Not a single man was lost during the attack or during future encounters. Under fire Truman had demonstrated that he was a man of Real Determination. One inspired soldier commented of Truman in a letter to his father, "We have a Captain that cannot be beat". It would later be said by another admirer, " If you really want to know Harry Truman then you have to understand that he is one tough Son of A Bitch of a Man".

After the war Harry returned to his beloved Missouri and in June 1919 wedded his life long love Bess Wallace in a tiny church in Independence. He was 35 years old and it was eight years after he had first proposed to her.

Shortly after his marriage to Bess, Harry and his old friend Edward Jacobson open a Haberdashery in downtown Kansas City. After experiencing initial success the store went bankrupt during the post war recession in 1921. It took Harry until 1934 to payoff the debt.

In 1922 Truman's old army pal James Pendergast thought Harry would make a good candidate for public office because of his exemplary military record, so he gave his uncle, Tom Pendergast a call. Tom Pendergast was a rawboned, thick necked, spat wearing Irishman. Brash and colorful, Pendergast was a hard drinker and reckless gambler. He knew how to win and was known as such an effective backstage operator that many eventually called Kansas City, Tom's Town.

In 1922 with the help of the Kansas City Democratic machine led by boss Tom Pendergast, Truman was elected to Judge of the County Court of the Eastern District of Jackson County, an administrative position. He was not re-elected in 1924, but in 1926 and again in 1930 was elected presiding judge for the court. In 1933 Truman was named Missouri's director for the Federal Re-employment program, as payback to Pendergast for delivering the Kansas City vote to Roosevelt in 1932.

Although supported by a corrupt machine, Truman maintained his integrity and earned a reputation for honesty and fairness. He loved the job, the prestige, the power, the opportunity to do good things. After years of drift and failure, Harry Truman had finally settled into a career.

Harry's relationship with and the influence of Tom Pendergast was a troubling and intensely difficult aspect of his life. Brought up to honor the difference between

right and wrong Harry found it more and more difficult to deal with the man to whom he owed his job. Although he did not participate in corruption he turned a blind eye time and time again while Pendergast skimmed millions. His anxiety grew so great that he checked into a Hotel in downtown Kansas City and poured out his troubles into private papers he recorded.....

Am I just a crook he wrote? Compromised just to get the job done. I wonder if I did right? I saved \$3,500,000, but I had to put a lot of no good sons a bitches on the payroll; and pay other sons of bitches more money for supplies than they were worth in order to satisfy the political powers. He concluded, I believe I did do right. In the final analysis Harry refused to condemn Pendergast. Through it all Harry Truman never took a bribe or kickback for himself.

In 1934, Pendergast's aides suggested Truman as a candidate for U.S. Senator; after three other men turned him down, Pendergast reluctantly backed Truman as the candidate for the U.S. Senate election in Missouri. With the Pendergast machine's influence Harry Truman won the democratic primary and then the general election by nearly 20%. Pendergast's parting words to Harry as he left for Washington were "Keep your mouth shut and answer your mail", Amusingly, in the eyes of many he assumed office as "The Senator from Pendergast".

In his first term as a U.S. senator, Truman spoke out against corporate greed and the dangers of Wall Street speculators. He was largely ignored by President Roosevelt, who did not take him seriously. Months passed before he summoned the courage to speak out on the senate floor. He became known as "Go along, Get Along Harry". It would be years before Truman would gain the confidence to work himself from under the shadow and influence of Tom Pendergast.

In his 1940 re-election bid for U.S. Senate, with Pendergast in prison for tax evasion Truman had to fight for his political life. In the end he won re-election by the narrowest of margins, just 8,000 votes.

During his second term, Truman gained national visibility by fighting waste and mismanagement in the war effort. The committee he chaired became known as the "Truman Committee". He had a distrust of Big Steel, Wall Street the automakers and all of those who were selling snotty goods to the government. He became feared by all who were called before his committee and demanded accountability. It is estimated that the Committee under Truman's leadership is reported to have saved taxpayers at least \$15 billion and thousands of lives through common sense and cost savings measures. In 1943 Truman appeared on the cover of Time Magazine for the efforts of the Truman Committee. His reputation soared. Reporters named him one of the ten most valuable men in Washington. At last Truman began to feel at home

in the Senate. Popular and nationally known he had become one of the most respected men in America.

In 1944 following months of uncertainty over whether then vice president Henry Wallace would continue as Roosevelt's running mate, Truman was ultimately selected to replace Wallace as the vice presidential candidate in a deal worked out by Robert Hannegan, who was Democratic National Chairman that year. Wallace was thought to be too liberal. After convincing Roosevelt to accept the change the hardest task was now to convince Harry Truman, who had no interest in the vice president's position and was absolutely terrified at the thought of following Franklin Roosevelt in the presidency. After receiving a direct phone call from President Roosevelt urging him to accept, Harry Truman relented and accepted the nomination of his party for the Vice President of the United States on July 21, 1944.

Truman had been vice president only for 82 days when President Roosevelt died on April 12, 1945. He was frightened and insecure. I'm not big enough for this job, he was quoted. I'm scared he admitted to his mother and sister, but maybe it will turn out alright. He had rarely discussed world affairs or domestic politics with Roosevelt and was uninformed about major initiatives relating to the war and the top secret Manhattan Project. Truman was briefed for the first time on the ultra secret Manhattan Project by Secretary of War Henry L. Stinson on the day Roosevelt died, following his first cabinet meeting as president.

The day after he took the oath of office, Truman met reporters.....

"Boys, if you ever pray, pray for me. I don't know if you fellas ever had a load of hay fall on you, but when they told me what happened yesterday, I felt like the moon, the stars, and all the planets had fallen on me."

On April 16, 1945 Truman made his very first address before a joint session of congress and the nation. Though nervous and somewhat in awe the speech was a resounding success. In his small town folksy style he came across as confident, competent, energetic and eager to lead the nation through the current difficult times. He clearly articulated his intent and determination to successfully end the wars in Europe and the Pacific as soon as possible.

On May 8, 1945 Harry Truman celebrated his 61st Birthday and Nazi Germany formally surrendered to end the war in Europe. What a Birthday Gift, one cabinet member noted. Now the president could focus all of his attention and resources on ending the war in the Pacific.

In the spring of 1945 an indication of what could be expected if the Japanese home islands were invaded was experienced in the battle for the island of Okinawa, located 350 southwest of Japan. The Japanese fought virtually to the last man, with casualties estimated at over 100,000 men. American forces reported losses of 10,000 men with 27,000 wounded.

On June 1st the president convened a committee which he had appointed to study options for ending the war with Japan and the possible use of the Atomic Bomb. The committee submitted its recommendation.....USE THE BOMB.....No other suggestions were put forth.

All of Truman's cabinet and close advisors strongly suggested that the Bomb be used as soon as it was available. Their arguments were predicated on the supposed fact that in the final analysis it would save lives on both sides when compared to the horrific loss of life estimated if America was to invade the Japanese homeland.

Yet another possibly plausible argument never reached Truman's desk. Some of the scientist at Los Alamos had become increasingly disturbed about the destructive power of the bomb and they advocated the use of a "Demonstration Bomb" which might convince Japan to surrender without the use of full Atomic Force. Truman was never aware of this petition.

Many argued that even if Truman had known of the petition from the scientist it would not have changed his mind. His overwhelming objective was to save American lives.

At this time the Bomb..... though near completion had not been tested. No one really knew if the bomb would work in accordance with its design. With this uncertainty still looming, on June 18th Truman agreed to a full invasion of Japan to begin in November of 1945.....The Clock was ticking.....

On July 7th after only four months in office Truman steamed across the Atlantic on the U.S. Cruiser Augusta, destination Potsdam, Germany. This was the first meeting of the leaders of super powers to determine the fate of the postwar world.

The meetings with Churchill and Stalin lasted for 17 days and were minimally successful. The allies agreed to divide Germany into joint zones of occupation but Stalin refused to remove his troops from Eastern Europe and to allow free elections. This issue was tabled for further for discussion. On July 21st Truman received a coded message that the second bomb had been successfully tested and that two

bombs were ready to launch with seven more near completion..... Time To Act Was Now At Hand.

Some would argue against the Bomb by saying.....

- **That a Japanese surrender could be negotiated if more vigorously pursued**
- **or that a Naval Blockade of the Islands would eventually force a surrender**
- **or that a much less destructive demonstration bomb would influence the Japanese to surrender**
- **or that if we would modify our terms of Unconditional Surrender and allow Japan to keep her Emperor they would be moved to surrender with dignity**

Harry Truman would later say.....His objective was to end the war quickly without invading Japan.....therefore the Bomb had to be used, and he used it.

On his 4th day at sea as he returned home from Potsdam..... the mission that would forever mark Truman's place in history began.....on August 6, 1945 at 2:45AM the Enola Gay began her epic journey into the history books.....

at 8:15AM the Bomb dropped clear of the Enola Gay, 43 seconds later it exploded over Hiroshima.

Harry Truman was eating lunch when he was handed a decoded message, it read...Results clear cut, successful in all respects.

August 14th The War is Over.....Japan Surrenders Unconditionally

Supporters of the presidents decision argue.....that given the circumstances, if it was later learned that any president had such a weapon at his disposal and refused to use it.....that would be grounds for Impeachment.

In 1954 Eleanor Roosevelt said that Truman had "made the only decision he could" and that the bomb's use was necessary "to avoid tremendous sacrifice of American Lives". Truman himself wrote later in life that, "I knew what I was doing when I stopped the war.....I have no regrets and, under the same circumstances, I would do it again."

And so we have it.....the opportunity for reflection, analysis, interpretation, second guessing and what ifs.

The true reality however is once in an Eternity that Situations, Circumstances, Conditions, Choices and outcomes so mesh together in time and space in such manner that the weight and future of the known world seems to rest upon a single individual.....

.....In the summer of 1945 that just happened to be a Frail, Near Sighted, Shy, Mother Dominated, Piano playing, Confidence lacking, Farm Boy, Haberdasher and Self Described Sissy from Independence, Missouri named HARRY S. TRUMAN.....A TRUE AMERICAN ICON.

Prepared and presented by Wendell Lynch - January 3, 2013