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WHEN YOUR RESUME READS “SOCIAL SECRETARY TO THE WHITE HOUSE” during the Reagan administration, having a stellar personality is probably a prerequisite. Speaking with Linda Faulkner about her career and travels, the conversation flowed freely as she elaborately described the parties she coordinated for the White House and the places she had been. Being a writer herself, she was so descriptive and charming I found myself wanting to stop taking notes and just relax and take it all in.

After studying abroad in Aix-en-Provence, France and graduating from Vanderbilt University in 1971 with a degree in philosophy, Linda continued graduate work in English at the University of Dallas. At age 27, as she was job-hopping trying to find her calling, she landed a job as a secretary in the public relations department of Neiman Marcus in Dallas and was quickly promoted to a public relations manager. Two years later, when she was promoting the book, “Complete Book of Etiquette: A Guide to Contemporary Living” by Amy Vanderbilt, Linda met the editor, Letitia Baldrige. Letitia was, among many things, the White House Social Secretary during the Kennedy administration. As fate would have it, Linda and Letitia hit it off and became friends. Linda immediately knew that Letitia would have a big impact on her future, although she wasn't sure in what way.

FROM DALLAS TO WASHINGTON

At age 29, Linda was restless to do something different. Ronald Reagan had just been elected president, and Letitia was now a Social Secretary in Europe. Under Letitia's recommendation Linda sent her resume to the White House for the position of Social Secretary. Late one evening, Linda got the call that would forever change her life. Nancy Reynolds was putting together Nancy Reagan's staff, with Letitia as a consultant. Before Linda knew it, Nancy Reagan was interviewing her. After a nerve-

racking interview Linda was offered the job as Deputy to the Social Secretary. Before Regan's inauguration, she found herself working in the East Wing of the White House. Linda's primary job was coordinating and overseeing every event at the White House hosted by President and/or Mrs. Reagan including coffees, teas, lunches and her favorite, State Dinners.

When the Social Secretary that Linda reported to left her position Linda applied for it. She admitted that she was not qualified for it just yet, and understandably, the position was given to someone else. Soon after, Linda was homesick and ready to do something new. Linda decided to start her own public relations business in Dallas, and did so successfully. After a year and a half, Gayle Burt, the second Social Secretary during the Reagan administration, resigned, and Linda got the news that Nancy Reagan wanted her to be the new Social Secretary. It was an offer that Linda just couldn't refuse. With a new found confidence from starting her own public relations firm and building her own clientele, she went back to work in the White House.



Linda Faulkner

photo provided by Linda Faulkner

from dallas to the white house

by jackie beynaerts

YEARS IN THE WHITE HOUSE

Working for the former first lady was all business for Nancy Reagan. However, it wasn't long before the two would become friends. Mrs. Reagan was an extremely gifted hostess. She went to great lengths to ensure

that every event was a success and every guest not only felt welcome, but also had a wonderful time. It was Linda's job to create a guest list of individuals from all walks of life who were at the top of their field. Brilliant architects, Nobel Prize winners, popular sports figures, astronauts, world-renown musicians and more were invited to events at the White House. Some of Linda's greatest memories were when she and Mrs. Reagan would sit on the floor of Mrs. Reagan's room with a model of tables and chairs for a particular event and together they would

scrutinize the seating arrangement for everyone invited.

During their eight years in the White House, the Reagan's hosted more than 50 State Dinners, including one for England's Prince Charles and Princess Diana in 1985. This was one of Linda's favorite State Dinners. The guest list consisted of some of Princess Diana's favorite actors including Clint Eastwood, Tom Selleck, Neil Diamond and John Travolta. Other guests included Jonas

Salk, who developed the polio vaccine, marine biologist, Jacques Cousteau, Pulitzer Prize winner, Larry McMurtry, opera singer, Leontyne Price and more. This was Princess Diana's first time in the United States, and Mrs. Reagan wanted it to be exquisite. Linda discovered the marine conductor had a medley of music from "Saturday Night Fever" and "Grease." When "Shall We Dance" began to play, Mr. Reagan asked Princess Diana to



John Travolta dances with Princess Diana at the White House, President and Mrs. Reagan pause to watch. photo courtesy of Pete Souza

dance as Mrs. Reagan danced with Prince Charles. John Travolta, after a little prodding, cut in when music from his hit movie began to play. As he danced with the beautiful young princess in the marbled White House foyer, he started doing his well-known dance moves, and surprisingly Princess Diana was able to keep up. Everyone backed off the dance floor and began to cheer for them. Linda had never seen that happen in the more than six years she had been in the White House. Upon leaving, Princess Diana confided to a secret service agent that this had been one of the best nights of her life.

AN EMBARRASSING MOMENT

As with any career there are ups and downs, and indeed Linda has experienced them too. Unfortunately, when her mishap occurred there was an audience and members of the press to witness it. When Vladimir Horowitz, one of the world's greatest pianists, was scheduled to give an afternoon performance at the White House, Linda went to great lengths to make sure that everything flowed smoothly. She even arranged for chairs to be set for Mr. and Mrs. Horowitz and Mrs. Reagan to sit in during the former president's thank you speech. The performance ended after Vladimir set the piano on fire with not one, but two encores. Afterward, an

aid came out with three chairs, and Linda positioned them on stage. During Mr. Reagan's speech, as Mrs. Reagan adjusted her skirt she fell off the raised platform because her chair had been placed too close to the edge of the stage. As she toppled out of her chair, she quickly regained her composure and exclaimed, "Just wanted to liven things up!" The people in the audience applauded her. Not missing a beat, the great communicator, Mr. Reagan, retorted,

"Honey, I told you only to do that if I needed applause." Linda was mortified and wanted to just disappear. After all, everyone had seen her run out and place the chairs.

"I wanted the earth to just open up and swallow me. I avoided eye contact with her all night. I was sure I was fired." Linda confided.

But Linda was not fired, even after a

picture of Mrs. Reagan before, during and after her fall, were all printed in the Washington Post the next day.

During Linda's six and a half years as Social Secretary to the White House she coordinated and oversaw events honoring royalty, holiday celebrations, and the "In Performance at the White House" series produced for public television. She also coordinated the dinner in the Soviet Union hosted by Mr. and Mrs. Reagan for the General Secretary and Mrs. Gorbachev in Moscow, as well as the INF Arms Reduction Treaty during the Washington Summit. Linda still keeps in touch with Mrs. Reagan and was in attendance at Mr. Reagan's recent funeral. Linda now works as a high-end residential real estate agent for Briggs Freeman. She has also fallen in love with the charm and architecture surrounding Frisco.

"I avoided eye contact with her all night. I was sure I was fired."

Jackie Beynaerts is a freelance writer living in Frisco. Copies of other Pete Souza photos are available by contacting www.petesouza.com