

# The Washington Post

## Margaret Truman Daniel Dies at Age 83

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Special to The Washington Post

Tuesday, January 29, 2008 6:22 PM

Margaret Truman Daniel, 83, President Harry S. Truman's only child, who had a famously short-lived career as a concert singer before emerging late in life as a writer of popular Washington-based mystery novels, died Jan. 29 at an assisted living facility in Chicago.

A spokeswoman for the Harry S. Truman Presidential Library and Museum in Independence, Mo., said the family had declined to disclose the cause of death.

Mrs. Daniel, who wrote biographies and a collection of profiles, penned 13 murder mysteries from 1980 to 1996. Her first work in the genre was "Murder in the White House," which became a bestseller and earned her \$200,000 for the paperback rights alone. Literary critics offered mixed reviews.

Other novels in her "murder-at" series dealt with homicides on Capitol Hill and at the Kennedy Center, the Supreme Court, the FBI, the CIA, the Smithsonian, Embassy Row, Georgetown, the National Cathedral, the Pentagon, the Potomac River and the National Gallery.

Mrs. Daniel also wrote biographies of her parents, a reminiscence of her years in the White House and profiles of a dozen Americans called "Women of Courage."

She debuted as a singer in 1947 on a national radio program with the Detroit Symphony Orchestra. She toured the country with a concert program of operatic arias and light classics, and she began appearing regularly on radio and television. In 1949, she signed a recording contract with RCA Victor Records.

As a singer, Mrs. Daniel is probably best remembered for her father's angry letter threatening physical violence against a Washington Post music critic who wrote a disparaging review of one of her concerts in 1950.

For seven years she had a radio show, "Authors in the News." But in 1956, after her marriage to E. Clifton Daniel, who became managing editor of the New York Times, she reduced her stage appearances to occasional summer stock performances.

Mary Margaret Truman was born Feb. 17, 1924, in Independence and moved to Washington when her father, a Democrat, was elected to the Senate in 1934.

For the next seven years, the family spent the first half of each year in Washington and the second in Missouri. The young Miss Truman graduated in 1942 from Gunston Hall, a school for girls.

As a young girl, she was a soloist in the choir at Trinity Episcopal Church in Independence, where the choir director urged her to get professional voice lessons.

She was a student at George Washington University when her father was sworn in as vice president in January 1945. Less than three months later, on April 12, President Franklin D. Roosevelt died, and Harry S. Truman became president.

At the White House, she fetched aspirin for a visiting Winston Churchill and exchanged pleasantries with military leaders. She christened the battleship Missouri, aboard which the Japanese signed documents of surrender, ending World War II on Sept. 2, 1945.

Like the president, Mrs. Daniel soon tired of living in the White House. She called it the Great White Jail, once saying "it was like living in a national monument."

After graduating from college in 1946 with a history degree, she took intensive voice lessons and launched her career as a singer. Her fees ranged from about \$1,500 for a concert onstage to about \$3,000 for a radio broadcast.

On Dec. 5, 1950, she did a program by Schumann, Schubert and Mozart at Constitution Hall in Washington.

Washington Post music critic Paul Hume wrote in his review: "Miss Truman is a unique American phenomenon with a pleasant voice of little size and fair quality. She is extremely attractive on stage. Yet Miss Truman cannot sing very well. She is flat a good deal of the time -- more so last night than at any time we have heard her in past years."

After the president read the review the next morning, he wrote to Hume: "I've just read your lousy review of Margaret's concert. It seems to me that you are a frustrated old man who wishes he could have been successful. When you write such poppycock . . . it shows conclusively that you're off the beam. . . . Some day I hope to meet you. When that happens you'll need a new nose, a lot of beefsteak for black eyes, and perhaps a supporter below."

Hume was stunned by Truman's letter, and Post editors planned to publish it after having its authenticity verified. But Philip L. Graham, the publisher, vetoed the idea. He said he had received several angry letters from Truman and had published none of them.

Hume later told Milton Berliner, the music critic of the Washington News, about the president's letter. Berliner told his editors, who promptly ordered up a story. The wire services picked it up, and it was printed all over the country.

In 1956, Mrs. Daniel wrote her first book, "Souvenir," a memoir of her childhood in Missouri, her years at the White House and her career as a concert singer. The New York Herald Tribune's book review section called it "a gracefully written tale of an average American girl drawn by chance into the White House."

She followed with "White House Pets" (1969) and a 1972 biography of her father, "Harry S. Truman," who died that year. The Christian Science Monitor called the biography, which sold more than 1 million copies, a "closeup of an undramatic man dramatically thrust into awesome power -- and coping with it."

In her first mystery, "Murder in the White House," Secretary of State Lansard Blaine, a man with a shady past as a businessman and a history of womanizing, is found strangled in the family quarters of the White House.

Characteristic of the critical appraisal was the review by William French in the Globe and Mail of Toronto: "Miss Truman seems to have studied Agatha Christie on how to introduce false leads, point to the wrong suspect and generally confuse the issue. She does this with a certain amount of technical dexterity, but it's too mechanical and juiceless."

In an interview with The Post, Mrs. Daniel said the idea of writing a Washington-based mystery came to

her when she tired of another book she was writing.

For more than a decade after the 1980 publication of "Murder in the White House," Mrs. Daniel produced a Washington murder mystery a year, featuring bureaucrats, diplomats, politicians and influential business and media figures. Some of her characters appeared in successive novels.

Writing in The Post's Book World, Jean M. White said Mrs. Daniel "writes a lively Washington scene with the sure hand of one who knows her way around the streets, institutions, restaurants, watering holes, people and politics."

In 1986, four years after the death of her mother at age 97, Mrs. Daniel wrote the biography "Bess W. Truman." Helen Thomas in the New York Times Book Review called it "a refreshing, real and touching biography."

Mrs. Daniel lived for many decades on Park Avenue in New York.

Her husband died in 2000. A son, William W. Daniel, died that year after being hit by a taxicab.

Survivors include three sons, Clifton T. Daniel of Chicago, Harrison G. Daniel of New York state and Thomas W. Daniel of Starksboro, Vt.; and five grandchildren.

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