

Will Obama mum-in-law make it a family affair in the White House?

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WASHINGTON (AFP) — When US president-elect Barack Obama moves into the White House in January, word is that mother-in-law Marian Robinson will be moving in, too.

"She sure can if she wants," Obama said in his first post-election interview, which aired on CBS television's "60 Minutes" last weekend.

Robinson, a widow, retired from her job at a bank in Chicago to look after the Obamas' two young daughters, Malia and Sasha, now 10 and seven, during the long campaign for the White House.

Michelle Obama has said her mother gives Malia and Sasha "their sense of stability."

On the Predictify website, which allows users to make a prediction and others to vote on the likelihood of it happening, seven in 10 users who took part in a poll on whether Robinson will take up residence in the White House thought she would.

And Washington Post columnists Amy Argetsinger and Roxanne Roberts said with some definitiveness on November 11: "Cue the mother-in-law jokes! The newly dubbed 'First Granny' is coming to the White House."

Robinson has not commented on whether she intends to leave her modest home in Chicago to move to the sprawling presidential residence in Washington.

But she was with Malia, Sasha and Michelle Obama when they toured the White House on Tuesday.

She is said to dote on Malia and Sasha and is also close to her daughter and son-in-law.

On the evening of the election, when Robinson reached over to take hold of her son-in-law's hand as the two sat on a sofa watching the election returns come in, Obama said he felt the full significance of his historic election.

"You had this sense of, well, what's she thinking? For a black woman who grew up in the '50s, in a segregated Chicago, to watch her daughter become first lady of the United States," he said on "60 Minutes".

According to reports in the media, Robinson allows Malia and Sasha to stay up past the 8:30 pm bedtime imposed by their parents and to watch more television than Mum and Dad allow.

She's also reputed to make a mean fried chicken, which her grandchildren love.

"Sometimes I will batter it with Ritz crackers and sometimes I will flour it, dip it in ice water, flour it and then fry it. That makes it crispier," she said in an interview with the Boston Globe.

Only two first mothers-in-law have actually moved in with the president, Carl Anthony, historian at the National First Ladies' Library in Ohio, told AFP.

"Mamie Eisenhower's mother Elvira Doud, daughter of Swedish immigrants, spent winters at the White House, living at her home in Denver the rest of the year," Anthony said.

Madge Wallace was there year-round during son-in-law Harry Truman's eight years as president -- but their relationship was reportedly not as warm as Robinson's with Obama.

"Wallace never accepted that her daughter married someone from a lower social class," Anthony said.

"She frequently carped to her daughter about Truman's decisions, but when she asked why 'Harry fired that nice man', Mrs Truman gave it back, saying: 'My husband happens to be president and General MacArthur was insubordinate,'" said Anthony.

Douglas MacArthur led US military campaigns in the Pacific, notably the Philippines, in World War II.

John Kennedy's mother-in-law, Janet Auchincloss, didn't live at the White House but "often substituted as hostess at afternoon events for older women while her daughter looked after her small children, or just avoided events and people she didn't enjoy," Anthony said.

Martha Regula, director for research at the First Ladies' National Library, said she was skeptical that Robinson would take up residence at 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue with the Obama family.

"She might consider moving to Washington, but not necessarily to the White House," she told AFP.

Obama has said that his mother-in-law might not take to life in the White House.

"She doesn't like a lot of fuss around her, and like it or not, there is some fuss in the White House," the president-elect told 60 Minutes.

"But we hope she comes," he added.

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