INTERVIEW I

INTERVIEWEE: TYLER ABELL

INTERVIEWER: T.H. BAKER

DATE: May 8, 1969

PLACE: Mr. Abell's home in Washington, D.C.

Tape 1 of 1

B: This is the interview with Mr. Tyler Abell. Sir, to begin at the beginning, do you recall when you first met Mr. Johnson, and under what circumstances?

A: I think that my first meeting with him was when he and Mrs. Johnson gave a party for my wife and myself very shortly after we were married in 1955. In effect the party substituted for a wedding reception, since Bess and I had eloped a couple of days prior to my entering the army and there hadn't been time for a wedding reception. The Johnsons were very close friends of my wife's parents, Senator and Mrs. [Earle] Clements. Senator Clements was the whip of the Senate when Johnson was majority leader, and later in the year 1955 Mr. Johnson suffered his heart attack and my father-in-law became acting majority leader of the Senate.

B: Was Mrs. Abell working for Mrs. Johnson then?

A: No, she didn't start working for Mrs. Johnson until after President Johnson became vice president, or after the election of 1960 and shortly before the inauguration of 1961.

B: Was this party at The Elms, their home here?

A: No, that home was purchased in 1961. The party was given at the Sheraton Carlton Hotel; at that time it was probably just called the Carlton Hotel. I remember it very vividly because there was a majority of the United States Senate in attendance, along

with many other dignitaries. I stood in the receiving line next to Mrs. Johnson and was impressed then, as I have been ever since, with her talent for making people feel at home, and her congeniality and her uncanny ability to call people by name and to introduce them to her other friends and tell little interesting anecdotes about them, which would get a conversation started, even in a mausoleum.

The then-majority leader stood at the head of the receiving line and greeted all of his guests with great warmth and guffaws. I remember that evening particularly the very warm greeting he gave to Senator Bill Knowland of California, who was the minority leader of the Senate. There was a considerable amount of joking between Johnson and the other senators who came through the receiving line about the fact that the Senate had adjourned early that day in order to let everybody attend the party.

B: Were many people there other than persons from the houses of Congress?

A: Oh, yes. That was a long time ago; I don't remember exactly who was there, but there were probably a thousand or more people. The room that it was held in is no longer in existence. It was in the north end of the Carlton Hotel on the ground floor, which has since been divided up.

B: You went on in the service then.

A: I was in the army at that time and my contact with Mr. Johnson didn't really flower until much later. I had one other slight contact with him in 1956, when I took some leave from the army to attend the Democratic National Convention in Chicago. Senator Johnson had recovered remarkably well from his heart attack, but still there were very, very few politicians outside of the state of Texas who took his candidacy for the presidency very

seriously.

I remember at that time going up to Senator Johnson's suite in the Hilton Hotel and really being amazed myself at the fact that anybody was taking Johnson very seriously. My stepfather, Drew Pearson, for whom I had worked before entering the army, was a long-time friend of Mr. Johnson's, but they frequently fought, usually over petty things. My stepfather enjoyed referring to his friend as "Landslide Lyndon," and Mr. Johnson was unable to see the humor in this type of thing.

B: Did Mr. Pearson do that to Mr. Johnson's face?

A: I don't think he ever did it to his face, no. My stepfather's a good politician too; in fact, he once considered a career in diplomacy. He's always very diplomatic. In fact, people usually are amazed to see what a diplomat he really is. The two men have had a stormy friendship in many instances, but they've always wound up as friends.

Anyway, out in Chicago I also remember running into an old friend of mine there, Bill Hobby, with whom I had gone to school here in Washington and who has now become the editor of the *Houston Post*. The paper is owned by his family. Bill, I believe, was attending his first national convention, but if it wasn't his first it was certainly one of the early ones, and like myself, he was rather green. But I commented to him my surprise at Johnson's apparent active candidacy instead of the role which I would have expected him to play, as merely a favorite son. Bill Hobby was as surprised at my surprise at Johnson as I was surprised at Johnson. He considered that the Senator was a great man and someone who should be actively considered.

B: It was your impression then that Johnson himself wanted to be more than just Texas'

favorite son at the convention, that he really wanted either the presidential or vice presidential nomination?

A: He certainly gave that impression after you got into the problem closely. I don't think the press took it seriously. I think that he probably with his friends at least, with his political associates, Johnson apparently was taking himself seriously. I think that he probably learned as a domino player in his very earliest years in Texas how to guard his innermost thoughts, and I don't believe that even Mrs. Johnson knows secrets like that. I've always been amazed, having known the man as long as I have, at the people who claim to know what he's thinking about and the ones that are continuously fooled by his apparent changes. I for one predicted in 1965 that he would not run for a second term. I changed my mind when the criticism mounted against him. I felt it would be Johnson's tendency to meet pressure with pressure and not to back out, but to make the second term, although I had considered in '65 that if he got through one term successfully that he would be happy to retire to the Ranch. I have no idea what he was thinking in '65, but I certainly proved wrong in my theory that he would meet pressure with pressure.

B: Did you see much of him in the interval between '56 and '60?

A: No, I don't think I saw him at all during that time. If I did, it certainly was very casual. After the army I went through law school and then I worked for a period of time at various different jobs, and in 1959 it was apparent that--let me stay with the chronology a little bit better. In 1956, the same year of the convention that I spoke of, my father-in-law ran for reelection to the Senate and was defeated by a very, very narrow margin. He was quite disappointed and quite despondent. He only would have been defeated but for an

incredible series of circumstances. Eisenhower had carried the state of Kentucky by over a hundred thousand votes, and my father-in-law had lost by a mere two or three thousand votes. If any one of a number of things hadn't gone wrong, he would have been elected; in other words, if Eisenhower hadn't run obviously he would have been elected; if Stevenson hadn't come out against atomic testing, which was a very unpopular stand in Kentucky, he would have been elected. If Stevenson hadn't come out against the draft, he would have been elected. The Kentucky Mountaineers take their military service and defense of country quite seriously; if the then-governor of Kentucky, a Democrat by the name [Albert Benjamin] Happy Chandler, hadn't been an arch foe of Earle Clements he would have been elected. And so on down the line. If Stevenson had done any one of a number of things right during that campaign, he would have been elected.

B: Did you help in the campaign yourself?

A: No. In the midst of my father-in-law's despondency I think Senator Johnson showed both his warmth and sometimes his lack of feeling, both at the same time. He announced, without consulting my father-in-law, that he was making my father-in-law executive director of the Senate Campaign Committee. I think unquestionably it was a very wise choice. My father-in-law was really responsible for the class of '58, the incredible group of senators who were elected in the year 1958 that gave the Democrats an overwhelming majority in the Senate and something that the Republicans still haven't recovered from. But at the same time, although it was a very wise decision on Johnson's part and although the job turned out beautifully for my father-in-law, my father-in-law was very disturbed at the fact that Johnson hadn't mentioned this to him beforehand.

And this same sort of thread can be seen running through Senator Johnson's relationships with many of his colleagues in the Senate. He was greatly responsible for the election of many of them. When they came to the Senate, he went out of his way to help all of them receive priority committee assignments, even to the point in many instances of talking his other friends into shifting committee assignments to make room for some freshmen members who he felt were particularly qualified for one committee or another. But although he did these things that were so correct and so good and so proper, he frequently did them in a way that got people annoyed and gave him the image of being a wheeler-dealer.

B: Did any of his friends ever get just exasperated at him? For example, Senator Clements in that kind of instance.

A: Unquestionably. His friends would frequently get exasperated with him. The thing that shows up is that the closer you are to the man, the easier it is to get exasperated, but at the same time the easier it is to see that in almost everything he does and in almost everything he has done, the overall good far outweighs any of the things which might temporarily exasperate you.

Unfortunately these minor problems will build up with the people, particularly reporters in Johnson's case, who finally just stop seeing the forest and begin to look at nothing but the trees.

B: This may be an impossible question for you to answer, but do you suppose Mr. Johnson is aware of this characteristic?

A: I'd love to be able to answer that question. I wish I knew, and I've often wondered. I

think he must because he has incredible insight into people, and I can't believe that he wouldn't have the same sort of insight into his own personality.

B: I ask because I've seen references in some of the books and writings about Mr. Johnson to a supposition that there's calculation in this kind of thing; that a man appreciates a favor more when he's down. It's a particularly devastating kind of criticism.

A: I don't know. I never thought that one through that carefully. What you're saying is that in some respects he might be making life difficult for members of his staff and others around him and then when he gives them a favor he knows that they'll appreciate it a great deal more.

B: I'm really not saying that, I'm paraphrasing what others have said.

A: I don't know that that's necessarily true. I think there's a tremendous difference in his mind, or there certainly seems to be from the things I have seen of him, there's a tremendous difference between his relationships with people outside of his office and the people inside of his office. He can get much more personally involved with the people in his office, but at the same time he treats them as just that--members of the staff. People outside of his office, he treats as equals, but with rare exceptions--and I wouldn't even want to enumerate the exceptions, I'm just going to admit that they're there--he doesn't have the same close relationships with them. One of the exceptions that I would admit to would be Judge Moursund of Texas, whom the President has been a long and close friend of. There are unquestionably others, but some of the ones that are played up in the press, I don't know how much that's warm friendship and whether Johnson peels off the outer layers for the benefit of, say, Everett Dirksen, or whether he's just playing a game with

Everett Dirksen. I'd probably vote for the game myself. I doubt that there's a real bond there.

B: I've diverted you from the chronology. You were talking about your father-in-law's defeat and his appointment to the campaign committee.

A: That of course led us into the little aside about the way Johnson treats people and can exasperate them.

After the election of '58, my father-in-law continued on the campaign committee and resigned sometime during 1959. During the year 1959 it was clear to everybody that Johnson would be a major contender for the Democratic nomination in 1960, and my father-in-law was one of Johnson's many friends and associates who attempted to counsel him and attempted to have him follow a pattern which would lead to the nomination.

I don't suppose that any of us will ever know why Johnson didn't follow a lot of the good advice that was given him.

B: Was the advice he was getting from people like your father-in-law along the lines of "announce early, firmly, file in the primaries?"

A: My father-in-law's advice to him was to, even if he didn't announce--I can't remember right now whether he wanted him to announce or not, I think not--but to at least talk early to some leaders and tell them that he was going to be a candidate--to admit that he was going to be a candidate; to start a little bit of a bandwagon effect and at some point to file for one primary. The West Virginia primary I guess would have been the one that anybody would have chosen until they saw how well Kennedy did in West Virginia. Maybe looking back on it, we should all say that Johnson was right in not going into any

of the primaries, that Kennedy would have beaten him in any primary where Kennedy wanted to go in and spend the Kennedy money and parade the Kennedy family. Johnson had access to tremendous resources too if he wanted to put them to work, and I feel confident myself he could have beaten Kennedy in West Virginia.

In any event Johnson refused to have anything to do with forwarding his presidential aspirations at all during the year 1959 and in the early part of '60. I went to work for the Citizens for Johnson for President Committee some time in May 1960. This was a frenetic effort on the part of people like Oscar Chapman, Leonard Marks and John Connally to put together some resemblance of an organization which would collect delegates, have delegate votes committed, and go in to the Los Angeles convention with a sufficient show of strength to stop Kennedy on the first ballot, which then presumably would lock up the convention long enough for Johnson to do his marvelous job, which he can do, of persuading individuals and the convention would slowly bend over to him.

B: Did this committee involve going out to the states, to the county and state conventions?

A: Yes. One of the most devastating articles about Johnson in this era was written in *Harper's* magazine by Larry King. Larry and I got to be friends during this period, and some of what Larry says is entirely too bitter and too biting, but a lot of it is pretty accurate, particularly about the 1960 nomination effort for Johnson. There was an effort made to send people out into the states. Unfortunately almost all the people that were sent out were from Texas; the image that Johnson knew he had to do something about was the Texas image. Yet at this point, very late in the game of 1960, I was one of the few non-Texans in the group and of course playing a very, very minor role. I think the

statisticians can tell you what happened. We kidded ourselves into thinking that we were going to do much better than we did. I don't think that Johnson ever kidded himself. I think that he was very realistic about what was going to happen.

I remember having breakfast with John Connally and Senator Johnson and my father-in-law, it must have still been May, and Bobby Baker was at the breakfast too at the Mayflower Hotel--to discuss what was happening and what was going to happen. Johnson was in a rather petulant mood, chastised all of us for putting forward these ambitions, and criticized John Connally severely for spending money. At the same time that he criticized us for spending money, he criticized us for doing the job poorly, which I could be in complete sympathy with--I think it was a pretty lame effort. He went on at great length with one of his famous monologues about his need to stay here in Washington and he couldn't be bothered traveling around the country, visiting this state and that state and the other state; that he had the B-70 to worry about, he had the Medicare bill to worry about, he had this, that, and the other thing to worry about.

What finally evolved from that meeting though was an agreement that we were to go over to see Speaker Rayburn and to get an agreement from Rayburn to adjourn the Congress on a date certain--I've forgotten now just what it was, shortly before the convention, that was the main thing.

The convention was very early that year, it was in July. Anyway, Johnson finally agreed that we would speak with Rayburn, that the Congress would be adjourned in time to go to the Democratic convention, and then the Congress would be recalled for another session.

As it turned out, that was a decision which almost cost the Democrats the election of 1960. The congressional session after both conventions was just a torn and political strife, and bickering, and it was absolutely horrible up there, where nothing got done and the Democrats almost succeeded in convincing the electorate that they were incapable of governing.

B: Was that the idea of Mr. Johnson himself? Did he originate the idea of that session after the convention?

A: I wouldn't want to put the blame for that on any one person because we all discussed it. I must say, I didn't discuss it. I was just like a little bug on the wall. I got lucky that day and happened to be with my father-in-law when he attended this breakfast, and since I was quiet and didn't say anything more than hello and goodbye they all tolerated my presence.

I think I've named all of the people that were there. I know there was my father-in-law; I know there was Bobby Baker; I know there was John Connally; I know that Senator Johnson was there. Whether Walter Jenkins was there or not, I'm not sure--I don't think so. But I do remember Bobby Baker going on at great length about what a fabulous decision this was, how marvelous it was going to be, that we were going to come back after the convention and pass all these marvelous bills and just sail through the election with flying colors. I don't think there was a soul at the breakfast that morning who considered that the Congress was just going to be in an entirely different mood after the conventions were over, and when the main focus of attention at that moment was not getting legislation through but getting a president elected.

B: Did you have an opportunity to hear Speaker Rayburn's reaction to the idea?

A: No, I went over to the Speaker's office when it was discussed with him, but if he reacted to it it was out of my presence. He sort of said, "fine, that sounds good," or something. I don't remember really what he said. I do know what he felt. He felt a very, very firm conviction that Johnson was the man to beat Nixon, and he wanted very much for Johnson to get the nomination. I assume that what ran through his mind was simply "If this is what Johnson wants, there isn't anything obviously wrong with it, and that's the way we're going to do it."

B: Some have said that in that time of his campaign for the nomination that Mr. Johnson was relying too much on his friends in the Senate; that is, he overestimated the extent of their support--not the extent of their support, he had their support but overestimated the importance of that in their states with the convention delegates.

A: That might be true. That certainly was true of his staff. I think all of us on the staff had just assumed that if Johnson could run the Senate and have the support of people like Mike Mansfield and Carl Hayden and other powerful senators who were clearly important men and had succeeded in being elected time after time in their states, that they'd be for Johnson and those states would go for Johnson.

I seriously doubt that President Johnson made that mistake. I say this because he was constantly fighting with the local Democrats in Texas. It was one problem after another. Frankie Randolph was always saying something he didn't like, and Maury Maverick was always doing some other thing he didn't like. It was a situation that if he didn't see that other senators in trying to control the political machinery of their states had

just as much trouble and probably less success, then he didn't have the political insight that I give him credit for having.

I think probably he just wasn't sure that he wanted to make the effort that Kennedy was making and that Kennedy had to make. He may have sort of hoped that he could get away without making it, and felt that there wasn't any way that he was going to get the presidency otherwise, so why not rely on your friends and hope for the best. I don't believe that he could have gone through life feeling that Carl Hayden and Mike Mansfield and people like that were going to deliver their states for him.

B: Did you see anything of the relationship between Senator Johnson and Senator Kennedy in this period before the convention?

A: No. I haven't the foggiest notion of what that relationship was like, none whatever. I was there one night when Senator Humphrey came in after he had withdrawn. There were probably about three or four of us gathered around the senator's desk in his Majority Leader's office over in the Capitol Building. This was late in the evening, well after dinner time. It had gotten dark. It was plenty dark when we went home, I don't know how late it was by then. But Johnson and Humphrey were talking about who had how many votes. Humphrey said, "Now, come on, Lyndon. Just tell me flat out. How many votes do you really have?" Johnson took a long drink on his Scotch and soda and smacked his lips a little bit and thought, and began reeling off some of the votes he had or thought he had. Humphrey kept pressing in on him for just how many votes he really did have, and I don't think that they ever settled on any specific figure.

And then Humphrey went into a long monologue about how he didn't want to be

vice president; I don't know whether he meant it or not but he was very, very specific, saying that if he didn't want to get a divorce he couldn't be on anybody's ticket, *et cetera*. Of course four years later there was some change of mind there for some reason. And a lot of people at the convention felt that Humphrey wanted to be vice president.

B: At the '60 convention, you mean?

A: At the '60 convention. How far you should go in believing a politician when he says he doesn't want to be elected to a higher office is always some interesting speculation.

B: Did Senator Humphrey's monologue on the vice presidency prompt any comments along that line from Senator Johnson?

A: I don't remember what they were. He may just not have commented on that. I imagine that he was thinking himself that Humphrey was telling about 30 per cent truth and 70 per cent what Humphrey thought he ought to be saying.

The convention of course was a surprise.

B: Was there ever a time there when you thought you might make it with a Johnson nomination?

A: When I personally thought that?

B: Yes.

A: Once in awhile I'd kid myself. I remember having a talk with Walter Jenkins a few days before we left for Los Angeles, and telling him that I didn't think there was any hope at all. Walter disagreed. He said, "Well, we've got great hope here. We're going to carry this state, we're going to get that state. The Kennedys have got weaknesses in Pennsylvania and Ohio and these other places." I went out of Walter's office thinking,

"Gee, maybe there really is some hope."

The only real hope that any of us had when we got right down to it was the thought that somehow or another Kennedy would slip up and not get it on the first ballot; and then the feeling was that the tide would begin to turn. Of course, we came awfully close to that. Kennedy didn't go over the top until he got to the very last state, Wyoming, so who knows! If we had just changed that couple of votes there in Wyoming or somewhere down the line so they had to run through the list of states again, it might have been different.

One of the things that a lot of the staff members said during that time was, "if Kennedy gets it, by God, I'm voting for Nixon"--sort of a parochial Texas attitude. I used to tell them that I thought they were wrong, that Kennedy would make a good president if he were nominated. I just thought Johnson would do a lot better.

Also, we used to speculate for hours on end as to why Jack Kennedy didn't just see the light and realize that Johnson would have a much better chance of beating Nixon; that Jack Kennedy ought to throw in with us and be vice president, which would give him plenty of time to be president eight years later. I think there were very, very few at that time who ever thought that Johnson would or should change that around so that Kennedy was president and he was vice president.

The first person I ever heard promote this idea was my father-in-law, who lobbied for it pretty strong long before any of the rest of us were willing to give up. He never said, "Johnson's not going to make it, he ought to be vice president." He would always say, "In the event that Johnson can't make it, you'd have a very strong ticket and the only

way Kennedy would win would be with Johnson on the ticket. And if he gets the opportunity Johnson ought to go on the ticket." He would make all the arguments that were later made about how Johnson was needed to carry the South, etc.

The Johnson team was pretty shocked when Johnson did accept the nomination in Los Angeles. I wasn't too shocked because I had thought about that, the thoughts had been precipitated by my father-in-law. Obviously now, when you look back, it was a pretty wise thing.

B: Did the Johnson staff speculate there on what Johnson's motives might have been for taking it?

A: Everybody speculated. I think one of the troubles with Johnson's staff was they all spent too much time talking to each other instead of talking to outsiders. I remember being in a conversation when somebody asked Bobby Baker why Johnson had done that, and Bobby's comment was "he's the most complicated man I've ever met," which I've always remembered, and which really sums up the essence of Lyndon Johnson in my judgment.

Another interesting commentary on Johnson and on the politics of the times was made by a fellow named Charlie Herring. Johnson later made him a judge. But at that time he was a state senator from Austin, a very nice guy, and really one of our better field men that were sent out talking to delegates and trying to get them to come around. Charlie came in to see me before he went through Maryland because I was supposed to have some knowledge and expertise about Maryland. When I look back now and realize how little I knew, it scares me.

So after Charlie had gone around visiting a number of these delegates, he came

back--you have to remember, he was a state senator from Texas. He returned to headquarters after this field trip--his first trip outside of Texas on any political mission--and he said, "Man, the first thing you've got to learn about this political business up north is the two-party system." This was really one of the things that Johnson and his staff suffered from. I think he probably understood it fairly well, but there were an awful lot of people on the staff that just never could understand that politics in New York City and Chicago are quite different than they are in Austin and Dallas.

B: Is there any obvious animosity at the convention between the Johnson staff and the Kennedy staff?

A: I'm sure that they had as many mean things to say about us as we did about them. Bobby Kennedy was the butt of considerable criticism on our part. None of us got into any fights and we were always civil and polite when we met. During the fall, during the election, many of us got to be good friends.

B: At the convention I know a number of stories went around, for example, that the offering of the vice presidency to Johnson was just a ploy that the Kennedy camp never dreamed he would accept. And also that the offer was made over Robert Kennedy's objections. Were these things floating around among the group?

A: Yes. I think that convention story and the nomination have been pretty well documented. Bobby did make the remark, I guess it was just to Speaker Rayburn. I heard it from D. B. Hardeman, who was staying with Rayburn at the convention, a very close friend of mine and a very close friend of Rayburn's. He said that Bobby had told the Speaker that he didn't know whether they could keep some of the delegates in line and he didn't know

whether they'd go for Johnson. D. B. quotes the Speaker as uttering a few obscenities and telling Bobby that it was in a hell of a shape if he couldn't keep his own delegates in line.

Then of course the question comes as to whether Bobby, who was a super-politician himself even at that time, was trying to push Johnson out or whether he was just doing the decent thing in warning the Johnson people that there might be some objections on the floor. And of course there were some objections on the floor, and it was all kind of minimized and when everything was said and done there wasn't any problem.

B: Did you work in the campaign?

A: Yes, I worked as an advance man in the campaign. This was the time when I probably saw the little human things, as well as anybody could see them.

B: Before you get there, may I get the mechanics straight? Were you working with the vice presidential campaign specifically?

A: I was on the payroll of the Democratic National Committee, working for Lyndon Johnson's campaign staff.

B: Was that the group headed by Charles Murphy here in Washington?

A: No, Charlie Murphy was in charge of the speech writers, and my wife worked there as a secretary part of the time. I was working in that building for awhile because Wilson McCarthy and I were, I guess, the first ones that were sort of reconstituted after the convention.

What happened was that after the convention everybody who was on a salary was

taken off the payroll right away. The campaign organization just evaporated. Walter Jenkins and Warren Woodward and a few others did a magnificient job of getting everybody out of Los Angeles and back to wherever they needed to get back to.

One of the funny human things, if you could ever find it, is a letter written to Mary Rather, which I saw much later, about all of the problems of finally cleaning up in Chicago [Los Angeles], and all the bills that hadn't been paid and all the cars that hadn't been returned, all the things that had been charged to the campaign, including, of all things, a portable typewriter which somebody had charged to the Johnson campaign at a stationery store in Phoenix, Arizona! But cars were abandoned in ditches and covered with parking tickets and everything else; it's just incredible, what people will do.

B: You said Chicago. You meant Los Angeles?

A: Yes, excuse me. But anyway, the dust finally settled on that and we got back to the campaign for the fall. Wilson McCarthy and I worked in the Investment Building in some space that had been vacated for awhile by a Texas insurance company--I've forgotten now what company it was. But they were shifting around and there was about a two months lapse in the lease there, so this space was empty and we just used it.

Later on Sarge Shriver's group came in there; their Citizens for Kennedy-Johnson used a lot of that space. But Charlie Murphy's group stayed in that space. My wife worked in that space with Vi Berry and Charlie Murphy and Jack Burns, a son of the governor of Hawaii who was one of the speech writers, and a couple of other speech writers that they had there.

I went on the road and spent the whole campaign traveling as an advance man for

Johnson. I'd go to a city about three or four or five days before him, and then get everything in readiness for his arrival. He'd arrive and you'd walk through the scenario with him and make sure that everything was done the way it was supposed to be handled, and then you'd leave. Sometimes you'd go directly to the next town and sometimes you'd come back to Washington for a day's rest or to change your shirt and get a clean pair of socks before you went out again.

But it was during this time that I first realized how difficult it really is to work for Lyndon Johnson. After the first trip, which was relatively easy and pretty straightforward, the subsequent trips got more and more complicated and there were more and more changes, more and more things that just made the life of the advance man difficult. We frequently wondered to ourselves and to each other what the hell Johnson was doing and why he required all of the things that he apparently required, or that his staff said he required.

B: What sort of things would he require?

A: There was the item of the lectern. We got bulletins about every week or so that would be circulated around headquarters that the lectern had to be this high, that high, or some other distance. Finally, Johnson resolved all of these matters by traveling with his own lectern, which would be just one more problem that the advance man would have to worry about.

Of course the sound system is absolutely vital. If you don't have a good sound system, there just isn't any point in having a candidate get up to make a speech because nobody can hear him. I always was very careful to be sure that we hired the most

expensive sound man available who would come in way in advance and set up the sound system, which would be tested and everything would be working fine. But apparently some other people didn't do that. There are certain times when you cannot do that. If you're in a caravan and suddenly the candidate stops the caravan and gets out to make a speech, there's no way of having a sound man come in advance and set it up. But whatever the reasons, Johnson finally decided he was going to travel with his own sound man and the sound man was going to have his own equipment. That meant that when the candidate got through, he would run off, hop in the car, and speed out to the airport and the advance man and the sound man were trying to load loudspeakers into crates and into cars and then get them onto the airplane before the airplane took off.

There were lots of little things that frankly I feel that the staff made more of than Johnson did. He had to have the right kind of Scotch, he had to have the right kind of soda water. But the one that flipped my lid was one day I had really put the last finishing touches on a suite in Allentown, Pennsylvania. I had fruit, I had Scotch, I had soda water, I had a new bed--it had to be longer, of course--I had everything done to make this a very happy home for Mr. Johnson for one night. I got a call from Marvin Watson saying, "Where are we staying in Allentown?" I told him, and he said, "From now on we're just staying in motels." It wasn't just the senator who was staying in that hotel, it was every member of his staff and all the members of the press, plus myself and the other advance men.

I said, "This is absolutely ridiculous. There's no way to stay in a motel. Besides, I'll offend everybody," etc. Well, they were just absolutely insistent we had to stay in a

motel. I didn't even tell the manager of the hotel that we weren't going to stay there that night, I just went out and made a reservation in a nearby motel. We brought Johnson to the hotel, then from the hotel we went to make the speech, and from the speech I sent almost everybody back to the hotel and took Johnson and his immediate personal staff, Bill Moyers and Bob Waldron and Mary Margaret Valenti and Helen Williams, the maid, to the motel. As I got out of the car to take Mr. Johnson into his room in the motel, he said: Tyler, I hope these trucks aren't going to be going by here all night to wake me up!"

Then I went back and slept in his suite at the hotel so that the hotel keeper wouldn't know that the suite hadn't been used.

B: Just for the record, what kind of Scotch and soda water did he have to have?

A: Cutty Sark. The brand of the soda water isn't important. You'd have to have a small bottle, so you'd open a fresh bottle each time. But I never knew him to complain when I was really hanging by his elbow every minute during my days as chief of protocol years later. I found that a lot of those little habits either had been cast by the wayside or they didn't really exist in the first place. I think his staff frequently overplayed a lot of that.

B: Did Mr. Johnson seem to enjoy campaigning?

A: He seemed to, yes, but I don't know whether he did or not. You couldn't tell very well; if he didn't enjoy it, he didn't show it. He didn't fall back in a heap and complain that people were trying to kill him and that kind of stuff. He'd complain a little bit once in a while, but naturally everybody does that. Gee, the way he would dive into a crowd and shake hands, I think he was a hell of a campaigner--one of the best I've ever seen.

B: Did your advance work involve seeking cooperation from the local party officials?

A: Oh, yes. This was what I enjoyed particularly. There's another thing where I'd get an insight into Johnson's abilities. When he met these people, in just shaking their hand and saying hello, they would fall in love with him almost immediately. All through that campaign I was meeting with officials who had been against Johnson during the preconvention days, and some of them had met him during the convention and fallen in love with him then; some of them met him during that trip and would fall in love with him during the trip. It's just uncanny, the way when the guy could get close enough to shake your hand you just had to like him.

B: Was cooperation with the presidential campaign adequate, as good as it ever is in those campaigns?

A: You mean by the local officials?

B: At all levels.

A: I've never seen one where it was adequate. You only win those things because the other guy is worse than you are in terms of campaigning and organization and that sort of thing. I got into trouble with the local officials, mainly for one reason, and this is that Johnson would change the schedules. All of them liked to set up a program and liked to know what was going to happen from the first day and to stick with that. That would have made them very happy. There was hardly a stop that I was involved in where Johnson didn't change the routine three or four times. I remember in Quincy, Illinois, a local congressional candidate there saying that it would be better for him if Johnson would just fly over Quincy and not bother to come at all. But in every instance it seemed to work out; whether there was some underlying feeling left with the local people or not

I'm not sure. But usually he'd come in, the meeting would be a spectacular success, he'd greet everybody very warmly, he'd say all the right things, he'd have his picture taken with everybody, and they'd all go away just thinking it was great. I frequently wondered whether it might be just five times as great if they'd gotten started out on the right foot.

He did the same thing when he was president. When he was president it didn't make nearly as much difference because everybody is very understanding that a man who is president has got a lot of other problems besides where he's going to be to make a commencement address at a certain time, *et cetera*, and that if he changes his mind that's because of national security and God knows what else that's much more important than their problems.

But for a man who's just trying to be president, and particularly for a man who's trying to be vice president, I think Johnson or his staff or whoever was responsible for all those changes probably did themselves a pretty big disservice.

B: Could you tell who was in charge on the Johnson staff? Is there any one member of the staff who was dominant over the others?

A: Let me say that first the dominant member was Lyndon Baines Johnson, and anybody else ran such a poor second that there wasn't a whole lot of jockeying around. Now back in '60 Moyers was the closest man to Johnson and very, very high up the scale of authority. Jenkins always stayed back in Washington; as far as I can recall he never went on a trip anywhere anytime, even some of the foreign trips. Watson was sort of the plane captain in those days. Marvin's a very nice guy personally, but I don't think he ever exhibited very much imagination in trying to help the President. They tell that story that

one day Johnson said they ought to build a fence between the Executive Office Building and the White House and that Marvin Watson supposedly went out and had them build a fence. It's an apocryphal story, but it might have been true. And I think Marvin was probably that way in the campaign.

Moyers was the fellow that if you had something that was really going to hurt Johnson, you went to Moyers and said, "Look, this is just going to be terrible and it really needs to be changed." You'd explain it to Moyers and Moyers would somehow get it changed. I think usually he just said, "Okay, change it," with the realization that if Johnson blew up about it it would be just a minor thing and it would go away.

That doesn't answer your question, does it?

B: Yes, better than I expected. I realize that in that kind of situation there probably isn't any firm chain of command type thing.

A: My experiences with Johnson were that when something finally became sufficient in importance that I had to go to him and say, "This is a mistake, you've got to do it this way," that he would agree. I don't know whether he did that because I was particularly persuasive, I doubt it--I think he did that because he had set up his staff in such a manner that by the time it filtered up to him he knew that I must have thought it was awfully goddamned important or else it wouldn't have gotten up that high.

B: And for all that, you won.

A: We won. That's right. And we carried the state of Texas, which was very important. We carried most of the South.

B: Is it about this time then that your wife, Mrs. Abell, goes to work for Mrs. Johnson?

A: Yes. Let me tell a little bit about that one. Bess had had our second child, Lyndon, in June of 1960 just before the convention. And in September of '60 she decided it was time to go back to work. She had worked for her daddy in 1956 and 1957 and 1958--the tail end of '56 and all of '57 and most of '58--during the time that he was executive director of the campaign committee. She had left that job about a week--she left it almost on election day, which was the 5th of November or something like that, and our first child was born on the 15th of November. After the second child she decided it was time to go back to work and she went to work at the Democratic National Committee in the speech writing department.

Liz Carpenter was writing speeches and working with Mrs. Johnson in the campaign, on a strictly volunteer basis. She at that time was an active newspaperwoman, but she had known Mrs. Johnson for years and years. I think they had been at the University of Texas together for a short time. I'm not positive about that, I get that impression though. She got to know Bess as a very competent secretary in the speech writing department and recommended to Mrs. Johnson that Mrs. Johnson hire Bess. That was really the way it got started.

Mrs. Johnson called, I think in December of 1960 and Bess started working rightaway. It started out as a job from--it was agreed that the hours would be 9:30 to 5, five days a week. Before the tour in the White House was over, Bess was working from about 9:30 until 2 a.m., sometimes seven days a week.

B: Then what did you do after the election?

A: I worked in the inauguration for a short time, and then after the inauguration I went to

work for the Post Office Department. I would see the Vice President socially. When they had parties, they'd frequently invite us, and frequently of course Bess was there working the party.

Then when he became president they invited us over one night--this was while they were still living at The Elms. There was my stepfather, Arthur Goldberg, myself, and some of the wives--I don't think everybody's wife was there--Jack Valenti was there. The President was late arriving. He came in with McGeorge Bundy and a couple of other people, and he was really taken up with the budget. This was his big item for concern as soon as he became president. Of course the budget is put to bed some time in November usually, or December, in any event. So the Kennedy budget had really been pretty well decided on when Johnson became president, and he decided that what he would do would be to cut the budget back; pass Kennedy's tax bill and pass the civil rights bill. But on this particular day his concern was strictly budget.

So he came into the room like a hurricane, with Valenti kind of running behind and McGeorge Bundy, who was doing a beautiful soft shoe switch from Kennedy to Johnson and was all smiles and shaking everybody's hand, and kind of bending over the President the way a teacher would bend over a bright new student.

Johnson sat back and relaxed and then started talking about the budget and how he was going to cut this so much and he was going to cut that so much, all the different agencies, and how terrible it was that they were spending all this money. He got down to the Post Office Department, of course looked over at me and said, "The Post Office Department--two hundred and ninety million dollars," or whatever the figure was, it was

fairly low at that time. Obviously it was higher than two hundred and ninety, it was probably six hundred and ninety. He said, "If you wouldn't give all those subsidies to *Life* magazine, that would be a lot lower."

I said, "Actually, Mr. President, the biggest subsidies are going to the transportation companies." He said, "Oh, is that right?" I said, "Yes. We could save at least a hundred million dollars in the transportation budget."

I think that started the germ in his mind there that led to my becoming assistant postmaster general about a month later. I gave him a memo the next day about the transportation business, and that was probably the last time that he ever gave the Post Office Department any positive thought during his term as president.

B: To back up a little, during the years of the vice presidency, did you get the impression that Mr. Johnson was under a kind of unnatural restraint in that office?

A: No question. I never talked to him about it personally. I talked to members of his staff, and he would talk to my wife about it. I think you'll get a better insight on those years from her than from an awful lot of people because she was in the house all the time. But there would be days there when he was just terribly despondent and felt that all the Kennedy people were out to get him. And there was a lot of justification for it, obviously. He would give them some very good advice, and they would just ignore it.

B: May I clarify that? The "justification for his view of the Kennedy people"--does that apply to, for want of a better word, the Kennedy staff, or does it apply to John Kennedy too?

A: Johnson used to say, "There's only one person in the White House that likes me, and

that's John Kennedy." That's the only insight I have on that question.

B: Did this kind of thing extend to social Washington, that is, people not directly associated with the White House or the government?

A: No, social Washington viewed him as the vice president, a guy that many of them knew because he had been here longer than John F. Kennedy had been here. He'd not only been here longer than John F. Kennedy had been here, but he'd gotten to know an awful lot of people in social Washington that Kennedy didn't really know, didn't really waste any time about and didn't care about. So in social Washington there wasn't any problem. And on the Hill there wasn't any problem, because he had his old friends down there. My view is the problem was strictly the guys on the inside in the White House. They felt a little bit cocky; it was a product I think of their immaturity. They'd beaten Johnson, they'd beaten the most powerful man in the Democratic Party, and they probably just weren't smart enough to realize, as Jack Kennedy realized, that after beating him the next step was to profit by his experience and knowledge. I just don't think that people like Kenny O'Donnell could see that far.

B: Were there any exceptions to this among the Kennedy staff members?

A: I didn't really know them that well. I would see them occasionally and I must say they were always very nice to me, so I wouldn't want to exaggerate their feelings. I just don't know.

B: I know your wife was in Texas at the time of the assassination, in Austin and at the ranch I believe. Were you with her?

A: No. I was in Washington. She'd gone down there to prepare the way for the visit.

I've got a 10:30 appointment downtown.

B: I'm sorry; I should have asked you earlier.

[End of Tape 1 of 1 and Interview I]

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