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INTERVIEW II

INTERVIEWEE: TYLER ABELL

INTERVIEWER: T. H. BAKER

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

DATE: May 29, 1969

Tape 1 of 2

B: This is the continuation of the interview with Tyler Abell. Sir, we were talking last time about the Post Office. First of all, it's under Mr. Johnson's presidency that you were promoted to assistant postmaster general?

A: That's correct.

B: What were the circumstances there?

A: The full details, I don't think are too important to anybody but me, but since you asked about all of the little personal things, this might be one indication of how the President feels about things and how his personal desires to do things his own way, which he found thwarted so often, probably gave rise to the credibility gap.

I had been seriously considering leaving the postal service before President Kennedy's assassination, and I continued pursuing various job offers after his death. One day, for some reason or another--I can't remember why--I went over to see Cliff Carter, who then had his office in the Executive Office Building. Cliff and I had a long talk, in the course of which he said, "Now I think that you're going to be made assistant postmaster general. It will either be you or Bill McMillan." Frankly this came as quite a surprise; I hadn't even considered the possibility that I would be appointed to that job. In fact it really wasn't a job that I particularly wanted. The Bureau of Facilities wasn't a

very interesting bureau to me, although I later changed my mind about it.

Cliff said, "If the President does tell you about this, you must be to act like you've never heard it from me." I said, "Fine." He said, "But there's another important thing. You also have to tell the President to be sure and call Owen Johnston about it."

I myself don't think that the second caution was quite as important as the first; in fact, I think it was wholly unnecessary. The President was the greatest congressional liaison operative that I have ever seen, and probably the greatest that history will ever produce. He was of course famous for being a wheeler-dealer in the Senate long before anybody considered him as a potential president. Anyway, I marked this in my mind.

Cliff had told me to take a biography over to the President, over to Juanita Roberts. So I got a biography and I went over to the White House and went in to see Juanita, said, "Here's a biography of myself." Juanita said, "Fine, let's just wait a minute." So I stood on first one foot and then the other, not really knowing why I was being asked to wait. About two minutes later Juanita said, "Go on inside."

I went inside, took the biography with me and handed it to the President. He opened it up and looked at it sort of cursorily. He wanted to know how old I was, asked me a couple of other questions and talked a little while. I was totally in awe of the whole thing because it was the first time I'd ever seen him in the very impressive Oval Office. It wasn't until I was practically out the door that I noticed that Okie [Yoichi R. Okamoto], the photographer, was in snapping our pictures. Later I was given a couple of the pictures, autographed by the President.

Then when I got home that night Bess told me that the President had called her

and told her for us to get on a plane that day with him and come down to the Ranch. That day happened to be Christmas Eve, and Bess said, "Well, Mr. President, I was really planning to spend Christmas with my family. You know, we have two little boys and Tyler and I want to do that."

He said, "Well, okay, you come on down the day after Christmas because I want to give Tyler a Christmas present."

Having heard all of that, it of course was a little bit difficult for me to act too surprised when the President told me that he was making me assistant postmaster general.

B: This was at the ranch? You did go down the day after Christmas?

A: The day after Christmas we got on a Jetstar and went down to the Ranch with several other people. Liz Carpenter was on the plane, Pierre Salinger, Pierre's secretary. Pierre dictated constantly the whole time, thanking everybody for Christmas presents that he'd received.

The Kennedys were great ones for accusing everybody else of a conflict of interest, but I never knew anybody who received more stuff than they did without any more notoriety.

I spent most of my time on the plane writing my biography because that was one of the other things that I had been told to do, was to be sure that I wrote a full biography for the press. I did this with great care and then showed it to Pierre Salinger, who made a few changes, and then it was pretty much given over to the press the way it had been written.

One thing I had tried to do in the biography was to make myself out to be a

politician, and Pierre had crossed all that out with the result that the headline that was carried on the AP wire was "Socially Prominent Washingtonian Appointed Assistant Postmaster General." I always felt that my judgment on that was better than his, that they needed some sort of a catch line, and when they weren't given one they dreamt up their own.

Anyway, after we'd been at the Ranch a short time Bess said, "Come on and let's go on out to the schoolhouse." It was either Stonewall or Fredericksburg; I guess it was Stonewall, where Van Cliburn was going to have a concert later in the week for Chancellor--I guess it was [Konrad] Adenauer of Germany. Wasn't Adenauer the little short fat one?

B: That doesn't sound like a description of Adenauer, but I think Adenauer did visit. We can check which one it was at that time.

A: They both did. Who was the guy who was there for years and years and years?

B: That's Adenauer.

A: Okay, who's the one that followed him?

B: That's the one I can't think of. I was trying to think of his name.

A: Ludwig--

B: Erhard.

A: Ludwig Erhard was there. So it was while I was out there just wandering around with Bess that Liz called on the phone, desperate as always--Liz always sounds like there's a fire in the house that she's calling from--and said, "Come back immediately. The President is going to invite you to go deer hunting." Well, that was an emergency and I

got in the car immediately and we drove back at a rapid pace, at least eighty-five miles an hour. I'm sure we exceeded any speed limits that the President might subsequently have broken. And the radio in the car--everything down on the Ranch is wired for sound and was long before the President was president--the radio came on when we were about three-quarters of the way back, "Tyler Abell, Tyler Abell, can you hear me?" A very familiar voice. I stumbled with the microphone, never having worked the thing before, finally got it up to my lips and said, "Yes, Mr. President, I can hear you."

"Well, where are you?"

I said, "Well, I'm on my way back to the Ranch," tromping down on the accelerator a little bit harder.

He said, "Hurry up, now. We want to go out deer hunting and it's getting dark. Let's go!"

I said, "Yes, Mr. President, I'll be right there. I can see the Ranch now."

"Well, hurry up."

So we just about that time turned a couple of corners and got in to the main gate and across the little ford that goes across the Pedernales in to the Ranch house, and as I came into the Ranch house the President was coming out and we got into this little golf cart that he uses to drive around the house. It's kind of a two-seater golf cart. The President and Mary Margaret Valenti got in the front seat, Jack Valenti and I got in the back seat, and Paul Glynn--it may have been Lem Johns--one of the Secret Service agents, got on in sort of the rumble seat behind us. The President turned around to back the golf cart out of the garage and he said: "Tyler, I'm going to make you assistant

postmaster general for facilities; that's a $4,000 increase in pay for you and I want you to spend every penny of it on whiskey for me!"

I said, "Thank you, Mr. President."

He said, "Who told you about this?"

I said, "Well, you did, Mr. President."

And he said, "Well, somebody else told you first. I can tell by the expression on your face." I just let that remark pass.

But I think it's indicative of some of the problems the President had. He felt that as president that he ought to be able to appoint an old friend, someone he knew very well like me, to a job that he was personally convinced that I could do and make it a surprise. But of course, as powerful as he was as president, he really couldn't do that. He had all of his minions about him whose job it was to try and make sure that the appointment was done properly; he had the FBI; and of course he had the additional problem that almost every time he asked somebody a question about me, the people either being well-meaning sorts or for their own personal reasons would communicate this to me. I had several other people that I haven't mentioned call me and allude to the fact that they'd put in a good word for me when the President asked them about me, *et cetera*.

One of the people who did it was John Gronouski, a very nice pleasant gentleman who was just not equipped to be postmaster general. He was put in much too big a job for himself. He had called me in, he had never heard of me before that day, I don't think, and he had recommended somebody else to be assistant postmaster general for facilities and the President had said no, that he was going to appoint me, and asked Gronouski to

write a letter recommending me. Gronouski was awfully slow, but he wasn't quite that stupid, so he wrote the letter and then instead of letting the President take all the credit he figured that he would salvage a difficult situation by calling me in and telling me that the President was going to do something very nice for me.

And so it went. So no matter what the President had done, there wasn't any way that he could really surprise me. Thus, this is just one little tiny example of how the credibility gap widened.

B: Is there any truth to the stories that the President has on occasion withdrawn or changed his mind about an appointment because it has leaked out in advance?

A: I don't know. He didn't change it about mine. I wasn't privy to any where he changed his mind, but of course that became almost a matter of semantics later on. And the President, I happened to feel quite correctly, took the position that until he announced it, his mind wasn't made up so how could anybody say that he changed his mind. The press takes the opposite position, which maybe is a little more practical, that after you've had an FBI check run on somebody and after you've told your immediate staff to set up a press conference so that you can announce the appointment of Mr. Smith, that this is certainly circumstantial evidence that would convince anybody in open court that you have made up your mind.

B: What was the deer hunt like?

A: The deer hunt was great. We first got on a helicopter, and as we started to go up to the helicopter the President had said, "Now you're very young." I think I was only thirty. He said, "You're only thirty years old, but I was younger than that when I was made state

director of the NYA [National Youth Administration] in Texas. I just want you to work as hard as you can and institute all of the best business practices that you can find, get the advice and the consultation of all the people that you know, and let's just see if we can't run the post office in the most efficient way possible."

And I did take that immediately to heart and went to work on it, that night in fact.

But in the meantime we took the helicopter over to Judge Moursund's ranch and the President got on the radio and said, "A.W., we're coming over there. Let's do a little deer hunting now. Have you got a package for us?" By package he meant an ice chest and a bottle of whiskey and some glasses. A.W. said, "Yes, I do."

The President said, "Well, I knew that you'd be able to provide the package. You just saved me some money."

We got out of the helicopter and A.W. was there to meet us in his car. We drove around looking for deer, and I think stopped probably twice to take some potshots at them.

B: From the car?

A: The President would step out of the car. It was a Lincoln sedan, and the President was riding in the front seat and Jack and Mary Margaret and I were in the back seat and Judge Moursund was driving. We'd stop at a place where some deer were and the President would step out and take a shot. As near as I could tell, he didn't really come close to any deer, none of them wounded. He had killed one earlier that day. I don't think he went deer hunting more than a couple of times after that; after that, he gave up shooting at them altogether, just would drive around and look at them. They were really beautiful

animals; the country down there is just lovely. As a matter of fact the Ranch is overrun by deer; in fact, they had open season on does because there were just too darned many of them, but the President would never shoot the does, even though it was legal, and he finally gave up shooting any of them.

B: Meanwhile, back at the Post Office.

A: I ought to finish off on that deer hunt a little bit. After the hunt, as it started to get dark, we went into A.W.'s house and sat around there for some time and watched the evening news on television.

The President discussed at great length with A.W. and Jack Valenti and myself, Mrs. Moursund--I don't think anybody else was there--what his plans were, what his problems were. He took a very pessimistic attitude about the future. He predicted the problems that he was going to have. Jack Valenti and I kept saying, "You know, Mr. President, you're tremendously popular." The first polls had come out and showed 85 per cent approval, *et cetera*, for him.

He said, "Well, I know what happened to Harry Truman. I watched the same thing take place when he became president, and it'll be a very short period of time before they turn on me."

Jack Valenti said, "Mr. President, that's just a bunch of hogwash. You get this budget in at under a hundred billion dollars like you're going to do, you get that tax bill passed, you get that civil rights bill passed, and there's no question but what with the popularity you have now that you'll be able to get those passed, and there's just no way that anybody can beat you in November."

Then the President said, "Jack Kennedy has been trying to get that civil rights bill passed for a year--whatever it was. The tax bill is in terrible trouble. I don't think that Kennedy ever could have passed it and I don't know whether I can." He went on about that and about the budget. He was a little less pessimistic about the budget because at that point he practically had the budget cut below a hundred billion, but he still was pessimistic about getting it below a hundred. He knew he was going to have it pretty low.

I said, "Mr. President, I don't think cutting that budget is so important." No, it was the other way around. He asked me whether I thought cutting the budget was important, and I said that I didn't think it was really that important. He said, "Well, do you think I ought to get it under Kennedy's budget?" I said, "I think if you can get it under Kennedy's budget, that would be great, but I don't think people are going to take that much notice. I think that really what you need to do is to get the job done."

He subsequently did bring it in under Kennedy's budget after, as the press has pointed out years later, telling everybody that he couldn't do it.

That night with me, this was the 26th of December, if he knew that he was going to beat Kennedy's budget he was keeping it awfully close to his chest.

B: Did he say anything that night about foreign affairs?

A: Not a bit. The next day the State Department sent down an enormous jet which spewed out hundreds of advisers and advance men and everybody else for the German Chancellor's visit. I remember one little episode that took place there.

One of the guys in the State Department--I can't remember just who it was--told

me that if I had an opportunity, to mention to the President that Conrad [Ludwig] Erhard was very insistent on being addressed in a formal manner, and it would be inappropriate for the President to be too familiar with him. I didn't have any thought at all that I'd have an opportunity to tell this to the President, but I did tell it to a couple of the Secret Service men, just as an interesting little story about the striped-pants set over at the State Department.

Then Rufus Youngblood, who had really risen to the top of the pile there in the Secret Service, said, "You just haven't been around the world watching Johnson operate. I just give them about five minutes and after that, it will be Ludwig and Lyndon."

B: Was it?

A: Sure it was. It was with all of them that I saw that were of any consequence. Johnson did a terrific job with the foreigners. It was only the ones that he hardly saw at all, that he didn't see for more than ten or fifteen minutes, that there was any problem with. Most of the ambassadors here in Washington who had been here a couple of years, he was on very friendly terms with, and he did a terrific job with the foreign countries that he visited.

B: The Post Office activities that you were involved in, did Mr. Johnson have anything to do with patronage, appointments of postmasters and so on?

A: No, he never paid a bit of attention to it, except as it bore on his congressional relations. I never saw any evidence at all of any personal work on his part. Where something in Texas was involved, I was always very careful to be sure that there weren't any problems or that anything developed that might be a problem, or if I thought that he might have a

personal interest, as in the Austin, Texas, post office, I always either checked it out with him personally or with somebody like Jack Valenti who I knew was close enough to really represent his personal feelings. And normally he wouldn't take any interest at all. I say normally, because there may have been an exception but I don't remember any instance where he took any interest at all in that kind of thing.

The San Antonio postmaster, Dan Quill, had made the arrangements for his wedding, and I knew Dan fairly well. Dan never, as far as I knew, put in any kind of a special request that he have a better post office or have his walls painted or anything else. And if the President did anything for him, I didn't know about it.

B: Before the tape was turned on, you mentioned Mrs. Johnson and the Karnack post office.

A: Yes. We desperately needed a new post office in Karnack and I should have been alert enough to have noticed it myself. One of my assistants called the Congressman from Karnack, I believe it was O. C. Fisher, to tell him that we were getting ready to build a new post office at Karnack and ask him if he wanted to make an announcement or do anything about it. He said, "That's wonderful, but that's Mrs. Johnson's hometown and you might want to do something with her about it."

So I called Mrs. Johnson and told her that we were thinking of doing something about Karnack, and of course berated myself for not realizing it myself. She said that was wonderful, and would it be possible to try to make Karnack an example of a really nice post office instead of just one of our standard off-the-shelf models. And I said, "Of course."

So I got some people in our regional office to design the building, which normally

isn't done. Normally in a village the size of Karnack we simply go out and say to the builders in the community, "We'd like a building that's 50 feet by 50 feet in this general area. Does anybody have one? If you don't have one, would anybody build one and we'll leave the bids open for 60 days, and the best all-around bid will win. And if you want to put a building up on this corner or that corner or the other corner, we'll sort of evaluate them all and come to a decision."

A little larger community we would go out with tentative, preliminary plans and say, "This is what the building needs to look like; we want it on this particular site right here, and you build it." It's only with the much larger buildings that we really have specific plans in which every cornice and all of the engineering details and everything else are done out to our exact specifications.

So this was a departure in that respect, but I felt it was worth the very small additional cost. However, the people down in the regional office couldn't produce any decent plans. They came up with a couple of things that looked absolutely awful that I took over to Mrs. Johnson. She's so diplomatic and so kind and so nice, and she said: "Tyler, it seems to me like maybe we could do a little bit better than that." I said, "Mrs. Johnson, you're just as right as you can be and we will do better."

Finally I called a friend of mine down in Dallas, General [Carl Lawrence] Phinney, who had been a good friend of the Johnsons for many years, and asked him if he could find a nice architect for me who would work on this project with no fee, somebody who would like the honor of doing something special for Mrs. Johnson, but the Post Office wasn't able to pay him because this was simply something we weren't authorized

to do. He said sure, and he came up with a very nice guy named Jim Roberts, and Roberts designed a very nice post office. I took the plans over to Mrs. Johnson and she made a few suggested changes; took them back to Mr. Roberts and he incorporated the changes; took them back to Mrs. Johnson again and went over them again and everything turned out fine.

She wanted the building made out of old brick and we were able to find some old brick. And then came the biggest problem of all. The Army Engineers, it turned out, owned one of the roads that went by our site for the new post office. It never occurred to anybody until we went in and started construction on this building that these two roads that formed this intersection didn't both belong to the public domain. We were well into construction when the colonel from this nearby army base that this road led into and was officially a part of came in and said, "I'm sorry, fellows, you can't do that. It's going to interrupt traffic going into the army base." That was finally resolved by the Under Secretary of the Army in favor of the Post Office. Nobody to this day can figure out how in the hell that colonel thought he was going to get promoted by objecting to Mrs. Johnson's post office!

B: You can tell that the colonel didn't know whose hometown that was.

A: He knew very well, and this had been explained to him in great detail by our regional officials down there, and everything else, and he said, no, that it would create a traffic hazard, that those post office trucks would be coming out of the post office just about the time that the people would be coming out of the camp, and that this would just upset everything and we might lose the war in Vietnam as a result.

To put this in perspective you have to realize that two trucks went in to the post office every day, and maybe a couple of dozen people would go by the post office during the course of the eight hours that the post office was open for business, except on Christmas, when there might be three or four dozen that would go by there in a day.

B: Did that cost the Post Office any extra money?

A: Yes. The Army Engineers finally relented at the insistence of the Under Secretary of the Army, but they insisted that the Post Office Department pay some extra cost of curbing that street there that they owned, which amounted to about $300.

B: Did the building itself cost anything more than normal?

A: It probably cost a little bit more because when you specify to a builder that he's got to follow these exact plans, it will cost a little bit more. If he's free to fool around and substitute a certain window casing that he's got a special on that month, he can save a little money and passes the savings on to the government.

B: Did you worry about the press getting hold of this?

A: Not at all.

B: And starting out with loud cries of special favoritism and so on?

A: Not at all. I think if the press had used this story, it would have played it up for what it was--an effort to make the post office a little bit nicer. And in fact Mrs. Johnson contributed a sizable amount out of her own pocket to pay for special plantings around the post office, and then she had a couple of other donors who wanted to contribute. There was a couple of thousand dollars that went into planting some trees and some flowers and some bushes around the post office, not at government expense.

B: Why did Larry O'Brien come over to the Post Office?

A: When?

B: Why?

A: I never really found out why. You can get two stories. There are some people in the Johnson camp who felt that O'Brien was not loyal to Johnson and that Johnson wanted to move him out. There were some other people who felt that O'Brien was really the one guy in the Kennedy group who had been completely loyal to Johnson, who had done all of the tough work in Congress that Johnson wanted done, and that Johnson had decided to reward him by giving him cabinet rank.

The first theory has some basis, but it really doesn't hold water because of what subsequently happened, which was that Johnson almost prevented Larry O'Brien from being postmaster general in any active way by giving him so many jobs of a political and congressional nature to take on. And at one point I was told by Ronnie Lee, who was the White House Fellow at the Post Office Department, and very close to O'Brien--he had known O'Brien before he came to the Post Office--Ronnie said that the President called one day and said to Larry that Larry just had to move back to the White House, that he was tired of Larry wasting his time down at the Post Office. "Come back and tend to the important problems and to hell with the Post Office!"

Whether or not O'Brien was passing those stories around so that he wouldn't have to spend any more time at the Post Office, which he found deadly dull, or whether it really happened I'm not sure. But O'Brien would go on at great length to me personally about how the President had just insisted that he do this and the President insisted that he

do that. And it got to the point where I really wondered why in the hell Larry O'Brien was spending so much time telling me what the President was telling him to do.

B: Is there anything special about the circumstances of his leaving the Post Office in '68?

A: O'Brien?

B: Yes.

A: Bess will tell you that story. I don't know. I hadn't talked with Larry except to say hello socially since I left the Post Office, nor did I have anything to do with him except socially until he was back in the Humphrey camp, running Humphrey's campaign.

B: We've skipped over a presidential campaign in here, in '64. I know you worked with the Five O'Clock Club. Any other involvement in the campaign?

A: That was my major involvement. In June of '64 I was called by Wilson McCarthy to be an advance man at one of Johnson's many commencement addresses. You look at some of these things now in past history and you realize how smart Johnson was, particularly some of the brilliant things he did in that first year. But the way he took off on the commencement addresses I thought was really good. He provided himself with an excellent forum there in the early part of the campaign year, and had himself so beautifully established that there wasn't anything that Barry Goldwater could have done. And he did it all without being a politician.

Anyway, I did make the one trip to Swarthmore, which was very successful, but that was the last advance trip that I ever did for the President. I think that it was a wise decision on their part not to use--it wasn't the last one, it was the last one I did until much later which showed the wisdom of not sending me out. But they made a wise decision in

feeling that I shouldn't go out. I was just too well known and the chances of somebody making some public comment about it were too great.

B: I'm not sure I understand that. I understand that an advance man ought to be as nearly anonymous as possible, but do you mean because of your connection with the Post Office?

A: It's hard to be anonymous when you are a presidential appointee and not only a presidential appointee, but your wife is a presidential appointee and you're closely connected with the Johnsons personally. I was far better known than most people of that rank in government.

Just to digress briefly, I did advance in Manila for the President. I wound up catching malaria, and the fact that I caught malaria then became the handle for everybody to say, what the hell was I doing in Manila anyway!

B: Is that the much later trip you referred to?

A: That was the trip in 1966. It turned out that just about that time somebody from the *Wall Street Journal* decided to write a long article about the Post Office Department, and one of the questions in the article was "How can they operate the Post Office Department if one of their bureau chiefs is off in Manila for a month?"

B: Was that valid criticism?

A: It was valid criticism.

The Five O'Clock Club was organized, really at the suggestion of my stepfather.

B: Drew Pearson?

A: Drew Pearson. He told the President that he thought that there ought to be better liaison

with the press, and some direct contact with individual members of the press, feeding them stories and giving them different things above and beyond what was done by the immediate White House staff. So the President asked Mike Feldman to set up such a group, and I think it was a very effective group, although I guess all of us in the campaign along about the middle of October were saying that we felt like--who was it?--Jim Sundquist made this remark. He said, "I feel like a pitcher warming up in the bull pen when the score is 14 to 0 in favor of my team, and it's the top half of the ninth inning.

B: That sounds like the kind of attitude Mr. Johnson would not have approved of.

A: You couldn't help but have that feeling. We still drove ourselves and worked, I think, as hard as ever, but we were so clearly way out in front it was hard to keep up the real tension. But again after it was all over I looked back and I saw the wisdom of Johnson's doing what he did--all of this tremendous effort that he put into that campaign. People complained. John Bailey complained to me; he said, "It's terrible. We're six million dollars in debt and the President has wasted all this money. He didn't have to spend all this money to do this."

I complained. The President went into New York, he campaigned four times in New York, and the main result was that it elected Bobby Kennedy. Johnson carried New York state by two and a half million; Kennedy carried New York state by seven hundred and fifty thousand and didn't even have the decency to say thank you to the President for campaigning for him.

But it wasn't just Bobby Kennedy who was elected in that landslide. There were Democrats all over the country who were elected that year who will never be elected

again. We got that fantastic Congress, it was the 89th Congress that came in on that landslide that passed legislation that will mean that this country will be a much better place to live as a result. The Democratic National Committee went into debt; a few oddballs were brought to Congress who shouldn't have been there, but the overall result was just monumental in its impact on history.

Johnson had that ability to just brush aside all that crap that his detractors would complain about and go on for the big win.

B: The Five O'Clock Club did more than just press liaison. There are those who call it the "department of dirty tricks."

A: It started out, the basic precept of the Five O'Clock Club was that we would take stories that Johnson or people very close to Johnson wouldn't really want to be too closely associated with, dirty stories about Goldwater; taking Goldwater quotations and building a story around them to show what a nut Goldwater was, or Miller was, or any Republican that was associated with the Republican national effort. It also branched out into some of the things that Dick Tuck was famous for. I thought of one of the really interesting tricks, which was writing letters to Ann Landers, which looks like a perfectly valid letter from anybody asking a question like, "Is it true that all homosexuals are like Barry Goldwater?" That's an extreme version, I can't remember what some of them were.

B: Did you get some of them in the column?

A: Yes. And we had of course an overall effort of writing letters to editors directly.

B: Did Ann Landers connive at this?

A: No, she refused to connive. I asked her to connive, but she wouldn't do it.

B: But you did sneak some in anyway?

A: Yes, we snuck some in anyway. We also got questions planted in that thing in the *Parade* magazine, which was also my idea.

B: That "People" feature that's in the first part of *Parade*?

A: Right.

B: What sort of questions did you plant there?

A: I've forgotten what we got in there but the type of question would be, "I've heard Barry Goldwater was once in a mental institute. Is that true?"

B: What sort of things did you think of and reject? Not dare try?

A: There was damned little that we rejected. The only way we would reject it is if we thought that it was likely to backfire and that if it did backfire, that the harm that it would do would be too great to our side to run the risk. We didn't reject anything on any moral grounds.

B: There's the episode in that campaign of the television spot of the little girl picking daisies and the bomb going off.

A: Yes, that wasn't our office.

B: I suppose if you got really cynical about that, that that may have backfired to the Democrats' advantage. At least you got a lot of publicity out of it.

A: I think it did backfire to the Democrats. I don't know whether it backfired or not; I think that ad worked to our advantage.

B: It was withdrawn after a few runnings, but that was all it took to--

A: It was withdrawn but it was still pretty effective. It had tremendous effect in the time that

it was there.

B: What were some of the other things this group did?

A: We hit the trigger-happy theme harder than anything else. We just painted Goldwater like the man going around with a hydrogen bomb under each arm. And every sentence that he uttered that we could just twist around a little bit, we'd get somebody to make a speech about it or get a copy of it somewhere; or if all else failed, and even if it didn't, we'd have people carrying signs--the next time that Goldwater hit a town, somebody would be waiting there with a sign that would quote his last speech and make some comment about it, some editorial comment.

We were pretty heavy on the signs because we felt that, from what we'd learned and from what we'd been told that the signs would really fluster Goldwater. In fact, I have one series of pictures that Slick Rutherford, who used to be congressman from El Paso, put together for me, and it had the pictorial evidence to prove what had happened. Some big sign that said something unpleasant about Goldwater in Spanish that four Mexicans carried down when Goldwater went to El Paso. A huge thing! It took at least four of them to carry this thing--a great big sign, and they got way up in front. Of course the people down in Goldwater's entourage didn't speak Spanish, so it took them awhile before it was translated to find out what was really being said about their guy, at which point they sent a few goons out to beat up my Mexicans and tear the sign apart.

Later on, of course, the signs in '66 and thereabouts began to change. The signs were against Johnson. This was where Marvin Watson came in with his itching powder.

I did another advance trip for Johnson. I went to West Virginia in '66; I'd

forgotten about that one.

B: Marvin Watson and his itching powder?

A: You could have 50,000 people just cheering madly for Johnson and there would be one guy in the back of the crowd with a little tiny sign that would say, "Johnson, go home," or "Get out of Vietnam," and Marvin would just say, "This is terrible. What is that guy doing in the back of the room with that great big sign?" A couple of times he ordered people to go out and attack the sign-carriers, which of course was disastrous because every time that happens the cameras go off the speaker and they focus in the middle of the crowd where this fight is being conducted. But that never deterred Marvin. Before we got ready to go around the world, we were asking him about things we should bring and things we should do, *et cetera*, and he said: "There's one thing I will do. If anybody needs any itching powder, I'll send itching powder anywhere in the world." He had this theory that you could just spread a little itching powder on the sign carriers and the signs would disappear.

B: Did Mr. Johnson in the '64 campaign know about and take an interest in the Five O'Clock Club?

A: Oh yes, he knew about it. In fact, he told me, "Drew has suggested to me that we have a group to work on stories and things that we can plant about the Republicans, and I've asked Mike Feldman to set it up and he'll be calling you about it. I want you to work with him.

B: I think we'd better insert in here for the transcript that the Five O'Clock Club name comes from the fact that you met at--

A: We met at Mike Feldman's every day at five o'clock in the evening. Mike Feldman was then special counsel to the President. He had been deputy special counsel under Kennedy, and when Ted Sorensen left President Johnson made him special counsel.

B: Who met regularly with the group?

A: The group was Mike Feldman; John Sharon was there a fair amount of the time. He had a heart attack one day at the end of the meeting, and he didn't tell anybody what happened. He lay down for awhile and he finally got up and he walked out because he was scared to death if he had a heart attack in the White House and the ambulances and everything came for him, it would create a great unpleasant kind of a story that could backfire.

B: John Sharon?

A: John Sharon, yes. Clark Clifford's law partner. S-H-A-R-O-N. Jim Sundquist was there--he was then working for the Agriculture Department. Leonard Marks was there--he was then in private law practice for himself. Milt Semer, who was then deputy administrator of HHFA [Housing and Home Finance Agency], which later became HUD--maybe it was HUD [Department of Housing and Urban Development] by that time, I can't remember when HUD came into existence.

B: I think it was later than that.

A: Abe Shays would meet with us sometimes, not too often. He was then at Harvard. Bob Wallace, who was assistant secretary of treasury, met with us quite regularly; Pat Moynihan was there part of the time; Bob Martin was one of the real regulars--he was there almost all of the time, a lawyer in Washington, and a guy that was tremendously

helpful, a brilliant guy.

I almost forgot Ernie Cuneo, without question the most prolific speech writer that ever existed. If you told Ernie that you wanted to say something mean about Goldwater in San Francisco, he would sit down and just like that [snaps fingers], before you were finished he would do it. But if you started off at the beginning of the meeting by saying "Goldwater's going to be in this place, this place, and this place," before the meeting was over Ernie would sit there and participate in the meeting and simultaneously write three statements having to do with each of the three local places to have the local politicians say about Goldwater, as Goldwater arrived. Ernie was in private law practice here in Washington then, too.

B: How much time have you this morning, sir? Have you got time to continue a little bit?

A: Yes, whatever your--

B: I've got all morning.

A: I don't know whether we can finish up today or not.

B: What was the relationship between your stepfather, Drew Pearson, and Mr. Johnson?

A: You really ought to ask Drew about that. I think Drew would give you a fascinating oral history.

B: We probably will, but sometimes an off-on-the-fringe observer's view is good to have too.

A: I think basically it was a long-term association rather than a real close friendship. They had known each other since the very early days when Johnson had been here in Congress. Drew might have known him before then; I'm not sure. It's conceivable that they knew

each other when Johnson was working as secretary to Congressman [Richard] Kleberg. Drew never missed an opportunity when he felt like it to take a dig at Johnson about his close association with the oil and gas interests and the money interests, the fact that he had been with Kleberg, who was one of the richest congressmen, *et cetera*. But at the same time he helped Johnson. He wrote a lot of good things about Johnson over the years, and if Johnson analyzed it, he'd find that the good outweighed the bad by probably ten or twenty to one.

B: Mr. Johnson is sort of known though for not conducting that sort of analysis.

A: He doesn't like that 90 per cent stuff; he wants it 100 per cent. Drew realizes that when you write about anybody the way that Bill White writes about Johnson that you lose all your credibility. Nobody picks up an article about Lyndon Johnson that Bill White writes and thinks they're reading anything but what Lyndon Johnson told Bill White to write. That may or may not be true, but it's what Bill White has built up for himself by being such a close friend and being such a 100-percenter for Johnson. Drew has never let himself get in that position with anybody.

B: Were there ever times when Mr. Johnson cut Mr. Pearson off for awhile?

A: No, I don't think so. I'm sure that mentally the President might have felt like it, and I'm certain that there were many times, although I don't recall any in my presence, when he must have blown up about things that Drew wrote.

I do remember one time when Mrs. Johnson told Bess--this was back when he was in the Senate--that whenever she could she used to get the *Washington Post* in the morning before Senator Johnson did and would cut Drew's column out to be sure that the

whole day wasn't started out wrong.

In those days Drew was getting an awful lot of stories from people like Joe Clark and Bill Proxmire, people like that--the radical nonconformist wing of the Senate, the guys that Johnson had tried to control and couldn't control, and they were just having a field day making life unpleasant for the Majority Leader. They'd feed Drew a lot of information that he used.

B: Were you ever put into a position of serving as a conduit between the two of them, from either side?

A: No, they always dealt with each other directly. I occasionally would tell Drew stories that were good for Johnson; much more frequently I would tell him stories on an off-the-record basis that were amusing and interesting and it would serve as background for him. Of course, anytime I did that he was perfectly free to go and dig out the same story from an independent source, which sometimes he did. And his independent source was usually the President. There were hundreds and hundreds of columns that he wrote that everybody around the White House had been cautioning, "This is top secret"--I don't mean that in a security standpoint--, "this is not to be leaked to anybody," and the leak was always at the top. The President knew how to do those things, and he liked to do them himself.

B: What I do here is sometimes kind of a license to be rude, so if this is impertinent shut me up. But what's it like to be the husband of the social secretary in the White House? Isn't that an awfully time-consuming job for your wife and the mother of your children?

A: Yes, it was time-consuming for her, but compared with life right now I frankly wouldn't

say it's a hell of a lot different. Bess' time seems to be consumed anyway. I guess a lot of people would have objected to it. I liked it very much; the kids liked it. Bess did a wonderful job at being social secretary and did a very good job as a housewife and mother. I know that sounds corny, but it's true.

The only thing that I have ever gotten mad at Bess about, and I still do, may have been emphasized a little bit because she was social secretary because she did that job so well, but I don't think it would have been a great deal different. She will tell me to do things, or ask me if I've done something that I feel anybody with a grain of decency and the ability to mind their own business wouldn't ask about. For instance, when I was chief of protocol I used to get this about three times a week and I really got mad at her and told her so. We'd be walking out the door of Blair House with all the pomp and fanfare and I would be busy making sure that the things were lined up right and that the Prime Minister was being steered in the right direction to his car, and Bess would say: "Have you got the luggage? Have you got the luggage?" But that lasts for about thirty seconds and it isn't anything serious.

B: That's probably why she did a good job as social secretary.

A: That <u>is</u> why, and that's the only thing that I ever objected to. On the other hand, you look at the thousands of benefits. If I bring five people home for dinner, it's not going to be the way you or I would eat if there were five of us and we dropped in unexpectedly on somebody at five o'clock at night. She really does the job right.

B: What were the circumstances of your being named protocol chief?

A: I had just come back from Florida. I got back from Florida about noon and I was going

to West Virginia that night. I've forgotten why I was in Florida. I was going to West Virginia with a client, a very important client.

B: You were out of the Post Office by this time?

A: I was practicing law. I was probably down in Florida on some kind of business, but I don't remember what it was and I'm sure that I was also combining it with politics, considering what time of year it was.

I got off the plane at the airport and called Bess and said, "I've just got a short time before I go to West Virginia. Why don't we eat lunch?" So I picked her up at the White House and she said, "My God, the damnedest thing has happened. The President just called me and said he'd been trying to reach you and couldn't reach you, and that he wants you to be chief of protocol. What do you think?"

I said, "I don't know. What do you think?" So we discussed it all through lunch. She explained exactly what he had said, which was that he'd been very nice about it, didn't say, "you have to take it" or anything like that. He said, "If Tyler can work out a leave of absence from his law firm and would like to do this, I'd like very much for him to do it. But if he can't do it, if it's inconvenient for any reason I'll understand. Have him give me a call back before four o'clock."

So I weighed all the pros and the cons and got on the phone and talked with my law partners. I concluded the first thing I didn't want to do was to take a leave of absence--I'd either resign from my law firm or I wouldn't. I just didn't want to ever be put in the position of not doing the job 100 per cent. I finally called Jim Jones at about eight o'clock that night, said I was sorry, I was already four hours late but I still had one

client who was up trout fishing in Idaho that I hadn't been able to reach yet; that I was pretty certain that I would take the job, but I'd like to clear it with this one guy first.

He said, "Fine. Call back in the morning." So I called back in the morning and said I'd take it.

B: Your father is long-time assistant chief of protocol, is he not?

A: Not a real long time. Angie Duke brought him in as assistant chief of protocol, I believe. It was after I was assistant postmaster general, and I guess it was probably in '65. Daddy had heard about this. The President told Bess, "I called Dean Rusk to ask him who he recommended for chief of protocol and he recommended a couple of different people, and then I said 'What about Tyler Abell?'" He said there was a long pause on the other end of the phone, and Dean Rusk said, "Well, he hasn't had any administrative experience and I don't know whether that would be such a wise appointment." He said, "I told Dean Rusk he was assistant postmaster general for four years; that's pretty good administrative experience." And Dean Rusk said, "What? Who did you say, Mr. President?" "And I said, 'Tyler Abell'." Dean Rusk said, "Oh, I thought you said George Abell."

B: That job, from the standpoint of an outsider looking in, looks like it could be a lot of fun and a lot of headaches, both at the same time.

A: That's right; there's no question about it. It's lots of fun and lots of headaches. I was only there four months and the fun greatly outweighed the headaches, but I think if I'd been there for four years I would have just been ready to climb out of my skin.

B: In that four months you had a small rash of foreign visitors there in the last of Mr. Johnson's administration.

A: I had four foreign visitors and one inauguration, which is a lot of work. The President made only one--we were thinking that he might make a trip to Moscow; that was rumored all the way up to the very last minute, and of course that really was something I wanted to do more than anything else. He made one little trip to Mexico, just a few feet across the border literally, for the dedication of the López Mateos Channel there in El Paso--one of a long series of dedications having to do with the change in the riverbed and the Chamizal.

B: Does the protocol job also involve continuing relationships with the ambassadors assigned here?

A: Yes. That's tremendous day-to-day effort there because each embassy--all of their people get tax exemption cards and passports and everything you can think of, there's an awful lot of paperwork and stuff there. Then also we had charge of the International Center, which was just getting started then. In fact, I let the first contract for the site utilization plan.

B: Why don't you take one of the foreign visits and describe what went on, one that's either typical or particularly interesting? Is that too tall an order?

A: No, it's not too tall an order. I think it would probably be a waste of time to go through the whole thing.

B: What I was getting at is what Mr. Johnson does with these things, how do you prepare him, and how he handles himself with visiting dignitaries.

A: Yes, let's do that part. Let me start out first by saying that the great thing about being chief of protocol is that you're the guy that really represents the United States; before the

trip is over if you haven't done a good job the guy will have a bad impression of the United States; if you have done a good job he's much more likely to have a good impression of the United States because you're with the chief of state from the moment he gets off the plane until he is safely put back on the plane and shipped out again.

A big fat briefing book is prepared that goes to the President and to all of the key people that are going to have anything to do with the visitor, and this is prepared by the State Department and the agency across the river, as it's known--it's usually classified "Secret."

B: You'd better explain "the agency across the river" is the CIA.

A: The CIA. I've never read anything of much consequence that I would consider secret in there, but they have a biography on each person in the official party. They have a list of all of the topics that are up for discussion; they have copies of all of the remarks and greetings that are going to be made. And then probably the most significant thing, they have a list of the things that the visitor is probably going to bring up and it's done in typical State Department fashion.

It says, "Mr. President, in your meeting with the Emir, he may ask about such-and-such problem. You may reply as follows:" and a long thing about that. "He may ask about this and you may reply as follows:" and so it goes.

The President followed his briefing papers fairly well, particularly in the instances where he didn't know the man so well. With the Iranian he was a lot freer because our relations with Iran are very, very close. He hadn't met the Iranian before but I think he felt that he could handle almost anything about Iran without any difficulty.

The same with the New Zealander. He was on a first-name basis with Prime Minister [Keith] Holyoake, and they'd met several times before. We don't have any problems with New Zealand of any consequence anyway. That was probably the friendliest visit that we had. Everybody could speak English, and the Prime Minister was just a delightful, jolly guy, and he kept saying, "I've been to this country before and I've never had this kind of treatment. They're taking me around in airplanes. I can go down and see Cape Kennedy and things like that." He really had a great time.

B: Do these briefing papers include the personal idiosyncrasies of the visitor?

A: Yes, very definitely, where they're known. However, as my wife has pointed out, the briefing papers aren't always that damned good. They told us that Prime Minister Holyoake loved cigars, so one of the things that Bess arranged for Mr. Johnson to give to the Prime Minister was a large cigar humidor. This was duly presented, despite the fact that from the time we picked Mr. Holyoake up until the time we presented him with the cigar humidor he never lit the first cigar.

B: Oops! Maybe he'll start, now that he has a nice humidor.

A: I just wonder how many other mistakes the CIA makes, if they can't figure out whether a guy smokes cigars or not!

B: Do you stay with the visitors continually from the time they get here until the time they leave?

A: Almost every waking hour, yes. I'm either there or awfully close at hand. I never sat in on the meetings they had with Dean Rusk. I did sit in on the other meetings; when they'd meet with some other Cabinet officer, I usually was there. And I was either in the

President's office or right outside the President's office when they met with the President.

B: Any of them give you any real trouble? Want to do something that you could not allow them to do, that kind of thing?

A: No. That's usually worked out so well in advance that when a great big head of state is coming to this country, he's not going to make some unreasonable request on a protocol thing. He might want a zillion dollars in foreign aid or a hundred thousand new jet fighter planes, but not--.

B: This is another world to me, but I suppose that every State visit like that has your opposite number doing the same thing for the visitor.

A: Right. There's a protocol man along always with the visitor, although not with Holyoake. Holyoake didn't have one. He was very much the old shoe guy. He came here with himself, wife, his secretary Mr. Barnes, and his foreign minister George Laking, who had at one time been ambassador here, and that was the official party.

B: Unusually small.

A: Very small. The Koreans on the other hand--he told me the Koreans had been down to pay an official visit to New Zealand a couple of weeks before he came to the United States and they arrived with ninety in the official party. We made it a rule in the United States that--I think the official party is limited to ten, that may not be the exact number but it's within a couple of people, to have ten or twelve. And there are all kinds of regulations that I violently disagreed with, about not paying for this and not paying for that--just the God-damnedest bunch of stuff you can imagine. We have all of these conflict of interest laws that are on the books to prohibit public officials of the United

States from accepting anything from anybody anywhere, which to me would indicate that by accepting a gift a public official would compromise himself a little bit and would be more inclined to do what you want him to do.

One of the purposes of these official visits is to get the official visitor to do what we want him to do, so one of the things we ought to try and do is to ply him with gifts and make life as happy for him as we can. And in fact he does get some gifts. The President gives him a number of very nice things. But then what happens! We insult the man by presenting him with the bill at the end of the trip, the car rental for all of his party, his X-number of thousand dollars. He had ten people in his official party and we paid for that hotel one night and the rest of the nights it's up to him to pay it. And so on down the line. If his wife needs a hairdresser, the hairdresser comes around and nobody from the State department will pay for the hairdresser. Unbelievable!

B: I didn't realize that kind of thing went on. Surely you don't give them a bill for room and board at Blair House?

A: No, isn't that amazing! We don't charge them a nickel for staying at Blair House. That'll be the next step some bright bureaucrat will dream up.

B: This question probably tells a lot more about me than anything else. What happens if some Arab potentate wants to bring several wives with him?

A: They never do. It's inconceivable. People in the Arab countries don't know who's married to who to begin with. Unless you're a very close member of the family, you won't know who has which wife.

B: But in effect your opposite number in those countries would not allow them to do

anything that would offend our way--

A: No. It wouldn't happen because they just don't do it. The wife is never seen. One of these big guys marries a wife, buys a house for her and puts her in the house and leaves her there. He goes to see her when he feels like it. And except for his very closest associates, they won't even know that he's married to that woman.

I went into this as a matter of curiosity, not because it was a problem. The guys in the State Department like Bill Brewer and Pete Hart who lived out in the Middle East for years didn't know, despite how closely the CIA and all these people are supposed to find out everything, they knew nothing of the personal lives of these men. Not who they're married to, who their children are, only the most cursory thing. There would be one official wife and they'd know a little bit about her, and that would be it.

B: Did Mr. Johnson enjoy these foreign visits?

A: That's kind of hard to say.

B: That's probably too general a question. Obviously it would depend upon the visitor and the importance of his country and so on.

A: It's kind of hard to say. He wanted very much to have the Germans down at the Ranch, and he had both [Ludwig] Erhard and [Konrad] Adenauer down there, because it's a big German community down there. It was a big thing, and he did that very deliberately. He had Adenauer down there when he was vice president. Some of the foreign visitors he knew well and liked and enjoyed and went way out of his way for. The Iranians. Much to my surprise, frankly, he went to the Iranian Embassy for a return visit which had been cancelled--that type of program had been cancelled a couple of years before. Let me

explain.

It is traditional and has been traditional in all these visits here and in other countries that the visitor arrives, the visitor is given an official dinner by the host and then the next night the visitor has at his embassy or somewhere appropriate a return dinner. The first foreign visitor to come to the United States was one of the kings of Hawaii in 1876--we were a hundred years old before the first person even came here. During the next fifty years we probably were visited by thirty or forty people, because it was a long way to go by clipper ship, if for no other reason; whereas, during the four months that I was there we had one a month, and actually it's usually more than that. While Johnson was president it probably averaged out something like twenty or thirty a year.

That's a lot of dinners, so somewhere along the line the dinner was changed to a cocktail reception, and then it was further changed and Johnson said that only for official State visits, that is, where the guy is the king or the president would he do it at all.

But when the Prime Minister of Iran came, Johnson went to a cocktail party that they had at the Iranian Embassy. I had written him a memo saying that the Iranians wanted him to go, and I didn't think he certainly had to go, but I did want to be sure that he understood how much they wanted him. And I also explained it was his last visit so that he could do it without changing any precedent, and he decided to go. He told me in the car coming home, "That's one of the greatest little countries. They've just been our friends through thick and thin, and I just want to do something for them."

Now does that mean that he enjoyed it, or does that mean that he was doing what

he thought was his job?

B: What did you have to do at the inaugural? Shepherd the ambassadors?

A: We were the go-between between the inaugural committee and all the inaugural activities and the ambassadors, to be sure that they got seats and everything, and that they got all their invitations and knew what to wear, *et cetera*. The inaugural was miserably handled, and I think a typical example of Republican ineptitude. Fortunately none of the ambassadors blamed me for all of the foul-ups.

Then also we had to shepherd the ambassadors into the inaugural reception itself up at the Capitol. It's kind of interesting, because of the three inaugurations where I have actively participated in the campaign of one of the people, for Kennedy, for Johnson, and for Humphrey, the best seat I had at the inauguration was when Nixon was inaugurated.

B: The protocol chief gets a good seat then.

A: He gets a good seat.

B: Anything else stand out about your time as chief of protocol?

A: There are lots of little things. It's hard to keep track of them and I just ramble along.

B: Normally if I were talking to a chief of protocol I think I'd feel obligated to ask him how he got along with the White House social secretary, but I don't guess I will.

A: Bess and I got along very well. That was not true though of other chiefs of protocol.

SANITIZED She got along well with Jimmy Symington really and pretty well with Angie Duke. I remember Angie one day got into a problem with her. It was one of the very early State dinners and Bess had arranged a beautiful theatrical presentation for after dinner. The President came out of the dining

room and started marching on down to the East Room where the stage had been set up, and Angie Duke ran ahead and said, "Quick, start the performance." So Bess who had been scurrying off doing something else, didn't realize that any of this was happening and they started the performance before a whole lot of other things were done that were supposed to have been done first. Bess was really sore about that one. Angie sent her a big bouquet of flowers the next morning, apologized, and made up for it.

But I had no problem with the White House social secretary. I never tried to tell her what to do. My only objections were when she'd try to tell me what to do, which she didn't do very often.

B: Putting on one of those things must be a full-scale production.

A: Yes, it sure is.

B: You took an active part in the campaign of '68?

A: Yes, up until I became chief of protocol I was quite active.

B: Let me phrase that another way. Did you start before March 31st on what should have been Lyndon Johnson's '68 campaign?

A: Yes. I was working just a little bit on that. In fact, what we were doing was forming another Five O'Clock Club just about the time that Johnson withdrew.

B: Assuming that Nixon was going to be the target?

A: No, that wasn't clear at that point. Rockfeller still looked very strong. This was in March. One of the reasons it was sort of hard to get ahead was because we didn't have a target, but we had been talking about it; we had been trying to get some of our people organized.

B: Had you any previous hint that Mr. Johnson might not be the candidate?

A: No.

B: You mentioned in the first tape your prediction made earlier.

A: Yes, my prediction had changed dramatically. I thought that he'd stick it out when the opposition was there. I ought to back up here. One of the things of course that the Five O'Clock Club wanted to be sure and do was to make sure that--this is pre-March 3lst--make sure that Johnson got through the nominating process without being so badly scarred that he couldn't make it through the election. McCarthy and, on March 15th, Kennedy were obviously out to make that very difficult for him.

B: What on earth did you plan to do?

A: We were going to do our best to carve up those two guys, and subsequently we did for Humphrey. We were very successful. I operated in a Five O'Clock Club for Humphrey, and we were successful in pitting McCarthy and Kennedy against each other so that I think in Oregon and California they were really knocking each other out.

B: With you in the background egging them on?

A: With us in the background egging them on.

Tape 2 of 2

B: What sort of things did you do to McCarthy and Kennedy after March 31, after Johnson's withdrawal and during the intraparty prenomination struggle?

A: We tried to do everything we could to hurt both of them, and the same bag of tricks that we used before. One idea that I came up with was to print up some bogus money because we tried to play up the issue that Kennedy was buying Indiana, which he was. He made

all the protestations about not spending very much money, but now the whole Kennedy family was behind the effort to pay up all the campaign debts that he ran up over a year ago. We printed up thousands of one dollar bills with Kennedy's picture on them with some clever little sayings on them that were circulated around Indiana.

B: Was this Five O'Clock Club meeting in the White House?

A: No, we met over in John Sharon's office.

B: Did Mr. Johnson know this was going on?

A: No.

B: Really?

A: He certainly didn't have any knowledge from any of us, absolutely not.

B: But obviously the McCarthy and Kennedy camps knew it was going on.

A: We certainly didn't advertise it. I wouldn't be telling you about it right now except for all the preliminary you gave me about how we can put this under lock and key.

B: Yes, I was going to remind you that we can.

A: We were quite close-mouthed about it. For instance, my then-partner Mike Feldman was for Kennedy, and I'm sure that he had no inkling about this meeting, although he had been part of our original Five O'Clock Club. I certainly wouldn't have told the President about it under any circumstances.

B: Did you ever hear any comments from the President about the situation within the party after his withdrawal?

A: No, I don't remember any. One of the interesting things that happened was out at the convention. I noticed a few Secret Service men around, which surprised me a little bit.

By Secret Service men, I mean some of the guys who were really close to Johnson, not the ones that I also knew who were with Humphrey and Wallace and McCarthy, *et cetera*, because all of them had gotten Secret Service protection by that time. I questioned them a little bit, but they won't tell you anything, and I just assumed that they really had to be extra careful because they had to anticipate something that Johnson might do, even when he legitimately isn't thinking of doing it.

When I got back to Washington a few days later I bumped into a friend of mine named Howard Cooke, who had worked at the Post Office Department. You have to remember that Marvin Watson in those days was postmaster general. We talked for a little while, and I asked him what he was doing out at the convention and he said, "Well, the same thing you were doing, I guess." He then unfolded this long, almost totally unbelievable tale, but nonetheless true, of how Marvin Watson had organized an underground "draft Johnson" movement, and the most childish, inept sort of a thing in the world. This was really the only reason Howard was telling me about it; he was almost embarrassed to have been part of the effort. But among other things, in order to keep it secret, they had all driven their cars to Chicago, loaded down with signs that said "Draft Johnson," "We Want LBJ," *et cetera*. This was so that nobody in Chicago would know that these signs were there.

And then they had started this effort of going around buttonholing delegates, trying to see if they couldn't get a groundswell of support to draft Johnson.

I don't know who knows. Whether this was all Marvin's doing, whether there were other people involved in it, whether the President knew about it, I just have no idea.

B: Was there ever a chance for that kind of thing to work?

A: No, not in my judgment. The President had been all too specific about withdrawing. If he'd started a little bit before the convention and really had some good operatives working on it, he might have pulled it off. But to have Marvin Watson working on it at the convention, there wasn't any chance whatever.

B: Did you see anything of the violence at the convention?

A: Oh, yes, what there was of it. I thought it was greatly overplayed in the press.

B: I phrased that badly. The violence in the streets was overplayed?

A: At the convention, yes. Nobody mentioned the fact that six people were killed at the Republican convention in Miami and nobody was killed in Chicago.

B: Did you go on then to work on the Humphrey campaign?

A: Yes, I was in charge of Florida until about the first of October when I became chief of protocol. Johnson did nothing that I know of or have since heard of in the campaign, and I think the main effort that he made and the effort that would have done Humphrey the most good was to end that goddamned war. I think everybody realized that, and that's what the guys around Humphrey used to say to me because we'd joke about it every so often. "What is Johnson going to do to help Humphrey?" "Just keep doing what he's doing and get that war over!"

B: Wasn't there a more serious debate within the Humphrey camp over whether or not to use Johnson in making speeches during the campaign?

A: I don't know. I would say that the Humphrey campaign was pretty badly managed.

B: That seems to be the consensus, that certainly at first organizationally and financially it

got off to a slow start.

A: It was terrible, absolutely terrible, inexcusably bad. I don't know whether there was a big debate over whether or not to use Johnson; there was a debate about everything else. I hope they didn't waste their time debating about whether or not to use Johnson, because I don't think they could have gotten the President to do very much. He would have ended that debate very quickly, and my guess is that he probably ended it with Humphrey. He and Humphrey were very close, and he would have just told Humphrey, "It won't do you any good for me to do that, and I can't do it. It's more important for me to do what I'm doing."

B: To a newspaper reader it looked like the campaign picked up toward the last. Do you think you might have won, given another week or so?

A: No, I don't think so. We came about as close as we were going to come, and I think we were just hitting the down side on the euphoria over the Paris Peace Talks. Maybe a day earlier would have made a difference, I'm not sure.

B: In Florida you must have had your hands full with Republicans on one side and Wallacites on the other side.

A: Yes, that was the only thing that could have enabled us to carry Florida, because enough of the conservatives would have gone over to Wallace to enable us to get a bare plurality. Unfortunately, frankly I honestly think George Smathers sabotaged Humphrey in that campaign for his old buddy Nixon. I think he pulled his whole organization off. I tried to advise Humphrey not to pay any attention to Smathers and to go ahead and form his own organization, which we could have done if we had proceeded early. But Smathers

had helped Humphrey in the convention, and Humphrey wanted to go with him through the general election. The idea was, clear everything through Smathers. That was fine, except Smathers wouldn't make any decisions. He in effect stymied all decision-making for a long period of time, so that we never got anything really off the ground down there.

B: I have about run out of questions, except of the most general kind. There's one that may be applicable. I have heard stories that during the Johnson presidency there was kind of a Georgetown social circle, not all government people but society, government, press people, who were sort of a continuing anti-Johnson rumor center. Is there anything to that?

A: I happen to think so. I feel there were a large number of Kennedy supporters who just felt that, goddammit, the White House belonged to them and Johnson wasn't doing it quite the way that Jack Kennedy would have done it if Jack Kennedy were president and they were in there advising Jack Kennedy what to do. A great many of those people were outsiders when Kennedy was president, and would have remained outsiders no matter what, but they had just enough smarts to get in a little bit with this bunch of sob sisters and made a nice presentation to certain reporters, some of whom had the same kind of feeling. That feeling, played up by the problems of the war, just kept going and I think expanded and was a tremendous problem to Johnson.

I'm one of those people who feels that if Johnson had been smart, he would have fired huge blocs of Kennedy supporters out of the government and put in his own people. This would have removed about 85 per cent of this Georgetown set, as you call it. Some of them were in the government anyway; those that weren't in the government were

getting information from their pals in the government about things that these people would say weren't being run right. Well, who's to say what's right and what's wrong! If a guy says it's wrong and he gives you a reason about it, you can play it up, and it was. Little things about Johnson, all the little things that built up to credibility gulch, really little, petty things, the kind that I described earlier about not wanting to have an announcement come out. Very unimportant. But if they're played up by enough people, pretty soon they have their effect and it's very difficult to turn that tide back, once it gets started.

B: And personal mannerisms too seemed to--

A: Yes, that was a problem too. They'd complain about not being invited to dinner at the White House--I got an awful lot of that because of Bess' job.

B: Was there a counter-movement where people like yourself, who I assume see these people regularly, argued for Mr. Johnson, or could you?

A: Yes, you could counter-move it and we would try from time to time when the opportunity presented itself, but the antis always have it over the pros in any kind of a fight, where public relations is involved, because it's newsworthy to say that Johnson belched very loudly at dinner. It's not news at all to say that Johnson sat down at dinner and ate with the rest of the people like anybody else would--that's what you expect him to do. So how do you fight it! You talk about the great things that he has done and the great things that are happening in the country because of the efforts that he made. That was said over and over again, but still these little things can gnaw away at the underpinnings. They wouldn't have counted for a goddamn if it hadn't been for that war, but you had that

problem that was the one big problem that was getting bigger and wasn't being solved. That, plus the personal mannerisms and the credibility gap, which really went together. The credibility gap was really another personal mannerism.

B: The war appears to have worn Mr. Johnson too. To someone who was as close to him as you were, could you see him getting more and more worried and frustrated by the war?

A: Sure. He didn't show it very often, hardly ever, but once in awhile he would come out with a remark. He made one to Bess one day--I've forgotten what the preliminary to the story was. Somebody had asked him to something and he was commenting and sort of grousing about it, and his punch line was, "Hell, I can't even get out of Vietnam!" But there were just very few things like that that would really show.

B: Sir, is there anything else you'd like to say on this kind of record, anything that should be said?

A: Why don't we print it and let me see what's in there?

B: All right, that sounds reasonable.

A: Then maybe if I see something worthwhile that ought to be expanded on, I can give you a call and we'll talk some more.

B: That will be fine.

[End of Tape 2 of 2 and Interview II]

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Date

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