INTERVIEW I

DATE: March 16, 1974

INTERVIEWEE: ROBERT BASKIN

INTERVIEWER: JOE B. FRANTZ

PLACE: Mr. Baskin's office at the Dallas News, Dallas, Texas

Tape 1 of 1

F: Bob, we've known each other too long to be formal, so we might as well go on there. Briefly, when did you first get aware of Lyndon Johnson? I guess about the same time I did.

B: I became aware of him when he first began running for Congress, but I didn't know him.

F: Did you know him at all before you went to Washington?

B: Yes, I did. I'd known him in Texas in his various campaigns for the Senate.

F: Had you actually covered any?

B: I did not cover the 1948 campaign, but I did do some coverage six years later in 1954.

F: When he was running against Dougherty?

B: Yes, Dudley Dougherty.

F: Well, what did you do? Travel the state with him?

B: He did not make an extensive campaign that year. As I recall, the year before [in] 1953, he went over the state making speeches and building up his organizations, and I covered him in that year and then in 1954 he felt so secure that he did not conduct an active

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campaign. He won very handily, as you recall.

F: Incidentally, we have a beautiful recording by Dudley Dougherty of an anti-Lyndon 45 rpm record he put out.

B: Oh, is that so? (Laughter)

F: He played it into the record. I'd never heard it; I don't believe it got a wide circulation.

B: No, I don't believe so. I wasn't aware of it.

F: In that 1953 running around, did you get really acquainted with him?

B: Yes, fairly well, I did, and we had an opportunity to talk privately and with a few other people on numerous occasions, and I found him very communicative and good company.

F: Anything in particular that stands out about that period?

B: No. I remember down at Hillsboro one day I was riding with him and Burris Jackson [?] in the car. He was going to make a speech there. Johnson, for reasons I do not understand, started talking to me about what a great man the late Senator Robert A. Taft was. I suppose he regarded me as a conservative and he was making a pitch to me for that reason. But he waxed rather long and eloquently about his friendship with Senator Taft, and what a great man Bob Taft was. I thought this was a rather interesting little episode, because Taft at that time was a leader in the Senate, and Johnson was emerging into a leadership role and, of course, he would assume as majority leader in 1955.

F: Knowing Johnson, I'm sure that he did try to get well acquainted with Taft.

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B: Yes, and I think they had a good relationship in the Senate.

F: Did you get any sort of intimations in those days of the sort of later at least alleged manipulation of the press that Johnson attempted from time to time?

B: Well, he wanted to tell you his story. There's no question about that. He wanted to persuade you, he wanted to make you friendly as possible. Yes, you get an intimation of . . . .

F: And did he read you?

B: Well, I was impressed with him. I didn't agree with him--

F: No, I mean did he read your copy? Did you get an idea that when you wrote something he would see it?

B: He would see it, certainly. His staff and he himself read things thoroughly, read the Texas press thoroughly, and you would hear about it if he didn't like it. I never did at that time have any instances of that. In later years--

F: 1954 was just routine.

B: Just routine.

F: You never saw any evidence of his great worry then in the 1954 campaign?

B: No, he felt he was not in trouble.

F: Did you cover any of the 1956 doings--either here or up in Chicago? You know this was the year of the Shivers versus Johnson-Rayburn contest.

B: Yes, I did, I covered the state convention.

F: Now this is the May one or the governor's one in September?

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B: The May one when they overthrew the Shivers-dominated State Democratic Executive Committee, and Rayburn-Johnson took over the state organization on the basis of Johnson being favorite son candidate and also chairman of the delegation to the national convention.

F: Any particular insights on that?

B: No, I've read since that Johnson regretted he had that fight with Shivers and he might not have done it the same way. It wasn't apparent at that time. I think the architect of the whole thing was the Speaker. But, if you'll remember, he [Rayburn] announced one day, just out of the clear blue sky up at Bonham--I think he walked up to the office of the Bonham Daily Favorite with a statement in 1956; he favored Lyndon Johnson to be favorite son, Lyndon Johnson to be chairman of the delegation to the national convention. This threw down the glove to Allan Shivers, of course. Now he could have let Shivers go on and be the chairman of the delegation. He could have worked out an effective compromise there, but this had to be a battle there.

F: This is speculative, but do you think Mr. Sam was trying to be sure the Texas delegation would hold to the party, or to prevent what happened in 1952?

B: I think that was certainly involved, yes, because he was still very angry with Shivers and with Price Daniel over their defection in 1952.

F: Were you fairly close to the Democrats of Texas at this time? Were

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you aware, beyond just a superficial journalist's concept, of where they stood? I judged that Mr. Sam worked with them, and Lyndon did not.

B: Well, that is correct. Mr. Sam could get along with them. They always rankled Johnson for some reason. You're talking about the liberal element?

F: Right, the D.O.T.

B: The D.O.T., as it was called at that time.

F: For Democrats of Texas.

B: He never felt comfortable with them, but Rayburn could get along with that group all right. They respected him, too. But there was always friction as far as Johnson was concerned, and, as you know, afterwards he went back into coalition with Shivers' people because he found these people very hard to deal with. And at the 1956 convention, he wanted Mrs. Lloyd Bentsen to be national committeewoman. And the liberals moved in and elected Mrs. Frankie Randolph. This is where the break really came, right there.

F: Oh, was this just a case of Johnson not being able to hold people in line?

B: I don't think it was that; I think they were just too liberal for him.

F: Did you go to Chicago in 1956?

B: I didn't go in 1956.

F: Did you have any more than just casual relationships with Johnson until you went to Washington?

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B: Well, no, not to speak of. It was after I went to Washington in 1958.

F: He held a press conference somewhere near the Ranch--first one after he had the heart attack? Did you cover that?

B: No. I believe he held one in Washington before that, but I was not in Washington at that time. I think after he got out of the hospital he called in the Texas press in Washington and he was in bed, as the story has been told to me, but I was not present. I think the outstanding thing there [was that] I think he said he had learned a great deal of humility. (Laughter)

F: Some people didn't see the lesson, did they?

F: Then did you go to Washington in 1958?

B: Yes.

F: Did you contact Johnson right away, or did he contact you?

B: Well, I'd been in contact with him before I went up there, and he came by the News in the fall of 1957 and had a luncheon with some of us here. He was told at that time by Jack Krueger, the managing editor, that I was going to Washington in January.

F: This had been ticketed for some time.

B: This had been ticketed. I don't think Johnson could figure me out very well at that time. He didn't look pleased, he didn't look displeased; he kind of looked blank which is unusual for Lyndon Johnson.

F: Because he never could quite get you in a convenient slot.

B: No, at that time he couldn't. But when I got to Washington, he

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was extremely cordial. I saw him practically every day because I was devoting most of my time covering the Senate.

F: Did you have a regular time, did you just buttonhole him somewhere in the corridor, did you call by the office, did he call you?

B: Well, I called by the office, I would go up to the Hill each day, and just before the Senate met at noon, Johnson would see the press on the Senate floor. So I would always be there for that little session. There'd be, perhaps, eight to ten reporters. And he would answer a few questions.

F: Mainly Texas reporters?

B: No, this was national.

F: National.

B: And then I'd go around and see him in his office, and on several occasions I'd be sitting in the press gallery say, around one or two o'clock in the afternoon. You have a late lunch around the Senate there because it meets at noon. Johnson would beckon to me and lead me outside. He'd do this from the floor, so I'd go down and meet him and we'd go and have lunch.

F: Where--there in the Senate dining room or private dining room?

B: In his office. He had these hamburger patties in the shape of the state of Texas, and you'd invariably have a hamburger. He'd talk all through the luncheon. You wouldn't get many questions in, but he'd talk and explain what he was doing.

F: Were these considered sort of off the record?

B: By and large, they were off the record; however, if he had something

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he wanted to give you, he made it quite plain it was for the record. And if you asked questions and you made it clear that you wanted an on the record answer, why, yes.

F: Could you usually get answers when you were wanting to know something? Straight?

B: Well, pretty well. He could be evasive at times.

F: He could talk around things.

B: He'd move you off in another [direction].

F: Did he ever give you a "no comment," or did he just always take off in another direction?

B: No, I don't recall any "no comments" from Johnson. That wasn't his way. He'd start off in some other direction, deflect your question.

F: Did he talk about his colleagues?

B: Yes, he did. Sometimes he could be very praising and he could be very condemning at times. He had his definite likes and dislikes.

F: What did he think about his new junior senator?

B: He didn't like him. He didn't like him at all.

F: I guess for the record I should say that was Ralph Yarborough.

B: Yes. There was a move in the Senate Democratic caucus to strip Johnson of some of his powers and Yarborough was among those who voted to do this, who was in favor of doing this. I talked to Johnson immediately after that meeting. He was just furious at Yarborough and called him some very harsh names. The thing was

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put down. The southerners of course stood firm for Johnson and the principal inspiration of it came out of some of the eastern liberals who were kind of chaffing under the dominating mood of the Johnson leadership.

F: Yarborough never was really part of the southern group.

B: No. Well, neither he nor Johnson joined the southern caucus. Johnson and Senator [Richard] Russell of Georgia, of course, worked hand in glove on everything. They were very close to each other. But I remember, I believe it was 1958, Yarborough and Johnson both decided at the same time to start attending the western caucus of Democrats. This surprised a good many people, but Johnson's real strength lay with the southern senators because they were a tremendous force in the Senate at that time.

F: I gather Richard Russell's been everything from an uncle to a daddy to a brother to him.

B: Well, he made him majority leader, no question about it. And they were always very close friends, always.

F: Did Johnson ever talk to you about upcoming committee assignments and that sort of thing? Would he ever get that intimate?

B: He would in a general sort of way. He wouldn't tip his hand. You know he liked to spring these things on his own; he didn't like leaks at all, any of that. He wasn't too forthcoming with that sort of thing.

F: Again, did he ever talk to you about Dallas News policy on any issues in these luncheons?

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B: Yes, he would; he would wonder sometimes why we'd written such and such an editorial, and if we'd said something good about him, why, he would be delighted and have copies made of it. I think he had a great deal of respect for the paper because we'd call the shots as we saw them. All our editorial writers did and sometimes they praised Johnson, sometimes they criticized him. And I don't believe he ever complained after 1948 that he didn't get a fair shake from us.

F: Was he fairly close to top management here? More particularly, Ted Dealey.

B: I wouldn't say so--but no, he was not close to Ted. He was on a friendly basis with most of them, but Ted and Johnson didn't get along. Ted would have told you so.

F: Two strong characters.

B: Just two strong characters there.

F: Did Johnson ever invite you, or maybe this is a violation of protocol, I don't know, but you know they had these Wednesday Texas delegation luncheons and every other week, they were open. Were newsmen invited?

B: I was invited on numerous occasions, and if you wanted to--this is something I didn't do--you could hang around out there and somebody would invite you in. Johnson, to my recollection, never invited me because usually it was a congressman that did it.

F: Well, now, at those, did Johnson tend to dominate them, or were they pretty much-- ?

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B: He was certainly looking to; yes, he was the dominant figure, there was no question about it.

F: I always wondered with two big talkers like Yarborough and Johnson, who did the talking?

B: Well, Johnson could control that situation. At these open meetings, they tried to avoid all controversy. They usually tried to discuss things in which there were state problems in which they were in general agreement. That's what might come up, and frequently you had some guest in from out of town that would talk for awhile or something like that. Or maybe they'd have somebody from the executive department to explain a particular project in which Texas was interested. It was the closed door sessions of the Texas group where the decisions [were made]--where they really got down to it.

F: Did you get much opportunity to see Johnson wheel and deal?

B: Well, yes.

F: Can you describe some instance of that?

B: Well, there are so many of them. He knew what every senator wanted and if he needed the senator's vote on a certain proposition, well, he knew how to hit him through that particular senator's desires and lend encouragement to his little pet project for his state or something like that. This was a technique. I think he also knew pretty well some of the weaknesses of individual senators and I'm not getting into any suggestion of blackmail, but he knew where to touch them.

F: The sort of thing that would appeal, one way or another.

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B: Yes, right.

F: Was he communicative with all the senators even though they didn't think he was the greatest thing in the history of --

B: I wouldn't say he was very communicative with them. As a leader, he would answer their questions if they were proper ones. But he wasn't seeking their counsel by any means.

F: Were newsmen ever invited as friends to any of those Rayburn Board of Education meetings?

B: Yes, occasionally; I've been to them.

F: Were they just more good talk?

B: Talk and a few drinks and banter but sometimes, why, that would be where something would jell.

F: Now, could you see it jelling, or did it just sort of ease into place without you being aware?

B: It'd just kind of ease into place. They were very adroit about bringing people around, you know. Now Johnson didn't get to those very often. After he became a senator, he didn't go to the House side much, and Rayburn didn't like to go to the Senate side. I do recall the story Johnson told about how Rayburn came over to his office on the Senate side one evening to have a drink and Johnson had a great big picture of Morris Sheppard up on his wall, and Rayburn was having a drink and it made him feel rather nervous. He told Johnson finally, "I just find it hard to drink with Morris Sheppard's picture up there." Sheppard who was the author of the prohibition amendment.

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F: Right.

B: And so Johnson said the next time he invited Rayburn over, he rearranged the pictures in his office, said he put Jack Garner's picture up there and said that Mr. Rayburn could drink very comfortably under that picture.

F: No inhibitions there.

B: No inhibitions there.

F: Did you get much idea in those late fifties that Johnson was preparing rather steadily and fiercely to offer himself in 1960 for the presidency or did you have a feeling that this was just something he kind of thought about in his odd moments?

B: Well, you know, there had been some talk about a possible Johnson candidacy in 1956. It didn't gain any ground and Johnson, for some reason--maybe it was intuitive--was very reluctant to push this presidential talk really seriously and get organized on it. Now, in late 1959 or a little earlier maybe, Rayburn started pushing this thing, and Johnson wasn't allowing himself to be pushed very far. When he finally got around to it in 1960, he was late, you know, in announcing his candidacy. I think he knew that the thing was very doubtful of his getting the nomination all along. But Rayburn thought it could be swung through a southern-western coalition.

F: Did you think this was the case of Johnson not wanting to stick his neck out on a losing cause?

B: I think that's involved probably, yes. But if that was his instinct, his intuition on the thing, I think he was quite right.

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F: Did you ever talk to him about his presidential ambitions?

B: Yes, he mentioned them, but it was always with heavy qualifications--how it could be accomplished. He was very doubtful any southerner could be nominated.

F: Did he ever, as far as you know, consider entering primaries?

B: No, I don't think he ever gave it any thought, and he didn't in 1960 you know.

F: Did you have any opportunity to observe his relationship with Jack Kennedy?

B: Yes, very friendly, until the White House days, until Kennedy got in the White House; then things changed, but their relationship was very good. Kennedy always spoke highly of him.

F: It was more than just correct then?

B: Yes, it was more. It was good and friendly, too.

F: Did he recognize Jack Kennedy as a good politician?

B: Well, I'm not sure about that. I don't think he was much impressed with Kennedy's record in the Senate, because there wasn't much of a record. A lot of absenteeism and he didn't do his homework particularly well. Johnson really liked people that bore in, you know, and did their job. But their personal relationship was, I would say, quite cordial.

F: Has Bobby emerged as a factor in Johnson's life yet? He was a name because of McCarthy and so on.

B: No, well, yes, in 1954 and 1959 Bobby was chief counsel of the Senate rackets committee and he was preoccupied with that. Jack Kennedy

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was on the committee, and this had the presidential overtones of course to build up--Jack Kennedy to a certain extent because he was a leading figure on this committee.

F: You can't beat it for a way to get your name in the papers.

B: No, it's a good forum for that, but I don't think Johnson was paying much attention to Bobby Kennedy at that time. He was concentrating on what he was doing.

F: Was John Connally trying to beat bushes for the presidency for Johnson?

B: He was very reluctant on the thing.

F: He saw all the pitfalls too.

B: He saw all the pitfalls. Rayburn in 1960 opened up a downtown office in Washington for Johnson for President without Johnson's approval, and John Connally [was upset].

F: Trying to force the issue.

B: He was forcing the issue, that's what he was doing. I know I talked to Connally about it and Connally was very upset. He said that "Johnson had not made his mind up to go ahead, that Mrs. Johnson was opposed to him seeking it, and there were so many things that have to be worked out before we can take a step like this." And he thought the Speaker had been precipitous about it, but the Speaker was determined that Johnson run for president.

F: Did you get a feeling this was sponsorship on Rayburn's part or that he looked on this as breakthrough or why did he take the lead in this? Did he ever talk to you about it?

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B: Oh, I think in a general way he may have, he thought Johnson would be a good president; I think that was it and I think the Speaker thought it could be pulled off. In the spring of 1960 Johnson went up to East Liverpool, Ohio, to a dinner up there--I'm sure Rayburn was behind that dinner because the guy who got it up was Representative Wayne Hays of Ohio, and East Liverpool is an extreme eastern edge of--

F: Kind of an off-shoot of Pittsburgh, in a way.

B: Yes, it is, yes, just across the border. We got up there--I covered this event--and they had Johnson for president signs all over the walls and a lot of Johnson presidential literature there of course. And the house we found had been very well papered with [it]. You know, they'd roll out a crowd, and Johnson made a speech, not mentioning any presidential ambition or anything like that and the evening went off very well. I think Rayburn wanted this to demonstrate that Johnson had some following in the North.

F: Yes.

B: And Hays, of course, needed the Speaker's help on so many things that he set this thing up. But it was very nicely staged, I might say that.

F: There wasn't any follow-up on it as far as Johnson was concerned?

B: No, no, there wasn't. It was shortly after that, however, that he made two trips into the West. I was on one of those trips. And he was really trying to determine if he could put together a southern-western coalition, in which case he really would have been a viable

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factor in the convention. But neither of those trips produced any delegates to speak of.

F: Well, now after he became, obviously, the number two candidate in Los Angeles, most people agree that his only hope was that if the convention failed to go for Kennedy early and then if the second choices start coming in for Johnson as Kennedy's stalled. Did Johnson ever talk to you about the strategy? I mean, by now his name's in the hat regardless of how it got there.

B: Well, he was hoping, and Rayburn was hoping, that they could get on to a second ballot.

F: Just kind of erode Kennedy a little.

B: Kind of erode Kennedy. Well, it got all the way to Wyoming. Wyoming cast the decisive vote and Johnson thought he was going to have most of the Wyoming delegates, but when they saw which way it was going and they could make the decisive thing, why, they threw in all their votes for Kennedy and that put it over.

F: Did Johnson ever comment to you on what looked like Udall's defection of the Arizona delegation?

B: Yes, in pretty vigorous terms. Carl Hayden and others thought they had the Arizona situation under control out there and that the Arizona state convention would throw the thing solidly for Johnson. Well, as I understand this story, they had a recess there. The convention was pro-Johnson before the recess. Came back and the Maricopa County delegation, which is kind of a key to it, had been taken over by the Kennedys. There was a great deal of

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talk of money being exchanged on this. But anyway it was a Kennedy convention when they came back, and Stewart Udall had been the engineer of it. They had pumped in a good deal of money. So this was very deleterious to this southern-western coalition scheme; in fact it may have been the fatal blow. They didn't get it.

F: And of course, Arizona coming early in the alphabet--

B: Made it very important, yes.

F: They do build up on you. Did you go to Los Angeles?

B: Yes, I did.

F: What did you do--cover primarily the Johnson camp?

B: Well, we had four reporters for the Dallas News and we were splitting it up on a day-to-day basis and, yes, I was around the Johnson camp.

F: What was it like around there?

B: Hectic. Comings and goings and--

F: Had Mrs. Johnson reconciled herself to his being a candidate?

B: As vice president?

F: Well, first [president].

B: Well, eventually she did become reconciled. I don't think she ever was extremely happy about it.

F: Do you think that's because of his heart attack history?

B: I think it might have been.

F: She never talked to you about it?

B: She never talked to me about it, but that would have been logical. But I know Connally told me that Mrs. Johnson was very dubious always

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about the whole thing. I remember being at the suite there after the convention was all over and Johnson had been nominated for vice president. He and Mrs. Johnson were leaving and she looked very bad and I remember she commented and says, "Well, I hope this works out all right." Just sounded--a note of skepticism in her voice.

F: Kind of like any wife whose husband's gone out and mortgaged the house on some speculative venture.

B: Yes, "I hope this works out all right."

F: Did you have any idea that, one, that Kennedy would make the offer, and two, that Johnson would accept?

B: No, I didn't. It caught me completely by surprise.

F: Well, I judge it caught most of the Texas delegation.

B: It sure did. Johnson had told all of us, everybody, that he would not accept the vice presidential nomination under any circumstances, and I believe he meant it at the time.

F: What do you think happened?

B: Well, I can see the politics of it; if Kennedy had been elected President and Johnson not been on the ticket, his role as majority leader in the Senate would have diminished considerably. Now he could be a big figure as long as we had a Republican president, a president of the other party, but you get a president of his own party and the role of majority leader goes down. In fact, he would be just a servant of the president in the Senate. I think Johnson

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was aware of this.

F: He'd kind of reached his peak then, I think.

B: Reached his peak, and so this was a calculated risk. I think he felt like he might have a whole lot more to say in the Kennedy Administration than he got when he went into office. He'd been used to dominating Jack to some extent in the Senate because of his leadership role and I think he really thought that he could have a great deal of effect on the President. It didn't turn out that way at all. I remember the first time I really was conscious of his getting his knuckles rapped by Kennedy people, Johnson told some reporters on the plane flight, I've forgotten where, that he thought it'd be a good thing if Kennedy would nominate Fulbright for secretary of state and this Negro congressman from Illinois, William Dawson, as postmaster general. And the Kennedy people reacted vigorously against this and they sat Johnson down, I think, about talking about something that was purely the prerogative of the President himself, not the Vice President-to-be.

F: Yes, it would be interesting to see Fulbright as secretary of state with Johnson. (Laughter) Might have changed a little history, at least of the two men.

After that time since you've gotten into that, did Johnson seem to sponsor Fulbright? Did you see any evidence of it?

B: I didn't see any evidence of it.

F: They were good friends.

B: They were pretty good friends up until then, up until the Vietnam

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thing. Fulbright was the man who put the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution through the Senate--only had two votes there against it.

F: Did you cover a part of the campaign with Johnson?

B: Part of it, yes. The most memorable part of that was his whistlestop tour through the south.

F: You were on that.

B: I was on that.

F: Describe that general scene, how it was organized, et cetera.

B: It was extremely well-organized. They had this LBJ Special.

F: Was Johnson in charge in effect, or were the Kennedys calling the shots?

B: No, Johnson was in charge of that.

F: I mean, they left him--

B: There's no evidence there that the Kennedys were running that thing at all. But it was a colorful thing. They sang, "The Yellow Rose of Texas" and there was a lot of activity. It got off to a bad start which is a famous story by now about the first stop outside of Washington was Culpepper, Virginia and there were about fifteen people out there. Senator Harry F. Byrd was, you know, preserving his golden silence and the people of Virginia were not turned on at all. The train pulled off a little quicker than [usual]. Johnson was still on the platform talking and the train started moving and he shouted out as he departed, "What has Dick Nixon ever done for Culpepper?" You remember that, I guess you've had that from a lot of sources. That actually happened.

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F: Besides Byrd's silence on this, was this partially just poor advancing?

B: I don't believe--you might have got out a big crowd--well you could have bused them in from other places, you can bus them in from Washington for that matter.

F: Always shoo the kids out. Just really not friendly territory at that moment.

B: No, it sure wasn't.

F: The crowds then picked up?

B: Crowds picked up and he had good crowds most of the way. I don't think there's any question that he contributed heavily to Kennedy's carrying the states in the South that he did.

F: What did Johnson do between stops?

B: Oh, between stops, at every place he'd bring a lot of local politicians and he'd talk to them until he got to the next stop. Then they'd get off and the new crowd would come on and ride with him and he's talking to people from county commissioner on up.

F: So if I were going to Seymour I would have picked up old Bob Baskin in Wichita Falls and we'd have moved on.

B: Right, that's the way he did it. And he'd have his picture made with them, and God, he had a couple of photographers there working around the clock.

F: Did they have a darkroom on the train?

B: No, I don't believe, not to my knowledge. They were getting the pictures made, and I don't know whether they had any drop-offs or

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not.

F: Did they have good press facilities on the train or did you have to get off?

B: Oh, excellent. The speeches were piped in through the press car, work car. Most of us got off at each stop.

F: Did he have a set speech that he gave everywhere or did he have a series?

B: Yes, it was always pretty much a set speech that appealed to the South.

F: Yes. Just with some local variations.

B: Some local variations. It was the traditional appeal of the national party to the grandfathers and---

F: Did they give him much trouble on the Catholic issue?

B: No, no.

F: What about civil rights.

B: There were only a few places where there was much heckling. There was some in South Carolina where he was picketed both on the civil rights matter and then there were some signs about the eighty-seven vote victory in 1948.

F: Did he take that in stride as a part of the game?

B: Yes, pretty well, pretty well. I wouldn't describe it as extremely serious heckling anyway, just a few signs up and people walking around.

F: Did he ever indicate that it might even be an advantage to him?

B: No, he just went on, he had everything going for him pretty well.

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The southern senators had all lined up for him, you know, except Byrd.

F: So he was satisfied with the way the tour went?

B: Oh, yes, he was as happy as he could be about it.

I know when we were going into New Orleans on the conclusion of the tour, he sat down in the press car and talked about what a great trip it had been and how much he had enjoyed it. He thought it came off well.

F: Would he come in from time to time and just sit down and visit with you all on a kind of no-holes-barred situation?

B: Not so much on that train trip because he was too busy with these local politicians, but now when you flew places with him, he was talking to you all the time during that campaign.

F: I want to go back to Los Angeles [for] just a minute. How did you learn about Johnson's accepting or being offered and accepting the vice presidency?

B: As I recall, I was in my hotel room writing a story with the television on when I got the announcement.

F: You just got it like every other Mr. and Mrs. America.

B: Yes, like everybody else. Allen Duckworth was over at that suite when it happened and he was astounded as anybody. We all were astounded.

F: Duckworth was there when the announcement was made?

B: Yes.

F: Did he ever talk to you about--I'm sure he did--the atmosphere there?

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B: Yes, everybody was running around and was pretty excited about the whole thing.

F: Did you get any opportunity to observe firsthand the sort of Bobby Kennedy-Soapy Williams-Walter Reuther opposition to the decision?

B: No, I was told that later that there was tremendous opposition on their part, but I did not talk to them personally.

F: Of course, they had no choice in the matter.

B: No, no.

F: You can't deny your hero or else you--

B: You know it's rather interesting. No two people give the same account of that negotiation.

F: Did any of the Texas delegates talk to you?

B: You mean before?

F: No, after this happened?

B: Yes, a lot of them were just shattered by it.

F: Had some of them already begun to turn on Johnson?

B: Oh, I think they were too stunned right then; they didn't know what they wanted to do. They were really shaken up by it. I just don't think anybody in the delegation, or among the Texas congressmen who were all out there, was prepared for that thing in any way. I know I wasn't prepared. I thought perhaps it was going to be Symington, I didn't know.

F: So did Symington.

B: So did Symington. It jolted us.

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F: Did Johnson talk to you any in the summer and fall of 1960 about the possibility of his actually losing his Senate seat to John Tower?

B: No, I think he felt secure.

F: It wasn't exactly a thumping victory.

B: No, it wasn't it wasn't that.

F: It set the stage for later. Now, after he became vice president and they had the special election to fill the Johnson Senate seat, did he ever talk to you about the fact that he had been replaced by a Republican?

B: Well, we were all wondering how Johnson was going to react to this, and whether he was going to act with due cordiality toward Tower. And he came through with flying colors; I would say he treated Tower extremely well. I remember the Republicans had a big party over in the Caucus Room in the Senate Office Building. And Johnson turned up over there and stayed for a while and made some remarks. They applauded him and it was a very happy occasion. So he didn't show any chagrin or he didn't show any bitterness about losing a Democratic seat and so it went off very well.

F: Again, superficially at least, his and Tower's relations were always rather cordial.

B: They were correct, yes.

F: I guess correct is a better word.

B: Yes, I don't think--

F: Never tried to cut him or anything?

B: No, not that I know of. No, I don't think so. Of course he was

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terribly disappointed that Texas elected a Republican. First one since Reconstruction, but--

F: Did you see him much as vice president?

B: Yes, fairly often. Made a few trips with him.

F: Did you go on any of those overseas trips?

B: No. Wait a minute, let me think. I didn't make the one around the world, the famous around-the-world trip.

F: Well, you know, he made one for Kennedy over to Berlin.

B: I made the Berlin trip. Yes, this was right after the Wall went up. Yes, I made that trip. The Berliners thought we were abandoning them. Kennedy sent Johnson over to reassure them that we were still on their side. And he did it very effectively. There was a very emotional atmosphere there: crowds on the street, people crying, this kind of thing.

F: Was that before the speech, during or after?

B: No, just when he came by. They were getting all worked up.

F: Just as a kind of show of support.

B: Yes, then we got in that convoy through East Germany, too, while he was there. That was another emotional scene. They were convinced that we were still with them, and he was the one that did it.

F: Do you think that the crowd that gathered-- it must have been a pretty tremendous crowd--came because it was stirred or was it whipped out?

B: No, it was stirred, it was genuine. They weren't whipped out at all.

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They didn't need to. People were already all wrought up about the Wall. They were fearing the worst might happen any time. And they had gotten the idea that the United States was not standing with them. So they came out to see the American Vice President and they cheered his reassurances that we were with them.

F: How'd they do that, incidentally? Was it translated as it went?

B: Yes, the principal speech was made there in the city hall. Willy Brandt was mayor, and Johnson--as I recall, it was translated in segments, they didn't wait till it was all over, that's my recollection.

F: How did they handle press relations on that?

B: You mean the Germans or us?

F: The Germans.

B: Well, we went over on the plane with Johnson, the American group of reporters. And they had full press facilities there, things very well taken care of even though the trip jumped up quite quickly.

F: Did the other western European countries send a fair press delegation?

B: Well, of course, they had plenty of correspondents in of their own in Berlin anyway, and there were none travelling with us. This was strictly an American contingent which got up with very short notice there in Washington. I suppose there were twenty-five of us.

F: You got used to short notice!

B: I sure did. That was a case of it, too. A lot of us had to renew passports, things like that.

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F: How did you handle that? Did you always make sure you had a clean suit, and a bag ready and so forth, because sometimes I gather your notice was almost instantaneous.

B: Well, yes, it was. Later, when Johnson became president and you almost had to keep a bag in your office because you never knew when he was going to dart off to Texas or someplace else. That was his style. I remember he did that as senator--I spoke earlier of that trip to East Liverpool, Ohio. We went back to Pittsburgh that night to spend the night, and Johnson was going to see some people in Pittsburgh the following day. He was going to make a speech in Clarksville, West Virginia the following night.

So he called us all to his room--all the press party--and he said, "Now," he said, "when we get through with this thing in West Virginia, why don't we have some fun and go over to White Sulphur Springs and just spend the weekend over there and have a good time." So everybody says, "That's fine. That's a good idea." So he got hold of John Connally to get us in the hotel. John Connally was on the board of the Chesapeake & Ohio Railroad which, I think, owns the hotel. Connally called back a little bit later and said, "They've got a big convention over there and it's full up." We were all sitting in the room with Johnson while this talk was going on. So after he talked to Connally, he says, "All right, damn it, we'll just go to the Ranch." So the following night after his speech in West Virginia, we took off in a rain storm and headed to the Ranch. Got in there around three or four o'clock in the morning. Mrs. Johnson and the other ladies, a friend of hers and Josefa, his sister, were there to meet us and had

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had everything organized out at the Ranch and put us up for the night. We stayed three days there. Just like that, you know. And then we'd be off. Here we go. "By God, we'll go to the Ranch," he said.

F: And the wives learn to accept any excuse. When you went down to the Ranch like that, where did he put you?

B: Oh, we were over there--if you've been to the Ranch you know those quarters--I was staying over in those quarters, I don't know what you call it, but they've got some rooms over there. I have stayed in the main house, but--

F: Now, on a trip like that, what'd he do, just turn you loose? I'm sure he took you on a tour.

B: He took us on a tour, of course, and we sat around and talked a lot--very pleasant. Sat around the swimming pool--he's got everybody's--you remember those concrete slabs he had?

F: Yes.

B: Squares--all of us had to put our names on those and Johnson's hospitality was really something overwhelming.

F: I realize that you're in the position of being the conscience and critical and so forth, but there was a lot of sniping on the barbecue and cornbread and beer routine. Yet I never went to anything like that that it wasn't thoroughly enjoyed. Now was this [the case then]?

B: That's my experience, yes. Oh, some of the ultra-sophisticates, I guess, liked to sneer at it.

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F: But they ate it!

B: They sure ate it, and they enjoyed it, and they drank his whiskey, too.

F: Yes. The kind of a "I like what you're doing, but here's the way I would have done it" sort of situation.

B: I think so, yes.

F: Well, I've often wondered if it was that or if they felt that their readership demanded it.

B: I don't know. There's always been a kind of a tendency in the East I think to sneer at the folkways of other sections of the country.

F: Well, you and I know that so many of your newsmen of your eastern papers, your network and so forth, are southern boys, western boys, and so forth. And yet they take on the garment when they get up there. What happens? Is this a compensation?

B: Well, I think so. I know several examples of just what you're talking about, and they change. They tend to be a little bit apologetic about their background, their origins and I don't know how to account for this. I never felt any inferiority to those people, and that I had to emulate their ways; some of them think you have to do it.

F: You, I presume, have to do a regular denial of your background. Did Johnson ever talk to you about the frustrations of being vice president?

B: Yes, he did. He was very unhappy over there.

F: Did he feel that it was inherent in the office or that the Kennedy

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people were kicking him around, or what?

B: I think he felt both. He had viewed his possible role as vice president quite differently than what it turned out to be. To begin with, he had an idea that he could still be a great influence in the Senate and he wanted to preside over the meetings of the Democratic senators. Well, they rose up about this. They said, "You're not going to do this." They said, "You're welcome to come any time you want to, but you're not . . . ." So this dissolved on him and he never went to the meetings after this occurred. Because it's against every tradition of the Senate for the vice president to undertake anything. But he did have an idea that he could maybe retain some of his old powers there with the Democrats of the body. And then I think he did believe that he was going to have more influence with Kennedy. But the staff over there joked about Johnson and they wouldn't turn a hand for him, even though Kennedy, I think, always had a good feeling. Johnson couldn't be running over there every day with a new idea, a new request or anything like that.

F: So he just sat over in the EOB. Did he tend to hang out in the EOB? He would still have several offices?

B: No, well, he was there sometimes but I think he spent more time over at the Capitol. I remember--showing you the frustration of it--I went in to see him one day in the office in the Capitol. I guess I spent a couple of hours talking to him--just the two of us alone in his office; nobody waiting outside to see him, no activity around

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there--a quiet place. It was such a contrast from the way it had been when he was majority leader. He had one phone call while I was in that room--Carl Albert. They talked, I guess, five minutes and Johnson was telling Albert that he thought he ought to get on television more often or something like this. Albert was the new majority leader, I mean, of the House.

I remember, too, [in] the Texas press--I've forgotten what year this was, I guess it was 1962--that we got a call from Johnson said, "Do we want to go down to the Ranch with him one weekend?" So I think about half a dozen of us said, "Yes." We real quickly organized the journey and we went down there. And this is the week-end of the events at the University of Mississippi and I've always thought about that as here was a place where Johnson could have probably had a good effect, but he was out of touch with it the whole damned time. Bobby Kennedy was running the show.

F: They weren't calling the Vice President down there every few minutes to say, "What do we do now?"

B: No. We were kind of partying down there. He did a lot of talking to us, and we toured the area and went out on the lake boating, things like that.

F: [He was] not much more in it than anybody else in town.

B: And this shows you--you can attribute this to how little they relied upon him in a situation where he might have been of great asssitance.

F: Did he consider his job with the Equal Employment Opportunity

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Commission and the head of the space agency as really challenging jobs while he was vice president?

B: Well, he tried to make as much out of them as he could.

F: Well, of course, you could make Johnson public weigher, you know, and he'd work at it.

B: Like when he was presiding over the Senate, on those rare occasions when we had a good gallery there, why, he'd bang that gavel and put on quite an act. You'd think he was running the Senate. Of course he wasn't.

F: Right.

B: I think the space thing--he did work at that really hard because this was one of his great interests and he did more than anyone for it.

F: And you think he actually made some input that was noticed by the Kennedys.

B: Yes, I think so, on that, I sure do. On the equal employment thing, I think he did just what was required about it.

F: Yes, that was a kind of nebulous thing anyhow.

On that European trip that you made, did he seem to feel that there he was really fulfilling a function?

B: Oh yes, I think he felt the gravity of that thing very deeply. So many other vice presidential trips he made you know were ceremonial affairs where you go up to some new African country that's just getting its independence, or you go off to the inauguration of somebody.

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F: Strictly a stand-in job.

B: Strictly stand-in job, ceremonial. This [the European trip] was a job that had to be done, carried great [weight]--it had to be done right.

F: And did he seem pretty relaxed on it, or was he uptight throughout it?

B: No, he was pretty relaxed. I know in Berlin he asked, "Can you get a group of Texas soldiers to come around and visit?"--with him for awhile. Well, he was still capable of doing things like that, you know.

F: Berlin was the real place. The others that he visited, like the Scandinavian countries, were just ceremonial, I gather.

B: Ceremonial. I don't know any others that had the significance of the Berlin trip.

F: Did you get much opportunity to observe Johnson's relations with Eisenhower?

B: Yes, and they were pretty good. He had to keep up a certain partisan pose, of course. But he and Rayburn were able to work out things with Ike. And when it came right down to something, particularly in the international field, they could work it out with him. There was never a warm relationship between Johnson and Eisenhower, but there wasn't the kind of friction you see now between the Democratic Congress and the President.

F: Did Johnson ever indicate that he thought he might be dropped as vice president?

B: Well, he was awful touchy on it.

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F: He just didn't like the subject discussed.

B: He didn't like that subject at all. And I know the Kennedy staff was feeling this out every now and then--the possibility of it.

F: Did you think this was staff desires?

B: I think they would like to have got him out.

F: Rather than Jack's [desire]?

B: I don't think that Kennedy himself had any particular desires on that point.

F: Did they have a candidate? Or is it kind of anybody but Johnson?

B: I think it was most anybody except Johnson; they just didn't like Johnson.

F: Had you been able by then to develop any kind of a feeling for the Vice President's relationship with the Attorney General, Robert Kennedy?

B: It was bad.

F: It started deteriorating from right off. Did Bobby just tend again to ignore LBJ?

B: Just acted like he didn't exist, yes. There was never a friendly relationship and Rayburn was very unhappy when Kennedy appointed him. (Interruption)

F: Okay, you were about to say about Rayburn.

B: Rayburn, I think, was really horrified by the appointment. Rayburn always said that the two most sensitive spots in the federal government were the attorney general post and the commissioner of internal revenue. And he didn't like either one of the appointments

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that Kennedy made: neither Bobby Kennedy or Marvin Caplan. And I think Johnson shared those feelings very strongly.

F: What was the objection to Caplan?

B: Well, they thought he was anti-business, which he turned out to be. In fact, he terrified the business community, you know.

F: When Kennedy made that famous statement about all businessmen are sons of bitches, did you ever hear any Johnson comment on that?

B: Never did.

F: Kept that quiet. I don't know of anyone who knew more sons-of-bitches than Johnson did, either in or out of business.

B: Right.

F: Did you come down here with Johnson on that fatal trip?

B: Yes, I was on that trip.

F: Did you make that swing till it got here?

B: Yes, I did. I came down from Washington with the press party covering the President and [went to] San Antonio, Houston, Fort Worth, and on the morning of November 22, I was placed on pool and I was on the Air Force One coming from Fort Worth into Dallas. You know, I was in the pool car behind the President, four or five cars.

F: Were you privy to any of the Yarborough-Connally goings-on?

B: Yes, I knew all about it.

F: Were they as real as they--

B: Yes, they were.

F: Did Yarborough--?

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B: He refused to ride with the [Vice] President the first day.

F: Then it took Kennedy--?

B: Kennedy had to knock heads on that.

F: Did you get the feeling that Kennedy came down here to put some aspirin into the Texas political situation or was he trying to get some money?

B: I think he thought he could maybe pull the party together.

F: That the breach was serious enough.

B: The breach was serious and of course he was feeling the water for 1964, too. I think he thought he could have a unifying effect to some extent, but I don't think any realists in politics believed that he really could because the two factions were just bickering and fighting all the time anyway.

F: They surely would have to forget a lot of things.

B: Oh, hell, yes. So I don't think this was a realistic thing. The only thing that could have been achieved in that trip, I think, was to build up his own personal following. (Interruption)

F: [Back to] November 22.

B: Right. No, I believe I said that the only thing he could do was improve his personal popularity and following.

F: The trip went fine, I gather.

B: Trip was excellent. There was a good crowd, friendly crowd; there was an extremely friendly crowd in Dallas. I thought it was a beautiful crowd.

F: And you were right behind the car?

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B: About five cars back.

F: Well, what happened from your vantage point?

B: We heard the first shot ring out and--

F: You knew what it was?

B: I instinctively thought it was a rifle shot. Then the two other shots followed and I was convinced it was rifle fire, but then this commotion started around the President's car and people were falling to the ground over there. And our press car came to a halt and we were throwing open the back doors to get out, and all of a sudden the thing began to move, and we moved down fast to Parkland, of course.

F: You went right on out there?

B: Went right on out there.

F: Did Parkland have any advance, I don't suppose they had anybody stationed there with a walkie-talkie, did they?

B: Oh, I'm sure the police radio alerted them. They had time for that--some kind of an alert.

F: So that they were aware then that something unusual was about to happen at Parkland before they just showed up?

B: I imagine so. They were out with stretchers right away when we got there.

F: What was it like when you got there?

B: Well, it was chaotic. We ran up beside the car and Connally and his wife were in the jumpseat, so they got him out first.

F: So you got there before they unloaded the car?

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B: Right.

F: Was Connally obviously in deep pain?

B: No, he just looked stunned, and he stood up before they got him onto the thing. I don't know whether he was out or not, but he was stunned. And he had this great big splotch of blood on the back of his coat. And Kennedy was just lying there.

F: Was he just laid open?

B: Yes, just blood--bloody head, you know.

F: What were the two women doing?

B: They were all slumped over when we got there.

F: Did they stay down the whole time?

B: They had been staying down. We got a glimpse of the car at the turn on the way to Parkland and we couldn't see anybody in the back two seats. They were all down.

F: You wondered just how much had taken place, didn't you?

B: We didn't know at that point; we didn't know till we got to the hospital. I didn't stay long--most of us didn't stay long around the car. [We] saw them get Connally on a stretcher and they began to remove Kennedy, and we rushed for the emergency room to get on the phone of course.

F: How did you handle that phone situation? Didn't have enough phones, did they?

B: You had to scramble for it, and I went to the blood bank--just happened to see a blood bank, there was a blood bank sign on the door. I just went in there, just for no particular reason, and

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grabbed the phone and called the office. I could not get hold of anybody. All the editors were out at the Trade Mart waiting for the President and I conveyed to whomever I talked to to get people out there as fast as they could.

B: Had they seen it on TV there at the office?

F: It wasn't on TV. They didn't know anything about it.

B: In other words, you broke the story down at the News. Okay, what did you do after that?

B: Just waited for word. I was there when Johnson and Mrs. Johnson with a heavy Secret Service detail left in a big hurry and pretty soon after they left, they announced to one of the press there'd be a press briefing over in the auditorium. So we went over there and the death was announced there.

F: Did you go on back to Washington or did you stay here?

B: Stayed here. Till the following Sunday.

F: What did you do around here?

B: Well, I had a lot of writing to do. Then I went back the Sunday after.

F: You're making a lot of news right now. Where were you at the time of the Jack Ruby shooting?

B: I was on the plane going back to Washington.

F: You were already on your way back then?

B: I was on my way back. I got into Washington and they told me about it. It was the first thing I heard there.

F: What was it like in Washington?

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B: Oh, it was a town in trauma. People were all shook up, and almost out of their minds and tremendous feeling against Dallas was apparent immediately. I remember John Mashek, he was in our Washington bureau at that time; he and I went over late one evening to the Western Union office to take some late copy. A woman took it, saw it was addressed to the Dallas News and tears came to her eyes, and she said, "Dallas, why did you all kill our President?"

F: What did you do during those difficult days? Just keep quiet and bear it?

B: You just had to bear it the best you could. I'll tell you one thing--you found out who your friends were and who weren't your friends. A lot of people were highly sympathetic toward Dallas. Others condemned the city, state, everything.

F: Did some people just flat cut you?

B: Yes, we had some instances of that.

F: It's a curious reaction, really.

B: It was, and I never fully understood it. We didn't have it after Bobby in Los Angeles. I don't think anything like this occurred in Buffalo after McKinley's assassination and I never heard anybody cussing Memphis after Martin Luther King's assassination. Why this distinction was here with Dallas, I don't know.

F: I put up with that for a while afterwards, but I'm sure you were right in the heart of the thing. Incidentally, were you here when Johnson had that famous or infamous little fiasco going from the Baker to the Adolphus.

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B: No, I was not. I wasn't here then.

F: Did you ever hear him comment on it?

B: Yes, he would--

F: What did you do--twitch him on it?

B: He wasn't really as offended by all that as he let on I think, in the campaign.

F: He realized it was kind of a plus?

B: It was a plus. Each telling of that as the campaign went on, it got a little worse. And you know, Dick Russell was staying out of that campaign; he didn't have any stomach for Jack Kennedy as president. He was over in Spain. And Johnson called him up and told him about what had happened to him in Dallas. Russell rushed back to the United States and started campaigning for the ticket. (Laughter)

F: Johnson must have made it good!

B: He must have really told him a good story.

F: I like that. I hadn't heard that.

Did Johnson make any particular effort to get in touch with the Texas press delegation, or did he just treat you all like everyone else now that he was president?

B: He didn't go out of his way for us, no. In fact, he thought he could see this problem, I think, when he got to be president, as winning over the eastern people in the White House press corps. He started very visably courting them. In fact, some of the Texas press felt like he was overdoing it. Naturally we expected some ins--that we were the ones entitled to.

F: Well, some of you had ridden with him ten, twenty years.

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B: But he couldn't have given us an advantage, realistically.

F: Did you think that Johnson misunderstood to some extent the function of the press?

B: Well, he certainly misunderstood the White House press which operates in a different way than the press on Capitol Hill. On the Capitol Hill, it's a much more informal thing. You sit around and talk. The White House is a stylized operation, it's a formalized operation. The President doesn't have the kind of time to sit around and talk to people dropping into his office or anything like that. Different way of life over there and the White House press corps tends to think that they are something special, too. They put themselves almost on a pedestal level with that of the president.

F: Except they are a little smarter than he is. (Laughter)

B: They know more. (Laughter) And Johnson could never quite get accustomed to the way they performed over there.

F: Did he ever complain to you that he had bent over backwards to be nice to certain journalists and then they'd been critical.

B: Oh, I think he has. I can't recall any specific incidents. When they wrote something he didn't like, he'd get awful mad about it.

F: Did he read that widely or did people feed it to him, his staff let him see it?

B: His staff read.

F: They didn't necessarily keep the bad news from him?

B: No, they did not. He saw the bad news.

F: A little different apparently from what you have now--a feeder

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operation.

B: That's right. It'd get to him if you wrote something that would displease him.

F: Did he ever chew you out?

B: Well, he would kind of fuss. He was always pretty gentle with me, but I remember one time when he was vice president, why, he called me up at home, must have been about ten o'clock at night and he says, "I'm just sitting here in my pool." He had that swimming pool and he had a chair rigged up with telephones hooked to it.

F: It's a wonder he didn't electrocute himself.

B: I could hear the ice tinkling in a glass and I'm sure he was having a drink, sitting out there. And he said, "I was just sitting here thinking. I was just wondering when you're going to write a nice story about me?" "God damn it," he said, "you haven't written a nice story about me in a long time." I said, "Why, I thought I'd written several nice stories." "Oh, you haven't done anything lately." And he went on in that vein, you know. (Laughter)

F: Did he ever indicate to you that he might not run in 1964?

B: No, no, he didn't. I knew he was in trouble, but--

F: No. I mean 1964.

B: Oh, in 1964, no, no, he was in better shape in 1964.

F: You know, he has said since that he wanted to get out and Lady Bird wrote the famous memo and so on, but--

B: He put that out right after he announced that he wouldn't run in 1968, but I'd never had any intimation of that. Everything I heard was: sure

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He wanted to run--he wanted his own mandate.

F: You hit the campaign trails pretty steadily with him, didn't you in 1964?

B: 1964, right.

F: Did you cover Goldwater, too?

B: I split it even between Johnson and [Goldwater]. I guess about a month on the road with each.

F: Goldwater's an extremely attractive man and yet he didn't come across. There have been various reasons--I mean, leaving out the ideological reasons. Was it not a good organization that he had? Were they inept?

B: It wasn't well organized, that's true. But Goldwater wasn't a good campaigner. He said the wrong thing a lot of the time. Go in to Knoxville, Tennessee and call for the sale of the TVA. Go in to St. Petersburg, Florida and renounce Social Security.

F: Looks like he went out of his way, didn't it?

B: Yes, looks like he didn't want it. It wasn't an intensive campaign. I remember we were up in New York City toward the end of that campaign and for two days Goldwater didn't do anything. Taped some radio stuff and I think maybe a television spot.

F: Right at the crucial point he was just neutral.

B: He acted like he didn't want it.

F: Did Johnson run scared or was his a vigorous campaign?

B: He ran scared. He campaigned intensively. I don't know how you could put more into a day than he did. Nobody thought that he

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was in any danger whatever.

F: I mean, it was pretty obvious to you as you went over the country.

B: Oh, yes, it was obvious that he could win big, which he did.

F: Did you cover some of the northern stops?

B: Yes.

F: And that was no problem there.

B: No, he was doing fine.

F: Were you present when he went up there to campaign for Bobby Kennedy?

B: No. Oh, yes, I was, sure. Sure, I was there.

F: Bobby's, you know, going to run for senator now in New York.

B: Yes, yes, sure. Bobby and he were in a motorcade together through Brooklyn. I was on that. He was campaigning for him--for himself and Bobby. They were together in the car, that's right.

F: Made an interesting pair.

B: Yes, sure did. I believe it was on that trip when the Walter Jenkins thing broke.

F: Yes, it was.

B: Yes, I remember that evening.

F: How did you get news?

B: Well, we were at the Waldorf-Astoria there and they had the press doubled up. I was rooming with Jack Wilson of the Cowles Publications of Des Moines and Minneapolis. I was in my room writing a story and Wilson came in; he says, "You better get down to the press room." "There's some big developments down there." And I said, "What are they?" He said, "Well, there's a report going around that

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Walter Jenkins has been picked up for sodomy or something." I said, "I don't believe that, I know Walter well. He's a good friend of mine." He said, "I don't care, you better get down there!" So I went down, the place was in pandemonium. Nobody knew anything positively, just a lot of rumors. Then all of the sudden--we had a ticker down there, two tapes, AP and UPI--the UPI ticker moved the story out of Washington. So about thirty minutes later George Reedy came down and announced that Jenkins' resignation had been accepted by the President.

F: Were there feelings this might be a real factor in the campaign or was this just one of those things?

B: Well, I don't think they had a chance to analyze right at that moment because the whole party was in a state of near exhaustion. It was one of those terrible days, and that motorcade through Brooklyn, New York had been a very tiring thing because it stopped every few blocks and they shook hands, I know the press was all exhausted from it. So there wasn't much time for analysis of it. Didn't know what to do, what to expect.

F: Did you have any prior intimations that Walter had this problem?

B: None at all, none at all. He would have been the last person I would have suspected.

F: Something I've wondered, and this is subjective: did you feel that Johnson's staff work lost something and part of his later problems might have stemmed from the fact that he no longer had Walter as a do-all man?

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B: I think it would have been better with Walter because he was a real good staff man, no question about it. Marvin Watson was very efficient. He got in there and--

F: Nobody's ever hustled more than Marvin.

B: No, but Walter could handle so many things and he was valuable to Johnson not only in his official capacity, but he handled a lot of his personal things, you know. He always did his income tax for example and handled a lot of really personal things in a business way. It was a great loss.

F: Did Johnson ever comment to you about it?

B: This is something he didn't bring up. The only thing that Johnson did was to try to kind of restore Walter socially. I attended a party or two in Washington after this thing had calmed down and after the election was over, and Walter would be at the parties, this sort of thing. I always felt that it was under Johnson's prompting that this was done.

F: Did the Republicans ever talk to you during what was left of the campaign about trying to make something big out of this or did they feel that just "there but for the grace of God"?

B: Some of them around Goldwater--

F: Goldwater did not.

B: --talked a little bit about it, but not Goldwater himself and he was not in it. I think they didn't want to. The wiser heads didn't want to play this thing up.

F: Did you get to know Bobby Baker pretty well?

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B: I knew him fairly well when he was secretary there.

F: What'd Bobby do, just overreach?

B: Just got greedy. He got mixed up in that deal with Senator Kerr and Kerr died and kind of left him high and dry. He just got greedy. He was doing all right.

F: Was he as good a man as--?

B: Damn capable man as secretary of the majority. He knew how to keep track of legislation and he knew how to keep track of the senators. He knew how they were likely to vote, or he'd find out; he had his sources. He was invaluable to Johnson as majority leader.

F: Was he as close to Johnson as indicated?

B: Yes, they were very close.

F: Do you think Johnson knew anything about his speculations?

B: I don't know, I think he knew that Bobby was making some money, which is all right, through investments and that sort of thing. I never knew of any connections Johnson had with him.

F: Yes, never was enough smoke there really to try to build a fire on Johnson's connection, except just something if you're disgruntled, you'd whisper?

B: I don't know what a full scale hearing comparable to Watergate might have turned up. Johnson may have pointed the way for him in business to make some money, I don't know. I have no proof of it. It wouldn't surprise me if he had and I wouldn't see anything very wrong with it.

F: Did you see Johnson alone any while he was president?

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B: I saw him. I went over on a number of occasions and talked with him, usually with either George Christian or Tom Johnson in the room. That would be all. I had no occasion to speak privately to the President and I didn't object to the presence of either one of them. We'd always go off to that little office near the Oval Office, you know, the little office, and talk there and I'm sure we were taped.

F: That's what I want to know, do you have anything beyond a suspicion?

B: No, nothing.

F: You don't know that things were taped.

B: I would just go into any situation like that assuming and suspecting, and I didn't have any reason to object if I'd known about it. Johnson, of course, was a bug on communications. He liked all kinds of communications.

F: Well, I interviewed Goldwater who is another real gadget man. And he, quite frankly was taping me while I was taping him.

B: Is that so?

F: Yes. There weren't any secrets there.

B: The press, the White House press, was convinced that Johnson was listening in on Reedy's press briefings every day. Sometimes Reedy would get a particularly sticky question and while he was trying to formulate an answer the phone would ring and Reedy would say, "Yes sir, yes sir."

F: That indicated something, doesn't it? (Laughter)

B: They were all convinced. I think it was probably so.

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F: Yes. You saw several press people under Johnson. Did each one have his strengths or were some just plain better than others?

B: George Christian was an excellent press secretary.

F: What made George good?

B: Well, he wouldn't lie to you; he'd shoot straight with you and he'd get as much information as he reasonably could. George handled the press extremely well. I'd always thought Hagerty did an awful good job for Eisenhower. In a respect I think Christian was better than Hagerty. They were both good, they were the two best press secretaries I knew in Washington.

F: In general, just over the years I've been fooling with this--that Christian was the only competitor to Hagerty. Of course most people place Hagerty up there because he was the first good one in a long time.

B: That's right. The first really--

F: Real pro at it.

B: Real pro at it and--

F: Well, I guess Bill Moyers was a right exciting press secretary?

B: Bill Moyers, in my estimation, hurt Johnson much more than he helped him. Johnson was very slow in discovering that. You couldn't rely on what he said.

F: How about George Reedy?

B: Reedy was a good, conscientious press secretary, and I think his problem was that Johnson was not telling him enough--he was not keying him in on enough things. George was absolutely honest; he

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would not lie to you. He might sometimes have a misunderstanding of a situation and give you something that wasn't quite clear, but it wasn't his intent. They hadn't filled him in sufficiently on a higher level. I think if they'd brought him in to the extent that they did Christian into every activity in the White House--Christian was sitting in on everything.

F: Do you think this was a matter of the staff learning what they had done wrong?

B: I don't think that so much. I think Christian more or less--I don't know this--but I believe that he demanded that he be well enough informed to where he could deal with the press intelligently.

F: Well, I gather Moyers could always give answers whether they came from Johnson or not.

B: He'd give answers whether they represented what Johnson thought or not. Sometimes they did. No, I thought that he served Johnson very poorly.

F: Was there anything to that rumor that oh, kind of theologically, he belonged to the Kennedy camp?

B: Yes, I think there was.

F: Was there a real Kennedy camp after Johnson came in?

B: Yes, there was, very definitely. There's still a Kennedy camp--not in the White House, I don't think.

F: Yes, but I mean as far as looking at everything through Kennedy eyes and judging Johnson by a Kennedy yardstick.

B: Yes. I think that's definitely there.

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F: Well, I picked up along the way one of the newsmen of national prominence who is supposed to have said that after the 1964 campaign that he thought Goldwater was far worse than Johnson and that Johnson had to be elected. But once he was safely insured of having disposed of the Goldwater threat, "Now, we'll gut the s.o.b." Was that an attitude or was that just one guy sounding off?

B: It wouldn't surprise me, it wouldn't surprise me at all. Some of them felt that strongly.

F: Do they feel that they have the ability to sabotage an administration?

B: I think so. Particularly the New York Times, the Washington Post, and the networks. I think they definitely feel the capacity for this, the capability of this.

F: Speaking of the New York Times, I read Bob Baskin with some regularity. You had an item sometime ago I guess it was on the campaign trails in 1964 or it may have been before that. I guess it was back in the fifties, Johnson wanted to get a story through you--

B: That was in the 1960 pre-convention thing, in the trip out West.

F: And the New York Times--let's get that on tape.

B: Well, we were flying into Washington state from Idaho.

F: You were going to Spokane, I believe.

B: We were going to Spokane, yes, and Johnson had not announced at that time for president. So he was exploring the West. Trying to evaluate the situation was what it was he was trying to do. But he was experiencing some troubles in Texas: on the one hand, you had the

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conservatives who were reluctant to commit themselves to campaign for him, and you had labor also kind of reluctant. They kept saying, "Well, why should we commit ourselves? We don't know if he's a candidate! So why should we?" This was getting pretty late for announcements and so Johnson wanted to allay this feeling of doubt in their minds. So he'd had a meeting with the Idaho delegates and the story was leaked to me. This was a private, closed-door thing. The story leaked to me was that they had asked him, "Are you a candidate?" And he had replied: "You're goddamned right I'm a candidate'" Now he wanted this story in Texas to round up the flock. He did not want it in the New York Times, but the guy who leaked it to me didn't realize I was sitting next to Jack Morris of the New York Times.

F: It wasn't Johnson who leaked it directly though?

B: No. And so it was a good story of course; it amounted to almost the same thing as an announcement. So we got into Spokane and Morris filed the story immediately and it hit the front page of the New York Times. Johnson was told about it when the thing hit late that night when the paper hit the streets, and he was furious. He wanted in the Dallas News.

F: And there's old big mouth Baskin telling everybody.

B: Yes, he suspected me, but I hadn't told anybody. Jack Morris and I were the only two that knew about it. Jack overheard the whole thing.

F: Well, didn't he think though--of course you can't know what he

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thought--but once it hits the Dallas News the AP would have picked it up and it would have been right back up there.

B: Yes, but it takes a long way for news to filter West to East. The other way it comes fast. I filed pretty late myself.

F: Yes, and you would have a time differential there.

B: But, anyway, this was something he didn't want played up in New York at that time.

F: Did he talk to you personally about it?

B: He never talked to me about it.

F: You just got the word.

B: I got the word, and Morris got the word personally from him. He wanted him to retract it, kill the story. Morris called me up and said, "What should I do? He threatened to kick me off the plane." I said, "Well, you know what you heard and you printed it in good faith," and I said, "I'm printing it. Stand up to him!"

F: He didn't kick him off.

B: He didn't kick him off the plane. And Morris didn't retract the story. I think he did raise enough hell to where the Times put it on the inside in the later editions. I'm not sure of that, but I believe Jack told me later that they did.

F: It's a legitimate story if you overhear it.

B: Yes, it should be.

F: I presume all administrations are about equal in leaking.

B: Yes, I don't see much difference at all.

F: In one administration over another--you've been through

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four of them, do you have more of an unauthorized leaking?

B: Now?

F: Well, in one than another. Or do they all pretty well--?

B: There weren't many leaks in the Eisenhower Administration. They were quite numerous in the Kennedy Administration; it was pretty leaky.

F: Had a lot of people that liked to talk, didn't he?

B: They liked to talk and they were very convivial people over there at the White House. At the end of the day they would go off to restaurants and bars around there and newspapermen would hang around and talk. And stories come out of these meetings, you know. Johnson tried to bottle up everything he could, but it was damned hard to do. It made him furious when he did get a leak, particularly on an appointment. He'd hold up an appointment if there was a leak on it. And I think he cancelled people.

F: Were you aware of any specifically?

B: I can't recall any names at this point; I remember that it occurred.

F: Well, now you had several off-the-record press briefings with Johnson, George Christian--I've got the notes here--the President in one, Tom Johnson in another, and so on. Did Johnson do that as a regular thing or just because of a longstanding respect for Bob Baskin I mean, how much time did the President have to fill you in on the Middle East crisis or just--?

B: They were usually at my request. I'd call up Christian and I'd just tell him--I never got through like that with Bill Moyers and nobody else did except maybe some of the eastern crowd did--

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"If the President has a little spare minute or some spare time I'd appreciate the opportunity to have a talk with him." And it'd take a few days sometimes.

F: Would he start to tell you what was privileged and what wasn't or was this just strictly an education of Bob Baskin?

B: Yes, he'd educate like that. State very forcefully his views on various things coming up. Of course the Vietnam war was the principal thing at that time. And he stated his views, for example, very strongly on Senator Fulbright and a number of other people like that. But they'd just be informal conversations. No, now, I never took any notes. It was with the understanding we were just talking more for my background information to kind of put things into focus than anything else.

F: It was my observation on a sit-in on a few of those occasions that he would talk much more frankly than a person in a lesser position could have afforded to.

B: That's true.

F: Say things that were generally considered secret.

B: Graveyard. He also used strong language in them.

F: Yes.

B: I remember one time I was there and they had a labor bill of some kind in the House, and the administration was having trouble with it. And I've forgotten even what the details of the bill were. They had a member of the staff there who worked the Hill named Goldstein and so Johnson got him on the horn. In this whole room

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he could just talk--he didn't pick up a receiver or anything else--have them punch a button and talk to anybody he wanted to.

F: Must be unnerving on the other end sometimes--just have that voice come on.

B: That's the way it worked and he got this guy Goldstein on and he just had a report that things were doing badly on the bill and he said, "Goddamn it, Goldstein, I thought you told me you'd get those Jews in line," talking about some Jewish congressmen. (Laughter) "When are you going to get them into line?" Just worked him over good and using strong language and we could hear Goldstein, of course. He was expostulating--he'd been working at it, and he was in constant contact with them. But it showed his method of whipping his staff into a job.

F: When he was president did he ever browbeat any of his staff in front of you?

B: No, I can't recall any. He used to browbeat Reedy all the time up on the Hill, but I don't recall any times I saw.

F: Did George understand this, or was he deeply resentful? George is one of the world's most amiable people.

B: It hurt him, but Johnson would always follow up an outburst like that later by doing something kind, and this is how he maintained the loyalty of his staff in part because his conscience hurt him about how rough he'd been on someone. But he'd go over them, he'd go over them.

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F: In September of 1968 you were invited to a White House buffet dinner.

B: Yes.

F: Was that any particular occasion?

B: September of 1968?

F: Toward the end of the administration.

B: Yes.

F: You're not there as a newsman on this occasion?

B: No, it's not a news event. He just wanted to invite a bunch of Texas people there, I believe he had Ben Decherd and his wife of the News too, and myself and my wife. It was just a party. He wanted to invite some of his old friends, he said.

F: In general, was he satisfied with the News treatment of him--I mean, allowing for the fact that he was never completely satisfied?

B: Yes. Oh, I don't know. I don't think he was too happy about a lot of it, and I think he did appreciate the support the paper gave him on Vietnam.

F: You know, Connally's down here as governor, not quite correctly but considered Johnson's boy, was not in complete sympathy with everything that was going on at the national level. Did either Connally or Johnson ever talk to you about the problems that one gave the other?

B: No, Johnson would talk about it on a philosophical basis. I've heard him say on several occasions that "Connally is a little right of center and I'm a little left of center. That's the main difference between us." But he was always loud in his praise of Connally

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so that he would say, "John Connally can do anything." And Connally of course was dedicated to him. But there was an ideological gap there--real. They could work out things.

F: They might quit speaking for awhile but they would get back together.

B: Yes, they had their peeves.

F: Did Johnson ever give you the cold treatment?

B: No, I can't say that he did. He'd be less cordial on some occasions, and overcordial on others. Depends on his mood and what was taking place. During the Moyers regime over there I didn't have much entree to the White House. I don't know what the reasons were for all that, but--

F: Did it put any special burden on you coming from--we'll be modest in this--one of the major metropolitan newspapers in Texas with a statewide audience? Did you come down in part to act as an interpreter for Texas to the rest of the national press corps?

B: Well, you'd get questions from them. They'd come around and ask you about certain things. Well, he'd use Texas language or he'd use some place names and they'd want to know "What's he talking about there?" Yes, you did have that come up, particularly in the early days when he first went into office.

F: Well, I've watched Johnson a few times, speaking of that, make certain references about, oh, "standing out there and the caliche blinding your eyes in the hot summer sun," and you can tell that he'd be going to take it over their heads. They didn't know what he was talking about.

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B: Yes, it just wasn't in their ken.

F: You became president of the National Press Club and Johnson wrote you a congratulatory letter.

B: No, no, I was never president of the National Press Club.

F: You were something. Weren't you an official?

B: No, I never ran for office there. I was active in the club and served on committees, but I never was president; in fact, I never was on the board, never sought office.

F: Well, somewhere I picked up the notion that he had written you a letter after you retired from your activities with the press club.

B: No.

F: I don't know what my references are.

B: No, I don't know what it would be.

F: Did you get down to the Ranch after he retired?

B: No, I did not. I was in Washington.

F: Did you see him when he came up there?

B: No, and he didn't come up there very much.

F: No, I know it.

B: No, I didn't.

F: Did you cover that farewell bash--January 21, 1969?

B: Yes, that's after the inauguration, yes.

F: Did you watch the leave-taking?

B: Yes.

F: Did you go out to Clark Clifford's?

B: No, I did not, I didn't go to that. Just what happened around the

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Capitol there.

F: Well, around the Capitol I guess everything went fine, and to his satisfaction in the leave-taking?

B: I think so, yes.

F: Did you ever witness his relationship, going back to the Senate days and then coming forward, with Richard Nixon?

B: How do you mean?

F: Well, Nixon would have been vice president when he was majority leader.

B: Yes.

F: And ex-senator of course, and then Nixon would have been a factor in the 1960 campaign as a candidate. Then Nixon was of course the President after Johnson retired. I just wondered if you ever had any opportunity to see the two men together.

B: Yes, on a number of occasions, particularly in the Senate there. It was always kind of amusing to watch them. They would be talking on the floor--Nixon would be out of the chair, you know and they both have quite prominent noses and they'd just be nose to nose. (Laughter)

F: Their noses got together first.

B: They'd get along all right, but of course the Vice President was not involved in Senate affairs to any great extent there.

F: I gather among Republicans, Johnson has some awfully close friends, of course starting with Dirksen.

B: He and Dirksen really hit it off; yes, they were good friends.

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F: And that's making a point that Johnson could jump party lines.

B: He could jump party lines, yes. He was well regarded by quite a number of Republicans. He'd really have Dirksen carry the ball on things very often as the minority leader that you'd normally expect the majority leader to do it.

F: Did Johnson ever comment to you while he was president on the falling off of quality in the leadership from the Democratic side in the House and the Senate.

B: I don't know, he might have mentioned some individual he didn't think very much of, but I don't recall him ever saying anything of a general nature like that. Of course I feel, obviously, that the leadership did decline and it's all weak there now.

F: He did as much as you can expect from any president--more than a lot of people wanted--but I've often wondered what he would have done if he'd had a Rayburn-Johnson team over there on the Hill while he was president. He'd have done the impossible.

B: It would have been wild.

F: Well, Bob, can you think of anything else we ought to get into?

B: I can't think of a thing, Joe. I think that pretty well covers it, unless you've got some other questions.

F: No.

B: There are so many things that you can think of later on that you just can talk forever about Lyndon Johnson.

F: Yes. I sometimes thought what I need to do--if you could do it, would be to rent a place for a week and get particularly a bunch of newsmen together and let them feed each other. Because you say something

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and then Carroll Kilpatrick can think of something and that'd bring up something else.

B: Bring up the memory--yes, it sure would.

F: I imagine that could just go on and each one of you would sort of top the other.

B: That's right. That would be a good way to do it because it would stir your memory more often. Yes, he was an interesting man.

F: Yes.

B: I wish we had leadership there in the Congress now like he and Rayburn provided. I think they would just dispose of this whole Watergate thing very quickly.

F: Did Johnson ever talk to you about the fact that he cut his ties with the South over civil rights?

B: Not specifically, but I know he was aware that he had cut his ties. He went farther in that direction than I ever thought he'd go. I always thought he was a moderate on civil rights, but he pushed stuff through that surprised--

F: He went a lot further, I think, than Kennedy could have ever gone.

B: Yes, I think so.

F: And maybe further than he could have gone, too.

B: Of course he sometimes had a very strong emotional situation that worked in his behalf. After the assassination of Martin Luther King for example he would get most anything through then.

F: Did he ever talk to you about King?

B: No, he never did.

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F: He's on record elsewhere on King. Well, thank you, Bob.

[End of Tape 1 of 1 and Interview 1]

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(More after formal ending of tape)

B: Press conference. We all trooped in there, got through with the press conference and we said, "Thank you, Mr. President." Most of us trooped out. The wire services of course ran for the phones. But then he kept on talking and in the course of this post mortem, in talking he announced some appointments. And I wasn't there. I'd gone on, but a friend of mine John Cauley of the Kansas City Star just happened to linger and one of the appointments he announced was Homer Thornberry to the Supreme Court.

F: Right in your backyard!

B: So if it hadn't been for Cauley I'd never know about it. The wire services didn't have it, but Cauley called me up and I called back to Reedy.

F: Yes.

B: Things like this!

F: Just off-hand, you know.

B: If I hadn't had a friend there--

F: It would have looked like Baskin was off somewhere else.

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