

INTERVIEWEE: CHARLES BOATNER (Tape #2)

INTERVIEWER: JOE B. FRANTZ

May 21, 1969

F: This is the second interview with Charles Boatner in his office in the Department of Interior Building in Washington on May 21, 1969. The interviewer is Joe B. Frantz.

Charlie, you have had several opportunities to pick up anecdotal material on President Johnson, and some to be with his mother when he was campaigning or otherwise and I wonder if we could get you to sound off on a few of them, in particularly as a starter the one on that happened at West, Texas, their sitting around the kitchen with the oil cloth table.

B: The President was making a speech at West during the campaign--

F: This is when he was running for Senator?

B: Yes. And Mrs. Johnson [Mother Johnson] had gone there--she'd been visiting in Fort Worth--she'd gone down with my wife and myself; I was covering it for the Star-Telegram, and I felt that I knew the speech pretty well so--the main points of the speech. I was sitting back in the crowd with Mrs. Johnson and my wife and the President reached the point where he was detailing how he studied at night, he was associating himself with those people at West, finding a common point of interest. He detailed how at night after they had dinner why he--his mother would get another lamp with a clean chimney, unsmoked chimney, and would wipe off the oil cloth table and would put the lamp there for the children to study on the same table where they had been eating. So he was portraying how she would wipe off the table and then get the lamp and Mrs. Johnson, who always sat

very erect anyway, became more erect and aside to my wife and I guess to me too, but mainly to my wife, said, "Lyndon knows better than that; Mr. Johnson would never let us have a piece of oil cloth in the house!" Then as an afterthought she said, "I wouldn't have had the stinking stuff either!"

F: West was primarily a farming community, right?

B: West is a community of Bohemians and farmers, sausage makers, bread bakers; it's a great place for sausage and salami. At this time some of the homes down there, although it was available to them--electricity was available to them--they were still using the kerosene lamp and I'm quite sure that nine-tenth's of the kitchen tables down there were still covered with oil cloth. And incidentally he carried West.

F: Incidentally, we used oil cloth as long as we lived in Fort Worth, which was not exactly a country town, in spite of some people's opinion.

B: There wasn't anybody in the audience that didn't know--

F: We gave it up when we moved to the metropolis of Weatherford [Texas].

B: He really showed them that he knew; he took the potato off the spout of the kerosene oil can, and filled the lamp, cleaned the chimney of the lamp with fresh newspapers and trimmed the wick of the lamp so the children would have an even and bright light to study by.

F: Do you think he just got carried away with his rhetoric on this?

B: Well, I think he did, and really in his own mind, although Mrs. Johnson didn't say so, I'm sure that she did some wiping of the table, or shaking of the cloth and I think in his own mind--

F: And certainly in visiting neighbors he would have--

B: He was visiting neighbors and he just used the speakers prerogative to amplify the story a little.

F: As long as she was active, did Mother Johnson make campaign trips with him?

B: Yes, she did. In wherever she could go, and be there, but not ever be a burden on him, she was very independent about that. She wouldn't introduce herself with the official party at all, but she did love to hear him speak, she loved to see his handling of the audience.

F: Even though she had heard it before she was glad to hear it again?

B: Yes. But she would pick him up later and I'm quite sure she picked him up on that oil cloth at some time or other and have him eliminate it from that speech.

F: Did she remain kind of the, I suppose by the standards of her times, either the elocution or the expression teacher for him through the years?

B: Yes, she did. She'd even grade him on his performance. And later--

F: What, A, B, C?

B: Yes. And later even after he was Vice President and he'd make a speech he might come through the plane and the first person he'd ask would be Mrs. Johnson, and he'd say, "What would you grade me on that speech?" And she'd say, "B", or "B+", or "C-". And if it got down to anywhere in the C's, he was asking why. Then he'd go through the whole plane asking.

F: He listened to her then?

B: He would! And I know one speech he was making at Bryan, Texas, after he was Vice President, he was working into a neck mike and neck mike was too low and it wasn't picking up and I was in the back of the hall and I kept holding my hand up to my ear to catch his attention and it did, and after it was over he made some remarks about me getting in the back of the hall where I couldn't hear and holding his hand up to his ear, and he said, "Why didn't you move forward?" And I said, "Well, there were other people

back there and they couldn't hear either," and I said, "I thought probably it was that neck mike," and he responded in characteristic fashion, that he'd used the neck mike before and he knew damned good and well how to use the neck mike. But I still couldn't hear!

F: You also have another delightful story about why some of the Johnsons are Baptists and some are Disciples of Christ, as I recall.

B: Well, this is another story that Mrs. Johnson--in fact, this all came from Mrs. Johnson--I asked her one night, I was doing assembling material for a feature on Mr. Johnson, I asked her why it was Mr. Johnson was not a Baptist as she was and most of her other children were. And she told me this story that an evangelist for the Christian Church, not the Disciples of Christ, but the Christian Church, which is another division was in Johnson City, held a meeting and the Vice President was, in her words, quite smitten with a young lady there in town and she happened to be a member of that church. And he escorted her to the revival every night, Brush Arbor revival. So the last night of the revival and when they were really working for converts he joined the Christian Church. Mrs. Johnson, on the side in expressing her own thoughts, said she really thought he was more taken with the girl who was a member of the Church than he was with the preacher! But at any rate a couple of weeks later she gathered all the other children except Lucia with her and she had done some preliminary work at home and they went down to the Baptist Church and joined the Baptist Church. Lucia was sick and this was Mrs. Johnson's other--she never expressed it that way, she was very glad she was a church member--Lucia joined the Methodist Church, and Mrs. Johnson always felt that she had failed her children just a little in letting the eldest and the youngest be other than Baptists.

F: Well, they were the forerunners of the ecumenical movement.

Was it a fairly close-knit family when you get down to the campaigning situation? Did the others help at all or did they stay in the background and let him run it strictly himself? Was there a lot of family advice?

B: They are an unusually close-knit family and they had different ways of working for him. Josepha was the active--she was the female counterpart of Lyndon Johnson; she was a politician. She made all the meetings, she made the speakings, she made the Democratic Executive Committee meetings, and the various subdivisions of it; she made them all. She was well known, she was well liked in the press, and she did a lot for him in that way. Sam was more of the behind-the-scenes operator and I couldn't say--I never saw Rebecca really working at a meeting--Rebecca did her work as I could tell with the more organized groups like the Women's Clubs--the B&PW women, and things of that sort. Lucia was always present, ready to defend her brother at the drop of a hat but not belligerently so.

F: She wasn't a nuisance then.

B: No, and she worked with individuals more than the others did. And of course the brothers-in-law came into it as much as--what they called them to do they did.

F: You came along--

B: Bobbitt is one of the best advance men I ever saw.

F: He is?

B: He is. He's real good.

F: You came along too late to know Sam Ealy Johnson.

B: No, I never did know him, but through the children and Mrs. Johnson I think I got a pretty good picture of him. And I think--my idea has always been

that Lyndon Johnson was a son of Sam Ealy Johnson refined by his mother. She put the vocabulary in his mouth, as for instance, he never did like to use words that he thought his audience would not readily understand. I remember on occasion he came off of a speech that George Reedy had drafted and he said to George, "Don't ever use 'eons' in a speech of mine. Hell, you know that I don't know that it means ages!" And that was the way he went.

F: Tell me the story about the black knights and the white knights.

B: Whether or not this is absolutely true I couldn't say.

F: Is this a family story?

B: It's a family story.

F: There's no authenticating family stories.

B: It seems that when Mr. Johnson went off to school and he got over to San Marcos he found out that the organization known as the Black Knights really ran the student body. To be a black knight--this was really the lettermen's association--so I understand that he went out for every sport but he just wasn't quite good enough to make any team. So the upshot of it was that he looked the situation over, figured that if he couldn't qualify that way why the best way was to qualify scholastically. So he organized the White Knights. To join in the White Knights you had to have a certain scholastic average or be a president of a club, or editor of the paper or something else. And he organized the White Knights, became the President of the White Knights and proceeded to take over the operation of the student body through the White Knights. I think this was really the forerunner of his organization of the A.A.'s on the Hill into the Junior Congress. He saw the similarities there and he organized that Junior Congress upon the Hill when he was working for Kleberg. Now this

is where he first caught the eye of many Congressmen. He organized those A.A.'s to where they were a very potent force in the Capitol.

F: Did you ever play any games with him?

B: Dominoes.

F: What kind of a domino player is he?

B: He's average but I'd say any of the boys that sit under the tree there in Johnson City can beat him.

F: Of course those boys--

B: They play dominoes! But I think he'd be a hell of a good domino player if he could keep his mind on it and not on something--while the other player's stalling--

F: Does he like to play fast?

B: Yes. If you stall your play, he gets to thinking about something else and then you can proceed to bring the play around to your way of thinking.

F: So he runs into one of those old Johnson City boys sitting under the tree who's deliberate and going to take all day before he makes up his mind--

B: He's going to figure out every rock you've got in your hand and every rock you've got in the bone pile and think just why you played that specific pay play you did. Were you forced to make it or were you leading up to building up a large county, or a series of fives and tens?

F: Did he ever play any other games that you know of?

B: No, none that I know of.

F: Where did he first play golf, was this in his Congressional days?

B: I think he tried it in his Congressional days, according to things that Arthur Perry has told me.

F: Kind of a social--

B: Yes, kind of a social event. He might have tried it as a college boy, I don't know whether they had a course down there at San Marcos or not. They could have had a sand green course down there, but I don't know.

F: Well, golf is such a consumer of time, it doesn't strike me as his--

B: Well, you know that he never played very much because when he gets hold of a golf club he grabs it just like a baseball bat. He may have changed that since the last time I saw him hold one up.

F: But he wrapped both fists around it.

B: In place of lining your hands up, your thumbs up like you do on a golf club, he gets hold of it just as if it were a baseball bat.

F: What's his game, just another duffer's game?

B: Yes. He and Stewart Udall play about the same type of golf.

F: I see. Well, I'm glad to know that in case he should ever ask me. Did you ever go to any sort of ball games or sporting events with Mr. Johnson, whether as President or back before anywhere in his career?

B: Well, I've been to rodeos with him, I never did get to any of the ball games. In fact--

F: What kind of spectator did he make?

B: He was a spectator for the first event usually, and then by the second event he was out looking up a telephone to call somebody to get back to his real hobby--which was also his work.

F: That's his sport.

B: He had other things on his mind other than that event.

F: Bull dogging, wild cow roping and so forth didn't--

B: No, he would catch parts of it, but I know one night he and Mr. Carter--

F: Amon?

B: Yes. And Thornton, [R. L.] Bob Thornton were in the same box at the Fat



Stock Show in Fort Worth and by the third event all the seats were empty, all were out on different telephones doing something, and the other people in the box were Raymond Buck and others who were watching the--

F: How did he get along with Amon Carter?

B: He got along real well with Mr. Carter.

F: They were strong-minded men.

B: They got along real well until the [Adlai] Stevenson campaign, and then Mr. Johnson had a commitment to Mr. Rayburn to introduce Stevenson through Texas. Carter called him and asked him not to. He didn't ask him; he told him not to introduce him in Fort Worth! And said that his paper couldn't support him thereafter if he did introduce Stevenson. Mr. Johnson told him of the commitment to Mr. Rayburn and told him that he would have to live up to his commitment, and did introduce Stevenson. Then right after--for a while thereafter--Mr. Carter would accept no calls from Mr. Johnson or anything else, and I think he even scratched him off of his Christmas list. And then Mr. Carter had his stroke, and Mr. Johnson tried to get in touch with him, but to the best of my knowledge and I think it's pretty accurate, Katrine Deakin was sidetracking all the calls and never telling Mr. Carter about them.

F: Who was?

B: Katrine Deakin, Mr. Carter's secretary, who never did like Mr. Johnson.

F: Even when he was in favor?

B: Yes, even if he had--Mr. Carter was the type man that once he got his man over, it didn't take him long, he would listen to reason, and go back over the thing, and if he was wrong he might not ever say he was wrong--

F: But he would at least pick up.

B: But in his actions he would admit his error, although without ever verbally

acknowledging his error. I think that the two of them would have gotten together again and been happy as Amon did--young Amon did--later with Mr. Johnson.

Bert Honea who was the business manager and still today runs the paper after the death of Mr. Carter and Mr. North, Mr. Honea became the guiding light of the paper and he's still the guiding light although he's said to be retired. He was against him [Johnson] all the way until after he was Vice President, and while he was Vice President he began to soften on him and when he went into the White House he was for him all the way. He did a complete flip-flop on Mr. Johnson.

F: What do you think, just realization that here was a man who had done something?

B: Well, I think he saw that he was wrong and also saw what Mr. Johnson was trying to do, and finally in his first thoughts about him, I think he just saw him as a threat to Honea's rock-ribbed Republicanism. Harold Hough told me that--

F: Hough was managing editor?

B: No, Hough was the vice president in charge of circulation and radio and television, if you can imagine such a combination, but that's what he was. At any rate, when Mr. Johnson and Mrs. Johnson were thinking about making this investment in KTBC, Hough told me that he personally advised Johnson to get the radio station and take it and that TV was coming so strong--the Star-Telegram had already had experience in it although they were still losing money, that they could see it was going to be a wonderful medium for advertising and for investment. So, he always claimed that he was the man that got Lyndon Johnson and Mrs. Johnson started in the TV business, with his counseling them to do it.

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F: He was the one that way back there was known as the "hired hand."

B: He was known as the hired hand. He has got a mule ranch up at Azle [Texas]. Said he thought it was appropriate he should raise asses at Azle.

F: Then Amon Carter and Lyndon Johnson never did get back together?

B: They never did get back together after the Stevenson incident.

F: Did you have the feeling from your vantage point that Johnson's heart was in his sponsorship for Stevenson or that he was just going through the motions?

B: I think it was--I don't know whether he would have ever--knowing what it was going to do to him in Texas or finding out after he had committed himself, that it was going to cost him some Texas sponsors and it cost some other Texas friendships other than Mr. Carter--I don't know whether he would have done it or not. Because he's a consensus man, and "art of the possible" man, but I think he stuck to his commitment to Mr. Rayburn to do it.

F: And his commitment to Mr. Rayburn was stronger.

B: Well, to go into that, after Mr. Rayburn was sick down there in Bonham, we'd go down on weekends to Bonham to see him, go to the Ranch, come back because there wasn't anything else to do in that area, and on the way back he'd tell me positively we weren't going to go back the next weekend; and meanwhile I'd go ahead and make arrangements and see that the plane was available the next Saturday or Friday, according to when the Senate was going to get out, and looking and checking his calendar to see when he'd have free time. On Thursday he would again repeat himself that he wasn't going down there. On Friday or Saturday he'd call and say, "We're going to go to Bonham," or to Dallas; it was whether Mr. Rayburn was in the hospital or at home.

F: Mr. Johnson has got a good bit of what I look on as the small town, oh, sitting up with sick friends compulsion, hasn't he?

B: Yes. I think it's more than a compulsion, I think it was born in him.

F: If somebody's in trouble he'll come.

B: It's a native instinct. He feels this about it. He just felt that whether Mr. Sam, and in some of the cases I don't think Mr. Sam ever really knew that he was there, but in case he did realize it he'd know that Lyndon Johnson still felt this way about him. He transferred, I think, his feelings for his father to Mr. Rayburn.

F: Did you get the feeling that Mr. Rayburn reciprocated?

B: I did. Mr. Rayburn was sick from the first time I really got to know him. He knew he was sick, I don't know if he knew what he had or not, but he knew something was wrong. But if he called Mr. Johnson to come over to his office, Mr. Johnson made arrangements to get over there very shortly. In some cases he'd ask people to wait a few minutes; he had to do something very important; he would run over to the other end of the Capitol to see what it was Mr. Rayburn wanted. And he could cover that ground--while he didn't run--he walked mighty damned fast!

F: Really kind of a beautiful relationship.

B: Yes. And I think too his regard for certain young men in his staff was also evidence of his desire to have a son; that he treated certain young men of his staff as if they were his son. He had it towards all the younger members of the staff, but he had a fatherly approach in his--and generally they were constructive criticisms of your action or praise for your action. He'd lay it on thick, just like a father would, and it worked both ways. If you did something wrong, he'd show you where you did it wrong. He'd back you up like hell on the outside, but then he'd take you

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inside and say, "I'm backing you up but don't do it that way again!" But he had this for Walter [Jenkins], and I think Bill Moyers, and possibly today it extends to Tom Johnson.

F: You undoubtedly--

B: I know it extends to young Pat [Nugent].

F: Yes, indeed! Some of these bright young men didn't always stay 100-percent in the camp. Did he ever get a feeling that he was used, or did he just think this is a young man stretching his wings and go on his way?

B: Well, I think it'd take somebody that's a better judge of it than I am, that was closer to him when those incidents occurred. I know with Ken Belieu he gave Ken an awful lot of rope before he finally ceased to be a sponsor of his after he was Vice President. Ken tried him at great length, longer than anybody else would have put up with some of the peccadilloes.

In relation to the oil cloth story, Mrs. Johnson later--this intrigued me and I was prodding her along--and she said when she would get ready to dress the girls for Easter and you know in those days that was a big thing in a small town, that she couldn't let anybody in town see the pattern she was using or the material she was using, or anything else. She'd have to keep them all secret because she discovered early that if she showed somebody, there'd be five or six other girls showing up at Sunday School on that Easter Sunday in the same dress. And so also, they rented their house in Johnson City not too long after Mr. Johnson had provided the first bathtub that the town had seen. So they rented a house and went to Austin. And at the end of the session they returned to Johnson City and they found that the people that had rented the house had moved the bathtub out in the yard and the women had planted flowers

and if I remember correctly it was petunias and verbena in the bathtub!

But these things, while she never did say it, they were the equivalent of the banker's family, the first family of Johnson City. They were the ones who got all the way to Austin and saw the world, and consequently they were the style setters, and the girls were--

F: And Mother Johnson had a sense of their style and their place.

B: And she would see that her girls didn't come home saying, "Mary Jo has a dress just like mine." She'd have to hide her materials, her patterns and do the sewing in absolute privacy, so that nobody else would show up in the same type of dress.

F: Were you involved in the Cantinflas procurement, you might say, recruitment in the campaign of Henry Gonzales?

B: Yes, but it was absolutely Lyndon Johnson's idea. On November, well, it was the night before the election, and that would have made it November 3, 1961, the Vice President had gone to Texas Tech to accept an award--not the Golden Shears Award that TWC--but it was an award up at--Golden Spur Award--and also to speak at Texas Tech. A dinner preceded the speaking, and George Mahon was there. After we returned to the motel that night, he got a call from Henry Gonzales, who said unless he had some help the next day he was going to get beat. The next day was election day. So--

F: Had the Vice President shown any interest in Gonzales up to this time?

B: Yes, he had shown interest, but he hadn't participated in the campaign. This call was like putting an old fire horse in harness. He hung up the telephone and thought for a few minutes and said, "What is the name of that Mexican comedian that was in 'Around the World in 80 Days,' Cantenflus?" And I gave him the correct pronunciation and he said, "Well, get him on the

telephone." So from Lubbock we started in Mexico City and we got Cantinflas on the phone.

F: Was that difficult?

B: It was about thirty minutes, but I'll say those operators in Mexico City that night performed as well as the White House operators do. They found him. And he then told him--Johnson talked to him personally--I gave the phone to Mr. Johnson before Cantinflas got on, and he introduced himself as he did in every call, "This is Lyndon Johnson," then he told him that this was a chance that the Mexican Americans had to elect their first member from Texas to Congress and would it be possible for him just to come to San Antonio the next morning, to meet us there at 7 o'clock at the airport.

F: You had no plans--

B: We had no plans; we had made no plans. Could he get there by 7 o'clock. Cantinflas checked the airlines schedules and agreed, and checked the airline schedules and saw that he could make it on a flight that would get him in there at 6:50 to San Antonio.

F: He was up all night and you were up all night.

B: Everybody was up all night. This was midnight or shortly thereafter. Then he got hold of--what's his name? (Bill Stinson) Worked for the veterans, and worked over at the White House. He called his San Antonio people and asked them to set up a series of shopping center speaking dates, as many as they could work in the next day.

F: Is he clearing with Gonzales all this time or is he--

B: No, he's flying straight, and he's the pilot; and to set up as many of these as he could and to get hold of Gonzales and where to meet him at the airport at 7 o'clock, that Cantinflas would be there and to set up with

the radio to broadcast every fifteen minutes where Cantinflas and Lyndon Johnson and Gonzales would be all during the day. Well, it was noticeable that they had to swing it in heavily into the Latin American sections of the town and put loud speaker trucks out also announcing it to be sure that if they missed it on the radio, they'd hear it on the truck, and get it into the afternoon editions of the paper. You know San Antonio papers started running afternoon editions at 9 o'clock in the morning.

F: This was going to be an all day affair.

B: All day affair, run it right up to the close of the polls. Cantinflas beat us there by about five minutes to San Antonio. The loud speaker trucks were already out, Gonzales was there, Cantinflas was there, the Vice President was there.

F: Did Cantinflas come at his own expense?

B: Mr. Johnson told him that he would be reimbursed for his travel expenses; however, Cantinflas didn't ask this. Then we started into--

F: Did Cantinflas know Gonzales at all?

B: No, he met him for the first time. We started in at the shopping centers and as we worked the day out you could see the results of the sound trucks and the radio--the crowds were bigger at every place we'd go. You'd expect that too, but they held that way and they continued to get bigger during the day.

F: What did Cantinflas do besides show up?

B: He showed up; he said he didn't know anything about politics, but he would speak to the crowd. And he would be introduced to the crowd from the back of this mobile platform and it was moving. In fact they had two or three, and they would move them so that when we'd get there, there



would be a flatbed truck to get upon, and mikes set up and the sound system ready.

F: Decent weather?

B: Decent weather, pretty weather. It was a good San Antonio day; it was about 75°, and the sun was out. Cantinflas would get up and say, "Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year," and he would sit down. But this wowed the crowd and they loved to see him and then the President would--he was the magnet--Cantinflas was the magnet--the President would tell them what opportunities they had to elect their first Latin American from Texas as a member of the delegation.

F: Was he making the speech off the cuff?

B: He made it off the cuff; nobody had drafted anything. We'd gotten some background on Henry so he would say where he'd gone to school, like in San Antonio public schools and St. Mary's to get his law degree, and that he'd been a member of the legislature. And the President had read enough of this on the race that he was familiar enough that he could ad-lib, and we went all day long. I think there weren't any noon meetings or dinners or luncheons or anything of that sort. We grabbed a sandwich where we could, drank a coke where we could, and in the car en route to the next shopping center--I think there were something like twenty-two or twenty-seven of those speaking dates that day. We wound up--they had found a Negro undertaker who was for Henry and he joined the speaking at the last two or three shopping centers; and in fact the President was quite taken with this Negro undertaker and later used him on one or two occasions, and saw that he got some publicity, and I think it helped him too. But at any rate, by midnight that night we knew that Henry Gonzales had been elected. As contrasted to the previous midnight when Henry said, "I am beat unless I get some help!"

F: Wonder where he pulled Cantinflas out?

B: Now, he had filed that man's name away in his mind--he hadn't seen the picture.

F: Oh, he hadn't?

B: No, but in going through the papers and seeing the publicity he had come to realize, and later Cantinflas was the first guess, I guess, at the ranch after the Pakistan camel driver. He slept in the same room, in fact Mr. Johnson told him he was sleeping in the same room as the camel driver slept in. So Cantinflas went in his room and screamed and jumped back out the door and everybody started back and looked down the hall, and he said, "He left his camel!"

F: Did Mr. Johnson think that was funny?

B: Yes, he kind of thought it was funny.

F: Well, now, was it this night that you came on back to Washington and stayed up about half the night in Kentucky?

B: Oh, that. Well prior to the call from Gonzales--in fact, the call from Gonzales came while my youngest son and two of his roommates were in the room at Texas Tech and my son had brought the roommates down to meet the Vice President, and he had asked Arvel when Arvel was going to come up to Washington and visit the folks and see Lynda and Luci. And Arvel had told him he didn't think he could soon because he had been bugging me for money to buy a tux and if he got that money he knew he couldn't get any travel money. So the President immediately volunteered that he had a tux that was made for him in Hollywood, right after his heart attack and he had a better figure then, as he put it, and he was positive that it would fit Arvel and he had Arvel stand up and try on his coat--the Vice President's coat. So the Gonzales election intervened, we stayed at the ranch one day; then I think, as I recall now, we made a

speaking date in Hot Springs, Arkansas. And then we got on up to Washington. No mention had ever been made again of my son's visit or the volunteering of the tux.

F: A lots going on in between.

B: A hell of a lot had gone on in between. When we left the airport and on the way home, the President went to sleep, I thought, in the corner of his car, so I asked the chauffeur just to let me out at my house and go on and take him home since it wouldn't be any out of the way. I was wrong about the President being asleep. He raised up and said, "No, you don't. You're going to get out to the house and get that tux; you've got to get it back down to Arvel for that dance." So at 3 o'clock in the morning we barged into the house on 52nd street; he awakened Mrs. Johnson, described the tux and asked her where it was. She told him, we got the tux, and that inspired him to the fact that he needed a tux shirt, he needed a tie, he needed a cummerbund, possibly would prefer a tux vest rather than a cummerbund, he would need studs and cuff links and we got all of that and then he remembered that during this period that he had his more slender figure, that he had accumulated a lot of underwear and other shirts that he hadn't been able to wear in a number of years, but they were there. So again Mrs. Johnson was awakened, if she had ever returned to sleep, and we got underwear and shirts and other ties out and it took me two trips to get all the stuff to the car. And when I got home I had my own luggage and all these clothes, and my wife wanted to know what the hell I'd been doing--going to a rummage sale or what!

But we got it off to him, then later--two or three weeks later--the Vice President told me that I had carried out my mission; he'd found out that I'd carried out my mission on the tux. And some discreet inquiries

had revealed that Arvel had written him and told him that the tux fit fine, it made a--it was midnight blue--it made a bit hit at the dance at Lubbock. It was a rush dance and he was one of the rushees, and that he had told the Vice President that he wouldn't leave it in any houses of ill repute because the Vice President's name was still in the pocket of the coat, and that's where he was going to see that it remained.

F: I would imagine that if he keeps his figure he will wear that with some pride for some time.

B: Yes, he still wears it. God, he takes care of it!

F: What was the name of the San Antonio contact that you--

B: Bill Stimson handled that, and he was then the assistant manager of the Gunter Hotel, but he had laid on the sound trucks, the public speaking systems, the radio announcements.

F: Well, he must have worked through the night too?

B: He worked all through the night; he had to work all through the night to get everything ready, and some sound people worked all through the night, because they used about three units.

F: Did anyone ever just plain balk at this middle of the night sort of operation, or did the President's own drive carry everybody along with him?

B: It carried you along. In fact, I know the phone would ring at the house while I was on the staff, and he always said the same thing--"This is Lyndon Johnson," and it might be 2 o'clock and it might be 3 o'clock in the morning; and when you heard that phone ring you got up and got a pencil and a pad and your smoking equipment and an ashtray before you sat down to that phone because had a pretty good idea who it was after the first one. And also I could nearly always count on a call while I was

eating breakfast about 5:30 to 6 o'clock, there would be a call.

F: What did he do--catnap along?

B: He had the greatest ability I have ever seen, as far as I know still has it, that even in the five minutes between appointments in his office, he could just go to sleep and wake himself up. In fact, when we'd gotten on planes he would go to sleep before--fasten his safety belt--go to sleep before we ever taxied out to the takeoff, wake up when he was served, go back to sleep and set his mental alarm to wake up thirty minutes before we landed, in an hour, hour and a half, to go over his speech again.

F: He wasn't a hard person to get up?

B: No, not at all; in fact he'd wake himself up. And you could figure that it was thirty minutes ahead of the landing, and you wouldn't--that is, the scheduled landing, it might not be--but he's self-disciplined that way.

F: At the close of the day in San Antonio did he and Cantinflas do any mutual celebration or did they just shake hands and depart?

B: No, they shook hands and agreed it had been a job well done and we went on to the ranch. And I think Cantinflas had broken appointments that day and he had to get back to Mexico City. If my memory serves me correctly, and I think it does, yes, I know it does because this has always been a sore spot with the President, that nobody ever sees you off--everybody's there to meet you, but nobody sees you off--that he rode out to the airport with Cantinflas, and stayed with him until Cantinflas' plane left.

F: Did Cantinflas seem to enjoy it?

B: I think he enjoyed the whole day. It probably did a little for his--he was complaining a little about being plump at the start of the day, but I think by the end of the day he figured he'd lost some weight.

F: What about Henry B.?

B: Henry, as he watched those crowds grow during the day, had a worried expression on his face when he rushed up to the President at 7 o'clock in the morning, but that worried look left his face as the day moved on.

F: Did you come in at the airport or did you come in a military--

B: We came in at the municipal airport.

F: So you were able right there at the airport--

B: We took off right from the airport. Bill had briefed the driver on where we were going, and the driver knew the route, so away we went.

F: Well, I think the whole thing is fantastic. This is when Connally was running for governor, isn't it?

B: No. No, he wasn't governor until the next time. One of the things I don't know whether I told you, and I don't know that it's appropriate or can be weaved into the background of the total picture of Lyndon Johnson, but one Saturday, a beautiful June day in Washington, I got a call about 1:30 in the office and I answered the phone and he said, "This is Lyndon Johnson." And I said, "Yes, sir." And he said, "Why didn't the girls answer the phone?" And I said, "They're at lunch." He obviously looked at his watch and he said, "At lunch, and it's 1:30?" I said, "Yes, sir, they didn't leave until 1:15." And he said, "Well, what are you'all doing up there this time of day?" I listed the matters we were working on and he said, "Well, it's too pretty a day to be working." He said, "When those girls get back, you fire them for eating lunch so late, and you fire yourself for working on a pretty Saturday afternoon like this and not having your wife out here, in fact you all fire yourselves and get your bathing suits and come out here and join me at the swimming pool." Well, that's what we did. Think it was Willie

B: Well, this leads to another tale. Let's see, August until Alice came up in October, after getting the boys off to school and getting furniture packed and all that, but--well, I know what Valenti's joys and sorrows were. The President then--the house was already ready, but the lease was still running over at Sheraton Park and one day, one Sunday, he made an instant decision that he wasn't going to stay at Sheraton Park any more, he was going to move right then out to the house. So he told the girls--or the girls heard him, and they spent that whole Sunday moving all their belongings over to the house.

F: By girls, do you mean his daughters?

B: His daughters, Lynda and Luci. They moved all their stuff into their rooms at the house and that night, he had gotten out of the notion. So they asked their mother what they were going to do--all their stuff was over there. Could they come out and stay at the house since I was out there. She said, "Well, check with Charlie, and if it's all right with him, it's all right with me." So we worked out some ground rules about what time they'd be in at night and so they moved down and I guess it was ten days before the Johnsons moved in. But they'd come in and tell me that--let me know when they were in at night--if I happened to be upstairs in my room. This was my first acquaintance with girls, having only boys, and it was a revelation to me that they would come in and tell me really what had happened during the evening, from the time they left until they got back. Well, Lynda really got me one night. She knocked on the door and asked if I was awake, and could she come in and I said, "Certainly--I was writing some letters. She came in and sat down on the bed, I was over at the desk writing, and she was telling me about the evening and finally she--she obviously had something on her mind. I said,

"Is there anything else you want to talk to me about?" "Well," she said, "There's one thing. What do you do when the boys that mother wants you to go out with aren't the type of boys that mother wants you to go out with?" So from my own experience and from my experience with boys, I just suggested to her that she double date and be the first girl brought home!

F: That's good.

B: But they were a great pair of girls to have around the house. But I tried, after Mr. and Mrs. Johnson moved in, I started down and packed up--in the meantime I had leased a house, so I started to move over to the house I'd leased, and I was going down the back stairs with my suitcases and walked in the kitchen and lo and behold, not only Zephyr, but the Vice President was there. And he said, "Where are you going?" I said, "Well, I thought I'd move over to the house, I'm crowding you'all, and taking advantage of your hospitality and appreciate it and all that, but really it's bad, I think, I'm just being a burden on you." He said, "No, I want you to stay here because I want to talk to you like we've been talking."

Well, what had been happening is that I'd get home about 8 or 9 o'clock and do whatever I had to do before bedtime, shower and maybe I'd get in bed, maybe I wouldn't. And they would have gone out to one of their many social obligations, and the President would come in and he'd call down the hall. I was at one end of the second floor and they were in the other and say--ask me if I was awake. I was always awake by that time, and so I would go up to his room while he was undressing and usually get in in time to catch the 11 o'clock news and we'd watch the 11 o'clock news and then he'd tell me what Mansfield or someone else, Humphrey or



Russell had told him during the evening and then the other things that he needed to know on that by the time he got to work the next morning. So this might take thirty minutes, it might take an hour, me taking notes. Then the next morning why about between 5:15 and 5:45, there would be a knock on my door and I'd say, "Yes," and he would say, "I was down in the kitchen fixing me a cup of Sanka and I thought you'd like a cup of coffee, so I made you one too. Do you want it?" So I'd say yes, and he'd bring the coffee in, then he'd take up the conversation right where he left it off the previous night--sometimes I'd get to drink the coffee and sometimes I wouldn't, according to whether I had to take any notes or not.

F: Then you'd have to go find the answers.

B: Then I'd have to go find the answers and I'd get up to the offices and try to find the answers by the time he got in. He'd go by the White House and then come on up to the Hill.

F: He was staying in the Senate Office Building?

B: He had the office in the Senate Office Building and he was using for most of the time the office that he had used as Leader, but he'd stop by first his office in the Executive Office Building before he would come on up to the Hill. He had Bill Jackson and Howard Burrell down there. And then sometimes he had appointments at the White House. But I do have the honor of being served--being waked up for a couple of months every morning by the Vice President, serving me a cup of coffee--it's a great memory!

F: Did you get the idea he was pretty frustrated as Vice President, or do you think he was fairly happy?

B: He was frustrated as Vice President in that he saw the inept handling of the Congress. He knew the programs that the President was trying to put

over. He could see the results up there daily of the inept handling of the matters. In fact when the affair of Hayden and Cannon came along and they couldn't agree on the appropriations bill, or where they were going to meet to discuss it--and finally, he never did say anything, but finally the President asked him--Kennedy asked him to see if he could get the two guys together, and he had a little lunch and got them together and got the thing off high center right quick.

F: He made an effort to not interfere--

B: Unless he was requested to do so, he strictly played it hands off, because he felt this was not his role unless he was directed to enter.

F: Did you make any of those trips that Kennedy sent him on abroad?

B: Made the Berlin trip and the wall trip--the Berlin wall trip.

F: Was that improvised, or was it pretty well laid out in advance?

B: It was--so far as I could tell, it wasn't laid out very well in advance, it was just that the Ambassador was told that we were coming. The whole thing had come to a head so abruptly that--and Kennedy felt that somebody should go over there and welcome those troops as they came into Berlin and inspect the wall and see what--and to get the West Berlin people assurance that the United States wasn't forgetting anyone. And Mr. Johnson certainly did that.

F: Do you think he was effective in that sort of situation?

B: He was completely effective. In fact, if he'd gotten turnouts like that in this country the 1960 election would have been different.

F: He liked that sort of thing?

B: He loves it, he loves it. It's worth every inch of skin that he has lost off his hands.

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By Charles Boatner

to the

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