INTERVIEW I

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INTERVIEWEE: PHYLLIS O. BONANNO

INTERVIEWER: MICHAEL L. GILLETTE

PLACE: Ms. Bonanno's office, Office of the United States Trade Representative, Washington, D.C.

Tape 1 of 2

G: Before we jump right into these events, why don't I ask you to trace how you went to work at the White House, so we'll have that background.

B: I was working at *McCall's* magazine with Lynda Bird. She and I became good friends, and I came to Washington several times. I was in her wedding, and I got to know the family pretty well. One day her father called me and asked me to come to Washington to talk about working for him. I said, "Oh, thank you, Mr. President, that's really very flattering, but I really want to be the editor of a woman's magazine." And he said, "No, you don't. Get on an airplane." So I came down, I think it was on a Wednesday, and really didn't expect to be interviewed by him. I was sitting in Marvin Watson's office doing my best to talk about the things I wanted to do as a grownup, and suddenly realized that Marvin Watson was not interviewing me and that indeed I was in a holding pattern. Because the President had not said that the job would be for him.

The door opened and he came strolling out from the little office that was between the Oval Office and Marvin's office. He invited me in and we talked. I kept telling him that I was really very flattered and it was really very kind of him, but I didn't know anything about politics and I didn't know anything about foreign affairs and what good could I be to him. He basically just didn't pay any attention to me and kept on talking

about why it would be very important for me to come work for him. One of the things you learn pretty quickly with Lyndon Johnson was that you weren't going to win.

G: What arguments did he use?

B: Oh, broadening my horizons and the experience. And he was right, and he appealed to that side of me that intellectually knew that it was a challenge that I really wanted, although I don't think at that age I could have defined it quite that way.

One very interesting thing happened in that interview, which was I said that my other desire was to be married and have children and I didn't know how I felt about working and giving up the kinds of things one would have to in order to perform for him the way it was pretty obvious to me, from the time I had spent as a guest in the White House, the staff worked. He said something about being a woman that was really very flattering to Mrs. Johnson. He said, "If you really want to grow up to be a good wife and mother, then you come work for me and observe my wife, because she is the best at both of it. You'll learn more about what being a good woman is all about, and that's an opportunity that you shouldn't let pass." And that's something, again, I don't think I understood at twenty-three, twenty-four, but I did as the years went by and [I] saw the relationship that they had. He really did depend on her a lot. And I think it's sort of interesting in retrospect that he appealed to that part of me, that this wasn't just an intellectual challenge, this was also an emotional and psychological challenge.

So I went back home, and of course I was sworn to absolute utmost secrecy that I could never ever tell anybody that he had offered me a job. I came back down again the next week. I think I stayed in the Mansion overnight the first night. I did. It was an interesting evening because Scoop Jackson and his wife, I mean people whom I had read

about, were there at a small family dinner. I was very taken by the whole thing.

I went back to Washington [New York?], and then he called me a week later, and I came back down. He said that they had done a background investigation on me and everything appeared fine, and had I made up my mind to take the job, and I said yes, I had. And he said, "When can you start?" I said, well, it would take me about a month, and he said, "How about next Monday?" So I went back to New York, and again, at that age, one is very naive. I called my boss, who was the editor-in-chief of *McCall's* magazine, Bob Stein. I called him Mr. Stein in those days. I said, "The President wants me to work for him and I haven't been able to tell you, and he wants me on Monday and I don't know what to do. I don't walk out on people and I feel very irresponsible. What am I going to do when the President wants you?" And Bob Stein just started to laugh and he said, "Phyllis, do you really think the President of the United States hired you without ever once talking to any of us?" And of course, it had just never dawned on me that they had done that kind of checking.

The day that I left to come to work down here I took the seven o'clock shuttle. Mrs. Johnson, in the interim, had called and asked me to stay in the Mansion with them until I could find a suitable place to live. So I packed all my stuff in New York--all my clothes; my parents later packed up other stuff for me. I had a very special friend in New York at that time, and he put me in a cab early in the morning and I cried all the way to La Guardia Airport because I really wasn't sure I wanted to do this and I didn't know what I was doing. I had a typical New York cabdriver. I had, in addition to my luggage, a tennis racket and a big teddy bear, and I was just holding onto the teddy bear and crying. And the cabdriver said to me, "Lady, I don't know where you're going, but no job

is worth it. You left that nice young man on the curb. He's really in love with you. I'm going to take you back to 78th Street. Forget it. About the only job in the world that you could go to that would be worthwhile in Washington would be if you were going to work for the President." And I just started to laugh, and I said to him, "That's precisely what I'm about to do." He said, "Oh, my God, lady, I'd better get you to the plane on time."

I got off the plane and a car met me, and we pulled into the South Lawn of the White House and there was the press corps and all the arrival ceremony people, but I didn't know what it was, all the marine guards and all the military. Prime Minister [Harold] Wilson was about to arrive. I always remember that whole scene, because the limousine pulled up at the South Portico and they were trying to get me out and into the Mansion very, very quickly so that I wouldn't disrupt the arrival. And there I was with tears streaming down my face and my teddy bear and my tennis racket, and feeling like such a jerk in front of all these people that were standing out [there]. And that was my arrival into the White House.

G: Let me ask you some questions about the March 31 speech. Did you have any indication ahead of time that he was going to withdraw?

B: Again, in retrospect, yes, a lot of them. A lot of his conversations at the family dinner table would be about how old he was getting and should a president really run for a second term, and should there be two-term presidencies. He once commented that maybe the tenure of a president should really only be six years, because when you looked at the eight years, your first four years were spent in getting reelected. Then you had two very productive years, and then you had two years of being a lame-duck president. Maybe if we had a six-year term, you'd have those two productive years anyway, but it would give

the country a chance to not have a president in such a state of flux. He reflected a lot about what a lonely job it was and how nobody ever really understood the person who had that power and what it was like to be the most powerful person in the world, and to have to make decisions. You have to remember that this was at the height of Vietnam and he would read the statistics and take it very seriously and wonder if he was making the right decisions. So as I said, in retrospect I guess there were a lot of signs, except that I didn't know how to interpret them.

Plus, Lyndon Johnson was a tester. He was a person who put a lot of things out to see what the reactions of the people around him would be. I think because of my relationship with Lynda, and Chuck going off to Vietnam, maybe we tended to talk more about that because I think that became a very personal issue for him. You know, what was he doing, his own son-in-law was involved in all of it. And I still to this day believe that he really didn't make the decision until about ten minutes before he went on the air.

G: I guess when they put it in the teleprompter, that was the point of no return. When did you first learn of it? Were you called in advance or did you just hear his speech on television?

B: I was called in advance. It was my twenty-fifth birthday, as I said. Gosh, everybody is going to know how old I am. I was at dinner. I had been called and told to be on standby because I might have to go in. And so we all watched the speech. So the first time I really heard it was when I heard it on television. Then I called in, and Marie [Fehmer] and I spent a long time talking, and should I come in and what was going on. It was just chaos. It was just decided that I should stay by the phone and if they needed me they would call me in.

G: Did the President's attitude change after that withdrawal? Did he seem to feel lighter or despondent or gleeful?

B: The President got older. You could really see that he sensed that he had failed at something very major. I think instead of the announcement giving him the freedom, I think it was just another burden to him.

G: How so?

B: Because President Johnson wasn't a quitter, and I think that there was a part of him who felt that walking away from the election was in a sense quitting. And I do believe that he really cared about the country not being divided, and I think that really came out in subsequent events, like the Martin Luther King riots, where he felt that Vietnam was really dividing the country and that we just couldn't afford it economically or politically or for any other reason. I suppose I look back and realize that Lyndon Johnson was a tragic figure because I will always believe that he tried to do the best that he could for this country. And indeed, since I have survived five more presidents, I still think, in terms of coordinating policy and implementing it, we have never seen a president, since I've been a grownup, who has been able to do it with such skill. And I think the country is really paying the price. I guess I consider it a tragedy that he didn't run again, because I think subsequent events in Vietnam were handled no differently than he was handling them.

G: Did you have any insight regarding the South Vietnamese government's reaction to his March 31 speech? They apparently had no--

B: It was a surprise. But it was a surprise to everybody. I'm just trying to remember. At one point I think that there was strategy that maybe this might be the way to end the

whole thing, to throw them so out of gear and to get them so panicked that they might consider coming to the table and negotiating a result.

G: You mean the South Vietnamese, the allies, or the North Vietnamese?

B: The North Vietnamese. I'm sorry, did you ask me about the South Vietnamese?

G: Yes.

B: I think our allies were a little bit concerned that they hadn't been briefed ahead of time.

G: Was there any consideration of briefing them? Do you know why they decided not to give them any advance warning?

B: Because I don't think anybody but Lyndon Johnson knew that he was going to do what he did.

G: Good reason. I understand that he did, of course, invite [Nguyen Van] Thieu to meet with him after the announcement.

B: We kept working on that, and that never took place if I remember correctly. The meeting was cancelled--no, then it subsequently took place---what?--in May.

G: I think so. Was the President surprised by the quickness of North Vietnam's response to the peace offering?

B: I don't think so. When one is as Machiavellian as Lyndon Johnson was, one anticipates a variety of things that might happen. I think, as I said to you before the tape was on, one of the things that I now understand is how little I understood, because I am now in a world where strategies and negotiations are an everyday situation. I think I learned a lot, but I don't think I understood when I was there. So something that may have been overwhelmingly shocking to me, it's very hard for me to characterize. But, no, I don't think so.

G: Of course, they came forward with the suggestion of meeting in Warsaw. Did this--

B: Why did he turn it down?

G: ---create a problem, since he had said he would meet anywhere?

B: With them anyplace, yes. I don't know why the meeting never took place in Warsaw. I don't know if there were just too many international political ramifications of a Warsaw meeting.

G: He never discussed the possibility of actually going to Warsaw or waiting for a more neutral site or that with you?

B: No.

G: Do you think that there were people in the administration that opposed the idea of direct negotiations with the North Vietnamese?

B: No. I think everybody at that time believed that if you could get people to the negotiating table, it could be your only shot to resolve something. You have to remember that this was also being looked at in terms of domestic political strategy, and now all of a sudden the domestic political strategy angle was no longer really relevant in terms of Lyndon Johnson. It was relevant in terms of the Democratic Party, but . . .

G: Do you have any insights regarding the selection of the American negotiators, Averell Harriman--

B: And Cy Vance?

G: --and Cy Vance? Why did he pick Harriman, for example?

B: Because Harriman even to this day remains one of our outstanding statesmen, who really understands the art of diplomacy. We don't produce people like Averell Harriman anymore, partially our system doesn't allow it.

G: What do you mean by that?

B: There was a time when the legal structure of this country had not so superimposed itself on the political structure that the art of diplomacy was very important to us. And we created an elitist group of people who were schooled in how to deal with things. As the world has become more interdependent and more complex, lots of times the remedies we take are legal remedies, and the art of law is not one of diplomacy. It's something that troubles us a great deal in our world, because trade always has been negotiated and always has been dealt with on a diplomatic basis and now we're beginning to see imposition of a lot of legal remedies to quotas and tariffs that we think is very dangerous.

Also I suppose the age of communication has made it such that the sophistication of the art of interception and all has made the need of a good ambassador not as necessary. People can be instantaneously in touch with one another. I think, by the way, all of this is bad. I think that there's something to be said about having a chief negotiator who has total control and isn't back-channeling. You really don't want me to go into the whole thing of Henry Kissinger and the National Security Council and the State Department, but I think it's been an interesting phenomenon to watch the art of diplomacy over the last twenty years.

Cy Vance he chose because Cy Vance was a bright, clever, good back-up to someone like Averell Harriman.

G: I guess Harriman especially had had a good deal of experience with the Soviet Union. I wonder if this was a factor.

B: Well, any president, when they're looking for a personal envoy, will tend to go to the Averell Harrimans or the Clark Cliffords or the Chip [Charles] Bohlens. Sol Linowitz

has now sort of been moved up into that category for the role that he played in the Middle East. There just are very few men--and I say men because I don't believe in our history we've ever had a woman who has been that involved in the art of negotiation--[who] are coming at it from a very interesting and complex perception which is the understanding of Washington, the understanding of international relations, usually personal, hands-on experience with the Soviet bloc, all of which are factors that make--negotiation is the art of nuance, and if you have somebody doing it who doesn't really understand what somebody is saying when they're not saying it, you lose 90 per cent of what you're sitting in the room for. That's the advantage of the Averell Harrimans; they understand what is being said and they understand what is not being said.

G: Was there confusion about the size of the area north of the DMZ that the U.S. would continue to bomb? Do you recall that there were some press stories?

B: Again, I can't answer that. I mean, I remember the confusion and I remember the concern, but I really don't remember the details.

G: All right.

Let me ask you about Martin Luther King's assassination. What are your recollections of that event? I believe that you were tying that in with the Democratic fund-raiser, was that what it was?

B: Yes. It turns out it was a congressional fund-raising dinner that was at the Hilton, and we were on our way to it. One of the fun things about working in the White House is you always changed into black tie in the office and went racing out the door. We used to--

G: Keep a formal there.

B: --keep dresses there, keep make-up there, keep mantillas there, because in those days

when you went to church you still wore something on your head. Kept white gloves there. In other words, you were just prepared for Lyndon Johnson to come strolling out and say, "Guess what, we're going." Sometimes you didn't even know until you heard the helicopter coming in.

But we all raced up to the Hilton, and when we got there we heard the news that Martin Luther King had been assassinated, and we came back to the White House. Things were relatively quiet that night. I eventually came home, and the next morning--I'm trying to remember the scenario. I can't remember if I went home in the middle of the night and got some clothes and went back or actually slept at my house that night. By the next day, though, the riots had started, and the President had made the decision to call in the troops. I may be moving this too fast; I can't remember exactly where he made the decision. But one of the things that was really overwhelming about that was going up to the third floor of the White House and watching Washington burn. It was sort of a scary feeling.

G: Did he see the fires?

B: Oh, yes. He and Lynda and I went up to the third floor. Then the agents got very nervous because they didn't want us near the windows. I don't think they cared very much about me, but they sure didn't want the President and Lynda near the windows. Then we spent incredibly long hours in the Situation Room. I just remember the whole thing as the phones ringing and Joe Califano was sort of managing, was sort of the nerve unit. Jim Jones was around. Marie was around. Everybody was sort of dispatched to different jobs, taking phone calls and answering inquiries. Joe was actually making the determinations as to what the President should know about and was probably briefing

him about every half an hour. But the President was with us a great deal of the time.

G: Was there any consideration of whether the White House was actually a safe place to be at that time?

B; There was, and I think we all decided that by and large it probably was the safest place to be in Washington at that particular moment. But, you know, that's very strange to see the White House ringed by military, and when I finally got out of there--and I don't even remember when that was--and went home, I kept being stopped at the check points. I just lived in Georgetown. I got home and there was a tank on the corner. It really upset me because I think to those of us who have been fortunate enough to grow up in this country, the idea of marshal law being imposed is just something so alien that it's very hard to deal with it. I also think that the President's reaction time was just incredible on the whole issue. He really did close this city down and get people out, and I think they really did save quite a few lives because that was craziness that was going on on 14th Street.

I suppose in retrospect or in the future one will really analyze the Civil Rights Act and why the whole thing happened. I guess social historians will look at the Civil Rights Act and analyze what was going on in the country at that time and have some very deep profound thoughts as to why the riots occurred. I think at that time we just sort of felt a sense of maybe betrayal, that the situation for minorities had hopefully improved and why was this incredible retaliation going on. You have to remember--

(Interruption)

G: Did the President feel that the blacks had been ungrateful or had rebelled against him?

B; I think he was perplexed. Again, you know, I'm saying all this and don't know why I'm saying it, so I must have perceived at that particular time that that was, or I must have

understood that that was going on, because I can't remember that I would drag that out of nowhere. Yet I don't really understand much more than everybody being very perplexed as to why it happened. Now, the Detroit riots had taken place the summer before. Am I not correct?

G: Yes.

B: And I wasn't around then. But analogies were consistently being drawn between the two situations, although the Detroit riots were really spurred by economic conditions rather than by the assassination of anybody. But, yes, I think it probably is fair to say that the President felt betrayed, and that he couldn't talk to anybody--I think what was even more awesome was it was unclear as to who was running them, so it was unclear as to whom you had to go to negotiate with to get them to calm down. And again, when one looks back, I don't think anybody really organized the riots. I mean, the riots were spontaneous, but at that time everybody was frantically casting around looking for the perpetrators.

G: Did he reflect on Martin Luther King during this interval?

B: Yes.

G: I know that they had not been close.

B: Yes, he did comment on Martin Luther King, and, no, I don't think it's my place to talk about the commenting.

G: Now, he did call in a number of black leaders to meet with him in the White House. Do you recall how that developed, whose idea it was?

B: Well, it goes back to this whole point of trying to figure out what exactly was going on and were riots going to go up in other cities, and was there some sort of a domestic

mechanism that had been placed in gear? Were we just going to see Detroit and Miami and everybody else going into chaos? I can't remember if it was Joe Califano's recommendation or if the President said, "Joe, get them in here." But I don't think there was any question that you had to try to find out as much as you could. Of course one of the things that we learned from that was that the black community was equally as perplexed about the origins of whether it was spontaneous or organized.

G: There seems to have been a controversy over some of the more militant leaders. As I recall, he invited Floyd McKissick, CORE, or whatever the group was, and McKissick wouldn't come unless he invited some other people, I think Roy Innis perhaps and one or two others. Do you recall that issue?

B: Yes. I guess the President--I'm trying to remember back--had pulled together what he thought was a representative group. It says here, "McKissick came to the gate of the White House with two other Negroes whom he demanded be allowed to attend the meeting. McKissick was invited and the other two could wait. And he said unless he could bring them in he was leaving." I suppose part of that was just Lyndon Johnson's stubbornness of not being told who was going to be in his meetings. Again, Joe being directly involved in all of this.

G: Why didn't the President go to Martin Luther King's funeral?

B: Security. The major conversations about that had a lot to do with security and the fear that if this had been organized--you remember, even at that point we still didn't know whether or not it had been organized. And you have to also remember that the President was being protected by a group of men who had already lost a president.

G: Good point. Do you recall his instructions to Ramsey Clark on investigating the King

assassination?

B: I guess I don't quite understand the question. I mean, I know that he wanted to get to the bottom of it and see whether it was a conspiracy--

G: I see. [inaudible]

B: Or whether or not it was again just a random event.

G: He did cancel a trip to Hawaii, to Honolulu, and I believe you indicated that that was a symbolic gesture.

B: Yes, because of what was going on and the fact that he felt that it was more important for him to be here. Now there may have been other reasons, but . . .

G: Did the President use this opportunity, the King assassination, to help push that Open Housing Act through the Congress?

B: I had never thought about it but I suppose he probably did. That would be a typical Lyndon Johnson [tactic]. As I said earlier in this conversation, one of the things that fascinates me, having stayed in this town through five presidents, is the uncanny ability that the President had to, no matter how terrible the situation, find something out of it that was going to be hopefully a plus. Putting different pieces together to come out with something more. So I suppose the answer is yes.

G: I wanted to ask you now to talk about the ordination of I guess it was Cardinal [Terence] Cooke in--

B: New York.

G: New York, yes. You went on that trip up there. This was the day of the assassination of Martin Luther King, is that right?

B: Yes, I think you're right. I tend to think of the assassination and the chaos being

simultaneous. I forget that there really was a delay of twenty-four or forty-eight hours before things really got out of control. Yes, the President came out and said all the Catholics were to get on the helicopter. So I grabbed my mantilla and white gloves and got on the helicopter.

That also was an interesting ordination because in the pictures there is the President and there's Mrs. Kennedy---Mrs. Jack Kennedy--Ethel Kennedy, Bobby, the Rockefellers, sort of an interesting combination of political factors all in one church. One of the things that was sort of interesting that day was they weren't expecting us, and I don't think they were expecting anywhere near as many people as came with him. The whole thing of trying to get us into pews and kneel down in protocol and who outranked whom was very overwhelming to me because I was raised as a Catholic and sort of the chaos that went on inside St. Patrick's was something that I wasn't used to. Then they had to throw up so much security so quickly and we landed in Sheepsmeadow [Sheepshead?] Bay because--I don't know why we landed in Sheepsmeadow, I guess we couldn't land on top of the Pan Am Building. The press kept trying to get to him. Every time a president goes into a major city like New York, it really causes a lot of havoc and you wonder sometimes whether politically it's a smart thing to do to make spur-of-the-moment trips like that.

G: Disrupt so many people.

B: Yes.

G: Did you observe his association with the Kennedys during that occasion?

B: Well, after the mass was all over, he went up to Mrs. Kennedy and chatted with her for a little while. Then he chatted with the other Kennedys. Then he asked to see Nelson and

Happy Rockefeller and we went over to the residence, and the Rockefellers were brought in. I can't really remember what the discussion was on. I just remember that the Rockefellers came in.

Then we headed back to the helicopters and the call came that he should go to the United Nations. So he and Marie and Jim Jones, I think, took off and went to the United Nations, and the rest of us waited on the helicopter for him to come back.

G: Did he have a special relationship with Nelson Rockefeller?

B: Lyndon Johnson liked people who were smart. He enjoyed intellectual sparring. I think he had a lot of respect for Nelson Rockefeller, in terms of both his political acumen as well as his own sense. The Rockefellers of the world to Lyndon Johnson were--again, I'm talking in retrospect and looking back. He was the poor boy who had gone up and made it. But there was always a sense of those families who had a historical tradition and something that he used to talk about in terms of leaving a heritage for his children and his grandchildren.

G: Do you think he saw Rockefeller as a counterforce to a Kennedy strength in New York?

B: You're talking about Bobby Kennedy strength in New York. Yes. Do I think he cared? (Laughter) Probably not.

G: Why do you say that?

B: There just was no love.

G: Sure, between LBJ and RFK.

Now, Robert Kennedy met with the President shortly after that March 31 speech, I think on April 3, the day before this trip to New York, and evidently commended him on his speech and commended his statesmanship and everything. I wonder if this

changed their relationship any.

B: The relationship with the Kennedys, again, you know, I wasn't there, so what I really know is things that I've heard said. As you know, Lyndon Johnson was a compromise on the Kennedy ticket. He never felt that they totally trusted him. And Lyndon Johnson was very strange about loyalty; loyalty was a very big thing to him. I've always considered one of the things that he gave to me was a sense of loyalty to those that you work for. I think even when Bobby came in and pledged his sense of unity to the party and did what he was supposed to do, I just think that he never could forget some of the minor betrayals that had been done to him early on. There was just always a sense of distrust. Now when someone is as good a political animal as Lyndon Johnson was, I mean certainly he didn't expect everybody to be totally loyal to him or totally trustworthy. He was not a dumb man. But I think he always felt that the support had always been maybe a minute or two too late or never with quite enough sincerity. Something which one observes in politics.

G: Do you think that he was too preoccupied with Robert Kennedy and Kennedy's ambitions this spring?

B: I don't know if preoccupied is the right term. He was also a realist.

G: But do you think he weighed decisions too much on how this would affect Kennedy?

B: Let me answer your question in a different way. I always felt that if we could have a president of this country who did not have to pay the price that our political system demands for a person to become a president, that we probably would have a wonderful presidency in the sense of not having relationships and obligations. Very idealistic. I really believed that for a number of years; I really believed that one of the problems that Lyndon Johnson faced was the commitments and the deals that he had had to make in

order to get where he was. We then had a president who didn't want to be president, in the sense of having never aspired for it or campaigned for it, and that was Gerald Ford. I was just so excited because I thought there was going to be a wonderful presidency and he was going to be free. I'm answering your question in a very roundabout way, but I guess the answer to your question is that no matter how you get there you bring with it a certain amount of indoctrination and prejudice and concern. And in Lyndon Johnson's case, he was an achiever who always wanted to achieve more, and part of that achievement was having everybody love him and agree with him. That's just not the way it works out. So I guess he never felt that the respect that he was accorded was true respect, and for that reason had a difficult time.

G: Let's talk a little about politics surrounding this period of time. Both Mayor [Richard] Daley and Mike Mansfield and a number of others cited the possibility of a draft, that even though LBJ would remove himself from the race, that the convention could still draft him. Did you ever see this as a possibility? Did the President ever see this as a possibility?

B: I not only saw it as a possibility, I really believed it was going to happen. I would be less than honest if I didn't say that I really feel that the President, even though he said, "I will neither accept nor seek"--

G: "I shall not seek nor will I accept."

B --that in his heart of hearts like all of us he hoped that the party would put forward a draft proposal.

G: Of course his popularity immediately went up in the polls some, almost 20 per cent I think. Did this have an effect on him, do you think, the fact that people now seemed

more appreciative of him than before?

B: Yes, except that I also think in those first several weeks afterwards, the implication of what he had really done--I mean, he was really walking away from something, something that probably would have been his. I am a believer that he would have been re-elected. It's a very hard decision to make. So I think while it buoyed him, I think it also really made him wonder whether or not the decision he had made had really been the right one. And I think that that made him very depressed.

G: Did he ever talk to you about it?

B: In the sense of the loneliness of the job and the decisions and you really never knew who your friends were, and how many years can a person do it. Oh, he'd see you smoking and he'd start talking about his heart attack in 1954 [1955] and how he had stopped smoking and how you should stop smoking, and wondered whether or not he had really conquered that or would that have been another problem for him in another term. He was very reflective. What have I done? Where am I going? What does it mean? Will we win, in the sense of the Democrats? What happens if the Republicans win? How is that going to change things? What will happen to the domestic policies? Yes, Lyndon Johnson used to like to sit at the end of the day and talk to two or three staffers, particularly if Mrs. J. was gone. And he'd talk about when he was young and had come and who was around then, J.J. Pickle and Jack Brooks and Sam Rayburn, and the things he had learned. I suppose for me being so young and wondering if at some day in my life I would be turning around and reflecting on those things, I think that there was something in me that responded to that [inaudible].

Tape 2 of 2

G: Let me ask you about his relationship with Hubert Humphrey in this period. One of the President's reasons for announcing his withdrawal was to remove himself from politics, and yet here his Vice President was about to announce his own candidacy in the wake of the President's decision not to run. Was the President at all torn on the issue of how much to help Humphrey, how much he could reasonably help Humphrey and yet still remain above the partisanship?

B: I have to tell you that to this day I really don't understand that whole phenomena. I really don't. I don't understand the dimensions of it or the ramifications of it. I don't know how much of it had to do with the positions on Vietnam. I don't know how much of it had to do with Hubert Humphrey's feelings that he himself want to have an image of his own and not be associated. Vice presidents are funny animals. I can't imagine why anybody would ever want to be a vice president of the United States. It's just sort of a thankless job. I do think that one of the things that the President did feel about Hubert Humphrey was that he had been loyal and done his job. And I think because of the role that Lyndon Johnson had played with Jack Kennedy, he had a very special feeling for that position and I don't think he ever tried to do anything that was nasty or mean. He had some very vivid memories of being left out of things. But I think what happened was that ideologically the two of them, as the years went by, really split off.

G: Are you talking about Vietnam in particular?

B: Yes, I'm talking about Vietnam in particular. I don't think ideologically on things like civil rights [they did].

G: Do you think that the President felt that on the one hand, if the Republicans won, that his social programs would be in jeopardy and his party would be turned out of power? On

the other hand, if the Democrats won, any of the candidates, that his foreign policy would be in jeopardy. Did he ever look at this dilemma?

B: Again, he would have had to. I would say though that Lyndon Johnson's main concern was that his domestic programs stay in place.

You were right when you said that all this triggers things. One day we were on *Air Force One*, and a couple of the female reporters were racing to get on board, dragging their suitcases and stuff. He started talking about how he hoped that Lynda and Luci would be able to cope in jobs, and what were we really doing with minorities and women, were we making things better by offering--he was drawing the analogy that here were these two women who were professionals, but look at what they were having to do, which was carry all their luggage the same way as the men and run and so on and so forth. Were we making the right decisions in pushing for more economic opportunities? And how would Lynda and Luci deal as grownups? Had he prepared them? What was going to happen to the minorities in this country, and what did his domestic programs really mean? How much--how right was it--what did it mean to create opportunities? Had any of us really thought about this long term? And it was just sort of an interesting reflection on his part, I think, about some of the things that he had done domestically.

And yet, I came out of my Lyndon Johnson years really being interested in the foreign policy side. Other than Vietnam, it's very hard for me to really think in terms of foreign policy, and yet obviously there was something that I saw that was going on, and I suppose what it was was that maybe during those days for the first time we were beginning to understand a little bit about foreign policy goals and economic goals and how they impacted domestically. Although I don't think I could have articulated it at that

point, part of it was our relationships with our neighbors and our allies, keeping borders open, and yet continuing to let the lifestyle of the American grow. Are you following me? This is all very complex. But losing lives in Vietnam. Vietnam had not spurred our domestic economy the way wars traditionally had. I mean, he would talk about these things. Why was it his place in history that he had the youth of America against him when in fact he was doing more to educate them and to help them? That the traditional things like war-production increases which boost your economy weren't really happening. I think sometimes he felt both a creator and a victim simultaneously of the environments domestically and foreign policy-wise.

I also don't think that Lyndon Johnson ever felt as comfortable with foreign leaders as he did with domestic leaders. I just . . .

G: Do you think he felt that he was getting an accurate picture of the war from his military advisers?

B: Yes.

G: That was a time when [William] Westmoreland had just asked for a substantial troop increase.

B: I remember sitting in the Cabinet Room with Joe and Larry Temple and the boss, and a tape had just come in from Vietnam from Chuck. General Westmoreland was there, and we were listening to it. That was just at the time that Westmoreland was asking for the increases. And he was weighing what he had imposed on his son-in-law against the men of America. We were up until about two o'clock in the morning that night, sitting and listening and talking. What did it mean and were we going to win, and what did winning mean? I think people tend to forget that Lyndon Johnson thought about those things.

What price were we going to pay?

G: Did he have doubts or do you think he was just reasoning out loud? Do you think he had uncertainties about the correctness of his course? I mean, as you think back about that night.

B: I think you get back to the whole thing about that being the loneliest job in the world, and that any president that's responsible has to question and sometimes be his own devil's advocate. Because most staff people will not do that. It's very hard to look at a president and say, "I disagree with you." You're talking to the most powerful person on the earth.

That is not to say that people didn't do it. That's a misconception I get very angry about, that nobody ever said to him, "You should be doing this and that and the other thing." But, yes, he was a human being, and as the days went by and the situation didn't get any better, of course he doubted what our strategies were. But I think he also felt committed to the overall principle that that was what one had to do.

(Interruption)

G: We were talking in general about Johnson and Humphrey, and Johnson and the other candidates in the 1968 [campaign]. Let me ask you a little bit more about Humphrey. Do you know why Humphrey delayed his announcement until almost a month after the President's withdrawal?

B: He wanted his totally committed support.

G: Is that right? Was Humphrey quietly working before his announcement?

B: Oh, no. No. I really think that Hubert Humphrey was a loyal team player and that he didn't do that. I know that there were factions of the party who very much wanted a Hubert Humphrey type of candidate. But I really could never believe that Hubert

Humphrey would be that Machiavellian.

G: Yes. But I mean after the President's March 31 speech, in which he removed himself from the scene, then Humphrey waited yet another month before he announced.

B: But that's because I really believe he wanted Lyndon Johnson to come out in support of him, and I think he was concerned that he was not going to get that total endorsement.

G: What did LBJ do for Humphrey before the convention, do you know? What specific things, like fund-raising lists or . . .

B: He did sort of the traditional things that an outgoing president would do for his vice president. I think the decision not to attend the convention was a very difficult one for the President, and yet I think he felt that he couldn't do it because Humphrey had so split with him on Vietnam at that point.

G: Was there, to your knowledge, a question of whether to make available to Humphrey the fund-raising list that LBJ himself had had?

B: I don't know the answer to that. I was not . . .

G: I notice when Humphrey announced, LBJ arranged to be in Kentucky I think, out of Washington. Was that intentional, do you know?

B: I think.

G: Designed to give more attention to him?

Now, the cabinet was somewhat split. I notice a number of them, at least one or two, favored Kennedy, and some Humphrey. How did the President deal with that?

B: The President was very interesting during that time because he didn't deal with it. I mean, he sort of removed himself from that whole process. It was interesting to watch.

G: Did he enjoy observing it, even if he wasn't participating in it? I mean, [inaudible].

B: Oh, he not only enjoyed observing it, but he got a certain sense of fun out of what he would be doing differently to make it work. Yes.

G: Did you ever hear him advise Humphrey on what Humphrey ought to do in his campaign?

B: No.

G: Let me ask you about his relationship with Gene McCarthy during this period, after the withdrawal. I notice he met with him.

B: You mean after the withdrawal from the race?

G: Right, the March 31 speech.

B: We didn't have a withdrawal on Vietnam. I just wanted to make sure I get . . .

G: He did meet with McCarthy during this period. Do you have any insights on their relationship?

B: After March 31, when the President knew he was not going to seek [the nomination], I think what he tried to do was listen to as many people and as many ideas and as many options as possible, because I think he really, really wanted peace by the next inauguration, and I think that's one of the reasons he spent time with Gene McCarthy and some of the people he spent time with. I think he doubted, to a degree, whether or not his decisions were the right ones, and now had the freedom to not be calculating everything he was doing from a political perspective.

G: One theme that seems to run through some of the press stories is that now LBJ could appeal to the other candidates to get behind him more on Vietnam, to present a united front so that the other side would be more inclined to negotiate with the current administration. Do you think this was a factor?

B: I guess it was a factor. I guess I don't know how to evaluate it.

G: Weren't there those who tried to talk the President into withdrawing from his March 31 speech, of getting back into the race?

B: Oh, yes.

G: Who were they? I gather John Connally was one.

B: I was going to say all of his Texas cronies is the first thing that comes to my mind. But it was broader than that. I guess the Texas cronies just because they always made such an impact whenever they did anything.

G: Tell me what you know about that, I mean the whole effort of different people to get him to change his mind.

B: I think that there was real concern that there was nobody in the Democratic Party who could really win the election except for Lyndon Johnson, and that we were playing right into the hands of the Republicans. People really were concerned that the Democratic Party was going to be split ideologically, and as it turned out, it was. So they were calculating incorrectly. And that because of that split, what was going to happen was that you were not going to have a popular vote that could bring in a Democrat. I think there were even people who really didn't like Lyndon Johnson all that much, but who in terms of the party really put pressure on him to stay.

G: How did he react to this? Was he pleased at least that they wanted to [renominate him]?

B: Oh, sure, he was really flattered. You know, he's like all of the rest of us. Everybody loves it when you say I'm not going to do this, and then you're rallied around and told you must do this for your country and this is too important and this is the most powerful job in the world and the country needs you. People kept saying Vietnam will end, and that

will not be a burden anymore, and you have an obligation to stay and see that your social programs work.

G: How about Mayor Daley? Was he urging the President to stay, also?

B: I was in one meeting with Mayor Daley and the President in Chicago.

G: Was that early in April or was that late in April?

B: Late in April.

G: When they had the protesters out there?

B: When the protesters were outside. Yes, Mayor Daley was urging him to run, *et cetera, et cetera, et cetera*. But, you know, I guess even then, although my political instincts weren't wonderful, there was a certain amount of that that I guess you didn't believe, a certain amount of it that you sort of wrote off as flattery and dogma. I guess that that's how I feel about the Mayor Daley conversations, that they were being done more not to make a political enemy than [anything else].

G: Now, Larry O'Brien left the cabinet and joined the Kennedy campaign. Do you recall that and what the President's reaction to it was?

B: I do. He put Marvin Watson into that job. The President was not pleased.

G: Did he try to keep O'Brien on?

B: Oh, no. Once somebody stepped away from the President, they never had another opportunity to step back in. I don't think he made any movement at all to try to change Larry's mind.

G: Did you feel that there was a good deal of pressure by the Kennedy forces on O'Brien?

B: Well, sure there was, and you have to remember where Larry came from in the party, and Larry came from that faction of the party.

G: Had been an old family friend.

[Robert] McNamara had a curious role in that interval, and I notice was part of a television commercial that praised Bobby Kennedy's role in the Cuban missile crisis. How would something like that affect the President?

B: Angrily.

G: Really? Do you recall that episode?

B: Yes, I do. As a matter of fact, I recall the ad. Again, I'm not answering your question directly, but the roles of Dean Rusk and McNamara were very interesting because somehow Rusk managed to survive and be loyal and be a team player and really have the respect of the President. I think the President was not unhappy when McNamara stepped down and he brought in Clark Clifford. I'm trying to remember when that was though.

G: Well, it was earlier I think.

B: It was in 1967, right? And yet there is one further point. Somehow McNamara and Johnson managed to work that out, and I think that that's one of the few relationships where accommodations were made. Because when it was all said and done, I think the President had a tremendous amount of respect for McNamara's abilities.

G: Another appointment, Arthur Goldberg resigned from the--

B: U.N.

G: --U.N. and was replaced by George Ball.

B: I not only didn't understand that one then, but knowing George Ball the way I do today, I guess I don't understand it today. I mean, I understand why Goldberg resigned, but I've never quite understood why George Ball was put in that place.

G: Did the President ever talk about it?

B: I guess not, because I guess I would remember if he did in front of me. But there just couldn't be anybody who I just think of as being poles apart from Lyndon Johnson as George Ball.

G: There was some speculation that LBJ would name Sol Linowitz or Joseph Sisco. I wonder if he considered those people.

B: He had great respect for both of them. As a matter of fact, when I went over to the State Department, one of the reasons the President agreed to let me go over there was because I was supposed to work for Joe Sisco. Upon my arrival at State, Joe got removed from international organizations--which is where I wanted to be--to the Near East, and so I never did work for Joe. As a matter of fact, I only lasted at the State Department six months. Subsequently Joe Sisco and I have become very good friends, because he's very involved in the Middle East, which is an area of responsibility for me, and he's also a trade person. Lyndon Johnson's judgment of Joe Sisco was very accurate.

G: Is that right?

B: Yes, very. A complete bureaucrat, and I mean that in the most positive way. Bureaucrats tend to have a bad name. Joe Sisco is somebody who really, really understands the system and really knows how to move forward with policies. I think he would have been very good for us at the U.N.

[End of Tape 2 of 2 and Interview I]

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