INTERVIEW II

DATE: April 6-7, 1983

INTERVIEWEE: PHYLLIS O. BONANNO

INTERVIEWER: Michael L. Gillette

PLACE: Ms. Bonanno's office, Washington, D.C.

Tape 1 of 1

G: There are one or two items in April [1968], the end of April, I want to ask you about. One is the visit of King Olav of Norway to the White House. Do you remember that?

B: Well, I'm only laughing because I only remember it because I happen to have a picture of myself with him. I think you wanted something more substantive than the fact that I had a picture [taken with him].

G: Well, any recollections of the King and LBJ together. He had apparently known him a number of years. He'd traveled to Norway when he was vice president.

B: Yes, I'm trying to [remember]. I'm sorry, let me just--is that in here?

G: Yes. It should be the last page of April.

(Interruption)

Okay, well let's start with May. On May 3 the President flew to Kansas City to meet with President Truman.

B: I was not with him.

G: Anything on their relationship that you recall?

B: I guess the only thing on their relationship was just LBJ's relationship with former presidents. I guess my comment on that would be that he felt that they were a very small fraternity and that anyone who had sat in that seat had a special perspective and that you

went to the few colleagues--there were only two alive when I worked for him, Truman and Eisenhower--when you wanted advice and guidance. And in retrospect, I just think it disturbed the President a great deal that he was not used more by Nixon. Although Nixon did meet with him several times. They never had the kind of relationship that he had with Eisenhower and Truman, which was almost a father-son kind of relationship. Of course, he and Nixon were much closer in age, so maybe that kind of relationship wasn't truly possible.

G: He certainly seems to have gone out of his way to consult with both Truman and Eisenhower, visiting Eisenhower at Walter Reed [Hospital] a lot.

B: And I went out to California a couple of times with him to visit.

G: Did you?

B: Yes. I don't have anything else to say.

G: He went to New York on May 20 and spoke at the Arthritis Foundation.

B: Yes. The most memorable thing about that for me was that I sneaked out of that to go on a date. (Laughter) I will never forget that. The secret service gave me a walkie-talkie so they could catch me. You know, we never got to go out. So I missed it entirely. Lyndon Johnson would have fired me if he had known that. But I missed the entire speech and sneaked out for two hours. My friends, the agents, covered for me. So I have no idea what went on that night.

G: How about the Ladies Garment Workers Union [convention] in Atlantic City?

B: We went up by helicopter, Jim Jones and Joe Califano, myself, Larry--I can't think of Larry's last name.

G: Levinson?

B: No.

G: Temple.

B: Temple, George Christian. That was one of the very few times that I got frightened for the President physically, which was interesting because that was a very pro group. But they got so hysterical when they saw him and so hysterical through his speech. He used to make us count the number of times that applause came, and that just was one of those speeches where--I don't even remember the substance of the speech, quite honestly, I'm sure it was democracy and workers and that's what makes this country great and so on and so forth. He was very good at that kind of speech, "You're the fiber of this country, it's what it's woven from" kind of [speech]. But at the end when he went to shake hands, they just mobbed the stage. And of course he really loved that, he loved to feel that kind of affection from the crowd.

There was something controversial in that speech though, because--he had already said he wasn't going to seek re-election. I think the crowd was not very pleased that he was not throwing his support in behind Hubert Humphrey. I think there were a couple of times where they wanted to know which candidate he was going to come out for and he wouldn't answer them directly. But Vietnam, for example, was not really a major issue. Labor unions, of course, were very pro our winning the war. That's really all I remember about that day, that it was kind of a typical labor, pro audience speech.

G: Was he pleased with the reception?

B: Oh, yes. And on the way back we passed a wedding. We took helicopters up to some place in Atlantic City and then took cars from the base to the hall, and on the way back there was a wedding going on. It got the President talking about Lynda and Luci and

what was happening in their lives. We were all really pleased, because you knew when you got on the helicopter that he was going to be in a very good mood and he was going to want to reminisce, and that was always a plus for the staff. If he came out of something and it had not been a happy gathering, then we would all sort of be chewed out on the way home. But if he had come out and the event had gone well and then he saw this pretty bride [he would be in a good mood]. It was a lovely, gorgeous day, so all he wanted to do on the plane on the way back was talk about little Lyn. I can't remember, Lucinda wouldn't have been born by then, but maybe Lynda knew she was pregnant. So we were all quite relieved, because if I'm correct I think that was a Saturday and we all wanted to be able to go home. Is this the kind of stuff you want to know?

G: Yes.

B: But it was really funny, particularly if Mrs. Johnson was out of town and you were with him on a weekend, you could be there until three o'clock in the morning, because he didn't like to be alone in the White House and he really liked people around him. She obviously must have been home, and he was in a good mood and we were all really pleased, because we knew we were going to land and be able to disperse and go do what we wanted to do for the rest of the weekend.

G: Did he talk about Dave Dubinsky and his long friendship with him?

B: Yes. David Dubinsky and the woman who, the Ladies Garment Workers Union--oh, I can't think of her name [Evelyn Dubrow?]--who he felt had--the two of them had really stayed in behind him and supported him all the way through. Gosh, that's funny, there's something significant about Dubinsky and I can't remember what it is right now. Maybe it will come back to me later. It's going to take a while for me to get back into this.

G: I think you're doing fine.

The next day Australian Prime Minister [John] Gorton met with LBJ in Washington. Do you remember anything about that?

B: Yes. One of the concerns of the Prime Minister was the entry of Britain into the European Community and what that was going to do to Australia's economy. I'm trying to remember it. We were having gold problems in May of 1968, right? A lot of that conversation had to do with the economy, with what would happen to Australia. You know, when Britain went into the Common Market it had to join the common agricultural policy, and of course Australia and New Zealand are the big suppliers to Britain. There was a lot of concern as to what that would do to wheat prices and how that would affect gold and exchange rates. But I wasn't sophisticated enough at that point to understand it, except that that was a very major issue. Also, Australia was one of our prime supporters in the war, and of course that pleased the President very much, that he was greeting a prime minister from a country that--really, basically Australia was the only country that stayed with us throughout the whole war.

G: Sent troops and kept them there.

B: Yes.

G: He seems to have had a special relationship with Australia. He'd been there during the war and was apparently close to Harold Holt. Did he ever talk about Australia and what it meant to him?

B: I think Lyndon Johnson thought of Australians as very similar to the kind of life he had had, tough, hard, rugged, hard workers, strong people, dedicated people. He liked to feel comfortable with sort of rough, tough people, and Australians are rough, tough people.

They're not the elitist gentlemen that the President didn't feel very comfortable with. I don't remember anything specific other than their support of Vietnam, which would have been of great importance to him. But I think the personality of the country probably was of great importance to him.

G: Do you think that had anything to do with his decision to have Ed Clark ambassador to Australia?

B: Probably. I mean, it would make sense. But again, I don't have any feel for that.

I didn't go with him to the TCU [Texas Christian University] commencement address.

There's one thing I wanted to talk about in May, which again is a personal commentary, about when the Tunisian president came, [Habib] Bourguiba. Lyndon Johnson was a very funny man. I used to have my hair done on Wednesday mornings because I didn't come in until nine-thirty on Wednesday mornings because I worked Wednesday nights. I'm sure somebody has gone through with you the fact that we rotated nights, Mary [Rather], Marie [Fehmer], Juanita [Roberts] and myself. Wednesday night was my night, and that meant I didn't have to come in until nine-thirty so I used to get my hair done on Wednesday mornings.

Whenever this visit took place, I went to the hairdressers that morning because my parents were in town. As soon as the President came in to the office, his words to me were, "Why did you have your hair done, Phyllis? It's not Wednesday." And I said, "Well, Mr. President, I had my hair done because my parents are here and we're going out to dinner tonight." And he said, "Well, you didn't tell me they were coming." And I'm sure I didn't say, "I didn't think you'd want to know," but I probably said something

similar to that. He asked me where they were staying and I told him. He chatted a little bit with me about them. And about four or five hours later my mother called and she was just hysterical because a White House driver had just delivered tickets to the state dinner the next night and they were just flabbergasted. They just didn't really quite know what to do about it. Of course, my mother didn't have a long dress with her and my father didn't have his tuxedo. So whatever they were--they must have been here on some sort of a business meeting, they spent the whole afternoon running around. I was very, very touched. I couldn't believe that the President had done that.

I was also going to the state dinner the next night, and the night of the dinner, as we were going through the receiving line, two significant things happened, to me personally. One was the amount of time Mrs. Johnson took to reassure my mother that I was being taken care of, that they didn't have to worry, that I was doing a good job, that she was there in case anything happened, and that my mother and father just should not be concerned that I was living so far away from home. Then the [second was] the President introducing my parents to President Bourguiba, and telling them all about my parents and all about me. You know, my parents were just so honored that the President and Mrs. Johnson both would take that amount of time in the receiving line to do all of that. Then after the dinner was all over and we went into the Gold Room for entertainment, the President came over to my mother and talked to her as they were going in. They really did spend a lot of time with my parents. It's that kind of thing that I think most people don't know about Lyndon Johnson. I think people realized that Lady Bird was very much that way, but I don't think they realized that he was the kind of person that in the middle of a busy day and you said your parents were coming, would think to call

up Bess Abell and say, "Dispatch tickets off to her parents."

G: Was this characteristic of him?

B: Oh, he loved to do things like that. The more of a surprise the better. He loved to see how excited you got by it. He was a man who very much needed a lot of love and affection. That's kind of nice.

G: He announced early in May that Hanoi had agreed to meet in Paris for the peace talks. Do you recall how he learned of this?

B: Yes. General [William] Westmoreland came in in the middle of the night. I mean, it probably wasn't the middle of the night, but I sort of remember him arriving ten or eleven o'clock at night. They talked about what Hanoi was willing to do and the timing and where it would be and what kind of requirements they were setting forth and the concessions we would have to make and what they might be--they went back and forth on how the whole thing would be structured, from everything--I think I'm right on this--to the size of the table and shape of the table, to where in Paris. Then the next day the President announced that Hanoi was willing to come to the peace table.

G: What was his reaction to this? Did he feel like he had really taken a stride toward peace here?

B: I think he was pretty optimistic that he was going to be able to end it and bring peace through this process. I don't think he felt that way a month or two down the road when everything was still not coming into place and everybody was being hesitant. But at that particular moment, yes, I think he saw it as the answer. And of course, it was the reason he had stated why he wouldn't run for the presidency again.

G: The same day, Nixon called for a moratorium on criticism of the administration's

Vietnam policy. Do you remember that?

B: I do, and I remember the president being very pleased because--I think he really believed that if you could have a standstill--the word we use when you want everybody to sort of stop--and not have so much criticism and go to the peace table, that maybe we really could end it once and for all. I think he felt that Nixon was very much responding in the spirit that he had tried to respond when he wouldn't seek the nomination again, which is for the best of the country. There are times one must set aside and do things for the best of the country. I'm not very articulate today.

G: Anything on his relationship with Eugene McCarthy during this period?

B: He didn't like him. (Laughter) I mean I remember that quite vividly. But I don't think I want to say anything in particular, no.

G: You know, McCarthy was talking about going to Paris himself at one time.

B: Oh, yes. I had forgotten that.

G: During the campaign.

B: The poet I believe he was affectionately called.

You know, this time period gets all very interesting, because we were so hopeful that the Paris peace talks would work and then we had--again, one looks at this in perspective. Negotiating anything is so complicated, setting the ground rules. You almost do all of your negotiations before you ever get to the table. And that period was such a confusing time because I didn't understand why, if Hanoi wanted to go to the peace table and we wanted to go to the peace table, you just didn't go to the peace table. I didn't understand about our not wanting to stop bombing and their not wanting to go into a de-escalation and some of the things you have mentioned here.

Also, the May 13 victory in the battle of Saigon was again a very funny time. I think we put it forth as a victory but I'm not too sure anyone deep in their hearts really believed that it was a victory as much as keeping the pressure on to get people to back a solution. I'm trying to remember this *Pueblo* crew release in the Vietnam peace talks in Paris.

(Interruption)

I guess what really happened was that Humphrey was not brought in on a lot of the decisions, and he was in the presidential race, he felt committed to make comments, as one does when one is running, thought he knew what was going on. There's a tremendous amount of back-channeling going on during this process that very few people were involved in. I don't know if it would be fair to say that the Vice President was left out of it deliberately, but I know that the President always felt the Vice President had a tendency to talk too much and say things without thinking them through. I think he got a little paranoid about that during all of this.

G: Do you think the fact that Humphrey was now a candidate and he himself had announced on March 31 he was not going to be involved in partisan political activity, did this lead him to involve Humphrey less, or do you think it was strictly that Humphrey was just too loose with what information he got?

B: Well, I think it might be fair to characterize it that the President got pretty paranoid about leaks when all of this was going on and it was all terribly secret and he felt very strongly that things would go off the track too easily and he wanted control over who knew. In many ways he put the Vice President in a very bad situation, because the vice president is supposed to know everything that's going on. Today, I don't think that would quite

surprise anybody, because we're in a different time and presidents don't seem to tell their vice presidents very many things. But you know initially Lyndon Johnson, having been a vice president, worked much more closely with Hubert Humphrey.

G: Was he himself responsible for a lot of the leaks that occurred?

B: Somebody once asked me why I was such a good wirer of things. Do you know what wiring means?

G: No.

B: Behind the scenes. Putting things together. And I assured them it was because I had worked for Lyndon Johnson. He was a master leaker, including all the indignation at the leaking that goes on. That's all part of the process. Lyndon Johnson probably had more control over the press than any president since that time. He knew exactly who to call in on what issue and exactly how it would get leaked, and he knew when to delegate his leaking, too. Presidents leak to get reactions. Yes, he . . . I don't think anybody on Lyndon Johnson's staff would have ever dared to leak something without his permission. Now that is not to say that people in the State Department and Pentagon don't leak things, but in terms of the White House staff I don't think anybody would have ever done that.

G: Did he trust the bureaucracy when it came to leaking?

B: It's too bad you don't have me on camera so that you can see the reaction on my face. Lyndon Johnson didn't trust anybody, much less the bureaucracy. That's why he became so concerned as to who was in meetings and who was taking notes.

G: Do you have any examples of this to demonstrate how he showed this concern? I mean, was there an occasion, for example, when someone was excluded from a meeting because he didn't want--?

B: Oh, sure. He'd exclude cabinet members.

G: Would he really?

B: Well, let's put it this way, instead of calling it a cabinet meeting, he would call in three or four or five people. I remember him calling Clark Clifford once at a dinner party, and the President asked him if he was on a secure phone, and the Secretary answered that he wasn't too sure how secure it was, but he was in a closet surrounded by mink coats and he thought it was probably about as secure as he could get given the circumstances. But that was the kind of question he would ask, yes, where are you, what kind of a phone is it, can you move to a phone that's secure. That was not atypical.

G: Was he disappointed when it became clear that Hanoi was using the Paris talks for propaganda purposes?

B: I think in that time period he was about the most depressed I had ever seen him. He was a very mercurial man and his temperament, his moods, went up and down. I think he really didn't quite believe that they were not trustworthy. I think that really did overwhelm him, that they would commit to something and then not follow through on it. He very, very much wanted peace before the election, and I think he couldn't quite believe--when you look at the way Lyndon Johnson could maneuver Congress and maneuver legislation, I think he was overwhelmed that he couldn't maneuver another country. And he had every right to believe that he could. He was a master at manipulation. I think that he sort of went into a decline in May and June of that year, really being overwhelmed that he had given up the renomination, he had done many things which for him were pretty significant, and that he wasn't going to end up with what he wanted was pretty tough for him.

G: Did he ever think about going to Paris himself?

B: Yes. There were also talks about secret meetings in other places in the world. He was really trying desperately to figure out some way to pull this together. I mean, things would be on again and then off again. He would think about going. Cy Vance was dispatched I don't know how many times to see if he could get the whole thing rolling and moving. It was a very hectic time. Not a very pleasant time.

G: Of course, during all of this you had the fight for the 10 per cent surtax. The Congress, particularly Wilbur Mills, was forcing a six billion dollar spending cut. Do you remember this issue at all in his disagreements with Mills?

B: I remember him sending Jim Jones out to find out how they could cut six billion dollars out of the budget. Yes, he was not very happy with Wilbur Mills. But he had also been challenged. When the President was challenged he was going to come up with some answers. I'm trying to remember who else. They stayed up for like two days trying to figure out where in the budget they could accept a six billion dollar cut, just so that he could get his 10 per cent surtax. Good training for Jim Jones, don't you think?

G: It sure is.

B: See, my problem with all of this stuff is that I really didn't understand very much of it. I like to think I understand it more. But I never knew whether things like this were really important to him or whether they were really important from a substantive perspective or whether they were really important from a personal perspective. He didn't like being outnegotiated. If that were to happen now, I would probably have a very different perspective on it. But back then it was very simplistic. Was he reacting because he really believed that we couldn't have that spending cut, or was he really reacting because

Wilbur Mills wouldn't fall in line? I must tell you the clear impression I have is it was because Wilbur Mills wouldn't fall into line.

G: Do you think he understood Mills at the time? What did he attribute Mills' opposition to?

B: Personal vendetta.

G: He had George Mahon on Appropriations as an ally.

B: Right. Wilbur Mills and the President did not get along well. And it wasn't the kind of adversarial relationship that [Everett] Dirksen and LBJ had, which was that they could rant and rave and roar at one another, and then Dirksen would send him some marigolds. I think it's marigolds that were Dirksen's favorite flower. And everybody would have a big laugh. I don't think he ever had that kind of a relationship with Mills; I don't think he ever felt that way about Mills.

G: Now, he came to the aid of France when the *franc* was in trouble.

B: Yes. I was looking at this Poor People's Campaign thing. The reason I'm thinking about that is because we flew over--do you remember, they were not on the Mall, but between the Lincoln Memorial and the Reflecting Pool and beyond. We flew over that in the helicopter, and the President was really upset about seeing all those people out there. I didn't say that correctly. He was upset to see that all these poor people had come and that it was pouring rain. That whole thing turned into mud. There was not enough facilities. Again, a very human side of him. He felt very concerned that they had come looking for something, and in addition had all these burdens put on them. We flew back and forth over that about three times in the helicopter so that he could just sort of look down and see what was going on, and the rain was coming down.

G: Was he at all concerned with the physical wear and tear on the area? This was something

that a lot of people complained about at the time, that they were ruining [the grounds].

B: No, he was pretty concerned about the physical wear and tear on the people, particularly the children. There were lots of children brought up.

G: Did he have any solutions for providing a better shelter or anything of this nature?

B: Well, I think one of the things that overwhelmed everybody was how many people actually showed up on that. The city was not prepared for that siege at all. I think he was pretty annoyed about the fact that the responsiveness--I kind of remember him fussing at Joe Califano; Joe must have been in the helicopter with us--about how did this happen and how come we didn't know and why are they down there. Look at those tents and what are they eating and who's providing them food, that kind of a commentary.

The support of the *franc*. Again, this all gets back to gold and what we were going to do with exchange rates, and didn't we have to go in behind the French. Also concern as to whether or not the strikes and riots were being motivated by the communists. I think that that's one of the reasons we went in behind supporting the *franc*. That was one of the first beginnings of a strong communist party in France; there's always been a communist element, but I think that was the beginning of the surge.

G: Did he ever talk about de Gaulle to you and his attitude toward [him]?

B: No.

G: Back to the Poor People's Campaign. There was that CBS special on hunger in America. Was he affected by this at all?

B: The President never liked to think that anybody was going to bed hungry, people couldn't get jobs. But again, it's hard for me because our problems in those days were really minor in comparison to today. We just didn't have all sorts of people out of work. I think

the President felt that his legislation had really been useful and that he was doing something to correct the problem, and that he had set into motion a social program that could take care of a lot of this. But it's very hard for me, because again, my perspective, I was just too young really to understand what this meant. I hadn't really seen poverty or long lines of unemployment.

G: Of course, he had in place the whole War on Poverty program. Do you think he felt by this time, by 1968, that the program wasn't working?

B: No, I don't think he thought the program wasn't working. I think he very often thought that his programs didn't have enough support and that the bureaucracy and red tape kinds of problems were things that he wanted people to get in and grapple and resolve and get moving. He didn't like that kind of delay. When he signed a piece of legislation, he wanted it implemented and operating within twenty-four hours.

G: Did he ever draw any comparison between the Poor People's Campaign and the Bonus Army back in the Depression?

B: Not with me. That would be the kind of thing he would be more tempted to do with people of his own age, because he always said that we didn't understand because we hadn't lived through that.

I know nothing about the [Drew Pearson story on a deal with John] McClellan.

I do remember his reaction to the Senate's failure to extend the ban on mail order sale of pistols and rifles and shotguns. Obviously Lyndon Johnson never got over what happened in Dallas, and he was--do you know that he actually stopped shooting game on the Ranch?

G: No.

B: Wouldn't allow guns to be used. Thought that the purchase of guns was just too easy. I suppose if one's been a witness to an assassination, one ends up--and this was prior to Bobby Kennedy's assassination, also, which should be pointed out. He felt pretty strongly about the control.

G: Well, he must have gotten a lot of opposition to this from the Senate.

B: Right to bear arms, part of the Constitution, National Rifle Association, sure. We were bombarded with letters: "You can't stop people from defending themselves," "You can't stop people from hunting," "It's a sport."

G: I think [Mike] Mansfield was one of those who opposed his effort here.

B: I can't remember.

[inaudible]

G: He asked for eleven million dollars to enforce fair housing. Do you remember that?

B: He didn't get it, I don't think. Didn't he only get about seven million?

G: I think so.

B: Yes. I mean again . . .

G: Now on the crime bill, he seems to have really had mixed emotions about it because it had some wiretap provisions and other things that he didn't seem to really want. Do you remember that?

B: He was a pretty big believer in people's rights. He was concerned that the right of the individual would really be hampered by the crime bill. His feeling about wiretaps was sort of an interesting one, which was that he liked them when they were in his favor and didn't like them when they went against him, I guess is the only way I can state it. I think he felt the FBI went bonkers on wiretaps and shouldn't be allowed to do it. But then I

think he thought J. Edgar Hoover went bonkers on some things and shouldn't be allowed to do it.

G: But then on the other hand, did he like to read the reports that came from this material?

B: Loved to read them, and loved to read them out loud to you, and loved to read them out loud to you and then tell you you'd die if you ever repeated a word to another human being about them. (Laughter) Yes. He was a man who liked to control, and finding out information about people is one way that you control. That was his problem with Hoover. He liked what Hoover did as long as Hoover was doing it for him. I think he never felt quite comfortable as to how much Hoover was doing that he might not know about.

G: Did you ever get the sense that Hoover was changing his allegiance after March 31?

B: I know the President thought that. I'm not too sure that that was accurate. He felt that the reports we were getting were nowhere near as interesting as the ones we'd been getting prior to that. I think Hoover's independence really bothered the President.

G: Do you recall any examples where he tried to discourage wiretapping?

B: It's a question that obviously you can see from my reaction that I must have, but I can't think of anything specific.

G: Truth-in-lending, consumer legislation, what did he think about that?

B: Again, I have no specific--you know, so much legislation went through in the time that I was there. But anything that was good for the consumer and for the people, he was always pretty ecstatic about it going through.

I do remember his wondering about the eighteen-year-old vote and debating back and forth whether eighteen-year-olds were old enough to make that kind of decision and

judgment. But if you were asking eighteen-year-olds to go to war, how could you not give them the right to vote? And I really do think that was sort of the bottom line for him on that issue.

G: Sure.

(Interruption)

G: This portion is recorded on April 7, 1983.

B: Have you talked to Harry McPherson, by the way?

G: Not in a long time.

B: Okay. Harry is another one of the people that I stay in touch with. You probably should.

On July 1, when they signed the Nonproliferation Treaty, one of the things that the President was very big on was as soon as something like that had been done, he wanted thank you letters to go absolutely immediately to everyone in the world. In this particular case he wanted letters to go to every member of Congress announcing that it had been signed and thanking them for their help, *et cetera*, *et cetera*. He would give these orders as he was walking, and he was walking back from the East Room and gave an order to get these letters out within the next twenty-four hours. Back in those days the word processing systems were not as sophisticated as they are today, so we called over and told the typing pool to be prepared that they were going to have to do four hundred plus letters that day and to get the staff in that was necessary for it. We called Charlie Maguire and told him to draft a letter. The President was really pleased with the signing of the Nonproliferation Treaty and he considered it a very major landmark in his administration. That night he was sitting in the office reminiscing about how it had come to be and what they had had to do and what it was going to mean for the world, and the

fact that [Anatoly] Dobrynin had come that day and how significant all this was. And the first group of letters came in for him to sign. He insisted that he wanted to sign all these letters himself rather than using the signing machine. The letters came in, and he probably signed seventy or eighty of them. Do you know this story?

G: No.

B: He looked down and he said, "Goddamn it, I didn't sign the Nonproliferation Treaty, Dean Rusk did. Who the hell drafted this letter?" The opening part of the letter was, "Today, when I signed the Nonproliferation Treaty was one of the greatest days of my life." Well, the typing pool had already typed all four hundred of them. Anyway, to make a very long story short they were there all night retyping these letters that we were then sending over to him in the Mansion in batches so he could sign them. But it's a good example of the kind of detail, and also the annoyance that he had that he was the one that caught the error. I mean, he should never have been the one that caught the error; one of us should have caught it.

G: Do you remember what else he said about the treaty, what it meant?

B: I'm trying not to laugh, because it isn't very funny and it isn't very humorous, but Lyndon Johnson would lapse into sort of his typical rhetoric: "one of the most significant things I've done," "hopefully it will change the world, make it a better place for my children and grandchildren" kind of thing. He also liked the fact that he had maneuvered the Soviets into signing something, which even back in those days was a pretty difficult thing to do.

G: Did he talk about how he had done it?

B: Actually, that's one of the instances where he gave Dean Rusk a tremendous amount of credit.

G: Did he?

B: Yes. He really felt that it was Rusk's patience that had gotten the Russians to the point where they would sign it. Then I think you probably know we did have some trouble with the Congress only because they felt that it wasn't tight enough, not because they weren't pro the concept, but they had hoped there would be some more restrictive language in it. But you know, treaties can never be all that restrictive.

G: Did he seem to be really concerned about the threat of nuclear war? Did he talk about this very often? Did he seem preoccupied with it at all?

B: I think he was concerned from the perspective that we might be losing our edge in terms of nuclear power. You know, that's an interesting question because at the time I came into the administration, he was so pro getting out of Vietnam and so anti-war *per se*, that I suppose it's hard for me to make a judgment on whether he was more concerned about nuclear power than any other kind of military power, in the sense of being destructive.

As I look at the diary though, I see something, which is that Bill Blackburn brought in his daughter that day, Victoria, and the President loved children. She had on a pretty starched little white dress and these long blonde ringlets, and he picked her up and scooped her up in the air. Children liked the President. He was talking as Bill was in there with the child about the signing of the treaty, what it meant in terms of safety for the world. And I guess maybe that's where this whole remembrance of the rhetoric is coming from. And I don't mean to say that he didn't believe it, but there would always be something about a child that would spur him to talk about why the world had to be a safer place to live and why the United States had the responsibility of making sure we didn't get into a major war, and look at what was happening in Vietnam and all the lives that

were being lost. The children would trigger that in him.

G: Did he see the Nonproliferation Treaty as paving the way for additional, shall we say, détente with the Russians? Did he want to go to the Soviet Union? You know, he was making plans for a summit.

B: Right. He did want to go to the Soviet Union. Again, I'm a little vague on this, but somehow the signing of the Nonproliferation Treaty and Vietnam are intertwined in the sense that I think once again he was hopeful that that was a sign that we were going to make some movement on the other front. Although that never came to be.

G: Didn't he want or try to get the Russians to use influence?

B: On the Viet Cong? Sure.

G: North Vietnamese.

B: The North Vietnamese, yes. I remember all of that but I don't really remember it in detail. I do know that he considered the signing of that treaty one of the more significant things he did in the administration, but then he could get that way about the Clean Air Act, too.

What else?

G: He met with President [Nguyen Van] Thieu in Honolulu in mid-July.

B: Okay. We're jumping forward.

G: If you see anything between there. (Interruption)

B: The President received an honor from the American Committee on Italian Migration, and he asked Joe Califano and myself to go. I have a funny feeling he may have called Dorothy Territo in there, too, we being his three resident Italians. He said, "Here are two junior Italian members of my staff, go talk to them." But then he proceeded to tell how

Joe and I were children of immigrants, which in my case wasn't really true, it's my grandparents. But he used us as examples of immigrating to this country and success stories.

The other thing, though, that was significant was [it was] the day that national quotas were abolished. Afterwards he and I were talking about that. I guess I must have been frank enough to tell him that it wasn't my parents who immigrated but my grandparents. He was talking about what a wonderful thing it was that national quotas were no longer in existence and what that would mean to future generations wanting to come to this country and the kind of opportunities that were available.

The President was in a very reflective mood that day. As I go through this diary, I guess the combination of all the things that happened--he had the cabinet meeting on the sterling, the balance of payments problem. There were four or five different crises--not crises, but things going on that particular day that were relatively significant to him. I think that I'm right about this, that that night was the night that--no, it isn't. He called Homer Thornberry. Whenever the President got into a mood where a lot of things had happened during the day, and a lot of them might be troublesome or worrisome, he would then go and pick up the phone and call Frank Ikard or Homer Thornberry or Jake Pickle or Jack Brooks or any of his old colleagues to kind of go through what was happening and how things had changed since they had all been young. He had a very, very strong need to keep in touch with his relations with friends from the old days, and I think a lot of that was that he just felt support from that group. Sometimes when he had done things that were relatively major, he felt that he needed the reassurances that he had done the correct thing.

That's all I really have to say about that. I will flip through the [diary]. There is one thing in here that--

This is when Doris Kearns, by the way, starts appearing. One of the things that's always interested me about Doris Kearns' reflections on her time with LBJ was that in fact she spent more time with LBJ after he was out of the White House than when he was in the White House. She likes to portray herself as having really been in the middle of things, and she wasn't.

On July 2, General Westmoreland came home. That night we all sat in the Cabinet Room listening to tapes that the General had brought back from Chuck [Robb] to his father-in-law about what was going on in Vietnam. That was one of the things that General Westmoreland [would do]. He was probably the highest paid messenger ever in the military. He would bring tapes in from Chuck and would take back chocolate chip cookies from Lynda, which I think is sort of nice.

We're jumping ahead a little bit here, but--

G: Do you remember the President's reaction to the tapes? I understand that he would play them for--

B: Oh, he would play them for hours and we would sit there listening. We were listening to the mortar fire in the background. Those tapes really upset him. There was something very real to him about the fact that his son-in-law was sitting in the middle of all that. And he'd want to know about the boys and the troops and how many losses had we had. It was really sort of morbid. He would really go over that in great detail. I've never liked those sessions, partially because that was my generation that was in the war, and that really brought home a great conflict in me.

G: Was he talking with Westmoreland, or who was he talking with in these sessions?

B: Mostly himself. I mean, he would ask rhetorical questions, why are we there, why are we losing these lives, are we ever going to get out, this thing has got to end, we can't keep going on. You know, the President once said to me that--and I'm sure he did to other people you've talked to--that being president was the loneliest job in the world. And it was at moments like that that you really saw the loneliness of it. Because who do you turn to? You're the one that's ordered the troops in. You're the one that has ultimately made the decision. It's very uncomfortable around someone who is really looking at his own conscience and asking himself whether or not he's made the right decision. And I never really quite understood why we were in there with him other than maybe he just felt so alone. I don't know, he'd sit there and . . . I would very often be the only woman. If it happened to be the night you were working, you were the only woman, and I would sit there with tears rolling down my face, and then he would get very upset about that.

But you couldn't help but cry. It was a terrible time in our history and we did lose a lot of lives, and I'm not too sure in retrospect we made the right decisions in Vietnam. But I can tell you that history's judgment that he didn't--one hopes that history will judge him as someone who really did understand the decisions he was making and that he did ponder over them, and that he did understand the depth of the commitment he had made. I get very angry that people think that he just signed pieces of paper, sort of gave orders without ever thinking of the impact.

Have we gone through here--does this come later, where we went to all the bases, the 82nd Airborne in Fort Bragg, North Carolina, El Toro Marine Base? Have we gone through all of that?

G: I don't think that has come up yet. I may be wrong.

B: That may have been earlier.

G: Well, I'll find it and have it next time.

B: I have a feeling it might have been in February or March, which we just did, because that's one trip that I went on with him, and it was really--he went to see all the troops off.

G; Let me ask you about the Abe Fortas nomination. This is something that really heats up in July. One item, Senator Thruston Morton switched his position and announced that he would vote in favor of confirming Fortas. Do you remember that? Do you have any idea what was behind Morton's switch there?

B: I only remember that the President was very bitter that he did not get that nomination. He very rarely lost a battle like that. I just don't know the *quid pro quo*.

G: How about Dirksen? Do you recall his--? (Interruption)

B: The presentation of the Distinguished Service Medal to General William Westmoreland. The President was a very organized man, and one of the things that really annoyed him was that people were never standing the way they were supposed to be when they were presented medals and the pictures were taken. He asked the person who was in charge of doing that to please come up with a system where the way they had decided people should be standing protocol-wise, and the way they ended up were in fact the same. So the aide to whom he had made this challenge came up with what he thought was a foolproof way of handling this situation, and that was by taping the names on the floor, and then people would be maneuvered into their places.

The first time this procedure was used was this ceremony for General Westmoreland. The aide was very pleased, he had all these little signs made up and he

went racing over to the Gold [East?] Room and laid them out and the microphones and this and that. When the President went walking up on stage and everybody got into place, I saw him look down, I saw a real look of anger come over his face. He started his remarks, ended the ceremony, all the pictures were taken, went into the receiving line, went through all of that, and then walked a hundred and ninety miles an hour back from the Mansion to the West Wing, just furious. The reason that he was furious, which really showed in the pictures later, was that while the aide had done all of this, the very same aide didn't put anybody in the right place. So Lyndon Johnson was standing in front of Lady Bird's sign and General Westmoreland was standing in front of the President's sign, and he just couldn't believe that anybody could be that stupid. That was the end of that system; we didn't use that system anymore.

But I guess what's significant about all of that is that the President was truly an organized man, and he just could not tolerate anybody making that kind of an error, and rightfully so. I mean, that's not the most complicated issue. But the fact that he could get all the way through the speech, all the way through the receiving line--and those receiving lines were awful, I mean three or four hundred people--and still feel the anger an hour or whatever it was later that he had felt at the beginning of all of that.

G: It seems to have been the little details like that that sent him into orbit rather than the major snafus, is that right?

B: Yes. He just liked, on a daily basis, for everything to run very smoothly. He felt that organization and tidiness was really a very inherent part of doing a job well. That went all the way down to the way we kept our desks. I mean, he would come through and just rant and rave if you had papers all over your desk. Today people ask me why my desk is

always so neat, and my desk is neat because Lyndon Johnson really believed that anyone who didn't have a neat desk wasn't organized and that that's all there was to it. As I said, I seem to be the one who's coming up with the humorous parts of this interview, but. . .

The President also didn't like to have time wasted on things. One of the things that really annoyed him was that several minutes were wasted at the beginning of every cabinet meeting while the cabinet secretaries decided what they wanted to drink, the President having a Fresca button on his desk so that they would know in the mess what he wanted. So he challenged Juanita to come up with a system to determine what it was that the cabinet members wanted to drink so that he wouldn't spend the first five minutes of his meetings with stewards going around getting orders.

Juanita, coming from a military background, came up with a system that she had the graphics people design, and basically what it was was a great big huge board the size of the blackboard, each cabinet title going down the left-hand side and being cross-matrixed by things like coffee black, coffee sugar, cream and sugar, tea, tea with sugar. And this was all intra-matrixed or cross-matrixed once again by colors. The way the whole thing was supposed to work was that the cabinet member would come in, pick out the tab color that he wanted, put it in front of him at his place. The stewards, after everyone got in the room, would then take this big blackboard back to the kitchen and by counting up the number of blanks, could then figure out what they were supposed to prepare and then come in and by the color tabulation put the proper thing in front of the proper person. Juanita spent weeks on this project. She finally had it all designed and she presented it to the President one morning, and he went bonkers. I mean, he just--he was livid! I mean, he just kept saying, "Isn't there an easier way? Can't somebody stand

at the door with a note pad and ask them as they come in the door?" That was the end. We never did see the blackboard ever again. But that's how the Lyndon Johnson White House ran.

G: He really didn't like to waste time, did he?

B: He really didn't. He liked to walk and talk. He worked on helicopters, he worked on airplanes, he worked in cars, and he wanted everything ready for him. Things had to be sorted into emergencies and things that could be read later in the day. He expected you to be able to make that kind of a determination.

G: Did you think he was this way because he was just a compulsive worker or because he just wanted to get a certain amount done in a day?

B: Oh, I think part of Lyndon Johnson's success was that he was always on top of every issue. And I think he had learned over the years how best to utilize his time. The other day I was being asked by some people whether or not Lyndon Johnson really paid attention to the appointments process. We were talking about the present administration and the appointments process, and the confusion that has seemed to ensue in the last couple of administrations on getting nominations through. Somebody turned to me and said, "Phyllis, the President couldn't possibly have paid attention." And I said, "Oh, you don't understand. Lyndon Johnson not only paid attention, but Lyndon Johnson had already cut his deal with the Hill before the name ever went up."

And that's one of the things that fascinates me in looking at four administrations that have been between Lyndon Johnson's and this one. Nobody seems to understand about the wiring. He knew every name that came across his desk, and it never got to his desk until everybody was certain that he was going to sign off on that. Now we seem to

be in the pattern where things get onto a president's desk and he doesn't want them there, or they get onto his desk and then go to the Hill and there's a problem because somebody hasn't done the right kind of background check. And that really stems from two problems. I mean, one, you probably have two or three times more appointments today than you did back then. And two is just the whole understanding of how to operate the system.

(Interruption)

G: We were talking about presenting inscribed photographs to visitors.

B: He probably used that public relations tool better than any president I've known, and really was pleased when somebody wanted a photograph, but also liked to surprise people with photographs. So he always had one person on his staff who was responsible for photographs from the day's events, and you'd have to go down and look at the contacts and pick out the best photographs and then send them over to Sandy Fox, who did the calligraphy. And you'd have to come up with original comments and statements, and then you'd put them into a particular--lots of times he would say no, he wanted to write the inscription himself and then you'd have to go back and order the picture and bring it back in to him and remind him that he wanted to do it. But I'd say on any given day the President signed between ten and a hundred photographs.

G: Did he really? Was there a certain time in the day that he normally did it?

B: Down time. The President always signed things between five and seven at night.

G: Was that right?

B: He had a signing table, which was the table behind him, that everything was laid out on, bills, appointments and pictures, letters, and he would swing around from his desk and

sign the pictures. He even, in the last days, the last year or so, instituted a procedure where everybody going through a handshake in the Gold Room or the Red Room or the Blue Room was to get a picture. So we used to have a military aide who announced the names, and then we'd have somebody standing in the corner who would describe every fifth or sixth person, so that when the contact sheets came in you could match up the names, and we'd send those over. Some of those, of course, were not signed by hand, and some of them were, and you were supposed to know who was important and who wasn't, and pull out the ones that should get hand signatures. But it's always interested me that no president since has really used the photography thing quite the same way he did, and it's really quite a clever piece of public relations, as I said earlier.

G: Do you think it's a throwback to the era of when he was a young congressman and people had more signed photographs of their colleagues and the president in their office?

B: No, I think it was more--well, yes and no. I think the President liked that kind of surprise. I think he liked to please people that way, that he liked the reaction when somebody got a picture unexpectedly signed by him. I think he liked to think of himself as someone who could identify with people and that this was something that he could do that kept those communications channels open. And I think it's something that more people should do. I mean, it's a very human quality. Lyndon Johnson, as I am sure I have said before and everyone else has said before, was a very complicated man, and he really did like to feel that he could relate to people on a one-to-one level, and he really felt that that was very necessary in his job. And I think that job, it may be more true in that job than most jobs in the United States, you have to get the perspective of the people around you.

G: [Yoichi] Okamoto must have been around him an awful lot, taking pictures and documenting.

B: My favorite picture is the first picture the President ever gave to me, the day he hired me, and it says, "To Phyllis, with high hopes." That was the kind of thing that he did.

And that day I remember being fascinated, because Okie must have taken thirty pictures, boom, boom, boom. The amount of contact sheets we used to have to go through on a weekly basis was just incredible. The amount of film was overwhelming. But I think when you're a politician it's very important to have that kind of relationship.

You were going to ask me something.

(Interruption)

July 25. Juanita comes in with a translation of the [Aleksei] Kosygin reply to a message from the President. That was the first time I realized that there was truly not a red phone in the sense of a phone. I had been so talked to about never touching phones that I didn't know what they were, that I really honestly believed that there really was a red phone. It isn't; it's a teletype kind of mechanism and in those days it was located in the National Security Council offices. And I remember being so astounded that there wasn't a red phone, and the President thought that was one of the funniest things he had ever heard of. And he kept saying to me, "You didn't really think that there was a red phone?" and I kept saying, "Yes, sir, I really thought there was a red phone." He must have told that story to twenty people, that he had this person working for him who was so naive that she thought there was a phone hidden somewhere that he opened the little closet and picked up and had the Kremlin on the other line.

The President liked things like that. He liked to be able to tease you about how

naive you were, how innocent you were. And he loved to tell other people. I don't know. And when one reads the reviews of the [Robert] Caro book and Horace Busby's sort of rebuttal the other day, there's lots of talk about the cruel streak in Lyndon Johnson. But you know, I'm not too sure that that was really cruel.

I think it just sort of genuinely did tickle him that something like that could happen, and I don't think that he did that back to us to embarrass you. I mean I think he just thought it was a good story.

G: Did you feel at the time that it was done in good humor?

B: Oh, I was sort of embarrassed, but I don't know, teasing is something that I don't really mind. He also liked to get you angry. I mean he liked to see how far he could push you before you'd sort of flare up and then he'd say, "You know, you're really temperamental. You're just like me." I think in some ways losing your temper was a sign to him that you were a strong person. I am not so sure that today I could ever do that back to a president, but you know when you're young, you don't really think about what it is that you are saying or who it is that you're saying it to. He also thought of temperaments as a very healthy thing.

G: A release?

B: Yes. That people who didn't react and people who didn't have peaks and valleys were people who were really not living what was going on. I don't know.

I wish there was something I could tell you about all of this.

G: The way you've described his temper, it seems to me it was something that he could turn on or turn off. It was voluntary; it was not simply an explosion.

B: Oh, and indeed Lyndon Johnson taught me the use of a temper. I have a natural temper.

Lyndon Johnson taught me and many of us around him that if one is going to wage a battle, there is a very precise way that one goes about it, and losing your temperament may be part of that. But you have to be very clear of what your goals are. I don't know if you're following what I'm saying, but I mean sometimes when I'm in the middle of a negotiation, I will see that there is going to be a point where I am going to have to be very firm and really act like I am very angry about what's going on. Well, who did I learn that from? I learned it from him. That's how you manipulate and maneuver people. According to their response is when you decide to come down hard and walk out of the room. That's why Lyndon Johnson was so good with the Congress. He really understood how to manipulate, and, you know, manipulation is not a bad thing. It's like the use of the word propaganda. People always think it's bad. He knew what he was dealing with and he knew how to play it. And I think we might all be a lot better off if more people knew what they were doing and knew how to play the system. Control was a very big thing with him.

G: Was he at all manic depressant, do you think?

B: Oh, yes. I mean I think he was a manic depressive, and I think he knew that, and I think one of the reasons why when Mrs. Johnson was out of town--Mrs. Johnson was a leaven if one can use that word. She knew exactly--she had the ultimate control over him. She was the one person who knew how to cajole him out of a mood or how to put something together to cheer him up or how to push him. Really fascinating, again, to look back and realize how well she did that, and by the way, how much respect he had for her ability to do that. That's one of the reasons why when she was out of town, he would always call in Joe [Califano] or Walt Rostow or Jim [Jones] or Marvin [Watson] and he would never go

home. I mean, he didn't like to go home if she wasn't there. He'd always gather up the staff, and he'd always be there until eleven o'clock at night. Because he really couldn't face not having that support around him, and so he would do it other ways. Or he'd call up the Brookses and invite them to come for dinner. He was a man who could not stand being alone. He never learned how to be alone, and perhaps that comes from the fact that that's such a lonely job. You do want to surround yourself.

The happiest times for him when I was around was when Luci would come with Lyn [or] Lynda would come home. He really liked having the girls around him, particularly if their mother wasn't there. Let me make myself clear, he liked it best when they were all there, but the next alternative was to have the girls around if their mother wasn't there.

G: But were there times when he was just really in a down mood and just--

B: Grumpy?

G: Yes. What would you do in a situation like that?

B: Well, I would tease him and try to make him laugh or look for something in the newspaper that was good, or look for something coming across the wires. I don't know, there were a variety of things that could make him smile. You told him that you liked his new suit. Very big on people reacting to his new suits. New tie. He expected you to remember every day whether or not whatever he had on--there were all sorts of things that we used to do to make him laugh. I think the best of us, by the way, was Mary Rather. She knew him better than the rest of us. Juanita would be smart and leave. (Laughter) Mary could go in and she could cajole him and she could cheer him up, or she'd get somebody special on the telephone.

G: She had a lot of practice at that I suppose.

B: You know, again, it's an interesting experience to experience that early on. I look back at a lot that I learned through that. It makes it a lot easier to deal with people, if you see how people handle troublesome people.

[End of Tape 1 of 1 and Interview II]

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