INTERVIEW III

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INTERVIEWER: Michael L. Gillette

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

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G: Let me ask you to talk first about the assassination of Robert Kennedy.

B: I came into the White House at about seven o'clock on June 5 [1968]. The President had already been up a couple of hours. I guess they got the phone call at five o'clock in the morning. And he was truly concerned. He kept talking about the tragedy of the family and he put phone calls out to I think Senator Ted Kennedy and Stephen Smith and offered all sorts of assistance. I don't think he was able to talk to Bobby Kennedy's wife, Ethel.

But he then started talking about gun control. I think you probably know that five years earlier, shortly after the [John F.] Kennedy assassination, the President stopped all the shooting at the Ranch. He just wouldn't go out with rifles anymore. And that was something that I didn't realize until this event happened, that there had been times when a lot of hunting expeditions would take place at the Ranch. But he had just decided that he didn't really want people shooting rifles and guns. And a lot of discussion in those days that I remember the sequence of, [was about] gun control, constitutional right to bear arms, what could you really do about it, how could you ever really control it, what the rest of the world does. The fact that in Europe at that time every country only had half a dozen killings a year. Why were our statistics so high? What was it that allowed that kind of crime to run rampant?

I guess that's what I really remember the most, that and the concern to get protection around all the other candidates, in case there was some sort of a conspiracy or some crazies. And that he moved on very quickly; I think within twenty-four hours every candidate [had protection]. And of course that's now law. He must have invoked his own prerogatives. But I think he also--we can look--called the Hill to make sure, to get them to push to get the authorizations necessary to do that. That, as you probably know, is the first time that anyone outside the immediate first family or the vice president's family had any coverage. And that continues on the books today; all candidates have coverage.

G: Did he offer any opinions on what factors were responsible for the violence that seemed to be so pervasive at the time?

B: You know, it's pretty hard to talk about any of these issues without talking about what was going on in Vietnam, what was going on in civil rights, what was going on with students in the country. I think he was very concerned about all the disruption and chaos, and he might at any given moment talk about any of those factors. I think he seemed to think that it was extremely violent times. You know, we had already gone through the Martin Luther King assassination.

G: Did he talk about his relationship with Bobby Kennedy?

B: Yes and no. Lots of times--I mean, it's hard for me again to pinpoint when he talked about his relationships with the Kennedys. But you know he thought Bobby Kennedy was the smartest of the Kennedy brothers.

G: Did he say that in so many words?

B: Yes, that he was sort of the runt of the litter who kind of had the brains and the Machiavellian sense to put things together. I think he looked at Jack Kennedy as having the personal charisma and stature, but Bobby as having the sort of manipulative abilities and the political astuteness that I don't think he always accredited President Kennedy with. And I think that that's true. I think if one looks back, Bobby's whole carpet bagging to New York kind of issue was an interesting ploy.

G: Do you think he realized that the wound was mortal at the time at the White House? Was there pretty general realization that it was a [fatal wound]?

B: Early in the morning, when I first got in, I think that there was still some hope that maybe Kennedy would live. Again, listening to those people who had been around during Jack Kennedy's death, I think there really was a lot more hope, and I think people really were a lot more optimistic that something might happen. But then as the day went on, I would say probably about noontime it became pretty clear that he wasn't going to pull through this. But, you know, it wasn't a case like with President Kennedy where he basically was pronounced dead when he got to the hospital. I mean, Bobby Kennedy was alive for quite a number of hours. I don't think they even really initially knew how severe.

G: Was there discussion of how this would alter the political arrangements? Here a major figure and certainly a major adversary of the President's was taken out of the picture.

B: You know, there were certainly conversations as to how this was going to affect Hubert Humphrey. I don't really remember [Eugene] McCarthy being discussed very much. But I also don't think that happened the first day. I think the first day was much more getting protection, getting help out there. Was he going to live, was he going to die? Probably simplistic on my part. I'm sure that there were lots of people talking about how it would

affect, but. . .

G: Did the measures that the President took in behalf of the Kennedy family come as a result of requests from the family or how did they initiate it?

B: No. Those were all his saying "What can we do? How can we help? Where are the various members of the family? Somebody organize all of that." As a matter of fact, I have a feeling that Jim Jones somehow was one of the people running around putting all of this together for him.

[Reading Daily Diary] I can't imagine what he talked to the Jones brothers of the Bostonian Shoe Company about in the middle of all of this. It would be interesting to see if anybody has any record of that.

Oh, here he's talking to Rufus Youngblood, a discussion of threats on the President's life. You know, whenever anything like that happens, again, you have to sort of stand back from it. You forget, one of the things that you don't know at that particular point is whether it's part of a conspiracy, and [there was] a lot of concern as to whether it was just targeted at Kennedy. Was it targeted at all candidates, was it targeted at Democrats? Was the President himself [a target]?

G: There was some indication that there were presidential death threats at the time.

B: They got hold of the background of Sirhan Sirhan pretty quickly, and again, I can't really recollect all of this, but I think I do remember that he was one of those people who had been tapped as having made threats before.

Then we have my international grains agreement in the middle of the whole thing. I think it's interesting to note that fifteen years ago we were controlling grains and dairy in this country, for all that we say that we're free traders and said it back then.

See, as the day goes on, he's doing all of his regular meetings because it is unclear that Bobby Kennedy is going to die at this point. I don't think I have anything else to say except that that was just a very chaotic day, chaotic day in the sense that things were going on in a routine way, but they weren't really going on in a routine way because the President would be checking the three tickers and people would be coming in with reports. Everybody was very upset.

G: Do you remember anything about the taping of his remarks at the time of Robert Kennedy's death? I noticed in the diary that there were retakes, that he did it more than once.

B: He went to have his hair combed. He did those remarks live from the White House on TV. The President made a statement on the shooting and he announced the formation of a commission. You're talking [about] later when Kennedy had actually died. I suppose one can't say anything about that other than the fact that Lyndon Johnson never liked the way he came across on anything taped. I guess I'm not surprised that they retaped them. How do you know they retaped them?

G: Oh, when you get to it it will indicate that he went back later for a taping. I think it was the lighting that he objected to.

B: Oh, yes. They did it the first time over in the bedroom and then the second time they did it in the Fish Room. It doesn't mean anything to me other than that was just so typical.

What's the next [question]?

G: Now another thing, during that time he asked you to get photos of him and Bob Kennedy campaigning together in 1964. Do you recall that?

B: He asked me to get photos of him--?

G: And Robert Kennedy campaigning together in 1964.

B: Yes. But I don't know what those were for. Is that in here?

G: Yes.

Do you want to turn that off for a minute? I didn't see that. (Interruption)

G: We were talking about the phone calls that he made to--

B: On the gun control legislation.

G: --Carl Albert--

B: I guess what he was pushing for was a unified statement on gun control legislation and hoping that when he presented it that he wasn't going to have anybody dissent. I mean, why people back or won't back gun control legislation is something that I think that's beyond most of us. But I think he really felt that at that time he--and obviously he's asking the leadership on both sides to come in behind him, which I guess they did. But that particular piece of gun control legislation really never went anywhere, never got signed into law, and today new legislation is introduced, so he obviously wasn't successful. If I'm remembering correctly, he got commitments from both sides of the aisle that they would back the legislation, but I think that they were also pretty realistic that they weren't too sure just by backing it that they were going to get the legislation through.

Oh, I do remember that he was talking about how he couldn't believe, after three such tragic assassinations, that people still wouldn't back control, and being overwhelmed that people could consider it a violation of their constitutional right to bear arms. I think I just said that a few minutes ago. But he was really quite horrified at that.

G: Yes. Do you remember his talking to one of these in particular?

B: He was on the phone with Speaker [John] McCormack. Now, Speaker McCormack, the Kennedy boys being protégés of his, or his being a mentor of theirs, obviously was behind [it]. I don't want to say who it was in this group that wasn't--

G: [Mike] Mansfield I would suspect, coming from Montana.

B: Yes, but I think even Mansfield came in behind. Carl Albert came in behind. But I think you're probably right that it was Mansfield who was the most realistic about the prospective of it, about the chances of it passing. And that's. . .

G: Anything on the funeral?

B: I'm trying to remember when the funeral [was]; the funeral wasn't for about another day or two.

G: Right. I think he flew to New York, didn't he, for a service there at St. Patrick's?

B: Yes. That is not the service that I was there [for], if you're thinking about [that]. I was there at the ordination of Archbishop [Terence] Cooke, not at the [funeral].

(Interruption)

G: We were talking about an incident where Yuki got into the President's office when he was meeting with the Irish Prime Minister.

B: What happened in that period of time was that little Lyn, who was probably about a year old at that point, liked the dog and the dog liked the baby, and so very often they would both be in the office. So we would have these periods where people came in to visit and all of a sudden the dog would come running into the room with Traphes, whatever his name was--

G: Bryant?

B: Yes, something like that, who was his keeper, sort of following behind him, and the President would play with [Yuki], very often stop whatever he was doing. There's an entry in the diary here that he called the girls to see if they could eat with him and hoped that the baby, Lyn, had not yet gone to bed, and it was already eight o'clock at night. I think one of the great joys of his life during this period was having Lyn come toddling in.

Then Lyn and Luci and Yuki had a picture done, and it was signed with Luci's name and Lyn's footprint and Yuki's paw print that they used to send out to kids. Have you ever seen that picture?

G: Yes.

B: But there's something else about the Irish Ambassador that I think--

G: Well, serving Fresca was one thing you noted in the diary, that the Irish Prime Minister didn't know what Fresca was--

B: --what Fresca was.

G: --and LBJ was explaining it to him.

B: Do you know where that is in here?

G: Did he drink a lot of Fresca during this period?

B: Oh, yes. This was the height of his Fresca period, and he even had a Fresca button put on the cabinet table.

G: Did he? Tell me what the buttons were that he had.

B: Well, I don't think he had any other button but a Fresca button.

G: Really? But on his desk in his office didn't he have--?

B: The only button that I remember is the Fresca button on the cabinet table, that when he pressed it, it rang in the kitchens and the stewards knew that he wanted a Fresca.

G: Is that right? Was this part of his effort to lose weight, do you think, or did he just like Fresca?

B: No, the President was a man of excesses. I mean, when he was into Fresca he was really into Fresca and everybody drank Fresca. And to this day I've never touched a Fresca because I couldn't stand it. Because we all had to drink it.

I once had a wonderful experience down at the Ranch where--I hate liver, and the President had ordered the calves to be slaughtered before we went down there because he loved fresh liver so much. And he made me eat all of it.

You've probably seen the pictures of this time. I have some nice pictures of the president and Lyn. Pictures of the president combing Lyn's hair in a big rocking chair.

The other thing that was going on at this time was the President was very into romances and was really pushing the Olivia Barclay and Jim Jones romance, and that becomes very evident in the diary when you start seeing that Olivia is being included in things at the Mansion. And of course Marie [Fehmer] was going with John Criswell then.

Here we are. The mass for Bobby Kennedy. The only people that went were the President and Joe [Califano] and Jim and Marie and then the people who. . .

I had forgotten that, the day of the funeral was also the same day that they caught--

G: James Earl Ray.

B: --James Earl Ray.

G: Yes. What do you remember about that, anything?

B: Well, no, because that was a Saturday, and I wouldn't have been around other than to

know that that--I wasn't around with them so I don't remember what the reaction was.

Here we go with the Prime Minister of Ireland. Let me see if I can read this and figure out any reason why. . . . Oh, see, this was Yuki--you were asking me the question about Yuki. He used to sneak into the President's office all the time when he wasn't supposed to. So if anybody opened a door [he'd sneak in]. He was a little thing. I mean, Yuki was not a big dog; he was this little thing, sort of an ugly little thing.

Here's another [thing]. Lynda and I had played bridge. See, what happened to me a lot during this time was Chuck was in Vietnam, Lynda was pregnant, and so when the Johnsons would do things like go up to New York for the funeral or do something, I would then be with Lynda. That was sort of my--I mean, Lynda being a good friend, I don't mean to make it say that it was a huge duty. But what would happen was I would then go off to be with Lynda, and the family would go off to do something else.

The other thing that happened during this time period, Lynda liked to walk a lot and she was supposed to walk a lot during this pregnancy. And I decided that one of the great things about being a presidential daughter--I don't think that there are a lot of great things about being a presidential daughter--was that we would walk and walk and walk, and then when we got tired the Secret Service car would pull up and we'd get into it and ride back. I've always thought that was one of the nicest treats, just to have somebody following you along.

G: Where did you walk?

B: Well, some days we just walked around the South Lawn, but we used to walk down by the [Lincoln] Memorial and the water, and sometimes over into little stores on F Street. Lynda liked to go over to Brentano's to buy books and stuff for Chuck. *Apropos* of

absolutely nothing, I just remember walking with her one day, or being at Brentano's and they wouldn't accept her check because it was from out of town, and we had to get her agent to verify who she was. She had Stonewall, Texas, I think on her checks and they said they couldn't take an out-of-town check. So her agent. . . . And we used to love things like that. We thought that was really funny. Lynda will kill me when she listens to this tape, but I remember somebody coming up to her once when we were in the ladies room somewhere, and the woman said to her, "Do you know you look just like Lynda Bird Johnson?" and Lynda said, "Do I?" (Laughter) We giggled and giggled. Lynda has a wonderful sense of humor.

You asked me what a red tag was. Red tag is whenever anything comes in for the president that is something he must see right away, the sender puts the determination on it by putting a red tag. In those days the red tags were little pieces of cardboard, actual red cardboard, that would be paper-clipped onto the envelope. But today we're much more sophisticated and have pre-sticker tabs that are stuck on things. But red tag is--I'm surprised this hasn't come up before, because red tag and for eyes only are two things that in Washington everybody seems to know what they mean.

G: Was there any other designation like a blue tag or a green tag?

B: No. Red tag just means urgent priority.

G: What happened to the red tag after the document had been returned?

B: Oh, we kept them in a pile, because we used to send red tags back to people. I guess everybody had these little piles of red tags on their desks that were just used over and over and over again. The interesting thing about red tags, though, is it's like anything else, the system becomes abused. And that was not an LBJ system, by the way. I don't

know how long red tags have been in use, but that was certainly something that started before him and continues today. But you got to learn that there were people that sent red tags in to him when it wasn't a red tag at all. So you learned to open them and read them. Because if you brought a red tag in to him that wasn't immediate and urgent, he got very annoyed.

G: I notice there is a note in here, in late June, that Walt Rostow had called the President about something. Juanita Roberts had answered and decided not to interrupt him for some thirty minutes or half hour or so, whatever it was. When the President called back, maybe it was an hour, Rostow had gone or was not there and the President then said, "Whenever Rostow calls I want to be interrupted." Was this a standard policy?

B: Oh, sure, and he'd change it every other week, too.

G: Oh, really? Okay.

B: You know, we'd have weeks where whenever X, Y and Z calls, put him through immediately. Then that would go on for a couple of weeks and then he'd say, "How come you're putting this person through to me every time?" and we'd say, "Well, you told us to." And he'd say, "Well, don't do it anymore." So all of that was a variable.

Has anybody ever gone through how his office was set up? The President himself was a very organized person, and he liked to be able to find things very quickly. He also liked records kept. So as the day went through, things were sorted into different piles. There would be the signing pile, which would be bills, letters, appointments, commissions, pictures. Those were all put on a table behind him. And as the day went by, when he had time he would go and sign the various documents. The only thing you had to be really careful of, which really the bill keeper's office would be sure to stay on

top of, was that if something had to be signed by midnight that you knew that. That would be a typical red tag, that time was going to run out. That was what we would call routine.

Then you had action items and information items. Action items would be papers that could be broken down again into two criteria: those that he had to see right then--they might relate to a briefing or a speech or a meeting that he would have that day--and those that would go into a night reading file. Then the information items also were broken down into immediate and things that could go into the night reading file.

So at the end of the day, if it was your turn to work that night, you would be left with the following: the diary, which was basically phone calls and entries of conversations; the night reading list; the day reading list. And one of your jobs was to make sure that everything that had gone in to him for a decision that day had come back out that day, if not that it was in the night reading file. In the morning when the night reading came back, it was your job to go through and match up and make sure that no documents were lost.

G: Did you log the documents to make sure that--?

B: Everything was logged. The way Juanita set the system up was there was--between the Oval Office and the Cabinet Room was the office where we sat, and there were four typewriters in there. So when everybody else left, there would be a log put in for night reading, a log put in for action items, and the diary log, and you would be the only person [there]. During the day there might be three different people working on those three different logs depending on how big a crisis it was. But what we generally tried to do was whoever was going to work that night tried to maintain them for the whole day, so

that there was some sort of continuity. That's why you'll see in the diaries a whole day by me, or a whole day by Marie, or a whole day by Mary Rather. We tried to do it that way, because if it was your responsibility to be on that night it was just much easier for you to know as the day went on what was coming through. And it was also your responsibility to take the night reading the next morning and log that back in, so there really was some sort of continuity.

Now this is on a normal, average day when there wasn't a crisis. When there was a crisis anybody might fill in the information depending on who happened to be in the office at the particular given time. So when everybody went home at night at six-thirty or seven you would end up with three different logs and three different typewriters. I know I've told you the story of my first night alone with him, sort of running from typewriter to typewriter, hysterical that I wasn't going to fill in the information fast enough as it was coming in, and really being upset that I was trying to track all of this stuff and what if I didn't get it on a piece of paper, *et cetera*, *et cetera*.

G: Well now, during the course of the day, memoranda would continue to come in to him, and these would be filed?

B: Again, decisions were made.

G: You would have to make the determination of whether to take the document right then, right?

B: And that's where the red tags come in, because if somebody sent it to you red tag--there were really two criteria during that time. Was that something related to a meeting he was going to have? Well, obviously if it was, there was no question that you would give that to him. The other basically was that if it wasn't a red tag he probably shouldn't see it until

the night reading. But then, as in any power structure, you have people who abuse the system, and you have people who abuse the terminology eyes only. You know, eyes only literally means for the president's eyes only, and nobody else is supposed to look at that.

G: Did it generally work that way in practice?

B: Well, again, you learned to determine whose office it had come from, because there were people who used for eyes only--people abuse systems like that, and around a president like President Johnson that's a very dumb thing to do because you end up, if you abuse it enough, he wouldn't tolerate that. So we'd always--it sort of happened with new people who would come on board, and they'd think that their issue was the most urgent and the most critical, and then they would learn as time went by that there were lots of things. . .

G: Now, did you ever get a feeling that some aides were trying to block out memoranda or ideas from other aides? Was there a competitive--?

B: Oh, sure, we had lots of that! (Laughter) The first one in, the first one to get their perspective in, the first one to get their views of the issues. And it's really no different from the way the rest of us operate. Who got to ride in the car with him, who got to ride in the helicopter with him? Who got to walk with him from the Mansion to the West Wing or vice versa? I mean, all of those were opportunities for everybody to put in their own battles. Who got to go home for dinner?

And then we would have the staff games down at the staff table in the mess, with secretaries calling saying "the President wants to see you now," and you got to learn that even that was a game to a degree, because I would very often know where the President was, and one of the senior staff members would be sitting there and taking a phone call saying, "Oh, excuse me. I have to go. The President wants me." And you'd know damn

well that the President wasn't calling him. Like little kids.

G: Amazing. Were there any aides who were particularly bad about screening out memos from others or blocking memoranda from others?

B: Sure. Am I going to tell you who they were? Not on your life. (Laughter)

G: Well, Walt Rostow was the one that has been suggested that he would either put the memoranda in his own--

B: Wording.

G: --framework. And other aides would supposedly rewrite the memo with their names on it, would take credit for memoranda that. . .

B: See, I guess, again, for me in retrospect that just doesn't surprise me, because I see that all the time, and it's just. . . . It's one of the things in Washington that really amazes me, the effect of power. I consider myself very fortunate that I learned at a very young age never to say "the President wants" if the President hadn't personally told you he wanted that. But it's a game that people play in this town.

G: Was LBJ himself emphatic in telling you not to use it?

B: Absolutely! I mean, that's one of the reasons I learned the lesson so well. Not that I was abusing the lesson, because I was too young and I wasn't in a power position. But I saw what happened to people who picked up the phone and said "the president wants," "the president needs," "the president has to have." He wanted to be the one that picked up the phone and said "I want," "I need," and he really didn't like people abusing that, and people shouldn't abuse that. But he'd say. . . . It's a Catch 22. Anyone who is the best and the brightest to be around a president is going to be a very competitive, progressive person. That's part of the personality that makes somebody achieve to get there in the

first place. You then throw thirty competitive people together, all vying for one person's attention.

G: Did he seem to enjoy that, do you think?

B: Oh, he loved it. One of the things that Lyndon Johnson understood and used better than anybody else was power.

G: I want to go from the written competition to the personal competition of getting into the President's office to meet with him in person. Was there a lot of rivalry here as well?

B: Oh, come on, you're not asking me that question seriously? Of course there was. And there were two routes. There was the official Marvin Watson route, which is how all appointments basically came in. And then there was the unofficial Juanita Roberts route, which was that Juanita had some favorites whom she would let into our office who would then have a chance to say hello to the President. But that, too, became one of those things where after X, Y and Z appeared in there so many times, X, Y and Z would no longer be seen because the President didn't like wandering out of the Oval Office and finding somebody in our office.

G: Did aides ask you to intercede with the President, at least bring their case to his attention?

B: Oh, sure, and particularly when you were on at night and particularly when you were young and didn't know what you were doing and didn't know who had power and who didn't have power and who got to see him and who didn't get to see him. Sure. And as I said, the whole thing of sort of hanging around by the door in the hopes that as he walked from here to there he might see you and ask you to come along with him. All those games were played.

And the other status symbol in the White House was to whom the President had

PLs, private lines.

G: I wanted you to explain the whole system of private lines.

B: A PL is no different than most phone systems that you press a button, like when they just buzzed me. That's a private line. In my case, that's an interoffice communication system. The President, however--and you have to remember, this is enough years ago where the technology wasn't the same as it is today. I mean, today it's nothing to have all sorts of sophisticated telephone equipment around. But he would install to his people of the moment a direct line, and he'd press the button and that would ring on your desk only. That would mean that he wouldn't have to place the phone call through one of us or through the White House lines or do anything other than press a button. Instead of the buttons having numbers, they just had people's names by them, so he would just press a buzzer and it would go off in Joe Califano's office or Jim's office or Marvin's office or Harry McPherson's office or DeVier's [Pierson] office. That person in that office, even if he was talking on the telephone or in the middle of a meeting, would then immediately snap into that line. And the line only went between the two of them; nobody else could get into that line. That's why it's called a private line.

G: I see. Did they ring only in the White House, or could they also ring at an aide's house?

B: Oh, they could ring at an aide's house. (Laughter)

G: So they did have private lines to their homes?

B: Yes, except that the private lines to your house were really a telephone, unlike these, where he just pressed a button.

G: Well, say if he wanted to call Marvin Watson at home, would he have to dial the number or have someone dial the number?

B: Yes, I'm trying to remember. I think he'd have to tell the operators to get Marvin at home, but again, the call would go through on his line directly to Marvin's phone at home. And nobody else could pick up on that line.

G: Really. Were there any lines to anyone other than, say, White House staffers?

B: Not that I know of.

G: Was there one for Dean Rusk, say, or Robert McNamara or Clark Clifford?

B: No, the PLs in the office, for sure, were just White House staff. I would also assume again that in those days you couldn't have done that. Today you probably could have a PL directly into anybody's anything anywhere in the world.

G: Were there any PLs to Texas?

B: Well, there was a Ranch line that he could pick up.

G: And call the LBJ Ranch?

B: Yes. I think he could get Dale [Malechek] directly on that line. But again, I'm trying to remember if--I think that was also a system though where he had to ask the operator to patch him into that. No, but he had lines to Lady Bird and Liz [Carpenter] and Bess [Abell] and all over the White House.

You know, one of the great stories is he used to--while Lyn would come into the office, the buttons were on a panel and Lyn thought the panel was just great. Lyn would stand there punching it and all over the White House people would be leaping over their desks to grab their PLs to the President, thinking that the President was on there, and they'd get this kid babbling into the phone or goo-gooing and the President laughing in the background. The President thought it was very funny. The staff wasn't sure it was quite so humorous after they had made complete idiots of themselves to grab the phone.

LBJ would have loved to have been alive today with all the little gadgets. That was definitely his style. Whatever the newest thing was, he always wanted to see it and look at it.

G: How would he make a phone call normally?

B: He wouldn't. He would pick up the phone and tell the White House operators whom he wanted, or he would tell one of us and we'd tell the operators. I don't think we ever dialed phones in that office. In retrospect you just picked up the phone and said, "Get so-and-so, get such-and-such," which goes back to that whole. . . . We've talked about the GHI button. The President one day was trying to make a phone call and came out and said the GHI button doesn't work. We're all going bonkers calling White House Communications to figure out what the GHI button was, and it's the number four on the telephone.

G: Now, I notice in some of these important conversations during June, there would be a note in the diary saying "MS notes to DT"-- Dorothy Territo--or "so-and-so's notes to DT," indicating that someone, a secretary, had taken notes of a phone conversation.

B: Wouldn't necessarily have been a secretary either. It could have been an aide in the room who took the notes, and then they went into--that was the other, I forgot to tell you the other part of our daily organization. Every day at the end of the day, Juanita would put together in a big packet for that day, taped remarks, speeches, appointments, and send it over to Dorothy Territo for the archives. Then when the pictures came out for that day, they also went into the file, which you must know because that's probably how you've tracked all of this. That was a daily thing.

G: Well, there's a [file], they call it the Diary Backup File.

B: Right.

G: But was there a routine of taking notes when he'd talk on the phone, if he told you to, or "this is an important conversation"?

B: Yes, as a matter of fact, he decided--stop me if I've told you these stories before, okay?--that Tom Johnson and I should learn how to speed write, and he announced to us one day that henceforth we were going to come in at seven o'clock in the morning to have special lessons to learn how to speed write. Tom and I sort of looked at each other, you know, what could you do when the President said you were going to learn how to speed write? That's what you did, right? You see, when I went to work for him I didn't know how to type, and I still basically don't, and I had never taken any shorthand.

So they signed up this poor little man from ABC Shorthand, which is a version of a very simple kind of shorthand, a speedwriting, as I guess I said already. The poor little man would come in at seven o'clock in the morning, and Tom and I would be in the Cabinet Room half asleep. We would go through all of our stuff and he would send us off with our little assignments, and we'd be great for two or three days. Then the President would say "we're going here" or "we're going there," or "tomorrow morning at seven I want you to do this and that," so then we'd miss three days. To make a very long story short, Tom Johnson and I did not learn how to speed write because we could just never get far enough in the course with any kind of regular instruction. That's a rote learning process that has to be built on every day and you have to practice. I think the President just gave up on us. What happened was Tom and I both developed our own forms of taking notes, and that's what you're talking about. That's the kind of scribbling that would--we would scribble things down and then come back and transcribe them or

have somebody transcribe them. One of the reasons the President wanted us to learn speedwriting is because unlike Pitman or Gregg, speedwriting anybody can translate it. So it doesn't mean that the person who takes it has to be the actual one transcribing it. It was a wonderful theory.

G: He was aware of that distinction?

B: Oh, yes. The President used to talk about Billy Rose, who could type a hundred and eighty words a minute or something. He was very overwhelmed by that. And Bob Waldron, the decorator, I think when he worked for the President, was the fastest stenographer he ever had in his staff. But you just learned to get around that. No, he was very big at any kind of memory aids, speed reading, speed writing.

G: But in this case, did he generally want you to take notes on particular things? Were there phone conversations that he would want you to--?

B: Why do you keep hounding on this point? I keep getting off of it. (Laughter) Yes, there were, and I wasn't generally one of the ones, because my skills were not good enough.

G: Could you yourself see a pattern of what he would want set down and what he didn't want?

B: Yes.

G: Really?

B: I just won't talk about any of that.

G: All right. Maybe later. Well, I won't even go into my next subtopic then, which is recordings.

Let me ask you about the Tuesday lunch. We understand that he would meet quite often, not necessarily on Tuesday, but with great regularity with a group of key

advisers. We know this as the Tuesday luncheon or the Tuesday group or cabinet or whatnot. Were you aware of this at the time you were working? Did this have a particular significance?

B: You know, there are just things that I just don't feel it's--

G: Let me turn this off.

(Interruption)

G: --I want to get this because this is really important. I was asking you about the polls, the presidential polls, the Harris polls that were taken during this period.

B: I always believed that up until the time he was actually on television, Lyndon Johnson really didn't know whether or not he was going to seek the re-election, and that he wavered right straight through to the election. And he'd look at the polls. As I was mentioning to you, all the arguments that people were making, the country was splintered, the party was splintered. The country needed some sort of peace after the chaos of the Kennedy assassination. What we needed was another two-term presidency. The economy needed it, *et cetera*, *et cetera*, *et cetera*, all those arguments. So on any given day he would look at the polls and see where he stood. He always knew, I mean, that was one thing that you could count on, that he knew where he stood in relation to everybody else in those polls all the time. And you might be with him and Mrs. Johnson, he'd say, "Well, Bird, what do you think? Are we going to retire? Are we really going to go back to Texas?"

I must say, one of the things that I admire a great deal from that time period was Mrs. Johnson's patience with all of this. It was always "whatever you want to do, dear, but we keep talking about spending next spring in the Hill Country and seeing the flowers

bloom and so forth." Incredible patience, because he would vacillate back and forth. And even as old as I am now, I'm not so sure I could tolerate that in somebody. It really does stem back to his period of sort of great insecurity. He loved knowing that he was ahead in the polls, and he loved tinkering with that, and he loved interpreting what did that mean and if he were really to go for it, how much could he really defeat Richard Nixon by? Yes, he really got into all of that. And then there would be days when he would say absolutely affirmatively that it was the loneliest job in the world, and nobody in their right mind would want to stay in it, and he couldn't wait to leave it. But, you know, he was a man who loved power, and I think he didn't like the idea of losing. Losing the power, not losing the election.

G: You indicated that Mrs. Johnson was pretty much neutral in that, whatever you want to do.

B: You know, one of the things about Lady Bird that I find so fascinating is--I don't know if neutral is really the right word, because neutral sort of implies that she didn't care, and I think that she cared passionately. When you consider the era that Mrs. Johnson was raised in, she really is one of the most interesting dichotomies of women in America, because she managed somehow to run the family business, do it with great astuteness, make a lot of money, and still be a wife and mother in a very traditional sense. And I look back on that with--I mean, as I get older--great admiration, because I don't know how she played both of those roles. And I think it is fair to say that Lady Bird Johnson was a happy woman. She was a woman who accepted very much her lot in life and got the best out of both sides of it, instead of letting both sides fight at her, which is what you see happen so frequently with women being torn. Should I be a wife and mother, should

I be a professional? And you tend to look at them as disjointed people. Somehow Lady Bird managed to get the plus and the positives. An incredible woman, just incredible. Without a doubt in my mind, the power in that family, the stability, the strength, the force, and yet she never got angry, she never lost her patience, just a person who really made the most. He was really very lucky to have had a companion like that.

G: When people think in terms of strength and force though, they normally think of Lyndon Johnson.

B: See, I don't believe that Lyndon Johnson would have had the strength and the force that he had if he had not had a Lady Bird. I think you have to look at Lady Bird as the inside of a coral reef, which is very tranquil and very calm and very safe, a safe harbor, surrounded by all this poisonous reef. Lyndon would go swimming out there to all the sharks and get into these big power attacks in turfs and so forth, and then he'd swim back over that reef and he'd go back into that harbor that was very quiet and very pleasant, very personal.

I don't think people quite understand how much Lyndon Johnson loved Lady Bird. I know I've told you this story that when I went to work for him I told him I wanted to be the editor of a woman's magazine, and he said, "Come work for me and be exposed to my wife and you'll learn more about what being a good woman is all about." And that was something that I didn't understand then as I do today.

G: Was there any episode that really brought this home to you, their relationship?

B: There's a picture of the two of them in the upstairs, not the family living room, but there's a formal room up there that was yellow in those days. I don't know if you've ever seen it. I have it. Lady Bird is kind of looking like a bashful little teenage girl, kind of one foot

behind her and her head cocked to a side looking up at him, and he's bending over her talking very seriously to her. Have you ever seen that photo? That picture to me explains more about their relationship than just anything else. He was always going to her for advice. He couldn't stand it when she was out of town, couldn't stand to be alone when she was out of town. He was always on the phone to her when she was out of town, when was she coming home. I don't think that man made any major decision in his life without discussing it with her. And I do think that while he may have been the power in the sense of the brutal force, I maintain that she was the brains. That's not to say that he was not bright, but I think that she truly had the brains of the family, the one that could see long term, the one that could see the big picture, the one that didn't get caught up with the minutiae, the one that didn't have the ego involved in it. All of which were terrible conflicts in him.

G: Can you think of any example though where she was an important factor during this time that you were at the White House?

B: March 31 speech.

G: Yes.

B: I mean, a lot of what I know about that has got a lot more to do with knowing Lynda than actually being there at that time, but the conversations and the back and forths. I mean, she wanted to leave the White House.

G: Was there anyone who wanted him to run again?

B: Anyone who wanted him to run again? Everybody wanted him to run again!

G: I know, but anyone who was really pushing it?

B: His entire staff, because they weren't going to have jobs. (Laughter)

G: After the March 31 speech?

B: Oh, sure. Jake Pickle, Jack Brooks, Homer Thornberry, the Krims. And again, I think it's fair to point out that everybody was very torn. On the one hand I think that they were concerned for his health and they were concerned about him. But I think every one of those people knew that he probably would not live very long if he left the presidency. I think the political party leaders, of course, were the ones that really were putting the pressure on him to stay. People didn't see--you know, the charisma of Bobby Kennedy versus the incumbency of Hubert Humphrey really caused great chaos in the Democratic party, and I think people were just hoping that he would just change his mind, bring the party back together again and go forward.

G: During this time there was also a lot of preparation for the [LBJ] School of Public Affairs and the [LBJ] Library, things that he would involve himself in in his retirement, should he in fact choose to retire. Do you recall any of this?

B: Oh, absolutely! Lyndon Johnson creating history. (Laughter) I mean, the combination of Lyndon Johnson and Juanita was really an interesting one. This is also the time when Doris Kearns starts playing a role, because he wanted somebody--no fool , he, although as it turned out I'm not too sure that's an accurate statement with regards to Doris Kearns--

G: Why do you say that?

B: Because one of the reasons that Lyndon Johnson hired me and then hired--you know, Doris Kearns was a White House Fellow who was assigned to us--was because he wanted somebody young to start doing a draft of his history. He wanted the story told the way he wanted it told. And I suppose what happened between the President and myself was that

he learned pretty early on that one of my characteristics is candor, and that it wasn't going to work and I wasn't going to be quite that malleable, a fact which did not please him by the way.

G: Tell me how that came out.

B: Well, he would start saying to me, "Your diaries reflect factually, you're not giving any interpretation as to what happened." And I'd say, "But I don't think it's my role to give an interpretation of what happened." "Well, you should be taking notes. You should write all of this down for history." It became very clear to me that he wanted somebody--and again, when I say it became very clear to me, I don't know how much it became clear to me intellectually as instinctively that what he wanted was someone young around him who wasn't saddled with all the pre-history and knowledge, who would look at him in a very idol, adul[ation]--I can't say that word, but you know, in such a way as to present the man to the world.

Of course my perspective on the President was a very strange one. He was Lynda's father. He was one of my close friends' father. So in the beginning it was very hard for me to take the man the president, the man the father, all the different elements of him and sort him out. And I think that's what he liked; he wanted this--I feel very mean saying this, but I understand where Lyndon Johnson was going. He wanted somebody fresh and new to say that he was right about Vietnam and that he was going in the right direction and he had made this self-sacrificing gesture of March 31. But I guess instinctively somewhere inside of me I knew I could never do that, that at some point history and experience would weigh in on me.

Doris Kearns is the other side of that coin, much shrewder, much more

intellectual than I am, and much more opportunistic. She immediately saw what he wanted and she really played up to that. He would start telling her all of the anecdotes and the stories. There are two things that I resent about what Doris Kearns sort of did. One, I think she used him for her own means, and I don't think anybody has the right to do that. I think if you share the insights of a public person, if you want to write a factual history, that's fine. If you want to write an interpretative history, I don't think you have that right. That's my own personal feeling. And the second is that Doris Kearns alludes to being around a lot more than she ever really was; Doris Kearns was around a lot after he left the White House, she was not around a lot during the White House. She makes it sound as if she was right in there in the middle of [things]. I don't know, if one wants to be a historian I think one has to train to be a historian. I don't think there's really any other way that one can sort of do that.

G: Is it correct to assume, do you think, that he reminisced to others the same way he did to her?

B: Oh, he did. Oh, he did. That I can vouch for.

G: She seems to indicate that it was unique.

B: I mean, I've heard all the Homer Thornberry stories and all the when-they-were-young-up-on-the-Hill [stories]. And they're wonderful stories. They could all get to laughing, stories about his mother and stories about his brother. But I don't think those stories are any different than he had told to anyone else.

That was not the genesis of the question. I think we wandered off.

G: You were talking about LBJ in history, and we were talking about what he would do in retirement and the Library and the School.

B: Oh, okay. Well, you know, he was a very complex man. On the one hand he wanted an interpretative history, on the other hand he wanted a real history. He was very adamant about the way things would be set up at the Library. I mean, Lyndon Johnson was truly one of the most organized human beings I've ever met in my entire life. He knew where things were, he knew what he wanted, he knew how he wanted them done, he knew how he wanted the records. People ask me why I'm so organized, and it really goes straight back to that. When he wanted something, he wanted it. Therefore you had to know where it was, *et cetera*, *et cetera*. It's all of that. And he knew how he wanted the Library and he knew how he wanted it set up.

Then of course the one really major gift that Juanita did have was that she was a person of great organizational skills. She was very good at interpreting. As a matter of fact, I think Juanita overinterpreted what he wanted. But you know, we have records--well, you know, you're there--of everything that ever happened. I'm sure you've seen all the little yellow cards that say who was in the White House when. I remember Diana Heiges once looking out the French doors at a ceremony going on in the Rose Garden, and she said, "Oh, my God, three hundred yellow cards," and that's what it became to us. You know, these crazy cards that we had to type. And you had to go back and find them if the person had already been in the White House, pull out their card, add it to it. I mean, Juanita was bonkers. When I think of all of that today, again in terms of communications equipment, keeping those kinds of records, I mean they do that all the time now. All the lists of who enters the White House are computerized and this, that, and the other thing. That was all done manually.

G: Amazing.

B: And then Juanita would sit there and she was truly concerned because nobody had been able to verify for her that white-out didn't have destructive elements in it, and someday somebody was going to go open those files and all the white-outs that we silly young girls used to make--you know what white-outs are? We used to use a liquid stuff in those days--because these silly young girls who didn't know how to type would make all these mistakes and use white-out. Juanita was absolutely convinced that someday in history people were going to open those doors and all these little yellow cards would have holes in them because the chemicals would have dissolved the paper. It's the kind of thing Juanita used to worry about. We were worrying about Vietnam and demonstrations and stuff, and Juanita was worried about the deterioration of paper. They used to joke that if the President ever painted the side of a barn, Juanita would have Xerox invent a machine to take a picture of it. I'm sure you've heard all the stories of her demands on the staff to send in pictures and memos. But I suppose in terms of history probably it will be one of the most intact presidencies.

G: There's no question that in this case her eccentricity is our gain. Let me ask you. Do you think he wanted to teach in retirement?

B: Do I think he wanted to teach or mold?

G: Well, teach. Actually have a professorship or lecture at universities. Because it seems to come up a lot in 1968, a deal with Rice [University], with the University of Texas.

B: You know, again, this all gets so complicated for me.

G: He had been a teacher before he went into politics.

B: I think Lyndon Johnson believed that at the last minute there was going to be a draft and he was going to be president again. There was a part of him that really believed that.

G: Why do you say that? What do you remember?

B: Because he would go back and forth at times when you were with him about how it was the loneliest job in the world, and then the next five minutes he would be telling you about it was the most powerful job in the world, and he could be on the phone calling everybody and making people do things. So when it comes to talking about what he was going to do in his retirement, again, I look at that in sort of semi-reality, semi-fantasy. "I'll go back to Texas, I'll teach, I'll be with young people, they'll give me the spirit, I will hand on to them the gifts." And I don't mean to sound as sarcastic as I am sounding in saying this. I don't think Lyndon Johnson ever really thought through what he was going to do. There was a part of him that wanted to teach, there was a part of him that wanted to be the elder statesman, there was a part of him who saw himself in this great advisory role to future presidents. There was a part of him who saw him playing with his grandchildren and riding around the Ranch with Lady Bird. And those were all real; each of those components was real.

G: Did he ever say "I want to run again" in so many words after the March 31 speech?

B: He must have. He must have for me to have this very strong feeling. Knowing him, he probably put it more in terms of "Did I make a mistake? Was it the wrong decision?" more than in the positive.

[End of Tape 1 of 1 and Interview III]

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