

## INTERVIEW I

DATE: August 14, 1986

INTERVIEWEE: RUTH BOOKER

INTERVIEWER: Christie L. Bourgeois

PLACE: Mrs. Booker's residence, Austin, Texas

Tape 1 of 1, Side 1

C: Okay, Mrs. Booker, I'd like to begin by asking you to tell me just a little bit about your background.

B: Well, as a little girl, my mother and father lived in a little town in East Texas called Linden, Texas. We lived there about eight or nine years and my father had a bad sick spell, and he developed TB. Well, he later died. But just a little while before he died, my mother had to leave this area and she went back to Johnson City and Stonewall, where her folks lived. Mr. and Mrs. Clarence Martin had a big two-story home. They were most generous and they told my mother to come there and stay with them until she could decide what to do. It was while she was living there that my father died in the TB sanatorium.

C: Where were you staying while--?

B: I was with my mother. This was in 1929. Mrs. Martin was most generous. It was very, very hard times but what little she and Mr. Martin had, they shared with my mother and me. We lived there in what was the Martin homestead, or family home. We lived there nearly a year and I went to the little country school down the road, walked down the road that was oh, three-fourths of a mile and went to this little country school which was called Junction.

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That also is the school where Lyndon went to when he was only four, five or six years old, which would have been of course the years before. As I told you before when we talked, Lyndon was seven years older than I was.

B: So you were five years old when you went to that school?

RB: Oh, no. No. This was in 1929. I was fourteen years old when I went there. I was in the seventh grade when I went to this little country school.

As I said, my mother and I lived with Mr. and Mrs. Martin there nearly a year. And Uncle George Johnson was a bachelor. He taught school in Houston and he came up to visit Mr. and Mrs. Martin one time. I guess he had such a sympathetic feeling for my mother and me because there we were, living off of Mr. and Mrs. Martin, who had nothing either. They were just sharing what little bit they had, and of course in 1929 and 1930, long before the government ever helped people out in hard times and gave anything like that. So Uncle George, being the kind of a person that he was, he was most warm and generous in every way. Why he told my mother, he said, "Jessie, if you will come to Houston, I will get a little apartment." And he said, "I'm living in a hotel and I eat in the restaurant. More than apt, we can get a little apartment and you can keep house for me and it will help the two of you. And it will take some of the burden off of Mr. and Mrs. Martin." And so my mother was just most grateful and she thought that was most generous. So we went to Houston.

But this was in the early part of 1930, just weeks or months after the financial crash of 1929. Well, the teachers--Mr. Johnson was a teacher, Mr. Bright was a teacher, and even though they got a paycheck for several years along there in the early thirties, their paychecks were cut and cut and cut. But they still brought home a paycheck. So before we could get a little apartment, Mr. and Mrs. Bright said, "Well listen, we don't know how

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long--I guess we'll all have a job teaching, but the paychecks are slim." [They] said, "Why don't we just combine households here and all live here until maybe things will get a little better and all."

B: So it worked out for all of you.

RB: So that's what we did. And do you know, there were six grown people and me. I was a great big kid, but we all lived there in this house.

B: So you lived with the Martins for just only one year--

RB: Yes, just a year.

B: --when you were around fourteen years old. When you went to that little school, still a one-room school with all the grades in the same room.

RB: Well, one through seven.

B: One through seven. Was the same teacher there then who had taught Lyndon?

RB: I don't think so. I'm nearly sure he wasn't because the man that taught me, I even remember his name. His name was Alphonse Klier [?]. He was a German fellow; you know, all of that area, German in there. And he was only nineteen or twenty or twenty-one years old at the time. He probably had a--

B: I think that the one who taught LBJ was a woman [Kathryn Loney].

RB: I'm nearly sure that it was. Well, see, when Lyndon went there, that could have been--gosh, that was when?--in the early. . . Let's see, he was born in--

B: He was born in 1908.

RB: He was born in 1908, so he was there. Yes, he went to school in that little school before I was even born.

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B: All right. Well, when did you first meet Johnson? When was the first time you met Lyndon Johnson?

RB: When did I meet him?

B: Where do you remember knowing him, that you remember anything about?

RB: Well, see, as I said, when I was a little girl, long before I was ever fourteen or fifteen, long before we ever lived with the Martins, I used to come, in the summertime we'd used to come and visit. I'd visit Lyndon's parents there in Johnson City.

B: Did you all used to go visit often?

RB: Yes. We'd go every summer if my mother could get together the money. I know my mother had a little model-T car and we used to drive from East--that was when we were still living in East Texas, you see that would have been in the twenties. Anywhere from 1923, or 1924 or 1925 on in the twenties, we used to go up every summer and visit our kinfolks in that area. I was very, very fond of Lucia. Since we were only--well, I guess I'm about eight months older than Lucia.

B: So you all played together.

RB: Yes, I used to go and visit her and, as I said, I was very fond of her. I thought an awful lot of Aunt Rebekah. She was just a delightful person. She was always real sweet to me and she was always tickled to have me come and visit Lucia and it was always a pleasure.

B: Do you remember anything about young Lyndon, then? You were seven years difference in age. I'm sure that you didn't play much together, but do you remember anything about him at all?

RB: No. All I can remember is that I can remember visiting when Aunt Rebekah would seat us all down to a meal. There was a big round table and we would all sit there. Well, Lyndon

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was very domineering and very dominating of the conversation. I don't care what the conversation was about; he had his two bits worth to say. I do remember that. That part is just about all I remember about him, during those times when I was eight, nine, ten, eleven, twelve years old along in there. Of course now I've read this, too, but I definitely remember hearing after he finished high school--of course as I said, he was only sixteen years old or somewhere along in there--I remember that because his mother was such an intelligent person and she had ideals for not only him, but all of the rest of the family. I can remember so well how perturbed she was because he didn't want to go on to college, even though I don't know whether they could have even paid his way to school. But he was ambitious, and a lot of people were working their way through school and working for their room and board and doing all kinds of chores for room and board. She wanted him to go on to school but he wasn't ready when he first got out of school. Either he was too young or he just had his eyes on other things.

B: Yes, well, probably a lot of fifteen-year-olds [inaudible].

RB: Oh yes, fifteen or sixteen years old. Heavens above, I probably wouldn't have gone to college either if I had gotten out of school at that age.

B: But you remember that his mother was unhappy about that?

RB: Oh, yes, yes. I can remember that. I do remember visiting during that year or two. I don't remember for sure, but--do you know, wasn't he out of high school two or three years before he finally went back to college?

B: I think you're right because he went to California for a year or two--was it one or two years he was in California?--and he came back and worked on the Highway Department.

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RB: I know it. I can remember them saying that he had worked hard. He knew he didn't want to do that, he knew he didn't. So finally when he got enough of that--now this is only indirectly related but it's very similar to what Lyndon said about working on the road. I remember my Uncle George saying when he was a great big kid picking cotton on the poor farm land up there, right where it's the old family homestead, you know it's right there next to Lyndon's birthplace and all, he'd pick down to the end of the row and he'd stand up and say, "Listen, I'm not doing this for the rest of my life. Now, that's all there is to it. There's gonna be another way. I'm gonna find another way." Well, Uncle George did. He got away from there. He went to school. He paid his own way through college and got an education.

B: Well, I've never picked cotton but I've heard tell that it's one of the worst things you can do.  
(Laughter)

RB: I can remember Uncle George saying that, "I'm not gonna do this. Now, there's got to be another way." So I think Lyndon had the same idea about this working on the highway, working, doing that dirty hard work in the heat of the summer. "There's got to be a better way than this and I'll find it." (Laughter)

B: Well, do you remember anything about Lyndon's father during those years when you'd go visit?

RB: Oh, yes, yes.

B: What was he like? And how did--?

RB: Well, Uncle Sam was sick. He wasn't too well. However, now, wait a minute, I must back up a little. I don't remember too much. He must have been well enough to be all right during the twenties. It was during the early thirties when I knew when he wasn't well.

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B: When you were living there with the--?

RB: Yes. Uncle Sam was awfully hard to live with. Aunt Rebekah, she was a saint, absolutely.

If there ever was anybody that deserved wings, I mean if the good Lord could have given anybody wings on this earth, she would have been one that would have gotten the wings.

Because he was not well at all. I think he passed away in 1936.

B: I think early 1937, right? Or mid-1937, after Johnson went to Congress.

RB: It doesn't matter. Anyway, it was in the thirties that he was not well at all. I can remember coming back there and visiting when he wasn't well, he was hard to live with but it was because he was sick.

B: Almost bedridden, and he had to be taken care of, and maybe a little grouchy?

RB: Yes. Well, by that time I was grown. I do not remember very much about Uncle Sam during the twenties when I would visit there. I do not remember.

B: Was he gone a lot? Maybe he was on the road a lot.

RB: He must have been gone. Now, that part I was fixing to say. He wasn't around, because if he was around, he was all right. He was well enough to be congenial and reasonable in every way. The main part I remember about him was after he got sick. I do remember that.

B: And then he would even become a little bit unreasonable?

RB: Oh, yes, he was. He was unreasonable. I can remember Aunt Rebekah, if Lucia and I were on the back porch playing there and we got a little loud, she'd come and she'd get real quiet. She'd say, "Daddy just can't stand the noise." Now, those are the things I remember. And that was, as I--

B: Well you probably saw him when he was at his [inaudible].

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RB: He was. He was. But, now, I do think that Uncle Sam had a lot of good qualities. I really do think that he must have had. I think that. But as I said, I do know that Aunt Rebekah was absolutely--she was a living saint when it came to protecting him, and taking care of him, and trying to keep all of the children in line where they wouldn't do things that would frustrate him and make him upset.

B: Well, anything more that you remember about those days before we move on to the Houston years?

RB: No. No. I don't recall too very much more, other than, as I said, visiting, and Mrs. Johnson or Aunt Rebekah was always most kind and most generous.

B: Did your mother ever tell you any stories about LBJ? Anything that you remember any anecdotes or--? I've read your mother's oral history and she said something about loaning him a hundred dollars one time to buy a Ford. Do you remember that?

RB: Yes. She and my daddy had a little money left from some that my daddy had, I guess, a little bit. They had very, very little, I know. But she said that she loaned him--I didn't know that it was a hundred dollars, but she'd loaned him some money and it was to help, I think, buy that car that they bought when not only Lyndon but these other friends of his went to California. Now that's the part of the story I remember. I hope it was correct because that's what I seem to remember.

B: Yes, that's what she said. She said that several years later when he was a congressman, he paid it back to her and had a birthday cake and she cut into it or something like that.

RB: Yes. He was always most generous with my mother. I'll always love him for that. You see, after all the rest of them in the family had passed away, my mother was the last living relative of the family of that generation that was still living. And I know he was always,



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always most generous with her. He and Lady Bird would call her and invite her down to the Ranch when they were going to be there. And on occasion they'd say, "Well, bring Ruth and her family." On some occasions they didn't. You know, it was just one of those situations. But they were most kind to her and he was very, very good to Mother. She thought an awful lot of him. She really did.

B: How well did your mother know Rebekah Johnson, Lyndon's mother?

RB: Oh, she loved Aunt Rebekah. She said the same thing I did about Aunt Rebekah.

B: Her being just almost a saint, such a wonderful woman.

RB: Absolutely.

B: I believe your mother, in that same oral history, said that at times she would help Rebekah with the chores.

RB: Oh, yes. I'm sure she did. We all did. Aunt Rebekah never could keep up with all of her housework. It was always piling up on her.

B: Was that because--I know that she had other interests, you know, she taught elocution and--

RB: It's very possible, it's very possible.

B: I would imagine that it was so hard to keep up with chores at that time.

RB: I know it. And then, too, see, if I remember correctly, they had to cook on a wooden stove part of the time. Now, maybe she had--I don't remember, but I do know that they didn't have all of the conveniences, anywhere near all of the conveniences that we have today.

B: It's hard enough to keep up with all of the conveniences.

RB: I know it. I know it. I'm sure my mother wouldn't have been the only one that would have pitched in and helped Aunt Rebekah, if they came to visit.

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B: You've told me, then, the circumstances when you and your mother moved to Houston.

You and your mother and Uncle George and Aunt Ava, and Uncle George [John] Bright?

RB: Mr. Bright. We always called him Uncle Bright. But it was John Harvey, Uncle John Harvey Bright, and Aunt Ava Bright. Then Aunt Ava and Mr. Bright's oldest daughter was living there at the time. She had graduated from college and she was working. She was married and she lived there at that time, too. So it was Mr. and Mrs. Bright, Mr. and Mrs. [Richard] Allison, who was the older Bright daughter, and Uncle George and Lyndon. They shared three bedrooms. There was a big sleeping porch on the back of the house. It was upstairs, two-story house, big sleeping porch on the back. That's where my mother and I slept.

B: Is that right?

RB: Yes. How about that?

B: Was it a screened in?

RB: Screened in. And of course the Houston weather, it never got so cold in the wintertime that we couldn't--

B: Stand it, yes.

RB: If it did get real cold, they hung up some blankets. The house was a three-bedroom house and there were six grown people living in that--

B: So Lyndon stayed with Uncle George?

RB: Yes. He shared a room with Uncle George. And I know he and Uncle George had a very, very good relationship. They got along very, very well. Uncle George might tell him every now and then something that he didn't want to hear. But Lyndon was one [of] these kinds

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that he'd turn his shoulder and he'd say, "Oh that's just Uncle George getting on the soapbox."

B: Is that right?

RB: Yes. I can hear him saying that. "Don't pay any attention to Uncle George, he's just on his soapbox."

B: How much time did Johnson spend around the house? I know he was real busy with his students and--

RB: Well, no. There wasn't an awful lot of time to spend around the house. There really wasn't. I know my mother and Mrs. Bright, they did the cooking for the group.

B: Did you all take your meals together?

RB: Yes, I guess they all put money in the pot and paid the bills. I was too little--I don't mean I was too little, but I mean I wasn't aware of the money situation. But I know that my mother would cook one week and Aunt Ava would cook one week. They'd take turns. One would clean house the week that she didn't cook and then the other one would cook. And they'd help each other. They got along fine. They were all in the same boat, hard times. But, you know, I can remember so well, they were all so grateful for having a job.

B: I would imagine so, when you see those bread lines and things like that.

RB: Don't you know? I can remember, honey child, going with my mother. Now this was later on in the thirties, after we did move, after living with the Brights a couple of years. One of those years was when Lyndon was there. Of course Lyndon only lived there one year. By the end of that first year that he taught school there, was when he moved on up and was Mr. [Richard] Kleberg's secretary. But after living with the Brights a couple of years, then we did move out and Uncle George got a little apartment for himself and me and my mother.

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During that time Sam Houston Johnson lived with us a year or two. During the time after we moved out and got a little apartment. It was only about four or five blocks from where we had lived with the Brights.

B: So usually, then, all of you would eat breakfast together and dinner together.

RB: Oh, yes. Yes, we ate meals together all of the time and it was always a very, very lively discussion. I was going to tell you over the phone the other day and you told me to wait and tell you when we could put it on a tape. I can remember so well one time, I've remembered this all of my life, I was sitting by Lyndon and they were passing the food around and Lyndon got the food and he helped his plate. He started to put some spinach on my plate and I said, "I don't want that spinach. I don't like it." And he said, "I don't care whether you like it or whether you don't. That's food. You eat it and don't you say another word." And do you know that stuck in my mind all of these years: "You eat it. That's food."

B: Did you eat the spinach?

RB: I ate that spinach. I sure did and I didn't say another word and I never fussed back either. I can remember that so well. (Laughter) I've told my kids that and they've laughed. I've said, "Lyndon Johnson told you to eat that food and you'd eat it. You wouldn't say a word back."

B: So he could get a little bossy at times huh?

RB: Oh, he was. He sure was.

B: He probably felt that he was your elder, too, because he was a young man.

RB: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. I was just a kid.

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He had a very, very good relationship with his students, too. His students dearly loved him. They really did.

B: Did he ever bring any of his students over to the house?

RB: No. Now, if he did, I don't remember it. Now, I sure don't remember it. I know Uncle George, he was a very lovable person, and he had students. I could even name some of the students that he had. In fact, they were some of my high school friends that I still keep up with, who knew my Uncle George and who absolutely adored him. Now I do not remember any of Lyndon's students, except I do remember this. Lyndon was a debate-- speech teacher at Sam Houston High School, and I remember going and hearing the debates of his debate team. I saw their pictures in some of these books. L. E. Jones and Gene Latimer, I knew them. They were a little older than I but not too much.

B: So you went to the debates.

RB: Yes. I heard the debates. The girls, I used to could call those girls' names, but right now I couldn't. In some of these books of Lyndon's, I've seen their pictures, and I recognize them. I knew them.

B: I was just looking to see if there was any oral histories today and there weren't, but I can't remember what their names were either. I think one of them is Margaret, but I can't remember exactly.

RB: I remember--

B: Well, how would Lyndon act during those debates? Was he real nervous or--? Do you remember anything about that?

RB: No, I don't. I don't remember that. I know that he was very, very fond of these students. They worked like dogs, and I mean they worked 'til way in the night. I can know Lyndon's

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ambition for them carried over into their lives and their debate subjects and all, because he was so enthusiastic, it was just catching. His enthusiasm was. These people, these four, there were the two boys and two girls; I'm sure that there were others, but I meant the main two debaters, the girls and the boys. They were very, very fond of Lyndon, very loyal to him.

B: Do you know of anyone else he socialized with in those years? Didn't he socialize with the other teachers or--?

RB: I wanted to tell you, this is something I made a little note of when I was--there were several people that Lyndon made friends with that we met, but I do not remember when or where we met them. But during that year he taught there, he became a friend of and made a friend of Mrs. Oveta Culp Hobby. We met her but I can't remember whether he brought her to our home or whether we met her somewhere else. I do not remember.

B: But you remember some special cases?

RB: I do remember the Mrs. Hobby and then another person, which the name wouldn't mean anything to you unless you remember having read it some of the books, and that's Roy Hofheinz. He was later mayor of Houston.

B: Yes. That's how I know who he is.

RB: I don't know how Lyndon met him or where or how, but Mrs. Hobby and Mr. Hofheinz were two of his friends that we met.

B: Is that right? Hofheinz never came over to the house that you recall, did he?

RB: I remember having met him, but I do not remember where it was. Whether it was at the Bright home or whether it was some of Lyndon's debate deals or not, I just do not

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remember where it was. But as Mrs. Hobby became more well known over Texas, in Texas, I remember--isn't she the mother of Bill Hobby?

B: I think she is.

RB: I think so. I think I remember that, too. There could be other people that were later became more known in Texas, but those two in particular I do remember.

B: When Johnson was at home, did he talk a lot about his students or a lot about his thoughts on education, the importance of education, or what did he talk about mostly?

RB: Yes. He was always interested in whatever was the moment at the time, whether it was local politics or national politics. He was always interested, and he always had an opinion. Whether you agreed with him or not, he had his opinion and, as I said, in a way he was demanding that you listen. Now, you didn't always have to agree, but you had to listen to him on his ideas.

B: Well, did he ever talk philosophy or anything like that? Like his political philosophy or was it mostly just particular issues?

RB: Well, it was mostly particular issues.

B: Well, let's talk a little bit about Uncle George for a while. Could you characterize him for me? What kind of a man was he? How did he come across--?

RB: Well, Uncle George had a very likeable personality. He was well-educated, well-groomed, and education was quite important to him because he knew that you needed the basic education to get along in this life, and the more education you had, the better he felt you were equipped to live.

B: Do you think he had a lot of influence on LBJ in that regard? Because LBJ, of course, became known as the education president.

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RB: Yes, I sure do. I think that that was part of it, and it wasn't only Uncle George, it was Mr. Bright. Mr. Bright was a very, very intelligent person. He and Uncle George both had their influence on Lyndon along the education line because Mr. Bright was a career teacher; he had taught all of his life, and so had Uncle George, and education was just very, very important to them. I feel like that it rubbed off on Lyndon too.

B: Well, you're probably [right]. Apparently they had a lot of conversation in this household and exchanged ideas--

RB: Oh, they did. Oh, yes. That was a big part of their conversations at the dinner table and at the supper table and at the breakfast table.

B: --so it wouldn't be surprising if they got that point very much across to Johnson.

RB: Yes, it sure was. And there's one thing about it, even though the Bright children came along during the Depression years and all, the Brights saw that their three children got a college education. It was important to them. And Uncle George saw that I got a college education. (Laughter)

B: He was a swell guy.

RB: He sure was. Uncle George was very, very, very special. As I said, I'll always--I named my oldest son for Uncle George. My oldest son is a very fine person, and I feel that my Uncle George would have been proud of his namesake.

B: How influential was Uncle George in getting LBJ that teaching job in Houston?

RB: I'm sure he did. I do not know the particulars on that, other than I know Uncle George knew Mr. [William] Moyes--M-O-Y-E-S--[who] was the principal of Sam Houston High School. Uncle George had taught there for years, and he and Mr. Moyes were friends, and I



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feel like that it was through Uncle George's influence that he got Lyndon that job in the first place.

B: But you never heard Uncle George talk about "Well, I'm really trying to get Lyndon a job or--"?

RB: No. I don't remember that.

B: Well, do you remember any of the circumstances of LBJ leaving that job in Pearsall, once the job did come open in Houston? LBJ at that time had a teaching job at Pearsall. He was--

RB: Cotulla?

B: No. Cotulla was earlier when he had interrupted his college career in San Marcos. But after he got out of San Marcos, he taught in Pearsall.

RB: He taught in Pearsall.

B: But he really wanted that job in Houston. But you don't remember the circumstances. . . .

RB: No. No, I sure don't remember that. In fact, I had momentarily forgotten that he taught in Pearsall. But since you mention it, I do remember now. I do remember.

B: It was only for a couple of months I believe. I believe he was--

RB: Oh, really? You think it was that short a time? In other words, he started the school year and then didn't finish it. He came to Houston.

B: Job came open in October or something like that, and he left--

RB: That I didn't remember.

B: Could you describe Uncle George as having a political philosophy that was liberal or conservative? Or could you not really describe his philosophy in those terms?

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RB: No. I couldn't say. I really can't. All I know is that the family was always very Democratic. I mean they were on the Democratic Party, and they didn't have too much like for the Republicans. I'm sure that could have been biased, but it was--

B: It would have been unusual in Texas at that time had it been any other way.

RB: I think so, too. I don't think that that would be necessarily a reflection on them. I really don't.

B: Do you remember any particular issues that Uncle George really felt strongly about, that he would just really be opinionated about, besides the importance of education?

RB: No. Now, that is the one thing that would come foremost in my mind would be the importance of education and the importance of free education for all. But as far as the other issues, I just do not recall anything more.

B: Do you recall when LBJ got the job offer from Congressman Kleberg?

RB: Yes, I do. Remember, I told you that. I remember sitting on the front porch and listening to Lyndon tell about it. I didn't want him to leave; I just didn't want him to leave. But he asked his Uncle George, and he asked his Uncle Bright, and he asked all of the rest of them what they thought. But I still think that he would have done just exactly what he wanted to, regardless of their influence.

B: You think that he had his mind made up?

RB: He had his mind made up because I think in the back of Lyndon's mind, there was no doubt that he was a politician. He just needed a chance to get started.

B: Well, what did Uncle George and Uncle Bright and everybody say about it?

RB: I'm sure they all--I do not specifically remember, but they were all pretty much of the opinion, "Well, whatever you think you want to do or whatever you want to do, that's up to

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you. Even though we hate to see you leave, we think you've got a good future or a brilliant future in the teaching profession." No, they told him to do what he thought was best, at least that's what I recall.

B: Did you tell him that you wished that he wouldn't go?

RB: I don't remember. (Laughter) If I did, he probably wouldn't have heard me.

(Laughter)

RB: I remember that he and Uncle George shared a car. Lyndon didn't have his own car.

B: Is that right? So they drove to school--

RB: They drove to school in their own car, and Uncle George's car.

B: Did he borrow Uncle George's car to go out sometimes at night? You mentioned that he had other friends. So Uncle George loaned him his car?

RB: Yes. When Lyndon got a car, I do not remember. But I do know that when we all lived there together on Hawthorne that Lyndon didn't have his own car. Uncle George had the car, and that's how they got to and from school.

B: How long after he got this job offer before he left for Washington, or before he left that house?

RB: I don't remember. I think he finished the school year though. Of course it could have been in the spring when he got the offer. I just do not recall.

B: You don't remember what time of year it was?

RB: No. No, I sure don't.

B: Seems like I'm thinking that it was after the school term, it was in the summer, but I could be wrong about that.

RB: I sure don't remember.

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B: You have told me that you later taught at Cotulla, where Johnson spent that year teaching--

RB: Yes.

B: --during his college years. Would you tell me a little bit about that, circumstances of your going down there to teach, first of all?

RB: Well, I want to add a little bit here; I wanted to say, like I said a while ago, that Uncle George was very dedicated to an education, and when I got out of high school--see, I graduated from Sam Houston High School, the same school where Lyndon and Uncle George taught--when I got out, Rice University did not even have a tuition. But you had to be in the top 5 per cent of your graduating class to get in Rice. Well, I happened to be in the top 5 per cent of my graduating class, so I applied to go to Rice, and I got in and I went to Rice. Just think, the fees to go to Rice were only \$75 and \$80 and \$85 a year, not a term, but a year and--

B: You just had to have the smarts.

RB: --my Uncle George saw that I got to go to Rice. I had no more business going to Rice than I did of flying.

B: Why was that?

RB: I wasn't intelligent enough to go to Rice. But I went.

B: Well, they must have thought you were.

(Laughter)

RB: I got admitted and I went to Rice, and I studied like the dickens, and I finally made my grade, but I didn't make any grades good enough that you could write home about, but I got my degree in four years. I got out of there. I look back at Rice and I think, it's a great school but--

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B: It is a great school.

RB: --I sure, in fact I wanted my oldest son to go to Rice. I don't mean I wanted him to--he wanted to go to Rice. When he graduated from high school, he was valedictorian of his graduating class, and he won a scholarship. But you know what he chose to do? Chose to go to The University of Texas. He won a scholarship to The University of Texas, a \$4,000 math scholarship. He paid his own way through college. Now, I got sidetracked--

B: He must have gotten a little of Uncle George in him.

RB: --I got sidetracked on my story, I've even forgotten--oh, I know, I started to say, after I got out of college, I got a job teaching school at Pettus, Texas. A friend helped me get this job. I taught school there two years.

B: Where was that?

RB: Pettus--P-E-T-T-U-S--Pettus, Texas.

B: Never heard of it.

RB: That's in Bee County.

B: Is that right?

RB: You've heard of Beeville?

B: Yes, I've heard of Beeville.

RB: This was in Bee County in Beeville. I taught school there two years, and they had to cut back on the teachers, so the teachers that were hired last were the ones that got let out, let off or whatever. So I was one of the last ones hired, so I had to start hunting another job. Well, I went to visit Margaret Johnson. That was the lady that I told you was the mother of that little girl that you asked who she was on that picture a while ago, that's Margaret Johnson's only daughter. I went to Cotulla to visit Margaret. Margaret lived across the

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street from the superintendent so she asked the superintendent if he had--you know, if maybe there would be an opening in his school. He said, "Well, we'll see." Sure enough shortly there was an opening in the school. But I had to go to summer school that summer to take something to be able to teach there that fall. But I did, and it was the same school where Lyndon taught.

B: Was that the same superintendent as when Lyndon was there, do you know?

RB: I don't imagine. I don't imagine it was. Because Lyndon taught there--I don't know, was it 1924-25-26, somewhere along in there?

B: It was when he was going to San Marcos.

RB: Yes, it was before he got his degree, I know that.

B: Yes, it was right in the middle there.

RB: I'm going to tell a story after while that you told me to not to mince any words when I got around to telling something, didn't you?

B: Right. Go right ahead.

RB: Okay. I'll tell the story in a minute. That's all right. Anyway, I got the job after having to come to summer school and take some courses. I got a job and I went back to teach there. The same lady that was my principal was also teaching in this same school. She was the principal of this school where Lyndon taught. But Lyndon was so ambitious and all 'til he sidetracked this woman and had her--now I don't mean he had her demoted, but they made Lyndon principal of this little school when I don't think Lyndon was more than nineteen years old.

B: Is that right?

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RB: And this lady did not like Lyndon from that day 'til the day I taught there. That woman did not like me and it was because I was kin to Lyndon. Now, I was told that. I do not know that to be a fact. I was just told that by some of the former teachers.

B: Do you know her name?

RB: Yes, I know her name. Her name was Mamie Wildenthal [?].

B: So she didn't tell you this directly?

RB: No. She didn't tell me this but the other teachers told me. The teachers who were teaching there at the same time that Lyndon was were also still there when I went there. They told me, they said, "Ruth, you watch it like a hawk. It'll show up some way that she'll take it out on you some way because she did not like Lyndon." The reason she didn't like Lyndon was that--now, I don't know how or why, but I was told that he was made principal of this little school when she was a lot older than he. See, she had priority. She had seniority. Now, maybe he wasn't made principal, now; I--

B: I don't recall that he was but I could be wrong.

RB: Maybe he wasn't. Maybe he wasn't made principal. Maybe that part of the story I have--

B: Well, maybe he just got a better salary or something, a promotion and got a higher salary or something that she thought she should have gotten.

RB: I just don't know. Again as I said, all I can remember is that those teachers told me at the time. They knew that I was kin to Lyndon because Mrs. Kimball, who was my Johnson cousin, is the one that helped me get the job or recommended me for the job. Then they knew because of my connection with Mrs. Kimball that I was also kin to Lyndon. They told me, they said, "You watch it. She will pick on you, and it will not be you. It will be because she did not like Lyndon."

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B: Did these other teachers think that Lyndon had done this teacher wrong, too?

RB: No. They didn't think so.

B: They didn't?

RB: No. So it may be that he was not made principal. I may be wrong about that because come to think of it, I believe he would have been too young to have been made principal. I don't believe they would have shoved her aside and made him principal. But there was some reason that that woman did not like Lyndon. I assume that just now when I said that, but that may not be true.

B: I recall in another interview something--it seems like I recall something about this woman, but I'd have to look it up myself. I'm sure that there is some truth to what you're saying. There may be--

RB: Yes. There was some friction but I just thought I remembered that. But now see, you can imagine how many years--that's been forty years ago.

B: Well, can you remember any other things that these other teachers who remembered said about it?

RB: No. If I remember correctly, they all liked Lyndon. They didn't dislike him. They didn't have any reasons to dislike him. They said that he had a lot going for the kids. He loved the kids. He worked with them and he worked night and day, early and late. He just had that kind of a disposition.

B: When you taught there, were most of the children that you taught Mexican-American or were they--?

RB: No. They were all Mexican-American.

B: They were all Mexican-American.



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RB: Yes. It was a Mexican school. They separated. They segregated. The Anglo-American and the Mexican-American, they were separated.

B: And I suppose they were probably still just about as disadvantaged at that time as they had been when LBJ had taught them.

RB: Yes. Yes.

B: I doubt that you knew any students who you would remember.

RB: No. I didn't know any students at all. See, Lyndon would have been there fourteen or fifteen years before I was. I was there in 1940, 1941, and 1942. Lyndon was there probably in the mid-twenties.

B: Anything else about Cotulla that you--?

RB: No, there's not.

B: How long did you teach there?

RB: Two years. But most of the teachers there had remembered Lyndon. Some of the younger ones didn't. The teachers that would have been, oh, ten and twelve and fifteen years older than I was, they all remembered Lyndon. And they all liked him. They all liked him.

B: So he made an impression one way or the other, anyway, if they still remembered him.

RB: Yes, he sure did.

B: These teachers told you that there were some conflicts between LBJ, and this woman and that she may take it out on you at some point; did she ever take it out on you?

RB: I felt that she did a number of times. I felt that she picked on me on a number of occasions. I know that toward the end of the time that I taught there, I knew I wasn't going back. I'll tell you, the poverty among those poor little old sweet Mexican children, it would break your heart. They would come to school barefooted and didn't have anything to eat for

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lunch. It was so depressing. There's no way that I could have taken money out of my pocket and have fed the children. So I said to myself, I can't--I was by that situation like Uncle George was by "I'm not going to pick cotton all the rest of my life." I said, "I cannot stay here and I do not want to. There has got to be something that is a little bit. . . ." Well, I couldn't help the situation so there wasn't any point in grieving about it and hurting myself. So I had made up my mind I wasn't going to go back there and teach another year. So toward the end of the school year, she sent word to me one day that she wanted me to come down, that she wanted to talk to me. I went down and she was very, very unbecoming, I meant very, very ugly to me. I don't remember exactly what she put her finger on but while she was giving me a good chewing out about whatever it was, I didn't feel that I deserved it. I felt that she was picking on me and I walked out of the room. I told her, "I do not have to take this. I do not intend to come back here and teach anymore. You take this job and you do what you want to with it. I do not intend to come back."

B: That's good that you did that.

RB: And I didn't. I left with--

B: You finished the semester?

RB: Yes. I finished the semester. That was only weeks before school was out and I finished the semester. I tried every way in the world that I could at first to do right, but when I saw that she was going to pick on me and I didn't feel that I deserved it, that's when I said, "I don't have to, I don't have to take it."

B: And you've never heard from her or got to her again?

RB: No. I've never heard another word. I've never been back to Cotulla. When I drove away from there and left there, I've never been back to this day.

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I loved Margaret Kimball. She was my first cousin, and incidentally when I opened up this book while ago, I found her name in here. It was just in there--oh, how precious. Anyway, my mother had one of those original ones.

B: Is that right?

RB: She sure did.

B: That's a great picture.

RB: Isn't that precious?

B: How long did she live there?

RB: Margaret married a ranchman down there; that's how come [she was] down in that part of the country. Margaret and Lyndon were very close to each other in age and very close to each other. They were just real close. Now, Margaret was Ava Cox's sister, and of course you know who Ava Cox is. Margaret and Lyndon were just real close, but Margaret married a ranchman off down in that country and she lived down there all of her married life. She had a very, very tragic death in her early fifties. It was just real tragic, real sad. But I never went back to visit in Cotulla after I left there because I didn't have a good feeling. I liked some of the teachers that I taught with and I think they liked me.

B: Did you ever talk to Lyndon later in life about Cotulla, about his feelings about it? I know that he oftentimes later said that that experience really did affect him and really made him feel like those kids should have the same opportunity.

RB: That was the poverty. That was the poverty that those poor people live in.

B: Did he ever talk to you about them?

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RB: No. No, I never was with Lyndon enough after he got off to Washington and in politics. I never was with him, except short periods of time and that would be in a family get-together or a family Christmas dinner. No, I never discussed it with him at all.

B: Do you have any anecdotes about any of those times that you would like to tell, anything that happened that was interesting?

RB: No. I don't think so. I don't recall anything. All I remember is, as I said, that I know those poor children down there, they came from such poor families with not enough to eat, not enough clothes to wear and no shoes to wear in the wintertime. It's bound to have--

B: If you have a heart, it had to affect you.

RB: Yes. It's bound to have an affect on him because it sure did have an effect on me.

B: One question that I would like to ask you before we close up here that I didn't get to ask you. Lyndon Johnson's temper is legend. On one hand he [had] generosity of spirit but on the other hand, there was his temper that sometimes came out and he would explode and really go after somebody. Did you ever see that side of him?

RB: Only slightly. Only slightly. I never saw him get on a real ugly tear. No, I never did. I've seen [him] get irritated and cross, but never on one of those tears.

B: Did you ever see the other side, the real generosity, and could you give me specific examples of that?

RB: Oh yes, he sure was.

B: Any specific examples you can think of right now, during that year that you lived in Houston or at any time?

RB: Well, no, not in Houston. I do remember that, as I said, after Lyndon became senator and even vice president and president, I do know that he was most, most generous with my

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mother. I know many a time at Christmas time, there would be a great big fruitcake for  
Mama, with a hundred dollar bill stuck in the little circular part.

B: It sort of became a tradition after he borrowed that hundred dollars for that car or  
something?

RB: Yes. He was most generous.

End of Tape 1 of 1 and Interview 1

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