

## INTERVIEW I

INTERVIEWEE: JOSEPH A. BRUNO

INTERVIEWER: David G. McComb

DATE: November 13, 1968

PLACE: Mr. Bruno's office in the West Wing of the White House, Washington,  
D.C.

### Tape 1 of 1

M: Mr. Bruno, will you tell me something about your background? Where were you born and when?

B: Well, I was born in March of 1935 in the Washington, D.C. area. My family's from New England, and I spent a few of my early years up there, but for the most part I've lived in this area. I attended Georgetown University and Catholic University here in Washington, and I have been associated with the President since his days as majority leader.

M: What kind of degree did you get from Georgetown?

B: Bachelor of Science.

M: In what area?

B: In business administration.

M: When was this?

B: In 1956.

M: Then did you go to work immediately?

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B: I went into the service; I served in the United States Navy, and then I went to work at the Library of Congress as a research assistant. Actually, I had no interest in politics at that time. But while I was working at the Library of Congress, I was approached by a friend over there who said that there was an opening in the office of the Senate Majority Leader for a research assistant. This was late in 1959, and I assumed, knowing enough that Lyndon Johnson was a great politician, that he would be in contention for the presidency and I assumed that they were beefing their staff up for this; so I went over and was interviewed and went to work for him in, I believe, February of 1960.

M: This was when he was driving for the nomination?

B: Things were just beginning to pick up a little bit; that's right. The work load was increasing. My co-workers told me at that time that our work was much heavier than it had been the year before. So I, of course, was intrigued with the whole idea in working for this man, and I've been fortunate enough to stay with him. Of course, I love politics; I think it is the most fascinating science there is.

M: Did you take this job with any hesitation? Didn't he have kind of a rough reputation?

B: Well, yes, he did. As a matter of fact, I had heard that he was not the easiest man to work for; that he had a reputation for working long hours and working his staff long hours, but still I rather enjoy a fast pace. So I really wasn't too concerned with that.

M: Did he interview you for this job, or did you just walk in?

B: No.

M: Who hired you?

B: Well, at that time, the Senator's administrative assistant was Walter Jenkins, and I believe

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that Walter Jenkins had the final say as he did in all cases of staffing.

M: So Mr. Jenkins, then, was the one who hired you?

B: That's right.

M: What kind of work did you do at that time?

B: I was doing research work. We had just general paperwork. Also, in accordance with the request of the then-Senator Johnson's mother, she had always hoped that the Senator's private papers would be put together and put into a permanent library. I believe this was one of the reasons why they did go to the Library of Congress looking around for someone over there to help out. So for the first year I did a good bit of work on his personal papers in trying to get them together for the--eventually they would become a part of the library at The University of Texas, we assumed. Of course, at that time he was senator. Then the next two or three years were taken up about the same, actually, in doing general paperwork and also helping out with the President's private papers for his personal library.

M: Were you actually organizing these papers in a logical fashion, or what was your work?

B: Actually, no, I think it was more a matter of classifying or going through so many of these things; it's awfully confusing and we have to put some order to them. That's what we were doing really, trying to track down history on some things, trying to find out and locate photographs, old photographs, family photographs, and putting them together, this sort of thing. Just a multitude of paperwork that had accumulated over the years that he served both in the Senate and in the House. And most of these things had just been put into storage boxes and left there.

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M: They hadn't been organized before?

B: No. It was just a matter of pouring everything into a box and leaving it there, so it was quite a job in trying to get it back together again.

M: The future University library at Texas will owe you a nod of thanks at least then for organizing those things.

B: Either that or they will curse me.

M: What was it, do you think, that interested Lyndon Johnson in organizing these papers? Why didn't he just leave them in boxes?

B: Well, I think the most important thing here is the fact that his mother felt so strongly about this point, and she wanted him to have those papers set up in a permanent library for the future. You know, his ties with his mother were extremely close, and I think just the fact that this was what she wanted would have been incentive enough for him to go ahead and do it.

M: Was there any talk at that time as to where the papers would be placed?

B: No, we just assumed that they would go to The University of Texas. This was just an assumption on our part at that time, figuring that that would be the logical place for them. We didn't know whether the Library of Congress would have any interest, truly, in the papers of a Senate majority leader. I always felt that the Library of Congress, even if they did take them, wouldn't put them to the same use that The University of Texas would put them to, so I just thought that it would be eventually a University project.

M: In your research work, would they assign you a research task, such as to find out the facts of a certain event, and then you would go find out and this would work its way into a

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speech, or what?

B: Yes, I did this on occasion. We had special projects working that I helped out on.

Specifically, I recall one instance during the period of the assassination, while the nation was in mourning, I was working on a project preparing foreign policy statements that the Vice President had made and getting all those facts together; of course he had wanted to make some statements on foreign policy during that takeover period. And this is the one project that stands out most clearly in my mind. I guess it is the most recent, too, that I have done for him, and that's been five years ago.

M: And what did you do, go back through his speeches and pull out--

B: Go back through his speeches, both on the floor and when he was majority leader, speeches he might have made on different occasions, and we checked the record thoroughly and that sort of thing.

M: Was the assignment to do this? Was this handed down through Walter Jenkins?

B: Yes, it was handed down through either Walter Jenkins or through George Reedy, who was his executive assistant at that time.

M: I'm kind of interested in the chain of command.

B: Well, in our organization up there, Walter was truly the administrative assistant in that he did handle the actual running of the staff and the running of the office. George Reedy was his executive assistant, and actually he advised the Vice President, and also when he was senator, advised him on a lot of matters involving domestic and foreign policy. So Walter was more of an office manager, in a sense, in dealing with the day-to-day activities and mechanics whereas George acted as a speech writer, as a press man, and

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advisor.

M: Would Mr. Johnson himself ever give you a task directly?

B: Yes, in the early days of his vice presidency and the last days of his term as majority leader, I think that I had more immediate contact with him than at any other time. And I was given assignments by him to handle for him which I did take care of. Of course, some of them were on office policy and some things involved taking surveys, but in many cases, of course, I was running around doing a lot of errands for him--two or three of us would always take care of these little things for him, taking him out to the airport or picking up plane tickets for him, helping him out when he had a receiving line. I remember one time I had to stand next to him in a receiving line and make sure that everyone had one of his passes to the galleries, while he shook hands with about three hundred people. So these were just one or two incidents where I did help him and work with him closely.

M: Did you find out that his reputation for being a hard taskmaster was true?

B: Yes, I did. I found out that everything that I had heard about him has proven to be accurate. I want to say he's a difficult man to work for; I don't mean to say it the way it sounds, but he demands a great deal of all of us, but he demands twice as much of himself, so certainly I am not unhappy when I'm in a situation where my boss does three times as much work as I do, and that's exactly the way he is and the way he has always been. He doesn't take too much time out to be jovial; I don't know whether he has the accepted form of a sense of humor that we all like to think of, but he is, I would say, 95 percent business all the time.

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M: Is it true that he thinks of little else but politics?

B: I think that's right. I think that that's true; politics is his business, and I think he's 95 percent business. I think his outside interests are extremely limited. He enjoys his ranch; he enjoys boating; I think he has probably played golf half a dozen times in his life; he doesn't have too many interests in the field of sports. But I can't think of any other way that he could relax as well as the way he does now, and that is by working all the time.

M: What does he do for amusement?

B: Well, that I don't know. We have a movie theater here in the East Wing. It's sort of a combined television studio and also a screening room. It serves as a private movie theater. We've always heard that the presidents who have lived here before have enjoyed watching certain types of films. One president enjoyed watching cartoons; another one was a great fan of westerns. Well, President Johnson goes in there quite often, two or three times a week, sometimes every night in the week, and all he watches is documentaries. That may be a form of entertainment for him or a form of diversion, but it's still in that same line that I mentioned earlier; it's business.

M: What kind of documentaries does he watch?

B: Most of them are on Vietnam. This is the thing, I think, that the President has on his mind more than anything else.

M: What kind of working day do you work?

B: Do I, myself?

M: Yes.

B: Well, our tours here begin at eight o'clock in the morning, so I'm here at eight and

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normally I go home at six. I don't work a particularly late day as many of the people do around here. Occasionally I will stay later. I work every Saturday from eight o'clock until about one or two.

M: When you were research assistant to the Senator or to the Vice President, what kind of hours did you work?

B: Our hours up there were longer; there were fewer of us to do the work. We'd start working at about eight-thirty and usually until seven or seven-thirty. But I noticed this--that the work down here has become more intense but the hours are shorter, for me, anyway. And, of course, the reason is that we have a lot more people around to take up the load. Since 1965, I've been working here in the tour office as the tour director, and my work involves congressional liaison work. We maintain contacts with all of the congressional offices; I make sure that everything goes smoothly with our visitors, and we are responsible for trying to present the White House in the best light. We are responsible for trying to provide as much privacy for the family as possible.

M: In your earlier experience as an assistant, was the President, or the Senator, or the Vice President, as the case may be, was he temperamental? He has a reputation of having a bad temper. Is this true?

B: Well, I have seen outbursts from the President on occasion, perhaps a raising of the voice. This would add to the legend that he is temperamental, I have seen that; I have never seen a really violent outburst, what I would consider violent. But yes, I think he is a temperamental man, and an emotional man, and he does show his emotions from time to time.



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M: Some of the people who have written about him make him seem to be a rather crude individual, using swear words and at times obscene words in his language. The question in my mind is, is he any more crude than most men?

B: No, I don't think he is. I think that most of us use obscene words or crude words from time to time, given the right set of circumstances. We're just lucky that we don't have it publicized as much as the President, or a president does. The President is a human being just like all of our chief executives have been, and they have the same failings as all of us have. It's just too bad that in some cases this gets more publicity than in others.

M: I guess we don't have a reporter standing beside us to write it down.

B: That's right.

M: Have you ever been on the receiving end of a temperamental outburst?

B: Yes, I have. I have several times; and once again, going back a few years to that period when he was vice president, I've caught it several times from him.

M: Can you tell me what happened?

B: Well, it was the same problem on a matter of taking care of correspondence. The President is very meticulous on his answering mail from his constituents, and he wanted me to tell him why certain things hadn't been taken care of; and I was giving an explanation, but I was giving it in a roundabout way, and he didn't particularly appreciate that. He wanted a direct answer, so he had to correct me several times on that. This happened on two or three different occasions, so I finally learned that the best way to handle it is to give direct answers to direct questions.

M: Well, did the problem of the temper clear up with you then when you would answer him

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directly?

B: Yes, it did.

M: Were you upset when he got mad at you about this?

B: Well, of course I was a little bit. It is a little upsetting to have the Vice President of the United States call you down. But it wasn't anything that was lasting, of course, because I realized that I should have been answering his questions more directly than I did.

M: One question that sort of underlies this is, with his reputation for having a strong temper, nonetheless, he has a number of people who remain loyal to him in spite of being on the receiving end of the temperamental outbursts. And you have received some of this, and yet you have remained loyal to him.

B: That's right.

M: Why? Don't you get angry at this and think about quitting?

B: Oh, sure, but I think that's not reason enough to disassociate myself with the President or with, for that matter, probably any employer.

M: It has never been to the point that you would think about quitting?

B: No, never, because I have a great admiration for the President, both as a person and as a politician and of course as a president. And I think I could take that sort of thing six hours a day from him and still not change my opinion about him.

M: Why is that?

B: Well, I think just because the amount that this man has accomplished over the years as the majority leader, his work with the Congress, his legislation, the way he handles people--now, this is difficult to put, but I think that the people that really count--I want to

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say, the people that work for the President, I think he expects 100 percent loyalty from them. And he might not treat us the same way that he treats others. And I've seen the way he works with people, his friends as well as adversaries, and it's a beautiful job of psychology and everything else. I just have a great admiration for the way he works with all people.

M: Do you mean to say that he is tactful and considerate of the feelings of other people?

B: Yes, he is. He is very considerate of the feelings of others. He is a contradiction in many ways. As I say, I think he might show consideration for other people that he wouldn't show for his staff on occasion. Yet I've seen him do things with the staff; for example, one time I thought that he treated one member of the staff not quite the way that she should have been treated, and he came right back again a few minutes later and just made over her so much that it was embarrassing. It would have been embarrassing for a man to have done that.

M: Did it smooth over the situation?

B: Yes, it did smooth it over completely. And he reached the point where he realized that he had been a little short with her, and he came back and just handled it so well, very sincere; you saw it in the man that he didn't know how badly he was treating her originally. And I think this is the way he has always been, sort of lets his guard down with the people around that he knows.

M: Especially with his staff? And once he realizes he has gone too far, then he will try to compensate for this.

B: That's right.

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M: Now, he has had a certain turnover of people in relatively close positions to him, such as the press secretaries, Why is that?

B: Well, I don't know. It could be that press secretaries have received lucrative job offers on the outside. I'm just speculating now. I honestly believe that the press secretary's job is the most difficult job there is in the White House, and I think that it's a job that requires great tact. That man is under a lot of pressure, he is abused quite often, and I think it would be just natural for a man in that position not to be able to last too long. That's what I really think; it's just a hot seat, and if an opportunity comes up where he has a chance to get out, I can see where he would take it. That's why I believe that the President has had a turnover there.

M: Have you had many dealings with Mrs. Johnson?

B: Well, I have had more dealings with Mrs. Johnson in the past three or four years than I have had with the President, frankly.

M: Before we get into that, then, let me take you to the position of where you are appointed into your present job. Now you worked for the President as a research assistant until when--the time of the assassination?

B: Until the time of the assassination, and then we came down here in November of 1963 and for the next year I once again did some research work for the President. I handled correspondence. Of course, you see, at that time I had the experience of knowing a lot of his old friends from the state of Texas by name, by reputation, and personally; and there weren't too many of us around here who had this knowledge. So those of us who did have it worked primarily with correspondence with the men and women from the state of

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Texas, and also the other friends and acquaintances that he had known through his vice presidential period as well as the period when he was senator. Then in March of '65 I came over here to the East Wing with the Tour Office.

M: One question about these letters. I would assume that the President gets so many letters that he cannot possibly look at all of these, or even a small percentage.

B: Correct.

M: How does he handle this?

B: Well, the mail is broken down--I'm just giving you a rough idea because I'm not exactly sure about the specifics. But when the mail comes into our mail unit, it's broken down and given to so many people to read; then they read the letters over. And some letters, of course, are generally critical, some are generally favorable letters--these go to a certain department. There are letters that deal with foreign affairs that are handled by another man and his staff, or domestic issues or any burning issues, you know, that may attract a lot of correspondence. These are just broken down where assistants will take this mail and handle it. Then the assistants, taking this mail and looking it over, will find letters that they feel the President should see; and then these are sent over to him, so that actually the mail is screened twice, one good screening before the President gets it really, although it goes through two hands at least before he sees it.

M: The assistant might well answer the letter then?

B: That's right.

M: Does he sign the President's name to this, or does he sign his own name?

B: The assistants sign their own names to them.

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M: And then I suppose that if the President wanted to, he could answer a letter personally--ones that were filtered up to him?

B: That's right.

M: And then when was it that you were appointed to this Tour Office?

B: It was the early part of 1965--I believe it was March or April.

M: Why were you given this job?

B: Well, I had expressed an interest in working with the tours, and I had had experience working with greeting a lot of the President's friends from the state of Texas, so apparently the special assistants felt that I could handle the job because a lot of my work is greeting people on behalf of the President. And that's how I was approved for this type of work.

M: Are there any particular difficulties in this tour work that you do? Is it fairly mechanical with the public coming in and going on the tours, or what?

B: No, it's not completely mechanical, of course, because we do have a lot of problems. I get caught in between quite often. People call that are close personal friends of the family, they are administration officials, cabinet officials, or cabinet wives, who want special favors done for them. Many times there is a conflict with the schedule of the family, and I'm in a spot where I have to try to tell them that things can't be done the way they want them.

M: What do you have to do then? You know the family's schedule and their use of the Mansion.

B: Yes, that's right.

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M: And then you have to fit in tours around that so as not to conflict with the privacy of the President's family.

B: Well, in general that's what it is. You see, our tour hours are from eight in the morning until noon. Technically, the visitors aren't permitted in here after twelve because the family has the full run of the house. But here's the point where we run into the difficulty. A cabinet officer's wife has a group that she wants to bring down for a tour in the afternoon; and this may be a lady who has acted as hostess on occasion when Mrs. Johnson has been away, and she's quite well known to the family. Yet, it's awfully difficult to try to persuade her that it's not a good time to come down. This happens quite often with people. A lot of people who consider themselves close personal friends of the family want us to show them the private quarters. A lot of these people are those that go back quite a few years to even the pre-Congress days from the state of Texas, and we just can't take people upstairs unless the family knows about it, unless they approve it. These are things that do come up and can cause problems.

M: Let's say an old Texas friend came in and wanted a tour and wanted to see the private quarters. What would you do?

B: Well, of course, if it's genuinely an old friend, Mrs. Johnson usually calls us because she gets the call or gets the letter, and then she alerts us.

M: So you know beforehand, I see. That smoothes your difficulty out.

B: I would never approve any one seeing the family's private quarters unless the First Lady had requested it.

M: So the initiative would have to come from her?

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B: That's right.

M: I see. Otherwise, you'd just stop it.

B: That's exactly right.

M: Are there gradations of tours--would you take certain people through certain places and not through others? Is there a grand tour and a minor tour?

B: Yes, we have two types of tours here. The early morning tour begins at eight and it runs until nine-thirty. That's called the Congressional Tour. Then from ten until twelve we have the public tours. Now, for the public tours the gates are open to all people; there is no checking involved; it's just a matter of lining up here at the gate and walking right through. Now, on the early morning tour which starts at eight, the visitors see three additional rooms; of course, we call it congressional because the tour arrangements are made through the offices of the members of Congress. Originally this tour was set up to give the congressmen a chance to bring their families or close personal friends down here--that was the main purpose of the tour. In recent years it has accelerated, and today, the peak of the season, we have 2000-2400 people coming down here on the so-called congressional or private tour. The two types of tours are coming very close together now, they're getting much closer in quality.

M: Only a matter of three rooms now?

B: That's right. That's exactly what it amounts to. The Congressional Tour is a little longer, but not much longer, maybe five or ten minutes.

M: Do you have any trouble with the crowds? Are there souvenir hunters? Do they mark the walls? Is there any of that kind of difficulty?



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B: Oh, we've had it occasionally. I think considering the numbers that we do have coming through the White House . . . Incidentally, during the Johnson Administration of the last five years, we have averaged about one million--I just did these figures the other day--five hundred fifty thousand (1,550,000) people per year. Now, this is what we have averaged in the fifties, the 1950s up to '59, or 1960, I think the highest figure per year was nine hundred thousand (900,000). That's all they were getting at their peak year. And this is an average over five years. So we do have quite a few people that come down here and very few incidents. I recall one time some man came in and nailed a sign on a wall upstairs in one of our parlors, and another time a man came in and--

M: What do you do with a case like that?

B: Well, most of them are mental cases. Most of them are patients who have escaped from some institution, and the police are looking for them, so we call the police. The Secret Service take them out and usually they are taken over to the mental hospital for observation.

M: What did you have to do then--pull the sign out and repair the hole?

B: Yes, that's right.

M: And then turn the man over to Secret Service?

B: To the authorities. In that case, I think they caught him before he drove a nail or he had just put one nail into the door.

M: Do you remember what the sign said?

B: No, I don't. Another time a man came in and he picked up a vase and threw it across the room and smashed a very valuable antique mirror; he was also a mental patient who

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should have been in a hospital. We've had cases of men and women who have come to the gates announcing that they were the president. We had a case, I think about two years ago, where a man drove his truck through the front fence trying to get in to see the President. But for the most part our visitors are very good. They have a great deal of respect for the Mansion and the family here, and in many cases they have to wait a long time outside to get in. The fact that they do wait indicates how much they want to see the White House.

M: Is this system of giving slips of paper for a certain time to come in to take the tour something new?

B: Well, this was an experimental system that was on for, I think, six weeks last summer.

M: Did it work?

B: No, it did not work. It didn't help the situation at all. I think that if it did anything at all, if you could say anything in its favor, it would be that it had a psychological effect on people because it gave them a ticket to use to get into the house, but it didn't cut their wait down. That was the primary point in holding the experiment.

M: Why didn't it cut down the time? You would think if you had the ticket and you were due at nine-thirty or ten-thirty or whatnot, and you showed up at that time, you could go right on through.

B: Well, it's a little more complicated, but I could put it this way. If you know you have twelve thousand people that are going to visit the White House on a Tuesday and you have two hours to give them and every inch of that sidewalk has feet on it all the way around the Mansion and you are not going to be able to get those people in without

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having them wait, how is it going to help to give out twelve thousand tickets? In other words, there are no breaks in the line. The gates open at ten o'clock and there are twelve thousand people lined up, every inch of sidewalk is occupied, every second or every few seconds there is a person passing through the gates. It doesn't matter whether he has a ticket or not, he's still going to have to wait and it just doesn't help. The system works only if you limit the number of people who enter the building. Now, if it can be said that we can handle five thousand people in the two-hour period comfortably, so that no one has to wait more than ten minutes, then the system will work. But, you see, we average more than five thousand people a day in here. In the summertime that means that if we are getting ten thousand or twelve thousand in every day, and the ticket distribution is limited to five thousand, what about those other seven thousand people? They are pretty unhappy. And that's really what our problem is. We have too many people in too short a period of time. The President has indicated, and Mrs. Johnson has indicated, that they want everyone to see the White House who wants to see it; so it's really impractical to turn away people at the gate.

M: Well, it's conceivable that there will come a time when there are just too many people wanting to see the White House. What if you doubled your rate? What would you do?

B: Well, of course, someone observed recently that probably fifteen years from now, the president and his family will be living at the Hotel Madison and the White House will become a permanent museum. That's our problem right now about the rate increasing. In 1959-1960, if there were three hundred people visiting the White House per day, that was a lot. You see, now we've got ten thousand. I don't know what we would do, to be

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honest. Really, the only solution to the problem is to increase the hours. If we could be open an extra hour, then it would help a great deal, but we can't open it an extra hour because it conflicts with the family schedule.

M: You've got a dilemma.

B: It's a real problem.

M: When the presidential family is here and they're living here, how do you protect their privacy while the tours are going on?

B: Well, the family knows where the tourists are; and if they want to come out and visit with the tourists, why, of course, it's up to them, and they do that quite often. Mrs. Johnson and the President occasionally will come out and say hello to the group. But we have a screen placed across our corridor, and it's only at that point where the President just might happen to be walking past, and that screen protects him from view. A few years ago we did have one little problem, not one incident, but I mean a situation that you just asked about. Our diplomatic reception room is a room that's on our tour, and that's the room that's used by the family as their private entrance. Well, from eight o'clock until nine-thirty in the morning, we show that room to the visitors. And Luci was attending Georgetown University at that time, and she had early morning classes two or three times a week. So on those days she would come traipsing through the room on her way out to her car, and there was always a group of sixty or seventy people in that room that always got a glimpse of Luci every morning when she was walking out. And, of course, it was quite a thrill for them to see the President's daughter. She was always very friendly and always gave a "good morning" to the group and excused herself because she was running

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late for class, and she would be off. So this does happen occasionally, but not as often as you would think.

M: Do you have anything to do with the furniture or the paintings or anything that is in the White House?

B: No, we don't. The paintings, all the furnishings, are handled by the curator. The White House Historical Association, I believe, is responsible for the maintenance of those pieces. All we do is just point them out.

M: Do you have to do anything about the security of the Mansion, or is that handled by the guards?

B: Well, our guide force is made up of police and Secret Service. We have fifteen guides who are uniformed Secret Service. Actually, they come under the Treasury Department.

M: So they have a dual function?

B: That's right. They serve not only as guides, but also they are here for the protection of the family and the house, and they are quite good in this area of public relations. They are very good men.

M: These men are career people--

B: That's right.

M: --that have been here for years.

B: They have been here for years. They are completely non-partisan. They serve all presidents in both parties with equal consideration and dedication. They are very fine people.

M: Has President Johnson sent down to you any particular directives about the handling of

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tourists? You mentioned that he wanted to show the White House in the best light.

B: Well, no. Once or twice, we have heard from the President, nothing specific, but just word has gotten down to us that he wants the house handled and shown in the best possible light. He has left this operation in the hands of Mrs. Johnson; and if there are any changes that are made, any suggestions from the family, they come through her.

M: So your relationship, in the tour office at least, has been closer with Mrs. Johnson?

B: That's right.

M: Has Mrs. Johnson passed down any directives?

B: Quite often. We get suggestions that we handle things a certain way; we received one communication from her that she preferred not to have the house shown when there was a function coming up, that it might show the rooms in a state of disarray, you know. If they are setting up for a dinner, for example, she would prefer not to have people see the Mansion that way. Of course, this is all after normal visitors hours. She never interferes with the period from eight till twelve. We've had meetings with her a number of times, once again, on how to present the Mansion in the best way. It was her suggestion, for example, that led to our putting these speakers out here, this tape along the fence that gives a brief history of the White House to the waiting visitor so that when he comes in here he has a general idea of what he is going to see. She was the one who thought we might try this ticket, although she didn't devise it, but she felt that we should give it a try in all fairness, and that's how it came about that we did work it out.

M: Does your flow of tourists vary with the season?

B: Yes, quite a bit.

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M: It's not steady?

B: No, it isn't. We are in a period right now where our visitors are dropping off. This is normal, of course. The largest number of visitors come to Washington in April. Then there's a drop in May, and then they come back again in June, July, and August. Our four highest months are June, July, August, and April; and then beginning with Labor Day they begin to drop off. The month of December, the month of January we have very few visitors, and then they start picking up again in February and March and they reach their peak in April.

M: Why April?

B: Well, it's because many states give Easter vacations to the children. Some states even have a different system. I know some of our New England states give the children up there a week's vacation sort of in between semesters. This is the time when the families all come to Washington. Also, most graduating classes from high schools give their senior students a class trip, and invariably they come to Washington. So that's why we have a great influx in April. Of course, it's obvious in the summer months that everyone's on vacation.

M: What about an election year like this coming up? Is your task going to increase?

B: Will our tours increase?

M: I mean, you are going to have an inauguration now in January.

B: Now, I would say normally that we would have a tremendous influx, particularly in the month of January; but I read in the paper today where there is a strong possibility that Mr. Nixon will not have any kind of a parade. There's even a possibility they may not have

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an inaugural, ball; and if that's the case, I think this will cut down considerably on the number of tourists that come to this city in January.

M: Did you have anything to do with the turning off of the lights in the White House?

B: No, I had nothing to do with that at all.

M: That didn't fall in your jurisdiction then?

B: No, we just make sure that all the lights are turned out when we leave a room, but we had nothing to do with the policy.

M: Will your staff fairly well stay here with the change in the administration?

B: I think so. The girls that we have that have worked here for some years in this office have been here at the White House since before the Johnson Administration. And they are classified more as civil servants or career employees rather than political. So they will probably stay right in this office.

M: Do you have any difficulties with Congress calling over for tours other than, as you mentioned before, people calling in the afternoons?

B: Oh, yes, this causes us our greatest problems. It's a situation that has to be handled, I think, with some tact. An example is this--during the busy season, tours are as hard to get as hen's teeth; and a member of Congress might call us one day and want to put someone on the next morning. In many cases it could be a member of his family, it could be a strong supporter who controls a large number of votes, it could be someone who has contributed financially to his campaign. Now, if we turn that member down, it's going to make it look very awkward that he can't get someone who he considers important on a White House tour, and this is really our biggest problem, I think. It causes me my



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greatest number of headaches.

M: You've got to handle it?

B: That's right.

M: So what do you tell a man like that?

B: Well, of course, we don't want to embarrass anyone, particularly the members of Congress who have been especially friendly to the President. Rather than causing embarrassment, we would go ahead and take the request from him.

M: And try to arrange it as best you can?

B: That's right.

M: What if you just couldn't do it? Then what?

B: Well, he would just have to take no. Of course, in some cases, if he can't do it, he may go over our heads--this happens regularly, also--and try to get it through someone like one of the special assistants.

M: So you may find it coming back to you again?

B: Oh, yes, that happens quite a bit. We may get it from a different source. Sometimes on especially difficult days, we may get the same request from five different offices.

M: And you have to keep saying no?

B: Well, yes, but finally someone may call who will say that we can't say no, something like that. But for the most part the people who call other offices to try to get in through their good graces, are people who are very friendly with the Administration, and we wouldn't turn them down anyway; but we still do have an awful lot who come through other sources and try to pressure us.

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M: Would the request finally work its way up to Mrs. Johnson?

B: On occasion they do.

M: And then if she says give the tour, then you say yes?

B: Well, certainly. We'll give it at three o'clock in the morning. The President, you know, on one occasion, invited some veterans of Vietnam that he had met at church; he brought them back to the White House and served them breakfast or brunch, and then instructed that they be taken around the house. This was on a Sunday, and Sunday, of course, is a day that we don't allow anyone to come in here unless it's guests of the family. Well, this was certainly an unusual thing, but whatever they say goes; it's their house.

M: So you gave the tour as requested?

B: That's right.

M: Do you get many requests for special tours of that nature from the President? Say, a foreign visitor comes in and he will want to have you take this man on a tour.

B: That does happen quite a bit. Mrs. Johnson particularly will call us on a request. I had a request two weeks ago from the President on a matter. He had been down to North Carolina in recent months, and he met the widow of a veteran who was killed in Vietnam. And he told her down there that if she ever came to Washington to stop by the White House; so she came to Washington, we had the call on it, and the President came out and, of course, he was extremely busy; he took her upstairs, and he and Mrs. Johnson went upstairs with her and with her two children, and they served them refreshments. I had been with her earlier. I came back here to my office and I received a call saying come up to the second floor immediately, and I went up there and the President was there. He

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came over and he asked me if I would take her around myself. I don't usually take tours around, or do it very rarely, and I, of course, was delighted to be able to do it. So we took a little tour together.

M: But that sort of thing does happen?

B: It does happen.

M: Well, that fairly well ends up the questions I wanted to ask you.

B: Fine.

M: Do you have any comments you would like to make about working for the President?

B: Well, of course, we all have a lot of comments at different times, I suppose. I think it has been a great experience working for him, for President Johnson himself, and not just working at the White House, although that is an experience in itself. I believe that he's a great man and that he has been misunderstood by a lot of people. A lot of people have personal prejudices against the man because of the part of the country he is from, number one, among other things. And I feel that in the long run these things will straighten themselves out. I just try to understand how difficult it must be to be in that position and to be open and subjected to the criticism that you get from all quarters. And some people are angered with him because he uses a battery-operated pepper mill; some people don't like him because he has an old pair of trousers he likes to knock around in. But these things really don't mean a thing and, as I say, in years to come we will all realize just how much he has accomplished and how much he has done for the country in general.

M: Good. Well, I wish to thank you for taking your time.

B: Well, thank you for coming by.

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[End of Tape 1 of 1 and Interview I]

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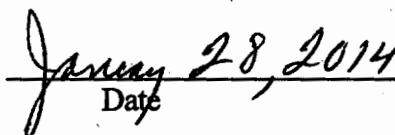
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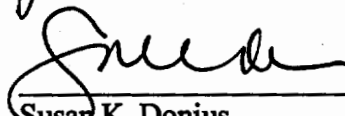
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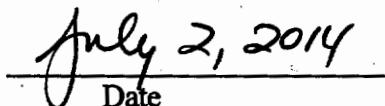
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Interviewee

  
Date

  
Susan K. Donius  
Director for Presidential Libraries

  
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