

INTERVIEW I

DATE: December 3, 1968

INTERVIEWEE: ELIZABETH CARPENTER

INTERVIEWER: JOE B. FRANTZ

PLACE: , Mrs. Carpenter's office in Washington, D.C.

Tape 1 of 1

F: Mrs. Carpenter, tell us something about your early career, where you came from and how you ever happened to get to know the Johnsons in the first place.

C: I came from the Tenth Congressional District--Austin, to be exact--and for my graduation present from the University of Texas got a trip to Washington. You didn't come to Washington in those days without calling on your congressman, and I went to call on my congressman. This was June of 1942. He was in the South Pacific, but there to meet you and shake hands with you was his wife, Claudia Alta Taylor. She made you immediately feel welcome. It must have been a great source of comfort to many people in the district there on much more important business than I was to find her there--her presence there. As you know, she was never paid for that job. She later has told me that it taught her more about the burden of being a public servant, that it was better time spent than almost anything she ever did to learn her husband's job.

F: She was definitely in charge of the office?

C: Yes, and worked long hours.

F: But without the title or any official position? She just came in in his place?

C: That's right. She was just standby while he was in the Pacific.

F: Do you remember where the office was?

C: Yes. 504 of the Old Congressional Office Building. It's an office that was large in size. Gosh, through those doors must have passed thousands, not only of constituents, but of really bright young people that Johnson attracted to work for him for various spans of their life. You see these alumni scattered all over the country right now, but I can name half a dozen who cut their teeth there.

Johnson was an errand boy for his district in the best sense of the words. Letters were answered, you know, by milking time. You felt loved whether you were a graduate from high school and got a letter from him, whether you were a constituent looking for Army-Navy tickets, whether you were trying to help get a dam on the Colorado River. There was a great closeness of association with him. You also felt in that office there was very much a kind of a family feeling present, and this has been true through all the years. [He] has never divided his time and his friends between work-friends and play-friends. He doesn't turn off work associations at night. He scoops up the people he's working with and they're his social friends. He would rather really be with them than anyone because I think he's an around-the-clock worker.

F: When you made that first visit, did you have any idea you might work for the Johnsons some day?

C: No, not remotely.

F: This was just purely a courtesy call?

C: This was partially a courtesy call, partially I was wide-eyed seeing the town. I don't think I'd ever seen a live congressman before, and I wanted to.

F: I remember my first one.

C: Who was that?

F: It was Congressman Guinn Williams whose son later played movie roles. He was known as Big Boy Williams.

C: Yes.

F: Very ugly person. Always played, you know, the outlaw.

C: But then, like so many girls who were coming here in the war-time, I got a job. I had come with a journalism degree in hand, and I got a job working for Esther Tufty.

F: Who's she?

C: Well, she's a newspaperwoman.

F: How do you spell Tufty?

C: T-u-f-t-y. Esther Van Wagoner Tufty, known as the Duchess. I'd beaten the paths around the National Press Building, really stood in all of those doors that read Look Magazine and New York Herald Tribune and a lot of publications that I was too intimidated to even go in. She had a news bureau for twenty-six dailies in Michigan. For twenty-five dollars a week I could be part-time secretary and part-time reporter, kind of earning that. So it's what I settled down to do. Then in the meantime being engaged and therein lies another story about Johnson, which I think is so typical.

Les and I were to be married here in Washington at the National Cathedral, really because it was war and you were--we didn't go home to be married, because most of your friends were off doing time in the service. So we sent an invitation, with probably more gall than expectation, to our Congressman. He came to our wedding. It wasn't that he knew me. It wasn't that either of us had any political, you know, come-on. He just

felt sorry for a girl who was twelve hundred miles away from home on her wedding day and came. And I'll always appreciate it. In fact, in my wedding book is his name signed from twenty-five years ago.

F: I see. Then what did you do with Miss Tufty?

C: Well, I covered the Hill, mostly the Michigan delegation for her. It was really localized reporting for that state that I learned a little bit of how you do it for my own state later when Les and I came here in 1945 and I was working for newspapers, the Austin paper. That's what led me to Lyndon Johnson's door again--to cover him as a young congressman. He and his wife would often gather together Texas newspaper people out at their house.

F: We'll talk to Les later about his involvement in this. Did you go home for any of his campaigns?

C: No. I was strictly--

F: It was strictly a Washington beat?

C: Yes.

F: You had no participation in any of the campaigns prior to 1960?

C: No, I really knew him only as a reporter who had covered him a lot. I think that he read my copy. It meant a lot to him for the simple reason it was the main paper in the district he was representing. So in 1960 when he was on the road to vice president and so forth, I think he began to be aware more and more that Mrs. Johnson would need someone to help her in the campaign. He had also seen me in operation because I was the president of the Women's National Press Club and because he was very proud of that, I think--the girl from Texas who had that job--and so--

F: When were you head of the Women's National Press Club?

C: I believe it was 1956. Was that an Eisenhower year?

F: Yes.

C: Yes. Because at one dinner in honor of President Eisenhower, I got Lyndon Johnson and Sam Rayburn to give him a calf, and we had the live calf on the stage of the Statler Hotel. But both Mr. Rayburn and Lyndon Johnson were so much a part of the national scene--

F: Tell me a little bit about this calf-story.

C: We wanted to get President Eisenhower to the dinner for one thing--the newspaperwomen's big dinner of the year. So we also knew he had a farm he was starting up here at Gettysburg. So it was just an idea I dreamed up to help get him there. I went around to Mr. Rayburn and to Lyndon Johnson. I went first to Lyndon Johnson because I knew him better and felt closer to him.

F: You knew him well enough by this time [that] you could talk to him?

C: And I said, "A good gimmick at this dinner"--which was a fun dinner, a kind of a gridiron-- "would be for you to give, you and the speaker to give a calf to President Eisenhower." I had checked with Jim Hagerty and he said he thought this was a good idea.

Well, Lyndon Johnson said, "I'll be glad to . You go talk to the Speaker."

I went and talked to the Speaker and said, "I have Lyndon Johnson to give his half. How about you giving yours?"

He said, "That's fine, but you can't possibly have a calf on the stage. We will just have a picture of it."

Well, I didn't say to Mr. Rayburn that we weren't. But anyway, I did end up with all three men on stage at the Statler Hotel.

F: Where did you get the calf?

C: We got the calf down in Virginia from a dairymen's association, or a meat raiser's association that made it available to us at a very favorable price.

F: Do you remember what kind of calf, what breed?

C: It was the same kind he was raising. I checked it out. I believe it was an Angus. I believe Mr. Eisenhower was an Angus man, and we had checked out what it would be with Jim Hagerty. So he was very pleased to come to the dinner and get the fattened calf. I got all three of them up there on stage and it only was at this point that Speaker Rayburn, who was by this time getting a little hard of seeing, realized that it was not a picture of the calf, but the other--the real thing.

F: This went off then quite successfully?

C: Very. It was great, and it was the highlight of my life up to that point.

F: How did you get the calf in and out?

C: We got it in through an elevator at the back, and the whole staff of the Statler became so intrigued with it that even the maitre d', who was in charge of it and who by hobby was a gardener and raised azaleas, had asked me for the manure in case there was any for his garden.

F: Did you supply him with any?

C: No, it was a very well-behaved calf.

F: A Republican calf, probably.

In these senatorial days, did you and Mr. Johnson--or did Mr. Johnson ever try to work with you to set up certain types of news stories on his activities?

C: Well, we were in the market for news, and his office was my beat. He certainly knew where he wanted to break the stories. Sure, you would go

by and say, "A Canadian dam story is about to break and I hope you'll break it on my time," and he generally would try to accommodate you. He had Booth Mooney and Horace Busby and various people working for him at that point, and you were important to him too, and so it worked two ways.

F: You had pretty regular access to him and didn't have to deal with somebody who did just _____ or press?

C: You had ready access. For one thing you were always in the cloakrooms when the votes were cast on the House side. You would call him off and ask him why he voted a certain way, and he'd give you a statement on why. The same thing was true in the Senate, although in the Senate he got busier, but he was very likely to see the Texas press several times a week and just feed out lots and lots of localized stories. I mean, if ever a man knew that mohair was an important story to San Angelo, it was Lyndon Johnson, or what anything about citrus was to the Rio Grande Valley, and that always water was lifeblood of Texas.

F: In my interviews, I have come across the feeling that Mr. Johnson, among Texas senators at least, was the first really to share credit with local congressmen whenever a story broke, that he gave--

C: He broke it jointly with them and he would always go out of his way to see that you protected them on the story, and so it was a joint announcement with them.

F: Well, now, how did he do that in practice with you for instance?

C: He would tell me that John Young and I are announcing this jointly. He'd make it very clear, or more often because it was a highly efficient office, he would have a press release all there with John Young's name in it. But he went out of his way to say that "we are announcing it jointly,"

and I think it's probably because he had been a congressman and somebody had not announced things jointly that he had worked on.

F: When did you first begin to suspect he might go beyond the borders of Texas in his significance?

C: I think that he's the man in whom you saw ambition, and ambition in the best sense of the word, not only for himself, but for you too. To me that's one of the real qualities of the President. He extracts the best from the people around him. He thinks I can do something better than I can really do it, Joe; but because he thinks so, I try to do it better. To me that's a fantastic quality of leadership. Two real qualities: One is he's open to every idea and I don't care whether it comes from Zephyr Wright or McGeorge Bundy. You can get an idea to him. This is very important to somebody if they're working in the great maze of government, and it's an unusual thing. If there's anything that the government is long on, it is channels, and short on, it's ideas being realized. But I know that any time I have an idea I can get it in front of him. He may, you know, buy one and I'll give nine, but still that's exciting to me. It's something that he's carried clear to the White House. You know, you have an audience of the President of the United States. I think you do this by memo because he can find his time. I've never gone in and outlined an idea verbally, but I can type one out and have it on his pillow at night.

F: You get it the next morning?

C: And the next morning, I will hear back or I will begin to hear back. That's a great quality.

Also, I think that Mrs. Johnson has said over and over, "Lyndon

stretches you." He does. He stretches you beyond your capacity and somehow in the stretching, you grow.

I remember so well. Well, one day when I was working for him for vice president--and this was very heady business for me--we were in the back of the limousine and we were on our way to the White House. He was going into a National Security Council Meeting. I can't even remember what it was that was coming up there, but he said, "Write me out a statement on that." Sitting in the back of that limousine, I jotted down a statement for him to say in this meeting with President Kennedy and other advisers.

Well, you know, I was bowled over. One, I'm not that smart, but I strained every bit of gray matter that I could to produce. I don't know whether it ever produced anything or not, but the fact that he thinks you can do it--

F: He involves you?

C: He makes you try harder.

F: Did Mrs. Johnson play much of a role in these senatorial days beyond just an ordinary senator's wife of being where she was supposed to be and doing the social bits? She hadn't really emerged as a person around Washington yet, had she?

C: No, I think that she was in love with the Senate always. From the moment he was elected Senate majority leader her job expanded because he was trying to win support, friendship, cooperation, from all the members of the Senate. That also means having the understanding of their wives. It meant some entertaining. I think that she fell in love with the Senate and became deeply involved with what he was doing. So many votes were

close. She went to the Hill quite frequently and would have lunch with several Senator's wives and then go to the gallery and listen to the debate.

She has always been involved since she married him, without really knowing it, because you can't be around anybody as catalytic as Lyndon Johnson and not be swept up into it. I think that she has had the best teacher in the world in government, in really practical government. She has probably heard more conversations on close votes and how you get them and the realisms of politics. Now, she has enjoyed this. She has learned by it, and she has become awfully good at it.

An example--gosh, what an example--never was there a day like it in the White House, but when we were going on the whistlestop in 1964-- (The President wanted her to go on the whistlestop because he knew her value. He was sold on a whistlestop, having been on one in 1960, as a way of campaigning. In fact, it was Harry Truman who said to him, "You know, there are a lot of people in this country who don't know where the airport is, but they know where the depot is. Go out and find them." Sure enough, there are more that know where the depot is.) So, before we went to Atlantic City, the President asked me to come up with an idea for how to best campaign in the South.

I met with a number of southern governors in Atlantic City. We began with one idea that governors would maybe have a reception for the first lady in each statehouse, but the Republican legislatures were becoming to be very alive in the South. Some of the governors were worried that they wouldn't be able to use their state capitols for this. As a matter of fact, we weren't too sure it would work either. The South was going

through all the birth pains of civil rights. At that point it was a heck of a lot better to have meetings outdoors perpendicularly.

Anyway, Mrs. Johnson decided to go on the whistlestop. It was a fantastic job of engineering. I went out and advanced it down the train tracks ahead of her and then came back and laid the whole thing out in front of the President.

And again, this is why you love Lyndon Johnson. I tried and tried to meet with Kenny O'Donnell about this campaign. Kenny O'Donnell had no respect for any women in politics whatsoever. The whole attitude of the Kennedy men who worked in this operation was to keep women barefooted and have them on their feet, preferably pregnant, on election day--but nothing beyond that. Kenny O'Donnell wouldn't even meet with Bess and me to talk about this until I laid the whole plan in front of the President. The President yanked him up there on the second floor of the White House and we got out maps and the President was obviously so enthusiastic about what Mrs. Johnson could do on a train trip that we sat there and planned it. I enjoyed watching Kenny O'Donnell being brought around by the President of the United States on the value of women, and he had to suffer three of them--Mrs. Johnson, Bess, and me, for that period.

Anyway, the President knew that Mrs. Johnson would be loved in the South. He knew that he did not want to default the South. They were hearing from so many of their friends that were saying, "You've forgotten about us. We aren't important. Our votes don't count." So her real role was to get on a train and go in eight states, four days, forty-seven speeches, and say, "This President and his wife respect you and you are loved." And to also say, because you had to at each stop, "We stand on

the civil rights program. This is the new South," and try to lift them to something better.

Well, two days before we were going to announce it--and we had the whole thing worked out on paper--Mrs. Johnson (and this is the lesson she had learned from her husband) called me up to the second floor and she said, "Before we put this out in the paper, let's make the courtesy calls." She got on the phone and for about eleven hours we stayed on the phone. She phoned every governor of a southern state and every two senators.

And the conversations were something like this: "Governor, I'm thinking about coming down and campaigning in your state and I'd love your advice."

Of course, we didn't want their advice because we already had the whole thing worked out, but she said, "I'd love your advice." She'd listen for a long while, and they loved to give advice. Then she'd say, "Well, we were thinking about coming through on such-and-such a date and wouldn't you like to get on and ride with us some of the time?" So many times the answer was, "Yes."

There were some hilarious "No's." I'll never forget one senator, Willis Robertson of Virginia.--

F: I know him.

C: When Mrs. Johnson got hold of him, he said he was going to be antelope-hunting. But the fact that she knew to call ahead before they read it in the papers is sheer Johnsonian performance. She had learned it at his elbow and it paid off tremendously because I think we got four of the governors and x-number of senators that we wouldn't have if we had just announced she was going.

F: I was going to ask you about that. You had any number of governors and senators and local people who by that time were disenchanted with Democratic liberalism, progressiveism--whatever you want to call it-- and were beginning to buck the party to some extent. Did they give you any obstacles on the trip or did they allow you to make the trip and they just didn't participate?

C: We were out to woo, and we were out to woo with real courthouse politics on a car in that train. John Ben Shepperd and one or two others--Buford Ellington--got on there, and we'd put on forty or fifty local people. There were some who didn't show, but in a way it was a little bit like the domino theory. The first two or three stops were so successful that the southern politicians began to be getting more and more aboard, and there were more people boarding than we had even counted on. You know how it is. They look to whether the judge or the sheriff showed, and they did show.

There were ugly voices. I guess what we'd look on now was the first echoes of pickets. But when we hit Columbia, South Carolina, there was a group of students and really--probably, I'm not sure whether they were all students or not--but there were people with the drum beating and tried to interfere with the First Lady's speech. And she controlled them. She put her hand up and she said, "My friends, this is a country of free speech, and I have a respect for your viewpoint. But this is my time to give mine." And to our amazement, they were quiet. I don't know whether that could happen again today as turmoil and voices grow louder.

But it was a fabulous trip and the real value of it, if you want to look at it from pure politics, is that for four days you stayed on the

big news shows, Huntley-Brinkley. You had five minutes every night--time you can't buy or afford to buy in a campaign. And we were on it every night because it was unique that a woman was doing it; in some ways, I guess because there was controversy along the tracks.

F: Now, this was to a great extent an all-female cast that made the trip from management standpoint?

C: It was a female-run. We did a whole lot of extras that you don't normally do on trains, with happy hours for the press and with serving the specialties of the house on the dining car of whatever state we were in. Hale Boggs and other southern men were along. But we were calling the signals.

F: Did you go down actually on the train beforehand and make the route?

C: No, I went down by car and plane beforehand and went and kind of shook the cobwebs out of old depots. It's an hilarious thing, what's happening to depots along that track.

F: Well, that intrigued me because I can imagine. Was it all on one railroad line?

C: No, we had about four different lines.

F: I didn't think you could get from here to there anymore.

C: Working that whole system out with the railroad companies was really something. But here's the thing. You got these fantastic telegrams from little two-bit towns along the way. I'll never forget one from a place in North Carolina--Abashie--saying, "Nobody important has been through here since Buffalo Bill. Please have your train stop here."

Well, stop we certainly did, even though it required some of the advance men pulling the weeds in the middle of the tracks, because some of these tracks hadn't been used for a long time. But it is a great way to campaign. You're right in the heart of town in so many of these towns. And if we

had run this time, I was hoping we would do one through Ohio.

But along this track, for instance, in North Carolina there are thirteen stops you can make in one day. It's almost the same in each town. International Harvester is on one side of the street; J.C. Penny's on the other. When you are in the towns of fifty thousand or less, people come from hundreds of miles around. When you get to the cities, they've moved the depot out to the suburb and you have to get off the train and go downtown and lay a wreath. That's just the politics of it.

But at one place, I remember so well, a woman got up to Mrs. Johnson and said, "I got up this morning at three o'clock and milked thirteen cows so I could be there." Well, you know, it's a great way to see the face of your country, and we're not all a sophisticated urban society.

F: What determined where you stopped?

C: Well, timing, space of the trains--we looked at some of the schedules the President had used in 1960 and Harry Truman had used before--the gathering places for the counties; where you would be at different hours of the day. We wanted to go into the towns that nobody else could get into. Anybody can get into Atlanta and out with their hide on even if you're for a civil rights bill. We took Savannah. It's tougher. We took Charleston. It's very much tougher. But she was going to the places that probably nobody else could get in and out of. And in some places, you know, they weren't all applauding.

F: As far as you know, did the President talk with her at great length before she left on how to handle such crowds and what she ought to be doing, or was this pretty much her initiative?

C: They talked a whole lot about it because I felt that he was somebody

that missed terribly being along. He joined us at Raleigh, North Carolina. I said we're going to need beefing up by the time we get to Raleigh, and he said, "I'll be there." He knew we needed a stimulant then to keep the train going. And he was at the end of the tracks in New Orleans. And he was there to say goodbye to us in Alexandria. I always felt that he was sorry he wasn't along every bit of the way. But he was never prouder of her than to be a woman who carried a train through a really difficult part of the country and did it with great crowds and with great applause. We blanketed the press in these areas for days before and afterwards, and he was the most insistent in saying to me,

"How many advance men do you have out?"

And I'd say, "Well, we have twenty guys out throughout towns along the way."

He'd say, "That's just not enough, and I don't want just men. It's the women who'll get out there and get the garden club groups down." And he says, "They have more stickability."

So we ended up sending men and women into every single town.

F: By advance men, did you send them out of here or were they people from that area? Were they people from here who originally came from that area? In other words, who were you sending?

C: They were generally people from here who were originally from that area, but people who had either worked on the Hill for congressmen or senators he knew. We used an awful lot of staff people who had worked for Senator Russell of Georgia, or for some of the senators--Ervin from North Carolina for there. They know the territory. They know the bases to touch. They know how to get the crowds.

But the thing that made this unique is we put out about sixty women who were out. They would go into a town three or four days before and have press conferences and boom the fact that the "Lady Bird Special" is coming to town.

One of them was named Mrs. Robert E. Lee, and I wish to gosh everyone of their names had been Mrs. Robert E. Lee. It was a great asset.

But all of these good-looking women, able women, were very much considered at the head of the ranks by the President. He never underestimated their value, and he was the one that insisted on advance women.

F: When he came along and joined you as at Raleigh, did it tend to take the spotlight somewhat away from her, or did it just give her a little respite?

C: It boomed the crowd. He made the speech. She's not a rally speaker. She wasn't making that kind of thing. We filled a tremendous colosseum there. It boosted the trip. It gave her the respite, but it also helped put the trip on the map, too.

F: How did you determine which towns to go to?

C: Where you needed votes; where the tracks went; where you could get to by nightfall; all the things that shape train schedules.

F: In general, what sort of hour arrangement did you follow?

C: Being on the back of the platform about seven a.m.--the farmers get up early--for a first show on the back of the platform. Through dusk--dark and you could get ten to fifteen stops in a day that way with thousands of people at each stop.

F: Did you sleep on the train?

C: Yes. Slept on the train. We had press cars on the train. The press had their typewriters and their bathroom and their berth all on the same

train, which also had advantages.

It is a fantastic way to campaign. It's the best of all ways. We had two hundred and twenty-five reporters. When we were going to leave here, I guessed we had fifty, and we had two hundred and twenty-five. They were paying their way. Their papers were paying their way. We started turning down-

F: It must have been an experience for some of them.

C: --foreign press, because we didn't have room, and we weren't running in Europe. But at least fifteen foreign reporters were along. Mrs. Johnson saw them privately just to try to clue them in on what American politics was like.

There were a lot of reporters who were along who, interestingly enough, don't like to fly and are scared to admit it. They all wanted to cover a political trip, and so the train trip was going to be their brush with politics.

To me, the biggest thing that she did politically was the whistlestop. It went so well that when we got to the ranch, the President, who was so proud of her he was about to burst, asked us to go on a flying whistle-stop through Arkansas, Oklahoma and I believe it was Northern Texas.

F: Did she hold up pretty well under this constant--well, it must have been a constant pounding.

C: Yes. She doesn't like to go beyond the strength of her endurance, because she likes to do everything she does well and the best she can and not be fragmented. We were at the end of our rope physically by four days.

F: It was a long enough trip?

C: But the President talked to her many times along the way, and there's no tonic for her like his words of confidence and faith. It's just like a magic wand has been waved over her.

F: Well, let's go back to these days about 1960. You had had just an ordinary, or little more than ordinary, reporter's association with the Senator and with Mrs. Johnson?

C: Well, you felt part of the Texas family.

F: You were a home district girl.

C: Right.

F: You and your husband both, which makes some difference, I'm sure. You could share--

C: We were in their homes a lot, but then they would scoop up on a Sunday afternoon press friends and staff friends.

F: What do you mean? Just get on the phone and call a few people to come over?

C: Yes. Come over, sit on the back porch, have hamburgers and homemade ice cream.

F: Who turned the freezer?

C: Well, they had a freezer. Zephyr Wright turned the freezer.

F: And this happened regularly?

C: Quite regularly. His place was a mecca, a gathering place, for Texans in Washington. It was a place where you were likely to see Sam Rayburn, where people were likely to bring their kids, where if there was anybody interesting in town--Ed Clark or anybody--he'd be there. The subject would always be politics and everybody would be included on it.

You would often see some films that Mrs. Johnson had made in his very early days, which are great character studies. The courthouse faces of Marshall Courthouse, particularly. But you knew you were going to hear the liveliest conversation in town there.

F: He has a reputation as a great talker, but he's equally a great listener, is he not?

- C: Yes. And he never forgets anything you say. He may not act like he heard it at the time, but it'll come back months later in a word or a deed. And, of course, with Mr. Rayburn, he was king. Mr. Rayburn was so much Mr. Speaker and so many gifts flowed from Mr. Rayburn that when he was around, nobody took over the conversation.
- F: When he started campaigning unofficially for the presidency in 1960, did either you or Les have any involvement at all in that, advisory or otherwise?
- C: For the presidency? Well, you wanted him to win, sure. The easiest thing to get in Washington is free advice, particularly from newspaper people. But there is a thrill in having been a reporter and watched somebody climb up the political ladder. There's a great sense of being for that horse. You know, you don't get paid great amounts of money in the newspaper business; you get bylines, but sometimes you see your guy that you knew as a congressman get ahead. This is a thrill to you.
- F: Part of you goes along with him.
- C: Yes. And so we were cheering for him and, sure, giving suggestions--ideas. He talked to me about Mrs. Johnson having out the newspaper women, but it's a very informal kind of thing. It was perfectly natural that he would because I had been here. I knew them. I'd been in a position of leadership as president of the Women's Press Club and so we did.
- F: I've run into some criticism of him from his friends who have said that he did not give them a green light quickly enough in 1960 to work for his nomination for the presidency. Was this ever discussed with you?
- C: Well, there was always griping among those friends because they thought that they could get the residency for him and he was playing his cards too close to his chest.

F: Why do you think he held back?

C: Because men are made by their past. He had run in one election and had been counted out by a very narrow margin. He had won another one by a very narrow margin. You don't play things loosely when something so small could make a difference in the fate of things. You're likely to hold your cards very close to your chest.

I think it explains the whole difference between the way a Johnson or a Kennedy would play the election--I mean, would play a campaign. You know, Jack Kennedy never really had to ask for anything. It came. He always won by big margins. He never was wanting for funds for elections, and he never suffered a loss.

When you have had to count votes closely, you're much more likely to weigh things with more caution. Johnson had a lot to lose by throwing his hat flamboyantly in the ring when he had been king of the Senate, and he wasn't sure he wanted to lose it. He didn't want to risk losing what he had already gained for himself through considerable effort.

Texas shapes it too. He was winning as a Democrat in all of the years that Texas was going through the evolution of becoming a two-party state, and that doesn't make for free and easy politics.

F: Did you go to Los Angeles?

C: Yes.

F: What did you do there?

C: I went there as a reporter and I went on to Chicago to the Republican convention as a reporter. In Los Angeles I saw the Johnsons. I was not a bit surprised that he accepted the vice presidency.

F: Did you have any advance idea that it might be offered?

C: No, I didn't, because I wasn't that close to the "throne" and the room. I remember how resentful some of the Texans were that he did accept it.

F: From your reportorial standpoint, do you think he had a chance for the presidential nomination?

C: Yes, and the vote showed he did, too. Because wasn't it 480 that he got on the first roll call?

F: He was second. Ballot pledges.

C: I thought he had a chance. I thought the Kennedys were--you know, they were swashbuckling. They had the headlines of the Los Angeles Times. They had the walkie-talkies. They were a train that was churning ahead and it was going to probably be impossible to stop.

Johnson's strength was the tremendous respect of senators--not governors, senators. And while this can count for something, it didn't add up to enough.

F: Under what circumstances did you see the Johnsons in Los Angeles?

C: Well, I saw him at press conferences; I saw him at caucuses; I was covering him. I saw Mrs. Johnson quite frequently in a kind of an informal, both reporter and friend, way--directed newswomen to her who were trying to cover her.

Booth Mooney was actually the one who was getting newswomen in and out who wanted to interview her, but they would call me and say, you know, "Can you be helpful? Mrs. Johnson is going to see fifteen newswomen, now what are they likely to ask her?" So it was just the kind of advice that you would give a friend.

Then I went on to Chicago to the Republican convention and I was there when Mrs. Johnson called me and said--I'll never forget the words--

"Lyndon and I've been talking about it. We've got a campaign ahead, and I'm going to need someone to be traveling with me and helping me. We wonder if you will share the great adventure of our lives."

F: That was nicely put. It would have been difficult to turn down, wouldn't it?

C: It was, and I guess it was the line that changed mine. I did do some thinking about it for very selfish reasons. I'm scared as hell of airplanes and I knew that with Lyndon Johnson, you would fly in all kinds of weather and land on all kinds of strips and that he would defy the elements to get there. I wasn't sure I wanted to subject myself to that physical torture for me to fly.

F: You've had a rough eight years?

C: My son is the one that changed my mind. He was about twelve years old. And he said, "But Mommy, there never has been a bird that crash-landed, and you'll be flying with Lady Bird."

So I thought, "Well, if these kids have that much faith and want me to do it that much, I just will not let a foolish fear rob me of a great experience." And I've never regretted it. It has been the greatest time of my life.

F: How long did you meditate on this offer--or agonize might be better.

C: All the way from Chicago driving back to Washington. About five days of there and then here. Then I started going out to the house and working with her on how we would campaign. We met with the Kennedy girls and again decided--

F: By the Kennedy girls, are you talking about the female contingent on the staff or the sisters?

C: The sisters and some of their advance women out of Boston who were cousins.

They had used the Kennedy "tea party" technique in Boston very well. They thought this might be useful all over. We met with them and our first mission was August of 1960--hot as hell--for us to take two of the Kennedy sisters, Mrs. Shriver and Ethel Kennedy, to Texas with Mrs. Johnson. In other words, the wife of the Vice President would be inviting them to come and be her friends in Texas. The President thought this was a good idea and also it did the very real thing of testing the Bible Belt.

F: By the President now, you're talking about Lyndon Johnson?

C: I'm talking about Lyndon Johnson. I'm so sorry. I perhaps shouldn't refer to him that way. He and Jack Kennedy were both still in the Senate. In August in the Senate they were trying to cram through a heck of a lot of bills in this time and couldn't leave. We set out to go to about six stops in Texas, beginning in Houston, in Dallas, Wichita Falls, Odessa-Midland, El Paso, winding up at the ranch.

Do you want some amusing sidelights of it?

F: Yes.

C: Well, there were some. We had a chartered plane. We had some Kennedy-Johnson ladies in gay outfits. We departed from Washington with lots of photographers out there to see these three females in the campaigning family--Mrs. Johnson and the two Kennedy girls--off.

We thought a great picture that would usher us into Texas would be Eunice and Ethel with Texas hats and that this would precede us on the wires to Texas--and we'd get a good welcome--because we weren't really sure how a Bible Belt state like Texas was going to receive two Roman Catholics. It hadn't been tested. Also, Texas was still not sure they wanted their favorite son running on the ticket. I think they went through

a whole evolution of things. Well, the two Kennedy girls were great and gay, but they sure didn't want to put on Texas hats. I kept thinking, you know, if we had been up in Boston we would have been glad to put on a derby or a homburg. But they practically sat on them. I kept making them try to throw the hat up in the air and they were embarrassed. They didn't quite know how to handle it. It was a whole different part of the world than they were used to.

But anyway, we went to Houston. Lines and lines of women came to the tea party out at the Shamrock Hotel. Mrs. Johnson, the afternoon before, had sprained her ankle. She didn't ever tell the President this. It got bigger and bigger. It was more and more swollen, and you can imagine what it was like.

F: Did she fall?

C: She had turned it, hurrying to do something. It got larger and larger and standing on your feet to shake hands with five thousand women at the Shamrock Hotel didn't do it any good. We left on the plane that night to head for Dallas where we were going to have a brunch the next morning. Really it was a terrific lesson in how to be a woman, I thought, because as soon as she got on the plane I got her shoes off of her so she could rest her foot, and she didn't let us pay any attention to the fact that she had been in pain. And she chatted with the people along the way and told them how successful she thought the party had been.

We got to the hotel in Dallas and I got her up to her suite. Then we had a room for Eunice and Ethel to share. I was informed that they did not want to share the same suite, so we had to separate them--which wasn't easy to do with equal suites. But that was done. So then

Mrs. Johnson got in bed and I got a doctor up to try to treat it.

About this time, the President called, Lyndon Johnson, from the Senate Office Building, as I thought to myself, "From the cool, air-conditioned Senate Office Building," when we'd been through an August day in Texas. He was eager to know how was everything. And so she said--and I'll never forget it--she said: "It was good." She never overstated it. She said, "The counter at the door counted five thousand and twenty-one bodies," I'm not sure that's the exact number. She gave him the exact specific. She said, "So-and-so was there from the Longshoreman's Union. So-and-so was there from the banks." In other words, she knew the names that would show how acceptable we were, the keys to the many factions. She gave it to him in about five minutes, and then she said, "But, how are you, darling?"

Well, I thought to myself, you know, I would have said--being a lesser woman--"Goddamn it, my foot hurts, and why aren't you and Jack Kennedy down here campaigning for yourselves?" But that's what makes a tremendous woman. She never once mentioned her ankle. That feminine business "But how are you, darling." It was a lesson. I tried it out a few times on Les, and he thought I'd lost my mind. But then he's used to a different kind of female.

F: He hasn't been broken in right.

C: We went on to Wichita Falls, and that was the most interesting test of the Bible-belt, because it's very Protestant country.

F: In John Tower country.

C: Very Protestant too. There was a tea, and at each of these teas they'd shake hands with everybody. Again, the Kennedy girls were always trying

to hustle everybody by. Mrs. Johnson wanted to spend time with each person. Of course, she knew them. But the Kennedy girls would send the Kennedy advance woman back of the lines to me saying, "Mrs. Johnson is taking too long with the line."

And so I would go to Mrs. Johnson and whisper in her ear, "They say you're taking too long with the line."

She would just smile and say, "But this is my state."

Then the three would get up and speak, and it really was unique in politics, I think, to see the three women speaking for men in their lives--making a political speech before what really looked like a Colonial Dame audience. It was the best show Wichita Falls had seen in a long time. You had a feeling that a whole lot of those women were there, not because they were Democrats, not because they were interested in the vote, but because they couldn't stand to miss the conversation of the town for the next month from this traveling roadshow.

Well, anyway, another great advantage was that the Kennedy girls looked like their brother. They sound like him. Eunice, you know, just his voice. So next to having the candidate there and next to having President Kennedy out there trying to campaign, to have someone who mirrored him was a tremendous effect.

F: It wasn't hard to accept the illusion that he was there?

C: Not a bit. Well, it was just a fabulous time.

Another funny thing was in Amarillo, when we were in Amarillo. All of these women were coming through with the sign of their hometown like Happy, Texas and some of those funny-named towns. Eunice said, "These towns couldn't possibly have these names. You've made them up."

F: It was an education for the Kennedys?

C: Yes.

F: In the years since, you have gotten, it seems to me, a marvelously sort of-- it's flexible but still a formula for handling these things. You were pretty much playing it by ear at this time, weren't you?

C: Very much. And, you know, I look back now and wish I knew all then that I've accumulated since.

F: No previous presidential campaign had had the female contingent as involved?

C: Never, never like this.

F: How did you arrive at decisions and procedures?

C: Like what?

F: Like where to go and how to handle it once you got there and whom to send ahead and so forth. I mean, you're giving women for the first time a kind of equal rights in politics.

C: Johnson did some of it. He had had advance men he could count on. He would do some of it by phone. You know, he'd say: "Cliff Carter, those women are going to be down there and you go to the people in the town that count and let's get a crowd."

So a lot of the advancing was done by Johnson over the phone. A lot of it was done simply by Mrs. Johnson's getting on the phone to her friends. They really have always had long lists of friends that they call and who are glad to get out and help. It's a great strength of theirs, and they never forget them--never forget them.

F: I don't want to digress from the campaign, but this is something that has intrigued me, that you've touched. Do they use any sort of a card file system on acquaintances, because both of them seem to have a facility for

pulling out the right name at the right place at the right time?

C: No, I don't think it's a card file thing. They have Christmas lists that are dog-eared by now because they've grown with the years.

F: That's expected.

C: She's a great one on a guest list to study it--and I mean really study it--before the dinner, and to know something, "Now, what can I talk to John Steinbeck about. What has he written besides Here's Charlie?"

I'll get a phone call from the beauty parlor where she'll be going over a list and say, "Would you phone Brentano's and get the names of the most recent books?" I think it's a kind of consideration where she wants their moment in the White House to be remembered. She's willing to do the legwork to make it memorable for them.

F: Well, I have, in my own experience, had the President just out of a clear blue sky ask me about some friend of mine that I was surprised-- He makes that personal association that makes you know he knows--

C: He has a fantastic memory.

F: And it can hook people. I've watched it work.

C: Yes. It's a fantastic memory and a fantastic appreciation for people.

F: Let's get back to the campaign. What else did you do during that summer and fall?

C: Well, seventy-one days we worked like crazy. We found out quickly that Mrs. Johnson and various assortments of Kennedy ladies were so valuable on their own that it was almost ridiculous for them to campaign with husband or brother. So we'd peel off. Mrs. Johnson would go meet Mrs. Joseph Kennedy in North Carolina and we'd do a couple of receptions up there.

F: This was all being handled where? By the Democratic National Committee,

by the Kennedys? At what point did you have your traffic directed?

C: The Kennedy women had an assortment of cousins out of Boston who have done this for years. In fact, I had the feeling that they had done it for Honey Fitz. It was rather inflexible pattern. We made it more flexible. But they would call and say, "Could Mrs. Johnson join Mrs. Joseph Kennedy for two days in North Carolina?" Then we would work on our friends there to line up things that went with us.

But we found that it made a much better news impact to have the combination of Kennedy-Johnson people, and the Kennedys wanted that Johnson name in the South, particularly.

F: Did you select places that the two male candidates could not get to, or were there places that you thought, maybe, were more suitable for women than men?

C: The first really is where the male candidates weren't going to go. Sometimes you overlapped and it was a different dimension because you were having an afternoon party for a great many women. But in most cases you were going where the two male candidates couldn't possibly find the time to go.

F: Did you ever hear any spoken appreciation for Mrs. Johnson's efforts by the Kennedys?

C: Yes, I did. Ethel, who was the warmest, would say how great Lady Bird is quite frequently. Then two other examples: On election night, you will remember we were in the Driskill Hotel and didn't really know for sure that we had won until about seven o'clock in the morning. Bobby Kennedy called, and he said, "Lady Bird carried Texas for the President." I presume that referred to Dallas, where she had--I think the state was

incensed when Mrs. Johnson had her hair mussed and had that mink coat crowd being ugly. But I think it also might have been Bobby being gallant, but he said, "Lady Bird carried Texas."

Then I know that when the Johnsons went to Hyannis Port to meet with the Kennedys shortly after the Republican convention--it was the first trip after he had been on the ticket--Mrs. Johnson had some time with Jacqueline Kennedy. She told me that Jackie showed her her house, and Jackie said: "I feel so totally inadequate, so totally at a loss. Here I am at the time my husband needs me most, and I'm pregnant; and I don't know how to do anything." I mean, she acted like it was a whole strange world.

Mrs. Johnson looked around her house and said, "Well, you know what? This is a charming house and it has your touch all over it." There were little sketches of sailboats and so forth that Jackie had done, and she said: "If I were you, I'd find one or two reporters and have them in and talk about your home. You could do that."

Well, it interested me very much that a few weeks later, and I think it was practically the only thing that Jackie was able to do in the campaign, she was interviewed in that house, talking about those. And I think that the idea grew from Mrs. Johnson's conversation with her and giving her confidence.

F: Showing her where her strength was. Were you in the Baker-Adolphus Hotel fiasco?

C: Yes, I was.

F: Do you want to describe that?

C: Well--

F: You had come over from Fort Worth, hadn't you? Or had Mrs. Johnson come?

C: We joined the President there and were going into the Baker Hotel.
Were we staying at the Baker or Adolphus?

F: You went upstairs to the Baker and then crossed over to the Adolphus.

C: Yes, the Adolphus was where the luncheon was to be held.

F: Right across the street.

C: And Mrs. Johnson and [Sen.] Johnson came across the street. He had been told that the place was filling up and milling with Bruce Alger, who was very conspicuously there with ugly signs saying, "Johnson is a traitor," hideous words--lots and lots of females crowding in that lobby.

F: You felt this was organized some time back?

C: Yes. You felt it was organized, and you felt that Bruce Alger and various people in his organization had been on the phone to get all of his new rich Texas Republican supporters down there. They shouted ugly things at Johnson and Mrs. Johnson as they walked through the lobby. You were pressed like a sardine. The President just held his head high. Mrs. Johnson didn't like being maligned, but she walked with him. And they walked right through it.

F: Was there any discussion of maybe outflanking them?

C: Yes, I think that the Secret Service had wanted them to go in a back door. But the Secret Services always wants you to go in a back door, and the President just thought he wasn't about to do that.

Then we got to the head table, and I know so much that I--Well, one thing that Mrs. Johnson said later was, "I'll always remember that Stanley Marcus walked by his best charge customers to be a Democrat in Dallas publicly that day, and it was not the popular thing to do."

Also, I remember that on the plane that night the President really was hurt that this would happen. He had done a heck of a lot of things for Dallas in his life. He had worked with those people. That night we were on the plane and I said, "Oh, they were nothing but riffraff down there."

He said, "No, I looked at those women and they were nicely dressed and they were well-raised women." In other words, they were daughters of friends.

And he started reading the dirty ad that had been in the paper and nearly every one on the list he could name some active friendship. Maybe he had found out when the war was on that their son was alive in the Philippines in a prisoner of war camp. He just went down the list. It did hurt him deeply inside.

I do think it helped turn Texas, because everybody jumped on him editorially--jumped on Bruce Alger--and particularly taking issue on the fact that Mrs. Johnson had to suffer this kind of situation.

But she also had a way of turning a bad event into a plus. And it was not unlike what happened on the Eartha Kitt thing years later at the White House. We got thousands of letters, just really infuriated Texans who were mad at the bad behavior in Dallas of what we called "the Mink Coat Mob." To everyone of them she wrote, and she said, "Well, what I remember isn't the ugly voices outside, but those five hundred people inside the room who came there to applaud the Democratic Party." And that was the same kind of attitude she took on the Eartha Kitt incident.

F: Are these letters answered?

C: Yes.

F: I mean when people--

C: Oh, absolutely. This is the most letter-answering administration you'll ever have. It's the training of being a congressman.

F: They see that if you send in something, you get a reply?

C: And not a perfunctory one. Something that tries to say something.

F: Let's go now to election night, 1960, which was a long night. Can you describe what you were doing that might take in the whole day? If you can bring it back together. You had a crowd at Municipal Auditorium in Austin. You had the presumed victory celebration down at the Driskill that never did come off because you never could get the votes in. What were you doing during that time and what reactions did you see on either the Vice President-elect or his first lady?

C: Well, on election eve there isn't much you can do except just wait for the votes to come in and hope that you make your statements to the press at the right time and not prematurely.

We were all dead tired. You had used just all the borrowed time you had. You feel like, as Mrs. Johnson says, "cooked spaghetti," which is really the way you feel.

And I'll never forget that afternoon. Johnson stretched out on a bed to get some sleep.

F: Where was he, at the ranch?

C: No, in the Driskill Hotel in a suite. And so, in a little while--we were in another room, I've forgotten what we were doing. I think maybe Mrs. Johnson might have been resting or getting her hair done. But anyway, he came in his robe in a minute and he said, "Well, I lay down twice to try to go to sleep and every time I did, John Tower's sound truck came by on the outside of the hotel, saying 'double your pleasures, scratch Lyndon Johnson twice.'"

Here was the man who was being nominated vice president of the United

States--elected that night--having to listen to that.

Then that evening we waited around, watched votes, had in people like John and Nellie Connally. I remember that Mrs. Johnson and I made some hot chocolate and served it around the room. All eyes were glued on television. Jesse Kellam got a lot of complaints because he was giving too many local figures on local races when we were really interested in the big stake. Then, finally, when it became apparent that we weren't going to get any news, about two o'clock Mrs. Johnson went to bed and almost everybody went to bed. But who slept? Certainly not Lyndon Johnson.

The next morning about six o'clock in the morning--Oh, first, we had gone across the street to get some scrambled eggs at--what's the name of that place?

F: PK.

C: P-K. But anyway, then we came back and the next morning about seven o'clock in the morning--when television had come on again with reports--I remember going into the living room which was littered with coffee cups and cigarettes and everything. There sat Lyndon Johnson alone, watching television and I thought: "Here is the moment of victory, and everybody in his forces were all so flattened out that he was having to watch it alone."

As the votes came in, showing more and more that the states he was strong in--the South and other states where Johnson was the popular guy--were carrying it, he said, and I'll never forget the line: "That Minnesota boy couldn't have carried this ticket, could he?" And he was referring to Orville Freeman.

I had never until that moment known that Orville Freeman had really been a serious contender for the second spot with Kennedy, but I would

gather from the President's statement that he really had. I didn't press him. I didn't quiz him. But it was obvious that nobody but Johnson could have helped carry that ticket to victory because it was so close.

F: Were you ever aware of any statements by Jack Kennedy--or Bobby, for that matter--on what Johnson had done in the South other than the public statements that were made over victory generally?

C: No. But I might not have been in a position to know. I know that I thought I sort of deserved a letter of gratitude, because I had worked like hell and I would have cherished it. You know, you were thrilled with the victory. I would have cherished a letter from President Kennedy thanking me for my part in the election--small as it was--and I never got it. They don't say thank you the way we say thank you. The President says thank you. Lyndon Johnson says thank you over and over. They never have learned how to say their thank yous.

F: What did you do in the period then between November and January?

C: Well, I rested. I slept. I helped Mrs. Johnson do an awful lot of letters and thank yous for everybody that had been in the campaign.

In the meantime, Lyndon Johnson was saying to me he hoped that I would keep on working with them. He wasn't making any serious overtures, and I wanted to go back to the newspaper business, I thought. But you'd been swept up. You'd been caught up. So the next April he called me back and he told me that he wanted me to work for him. He was going on a trip to Senegal and by then I had sand in my shoes and the excitement of--

F: You were back at work?

C: I was back working with Les. So he urged me to go and I went on the plane with him on this first trip. I helped work out Mrs. Johnson's schedule,

which he kept latching onto and tying in with us, because it was a good schedule. It was going out and seeing the country--into a little fishing village and going into the market place. He was thrilled with the trip, I think. So then he asked me if I wanted to come work for him and be his executive assistant, and I did. Bill Moyers was leaving about this time, and so I did.

F: Where were you--over in E.O.B.? Where did you work from?

C: Physically? The Hill, his office in the U.S. Capitol.

F: You were working up there?

C: Yes. Can we close this up for today? I'm about talked out, Joe.

F: All right.

C: Thank you.

[End of Tape 1 of 1 and Interview I]

GENERAL SERVICES ADMINISTRATION
NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND RECORDS SERVICE
LYNDON BAINES JOHNSON LIBRARY

Legal Agreement pertaining to the Oral History Interviews of Elizabeth
S. Carpenter

In accordance with the provisions of Chapter 21 of Title 44, United States Code, and subject to the terms and conditions hereinafter set forth, I, Elizabeth S. Carpenter of Austin, Texas, do hereby give, donate and convey to the United States of America all my rights, title and interest in the tape recordings and transcripts of personal interviews conducted on December 3, 1968, April 4, 1969, May 15, 1969, August 27, 1969, and February 2, 1971 in Washington, D. C., and prepared for deposit in the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library.

This assignment is subject to the following terms and conditions:

(1) The transcripts shall be available for use by researchers as soon as they have been deposited in the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library.

(2) The tape recordings shall be available to those researchers who have access to the transcripts.

(3) During my lifetime, I retain all copyright in the material given to the United States of America by the terms of this instrument. Thereafter, the copyright in both the transcripts and tape recordings shall pass to the United States government. During my lifetime, researchers may publish brief "fair use" quotations from the transcripts and tape recordings without my express consent in each case.

(4) Copies of the transcripts and the tape recordings may be provided by the Library to researchers upon request.

(5) Copies of the transcripts and the tape recordings may be deposited in or loaned to institutions other than the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library.

Elizabeth S. Carpenter
Donor

Sept 17, 1979

Date

Walter M. Steader
Archivist of the United States

ACTING

OCT 10 1979

Date