

INTERVIEW II

DATE: April 4, 1969  
INTERVIEWEE: ELIZABETH CARPENTER  
INTERVIEWER: JOE B. FRANTZ  
PLACE: Mrs. Carpenter's home, Washington, D.C.

Tape 1 of 1

F: Liz, we'll dispense with formalities on last names. Did Mrs. Johnson show any tendency toward a separate public personality prior to the election in 1965?

C: Yes. From the time we went into the White House, you had newswomen saying, "What is your role?" "What is your role?" And Mrs. Johnson's reply at that time was, "My role as first lady will emerge in deeds, not words."

F: The President made a magnificent speech to Congress, a State of the Union speech in 1964 right after he had taken office. He talked about the poverty situation around the country and particularly the declining industries, like coal mining, where you were trying with the Area Redevelopment Administration to pump new skills into coal miners and the next generations. This was January. And I wrote a memo to the President and Mrs. Johnson and said, why didn't we got with Bill Battel, the head of ARA, to see what had happened in the Scranton-Wilkes Barre area. It was discussed by the President and Mrs. Johnson and Pierre Salinger on the plane on the way back. And Salinger very much recommended it and thought it would be good.

This actually set the tone, I think, of Mrs. Johnson's years in the White House. It wasn't separate so much, but underlining the President's dreams and goals and purposes.

We gathered up a press plane, which we chartered, and sixty reporters signed up on that initial trip. I must say they welcomed very much a first lady who was going out and be the eyes and ears and an extra set of legs for her husband. And we flew in the grimmest of all weather to that part of Pennsylvania and saw what they were trying to do in making auto mechanics out of the sons of coal miners because the coal mines had gone.

One of the interesting people, who was an escort officer and a very gracious one, was the wife of the Republican governor of Pennsylvania, Mrs. Bill Scranton. And we spent an entire day there, with Mrs. Johnson making speeches to graduation classes of small colleges, going through the training schools.

F: Was this late spring?

C: No, it was January. My memory is that it was right on the heels of the President's program. Now, forty trips in her tenure resulted from that, not all of them based on the poverty angle or what the government was doing, but that to me was the singlemost thing that set the tone. From then on, the world and the press here knew that they had a First lady who [was] not unlike Eleanor Roosevelt in being an extra set of eyes and ears for her husband.

F: Was there any particular discussion of the President's going on this trip, or was it taken for granted from the beginning that-- ?

C: None whatsoever. It was that she would go and see and bring him facts. And she echoed this in every speech, "I'm going home and tell Lyndon tonight what a fine job you're doing."

Now the rest of that year was taken up in accepting various speaking engagements because that one was so successful that it propelled others. And we went to Lick Branch, Kentucky to a one-room schoolhouse and she turned on the

lights there--the first lights that had ever come to that little country schoolhouse.

F: How was this place chosen?

C: This place was chosen in a letter and an invitation that came in. She was the first person who went up into what was later known as Appalachia-- it was known as Appalachia then but became more labeled as Appalachia later, and was shown around by the same superintendent of schools in that little county that had shown Eleanor Roosevelt around twenty-five years before. And you had the feeling that they hadn't seen anybody much since Eleanor Roosevelt, and not a great deal had happened.

F: Not much progress in the meantime.

C: No. We were campaigning really without labeling it campaigning, until you got into the heat of the summer. But we were going into the states where the President would need help.

F: Now, hypothetically on this matter of speech-making and trips, I am a school teacher, a group of school kids, a superintendent, whatever; I write the the First Lady that I would like to have her come to my school. What happens when the letter gets in? How does this finally get to a decision with Mrs. Johnson?

C: Well, it gets to my desk first.

F: You see all such invitations?

C: I saw all speech invitations. Sometimes it comes in a letter, sometimes it comes through a congressman or senator who wanted her help and who was up for election. I'd check out a number of things. I checked it out several different ways. I checked it out with the Democratic Committee; I checked it out with the people the President knew in each state where you could say "Is this worth doing; will it make an impact; is it worth the First Lady's time?"

F: Are you trying to get a particular mood at a particular time sometimes?

C: Yes, that has something to do with it, but actually in that first flush of invitations, I think that we were trying to vary the geography of where she would go and I think that we were trying to help people who were Johnson friends in the Congress.

Now, one of the trips we took that year was to the West, and this was from Stewart Udall's urging; and we put it together in what we would call a package trip Utah and Wyoming. And Udall was impressed with the First Lady and invited her to dedicate the Flaming Gorge Dam. It was the first time that any woman in the country dedicated a project of that size--dam. And while we were there, we were also hoping that some of the effect would be to slough off and help the re-election of two senators: Moss of Utah and Gale McGee in Wyoming.

F: Both of whom had hard races that year.

C: Both of whom had hard races. This is really where the seed of the beautification program began to germinate.

F: Before we get into that, this was not, though, at this time ostensibly political? The political effects were kind of planned incidentals?

C: They were a planned incidental; she was there to dedicate the dam and to see some projects that the Senators wanted her to see, but it certainly was helpful to the two Senators who were there, and certainly you weighed in the fact that both of them had been helpful in bringing the projects to fruition.

F: Right. Now, you said you planted your beautification seeds there.

C: Well, if you want to talk about where was the beautification idea born, it really was born in Lady Bird Johnson in Karnack, Texas when she was

a child. She loved beauty; she loved those piney woods; she loves going out in a bateau on Caddo Lake and seeing the cypress trees and their gnarled roots. Those were the things that she really carried with her all her life, and she spoke of it in a speech in the Grand Tetons at Jackson Hole on September 7, 1965; and she said, "Each of [our] actions sprang from what nurtures us, and what nurtured me was walking through the piney woods in my own deep East Texas."

She went on to say that then life and faith had led her to be married to the President of the United States and that your loves take a different shape-- in this case, an organizational shape. And she said, "My husband's life has led me to an organizational effort in beautification, and if I can serve this goal then I'm most happy to actively work away at it. I will settle for an epitaph 'She planted three trees.'"

There were many things that happened before that speech was made when she was reflecting on what led her down the beautification path.

After the election, which came as the result of a whistle-stop trip on her part, a really frantic year of nine months of hard work at what Mrs. Johnson called "early sunups and cold pancakes," because that's what campaigning consists of, the President was having a parade of cabinet members in and out of the Ranch to talk about their programs. He wanted to come to Congress in January of 1965 with a really virile program that would lift this country to something better than it had ever known, whether it was environmental improvement, improvement of the economy, the ghettos having hope, whatever it was-- whatever the aim was. One of the callers was the Secretary of the Interior Stewart Udall. Udall had talked generally to Mrs. Johnson when he accompanied us on that trip in August to the West. He loved the scenic

beauty; they were his parts; and he began to see that he had a very responsive first lady to the wonders of nature.

F: Had Secretary Udall known Mrs. Johnson particularly before this trip?

C: No, he had not. They had known each other, but not any-- were dozens of people she knew better.

So at the Ranch, where he was outlining what he hoped the President would include in the State of the Union message and what he would subsequently send in a Natural Beauty message to Congress, he found that the First Lady was a very attentive and knowledgeable participant in the conversation; that she had a mind that grasped... This is not to say the President didn't. But I think he was more startled--Udall was--in finding that the First Lady knew something about landscape and wanted to do something about it.

She said to him that this would be something she would like to work on. Bear in mind, Mrs. Johnson is not a club-woman type. She's not a person who thinks in terms of committees and structured organizational movements.

C: No. She had great respect for their handiwork, but she herself was not that kind of a personality. But she did give Udall the distinct feeling that she would be a willing voice and a worker for the whole business of improving the natural environment.

F: Do you remember how the two of them got together on this particular trip? What kicked off the whole thing?

C: Well, she was listening to Secretary Udall outline his plan and they were then going around the Ranch, which includes some, as you know, riding around the Ranch and talking to the visitors there. He discussed it with her and some of it was a follow-up of their own joint enjoyment of the scenic beauty of the Grand Tetons.

F: To digress just a moment--two things on this particular incident. One is that in the papers following the assassination of President Kennedy for some time into the Johnson Administration the pundits invariably said that Secretary Udall would be the first to go. As we know, he stayed until the end. Do you think that his association with Mrs. Johnson gave him a sort of dimension and perhaps an endorser in the White House, or were the pundits just way off base?

C: I think the pundits were way off base, because the President had no stomach for firing anyone. He wanted to keep what team was here that was willing to keep at it and keep working. And his battle-cry at that point was "Let us continue." Looking back, I'm sure there are people who can find errors in that. I do not think it was an opportunistic effort on Udall's part. He is a believer. He found an ally in his belief.

And she said to Udall, "When you go back to Washington, call Liz and tell her about our conversation."

Udall did call me and the nature of the conversation was to say this would be a great project for the First Lady. He said if she would take the city of Washington and try to make an effort to make it better-looking, it would be a superb complement to the [Potomac] river. And he also was working to get the Potomac River unpolluted and made into a scenic river. The river would be the President's kind of personal Washington project, and the city would be Mrs. Johnson's. He asked me to set up a meeting with her when she got back the first of the year. And I did, and Secretary and Mrs. Udall came. Mrs. Johnson and I met with them in the Queen's Room sitting under the portrait of Mrs. Teddy Roosevelt.

Our object at that point was to convince Mrs. Johnson to take the bull by the horns, so to speak, and to form a committee that would have the podium of the White House to air views and efforts in making the city of Washington more beautiful.

As I say, she is a modest and shy person. She doesn't really cotton to naming herself chairman of some kind of committee.

F: She doesn't come on strong at that.

C: But we had struck what she really loved to do and by convincing her that it would have an effect not only in Washington, but nationally, she said that she would be glad to form such a committee and to do whatever she could to lend it aid, support, in the form of the White House. And so the next few weeks, she, Udall, I, and Charlie Horsky, who was the assistant to the President on behalf of the District of Columbia, tried to get together the best list we could of thirty to thirty-five names drawn from many walks of life--architects, people who were motivated to beautification because they were social welfare minded and knew that you improve a gray world by bringing to it--

F: Now, you're not talking about a District committee? This was the whole United States you were drawing from?

C: To draw from the whole United States, but our goal was our hometown--what was her hometown at the moment and had been for thirty years, the city of Washington. The example was to say in deeds to the rest of the country or to Mrs. Kansas City: "I, Mrs. Johnson, have decided I'll roll up my sleeves and go to work in the town that's mine to make it look better. You can do the same back home."



It did spill out, and there were waves of things that began to happen that made you know you had really hit a dormant nerve in the American public. First, her formation of this committee meeting in the White House, and with press briefings after each one. Then the President had his State of the Union message on the natural environment. I believe he was the first president since Teddy Roosevelt to even use terms about beauty, to put beauty in the national vocabulary.

Suddenly, you had a host of telegrams, letters, phone calls, requests for meetings, from what I would call the "believers." The garden clubs of the United States, the town planning councils, the conservationists, the ones who had been hard at it but with no national podium. And here they had two friends in the White House. It was like a great awakening, and suddenly their voices were louder in their own hometowns than they had ever been before.

Then on the heels of what I would call the believers [came] the cosmetic group, the ones who had been at it but not been getting very far except in a very plodding kind of way. She would make speeches to them. She wrote letters. She said, "I want to be more than just an assembly line of letters when these people write in. I want to be a clearinghouse of ideas, And you found a hunger for ideas. So Udall gave us an assistant, Sharon Francis. And we soon found that we had to pull all that mail, which was truly quality mail, out of the correspondence section and put it in a separate office and get two people to handle it because if an idea that occurred in Charlottesville, Virginia, where a banker had used advertising money, instead of putting it in a billboard, to beautify the entrance to the town, if that could help somebody in Seattle, Washington, that was writing in and saying, "Tell us what to do," we wanted to spread the message.

F: You couldn't give perfunctory answers then?

C: She worked very hard on that mail, and it brought great fruits. The next wave, after the believers, were what I would call the hardware group who might at first have thought this sounded too cosmetic for them--ladies planting trees. But it was expanding and they suddenly realized that beautification also means burying electric transmission lines in housing developments, and that by spending a little bit more you make that neighborhood last longer and be more attractive.

And so General Electric Magazines came in and wanted a message from Mrs. Johnson and started putting real cash into some research on the electric side of the landscape.

When a neon sign company wrote in and wanted a speaker from Mrs. Johnson's committee, I knew we had hit pay dirt. Because if they want to know how they can look better, you've gotten somewhere.

Architects, the people, the contractors, even junkyards. Believe it or not, there is a junkyard association, and they were coming to Washington to have a meeting. And one of their members is someone from Austin, Texas, that Mrs. Johnson had known for a long time, and he asked if she would receive the wives. Well, she sure would, because she wanted them as allies. And so it was a great assortment of ladies with ankle bracelets and blondined hair. But Mrs. Johnson shook hands with every one of them and spoke about how you can make the country look better and really tried to make them think in terms of what they could do about their husbands' junkyards, like screen them.

F: Where did you get the term "beautification?" Was that consciously picked, or did it just sort of come to the fore?

C: It just seemed to rise up, and it was never a word that we were totally satisfied with, but the alternatives were very stodgy and they didn't sound like anything new. Conservation. Environmental beauty. Nothing-- The newspapers, I guess, really condensed it more. It fits in a headline.

The third wave of people who rallied to the cry of beautification and to Mrs. Johnson's program were members of Congress. And when we started getting phone calls from Republicans and Democratic congressmen and senators who had heard back home from a garden club or a town-planning group that wanted Mrs. Johnson, and the congressman or senator wanted to go along--Republican and Democrat--I knew we had hit pay dirt. And her feeling that the thing had gotten out of hand and to get ourselves a speaking committee, because when you had groups wanting to do something and you just couldn't turn a mute voice to them. So we formed a committee of--a speakers' bureau, and we just took all those seventy-five invitations a week that were coming into Mrs. Johnson to come speak on beautification. And Mrs. Henry Fowler, the wife of the Secretary of the Treasury, Mrs. Freeman, and several Republican members, along with the others, Rogers Stevens, who knows real estate--we had a mixture in the committee so we could answer the variety of groups that came in. And they would go out and make speeches around the country as substitutes for Mrs. Johnson because she couldn't handle all of them.

F: Was there an effort to sell the idea that beautification is good business economics?

C: Yes. And any time we got a letter that a businessman would write who would say, "Since I have fixed up my filling station, I get so many more customers," Mrs. Johnson would air it in every way that she could. We would put it out to

the press; she would read it at her committee meetings; she was trying to preach the fact that it was good business and that it did pay off in dollars and cents.

She also was one of the most insistent, she alone, on putting a member of the oil industry who would have some influence with the half a million filling stations that are around this country on her committee. And we contacted Frank Ikard and ended up with a man named Adam Rumishofsky. And then in a separate group meeting, she had him bring in the marketing vice-presidents of all the major oil companies. We had them in for a movie. Well, actually when we invited them in, we invited them long enough ahead of time that they could come in with reports on what they had been doing. And this suddenly made them do something. And they have started hiring better architects and started giving some awards. And here and there you see that there has been an effect on the corner of the streets of America.

F: Do you think that you developed enough momentum that this will continue through sheer momentum and won't be turned back?

C: I think there's no turning back because gardening is contagious. There's a perfect example in Washington today, Joe. I've been out riding around and having a picnic on the banks of the Potomac where one million daffodil bulbs were planted. It was the biggest planting in the history of the world--I suppose since the Garden of Eden--that Mary Lasker spearheaded on Mrs. Johnson's committee. And they not only are blooming in full force, but you see daffodils multiply and so there are more this year and there'll be more next year.

I've noticed in the newspapers, even though a Republican Administration is in power now and the attention is on the new people, that last night's Star had a four-column picture on page one of daffodils saying they were the result of Mrs. Johnson's beautification program. I'm quite sure that we're even going to get credit for things we didn't plant. I kind of chuckled to myself when I went around the Tidal Basin and saw all those feathery pink blossoms that were planted forty years ago and wondered how many people were giving Mrs. Johnson credit for them. I'm quite sure, you know, that "never grows so red the rose--"

F: When Mrs. Johnson got people to give donations as Mrs. Lasker did, what's the technique there? Did she approach them, did they come forward as volunteers, did you have someone within a committee who did that? I know instances all around Washington, for instance, in which people did beautify a particular school or a particular area; and of course Mrs. Lasker was all over the place.

C: How did we get the money?

F: How was this worked out? This is a good combination of both government and private service.

C: Well, first, the President was a great help because he was backing her and patting her on the back every step of the way and he said, "we've got to begin right with the United States government. Let's have better designers for our buildings; let's clean up the looks of our buildings; let's don't let them be eyesores--the government buildings." And he said this to his cabinet. And so each of them began to examine their budgets and so many of them did plantings at their buildings so it could be a source of pride and an asset to the neighborhood. The Post Office Department

was one of the very first to do something about it. They held a contest within their department, and Mrs. Johnson gave out the awards in a ceremony in the East Garden of the White House to the post offices that looked the best around the country. And we would have displays and slides and air their success.

Then Mrs. Lasker and. . . Laurance Rockefeller--this is an interesting story. Laurance Rockefeller gave the first gift of \$75,000, which was going to be used as the Department of Interior saw fit in improving the the landscape of Washington. So we used it in two ways. We used \$25,000--no, excuse me, used \$75,000--I won't even try to give the figures, but we used two-thirds of the money in the northeast section of Washington, a place called Watts' Branch, that had been one of those abandoned creekbeds in a low income area. They hauled out five truckloads of old refrigerators, tires, and everything that people had tossed in there, and made it into a beautiful park. They also used money to clean up some of the statues. We, you know, blinked twice when we found out we were cleaning up General Sherman because he was Mrs. Johnson's least favorite general. But we cleaned him up and just didn't talk about it.

But some of the people who were on the committee made fast and visible gifts. Mary Lasker is the originator of the phrase, "Put masses of flowers where masses pass," because she feels that that makes every citizen want to go home and plant his yard. So she gave \$10,000 worth of azaleas to put down Pennsylvania Avenue and line Pennsylvania Avenue with it.

Mrs. Johnson never asked anyone for money; one, she thought it would be unethical and inappropriate, and two, she is not a hard-sell person. But we did

take people on bus tours and Mary Lasker did form a separate group that was to be the receptacle for receiving funds that people wanted to give. And then, some of them just came in with no effort. For instance, I remember a group of school children who came to Washington in the spring, saw how beautiful it was, and sent back a check--a modest check--of something less than a hundred dollars to plant a tree here.

So we constantly would open envelopes and find that money had come in that had not been solicited, but it was an enthusiastic response to what people could see.

The three main givers were, interestingly enough, New Yorkers: Laurance Rockefeller, Mrs. Vincent Astor, who was more propelled by wanting to improve school yards or put in playgrounds in low income sections of towns, and Mrs. Lasker. They were all three a tremendous help.

F: Had Mrs. Johnson known them before she became first lady?

C: She had known Mrs. Lasker and very slightly Rockefeller. She had not known Mrs. Astor at all, but she had read about what she had done in New York parks in doing outdoor living rooms for all ages, old people to sit in the sun, young people to have some instructible kind of playground equipment. And so once when she was in New York, she asked Mrs. Astor if she would take her around and show her these parks, and she did.

But then, we had many Washingtonians who helped pick up the ball--Kay Graham, the owner of the Washington Post, got her foundation to give some school the improvement of playgrounds; and the newspapers in Washington were magnificent in helping promote the idea. Showed before and after pictures. And Mrs. Johnson was very much an active person to go out and be there with coverage to help tell the story of what could happen, either in speeches, pictures. We lost count of how many symbolic tree-plantings we had after the fourteenth one in the first year. We just lost count completely.

F: You have trees all over the country?

C: All over the country.

F: Mrs. Graham told me, incidentally, that she took her mother out to see the results of their bequest, her mother hadn't seen it therefore, and while they were there, without any previous announcement, Mrs. Johnson drove up on one of her periodic tours, you know; and it turned out to be a real bonus as far as Mrs. Eugene Meyer was concerned because she felt like, well, you know, "I didn't just give some money; I'm giving some that the First Lady has an interest in."

C: Well, Mrs. Johnson went slumming in Washington more than anyone will ever know about. But she would feel the desire to get out of the White House and she liked nothing better than to get an unmarked car. This is hard to convince the Secret Service that you should do it, but she would tell them not to get her limousine but to get a small black Mercury, and she would scoop up either Walter Washington or Libby Rowe, or occasionally me, and we would drive around and look at the project. We stood in front of one school--

F: This was without police escort?

C: With nothing.

F: Just like private citizens?

C: Just like private citizens. And so often, you'd see lots of children and they wouldn't recognize you at all. But we went to one particular school and I remember her standing there and saying, "Doesn't it look so like a prison--institutional? Just brick, brick, and beaten down dirt." And she stood there and counted twenty-six broken windows.

Well, there was nothing to relieve the monotony of that neighborhood



or of that school. She said, "I wonder if a little bit of planning, a little bit of recreation equipment, wouldn't make everybody feel that their school was a place of pride in their neighborhood." And so with a check from Mrs. [Marjorie Merriweather] Post, and very much the cooperation of some of the nurseries around town, who by now had begun to feel the economic aid that her program had brought all of them, we planted that school and had a ceremony. Walter Washington was then head of Housing, but that was also one of the by-products of that committee, Joe. Walter Washington is mayor of Washington because of Lady Bird Johnson and because she got to know him well--his work as head of the Housing Commission and his work as a member of her committee in those years of the First Lady's Committee for a More Beautiful Capitol. She found him such an imaginative, solid citizen and one who really knew the neighborhoods of Washington, and particularly the black neighborhoods of Washington, because public housing is low-income, black housing in Washington. And she had great admiration for him and was most enthusiastic in her discussions of him with the President, who at the point at which the President made possible a government for the District of Columbia, and he had heard so much about this remarkable man and Mrs. Johnson's high recommendations, that three members of that first council came from the First Lady's Committee for a More Beautiful Washington; and I have never felt... Well, I never see a headline about Walter Washington or see his terrific performance during the riots that I am not very aware that it was the First Lady who recognized him and how blessed we are that he's there.

F: I haven't seen him yet. He's someone definite down the line.

What do you know about the planting of the Jacqueline Kennedy Garden?

C: Well, at the time we moved into the White House there were a number of things that Mrs. Kennedy had started which had not been completed. As you know, she had concentrated on the house--on a very expensive but very beautiful total redecoration job. Then the next step was to improve the two gardens, and she had as her ally Mrs. Paul Mellon. The garden--the East Garden--was all planned and work had begun in redesigning it, but it had not come about before President Kennedy's death. And I'm told that he very much was a part of the planning of it. Mrs. Mellon was the real designer who worked on it. And so Mrs. Johnson wanted--was delighted that this was planned and thought it was absolutely beautiful. It was thought that this garden would serve first ladies because first ladies really don't have any particular spot on those eighteen acres that's theirs. This would be a garden for cutting flowers, for herbs for the kitchen, and where a first lady could use it and enjoy it. And Mrs. Johnson said she wanted to name it the "Jacqueline Kennedy Garden" and have a dedication.

I suggested, because there was nothing else around the house that was named for a first lady, that we name it "First Lady's Garden," because there would be more continuity in all the thirty-two first ladies there have been. She said, "No, I think that Mrs. Kennedy gave a great gift to this house and what she has done with it," and she wanted to name it for her.

So she wrote Mrs. Kennedy, told her, and invited her to the dedication; Mrs. Kennedy had not wanted to come back to the house, which Mrs. Johnson understood, because she felt that it brought too many sad memories to her. And so in place of her, we asked her mother to accept--to make the response to the dedication speech--her mother, Mrs. Janet Auchincloss.

F: Has Mrs. Kennedy ever seen the garden?

C: No.

F: Has she shown any interest in it?

C: She has written notes periodically to Mrs. Johnson, gracious thank you, but I think she doesn't want to come back to the White House until a much later date.

F: Did Mrs. Johnson or the President originate the idea of doing something about highway signs? Was this part of Mrs. Johnson's overall beautification?

C: There had been a long effort on the part of club women of America to get rid of billboards, and it had never gotten anywhere.

F: You mean going back to Ogden Nash?

C: Yes. The President made some remarks about it in terms of junkyards. I think you'll recall his flying over something and he told a group of reporters, "Lady Bird just hates to look down and see those junkyards."

I really can't answer that question except to say that a bill was written, the billboard [industry] knew that the movement toward beautification was going to center on them, and there was a man from Waco, Texas who was head of the sign companies--Philip "something" I'm sorry, I've forgotten. He finally worked out with Bill Moyers a compromise piece of legislation. It was not an ideal bill by any means. It was a difficult bill even for the defenders of it to push, and it certainly didn't satisfy the hard-core conservationists, because you were paying people to take down their billboards. But realistically, that was the only way you could get it through Congress.

And the President wanted this to go through very much, and he urged Mrs. Johnson to call together some women and let's get busy and get the bill passed.

- F: This is objective, but do you think that he was committed to it emotionally or he just wanted to do something for her?
- C: There was a little bit of both. But I know that Mrs. Johnson--
- F: You know, he can kind of be the indulgent husband at times.
- C: Yes, he can, but I think that the President was a true believer and letting her be the voice and letting this be her thing. You know, he has a good eye for the landscape, too. And while he may not wax poetic about the beauties of it, he's the one that wants to get it cleaned up and put into productive use. I think the people are wrong, whoever think that this was a project that was all Mrs. Johnson's. He was giving her support and voice and shoving his cabinet members and his own government officials every step of the way, and I certainly don't think it was just like you would give a pretty brooch to your wife. I think he wanted it to count and knew it was important to count.
- F: His cabinet members, various White House assistants, and so forth, more or less had a green light to help Mrs. Johnson on any of these programs?
- C: Yes. And wanted to because they quickly respected her. It wasn't a matter of just doing it.

John Gardner called me and was very eager to get going on some education help for Mrs. Johnson. You see, her trips were getting such a good press and such a good play that they realized that she was telling the success story of the Great Society. That's the hardest thing in the world to do, Joe, and this is really one of the most important things the First Lady did. That is, to get a success story of an administration told. You can find the Job Corps where somebody put their hand in the till, or where they

rioted, but the one that works will get passed by by the press so no one ever knows about it. By taking a newsworthy person to the scene of the good examples and making it extremely easy for them to cover the story through every technique we knew then--having phones on the place, having good briefing papers prepared, making it possible for the photographers to get close to make the picture that would move--you did help draw the curtain back a little bit wider on a problem and a possible solution. That was really a fantastic contribution on her part. The cabinet members saw this immediately. As I was about to say, Gardner wanted us to go out and start doing his thing--hospitals. She could have been fragmented into effectiveness. And while we did go out and do some education, we would stick to one theme for each trip, so you would have a concentrated impact for three days. Instead of walking through a hospital, and planting a tree, and visiting a school on one trip, we put it into categories to help the reporters really make their copy make sense to the American public.

F: Something more than just a tour.

C: Yes.

F: You developed these trips, which were invariably successful, almost into a formula as far as the way that they were run off each time. And you made them in every part of the country. The formula always seemed to work. How did you decide where to make one of these major trips? How did you come to name it? I want to get the technique of the trip from beginning to end.

C: The trips were born in many ways. The trips could be born in the mind of a cabinet member of which Udall, Freeman, and Gardner all would say, "I

wish she'd do such-and-such." It took fantastic organization to make them work. And we worked at it and we liked it and we had a good audience out there, and so we were playing to a very receptive crowd. Sometimes it would begin with one good speech invitation and you would build from there. In other words, you would say, "Well, now, if she accepts that speech at "X" place, what other things in that area help tell the story, and what would be fun for her to see; what would be useful for her to see?" and we would try to give it variety so that you didn't have the same story over and over for a reporter, recognizing their morning and afternoon papers. I mean, if she's going to take the energy and go to the expense (and incidentally, these trips--she paid her way, she paid her hotel bills, there are no funds like that for a First Lady and I had to make them saleable to enough reporters to pay for the plane)-- It was a joint venture.

F: The plane costs were prorated?

C: Plane costs were prorated, and you had to know that the two-day package or the three-day package had enough news value and enough variety in it and enough accommodations for the press that an editor would say, "Yes, that's worth \$250 to me to send girl-reporter on that trip."

F: Did you always get sufficient response?

C: No. And so you just lived in terror of what kind of plane you were going to get, whether it was...They don't make the right size plane for first ladies. The right size plane would carry fifty people, because you always can get thirty to thirty-five reporters. But planes today either hold fewer than twenty or eighty-five. And believe me, when you try to

pay for an eighty-five passenger plane with thirty-five reporters, you don't sleep nights because there isn't anybody else to pick up the check. So some of the trips were more successful than others. But there would be a feeling out of it.

F: Now, how did you contact the press to let them know that this trip was coming up?

C: Called a briefing and told them. Put out an itinerary. We added a lot of. . . Because I had known them all my life--most of the reporters--and had worked as a reporter myself, we had delightful briefings. Sometimes we would introduce the theme and everything with a drink. We had Panther Junction punch that I served up before I told them all about the Big Bend trip.

F: It was sort of fun while working?

C: And made it gay and really we treated the reporters like people and knew that she was not "hard news." She was the side story. She was also the expendable story from the standpoint of a budget officer on a newspaper. That's why you did have to put it within the financial reach, and I had to do something that is not required on the west side on a presidential trip. A presidential trip is a must to sixty or seventy newspapers in this country, and they don't even have to know how much it's going to cost them.

F: They go along regardless of where he goes or what he's going to do?

C: Whether it's a thousand dollars or two hundred dollars, he is news, he has to be covered. A first lady's trip is not a must for an editor. So I had to guess within the best of my ability and give them a maximum price

on a trip before you could get them to sign up. But I didn't have any trouble most of the time; only one or two where there were fewer than I expected. In fact most places we practically had to expand the plane and get a bigger one. We varied in our trips from, . . . there were 225 reporters who went on the Lady Bird Specialty Whistlestop Trip. There were seventy-five reporters who went to the Big Bend; those were the two of the big trips. And on her last trip, "The Last Hurrah," (I hope I'm remembering right), there were eighty reporters.

F: For that kind of trip, that was very good.

C: And they paid. Of course, the advantage of traveling with the First Lady, of being treated like a human being with the First Lady, of getting to see their country through her eyes, of being able to come back and sit down and chat with her and hear something come to life through her eyes (she's a very excellent observer and word-framer), there just never has been anything like it.

F: Did the reporters respond to Mrs. Johnson as far as feeling that she was a friend?

C: Yes. I don't believe she has one enemy in the press.

F: She never developed that presumed animosity that the President had with the White House press corps?

C: None. I think they felt that. . . They respected her for working hard, for doing all she could to help her country, and she wasn't content to sit upstairs and do needlepoint, but she got out and tried to be a help to him. They liked her personally; it is not difficult to like her personally. And she had respect for them too. I never had the problem



of calling her and saying, "The AP and the UP have to know this."

Having been a journalism student and graduate, while she had never been a practicing journalist, she knew the five W's and the H, and she knew the difference between the a.m. and the p.m. And besides that knowledge, just personal consideration for another fellow's problems made her a saint to work for. Because I could call any time of the day and say, "Fran [Lewine] and Helen [Thomas]--the AP and UP girls--have this problem and have got this question," and we maybe couldn't give them an answer but I didn't stall them and I didn't get mad at them. They got a call back.

F: Did you run into any real disappointments in either the trips or the beautification program? Of course, I'm sure not getting the highway sign bill through was, but--

C: Well, it went through. It didn't go through as strong as we wanted it to, but, you know, a little piece of progress was better than nothing.

No real disappointments. Of course, there are people who like to laugh at that kind of thing and think, "There's just a little lady out planting some petunias." But these were in the minority and you just have to not worry about them. Of course, there were some trees that died; some that were stolen by souvenir hunters. It was very hard to keep a Lady Bird tree growing in the ground, because it would be stolen in the middle of the night. But you just keep planting, and you just can't let that bother you.

I don't think that there were any disappointments except she felt that there was never enough hours in the day to do all she wanted to.

F: In the latter days of President Johnson's administration, when you could always depend on some demonstrators at anything at which he appeared, did she run into this on these trips?

C: Yes, and it was a real cross. The first time we ran into it, I guess it was a blessing in disguise, but we felt a little bit like, you know, if it weren't for the honor of the thing, we'd just as soon not have them. That was on a whistlestop where four days down the track from Alexandria, Virginia to New Orleans and when we got to Columbia, South Carolina, there were a group of people. I guess they were students. They had a drum that helped them keep their chant going, and they tried to interrupt her speech and stop her from speaking. Interestingly enough, it wasn't Viet Nam. It was civil rights that provoked this, and the Johnson policy on civil rights, which had been more liberal than anyone's. And she handled it beautifully. She just put one hand up and said, "My friends, this is a country of free speech, and I respect your opinion. But this is my time to speak my mind." This was carried over television widely. In fact, it turned out that we got more national coverage on that campaign than the Democratic Committee could ever have afforded to pay for. She was on the night news shows every night and part of the reason, unfortunately, but it is the truth, was because there were protesters along the way.

The President was so proud of her he could have burst by the time we got to New Orleans, where he was waiting for her, and he immediately sent us off on a flying whistlestop through Oklahoma and Arkansas.

But then as time and Viet Nam went on, the pickets got worse. I think we let them bother us too much. But it did bother the President. Nobody

likes an ugly, sour, angry voice tearing into you when you have knocked yourself out to write a beautiful speech or to write a really good speech and to go to the trouble of going to "X" town to give it. And then the cameras, the press, give the combative voice the whole attention, and what you've worked hard to say and do never gets a mention.

The worst experience Mrs. Johnson had with it was when we went to two Ivy League schools. I had thought she would be one person in the administration who could get in and out of those schools without an ugly demonstration.

F: Was this part of a larger trip?

C: It was the trip. But she had very sincere invitations, first from the Yale Political Union, a group of 800 students, and the president of it, a man named John J. O'Leary, called on her at the White House and said, "We really want to know more about what we, as students and young men who will be going out in the world, can do about the natural environment."

She didn't think this was particularly her kind of audience. It was boys; she hadn't raised boys. She had raised girls. And she also knew that we had seen McNamara and other people appear on that campus and get shouted down with cat-calls, but she just decided that they were sincere in wanting to hear her and she would go, and we'd take a try at it.

In the meantime a second invitation from that part of the country came up, and that was to open up an environmental studies school at Williams College, which is another end-- western Massachusetts. And again, it was sincerely put.

In both cases I called the presidents of the two colleges. Kingman Brewster at Yale assured me there would be no problem, and he was most enthusiastic about the First Lady coming. And we were assured of the same thing at Williams. We did not drum up press for this trip because we thought that it was quite possible that there would be some trouble. The Viet Nam war had gotten-- moved in on us more, and we were seeing more college protests.

We went to Williams. There were people with black armbands, bearded types, out in front of the house of the president of the college; and he was very abashed and embarrassed but they were there. Mrs. Johnson was the least bothered by it of anybody. I was in agony to think that we were there and knowing that they certainly were going to get the story. And I did know that these things get rolling. I knew that Yale wasn't going to be pleasant because the stories would be in the papers the next day, and it would whip up more of a crowd.

A small group of students got up and walked out when her speech began, as their protest against Mrs. Johnson. She went on and delivered it. That night the President called her and he was disturbed and he said, "I just hate for you to have to go through those things."

Then Yale was even worse, because there were about 1200 students out on a plaza next to where her speech was going to be made that were sitting in silent protest. This was the ridiculous peace that Kingman Brewster had made with them. Instead of taking the line that everybody has the right to come to this campus and the Yale Political Union can have Reverend Coffin next week, he rather encouraged them to show their

animosity in this way. He was a soft-headed, academic type, and it was really a lesson to both of us of one of the problems that's wrong with American colleges. But they had their silent vigil during her speech.

The kids inside were terrific, and she got a standing ovation to her speech. She never delivered it better; she was never better. She didn't get five lines of coverage, and she had knocked herself out on the speech. And I thought it was so wretchedly unfair too to have 800 boys who really gave her a cheering ovation, and yet none of that ever got covered. So we left with me rather bitter about my profession.

I asked Mrs. Johnson if she regretted going to those two schools, and she never would say no. She said "I hate to be the reason--the excuse for people to protest my husband," but she also had enough detachment that she wanted to see exactly what was happening on campuses and this was an interesting test to her. She never would say she was sorry she had gone.

F: I don't want to start something too late, but let's talk a little bit about Head Start.

C: All right. Head Start was one of nine weapons on the war on poverty, and Sargent Shriver, who was the head of the war on poverty, had asked Mrs. Johnson if she would receive some sixteen or seventeen members of a national advisory committee that was really formulating what the weapons of the war on poverty would be early in the spring of 1965. She wrote back and said, "I will have you for tea, but you must talk for your tea. I want to hear what they have to say."

And these were people of outstanding background who knew something about ghetto life, the problems of poverty in their own areas. We had them in the Red Room. It was the most exciting two hours I've spent in the

White House in five years, and it beat anything else. The air was electric and alive.

F: People talked.

C: People talked, and you saw. I mean, the whole feeling of it was that there is great waste of human material.

F: I can check this out, but what kind of people were they?

C: Well, there were people like Archbishop from San Antonio Lucey, who had worked with Mexican-Americans for a long time; there were people like Dr. Otis Singletary, who was the former president of the University of North Carolina and the first head of the Boys Job Corps; there were people like John Kenneth Galbraith; but the man that got everybody talking was the then Secretary of HEW, Anthony Celebrezze. And he told a story about his own boyhood because somebody threw out the question, "Can it work? Can it work to pump some money into third and fourth generation welfare cases and hope that fifty percent of them will come out of it?"

He told the story about growing up in, I believe it was Cincinnati-- I'm not sure whether it was Cincinnati or Cleveland--

F: He's usually associated with Cleveland.

C: Cleveland. And he said, "I remember a boy, a group of boys." He didn't identify himself as one of them when he began the story. He said, "I remember a group of boys in Cleveland who were just thugs and were just hell-bent to get into trouble, and they were out on the streets. And there was a very intelligent woman schoolteacher there and she got everybody together on a Tuesday night and said, 'All right, you all have so many ideas--let's have a Tuesday night forum,' and we called it the Teddy

Roosevelt Club. And we would meet every two weeks and we'd talk about other people's problems."

And he said, "Today, two of those boys are public accountants, certified public accountants; two are judges; one is a senator; two are doctors; and one is the secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare."

It was such a moving story, and it was so much the proof that some care, attention, would make its mark that from then on this rather stuffy group loosened up and really got enthusiastic about what could be done with the nine weapons in the war on poverty.

At the conclusion of the meeting, where you just practically walked out in a daze, you know, ready to charge the world with a bucket of water, Shriver drew me aside and said he hoped very much that Mrs. Johnson would be the national chairman of Head Start. That she could be very effective and it would make women want to participate in this program and be volunteers.

And so I talked to her later about it and with some--

F: Up to that point, she had had nothing to do with it?

C: It hadn't even existed. It hadn't been born. This was the birth of Head Start. It was on paper. And so she agreed to be it. And so we had one of the first meetings. He wanted to have some kind of real effort to get volunteers in and to be educated on Head Start.

Again, Mrs. Johnson let the White House be useful in this endeavor. We started out to have a reception for about seventy-five women across the country--social welfare types, heads of YWCA, and the women's organizations, who could urge women to give several hours a day in volunteer services to make the Head Start projects work.

The phone nearly rang off the hook from Congressmen saying, "Mrs. So-and So in my state wants to come to that meeting." The real eye-opener was two governor's wives who phoned and said, "I want to be invited." One was Mrs. Orval Faubus of Arkansas; one was Mrs. Hulett Smith of West Virginia. Apparently Mrs. Faubus was vitally interested in child care.

I told Mrs. Johnson about that and as a result, we ended up with 400 woman crowding in to the East Room; Mrs. Johnson opened the meeting, told them what she felt about Head Start, and what it would mean for women to get involved. And as a result, 200,000 women signed up to be and were volunteers for Head Start projects all over the country. I don't think there had to be even a national drive of any sort. It spilled out all over. She made films for Head Start; she allowed her picture to be on a poster, which Shriver convinced her would help bring in recruits to work as volunteers. She wrote continual letters to buoy up Head Start projects, and we went to Head Start projects and looked at them in Newark and in various parts of New Jersey and in many other places.

So often on a trip, even if it wasn't to the mission, the purpose of Head Start, there would be a little cluster of Head Start children at the foot of the plane when we'd get off who would want to come down and see the First Lady, that lady whose picture was in their Head Start project.

F: Was there any of that alleged tension of the Kennedy versus Johnson forces in Mrs. Johnson's relationships with Sargent Shriver?

C: I think if Mrs. Johnson had not accepted the chairmanship of the national committee, Shriver would have asked Mrs. Kennedy to. But I don't think there was anything on Mrs. Johnson's part. There isn't a jealous bone in her body.



She had great compassion for Mrs. Kennedy, particularly in the early days after the assassination, and I didn't see that as far as Mrs. Kennedy was concerned. I certainly think Mrs. Johnson has a high enough political I.Q. to be aware of Senator Kennedy's efforts to undermine her husband.

F: But she and Sargent Shriver could make a good team?

C: Excellent. He appreciated her tremendously and as a matter of fact, Sargent Shriver was at odds with the Kennedy clan because they couldn't forgive him for staying on with Johnson. He was considered a defector by the Kennedys, and he was having his problems with them.

F: How did the "doers" luncheons get going?

C: They got going very early in 1964, and Bess Abell, the social secretary, and I and Mrs. Johnson worked them out together. For one thing, the President really wanted to do something for women in his administration. For another, Mrs. Johnson didn't want to have luncheons of people to sit around and talk about their ailments and their bridge games. So to get a more vital type of woman, we just started calling them Women Doers Luncheons. And we would have eighteen, which was the number that could be seated on the second floor. And you tried to get activists in different fields to be there and have one person speak on a subject. The very first one was the woman who was head of the library at Radcliffe, which was a women's library and the only one in the country, and we wanted to hear about that. But there were more vital things that came along.

An interesting thing that develops--some of these women were the professional career woman types, not always an attractive lot, vital, but not always an attractive lot, and not always the kind that the average woman can identify with.

Mrs. Johnson was a great one for always wanting to include on these guest lists the average woman, the volunteer, maybe the one who was less on cause but might be the person that we would score the biggest hit with on some cause. And so we tried to get balanced luncheons.

And I think that it had its effect around the country and that women were proud of this showcase and patting of the First Lady and the President to women who had done things in health and in many fields.

F: How did you happen to use Eartha Kitt?

C: Eartha Kitt was chosen because she had testified in behalf of the President's bill before a committee. We were looking--

F: What bill?

C: A bill on juvenile delinquency, and she had talked about what could be done on crime. If Eartha Kitt had come to the White House and told about the ballet classes that she teaches as a volunteer in Watts, it would have been a whole different ballgame. But she came and for reasons that I do not know but only could guess that she was the declining actress looking for a stage. She decided to throw in the Viet Nam war and get firey about it, and so she really undermined her own race because for the first time, a first lady was trying to tackle the subject of crime and she diverted everyone's attention to Eartha Kitt and Viet Nam while someone was trying to accomplish her problems.

Eartha Kitt was suggested by the committee on the Hill that had run the hearings on. . . I checked her out with two or three people at Justice and so forth, and asked if her name had ever showed up on any kind of ad protesting the President on Viet Nam. It had not. It still has not. In fact, as far as the Viet Nam. . . The day that she appeared at the White House

luncheon, she had asked a congressman to make an appointment for her at the Pentagon to see about going to Viet Nam to entertain the troops. She did not believe enough entertainers were helping our boys. She canceled the invitation and the most surprised man in Washington was the Army colonel who she had an appointment with at four o'clock that day to work out a two-week trip touring in Viet Nam; when he heard on the radio of her blast at the First Lady.

F: Do you think that this was sort of an impromptu decision on her part, or do you think that it was all along calculated?

C: I think that she was always looking for headlines. I think they could have taken any kind of turn. I have wondered if the militant blacks got hold of her before she came to the White House or afterwards. She was seen with Stokely Carmichael leaving the Shoreham Hotel where she was staying. To the best of my information, and I did considerable checking, it happened in an impromptu way. She has a lot of problems. One of them was she was dieting and she didn't eat a bite at the lunch. She had had some drinks. The second thing is she is a declining actress looking for publicity, and she was determined she was going to get. . . Her agent had called me and asked me if she could make a speech. I said, "No, we have speakers."

And so she didn't. But it ended up that she got the headlines.

However, here again, Mrs. Johnson was determined to convert what that bad blast had been into constructive action. We got ten thousand letters on the Eartha Kitt thing. The phones rang off the hook, and I had the staff in my office to take every single phone call, who called,

and what they said. They were 95 per cent in behalf of Mrs. Johnson and indignant that anyone would talk to a first lady that way as a guest in their home.

But about five national organizations put out prime kits as a result of hearing about it. Maybe they wouldn't have heard about it if there hadn't been that angry voice, so that we got our story out. And to every one of the ten thousand letters, we sent a letter saying, "It is too bad that an angry voice tried to turn our attention, but if you were serious about doing something about crime in your city, here are eighteen things you can do," and we listed each one of the eighteen things, such as, "You can have a survey and check on the amount of street lighting in a neighborhood because where streets are lighted, less crime occurs."

And so good things came out of it, but it was an awful moment, of course.

F: Did you get a secondary response to these letters that you sent out? Of these eighteen possibilities?

C: Some of them. More we heard in the terms of resolutions passed by national organizations on "This will be one of our projects." And the Business and Professional Women's Clubs got out a crime kit using our list of what you can do. The National Federation of Women's Clubs passed a resolution applauding Mrs. Johnson. Interestingly enough, even the National Association of Colored Women passed a resolution--

F: Now, Mrs. Johnson's public reaction is a matter of press record. What was her reaction after the luncheon was over and you and she and whoever else got together on this? Was she terribly upset or did she just seek or figure where do we go from here or what?

- C: Deep despair, because no one enjoys having such an ugly exchange. And it came as such a shock, and I think she was very blue about it. I think she really. You know, you reexamine your own thoughts and think how in the heck did this woman get on the list? And that was one of the questions we had to answer. You know, you think, "Gosh, I should have been smarter than to invite her." We didn't know much about her. The only thing we knew was the record that she was one of the few persons in the performing arts who had ever made a statement on crime.
- F: But you didn't have any repetition of Eric Goldman's story on the White House Conference on the Arts and Robert Lowell and so on in which rightly or wrongly, Goldman said that the President was just totally outraged because he had invited some of these people anyhow. Mrs. Johnson understood that this was just one of those mistakes?
- C: No, there was no reaction of that.
- F: No recrimination against Liz Carpenter--
- C: I think we all felt that we could kick ourselves for doing it and probably I suffered more than anyone, because I had gotten the name. And you didn't know how it was going to come out for twenty-four hours. But we got busy fast to make it come out right. You can't bury your head in the sand on those things. You've got to face it. And she's never one to turn her face from a problem just because it's ugly.
- F: She just lowered her head and went to work on it?
- C: She just got us busy making something good come out of a bad volatile situation.
- F: Did you coordinate your efforts with the White House Press Secretary's office, or did you run two independent operations?
- C: We ran two independent operations, although there would be occasions when

you certainly had discussions on schedules and whether one would interfere with the other. But the way it was set up at the beginning really was established by Pierre Salinger with me.

Kennedy's press conferences had gotten to be a mixture of world problems and questions about Caroline's hamsters. Pierre was answering questions for both sides of the house. Or about Mrs. Kennedy's clothes. This always read so much that it seemed to me that it low-rated the President of the United States. I talked to Pierre about this when I came in, and he very gladly agreed with me, very happily agreed with me, and there was a fine line at which he would handle everything about the President. I would answer all questions about the family, the house, the animals, the furniture. I just called it Women, Dogs, and . . . There was never any difficulty. I never got fuzzed up. I had to be careful in answering questions for the press--they would call me and say, "Where is Mrs. Johnson going to spend Easter?"--that I didn't betray the President's plans. And two or three times I goofed and did.

F: For instance?

C: Well, all sorts of questions on, when they were being very cagey on the west side on where the President would spend Easter or not, you expect she will be at the Ranch. And so these women would immediately read it--both, so I learned not to let her be used by them to trap me into answering the President's questions. But I learned the hard way. However, we ran two separate operations and there were about eighty-five newswomen to cover the east side of the White House, and their questions were very light. I do think that in the history of this country press officewise, that from that point on you didn't have a President's press conference messed up with a lot of inconsequential but legitimate questions about the family.

F: I think this would be an appropriate time to break.

C: Thank you, Joe, I enjoyed it.

[End of Tape 1 of 1 and Interview II]

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