INTERVIEW III

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INTERVIEWEE: ELIZABETH CARPENTER

INTERVIEWER: JOE B. FRANTZ

PLACE: Mrs. Carpenter's home, Washington, D.C.

Tape 1 of 1

F: Liz, let's talk about the larger trips. I understand Mrs. Johnson did forty altogether. I don't suppose there would be any advantage in going into all of them. But let's talk first of all about the technique of setting up these trips you made to New England, the trip up the Hudson, the trip to Big Bend, the trip to Padre, the trip in Utah and Wyoming, that cross-country trip you made at the end of the administration. Let's tell how you planned it, whether you set yourself a real formula on this, how you selected names. In other words, let's just go into the whole mechanics because I think this will be interesting down the line.

C: Joe, there were forty trips covering what we estimated at the end of the time two hundred thousand miles.

F: First of all, you had no precedent for this, did you?

C: No, only that Mrs. Roosevelt had gone and seen coal miners in trouble about twenty-five years ago, and it served President Roosevelt very well. I can't say that we were trying to pattern Mrs. Roosevelt at all, but the President's first speech to Congress in 1964 was calling attention to the terrible situation of poverty and the declining skills in such areas as coal mining countries.

Mrs. Johnson had wanted to be an activist first lady. She said that she wanted her deeds to emerge. The previous year, the ten months we had

been in office since the assassination, were used to kind of do what was at hand--immediate needs. Part of it was campaigning, as you know. We whistle-stopped a train which was a unique thing in itself for a first lady. But now we were into everything being erased and you could start from scratch. So, it seemed to me that this would be something that Mrs. Johnson would want to do that first trip. It worked out so well that actually it kind of opened the door on many more for many purposes. But the total effect, and I realize this more every day and I even begin to realize it in watching it unfold in the press, was simply that it was the best way in the Johnson Administration to underline a success story. The hardest thing to do is to get the success story told.

F: How did you decide where you were going to go?

C: Sometimes with an invitation. For instance, Bill Battel--I think I told you in the last tape, had been head of the Area Redevelopment Administration--came over and hoped Mrs. Johnson would go up and give out certificates and see where they were retraining ex-coal miners, the children of coal miners, in the Scranton-Wilkes Barre area. It often began with a letter or an invitation. Stewart Udall was full of ideas because he wanted to show off the parks, show off the conservation pictures, which ended up serving the Discover America program very well. We were discovering America long before there was a program on it.

F: Were you conscious of the dollar-drain in this?

C: We became conscious of it; we weren't at first. We were actually going because--

F: At first you were discovering America and there wasn't really any tourism involved?

C: No tourism, although kind of subsconsciously Mrs. Johnson believed in use,

use, use for parks. She would always point out, "Now, I see in that campground there license plates from x-number of states. Look how many families are enjoying it." So we were doing it without the program having a name.

F: Had Mrs. Johnson been such an indefatigable traveler in her pre-first lady days?

C: No. Most of it was back and forth between Texas and Washington, raising two children, and running two households.

F: There just really hadn't been time for this sort of activity?

C: That's correct. She enjoyed tremendously the travels when the President was vice president at that point. In many ways he paved the way for what she would do because in the very first trip to Senegal, Africa, in 1961, the President was the one who asked me to come along and said, "Let's work up another program for Mrs. Johnson." So we did.

F: Let's diverge a moment and talk about that first trip, because it was an ice-breaker, and you must have seen a few things, learned a few things--both what to do and what not to do from it.

C: Yes.

F: That was triggered by the fact that President Kennedy wanted the vice president to represent him, right?

C: Right at the independence of an African Republic--Senegal. And the President asked me to go along. We took a plane and a congressional delegation of two or three people. I remember the most romantic name on the trip was a delegate that Kennedy had named, Romeo Champagne. Can you beat that?

F: I wouldn't believe it if I saw it in a musical comedy.

C: Anyway, we went and it was a spectacular trip because you were just

dumped right down in the middle of what seemed like pages of the National Geographic. I had never seen anything like it before.

F: Was the Vice President accepted as someone who came on equal footing--someone who was patronizing? In other words, what was his reception?

C: His reception was overwhelmingly great, and we were competing against Malik, the Russian delegate from the Soviet Union who had arrived as his country's representative at this birthday party.

F: This was when Russia was wooing Africa so sedulously?

C: Yes. Johnson got out in the streets and really set the tone of person-to-person diplomacy from that moment on that marked all of his trips. He went down in the market place, shook hands all around. I had been looking for something for Mrs. Johnson to do, and she always likes to get out of the capital, get out of the city. So actually I was fishing around for peanut farms. We had read that peanuts were grown there. I assure you our Embassy would have been the last to know because we had the old-world type of ambassador who believed in doing everything in channels.

F: He never got out of the Embassy?

C: Never, but we had a very able head of an AID mission there named Jack Vaughan who ended up being head of the Peace Corps.

F: Was that where he first came to Mr. Johnson's attention?

C: He did. And he took all of us out to a fishing village, Kayar, which could have been exactly the same as it was in Biblical times. And it was the first time the Ambassador had been there, and he honored it by not getting out of the limousine. He sat in it. It was too smelly a town for him. But the President got out and walked all through the streets of Kayar, which are everything: chickens, pigs, smelly fish. He was shaking hands

all along the way. To the horror of Dr. Willis Hurst, a few of the people he was shaking hands with were lepers. But anyway most of us, I will tell you, had to have our shoes burned or throw our shoes away when we got back. It was that kind of a village.

But I'll never forget the Chief of the tribe rushed up to the President before he left and his language had to be translated twice from Wooluf,the tribal tongue, to French to English. It was that kind of a village. He had a wonderful face and he rushed up in his robes to the President and he said, "You go back and tell your President you're the first man of any importance to come to my village."

F: The new head of Senegal didn't go with you?

C: No. His name was Premier Senghor. This was strictly Johnson getting out to meet the people and show the flag in places it hadn't been shown.

F: How much notice did the village have that you were coming?

C: I believe they had none. Jack Vaughn--

F: So that there wasn't anything special put on for them and he saw it as it was?

C: No. I remember Mrs. Johnson saying on the ride back in, "You realize the value of a Peace Corps operation." She said, "You realize what a hundred yards of screen would do here," because flies were everywhere, as they would be in a fishing village. The hospital was the most primitive type, and a hundred yards of screen would have done a lot.

F: Did Mrs. Johnson get out of the car?

C: Oh, yes, she went walking along. She walked along the street with the President. They shook hands with lots of people. We went into what was a market area and she picked up some of the vegetables and looked at them and talked a little bit about crops.

F: The absence of Wooluf in the vocabulary was no barrier?

C: Jack Vaughn, if I'm not mistaken, either had somebody or could speak the tribal tongue. But I remember how my hat was really off to him because you felt he was knowing the people of the land.

F: Had he been there before himself?

C: Oh, many times.

F: So that he knew--

C: They knew him, and he was like a god to them.

F: He was the ambassador, in other words?

C: Yes.

F: I picked up somewhere in my interviews Mrs. Johnson in Senegal sitting down at a sewing machine in a tailor's quarter. Was this the trip?

C: I don't--

F: Do you remember the incident?

C: I don't remember that. It could have. I tell you, we went to a crafts show, and it's quite possible it happened there.

F: But you weren't a witness to it that you remember?

C: I don't remember it right now.

F: How long were you in Senegal?

C: Three days.

F: How did Mr. Johnson get along with the representatives of the other countries --that were present for the ceremony?

C: Very well. He was a big, friendly, strong Texan. I wanted to tell you what the effect of the President going out in the streets and visiting the market and going to Kayar was. There was practically no other country that had any mention in the newspapers. He was a visible flag of the

United States.

F: The remainder of them stayed with the sort of protocol--

C: You forgot completely about Malik being there. We just blotted out Malik and the reports were very good. It was a Johnson show--the whole thing. I think it was also one reason President Kennedy sent him, almost immediately when we came back, to Southeast Asia.

F: Did you just go to Senegal and right back?

C: Came back by way of Geneva and through France to visit NATO.

F: How did those stops go?

C: They were good. They were much more conference-type meetings. In France, I believe, he had a conference with De Gaulle. In Geneva, American delegates were conferring on the disarmament, if I'm not mistaken, and he was a party to that. Horace Busby was along and I believe he would be invaluable on that.

F: Were you on the trip then to the Northlands of Europe--Finland--

C: Yes.

F: Do you want to talk a moment about that?

C: Well, here again, it's a waste for a wife of a public official to go along and just wait around while the men are in meetings, and then show up at the dinners. Mrs. Johnson has much more curiosity than that. She wants to see. I think there has been a hunger in her to travel that had never been satisfied.

F: Did she want to do more than just see?

C: See, learn, and was willing to use her--

F: Maybe recommend?

C: I'm not sure. She's not much of an advice-giver. Her perception is

good, but she wouldn't say, I think you ought to do anything this way." She wanted to be an interested tourist and an informed one. She also wanted to get out of the capital.

F: Well, I was struck on this North Europe trip by the geography of the thing. You hit a number of towns that I wasn't even really too aware of.

C: That's right. The President, I think, wanted to see. He was more a visit the country picnic; visit the craft show; visit where the American money has been spent that has meant something to the people--or visit something they're doing for themselves that they're terribly proud of. Those were the things that marked his itinerary, and trying to sell that to the State Department is just hell, Joe, because they use old standards of seeing--ceremonial kinds of visits. They think if the First Lady wanted to do anything, it should be to run down to a hospital. Now, this is highly unimaginative. In the first place, all you do is disrupt sick people. The press is along and they end up cluttering up the hospital. It's really a cruel thing to do and Mrs. Johnson's interest was not so much in healing the wounds as in looking to the future. We were much more interested in schools than hospitals. We were more interested in going and looking at the economy of the land than to sit around at a petit-four teaparty in an Embassy. Now, one reason we planned these trips early and the reason we'd take the ball and run with them was because if you didn't, you were left in the hands of some highly unimaginative planners who would hand you the most palish type of schedule.

F: Well, let's talk about that just a second. President Kennedy decides that it's a good idea for the Vice President to represent him in Finland and Scandinavia generally. Now, then, my knowledge of these visits is

they're usually well worked out in advance and that the local person, to some extent--the local representative--prevails in saying that, "In Finland you shall see thus and so," and the one in Stockholm adds to the schedule and so on. How did you get around the sort of formal approach that is usual in these cases?

C: By staff people exploring every means they could with the President's full support.

F: Did you send people in advance to see where you might want to go?

C: We did later. I believe that on these we didn't. We did it through Bill Crockett at the State Department who, being born in Cimarron, Kansas, knew what the score was. He would send messages. And the Embassy--I shouldn't be as critical as that. They do have individuals who, you know, once given the line will try to follow it. But unless they were, you were likely to lapse into old patterns too much.

The President made a fantastic speech at the National Press Club when he came back from Southeast Asia in which he talked about Cadillac-diplomacy, saying that "This is no way to run diplomacy," and the value is to get out of your car and see the countryside and meet the people because leaders change. And they're there through the sufferance of a population.

F: But the people are there for the next generation.

C: Yes. The New York Times, and some of our foreign correspondents abroad, are married (and this must be a very real problem). They marry nationals and continue to live there. Often they take the viewpoint of the country rather than the viewpoint of their own country. Well, my experience with the New York Times abroad is that all of them are armchair secretaries of state.

F: So you got some criticism that this was kind of an imported Americanism or something coming in?

C: That's correct. They would have criticized anything you do, Joe. They would have criticized you if you had just followed the old form. But it could irritate you. But on the other hand, the impact of what the President was doing was being applauded in the streets of those countries so much that it didn't deter you.

F: Did the State Department, as a general thing, respond to this sort of aggressive informal approach, or were they uneasy?

C: I guess it varied from country to country on how timid the ambassador was. There were some who were--Well, they sent us the thousands of clippings, which I guess in a way measured the success of the native papers and what they said about Lyndon Johnson.

F: How do you keep an Embassy staff from overfilling your schedule so that there's no time really to do what you want to do?

C: You don't win those battles. You insist and insist and insist and, I guess by cables and by having somebody that you can rely on within the State Department as we did with Bill Crockett. That's about the only way and you still don't always win them.

F: Did the Vice President prefer on those trips to stay in hotels; did he prefer to stay at the Embassy itself?

C: He was invited, and they were constantly insisting, that he stay at the official guest house or with--well a great variety. He insisted in every case that he stay at the hotel. That goes back to Senegal, our first trip, where the President, then-Vice President, stayed at the residence of the Ambassador. There were very few places to stay. He stayed there. He was

up at night, messaging and talking back and forth to the United States and keeping up with the news and keeping up with the flow of cables, and he enjoyed that. As you know, he doesn't require much sleep. This upset the highly upsettable wife of the Ambassador, and she would get up in a long robe and come clattering down the stairs bringing a great silver tray of cold drinks and sandwiches. In other words, he didn't want to put her out and he just really wished she would go away. But she just was going to let it bother her so she could complain. I'm sorry, but that's the way it was. I think that that distressed him so much that he would upset the Embassy that way and they would try to interfere with his way of doing business that from then on he wanted to be in a hotel.

F: Did you get the feeling that President Kennedy approved the Johnson approach on these trips?

C: Yes, because he always welcomed us back at the White House. President Johnson very wisely, when he went to Southeast Asia, carried letters of not only introduction, but some instructions of what he would do from Kennedy which gave the trip more of an impact and him more of a license to operate as Kennedy's representative. My feeling was that Kennedy was very pleased.

F: Kennedy gave him certain discretions then. It wasn't just a ceremonial appearance?

C: No, and an interesting story along that line, Joe, is when we went to Pakistan and LBJ met Ayub Khan, who was very much a man's man and a builder of that country which had been newly partitioned. Khan told LBJ, and this was shortly after Kennedy's election, "Russia is going to be putting your young President to a test. They'll be doing a whole series of things to

see how much backbone he has. He should know that they are testing him all the time." Because nobody yet had measured Kennedy in the international area. LBJ came back to Washington, told that to JFK, and Kennedy said, "Get hold of that man; I want to meet him." So through the Vice President's report, Ayub Khan's visit was moved from fall to, I think it was July--summer, and hurried up because Kennedy wanted very much to meet him. Of course, Pakistan was a virile country in supporting our position in Southeast Asia and giving us airfields.

F: Ayub Khan, as I recall, also went down to the ranch on that trip.

C: Yes, that's right.

F: Did you go along?

C: Yes.

F: Tell me about that trip, that visit. What did you do to get ready?

C: You're eighty miles from a fresh head of lettuce, so you do everything from repair the plumbing--which is never completely in order down there, being an old ranch house--and getting groceries and setting up a schedule for Ayub Khan, but also a rest period. The thing I remember about that trip was one: how really Ayub Khan and Johnson were so much he-men and loved the land; loved the countryside. I remember also seeing a number of the Pakistani women, Embassy wives primarily in those lovely, lovely saris along the Pedernales River. Well, this was such a change to me. The world had really shrunk in my eyes, because I was twenty-one years old before I ever saw a Republican. So seeing saried women from the Far East in a remote part of Texas was a whole new ballgame.

F: Were you privy to the famous camel-driver incident?

C: Yes. In some ways nursemaid for the camel-driver. That is a really long

story. I wonder if we should go into it now or if you should just read my book.

F: All right, if you've got in detail, we'll just skip--

C: I've got it in detail in my book.

F: Let's save that then.

C: But it was a great plus for LBJ because the total effect of it in Southeast Asia was to identify with the man on the street and the peasant instead of the professor. The professors had been being brought over here by grants and you know, it didn't make much of a dent. But here was a guy who won the sweepstakes--the Vice President of the United States invited him over. He had a wonderful smile. In every teahouse all over Pakistan, they were talking of nothing else when he was here except his visit. It was page one every day. Kennedy is supposed to have said, and I believe this is in Schlesinger's book, "I don't know how Lyndon got away with that. If it had been me, there would have been camel dung all over the South Lawn."

F: I see. When Johnson has someone like Ayub Khan or Conrad Adenauer to the ranch, do they stay in the house or do they have a guest house?

C: They stay in the house with the President. Their aides stay in guest houses, but the guest rooms were expanded for that purpose, because--

F: By and large, is any special menu contemplated or do they just sort of eat what they would any time they had guests?

C: No. Mrs. Johnson likes to serve the fruit of the land so to speak, garden vegetables and so forth, and what Texas is famous for. Peaches were in when Ayub Khan was there, and she had great beautiful bowls of peaches from Stonewall, and we had peaches at a number of things. Of course, you

look into the diet requirements. And in the case of Ayub Khan, we couldn't serve pork ribs at the barbecue to the Pakistanis. We had pork ribs for our other guests, but not on the tray that was--

F: But only for the infidels?

C: Yes. They were not offered to the President of Pakistan.

F: So except for the restricted foods then, it's pretty much the same as it would be for any--

C: Right.

F: All right, now. You've made a number of trips while he is vice president, and you've made this trip up into Northeastern Pennsylvania. At this time, did you realize that you were going on a kind of five-year trip?

C: I hoped we would, because to me it was the most creative thing that the First Lady did. It was the way she became known, and she was the President's goodwill ambassador whether it was Peoria, Illinois, dedicating a downtown square because Senator Dirksen had asked you to, or whether it was riding down the Snake River in the Tetons. It was also highly--

F: Do you think Mrs. Johnson envisioned a succession of such trips?

C: She told me that she had liked getting her feet wet on the early ones, and she said she'd like to do five or six a year. I believe at first we did one about every six weeks. It was a matter of sometimes finding the invitation that came to build a trip around.

But the virtue of her trips was we didn't try to scatter our shots. We had one theme and if it was discover America, then we stuck to that. If it was education in Appalachia, we didn't fragment it by running off to look at other projects. We stuck to the school rooms of Appalachia. That way the story had more impact.

There was another ingredient that made them highly successful and that was the fact that she flew in the same plane with the press. In fact, it was the only way we could go because there were no funds except out of her own pocket to pay her way.

F: And sometimes rode in the bus with them.

C: Yes. And so we would charter a plane. Tremendous organization effort went into it because we have a highly demanding press, and I wanted everybody to be happy. So we sent advance people. We had phones in the right place at deadline time. We tried not to lay on so much that we wouldn't have the time to write a story. Now some of the places we went to were so remote it was awful hard to get the story out.

F: In the East, you had no great problem as far as getting stories in, but when you went to the Snake River country and when you went to the Big Bend, there were some logistical problems there. Did you more or less put yourself in the place of a working newspaperwoman and try to figure how often you'd need to file and from where you'd need to file and so on?

C: Unless you want it to be an exercise in futility, you have to. You are a reporter for the reporter. We knew that to get film back to the Huntley-Brinkley Show it had to leave a small airport in Jackson Hole at X hour, and we would help them get the film there. That's, to me, all in the line of work for a good press officer. You're trying to share a story with the country, and so you don't do it by making it difficult for the press.

F: Were you selective on who could come?

C: No, anybody who signed up, as long as there was a seat left, and we had a great variety in who came.

F: If TASS for instance had had a--

C: TASS did go on one of our trips and we had two or three Iron Curtain reporters occasionally. But they weren't too much interested in us because they weren't so interested in seeing the success stories perhaps in the United States. We were more or less going out to see the project that worked.

F: The obvious politics--

C: We had a great variety of reporters that went along, quite a few men, incidentally. The longer the trip lasted--I mean the longer each trip occurred, the more likely we were to get men who came along. We had a number of Negro reporters who went with us through the South. While it was a potential difficulty, by foreseeing it you could avoid problems.

F: The difficulties that come over housing and eating, I presume?

C: Well, it didn't, but you were always alert that it might.

F: Did you more or less plot a complex, a reticulation of places to go throughout the country, or did you do them ad hoc?

C: A little bit of ad hoc, but if you had just been to New England you weren't going to go back to New England. You'd look to another piece of the country. Or Mrs. Johnson would say, "That invitation sounds nice to me because I have not seen that part of the country." We did try to, I guess, show the President's Flag, show the interest of the Democratic Party and of this President in various areas of the country. She liked the little towns the best, and they were in many ways our most picturesque stops.

F: Traditionally, correctly or not, Mrs. Johnson is supposed to have been quite shy as a girl and as a wife. I never saw this. Is this a transformation of character? Is it extreme discipline? Or do you think she

really did become more outgoing as time went on?

C: Oh, practice is bound to wipe away old timidities, and certainly her ability to speak and project grew tremendously as time went on. I still think that she's basically a shy person and basically a very modest person, but she didn't have quite as many butterflies when she got to the podium in the last days as she did in the first.

F: Of course, part of it is confidence that success breeds. She also had, I thought, a very happy gift for phrase-making--and this may not be answerable, but so often in her descriptions of things she saw, her comments even on such things as wildflowers were eminently quotable. Do you think this was spontaneous? Did she tend to think these things in advance? Was she fed them by you who have a gift for phrase-making yourself, or is it a combination of all of this?

C: I think that it was basically her and an English teacher she had at St. Mary's Episcopal School in Dallas, Texas. The English teacher--she has often talked about this teacher as being--you know, nearly everybody has within their lifetime one or two teachers who made a vivid impression, and she said she would never accept the trite word. She'd never settle for a phrase that didn't really say. So she must have been trained in that English class to really strive.

F: It wasn't sufficient to say "that's a pretty sunset?"

C: Yes. But they come, they flow out of her, and the difficulty I had in trying to put down words for her would be to take down what she said in our first conference for a speech just as she said them, because the way she said them was so much better. I mean, she would talk about walking through the corridors of the White House and "history thunders down at you."

She has the vivid phrase and it's too bad she never wrote poetry, because I've never known anybody who could put poetry into words so naturally as she could. I think also the fact that she was a child who grew up devouring books and reading the classics fed this ability.

F: Why didn't the President go along on any of these trips?

C: He did. Occasionally he would join us and it would be both delightful and bedlam, primarily bedlam, because when we mixed his press with her press it was just total chaos. But this happened from time to time. On the whistlestop, which he worked with me a lot on, and which I had the definite feeling he wished he had had the time to make, he was at our farewell in Alexandria, at our half-way down the tracks at Raleigh, and then in New Orleans, and he was as proud as punch. I think that he followed that trip every step of the way, every mile of the road.

F: I was thinking of trips primarily to natural areas.

C: Well, I think he simply didn't have the time. I believe that he would have enjoyed it tremendously and it's too bad that he couldn't have, but he relied on her to bring it back. But you know, he had the kind of burdens that you don't pick up and run through the redwoods and leave.

F: Did you get the feeling that sometimes the press misinterpreted the object of the trip?

C: Never, except I felt that--

F: You think they responded to Mrs. Johnson?

C: I think they responded completely to Mrs. Johnson. The only time trip stories backfired on us were when pickets showed up, and the picket would get the play.

F: Well, of course, that's something you can't control.

C: Well, I tried to, but I lost.

F: That's the advantage of the Snake and the Big Bend. The only pickets would be crickets.

C: No, I think the copy that followed her--I have no complaints. We had talented writers. She aroused some spirit of the desire to write in them, and they came through beautifully. And the fact that she would sit there and go over the trips with them and be interested in their observations fed the reporter.

F: Was there any difference in response between male and female reporters on this?

C: Viva la difference, I guess. I don't believe so. Newspaperwomen want an activist first lady. They congenitally identify with them. They're proud of them. The fact that she would get out and be a set of eyes and ears for the President thrilled them. It also improved their beat and improved--and you know, if you want to look at it selfishly, they had a better play on their stories.

F: By and large, the press people who went along on these trips were, I would presume, women's page editors, travel editors, vacation editors, that sort of person.

C: No. Some. There are eighty-five newspaperwomen in Washington who cover the family side of the White House. Now, they cover other things too, but they cover those. So it's what you'd call White House Female Press Corps that was the basic group. Then, if it was a story on education, we would make an effort to invite the number one education writers--and many women are in this specialized field of journalism--education writers--somebody from the St. Louis Post Dispatch or somebody with the NEA Journal.

You go out and just let them know about the trip and hope they came along. In travel, we did add some travel writers onto it. But the basic group was always the group that covered Mrs. Johnson at the White House.

F: So that they knew her before they made the trip?

C: They knew her and they knew Washington and they were delighted with an invitation to leave it and travel with the First Lady.

F: Now, on the trips I've been along on there have always been some very gruelling days and yet I never saw her lose her public face for a moment. Does this hold up privately? Does she get anxious or irritable?

C: I've never seen her impatient except on perhaps two occasions in her life. It's remarkable, but she is basically a very calm woman who has inner peace. She enjoys it. She has a delightful sense of humor and while, of course, she'd collapse when we came in from whatever the chores were, she would always be game to hear, you know, the funny things that were happening to the press, the difficulties that they were having. She was one person and really a total woman.

F: Let's talk a little bit about these big trips you made. You made one into New England which was a history trip. Of course, you made the ones into the Big Bend and into the Teton country, Padre, and so on. First of all, where did you get the titles for the trips?

C: We sat around and worked hard on cooking them up.

F: We who? Your office?

C: My office staff primarily who got to be very good advance women in going out ahead of time, Nash Castro who went with us on a number, Charlie Boatner-there were a few men that we could borrow to help out on the trips and were always helpful and always good.

F: Now, on the East Wing of the White House, you had people like you, like

Bess Abell, for instance, who had their own staffs and yet it always seemed to me that the staffs overlapped or interchanged to a certain extent. Was there freedom if you wanted to use someone like Sharon Francis to call on her to do certain jobs? Was this understood? Or did you have some sort of a channel arrangement?

C: No, she was assigned to help the First Lady and whatever we directed her to do, whether it was me directing her to, Mrs. Johnson directly, or Bess, there was never any problem on it.

F: There wasn't any kind of rigid departmentalization there?

C: No, it a very elastic and happy arrangement because everybody was doing a job and we were serving somebody we liked.

F: You see a need for another assistant, some field you're not covering, do you have a somewhat elastic budget in a situation like that? Or do you have a hard and fast budget that you have to stay within? In other words, how did you build a staff?

C: By borrowing people and that's not just my side of the White House, but I think they've operated on a very outmoded personnel arrangement for years and years. You don't have the spots and, of course, the side of the House that is not directly connected with the President's daily demands is going to have the shortage. So you would borrow somebody from a department where that department was relevant to the trip you were taking or the mission you were taking. I could certainly borrow people from the Interior Department to work on trips to the national parks. You know, it paid off for Stu Udall to be advertising the parks. What more could he ask for than a first lady who was interested? So we would borrow people like that for a few days.

F: Udall has said to me that the country didn't know how fortunate it was that it had two secretaries of the Interior while he and Mrs. Johnson were in there for the price of one. Let's talk a little bit about Udall and Mrs. Johnson's relationship. How did they first get together and how did it develop into this sort of harmony which it always seemed to me to have.

C: Well, it was very harmonious, but I believe that I went over that in the first tape in discussing when Udall went down to the ranch to talk about the beauty message. Then he and Mrs. Johnson worked together on a meeting of the First Lady's Committee For A More Beautiful Capital, and it met once at least every month. He also was a man of ideas and he realized that she had a love of country so he invited her to dedicate the Glen Canyon Gorge.

He invited her to take part in a number of ceremonies, and the ceremony was just an instrument to get you there too, because then you could build the trip with the ceremony as one item on the agenda. For instance, we went to Glen Canyon Gorge and she dedicated it and I believe is the first woman to have dedicated such a large project. But we also did a whole series of things for three days. Once you rent a plane--part of it is economical need, Joe. With us operating on renting a plane, you had to make the story worthwhile for the people who were going to be buying seats on that plane--the press, and a one-shot deal didn't do it. So what we really cooked up were package tours that made it possible to afford the plane.

F: Well, if an airline were to offer you a plane, could you accept it?

C: They can't offer it under the CAB rules.

F: Not even for a first lady?

C: No.

F: What about any sort of local picking up of the check? Is this permitted?

C: Well, there were always people who had been long time friends and who offered hospitality and don't think I wasn't glad to get it! Because if there's one thing more necessary to a reporter than a phone at the right place at his deadline, it's a watering hole at the end of the day. So those were picked up for the press.

F: Did you solicit this sort of thing, or did you have more offers than you could take?

C: Little bit of both. Generally the newspaper in the town was so pleased that they were going to be entertaining the White House Press that they would do this.

F: I remember on the Padre Island trip the Cattos had the press out. The Cattos are well-known Republicans. Why would they do this for a Democratic first lady?

C: For one thing HemisFair was in San Antonio and everybody is eager to show off their town, and they were part of the HemisFair committee that was, I guess, reaching into its pocket all year long to extend hospitality to visitors. And what served them better than thirty-eight foreign editors that Mrs. Johnson brought to town? It was really a delightful trip, as you remember, and an ice-breaker of a party. Suddenly we had the Germans wearing Texas hats and singing Texas songs, and I think that was a most successful trip partially because Mrs. Johnson was in the role of guide for thirty-eight editors from Europe.

F: Why did you go the Big Bend which is way off from anywhere and certainly

had no constituency except for a few white tails?

C: Two reasons. She had always wanted to and three, the Park Service had always hoped that they would get some advertisement, if you want to use the word. It's the least visited national park in the system. So we went, and I'm told by the man who rents the horses that the next week the number of horse rentals doubled. The visitations always doubled or tripled after her visit, even to such a well-known historic site as the John Adams home in Quincy, Massachusetts, which incidentally she was the first member of a presidential family to ever visit.

F: That's incredible.

C: It is incredible. They welcomed her with open arms, but as much as the Kennedys talked about being history-minded, none of them had been there. Forty miles from Boston.

F: Why did you pick the John Adams home?

C: She was interested in seeing presidential homes, and she had known Mr. Charles Adams, the head of the Adams family, and the Park Service also runs that house and was anxious for us to go. As I say, they have been sitting there--Probably the most historic presidential house including Mount Vernon in the United States, because it was lived in by two presidents, John Adams and John Quincy Adams. It also has so many things that were used in the White House because the Adams were the first family here. So all of the crystal and dishes and china were what Abigail Adams had carried down from here in a covered wagon, or a wagon anyway, and had taken home. Mrs. Johnson had lunch with all of the Adams family, or the hierarchy of it, and I'll never forget--

F: That must have been intriguing.

C: Yes, the eighty-eight year old great great granddaughter of Abigail Adams, whose name was Abigail Adams Homans--a very matriarchal Bostonian type--was having a glass of sherry with Mrs. Johnson and she was trying to make a point in a highly expressive way and she waved her glass around and knocked it into something and broke it. And her voice could be overheard by the press outside because she said in a resounding tone, "Hell, I certainly hope that wasn't one of the antique ones!"

F: Probably the first highly placed Democrat she'd ever drunk with.

C: Well, Mr. Charles Adams who is the financial head of the family had been head of the Johnson for President organization in New England. We didn't know this before we came, but we were delighted to learn it.

F: This was just a bonus.

C: Yes.

F: How do you allot the amount of time that Mrs. Johnson stays at one place? Unlike the President, she stays on schedule?

C: By walking through it and kind of knowing her. Of course, you never stay as long as you want. And we didn't always make the right decisions. Sometimes we allowed too little time. And Mrs. Johnson often said, "I wish I could advance my own trips. I'd like to go to learn and then go back for the ceremony." But of course that wasn't possible with her posture as first lady.

F: Did you have any difficulty with a bunch of metropolitan females in the Big Bend? It's pretty rugged.

C: Oh, they loved it. And the more I tried to make that trip sound remote and difficult, the more got aboard. In fact the President kidded me. I was having briefings on the trip and having gone out there myself first--

and I advanced that one myself--I knew it wasn't going to be any easy trip because you were eighty miles from everywhere.

F: That's a filling station--

C: So, when I called them together to tell them about the trip and announce what we would be doing and the theme of it, I said, "This is rugged country. There are panthers out there and I don't want anybody to go along who's frail and has heart problems." Well, the number went up from about fifty to seventy-five. Then I'd throw in the rattlesnakes and tell them about that, and it would increase even more. The President kidded me, he said "When are you going to start talking about these panthers?" He thought I was creating a credibility gap. But as you recall, Time Magazine did see a rattlesnake. We did have to scare antelope off the runway in order to land. We saw hundreds of canyon wrens in Mareschal Canyon as we floated down in what must be the strangest armada since Dunkirk, that five and a half hour trip.

F: From what you know about it, were the antelope on the runway on their own volition, or had they been herded in?

C: I think that probably Charlie Boatner had had the antelope brought in the area, because he didn't know whether the press would get to see the antelope anywhere else. But he didn't put them on the runway. As you remember, that runway was pretty broken down, left-over World War II antique with grass growing on it and I had the feeling--

F: Bad enough at best.

C --that our only real direction was a Secret Service man standing up with a sock in his hand to show which way the wind was blowing.

F: Tell a little bit for the future something about your press relations down

there. I mean your press logistics.

C: At the Big Bend?

F: Yes.

C: We had to get teletypes in there so that the copy could get out by Western Union. It required taking over the park ranger's hut and putting machines in there. We also had to have a runner that would come down to the places we would go in the park where maybe it would be four or five hours before our party would get back to where they could file, and we'd have to have this runner send them back. The runner had a car incidentally, but there would be a Western Union man there waiting. Charlie Boatner just for laughs got a donkey and put a big sign on it saying, "Pony Express." He was just a prop though. We then also had to get film from the cameras and drive it eighty miles and get somebody to fly it from that landing strip to Dallas which was the regional area for the AP and UP so you could get the stuff on a ticker.

F: This was a private plane that flew it?

C: Yes.

F: You have no regular air service in there?

C: No, just a friend who wanted to help the press.

F: Did you do this on regular schedule?

C: Yes, we had said on our sheet, you know, the film must be in such-and-such a place at five o'clock and then it will be driven--

F: All right, I'm taken down to Mareschal Canyon in the morning. I'm put aboard a raft. I emerge some time late that afternoon. I've got a fist full of copy. Have I taken my typewriter along? Do I have typewriters at the next kind of basing point? How do you handle that end?

C: Some of the girls do have lightweight Olivettis and they carried them on the rafts with them or we had them taken by the bus and meet us there. Some of them wrote by longhand, each person kind of worked out on their own. I didn't have any typewriters bought for them at the end of that, and I don't particularly remember that, but their habit is to keep their. . . They all look like walking packrats, because they have to carry everything with them.

F: Do they pretty well follow instructions on what to wear?

C: Pretty well. Sometimes, alas, I give them the wrong dope. You know, it may be cold when our advance woman was out there and the next week get into a heat spell. But generally they do, and they learn, you know. Well, that was one of the main questions because the handling of baggage, getting baggage into the girls' rooms--which service we performed. Her baggage would go ahead of her and by the time she got to her hotel room, it would be there. By going ahead, I meant it went directly from the plane to the hotel. Yes, I think they did. On the whistlestop they worried about if they were going to be able to run three cars down the cindered track to the back platform to hear forty-seven speeches between Alexandria, Virginia and New Orleans. And we decided on tennis shoes, so everybody showed up with tennis shoes.

F: Do you limit the amount of gear they can take?

C: No, unless it's absolutely necessary, and it wasn't ever necessary that I recall. They learn that by--you know, they're toting a lot of it so. . . They're veteran travelers. They're not frail women with six pieces of luggage.

F: Were you instrumental, or was this handled on the west side, in the visit

of the Latin American diplomats to the ranch in the spring of 1967?

C: Well, the invitation was issued through protocol, but the arrangements were made primarily by the social office and that's Bess. Are you talking about the barbecue and the Fandangle?

F: Yes.

C: Well, Bess' office worked primarily on that. I worked on rounding up press to come down and cover it, because one of the reasons that the President was inviting them wasn't so much to see the ranch but to educate them with HemisFair and hope that those countries would put in their cooperation with HemisFair. One time I got burned and, you know, ran a hundred yards for a touchdown and got tackled on the sixtieth yard but--

F: How was this?

C: Well, I had the idea we were to drum up a big press to take them down there and in doing so, I made a lot of calls to travel editors and people who wouldn't ordinarily have been going like Earl Wilson and urged them to come. And of course one of the main reasons they wanted to come if they thought they were going to get to see the Fandangle at the ranch. The President was, I think, afraid that it was not going to be a successful thing. So reporters were only allowed to come on the ranch for about thirty minutes for picture taking purposes and then leave. I always thought they were shortchanged and it was too bad they didn't get to see the Fandangle.

F: Did you get criticism out of this?

C: A little bit. But I did everything I could which was primarily to get my newspaper friends like Charlie Kilpatrick and Houston Harte in San Antonio to load that bus down with food and drink and hired a mariachi band and tried

to keep the press happy back and forth between San Antonio and the ranch.

F: Did you do anything specially for them that night?

C: Yes, we went out on the river.

F: So that you did have a compensation for whatever disappointment they might have had?

C: Yes, everything except my nerves and blood pressure.

F: Did the President get unhappy with you over this adventure or not?

C: I suspect so.

F: But not directly.

C: Well, nothing that we couldn't both recover from. I didn't have the total support of Mr. Christian.

F: Did Mr. Christian know what was going on?

C: Yes.

F: But he didn't back you up?

C: Well, he didn't get anywhere.

F: Why did you pick Padre Island for a visit?

C: Mrs. Johnson had always wanted to go there, and it was ready to be dedicated. She had the encouragement of Bob Jackson of Corpus Christi Caller-Times to come down, and so everything fit into it. And the President had made a recent speech about conservation in which he was saying, you know, "There's really only so much real estate in this country and we need more and more recreation outlets for our people. We should look to the necklace of islands around the United States." So here was a great example and again she was implementing his program.

F: When Mrs. Johnson takes one of these trips, a number of senators, you know, have split delegations politically and yet the local congressman

even though he may be of a different party wants to be in on it because that's where the crowds are and the action and even the good will. Do you make any distinctions between Democrats and Republicans? Would you make any distinction between Ralph Yarborough and John Tower, for instance, in going to Padre?

C: None whatsoever. You can't. She's first lady of the land. We never went out and solicited senators and congressmen to go with us because we couldn't offer them a free plane ride. They often called and wanted to get aboard, and sometimes they came with us anyway. But generally they backed off when I said, "Well, unfortunately we're all going in the press charter plane, and so everybody has to pay a pro-rated part." This lessened their interest almost immediately. You see, they were used to flying with the President on Air Force One where he could offer them the hospitality. We didn't have any funds. It's too bad. Sometimes they would go with us or meet us there.

F: Tell me about that very last trip you took that started in New Orleans and just skipped back and forth across the country. That was pretty ambitious and pretty short.

C: It was an ambitious trip, but it was kind of--

F: Why did you decide to do it?

C: Because we wanted one more for the road, one more last hurrah! The newspaperwomen wanted it. Mrs. Johnson wanted it just before she went out as first lady.

F: There was just a general demand?

C: Yes. And it was also a very good reason in the fact that we felt that so many of the President's programs had not been underlined. So we

would try to pick ten or twelve of the principal things and hopefully work out a stop along the way which would make sense geographically and would underline his interest in health and the arts and conservation and education.

We did that. I think the result was so evident in the coverage that emanated from it, not by people who were necessarily along but by a whole array of editorials across this country which was kind of second thoughts about Lyndon Johnson. I think they used Mrs. Johnson's trip as a news reason to applaud five years--and some times thirty-four years--of public service.

But it was fascinating because we did scoop up and take with us the Arts Council--Duke Ellington and Marian Anderson--and they went with us to some ghetto schools in New Orleans. And, of course, Duke Ellington--every little boy would like to grow up to be Duke Ellington.

F: Including this one.

C: Terrific reception there and everywhere. And then also space, the Cape Kennedy issue.

F: Musicians are notoriously, whether correctly or not is beside the point, sort of inexact on schedules and like to work their own set of hours and so forth. You don't have any problem with someone like Duke Ellington who maybe is a night person getting up early in the morning and being where you want him to be?

C: Well, I didn't have any problem but then I had assigned Barbara Keene who worked with the Arts Council to worry about her little charges, and she I think alerted them five or six times. She probably had somebody, if I know Barbara, in the Arts Council who would be an early riser and

and help see that they were on time. But he didn't miss any deadlines with us.

F: Did you ever leave anybody behind on one of those trips?

C: Yes. We lost a couple on the whistlestop. They found the advance man and drove like crazy to the next town and got back on aboard. We left a Life Magazine reporter one time here. She didn't wake up in time to make the plane and she caught up with us about a day and a half later. We almost lost Dr. Grosvenor in New Orleans, but when I thought I'd lost him and really became desperately concerned about losing the National Geographic in our own country, I got to the airport and he had very wisely grabbed a taxicab and driven like crazy and beat us there. He had also scooped up two very pretty correspondents.

F: So you really didn't have any irrevocable embarrassment to haunt you from these trips?

C: No, because we laid out a schedule that was very plain and made it clear to everybody that that plane flew on time or that train moved on time.

F: Do you run into hurt feelings from local people who feel that Mrs. Johnson ought to have time to stop here, stop there, have cookies at this place and tea at another, and you can't accommodate them all?

C: That's always a problem.

F: How do you handle it?

C: Well, various ways. You let them know from the beginning what the mission is, and you write the nicest kind of "Thank you, but we're so sorry we can't at this time" letters.

F: Do you try to anticipate this sort of thing, by having your schedule sort of laid out before people begin to know about it?

C: Yes. If you can get the jump on them, that's better. Because always, of course, the Democratic Party people want you to do nothing but spend all your time with them. And this really is a disservice. I've often wondered why they didn't realize that showing off their proudest product to everybody was the best politics of all. We could lick a lot of those problems by letting the mountain come to Mohammed. In other words, if somebody insisted that we come by and see Girl Scout Troop 54 because Mrs. Democrat was the godmother of it. We'd say, "Bring them all out to the airport." Mrs. Johnson would know they were there and take the time to shake their hands. We often did this with Head Start projects because the little Head Start children and their teachers knew that the First Lady was honorary chairman. But she couldn't run around to all of the Head Start projects when she might be there for another reason. But we would invite them to the plane or sometimes to come by the hotel and see them.

F: So far as I have been able to observe, Mrs. Johnson never made an embarrassing gaffe at one of these things. Other talented people have. How did you avoid this? Did she just do a fairly thorough briefing before she went somewhere?

C: You know, she really is a scholar. She would want to read everything for weeks before--the best literature that had been written about Appalachia, the place itself. She would tell me to get the people from the departments over there who really had been there and knew what it was like. And then often she would call two or three friends in the area. The Johnsons have a great resource of long-time friends in every part of the country. She'd call them and get their evaluation of it, or find out some facts from

them.

Often the newspaper girl would be the one we'd call. Maybe somebody that had been on another trip like Marian McBride in Milwaukee on the Sentinel before Mrs. Johnson went out there to dedicate some fountains and a big botanical garden. There really was nobody that we thought could give us a word picture of what this was like and what the mayor of the town had done in uncovering old fountains for interestingly enough, beer horses, that became an asset to the city. So Marian McBride had traveled with us. We just got her on the phone and I know she wrote a story later saying that she couldn't have been more flabbergasted than to suddenly find that she was talking to the First Lady who was saying, "Tell me about Milwaukee." But Mrs. Johnson was a go-to-the-source person, and she wanted to know.

I know before she went out to speak to the wives YWCA in Ohio, we were working on a speech. She said, "Now the Y that I'm familiar with is the one close to the White House. My children have gone there to swim. I've been there to some of their international bazaars. I would like to know a little bit about what kind of people that Y serves." In other words she wanted to talk about something within her own experience. Well, I called the Y and got all the information for her, but she says, "It'll mean more to me, Liz, if I hear it myself." So she had me get the woman back on the phone to repeat what she had told me. And it came through.

Everything must ring true with her. There's not a phony bone in her body, and she won't say things she doesn't believe. She will temper her remarks if she doesn't truly think Rome can be built in a day; she

won't give that great optimistic report. She'll say it in a way that exactly how she means it,

F: When you were planning one of these larger trips in which you involved the Department of the Interior, did you clear things pretty much with Mr. Udall? Or did you pretty well give him the schedule once you'd worked it out with Mrs. Johnson?

C: Well, he always had eighteen ideas and was excellent at ideas. So did Orville Freeman when we went on a trip with him to see the small towns of the Midwest. They would send me over a proposed schedule. Udall was superb at it, because he's an outdoor man.

F: He knows the land--

C: Knows the land. He knew the kind of things she'd like. We wouldn't buy everything, but most of it would come out of that original memo from him. Then we'd add some things on or we might vary them or we might trim some of them and spend more time on others. If she didn't feel she was at home with the situation, she wouldn't want to do it. Then both of them would send assistants or come themselves to talk about the trip.

You know the First Lady served their departments so well. John Gardner had never been able to really tell what the heck the Teachers' Corps was like. You can write a million press releases on it, and you can talk about it, but until you see those crewcut young men in the mountains of Appalachia where people have been land-locked in those hills for so many years giving haircuts to the kids --until you know that the difference they've made is more children are going to go on a bus down that hill to high school than ever have before because the Teacher Corps was there, the story doesn't come across. Through her he got the story out, the

the excitement of night schools, the fact that schools don't close at 3:30 anymore. And Gardner, who's basically a timid man and does not have the salesmanship capacity or technique that Udall does, you know he just couldn't get over it. He would liked to have used Mrs. Johnson out on the road all the time talking about his programs. Udall would loved to have used her full time. We turned down many Udall trips simply because there wasn't enough time. All of the department heads realized her value in getting the message over, because a VIP, a Lion, a First Lady, was there with an entourage of press and she knew how to take hold of the child or take hold of the teacher and help reporters get their story.

F: Did you get any feeling of competitiveness among the cabinet heads for her attention and her presence?

C: I didn't feel that so much. If I'd run around and looked for it, I'm sure there was some there, but it didn't unfold for me.

F: Beyond the simple act of advertising some of the President's accomplishments or the President's desires, did you get the feeling that she was responsible for certain legislation through these trips or that she muted some of the criticism? Can you be specific in that or do you have any just general feelings?

C: I think that the statistics came to life for her. The night reading that she had shared with the President she could suddenly see in terms of people. She could report back. I think that certainly her own belief in certain bills must have been increased by that. She really was sold on this adult diploma program that was part of the Education Bill when she saw a high school in Ashland, North Carolina, literally filled

with excited people of all ages and very low income levels trying to get their diplomas. I'm quite sure that she would have come back with her faith in the program strengthened by what she saw. It would be hard to trace the channels down to a piece of legislation, but the President respected her opinion so much and he followed our trips very closely.

F: Did he ever make any suggestions on where you ought to go?

C: Oh, yes. You know, he has never been shy about making suggestions, and we went a lot of those places. He had a lot of good ideas on what we should do or would embellish a program. Generally I'd send a basic schedule up there and then he would think of two or three other things he thought we should do. He often was very helpful by talking to the senator or calling the governor and saying, "Lady Bird is coming and this is what she wants to know." No, he was our total ally.

F: Were you privileged to veto him if some suggestion didn't seem to fit you pattern?

C: Well, if it didn't work, he wanted you not to. But Mrs. Johnson was in a better position to veto him than I was, so we certainly always spoke up if there was a reason we thought something wouldn't work.

F: Was there a sort of average time period from the conception of a trip idea up to the time that the trip became reality, a formula in that sense, or were some long in planning and some jumped up?

C: Some were in the back of your mind and then the time would come when it would be right, or the season would come when there was a better time to visit. You'd know they were cooking. But I guess it takes six weeks to put on a really successful trip. We've done it in less time. We've taken more time, but six weeks would be what I would think is the best

space. You'd send somebody in and then they'd come back. Then you'd send them and stay three or four days and be there on the ground when you went. That's the way to run an advance.

F: Well, now, the trip to Padre was, I gather, somewhat jumped up by the unexpected bonus of foreign travel editors coming.

C: Yes. Mrs. Johnson had hoped to have newswomen come to Texas at a time that the bluebonnets were blooming and the countryside was lovely and to conform, also, with the opening of HemisFair. We heard that the thirty-eight foreign editors were being brought over to the opening of HemisFair by TWA. At this time we were also in the terrible throes of the balance of payments plan where we were trying to advertise "See the USA." So all three purposes meld together to make it an ideal trip. The bluebonnets bloomed, and she served as guide, and all of Europe knows about Texas.

F: On this or any other trip, did the political realities ever confront Mrs. Johnson in the sense that someone tried to utilize her presence to get some statement of political significance, or even insignificance?

C: Oh, quite frequently. Often through pickets who would show up with a sign. It wouldn't be so much a demonstration against her as it would be their point of view on national situation.

F: I wasn't thinking as much of them as I was of reporters themselves who instead of describing the forbidding beauties of the Big Bend, for instance, would want to know how she felt or get some statement from her on--

C: Oh, well, if news was breaking in Washington on something like the marriage of the Dean Rusk daughter to a Negro, certainly they would ask her about it on the trip. I mean they wouldn't have been doing their reportorial

job if they hadn't. As always, she was the fountain of right impulses well expressed.

F: Well, now, Martin Luther King was shot and Washington was burning while she was on this Padre trip. Did that bring any particular criticism?

C: I think some behind-the-copypaper talk. I never saw anything in print that criticized it, because from the beginning she faced the fact and made the decision "Why let down thirty-eight foreign editors? Why not go ahead and show that there were cities in this country that were not in flames."

F: She didn't seriously consider cancelling the trip?

C: She considered it because everything had ground to a halt. We had some suggestions of reporters that we shouldn't be out there. But as I say, as far as I know there was never anything in print. I think that it was well that she went ahead with the trip than to just fold her tents and stay here and let down thirty-eight foreign editors.

F: Did you get the feeling that she was more effective in small town and rural situations than she was in the large urban areas. Or do you think she was equally effective? Did her lack of an urban background as a child interfere with her appreciation of ghetto problems?

C: She appreciated ghetto problems.

F: Did she communicate in the ghettos?

C: Yes. And we went through Newark streets. If it were a situation like a Head Start project, there was no problem communicating, being interested in them at all. But she didn't like the big city backdrop as much as she liked rural America. She just has a lot more faith in 4-H Clubs than in militant organizations.

F: Black Panthers.

C: When we went on the whistlestop, it was Brer Rabbit in the briarpatch. She was very much at home all down that train track, even though she expressed at every stop her full belief in the necessity of the South to move forward and in the fact that the President had signed into law the Civil Rights Bill four months before we went on the trip. This was very much in the minds of the southerners. You know, she made it clear and quoted Robert E. Lee as saying "Make your sons Americans."

F: When you went through South Carolina on that trip, did Strom Thurmond ignore you or play with you or what?

C: Well, I don't even remember Strom Thurmond being in the vicinity. Mendel Rivers and Olin Johnston and the governor of South Carolina, Donald Russell were very much at our side all the way. South Carolina was the toughest state. We didn't have any heckling until we got to Columbia, South Carolina, on the trip. Then we had a heck of a lot of it and it grew clear through Savannah. But Mrs. Johnson, in laying out the plans for the whistle stop, had said, "I don't want the easy towns. Don't give me the Atlantas. Give me the Savannahs."

F: She didn't try to play it safe necessarily?

C: No.

F: Not on any of these trips?

C: No. We went to Williams College and to Yale.

F: You mentioned that before.

C: She would never say that she was sorry she went there. The President, I think, he was sorry that we went there because he said, he told me, "I don't like to see her have to take that." But if she had any regrets,

she never said them and she had so much native curiosity I think she, really kind of looking back, felt it was part of her education.

F: Let's talk in what's left of this afternoon a little bit about your organization of the press office and some of the problems getting one underway and how your procedures worked.

C: Well, Joe, as you know, I have been a working newspaperwoman for about sixteen years in Washington. I have covered Eleanor Roosevelt and Bess Truman and Mamie Eisenhower. I never covered Mrs. Kennedy because I was working in a government position by then. Always, you really yearned for the activist first lady. Every newspaperwoman in town stood taller because Eleanor Roosevelt was news, was interested. It isn't that you wanted a first lady to go out and do her own thing so much, but you wanted her to care.

F: Is part of that, too, the excitement as a woman reporter of having something that's significant to cover?

C: Part of it is, but part of it is you just think that if you occupy that privileged post, you ought to care and you ought to show it. You ought to do more than stand up and say howdy at the barbecue. You ought to go farther than that. So I was proud and really picked my own job to be press secretary to the First Lady and tried to build it into what I thought newspaperwomen had wanted through the years, having been on that other side of the pad and pencil.

We very realistically, also, knew that television is part of the twentieth century. So I got Simone Poulain, who had been helping Dean Rusk on television at the State Department, and I think Mrs. Johnson was able to tell the story of the White House and the country through television,

partially because of Simone's genius for it. Actually, we were much better equipped in this field than the President's office was--and I suspect of any press office in town. We were twentieth century in the communications field. At least, I hope I'm not just giving us bouquets.

F: Did the President show an interest in your setup--how it might adapt to him?

C: No, I hope he was interested, but he was I think too busy. He was only interested in the way it reflected itself in print really. He had certain respect and appreciation of it and sometimes irritation with it when we'd hit snags I'm sure--she said with a smile on her lips.

But the greatest thing was that you had a first lady who knew what an A.M. and P.M. deadline was. You'd never had one like that before. She was as close as my telephone. If the AP and the UP were beating me over the head for an answer to something before noon for a deadline, I could pick up the phone and tell Mrs. Johnson this and she'd either give me an answer or tell me the reason she couldn't and at least I would get back to them. The worst thing that can happen to a reporter is no one to answer the phone. Even if you tell them you can't tell them anything, at least they know you're at the other end of the line. So I tried to return all calls and be aware of deadlines. And Mrs. Johnson was a saint to work for in that field. She also was active enough, being more than a poster first lady, being more than a "shake hands with the DAR" first lady, that they were active.

That is, quite frankly, one of the real problems that Mrs. Nixon is having that she could remedy in two minutes. She's very busy, but all she's doing is running a parade of groups through to serve them tea and

F: But it did give you your peg to go there?

C: It was the peg. Frances Lewine and Helen Thomas, who probably covered the First Lady more consistently because they worked for the AP and the UPI, were constantly sending in suggestions of women that Mrs. Johnson might invite to Women Doers. They were covering a variety of things and there was just an open dialogue. She really, I think, was blessed with the good will of newswomen. She deserved it because, my God, she was the greatest invention for newspaperwomen since the typewriter.

F: Did you ever leak stories to pets among the newswomen?

C: Yes. Because there are some stories that don't shape themselves to be put out in an announcement. Not leak so much as kind of "service." For instance, we didn't want to come out with one big blatant announcement that Luci Johnson for her wedding couldn't accept gifts of over $25. I mean the White House doesn't want to run off a sterile press release saying this--that looks ungracious--and that we couldn't accept things from strangers. Yet very thoughtful guidelines were set up. I let the reporter know it who I thought would handle it with sense and conscience--Betty Beale. And she did. As a result, the word got around. So we were not plagued with returning a whole lot of things she couldn't accept. There are many stories that are handled that way better.

F: Did you get criticism from the other correspondents for favoring Betty?

C: Well, I tried to cover my tracks but you didn't always do it. Sure they'd get mad but you'd try to even it up and throw them a break next time. The rule you followed was to try to serve the girl who had asked you the question first. I always felt that that was the fair way to do it. The first person that had originated the question got it served on their

dateline and their deadline. If it was the AM papers that originated the question, I tried not to break the stories for PM's.

F: Did you get any more favorable press from one part of the country than from another, or was it pretty uniform with Mrs. Johnson? Or more critical? We can state it either way.

C: I haven't thought about that, Joe. It was pretty uniformly good, and I think that a lot of things did that, I guess that the influential editorials that appeared in Life and a story by Nan Robertson in the New York Times did get you more national applause than lesser stories in other areas and they'd stimulate other invitations and applause.

F: But there wasn't what seemed to be sometimes a case with the President of one section of the country not really accepting certain aspects of the man that maybe his own southwestern region would say, "Well, that's just the way people are?"

C: No, I think she was a national first lady and some of the most interested reporters were from the eastern press about her. Maybe it's the difference between the woman reporter and the male.

F: Do you think that you have established a precedent that will have to go forward, the press secretary? Or do you think that this is just going to be a spasmodic thing depending on the luck in drawing a President's wife?

C: I think newswomen have come to demand more of the press office of the first lady than they have ever have. I hope that we will always allow our first ladies to perform in their own way. I would hope also that all of them did care about their country enough to want to put on an extra effort because they have a job they can use for the country.

cookies. Now, this can be time-taking, but it isn't satisfying eighty-five newswomen who wish that she were out handing out diplomas at a school or being. . . Her interest lay beyond those eighteen acres. And she could serve her husband very well that way. It's not any of my business to say, but I think that shows the contrast between the two First Ladies.

F: There's a little bit of "You've covered one tea party, you've covered them all" to perpetuate the cliché.

C: That's right. It's not virile enough. And times have gone past tea parties and petit-fours.

F: Did suggestions for Mrs. Johnson's activities ever well up from the Woman's Press?

C: Oh, I'll say. Everybody was an armchair press secretary. I got more advice--and solicited a lot of it because I thought it expressed their good will and their confidence.

F: Could you be more specific on some ideas that might have come in that she accepted or activated?

C: Well, Frances Colton of Mademoiselle Magazine, who was the travel editor, was with us in the Big Bend on the trip. On the way back she said, "Mrs. Johnson ought to do a literary trip of the Hudson River. It's just right for her. I can see how interested she'd be and how much it would mean." This stewed around in the back of our minds. Frances sent us a whole bunch of books, The Last of the Mohicans by James Fenimore Cooper. and all of the works of Washington Irving. So out of that, the Hudson River trip grew two years later, but the seed was planted by her. It shaped up in broader directions, but we did go to Washington Irving's home.

F: Any mistakes you made--I'm thinking of mistakes in procedure or policy--that you would correct if you were starting now?

C: Loads. Oh, that would take us two or three days, I suspect, but I have no major regrets.

F: Let's quit.

[End of Tape 1 of 1 and Interview III]

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