INTERVIEW IV

DATE: August 27, 1969

INTERVIEWEE: ELIZABETH CARPENTER

INTERVIEWER: JOE B. FRANTZ

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

Tape 1 of 1

F: Liz, last time we just raised the subject of mistakes that might have been made, either wrong procedures or policies or any regrets you might have had that were either fundamental or just interesting, that if you had to do over again you could avoid, would avoid, or would change. Do you want to sound off on that for a little while?

C: Well, you think of big errors and little errors. I don't think that there were any major errors because there was really no great room for major errors. If they are, you know, you should go to critics instead of the participants.

A small error that I might do differently if I were doing this again: we went out of our way not to ever announce the name of a designer of a fashion. Part of this was because Mrs. Johnson did not put clothes first in her list of priorities. And you had a previous First Lady who had put great emphasis on clothes, who was a clothes horse. We wanted to accent what Mrs. Johnson did rather than what she wore. I think for that reason the fact that she was a very well dressed first lady was often overlooked. It was a side of her life that took a great amount of time, and you spent more money and more time on it because your clothes went out of date faster since you were in the paper more frequently. I think if I were doing it over, I would go ahead and not strain so hard not to announce who

designed such and such a costume. Clothes are just a part of a first lady's job. She is the American woman on the scene, and women are interested in what she's wearing. And whether Adele Simpson mad it or Molly Parnis made it is, while not monumental, the fact that Mrs. Johnson was wearing the clothes of a variety of American designers was probably a plus that we should have emphasized more. I don't think she ever got the credit for being the well-dressed woman that she was. That may partially be our own fault for not emphasizing it.

F: Do you think that, to a certain extent, people think you're well-dressed because they know who dresses you?

C: Well, the fashion writers--who are a whole cult and who do seem to think that that's more important than anything else you do--did take issue with us quite frequently on this subject.

F: Did they do detective work behind the scenes to try to find out?

C: Oh, yes. And it got to be kind of ridiculous because at a party if Mrs. Johnson had the jacket lying over on a chair, they would go over there. I'd see some newswoman over there looking at the label. It wasn't that monumental, but it was shaped partially by the predecessor, partially by the advice of the AP and the UP girls who came to me and said, "Whatever you do, don't let this take the play." In a way it seemed very commercial to be advertising the names of designers. But it's a part of life, and that's one small thing I might have done differently.

F: Would be sort of like not telling what kind of car the President's driving when he's on the ranch.

C: Yes. The big thing is I would have really tried to persuade the President to run again, but I didn't have enough warning. I think he would have

won, and I think that there would have been greater continuity. Well, you can look back and see all kinds of things that would have been better for that reason, but it wasn't my decision.

F: Did you ever come to a formal decision on what was private business and what was public business that was at the same time still private. That is, as I don't have to tell you, the President does--and the whole family--live in a fish bowl, and yet some things are theirs.

C: Well, that was constantly the tightrope that a press secretary to a first lady walks, because the first lady and the children of a president who by virtue of living in 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue are public property, still are not elected by anybody. They just happen to be the wife of and the children of the President of the United States who is elected.

F: Probably, the fact that they were girls made it a little more interesting, I think, than boys who tend to wear the same things unless they're just outlandish.

C: Well, clothes, their romances. Of course the two girls--Luci was in high school; Lynda was in college. So they were at a time of life when there were many milestones--commencement exercises, what grades they made in college. All of this came under public surveillance. It seemed to me remarkable that both of them managed to give a piece of themselves to the public. They did share things. They did go out and campaign when it was necessary; and they did do some "good works"--Lynda in the field of the arts, Luci in the field of children for the blind.

But, on the other hand, they reserved very much their right to have their own boy friends and not to be trailed with that insatiable curiosity that the public has about how a girl has a date with a Secret Service man

in the car. As a result, I think that most of them spent most comfortably on the third floor of the White House with time for seeing their own friends, because then you do not have to have a Secret Service agent present. You don't have reporters.

F: The simplest thing was to have people in?

C: In, instead of going out. The hardest time to straddle the whole thing was of course when the two girls got married, because when Luci married it was the first time in fifty years that there'd been a White House bride. And the whole world loves a lover. There were more than five hundred reporters who covered that wedding. They felt that every one of them should be in the church. We had a limited pool of fourteen in the church, but we did try to set out in an orderly way information.

F: How do you handle the pool?

C: The pool you try to divide up between wire services, magazines, newspapers, television, and foreign press--foreign press being put on for the very simple reason that when there are foreign royal weddings we want American reporters to have the right to be there.

F: Do you arbitrarily pick who will be in the pool, or does the particular type of professional group choose?

C: The agency--I mean, one spot goes to AP--

F: The wire services--

C: No, they would resent very much if you chose. We did choose one on the basis of size. Bonnie Angelo who was about four-feet ten-inches tall and weighs about ninety-three pounds could fit into the altar behind Lynda's wedding in the East Room. She said with some complaint that "All my life I've striven to be an outstanding writer and newspaperwoman,

and the one time I was selected it was the basis of weight and height."

F: Now, you had to get Luci--let's talk about her a minute. You had to get her through a high school graduation, and you had to get her through being pinned.

C: Several times. And joining the Catholic Church.

F: And her conversion.

C: Right.

F: And, of course, she was in the usual Azalea Festival Queen. Was she Apple Blossom?

C: Yes, Apple Blossom, and also in Norfolk at Azalea.

F: Before we get into the wedding, tell me a bit about these earlier things. Let's talk briefly about her graduation and any problems that came in. I remember she got a Corvette, if I am correct, as a graduation present.

C: Yes. From her father. Well, those are public ceremonies, so you did try to accommodate the press by having some space for them at National Cathedral School and then at the various festivals. You know the people who are sponsoring it hope very much that they'll get some attention.

F: That's what I'm getting at. You've got two motives here. You, in a sense as the protectress as well as press secretary, on the one hand and the institution which would like as much publicity as they could get and which basically in control of the situation.

C: That's correct. But there the girls certainly did cooperate with the institution because you don't become Cherry Blossom Princess to see the sun set on the empire, so to speak. I mean you wouldn't take a public assignment or honor like that if you didn't expect to do some penance with the press. So they wouldn't go into that thinking that they were

going to have a nice private time.

F: Exclusive affair.

C: A public event. The times that they did want privacy were--you know--when and who they dated. They were pretty understanding though in foreseeing when an event would make news and therefore try to let me announce it in a way that was orderly. Example: Luci had studied to be a Catholic. There kept being rumors about it, but we stalled questions. Actually though, on the day Luci was going over to become a Catholic, where she didn't want to go into her vows with lots of televisions lights and curious people, her mother wrote out in her own handwriting the announcement of Luci becoming a Catholic--very simple--and called me in an hour before the family went over to the ceremony and gave me the announcement. Then I had the press so that practically while Luci was at the church, or just back--on her way back, I was notified--I announced it. In other words the press wouldn't have a gripe for doing something behind their back, and yet I think they did respect her right to have that privately done. I think that shows farsightedness on Luci's part and on Mrs. Johnson's in knowing this is a story and plan ahead for it being handled in that manner.

F: You've got Lyndon Johnson as a Baptist turned Christian, and Mrs. Johnson as an Episcopalian. From anything you saw, how did this conversion set with them?

C: I think that the President in an unusual way was quite proud of Luci having the spunk to stand up to him--not that he tried to argue her out of it at all, because he has always felt that the girls' choice of mates and choice of religion is their business. You know, he defends their right.

I think he was very sympathetic with Luci. I think he wanted her to think it through rather a long time, and for no one to be able to say, "It was just a whim of a young girl," because girls do go through stages of wanting to do something dramatic. But he went along and I think was quite proud of it. Subsequent things show--you know, he has gone to church with her and with the baby. He even goes to church sometimes at the Catholic Church when she doesn't go, taking little Lyn.

F: There's a rumor in Texas that he's going to turn Catholic.

C: That would surprise me very much.

F: It would me, too. It was also the rumor, spread by some of his detractors, that he was trying to get somebody in every major religious group for political purposes. You never sensed any of this I guess?

C: No, none whatsoever. There were too many reasons that Luci joined the Catholic Church [that] was not good politics.

F: Did her interest in this precede her meeting Pat, or did this come after?

C: Oh, I think Luci was almost born with a rosary in her future because she's a deeply religious girl and a very sensitive girl. Her path was always in that direction.

It was an interesting thing to handle press-wise. [It] occurred over July 2 which was her birthday, and then we went into a July 4 weekend. After the basic announcement, there were loads of people who wanted to do all kinds of soul-searching with me on her motivations. So I counted--and I must say, I give the press credit for this--every single paper that hadn't had a correspondent at the White House, every major paper--called to doublecheck that it was an accurate story that they were reading on the AP and UP. I was surprised at how many did call to doublecheck it.

F: They weren't putting out unverified rumors?

C: That's correct, and it doesn't always happen that way.

The second thing is that my phone was so tied up that evening, and Nan Robertson suddenly appeared at my door--the girl with the New York Times--in blue jeans. She hadn't been able to get a phone line into my house, though I had three lines, because of the number of phone calls. She wanted to come over and talk about it. But my feeling is that, while it was a dramatic thing, we tried to handle it as matter of factly as possible and not try to second-guess Luci's motives.

F: Did you get many letters on this?

C: Yes. And the Catholics are a union all their own. She got thousands--literally thousands--of postcards and letters welcoming her to the club. We got very few against. I think that, one, Kennedy's election as a Catholic made it safe for anybody in any religion to be in the White House.

F: One thing that occurs to me that we skipped way back there and it's something that I wanted to ask you. And this is an intrusion on the thought, but I want to get it out. We talked about the campaign of '60 when the Kennedy sisters came to Texas and worked with Mrs. Johnson. One thing we did not mention that time was the fact that Mrs. Johnson's father died in the midst of that, and I wanted to know how that affected her campaigning, what it did, whether she bore up under it, whether it was a great strain on her, or what happened.

C: Well, she carried it with her in the back of her mind everywhere, keeping close check in Marshall where he was in the hospital. The night in Houston when Jack Kennedy came down and was making his public confession to the Baptists gathered there, she got a telephone call from Marshall

saying that her father--

F: That's the reason I wanted to bring this up.

C: --her father had developed blood poisoning in a leg, and they would have to amputate the next day. I watched her on the phone and saw her whole body flinch when she got the call. The President was getting dressed for this important meeting. She didn't ever mention it to him. She flinched, said to the doctor, "What time will they operate? I will be there."

Then after the President had gotten all dressed and a lot of his problems all solved and we had arranged the plane for her to go on, she went in and just put her arm calmly on him and said, "Daddy's going to have to be operated on in the morning, and I will have to leave and be there." He nodded and with a deep sigh then went on and they went about their chores that evening. It's a fantastic--

F: She went ahead and wrapped up what she had scheduled that evening?

C: Had to do, had to say to him. Then they went through the other things. But that is a fantastic capacity of Mrs. Johnson, who has had a lot of tragedies--personal--in her own life, and that is the ability to live each moment unto itself. That done that evening, she closed the door on it from her worries and her thoughts and went on with meeting President Kennedy, who was not president then, but going through all the handshaking and everything that was required.

The next day she went and she was with him at the time of the operation. And then later she had to peel off from a campaign trip one time and return to Marshall. Ethel Kennedy and, I believe it was Jean Smith had been traveling with her in Texas, carried on. We went on to San Antonio, and I stayed with that group because I knew the Texans. She went to her

father's side.

Then the word came when we were in Arizona campaigning that he was in bad shape. So again she told the President at the time it would worry him the least, made the arrangements to get on the plane, and flew to Marshall. But that was a constant thing she carried, but she carried it without ever letting it erode the President's own strengths for his needs.

F: Didn't he die when she was in Texas on one of those swings with the Kennedy sisters? I seem to remember that, and then she rejoined them down in Laredo.

C: Yes. I would have to check to be sure of the exact time, because there were many times she peeled off for needs in Marshall.

F: What was behind Lynda's leaving the University of Texas to come up to George Washington?

C: I think that her mother encouraged her very much to because she wanted the pleasure of Lynda's company, knowing that they would be living in a big, either house or museum. It's less of a museum if you have children there. Her mother enjoys Lynda's sense of history, and she thought that it was worth having her close by for sacrificing some continuity in Lynda's schooling at the University of Texas. As it turned out, it did cost her being a member of Phi Beta Kappa. Lynda had the grades but because of the rules which don't allow you to make your A's and B's in your third year away from the University of Texas, she couldn't be a member even though she qualified scholastically.

F: You'd give up Phi Beta Kappa though to live in the White House?

C: Yes. And she felt that history thunders over your shoulder in the White House, and she wanted Lynda to absorb it. Lynda was a great history buff,

and I think she brought a great deal of joy to her parents by being there.

F: Did the press show much interest in this?

C: Yes, in that, and in the fact that for the first time the White House had a "boarder", which is the way they dubbed Warrie Lynn Smith who had been Lynda's roommate at the University of Texas and came up there. So they were interested in it. Young children of presidents are always going to make news there, particularly eligible dating young girls.

F: Did Warrie Lynn to some extent go her own way, or was she pretty much just Lynda's companion throughout?

C: She and Lynda were very close, being in the same year of school and the same sorority and the same set of circumstances. They were pretty inseparable, but this was more because life blocked it out that way.

F: Did the press try to get Warrie Lynn segregated so they could talk to her informally?

C: Oh, yes.

F: How did Warrie Lynn handle that?

C: Well, she has a great gay manner, and she quickly learned not to get burned.

F: Did she get burned?

C: Oh, I think two or three times she did, and she would suffer over it. I don't even remember what they were, but something where she would be quoted.

F: Find out everything she said was--

C: Yes, was news because she lived at that address.

F: Did both girls--Lynda and Luci--have an innate sense of publicity and press relations, or did they evolve? In other words, did you have to educate them, or did they come to it early?

C: I think that they were both surprised at the tremendous amount of interest in every segment of their lives. I think at times they were hurt and disappointed.

F: Through the vice presidency I judge they'd been reasonably anonymous?

C: Fairly. But, on the other hand, I think of them in contrast to somebody whose father might never have held public office. These girls grew up in a house surrounded by Sam Rayburn and Dick Russell and men in the news and whose lives were shaped and influenced by the press. I think that while they had never been "it," they had been so close to people who were "it" that they came into it with a great deal more savvy, because they were born into politics.

I can't say that either one really enjoyed it. Luci mastered it. Lynda had a kind of shotgun wedding with it. By a shotgun wedding, I want it understood, it was with the press. It was an arm's length arrangement. She knew you had to give them their due at certain times, but she never enjoyed it. Luci was like a blithe spirit and she just attracted a following wherever she went. Lynda would try to fend it off.

F: Luci, it seemed to me, was eminently quotable, too.

C: Yes, and Lynda would have been too if she had enjoyed it, but she never enjoyed that side of it.

F: Did either girl ever embarrass you with what she had to say--put you in a bind?

C: Not so much by what they said as their reluctance to let me be fair with the press, or what I would consider fair--accommodate the press on occasions.

F: Along what lines?

C: Well, it would be a lot easier for me to be able to say, "Yes, Lynda is in Los Angeles seeing George Hamilton," than to play cat-and-mouse. I had to take the position--and perhaps it is right--that this is a private time and she's a private person. On the other hand, when reporters have seen the body in Los Angeles, you do feel like a nut if you're a press officer and have to be elusive.

F: Don't know anything about it.

C: I never did lie, because I just made up my mind I wasn't going to lie over that. I thought it would cost us more later, and cost her mother and father good will.

F: All right, I say to you as press person, "What is Lynda doing in Los Angeles with George Hamilton?" What's your evasive answer to that that keeps your skirts clean and yet somehow gets me--

C: Well, I had two or three. I would say that Lynda is not in the White House; Lynda is having a private visit and I'm not at liberty to release the destination.

F: Then I say, "But, Liz, she has been seen at Chasen's."

C: Well, I would say, "I would suggest that you have your reporter out there who has seen her handle the story."

F: Did the President, as far as you know, ever lay down any restrictions on where the girls could or could not go because of the fact that they would be seen and it might somehow get back on him?

C: I don't think so as far as being seen in that manner--in the manner of being at a night club or some place. They were aware that there are certain places that are not going to help their father, and so they wouldn't go there by choice.

F: Neither was rebellious in the typical teen-age sense?

C: No. The one time that I think he did lay down the law is when Lynda had wanted to go to Europe. Along we came with a balance of payments problem. The President was telling everybody that they had to stay home and travel in the United States and not send dollars abroad. So he did lay down the law and say she couldn't go abroad that year.

F: Did that get into the press?

C: Yes. We put out a statement saying she would not be going.

F: And gave the reason?

C: Yes.

F: Did the press accuse you playing politics with that?

C: Well, everybody knew that you were playing politics because you said--in fact it was a statement by Lynda, "Because of the balance of payments, I am not going.

F: Basically, was anything that happened to Luci and Lynda the responsibility of your office, knowing that they're children of both parents, and, therefore, what affects them does not affect just the distaff side of the White House alone, but also the male side?

C: Well, you have to have a clearcut decision on who's handling what categories of news. The West Wing handled the presidential news, and I never got into it. The East Wing--we had it understood at the beginning that any questions about the girls, women, dogs, or old brocades, come to my office. The President respected that very much and whenever he had anything that he thought should be cleared up about the girls or should relate to the girls, he would call me. That was a great advantage, and I must say that's what I see in the problem right now. Well, we have the example

yesterday of Tricia Nixon's appendicitis operation announced on both sides of the White House. That would never have happened. And I don't say this patting me on my back at all; it's just that it was such a clearcut understanding

F: And some things get passed over now, I notice.

C: That understanding was made between Pierre Salinger and me the day I walked into the White House. He was tired of having to answer hamster questions, and Carolyn and John-John questions, and he thought that they low-rated--and I certainly felt they low-rated--a presidential press conference. I suggested that I would handle all things on dogs and women and furniture.

F: Now then, a Roman Catholic conversion in one sense involves the President, because this has certain political overtones. Nonetheless, this is still a woman's business because she's the one who is doing is; therefore, it is your story.

C: Well, it was not an elected official who was doing it. It wasn't the President. It wasn't because it was a woman. I would have been handling it if he had had a son. I handled all the news about little Lyn. But the very fact that I handled it kept it from being a political issue. It was a family event--a family milestone, not a political milestone. I think that helped tremendously.

F: You had some minor flaps--and if they're not worth talking about, don't talk about them, but I feel like I ought to ask you. There was one when presumably Secretary Zuckert was unhappy because Lynda had called his daughter on his private line.

C: Never heard of it.

F: Gerry Mulligan wrote a song for Lynda. What happens in a case like that?

C: I don't remember that one specifically, but we often had people writing songs to the girls, to Mrs. Johnson, to the dogs, trying to commercialize on the White House. We tried to be considerate but tough. Generally, I drafted a letter for the General Counsel to sign if it concerned the family, because I thought the General Counsel signing those letters would have an effect. That was that "you cannot exploit the name of the White House or the people in it for commercial purposes." This was a constant problem. You have such things as real estate firms in San Antonio advertising Lady Bird houses, almost as though she'd put some kind of beautification stamp of approval on them.

F: Jackson and Perkins, the nursery people, did a Lady Bird chrysanthemum which they said was not named for her. What do you do? Her name isn't copyrighted.

C: Well, again, you send a letter saying, "She's flattered, but you must know the rules of the White House." It's a rather strongly worded letter. Now, this changes somewhat, and we probably were too tough about it because at the end a rose was named for Mrs. Johnson, but not while we were in the White House--on leaving. So you couldn't feel that it was exploiting the office but was done out of devotion. Of course, there are lots of roses named for Princess Elizabeth and the Queen and everyone. I think most gardeners really enjoy this. So we did it. But the commercialization of the White House is a constant worry and you have to have a very alert general counsel. But in so many instances the original letters would come to me, and then I would send them over to him.

F: Now, occasionally Mrs. Johnson would do something like an introduction

to a particular book or something on that order. What made you decide in this case to go ahead and do it?

C: If it was something she felt terribly in tune with, but she rarely did it in the form of an introduction to the book. More often she would do as a letter to the author, congratulating them, and then give the permission to the author to use the letter. And many of Mrs. Johnson's letters were used in a variety of ways, mostly to boost the beautification program. I think she only wrote one introduction to a book that I recall, and that was either Marie Smith or Ruth Montgomery--the first two books written about Mrs. Johnson; she did one or the other. But then it became abusive in the number of requests she got. Again, we may have been too tough about it, but we did try to not jeopardize the office from being misused constantly.

F: Now, Lynda worked for awhile for McGeorge Bundy as a non-salaried clerk, and Luci had those summers with the optometrist. Was this really an attempt to learn something on the part of the girls, or was this just the fact that girls shouldn't be idle around the White House?

C: Well, I think it was two things. One, Luci wanted to earn some money. She went out and got her own job. She'd been being treated by this optometrist. She liked it. She'd always had a bent for nursing. She just asked for the job, got it, and it worked out fine.

F: Did you get any retort that this was a use of the Johnson name to get business for the optometrist?

C: Only from the most cynical. I had some trouble with the optometrist because he was something of a publicity hound, and I would find him constantly--well, he was never sorry to see reporters come. I was

trying to turn them away from his door by saying that she's on the job, she can't work--

F: Did Luci work?

C: Luci worked regular hours out at his office.

F: She kept her hours?

C: He would have enjoyed more publicity out of it, it was my impression. I had an agreement with him that was, again, done rather under pressure to let's set up pictures the first day and then no more--the lid went on.

F: Did he pay her just regular rates?

C: Yes, regular and not a whole lot. But it was a young girl working and holding a job and doing her part of it.

F: What was behind Lynda's job over--?

C: I think that Lynda did not want to be idle; that it's very hard for a girl in the White House to work, although later she worked for McCall's without too many problems. There would always be some reporter who would stand there and if she was one minute late or one minute early, would be the kind of person that would report it. These are intrusions, I think--very unfortunate intrusions--on a person's right to be a public person; to criticize them if they didn't work and to criticize them if they did; looking for the ridiculous, the slip-showing or something like that. Two or three times the Secret Service, which always had the capacity of parking the car in a "No Parking" place with a driver in it would get us in a jam over that kind of thing. That was never Lynda's fault. She didn't park the car, but there would be newspaper stories about it.

F: Did the Secret Service provide any leaks at all?

C: Yes. The very fact that they were operating, and you know, they're very

easy to recognize. They would be into advancing a trip--the nature of their job takes them out there. The leaks often came from police stations before a trip--almost invariably.

F: There's no way to swear a police station to secrecy.

C: Not when you have reporters sitting around on a police beat, seeing a newcomer come in. The most interesting thing that has happened in Des Moines or Podunk that day is a White House Secret Service man. So the story would be out. It became very difficult, particularly with the President's desire to keep trips unannounced in advance. That was also an error, I think. If we look back; I think we went to too many lengths to keep things a secret until it happened. Sometimes there were reasons for it; sometimes it was better to announce it.

F: Well, now, the Secret Service wanted things to a certain extent kept unannounced, or uncertain, because it made guarding easier.

C: Yes, and it did keep you from getting--

F: Did they oversell the President on this, do you think? Or was this just a natural bent?

C: I think he had the natural bent from the time he went to see a Texas governor who was supposed to be showing up in New Braunfels. He took the day off, got somebody to work for him, and he didn't show up, and he was disappointed. He has told the story many times. Therefore, he always kept his options open--the fact that maybe something would keep him from keeping the speaking date, so he would want it done in an impromptu basis. He didn't want to disappoint people.

F: Early in '64 Mrs. Johnson conducted newswomen through the private quarters of the White House. This was the first time that had ever been done.

Whose idea was that? Do you remember that?

C: Well, it wasn't really the first time it had been done. I covered, you know, Mrs. Roosevelt and Mrs. Truman. It was very rare that they would do anything for the newspaperwomen in private quarters. But I remember when the White House was done over by Truman, Mrs. Truman took us through.

But all of the newswomen had wanted an interview with Mrs. Johnson. We didn't want to have a big press conference, so the thing to do was to simply receive them on the second floor. Mrs. Johnson, being superb at telling the history of each room, took them around to see the second floor. They had not seen the second floor since Truman moved back into the White House from Blair House. So it was unusual that you would open the hospitality of your home, which is the second floor of the White House to newswomen. There were about eighty-five who came. Mrs. Johnson received each of them and then walked with them through the second floor halls and the rooms and talked to them about it. I remember she pointed out quite graciously to a group as we went into the Treaty Room, "Many of you will remember this room because it's where Eleanor Roosevelt used to meet with you."

F: Did reporters sometimes ask embarrassingly intimate questions?

C: Sure. I've been asked if the President had false teeth. Of course, that's not my category. He wasn't my area of responsibility, but that's just an example of the extent--if Luci dyed her hair--you know those kind of things.

F: What kind of rinse is she using now.

C: I always tried to divert to other stories.

F: How were the girls as campaigners in '64?

C: Good drawing cards. The barbecues will show that they drew two and three thousand. A candidate cannot be everywhere, but a member of his family is the next best person to a candidate. And they drew young people. They were well organized and set up, and they made good little speeches.

F: Did you write their speeches?

C: No, they kind of prided themselves on being able to talk in tune with their age group. I might give them an idea, but I never did write the speeches.

F: They felt they were a little younger than you?

C: Yes.

F: Let's get back to the two weddings. You had all this problem with Women's Wear Daily. Was this just the most obvious of the problems with the various magazines and other news media, or was Woman's Wear Daily a sort of a special case?

C: Well, it was one of the problems, and one of the most public problems. They were trying to release and do a lot of sleuthing around on what Luci's wedding gown would look like. Luci wanted the right to wear her wedding gown for the first time with her groom never seeing it. So we had a flap on that. Actually though, Joe, I have written this rather extensively in"Sixteen Crises"--makes Richard Nixon look highly unqualified for the job when I had sixteen just with the wedding. But I've written it in my book, Ruffles and Flourishes, and I think I covered it extensively.

There were other crises--wedding cake, for example. I had announced that we were going to have fresh lilies of the valley on top of it, and I got a frantic call from a public servant--not a crank--who let me know that there was a public health bulletin out which said that lilies of the

valley drip a juice that gives people hallucinations. They can wander around as though they're in a coma. Well, I could see five hundred wedding guests wandering around as though they were in a coma, and I tried to convince Bess Abell of this. She thought I was crazy, but we got the public health bulletin and so we sprayed the lilies of the valley. These are minor crises, but they're funny and it's multiplied in the humor when they occur in the White House, of course.

F: Okay, I'll wait for your book on that.

Lynda got into two pieces of bad publicity, once on a trip to Spain and once again on a trip to Colombia. The one in Colombia I don't think she was involved so much as the Secret Service who were supposed to have pushed some people around down there unnecessarily. Do you have any connection with either of these two trips?

C: No. I'd just get some backlash at the White House because the stories would move out of there. I think that perhaps Lynda worried a little bit too much--had a little bit of a Greta Garbo complex at times. She wanted to be a sightseer alone. She had found out that so often when people know you're coming, you have a whole trail of photographers and reporters trailing you. You know, the technique, if you can do it, of meeting whoever is at the dock--the press--or at the airport, saying a few words and then trying to spend your own time in your way. It's difficult, but if you can do it, it's better.

Secret Service can be very officious. They're just by their nature an enemy of the press because they want to move their person around unencumbered, and the press wants to get at the person. They can offend reporters very easily, and I've seen it cost good will. I don't know the

answer. They have a right to be worried about their jobs just as press people have a right to be worried about theirs. It is too bad the Secret Service [is] necessary at all in a democracy.

F: Do you see any difference between the foreign press and the domestic press in their approach to these problems of getting at people? Or are they all sisters under the skin?

C: The foreign press is generally more inhibited when you're traveling abroad. I guess that may be because we traveled in a great many countries that were highly controlled countries. They would be there with their pad and pencil, but they're not as pushy as our own reporters who came.

F: They didn't have quite that, "I've got a right to know regardless" attitude?

C: No. I think that they probably are more inhibited, except I think of Italy where you have these wild photographers flying around over your [You] find someone everywhere with a camera.

The main thing that has hurt on the press thing with everybody in public life is the weight of television. It's no longer a girl and a pad and pencil. It's Nancy Dickerson and three cameramen and fifteen hundred pounds of equipment.

F: Now then, that brings up something else; and that is because television reaches such an audience with such an impact so quickly, do you give them a priority over the old pad and pencil people who do the daily bread and butter, even the dull stuff, who stick with you on the days there isn't any news?

C: Almost inevitably you come to be pretty cold-blooded about this. Yes, three minutes is more important to you on getting a story over on David Brinkley or Cronkite than two columns in the Birmingham News Age Herald.

By the nature of these things, you're moving those people and their cameras up front just to get them out from being underfoot. The camera does have to be there to make the picture. I think that the pad and pencil press has had to take a back seat. People who are handling information are looking for the way to tell the story to the greatest number of people with the most impact, and that's with the camera.

F: At the weddings--and you may have covered this--there was a good bit of criticism by what I thought really was kind of some of the snobbish press and magazines. There always, it seemed to me, through the whole Johnson Administration [was] a tendency to downgrade what the ladies wore as compared with what Jacqueline Kennedy had worn. Were the girls sensitive about this?

C: Maybe a little bit. I think they all started thinking more about what they wore when they were in the White House. But they didn't have the great big fat budget to spend on a new outfit every time. They never felt that clothes were God.

F: It wasn't a major issue?

C: No.

F: It was just one of life's irritations.

C: It was one of life's irritations. Naturally you want to look well, and you want people to think you don't look dowdy.

F: Did George Hamilton give you much trouble--because you're dealing with another publicity type now that attracts his own natural publicity. And leaving out the fact that Lynda's boy friend is a target, you've got someone who is in a business that puts a great deal of emphasis on good publicity.

C: George Hamilton understood my problems better than almost anybody.

F: You could talk to George.

C: Yes. He would call me and say, "There are five reporters outside this house now, and Lynda and I are having people in. Shall we just be ugly to them, or should we let them make a picture and then bid 'goodnight' to them?" He never did try to press me for my decision. Generally we felt together that let's be--you know--they are news, do make a picture, and then politely say, "Goodbye." Don't let them devour the party.

F: He never tried to milk the publicity?

C: Never. While I would occasionally get a report that made me wonder if he had press agents that did, I never could really prove it.

F: Of course, the press agent gives you a different type. He has got to; again like the Secret Service, he has got his own job to do.

C: But George went out of his way to be a gentleman, always out of his way to call and check with the White House before he offered any invitation to a reporter to be with them. There were many opportunities he and Lynda had to be with the press where he didn't make any effort to be. I think he gets A-plus for his behavior, because it must have been difficult for him, too. Particularly, when the press ridiculed him over his pictures, ridiculed him over his draft status.

F: I was going to bring that up. This was a minor national issue, whether his going with the President's daughter was keeping him from--

C: No, it put him more on the spotlight. I think he probably never would have had so much attention from his draft board or anybody if he hadn't been going with her; I think it cost him in that respect.

F: Did he accept it with good grace?

C: As far as I know he did. I didn't have any particular thing to do with it.

F: This didn't become really much of an issue for your office?

C: Well, I never had to answer any questions on that subject.

F: Lynda did an article for National Geographic. I think she did one for Look. In both cases she gave the money for some cause. Mrs. Johnson gave an occasional interview to somebody. How do you decide who gets the article? Who gets the interview? I suppose Lynda could have sold to every magazine in the country from True West on.

C: I think it was whether it was something they felt that they generally had any reason to express themselves on. They wanted to do a story on the ranch and really wanted Mrs. Johnson to write it. Well she can write well. She knows the ranch better than anybody, and she ended up writing captions. But it was on a subject close to her heart. She did very few of those. They could have done more.

F: Now, when she did one, did the other people who hadn't had that exclusive, did they get captious and critical, or did they just accept it as the breaks of the game?

C: I think they accepted it as the breaks of the game. Then they would come in and ask for a similar one later. You tried to parcel it out in a way that it would be as fair as you could do it. It isn't as though there are so many magazines that, you know--the magazine market has closed down. But I don't think we got any major complaints on that, and you always worried about it.

F: Let's shift, Liz, to that day with Mrs. Gvishiana up in New Jersey.

When did you first learn that this was impending?

C: Well, almost the day before, when I heard that she would be accompanying Premier Kosygin. Therefore Mrs. Johnson would be part of this, and we had to do something with and for the lady. The President meantime had talked to Dick Hughes. He and Betty had thought that a day at a beach with a normal family might be what she would enjoy. I'm not sure we were right. She is a great art connoisseur. She has planned the exhibits of Russian treasures in London. I think that while she enjoyed this--and it's the kind of, you know, hot dogs on the lawn of Hyde Park kind of day that we always think we should give people--she might have enjoyed the White House and the treasures that we have there.

F: Who made the decision to give her this day?

C: It became necessary to do it in New Jersey simply because of the location of where the meeting was at Glassboro.

F: There never was another alternative that was ever really considered?

C: No, I think this really dawned on us later when we found out more about her.

F: Well now, where were you?

C: I was in Washington.

F: What did you do--call the--?

C: I talked to Mrs. Johnson and told her we'd have lots of press interest in it. She told me to get on a plane that was going up the next day. She was at the ranch. So we joined each other in--

F: In Glassboro?

C: Yes.

F: How do you get the word to the women members of the press, or those who cover the women's activities in the White House? I realize most of

them are women, but not necessarily all. How would you let them know that, "I'm going to New Jersey, there's going to be a story?"

C: Well that was not so much a problem on this thing because so often they hear the word with the announcement of who will be in Kosygin's party, which is made either by the State Department or the west side. Then, they have enough savvy to know that they have a woman's angle story. So probably more of them went on the trip than would have. But I start getting phone calls saying, "I read that she's going to be there. Will Mrs. Johnson be there?", and so I start telling--

F: Is there anyone or any class of person that you make a particular effort to have one of your assistants call and be sure that you're here or somewhere for a particular story?

C: On some stories of this nature, yes. You certainly do let the women commentators know, the major women on newspapers know, so that they won't find out at the last minute and feel they were robbed of a story by their ignorance. You do not want a newspaperwoman to be caught ignorant if you want her good will because that embarrasses her with her boss. So I try to tell the Nan Robertsons that Mrs. Johnson will be up there and, "I will be available to give you a small briefing on it."

F: Okay, so you hopped on the plane the next morning. Did you have any clear cut idea what you are going to do?

C: Not too much, except that I knew I would have to be in touch, that at some point I might be the only kind of observer with the responsibility to the press to fill them in on the luncheon with--

F: Were you able to tell them where they were going? Or did they just congregate at Glassboro and follow you around?

C: They congregated at Glassboro. We took off in a helicopter and went up to Mrs. Hughes beach cottage. I made notes on the way, and then when we got there I called back George Christian and Tom Johnson because--

F: The press was still waiting at Glassboro?

C: Yes, to fill them so far on what they were doing. It was a matter of going to the fence where all the reporters were waiting and say, "This is the latest thing." It was helpful to them, they told me, because they were not able to put out any information at all on the male discussions--the heavy negotiations.

F: Yes, I'm sure they had a problem that day of--

C: And so any little thing I could phone back on gifts, menu, everything like that, was used to kind of toss to the bears while they were waiting for the big story.

F: Right now, you all exchanged gifts, and all this is done kind of sudden. Is there a backlog of gifts that you get at something like that. I know that if you know it's going to be a state visit, you can shop and so forth; but where you've got to do something in a hurry, how does Mrs. Johnson reach in her knapsack and pull out something appropriate?

C: Well, by having Bess Abell who has a whole office full of kind of standard things. In this case, a gold Hamilton wristwatch. Bess keeps a few on hand, and we happened to have some on hand-- I think maybe the Early American mirror which was used by bridal couples in New England in the early day and was kind of a nice antique to give [that] had been planned for a subsequent visit. We had to pull up something in a hurry, so those were handy and available.

No, there wasn't any time to go out and shop on this case. There are

some standard books that Mrs. Johnson likes to give.

F: So she anticipates on that kind of thing?

C: Yes, and I think through experience Bess has learned to never be caught empty-handed.

F: Is it a difficult decision sometimes, or does that decision--

C: On gifts?

F: Yes.

C: Well, the President told Bess to spend imagination more than money. I think that our gifts were much more thoughtful and personal. We didn't just give Steuben glass out on an assembly line. You tried to find out a hobby of a person and then choose a gift that went with this hobby often. The President really enjoys gadgets, and so he liked to give Accutron clocks and that kind of thing.

But often you could do a gift for practically nothing. For instance, when Bess found out that the Prime Minister of Japan had been a postman, she found an antique post office box through her husband who worked here at the post office department, and fixed it up. And the Prime Minister was absolutely enchanted. When we found out that the Jewish mayor of Dublin, I believe it was, had been born in this country, we found his birth certificate and had it framed nicely. There's something that's tasteful, meaningful, costs twenty-five dollars in contrast to five hundred dollars.

F: And he'd rather have it than anything.

All right, you have gotten up to the beach house and you've called back, and you've told what you've been doing in the interim. Now then, I presume they all hop in something and get on over to the beach house.

C: Yes, we went in the cars and went to the beach house. Mrs. Hughes had her children all lined up there and some of her neighbors.

F: Now, you're at a place with one telephone--just a family telephone, I gather--and that's sure the extent of your press facilities. What do you do in a case like that?

C: But there's no press there. The only press there was down the road.

F: Didn't they come?

C: Some of them. The bulk of the press was back in Glassboro. They were being fed the story by me through George Christian and Tom Johnson. But there were two hundred or so reporters. Here there were a group. They used neighbors' phones.

F: Eventually, at least a handful showed up.

C: Yes. News leaks out, and so the New Jersey and Philadelphia reporters showed up there. I'd say five to fifteen. I just made myself available, filled them in on the information. Then they went to neighboring houses to make the phone calls for their papers.

F: On something like that, how do you ever get fed? I know you must, but you're busy. You take things like Mrs. Johnson sitting down to lunch with Mrs. Gvishiani to go do your work so you can come back and see what's happening afterwards.

C: You can eat in the kitchen, and often you don't eat. But that's the least important thing. I think a press officer has got to decide she's not a guest. She's part of the pots and pans, and the same thing with the social secretary. Bess Abell never sat at a table to eat in the White House at a state dinner even though she was running them until, I think, the last three months we were there. But she said, "I could no more sit at a table, I would be a nervous wreck; you've got to be doing your job." So you simply cannot consider yourself a ceremonial figure; you aren't.

You're there to make it easy for the ceremonial figure who's the first lady or whoever.

F: Did you yourself get a fair acquaintance with Mrs. Gvishiani--fair one-day acquaintance, or were you pretty much background?

C: Yes, I felt she was probably as nervous as we were--nice person, down-to-earth person, but guarding her words. It was too bad that we saw her under circumstances which are almost artificial in their nature. Betty Hughes did as much as she could to bring it into a normal setup. But you don't have a normal setup when the two heads of two great powers are meeting, and the wives and daughters of them are flown off by helicopter and told to spend two hours with each other. Even as great as Betty Hughes and Mrs. Johnson are at this kind of making you feel at home, still you keep worrying if you should be giving them a message.

F: I can understand that strain. On the whole, though, you thought it was a successful day?

C: I thought it was a very successful day. She saw the New Jersey shore and a lot of truck farming, and had time with some women who gave her a lot of attention.

F: Did you ever hear anything further from her yourself?

C: No.

F: The Russians didn't send along any kind of press person with her?

C: No. And I think that she had a terrible time shopping in New York as a result.

F: Let's shift to another subject. You, as I gather, were about the first person to be contacted on the Walter Jenkins' arrest. Tell me about your role in that.

C: Well, we were planning the whistlestop trip, and I got a phone call from Charlie Seib. He was an editor on the Star. He had been a friend from Philadelphia days when we both worked there on newspapers. He called me and said, "Liz, did you know that on the police blotter there's a report that Walter W. Jenkins, such-and-such address--Huntington Avenue--has been arrested on a morals charge, and we are going to use the story, but someone should say something. Is he in a hospital? Is he under medical treatment? What is the story? We want the White House to say something. I've tried to get hold of George Reedy, and he's in New York."

F: Was Mrs. Johnson gone then, or was she in--?

C: No. Mrs. Johnson was in the White House. You can imagine how shocked we were--I mean, I was.

F: How did they get the story? I mean, who picked it up off the police blotter?

C: A reporter for the Star, but they were being tipped off, and it became obvious during the day--

F: I wondered if it weren't leaked somewhere.

C: It was leaked by some policeman who felt pro-Goldwater, because nobody reads police blotters that carefully. You see, this happened all the time.

F: Had it happened--?

C: Then the Republican headquarters started phoning around, calling it to the attention of reporters. Nancy Dickerson called me later in the day and said, "I've been called by Republican headquarters."

F: What did you tell Seib--that you would check it out?

C: I said, "Give me time to check it." I got up out of the room where people were meeting and went--

F: What time of day was this?

C: This was about 10:30 in the morning, and he said, "Well, call me right back."

F: After he had been arrested the night before?

C: Yes. "Call me right back."

F: Where was Walter?

C: So I went to the other phone and phoned for Walter, and he was not there. He was on his way into the office. Mildred Stegall, his secretary, was there. And I said, "This is what I've just been called by the Star. Do you know of any reason I should not check this with Walter Jenkins?"

She said, "None whatsoever. Phone him direct."

Walter was the kind of guy that everybody laid their troubles on. If this had happened with another staff person, he would have been the first person I would have phoned to say, "What do you do about it?" I called him, and I just simply said, "Walter, I know this is not true, but tell me what to say. This must be a mistake, but this is what I've been told." And I told him very matter of factly.

He said, "I will call you right back."

F: Is this after he got to his office, or did you get him on the car coming in?

C: No, I got him in his home. He hadn't left. It probably was earlier. It was probably 9:30.

He didn't call right back. I got a call in a few minutes from Charlie Seib saying--Oh, excuse me. He didn't say, "I'll call you back," he said, "I'll handle it. I'll call the Star." Obviously the Star was trying to be cooperative and give us every advantage they could. I must say I look back on that phone call and think of Charlie Seib sitting there with the story ready to go, and throwing me the possible excuse that there was a

medical reason. I will always think more of him and the paper because of the way they handled it.

Walter said, "I'll handle it. I'll call him,"

I said, "Well, do call him because he's going to run the story."

Then Charlie called me in a half-an-hour or so and said he hadn't heard from Walter. By this time Walter, as we now know, called Abe Fortas who was a private attorney. Abe Fortas made calls to the paper, and they made the decision not to run the story until later. Abe went to the Post with the same plea and found a far less sympathetic reception.

F: That's surprising in a way, isn't it? When you think of the political leanings of the two.

C: Yes, and you also think of the compassion which they should have felt because their own publisher had had personal scandals which the press didn't entirely cover.

But the Star had made an error one time in writing a story about a Senator's son who was caught in this same kind of problem and the Senator shot himself. I think that that lay heavily on their conscience.

F: Okay, so you've got the Post that's going to break it--

C: Then Abe called me and said--

F: Are you just sitting meanwhile?

C: No, I've gone back into the meeting.

F: It strikes me you must be a little upset.

C: I was very upset, and felt that I could not open my mouth to one person, because I felt it must be untrue.

F: Even if it's untrue, if you mentioned it to me, then that spreads.

C: And also going through the own torture of whether I had done the right

thing in dealing directly with Walter. Abe called me later that morning and said, "Tell me exactly what you did."

I said, "I called Walter."

And he said, "Did you call anybody else."

I said, "I have not opened my mouth to another person." I said, "Perhaps I did the wrong thing in calling Walter," because it did occur to me to call Abe. There was no one else there to call. I would have called the President's press secretary if he had been there.

F: Yes, but everybody's in New York.

C: Everybody's in New York. I certainly felt, as a friend, a tremendous desire to protect Walter from hurt. Abe said, "You did exactly the right thing." I think looking back, it showed that my own conviction was so strong that Walter was not guilty of any such charge, that I felt free to call him and just tell him directly what it was.

Then the next morning--I didn't sleep all night; I worried about it tremendously--I had calls from Harry Provence and other people in Texas who by now were beginning to get radio reports and everything on it, saying, "What is the real story?"

I just simply said, "I'm not at liberty to talk about it." And really I didn't know enough to talk.

F: And you really didn't know.

C: Didn't know enough. So the next morning very early--

F: Had you ever had any more contact with Walter?

C: Have I?

F: No, had you after that? You've called him and alerted him and-

C: No. By the end of the day he was in the hospital. Then I later talked

to George Reedy in New York, urged him to have the President make a statement. Of course, George was going through all kinds of problems because the press heard that Walter had resigned and they wanted the President to make a statement. They had heard rumors.

The next morning I got to the White House about 7:30, and I went up to Mrs. Johnson's room. I called to find out that she had ordered coffee and was awake and went in to see her. She had not slept either and looked very worn and shaken and worried. She said that Marge had just phoned her, and had been very unpleasant over the phone about the fact that Walter's resignation had been announced.

F: Was Marge taken unawares?

C: Yes. Then I stayed with her and we phoned the doctor to find out how Walter was. We both felt Walter should not be left alone at the hospital.

F: Was it Walter's idea to go to the hospital?

C: I don't know. I think that his blood pressure was so terribly high that it was a necessity.

F: Just coming out of his skin.

C: Yes, because he did have high blood pressure and anything like this would make it go soaring. I think that Abe very sensibly had a doctor look at it.

Mrs. Johnson talked to the doctor to find out how he was, and in that conversation said, "Poor man, he has reached the end point of exhaustion--total fatigue--from overwork." Then both Abe Fortas and Clark Clifford came up and we talked about the problem and what could be done about it.

F: Mrs. Johnson's attitude was one of great compassion, I gather?

C: Tremendous.

F: Not blaming Walter for having done the President in.

C: Nobody was. Everybody was just saddened and almost silent with this. But there were four of us in the room. We were being called on her making a statement. My office was getting calls about what was Mrs. Johnson's reaction to this. So I wrote out something based primarily on the things she had said to the doctor--he had reached the end point of exhaustion--and put it into a statement. Abe and Clark looked at it. However, it was her statement. It was the kind of thing she had been saying and I'd made notes on. They were just saying that she knew that his religion and his family would be a great comfort to him.

Then she called the President in New York. She talked very low to him.

F: Had she talked to him before this?

C: I think she had talked to him the night before. She was almost throwing out great sympathy to the President, because she knew how distressed he must be over somebody who has been such a great friend and servant of your needs for twenty-five years. And she said, just very quietly, "I'm here. We've all talked about my saying something, and this is what I'm going to say." And she read it to him, and he obviously was just resting on her decision. Then she said, "I never loved you so much as I do this minute." I think my feeling was it was a woman who was trying to comfort a husband with all the burdens of the world and who had suddenly this terrible personal distress--as well as an election in a month--that somebody could make something disastrous out of.

So I phoned and put out the statement. It was put out before the President's statement. We got an immediate good reaction because what her statement was was showing the family support of Walter Jenkins, and

it kept it from being a federal case and a security case which a very reckless kind of political opponent could have made of it--made it look like Walter Jenkins was a security risk. She made it a medical case with that one statement, and I must say Barry Goldwater never used it. As a matter of fact, [he] had been a friend of Walter's in the past and been in the same military unit with Walter, and I think that it showed something on his side that he wouldn't misuse it.

The really remarkable thing was the mail that came to the White House in the aftermath, so many people saying, "I have that problem in my family." The country is really much more civilized sometimes than you ever think they are. People are more civilized if you give them the chance to be.

I don't think it cost us a vote in the election. It cost us a superb helper at the White House.

F: From your long time look at it, did you have the feeling that the President's staff work went down from that point forward?

C: Yes.

F: That part of his future problems stemmed from that?

C: Stemmed from that, yes. Because Walter, so used to the man, would weigh orders and sometimes hold them awhile, knowing that the President. . . He knew how to interpret the President's orders. He would go back with the problems.

F: He knew when the President was likely to have second thoughts.

C: Yes. The next few people that came in there did not have that sensitivity to him and were apt to just take it and follow it to the letter. And the President wanted somebody who would bounce back with it.

I credit Jack Valenti with having more bounce back than most of the people around the President. Jack would bring up something a second and third time if he felt it served the President's interest.

Walter did that constantly, and then there were so many things where Walter simply made the decision without the President having to--on little things. I think that the people that followed Walter worried the President with too many little things that Walter would have weeded out and handled and felt the assurance that he was following the President's wishes.

F: As a press secretary to the First Lady, did your relations with one or the other of the President's own press secretaries change, or were they pretty much the same throughout?

C: Well, there was always--

F: Which is another way of asking, did you get along the same with all of them?

C: I got along with all of them, and I give all of them high marks for effort. I think that each of them had a different kind of quality that served the President. I've often been sorry we couldn't cross-breed all four because I would have taken the camaraderie and lightheartedness of Pierre Salinger, and I would have mixed it with the knowledge and mellow experience of George Reedy. I would add to it the inspiration and the idealism and daring of Moyers, and throw in the caution of George Christian. And I think you'd have the best press secretary in the world.

F: Did you anticipate the break between Moyers and Johnson?

C: Yes.

F: Why?

C: You could see it happening. Because problems were mounting. Tempers were high. Bill is an empire-builder. The President was getting more

and more sour with the press. It's too bad it happened because I think that in many ways Moyers was the only press secretary that truly tried to influence the President. The rest of them were able mirrors of the President. But Moyers did try to influence the President.

F: Do you think the President appreciated this?

C: I think that in the long run he did, but the wear-and-tear on the--

F: You think his nerves were a little thin by then?

C: Yes.

F: I get two opinions on George Christian. One is that he's the best press secretary that Washington ever had, bar none. The other is that he was nothing but a parrot for Johnson.

C: I've known Jim Hagerty, and I would give him awfully high marks--

F: I get that too.

C: --in that department.

F: That Hagerty kind of wrote the textbook.

C: I think that George was fair to all reporters. I think it was an uninspired period of being a press secretary. I don't think that--

F: I don't mean to be invidious. Is it a little bit like the contentment with Nixon over the fact that the excitement is gone, you know, and you're kind of glad to rest awhile? His following Moyers is what I'm getting at.

C: Yes, I think that they had had a starlet. Bill was a great one to play favorites. But Bill would also try to explain the President, which I think sometimes serves him. It serves his best interests. George didn't. George just laid the cards on the table and played it very low key. Maybe my own evaluation is colored by the fact that I'm not a low key person. I think you ought to get out and persuade.

F: You think everybody really is on the team?

C: Yes.

F: Let's go back to Lady Bird for a moment. Did you have any opportunity to observe her as a business manager? As you know, there's talk that she has been the business brain behind the growth of Lyndon Johnson's personal fortune, et cetera.

C: I've observed her in some respects of that. I've certainly seen her manage a house and manage her properties.

F: There is, I suppose, a cliché really that he tends to be extravagant and she tends to be careful and knowing.

C: I wouldn't argue with that.

F: You've seen evidence of this?

C: Oh, I think that the President enjoys giving, enjoys spending, and plays the wide, wide berth--is that the word?

F: Or swath.

C: Plays the wide swath. I think that Mrs. Johnson is much more careful. Like the President once said about her, "She would never cheat you of one penny, but she would never give you one penny more." That isn't always true. She just doesn't enjoy spending money to the extent that he does. On the other hand, she after all realized that she had a certain amount of income and that that was going to have to be their insurance in a very hazardous occupation. The hazards of being in public life are fantastic. So as a result she had education funds for those girls which certainly served them well at a time when her husband's in an office where you can be defeated overnight.

F: The President was a great hand to make a lot out of anniversaries,

Christmas, birthdays, et cetera.

C: He's the most sentimental man I've ever known.

F: He became president in November of 1963. December of 1963 was his first Christmas in which he spent here in Washington. In explaining his gifts somewhere in there, he said that Mrs. Fulbright had done his shopping for Lady Bird. Do you know anything about this, or about his habits of the purchase-- ?

C: Well, that was not unique. She happened to be there at dinner, and he wanted to get Mrs. Johnson a beautiful robe from Elizabeth Arden or from somewhere, and he suggested she go get some. She brought several in and he chose.

F: She was quite happy to do it?

C: Oh, yes, and she was honored and flattered that he would ask her. He often did this with whoever happened to be within the sound of his voice or handy. He'd say, "I want to get Lady Bird that." So somebody would go in and bring in several sets of earrings and he would choose. He loved to go into stores himself. I've been in towns where if he had an hour off-

F: Did he do that as president?

C: No, I don't believe so as president.

F: But in the earlier days he did?

C: But as vice president I remember, and then he'd go into a shop and buy a dress for her.

F: It is true that he did some of her shopping?

C: Oh, yes. Loved it and got great pleasure out of it, and always remembered every anniversary with such joy. He just loved the act of giving.

F: Did Mrs. Johnson feel very strongly about whether she finished first, second

or ninety-seventh on the most admired, or the best-dressed list? Did she pay any attention to that?

C: No. However, I guess that you didn't like to be. . .It was when it would come out and you would kind of wonder why you were fourth and fifth. But I don't think that she ever weighed it in as being terribly important.

F: Did she feel competitive with Jackie?

C: No. And I don't think she wanted to feel--but there's not that competitive spirit in her body. She lives for one thing, and that is to be a joy and a companion to her husband and her daughters. It simplifies all life if you have one purpose.

F: Did she and Jackie have any communication?

C: Yes. They did. During the period after the assassination while we were still at The Elms, she received about an eleven-page handwritten in that eastern school backhand of Jackie's--legal-size foolscap memo on all the details about the White House Committee on Preservation and the art treasures. Obviously this was important to Jackie.

F: Done personally by Jackie?

C: Yes. But I had a strange feeling when this was delivered that it was pretty grim--rather ghoulish--that Jackie sat up late at night in the White House and put so much emphasis on furniture when she must be in dreadful shock and sorrow over her husband's death. But those were material things that mean something to her, and she wanted Mrs. Johnson to know the background.

F: Was there any communication, as far as you know, between them on when the move into the White House should be made?

C: No, I don't think there was.

F: How was that handled?

C: Mrs. Johnson and the President had both said to Mrs. Kennedy to please be comfortable about moving out. They made that very clear at calls they met at the White House during the days of the funeral. Then Mrs. Johnson also told Mrs. Kennedy that she wanted to keep the school, Carolyn's school, there. Mrs. Kennedy was concerned about disrupting Carolyn's school which was meeting on the third floor. Mrs. Johnson said keep it there as long as she would like to, and she did keep it there several months.

F: They stayed on even after Mrs. Johnson moved in?

C: Yes, and Mrs. Johnson went up and visited it several times.

Then the press were the ones who kept asking. And it did seem like a long time because I think it took Mrs. Roosevelt a very brief time to get packed and leave. The press, after the funeral, they expected Mrs. Kennedy to just move out. Well, she didn't until December 7. But their questions got more and more, "When are you moving in? When are you moving in?"

So I went to Mrs. Johnson and I said, "They just keep asking when are we moving in. When are we moving in?"

It's the first time I've ever seen Mrs. Johnson really angry. She turned and said with rather intense indignation at the question, "I would to God I could serve Mrs. Kennedy comfort. I can at least serve her convenience." I used that statement in answering the question, and it was used widely on television, and it did put an end to the question. I think it was a good statement, because it was honestly the way she felt.

Then, I believe we didn't hear until the sixth, and we may have heard it through Mr. West that we were moving in the seventh. But Mrs. Kennedy had sent Mr. West, who was the chief usher, out with floor plans that

Mrs. Johnson was able to look at and place the furniture mentally in her mind.

F: As far as you know there was no communication in which Mrs. Kennedy said, "Now then, Mrs. Johnson, expect to move at such--"

C: No, I believe there was not. I know Mrs. Johnson talked to Mrs. Kennedy once or twice on the phone.

F: What was going on at The Elms during that period? You must have been quite busy yourself.

C: The Elms was a fantastic beehive of activity, because we moved all the bags of mail from the White House. There was a fantastic kind of mail coming in to the White House in the wake of the assassination and a new president. One, was tremendous mail to the Kennedys expressing grief over the tragedy. Then congratulations to the new [president].

[End of Tape 1 of 1 and Interview IV]

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