INTERVIEW I

DATE: February 6, 1969

INTERVIEWEE: LESLIE CARPENTER

INTERVIEWER: JOE B. FRANTZ

PLACE: National Press Building, Washington, D.C.

Tape 1 of 2

F: Mr. Carpenter, tell us briefly about your own career, how you happen to be where you are at this time. I know you are a native Texan and a few things in between, but you fill it in.

C: I was born in Seton Hospital, then Seton Infirmary, in Austin, Texas, February 20, 1922. I went through the Austin public schools, through the University. I received my bachelor of journalism degree in February of 1943. I worked on the Austin American-Statesman, a full-time job while I was in the University.

I was in Austin fifteen years old when the President won his first race, when President Johnson won his first race. I don't think I really ever knew him until after the war. I had met him.

I went immediately after receiving my degree from the University in February of 1943 into the navy. I went to Midshipmen School at Columbia University, and then served in the navy until the end of the war. I was a lieutenant (j.g.) at the end of the war, and I had had a bad back accident. I had fractured my spine and had been put on permanent limited shore duty by the navy. They put out a directive that any officer on permanent limited shore duty could get out of the navy on request. So I requested it and was put in the inactive reserve. For that reason, I got out of the navy earlier than I would have, or earlier than my colleagues did because I didn't have the points, but I had that health thing.

So I came to Washington in September of 1945. And I went to work for a news bureau here headed by Bascom N. Timmons, formerly of Amarillo.

He represented a lot of Texas newspapers.

F: Before you get on with that, weren't you married in there somewhere?

C: Oh, yes. Liz and I were married on June 17, 1944, in Washington, at the National Cathedral, and then-Congressman and Mrs. Lyndon B. Johnson came to the wedding and came to the reception afterwards.

F: But they didn't really know you very well?

C: We didn't know each other very well. We had met. Liz and I both had met the Johnsons several times, but I guess he was coming to the wedding of constituents; we were both from Austin--Liz and I were--and there were some Austin people who came up for our wedding. I couldn't get enough leave to go to Austin and be married at that particular time and that's why. I was being transferred from Key West to Philadelphia, and we stopped off in Washington. It was the place where we knew the most people, and I just didn't have time to go to Austin. As you know, travel wasn't as easy during the war as it is now. And it was just simpler to be married here. They came to our wedding, and as I say, I came back to Washington September 5, 1945, working for a news bureau which represented newspapers in Houston, San Antonio, Dallas, Ft. Worth, Wichita Falls, and Amarillo. So I started covering Lyndon Johnson then, and Liz--I think you've already interviewed her, Joe--wrote a column called "Southern Accents in Washington" which she sold herself to a number of papers, including a number in Texas. So we were both covering Lyndon Johnson. A few years later on, at the beginning of 1951--January of 1951--Liz and I set up our own news bureau and worked together for a long time.

F: You'd been with Timmons until then?

C: I'd been with Timmons until then. I had represented Texas newspapers at all times since I've been in Washington, ever since September 5, 1945.

I covered Lyndon Johnson daily all the time he was in the House, all the time he was in the Senate, all the time he was vice president, and, necessarily, I saw much less of him after he became president. But I did see him both professionally and personally at times when he was president.

F: Let's bring your career on up to date and get those facts down, then go back and pick up the congressional story. In 1951 you set up your own news bureau.

C: Yes. Well, I worked for Bascom Timmons and Liz had babies and worked on and off. She had a column that she tried to sell for a while. She finally gave that up. She worked in a news bureau that represented midwestern papers. Then, finally, Harry S. Ashmore, who has become a well-known writer nationally, was at that time editor of the Arkansas Gazette. He came to Washington and met Liz and me in 1950, and he said, "I want you two to represent the Arkansas Gazette, but the Gazette doesn't have the money to pay both your salaries."

So I said, "Let's set up a news bureau like Bascom Timmons has." So he helped us get other newspapers. He got the Tulsa Tribune to pay the same amount the Arkansas Gazette did. Then Liz, in the meantime, had started a little news bureau of her own, and she represented the Beaumont Journal. We later were to represent the Enterprise as well. Those are the two newspapers in Beaumont. She represented the Beaumont Journal, the Abilene Reporter-News, and the Amarillo Times, a paper which later was sold and no longer is published. I forgot to mention that Bascom Timmons permitted me to represent on the side, in addition to working for him, two newspapers in Massachusetts, the Boston Post and the Springfield Daily News. Springfield is in western Massachusetts. So I had those two papers in Massachusetts, Liz had the three papers in Texas, and Harry Ashmore

put together the Arkansas Gazette and the Tulsa Tribune. And this way we were able to assume the risk of going into business for ourselves. We had to make more money than we were making then to take the gamble, and we had to have sufficient money to cover all of our expenses--office rent and stuff like that. Well, the bureau just grew and grew and grew. Before the first year was out, we had the Houston Post added to it, and then we kept adding things. In this kind of business you gain papers and you lose papers. Both the Houston Post and the Tulsa Tribune decided later to set up their own Washington bureaus with their own members--with their own staff members, and we lost those accounts but we picked up so many others that it more than made the difference. It's been a growing bureau; it's made more money every year than it made the year before. I now represent eighteen newspapers in six states. I'm a small businessman in a big business economy, but I do have a large circulation and, in addition to my news bureau, I write a syndicated column which is syndicated nationally by Publishers Hall Syndicate, and that's owned by Marshall Field who owns the Chicago Sun-Times and the Chicago Daily News.

F: So that you have a national audience?

C: Yes, sir, I do, thank you--for whatever it's worth, or for whatever I'm worth.

F: You had the rather fortunate and peculiar situation of representing the constituencies of two Congressmen who were going to become president later even though they lived across the continent from each other.

C: And I probably saw more of Jack Kennedy, if everyone will hereafter forgive me for referring to him as Jack, because he was close to my age, he was a little older than I was, but we were such good friends in those days.

F: Did you know him before he came to Washington?

C: No, I met him the day he arrived in Washington as a new congressman.

F: In your capacity as a--

C: As a correspondent for the Boston Post. I saw him the first day he came here after he was elected, and I saw a lot of him for an unusual reason. In those days, Liz and I weren't making very much money, and Liz was having babies, and I needed every dollar I was getting. And the Boston Post was in a very bad inheritance tax situation. Both Mr. and Mrs. Crozier who owned almost all the stock in the paper had died. There was not enough money available to pay the inheritance tax, so the heirs were forced into a situation where they had to sell the paper. And it was the voice of Cardinal Spellman in Boston. It was the only Democratic paper in Boston, and everyone thought that Joseph P. Kennedy--Jack Kennedy's father--was going to buy it. So every day I thought that this young Congressman was going to be my publisher's son tomorrow. So necessarily I paid a lot of attention to him, and I buttered him up, and everything else I could, so I saw a lot of him in those days and spent many, many afternoons in his office talking to him. We were very close friends. I was very close friends--my two best friends in the House were Jack Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson; it's that freak coincidence. Now, later on, I was to have a break with Jack Kennedy, which I always regretted, and it taught me a lesson--never to tell a lie--but I did it trying to save someone's job. After Jack Kennedy was elected to the Senate, he had to have very serious surgery on his spine, which he had, and his life was in great danger for a long period. But after that was over, he went to Palm Beach to recuperate. So he and an administrative assistant--in those days his office staff was composed of one man and two girl secretaries. And I must inject this. Jack Kennedy was so bad at remembering faces and

names in those days that I went into his office one day and his secretary was crying--one of his secretaries was crying. And I said, "Why are you crying?" She said, "Because my boss came in here, and for the seventh time shook my hand and introduced himself to me." He thought she was a constituent from Boston visiting the office. And she had been working for him for six months. But anyway Jack's mind was always off someplace else in those days. So Ted Reardon was the man in his office. Ted had gone to Harvard with Jack, and they were very good friends, and Ted was his right-hand man. Ted was later to become of less importance when he was in the White House because Ted developed a bad drinking problem, but he was his top man, his only man when he was in the House, and he was his top man when he went to the Senate.

But back to my story about why Jack and I broke. I called Ted one day to ask how Jack was in Palm Beach, and so we were talking on, and he says, "You know, Jack has got me after the Library of Congress to do a lot of research for him on senators he considers behaved themselves in uniquely courageous ways." And one of them, by the way, was Sam Houston, for his stand at the time of secession. At any rate he said, "So the Library of Congress has got several people over there working on the research, and we are sending it all down to Jack in Palm Beach and Jack is going to write a book about unique bravery by selected senators. Well, he wrote that book, of course, and it was called Profiles in Courage. But at any rate, I wrote a story and sent it to the Springfield Daily News and to the Boston Post. No, wait a minute, I think the Boston Post had been sold--I no longer represented it at that time--but at any rate I sent it to the Springfield Daily News. I know, because I remember they played it on page one.

F: Incidentally, you said you were with the Herald-Traveler, didn't you?

C: Yes, I now represent the Boston Herald-Traveler.

F: So you've kept the Boston connections?

C: Yes, I've kept Boston connections. I've represented the Springfield Daily News continuously since early 1946, and, of course, Jack didn't come to Congress until January of 1947.

At any rate, though, I wrote a story that the Library of Congress was doing research on senators and that Jack was going to write a book about it down in Palm Beach. And I remember the Springfield Daily News played it two or three columns. It wasn't a long story, but they really blew it up into a box on page one, and I had a telephone call from Jack in Palm Beach saying, "Where did you get the information that the Library of Congress is doing research for a book for me?" And I knew Jack had a terrible temper, terrible temper--and I knew that he would just chew Ted Reardon out and probably fire him if he knew that Ted had told me that, because Ted had to be so careful about what he told any reporter about Jack. So I lied to Jack. I told him a friend of mine over at the Library of Congress told me about it. Well, I never should have lied because he had everybody at the Library of Congress investigated to find out who told me. And he never could find out. And Ted would never admit it, you know. I told Ted what happened. So he never forgave me for that because Drew Pearson, who had far more circulation than I did--somebody sent Drew Pearson that story or Drew found out about it someway. He came out with a big column that this multi-millionaire's son was using the taxpayers' money to research a book for him, and really blasted Jack. Well, that made Jack even madder, and then the book won the Pulitzer Prize. So Drew Pearson wrote another column saying that the biggest rape of the

Pulitzer Prize in history, a book that was written in the Library of Congress and just polished up a little bit by Jack Kennedy, gets the Pulitzer Prize--Jack Kennedy gets the Pulitzer Prize for it. So Jack got madder still. Jack could never forget that and could never forgive me, and so that's when our close relationship ceased, when he returned from that illness. He was always nice to me, but we never were as close as we were in those days.

F: He seemed to have had a number of friends among newsmen at the time he became president.

C: He did. None of them had been close to him during the days that he was in the House because none of them were here. They came later on. These were most of all newspapermen who had gone to Harvard with him. I'm thinking of Charles Bartlett, for example; I'm thinking of Ben Bradlee; both went to Harvard with him. Rowland Evans, I don't know whether he went to Harvard with him or he knew him another way--I'm not sure about him--but certainly Bradlee and Bartlett, who were two of his closest friends, were Harvard classmates or there at the same time.

F: Would this be a Washington way of life that the public, particularly the elected official, invariably breaks with newspapermen over a long period of association?

C: Oh, yes, I had a break with Lyndon Johnson. We hardly spoke for almost a year, eight or nine months. I wrote an article about him; the first article ever written for a national publication about Lyndon Johnson was written by me in Collier's Magazine, and it appeared in February of--what year was he elected whip of the Senate--February of 1951, because I remember they had to stop printing the magazine to put in his election as whip. He was elected whip in January. They printed it ahead of time.

F: A rather nice piece of timing.

C: Yeah, right. Well, anyway, they called it "The Whip from Texas." Well, he felt that I put things in that article that I knew only because of our personal friendship that I never should have published. And this article was significant to him because it was his first national exposure. I mean, you know, he had been written up a lot by the AP and UPI in the newspapers, nationally, but he had never been written up in a national magazine before. Two things in it made him more angry than anything else. One of them was I said he was ambitious to be vice president, which, of course, he was. He wouldn't admit it and didn't want it in print. And the other one was that I said that he never paid less than $200 for a suit of clothes, and he bought them five or six at a time. That happened to be the truth, and the reason he bought them five and six at a time was because he had very little time to shop and just bought up a bunch of clothes; and the other reason was, I guess it's just because he grew up as such a poor boy in coveralls and in not very special clothing that he had a great, great fondness for clothes, and still does. I mean, he likes to be the best-dressed man. And he likes to own lots of shirts, more than he needs, and he likes to own a lot of suits, more than he needs. And before he became president, even when he was vice president, he was choosing most of his wife's dresses. Rather than her choose her clothes, he chose them for her. I remember once he came back from a trip to New York with about six hats for her. Now, imagine a man going in and buying a hat for his wife that she hasn't even tried on. But he did.

F: Was he fairly lucky in that? Could she wear them?

C: Oh, she wore them. Mrs. Johnson would do anything, and she always acted like they were the prettiest things she ever saw, whether she thought so

or not. She's that kind of wife. You know that--the completely loyal wife.

F: What most men bring home like that has to usually be put back or taken back.

C: Why, sure, in ninety-nine and nine-tenths percent of the marriages. But Mrs. Johnson wouldn't think of returning anything, wouldn't have thought of it. She has that gentle, thoughtful, kindness about her that she would make him think it was the prettiest thing she ever saw, as I just said, and that would encourage him to buy more things for her. I often wished, looking at some of these horrible things he bought for her, he would let her buy her own clothes. But he thought he had great taste. He was very extravagant, and he spent more money on her clothes than she would have spent on her clothes for herself. She's frugal; he's very, very generous, exceptionally generous. I remember once when he was vice president, he was in Hong Kong, and he bought eighty silk shirts from the Dynasty Shop, which is owned, by the way, by a man named Linden Johnson, from Topeka, Kansas. Liz and I had been in Hong Kong before that, and we were invited to a number of dinners, and people kept saying, "Did you hear what what Linden Johnson said about so-and-so, what Linden told about so-and-so?" And I thought, My Lord, how could the Majority Leader of the Senate be so prominent that everybody in Hong Kong is quoting him. And then we found out they were talking about the other Linden Johnson who owned the Dynasty Shop.

But back to my story about the eighty shirts. He bought eighty silk shirts in Hong Kong, and he brought them back and they were beautiful, just beautiful shirts. One night I was over at the house and he gave me three, and he said, "No, you ought to have more than that." He went

upstairs and got two more and gave me two more. So I wound up with five of them myself. We were somewhere later, a few months later on, and I had on one of the shirts he gave me. And he said, "Gee, I wish I still had one of those shirts." I said, "Don't you?" And he said, "No, I gave all eighty away." But that's like him. That's typical.

F: Did he and Kennedy have much of a relationship in Congress, or were they just two congressmen from two different areas?

C: I don't know that they had much of a relationship in the House. Certainly they knew each other. I must say that if a poll had been taken in those days in the House on which one of those men might someday be president, I think that Johnson, even despite the fact that he is from Texas, would have won it by a landslide, because Kennedy was a very lazy member of the House who didn't take part in debate, introduced little legislation that was noticed, was absent a lot of the time. He was a playboy in those days; it was before he got married, and so forth. Now after he went to the Senate, Johnson--I'll have to check these dates--was probably already majority leader or at least he was whip.

F: Johnson went in 1948 and became whip then after he overturned. . .In 1950.

C: In January of 1951.

F: Then Kennedy was elected in 1952, which means he would come in in January of 1953.

C: Well, then Johnson was leader.

F: Johnson was the--

C: Minority leader.

F: He was the minority leader.

C: Because Taft was majority leader.

F: And then in the beginning of '55 he became majority leader.

C: Well, Kennedy had not been--he needed his vote, so they certainly were close then, and one reason that Johnson's leadership in the Senate is so remarkable was that he had every Democratic senator personally psychoanalyzed by him; he knew all their strengths, all their weaknesses, everything about them. He made a point of knowing how you could get a vote out of them.

F: Do you have any idea how he worked Kennedy?

C: No, I really don't know, but I do know that during that long illness--it created quite a problem for Johnson because he needed every vote he could get and then Kennedy had not given the support to the Democrat running against Saltonstall in--

F: Saltonstaff ran in '48 and again in '54.

C: He had not given the support--well, no, Kennedy was elected in--

F: In '52.

C: '52.

F: Saltonstall in '54.

C: Saltonstall in '54. Well, Kennedy had not given the support to the Democratic candidate for the Senate, I believe it was Foster Furcolo. He never endorsed him for the Senate, and the election was very close. Saltonstall won it. And if the Kennedy organization had backed Furcolo--had worked for him--everyone believes that Furcolo would have been elected, and Johnson would have had that additional vote in the Senate. I remember Johnson was very bitter about Kennedy not supporting Furcolo. I don't know what all the facts were behind it. I do know that Foster Furcolo was in the House with Kennedy. I covered both of them. Foster Furcolo was a

congressman from Springfield. I mentioned that I represented the Springfield paper. Kennedy never could stand John McCormack, and Furcolo did business with John McCormack, so therefore he didn't like Furcolo. It goes back to that, but then there were other issues in Massachusetts politics. But Johnson really never could forgive Kennedy for losing him a Democratic seat or a Democratic vote.

I don't know what their relationship was. I don't really know anything solid about their relationship until they both ran for the presidential nomination in 1960. Every time I saw Jack Kennedy he would just quiz me about Johnson's intentions. Of course, I didn't ever tell him anything, and I don't know why he expected me to. I remember once I was on a television program with him in Philadelphia. It was a television program done before a national convention of teachers, no, the National Education Association, perhaps it was. And it was on a network, I forget which one. I was one of the people on the panel who interviewed Kennedy. We came back to Washington on the train, and the producer of the program had arranged compartments for us to ride back in. Jack invited me into his compartment--this was early 1960--and he spent the whole time trying to find out what I knew about whether Lyndon Johnson was actually going to be more than a favorite son candidate in the Los Angeles convention that year. This was early 1960. And I never would tell him. But I do know from things he said, remarks he made, that he never particularly liked Johnson personally. Well, he didn't dislike him, but there was never a close relationship there.

F: No great congeniality there.

C: No. I do think there was a close relationship when Kennedy was president and Johnson was vice president. I think Kennedy leaned over backwards

to try to include Johnson in on decision-making and important things--while he was president.

F: To go back a moment, Kennedy in a sense was an indifferent congressman and for a while an indifferent senator, although--

C: He became an interested senator later on.

F: Well, from the days that Joseph Kennedy first kind of emerged under Franklin Roosevelt, the Kennedys were always newsworthy because, if nothing else, the money and the size of the family.

C: That's right. And in those days Eunice was always getting her jewelry stolen, stuff. She was in Washington working for the Justice Department or Commerce, I've forgotten which. I'll never forget, Jack used to get so disgusted with Eunice losing that jewelry. Really bugged him.

F: Did she just leave it around?

C: I remember once she left--I've forgotten what the figure was--$50,000 to $75,000 worth of jewelry in the seat of the car and didn't lock the car.

F: Someone took it?

C: Someone took it. I remember Jack said, "What a damn fool stunt."

F: Right. When did you begin to suspect that Jack Kennedy might be formidable on a national basis? Other than the fact that the nation knew about his tea parties?

C: Well, his health was so poor. I mean, I was familiar with that because I was so personally acquainted with him. His health was so poor that I discounted talks about Kennedy as a potential presidential or vice presidential candidate, and then I got to Chicago in the year Kefauver was nominated, the year that Adlai Stevenson threw the convention open to pick the vice presidential candidate, and he would say nothing about it. And Kennedy did so well then. I was absolutely amazed, but he worked hard at it. I'll never forget one morning I had--

F: Did he work in anticipation of the fact that it would be thrown open, or was he just working because he felt the time had come to make his bid?

C: Well, he was working before he knew it was going to be thrown open. I assume he was trying to build up enough support so that Adlai Stevenson would have to think about him, and then when it was thrown open he worked even harder. I remember seeing him walking into the Hilton Hotel lobby, he stopped and talked to me late the night before the balloting was to take place the next day, and I never saw Jack look so bad in my life. I just thought, "If a television camera would catch you now, you wouldn't have a chance tomorrow."

F: Was there any serious thought while he was--

C: As you well know, Lyndon Johnson and Sam Rayburn threw Texas votes to Kennedy on the second ballot. They went for Albert Gore the first time. Not because they were for Kennedy, but because they hated Estes Kefauver so much. I don't mean hated--let me rephrase that because that's a completely erroneous statement. They felt Estes Kefauver did not have the ability to be the vice president of the United States. I mean, they felt he was a unique politician phenomenon who had gotten a lot of national publicity.

F: Of course, anybody who was mildly liberal from the South stood out like a sore thumb.

C: Well, I don't think either Sam Rayburn or Lyndon Johnson objected to Estes Kefauver's liberalism; I think they supported it. I think that--

F: No, that's what I mean though, the fact that he replaced old Senator McKellar, wasn't it, and so forth, made a vast difference in the type of representation you were used to getting in that area, that he looked better than he was.

C: That's right. But I think they thought that he had been completely oversold to the nation. I thought so myself about it. I did not think Estes Kefauver was a man of any capacity to hold a post higher than senator, and there was some question in my mind whether he was qualified to be a senator, or was a very good one. I didn't think he was a very good one, but he had something that sold. It started out, of course, in that crime committee on television and created some extension.

F: To get back to Kennedy for a moment, was he a good congressman in the sense of taking care of the constituency?

C: Well, yes and no. He and McCormack were always at war over the Boston Naval Shipyard which had a very large payroll, and each one was trying to take credit for something that went in there. He and McCormack didn't get along at all which made it a little difficult for him because Rayburn was speaker and McCormack was House majority leader, and McCormack would sit on him. As I say, he was a playboy in those days. He was always running off to the French Riviera, or running off to Palm Beach, or running off to New York, or Boston, or somewhere. He was out of town a lot. He didn't seem to have any interest in legislative work. Ted Reardon was in charge of taking care of the constituents--answering the mail and stuff like that, and I assume that was handled very well. Jack Kennedy was by nature a very, very shy man. I never saw anyone change so drastically in my life as I saw him change from the early Jack Kennedy I knew to the Jack Kennedy who was running for president. He was so shy you'd practically have to back him into the corner to shake hands with him. You'd see him at a party and he wouldn't go up to people and make conversation. He would sort of be withdrawn and people would have to come to him and make conversation. I think marriage took some of the

shyness out of him; ambition took others. When he first came to the House, he told me one afternoon, "You know, I shouldn't be here, and I don't really like being here. I wish I were a writer like you. But my father wanted my brother, Joe Kennedy, Jr., to be governor of Massachusetts." The brother, of course, had been killed in a plane crash in World War II, and he said, "After my brother's death, then I had to be governor of Massachusetts." And all the plans were for him to use the House for a springboard to run for governor. But the opportunities in Democratic politics in Massachusetts worked out so that he had a chance for the Senate, a better chance for the Senate, than he had for the governorship at the time he ran in 1952 for the Senate. There was an incumbent governor, Democrat, running for reelection, and he couldn't very well oppose an incumbent Democrat, so he ran for the Senate, ran against Lodge, Henry Cabot Lodge, and was elected. But he spent a lot of time in Massachusetts between about 1950 and 1952 getting ready for that first Senate race. But he never did anything in the House of any consequence. And some of his old Harvard professor friends would send him ideas and send him speeches and stuff like that. And sometimes he would make them, and sometimes he wouldn't.

F: Was there any thought during that operation that he just might quit politics? Get out of the Senate?

C: I thought so. He had such a long recovery and had so much trouble when he came back and the brace kept bothering him. He kept having the brace changed all the time trying to find something that was more comfortable. He talked about being in pain all the time. I certainly, in those days, couldn't conceive of his doing anything except staying in the Senate a little while longer. He always wanted to write; I just assumed that his

father was going to buy him a newspaper. There was lots of talk for some years that his father was going to buy the New York Herald-Tribune for him, which was in great financial difficulty under the Reids in those days, but finally Jock Whitney took it off their hands. But it had been for sale for a long time before Jock Whitney bought it. But Jack Kennedy did not show any leadership potential in those days.

F: Did you cover Congressman Johnson's campaign for the Senate in '48? Did you -- the events at this end?

C: I covered this end, and President Johnson gave me quite a bit of credit for making an important contribution to his eventual runoff victory in the Democratic primary of only 87 votes.

F: How was that?

C: Well, I did two things for him. Coke Stevenson came to Washington; it was the biggest mistake he made. He was being criticized by Johnson because he didn't know anything about foreign policy. He'd only been governor of Texas. So between the first primary and the runoff, he came to Washington for some appointments at the State Department to get briefed on foreign policy, sort of a stunt to get rid of this irritation of, "He doesn't know where Greece is", sort of thing. Well, they didn't say that, but you know what I mean. So he came to Washington. You will probably recall the AFL-CIO had endorsed Coke Stevenson because Johnson had voted for the Taft-Hartley Law. Also because the leader of the AFL-CIO in Texas at that time happened to be a Coke Stevenson man anyway. So Coke Stevenson arrived and all the Texas reporters, all the reporters in Washington covering for Texas papers, waited in the lobby of the Washington Hotel for him. And he came in, and I said, "Governor Stevenson, do you think that the Taft-Hartley Law is a good law or a bad law?" And he said, "I didn't understand

that question." And I said, "Do you think the Taft-Hartley Law is a good law or a bad law?" He gave me an evasive answer. I said, "Governor, you didn't answer the question. Do you think the Taft-Hartley Law is a good law or a bad law--good or bad?" And he gave me another evasive answer. I wound up asking him eight times, "Do you think the Taft-Hartley Law is a good law or a bad law?" And he never gave an answer, and all the Texas reporters wrote the story he was asked eight times, "Do you think the Taft-Hartley Law is a good law or a bad law?" and that he never answered the question. We all wrote it; it became a big issue in the runoff campaign, and I'm sure cost Stevenson some of his conservative support as well as shook up organized labor a little bit because they didn't know whether they could trust him under those circumstances. That was one thing. And, then, another thing. Johnson was looking for a new issue for the runoff campaign, and I suggested because inflation was the number one worry on the domestic front at that time that he should advocate something for the consumer. And I suggested that he say that if he got elected to the Senate the first thing he would do would be to introduce a bill to set up a study of consumer problems and so forth. Well, it's longer than that--we don't want to go into all that here--but he did make that speech, and he did receive quite a response in the mail and everything else on that issue. He did introduce such legislation in the Senate.

F: Do you think this is where the germ incubated that developed into Betty Furness?

C: I don't know, but he got a good response on it, and I think he was consumer-minded from then on.

F: Let's talk about some more of this--

C: Let me talk about the courageous things if I may, because I got off talking

about him being an effective congressman. He voted during the war to keep price controls on meat. Now this just absolutely set the Texas ranch country on fire. I was not here at that time, but Roosevelt, allegedly, asked him to help because it was quite a problem, and in the national interest, and in the consumer interest, it was very important to keep price controls on meat. Now, I was not here then. But after I got here I remember he voted to end all appropriations for the House Un-American Activities Committee. Those were the days when John Rankin of Mississippi was chairman of the Un-American Activities Committee, and they were just running absolutely wild with civil liberties. I mean, nobody was allowed to have any. And it was a very courageous thing because the big thing in those days was to find those Communists and do something about them. Only one other Texan voted to end appropriations for Un-American Activities Committee and that was Albert Thomas of Houston, who was quite a liberal. Then I remember also Johnson as a congressman, my congressman in my district--I was very proud of him--voted for the bill to end the poll tax which is something--all the southerners voted for the Un-American Activities Committee, all the southerners voted against the anti-poll tax bill, but Johnson voted to end the poll tax by legislation which was in those days a very courageous thing for a southerner to do, and I must say Albert Thomas voted for the anti-poll tax bill also.

F: We can go back before your time, and you probably know this, but Johnson also was one of three southerners, all from Texas, who voted for the first wage-hour.

C: Oh, yes.

F: The other two promptly got defeated.

C: That's right.

F: Gives some idea of the intensity of the feeling on this in that part of the world.

C: That's right. Well, Johnson had such a feeling for people who were poor; he never said it better than when he was president, when he was making one of his speeches of the Joint Sessions of Congress. He said, "When I was a boy, we were so poor we didn't know poverty had a name." Everybody was so poor. So he never forgot the little man, and I think another interesting thing about his career that I've heard him tell many times, when he graduated from Southwest Texas State Teachers College with a Teacher's Certificate in San Marcos, he asked to be assigned to a school which was predominantly Latin American, and that's when he was sent down to Cotulla. And I'm sure the Library must have some notations about the burial of the Longoria boy--let me see what his name was, I think I have something. And then I'm sure the Library has a record of the burial of Felix Longoria, Jr. Felix Longoria was a Latin American boy from Three Rivers, Texas, and he was killed in the Korean War. Felix Longoria, Jr.'s parents wanted to bring his body back from Korea and rebury him in Three Rivers, Texas. Three Rivers only had one undertaker in those days, and he refused to bury a Latin American boy, a Latin American boy who had been killed in the uniform of his country. Well, Johnson found out about it, and just went up in smoke, and called the mother of Felix Longoria, Jr., and said, "How would you like to have this boy buried at Arlington National Cemetery in Washington with full military honors?" And she was a woman of very poor education and so forth. She wanted to think about it, but she thought about it and decided to do it, and he brought the entire Longoria family to Washington at his own expense and they had the reburial at Arlington Cemetery. Johnson at that time was majority leader of the Senate,

and most of the Senate came out for the ceremony. I was there. I went there to cover it, and Sam Rayburn, the speaker of the House, came out for it, and the Organization of American States--it wasn't called that then--it was Pan American Union, I guess. But at any rate, representatives of Latin American countries, not just Mexico, but many other Latin American countries, came out for it also. It became an international incident. But Johnson couldn't endure intolerance.

F: It used to be--guessing among some of my Washington friends in the vice presidential days as to whether Johnson and Bobby Kennedy was the more committed to civil rights, feeling that Johnson for all his southern background maybe had more emotional feelings.

C: I never knew anyone more anti-Semitic than Jack Kennedy. He talked about it so often, it came into the conversation so often that you knew he must be obsessed by it.

F: Was this an Abby's Irish Rose sort of thing?

C: I don't know. It may go back; I'm not that familiar with the Boston Irish. I don't know whether the Boston Irish are anti-Semitic as a group or not. Generally, people who are in competition with jobs for each other are.

F: I've even known them as more anti-Italian since that was the next--

C: That would figure in it. Of course, the Kennedys were lace-curtain Irish, but they still reacted to the other Irish in Boston. I don't know what was behind it, but I do know they used to make remarks about it quite frequently. I certainly never knew Johnson to be anti-Semitic, anti-Negro or anti-anything. He would be for humor. I mean, he would tell almost any Texan his age stories in dialect. But I never saw an example in my life of intolerance or never heard a remark that I would interpret as being that.

F: Working with other newsman here, did you think there was any chance of his overcoming his southern origins and becoming a national officeholder?

C: No, I didn't. I certainly thought he could be vice president, don't think there's any question about that, and I think it's the luckiest thing that ever happened to Kennedy in 1960 was to offer to Johnson and to have Johnson accept it because it carried states in the South for him that he wouldn't have carried otherwise. It certainly didn't lose him anything in the North, and they barely squeaked through.

F: Did you have any connection with the pre-convention jockeying in '59 and '60 as it came down toward the convention in Los Angeles?

C: Oh, yes, I was very much involved in the counting, and I was consulted by Johnson. I did know, and did break the story. I was working for NBC as a consultant. NBC hired me in the 1960 convention to give them any story I had that they might not have. And I did give them the story that Johnson was Kennedy's choice for vice president about an hour before it was announced.

F: Oh, really. How did you get that story?

C: Well, I got that story because I was in John Connally's suite talking to him and Nellie, his wife, and Mary Rather who was a long-time secretary to Johnson, and he got a call and dashed out and said, "He's going to accept it." And I said, "Accept what?" And he said, "The vice presidency."

F: So you had a clear break on that?

C: So I had a clear break on that.

F: Had you anticipated before that that it would be offered to him? Anything from your own Kennedy connections that would have indicated it?

C: Well, I knew--I can't remember who told me now. Someone very close to Kennedy told me that Kennedy thought that Johnson would be the strongest running mate he could have if he could get Johnson to take it. It's very

awkward to have forgotten who told me. I don't remember now, but it was someone very close to Kennedy.

F: Were you surprised at both the offer and the acceptance?

C: I wasn't surprised at the offer because of the other thing really. I was surprised by the acceptance. Johnson was not the kind of feller who wanted to be second to anybody--ever.

F: I get conflicting stories on whether Rayburn wanted him to accept the vice presidency, or not. Do you have any light to shed on that?

C: Only what I heard after the whole thing was over, and Sam Rayburn once told me that he was against the idea at first but finally decided in favor of it.

F: Do you think it was part of Johnson's career?

C: I think that Bob Kerr talked Sam Rayburn into it, is my memory. Isn't that right.

F: I've heard that.

C: Well, Rayburn told me--my memory would slip now--but I believe Bob Kerr is the one who talked him into it. Bob Kerr felt it was going to be so hard to sell Kennedy in Oklahoma, he wanted somebody on that ticket with him to help.

F: In fact, he didn't sell him to Oklahoma.

C: No, Oklahoma went for Nixon. But he was looking out for his own state problems. I mean, he wanted Democrats to win in Oklahoma, national ticket on down. And he was very worried about the Catholic thing because I guess in those days, Oklahoma was perhaps the most anti-Catholic state in the nation, and may still be.

F: Did you have any relationships at this time with any of the Kennedy adherents who protested so mightily against Johnson?

C: Protested against Johnson?

F: Yes, sir. Do you think that sense of outrage was legitimate?

C: Oh, I think the sense of outrage was legitimate. I was there on the convention floor when Joe Rauh of the District of Columbia tried to nominate somebody else in opposition to Johnson, and I've forgotten now--without consulting my records--who that was. Is it Mennon Williams? They nominated somebody against him.

F: I don't remember, but Mr. Sam couldn't hear him. Did you know Mr. Sam very well?

C: Oh, very well.

F: Did you have any opportunity to observe him in his relationship with Johnson at any stage?

C: Oh, yes, all the way through. I need to go back and tell you one thing, and I may have to seal this for a while--for telling you this. But there was a night at the Democratic National Convention in Chicago in 1956 when Johnson became so convinced himself that he had a good chance to be nominated president that--

F: In 1956?

C: In 1956--that he started telling people, including me, "If you want the real story, I'm going to come out of this convention as the deadlock choice." Harry Truman arrived in Chicago on Sunday morning and had a press conference in the Blackstone Hotel and announced his support for Averell Harriman, who was then governor of New York, and all caucuses scheduled for the rest of that day were cancelled because the whole convention was in an uproar over, "Did Harry Truman have enough strength to keep Adlai Stevenson from being nominated again, with Harriman?" Well, no one really thought that Harriman could get the nomination, but

a Harriman-Stevenson deadlock with Kefauver and other people in there, a deadlock, someone like Lyndon Johnson who had been chosen by the state convention in Texas as to be the favorite-son candidate was going to be nominated, his name was going to be before the convention. And someone like Lyndon Johnson might be nominated. And I'll never forget after Johnson remarked to several people about this possibility, Sam Rayburn had some reporters in his room down the hall of the Conrad Hilton, same floor as Johnson, and he says, "Fellows, do you know that damn fool Lyndon thinks he's going to be nominated president." There was a jealousy that developed in Sam Rayburn's later years, a jealousy of Johnson.

F: It was a case of a student outstripping the teacher.

C: It was a question of the son becoming a bigger man than the father, and it bugged him. And he would take cuts at Johnson with some degree of frequency.

F: Do you think Johnson ever heard any of these?

C: Oh, I know he did.

F: But they didn't seem to impair relationships?

C: The relationship was so close I think he could understand it, and I think he felt sympathy for Rayburn, who was at this time becoming an old man. I think he felt that if Sam Rayburn were ten years younger it couldn't possibly happen. Sam Rayburn never got over the fact that he almost was president of the United States himself. You know, he was almost nominated as Roosevelt's running mate in 1944. Harry Truman used to tell that story all the time, "I went to Chicago in 1944 with a speech in my pocket to nominate Sam Rayburn for president," and Sam Rayburn never thought it was funny. And he never liked Truman telling it. It used to outrage him because Roosevelt would have died and he would have been president. Sam Rayburn would never forget that he was almost made the president. But,

of course, he turned around and I remember in 1956 when Johnson was actually placed in nomination as Texas' favorite son, and the ball game was over, Adlai Stevenson was going to be nominated by this time, even though he had made that dirty, bitter remark about Johnson to the reporters which I told you about a few minutes ago, he stood there as permanent chairman while the demonstration was going on for Johnson and just cried buckets of tears. It was the saddest sight to see that old man's weeping. And then in 1960 Sam Rayburn just worked his heart out for Johnson. He refused to be permanent chairman because he wanted to be free and on the floor to work for Johnson.

Let me tell you one thing about Eugene McCarthy, who was to figure later, last year in 1968, as a major figure in national politics and who was to have something to do with knocking Johnson out of a bid for reelection--a partial, small degree. At any rate, in 1960 there was a press conference announced as Senators to endorse Johnson for the presidential nomination. This was 1960, in Los Angeles, where Kennedy was nominated. It was a national cross-section of senators, all of the southerners, Tom Dodd of Connecticut, a lot of westerners, Warren Magnuson of Washington, Mike Mansfield of Montana, and so forth, a lot of border states, Bob Kerr of Oklahoma, many, many senators. Gene McCarthy was supposed to be there to announce for Johnson. So some reporter got up and said--the senators all sat at a long, long table and jointly announced their support of Johnson, and some reporter jumped up and said, "Where is Gene McCarthy?" And Mike Mansfield, who at that time was Democratic whip of the Senate, left the microphone and said, "Senator McCarthy had authorized me to say that he is going to place Adlai Stevenson's name in nomination, that if Adlai Stevenson's name is later withdrawn, he will cast his vote

for Lyndon Johnson." Well, Sam Rayburn and Lyndon Johnson put McCarthy up to nominating Stevenson because they were trying to hold all the Stevenson votes together they could because those Stevenson votes would largely have gone to Kennedy if they had been turned loose. So they thought that Gene McCarthy was the best speaker who could nominate Stevenson. Mike Monroney was the chairman of the Stevenson effort, but he was not that good a speaker. He was a senator from Oklahoma. Gene McCarthy, of course, was a senator from Minnesota and still is. Mike Monroney was defeated in the last election. But, at any rate, I was sitting next to Sam Rayburn in the Texas delegation on the floor when Gene McCarthy made that speech. And it was so funny to see the Speaker directing the Texas delegation. "Yell louder," "applaud more," he was just trying to tear up that convention with excitement for Adlai Stevenson, so here were all the Texans who were for Johnson making more noise even than the Stevenson supporters trying to keep the Stevenson thing alive and kicking if possible.

F: I remember from television that the Stevenson thing was quite dramatic.

C: It was very dramatic.

F: Did you get the feeling in '59 and '60 that Johnson was reluctant to stick his neck out for the presidency?

C: He had everybody baffled. I'll never forget when John Connally, who was as close to him as anybody could be in those days, rented an office over here in the Ambassador Hotel at Fourteenth and K and had a sign painter paint a sign, "Lyndon B. Johnson for President." And John Connally personally made all the arrangements. Johnson heard about it, had the place closed up, and the sign taken down. So I think he had everybody guessing. He didn't know himself. Lyndon Johnson's not the kind of guy

who likes to lose anything, and he didn't want to run for president unless he thought he was going to win. And he wasn't convinced at all that he could win. He had learned in 1956 that you couldn't get nominated with senators behind you. You have to have governors behind you, and Kennedy had a lot more governors behind him than Johnson did.

F: Had Johnson done anything noticeable in the years since 1956 to solidify himself with governors?

C: Yes, I think he had made the effort; I think he made a conscious effort to get governors. Ironically, the only state besides Texas which wound up voting for Johnson in 1956 [was Mississippi], because Johnson told everybody, "Don't vote for me," when it looked like Stevenson was going in. He would have had a lot of votes, but he was giving the message to everybody, "Don't vote for me." But the Mississippi delegation voted for him. Texas, of course, did. They'd been instructed by the state convention to do so. But Mississippi cast their votes for him because Governor Coleman of Mississippi, I can't remember his first name.

F: James.

C: Governor James Coleman of Mississippi had been a Capitol cop while Lyndon Johnson was a secretary on Capitol Hill, and they were close, close friends. There used to be an organization of secretaries and Capitol employees called the Little Congress. When Lyndon Johnson, as a congressional secretary, was elected speaker of the Little Congress, Jim Coleman was his campaign manager. And Jim Coleman said, "Goddamn it, you've been nominated by Texas as president of the United States and Mississippi's going to vote for you.

F: That's particularly good in view of 1964.

C: Yes. But of course Mississippi became the great problem four years later, and eight years later.

F: Johnson, then, throughout the remainder of 1959 and into '60 would not permit any real campaigning in his behalf?

C: Absolutely not. Absolutely not. And he wouldn't permit any solicitation or campaign contribution or anything. Neither pledges of support nor pledges of money.

F: He pled Senate business in the fact that he was hired to look after the United States Senate.

C: He was overly cautious; he didn't want to get into it unless he thought he could win.

F: What did you do, then, after the nominating convention? Did you follow Mr. Kennedy or Mr. Johnson around?

C: No, we drove from--the kids were of the age to take a western trip, so we drove to Los Angeles in 1960, left Washington three weeks ahead of time and drove through all the northern national parks and other scenic points of interest, and then from Los Angeles we drove the southern route to Chicago, to the Republican Convention, and took in the Grand Canyon and all the stuff like that--Las Vegas. And we wound up in Chicago. And the Johnsons had been trying to get hold of Liz all the time we were driving from Los Angeles. Liz called the ranch and the two of them got on the phone and told her that Mrs. Kennedy, of course, was expecting a baby and would not be able to do any campaigning at all, and that the presidential nominee, Jack Kennedy, had asked Mrs. Johnson if she would carry the load of the women's end of the campaign and travel with his sisters and his mother and so forth. So they were trying to get Liz because with Mrs. Johnson they wanted somebody who could help her put together and execute a women's campaign for the Kennedy-Johnson ticket. So, we had the Republican Convention to cover, and so Liz said, "I'm so tired I don't

even want to think about it until we get through the Republican Convention and I talk to my family." So Liz agreed to do it, and I had to hire somebody real quickly to take her place in the office. There were just three people, just three of us in the office in those days, I didn't have as large a staff as I have now, and I just couldn't get away from Washington long enough. I mean, I just couldn't get away from Washington for any number of days at all because the business here would fall apart. So I didn't travel in the campaigns. I was always over at the house with the Johnsons when they stopped off in Washington for a day or two during the campaign. I always saw them then, but I didn't travel with either candidate simply because I couldn't leave Washington because of my business.

F: Did he seem reasonably content with his campaign role and the prospects?

C: Reasonably so.

F: I mean, I realize that he is always a restless man.

C: Terribly restless and generally when I saw him he had almost lost his voice. He was always very hoarse, and he was always trying to save it, and he always wanted new ideas, something else they could do. He was very careful to see that he got treated right as a vice presidential candidate. He saw to it that he got into the big places like New York and Chicago and Los Angeles and wasn't just relegated to the smaller towns. He also saw to it that he got the same size airplane to travel in, chartered for him, as was chartered for Kennedy. He's a man of considerable pride. He didn't want to be the second-class citizen in the campaign.

F: As far as you can tell, were they reasonably agreeable co-campaigners?

C: Oh, very much so. Very much so.

F: They understood what the problem was?

C: Well, Liz was so involved with it--and other close friends of mine were so involved with it--I had the tone of the thing the whole time. I was briefed on everything. No, they got along beautifully on everything. Kennedy deferred everything Johnson wanted, and really made a part of it. Now the Liberal Party in New York acted up on--I only made one campaign trip for Johnson when he did New York City--well, I made two. When he did New York City in October, I guess it was, I went up for that, two days, and then I went up for the final rally in New York on the Saturday before the election. And I was there, when in October, I guess it was, there was a lot of irritation in the Liberal Party saying that they should back some other ticket or have their own, because they didn't want to support a ticket with Lyndon Johnson on it. They were all for Kennedy, but they didn't want a ticket with Lyndon Johnson on it. So Johnson went before a meeting of the Liberal Party--I was there--and won them over with Dave Dubinsky, and I never heard Johnson more persuasive or more eloquent in my life. He had those liberals on their feet giving him the loudest standing ovation you ever heard. I say liberals, I mean the Liberal Party; it's the far-out left of New York politics, as you know.

F: Yes. Was it a regular speech or was it a talk?

C: It was a talk without a note or anything else, and it was a talk in which he recalled that he was one of the three southern congressmen who voted for the first wage-and-hour law; it was a talk where he told everything he had done, you know, for social progress; and I mean as an old New Dealer, Lyndon Johnson, of Roosevelt days, and very effective, very effective, with many references to his close relationship through the years with Potofsky and with Dave Dubinsky and with all these old-fashioned

labor leaders with whom he had had close connections. They were all very friendly to him, personally.

F: How do you make a connection with these people?

C: I don't really know because it was before my time. It predates me. But, you see, he was always a close friend of people like Tommy Corcoran and people like Jim Rowe and people like Abe Fortas and all the old FDR aides, all the old Roosevelt aides. Of course, Roosevelt had him over at the White House quite a bit, and I'm sure probably had him there the time he had some of these people there.

F: Did you have any opportunity to observe Jacqueline Kennedy?

C: Yes, not as much as her husband, of course.

F: Is it true that she was reasonably disinterested in politics?

C: I think she was completely disinterested in politics and wished he were in another career.

F: What I was leading up to, Mrs. Johnson really carved out a new facet in American politics when she took to the campaign road because presidents' wives largely either stayed in the background or had done little more than just stand up with their husbands, and even Eleanor Roosevelt, who was the most active of them all, did not campaign. She went around doing a lot of good work and seeing about things, but she never solicited votes.

C: Mrs. Johnson made her first campaign speech in 1948 in that runoff Democratic primary race with Coke Stevenson. The last rally was to be in San Antonio and she was in Austin and President Johnson was in some other Texas city, and she was driving to meet him in San Antonio. He was having her make a speech, and she was very nervous about the speech, and she and Mary Rather drove over there, pretty sure Mary was driving. Anyway, the car had an accident and turned over twice. It's been so long

ago I've forgotten what caused it to turn over twice, but it did. She and Mary got out unhurt--I remember her stockings were run and so forth, but really unhurt--and hitchhiked the rest of the way to San Antonio. And after that experience she made her first political speech. She said she was so frightened by the accident that it somehow overcame her fear of the crowds and she was able to make a pretty good speech.

Now, she's one of the few women who had done any campaigning by that time, I would assume. But while Mrs. Kennedy always avoided campaigning after she married President Kennedy, his mothers and his sisters campaigned for him both times when he ran for the Senate in Massachusetts, campaigned extensively--tea parties and a little talk to the ladies at the tea party. And this is the sort of campaign that Mrs. Johnson conducted in 1960. She traveled with President Kennedy's mother in two or three states and then she traveled with his different sisters and his sister-in-laws,Joan Kennedy and Ethel Kennedy and then his blood sisters, different ones at a time, into a number of other states. I've forgotten--they did at least a dozen states campaigning together. Mrs. Johnson was the ranking person because she was the wife of a candidate. So they would stand in a receiving line and receive loads and loads of ladies, and then Mrs. Johnson would make some remarks and whichever sister or sisters, or whatever, mother, would make a response, also. Mrs. Joe Kennedy always had a set speech. She had it memorized; apparently she had it memorized. Well, anyway, every word was always the same and she always wound up with the death of her son, Joe, and she always cried at the end, and the audience also cried. I shouldn't laugh about that, but it was effective and she knew it.

Then, of course, in 1964 Mrs. Johnson did something that was unheard of for a woman to do. She ran a whistle-stop train from Washington to New

Orleans and made a speech at, I've forgotten how many stops.

F: Did you go along?

C: I went along; I got off the train at Charlotte, North Carolina, because Doris Fleeson who was a very prominent columnist at that time had a stroke on the train. I had been an intimate friend of Doris Fleeson's for many years, and the doctor on the train talked to her doctor in Washington and he wanted her flown back to Washington, and I was the only person on the train besides my wife, Liz, who was, of course, helping to run it, who knew Doris intimately enough to come back with her under those circumstances. So I brought Doris back to Washington, and that's why I didn't finish the trip.

F: Looking at it from a man's viewpoint, how do you think it went?

C: Well, I think it went well because Mrs. Johnson has always been able to communicate with a crowd. Women can identify with her, and men like her. Her sincerity projects. And while it was a novelty and a gimmick and anything like that in politics is always suspect by many, I think that to people who heard her, I think she helped. Of course, they lost some of those states to Goldwater. I don't think she lost any votes; I think she may have gained some, and her accent is decidedly southern because of her Alabama association when she was brought up.

F: Did you have any particular relationship with the Johnsons during that vice presidential period other than of course, I know that Liz was very definitely involved.

C: No, well my wife worked for them. And while the Johnsons had always invited us into their home very frequently, once a week or more often when they were here--well, maybe not once a week, but very often--I guess they invited us even more often while he was vice president because

he always had key staff people over at the house. We lived only a few blocks from us, and we had a blanket invitation when the weather was good to come over anytime we wanted to and swim. They had a swimming pool, and so we just made their home our home.

F: When the Johnsons had people over like that, was it mainly to talk?

C: It was to talk and to relax. He never could stand to be alone, and that was his objection to the Sabbath Day. After church, there wasn't very much to do. And to go to the office, the rest of the building was deserted, and so he liked to have people over to talk to him so we always had hamburgers and stuff almost every Sunday we spent with the Johnsons. Shortly before President Kennedy's death, just before he went on a trip to the Benelux countries, Mrs. Johnson called us one day and said, "Would you like to drive with us down to Middleburg, Virginia"--which is in the hunt country--"to look at the fall leaves." And said, "We'll have lunch somewhere and get back by late afternoon and then come with us home and have a hamburger. We have more people coming over."

F: Who made the hamburgers in that case?

C: Zephyr Wright, I guess.

F: Does the President ever take a hand in the kitchen?

C: Oh, no. All he did was complain about the food if he didn't like it. But anyway it was right after the Bobby Baker case had broken--the Bobby Baker scandal had broken--and the original stories, the first leaks that something was wrong with Bobby Baker, had been written in the Washington papers and on the wire services by reporters who regularly covered the Justice Department, rather than cover Congress. And so Johnson was suspicious that Bobby Kennedy had cooked this whole thing up trying to embarrass him, although of course as it turned out, everything Bobby Baker

had done wrong he had done after Johnson was vice president and after Johnson no longer had a working relationship with him. But at any rate he read this as Bobby Kennedy trying to knock him off the ticket in 1964.

I said that they had some other people coming over for hamburgers that night; I don't think they did, because I remember we went back to his house and had some hamburgers. Then he got back in the car with us to ride home with us. It was his car and his driver. And he said, "Park in our driveway and let's talk a few minutes." He said, "I think I'm going to announce that I'm not going to run again for vice president so that I can get off that ticket before they try to knock me off." So that was running through his mind just a few weeks before he himself became president. He said, "What I would like to do is go back to Texas and be president of Southwest Texas State Teachers College." I thought until the Evans and Novak book, Exercise of Power, came out that we were the only people he ever said that to. Then it said in the Evans and Novak book that he had been saying that he wanted to go back and be president of that college. But, anyway, he said it to us. He obviously said it to somebody else, because we never told anybody.

F: Did he think that Jack Kennedy wanted to dump him, or did he just think it was the Kennedy adherents who were trying to dump him?

C: Well, he was seeing signs that Bobby wanted to dump him, and he didn't think Bobby would be doing it without Jack's acquiescence. He was suspicious.

F: Why do you think they wanted to dump him?

C: I don't know that they did. Do you think that they did?

F: I don't know.

C: I don't know.

F: Of course, it's awfully easy in this job, you know, if you're insensitive,

to see things, because you can't be in on everything, I mean--

C: When we had that conversation, no one knew what they had on Bobby Baker. And Johnson didn't know what Bobby Baker had been doing while he had been working for him. I mean, he didn't know of any dishonesty. It turned out there wasn't any when he was working for Johnson; it was just a luckiness in timing because I knew Bobby Baker well, and I didn't know what he was doing.

F: No one really suspected Bobby Baker until the thing began to leak?

C: No. Well, I tell you, I got suspicious.

F: You know, so often, for two, five, seven years you can see something coming and you wonder when it is going to catch up with the man. You didn't have this kind of foreshadow?

C: Well, I got suspicious because Bobby was spending so much money. He had bought some jewelry for his wife that he couldn't afford on his salary as secretary of the Senate. And he was in this motel down here in Ocean City, Maryland, and I didn't know where he was getting the money for that. So I remember I said to, I guess it was to Bob Kerr, I said it to some senator, "I wonder where in the world Bobby Baker is getting all this money." And he said, "Don't you know? Senators are giving him stock tips and he's making a killing in the market. He's buying something that goes up in a big hurry and then he's selling it." Well, that made sense to me and he was so close to so many men in the Senate with good stock market information that that at least satisfied that thing because I had no reason to believe that Bobby was dishonest. In my work as a newspaperman he had been very helpful to me. I used to say, "Bobby, such-and-such a piece of legislation. Is it going to pass?" And he said, "Yes, it is going to pass 49 to 47," or whatever. You know, he always told

you the vote. And he was seldom wrong on a number. He was always right on whether it was going to pass or not.

F: He and Senator Johnson must have understood each other.

C: They understood each other perfectly, and he gave me some very good stories on what was going to happen in the Senate before it happened. So I knew Bobby Baker very favorably as a news source, and as a friend. And I certainly had no reason to believe he was dishonest. I was very surprised. You get surprised sometimes at people who seem to be very clean and they aren't.

F: In their congressional, senatorial, and even presidential days, was there any basic differences in approach to staff between Johnson and Kennedy?

C: Staff?

F: Yes.

C: Well, Johnson always had the hyperactive staff, and I'm so glad that you caused me to remember this. Johnson was always full of energy, and he always worked his staff to death. And, you know, he always wanted to satisfy all kinds of whims. And when he was first elected to the Senate, he wanted his office open 24-hours a day. He didn't want anybody calling Senator Lyndon B. Johnson and his office didn't answer. So he had the staff organized in eight-hour shifts, and they were there all night long.

F: That would have been great when you had only one administrative aide, wouldn't it?

C: Then it turned out that the only people who called Johnson during the night were too drunk to remember it the next day so it wasn't achieving any good result anyway. So that lasted only a few months. But anyway it is one of the strange things about the man. And also when he was first

elected senator, he wanted to see any Texan who wanted to see him. And he made the mistake of telling the Texas press about this, and it got in the newspapers. So he did it for about two years. He saw every Texan. He would stay there as long as they would stay there to see him.

F: Well, about what time?

C: Well, they would try to rig things so that he could get them out of the office and they wouldn't stay too long. But, anyway, he did see every Texan who came in to see him who was willing to wait his turn. And in line--they registered, practically. And after he got to be whip and got involved so much in legislation and party leadership and so forth, he had to cut that out.

But another thing about him is that he always had his telephone number in the Washington telephone book--his home phone. Very few members of Congress list their home phones because they don't want to be bothered at night. But he had his listed until November 22, 1963, when President Kennedy died in Dallas. The Secret Service got the telephone company out there to disconnect that listed telephone number and to put in the White House lines. But it was always in the phone book.

F: Right through his vice presidential days?

C: All through his vice presidential days. And they would get the screwiest calls all night long, particularly from drunks, you know. People got drunk, "I'm going to call Lyndon Johnson." And they would dial the number and the phone would ring. Now Estes Kefauver was another neighbor of mine. He lived in the next block. Johnson lived about eight blocks away, when he was vice president he did. Estes Kefauver had a listed telephone, but he had the telephone fixed so that it wouldn't ring, and

you dialed the number and it never answered. And they never knew it was ringing. But that was the only number Johnson had was a listed number. He didn't have an unlisted number at home.

F: I guess Kennedy's staff took it a little easier?

C: Oh, yes, in the House days they did; in the Senate days they beefed up the staff considerably when he started getting ambitious for higher office.

F: Did you have the closeness among the Kennedy staffers that you did among the Johnson staff? Johnson might work them to death, but he also mothered them.

C: Absolutely. He ran their whole lives. He gave them some money when they went off on vacations, and he paid the bills when they went to the hospital, and he had them over to his house every Sunday night for hamburgers, and they were very much a part of his social life, as well as his business life. The Kennedys did not do that. Jack didn't do it even before he married. But, of course, Mrs. Kennedy wasn't going to spend her time with hired hands of her husband. I mean, she wanted to be with the beautiful people.

F: Where were you in November, 1963?

C: In Portland, Maine, making a speech to the New England Society of Newspaper Editors. I never had so much trouble in my life as getting from Portland, Maine back to Washington, when I heard that--the news of the assassination.

F: Why so?

C: Well, Portland's a hard place to get out of. I called the Boston Herald-Traveler, and they said, "We've got to have you back in Washington. Charter a plane if necessary."

F: Probably couldn't even do that, could you?

C: Well, I got on a commercial plane which stopped in Boston. The Herald Tribune had a seat held for me on a plane that was leaving for Washington

then, so I was able to get through. But we had to coordinate it between Portland, Maine and Boston.

F: What happened after you got back to Washington?

C: Well, I didn't see--

F: You came on back on Friday?

C: Yes. I didn't know anything because I was in the air between Portland and Boston when the pilot came on the loudspeaker and said, "Ladies and gentlemen, the President of the United States is dead." I knew he had been shot, but I didn't know he was dead. The lady sitting across the aisle from me leaned over and said, "I didn't know President Kennedy was sick." And I said, "He wasn't sick, lady. He was shot."

But, at any rate, I got to Boston and the Herald-Traveler moved me from one plane to another and gave me a real quick fill-in on Mrs. Kennedy was not hurt, which I didn't know. I was afraid she might have been hurt. Mrs. Johnson and Vice President Johnson were not hurt.

So, anyway, I flew on to Washington. I had left my car at the airport in the parking lot, and I got in the car and turned on the radio. On the radio it said, "The new President and Mrs. Johnson are coming down the steps now. And right behind them is Liz Carpenter." Which was the biggest relief of my life, because that was the only time I knew my wife was okay. I thought something could have happened to her, you know. We landed in Washington at the same time, as it turned out.

I came to the office and wrote a story, a long story about Johnson, and sent it to all my papers, and stuff like that. I saw the Johnsons several times before they moved into the White House, and Liz and I

went to dinner at their home, The Elms, the last night they spent there before they moved into the White House, just as we ate dinner with them the last night they spent in the White House. Well, we called it the last supper because there were twelve at The Elms. Anyway, I noticed that. Well, it was a very sentimental evening about what destiny had done, and I remember Johnson again, as he had through almost all the days before that, talked about, "Where are you, Sam Rayburn, now when I need you most of all?"

F: Johnson has an enormous loyalty to old friends, doesn't he?

C: Oh, complete loyalty to people who have been loyal to him.

F: I mean, Rayburn might have snapped at him toward the end of his days, but Rayburn could do no wrong as far as he was concerned?

C: Well, I said earlier he forgave Rayburn for that because it was the reaction of an old man, and he could see it. And even though a little bit of senility was showing in Rayburn, he still had that wonderful, horse-country judgment that you can't beat. I mean, he just knew what was right and what was wrong on anything that came along. His judgment never failed. He was one of the most human men I ever knew. There was just something--he just had an extra sense of rightness and wrongness.

F: Now, in the early days of Johnson as president, he tended to see a fair amount of the press and walk around with them on the White House grounds particularly as it got warmer. And, of course, there was a great deal of interest in it as a new president. On the whole, I think he got a very favorable press. Where do you think the deterioration set in?

C: Well, Lyndon Johnson always understood how to operate in the game of

politics except with the press. It was his blind spot. He never could understand the press, and the press never could understand him. He got along with great simpatico with everybody else connected with political life. He had a very, very thin skin about the printed word or the television camera or anything else.

F: Did you see this in his pre-vice presidential days?

C: Oh, always. It was almost impossible to satisfy him with anything that was written about him unless he dictated it himself. And, of course, nobody was going to take his dictation.

F: Then he read everything that was written about him?

C: Oh, he read everything that was written about him and, as president, he spent so much time reading newspapers and he had, as you know, in his office two press association wires, the AP and the United Press International. And he read those all day.

F: Yes, I've gone in his office and then had to wait ten minites while he got down on his haunches and caught up with both tapes.

C: We've had the same experience.

Tape 2 of 2

C: I might add that the only person I knew who was as thin-skinned, or maybe even more thin-skinned, than Johnson over what was written about him or said about him was Jack Kennedy.

F: I was going to ask about that earlier because his having read this bit on the prospective Profiles in Courage. Did he read avidly everything that was written about him?

C: Oh, yes. Of course, he had an advantage over Johnson because he had studied speedreading at Harvard. Johnson reads very fast, but not as fast as Kennedy did. And Kennedy had this enormous appetite for reading. I mean, he just wanted to read something all the time. He read every word that was written about him and liked very little of it. And he used to blow up. Before he was president, he used to just raise hell with reporters all the time about what they said about him. Actually, Kennedy never coddled the press. He just blew up when he wanted to. And although he was friendly with reporters, he never went out of his way.

Johnson probably had worse press relations than Kennedy for one very important reason, and that was that he played it two ways. He would just chew a reporter out for something he wrote about him, and then he would smother the reporter another time with attention and overdo it. Johnson always had a tendency to overdo kindness--just too many compliments, just too much backslapping. So it would be such a sharp contrast.

F: Sort of make the shock all the worse.

C: Right. And reporters don't like to be treated that way.

And another thing reporters had difficulty--the press in Washington had trouble figuring Johnson out. He liked always to operate in secrecy when he was working on a political deal. He wanted the whole thing put together and wanted to succeed and he wanted credit for it. But he didn't want anybody to know what he was doing until it was an

accomplished fact and was a success story. It used to bug the hell out of him that somebody would leak a story to the press about something he was doing or something before he was ready for it to be announced, both before and after he became president. When he was Senate majority leader, some of his little schemes would get in the press before he executed them, and he would blow up about that.

But, again, he was too kind to the press and then too mean to the press.

F: In other words, Kennedy held them off a little more.

C Kennedy kept his distance.

Johnson would try to win them over and then he would slap them back down; then he would try to win them over. And they were completely mystified by it. Nobody else behaves that way. That's just one of the crazy quirks of Johnson's.

Of course, Johnson had devoted friends in the press to whom he was devoted. I think of William S. White in Washington. I would include myself in that group. I think of many people in Texas, like Gordon Fulcher on the Austin American-Statesman in the old days, Lorraine Barnes, Buck Hood on the Austin paper, Charlie Boatner on the Fort Worth Star-Telegram, many around the state, and others in Washington, too.

F: What is this--a case of their having gotten to know him well enough that they will put up with the changes in temperature?

C: That's right. Those of us that I was talking about, we understand him. He does something that irritates us, and we just write it off,

"Well, that's Lyndon Johnson." But I think you almost have to be a Texan to understand Lyndon Johnson.

F: Do you think, say, if Goldwater had been elected in 1964 that the fact that he also came out of somewhat the same background would have also hampered him in press relations? What I am getting at--do you think that the figures of speech and some of the attitudes are sufficiently foreign to much of the press here, even though it does represent the whole United States, that sometimes they are unsympathetic with the allusions and don't understand what the man is talking about.

C: Well, I think a Texas accent is a handicap in Washington, it's a handicap in national politics. Barry Goldwater always had good press relations because Barry just rolls with the punches, has a delightful sense of humor, nice fellow, I've always liked him very much. I never agreed with him politically on anything, but we've always been good friends. I just was at the same lunch with him Sunday before last and hadn't seen him in a couple of years, and his wife kissed me on the cheek and he gave me a very warm handshake, and he knows that nobody was more against him in '64 than I was, and I've written some pretty sharp stories about him when I thought he deserved them for political reasons. But he never seemed to be very irritated about what was written about him and was always friendly with the press. And the press liked him personally. They could get along with him a lot better than they could get along with Johnson. You didn't get the riot act read to you. You know, there was a story and it's true--Johnson had one of his press conferences in his own office, and the press ran out to the telephones to dictate their stories, and he read on the UPI machine in his office the lead of the UPI story and he didn't like it, and

he sent somebody out to knock on the telephone booth door and tell that reporter to rewrite that lead.

F: I hadn't heard that story.

C: So that's where you get the word, "managed news." And, as I say, Johnson had this irritable--to the newspaperman--habit of trying to withhold so many of his own little secrets until he himself was ready to announce them.

F: Is it possible to keep a secret in Washington?

C: Very difficult.

F: I was noticing some figures on a very delicate situation in which he figured that a minimum of sixty people had to know in order to work out the problem. Well, your percentage chance of a leak there is enormous.

F: Well, the Drew Pearson success story is one story, and that is that if anybody in Washington knows something, he's going to tell somebody else, and somebody trying to get somebody is going to leak it to Drew Pearson, if it harms them. So--Drew says that himself--that it's the people carrying grudges who give him almost all his copy, or a large part of it.

But I do think you have to be a Texan to understand Lyndon Johnson. There is something uniquely Hill Country about him. He really does love that part of the world. I never saw a man as close to the land as he is.

F: How much of the disenchantment with Johnson by the press stems from his somewhat irregular habits? I'm thinking about the fact that he is not on time to so many things and that you never can tell how long anything's going to last.

C: Well, he made a lot of big public relations boners--it's awfully hard to tell a president of the United States that he is doing something wrong. For example, I think of--for example, he started calling reporters in

Saturday morning or early Saturday afternoon, into his office. Anyone who was there came into the office because he was trying to get the Saturday night newscasts and the Sunday morning papers. So it meant that everybody had to work on Saturday because sometime during the day, and you never knew when, Johnson was going to call all the reporters in. Then there would be Saturdays when the press would go--everybody would be there at ten o'clock and it would get to be three or four or five o'clock in the afternoon and he still hadn't called them in. They would have wasted an entire day. The finally the press secretary or somebody from the press office would come out and say, "The President is not going to see reporters today." Well, they've wasted the whole day, a day they could have spent with their families on projects of their own, and it irritated them very much. So finally he just cut the Saturday thing out altogether.

F: He was aware of this?

C: He became aware of it.

F: Is there anything to the fact that Bill Moyers and, to a lesser extent, George Reedy irritated the press and that George Christian was the first one in the Lyndon Johnson entourage in whom they had a little confidence?

C: Well, I didn't think George Christian ever gave out very much information and neither did the President. That's why he thought he was his best press secretary. Unflappable George is one of the most likeable people I have ever known in my life, but as a press secretary he left a lot to be desired. Everybody, as I say, liked him as a person, but he didn't give out very much information. He was more interested in serving the President than he was serving the press.

Bill Moyers, on the other hand, gave out more information than any of them, and I think that's why he and Johnson had a parting of the ways.

George Reedy--the job was really too big for him. George doesn't have the personality for the job. He's too wordy. He's a very intelligent man, extremely intelligent man, but it takes George five thousand words to say something that could be said in a hundred.

Pierre Salinger served the President very well in the short time he was there. I don't know whether his allegience to the Kennedy family would have caused difficulties if he had stayed longer or not. But while he was there, he served Johnson as an excellent press secretary.

F: Did you yourself ever run into an authentic example of the President lying to a reporter?

C: There are stories about his doing it. He never lied to me; I don't know of any instance where he lied; I don't say there aren't any. There are many times when he wouldn't tell me something that I wanted to know and needed to know. But he never misled me, and he never lied to me, to my knowledge. And neither did Jack Kennedy, I might add.

F: You don't think, then, that the news was managed any more than as just sort of necessary to keep things going?

C: Well, Lyndon Johnson loved reading favorable stories about himself in newspapers. So did Jack Kennedy. And so does Dick Nixon. But the press in Washington is essentially made up of people who grew up in the East or at least went to eastern schools. They weren't oriented to Johnson's Texas way of doing things. The President, after all, like any man, has shortcomings. One is that he really has very bad manners, both in dealing with people as well as at the dinner table. And he doesn't always treat people as courteously as they should be treated, and this is offensive to

a lot of people, particularly newspaperwomen. I think, on the whole, newspaperwomen treated him better than newspapermen did. I think they liked him because he's a fine-looking, very masculine, big Texan.

F: And could be gallant.

C: And could be gallant--when he wanted to be. But he could also be pretty discourteous to you, too, without meaning to be. He's just always been--you know, he's raced through life, he's always been in an enormous hurry, it's always been, "It's got to be done today, tomorrow may not come" or "It should have been done yesterday." So he just doesn't take time for manners. Manners to him were expendable. So he does eat his peas at the table out of a bowl with a spoon, and he does turn his back on you when he is talking to you, and he does do other things that are really rude, simply because he doesn't have time or the patience to do those Victorian courtesies.

F: Well, now, in these somewhat trying press days, has he actually refused accreditation to a press representative who has annoyed him in the past, or does he continue to deal with them?

C: Oh, no, he's never thrown a reporter out or cancel--

F: He didn't cancel his subscription to the Herald-Tribune?

C: Well, of course, the Herald-Tribune was gone, but Jack Kennedy, of course, cancelled all subscriptions to the Herald-Tribune in the White House and then, of course, you know Jackie bought one of her own because she wanted to read Eugenia Shepard on fashions.

F: I didn't know about that.

C: She didn't tell him; then he found out about it. She left the Herald-Tribune laying around--"Where did this come from?" But, no, he never has cancelled a subscription to a paper and never asked anybody to fire a reporter and never threw a reporter out.

He became so annoyed at a reporter in 1955 that it contributed to his heart attack. You know he had a heart attack the July 4 weekend in 1955. It was a Saturday, something like July 1 or 2, or something. He was Senate majority leader, and he always had the reporters in on Saturday morning. Anybody who wanted to come in and talk to him about next week's Senate business, he would talk to them. So quite a group of reporters did. It was always very full of a lot of information and always valuable. This particular Saturday he was going down to Middleburg for the weekend. And it was, as I recall, John Chadwick on the Associated Press--maybe I better check that name to be sure. Anyway, it was a wire press association reporter, and I'm pretty sure I have the right one, who asked him some question that really irritated him, really bugged him. He told me himself that driving down there to Middleburg, he was thinking about how mad he was at that reporter and that question when he first started having pains in his heart. Now, whether temper can contribute to a heart attack, I'm not the doctor to say, but certainly he was very upset.

F: Where were you during the heart attack?

C: I was in Washington. And the funny part is that I had been to Middleburg, that same house, the weekend before. But I was not there then. And we found out about it. He was in the hospital for, oh, a week or two before I ever saw him.

F: This may be something to which there is no answer. Johnson's opponents back in Texas, of course, have always claimed that he made Brown and Root wealthy and vice versa. Did you ever see any evidence at all of anything more than just a normal relationship between someone that could help an aspiring politician and an aspiring politician who--

C: I never saw anything. I never saw any evidence Johnson had anything to do with any Brown and Root contract. I always thought that Albert Thomas got them the contracts because they contributed very heavily to Albert Thomas' campaigns, and Albert Thomas was a very aggressive member of the House Appropriations Committee and very aggressively defender of Brown and Root at all times and really used his membership on the House Appropriations Committee to be as effective for any of his constituents that he could be. Brown and Root was a Houston company. All of the Browns in the company itself were constituents of his, and how much Albert Thomas did to get them contracts and how much Lyndon Johnson did--I don't know where one stops and one ends. I know that Lyndon Johnson was at all times very close to Herman and George Brown. I know that they contributed sizeably to his political campaigns when he ran. I know he accepted their hospitality in Houston, and he was going to a home in Middleburg, to an estate in Middleburg owned by George and Herman Brown when he had the heart attack. And you know he came back from Middleburg in a hearse. Do you know that story? Well, he got down there, and he didn't know what was wrong with him. They called the doctor, but Clint Anderson was there--

F: A local doctor?

C: Well, they called a local doctor, but Senator Clinton P. Anderson, the United States senator from New Mexico, was also a guest in the house, and he diagnosed it instantly as a heart attack because he had himself suffered two, and the doctor got there, and, of course, confirmed that it was a heart attack. So the doctor was a country doctor, obviously not the kind of doctor that should be treating Johnson. So Middleburg had no ambulance; all it had was a hearse. So he had to ride in a hearse from Middleburg to the Bethesda Naval Hospital and Frank Oltorf, who at that time was the

Washington representative of Brown and Root, who now lives in Marlin, Texas, rode with him. And Frank has the nickname Posh, and I'll refer to him hereafter as Posh. Posh said that he said, "I haven't written a will." Or maybe he had a will, but if he did, it was an old, old will. Anyway, he dictated a will to Posh riding in that hearse, and signed it before they got to Bethesda.

F: That's very interesting. No, I haven't heard that story. Did you visit with him at the hospital?

C: Yes, but more than a week after the heart attack. He was much, much better when I saw him. He was able to get out of bed and everything like that. I'll never forget I also visited with his mother and with Mrs. Johnson when I was there. His mother was such a woman of such quality. I'll never forget the look in her eyes when she said, "God has answered my prayers." I wish so many times that his mother could have lived to see him president.

F: Have you noticed any change in Johnson at all? You have almost a quarter of a century now as a vantage point.

C: Well, he's grown.

F: You noticed when Jack Kennedy got ambitious.

C: Well, of course, he's grown, but he was a man of remarkable talents the first day I ever started doing business with him. He always worked harder than anybody you ever knew. He worked his staff to death, but he worked harder than they did. Death being an exaggeration, he worked them severely, but he worked himself harder. And that's one reason they didn't mind it so much, because they could see that he was doing more than they were doing. You know, they say in Washington, or in the presidency, that some heads grow and some swell. And his grew.

F: Did you have any intimations of the Walter Jenkins misfortune?

C: Oh, absolutely none. Absolutely none.

F: This was just a clear-cut--

C: I was the most surprised human being in the world. Absolutely none.

F: What was the reaction among the press as people?

C: Well--

F: It didn't hurt Johnson, as far as I can tell. But the timing, of course, could hardly have been more unfortunate.

C: Right. Of course, he refused to believe it. It took about twenty-four or forty-eight hours for him to admit to himself that it had happened. He just couldn't believe it. And others of us, practically the same way, we just could hardly believe anything like that could have happened. And I just write Walter down as a casualty of the job. He had worked himself so hard that I think it was just a temporary mental unbalance of some kind. I think it was some psychological quirk that surfaced simply by an extremely overly tired human being. I had seen Walter--

F: So the press was generally sympathetic and not inclined to be spiteful in this?

C: I was out of town when it happened. I was actually--gosh, where was I?

F: I heard that on a midnight newscast, and it just did away with my evening.

C: Now, wait a minute, I was in town. I take it back, I was in town when it happened, but I couldn't have been more shocked. You know, Liz got the first telephone call at the White House about it.

F: No, I didn't.

C: Well, the President was in New York State, touring New York State campaigning for Bobby Kennedy, and I say that because he didn't need to go to New York State for himself, and he went up there at Bobby's urging, "Come help me."

Of course, the President carried every county in New York State, the first President to ever do it in history. He also won by more than two million votes, and Bobby Kennedy won by 300,000. In other words, he ran 1,700,000 votes behind the ticket. But, anyway, so his press secretary, and I can't remember who was press secretary to the President during the campaign at the moment. I guess it was Bill Moyers. I can't remember. Well, at any rate, he was in New York State and so was his entire press secretary staff travelling with him in the campaign. So Liz was the only press officer on duty in the White House. And Liz got a telephone call from the assistant managing editor of the Washington Star saying there is this police record, and Liz couldn't believe it. And she called Walter, and said the Star has the story, and I'd rather not transcribe any more. If Liz wants to tell the rest of the story, it's her story, not mine. It was the biggest shock Liz or I ever had. Just as it was that kind of shock to the President and to other members of the staff.

F: Let's go back to the press secretary business. There is a feeling that Johnson, to a certain extent, was made or broken by his press secretaries, and I suppose one reason that Kennedy was successful with the press in a sense was that Salinger was always winning, if nothing else. What, from your viewpoint, is the role of the press secretary? Is this a job that is manageable, or is there sort of a fundamental contradiction in what the press secretary has to do. In other words, does George Christian tell all he should, does he not tell all he should, did Bill Moyers talk too much, what is the rationale here?

C: Well, of course, the press thinks the press secretary should represent the press's interest. The President is employer; he is the one who decides who is press secretary, and he thinks the press secretary should represent

the President's interests. The ideal press secretary comes in between and represents both interests. Jim Hagerty was the best press secretary in Washington in my twenty-three-plus years here.

F: They used to badger him unmercifully at times.

C: Oh, yeah, of course they did, but Jim Hagerty was a press secretary who talked back to the President on things he thought the press had a right to know. And frequently won.

F: He actually did get Eisenhower to give certain things he wasn't likely to otherwise?

C: No question about it. And Jim Hagerty did it with regularity. He knew how to handle Eisenhower and get away with it. Now, Bill Moyers was something of that. Bill Moyers would argue with the President over making information public and made more information public than any other press secretary the President ever had. Now, George Christian is one of those lovable people you meet in life. I mean, one of the finest human beings you are ever going to know is George Christian. He is not the kind of person who is going to argue with his boss. When Lyndon Johnson says, "Tell the press this, but don't tell them any more about it, and keep this secret," George Christian did that. When I criticized his role as press secretary, I did it strictly speaking as a newspaperman because I don't think George cared much for the press's interests. He was looking out after the President's interests. The President thought he was his best press secretary for that reason. The press liked George Christian, personally, but didn't like the absence of answers to a lot of questions.

F: George just clams up on things--he didn't speculate?

C: No, no, didn't go any further than the President wants him to go. He had a clear understanding of what the President wanted out and that was all he put out.

F: Really becomes a handout, in other words?

C: Well, not a handout. There were questions where George would say, "I have to check on that," and, of course, what he really meant was he had to find out whether he could put it out. I want to make clear that I didn't go to many of George Christian's briefings myself. I read the transcripts frequently, but didn't go over there. One thing, because my wife worked at the White House, as Mrs. Johnson's press secretary and because everybody knew I was a friend of the President's, I tried to make myself as scarce in the White House Press Room as possible. If they saw me over there, they wondered what I was doing there. It was easier for me to send a member of the staff over there.

F: Who did you tend to send?

C: And I certainly wouldn't--well, Margaret Mayer was here at that time and she would always give us a fill-in on it. Or I'd send a member of my own staff.

F: You never used your position for a press advantage?

C: Oh, well, I certainly tried not to. And well, if I ever went over there and asked a question, there would be suspicion that it was a planted question. And just like Bill White, who is very close to the president. He almost never went.

F: Where did the President and Bill White get close?

C: Bill White came to Washington from Texas with the Associated Press to cover Texas news in Washington--regional news--at the time the President was a secretary on Capitol Hill.

F: Oh, it goes back that far?

C: Yeah. The President was working as secretary to Congressman Dick Kleberg, and Bill found him to be one of his best news sources. Johnson was a very

active secretary, as he was a very active everything else, and he was nosing around finding out what everybody from Texas was doing, so he was a great news source for Bill White because he knew not only what was going on in Kleberg's office, he knew what was going on in all the other offices. So they became great friends, and have been through all the time since. When the President married Mrs. Johnson, Bill White gave a party for them the night they got back to Washington from their honeymoon. So it's a close friendship.

F: I haven't seen Bill White yet. One final question--you've been very generous with your time. Was there any sort of an informal plot after the election in November, 1964--the press, presumably, preferred Johnson over Goldwater, to sort of trim Johnson down to size after that to get--to cut him down for real or imagined indignities or insults or something?

C: In other words, let's don't let history record that this man who won by the biggest landslide in history is really that good. Is that what you are trying to say? He just had the good fortune of having Barry Goldwater as an opponent.

F: Yes.

C: Gee, I don't know that there was any plot. This town, Washington, is filled with reporters who never have liked Johnson and never will. Never trusted him, always considered him a backroom operator and a double dealer.

F: Course, in that sense he was handicapped by having been here so long so that he had exposure to so many people.

C: That's true.

F: He wasn't fresh.

C: That's true. And that's so true of other people in Washington. I mean, some people who just hit the scene and make a smash, you know, it's like

Mayor Lindsay in New York. He's a perfect example. Nobody in New York really knew him, although he had been a congressman in New York for a long time. The press in New York didn't know him, and they made a glamorous hero out of him just instantly. Of course, the halo is beginning to drop a little bit now. He's getting into so many difficulties there, problems that just won't go away.

But I don't know that there was any plot. There could have been a rather common feeling among the press that, "Let's don't let Johnson get too big-headed about this victory." Certainly he did start getting a more critical press immediately after the first of the year after the 1964 election.

F: Yes. Okay.

[End of Tape 1 of 1 and Interview I]

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In accordance with the provisions of Chapter 21 of Title 44, United States Code and subject to the terms and conditions hereinafter set forth, I, Elizabeth S. Carpenter of Austin, Texas, do hereby give, donate, and convey to the United States of America all my rights, title, and interest in the tape recording and transcript of the personal interview of Leslie Carpenter conducted on February 6, 1969 in Washington, D. C., and prepared for deposit in the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library.

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Elizabeth S. Carpenter
Donor

Sept. 7 1979
Date

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