

INTERVIEWEE: JOE CARTER (JOSEPH HENRY CARTER, SR.)

INTERVIEWER: THOMAS H. BAKER

December 3, 1968

B: This is the interview with Joe Carter, speech writer. Mr. Carter, to start off with, would you outline for us your background, your career, up to the time you joined the staff here.

C: Well, I was born in Oklahoma and was educated at the University of Tulsa. I received first a degree there in economics and later another degree in journalism, both of these being bachelor of arts degrees. Then I worked for newspapers in Oklahoma. I was with United Press International for four years.

B: Was that in Oklahoma, too?

C: That was in Oklahoma, Texas and in Kansas City. I was in Texas, incidentally, during the assassination of President Kennedy in '63, and was working with Merriman Smith for United Press International at the time. However, I did not know the President at this time. I had covered him before when he was making speeches in Oklahoma. He used to come through Oklahoma stumping for Senator Kerr back during this period that I was a newsman. I used to cover him. I became, what I would call, an admirer of Lyndon Johnson because I thought his speeches were very provocative and I admired his leadership. I had no personal relationships with him and my relationships with Senator Kerr were limited to newsman-politician type things. From United Press in Dallas, I went to the Honolulu Advertiser for a year. Then I went back to Oklahoma in 1965 and became associate editor of the Oklahoma Journal. I was there for

three years. I left there to come to Washington in January of '68.

B: Let's back up just a minute. You were in Dallas at the assassination, at the time of the assassination?

C: That's right.

B: Where were you when it happened. I know Merriman Smith was in one of the lead cars of the motorcade.

C: Smitty was one of the four pool reporters, and I was serving as-- the wire services have what they call a backup man. I was overnight editor for UP, and then I went out that morning to backup (I was in Dallas, I was stationed in Dallas and lived in Dallas. I went out to the airport to back up the Kennedys' appearance at the airport which was dramatic, and this was very important politically--this trip, as you recall. And I was writing sidebars on Texas politics for the wire because Texas politics at this time was--seemed to be--either down, you know, going to start fighting to regain his popularity in the South at the time. I was writing Texas reaction-type stuff. Smith was writing the main lead. I had picked him up at the airport and was in the motorcade. I was the first--I was in the first press bus behind the limousines. I heard the shots.

B: Where did that bus go when the motorcade broke up?

C: It went on up to the site of the dinner at the Trade Mart, and then at that point I got off the press bus and phoned my bureau and then I went to--and then the bus was hopelessly clogged in. I found a car with some unknown bureaucrat in it, or politician. I told them I could direct them to the hospital where President Kennedy

had been taken. I went to the hospital. From the hospital, after Mac Kilduff announced the death, I went on the press bus again back to the airport. Smith had been on the plane when President Johnson had taken the oath, and I got the information from a pool reporter about what had happened on Air Force One, and I relayed it back to United Press. That was all United Press had for several hours, which was very skimpy about what had happened on the plane, until Smith arrived, of course, with full details at Andrews here at Washington.

B: In those minutes after the shots and while the bus was going to the Trade Mart and you were getting to Parkland, was there much discussion among the reporters on the bus about possibly what had happened?

C: No, there were just questions. We weren't even sure shots had been fired, and I recall that at this time when I called the bureau (I was one of the first guys off the bus and got to a pay telephone in the Trade Mart and I called the bureau and Smith had a ship-to-shore radio arrangement in his car and he had told them that shots had been fired) and I told them it sounded like shots, and they affirmed to me that indeed shots had been fired. They told me where the President had gone. We didn't know that he had gone on to Parkland Hospital.

B: It must have been a right frustrating experience for a bunch of reporters to know that something big was going on and not be able to find out what it was.

C: It was the most frustrating day of my life.

B: I can imagine. There has been a good deal of talk about animosity directed towards Texans on that day. Did you find any of that?

C: I was from Oklahoma originally and I didn't--wasn't in any position,--

didn't have filial alliance with Texans. In fact there is a lot of competition between Oklahoma and Texas, if you are sectional. I've seen this a great deal since then, that people blame Texans for this thing, and some of them even blame President Johnson, you know, for some concocted reason which I have discounted. I have always defended everybody including the Dallas police. The following spring I went to Honolulu where there was a great love for President Kennedy and also for President Johnson. They had quite a hatred for Texans out there as a result of this assassination, and I think most of it is ill-advised and based on no facts. I think it was very shallow.

B: To get on to your taking a position here on the staff, how did that come about?

C: I became acquainted with Jim Jones some time back. He had been a friend of my brother's in college, and Jim started reading my columns and news stories in the paper in Oklahoma, which is his home state. We became friends and a dialogue developed. I expressed an interest. I told him that I wanted to work for the President if I could, do anything, in particular, in this campaign. I felt like I had reached a stage of development in my news career that qualified me for a job, maybe as a speech writer or an advance man.

B: In this campaign, do you mean--

C: In the '68 campaign. And we finally came to some sort of a loose agreement in December of '67, and I came up under civil service in January of '68. I was at the Veterans Administration for a few weeks, and I came over to the White House in the detailed arrangement.

B: That is, you were just on the payroll at the Veterans Administration, but actually working for the White House?

C: That's correct. I made that switch on the fifteenth of March. On the twenty-eight of March, I was asked by Marvin Watson to go to Omaha to work on the campaign. I was changing planes in Kansas City the night of March 31st when I heard that the President had decided not to run again. I went on to Omaha for one day and then I came back to the White House.

B: What did you do in Omaha? Did you have to explain to some local politicians?

C: I had to explain to a lot of people, including my wife.

B: Including yourself, I would suppose.

C: Including myself most of all. We had run into a situation out there where they had a new national committeeman who was a very capable man and a very good fund raiser. The press had called him that night for a reaction. He told the press that he knew that Lyndon Johnson was not going to seek re-election. When I landed in town, they (the people in the organization, the Johnson and Humphrey committee) knew that I was from the White House. They were angry because this one guy was shown as the guy with great insight. Of course he had no insight at all. It was bad judgment on his part. We had to straighten that out and keep harmony in the Democratic Party in Nebraska. I had resigned from the civil service to go with the Democrats for Johnson and Humphrey, and to participate in the political aspects. I was to do various things out there.

B: Were there plans then in March for a fairly well organized campaign?

That is, the trip you made to Omaha, was this one of several trips being made by other people to start preparing for the campaign?

- C: There was to be a primary election six weeks later in Omaha--in Nebraska--which was the Democratic primary. When I arrived in town, the McCarthy forces had geared up. They had a large suite in the Sheraton-Fontenelle Hotel, and Senator Kennedy's supporters had also moved in in a very big way. They had opened up a big headquarters in the Sheraton-Fontenelle. We had opened up. There was one man out from the National Committee, Marty Hauan (of Oklahoma City), who had arrived perhaps a week before I arrived. Marty had set up a few telephones and, you know, gotten the typewriters in. We were planning to start our activity on April 1.
- B: Your work was mostly just as advance man type work, then.
- C: It was organizational advance and speech writing for our supporters and writing news releases. It would have been the general coordination of the campaign. I would have stayed in Omaha, or in Nebraska, throughout the campaign--through the primary. I think we had a good organization going. Hauan, who is an advertising specialist, had some very good ads that were never used. He had some of the best ads that I have seen, I think. He had pictures of Senator Kennedy--this, of course was before Senator Kennedy's death. Under the picture was a quote praising Lyndon Johnson. These were actual quotes that the Senator had made. He (Hauan) had a good ad campaign going. We had things rolling. I think--I thought we could change the tide of this thing. Hauan and I, who are friends, were rather confident that we could rewrite

history out there, but we didn't get a chance.

B: Did you figure your main opponent was going to be Senator Kennedy?

C: Yes.

B: That would have been before McCarthy began showing the strength he showed later, I guess.

C: The Wisconsin primary was on April 2, I believe, and McCarthy did well in Wisconsin. I think that probably there is no way to tell how he would have done had it not been for the March 31 speech. I think the timing of that speech was such that it changed the tempo of both his campaign and of Senator Kennedy's campaign.

B: Incidentally, someone said that the Democratic National Committee at that time and indeed, for some time during the whole Johnson Administration, had not been as efficient an organization as it should be. Did you see any signs of that?

C: I think that the worst complaint I heard about the Democratic National Committee was that staff members would not return telephone calls, even from members of the White House staff, which I think is not very courteous. This never really happened to me in a vital function. Others on the staff, particularly Will Sparks, complained. He was in charge of preparing messages for the President--you know. Some 6,000 messages go out each year to various organizations who are having conventions. Will Sparks was in a position of having to coordinate these messages with the Democratic National Committee to find out if these people were our political friends. We really had no way of knowing here except, you know through formal channels. The DNC, as we understood, was to keep formal channels

open and have formal records of who, indeed, support a President politically, which is part of the presidency, and who does not.

If someone was our friend they might get a message whereas they wouldn't get one if they were our enemy you know. Sometimes these are discretionary things that are--

B: You are talking about messages of congratulations to people who do things and so on?

C: Or a message from the President at the opening of a convention. You know, the wives of the American Legion, you know, the auxiliaries or something have a convention. The President sends a little message and says, congratulations, and recognizes something that they have done, if we know about it. But we found that we didn't have too much--we had trouble finding out political facts from the DNC, right here in the White House. This seemed a bit strange to me, although I only got in on that more second hand, because Sparks was the guy who had to deal with those people. I had a personal relationship over there with Marty Hauan, the gentleman who was in Nebraska with me, and was a personal friend of mine--so was John Criswell. I could call both of them on a personal basis. By the time, of course, I got involved in this thing the Administration was so-called lame duck and we weren't building up steam like we had been before. I could tell (even though I was here for only a short time before the President made his March 31 pronouncement) the difference in the atmosphere later. It was more relaxed. There was less desperate haste to succeed.

B: Well, what happened to you after March 31? You came back to Washington here. Did you have any idea that you might no longer be working with the White House?

C: I had. I didn't know whether to even come back to Washington or not. I was welcome back at my newspaper in Oklahoma. My family was still down there. I came back maybe to fill out my expense account which had not run up too big. I think \$28 is what it cost the Johnson-Humphrey camp to send me, plus the airline tickets, which they were billed directly for, I presume. I came back and I started working in public correspondence, editing Vietnam mail and things. I work with Will Sparks writing messages, mostly kind of the secondary chores of the speechwriter. Many speech writers write letters and a few of them work on messages.

B: Whose payroll were you on then?

C: I went back on the VA payroll. I still, to this day, am detailed from the Veterans Administration.

B: Now, the campaign preparations that had been made were those transferred over to Hubert Humphrey? Did you get involved in any of the intraparty warfare between McCarthy, Kennedy, Humphrey, and then in the Humphrey campaign?

C: Marty Hauan stayed in Omaha, Nebraska, largely at his own expense, I know from having checked with him later. I was only there one day after we had a press conference and explained our position. Then I left. Marty Hauan stayed there, awaiting some word, hoping that somebody would tell him that the Vice President was going to take over this machinery that he had set up.

He had set up a marvelous, a good, efficient office set up and he had a good organization going. He stayed for almost a week waiting for somebody from Humphrey's camp to contact him and tell him which way to move. They didn't. He finally just closed down the shop, and, of course, the Humphrey people did nothing to take advantage of that.

B: Did he try to take the initiative himself--that is, to get in touch with Humphrey's staff?

C: Yes. He talked to--I know that while I was there, some names--this has been some time ago and there has been a lot of things that have happened in the interim--He talked to the DNC constantly. During the course of this day, and I was in touch with George Christian and some other people, mainly trying to find out if there was some way that this information could have leaked, you know, to Nebraska because of a little local problem that had arisen there. And he talked to Mike Monroney, Jr. who seemed at the time to be rather in favor of Vice President Humphrey's candidacy. Mike Monroney, Jr.'s father, who is a Senator from Oklahoma, said that he would try to build some interest. But there was none--it was a complete loss. No one took advantage of the organization, nor the facilities that were --or the advanced arrangements that had been made. As far as I know, it was just completely lost.

B: Did you get involved in any of the other political activities of that year?

C: From then on I was non-political. I didn't do anything--

B: Even during the campaign itself, after the nomination of Humphrey?

C: That is correct. My only contributions were just very informal. If

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I thought I had a joke that was funny that the Vice President could use in the course of his speeches, I'd pass it to the guys in the hall. They are just around the corner, you know, and I had a very informal relationship, and I would pass it on to them. I had no way of knowing whether they were used or not, either a word-of-mouth thing, it was something that any citizen could have done. ~~you know.~~

B: It seems that toward the last of that campaign at least that the activity of the White House staff in the campaign increased. There were some people apparently on the staff who were working fairly actively for Humphrey.

C: I went down--the only thing that was even nearly political that I did overtly--the President went to West Virginia and then over to Kentucky, to dedicate a dam maybe ten days before the election. I was the advance man in West Virginia--Huntington, West Virginia. There were some candidates there but there was no effort to promote the candidacy of Mr. Humphrey at all other than the President's own words when he arrived at--in West Virginia. He made remarks endorsing the Vice President. As an advance man, I made no effort to get out placards or even to ~~tap~~ the organization of the Vice President, ~~and~~ It was not a clear instruction but I had the feeling that we--that this was a non-political trip, the President was there for a specific purpose, to dedicate a dam, it was an airport stop, and I never even called the Humphrey organization. I was, frankly, very much in favor of his candidacy and voted for him; I am proud of it. I wish you'd tell Mr. Nixon.

B: Maybe he will someday have an opportunity to see all of this. To get on politics itself, what is involved in being an advance man on

a trip like that? What did you do in West Virginia?

C: With the intense security that cloaked around the President, they never announce the visits in advance or they seldom announce them. And in this particular trip, it was never announced. I mean, even when his helicopter had left the South lawn, there was no official word from the White House that the President was coming to Huntington, West Virginia. But when they started out, there were going to be several stops. Earlier in the week, when I was advised that I would go on this trip and advance his part, they loaded Secret Service agents and Signal Corps men who handle communication, and political advance men (which is the term they would apply to me) onto a very large Air Force plane, and we landed at this little airport--it's the largest plane that ever landed there--and we unloaded all of this electronic gear. TV cameras were there and they were shooting pictures. The Secret Service and the political advance men could all run and hide, but this airplane could not hide nor could the Signal Corps guys with rather bulky equipment, including radio gear and telephone equipment.

B: What is all that gear? Is that what is required to make a speech or is that what is required to keep the President in touch with the government?

C: They need first to keep him in touch with the world, so he can be a viable President. They set up communications for all the people who are involved in the security. They handle--they kind of act as a base--for Secret Service communications so that one agent can communicate with another one. Thirdly, if the President is speaking, he likes

to have a microphone and a podium. We had that along just in case he wanted to speak. We had no way of knowing whether he would speak at Huntington. There was no speech, even informally, planned, but I was told that if he got there--and a podium and a microphone and a crowd and an enthusiastic crowd were there--that the President would probably want to speak. He came from the cuff, and it was very extemporaneous and very good. I thought it was one of his better little speeches that I have heard him deliver.

B: What else is involved in your job in advancing that kind of trip?

C: Well, I never was able to talk to anybody formally. I had to act very informal and stay anonymous. And I tried to get information from Washington, from the White House, you know, about whether the President would make this particular trip or not. I tried to encourage people down there to get out a crowd because getting out a crowd is a strange thing. A lot of times ten minutes after the President leaves we have found, or I understand it and I have experienced this myself, many people say, "Gosh, if I had just known he was going to be here, I would have been out to see him because I've always wanted to see him and hear him." So we try to move this ahead so they are out there ten minutes before he arrives. We use various means, the Congressman, Ken Hechler, who had been a speech writer and advance man for President Truman and had worked in the Roosevelt Administration, is a congressman there. He was very astute and he knew what my problems were and he did about half of my work for me. He was very good. Ken got his friends to work, and we got a very good turnout--I would say maybe

2,500 people were at the airport. And they were all friendly.

There were no unfriendly signs or pickets.

B: Did you take any steps to make sure that there wouldn't be any unfriendly signs or pickets?

C: I took no steps at all. There was no unfriendly feeling in the city. There was no anti-war feeling. The war seemed not to be an emotional issue there. And there were no--we took no steps. We were interested in knowing and Secret Service had gotten some word that there would be but no protest materialized, and it is a university town. But they were having a homecoming that day, and I guess the protesters were more interested in the homecoming than they were in protesting.

B: Does your work get involved in security measures, too?

C: Only in negotiating with the Secret Service men about clearing something. I would suggest something and the Secret Service would be in a position of--I never felt like they could veto anything I said--but I was always ready to compromise anything. When I suggested something, I would check with Coin Hayk and ask him if he agreed that this was fine with him. He never vetoed anything. Sometimes we would discuss it and we would make a slight alteration. I also worked closely with the Signal Corps to be sure that the sound equipment--when we were rather sure that the President was going to speak--and we set up a podium. We worked this out together, and as I understood my role it was to coordinate their work--the work of the Secret Service, and the Signal Corps. And then to coordinate with the people who were interested in--the local officials and politicians--meeting the President or having

their supporters out to demonstrate support for him. I coordinated this.

B: Have you done any other advance work like that?

C: I advanced--when the President went to Honolulu in mid-July to meet with President Thieu of South Vietnam--I advanced that trip with Marty Underwood. But it was a different situation. It was really a matter of--I mean, we were not interested in crowds anywhere. We were interested in buffering the President, and also the meeting. The whole thing was handled militarily. We didn't even try to get a crowd out at the airport for his arrival. But, there was a good crowd there. But it was mostly military dependents, I think, because the base--it was a military base and there are certain securities on a base--and we were not interested in opening the base or anything.

B: For a trip like that, do you have to take care of such details as room and board for the President and his party?

C: That's right.

B: Does the President have any little idiosyncracies in that regard as to what kind of room and equipment he wants?

C: Mr. Underwood, who has worked with the President since 1963, seems to know everything that the President wants. At this particular stop on this particular trip the--it was decided that he would stay at the Kaiser mansion which is a big home, very nice, just across the bay from Diamond Head. I've heard stories that the President likes a good brisk shower and just demands a good hard shower--

B: I wasn't getting the impression you were going to evade it, besides Mr. Underwood is going to be interviewed next week.

C: I think he knows about what the President wants. The President likes--he doesn't like to displace people. I was told this kind of in a general briefing situation which was very informal that the President does not like to take over someone else's home. He doesn't like to move in and have a family move out so he can come there, because he knows it is uncomfortable for them. But sometimes, because of security and the combination of events, you have to do this, as I understand it. And it would be logical that the President has got to be protected and got to be--he's got to have the proper people around him and the proper facilities. But he doesn't like that. I know he's just very tough on his advance men when it comes to--when they suggest that he should move into an ambassador's home. I was also on a Central American trip last summer and he stayed at the ambassador's--at Ambassador [Raul] Castro's home. He was very disgruntled because of this, as I understand. They explained to him that the only other suitable accommodations was at a hotel and he could possibly be killed. He would have had a better chance of surviving a Central American earthquake in the ambassador's home.

B: Your other duties here in the White House--you said one of them is editing the public mail. Does this mean going through the general unsolicited mail that comes in?

C: My role in this regard has been with Whitney Shoemaker. I work just to assist him because it is very difficult, monotonous work. When there was an overload of mail, I would move in and just kind

of coordinate it with my other. It's about the lowest priority work for me, I would say. Basically there are drafters who answer mail. We try to get particular emphasis and care to mail from Vietnam or from people who have relatives in Vietnam. I have read a lot of that mail just to make sure that the response was in good taste. This was mail written and answered on behalf of the President by Whitney Shoemaker.

B: Does every piece of mail that comes in get answered?

C: Edited?

B: Answered.

C: No, a lot of it is insulting, derogatory, and we don't try to answer it. We try to answer reasonable mail, and we try to answer thoughtful mail even though it may not be reasonable. If the person is trying to express [himself] themselves, and we feel like they are honest. A lot of the mail is from dishonest people who are trying to manipulate and trying to insult the President, and we don't--we never. We file a lot of that mail just without answer.

B: How much of this mail does the President himself see?

C: I don't know. I send some mail to him. In addition, besides the Vietnam mail, also handle mail with--that might be from--that has political comment in it. I would draft an answer for that, either for the President or for Shoemaker, or some other person that might want to answer it. If it is political, they seem to think they should be handled--and some of them have political suggestions, and the people seem to be familiar with the President, or they may be a party leader. We try to answer this in such a way that--something other than just a form letter replying. And I would

send a lot of mail over to the President. Sometimes he would answer it and sometimes he wouldn't.

B: What kind of speech writing duties do you have?

C: On Central American, I wrote two speeches in their entirety. During the trip, he made a speech at the LBJ School in Salvador. I wrote the speech there. And as we were leaving Central America, he made various stops and dropped off the Presidents. He made short speeches at the airports. I wrote one for San Pedro Sula Airport stop at Honduras. And those were the only two complete speeches I wrote. And my other contributions to speeches have been drafts or suggestions or maybe jokes, you know, funny lines or even memorandums.

B: Can you take one of those speeches in Central America--the more important one--and trace the process of writing it from the idea on to delivery? Exactly how does it go about getting done?

C: Well, I went to Central America with Charles Maguire and Harry McPherson. We flew from here down on to Salvador. The President went down from Texas. We arrived in advance. When we got there we went to the points where the President would make speeches on his main day there, which was a Sunday, I believe. And we went to the Embassy where he was going to address the employees of the Embassy. Then we went to the LBJ School, which is a school built with A.I.D. money and named in his honor. It had been destroyed by an earthquake. And then we went out to a small college campus out in the countryside. And after we had been to these places, we were coming back--

B: What was the purpose of this, incidentally? Just to see the physical layout?

C: Of the visits? Yes, to see the physical layouts and we met the people

that he was going to speak to. We went to the Embassy, and we were briefed on the country and the trip by State Department personnel on what they thought were the objectives of the trip and what the problems were in the country. It was a very informal thing. We asked questions, but mostly we just listened to what they had to say. We had read briefing papers on the trip which was a regular briefing form prepared for the President. They make copies for speech writers and aides. When we got to the LBJ School (I speak very poor Spanish, mostly what I picked up along the Texas-Mexican border, which isn't too good, probably not too clean, but we went around and we met the teachers). They understood that we were members of the President's staff. We looked over the school facilities, and we spoke to them. We had no interpreter, and they didn't speak English. We all did our best with our Spanish, and we tried to find out what they were doing there and how happy they were with the school. They were, indeed, happy with the school. It was a very model school house with a courtyard. It was rather bleak looking to me, but they were repainting it in anticipation of the President's visit. It didn't need to be painted again, I didn't think, but somebody, maybe somebody with A.I.D. or somebody thought it should be painted. I remember we got there and for some reason A.I.D. hadn't delivered books out and we were there the day before the President was going to be there, and my gosh, they had some books but not the books that we had been told that they would have. We had to make loud noises to get A.I.D. to deliver the books. It was some small snafu.

Then we went on to the other places. Then driving back towards our quarters Charlie Maguire told me to write the LBJ School speech. He decided that everybody else would write. When I arrived I didn't even know whether I would have a speech writing assignment or not. We didn't even know what kind of speeches he would be making, as a matter of fact. I mean, we made these decisions there. And I wrote a rough draft on just a pad with a pencil--which I never do--I ordinarily draft everything with a typewriter because of news training. Generally, in the news business your first draft is your final draft because of time limitations. But we didn't have a typewriter. I did a draft on a pad, and then I retyped it, then I typed it, and I polished it, I think, on the redraft, when I typed it. The President read it late that evening. He read the speeches, and he ordered them all to be cut down to about two-thirds their length. Harry McPherson cut mine down. He and Maguire both read it over and edited it down, and improved it in doing it, I think. And I'll say that, and I'm jealous of every--of all my precious words, just like every other writer is, but they cut it down. Then it was put on a speech card. The next day the President somewhat strayed from it, but followed it and sometimes he injected additional things. I think that probably the speech ended up being about as long as it started. We were instructed to make them very tight and try to keep the ideas very simple. He didn't want any complex ideas. He didn't want to throw out a new theory on education. I think that about the best thing in that speech was a line

that I put in that I called, because I thought we were in a revolutionary banana republic setting, I called education "the revolutionary music of democracy." And I was alluding also to a piano that the President presented to this small school during that time. The President followed this line. He was pleased with the speech, as I understand, but he never told me. That's all right. I was pleased. I was very flattered. That was the whole process. It was very simple. I was amazed. I had never really written speeches before I came here.

B: Wasn't that the occasion in which one of the President's daughters played the piano?

C: Yes.

B: How do you go about, in a case like that, tailoring a speech to the President's style? Do you consciously try to adjust the sentence pattern, and so on, to the President's delivery?

C: Well, I--like I said, I had never written speeches before. I always wanted to write speeches, but I never had any--no one asked me to, and I never did, I mean to any degree. In fact, that was the third speech I had ever written in my life. He doesn't know this. I'm glad he's finding out in hindsight. I felt like a competent writer could write a speech if he could put thoughts into words, and words on a paper, then it's just a matter of how well you can do it. If you can do it well enough, you know, you get a good job as a speech writer. I think that probably I rate as a speech writer--I'm mediocre. I don't know if I could be developed or not. I think with training, with assignments--I think a lot of it is getting good assignments, you know, the natural setting. It's almost like writing a news story. If it is a dull event, it is a dull news story.

If it is an exciting event, and you do an accurate job of reporting the event, you are a great news man. I had read a lot of Lyndon Johnson's speeches up to this time. I think a lot of his speeches, frankly, have been very poor. I think that they don't sound like the Lyndon Johnson that I think that I would expect, at least expect, and maybe, that I would almost demand. I think a lot of his speeches are written by people who don't try to tailor them. I think that my own speech and my own thought patterns run--I think partly because of the geographical background and probably even the rural Oklahoma-Texas poverty that (I also came from poverty) and I think that these things--I think I probably think like Lyndon Johnson thinks. Only I'm thirty years behind him or so.

B: Have you made suggestions like that to other speech writers?

C: No.

B: Of course, it is kind of late in his administration for you to be getting in on that.

C: I don't think they would have listened to me anyhow. Because, I think, that they all think that they write the best speeches. I don't think I write the best speeches, but I have read some of theirs, and I think the President doesn't sound like a President--or the speech doesn't sound like the President.

B: President Johnson pretty obviously has some trouble coming across, particularly on television. Do you think this might be part of it?

C: I wouldn't absolve the speech writers. I think it definitely is part of it. I think a part of it, too, is the delivery and his appearance and all is not exactly what the people expect, following Kennedy and everything. I think Kennedy must have had better speech writers.

B: Does President Johnson do better in speeches delivered to an actual audience, as in the LBJ School speech, than he does in televised performances?

C: The speech writing profession is going to damn me for saying this, but I think President Johnson would do much better without prepared text. I think that--I was amazed at how well he did at this little airport in West Virginia, you know, where he hopped up on the podium. You know, he started telling them like it is. And it was Lyndon Johnson. It was short sentences with meaningful words. There was no question, you didn't feel like you had to dig around to try to figure out what did he mean. I think President Johnson knows what the hell he means when he says something, when he is talking in person. But I don't think that some of these speeches were real. Maybe it is a diplomatic dodge. Maybe that's the excuse for it, but I doubt it. I think the man wanted to be direct. I think in the Vietnam War--I know it is a complex issue--but it became more and more complex sometimes after you read a speech and you tried to find out about it. I'm not prepared to debate this thing, but I think that in the March 31 speech when he removed himself from personal partisan politics, as you recall, if you remember those three words, this seemed to change meaning as he went through--personal partisan politics. Pretty soon it meant that it was his own Lyndon Johnson Democratic politics. That's what it finally apparently meant that he could go ahead and work for--and I don't know if this was his own wording or not. I think that the American public would have been

better satisfied if he had said, "I'm not going to run again, and I'm not going to work for my election or my nomination." I think sometimes he tried to boil things down too tight or get too many thoughts in. He felt like he had to boil it down to keep from losing his audience. Maybe they were too tight.

B: Have you had much direct personal contact with Mr. Johnson?

C: Very little.

B: Has he--when you were hired, did he greet you or have an interview with you?

C: Never did. I worked with Jones and Marvin Watson and Whitney Shoemaker and then, finally, when I went over and started working with Will Sparks, I talked to Will about what he wanted to do, and then when I worked in speech writing, I mean, I just worked into it. There was never anything very formal about it.

B: But you have never been on the receiving end of either the Johnson treatment or the Johnson anger?

C: That's right. I'm sorry. I would have enjoyed it perhaps.

B: It would have been an experience to recall that. Is there anything else you think ought to be added to this recording Mr. Carter?

C: No, I think that's got it. I probably talked too long.

B: Thank you.

GENERAL SERVICES ADMINISTRATION
NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND RECORDS SERVICE

Gift of Personal Statement

By Joe Carter AKA JOSEPH H. CARTER

to the

Lyndon Baines Johnson Library

In accordance with Sec. 507 of the Federal Property and Administrative Services Act of 1949, as amended (44 U.S.C. 397) and regulations issued thereunder (41 CFR 101-10), I, JOSEPH H. CARTER, hereinafter referred to as the donor, hereby give, donate, and convey to the United States of America for eventual deposit in the proposed Lyndon Baines Johnson Library, and for administration therein by the authorities thereof, a tape and transcript of a personal statement approved by me and prepared for the purpose of deposit in the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library. The gift of this material is made subject to the following terms and conditions:

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Signed Joseph H. Carter

Date October 1, 1974

Accepted Harry J. Hinson for
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