INTERVIEW I

DATE: March 13, 1975

INTERVIEWEE: EVERETT COLLIER

INTERVIEWER: Michael L. Gillette

PLACE: Mr. Collier's office in Houston, Texas.

(Tape 1 of 2, Side 1)

G: Why don't we begin with your school days at Sam Houston High School, your recollections of Lyndon Johnson as a teacher there.

C: Fine. I came to Houston with my family in 1929 from Long Beach, Mississippi, and felt very much a stranger in Texas at that time. In the fall of 1930 I entered Sam Houston High School. I was fifteen years old. President Johnson, then twenty-one, was the instructor in speech and debate at Sam Houston High School. Although the President in later years always introduced me as one of his former pupils, I actually was not. However, I was in that little group that became so close to him during the time he was at Sam Houston, the group that included: Edna Dato, Jake Kamin, Myrtle Lee Robbins, Ellie Jones, Gene Latimer. Through particularly Edna Dato, who later was the one to get me into journalism, I got to know Lyndon Johnson as a friend, rather than as a teacher. We formed a friendship at that time, while he was in Sam Houston, that lasted throughout the years. I still consider him a good friend today although he is gone.

I can recall vividly today the image of Lyndon Johnson at Sam Houston High School. He was taller than all of the students. He was an

intense person with pent-up energies, as he was throughout his life. I can see him striding through those old halls at Sam Houston, towering over everyone else as the hall corridors were filled between classes. And those long strides that he took, out-running everyone else. He was a very handsome young man, a striking-looking young man. He had a peculiar quality that I think served him throughout his lifetime. That was to weld people to him with great devotion. As I think back over the years, those whom I have named, they have certainly remained devoted to Lyndon Johnson--the friends he made in Sam Houston High School.

I think back during his early years in politics, when he first ran for Congress in 1937 from the Tenth District. One man comes to mind immediately: Cliff Carter. Now dead, he was from Smithville. He had been attending Schreiner Institute. He came back for a brief vacation with his family in Smithville and was hired to pass out cards for a young candidate at a political rally there in Smithville; that candidate was Lyndon Johnson. Cliff Carter met Lyndon Johnson that night. He became so deeply impressed with the man that he devoted much of the remainder of his life to Lyndon Johnson. He had complete faith, complete admiration for Lyndon Johnson. I think this particular trait served the President exceptionally well throughout his lifetime in public office.

I can remember another incident that happened in that first congressional race of the President's. I had got out of Rice University at that time, and when the President was running, some of the old friends called me and asked if I would have dinner with them at Old Mexico Restaurant on West Gray. I went, and there were about ten of us.

I can recall that I had to borrow thirty-five cents from my brother to pay for my dinner that night at Old Mexico.

The purpose of the meeting was to get all of the President's friends in Harris County to write to everyone they knew in the Tenth District and urge them to support their good friend Lyndon Johnson in this congressional race. The only two people that I knew in that district were a man and his wife whom I knew to be life-long Republicans and strong anti-Roosevelt people. Of course, President Johnson was running on a pro-Roosevelt platform. However, I dutifully sat down and wrote letters to both of those people, urging them to vote for my friend Lyndon Johnson in that race. The President had many devoted followers here in Texas even at that time. Of course, they grew by the multiple thousands as he remained in politics.

(Interruption)

C: I was speaking of the loyalty that these old friends had for the President. The President had the same type of loyalty to his friends. I can recall one incident that exemplifies this. We used to laugh among ourselves and say that the President was bossy; and to a degree, he was. But I am reminded--I had spoken earlier of Edna Dato, now deceased. She had left Rice University and had gone to Austin to attend the University of Texas and get a degree in journalism. These were the Depression years. She had to work in order to make money to go to the University of Texas. She was working in the state library, which was then in the state capitol.

One day she was walking down the front steps of the capitol and President Johnson came bouncing up them. And he stopped; and he asked

her what she was doing. She told him where she was working. And he said, "I have just been appointed director of the National Youth Administration in Texas, and I want you to be my secretary." She told him that she had no expertise for being a secretary: she could not take shorthand; she was only average as a typist. Typical of the President, he said to her, "I am the best judge of what my secretary should be. You will come to my office"--and he gave her the address--"at ten o'clock tomorrow morning and you will be my secretary." Edna went on her way and thought no more about it.

Shortly after ten o'clock the next morning she was at work in the library and her phone rang. And this voice says, "Edna, I thought I told you to be in my office at ten o'clock this morning." She said, "Yes. But I told you I am not qualified to be your secretary, and that's why I'm not there." He said, "Edna, you come over here immediately. I do not want to hear any more argument out of you." She did go over there, and became his secretary.

Sometime after this, she confided to him that she was going to be married to his old friend, the man who succeeded him as speech and debate teacher at Sam Houston High School, Hollis Frazier. The President said, "Don't make any plans beyond this point. When do you want to be married?" She told him. He said that Mrs. Johnson would handle the whole thing. He called Mrs. Johnson, [and] had her, and he and Mrs. Johnson arrange that wedding. It was in the Johnson home, that old two-story white house in Austin. And they handled every arrangement for that wedding. They got the preacher; handled it all. This was not

being bossy toward Edna; it was wanting to help a friend. He did that throughout his life.

I had intended to be a professor of Romance languages at the college level. But after I got into Rice University, Edna Dato got me into journalism during my freshman year. I later became Rice correspondent for the ***Chronicle***, and went on into journalism. President Johnson went into politics. Therefore we still had a close association over the years. We saw each other a great deal, communicated with each other a great deal over the years.

The part where perhaps I came to know him best, and had the closest association with him, was right after he became president. He requested a news media liaison from Texas in Washington, and I was the one selected because of my past association with the President. I arrived in Washington on January 9, 1964. I was managing editor of the ***Chronicle*** still, but took on the additional titles of national political editor and White House correspondent. I remained in that capacity until September of that year. During those months that I was there I was in close association with the President.

I would like to cite at this time, when in 1968 the President announced that he would not seek reelection, there were many segments of the news media that speculated that he feared to run for reelection. And when he said that he had considered in the past not seeking reelection, they scoffed at this idea. I know for a fact that in 1964, before he ever ran for his full term, he gave serious consideration as to whether or not he should run in 1964.

I recall vividly: One morning in March of 1964 I was sitting in Jack Valenti's office; it overlooked the South Lawn of the White House. Valenti and I both had our backs turned to the front and side doors of his office. We were looking out over the South Lawn and just gabbing. We heard the side door open, but neither of us had first paid much attention to it, thinking it was the secretary. Valenti glanced around and came quickly out of his chair. I knew instantly who it was, and I stood up also.

It was the President. He sat down in a little rocking chair there in Valenti's office, and we talked for more than an hour. Much of that conversation was devoted to the coming Republican and Democratic national conventions and the campaigns to follow. The President said at that time that he was giving very serious consideration as to whether or not he should run. The President was keenly aware of the problems that were besetting the nation at that time, and he truly felt that if he could not provide the leadership to bring this nation together toward the solution of those problems that he should not run for the presidency.

This man's thought at this time was on the country, rather than his own political ambitions. This is why I always resented those who said that his ambition was so great that he would let it come before the good of the country. That is not true.

President Johnson became a different man when he took that oath of office in ***Air Force One*** in Dallas on that day in November of 1963. Many times in his political career President Johnson was referred to by the news media as a political animal. Yes, President Johnson had been a

political animal; he was almost intuitive in his political understandings, in his political judgements. Few people in politics in this country have ever been as skillful as he was. But one of the first things that I noted when I went to the White House in 1964 was this deep change in President Johnson. He ceased being the political animal. He became the president of the United States.

He had an almost awesome concept of the presidency, a deep respect for the office of the presidency. He would not let the function of the presidency be misused. He would not let the dignity of the office be abused. President Johnson gave enormous dignity to the presidency, enormous respect.

I might, at this point, tell another little incident. I drove a car to Washington because I knew I would need one up there. And all the way to Washington I kept coaching myself to say "Mr. President, Mr. President." From the time that I was fifteen years old I had called him by his first name in addressing him. When he was vice president, if we were just among friends, I still addressed him by his first name. I was afraid that I was going to blurt it out up there. I need not have worried. I *too* have enormous respect for the office of president.

I got up there on a Sunday, and on a Tuesday morning Jack Valenti told me that the President wanted to see me. And when I went in to see the President he had gone into that little-bitty office that had once been a bathroom, but President Kennedy converted into a very small relaxation room. As Jack and I went down the corridor toward this room, [although] I had known the President since I was fifteen, had been on a relaxed basis with him all my life, suddenly I found myself very

nervous. I was not going in to see Lyndon Johnson; I was going in to see the President of the United States. I told Jack Valenti, "For some reason, I'm nervous. Stay with us until I can relax."

We went in and sat down and the President was in his reclining chair; he was already in there when we got in. I sat down on a little settee, and the room is so small that our knees were almost touching. Valenti sat down in a small chair to my right. We had no sooner sat down than the President, who was leaning back in the chair and rubbing his eyes, said to Valenti, "Jack, go get us some coffee." Jack got up and bounded out.

There was a little silence. And suddenly I blurted out, "Damn it, Mr. President, I've known you all your life, but for some reason I'm very nervous." He did not tell me not to be nervous--because he knew that would only make me more nervous. If he'd said, "Don't be nervous, I'm just the President," I probably would have collapsed. He leaned back, continued rubbing his eyes, and said, "Everett, how's Edna?" referring to Edna Dato. He then went back into Sam Houston High School and brought back all those recollections and we discussed our mutual friends from Sam Houston High School.

And suddenly I thought how very adroit that was, in putting me at my ease, to go back to the familiar, the starting point of our friendship. And he did have me completely at ease at that point. Another one of the traits of the mastery of Lyndon Johnson: How he understood human nature.

There are so many incidents that I can think about in our lives that show up these great traits. I was talking a moment ago of the

intensity of his feeling for the presidency. I would say also, when I first knew Lyndon Johnson in Sam Houston High School, one of the things as I listened to the man talk, as I watched him in action, that I realized about him: He had an intense pride in our country and a deep-rooted sense of patriotism. He was a reserved man. He did not go around flaunting flags or making beautifully-sounding speeches of patriotism. He lived his patriotism. He acted his patriotism.

Another thing I noted when I went to the White House was the intensity of his patriotism. That morning back in Valenti's office, when I would try to talk politics to him he would resent it. He wanted to talk in terms of country, not politics. He reminded me that he was the president of the United States, and that no longer could he take advantage of any political aspects that would be helpful to him, that he must serve as the president of the United States.

I recall another incident when I was sitting at the dining room table in the mansion part of the White House late one afternoon. I was sitting at his left. I had talked to a number of our friends in Texas about certain appointments that were to be made, very high appointments in our government. And I knew full well his feeling toward the presidency; I knew also the quick temper of Lyndon Johnson and what could happen if you triggered it. But I brought it up anyway.

I told him that I'd been talking to our mutual friends in Texas and that it would be politically advantageous for him if in the two great appointments that he was to make he would pick a more conservative, prestigious type of person, well respected in his profession, and then make another appointment that he wanted a month later. The

President laid down his knife and fork with something of a clatter on his plate, turned those black eyes on me angrily, stuck his nose very close to mine, and said to me, "Everett, I am the president of the United States. I can no longer think in terms of political advantage. I am going to appoint"--and he named the person that he intended to appoint. And I might say, he did it just the way he said he was going to do it.

G: There are hints that he wanted to appoint Leon Jaworski his attorney general, but thought that people would think there were too many Texans around if he did that.

C: I do not know anything of that. I am a very close friend of Leon Jaworski's. Leon and I have discussed many times the President. The President had enormous trust in Leon, great admiration for Leon. The only thing that I know in that area is that President Johnson at one time did want Leon on the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals at New Orleans, but Leon did not want it.

There was a great deal of talk about the President appointing Leon to the United States Supreme Court. Whether the President ever seriously considered that, I do not know. Whether Leon Jaworski would have accepted it, I do not know. Knowing Leon I would have said, yes, he would have accepted, because of his feeling of obligation to his country. I talked to Leon shortly after he had accepted the position of special prosecutor for the Watergate incidents. And only because of that deep feeling of obligation to his country, would Leon Jaworski have ever undertaken that job. The President knew these traits in Jaworski. If they ever discussed the attorney generalship of the United States that's

the first I'd ever heard of it. It seems to me that I might have heard about it had the President ever discussed it with Leon. I think Leon would have discussed it with me, because we are pretty candid in our discussions.

G: Let's go back to some of these early campaigns. Did you have any involvement in the 1941 campaign, in the first race for the Senate?

C: Not a great deal. I saw him several times during that campaign. He was very optimistic in that campaign. I'm trying to think of how to express a feeling that he came out of that campaign with. You recall that on Sunday afternoon after the election had been held on a Saturday, President Johnson had a considerable lead. By Wednesday that lead had dwindled and Governor W. Lee O'Daniel had won the election. President Johnson always felt that somehow in the overall election he may have been counted out. And it became a deep-rooted feeling with him.

And I recall being with him in 1948 when he was getting ready to announce for the United States Senate, the year that he did win the Senate. And I remember him telling me--and it was in that white house in Austin that I can visualize so well--that this time there was not going to be any counting-out. And many times during that campaign--now I feel I should go further at that point, in view of what has been said and published in the past. I am not implying in any sense whatsoever that President Johnson did anything to keep from getting counted out. One of the things that distressed him through the years were some of the charges that were made against him and against his political organization during that campaign of 1948.

But as Jack Valenti later knew--Valenti was not involved then; he was too young--but I was deeply involved in that campaign. And President Johnson in that campaign of 1948 would not in public statements defend himself. He said that his defense would be in the courts, and not in the new media. He would not resort to countercharges.

Let me give you one little example. I do not want to get into all the detail. Let me give you one little example of what I am talking about. In Harris County an election judge of a large precinct admitted publicly on page one of the ***Houston Chronicle*** that he had not counted the absentee votes cast for Lyndon Johnson in his precinct. He claimed that they were illegally cast. The county clerk of Harris County, who under the law was the one responsible for saying whether they were legally cast or not, said publicly that they were perfectly legal votes. This precinct judge was known to be a rabid anti-Johnson person. To this day those votes have never been counted.

Much is said of President Johnson winning the Senate race by eighty-seven votes. President Johnson had full information of many incidents like the one I have just related. He would not use those and would not let his organization use those. He insisted on using it in points of law. This may damage him in history. Valenti and I have talked about it a number of times, as to what history will say about the 1948 Senate race because the President would not permit countercharges to be made in his behalf, citing and listing things that were done on the other side. I am not saying that Governor Stevenson, his opponent in that race, knew about or condoned any of the things that I'm talking

about. A number of those things were public, but the President would not use them in his defense, making countercharges of them.

G: I've heard that in East Texas that President Johnson felt a lot of the counting was detrimental to him.

C: He had information at that time. And in some parts of North Central Texas.

G: Do you think it was possibly a difference in strategy in those two elections, in 1941, flushing out their strongest precincts early so that they would leave themselves open to this sort of adjusted vote count, if the strongest Johnson precincts report early and it'd be easier to get counted out?

C: I simply do not know. When you get into a welter of charges in a political campaign sometimes you do not know exactly what the truth is. Also, if there were some irregularities in that election, on one side or on both sides, that does not mean that the principal candidates knew about them and condoned them. It did not mean that there was any conspiracy at the top to defraud in the election.

G: Right. Well, how did the leaders in Houston line up in that Stevenson-Johnson campaign? Were they pretty much divided here?

C: Most of the leaders, my recollection is, were conservatives, and had been anti-Roosevelt people, and therefore were anti-Johnson people. Johnson never ran well in Harris County, and it was always sort of a thorn in his side. Harris County was almost his second home. He had taught school here; he had many relatives living here--an aunt, an uncle. He had always been very sensitive about Harris County. And it was not until 1964 that he ever ran strongly in Harris County.

G: In that 1948 race he got, I'm told, an overwhelming majority of the black votes.

C: Correct.

G: Do you recall how he did that? Who headed up his campaign in there, or who were his--

C: Oh, well, Roy Hofheinz was Harris County manager of his campaign.

G: Do you think Judge Hofheinz was responsible for that large black total?

C: I would say yes, that Roy was the one who would have organized them. But remember that this doesn't mean there was anything wrong at all; particularly in those days the blacks were voting solid for the liberal Democrats. Now, Governor Coke Stevenson was the strong conservative in the race. Lyndon Johnson was considered the liberal in that race. He was considered the liberal in Texas. But in Washington he was considered a conservative.

G: Right. I didn't mean to imply that the organization of black votes had been irregular in any way; I was just wondering about the political aspects of the leadership there. If Mack Hannah or other black leaders might have helped organize the vote, or if--

C: Yes, Mack Hannah was one of those who did. Now, Mack Hannah was always a strong supporter of President Johnson's. The late Reverend M. M. M. Simpson, one of the early leaders in Houston in the integration movement but certainly not a radical in any way whatsoever--he was always a strong supporter of President Johnson's. Mr. and Mrs. Moses LeRoy were strongly supportive. They were just natural strong supporters of President Johnson. And certainly the known views of the candidates toward the blacks would have had an influence on them.

But I think one of the things that Roy Hofheinz did in that year--he was an aggressive campaigner, and as far as I know there was nothing whatsoever illegal or unethical about what Roy did. He went out to all of the hospitals and the nursing homes and got those people to vote absentee, so that there were huge absentee votes for Lyndon Johnson.

G: I'd never heard that. That's a terrific strategy.

C: It was one of the first times it was ever done. It's done fairly often now. But Roy was an ingenious campaigner, very formidable campaigner, very bright young man.

G: Judge James indicated that, at least in Harris County, he and not John Connally had played the dominant role as an adviser running the campaign.

C: I have no knowledge of that.

G: I'd heard that officially Claude Wild was the campaign head, but that John Connally had been the real--

C: You're talking about statewide, not Harris County.

G: Right.

C: John Connally was not in Harris County at that time.

G: I see. Okay.

C: John Connally was the man always at Lyndon Johnson's side, in 1948 I'm talking about. Now in the early years, John wasn't there; John was in college. But I'm talking about in 1948. I can't even remember when John first became close to the President, but my recollection is that John was around in 1941, in that campaign.

G: He was.

C: I remember John and Nellie being involved in that damn thing.

G: What about Senator [Alvin] Wirtz? Did you have any contact with him, and those kind of things?

C: I knew Senator Wirtz fairly well, but never closely. You see, he was from Austin, and I never did get as close to him. I knew much better the Houston lawyer, Charles . . .

G: Francis.

C: Francis. Charles I. Francis. In fact, many times talked over that campaign in 1948 with Charles I. Francis.

G: You were a political reporter for the ***Chronicle*** at the time, is that right?

C: In 1948?

G: Right.

C: I was the political editor of the ***Chronicle*** in 1948.

G: What did you do during the campaign?

C: 1948 was an interesting situation, but a very trying one for me. The only two large daily newspapers in Texas that supported Governor Coke Stevenson were the ***Houston Chronicle*** and the ***Dallas Morning News***. Jesse H. Jones, the owner and publisher of the ***Chronicle***, was alive at that time. Mr. Jones chose Coke Stevenson to support. I was assigned by management to travel with Lyndon Johnson. It was very ticklish, but I will say that we maintained our friendship throughout the campaign. And I feel that I fully maintained my loyalty to the ***Chronicle*** and my obligation as an objective reporter.

G: It must have been quite a feat.

C: Yes. I can remember in East Texas--it was still the day of the political rally at that time but in the waning days of it--and we would go

into these small East Texas towns at night. That had to be the hottest summer on record. It was just scalding hot, even at night. We would go into one of these small towns and all of the other news media that were traveling with Lyndon Johnson would hole up in an air conditioned hotel.

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C: And Horace Busby would give them press releases which they would use, and they didn't have to go out to the rally. I was under orders not to take a press release; I had to listen to him say what he'd say. And several times during that trip through East Texas he would have crowds of eight, ten and twenty people--just discouraging; they just would not come out for the rally. And the President would point to me and he'd say, "You see that man sitting over there. That's Everett Collier, the political editor of the ***Houston Chronicle***. He's not here to hear what I've got to say; he's here to gut me." And as soon as it was over he'd take off that lavaliere mike that he had on, and he'd come over and grab me by the arm and say, "Let's go have a cup of coffee." He was using me to his advantage, but I did not mind being used. And he knew that I was not going to get real mad at him about it.

G: Were you there to gut him?

C: I wish he were alive to answer that. I did not.

G: Did your supervisors mind if you reported back friendly stories? Would this get you in any difficulty, if the stories did not put LBJ in a bad light?

C: There were some difficulties.

G: Well, why did--

C: Are you going to talk to Horace Busby?

G: Yes. We haven't seen him yet, but we plan to.

C: Why don't you ask him that question, if I had any difficulties. Horace rode in my car during that campaign. Something happened to his; I think his wife had to have it or it broke down or something. And during part of that campaign Horace Busby rode with me.

G: I've heard that the Johnson pace was often too rapid and tiresome for most reporters to keep up with, that oftentimes reporters would alternate two weeks with Johnson and then two weeks with Stevenson, or a week with Johnson and Stevenson. They always got a good rest when they were campaigning with Stevenson because the Johnson pace was so much quicker. Is this correct?

C: That is correct. Very correct. Lyndon Johnson never went to bed. He would get the news media out of bed at six o'clock in the morning for a press conference. I can recall one in San Antonio just before the run-off election. Busby came pounding on our doors, and we had been up late the night before because he was out all over San Antonio and we didn't go to bed until he got back. The man never slept during the campaign. I don't know how he ever had so much energy. The same way in the White House. Up early in the morning, to bed late at night.

G: I've heard that he would often use the phone, too, late at night.

C: Yes, he used the phone. He was addicted to the telephone. Particularly when he was unhappy with someone. I can remember when he was vice president, I was out at a friend's house playing gin rummy; there were three of us playing gin rummy. And I was ninety-six dollars ahead. And the phone rang and it was Lyndon Johnson and he wanted to talk to me.

And he was mad over some little-bitty story of no consequence that had been in the paper a couple of days before.

And he started out being very severe with me, telling me that Lyndon Johnson knew more about what Lyndon Johnson was going to do than those usually unauthoritative sources that we were quoting in the ***Houston Chronicle***. And after bawling me out severely for awhile, he started reminiscing, which he'd always do. And the man must have kept me on the phone for forty-five minutes; he was at the Ranch. And he got me so rattled and my two colleagues were screaming at me, "Hang up on the blankety-blank. Get back in the card game."

He got me so rattled that when I went back to the game, I lost my ninety-six dollars plus another hundred and nine dollars. And I always claimed that Lyndon Johnson owed me that money, but I never did have the courage to ask him for it.

G: What would he like to reminisce about? Do you recall?

C: Sam Houston High School. That always stuck very close to his heart. Those people who were close to him at Sam Houston were always in his mind for some reason. I told you about him asking about Edna Dato, who later became Mrs. Hollis Frazier, and then after Hollis' death, became Mrs. Thomas Harling. She has been deceased for three or four years.

He always went back to that period. It must have been a very happy period for him. He went back to his early campaigns. It would never be the immediate past that he would talk about. He treasured his friends. And if he thought a friend was angry with him it disturbed him deeply, even if that friend had no political influence whatsoever. It

bothered him horribly if they were angry with him. And he'd usually try to hire them to get them in a good mood.

G: He was very much a people man, wasn't he?

C: Oh, extremely sensitive to people. Extremely sensitive.

G: As far as Lyndon Johnson the politician, when do you think he was the happiest? In the White House, or in the Senate, or the vice presidency?

C: I would say when he was in the Senate, and as Senate majority leader. I really don't believe that the President was ever a happy man in the White House. He took too seriously the duties, the obligations of the presidency. He was so serious when he was in the White House.

And, a subject that I'm hesitant to discuss for the public record, but prior to the President becoming president he would sit down with old friends and have drinks and relax. After he became president I never saw him take more than one. I can't recall; I'm just thinking now. I never saw him take more than one. He might have, in the intimacy of the home at the Ranch, but I doubt it. He told me one time, "That telephone is always at my elbow," meaning that he would have to make a critical decision for this nation. And that man was not going to let his mind get into such a shape that he could not make the right decision if that telephone rang. He was very, very conscientious about that point.

I can remember right after I went to Washington, the late Albert Thomas gave a very small party--maybe twenty people--for the President at his home on 34th Street there in Washington. And all but two of those present were very good friends of the President's from Texas. And he certainly relaxed that night. And he talked rather candidly among his friends. But I particularly watched that night, and I never saw him

take but one drink during the entire evening, even though he was relaxing so well that Mrs. Johnson had great difficulty in getting him home. They started out three times and he'd dash back, because he would have something else to say to someone in the party. He took the presidency so seriously. As it should be taken, of course.

Another facet of him was, he knew the people around him so well that he could tell what they were thinking by looking at them. I recall an incident in 1964. The Republicans had already nominated Senator Barry Goldwater. It was early or middle August, and the Democratic national convention had not yet been held. Senator Goldwater had charged that President Johnson's orders to the commander of the naval forces in the Gulf of Tonkin, where we had had the incident of American vessels firing on foreign vessels, had been so ambiguous that they could have used the atomic bomb had they so chosen. I was aware of the nervousness of the American people, particularly at that time, about possible use of nuclear weapons.

On a Saturday afternoon the President called a quick press conference. And I suppose there were only about twenty news media people [there]. I went around to the left side of his desk and was standing just to his left. One of the wire services, which always opens press conferences, asked him immediately, "Were these orders loose enough that atomic weapons could have been used?" He said, "No comment." During the course of the press conference someone else asked him the same question. He said, "No comment."

This bothered me a great deal. I could just see the headlines. I could see television concluding that his "no comment" was a tacit assent

to what Senator Goldwater had said. And I waited until I thought he was about ready to dismiss the press conference. And I tried to phrase it in a way that it would not look like I was persisting in asking the same question, but I did ask the question.

And those black eyes came around and stared at me. And when those eyes were staring at you time just seemed to go on. I felt that it must have been thirty seconds that he just stared without any emotion on his face; he was looking in my face. And he turned around and he looked at Jack Valenti, who was standing at his right. He did not nod his head; he gave no visible signal to Valenti, but Valenti took off on a run.

The other wire service closed the press conference, and we started back to the West Lobby. Secret Service men came running after us, saying that the President wanted us back. We went back into the Oval Room. The President showed us the actual radio message to the commander of the Gulf of Tonkin. It was, of course, quite specific; and specifically ordered use of conventional weapons only.

I recall, as we walked out down the corridor, Dan Rather, whom I had known well in Houston and was at that time CBS White House correspondent, said to me, "I know you did it, but how did you do it?" Because there was no visible signal anywhere. He was not only a sensitive man, but an intuitive man. And of course, Valenti knew his every movement, just understood him perfectly. And heaven knows there was no one on earth ever more devoted--totally devoted--without reservation to Lyndon Johnson than Jack Valenti.

G: I've heard it said that LBJ couldn't walk by a telephone without picking it up and calling someone, that it was virtually impossible for him to pass one by.

C: He did love telephones. There's no question of that.

G: Were you called very often by him at some times or--

C: Not often. Not often. No. When I was in Washington it was Valenti who called. And Valenti would say, "He wants you to do"--between Valenti and me it was always "he."

G: I've heard that the late Charles Marsh had considerable influence on President Johnson as a young man. Do you know anything about that? Did he ever talk to you about the--?

C: I don't even know Charles Marsh.

G: --the Dallas editor/publisher up there.

C: No. I do not recall the President ever mentioning his name to me.

G: This would have been in the early days, I guess. What about other people around the President that you think contributed significantly to his decision making. Was George Reedy important?

C: George Reedy was important. George is a close friend of mine. George was another one wholly devoted to the President.

The person who went to work for the President in 1939 and got the President's complete trust, just so totally, was Walter Jenkins. If Walter could have remained with the President there might have been a totally different course for the President. Walter, in his quiet way, had such excellent judgement as to what the public reaction was to the President, and as to what the President should do and say. He had enormous influence on the President.

G: Can you recall any specific occasions of Walter Jenkins supplying this sort of counsel?

C: I can recall two that I'd rather not discuss. But I know firsthand where Walter's influence was very great.

G: How would he do it? He was very low-key?

C: Extremely low-key. After Walter went to work for President Johnson in 1939, Walter's whole mental life was Lyndon Johnson. He idolized the man. He had total devotion to Lyndon Johnson. But Lyndon Johnson knew of that devotion, and I think that's why he had such great faith in Walter Jenkins.

For many years, when the President was Senate majority leader--senator and then Senate majority leader--when I would want something out of the President, to get his thinking on something, Lyndon Johnson would be difficult to get because he was so busy. I'd call Walter Jenkins. If Walter said it, there was no question but what it was accurate: the President thought it.

I would like to say something, but would you show it to Mildred Stegall before it is transcribed?

G: Okay.

C: Do you know Mildred Stegall?

G: Yes.

C: If she objects to it, please delete it. Because if you don't, I will.

A thing that impressed me: Of all of the cramped space in the West Wing of the White House there is not half enough space for the staff that the president has there. Walter Jenkins had that huge office in the southwest corner of the White House, the opposite corner from the

Oval Office. After he left, that office, as far as I know--and I was in it several times later--was never assigned to anyone. Mildred Stegall, Walter's secretary, sat in it. I went in to see Mildred several times. And she was always--just she in that office. And I always. . . .

I would never discuss Walter with the President. It was a very hurtful thing to the President, and so I never discussed it with him; I discussed it with others. And, possibly for the record--are you going to do George Reedy?

G: Yes. We have done interviews with him.

C: Did you do them? Do you know what he said?

G: I've listened to them, but I didn't conduct them.

C: There is an incident that George told me that I think should be in the historical record on Lyndon and Lady Bird Johnson, that I know only from George, but George was there first-hand. And I'd prefer that George be the one to tell it. And that would be the afternoon and evening of the Walter Jenkins incident. This shows so beautifully the President's loyalty to his friends, and Lady Bird Johnson's loyalty to their friends. To me it's one of the most beautiful incidents of Lyndon and Lady Bird Johnson. But I'd rather George Reedy tell it, because he was present, he participated in it, and is the man that should tell the story.

G: We may have it. I don't recall hearing that on the tape, though.

C: I would bet that he did not tell you.

G: Well, that could be.

C: But I do not see any reason--I would think that George would want to ask Mrs. Johnson first. But I would hope that Mrs. Johnson would permit

this to go on the record. It made me feel so warm toward President and Mrs. Johnson, and to admire them so much more.

G: Why don't you tell it, and then we can get--?

C: I'd rather not. I'd rather that George Reedy tell it. I've discussed it a number of times with George Reedy. He told me the details shortly after it happened. I think it would be better if George did the telling of it.

I would like to put into this record that I have known Walter Jenkins most of my adult life. I consider it ridiculous to think that Walter Jenkins would ever, for any reason, have betrayed Lyndon Johnson or the United States of America.

G: I've heard that he was the best of all the Johnson aides at anticipating the President's wishes, that he had just sort of an instinctive quality of knowing what LBJ would do or would want to do on any given matter.

C: I would assume that is right because of length of tenure with Lyndon Johnson through all those years, you see, as a congressman, as senator, as Senate majority leader. As to the understanding of the President, Valenti, in his much shorter tenure, would have to rank right in there with Walter Jenkins on the understanding of the President. And I think in both cases that deep, deep understanding was based on devotion as the bedrock of it.

G: Let's talk about President Johnson's relations with the press. Do you think it was essentially an adversary relationship?

C: Unfortunately, it was. It should not have been. He always--oh, and I'll go back to his early races--he always felt that they were out to get him. Even when he was among friends, he felt that they were out to

get him. When I was dealing with Lyndon Johnson personally he didn't think of me as a newspaperman. He went back to Sam Houston High School and thought of me in those terms.

I think possibly that he--although they fought like dogs most of the time--he got that same feeling toward Margaret Mayer of the ***Dallas Times Herald***. Now, I know he has called Margaret Mayer a number of times, when he would be displeased over something. She is chief of bureau of the ***Dallas Times Herald*** in Washington now.

But generally he had a deep suspicion of the press, of the news media. He never felt relaxed around them. In all of the great positions he held, and during his years as Senate majority leader when the overwhelming majority of news media were just lavishly praising him, he still had that instinctive suspicion of the news media.

That doesn't mean that he did not recognize their role, and did not respect the role that they play in American society. He full-well did. But it was a subjective feeling on his part. He did not give his trust easily. He was a suspicious man.

G: He had close friends among editors in Texas, did he not? Houston Harte, and--

C: Houston Harte; Rhea Howard of the ***Wichita Falls Times***. I doubt if few people in the world were as close to him as Mr. Rhea, up in Wichita Falls. And certainly I would hope that you would talk to Mr. Rhea. I think his health will permit now. He was feeling bad, last I heard, but I think he's in much better health now. And he was extremely close to President Johnson. And the President valued these friendships so

greatly. The ones that the President was always so suspicious of were those who [were] actually doing the writing or talking.

G: Rather than the editors.

C: He has been accused of trying to manage the news. And I suppose that in that particular area, during the time I was in Washington in 1964, I would have been as close to him as anybody on that particular subject. I never knew of him to have any desire to manage the news. His desire was to stop what he considered unfair attacks on him, or unfair or inaccurate interpretations of what he was saying or doing. The President could put one interpretation on what he had said, and if every news medium in the country put a different interpretation, the President still felt he was right.

G: I've understood that he would also give exclusive leads to editors who were friendly on important issues.

C: He did that. He did that.

G: Would you like to recount the story of the Great Society and how the ***Chronicle*** got the news break on that?

C: Yes. You know that at that time, when he first started talking about it, he had not even coined the words "great society," but he wanted a war against poverty. I was interested in the subject [and] talked to him about it. The assistant director of the Budget at that time over in the Executive Office Building was the man that the President delegated to formulate the Great Society program. He gave orders to this man that I was to be allowed to know anything they were doing, and to work with them on it. That did not mean that I was having any input whatsoever; I was merely being informed on what they were doing. I worked very

closely with this man and he did, I think, tell me everything they were doing right along. I knew also the philosophy behind what President Johnson wanted.

President Johnson came out of the Spartan Hill Country of Texas. He devoutly believed that each person should exert by his own efforts that degree of energy to earn his living and to set his own standard of living. But he also understood that this country must provide the opportunity for the individual to do that. He wanted people to work for a living, but he wanted them to have the opportunity to work. So that this was the simple underlying philosophy behind the entire antipoverty program.

For example: I recall he told me that there were fourth-generation people on welfare in this country who had never known a way of life other than welfare. The numbers of these people were growing at a horrendous rate; still are. He said the cycle had to be broken, but that these people did not know how to do it, did not have the expertise to do it. He wanted to provide that. He wanted to go into the ghettos, pull those young people out of the ghettos, take them into a different climate to teach them what the basic American society is.

That is why you had the training camp at San Marcos. You see, San Marcos he considered home country. And he particularly wanted it. He wanted those people brought out of the ghettos to see how these rural and semirural people lived, how they worked for their living and built their standards of living, how they had good standards of living, to give these young people something, a goal, to work for. Then he wanted to send specially gifted teachers into those ghetto areas, and for the

federal government to provide the special training for these teachers so that they could reach these young people and give them some incentive for getting out of the ghettos.

The President had conceived a beautiful program. I thought it was a fine program. When he was ready to release it and before he turned it over to his cabinet members--and they saw it before it went to Congress--he permitted me to publish in the ***Houston Chronicle*** the exclusive story of what the Great Society program was. And I did.

I know that we ran it under a headline on page one, under my by-line. And I believe that we ran twelve columns of type on that; that's my recollection. You know that our paper has eight columns to the page, and we ran twelve full columns on the Great Society program. I was very pleased because all of the news media in the country were very anxious to know what the Great Society was going to be. But he gave me that exclusive.

But the big exclusive of my career he would not let me have. The general public, as I tell this instance, might think that I shirked my obligation as a newspaperman, and I want to emphasize at the outset that I did not, that to me loyalty to confidential trust must be kept.

You will recall that the great news media question in August of 1964 was, "Whom is the President going to select as vice president?" About two, maybe three weeks before the convention I was in the office of one of the President's top assistants, and one who was closest to the President. And I must say at this point that it was not Jack Valenti; I don't want to get Jack in trouble. And I went in this man's office and just as I sat down he said he had to leave his office to go down the

hall and would be gone fifteen or twenty minutes, but for me to just sit there.

I looked down on his desk and there was a confidential memorandum from the President to his key staff members. I have no idea how many such memoranda were put out; there may have been just that one. And as I looked at it, it started out by saying that Hubert Humphrey was his choice for vice president, and then went on; as I recall, maybe it was a three- or four-page memorandum. I did not read the whole memorandum, but in looking at it I saw that Hubert Humphrey was the choice.

Later I felt that the President had ordered this to be done to test my loyalty, to see whether I would reveal that or not. There was no way that I could reveal that without the President's permission. I think it would have been one of the greatest betrayals a man could have.

One of my close friends in the White House is that very dear lady, Willie Day Taylor. She was with the President in 1948 when he ran for and became senator. Willie Day was in the office of the press secretary of the President; at that time it was George Reedy. I slipped in to Willie Day and told her that it was something I didn't want to hit the President with directly, but that I wanted him to know that I knew for a fact that Hubert Humphrey was his choice for vice president and I wanted to run the story. It was the big scoop of my career. Willie Day said she would ask him. So she wrote a memorandum. And I told enough in it to let the President know that I knew positively that it wasn't any rumor, that I knew that it was Hubert Humphrey.

I would keep going back to Willie Day. I went back a couple of days later [and] asked her. In the late afternoons, when no one was in

the Oval Office, Willie Day would wander back there and chat with the President. And she had such a close personal relationship to the family, having stayed in their home many, many times and much of the time having kept the children while they were away.

She told me that she had laid that memo on his desk. And I said, "What did he say?" She said, "He didn't say anything; he just looked at me." This happened three or four times, and it came up very close to the convention. I was most anxious to have it. I could not tell a living soul what I knew, though.

I was going to Atlantic City to the national convention on Saturday, and I went in on a Thursday afternoon. [I] told Willie Day that I was leaving on Saturday, and told her I just had to have that story, that he had to give me an answer. I got no answer. So I went on to Atlantic City and when I got to my hotel among the calls I had waiting for me were two urgent ones; one from Cliff Carter, who was running the convention for the President, the other from Willie Day. I answered Willie Day first.

We have sort of a code saying that we have used for years, and that is, "Oh, ye of little faith." We've kidded about it; it's had meaning to Willie Day and me over the years. So when Willie Day heard my voice she says, "Oh, ye of little faith." And I said, "Oh, Day, does that mean that I can run the story?" She says, "Uh-uh. He said 'no.'" He never did permit me to run that story.

And then, another insight into how sensitive the President was toward those that he felt close to, that he felt might not be serving him as he wished to be served. When I went to see Cliff Carter he first

said the President wanted me to perform a mission during the campaign. I told him I could not do it without the permission of the then-president and publisher of the ***Chronicle***, John T. Jones, Jr. I called John Jones from Cliff's desk at convention headquarters and John said he would be very pleased if I would do anything I could to help the President. I then accepted. This required my returning to Houston in September of 1964. And I did perform this mission for the President.

The day after the general election Jack Valenti called me and said the President wanted to know what day I would be back in Washington. I told him that my superiors had given me orders that I could not return to Washington, not because of anything pro- or con-Lyndon Johnson; it was because of our own operation here, where they wanted me to remain here within our own operation. I told Valenti that I could not come back. He told me the President was going to be very unhappy over that. I told him I could not help it and to please explain to the President that it was not my decision, that I was under orders, that I worked for a living, and I had to obey those orders.

Valenti called me a week later and he said, "The President is very unhappy over this, and he asked if you will not reconsider your decision."

(Tape 2 of 2, Side 1)

And I kind of blew up and said a few obscene words to Jack Valenti and told him that he had not conveyed my message accurately to the President; he had not made the President understand that it was not my choice, that I simply was under orders and could not go back to Washington.

That was the last I heard of that until early March in 1968, shortly before he announced that he was not going to seek reelection to the presidency. I was again in his dining room in the mansion part of the White House, and again sitting at his left. In the room at the time, as I recall, were George Christian, the press secretary; Marvin Watson, the appointments secretary; Jack Valenti, who at that time was not working for the President--he had already left; his wife, Mary Margaret; their daughter Courtenay; and there might have been a couple of other staff people in there. But it was just the President, his staff, and me.

The President had waited a long time to let me have it over not going back to Washington. The President could be very intensive when he decided to take your hide off. And he suddenly began taking my hide off. He started talking in general about those who loved that Texas gold more than they did the poor old President. The poor old President was sitting up there, captive in the White House, and he needed people around him that he knew and whom could trust. But they were more interested in that Texas gold than they were in helping the poor old President.

I could see that Christian, Watson, Valenti, and all of them were enjoying--

(Interruption)

--that he wanted, I think, that feeling of old familiarity and trust around him.

Another thing I'd like to say about the President. I always resented so much his critics picturing him as a calloused man who would

send young Americans over to Vietnam to be killed and not have any concern for them. Oh God, I wish those critics could have sat in the White House with that man, as I had the opportunity to do, and see how he agonized over those young people in Vietnam.

When there was an air strike out at night--two different nights I sat with him at the White House. He would not go to bed until that last plane was in and he knew the fate of that flyer. This man agonized over every American citizen that was in Vietnam. He did have a heart. He had a deep concern for every American that was involved over there. But he also had a concern for the other people that were involved because the man had a great care for humanity, a deep feeling for humanity. I get a little emotional when I get on the subject, because. . . .

G: What about President Johnson and civil rights? When do you think he first became, in his mind, a civil rights advocate?

C: When he became vice president.

G: Do you recall an incident at the Rice Hotel where a foreign dignitary from an African country or something was not allowed to stay at the Rice or the Shamrock or--I believe it was the Rice--and he intervened in that? Did he ever tell you about that?

C: I'm not familiar with the incident, but the Rice Hotel was desegregated in 1954, before there was ever any court order that it be done. The late Jesse H. Jones was always a moderate--very moderate, almost liberal--on the subject of civil rights. You see, during his lifetime--Mr. Jones did not die until 1956--and it was during his lifetime that his hotels here in town took the lead in getting Houston hotels to desegregate. Now that would have had to have been before 1954.

G: I guess. Either that or maybe it was the Shamrock.

C: The Shamrock didn't open until 1949, I think it was.

G: Can you recall any early civil rights episodes involving Lyndon Johnson that might foreshadow his later achievements there?

C: No.

G: What about Lyndon Johnson as a raconteur? I've heard he was a great storyteller.

C: He was indeed. He was indeed.

G: Can you describe his techniques and the type of stories he would tell, and how he would use them?

C: He would relate all kinds of stories, but his favorite stories were those that had some relation to politics and some personality involved in politics. He had a sharp wit, but a very dry wit. He never smiled when he told these stories. But he could tell them very effectively.

This calls to mind something very interesting. Right after President Johnson became president he had a reception in the East Room of the White House, and there were a number of Texans there. And one of his old friends from Texas, meaning no disrespect on earth, just not being schooled in protocol, kept referring to him to his face as "Lyndon." And the President did not want to offend this old friend, but there were other non-Texans there that were hearing this.

So the President got a little group of his Texans and said, "Let's go out on the Truman Balcony; I want to tell you the story of the Truman Balcony." They went on out to the Truman Balcony which, as you know, overlooks the South Lawn; it's on the south side of the White House. And while he was out there he said, "This reminds me of a story. "I

recall so well that on the day that President Roosevelt died, Mr. Rayburn"--referring, of course, to Speaker Sam Rayburn--"wanted to congratulate Harry Truman on becoming the president of the United States. So he went over to the Senate side of the Capitol where the Vice President had his offices, shook his hand, and said, 'Harry, I just want to tell you now, while I may, how much our friendship has meant over the years. After this moment I can never again call you 'Harry' and express myself as I wish to express it. God bless you, Mr. President.'"

And the Texas friend chuckled and said, "That's a hell of a good story, Lyndon." (laughter)

G: He hadn't gotten the point.

C: He did not get the point. The President did not pursue it.

As I have said so many times in this discussion, the President had such an idealistic viewpoint of the presidency of this country. And as I said a moment ago about Walter Jenkins not betraying the President or the country, Lyndon Johnson would never, never knowingly have betrayed this country in any way to seek any personal advantage of his own.

G: I suppose his ability as a raconteur was really part of this Johnson treatment and his ability to deal with other people in a very effective way. Can you describe other aspects of the Johnson treatment and how he would--

C: Let me say first that very often these stories he told had a point; and the point would be in his favor. He would use them often in putting

over his viewpoints. He was absolutely masterful in persuading you, one-on-one or with a little group. He was extremely persuasive.

Somehow he could never be that persuasive before a large audience. I never did think that the President did well, came across well, before a large audience. I don't think they would grasp the deep sincerity of the man, the intensive feelings of the man. And I thought he always did not well on television. Some come across strongly on television.

Of course, the master of them all was the late President Kennedy. He was an infectious person who could captivate an audience. I recall the night before he was killed, when he was here at Sam Houston Coliseum for the dinner honoring Congressman Albert Thomas, which was the stated reason for his coming to Texas. And how my wife and my son and I were sitting right down in front of the President, but how he captivated even those in the far reaches of Sam Houston Coliseum. He had a magnetism.

This brings up a point that I have always kind of resented. In some of the books written by those close to President Kennedy, and in some of the news media, it has been said that President Johnson urged Kennedy to come to Texas to bail Lyndon Johnson out. Nothing could have been farther from the truth than that.

In 1963 Lyndon Johnson did not need bailing out in Texas. President Kennedy was not strong in Texas. I believe that even the strongest supporter of President Kennedy would admit that it was Lyndon Johnson's name on the ticket that won for Lyndon Johnson and President Kennedy in Texas by a very small margin in 1960. Unquestionably it was the Johnson name that carried Texas in 1960. Johnson, in my opinion,

was even stronger in Texas in 1963 than he was in 1960, but President Kennedy was still not popular.

I had the opportunity to be somewhat on the inside on President Kennedy coming to Texas at that time. Albert Thomas was my long-time very close friend. Jack Valenti and he had talked to me when the idea of this testimonial dinner had first come up. Valenti then, as you know, the advertising and public relations man of Weekley and Valenti, was handling all of the details of the dinner. But I was handling the political background of the dinner for Albert Thomas, and was in almost daily contact with Albert Thomas and with his retired but still active administrative assistant, Marie Ball. Unfortunately, Marie never let out of her possession--although I begged for them--her memoranda on all of this.

I know that it was Albert Thomas who went personally to the White House and asked President Kennedy to attend this testimonial dinner for him. I know that I had Albert Thomas' word for it, and certainly did not doubt that word, that President Kennedy showed great enthusiasm at that meeting for coming to Texas. He had wanted a reason to come to Texas. When Albert Thomas went to see him that day that was, I am quite sure, the first time that President Kennedy ever heard of coming to Texas on a trip. If Lyndon Johnson was ever involved, except at a later time when they were planning the exact details of the trip, in getting Kennedy to come to Texas I certainly knew nothing of it from Lyndon Johnson, from Albert Thomas, or from any other source. It was Albert Thomas who worked directly with the White House on that.

And you recall that John Connally was governor of Texas, at his peak of power as governor of Texas; that Senator Ralph Yarborough was the senior senator from Texas; and that there was intense feeling between those two men, which greatly affected the Democratic Party in Texas. It was some of those ticklish background matters that I was trying to iron out for Albert Thomas and for President Kennedy, so that there would be no embarrassment to Albert Thomas or to President Kennedy. And it got extremely ticklish.

G: That must have been a full order.

C: There is another matter that I've thought about telling. I handled for the President the background politics on the Hubert Humphrey dinner in Houston on the night of October 19, 1964 and so much happened that almost a book could be written about that one event.

G: That's fascinating. We haven't gotten any testimony on that.

C: If I tell you will you promise me that you will show it or let Mrs. Johnson listen to it before it is ever transcribed onto paper? And if she has any objection to it, it must be deleted.

G: We can do that. We can play the tape for her and have her pass on the-- decide whether or not to have--

C: I will not utter one word that might at some point in the future be considered damaging to President Johnson.

President Johnson, as I told you, was always skittish of Harris County. He was sounding me out frequently during that campaign on Harris County sentiment. And he decided that he would get Senator Humphrey, the vice presidential nominee, to come to Houston for a big dinner to be sponsored by some of the biggest men in Houston. He

prevailed on nineteen of those men to become the sponsors of this dinner. One of the men, surprisingly, was a life-long Republican, and I still don't know how the President got him to be one of the nineteen sponsors.

As I said, John Connally was governor of Texas; Ralph Yarborough was the senior United States senator. The President knew quite well that this was going to affect the visit. The President had Weldon Weekley of the old Valenti firm handling the actual details, invitations and so on, to the dinner, and tickets and so on. But working in the political background, I was the principal one. But also on the money raising and some political background was Marlin Sandlin, at that time of Pan American Sulphur, but also oil man, gas pipeline man, and intimate friend of the President's. Marlin and I were working very closely together.

The President sent down as White House representative Leonard Nicalauric [?], a lawyer. He had been a law partner of Abe Fortas, but was not at that point. Leonard moved into the Rice Hotel across the street here from the ***Chronicle***, and began putting together the political portions of the dinner. He immediately realized what a rat's nest he had got into. He did not know these people, did not know how to deal with them. I had been reared with these people. He kept calling me constantly. And three days before Hubert was to get here, Leonard Nicalauric just moved over into my office and was operating out of my office.

The infighting became so intense that on the afternoon before Hubert was to come the next day, Nicalauric picked up the telephone and

said he was going to recommend to Hubert Humphrey that he cancel the dinner. And I grabbed the telephone and shoved it back in place and said, "Like hell you are, because Hubert is going to be on the phone to the White House in a matter of minutes and this phone's going to ring and that man up there is going to say, 'What the hell have you been doing down there?' You're not getting me in that spot."

It became so intense that Hubert Humphrey, who on the afternoon of October 19th was to address the state Democratic convention in Little Rock, Arkansas, said he would not come into Houston unless I flew to Little Rock and briefed him on what was happening in Houston before he came in. I checked this back through the President and he said he wanted it done. And I told him I did not have time to get up there and do it, that it was dangerous, me leaving the city. But I finally agreed to do it.

And I get up on the morning of the nineteenth and there is a full-page ad in the morning newspaper, calling on these nineteen sponsors to apologize to the people of Harris County and to explain to them why they would sponsor a dinner for the founder of the Americans for Democratic Action, and went on and cited Hubert Humphrey's liberal connections, some of them pretty far-fetched.

I knew this was going to panic the sponsors. I rushed to my office because I had to catch a plane for Little Rock, and it isn't easy to get from Houston to Little Rock. I called in the public relations man for President Johnson in Harris County, told him for God's sake to hold the line until I could get back into town and we would devise an answer to this ad.

I then went on and caught the plane to Little Rock, and did Hubert and this man, William [Connell?]--I can't remember his last name, who was Hubert Humphrey's aide and such an outstanding man--dashed over to the wings. Hubert listened to part of it and then left and William--

G: Droves, is that it?

C: No, that's not the right name. He listened to the whole thing and then they dashed me out to an airplane and rushed me back to Houston.

One of the questions that Hubert asked me was, "What is John Connally going to say about me when he gets up to introduce me? If he gets up and says 'Gentlemen, Senator Hubert Humphrey' and sits down I may as well leave the ballroom, because I am dead." I'd been asking Connally every day, "Are you coming? Are you going to introduce him? What are you going to say?" And Connally kept saying, "I don't know; I'm thinking about it. And I'll think about what I'm going to say."

That picture you see right there on the wall was taken at old Hobby Airport in Houston. My plane landed and as I got out and started toward the airport, Connally's plane landed nearby and he got out. He motioned to me to wait. He took me off where nobody was close. One of the ***Chronicle*** photographers took that with a telescopic lens. Look at my face. Look at Connally's face. You notice his arm had not fully recovered from the shooting at that point.

He started asking me details. He was asking me, "Who is here? Who is going to take part?" And you know who he had in mind. So I told him everything. And I said, "John, what are you going to say about Senator Humphrey?" And he looked at me with that quirk of a smile and said, "I'll think of something." And we left.

I came on back to the Rice Hotel and William, the administrative assistant to Senator Humphrey, caught me and told me the first thing that Hubert had was a press conference. And he said that Hubert was so nervous over this press conference and afraid that he was going to say the wrong thing. And we had briefed him fully beforehand on the questions that would be asked and advised what to say--in writing we had done this. But he was so nervous about it that I was asked to sit on the front row of the press conference--and I suppose there were two hundred news media people there--and if anyone asked a question that was a loaded question but one that was so loaded locally that Hubert wouldn't know about I was to cross my legs. If I crossed my legs Hubert wouldn't answer it. That went on during the entire press conference. I never did have to cross my legs. Hubert handles himself so well that I never felt any need to do it. But this man William was sitting next to me.

The next item on the agenda was for him to go in to a reception of Democrats at the Rice Hotel. But he had been fully briefed on this ad, and he was sensitive as the devil as to what these men might say in reply to it, or that they might pull out. He had asked that I check and find out what had happened, what the latest was on this incident. And just before I went into the press conference I had talked to Ben Kaplan, the public relations man. He told me that the sponsors wanted to answer the ad; none of them had pulled out, and that we were to devise an answer for them.

Senator Humphrey wanted the answer before he went into this reception. He was afraid someone would hit him with it. He wanted the

latest information on them. So as a guise [so] that he could talk to me, we took him into the restroom to wash his eyes in cold water because he'd been out in the sun all day, so that I could get to him privately and tell him what the status was. He then went in to that reception.

We went on then to the dinner. I was still worried about what Connally was going to do. I had no inkling of what Connally was going to do or say. And I was hovering near the door of the grand ballroom of the Rice, and someone came up and told me that the traveling press corps was furious at being excluded from the dinner. I said, "They're not being excluded from the dinner. What are you talking about?" They said, "They are. They're hovered around in the hall back there." I went back around there and my God! There was the great Scotty Reston, the whole traveling press corps--excluded.

I was nervous; I was tired; I blew my stack. They went in. They got in before he started speaking. And I made darn sure they got served. And I stood there at the door to wait and see what Connally was going to do.

And that man got up. And when that man wants to charm an audience, he has what Lyndon Johnson never could achieve: that ability to charm audiences. That man got up and charmed that audience in praise of Hubert Humphrey.

I was so relieved at that point I went dashing back to my room and I knew--I was just bathed in perspiration from nervousness--went dashing back up to my room and stripped off--knew I didn't have time to take a shower but was just washing off with a cloth. Somebody started banging

on my door; I went to it. It was one of the men guarding Hubert Humphrey.

Hubert had got back into the presidential suite but was holed up in a little room and would not go out to meet the sponsors. There was a party in that suite for him to meet the sponsors. He would not go out to meet them until he found out what they were going to say.

Well, as the reception for Democrats was starting, I got three of the top leaders of those nineteen in the corridor in front of the Crystal Ballroom and asked them what they wanted to say. And it boiled down--and I wrote it on a rice [piece?] of pale paper napkin and handed it to Kaplan to come back down over and put into writing. They said essentially that they were for Lyndon Johnson for president, that President Johnson had asked them to support his vice presidential nominee, Hubert Humphrey, and out of their respect for President Johnson they were giving this dinner for Hubert Humphrey.

So I went in that little room in the Presidential Suite and I had the typewritten copy by this time. And Hubert says, "Everett, what are they going to say?" And I read it to him. He blew his stack. He said, "That's not what will be said." He said, "*This* is what will be said: 'The Democratic national convention in all of its sovereignty chose Senator Hubert Humphrey to be the Democratic nominee for vice president, and in respect for the action of that convention we are giving this dinner for Hubert Humphrey.'" And I thought, "You blew it, son; you blew it. They'll never take it."

So he went out among these sponsors--and he has a lot of personal charm himself, and he was charming--and these rock-ribbed conservatives

and the top businessmen in the city; he was charming. And I slipped to each one of them in turn and read this to them. I softened it from what he had said, softened it a lot. And they accepted it.

But when I first went into the ballroom when people were beginning to go in, these nineteen sponsors were at the head table. And Marlin Sandlin was kneeling down on the floor, back of the head table, with a telephone in his hand. And he motioned me over to him, held the telephone and said, "This is the President on the phone. He wants to know how many of the sponsors are here." And I said, "Marlin, they haven't got here yet." And Marlin had to kneel there on the floor and tell Lyndon Johnson as every sponsor walked in.

G: That's terrific. Did they all make it?

C: All nineteen made it, including the life-long Republican. But I certainly want--I see nothing wrong in telling this. I know that John Connally would not be offended by it. But if there is something in that recounting that Mrs. Johnson thinks should not be in there, then I would want it deleted.

G: What about the 1960 campaign? Do you have any recollections of the 1960 campaign in Houston, President Kennedy's trip down here?

C: Of course I recollect very vividly his appearance before the Baptist ministers. I recall this--

G: Were you in the--?

C: No, I was across the street here.

G: Were you at the convention in Los Angeles?

C: I did not get to go that year.

G: So you stayed here in Houston during the campaign?

C: Yes. You see, I was managing editor at the time and a new editor had just come to the ***Chronicle***. And the upper management did not want me to leave in 1960, so I did not go. In fact, it's the only one since 1948 that I've missed. But because of internal situation I could not go to the 1960 convention. I knew a good bit about it.

G: Do you recall efforts by Lyndon Johnson to persuade Texans, and Houstonians in particular, to accept John Kennedy?

C: No, I really don't. I know that he did want them to accept John Kennedy, but I don't recall any particular efforts on his part along that line. The only time during that campaign--it seems like it was at the Lamar Hotel, that I had any long talk with the President during that campaign. I worked with his people, but I don't remember too many communications directly with him.

One of my most vivid memories of that one [is] of this little youngster that was over in the Rice Hotel working in the Kennedy campaign, who is now Senator Edward Kennedy. And although that seems rather recent, 1964, he seemed like such a kid to me to be working in the campaign. But of course, as we know, he is a quite intelligent man.

G: You mentioned your visit at the Lamar Hotel with then Senator Johnson.

C: Yes. I think it was--I'm sure it was the Lamar Hotel. And it was just --there was no special point to it. It was just going to talk to him while he was here, I think.

G: Was he happy campaigning in 1960? Did he talk about the campaign, do you remember?

C: That is the one campaign that I have the least recollections of.

G: Do you think he was satisfied with the office of vice president, or do you think he wished that he'd been back in the Senate while he was there?

C: I never had any indication that he was not satisfied with the office of vice president. He never gave me any indication that he was not.

G: Why do you think he took the nomination?

C: I have no idea. The only thing that ever came out of that 1960 convention that he talked to me a number of times about was the fact that so much had been written about him being shoved down President Kennedy's throat and forced on President Kennedy; and he was extremely sensitive on that point. This day that I am talking about in March of 1964, when he came into Jack Valenti's office and we talked for a long time, we went back to the Oval Room because he wanted to show me a letter from Joseph Alsop that he kept on his desk--I'll bet he kept it there throughout his tenure, because he often referred to it--in which Joseph Alsop gave him supposedly factual information that President Kennedy felt that he had to have Lyndon Johnson on the ticket if he was going to win. And he showed me that Alsop letter and Alsop did say that in the letter. I don't remember all of the proof that Joseph Alsop cited in the letter, but I do quite well recall reading that letter.

There was an amusing thing happened at that point, too. Valenti and Bill Moyers had joined us in the Oval Room at this point. And the President kept talking to me. And Moyers and Valenti would get behind him and motion for me to get out. And I knew that there was something pressing on his schedule, but the President seemed very relaxed about the whole thing. And I would start to ease toward that main door out

into the corridor of the Oval Room, and the President would say, "Now come back here, Everett, and look at this. I want you to see this." And I'd go back to look; Valenti and Moyers would get back of him and motion me out again. So finally we did go out, and the President went out with us. And sitting there waiting were Dean Rusk, McGeorge Bundy, Kenny O'Donnell, and some other high-ranking official of the State Department. And heaven knows how long they'd been waiting.

That was one of his points of obsession, was that President Kennedy wanted him, rather than him trying to shove himself on President Kennedy. And I think that President Johnson was actually correct on it. I think there's no question but that President Johnson was correct on it.

G: Our records certainly seem to bear that out.

C: Senator Ted Kennedy has always been friendly to me. I barely know him, but he has always been very friendly to me. Senator Robert Kennedy was not.

(Tape 2 of 2, Side 2)

G: Do you think it was mainly personality here, between Bobby Kennedy and the Texas people?

C: No. It was a matter of achievement of goals. Texas stood in Senator Bobby Kennedy's way toward the achievement of his goals. And so did President Johnson. And therefore he did not like anyone close to President Johnson.

I recall that--I believe it was in 1963; it was while President Kennedy was alive. I was at a national convention of editors and the then-Attorney General Bobby Kennedy was one of the principal speakers.

And as I walked down a corridor, some of the editors were talking to him and called me over to present me to him and did. I had met him, of course, and he knew who I was. And when I was introduced to him he said, "Yes, I know Mr. Collier. He is Lyndon's man." And that was the viewpoint that he always took toward me. He was never friendly toward me.

G: Do you think the hostility came out of that 1960 campaign, or did it come later or before?

C: It originated in the 1960 campaign but built up during the years of President Kennedy's administration. I remember I had the misfortune of coming face to face with Senator Kennedy the afternoon that President Johnson had told him that no member of the cabinet would be chosen for vice president. And Jack [John A.] Cleland, of the ***Chronicle*** Washington bureau, and I had come from the National Press Building and I believe we were walking toward the State Department, because we were walking in the esplanade of Pennsylvania Avenue where Jacqueline Kennedy had had the flowers planted. And just as we started in that direction Senator Bobby Kennedy and two of his aides came facing us. And Jack Cleland knew Senator Kennedy pretty well and they stopped for a chat, and I didn't open my mouth. But Jack Cleland, not knowing the background, attempted to introduce us. And Senator Kennedy just said in a clipped tone, "I know Mr. Collier." And that was all that was said. I later found out what had happened and why he was especially frigid that afternoon.

G: Are there any other stories regarding Lyndon Johnson that come to mind?

C: Not that I would tell.

G: What about in retirement?

C: Oh yes, in retirement. The President really relaxed for the first time in his life after he went back to that ranch. I had the privilege of being with him on a number of occasions after he was back. Not long before his death--my recollection is that it was in November, before he died in January--I spent the day with him at his request. He'd sent word, I think through Mary Rather, that he wanted to talk to me and I spent an entire day at the Ranch with him. And we just roamed around in that white Lincoln Continental all day long. And that day he told me that he was happy, happier than he had ever been in his life. That he had been able to relax outside of government service, and he was so thoroughly enjoying his life on the Ranch and his life among his old friends. He did enjoy being with old friends.

I recall something that amused me that day because it seemed so incongruous. You know that he is almost as bad as Mrs. Johnson about beautification of countryside and preservation of the beauty of countryside. And we went over to the Lyndon B. Johnson State Park, across the Pedernales from the Ranch. And I was dismayed that day at the way the tourists had littered that park. They had thrown old paper bags, wrappings off sandwiches, everything you can think of they'd just thrown around on the ground. And here was the immediate past president of the United States, walking over those grounds, stooping over and collecting all this litter and going and putting it into the trash barrel. To me it seemed so incongruous, but it was so typical of him.

He was a do-it-yourself man, even as president he was a do-it-yourself man. And he might ask you to do some extreme things, but he was willing to do the more extreme.

G: Did you get the feeling that he was quite uncomfortable in that last year, physically?

C: Yes. Yes, I did. He was more careful of himself, he seemed to be. The next to last time that I was with the President at the Ranch I had taken the new assistant editor of the ***Chronicle***, Phil Warner, to the Ranch to present him to the President. And we roamed around the Ranch with the President that day as we usually did--he loved his ranch--and then went in and had lunch. And right after lunch we were sitting in that little sitting room with the fireplace off of the dining room and he went bouncing out, told us to wait there, and he came back in and he had a large package, beautifully wrapped, that he gave to me. And then he gave a little package to Phil Warner. And he was kidding me and saying that his money was running out and he was a poor man and couldn't afford expensive gifts, and so Phil's might not be as elaborate as mine and so on.

I opened mine and it was something that I really treasure. It was a small pillow and it says on it: "This is my ranch and I do as I damn please." I have that at my ranch now, mounted in the living room. This sort of typified his attitude, I think, at the LBJ Ranch: This is my ranch and I do as I damn please. For the first time in his life--well, in his adult life, because he'd been in politics since he was in his twenties--for the first time in his life he could say that. "This is my ranch and I do as I damn please."

I recall him telling me that so many of the news media had urged him to do in-depth interviews on his life after the White House, and how often news media have called to get him to comment on something that

President Nixon had done, or that something that Congress had done. And he said that he was not going to do that, that he was not going to involve himself in politics and government. He said that the president of the United States has a hard enough time as it is to carry out the duties and obligations of the office without being sniped at by a former president. And so he remained silent. He would not do that, and said he was not going to grant any. . . .

Now he did do this: In December--let's see, he passed away in January of 1973. In December of 1972 the editor of our road reviewer magazine came to me and asked if there was no way that we could get the story of President Johnson at the Ranch, after the White House. That not only would it be great for our magazine, but that it would be such a fine historical record. So I called Mary Rather, told her what we wanted, and she said she would check it out. And she called me back and told me that he was not feeling too well at the time, but that contact her again in early April and the President thought that at that time he would do it. And this is how close we came to having a documented record in picture and word of the President's years at the Ranch after the White House. But of course then he died in January before we could do it.

He was a strong person. He leaves a strong memory.

G: You've covered an awful lot of ground. Is there anything else that you'd like to add?

C: I want to make this clear, though. I was not one of Lyndon Johnson's closest friends, or confidants. I don't want to set myself up as that. I did know him from the time I was fifteen

years old, and I did have that devotion to him throughout all those years.

You recall, as to the 1948 episodes I referred you to Horace Busby. It would be better if Busby said them, than if I made any self-serving statements. And you tell me that you are going to talk to Buz, the Great Buz.

G: Thank you very much, Mr. Collier. We appreciate it.

(End of Tape 2 of 2 and Interview I)

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EVERETT D. COLLIER

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