

## INTERVIEW I

DATE: April 16, 1985

INTERVIEWEE: AVA JOHNSON COX (Mrs. Ohlen Cox)

INTERVIEWER: Ted Gittinger

PLACE: Mrs. Cox's residence, Johnson City, Texas

Tape 1 of 2

G: You said that your boy, Corky [William J. Cox], had a similarity to Lyndon Johnson. Is that the Bunton [LBJ's paternal grandmother was Eliza Bunton Johnson] strain, is that what you think?

C: That is definitely right. He has those piercing black eyes, he has the stature, the personality. In fact, he is a good duplicate or similar to Lyndon in every respect.

G: Aside from the eyes, the piercing dark eyes, what does the Bunton strain mean? What other characteristics are there to that?

C: They're men of their word, first of all. Their word is their bond. They're straightforward, they're very dedicated to their friends, they're dedicated to their family. And when I say their family, it doesn't mean just their immediate family. It goes further than that. Blood to them runs deeper than water. And they're a close-knit race of people. And they look-- "Well, if Joe did it, that's great, I'm for him," and that's the way it works. That's the way we've been brought up.

G: We have a lot of stories about Lyndon Johnson's mother, Rebekah, teaching elocution. Is that the right name?

C: That's what she called it, elocution.

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G: And she taught you elocution.

C: That's right. She sure did. I stood on a box to wash dishes because I was too short. Aunt Rebekah was tall and her tables were tall, and the water would run down my elbows if I didn't stand up on a box to wash dishes and clean up the things to get her to help me with my elocution and public [speaking].

Well, Uncle Sam [Ealy Johnson, Jr.], now, so many people don't give him credit for what he really did for his family, but now let me tell you, he was in there working with every one of those children in elocution. Now, we called it extemporaneous speaking. They'd give you a subject, or you'd draw a subject, and you were given ten minutes to think about it and then you would get up and present it. Now, that's one thing that Uncle Sam worked with and worked hard. We were quite young, and we didn't have a daily newspaper. The *San Antonio Express* came out weekly, or semi-weekly is what it was called, and of course our mail service wasn't the best in the world, so we didn't have too much. But we took the *Pathfinder*, which was a little current event paper that came out, and we took that every week. And as we would go along, Uncle Sam would coach us in asking current event questions. At that time the Socialist Party was just coming in, like Eugene V. Debs was head of it. And he would ask us [questions], and I'm telling you, we had to get down and learn and to know what he stood for, what was the Socialist Party, and so on. At that time a big question was government ownership of railroads and [another was] the League of Nations. We were just very young kids, but we would sit down and write a letter to the Extension Loan Library at the University of Texas and get literature on that so that the next week when Uncle Sam came in from the [Texas]

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Legislature and it was our time to get up and talk on a subject, we would know exactly what it was all about.

(Interruption)

G: --the library at the University of Texas to get the literature.

C: Extension Loan Library, and get the material on this and read up on it.

That is one of the greatest things that I can say that Uncle Sam did for me is to [teach me to] think on my feet and to get up and face the public. Now, I was pretty timid and there was reason for that. Lyndon was outgoing and my sister [Margaret] was outgoing. I was the oldest of the family and it was my responsibility to see that everything went right, and they had to mind and do and I was pretty serious about everything. I never butted in. And if they took a notion that they wanted to do something, they'd double-team on me and I either did it or I'd get the little end of the stick. So I was really withdrawn, and I can never give Uncle Sam too much credit for what he did.

And another thing, he was great for numbers, arithmetic. We had no such thing as flash cards when we were little, but we used dominoes. You'd put those dominoes out on the table and you'd draw one and if it was the trey-deuce, you'd slap your hand on it and say five; if it was the five-four, you'd say nine. And whoever recognized it first, you would get it. Everything was a contest.

G: Very competitive.

C: Very competitive, from the word go it was competitive. And I'll never forget, Aunt Rebekah was great in elocution, but they gave me Daniel Webster's last plea for union. And Uncle Sam said to me, "You eyeball somebody," and I wondered what he really

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meant when he said eyeball. He said, "You get that eye contact and you talk like you really mean it. When you come to that place where it says, 'God grant that in my day at least this curtain may never rise on a divided nation, but a union.'" And he'd say, "Come down on that 'union.'" I can remember that just as well as [if] it were yesterday. Aunt Rebekah was one of these easy-going ones, but he did a lot in extemporaneous speaking and training himself.

G: Do you think Lyndon benefitted from that training, too?

C: (Laughter) Yes, he did, I'll say that. He really did to a great extent. But Lyndon was never as forceful a speaker as his father. I don't know why.

G: Some people have suggested he was very good in small groups--

C: He was.

G: --but not good with large ones.

C: Not good with large ones. Now, he could handle a small group quite well, and he did. But a big overflow, no.

G: He'd get kind of formal and stiff.

C: Very stiff. He never would act his own self, and I never did understand that. I just don't know whether he clammed up on the inside or what happened, because I do know a lot of times that speech wasn't written like that, so I just don't really know.

G: How did LBJ do when it came to going to school finally? What kind of a student was he?

C: Well, now, let me tell you, Lyndon had everything that a boy would desire, but he was just a natural, everyday teenager. Now, there's no ifs and ands about it. I can tell you

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one thing, if it hadn't have been for the girls in his class, a lot of times he'd have never made it through. But he could get around; he could talk you into anything and get you to do anything under the shining sun when you knew very well that it wasn't going to work and you were going to get caught at it or something. But he'd get the point over and you'd finally wind up doing what he wanted you to do. And you did it.

G: Did you help him with his homework?

C: Oh! I've worked more geometry problems for him than I did for myself, almost. But I enjoyed doing it, because then by the same token I got halfway smart. I'd say, "All right, I'll do this. Now you get my history questions right quick for me." History was all right. I loved it and I worked on it, and I like it today, but the thing of it was I had to read so much to get it, and he was a more fluent reader than I was. Naturally, I got to where I said, "Now, all right, you answer a few of these questions and I'll work your geometry."

But we always did that, though, in everything. When it came to writing themes and things, Aunt Rebekah was real good, and he'd get an idea from her and then he'd bring it to school, and then he'd get all of our ideas together and we'd all put it together. I don't know how the teacher ever put up with us, but she did. It'd take about three or four of us, and we'd put all these ideas together on one paper, and then he'd get maybe the best grade and then we'd get what the little boy shot at.

(Laughter)

But that's the way it worked and we enjoyed doing it. I think he has made the remark that if it hadn't have been for the girls in his class he'd have probably had a hard time doing it. But he was always a good student; he always tried. Didn't make much

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effort at studying at home; he'd get it after he got to school from everything we knew and then he'd add his to it.

G: He was good at picking your brains, then?

C: He sure was, and he still was, till his dying day. He sure was.

G: Let me ask you about the family, about the Johnson family. Lyndon's father, it seems, had a period in his life when he was a successful man and then [one] when he was less successful.

C: Yes, that's very true.

G: Would you comment about that?

C: Well, Uncle Sam was his own worst enemy. He never hurt anybody but himself, and if he had a dollar, you had it. He went [without] lots of securities that he never got. But he never complained. He would do for people and neglect his family; he was just that big-hearted. I don't call it big-hearted, but whatever you want to say, but he would do for John Jones over here--that's a fictitious name--when his family could use it at home, to be a big man, I guess, to be well thought of.

G: Well, was the family in need at any time?

C: Yes, lots of times they were. They were poor people. Of course, the girls at one time denied that, said that if they were poor they didn't realize it. That may be true, but we were all poor. Now, that is for sure, we were all poor. If we had been affluent people, do you think we would have been wearing flour sack underwear and flour sack dresses and feed sack clothes? But we did it. And they were made neat and nice and they looked nice. They were starched and ironed, and we went to school dressed as well as anybody

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else in our cotton sack clothes or feed sack--turkey feed sack, chicken feed sacks. At that time we had flour sacks that were bleached out and they were nice material.

And we worked hard. We picked cotton, we chopped cotton, we baled hay, we shocked grain. At that time, it was a different era so much to what it is now. We would swap work. One family would swap work with the other: "Well, all right, we'll get the Johnson kids." Well, that would mean Lyndon would always work with us, my brother and sister and I, and Rebekah, [they] worked with us more than any of the other Johnson children. Lyndon and Rebekah were the oldest, but Rebekah didn't work every day like Lyndon did. But Lyndon worked every day with us. My father would say, "Well, I'll have four kids over here to help shock grain today," and we'd go from one grain patch to the other. We had a community reaper and Dollahite operated it, W. W. Dollahite. The community bought it and left it with him to operate. He operated it, and he'd call and say, "Well, I'll bring a sacker." And if they were going to thresh, we had a community thresher and a community reaper. "If you're going to do that, I'll furnish a sacker and you furnish the rest. Well, Tom, you'll furnish four hands?" Sure, that was his three and Lyndon. Lyndon in the summertime worked hard with things like that. And we even had to top broom corn out at Mr. Dollahite's, and, oh, that broom corn will eat you up. Now, the whiskers on wheat's not half as bad as broom corn.

G: Cut your hands up.

C: Oh, it sure does. And we'd do that and Mr. Dollahite made brooms and sold them in the community. So we worked for that and it was hard.

(Interruption)

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G: Well, as long as we were on the topic of hauling adobe, I have heard that you worked on that road with Lyndon.

C: I sure did. Now, that's another thing that is a monument to Uncle Sam. He got the first six-mile contract that we ever had for this county. He said, "We've got all kinds of good material. Why not have good roads?" Major Wells [?] and, as Mr. Hobbs [?] told you, his father and Ollie Wilson [?], Ed Ferrell [?] and Tobe Ferrell [?], that I can remember besides our wagon, hauled the adobe. Now, you would have just one set of sideboards, and the bottom of it was made of boards and they were tapered out at the ends where you could turn them and let the adobe fall through. And you say, "Well, how did you haul it that you didn't get all of that in there?" Well, we would put over those cracks our old cotton sacks that we'd used and that kept it from all falling through. Then on the outside was always the one next to--the sideboard never had a crack there; it was juggled up in it. We could slide it out, you see, and that gave us the room to let all the other through.

G: At least you didn't have to shovel it out.

C: No, we didn't have to shovel it out. And there'd be two stay there and haul the adobe or the sand, whatever it was we were hauling; two would stay there and two would ride the wagon. Those that rode the wagon would load [?].

G: That seems like kind of heavy work for a young lady.

C: Well, I don't know. It was heavy work and I've done heavy work all my life. I've done a man's work, and it hasn't seemed to bother me, not too much.

G: How good a worker was Lyndon on this project?

C: Well, you had to keep after him, because he would find something else to do. He'd go



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talk and you'd call him back. But he was good to me and he seemed--well, I'd say, "Well, now, if you don't get on the ball here and don't help me, I'll have to tell Daddy on you."

And that didn't hurt, because Uncle Tom talked to us--that was my father. I'd rather have forty whippings than have him sit down and talk to me. And that was bad business. So he'd come through.

G: The Johnson household. Mrs. Johnson, Rebekah Johnson, I've always heard was a very cultured woman, but she was in a household where she had to work hard at common tasks like washing clothes and ironing and so on. How good was she at that?

C: Well, she managed to get that done. Now, I don't know of but few of them that paid for their elocution lessons in money. Lots of them paid for it in cleaning and ironing and things like that. And Uncle Sam usually hired someone to come to the house and wash. Of course, there were a few things that she would wash out herself, the nicer things that she would like to do. Then he would see to it, or pay for it, that someone helped her with the ironing also.

G: You're quoted someplace as saying that you admired Lyndon's father for the work he did on the farm, because he had to work hard at really what was not a paying proposition.

C: That is the very truth if I ever told it in my life. He was an early riser and he was a late worker, and he worked hard. Now, I know that Lyndon was a driver in his work. I mean, he definitely inherited that from his father, because Uncle Sam was a worker. He never quit until his work was done. If he laid off a section of land to plow, he stayed with it till he got it done. And he worked hard. I know that Uncle Sam had his faults, I know that, and I know that he wanted the best for his family. I was old enough to realize

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that, and I was old enough to realize the sacrifices that he made to see that they got it.

And I appreciated the many, many things that he did.

How many fathers in this day and time would take a ten-year-old to Austin and sit him down and expect him to listen and to get anything out of a transaction in the legislature for a whole day? He'd do that. I never will forget, he took Lyndon and Margaret and I down. Now, Lyndon had sisters and they were close sisters to each other, but I don't know--I do know because Lyndon worked with us and that's the reason that I guess that there was such a tie between we three. Because we worked together. Every summer we were together all the time nearly and worked hard. Well, Uncle Sam took us down there and we'd sit and listen. What would happen to a ten-year-old in this day and time if you'd take him down there? Why, he would be up and running and wanting to do something else; he wouldn't sit there and listen. But we were brought up in a time little folks were seen and not heard. "You listen and you'll learn a lot more. Don't speak until you're spoken to." That kind of stayed with us.

G: Is it true Sam Ealy Johnson would say, "You're not learning anything when you're talking"?

C: He sure did. And how many times I've thought of that, and that was one of my favorite sayings when I was teaching school. "All right, little folks, let's cut off our broadcast and let's tune in and see if we can get going here." Now, they'd understand that, but they wouldn't understand what he would have said. I said, "Now, let's tune in and get going here."

G: After things turned bad for Lyndon's father and his deals fell through and--

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C: Everything--

G: --the price of cotton dropped and so on, how bad off were they? Because I have heard that they became kind of an object of scorn in Johnson City.

C: Well, to some, yes. But to real old friends, they were still the same. But I'll grant you that it was hard for them, because I think the main thing--and of course, now, that's my personal opinion--I don't think Uncle Sam ever sat down and talked it over with Aunt Rebekah, how broke they really were. I really don't believe that he would ever, ever talk to her and tell her, because had he done it, things probably would have been quite different. But she felt like everything--and he was great that way, he shielded her in every respect.

(Interruption)

G: We were talking about when the hard times came for the Johnsons.

C: I know we were living down on the ranch down below town here on the river. Well, it's five miles out. We'd raise turkeys and chickens and we had Spanish goats to eat and always had our own hogs and we'd kill a beef, always killed a beef. No deepfreeze or anything, but we cured our beef much like we did our hog meat. We'd take the hind quarters--well, the hind quarters has four lobes in each hind quarter and you'd just scoop those out and leave that stripping around it. And you would--or we did--put a smear of black pepper and salt and brown sugar and flour on it and hang it up and smoke it. And it was just like cured ham. Our briskets, we would do the same thing. You could put them inside the oven and warm them, and it was like barbecue. And you would eat. It was good eating.

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And I never will forget, my father came in and he said, "Well, I want to get a turkey tonight and take up to Sam and Rebekah, because I know they won't have one. We've got two extras out there." And Mother said, "Yes, we do. That would be nice. We'll have one and we'll take that one up to Grandma and Grandfather Chapman. They don't have one." He said, "That'll be good, too, so I'll just kill two." So they killed two and Mother dressed them--that was one thing that I don't guess that Aunt Rebekah ever did, was to dress a chicken or a turkey, because I don't think that really she--well, I don't know that she knew how. I won't say that she didn't, but I just know that it was something that she didn't do. Anyway, Mother dressed it and took it up, and I know that we went to the cellar and got some potatoes and of course we had a bunch of dried beans, dried peas, and we took a bunch of food. I know that, and in the place of giving presents, that's what we gave that Christmas. Not that they really just didn't have it, but I just don't think that they had enough income to have that much.

Well, I know that we did it, so that's. . . . I just don't really know how much Uncle Sam really had, but I do know that he was in drastic circumstances. And I do know that he worked hard and his health failed and he just worried himself, absolutely just worried himself to death. He couldn't cope with losing out. Physically he was a sick man and he just couldn't do the things that he always could do, and he just couldn't cope with it, because he had been a firehorse all of his life. It just came to a point where he couldn't anymore, and it just was one of those things.

G: What kind of a relationship did Lyndon have with his daddy?

C: Well, I would think it was very good. All the time that I was ever around him, he

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admired his father. Of course, I hear people say that he was his mother's pride and joy. Well, I know she loved him and I know she thought a lot of him and I know that in later years--but I do know, by the same token, that Sam Houston could do no wrong in her way of looking at things. Lyndon was such a outgoing person and he was much older than his years and he associated with much older boys and men and women than he was. He never associated with people his age; they were always older. Sam Houston relied upon his mother's ability to think and to do for him in fact everything. And you used to ask him, "Well, Sam, what are you going to do when you grow up? Are you going to be a lawyer like your father or go into politics?" He said, "No, I'm going to be a 'Babbit' [Baptist] preacher." And that just thrilled Aunt Rebekah to death, because he was going to be a "Babbit" preacher. Well, enough on that.

G: (Laughter) Did she shield Sam Houston?

C: She sure did. She sure did. And poor old Lyndon took the brunt for a lot of things that didn't belong in his camp at all.

G: How was Lyndon's relationship with Sam Houston?

C: Well, it was his little brother and he tried to bring him up and he tried to take care of him, just like I tried to take care of him [Lyndon] but I didn't have any luck. Oh, I did, too. I mustn't ever say that I didn't, because I know that I did. He was good and kind to me in lots of respects, but by the same token, we got into a lot of trouble.

I never will forget, one time we stole Uncle Sam's old car out. Well, I could drive a Model-T all right, just really pretty good. And Uncle Sam, we'd gone by and told him that we were going over to the Baptist church to prayer meeting Wednesday night. We

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did. We went. But we came back and the old car hadn't been put up, but Uncle Sam had gone to bed. We just thought, oh, how much fun that would be to get in that thing and go for a ride. So we cranked it, and I got in to drive and Lyndon said, "Oh, let me drive. I want to drive. I haven't driven. I want to drive." I said, "Lyndon, you don't know how and no telling what will happen. Let me get out of here and then I'll let you get in and you can drive down this straight road." And nothing would do, as again, he talked me out of it.

So we pushed this old car and I told him reverse was the middle pedal and when he did, well, just slowly push it in and it would catch and then it wouldn't die on him. So he did. We pushed it out and he pulled this lever down on the gas down on the steering wheel and it shot across the road and went through the fence and knocked down a bunch of corn that was over in the other thing. It was a sandy land, and those 33 1/3 tires just bogged up in that sand, and we like to have never in the world pushed that thing out. We finally got it out and I said, "Let's put this thing back," and we pushed it back now. We had five: Georgia Cammack [Edgeworth], Kittie Clyde [Ross Leonard], Lyndon and Margaret and I. Lyndon was the only boy.

We pushed that thing back over there and the next morning, this old man called up my daddy. He said [speaking with a German accent], "Is this the Tom Johnson residence?" Daddy said, "Yes, it is, Mr. Thiele. What for you, Gus?" He says, "Do you know where your children were last night?" And my daddy said, "Yes, they went to prayer meeting." He said, "You just come over to my house. I want to show you what they did to my corn patch. I made those roasting ears to sell in this town and look what

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they've done!" Well, my daddy went, and I am telling you, when he came back there were two little girls that really got a seat-warming. Then that wasn't enough. Uncle Sam called us all in and we had kangaroo court on the back porch, and he preached us a sermon about how unlawful it was and what we were up against. We squalled and bawled. And [he said] we could be put down there in that jail for tearing up public property and running over a fence and what a terrible fine it was. Oh, I'll tell you right now I never felt as bad about anything in my life as I did about tearing up that corn patch and that old man's corn. Well, we were grounded for two weeks; we didn't get to go do anything. I well remember that.

G: Did he make a habit of swiping the car and--?

C: That broke us for about three months. But then we made a pretty good habit of every time it was left out and every time my daddy's was left out, we'd slip them out. One time we slipped them out and went down to the river, Clayton Stribling and Lyndon and Otto [Crider?] and Emmette Redford, now down at the University [of Texas], and I believe Cecil and Clarence [Redford] and Zelma Stribling and Opal [?] and Georgie [Cammack Edgeworth?], Irene [?], Kittie Clyde, Margaret and I. And the boys had stolen some chickens and we fried them. We stole the grease and everything and we were down there frying chicken, and Matt Stubbs [?], the district judge, got wind of it and he come down and he caught us. And we were up again, just before going to the penitentiary.

(Laughter)

I tell you, of all the begging and pleading that we wouldn't be prosecuted, and now I can look back and think about it but--and they really made it stick, we really thought we were

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going to the pen. They were just that persuasive. Well, we didn't get any more chickens, I'll guarantee you that. But we did steal a few watermelons and we got caught with that.

But the things we did like that, we really had to pay a penalty for. We didn't get to go anywhere and we didn't have any money to spend. Well, we didn't have it anyway; we got two bits a week if we were good, and that was a lot of money, just a lot of money.

And we were never very good. We had to have a clean slate. I mean by that there was a little chart, you'd picked up your clothes and you'd done your chores and you'd gotten your lessons and all that kind of good stuff, and we very seldom got a star for all of it. We were punished, we were brought up pretty strict, yet we had a good time. The only bad thing about it, my daddy would always say, "If you go to a dance and dance till twelve o'clock, you've got to get up and go to church regardless." That was a must in our house. And Lyndon would always go with us. I know that to be a fact.

G: Did you go to the Baptist church?

C: We went to the Christian church, or the Methodist. I don't ever remember--oh, we went to the Baptist BYPU [Baptist Young Peoples Union] and Baptist young folks deal, because it'd take all of us to make a quorum for any one of them. We'd go to the Christian Endeavor and the Epworth League in the afternoon and BYPU at seven o'clock at the Baptist church. But we would go to all of it. We'd have sword drills, which they'd call--you had to know all the books of the Bible, and that's one thing we learned, [that] we had to do. They'd say, "Ezekiel 5 and 12." All right, the first one that found it, well, your team got a mark. So that was another challenging [thing] to do. And how many Scriptures had you read, how many chapters did you read, how many could you quote?



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If you couldn't quote more than ten verses in the Bible, you'd just as well not even be counted on the team. So that was another thing that was very competitive.

G: That's interesting.

C: And I think that, my best remembrance, Emmette Redford quoted more or knew more Scripture than all of us put together nearly. Everybody would want to get Emmette on their side first. He was really great at that. And we would take part and get up and give good lectures and whatnot, and that would count on our extemporaneous speaking and things.

G: Was Lyndon any good with the Bible?

C: Oh, very good.

G: Was he?

C: He was a good Bible student. Lyndon knew it real well and he could quote it quite well.

G: I've heard that he ran away to go to school at a very early age.

C: (Laughter) Yes, that's so right. My grandfather, [Sam Ealy, Sr.] Johnson, gave me an old horse and we called her Old Kussie, and I lived up above, right back of where they lived. As you walk out of the Birthplace today and you look over to the northwest, there's a clump of trees and a windmill. Well, that was my home. I'd go down the turning row, and we couldn't go across old man [August] Benner's place because he was just fresh from the fatherland and he said you were tromping down the grass and he wanted it for his "kos" [horse?] and we were just ruining the pasture. So we'd have to go up and go around the turning row and back down and come down the main school road or just the main country road there.

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I'd get on Old Kussie and go down and Lyndon would crawl up on the gate to get on, and I'd take him. I never thought about it being wrong to take him to school. I'd go down and play with him every afternoon and he'd always want to ride. I'd ride across the river to get my grandfather's mail and take it to him down the road. So I just went down and got him and put him on behind me; we'd ride to school horseback over there. Then he got to where he'd run off if I didn't come by. My father admonished me and got after me and said, "Now, don't you do that anymore. Aunt Rebekah worries and you just don't want to worry her, and that's not right." So I didn't go back and get him and he just hotfooted through over there, and then he'd get grass burrs in his feet and he'd call and I'd have to go get him and carry him. And he was always tall as I was, but he wasn't as large, and I'd have to carry him out, and, oh, land! And he'd come on over there. We'd put our dinner buckets in the back of the school room. There is his--see that red Union Leader?

G: That red Union Leader bucket?

C: That's right, and that was what I'd carry my lunch in, and I'd always take a sandwich or something for Lyndon. And he knew that Union Leader and he'd go back there and he'd get it; while we were out playing or whatnot, he'd always go get him a sandwich out of that basket. One day the little Klein boy that lived just down the road from us, he had one back there and his was a Union Leader, too. And he [Lyndon] got in the wrong dinner basket. His mother had put him in some lemon pie and it had meringue on it, and Lyndon got that meringue all over his face. He came out there and I said, "My goodness, Lyndon, I'm going to have to clean you up." And Augusta [?] Klein--that was the sister

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of the boy--said, "Did you get in my dinner basket?" He said, "No, I was in Ava's basket." I said, "Well, I didn't have any pie." I went in there and he had gotten into this boy's [basket]. And he [said], "But I didn't eat your pie." And it was just all over his face, I'll never forget that. I said, "Yes, I guess you did, because it's all over your face."

And we would go down to the river, if we didn't have any water in the old cistern, and get a bucket of water. Sure enough, we didn't have any water in the cistern and [we] went to the river to get a bucket of water. Now, that was river water. Can you feature drinking river water today? Well, we drank it. And I had my little folding cup in that dinner basket. But we had a public dipper and you'd take that dipper and throw it in your cup and, yes, we all had whooping cough at the same time and we all had measles.

G: Sure.

C: But that's the way it was.

G: Did he herd goats when he was a kid? I've heard that.

C: Yes, he did and he herded sheep.

The Interscholastic League meet was the only thing that we had that was real competitive with anywhere around here. We had relays and we had broad jumps and high jumps and things like that. When you said did he herd sheep or goats, well, my daddy would turn them out and he would say, "Now, don't let these sheep get over here because there's old horehound over here and it'll get in their wool and it's no good. Now, you keep them over here and you can play and you can do this, but don't let them over here." Well, that was our herding and that's how we'd do it, "Keep them out of the horehound and keep them off of the river because there's cockleburs down there. If you

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get cockleburs in there, you've got to take them out." So we sure kept them away from there. And we would take them only to the river where it was a sandbar and there was no way of getting cockleburs in them. We'd do that whenever we were put out to care for them or whatnot.

We were in this Interscholastic meet and in this relay, and I'll never forget it if I live to be a hundred years old. It was one of the women that was judging and when they came up to run, you had to go sign your name on a piece of paper where you were number one or number two. And she said, "Oh, my Lord, there's those Johnson girls. They've been penning jack rabbits for lambs for the last six weeks. No use in entering against them." I'll never forget her saying that, and it just infuriated me. I guess I had a temper, I'm quite sure, when I was young. I turned around and I looked at her and I said, "Well, that's just what you think!" And I just never will forget that. So then we ran, all right. That was true. We did, and we outran them pretty bad. But probably she had a point there; we had been working out, but not knowing that we were.

G: That's funny.

C: Yes, that is.

G: Did he work as a printer's devil, too? I heard that he'd worked at the newspaper when he was [a boy].

C: Oh, yes. That was something else that--and that's another time he'd inveigle everybody in that he could to help him do that. (Laughter) Oh, I know I went down and I helped him one afternoon. I was supposed to ride on home on horseback, but he insisted that I help just a little bit so he'd get through and he could play baseball. He loved to play baseball.

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And I said, "Okay, I'll help just a little while. I'll lope this old horse nearly all the way home so I won't be too late." And do you know, I got that ink all over my dress, and dresses were as scarce as hen's teeth in those days. Well, I really got a good reprimand for that, and I was late getting home and I was late getting my work done. Yes, I paid the penalty but dear. Again I was talked into it.

G: What was he doing exactly in there? Was he setting type?

C: He set type principally.

G: I see. Whatever needed to be done.

C: Whatever needed to be done, he'd do it. Lots of time it was cleaning type and lots of time it was cleaning slabs.

G: Was that at the time that his daddy had bought the paper?

C: Yes. It was called the *Enterprise* at that time.

G: Had Miss Stella come to town by then?

C: No, she didn't come until a year later, just about a year later, [Stella] Glidden.

G: Yes. Well, she just passed on here a year or so ago, I believe.

C: Yes, that's right.

G: Did he shine shoes at the barbershop?

C: Oh, yes, he shined shoes in the barbershop, and he was quite an aggravation to a lot of people, because he would butt in and ask questions. They'd be talking and he'd just butt right into a conversation. If he didn't understand, he'd ask.

G: Of course, in a barbershop there's lots of conversation.

C: Lots of conversations, and he didn't want to miss out on any of it and he got two or three

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good spankings and lots of trouble. But he did, he worked in the barbershop.

He'd do anything to get a nickel or a dime, what I mean is, that was halfway good.

And you know he has such awfully long ears and big ears, and they'd give him a nickel or a dime to get to flop those ears. And they'd come out--poor thing, they'd be just as red as a beet and, you know, the outer rim would just be so swelled up. But he'd have his nickels and dimes.

G: I'll declare.

C: That's right.

G: I heard he was a marble shooter.

C: He was. He was a good marble player. That was another contest and that was just as regular as clockwork that we'd shoot marbles. He had an accurate eye, a very accurate eye, and he was a good marble player. Otto Crider and Tom Crider, John Dollahite and the Redford boys, oh, that was one of the main things, contests, marble shooters.

G: Was he pretty good? He was pretty good, wasn't he?

C: He was good. He was exceptional.

G: Did they play for keeps?

C: They played for keeps. That's for fact. Lots of times we wound up in lots of fights, I know that. But anyway they--well, the girls played marbles, too. We played with the boys. We didn't have enough girls to have a baseball team; we didn't have enough boys to have a full diamond [?] team. So the boys and girls played together and we had a team, and we had lots of fun.

G: I heard he played first base because he was tall.

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C: Reach! Boy, he'd reach halfway to home plate and second base. He always played first base.

G: Could he hit?

C: Yes, he'd have to hit a home run to get coupled up to get to first base nearly. His coordination was--he was so tall for so young, he just was not a good, fast runner, but he was one of those long runners. You know, like for the 880 [yard], long-winded, long race runner. He was always good at that. But he'd knock a long ball to get his work done.

G: There's a story I hear that some people say is true and others say it never happened, that he fell out of a tree or out of a barn and broke his leg.

C: I don't know who told you that that wasn't true, but that was true. We were having a cob fight, the red cobs against the white cobs. And to us, it was a disgrace to be captured. Now, it's all right to be killed in the line of battle, but don't ever be captured. Well, Lyndon was the last one, and Uncle Sam--we'd put the old cow across the brook in a pasture. All we had to do was open the gate and let her through. And he milked the cow night and morning, or two of them--it's a wonder to how they came in with their calves--lots of times they'd have two cows to milk. But, anyway, we took this hay and threw it down, so it would be there for us to jump on and it would be there for the cow to eat that night. He was the last one to be captured. I hollered, "Jump, Lyndon, jump on the hay. That's in our territory and he can't capture you." Okay, Lyndon jumps, but he misses the hay pile; he jumps over it and broke his leg. Well, he screamed and he cried and he yelled and he said, "Oh, I'm killed, I'm killed, I'm killed." So, sure enough, we thought

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he was, he just folded up and cried so.

The doctor was downtown but not in his office; he was sitting down on the steps that went upstairs to the office and he didn't hear the telephone ring. He very seldom got calls anyway. But anyway, he was sitting down there. So I believe it was Emmette--I don't know now whether it was Emmette or Cecil Redford--one of the Redford boys, though, ran to town and got the doctor to bring up there. They took him to the house and put him on the table, dining room--no, it wasn't the dining room table, it was the kitchen table, just an old, long kitchen table in the back, by the kitchen. It was the cook table. He said he'd look it over.

So he turned around and he picked up his little satchel and he said, "I'll have to go to town and get some things and I'll be right back." And he did, he went down and got some splints and came back and put the splint on his leg. But he first said to him, "Lyndon, I'm going to have to give you a shot before we do this." And old Lyndon raised his head up, "Oh, don't do that, don't do that, Mister! Oh, don't do that! I want to live, I don't want to die!" And he said, "I'm going to just give you a shot." And he said, "I don't want to die! I don't want you to kill me!" And he just kept on and so Dr. Barnwell said, "Well, what in the world is wrong with you, man? I'm just going to put this needle in your arm and that's going to be it." Oh, he looked at that needle and he said, "I thought you said you were going to give me a shot, you were going to shoot me. Uncle Tom shot that old cow that fell off the bluff, and I thought you were going to shoot me." He just screamed and yelled, and of course he got his shot and it deadened it. He had two or three to deaden it along there so he could put the splint on, and he splinted it up.



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Then he put him back on the back bed in his bedroom.

It was a wooden bed and every day or two, well, we would go by to see Lyndon, all the kids from school would go by to see him. Now, this sounds unreasonable, but honest to God, it was the truth. We used to play mumblepeg at school a lot, and we had these little old YXL knives and tin handles, you know, but they were the best in the world to us. And he said, "Well, get my pocketknife and hand it to me. Put me around down here at the foot of the bed." I said, "Oh, Lyndon, we can't afford to do that. You've got to stay up here. We can't--" He said, "You can help scoot me. I can get in--" So again he talked us into it, and of course it was just a bunch of girls, two boys I think and four girls. We got around there and we turned him around in that bed, and then he got that pocketknife and played mumblepeg on the headboard of that bed. Now, again, there was kangaroo court and again we had it. But again I was talked into the same thing, knowing that I was going to get it, but did it [anyway]. So I deserved it is all I can say.

G: What was the horse's name? Cassie?

C: Old Kussie. Old Kussie. And, yes, we fed her. He said, "I'm so tired of riding Old Kussie, because she has such a sharp backbone." Juan Escamilla [?] was there and he said, "Well, just feed her some oats. Feed her every time you ride her." Well, kids didn't know how much to feed, and there was a tub out there and we got that tub and we filled it full of oats. Now, we didn't fill it just half full, but we carried it out there in buckets. I never will forget, it must have been a ten-quart bucket, because it took Lyndon and I both to carry it. I don't know how big the bucket was, I can't remember. I just know by the time we filled that bucket up that I couldn't lift it by myself. And I know that--well, I just

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think about it now. We filled that thing up and then we turned the water on; there was a float in this trough, but you had to be sure that you cut it off because it wouldn't hold and it would leak out and it would drain the tank dry. So we turned it on and got the water trough full and cut it off. Well, Kussie wasn't Kussie in the morning. She swelled up as big as two horses and she was dead. And all the crying, now it took place, because we'd killed our horse. But we didn't get any punishment for that, because we were punished enough for [by?] crying. It just made us sick, that's all. But we got the awfulest talking to [from] my daddy; oh, mercy, how we'd killed the best friend we had.

G: Oh, dear.

C: Just killed it. Oh, those talks were horrible. To think, I mean for a child, that we had done such a horrible thing as killing the best friend we had, our horse. He said, "The poor old thing would take you across that river and bring you back. Now what are you going to do?" Well, that was really right. What were we going to do? We didn't have anything.

But it wasn't long till we wound up with a Spanish donkey, and we were off of her more than we were ever on her. She'd just down her head and we'd just keep riding, and that old hide would just roll where there's nothing to hold onto, and we'd just go right on over her head. Get up and dust ourselves and pick out the grass burrs; if we didn't hit in the bull nettle, it was a grass burr patch. Get up and try it again. And she'd go maybe ten or twelve feet and stop again. I don't know how we lived, don't know how we got by.

(Interruption)

G: I heard that Lyndon boarded at your place to go to the tenth grade in Johnson City, is that

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the way it was?

C: That's right.

G: And I also heard that he was pretty obstreperous at that stage of his development.

C: (Laughter) Well, I'll tell you, as I laughingly and jokingly said, I don't know what kept us out of the penitentiary for things that we did, they accused us of so much. But that's very true, he stayed with us to go to school in the tenth grade and, yes, we were in a lot of hot water a lot of times, but it wasn't ever anything real bad. It was just sheer mischief.

G: I see.

C: We didn't rob any banks, we didn't steal anything any more than a watermelon and wouldn't have done that if they'd offered it to us. We'd have probably pawned our nickels and bought it, but they didn't. But, anyway, it was wonderful that I can look back and laugh about it now, but I sure didn't laugh about it when it was happening.

G: I'll bet not.

C: It was serious business.

G: Did your daddy have trouble keeping him in line?

C: No, he minded my father, respected him quite well, and I think that's one of the reasons that he stayed with us so much. Papa never was much of a hand for spanking. I would have rather had one forty times than to have my daddy talk to me. [He'd] sit me up on his lap and he would say, "Well, I didn't think my little princess would ever do a thing like this. My little girl wouldn't do things, that's bound to be somebody else's than mine."

G: Oh, dear.

C: That just shook my telephone but right. That just killed me, "My little girl." I was my

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daddy's shadow, there's no question about that. Again, I tell you, what you put into a child when they're little they never forget, those principles. "I didn't think my little girl would do a thing like that." And to disappoint my father and to disappoint or hurt my mother, that was the worst thing in the world I could do.

And I can remember my mother and my father, they had time for us at night. They sat down, "Well, how was the day? What did you do today? How did you get along? Did you have any trouble?" "No." "Okay." And if it was, "Let's discuss it, let's talk about it." Then after we had finished our lessons and everything, my daddy loved to sing and he had a beautiful voice. So did Uncle Sam. Now, Uncle Sam could really sing, had a beautiful tenor voice. And Mother and Dad would sing and we would all join in. Then, of course, they were just old favorite songs, "Carry Me Back to Old Virginia" and "My Old Kentucky Home" and "Maggie," songs like that. In other words, songs with a soul. But anyway, that would be the end of the day. Mother would always sing whenever it's--she could whistle, you could hear it for miles. And when I say miles, that was right, it was such a keen whistle. Then she'd sing that little song, "It's Suppertime in the Valley." And it was home, it was--you came in with a feeling that you belonged.

When it was time to go to bed, it didn't make any difference whether we had a real fancy nightgown, which we never had, it would just be a plain old flour sack gown. But we'd come in and Mother would sit down and we'd all line up around the chair and we'd say a prayer. It wasn't, "Now I Lay Me Down to Sleep," it was really a prayer. And when we wound up it was always, "Help me, God, to be a better girl or a better boy. Make me to see the right thing and do the right thing and not the wrong thing." And

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honor thy father and thy mother, respect them and love them. That was ritualistic. She had time to tuck us in bed; she had time to kiss us good night. And I think that that's one of the things that Lyndon appreciated and loved as much as anything in the world. He loved his Aunt Kitty and Uncle Tom, and he loved them dearly. And when he was in the White House [Congress?] and there were problems, he'd say, "Uncle Tom, I want you to come up. I'm sending for you." And he'd go.

G: Just wanted to talk.

C: Just wanted to talk. My daddy had time to listen. He was not a politician; he was a family man. And he loved his family, and he loved Lyndon. Oh, he was so proud of Lyndon.

Uncle Sam was just as proud of Corky as he was of any of his children, I know, and when he was little and he [Sam] was sick, Corky would go fishing and take him a fish and it would just thrill him to death. And that chair right there belongs--

G: That little highchair.

C: That's the highchair. And when Corky was little, Uncle Sam said, "Well, I don't have any more babies and I'll never live to see any of my grandchildren, and I want you to have this chair for Corky," and that's the reason Corky won't part with it for nothing in the world.

G: I don't blame him.

C: And Aunt Rebekah gave him a bunch of pencils when he first started to school, and a pencil box, and I wanted him to donate them up here to the Boyhood Home. Well, you heard what he said: "Never." He says, "Those are dear to me." And that's one of the

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characteristics of Lyndon. Now, those things, he didn't have a lot when he was little, but what things that he did have were very dear to him. And I took the marbles that he played marbles with that tenth grade year--the next year he graduated. Well, he left the marbles at our house. I've kept them all these years and I took them up to the Boyhood Home and I gave them to them. Well, they didn't put them out, just stuck them back. I don't know where they are now. But now those marbles meant a lot to Lyndon, because he was a first-class marble shooter, and I don't know where they are, but I gave them to them. I wanted to have something up there and I had kept them, but I knew that Corky wouldn't part with that. I gave the marbles to them, but they're not there now.

G: Do you have any insights into the California trip that he took? Did he talk to you about that?

C: No, he said he grew up overnight.

G: He did?

C: That's what he said. He said, "I just grew up overnight. I found out that the grass wasn't quite as green on the other side of the fence as it looked like. When you get back here, you know people and they know you, and you know that you have a friend. You don't have that there." He said, "I learned a lot." And, well, he was a bus boy there for a long time and he said, "I'll tell you right now, you know that saying that Uncle Tom always had, 'You could tell a thoroughbred from a dogie'?" I said, "Yes, I remember it." He said, "You sure can when you're a bus boy. You can sure tell it there." And I said, "Yes, I think all phases of work you can soon tell the good from the bad." He said, "That's so right." And he said, "You remember that other saying he had, 'All work is honorable just

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as long as it's honest'? You know, that's pretty good. And that's a mighty good saying, regardless of what it is, just as long as it's honest and you do a day's work. But," he said, "I don't know how long you can keep it like that." I said, "I don't know." Anyway, I remember him saying those two things that my daddy used to say: "All work is honorable as long as it's honest," and "You can always tell a thoroughbred from a dogie." "And you can tell that," he'd say, "the first time you have money dealings with a person, you can soon figure him out."

G: I wonder if he had had some particular experience that he was remembering?

C: I don't know, but I well remember him saying that when he came back, the first time that we had a chance to sit down and talk. And that's one of the things that he said, but I don't know what the experience was. I sure couldn't tell you.

G: Tell me about when he went to Robstown. I've heard that that was a runaway and then I've heard that it wasn't and that his daddy got him that job down at Robstown. Do you know anything about that?

C: Well, I was under the impression that Uncle Sam got him that job. I don't ever remember Lyndon running away any time or any place other than when he made up his mind to go to California and everybody tried to talk him out of it, but he was headbent, he just wanted to go. He knew everything was rosy and the goose hung high, all he had to do was go out there and he'd just make it regardless. Well, he was so disillusioned in the fact that it wasn't that way that it reminded me of this saying that we used to have at college, "C.O.D., Call on Dad. I'm broke, I'm hungry, I want to come home." And I think that was the thing--in fact, I know that was the thing in California. But when he

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went to Robstown, Uncle Sam really blazed the way there. He didn't run off, not that I know anything about, and I think I would know if he had.

G: Do you know why he came back? What brought him back?

C: No, I don't really know other than he just bit off a little more than he could chew and it was a little harder than he thought it was. He just couldn't quite cope with it.

G: That cotton gin?

C: Yes. You know, when we had cotton gins here, we were given two bits apiece to feed a bale of cotton up. And that was a whole lot of money, you know it? But we'd feed a bale of cotton up. Of course, that took a little time, too, and you had to watch your step and you had to do a lot. Well, he thought, oh, that's just easy. And coping with the weights and coping with--and you had to be very accurate, and a lot of things. Lyndon was accurate all right, but like most boys he was--well, he was pretty slovenish about the way he put it down and not very neat with what he did. Anybody could make out if they wanted to or whatnot. I think that was the whole thing in a nutshell. He just wasn't really right up to doing what was supposed to be done.

G: What decided him to go to school?

C: I think he tried everything and I think he found out that you needed an education regardless of whatever phase of work that you went into, and how many times had his daddy told him that regardless of what you do, you've got to know that you know the job before you make a success. You've got to sell yourself on the idea that you can do that before you can do it, and if you don't know, you'd better try to find out. So he had two or three pretty hard jobs of manual labor, and not that he was afraid of work, because he



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wasn't, but by the same token he knew that he was going to have to have an education to get anywhere. And he just decided to come back and go to work.

G: You went down to San Marcos with him, did you not?

C: That's right. How did you get all this stuff?

G: I think I read that in Robert Caro's book [*The Path to Power*]. I think that's where it was.

C: Well, yes, we both went together and we both--oh, yes, and then again we slipped Uncle Sam's car off and went down the hill. We lived over on 208 Westwood and Lyndon came over and ate dinner with Margaret and I over there. We went down the hill. We couldn't get the old car started, and Lyndon was in it and we pushed it down the hill. Margaret and I were on the outside pushing, and as we got it going down that hill, well, Lyndon stopped it and it stopped right in front of the Catholic church at the end of Westwood, and there were two nuns sitting out there on the thing. And we just crawled in the car, just opened the door and got in on the front seat. I went around. I was on Lyndon's side and Margaret was on the other side. She opened the door and got in the middle and I went on around the front and crawled in. They got the number of the car and whatnot and, of course, Lyndon, big old hearted Lyndon, waved at them and he said, "That's Sister So-and-so." We didn't know them. He said, "Yes, they're good friends of mine."

Okay. We go on down and we go down to King's Cafe and got us a sandwich. Then we came back up and rode around, got Kitty Cochran [?] and Kittie Clyde and two or three others in the car and went for a little ride. But we didn't go back around the Catholic church. We went back around this other way and let Kitty Cochran out and Kittie Clyde, and Margaret and I went on with Lyndon over to his room over Prexy's

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[Cecil Evans] garage. And he wanted to--well, we had a paper over there we wanted to get. That's another time we were swapping ideas and work. We got the paper and got back in the car and he took us home. We went right back by that Catholic church and those two nuns were still sitting there. Then he went on and he brought the car back and left it, and he went on and walked on home.

The next morning, why, I had a note delivered to me at class to come by the Dean's office. Miss [Mary] Brogdon called me in and she really got after me, asked me what in the world was I doing pushing that car down that hill and riding on that fender until it stopped. She said, "The very idea of such a thing! Were you trying to advertise silk hosiery?" Oh, she tore me up, because I rode the fender of the car. That was unladylike. So I was campused for two weeks. So was my sister.

G: What happened to Lyndon?

C: He didn't get a thing. He wasn't advertising, we were. Yes, times have changed and they've changed considerably. But she was very [inaudible] the nuns set to catch us. Of course, we'd been going to New Braunfels to dances at night, and I know that's the reason, but we got caught riding. . . . (Laughter) Oh, shoot, that's a little thing, but we'd done bigger ones and gotten by with it.

G: You've been quoted extensively on his first campaign for Congress. Were you busily involved in that?

C: Oh, man, you bet I sure was. I was like Adlai Stevenson; I walked the sole of my shoes off for that boy. I sure did. And the town even closed up; they'd take it turns about going to different places and electioneering and selling Lyndon Johnson. This whole

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community was behind him, and I worked hard, you bet I did. Why, we even closed the garage for a whole week and got out and campaigned. People that we knew had moved from here that were in communities, we'd go see them and sell them on the idea, sell Lyndon. Yes, we did. We worked hard, and I don't regret a bit of it. I think he appreciated it and I think he showed he did.

G: One of the things that I've always been curious about is the community over toward Fredericksburg. They weren't as open in their support of Lyndon as they might have been, were they?

C: Well, Lyndon was a true Democrat from the word go, and they liked Lyndon as a person, that's very true, but let me tell you, that is a Republican community since before the Civil War. It's always been and they don't change. You can sell yourself. If you can sell your worth to them, well and good, and they like you, but by the same token, they still hold onto that belief. I have lots of good friends up there and I taught school there and I admire them, but they're still. . . . They know that he did a lot for them, they know that, but they just can't jar loose from it, that's all.

G: Yes, the same way some people can't jar loose from being Democrats. That's just the way they are.

C: That's right. They're just old mosshead Democrats and you can't do a thing in the world about it. They're just as hardheaded. And you can't fall out with a fellow because he believes that way. I don't. As I say, I've got lots of good friends up there and I admire them for what they do. What they believe, they stick to it like a Dutch uncle, and that's exactly right. If you believe in a thing, stay with it until you're proven wrong.

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G: Exactly.

You went to the inaugural in 1965.

C: Yes, I did. I sure did.

G: Tell me about that. Did you find anything particularly interesting about that trip?

C: It was all very interesting to me, because I just never quit learning. And I enjoyed it; I had no idea it would be anything like it was, no way. The most impressive thing to me of the whole thing was meeting every governor or a representative for the governor, which might have been a lieutenant governor or a speaker of the house, sometimes it was, representing that state. And you had the opportunity to talk to them and converse and ask questions. To me, that was the most wonderful thing that could have ever happened to me that I enjoyed. Now, that was outstanding.

G: He sent *Air Force One* down here.

C: He sure did.

G: Where did you have to go? Did you have to go to Bergstrom Air Force Base?

C: That's where we went. There's a picture of *Air Force One* right there. See it? On the wall.

G: Well, I think it's behind the lamp.

C: No, it's right over the lamp.

G: Oh, okay, sure.

C: Right over the lamp. That's Lyndon, and I'm sitting on the arm of the chair, and Lady Bird and Aunt Jessie [Hatcher]. She was the only living aunt that he had on the Johnson side at that time, and I was the oldest cousin that he had living. Fact of the business is, I

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think I was the only--well, I know I was--Johnson relative there. But I'd have walked, if I didn't have the clothes and if I didn't have what it took to get there. But when he called San Antonio and said, "Yes, you're going," I said, "Honey, I don't have the clothes, I don't have the money." He said, "Oh, yes, you do, and you're going. It'll be ready for you, and I'll see that you have plenty to wear." And he did, bless his heart.

G: How did you get to Austin to catch the plane?

C: Helicopter picked us up here.

G: I see.

C: And I went in a helicopter down there and got on the plane there.

G: And he was there in Austin?

C: Oh, you bet. He sure was.

G: Where did you stay while you were in Washington?

C: I stayed in the White House and I used the Washington [Lincoln?] Room.

G: That's quite an experience.

C: Yes, that was. That was quite an experience.

G: How long were you there?

C: That time I was there about ten days.

G: My goodness, a good visit then.

C: Too long for a country girl. What I mean by that, well, I could have come on back, but the weather was quite bad, and so he said, "Oh, you just wait. You've got plenty you can do around here." And there was. You know, he was the type of fellow that he just didn't take no for an answer if he wanted something done. But we had a good many Texans

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there, and I had been through the White House once or twice before. And he said, "All right, now I want you to get down here in the morning, I want you to get busy and help take all of this group that you know of, these people from Texas and especially from the Tenth District, I want you to take them through the White House on a tour and I want you to explain it to them." Well, that kept me busy, and I didn't have time to think about something else. I was teaching in San Antonio at the time, and I kept busy and it was a wonderful experience.

G: How did you come back then?

C: I came back with John Connally--no, I came back on Connally's plane, not with him. It was his plane that came back, took him up there, and it was to go back and pick up some other one, and I came back on that one.

G: Did they drop you off then in Austin or out here at the Ranch?

C: We had to circle about three times, the weather was so bad, and we went into San Antonio to land at the field there, because the weather--it was so much rain and so bad. So they landed to let a bunch of people off in San Antonio and I said, "Well, just let me off here. I'll call a cab and go from here to my house rather than going home." And there was a helicopter there to pick up [Dale] Malechek and his wife. So they said, "Oh, just come on and go from here up to the Ranch. Then you can go on home and rest before you go back to school." And I said, "Well, I believe I'll just do that." And, man, that was the coldest ride I believe I ever had in my life in that helicopter, but that's the way I came back up. But I enjoyed it. It was well worth the time.

G: Then you went back, let's see, my note says August of 1966.

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C: Yes.

G: I don't have a note as to what the purpose of that visit was.

C: Luci's wedding.

G: Oh, sure. Of course.

C: I went back to Luci's wedding and I stayed for that, and I went back for Lynda Bird's wedding and stayed for that. I enjoyed every time I went and I learned something new each time that I went. It was quite educational to me because, well, I had a little more run of the house that I could get along with. Each time it was opened up a little more, and I enjoyed it very much.

G: When he came back to the river, back to the Ranch, did you see a lot of him at that time?

C: Well, much more than I usually did. And the Christmas of 1973 [1972] he came down here and spent almost two hours talking just like he used to. It's very touching to me to even talk about it now, because I think he felt that his days were numbered then. Of course Lyndon is so much taller than I am, I can stand under the pit of his arms easily. He got up and he got ready to go and he said, "Well, sister, I want to tell you one thing. You have stood by me through thick and thin, and I love you." And I said, "Well, of course, you do. You've got me into so much trouble in my life, you ought to think I'm something extra." He says, "You are. You've been very special in my life." And that's on one of those pictures up there, "A person who has been very special in my life." And he said, "I want you to know that I think that you have contributed more than any member of our family to this society that we have today." I said, "Lyndon, you've had the whole world on your shoulders and I've only had a few children to manage each day,

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and I don't see how you can say it." He said, "Let me tell you, as much as you have done for the outside world besides what you've done for the children, you have been an inspiration for all of us, and I want you to know it." Well, that called for a few tears.

G: I can imagine. Now, that would have been his last Christmas.

C: It was.

G: I've heard from other folks that he talked a lot that way that Christmas.

C: Yes, he did, he sure did. And he hadn't spent two hours with us in many a day. He'd come by and say hello and he'd have dignitaries with him. My home was never too simple for his friends. [Robert] McNamara--oh, I could name you so many that have been here that he had visitors with him from the State office. Just like [when] you came in, I had just taken my bread out, well, he came in one day and McNamara was with him that day. He said, "Oh, I smell that good homemade light bread. Where is the butter and the grape jelly?" I said, "It's in here." He said, "Well, let's have some." Sat down at this very table where we are sitting right now and I brought the butter in and the grape jelly. And he said, "Now a cup of coffee." And just like I went and got one for you, my coffee pot stays on all day long. And I fixed the coffee and I said, "Well, now, Lyndon, there isn't any silver service with this coffee, and it's just going to be plain cow butter. I don't have any margarine for you." And he laughed, he said, "Well, you're just plain manila anyway, aren't you?" Manila. I said, "Yes, I am." So those things have always meant a lot to me because it didn't make any difference, he was never ashamed of his people; he was never afraid to let the world know who they were.

G: Did McNamara eat the bread and butter?



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C: Oh, yes, he was--I begrudged it.

(Laughter)

Because, well, McNamara was vice president of Ford Motor Company and he tried to poke a lot of stuff down us when we were in the Ford business, to take cars when we couldn't sell them. And I had talked to him over the telephone in Michigan long before he came here, and I just had a very biased feeling toward Mr. McNamara.

G: That's interesting. I hadn't known that.

C: Well, anyway, that's--

G: Did you confront him with it when he showed up at your table?

C: (Laughter) He said, "Are you the Mrs. Cox I talked to?" I said, "I sure am." He said, "Well, I figured that." But, yes, that was the only time I guess that. . . . Lyndon said, "Well, when was this?" And then I told him.

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G: Oh, he did?

C: He [Sam Houston Johnson] got my brother to sign a statement that--well, in my mother's will it was [stated] that I was to take care of my brother, regardless of what came or went, out of the [income from the] ranch down there, not to sell it, but the loan or the lease off of it was to take care of my brother as long as he lived. Well, it got to where it wouldn't begin to take care of him. And Sam came down and insisted that James Ealy [Johnson] sign over everything that he had--well, he had a life estate in this house--and I was to pay for his groceries, his medicine and his doctor bills and clothe him as long as he lived. Well, I couldn't begin to do that out of a hundred dollars a month. But anyway, he

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deeded all of this over to Sam at his--well, he only had a life estate in it and a life estate in the ranch. Then if there was anything left, it went back to the estate. And Sam Houston and Phillip Bobbitt put me through the wringer.

G: I hadn't known that either.

C: That's the way that happened. I don't know. Sam wasn't really at himself at no time, mentally. Neither was my brother. So I don't hold that against them. They just were not at themselves.

G: I have a note that you did a lot of work on the Birthplace and the Boyhood Home. Is that right?

C: I sure did.

G: Tell me about how that project got started and got going and who ran it and all the rest of it.

C: Well, in the beginning, as I told you before this recording was on, I came up here in May of 1973 from San Antonio when school was out and I went over to the Boyhood Home and I said, "Well, now this should be like this. This isn't the way it was, and this is the type of paper we had on here." Of course at the time, poor little old Lucia I don't think was over five or six years old. You know, no kid is going to pay any attention to what kind of paper you have or much about anything in the house. Well, you may have this and you may have that. Then when she was ten years old or twelve years old, they had had some work done on it and remodeled it. It was written up in the Johnson City *Record-Courier* when Uncle Sam built the screen porch on the house up there, they were so proud of it. It was written up in the *Courier* about that, how a new improvement had

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been made on the house, because it really needed a lot. It had a very small porch at the back and you come right in from the cow pen right in the house. Well, that's no good for anybody. So they put this screen porch back there and that was where if we were real good, at the end of the year, we'd get--

(Interruption)

G: You were talking about going to work for the Boyhood Home and the Birthplace.

C: So I helped, or did as much as I could help, Mr. [Bobby] Flickinger with selecting the paper and the paint for the Boyhood Home as I remembered it, and restoring or putting in--well, it was a wood box, and that's where Aunt Rebekah seated all of her children when she was--she never took one at a time. She would always take three and put them over there. And she didn't look at the child. She had a mirror on the wall and she would sit in this chair and look at your reflection in this mirror as you said your declamation or recitation, whatever you had. And you were judged from the minute that you sat down on this wood box until you got up and walked out in front of this mirror. And she would tell you, you didn't come in and sit down and cross your legs and flop down. You sat down and folded your hands like a little lady, put them down like this. And you sat up straight and you looked out, because you didn't know which one would be the first one she'd call on, and you must be at attention at all times. And one thing about it that really did count whenever we went to the Interscholastic meet was your posture on the stage and the way you carried yourself and the way you presented it.

That was one of the things that we had to get back, the mirror and the old platform chair that she used to sit in. And Lucia, I think, got that or had it restored or

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fixed it; I'm pretty sure she was responsible for that platform rocker that her mother used to use. Then at the Boyhood Home, of course I could remember that as good as the next one, because I was there so much. Well, I was there at the Boyhood Home and the Birthplace; I was there at the Birthplace a lot, go there every day that I lived up there. And then at the Boyhood Home, we lived there. After Uncle Sam would serve two years in the legislature, then he had to stay out two years before he could run again. And those two years [that] he'd go back to the farm, well, we'd come into town and live there, and back and forth like that. And naturally I knew the place pretty well.

G: So you were of considerable assistance in advising them on how to restore things?

C: Well, Mr. Flickinger seemed to appreciate it a lot. I don't know as the park did especially, but he did. He was the main one.

G: Were they pretty successful, do you think, in restoring it?

C: I think so. They did a very nice job of it, as far as restoring the house is concerned. Of course, a lot of the furniture wasn't identical, but you couldn't expect that either.

G: No.

Let me ask you just a couple of things about the later years when Lyndon came back home. First, before I do that, let me ask you an earlier question. Do you remember when he brought Lady Bird home for the first time?

C: Well, yes, I do.

G: What did you think of her?

C: Well, I thought that she was a very, very, very attractive woman. I just thought she was beautiful. I'll tell you, she had on a yellow dress and I just don't know as I've ever seen

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anybody as pretty in my life in my eyes as she was. And I think one reason for that is Lyndon was looking for approval, and he was the apple of my eye, always was.

So there's no use in me denying it. I loved him until it wasn't--I loved him as well as I did my own brother and probably I guess better in lots of ways. He said, "Don't you think she's pretty?" and I said, "She is as pretty as she can be." And to me she was, and she always has been. I think she had such a warm feeling and personal contact, I just fell in love with her the first time I ever saw her. And I think I showed it probably more than any one of the family. Couldn't help [it], because I just felt that way about her. I still do.

G: All right. Fair enough. The question I wanted to ask about the retirement years, if we can call them that, is how long did it take him to decompress from those years in the White House to being a rancher on the Pedernales again?

C: Well, I don't think he ever--you know, when he would come out here, he was a rancher. He just lived it up. He'd get in that old jeep or get on his horse and he would just get going. And he'd look it all over and he'd ask more questions and he could find more things for a fellow to do than Carter had oats. My land, it was something. It was just a continuous build-up, what he'd see that needed to be done, wanted done and wanted done right now. It was just like a bird out of a cage. He didn't have to do until he got ready to do.

I actually believe that if he could have seen his way clear with a lot of political problems he'd be alive today. Lyndon Johnson didn't die of a heart attack; he died of a broken heart. Now, that's my way of thinking and I'll think it all my life. Because he

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couldn't do anything about that Vietnam War. That was handed to him and there was nothing much he could do about it.

G: Did he ever talk to you about that? Do you remember that?

C: Yes, we talked several times, but it was just like I'm saying, it was something he couldn't handle, something that he inherited that he couldn't undo. I never will forget one time I said to him, "Lyndon, I don't believe that they're feeding you the right information. I'm afraid you're being sold downstream." He looked at me and he said, "Don't say that. Don't ever let me hear you say that again."

G: He couldn't afford to think that, maybe.

C: Well, he just didn't want me talking like that, and I sure did hush. But that was the way I felt at that time.

G: Did he enjoy his last years on the Ranch?

C: Yes, he did. He enjoyed every bit of it. If he'd have felt better, he would have enjoyed it more. It's just like he said when he was brought that glass of milk, "This is the best milk in the world," because it came off of the place right here. Yes, he enjoyed it. He enjoyed his people and he enjoyed what he was doing. He couldn't do too much, but he enjoyed it. He lived every minute to its fullest.

G: That's a good line on which to end.

End of Tape 2 of 2 and Interview I

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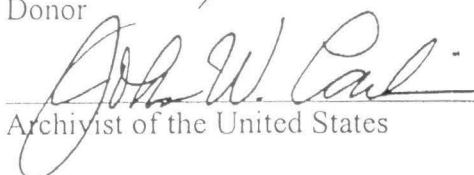

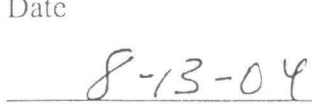
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AVA JOHNSON COX

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