

INTERVIEW IV

DATE: February 4, 1978

INTERVIEWEE: LADY BIRD JOHNSON

INTERVIEWER: MICHAEL L. GILLETTE

PLACE: The LBJ Ranch, Stonewall, Texas

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G: Let's start with your trip to New York in June 1934, I guess it was.

J: Yes. My daddy gave me that as a graduation present. I think I pretty much must have put the idea in his head. He was a dear about giving me things and doing what, in those years and in my milieu, were rather expensive things for me, but I think maybe the idea did come from me. My roommate in college, Cecille Harrison, was all for the idea. She's one of those excitable, amusing, capricious, thoroughly delightful young woman. [I] still see her, still find the same qualities engaging in her--and also sometimes maddening.

G: Was it more your idea, though, than hers to go?

J: I don't remember. I think we probably just cooked it up equally.

G: Why did you pick New York?

J: Oh, New York was the most fascinating town in the whole world, and also I knew a young man in Washington.

G: Victor McCrea.

J: Victor McCrea. He had gone to work up there. I think his uncle, who was an assistant postmaster general and a man of considerable substance, had gotten him a job. He was

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writing me back about the city, and he said he'd be my guide when I came.

I'm sure that I told you before the story about Gene Boehringer giving me Lyndon's name and address.

G: I'm not sure. I've heard it, but I'm not sure that we have your version.

J: Well, it's an oft-told tale. Gene had a fondness for getting people together. She liked Lyndon very much, and they had some dates, but mostly in sort of just a camaraderie of mutual interest. She had been a good friend of his father's. So she told me I ought to meet this young man, and she was going to write him that I was coming to Washington. She wrote down his name and address on a slip of paper, and I think perhaps his telephone number, too, and put it in my purse and said, "Now you take that out and you call him when you get there. He's going to be expecting you." I never did take it out the whole time and did not intend to, because I hadn't met him, and I had plenty else to do.

Cecille and I thought that to travel on a boat would be *the* most glamorous way in all the world to take this trip. In those days there was a tour boat that went from Galveston to New York. It stopped, I think, in Miami; at least it went by Miami. It took six days. The pictures of the staterooms looked lordly and sumptuous, and the whole thing just sounded so romantic. And this was the depths of the Depression. The prices were so cheap. As I look back on them now they were just incredibly cheap, and even then, although to take a boat to New York was big doings, because of the times it was really pretty cheap.

So we drove my car to Galveston. A big storm came up on the way, just rain, rain, lashing rain. You just wondered if we were going to get there. We put the car in a

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parking garage, and my recollection is we went up on the roof of the Rice [Hotel] and had dinner and sort of lived it up, felt so grown-up and sophisticated. I think the boat sailed the next morning. I'm a little unsure about this. I remember when we got on how high the waves were, lashing up on the sides of the boat, and I was kind of scared. Of course, when we got to our room, it was *tiny*! We either had to take a choice of putting all of Cecille's luggage in there or of keeping the one chair that was in there. So we got rid of the chair. Cecille just traveled with more luggage than anybody conceivably needed. She was sort of scatterbrained, but delightful, and we just had a marvelous time.

G: Was your dad apprehensive about your taking a trip?

J: No. Not in the least, not in the least. As I look back on it, some people might have thought my dad was uncaring because he did not say no to a lot of things that you might consider dangerous, in those days. I had a car when I was thirteen; I went most anywhere I wanted to in it. It didn't occur to him that, apparently that--well, he certainly was no stiff Victorian parent.

G: Were there friends who went up on the boat with you?

J: No, but we quickly made friends. I remember there was a--I guess I considered her elderly, I would now consider her middle-aged, I'm sure--widow from Pampa who had a daughter on there, about our age. We quickly made friends, and we just did all sorts of lively things together. I feel sure Cecille fell in love going up, and in love with somebody else coming back. I don't remember that I did.

But I do think, one way, I guess going up, Cecille must have stayed up all night and I nearly all night, because I think we reached New York and docked shortly after

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sunrise. I think we wanted to see the sunrise over the city. The meals, of course, were lots of courses and very fancy.

Oh, yes, there were some friends on there. M. D. Bryant from San Angelo and his wife were along, and they had the best suite on the boat and shared it with us a number of times. You know, "Come down and have a drink and let's all go to dinner together," or "We're going to have a party and invite some more people."

G: Do you remember the name of the boat?

J: No, I don't. I doubt that it was a very plush boat, but it sure looked it through my eyes.

When we got to New York we stayed, on this marvelous tour rate, in what I'm sure some of my East Texas friends would have said was a "wagon yard." It was the Taft Hotel, right downtown. About all I remember about it is that it was right downtown in the places where all the big lights came on all around. I think it's just about at Broadway where lots of the . . .

G: Right in the theater district, isn't it?

J: In the theater district and a lot of the bright lights. In any case, we considered ourselves perfectly safe and were.

This tour also included going to a nightclub. I forget whether M. D. and his wife--whether we were all along together in a group. Anyhow, our eyes were out on stems, and we were not the least bit apprehensive about going to a nightclub and had a great time. Once more, Gene Boehringer, a friend of hers whom we had come to know well and liked very much, Mr. Hiram King, who was a vice president of Sinclair Oil, had written some of his friends up there to take these two young girls out. This time we were

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a little concerned. We didn't know whether we wanted to meet two perfectly strange men or not. When we looked at the address they asked us to come to a party at, and we saw it was Park Avenue, and we decided we had to go. So we went, and it was glamorous and lived up to our expectations.

Another friend of mine, Emily Crow, I believe that she had asked her uncle to ask some of his friends to have us out. I think that time we really got into quite a lively political argument, because this man had an absolutely bitter opinion of President Roosevelt. He was a wealthy man and he--I think we may have left in a huff in any case.

G: Is that right? So you were really a Roosevelt defender.

J: Yes. At any rate, I learned something about the extremes of political life.

We went up on top of the Empire State; we went to several shows. I think for the first and only time ever in my life, I went to--gee, I can't think of the name right now, where there's lots of fish. You know, a museum for fish.

G: Oh, the aquarium.

J: Aquarium, aquarium, of course.

G: I have a note that you went to Chinatown and the pushcart district.

J: Oh, I'm sure we did. Oh yes, we took two marvelous bus trips, uptown and downtown. I remember distinctly that the bus going uptown was the double-decker, and we rode up top. There was a man who called out the places that you were seeing. In 1934 there were still standing many great houses along, I guess it's Riverside Drive or maybe Fifth Avenue, anyhow, an elegant downtown part of the city where there were fabulous houses that belonged to such people as the Rockefellers and the Astors. He would have exciting

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stories about each one, and I'm sure often exaggerated stories that he'd throw in about a few movie stars here and there, you know, and where they lived and some tales of their love affairs. (Laughter)

Then we went down in the dreadful part, the really skid row part of town. We'd see people sort of huddled on the sidewalk, clutching a bottle or asleep or raggedy. Of course, this was June and it wasn't as miserable as it probably was in, say, January, but it was an eye opener.

G: Had you seen that kind of poverty before?

J: Never, never. Not like that. We kept on seeing signs that said "Loft to let" up in a window, and I wondered, "Why on earth all these lofts?" and, "Who wants to rent a loft anyway?" and, "What would you do with a loft?" I was later told that that is where people did sewing, this piece--you [would] get a very small sum for a garment, and some entrepreneur would rent a loft and get ten or twelve no doubt women, or children of, let us hope, age enough. It was terribly low paid labor doing a tedious, repetitive job. I think it was the garment making. That was an eye opener to me, too.

I remember we went through Wall Street and how impressed I was. I always loved, loved waterfronts and harbors, and we went up and down the streets where the big boats came and docked. That was one of the most fascinating things that I did.

G: I have a note on the Casino de Paris Hotel and the Paradise Club.

J: That must have been our nightclub! I remember there was a person there named Nils T. Granlund who was quite the toast of that day, and I just thought I was--I think the word one used then was *soignée*.

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G: Did you have an urge to live in New York?

J: None whatsoever. But my eyes were out on stems, and I was very excited, and just took it all in.

G: Then you went from New York to Washington, is that right?

J: Yes. I'm not sure how. I vaguely remember that we went down on a bus, because I think I remember going through the city of Baltimore. At any rate, my friend, Victor McCrea, had suggested that we take rooms in a hotel named the Chastleton, on 16th Street. Once more the rooms were relatively inexpensive, but the hotel was impressive and big. I don't know whether it is still standing or not.

G: It doesn't ring a bell, but it may well. What did you do in Washington?

J: We did a tremendous lot of sightseeing. I'm trying to remember whether we went, surely we must have gone through the White House. I've been through it such an infinite number of times since, sightseeing. I think we did. I remember--no, maybe that was later; yes, it must have been later--standing outside taking a picture of [Franklin Delano] Roosevelt as he came out in his long black car with the Secret Service men standing on the fenders behind him.

G: Is that right? Do you remember when that was?

J: I'm trying to. I think that must have been more like when we first went to Congress in 1937, and not in 1934.

We went to lunch, and Victor took me, in the garden of the Carlton Hotel, which I think now is called the Sheraton-Carlton. I believe the little area is still there, but I don't think lunch is served there anymore. It was elegant then, and it's elegant now. It's one of

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my favorite places. He took me to a place called the Cotton Club. It was sort of a Dixieland sort of music.

G: Did you go to the Capitol?

J: Yes. I'm trying to dredge up from my mind impressions and thoughts of going through there. I remember very distinctly going through the Supreme Court. It had just been finished. There it stood in white splendor, just a majesty of a building. It was a slight confusion of winding up a job before anybody has moved in. Cecille never believed in signs that said "no entrance" or anything like that. There may not have even been such a sign. In any case, we found ourselves walking around in the interior of that building with nobody to stop us. We went through the judges' chambers, and she sat in the seats and so did I! (Laughter) We noticed that several of the chairs were different heights, you know, because the nine old men that were going to move in very soon each had a favorite chair more or less suited to his comfort. They had been men of considerable tenure at that point, as I recall, and different statures and sizes. Nearly about all of those chairs were different. Oh, it was such an impressive building.

G: Let's try to reconstruct a visit to the Capitol, if you made one. Would you have seen Wright Patman, do you think? I guess he was your congressman.

J: He was my congressman. I was aware of him, as everybody in deep East Texas was.

G: Or maybe if you sat in the gallery and saw the Senate or the House in session, or if it would have been in session then.

J: It would not, probably, because this was 1934, and I remember hearing Sam Rayburn talk about the old days when, "We always got out in April or May or early June." I don't

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know whether the rigors of the Depression were sufficient to make them stay longer. It may have been. It's a strange thing; I cannot remember. I guess it's overlaid by so many other years of going through there. Cecille told me the other day though that she would try to dig around and see if she had any recollections. My recollection is that she stayed on a day or two in New York and I went on down, so I had a little bit of time there before she joined us.

Vic himself had moved into--one of the young men that he lived with had a sister. His somewhat older sister had come up there and gotten an apartment, and all these young people were there together. Vic had moved in and invited a couple of roommates, and this young woman had quite a household over which she presided. They invited me over, and I think I spent a night there. I know I had a meal or two with them. It was sort of a way of life that's [gone].

G: Did you find Washington exciting?

J: Yes, I did. I immediately--I liked it. I thought it was intriguing. It never occurred to me that I would return, but I liked it.

G: Any other impressions of the city, or its buildings, or just the whole experience of being exposed to the center of government for the first time?

J: I remember going through the Library of Congress, which was the most ornate building I had ever seen and is still one of the most ornate, sort of Italian Renaissance architecture, on the inside in any case. Oddly enough, I expect Lyndon's sister was working right there then, because he had brought her up and she did work there at some point. We drove by all the embassies. I was very much impressed by them. I thought it was a

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glittering life.

Oh yes, I do remember one little thing. My father, from his very rural beginnings in Autauga County, had a friend, a woman, perhaps somebody he dated in his youth, who had married a man who achieved a certain eminence, and they lived in Washington in an apartment on Connecticut Avenue. They asked me to come to a cocktail party, and there I met a congressman. I remember writing my father a postcard about it. I really thought, "Gee, this is exciting."

But no, I did not apparently try to go to see Wright Patman. Maybe one didn't. I mean, you bet one did, one always did, but I didn't know about it, I mean.

G: Do you remember the name of the congressman that you met?

J: No, I don't. I certainly did then.

G: That's interesting. Anything else about Washington, or your trip, that you recall?

J: No. If something comes to my mind I will put it on as a postscript later on.

I remember one more thing about the trip. We went back to New York, Cecille and I, just the day before the boat was going to sail.

G: She almost missed the boat.

J: Almost. She had innumerable amounts of clothes. The boat was going to sail at some very early hour, and they cautioned us to be sure and get there not later than nine o'clock. It took a long time to get down there to the dock. So I packed all my things, and just saying over my shoulder, "All right, Cecille, hurry, hurry, hurry. We've got to leave at such and such a time!" She wasn't ready. I patted my foot. I waited a while. She wasn't ready. I just was mad as I could be, and I said, "Cecille, I hope you miss the boat. I'm

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going!" So I got in a taxi with my luggage and went on out and got on the boat. A lot of the people were there, but not nearly all of them. Gradually all began to come on. About an hour and a half after the time they were supposed to sail, here came Cecille blithely up the. . . . A few minutes later they left. It never occurred to her, though, that it was real and that she should have been there at the regular time.

And once more, we had a delightful trip back. I really loved that trip. I'm sorry they don't have them anymore. They used to have a number of them like that.

G: What did you plan to do with your life at this stage? You'd graduated from college. You'd taken that trip that a lot of people take if they're fortunate, and have a yearning to travel to see what, I guess, you didn't have time to see when you were studying. What did you intend to do?

J: I had given it considerable thought with no positive, definitive answers. I had had enough dates with newspaper people, enough contact with them, to find them interesting and to think that they were always where something was happening and that conversation around them was lively and changing. It intrigued me, and so, as I have mentioned to you earlier in this, I had stayed on at the University a year longer than I needed to and had gotten a B. J., and I liked it. I particularly liked Dr. DeWitt Reddick and some of the subjects that I took, particularly a sort of creative writing one, which was feature stories. I thought I might get a job in the newspaper world somewhere.

Too, I had taken enough courses in education where I could get my foot in the door as a teacher. It was what was called a second grade certificate, and I think you had to then go on back to school in the summer and take more courses and beef it up. I did

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not really have any drive to become a teacher, but I thought it might be very interesting to get a job teaching in some romantic place like Hawaii or Alaska. I'd even gone so far as to find out the name of, I think the word was delegate, but anyhow, the representative from these areas to Washington. One of them was named [Anthony J.] Dimond [delegate from Alaska], as I recall. I wonder if that's right.

G: I'll check it.

J: I had, I think, written him a letter to inquire about the possibility. I did *not* want to teach in Karnack or Lee, next door. But the idea of the travel was intriguing enough to make me think I might do that.

Then I had taken enough shorthand and typing to be minimally competent in that and to think that I could, with practice, handle a job. I firmly believed then, and I think it was not far wrong, that from being a secretary, if you are bright, willing, and able, you can progress, as I used to say, anywhere from marrying the boss to being the president of the company. I think it's a good way to start.

G: Did you want to live in Austin longer? Did you have any idea of where you would be, say, at the end of the summer?

J: No, no very positive idea. Oh, at the end of the summer? I had in the back of my mind, always had thought I should stay at home one year, that was kind of the limit I gave it in my mind, and work on the Brick House and make it more comfortable, and habitable, and hopefully more gracious, see if I could get a better set up of a servant who was better trained and gave my daddy more of a variety of meals and took care of him a little better. I just wanted to be at home for one year, for him and also to teach myself how to do some

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of those things with the house.

G: What led you to do this? Was this something that he had expressed an interest in having you do?

J: Not at all, not at all. In fact, I'm not even sure how welcome it was at first, because he was a very independent man and he was so used to being alone. I'm sure he had his own lady friends, but they were not a part of his domestic life.

G: With regard to the remodeling, was that again your idea?

J: Entirely, entirely. But, once more, he let me do it and was glad to pay for it, probably had less ambitious ideas than I had. You see, if I had stayed there that whole year, I would have learned a lot and I would have done a vastly better job. As it was, after I got back, in I guess July, I began to look around for an architect. I think we must have started probably--I don't know just when, but at any rate, maybe September. I don't know. At any rate, I didn't do enough study on it. I was not educated enough in it. I had a great old house at my disposal. If I had persuaded my father, and if I had learned more about it, and raised our sights as far as the amount of money to be spent, quite great things could have been done with the house. Instead, I'm afraid we did at least some wrong ones.

We painted it a sort of a buff--it was red brick; perhaps we shouldn't have painted it at all. We painted it a sort of a buff color with a white trim around the windows. That, for an old colonial house was, particularly in Virginia, an often done thing, I'm told. The architect, whom I got in Shreveport, convinced me that it was a good thing to do. I really think we should have probably left it red brick and put on [a] proper size and scale of

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white shutters, because the windows were too narrow. My father, when he bought it--and once more, I'm not sure when he did buy the Brick House. Tony and I were reconstructing it and trying to decide. Tony was not born in it, and he was born in 1904.

G: I have 1907 in my notes as the date.

J: You do? I'm sure you probably know more about it--isn't that funny?--than we do.

Dorris tells me that when he bought it it had great big sixteen light windows, that means sixteen panes, big windows, but that they did not have the weights in the side, that they were the early sort of construction where you just had to raise them up by dent of considerable muscle power. So as an improvement, it was considered then, my daddy had put in weights where you could really raise them very easily, and to do that required narrowing them.

And then, oh dear, I don't know whether it was I that did the sacrilegious thing of covering those wide boards, with the very primitive nails in them, up with hardwood or not.

G: Was this in the ceiling or just in the--?

J: No, on the floor.

G: Oh, I see.

J: At any rate, we did a nice job of painting it. We did many good things and some bad ones.

G: Did you do anything to the exterior as far as the porches or the columns or otherwise?

J: No, nothing except necessary repairs and painting.

G: It didn't have a face lift then, other than just the painting and that sort of thing?

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J: Yes.

G: No structural engineering?

J: No structural changes. The house from the front is Georgian. The house from the back and side, and this is interesting and you wonder what was in the mind of the architect, but it's very Louisiana, with the two long galleries in a sort of an "L" shape.

G: Was all of that part of the original house as far as you know?

J: Yes.

G: It was not added onto it?

J: No, it was all part. The only thing that was added onto was right at the back, a kitchen and a bathroom. That was added on. The bathroom was put on, gee, I think I was twelve years old when it was put on. Up to that time, you know, we had had just outdoor facilities. You bathed in a big zinc tub and stood close to the stove if it was wintertime.

G: You even supervised the landscaping, too, I assume?

J: Yes, and that was fun, except that once more my mind soon got so absorbed in Lyndon that I didn't do enough. I didn't set my sights high enough. I didn't follow through enough.

G: I have one note that you went to Shreveport to get a new stove at one point. Do you remember that?

J: No, I don't, but I learned a good deal about buying, and comparative values, and shopping around. My father, of course, having several stores could get things wholesale. I pretty much always had to come back to the places where he could get them wholesale, which were limited, but yet good ones.

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G: You were quoted as writing at this point that, "This is the first time I've ever really done anything in terms of building or doing something, and I like it." Did you get a sense of satisfaction?

J: Yes, I did, a definite sense of satisfaction. I do think I improved the menus and the service, and I think Daddy noticed it and liked it and was just kind of amazed. He didn't know anybody was ever going to try to take care of him like that.

G: Did you hire new staff people?

J: My recollection is that I just worked with the one we had and then tried to teach her. I think I probably did get some extra help.

G: You were in Austin, I think, in part to see an architect, or at least you saw an architect while you were there when you met the President, didn't you?

J: Yes, and I can't quite synchronize it. The architect I went to see was a good friend, Hugo Kuehne, who had an office in the Littlefield Building. I think he must have advised me to get one closer to home, and probably even recommended this one in Shreveport, which was just about forty miles from our house.

G: So you went to Austin. I guess you were up there seeing Gene Boehringer, too. Do you recall that trip?

J: Yes. Gene and I would always get together as often as we could think up a good reason. I had gotten back from my boat trip; I expect it was in July some time. Then by the time I went down to see her--I've never been able to quite pinpoint the date; some time I must ask her if she can--it was certainly the last few days of August, maybe between the twenty-eighth and the thirty-first, or maybe it was the first or second of September. In

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any case, she said, "Lyndon's in town." Gee, or did she even tell me? I think perhaps I just went in Mr. C. V. Terrell's office; he was the railroad commissioner for whom she worked. That was one of the great old offices in the Capitol, high ceilings, impressive office. She was his very trusted secretary and had been for some years. And Lyndon walked in. So she went on a lot about, "Here I've been trying to get y'all introduced all this time," and, "I'm so glad," and told each one of us a lot about the other one.

G: So it was just a coincidence?

J: Yes, it really was.

G: Was Dorothy Mackleroy there, too?

J: Dorothy *Muckleroy*. I'm not sure whether she was in the office or not. Lyndon, in any case, had already made a date with her. My memory is that he asked Gene and me, and possibly Dottie was along with us, to go and have a drink. Let's see, that was in 1934. I've forgotten what one had to drink in those days. I guess liquor was back in by then. And we did. We had a pleasant little hour, but he already had a date with Dorothy.

G: Where did you go? Do you remember?

J: I don't remember. So he asked me to have breakfast with him the next morning.

G: In front of the others? Just right on the spot there?

J: I don't remember that, but I know he did. I wasn't quite sure I wanted to.

G: Do you remember the thrust of his initial conversation with you after you were introduced? Did he seem interested in you? Did he ask you about Karnack or the University or anything like that?

J: No, I don't remember anything precise. I know there was something electric going, that

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he did ask me to have breakfast with him the next morning, and that I was sort of unsure whether I wanted to or not, and didn't call to make it firm. I started by to see Hugo Kuehne, whose office was next door to the Driskill [Hotel], and there was Lyndon, sitting in the dining room on the other side of this big plate glass window where I was just walking past. He looked up and flagged me down. He was there waiting for me. I don't know whether psychologically all the time I meant to go or not. In any case, it was a near miss. I'm not sure whether I said I'd be back in ten minutes and went up to see the architect or whether I then had breakfast and went up to see the architect, but one or the other. It's really a bit vague.

After breakfast, and somehow after the architect, and it is vague, we did get in his car and ride and ride and ride. He did a great deal of talking, of a surprising sort of nature for me, told me all sorts of things about himself, and not the least bit in a bragging way but I mean just factual things.

G: What did he say, for example?

J: About the jobs he'd had, just a sort of brief history of his life. He was explicit about how hard it had been to get through school and how [for] his parents it was a struggle to try to get the rest of the children through school. [He told] what his job was, and he was really burning up with excitement about his job. He said he was planning on getting into law school. I believe he told me then that he was--at night--at it would be George Washington, wouldn't it?

G: No, I think he went to Georgetown.

J: Georgetown? In the letters it no doubt appears which one it was.

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G: How was he different from the other young men that you knew at this point? Was there anything distinctive about him that struck you right off?

J: Well, he came on strong, and he was very direct and dynamic, and you just had a sense of this is--I didn't know quite what to make of him.

G: Did you sense that magnetism?

J: I did, quite clearly. I do believe before the day was over he did ask me to marry him, and I thought he was just out of his mind. It was very--I'm a slow, considered sort of person generally, and certainly not given to quick conclusions or much rash behavior.

G: Do you remember where you were when he proposed? Were you still riding around in the car?

J: We were. We rode around all day long. During part of it we did drive around to some of my favorite haunts, which were the lovely little country roads around Austin where there were these clear streams running over the white rocks and the chalky limestone outcroppings.

G: You probably knew Austin better than he did at this time.

J: Yes, I did, knew it much better. The Capitol was just about the main thing he knew, or was interested in. I think we went out, for one, Anderson Mill Road. It was exciting. It was intensely exciting. Also a little bit frightening, because I was far from sure I wanted to know him any better.

G: Do you remember where you were when he proposed?

J: No, I don't.

G: It was on the first day though?

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- J: I do believe it was. It sounds absolutely too outrageous, but he has said so many times himself, and I think he was correct.
- G: Did he seem serious, more serious, not about this, but just in general?
- J: Yes, he seemed more serious about his job, about his plans for the future, about his life, about me. He had a lot of exuberance, but it certainly was not the exuberance of a youngster.
- G: Did you get a sense of his sense of humor? Was he amusing? Was he fun to be with that first day, do you recall?
- J: I wouldn't call it fun; I would call it exciting. Also, I think he was trying to be very fair, too, because I remember at one time he said something like this: "I want you to know you're seeing the best side of me, just the best side of me." I think that was when he was getting serious and wanting to warn me that-- (Laughter)
- G: Did he also inquire at great length about you?
- J: Oh, a great deal! All about my father and my life and when my mother died--because he knew a little bit about me from Gene--what I liked, what I wanted to do.
- G: Did he seem surprised that your plans were not more definite for your own future?
- J: Not exactly surprised, but I gathered that he thought I just better start taking them in hand. (Laughter) The schoolteacher aspect of him was very often in evidence in his life.
- G: I've read that when he proposed you didn't say yes and you didn't say no.
- J: No, I didn't. I just sat there with my mouth open, kind of. (Laughter)
- G: I guess it was the next day that you went to the King Ranch.
- J: Yes. He asked me to go and meet his mother and father, and drive on down to meet his

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boss, and I, feeling sort of like the moth in the flame and not at all sure I wanted to be a part of any of that, did go, and very uncertainly. That night I told Gene I didn't know whether I would go or not. I think she was both anxious for me to go and a little concerned about me going, too.

G: She was promoting this?

J: She was promoting it up to a point, but I think it was going a little faster than she had anticipated and perhaps a little more seriously than she had anticipated. (Laughter)

G: Did you start the next morning for San Marcos?

J: Yes, he came by and picked me up. I was hesitant and unsure, but I knew that I didn't want to say no and walk out of his life.

We went to see his mother and father. They lived in quite a modest house. I'm not sure; I think we met Lucia, Birge, and Josefa. I do not remember meeting Rebekah, and I think probably Rebekah was already at a job in Washington.

G: Were the parents expecting you? Had he called them?

J: I think he had called them, but he had probably given them all of an hour's notice. I think I have mentioned this before, that his mother seemed a little apprehensive. She and I were in some ways somewhat alike, because she was afraid her first born, her chief dependent, her dearest loved one, was getting taken in by somebody. I don't know what he told her, really, but I think she sensed that he might be in a serious frame of mind about somebody she didn't know enough about.

G: I read somewhere that when he introduced you to her that he told her right then that he had plans for you.

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J: I think it's quite likely. I cannot say honestly that I remember that it happened just like that.

G: What were your first impressions of her, though, as his mother?

J: That she was very much a gentlewoman who had had trials and a lot of work, and that she was intelligent, and gracious, and life had not made her way as comfortable and easy as might have been expected.

G: Did you meet his father then, too?

J: Yes.

G: What was he like?

J: Well, Mr. Johnson was much older than his years. He had really taken a beating from the Depression, and from an earlier depression, too, in 1922. I would say probably the last twelve years of his life [he] had been [under] severe economic pressure, whereas he had enjoyed much more affluent years before that. He was one of those who got caught in the [depression]. I think cotton was forty cents, and then it went to eight. I believe it was 1921 [or] 1922; it could have been 1924. It's a simple matter to see when that big depression was [It was in 1920-1921.]. But it caused a lot of people to go broke. He had engaged to buy land from his brothers and sisters, had hired several families to move onto his place and work the land, had bought some tractors and all sorts of equipment. Cotton went from forty cents to eight cents. He had to pay all that with eight-cent cotton, and he was in debt from then on. He struggled to pay his way out. It was hard on his family. I do not know the details, but he had to take a job. He went from one job to another, just struggling, and they had very hard times.

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So I saw a man who had been used to a bigger place in the world and had [had] considerable battering, who had a lot of personality and keen intelligence and charm, but who had been badly buffeted. You see, this was actually just about three years before he died, and I expect he already had heart trouble. He seemed older than he was. I don't remember exactly what I thought about him when I first saw him, but I soon saw him in a series of different pictures, sometimes charm and affability, and sometimes difficult.

G: How so?

J: Irascible, crotchety. You know, it's because he was so troubled, and no doubt because he hurt. I'm sure his heart trouble had already started then.

G: Did you get a feeling for the relationship between the father and the son? For example, how [the President] regarded his father, particularly, let's say, when he was introducing him to you and when he was describing his father to you? How the father seemed to regard the son here, too, in both ways?

J: Well, that sort of grew with the years. My immediate impression was one of affection and respect, and that's about all it was. The fact is, as I came to feel later on, Lyndon had learned an awful lot from his father. He had the greatest respect for his philosophy and for his very real caring about people. He was a populist. It was bone of his bone and heart of his heart. He was a genuine populist. He really cared about all those people he had represented in the legislature and all those people that lived in Johnson City and that were a part of his life and that he'd ever helped. He was also a philosopher. He was also very quick of wit and mind and movement, until the years and the troubles ate on him so long. Mrs. Johnson often would say sadly about how graceful he had been as a young

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man and how swiftly he moved. I'm afraid I could see that, too, in Lyndon's last year or two; when he no longer walked swiftly down the hall, it was sad to see.

So Lyndon always had great respect, and great affection and liking for his father. At the same time, he was twenty-seven or -eight years old and he physically had outstripped him and passed him, and his capacity for making money and running the show was bigger than his father's at that time. It's a sort of a cruel fact of life that you sometimes become impatient with your elders that you have outstripped. He didn't mean to do that, and he was always respectful and loving, but sometimes you could see that the young bull was passing the old bull.

G: Did he seem closer to either parent than the other?

J: Yes, I think he was actually closer to his mother, although he was more like his father. But he had some of his mother in him. He had a strong filial quality for both of them, both his obligation to take care of them and to respect them and to love them, and just a very real liking [for] them as people, separate and apart from filial regard.

G: So you stayed how long, would you say, in San Marcos?

J: I've forgotten whether we stayed for lunch or not. We did stay an hour or more. I remember, too, noticing at least one of his sisters, Josefa, sort of regarded me with sort of an interested eye, like, "What are you doing here, young lady? What are your ideas about my brother?" I remember thinking, "Oh, I just wish I could reassure you, dear lady. I have no idea of taking your son away from you. Be calm!" But I didn't, because I wouldn't be that presumptuous.

G: Did you feel that his mother also had some concern here?

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J: Yes, I did.

G: Did she quiz you?

J: Oh, good heavens, no. She was always *the* most perfect lady, and also. . . . Goodness, words are certainly not coming easy now. She was never the least bit pushy in expressing either affection or annoyance. She was a very civilized person and, really, an elegant person.

G: Did you travel around San Marcos any, say, see the campus?

J: Oh, yes. He told me a lot about the campus. We didn't travel around it much, but he just began filling me with stories about San Marcos and his life there from the first time I laid eyes on him.

Then, it seemed to me we stopped in San Antonio. I believe I met Dan [Daniel J.] Quill and Malcolm Bardwell then. Or it could be that that was so soon thereafter. In any case, we went on down to Corpus Christi and stayed at, I forget what the name of the hotel was. He took me out to see his boss the next day and his boss' mother.

G: That was Gertrude?

J: Well, the Santa Gertrudis cattle got their name from some family connection, and I don't remember whether [it was] Mrs. Kleberg. I do not think she was named Gertrude. She may have been. [Her name was Alice Gertrudis King Kleberg.]

G: Can you describe this visit to the King Ranch?

J: Yes. It was one of the most impressive places I had ever seen. I have never seen it since, and I hope I will some day. It was a great house, impressive, rather overpowering, and so was Mrs. Kleberg. She was really the aging duchess. But she was very crazy about

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Lyndon. This was her son's secretary, but he was more than that. He did a lot of things for her son. He handled the finances. My impression was that Mr. Bob [Robert Justus Kleberg, Jr.], who ran the ranch and made the money and handled the money, gave his brother his portion of it sort of carefully. It was up to Lyndon to pay the bills and do the bookkeeping, and see that it didn't get all squandered, which got him into a certain amount of disfavor from time to time with Mr. Kleberg's wife and children. It was not easy to handle.

In return for the confidence and respect and affection that Mrs. Kleberg had for him, she would do nice things for him. He told me once that she sent him a suit every Christmas, a nicer suit than he had ever had. In fact, that was the beginning of his taste for good clothes, I expect. (Laughter)

G: What was she like when you were around him? Did she brag on him?

J: Yes, she did. She was very affable. She seemed to like me a lot. When somebody took me around to show me some more of the house, I noticed she and Lyndon were having a sort of an earnest conversation. He assured me that he had told her--well, I think maybe she had told him before he had told her at any rate--that this was the young woman he was going to marry. At any rate, she didn't say that to me, but Lyndon told me afterwards and told innumerable people that she had told him that this was the one he ought to marry.

G: I've heard that she told you that you ought to marry him. Is that distorted?

J: I really don't know. I really don't remember. I just remember that she was impressive, affable, that I was terribly interested, and my eyes were out on stems. I was very

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impressed. I was a bit in awe of her, not exceedingly--I was at ease enough--but she was a bit awe-inspiring.

G: Did you meet Congressman [Richard] Kleberg?

J: I did, and he was one of the most delightful people I have ever met. Well, this is the way I came to know him, as exactly the other side of his brother Bob. His brother Bob was tough and strong and just work, work, work was his thing, running the ranch and making the money. Mr. Kleberg told the most wonderful stories. He was a great raconteur. He liked to play--let's see, was it the guitar? He spoke Spanish as well as any native. He liked to sit out on the front porch with the ranch hands as the sun came up and drink coffee and trade tales with them. He was perfectly content to let Lyndon handle a lot of his congressional work and take a great deal of the initiative; and also, cover the district and do a lot of his politicking for him, although he enjoyed that, but not a steady day after day diet, I gathered. He liked to play golf, and he would give Lyndon a rather extraordinary amount of running room in the office.

G: People have said time and time again that the President really was the congressman for all intents and purposes, I mean, running the office and doing things in other situations the Congressman himself would have had to do. Was that your observation then?

J: It became my observation, yes. Which was a wonderful learning experience for Lyndon. It did not detract from the charm and interest of this man, but just grinding work was not his thing. He was more of a poet and a philosopher. I guess you would have called him a playboy. I don't know that that word was around then.

G: How did the two men get along? Were they close, at least from your observation here at

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the time?

J: Lyndon and Mr. Kleberg?

G: Yes.

J: Oh, yes. Lyndon was just crazy about him, and he was, I think, about Lyndon. He wasn't terribly serious, in my opinion.

G: Was it sort of a father-son type thing, or were they more colleagues?

J: I expect more colleagues, although of course he was always the boss, and Lyndon knew that and respected that, but used every bit of opportunity to learn and expand and act. Loyalty, from the very beginning of his life, and this is something his father taught him, was spelled in capital letters and was the keystone of any job you handled. He certainly always had it, for everybody he worked with.

G: Was Roy Miller there?

J: I can't remember. Roy Miller was a big name in our life from the very beginning, but I don't remember when I met him, because I heard so much about him before I met him. Actually, I had heard a lot about him before then, because he was around Austin when I was in the University. He was a name.

G: How about Ben Crider? Did you meet him during this trip somewhere?

J: No.

G: You didn't?

J: No. Johnson City I did not become acquainted with until later.

G: Well now, let's talk about Mrs. Mamie Kleberg. She was there, I guess, at the Ranch also when you were down there.

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J: I do not remember meeting her, and I don't think I did. You see, they had a house in Corpus Christi as well.

G: I see.

J: I definitely did meet her later on, of course, but I really just don't remember when.

G: What was she like?

J: Beautiful, statuesque. She, too, was very, very fond of Lyndon, in the beginning. I think he was with them about four or maybe five years. He had difficulties trying to handle the finances of the family and keep everybody happy, because they all had tastes for luxurious things. In the case of the money, he would try to do what Mr. Bob told him to, because it came from Mr. Bob.

G: Mr. Bob, really? Or Mr. Dick Kleberg?

J: I mean Mr. Bob, who managed the ranch, handled the family finances, is my impression, and just sort of doled it out or said, "Here's your portion."

G: I see. So, really, he had not only Dick Kleberg, but Robert Kleberg.

J: Mr. Dick, he didn't mind that a bit, I don't think. (Laughter) That was my feeling.

G: Was that the Breakers Hotel that you stayed at in Corpus?

J: No, no. Goodness, I can certainly remember it if I--I can't call the word right now. I might as well say there was a certain apprehension on my part when I went up to my room and Lyndon was very long in saying good-bye, but I got the door shut all right. (Laughter) I think, really, he was relieved.

G: How long did you stay in South Texas there?

J: Only just that one night. The next afternoon we started driving back, and I think we

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drove as far as Karnack that night.

G: Was this trip--

J: Maybe we might have gone back by Austin. I'm just not sure. I think we did probably go back by Austin.

G: Was this trip all pleasure, was it business, too? I mean, was he going down there anyway for some business, or was he just going to take you down?

J: You know, I think maybe he was just taking me down. I am not sure. In any case, he was just about to start back to Washington because he was going to register in law school, night school. Although I don't know whether Congress was in session or not. The office was open and doing business. Somebody had to be there. But at any rate, I asked him to come by the Brick House and meet my daddy. You know, first and last, we did several of those trips by car together. I don't know whether I went on home ahead and waited for him or whether we actually did come together. I'm sure in some letters, somewhere, that reference exists. I have a recollection of him gathering up his secretary, Gene Latimer, and also Malcolm Bardwell, who was secretary to Maury Maverick, and them coming along behind us in another car and me being in the car.

G: Maybe he rode with you in your car.

J: Maybe he rode with me in my car. At any rate, we all went to the Brick House, because I remember Malcolm Bardwell used to talk about how far it was from his bedroom downstairs to the. . . (Laughter)

G: I believe this is the occasion where Dorris Powell has been quoted as saying that you called home and told your father that you were going to bring a special guest or

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something.

J: Yes, I'm sure I must have done that.

G: Do you recall your father meeting him?

J: Yes, and Lyndon took to him at once. Daddy, as has been quoted a number of times, said later to me, "You've brought a lot of boys home, and this time you've brought a man." When I began to talk to my daddy about that he'd asked me to marry him and I didn't know what to do. The only thing I knew I didn't want to do was to say good-bye to him and put him out of my life; that much I was sure of. I really wanted to think about it for about six months. [That] was what I thought was the sanest approach. My daddy said, "Huh. Some of the best trades I ever made have been on short notice." (Laughter) He had a funny little chuckle, which kind of came out like "Huh."

G: Did he give you the advice you were looking for, do you think, or do you think he was too blasé about it in a sense? Maybe he didn't. . . .

J: No. Somewhere I had a letter from him later on about, "I'm the one who cared the most of all, and I'm the one who said the least to you about it." No, he sort of just let me talk, and then he said that about the short notice. Then later on he did say, with very considerable vehemence, that if I waited until Aunt Effie was willing for me to marry, I would wait forever. I thought that was a cruel thing to say, but it may have been an accurate thing. Not that she would have done it with any desire in the world to hurt me or my future or to prevent me from happiness, because that's what she wanted most in the world, but she would inevitably have seen it through her own eyes and it would have been hard for her ever to agree. And then, also, it's hardly good sense to marry somebody

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you've only known as short a while as we did. Actually, first and last, it took us about two and a half months, but even that is very short notice.

G: You must have used this argument with the President when he kept pressuring you here. I mean, I gather he wanted to marry you right away.

J: Yes. I really can't say how quickly he thought we might do it. In his opinion, two and a half months was a long time, and in mine it was a short time, [a] preposterously short time.

G: So did all of you have dinner there that night?

J: Yes.

G: Can you describe that occasion?

J: No, not really. Gene was an amusing, affable youngster, sort of puckish, very bright. Malcolm was a very knowledgeable political character. He could have come right out of *Guys and Dolls*, come to think of it, dear man. They were all interested in the Brick House and in hearing all about the life around there. But no, I really don't remember.

G: Did they talk politics, do you think?

J: I doubt it. Daddy, although he was always visited by the local politicians just as a man of substance in the community--they'd go down to see what "Cap" Taylor had to say and whether he'd be for them or not--I feel sure never did any electioneering, as the word was then.

G: I gather he was very enthusiastic about having the Bankhead Bill repealed. Do you remember if your father was?

J: No, I don't. No, I don't. What was the Bankhead Bill?

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- G: I assume that it had something to do with agriculture.
- J: Well, I'm sure it must have, because his interests lay wholly in agriculture, of one sort of another, add a little timber and add a few thousand pounds of fish a week.
- G: Did the President go on back to Washington the next day, or did he stay several days? Do you recall?
- J: He may have stayed two days and nights, but he went on quickly, because he just did all things quickly.
- G: Had you reached an understanding at the time he left?
- J: No, just that we would write and talk and visit as much as we could. So then began that series of letters and also phone calls, which were sort of funny over a country telephone where probably a lot of folks were listening in and there was a lot of cracking and popping and noise. I began to go into Austin to one or several friends' homes, especially one, a lovely redheaded girl named Shirley Scales, I think her name was, to use their telephone to get a better line. Lyndon began sending me a barrage of letters, and I think also some books, and I think among them a congressional cookbook.
- G: Was it still pretty much six one way, half a dozen another as far as your decision, or had you pretty much decided that you would marry him? It was maybe just a question of wanting to wait a while.
- J: I don't know if that would have worked. Because I was perfectly willing to say, "Let's be almost sure we'll get married in a year." But he was saying, "No, if you wait that long, if you don't love me enough to marry me now, you won't a year from now. It will do nothing but keep me in a turmoil and make life unbearable for a long time, and then we'll slip

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away somehow or another." I think he, too, was fearful about Aunt Effie, who was not, dear heavens, a person to be afraid of. She was a person to have a loving sympathy and kindness for. But the silver cord could have throttled us if he and Daddy both hadn't been so positive.

G: Did you get any idea then of what you were marrying in terms of his career?

J: Oh, yes indeed. I did not at that time really think in terms of Congress, but I did think in terms of Washington and activity and expanding horizons and ambition and drive and excitement. What was going to happen I didn't know, but I knew it was going to be something important.

G: At this point was he thinking about becoming a lawyer? He was going to law school?

J: He was seriously thinking about becoming a lawyer, and in retrospect, I'll probably get very big black marks as putting an end to it. Because, although his letters were loaded with the number of hours he went to school and the number of hours he studied, and it was obvious he was serious about it, he just couldn't conduct that courtship, hold down his job as congressman, go through law school, and then, especially, couldn't have a brand new wife to whom he didn't give any time at all. Because those two other activities were consuming about sixteen hours a day, and really, I'm sure he just must have known it wouldn't work.

G: While we're on the subject of law school, he went that fall semester while you were courting. Do you recall if he continued after you were married and started the spring semester?

J: No, no he didn't.

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G: Was that a decision that he made with some difficulty?

J: If he did, he didn't share it with me. I just do not remember him going to law school. I am quite sure he did not go to law school any after we married.

G: He just dropped out?

J: Yes. It was really too bad. I did not really know what I was doing then in depriving him of the assurance of the future. But who knows what way fate would have taken us? I just don't know, but it would've been. . . . But he couldn't do all of those things, and he loved being a congressman's top assistant.

G: Now, while you were courting, at one point he thought about transferring to the University of Texas Law School, moving to Austin and finishing there. Do you remember that?

J: No, I don't.

G: I think even before you were married he realized that it was too difficult to do the work that he had to do for the Congressman and go to law school also. I think he was planning to cut back on the work and move to Austin.

J: How is that evidenced? Where did you read that?

G: Well, it's in your letters. He's talking about it.

J: Is it?

G: Yes. As I said earlier, Welly Hopkins and Senator Wirtz were planning to get him some job. All of a sudden, you hear no more about it. For some reason it didn't work out or he decided not to. Who knows what would have happened?

How are you doing? Are you getting tired at all?

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J: Good heavens, is it twenty of what?

G: It's almost seven.

J: It is? My gosh.

G: I've got plenty of time, but I don't know whether [you want to continue].

J: Let's stop it a minute and let me go and see what's happening to--

[End of Tape 1 of 1 and Interview IV]

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Legal Agreement Pertaining to the Oral History Interviews of

CLAUDIA TAYLOR JOHNSON

In accordance with the provisions of Chapter 21 of Title 44, United States Code, I, Claudia Taylor Johnson of Austin, Texas, do hereby give, donate and convey to the United States of America all my rights, title and interest in the tape recordings and transcripts of the personal interviews conducted with me and prepared for deposit in the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library. A list of the interviews is attached.

This assignment is subject to the following terms and conditions:

- (1) The transcripts shall be available to all researchers.
- (2) The tape recordings shall be available to all researchers.
- (3) I hereby assign to the United States Government all copyright I may have in the interview transcripts and tapes.
- (4) Copies of the transcripts and tape recordings may be provided by the library to researchers upon request.
- (5) Copies of the transcripts and tape recordings may be deposited in or loaned to other institutions.

Claudia Taylor Johnson 6/20/02
Claudia Taylor Johnson Date

Sharon Everett 5-10-2011
Archivist of the United States Date

Assistant Archivist
For Presidential Libraries

Appendix A

Attached to and forming part of the instrument of gift of oral history interviews, executed by Claudia Taylor Johnson, and accepted by the ~~Archivist of the United States~~ on 5-10-2011.

Mrs. Johnson's Oral History Interviews:

**Assistant Archivist
For Presidential Libraries**

May 26, 1975, with Merle Miller
June 25, 1976, with Merle Miller
June 29, 1976, with Merle Miller
January 30, 1977, with Merle Miller
February 14, 1977, with Merle Miller
August 12, 1977, with Michael Gillette
August 13, 1977, with Michael Gillette
August 14, 1977, with Michael Gillette
February 4, 1978, with Michael Gillette
April 1, 1978, with Michael Gillette
August 6, 1978, with Michael Gillette
October 9, 1978, with Michael Gillette
January 23, 1979, with Michael Gillette
January 24, 1979, with Michael Gillette
January 25-26, 1979, with Michael Gillette
February 27-28, 1979, with Michael Gillette
August 19, 1979, with Michael Gillette
September 2-3, 1979, with Michael Gillette
September 9, 1979, with Michael Gillette
November 13, 1979, with Anthony Champagne
January 4-5, 1980, with Michael Gillette
January 29-30, with Michael Gillette
September 20, 1980, with Michael Gillette
September 26-27, 1980, with Michael Gillette
February 6-7, 1981, with Michael Gillette
February 20-21, 1981, with Michael Gillette
August 10, 1981, with Michael Gillette
August 23, 1981, with Michael Gillette
September 5, 1981, with Michael Gillette
November 15, 1981, with Michael Gillette
January 2-3, 1982, with Michael Gillette
January 10, 1982, with Michael Gillette
January 30, 1982, with Michael Gillette
March 15, 1982, with Michael Gillette
March 19-20, 1982, with Michael Gillette
March 22, 1982, with Michael Gillette

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March 29, 1982, with Michael Gillette
August 3-4, 1982, with Michael Gillette
September 4, 1983, with Michael Gillette
December 30, 1984, video and audio interview with Michael Gillette
January 4, 1985, video and audio interview with Michael Gillette
February 23, 1991, with Michael Gillette
March 4, 1991, with W. C. Trueheart
March 8, 1991, with Michael Gillette
August 1994, with Harry Middleton (six interviews)
November 5, 1994, with Harry Middleton
January 23, 1987, with Nancy Smith
August 18, 1987, with Lou Rudolph, Jim Henderson, and John and Sandy Brice
August 19, 1987, with Lou Rudolph, Jim Henderson, and John and Sandy Brice
August 20, 1987, with Lou Rudolph, and John and Sandy Brice
August 1994, with S. Douglass Cater
March 22, 1985, with Louis S. Gomolak
July 16, 1996, with Jan Jarboe Russell
July 17, 1996, with Jan Jarboe Russell