

INTERVIEW V

DATE: April 1, 1978
INTERVIEWEE: LADY BIRD JOHNSON
INTERVIEWER: MICHAEL L. GILLETTE
PLACE: The LBJ Ranch, Stonewall, Texas

Tape 1 of 2

G: I hate to start off with such a mundane topic, but I was going to ask you to describe in a little greater detail the Johnsons' house in San Marcos. Remember, you stopped there on your way down to the King Ranch? You said it was a rather modest house, but do you remember [any details]?

J: It was a modest frame house, Victorian, as I recall. San Marcos was a center where a lot of people who could not manage to get their children into the more expensive schools either sent them there to board, or in some cases moved there themselves for the period of time that the children would go to school.

I remember little about it, except that it was simple, cozy, in a pleasant, quiet neighborhood, close to the school, as I recall. You see, Lyndon I think boarded the entire time that he was there, but by the time Mrs. Johnson began to feel that she just must get the daughters there to school they moved there and stayed I don't know for how many years. But I know they did return to Johnson City, actually, in the late fall of 1934 I think, within a few months after our wedding, or maybe it was 1935.

Johnson -- V -- 2

G: Again now, picking up some loose ends, there is the quotation from one of your letters wondering, "what the deal is," and saying, "I hope it's not politics, because," you say, "I would hate for you to go into politics." Of course it was politics, but why did you feel this way about his going into politics, or the possibility of it? Why were you against it? Do you recall?

J: I grew up in a milieu in which politics was not what you would want your son or your husband to go into, really. I remember in deep East Texas, which is my home, there was a sort of general expression about, "He ought to have the job; he's got eight children. He ought to get elected to that; he hasn't got but one leg." Meaning, of course, that he was a veteran and had fought in some war. It just wasn't regarded as one of the top professions in the life I had lived. I came very soon to change that opinion, but at that time I thought it was too hazardous, uncertain, not the life that I would like to be a part of. As far as what the "deal" was, I don't remember for sure, but there were a number of times when people in the business world would make very interesting sounding offers to Lyndon, and he came quite close to accepting one or perhaps several of them.

G: Can you remember any of these?

J: If I tried hard enough I might. At the moment it doesn't come to me, but it was a well-known name in financial circles. I think it had to do with somewhere in the utilities business, perhaps.

G: Owen Young, I think, had made him an offer.

J: I think that was one of the names I remember. Yes.

G: Was this after you were married, or was this before?

Johnson -- V -- 3

J: I don't really remember, because there were several of them. And then also, there were offers to head agencies. One had to do with the REA [Rural Electrification Administration], and that was somewhere in the early years. I'm not sure whether that's before we went to Congress or after.

G: After, I think. Was he ever offered the position of secretary of the navy, do you know?

J: No. I think I would remember that.

G: I had the impression, too, that at one point Charles Marsh offered to make him a partner or take him in with him in business.

J: Yes, he definitely did, but Lyndon did not want to do it. In fact, he was quite incensed at Charles. We're getting ahead of ourselves a bit, because as far as I remember, that took place several years after we were married. We were down at White Sulphur Springs. We got in the car and drove all the way back to Washington at some ridiculous hour of the night, as I recall, because Lyndon--I just can't quite express it, and so I had better not try to express it at all, but he seemed to think it was rather condescending; or it was somehow mixed up with his job of being a congressman, as though, "Here you are in public service, and you can't make a living out of that. I better fix you up with some kind of money so you can have a backlog." Well, Lyndon was a very independent person and thought he could handle his own backlog or do without it, which really isn't being fair to Charles, because Charles was a most remarkable man, in my opinion. He wasn't about to think he was buying a congressman. He was more thinking he was supporting a talented public servant who could then go on and turn his full energies to public service. Now, if you are the least bit cynical you wouldn't buy that, and perhaps that was Lyndon's attitude

Johnson -- V -- 4

at the time. I think that Charles' intentions would have been quite all right, but Lyndon didn't.

G: Was there also in the very early years an offer, an overture, to be president of the college down there at Corpus, or Kingsville, Texas . . .

J: A&I?

G: Yes.

J: I don't remember. It rings a very faint bell, but I just can't fill it in at all.

G: Any other diversions from politics or alternatives to political life that were considered or offered or weighed in these early years?

J: None come to my mind right now.

G: When do you think you realized yourself that he was going into politics for good, that he was cut out to be a politician?

J: Oddly enough, I think it was perhaps something that L. E. Jones said to me. We had been married I forget how long, I think Lyndon was in the NYA [National Youth Administration]. We still always saw a great deal of the people who had been close to us, and L. E. had been Lyndon's secretary, as you know. We were driving down the street in Austin, and he said something about, "In a few years he'll be in Congress." I just practically ran the car off the road, and said, "What do you mean?" He said, "Well, don't you know? Don't you think he's always heading in that direction?" I had not, which was probably quite stupid of me, but from then on I somehow knew that it was going to happen.

G: What were his ambitions during that first year you were married? Were they political

Johnson -- V -- 5

when he would talk to you about them, or were they getting ahead in business?

J: It was to be the best secretary that a congressman ever had, and to really take care of that Fourteenth District. He loved that Fourteenth District and Corpus and all those counties. I think I told you that one of the first things he asked me to do was to memorize the names of the counties, the county seats in each one, and two or three of the *jefes*, the *alcaldes*, the important men in each community. As we would drive around, from one community to another, he would say, "Now do you remember who we met down there at Beeville?" or Alice, or whatever the name of the town was.

G: Did he have a good faculty for names even then?

J: Quite good. Quite good. It's not just for remembering the names, because every one of them was a figure on his stage with his own problems that his congressman needed to help him solve and his own capabilities of helping the congressman when he needed help.

G: You always hear that that's one of the real gifts of a politician, to be able to remember a name and place it with a face.

J: I think it's really just a matter of concentration, of wanting to do it, and perhaps calling the person's name two or three times in the conversation after you've just met him helps to fix it in your mind.

G: How good at it was he? Was he pretty remarkable at it?

J: He was quite good. He also told a lot of funny jokes about it, too, about, oh, Senator Tom Connally for instance. As the years began to go along and he was getting a bit old he'd take somebody driving his car and they'd stop at a filling station, and the driver was supposed to go in and find out, by whatever way he could, the name of the owner of the

Johnson -- V -- 6

station or the name of the place of the business, wherever they were, [and] come back and tell Senator Connally. Then Senator Connally would go in and he'd say, "Well hello, Bill, how are you? And how are all those three nice children?" All the amusing stories of the ruses by which one can lean upon something.

G: Getting back to the courtship, he sent you a number of books to read. I think one was the *Congressional Cookbook*.

J: Yes.

G: Do you remember any of the others that he sent?

J: No, and how ridiculous it is that I don't. But he was always sending me something in that brief while, candy or books.

G: I guess that he came down again in October, is that right? A brief trip to Texas before--

J: Before we married? Yes. His letters had been growing more and more determined to reach a conclusion. I, as I've mentioned, felt that wisdom and caution and all sorts of things said, "Wait, until you know this person better. He should want to wait until he knows you better. You might not really suit him." So I was in a desperate state of uncertainty as to what to do. The only sure thing was I didn't want him to drop out of my life. *That* I was sure about. But how to keep him a part of my life and not marry him was the hard problem, because he was convinced that if we did not go on and get married, that either my Aunt Effie's need of me and request that we wait, would separate us. Well, he was all his life an impatient person. When he wanted something, he put out every effort to get it, tried with all his might, and then if he couldn't, he did indeed turn away and begin something else. I saw that a number of times, in the Senate race of 1941 and in an

Johnson -- V -- 7

attempt to become a member of the committee on appropriations.

G: Did he come down in October and then go back and then come down again in November, do you remember? You were married in November, but do you remember that?

J: My recollection is that he came down just about Halloween, and that he left Washington. He phoned me almost every day. He left Washington, and I counted the number of days that I thought it would take him to make the trip, three, driving at a sensible pace.

Instead, he drove night and day. He had, I think, Gene Latimer with him, and they did not stop except for gasoline or a hamburger. They didn't stop to sleep or to sit down at a restaurant and have a decent meal. They just got pick-up food, and one would drive for four or five hours and the other would take over and drive. I certainly hope that they got a little sleep, the one who wasn't driving. To my great consternation he drove into Karnack about two days, or certainly a day and a half, before I was expecting him. I cannot remember whether he called me from Marshall or called me, perhaps, from Texarkana. I think maybe he did call me from . . . when he was within an hour or two's drive of home. Oh, it really threw me into a great fluster, because I had not gone to the beauty parlor, as any normal woman would want to do. So I lit out for Marshall to the beauty parlor, flinging orders over my shoulders to our somewhat casual help to finish getting the house clean and get something good for dinner and all the preparations that you would make for having company.

I cannot recall this clearly, but I think vaguely that by the time I got to Marshall, got my hair done and got back home, he had already arrived. I walked in the house, and someone told me that he had already arrived, and I said, "Where is Lyndon?" I remember

Johnson -- V -- 8

the black woman who helped us said, "He's gone." And, oh, my heart went down in my boots. I think he had gone down to the store to see my daddy, a very sensible thing to do when he didn't find me at home. But for a breathless moment I was really filled with consternation.

G: Had he talked to your father at this point about marrying you?

J: Yes. Yes, he had.

G: He had done that on the first trip?

J: I think he had. He certainly did on this [trip]. I think he had talked to my daddy and given him the definite impression that he was very interested. I'm not sure he had been quite as clear as, "I want to marry your daughter." But you will remember that quote that Daddy said, which I have mentioned and [has] been in probably quite a few articles about, "Honey, you've brought home a lot of boys, but I think this time you've brought home a man." But he did talk quite clearly to Daddy about it this time, and to me, convincing me, to my great dismay, that he absolutely was determined to marry me or else to make his departure. His argument went something like this: "If you don't love me enough now, you never will. If we let something stand in our way now, something will separate us."

There are moments that stand out as vividly, with the sharpest clarity, emotions and scenes, but there are also just whole passages that I don't recall exactly the sequence of. But I think it went something like this: I said I just had to go to Alabama to see Aunt Effie and talk it over with her and try to win her understanding and sympathy, if not her wholehearted approval. She was in a hospital in--let's see, was it in Atlanta, Georgia,

Johnson -- V -- 9

perhaps, or Birmingham? I don't remember which one, because from time to time she would find some new doctor or some new source of help. I think perhaps this may have been--well, one or the other. In any case, I did go to Alabama.

G: Was this right away?

J: It was within two or three days.

G: How long did he stay at the Brick House this time?

J: I think he stayed just a couple of days. Then, it may be that we went on down to see Gene [Lasseter] for a couple of days. Then he said he had to go to Corpus Christi to handle some of his boss's business, and I went to Alabama.

It was a very sad, bleak trip to me to Alabama, because Aunt Effie was so unutterably dependent and vulnerable and lost without me. It was just like deliberately hurting a small child. But yet I was much too young and vital and reasonable to be content to give up my whole life to taking care of her. I had to admit she had a lot of good sense on her side. To marry someone you have known two months is a risky business. To marry anybody, anytime, is a risky business.

G: Had she met him yet?

J: No, she hadn't. In fact, she didn't meet him until Christmas, after we had been married six weeks, I guess.

So I went back to Texas feeling very dejected and more confused than ever. There really ensued one of the funniest twenty-four hours that anybody ever lived through.

G: Is there anything else on your conversation with Aunt Effie, though, that you feel is

Johnson -- V -- 10

important? Any of the specifics of it?

J: No, I can't remember anything. I know she kept on sort of holding out the idea that maybe I might find somebody just a little later on that was everything I wanted and needed, and that no telling what bright horizons might open up because I was only twenty-one. As a matter of fact, I was going to be twenty-two in a few months, so I was not all that young.

G: Did you see any of your other relatives while you were up that way either?

J: Inevitably some of them, because there were so many, but I don't remember.

G: I think I read somewhere that you took a picture of the President with you to show your aunt. Do you recall doing this?

J: Oh, without a doubt, I certainly did. I remember my cousin Elaine looked at it and said, "Oh, he's a regular Fisher Boy" or something like that. I forget the name she used. But there was an artist at that time who drew pictures of handsome young men, and they appeared in all the magazine illustrations. It was just as well known as a Gibson Girl, let us say, in another period. It was an extremely handsome picture. I have it and still love it.

G: In your conversation with Aunt Effie did you conclude it by saying that you were going to go ahead and marry him, or did you say that you'd consider it? Did you tell her definitely that you'd made up your mind? What was the bottom line on that?

J: No, I couldn't tell her definitely that I had, because I hadn't really. I'm sure, in summary, she must have felt that the chances were I would marry him, because I just couldn't bear the thought of him suddenly dropping out of my life, and I, by that time, was convinced

Johnson -- V -- 11

that he would.

So I went back, and once more he arrived at the Brick House. This time he just spent one night. I had a suitcase full of clothes that had just traveled this journey to Alabama, and for some reason which I can't quite understand there was a pair of riding boots and a whole lot of ridiculous gear like that in them. He said, "There's no reason in the world why we just don't go on and get married tomorrow." I said, "Well, we said, you know, that we were going to have Welly Hopkins for best man, and I was going to think about who I would like to have in my attendance. We just don't have time. We haven't gotten out any invitations. We just couldn't. I don't have a dress." He said, "We'll stop in Marshall and you can get something." It was really hilarious.

I had bought exactly two new fall dresses, one of which was a little gray plaid dress and jacket, as I recall, with a little stripe of yellow in it, which I thought was quite smart and perky. The other was a sort of a violet-colored dress, silk, with a bunch of artificial flowers at--was it the waist or the shoulder? In any case, it was what was called in those days an afternoon dress. So I packed those, together with what was already in my suitcase, which was a ridiculous assemblage. We stopped in Marshall, and while Lyndon was perhaps going to the doctor to get a blood test or something like that, I went into a shop and bought a beautiful negligee.

I had not at this time firmly made up my mind. We were heading for Austin or San Antonio. I would either get off at Austin, visit Gene, just say goodbye forever, or I would go on to San Antonio. As we talked, as we drove down the road, he was saying, "But you would have Cecille in your wedding anyway. She lives in San Antonio. That

Johnson -- V -- 12

would just be fine. I have lots of good friends there. If you want to get married in the church, why, that's what we'll do. I'll phone up Dan Quill and arrange to get the license." So that is what he did, to get the license and also a ring. I think perhaps I have told you that earlier when we got engaged, some two or three weeks earlier, we had gone in Carl Meyer's jewelry store in Austin and selected an engagement ring, a very small, dainty, pretty engagement ring which had a matching wedding band. He said when we got to Austin, "I'll stop and get the matching wedding ring." But somehow or another I couldn't bear to stop in Austin.

G: Why?

J: Well, Austin was my past. Austin was all of my life before then, and I just practically had to close my eyes as we went through.

G: Were you afraid that you'd change your mind?

J: Yes, I guess that was it.

G: We didn't talk about the engagement ring in the earlier tapes. Was this when he was down in October, or was this the first time you met him--

J: I think this was when he arrived at the Ranch [Brick House] on October 31, or thereabouts, and spent one or two nights, and then we drove on down to Austin.

G: Oh, I see.

J: I stayed a day or two with Gene. He then went to Corpus Christi, as I recall, and I went to Alabama to visit Aunt Effie. In that interlude there, we had proceeded as far as becoming engaged and getting an engagement ring.

G: That was a watershed there that I didn't know about. Why didn't you get married in

Johnson -- V -- 13

Marshall, or in East Texas, closer to your home?

J: That does seem strange, doesn't it? I suppose, actually, it was my inconclusiveness as to whether I was going to get married at all or not. That was one reason, and then, frankly, I can't answer it very well, except that I had thought of having Cecille in my wedding all along. San Antonio, old St. Marks, all of those things appealed to me. There was a certain romantic quality about San Antonio. I had gone there on a lot of happy weekends.

G: Was this dilemma clear to him when you were driving, that you were either going to get out in Austin or [go to San Antonio]?

J: I think it was clear to him, and he was really talking me out of it for three hundred and fifty miles, so to speak.

(Interruption)

G: In the back of your minds there was also a planned wedding with Welly Hopkins?

J: Oh, yes, of course. We had talked a lot about it, who we would have, where it would be, who all we would invite.

G: Where was it going to be? Would this have been in San Antonio also--

J: No. We had really not firmly said. I suppose I probably thought, when it was going to be a planned wedding with proper invitations and all that, that it would naturally be either in my home or close by. But I really had no closeness to a church in Marshall. I did have a closeness to St. David's in Austin. But somehow St. David's was--the whole city of Austin, encompassed all my past, and somehow this was such a break with my past, that I for some strange reason didn't want to be married there. So on this ridiculous ride Lyndon stopped a few times to make phone calls to Dan Quill about the ring and the

Johnson -- V -- 14

Episcopal church and the Episcopal minister, with whom incidentally they seemed to have had quite a time convincing him that we weren't a couple of people out of our minds, getting married on such short notice. He was not quite convinced that he wanted to be a party to it, but in the end he was. He was an extremely delightful man, Reverend [Arthur] McKinstry. I must sometime or another have made a call to Cecille because she showed up down at the hotel shortly after I arrived. I was getting dressed and talking a mile a minute, still uncertain whether it would be wisest to jump out the window or go on and get married.

G: Did she encourage you to marry him?

J: Oh, she was very excited about it. She thought it was a great lark. Yes, I would say she did encourage me.

G: Is there anyone else that had prior knowledge of the event? Did you call any of your other friends just to tell them that you were going to get married?

J: No, I don't believe a soul. We sent my daddy a wire and Lyndon's mother a wire the next morning. I don't think we told anybody, not even Gene, before the wedding. I think we must have sent Gene a wire, too, because she had been so much a party to it.

We went over to St. Mark's. I must say, by the time the ceremony started I was quite calm, and it was Lyndon who was holding on tight to--I think he was nervous and uncertain at the very moment of the ceremony.

G: Was there anything that he said that indicated this?

J: No, no. If you have any antennae at all, you can sense when another person is not quite assured.

Johnson -- V -- 15

G: Is there anything else on the trip that is noteworthy or humorous or interesting, that you recall? It was a long trip, I guess.

J: Yes, it was. It was an all-day trip practically, because it's about three hundred or perhaps three hundred and fifty miles. Although Lyndon was a very fast driver, cars in those days were not as powerful as they are now. I remember walking back across that lovely little park from St. Mark's after the ceremony, and several of Lyndon's friends were there. I feel sure that Maury [Maverick]'s secretary, Malcolm Bardwell, must have been there. I know, of course, Mike [Dan] Quill was, and there was a lawyer who was a great friend of Lyndon's. I must supply this name to you.

G: Henry Hirshberg?

J: Henry Hirshberg.

G: Was his wife there also?

J: I think she must have been.

G: Did he stand up with the President, Hirshberg, do you recall, as sort of a best man?

J: I really just don't recall.

G: Did you have anyone else there besides Cecille?

J: Just Cecille.

G: So Malcolm Bardwell, Dan Quill, the Hirshbergs, and Cecille Marshall were about it. Was there anyone else?

J: That's all that I can remember. Very likely there were some more of Lyndon's friends.

At any rate, we went on back afterwards, and I believe it was Henry Hirshberg who had a pleasant little supper for us on the roof of the St. Anthony. Does that sound

Johnson -- V -- 16

[right]? Anyhow, whatever the pleasant dining place in the St. Anthony was in 1934.

The conversation was very much centering on Maury Maverick, not on us. (Laughter)

Maury at that moment was being operated [on] at Mayo's for some very severe troubles.

They were all great friends of Maury's, and they had lots of concern for him. They had

all helped him in his campaigns, and they didn't want their hero to go down. They

wanted to see him come back strong, and this was a serious operation. So they were

getting bulletins on the phone once or twice during the evening on how he was doing.

G: Did they talk politics in general, too?

J: I don't think we quite talked politics. That's the main thing I remember is about Maury.

G: Was there a reception or party before the wedding also?

J: No, I don't believe so.

G: You went straight to the church?

J: Yes, straight to the church. I think about seven o'clock, as I recall.

G: I've heard the story that you really made up your mind walking up the steps, that it was that much of a question of the decision not having been made up before. Is that right?

J: No, no, no. I don't think that's quite so. I think by that time it all seemed inevitable. I can't imagine myself fleeing from the church door. I think that I committed myself that far; that that was it.

So we went on to Mexico on our honeymoon, which lasted as long as our money lasted. As I recall, it was about ten or twelve days, ten days more than likely. We went in Lyndon's car, I think, to Saltillo, and I remember the hotel there. It was so charming, and had a corner fireplace and was very picturesque. Oh and yes, we certainly stopped

Johnson -- V -- 17

one night in, oh, the city that makes all the glass, and also steel and beer. It's now the industrial city of Mexico--Monterrey, which is not the most romantic of cities of Mexico, but which has a lovely old hotel called the Ancira [Gran Hotel Ancira]. I remember looking out the window at a perfect view of the cathedral. I think my frequently expressed taste for the picturesque and the scenic, well, Lyndon certainly got a dose of it in those ten days. But he was very anxious to show me everything that *was* picturesque and scenic. It was a long time before he did that much sightseeing again.

G: He and Welly Hopkins had been to Mexico earlier, is that right?

J: I don't know, but I expect they had.

G: But that doesn't at all sound characteristic of him to take off for ten days and just [sightsee], even on a honeymoon.

J: No. No. I really think that all of his friends were just shocked. They thought he'd be back in about three. It may have been only a week. He told me when he left how much money he had, and we just had enough to get home comfortably. We stayed in lots of lovely hotels. We did a lot of sightseeing. We even went to see the excavations in Mexico City, which at that time were not as extensive as they are now--the pyramids, you know.

G: Was he interested in that? Did that interest him?

J: I don't think it interested him, but it interested him to make me happy and to have me receive from him something that I thought was wonderful. He always loved giving people gifts that they wouldn't get otherwise or that pleased them greatly. We went to the gardens of Xochimilco, which I do not know whether they are still there or not. He

Johnson -- V -- 18

bought me loads of flowers, just arms full. We rode around in those ridiculous little low boats, and we had some pictures made that are horrible to look at. We are both grinning broadly. I'm sure you must have seen those pictures. I should have thrown away the negatives.

G: Did you have any regrets at that point, or did you feel that you'd made the right decision?

J: Well, you know, it's a chancy thing. That's a day-to-day business. But, no, I don't think I did.

G: I mean, did those first weeks together seem to confirm the decision and make you feel . . . ?

J: Well, I must say my sense of excitement mounted and certainly didn't decline. I just found it more interesting as we went along. I suppose it takes a longer time to confirm a judgment that's supposed to last a lifetime. I remember one of the things I did when I was unsure, I just got out the Episcopal wedding service and read it through from beginning to end, and when I got to that line, "forever and ever till death do you part," that was when I really got so unsure. That was the big hangup in the few weeks before. Because even at twenty-one years old I had seen many changes in myself, and I was not the same person that I was at sixteen. I didn't know how much more I might change in the next five or ten years or, indeed, how much he might change.

G: Whose idea was it to go to Mexico, do you recall?

J: It was his, and I immediately jumped at the idea.

G: Was this part of his persuasion to get married?

J: Yes, I think it was. It certainly didn't weigh heavily in the scale, but at any rate it was a

Johnson -- V -- 19

very enticing thought.

Tape 2 of 2

G: Did you go directly to Washington from Mexico, or did you stop back by Karnack?

J: No. This, you see, was the period when Congress is out of session, and we went to Corpus Christi. But by that time it was about December 1. It seems to me we did go to either Lyndon's house or mine for Thanksgiving, and then we went to Corpus Christi.

G: Was his mother, do you think, upset by the [marriage]?

J: Yes she was, and who wouldn't be? She was indeed, but she wrote him a lovely letter, which you have seen I'm sure. Because to her, marriage really was eternal, and she thought, "Well, now what I must do is to make the best of it, and win this young woman, and try to help her make the happiest life possible for my beloved son." So from then on, [there] was no backward looking for her. We soon became just the greatest friends.

G: How did the rest of the family receive you, say, at Thanksgiving or immediately?

J: I think the girls were not all that big on the idea. They were sort of looking at me from a distance. Mr. Johnson, Lyndon's father, was just terribly sweet and nice about it. I was fond of him as I was of Mrs. Johnson, although I was much more understanding, sympathetic, and like, if you will, Mrs. Johnson, than Mr. Johnson.

G: Where did you live in Corpus?

J: We lived in a hotel, thinking that when we would come back for a longer stay we would do something else, but that was only going to be three or four weeks. I remember we went to a few nightclubs and we went out with Lyndon's friends there. He made me better acquainted with the district. That was when he began to try to teach me all these

Johnson -- V -- 20

leading figures in each community.

G: Do you remember the hotel that you lived at?

J: I think it was called the Nixon. It was the old Driscoll Hotel, it seems to me, that we stayed in when we made our brief trip down there to meet his boss. But I believe we lived in--frankly, I don't know for sure, but that was probably the Nixon Hotel.

G: I'll check. So did you go up to Washington together when the next session of Congress opened?

J: Yes, we went back to the Brick House for Christmas. There we met Aunt Effie and that of course was a straining time. She was aloof and withdrawn and so sad. Vulnerable I guess is the very best word for her. Lyndon really put himself out to win her.

G: Did he?

J: He really went all out. My father, I must say, was sort of impatient. He didn't think that she had a right to dominate my life. He wasn't as understanding of her as he might have been. Of course, it was exciting to show Dorris [Powell] my new husband. In fact, Dorris had been tremendously helpful to us all along. She had sent out the wedding invitations [announcements], had them made and addressed them. I would be on the phone, of course, giving her the list.

I remember somewhere along the way Lyndon and I on a trip through San Antonio stopped at a jewelry store, a great big, handsome jewelry store that's still right there in downtown San Antonio, and went in and selected silver. Once more, that was one of those rush, rush things which seemed to fill up my life from the moment I met him, because I would no doubt have taken several weeks to select my silver and would have

Johnson -- V -- 21

researched it and looked through all sorts of magazines and asked all my friends. He said, "Let's run in here and choose some silver, because Mr. Sam Fore says he wants to give me X number of spoons or forks or knives or whatever. So-and-so wants to give you some, and so and so wants to give you some. Go in there and select it." He thought I could do it in about five minutes.

G: Did you?

J: I was appalled at the idea, but I did go in. Yes, I finally wound up by eventually selecting some, although I really didn't think that was the way to go about it.

G: Were there any wedding presents that were particularly memorable or significant that you recall?

J: Well, there were quite a number of them for such a hurried wedding. But we did send out the proper announcements, and so they did begin to come in. I can still find some of them. I remember there was a set of after dinner coffee cups from a boy, just a real friend, not a beau. I used them and used them throughout the years until finally there was just one left that wasn't broken. So then I put it up. And the same with some handsome crystal glasses that one of my real beaus did give me. When there was just one of those left, I put it up. I'm afraid it is surrendered to about fifteen moves, but the cup I still have. Mrs. Johnson--yes, there was one thing that is memorable--she gave us a silver tray, and I'm sure that in their circumstances it was a gift that they could hardly afford. It was lovely, and I still have it.

G: Did you worry financially at this point?

J: No, I don't remember ever worrying financially, really. I knew Daddy would come to my

Johnson -- V -- 22

rescue if I needed him to, and also I very early got the feeling that somehow or another Lyndon would manage. He was very determined that I should learn all about his finances. In fact, he was an extremely open person, far more open than I was. He would say, "We've got-- " it seems like he made \$267.00 a month. That does seem very small, doesn't it? I believe maybe he got a raise to \$325.00. I'm sure it would be possible to check that, but it does seem quite small. He said, "Every month I think we ought to buy a bond." So we did. I think we began probably the month after we got married, December, and we bought a bond every month. It was just a twenty-five dollar bond, cost us \$18.50. But nevertheless, that was a chunk out of that, 5 per cent I guess, wouldn't it be?

He always had insurance, and he always told me just what his insurance was and who it was made out to. I told him that he didn't need to get any more for me. He had it made out to his mother. I told him that was just the way it ought to be and that was fine, and he didn't need to get any for me. I forget how that ended. I don't know whether he did insist on getting some made out to me or not.

G: Did you keep the budget, or did he?

J: I certainly did. Those who knew me now would be surprised at how very knowledgeable and organized I was about where every penny I spent went. I had a very clear picture of how much for groceries and utilities and rent. Clothes were something that I always handled myself, just out of little bits of income, at least my own clothes. If I wanted something, I always felt that I could manage that. My daddy gave me a car. Rather, I'd had a car. I never had been without one since I was thirteen, so I just said I'd like to take it up to Washington. Somehow or another we got it up there, I forget how. I'm sure that

Johnson -- V -- 23

L. E. or Gene must have helped us drive.

G: Do you remember the trip to Washington, whether you took the car or a train the first time you went with him?

J: We drove I'm almost sure. Because the first many, many years of our married life we drove, and then finally, as Lyndon began to get busier and busier, I would drive and maybe a secretary would go with me. He would fly down.

G: When you moved to Washington, where did you set up house?

J: Oh, in the most ridiculous little apartment! Malcolm Bardwell, as I recall, had done a little looking for us ahead of time and had had several places to recommend. Whether we took one, I'm not sure. We took one on Kalorama Road in any case. I think it was 1910 Kalorama Road. One side of Kalorama is a very elegant place; it's where the French Embassy and lots of the great old homes of Washington are. The other side is quite a different story. It was perfectly respectable but very middle class, and I'm sure we were surrounded by secretaries and civil servants and people of moderate means. It had a living room with a couch that made down into a bed and a tiny little porch off of it, a little screened porch, which is about three times as big as this couch I'm sitting on, then a wee little kitchen and a comfortable sized bedroom.

It looks like a Marx Brothers comedy to remember the number of people we sometimes had staying with us in that apartment. Because Lyndon, I early learned, was very close to staff, family, lots of friends, just thought nothing of inviting them to come and stay with us, and the same had always been true of me. I immediately began to write Aunt Effie and my various Alabama kinfolks that they must come see us in Washington,

Johnson -- V -- 24

and see some of the great sights. Actually, I remember one time, an unbelievable time, when Aunt Effie was there and Uncle George was there at the same time--Lyndon's Uncle George--and a secretary living with us. I just cannot remember how we did it all. We moved out of the room and gave that to Aunt Effie, and I'm sure if there was any other girl visiting at any time that she used the other twin bed. Lyndon and I slept on that roll-down sofa bed, and I'm sure Uncle George must have slept on the little screened porch. It was quite a chummy household, and there was just one bath.

I did all the cooking and cleaning. I suppose it was two or three years before I began to have help. But I learned to cook. I never had cooked hardly anything, but I soon discovered that if you could read and had a sense of organization you could learn to cook. I'm sure I was never a talented cook, but I put fairly good meals on the table and really took pleasure in doing it, although I never for a moment thought I was going to make a life's career out of that. I was just doing it until we had a more expansive household and more means.

G: Was this the Kennedy-Warren place?

J: No, the Kennedy-Warren--just a moment, now I am confused, I must say, because we did live at the Kennedy-Warren. Could that have been the very first one?

G: I think maybe you lived there and then moved to Kalorama Road as a more permanent [home]. I don't know. I had heard that the Kennedy-Warren, that as soon as you came to Washington that you stayed there for at least a short time.

J: We did indeed. Isn't that something? Now I am confused about where my first home in Washington was. Kalorama Road was certainly our first home for a period of six or eight

Johnson -- V -- 25

months, I mean for any protracted period. I do think that we stayed at the Kennedy-Warren when we were first elected.

G: I see, okay.

J: That is it. That is it.

G: Because you moved back to Texas in July of 1935; so you weren't there too long.

J: We were there at Kalorama Road from right before New Year's. I think we must have reached Washington perhaps the twenty-eighth or twenty-ninth, thirtieth of December, and we were there until in the middle or late late July, sometime in July, I wanted to go home and spend two weeks with Daddy. I think I've probably told you this. But while I was there with Daddy I got this call from Lyndon, and I could tell by the decibels in his voice that something--the firecrackers were shooting off--exciting was happening. He said, "How would you like to live in Austin?" which was just like asking, "How would you like to go to heaven?" I said, "I'd love it." He said, "I've been offered a job as head of the National Youth Administration." Then he went on to describe all about it. I could tell that he was excited about it and wanted to take it. I think that he just thought that what he could learn and do and achieve in Mr. [Richard] Kleberg's office had already been done. He had gotten all out of that job that he could.

G: What did he say about the NYA job, do you remember at this point, on the phone?

J: I guess he described what they would do to keep young men and women in college by giving them small jobs, or those that were not destined to go to college by giving them some training that would enable them to get a job, whether it was mechanics or painting or cooking.

Johnson -- V -- 26

G: Did he indicate how he had been selected?

J: Yes.

G: Who helped him?

J: He said that Maury Maverick had talked either to President Roosevelt himself or to Harry Hopkins, and recommended Lyndon. I think several other people had also been recommended, by others. I think it was a little uncertain at first who would get it.

G: My impression is that someone else had already been pretty much named, someone from East Texas in fact, and that he sort of got a negative recommendation and at the same time Maury Maverick and others perhaps were touting the President. Had you ever heard that story? Does that sound [right]?

J: I do know that somebody else was recommended, but now, who it was I don't know, and how close they came to getting it, I don't know.

G: Was this at all related to, say, the strife that was going on between the President and Mrs. Kleberg at this point?

J: I'm sure it was in a way because that was a disruptive, abrasive sort of a situation for Lyndon. He regretted it so much because he had begun feeling so much admiration and affection for Mrs. Kleberg as well as for the Congressman. He never lost it for the Congressman, but Mrs. Kleberg really did come to have a feeling that Lyndon was a part of her husband's--leading her husband astray, helping him in having affairs with other women, which I expect were nonexistent. But anyhow, she had an exceeding jealousy of her husband in which Lyndon played some kind of a part. Also, Lyndon had the unhappy job of having to pay the bills for the family. The money was dispensed by Mr. Bob

Johnson -- V -- 27

[Kleberg], who always ran the family business with a pretty iron hand. The bills would stack up and stack up and stack up, and Lyndon would call or write Mr. Bob and say, "We've just got to pay these, Mr. Bob." He'd say, "But I just sent X dollars three months ago. What's happened to that?" Anyhow, he would try to hold them down. Lyndon would do his best to appease the members of the family, all of whom had expensive tastes, and write the checks, dole them out as well as he could. He did get tired of being the man in the middle.

G: I gather that there were some demands made on his time, too, to see that the daughter got here or there and to, you know, pick so and so up at the station or some things that were not at all related to his job as secretary.

J: Well, I daresay there were, but I also don't think he would ever have minded those. Because part of his own theory of the people that worked for him is that he wanted them to be smart enough to outthink him and willing enough to carry his suitcase. So I don't think he would have minded any of that.

G: Do you think he would have quit even if the NYA job hadn't come up?

J: I think he probably would have, because all of his life he learned as much as he could out of a job and then he went on to the next one. He had been in that one what was it, four years, something like that?

G: What I'm really asking is how trying was this time for him when you did have this situation there?

J: Yes, I think it was quite trying, and it made him sad because it was frustrating. He didn't think he deserved to have her think that of him, and he couldn't change it. But Mr.

Johnson -- V -- 28

Kleberg couldn't have been more affectionate, treating him like a son, and took his recommendation when he left to give his brother the job. Sam Houston did take the job afterward.

G: There was one interpretation that Mrs. Kleberg, or Mamie Kleberg, had told the Congressman that the President was considering running against him at some future time and that it was a good idea not to have him around for this reason, that he was politically ambitious. Had you ever heard that theory?

J: Never had heard it, and it makes me sad to think that she might have thought that, because never, never, never in the world would he have done that unless Mr. Kleberg had retired. However, when he did finally run for Congress in a different district, they did not support him, and that was one of the saddest things that had happened to me up to that time.

But to get back to that period in Washington, I cannot remember a lot of precise things about it. I remember a lot of little vignettes. I remember Lyndon even then would come home rather late for dinner, but I'm sure earlier than in the succeeding years. I'd be getting dinner ready and looking out the one little window in that kitchen, and all of a sudden I'd see his car come into the sort of back driveway or parking lot which was provided for a few of the tenants. He would park right underneath the window and get out and sort of wave at me, just a few feet apart, right out that window. That was always an exciting moment. Things picked up from then on.

It was my first exposure to snow, to lots of snow that is, because snow in East Texas was always just a big event and you got the camera and ran out. But in

Johnson -- V -- 29

Washington it would stay on the ground for weeks and weeks, and all of the trees would be heavy-laden with it. When it was fresh, it was just absolutely fascinating to me to get out and walk all over that part of town. I would do it just for fun, just to see how every bush and tree in Rock Creek Park and all the homes, how they looked in their mantles of snow. There was a song at that time that was very popular called, "Walking in a Winter Wonderland," and to this day if I hear that song that evokes that feeling and I am about twenty-two again and walking in a winter wonderland.

G: I have a note here that says your first dinner guests were the Maury Mavericks.

J: Yes, they were. I had baked ham and lemon pie, as I recall. They were both darlings, especially Terrell. I still see her, and she has fared so well with time.

G: Did it take some time for you to get used to Maury Maverick?

J: No, I liked him fine from the beginning, because no need of me ever getting mad at anything he said because it really didn't matter to me. I found him amusing, and, you know, you will forgive people a lot for being amusing.

G: How did he and your husband get along? Were they friendly?

J: Just fine. Just fine. They were great friends, and I think they understood each other very well. At the same time, Lyndon would get out of patience with him sometimes.

G: Are you thinking of something in particular here?

J: Well, he thought he would just ask for more trouble than he had to. To have high idealistic goals was something that Lyndon thoroughly agreed with, but you didn't have to insult everybody along the way getting there. But on balance they were great friends.

G: Politically at this point, let's say that first year or so, could you see any difference

Johnson -- V -- 30

between them philosophically, not, let's say, in their methods, but in terms of what they believed?

J: No, philosophically I didn't see any difference in them. I think Lyndon was more practical and Maury more intellectual or theoretical, if you might call it that. Yet they were both quite earthy people.

G: I guess the Bill Whites were in your circle of friends, too.

J: The very first house that I went to.

G: Is that right?

J: I think. He was at that time married to a beautiful woman named Irene, and they lived in a picturesque house in Alexandria, Virginia. It seemed to me that we probably went there on New Year's Eve. From that night sprang a long-time family joke. I was the butt of the joke, but I didn't really get mad at it. Newspaper people were fairly heavy drinkers, and at this New Year's Eve party there was quite a lot of drinking going on and it was cheap whiskey. I had several drinks of it and it really made me sick, so that I got up and began my career in Washington the next day not in the best of condition. Lyndon just teased me and laughed about it for years and years and years, and also teased Bill. He was a natural-born tease.

G: I've heard that Bill White was the only one that called him Lyn. Is that right?

J: Yes, I think so. I don't remember anybody else calling him that. The boys called him--

G: Did he do that for any length of time?

J: No, just a personal . . . Let's see, Bob Jackson and Arthur Perry were two of the Dodge Hotel gang, young men who used to live in the basement of the Dodge Hotel in very

Johnson -- V -- 31

cheap rooms and worked either on the Hill as secretaries to congressmen or senators or else [in the] newspaper world.

G: Do you remember the first time you met Welly Hopkins?

J: I met Welly and Alice in Texas before we married. At that time he was still, I think, in the state senate. It was a good bit later, several years later, that he went to Washington to take that very controversial job working for [the] United Mine Workers, right in under and close association with John L. Lewis.

G: That must have generated some interesting discussions.

J: Oh, it did. We rode and rode and talked about it all day long one Sunday. Lyndon could foresee he was cutting a lot of Texas ties, asking for a lot of controversy. But of course it meant expert use of his ability as a lawyer, and it meant security and a good salary.

G: Had you begun during these early months in Washington to visit historic places, or was this something you did later on?

J: I am pretty sure I had. Somewhere I came across a letter that I wrote Cecille. I think perhaps she gave it back to me, or showed it to me, and I was talking about all these places I had been and how fascinating it was and how she must come up and see them. I early began to have visitors, as I've mentioned to you, Uncle George. I took him to every historic spot anywhere around because he was a teacher of American history, a *marvelous* old gentleman. I'm glad I knew him for the few years that I did because he died at an early age with heart [trouble].

G: What was he like?

J: Very professorial. He was a natural-born teacher, a most generous and loving family

Johnson -- V -- 32

member, spent everything he ever made on a widowed sister and her child and his nephew, Lyndon. He just practically gave him all the money he had when he ran for Congress. Lyndon used to laugh and say that when he was boarding with Uncle George and Aunt Jessie and teaching school in Houston, that when school would let out and he would start home, he would stop by the ice cream stand and buy an ice cream cone. He loved something sweet all his life. Uncle George would look at him, frowning and saying, "Son, you never will get ahead throwing away your money like that." (Laughter)

G: Did Uncle George talk about that year in Houston?

J: Talk to me about it?

G: Yes, did he give any insight into the President while he had been a teacher or during that period?

J: If he did, I wasn't wise enough to take it in. He would have been a marvelous source, because he was wise and able within the horizon of teaching. But I didn't. I do remember one thing about Lyndon's teaching, is that he carried in his wallet, for years and years and years until it literally wore out, a little piece of paper signed by the head of the school system that said he was on a leave of absence, and that they would welcome him back at any time.

G: I never heard that.

J: Years ago I could have rattled off the name of that school--whatever he was--superintendent or whatever. I can't now.

G: Did he ever talk about Uncle George at all?

J: Oh, yes. Lyndon, you mean? Oh, yes. He talked about him with love and admiration

Johnson -- V -- 33

and also with impatience about him not wanting him to spend any money at all on little fun things. For instance, Uncle George had saved and saved, and he was finally going to go off on a trip somewhere. Other members of the family would say that the day that he left Lyndon came in from school and said, "Well, is he gone?" They said, "Oh, yes, he's gone. He really left about an hour ago." And Lyndon said he was going out and buy I forget what, but let's say a banana split or some great big treat.

G: I guess, really, he must have been his closest relative aside from the immediate family. Is that right?

J: Of somebody that he could talk to and whose advise he valued, yes, he was very close to Lyndon.

G: Did they get along well together in Washington when Uncle George was staying there?

J: Oh, sure. He was just up there for a visit for two or three weeks. We were just delighted to have him, and he was great fun. I remember I went back driving the car with my Aunt Effie and Uncle George. Uncle George wanted to read every single Civil War marker along the road, and there are lots of them between Washington and Texas. Oh, that pleased Aunt Effie to beat the band. She just liked to hear it all. She was never more entertained. I laughed and laughed, being chauffeur to these [two].

G: Wasn't that something? Who else were in your circle during that first stay in Washington? Is there anybody else that you were particularly close to or that would come by? Was Senator [Alvin] Wirtz? Do you remember when you first met him?

J: No. He was not there until considerably later.

G: I know he didn't live there, but did he come up and have dinner with you or anything like

Johnson -- V -- 34

that?

J: No, he did not. I'm sure he didn't.

There were a number of people. I remember Lyndon introduced me to one of his old girl friends that he had told me a lot about. Because, indeed, he did tell me all sorts of things about his own past: the people he'd gone with, the achievements he'd made, the failures, the embarrassments, the losses, every last thing about his financial life. This young woman was the daughter of a Supreme Court judge in New York, I think. She had apparently taught him a lot, and they had been real intellectual--she sharpened him up. Not that it was a purely platonic relationship, I think they were both quite fond of each other. He always had a very reasonable gratitude for people who helped educate him, and there were a number along the way.

G: You were talking about the party that Bill White had. I was just wondering if you remember any parties that you would have for journalists. Would you ever have the rabble over to your place?

J: It was pretty small for having parties. Mostly we would go to places like the Texas State Society once a month, eat, drink, and dance, and meet a lot of folks. I remember in the summer--but it must have been, could it have been that first summer? At any rate, going to a place out on the beach at Maryland, one of these long, rambling, frame hotels with a porch and rocking chairs and the water right there handy and going in swimming. The Bob Jacksons were along. I'm trying to think whether Bob was married at that time. I think he was. Helen Jackson was his wife, and I still see her, and Arthur Perry and Kay, his wife.

Johnson -- V -- 35

G: Did you adapt to living in Washington easily?

J: Oh, quite easily.

G: Did you enjoy it?

J: I enjoyed it tremendously from the first day I arrived. I never did feel like it was forever home, but it was a great adventure while it lasted. First and last we certainly lived in a lot of apartments there. Although it's quite true, now I'm firm that it was Kalorama Road which was our first home.

Can I get you any more lemonade?

(Interruption)

G: This has really been a splendid session.

[End of Tape 2 of 2 and Interview V]

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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

Patricia [Signature]
by Patricia [Signature]
Sharon Swett 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

CTJ Appendix A -- 2

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