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INTERVIEWEE: LADY BIRD JOHNSON

INTERVIEWER: MICHAEL L. GILLETTE

PLACE: LBJ Ranch, Stonewall, Texas

Tape 1 of 2

J: The winter and spring of 1950 began a new thing in my life and that is carpooling. Lynda, at six, needed to go to Ben Murch School, and although it wasn't far, still she did have to cross Connecticut Avenue. So until she was bigger, for several years, I would carpool. There was a little boy who lived behind us, and then there were a couple of girls on Ellicott, and I would pick them up in the morning and bring them back, and other mothers would take turns.

When we first moved into that house, in the fall of 1942, it was absolute wilderness behind, trees, lots of wildlife, rabbits would come in and eat up our garden, and so it remained because of the war. During that time nobody built anything and for several years after they couldn't get the materials. But by 1950, I think, houses were already going up back there. It was one of those houses that the little boy lived that became her playmate and was a part of the carpool.

Lyndon went to talk to the school superintendents in Atlantic City. The thread of his interest in school teachers was a continuous one, from Cotulla on through to the end

of his life. The thread of the University of Texas with me was continuous. Every March the second, wherever they are, former students of the University of Texas gather and salute the University and talk about "Remember when" and sing "The Eyes of Texas Are Upon You," and usually have somebody from the University to come and tell them about the progress and the greatness of the University.

Lynda Bird, at that time six years old, about six, looked very much like her father, was growing quite tall. I had her hair cut in a Dutch bob. I can't say that it was a most becoming possible hairdo. In fact, I can't look back with pride on the way I dressed my children, and they look back with laughter and chagrin and outdo themselves in dressing their own little girls.

G: Were these dress styles that they had, were they their own ideas? For example, the haircut, was this--?

J: No. Actually part happenstance I suppose. I would just take her to the beauty parlor and we would emerge with something, and that's what it was for quite several years. They had a number of look-alike dresses. Luci was very pretty and amenable and gentle. She was like a sweet little lamb or kitten for the first five years or so of her life.

G: Was the President interested in Lynda's education when she first started out to school? Can you recall whether he actively concerned himself with what the teachers were like, what the school was like, how she did her homework and things like that?

J: No, I can't, and that was his loss, which he often repeated very much, that all credit was due to me for raising the girls. That's not so, but the compelling nature of his job did mean that he spent very little time with them, although when I read his letters to his

mother and on various occasions, I see that he was aware of so much about them.

Once or twice, well, probably once a year would fall my lot to take the leadership in putting on a Texas ladies luncheon. I think the delegation was at that time twenty-one. We are some, what, twenty-eight now? That meant deciding where to have it, what the menu was, phoning everybody, keeping track of how many were coming and their guests and so forth, and sort of priding ourselves on the choice of the place or feeling we might have done better. If you had any managing instincts at all, and I was not a natural leader, but once I took a job, I think I did it with reasonable organization. At any case, I did my share in that and we were a very cohesive lot, we women of the Texas delegation.

G: Do you think the increased status that you had being a senator, as opposed to a congressman, also conferred an increased status on you as the wife?

J: Oh, it did in a way. But really, the one that we considered our unnamed and unelected dean, so to speak, was likely to be the one with the longest tenure. So Mrs. Wright Patman for many years was that one.

The whole delegation, men and women, would get together socially for cocktails or dinner, and the women just at lunchtime. First and last we'd go to practically every one of our houses. In the spring we went to cocktails at the Fritz Lanhams'. He was always the one who would read on March the second this marvelous letter from [William Barrett] Travis, and he would read it in such a voice that you would be practically tearful and ready to grab up your own musket and go forth to fight when he finished. We'd go to Omar Burleson's. He was one you'd always call on to give the prayer at a breakfast. He was very, very gentlemanly and sort of--well, very nice sweet man. His birthday was the

same as Lynda Bird's. He never lost an opportunity to send her a wire on the nineteenth of March and say happy birthday to her. But I suppose it was probably to the Worleys' that we went most often to dinner and certainly ate the most.

Then sort of at the other side of the spectrum there continued our talking evenings with people like the Bill Douglases, the Bill Whites, Dick Russell. And a sizeable number of press people were a part of our life. Doris Fleeson, of the acid tongue and very perceptive eye. We got along reasonably well with her.

G: What was she like with LBJ? Would they exchange views readily?

J: Yes. Respectful of each other, because they were both tough, and one of them didn't want to cut the other one up because then that one might cut back. I would say we really got along all right. Everybody in town was a little bit scared of Doris Fleeson.

G: Did you notice any change in your associates during this period? For example, did the old New Deal friends come less frequently, and say, Senate colleagues tend to come more often?

J: Senate colleagues more often, yes. But we were not about to be parted from our old New Deal friends, although there would be a good deal of chiding from time to time on the part of Jim Rowe, for instance, if he thought Lyndon was not being properly supportive of some liberal measure.

Another one of the annual things became the flower show, which took place in the Armory, which I usually went to but always sort of wishing that they would show what flowers you could get the most show from for the least work in that climate, and they went a little bit too much for arrangements, precise little arrangements in precise little

vases to suit my pleasure. I looked at it from sort of a different angle.

G: You were more interested in the cultivation of flowers?

J: Yes. Getting the most color for the least effort and expenditure, because to have a rare blossom of great perfection is not something I ever aspired to. I just wanted a nice splash that would brighten up the house and brighten up the yard.

Diana [Taylor] came down to see me. That's Tony's daughter. She was at Miss Shipley's in Bryn Mawr, a suburb of Philadelphia, a very excellent school. She came down that spring, twice I think, and we went through the whole routine, which would of course include going to the National Theater, and on her first visit Mount Vernon and Arlington and the monuments, and then taking her to the usual Friday afternoon teas at the Congressional Club, which gave us rather rich fare, as I look back over it that spring.

We had Clare Boothe Luce to talk to us one Friday afternoon. Well, I can't remember at the moment who the other was. For Diana, I tried to look up some young folks. My friend Paul Porter, he and Bess, his wife, had two daughters. Betsy Goodlow [Gilman?] was about Diana's age, so I took them to lunch. Betsy Goodlow got some dates for Diana. And then Mimi Clark, the Tom Clarks' daughter, took her out. Tom Clark was one who remained all through our life, and I still see his wife and daughter. Diana already gave promise of being an exceptionally bright person, and she was pretty. I was very proud of her. It was only, oddly enough, after I became an adult, that I became really close to my brothers, to Tommy and to Tony. I guess it's not oddly, because we were not together all that much as young folks. And of course I took Diana down to sit in the Senate gallery and listen to all the speeches about the natural gas bill.

(Interruption)

To go to the Senate Dining Room was one of the main things on my beat. I can still close my eyes and see that room. At that time it was a very beautiful room of excellent proportions with a slightly concave ceiling, as I remember, decorated by [Constantino] Brumidi, the Italian artist who spent twenty-five years working on the Capitol. Later, most regrettably, in an effort to enlarge it, they lost all sight of the ceiling and I think it wound up in a cloakroom or something. But in those days it was an intimate chamber. You felt a certain sense of pride at being there. There was one table in a corner that belonged to Senator [Pat] McCarran; nobody would have taken it over. There were certain things that were served. For instance, a senator would bring up a batch of the favorite food of his home state perhaps once a year, some crab, some shrimp. For a while I think perhaps we presumed to bring up some chili from Texas and offer it to the whole Senate. The specialty of the house was bean soup. Why, I don't quite know.

G: Was there a requirement that you had to be either with a senator or a senator yourself?

J: Oh, yes, you had to be a senator or the spouse of a senator. I really don't remember that even the senator's top assistants came in there unless they were especially escorting somebody at the request of the senator. There was sort of a cafe au lait-colored gentleman, a black man who had a lot of white blood I expect, and was a very elegant man and very courteous and knew just how to handle people. He was there for so many years, and now, alas, I cannot even remember his name.

G: Did LBJ eat there very often?

J: Oh, yes. Because he wanted to eat close to his work. He would dash down and wolf his

meal and get back, and I spent thirty-eight years trying to get him to dine leisurely, for the good of his stomach, and also for the pleasure of a conversational meal. But I never really made a sale. He said, "If you had worked your way through school like I did, in full college course, four years in two and a half years, and carried a forty-hour work week," then he'd rattle off all these things he'd done, "and had twenty minutes to eat, had to walk clear across campus, eat and get back in twenty minutes, you would eat fast, too." Well, certain habits do stick, and that was one.

G: I have the impression that later on he often ate in his office just at his desk. Is that right? Would he have the food brought up after he became majority leader rather than going down to the dining room?

J: I'm sure he did from time to time, and of course, during some of the times, for instance that long terrific thirteen day and night siege I believe it was in 1957 I took down a lot of meals to him, simply for the sake of--

G: If he would go out for lunch, where would he usually go, if he didn't stay in the Capitol and eat in the Senate Dining Room? Did he have a favorite place for lunch other than that?

J: No, not that I remember. Favorite places for dinner, yes. Likely to be seafood places like Hall's, possibly Hogate's. My date book of these years is pretty much scratched up from Luci's little handwriting. (Laughter)

I kept on with my household--improving the quality of our home, putting some chintz in the guestroom, what was really the attic, the third floor.

G: The fact that you now had one daughter at school at least part of the day didn't really

affect you too much I guess because you still had another one at home?

J: Well, as I compare my children's lives now with mine I am keenly aware that I had the great privilege, and I expect it was also a loss, of having good help and so I didn't have to take care of the children any more than I wanted to. I spent leisure time with them. I took them to the doctor; I took them shopping, to get haircuts. But I didn't have to guard them every minute, because I had nice little Patsy [White] there doing that. When she was off, Zephyr [Wright] would, with an eagle eye and a stern voice, but a very loving heart. I was purchasing agent for the house, and it's interesting to look back on prices in those days, like a case of Old Taylor for sixty-four dollars, I. W. Harper for fifty-nine. We always drank Scotch, but a lot of people did consume bourbon in those days, and *no*body that I recall drank wine, except at weddings.

G: Isn't that funny?

J: Yes. The Bredts came to Washington, Olga and her husband. We had a cocktail party for them. Spring was the traveling time for constituents, heralded by the Cherry Blossom Festival, and main groups were the DAR [Daughters of the American Revolution], who always came in April and it was impossible to get a hotel room when they were in town and when the American Association of Newspaper Editors was there, followed by the Associated Press gathering. Of course, since those days, conventions have proliferated, but the two months of April and May were certainly the busiest. The Texas Association of Chambers of Commerce came. And each of those organizations required our presence in one way or another. We would go to a cocktail party or dinner. We would have the delegations from our state out to our home, or I would take the women sightseeing while

the men were doing their work.

We had become quite close to the Thornberrys. I believe this was the year when there began that delightful little interlude of playing canasta at the home of either the Walter Jenkins or the Homer Thornberrys or our house. We would have dinner, and then we would settle down to canasta. Lyndon, he was not very much for playing games. We lured him into a game one night, and we didn't wind up that game until about one-thirty or two o'clock. From then on he was hooked. For about a couple of years, we did this.

G: Was he good at canasta?

J: Oh, yes, and terribly competitive, and loved it.

A tribal ritual was a style show. Every ladies luncheon, or every ladies benefit of any sort, was likely to have a style show hooked onto it, ladies parading down the walkway in fancy clothes.

And of course, the crowning of the cherry blossom queen was--in my early years I nearly always knew who the queen was, participated in some way, did something for the Texas queen. Later on it became a crowd to be avoided. But for instance when Diana visited us, I made sure that she saw everything, all the festivities of the Cherry Blossom Festival.

Mrs. Ed Cape was one of our visitors that spring, in connection with the DAR, I think. She went back a long way in our life, certainly to 1937. She was terribly interested in genealogy. I took her to all my little routine of treasures, like the Texas ladies luncheon, and the house and embassy tour, and the Women's National Democratic Club luncheon.

But one of the main things that I remember about every spring was just the sheer recurring delight of living it. The first thing that happened was the willow trees along the Potomac would get this delicate green, a kind of a chartreuse, and that was a harbinger of spring. Then next was the forsythia, although there would likely be a snow even after the forsythia was out, and I do remember snows into March, mid-March. There was even one on Easter Sunday in an April, but that was way back in 1942 when Nellie Connally and I were living out at Buckingham. After the forsythia, there were the daffodils all through Rock Creek Park, and that was [a] wonderful time to take pictures, to walk. And then the cherry blossoms around the Tidal Basin. You know there are two kinds of cherry blossoms. The single ones are sort of pale, fluttery pink ones around the Tidal Basin that consume such millions of dollars worth of film every year and are sort of the trademark of the city of Washington. And the double blossoms that are around Hains Point that we many years later were to augment, they're deeper and pinker and fatter and bloom later.

But that's not near the end of the feast. My real favorites were the dogwoods, and all the forests in the adjoining Virginia countryside were just like fairyland with white lace spread out through them. The azaleas, somewhere along the way I discovered the Botanical Gardens. There they sat without very many native Washingtonians paying any attention to them and practically zero tourists. When I discovered them, they gave me a lot of pleasure, although they were hard to get to, it took you quite a little while, and I can't say I went often. But it's a beautiful treasure of acres of blooms.

In my own yard, the first things were the crocus, and then in the backyard I came

to have and I cannot remember quite the procession of years in which they arrived there, but when we bought the place there was one tree, an apple tree, sort of at the right rear of the yard. In the course of years I planted a weeping cherry closer to the house, and then on the opposite or left-hand side, I planted a pink dogwood and then a fourth tree, and to save my life I can't remember what, but I think just a white dogwood. So that was four trees sort of forming a square. Across the rear of the yard was a fairly deep flower bed in which I had some marvelous peonies left over from the original owner of the house, who had, I think, been a nurseryman, or had a nurseryman in his family, because these were great specimens, and gave me eighteen years of joy. Our next-door neighbor was Dr. O. E. Reed, about whom I've talked often. He and I would confer over the back fence about when was the time to put out pansies in the fall or put out more grass seed, which we did twice a year, about September and March. I always planted zinnias. I only planted things that were easy to grow and would give me a lot for a little work, because in spite of the good help I had, there was always twice as much work as I could get around to doing.

G: Did you ever take plants from Washington and try them out in Texas, or vice versa?

J: Not with success. I took peonies home to Texas two or three times. They would bloom the first year. The second year they would come up and maybe grow, but really not give me a good bloom. They were just not meant to live without the cold.

Easter always meant a new hat for me and an egg hunt for the children, a new dress for the children, a lot of picture-taking, and a big deal of making the eggs, in which there was more fun than artistry I expect. We'd have six or eight little children over to

hunt the eggs in the back yard. I still have some home movies of children stumbling around in the still-wintry flower beds.

I don't know whether I've mentioned that we went to--I know I've talked about the Joseph Davies and that lovely home, Tregaron. But one night we went to a dinner there. The table looked absolutely football-field long to me; I don't remember how many it seated. But we had gold plate. I think that's the one and only time I have ever had gold plate. The house was hung with handsome portraits and exquisite pieces of art and china. In fact, it was just a museum house, her whole life was something that will not be repeated. There's not *that* sort of money being spent on living anymore I expect. I'm glad I had a glimpse of it.

I've mentioned that April and May were always the busiest times of the year. Indeed they were in spite of Lyndon's being so terrifically hard-working. In the spring months it was quite likely that we would go out three or four times to dinner, mostly to some of these sort of business-type dinners, and then I might go to a tea, a luncheon, and a cocktail party besides.

Senator [Alben] Barkley, by now our vice president, had married a younger woman, Jane I believe her name was. Is that right?

G: I don't remember, I'll check it. [Jane is correct.]

J: Who was very warm and attractive and everybody rejoiced in his good fortune because he had for many years an invalid wife to whom he had given every kindness and attention. So there was an awful lot of social affairs that went on for Vice President and Mrs. Barkley. Oh, I was mentioning a while ago the Congressional Club and what they

offered us for entertainment. In that one spring I think they had, besides Clare Boothe Luce, Eric Johnston, who was head of the movies association. He had had other very sizeable jobs before that, an exceedingly articulate and attractive man. And Harold Stassen. So I, like a great many congressional wives, was always in search of soaking up what there was to be had in Washington, to learn from. I liked experiences, and I liked new things, so I lived it all as much as I could. But one that I savored perhaps the most and always was to go to the Speaker's apartment at the Anchorage upstairs and have dinner. One, I did because Lyndon was always willing to go and eager to go, and I didn't feel like I was imposing on his time and strength. And two, always there were interesting people and the Speaker was a natural host.

G: Who else would usually be there?

J: Tom Corcoran and Ben Cohen were frequently there, [Fred] Vinson of Kentucky, who later became chief justice, and Roberta, several members of the Texas delegation, Wright Patman especially, an occasional newspaper man.

G: You say Speaker Rayburn was a natural host. How would you elaborate on that?

J: He wanted to put you at your ease and make you have a good time. It was just a natural southern sort of courtesy, I think.

G: Did he have friends who would attend these evenings that were not in politics?

J: The whole town was politics; that's what the press was all about. No doubt there were people who lived there we were inclined to call the cave dwellers, who just owned businesses and were no part of us, and may even, for all I know, have looked down on us. But I don't know. We didn't know them and they didn't know us, hardly.

Besides Lewis to work on the house and in the garden, I also had the good fortune to have a sewing lady who came occasionally and repaired all sorts of things around the house, and the children's clothes. Life may have been harder for them, but I must say, life was easier for me than it is for my children now, I think.

We would go to dinner with our Senate friends, a cozy dinner at the Lister Hills', very southern cooking. He was *the* most courtly, typical southern senator I knew. Or we would go very occasionally to some--Senator and Mrs. Tom Connally would have a dinner. She was a beautiful woman, the only person I've ever known who was married to two United States senators. He and Lyndon were a bit like the old bull and the young bull, with lowered heads regarding each other. But he was mostly kindly to us, and Lyndon was always respectful to him, and on that basis, they got along. I still saw my old New Deal friends, the wives that is, for lunch sometime, like Jane Ickes and Theron Perkins and Peggy Corcoran. I'd say one of the most elegant things we ever did was to go to the F Street Club, and that did come into our life I think in the Senate. I don't remember--have I mentioned going during House days? But we certainly did when we were in the Senate, particularly with Stu Symington. One big event was to go to a dinner at the [Millard] Tydings, the senator from Maryland and chairman of Lyndon's committee. Their home was in Oakington [inaudible, Oakington was Tyding's Maryland farm], and a handsome estate it was.

G: What was Tydings like?

J: Tall, handsome in a sort of a hawkish way, impeccably dressed and impressive. I'd say he was patrician.

G: Was he distant?

J: Yes, I'd say rather distant. His wife was very outgoing.

Mrs. Truman's annual luncheon for the Senate ladies took place in the garden of Blair House that year. Blair House itself would be pretty crowded, which meant that there were less social affairs during the years that they were there.

We lived on 4921 Thirtieth Place you know, which is almost like living on a deadend street, because at the end of it was the Peruvian Embassy, which you entered through very private-looking gates. I don't remember, in those days, any locks and chains or any need for them. But you just simply knew it was private and wouldn't go in. A road wound through a rather sylvan wood, must have occupied several blocks, and then a big, nice, comfortable house that was the Peruvian Embassy. I remember they had a tea there once for the Joseph Davies. The same ambassador represented Peru for a good many years. Many things combined to make that place a pleasant place to live.

Lyndon was winding up his association with Daddy's business by consolidating all the loans that Mr. Evans had made. He'd just gone from one bank to another and used Daddy's business statement to borrow from, and it turned out when it came to light Daddy owed money in Dallas, Austin, and Houston, as well as Marshall. But I have told you the outcome of that, which really came out all right. But it took a lot of hours and diminished Daddy in his own self-assurance, until he found that Franklin Life Insurance stock and sold it for such a fine sum.

The theater was always a joyful resource. In those days it was pretty much limited to the Olney in the summertime and to the National all year round. I went often,

almost always without Lyndon. I remember one time I did get Lyndon and the Speaker to go with me to see a play about our founding fathers in the early days of this country, about the making of the Constitution. I'm trying to remember what it was, and I can't remember the name. But it was really the sort that made your spine tingle to see Thomas Jefferson and the Adamses striding across the stage and to hear those great words and think, "Here I am, sitting beside Speaker Rayburn and a senator, who is my husband!"

G: You really did have a sense of history in those days.

J: Oh, yes, and such a place to live it in, and knew it.

We saw a lot of our staff, at our house or at theirs. Horace and Mary V. [B?] Busby had us out to dinner. Never were there any more fun dinners really though than those out at Clark Clifford's, a big white rambling frame house out in Maryland. The city had grown up around it. When they got it, I'm sure they felt they were living in the country. She was one of those women who had a rare touch with houses. It was welcoming, colorful, warm, a great place to live, and the pictures on the wall told of their decades of acquaintance with Washington. They had an annual party, which took place--I think his birthday is on New Year's Day, and they would write--the family would collaborate. All the three daughters--I believe there are three--and their husbands, as they acquired them, and Clark were the actors. Only Marny [Clifford's wife], who is as smart as any of them, wouldn't act in it. And they would do a spoof on Washington society at that time, mostly gentle, sometimes a little barbed. It was just as good as the Press Club's--Gridiron.

J: Gridiron.

G: Can you recall any particular spoofs?

J: No, I can't, but Clark is a natural actor himself. The people would be sitting around on the floor just howling with laughter, and it was a guest list from all over town. It finally got so big that after about ten or twelve years, they had to quit it. It would run them out of house and home.

The Speaker's eminence vaulted us into lots of interesting places. For instance, the French Embassy had a dinner for him. But once more, this was partly the character and personality of Henri Bonnet. I'm sure he wouldn't have gone, wouldn't have let any embassy have a dinner for him unless he had a personal fondness for the ambassador himself.

It was a spring from which the news at home was mixed. Mrs. Johnson, Lyndon's mother, was engaged in what became one of her most favorite accomplishments, and that was a genealogy of the family, starting in her self-effacing way, on her husband's side, intending later on to get to her side. She wrote us that she had located the grandfather of Lyndon's grandfather--now how far back does that take us? Four generations I think--in Oglethorpe, Georgia. Bobbitt at that time was working for KVET, and Rebekah, whose health was always precarious, had ulcers off and on. Josefa was getting a divorce. Aunt Lucy was--her health was failing, but she was one of those sturdy, dependable people that you never thought of as being sick because she didn't talk about it. She was of stern stuff.

Drew Pearson took a few bites out of us about the natural gas act. I'm sure we have gone into this the last time we talked, but Speaker Rayburn put all his prestige behind it, and it passed the House. It had already, I think, passed the Senate first, but

Truman vetoed it sometime that spring.

G: LBJ seems to have put an awful lot of his own time and energy on this. At one point I think Mary Rather wrote that he was taking a weekend off or so because it had been so exhausting. Was it taxing, this issue taxing for him in terms of the amount of time he was spending on it?

J: Indeed it was. He would work until eight o'clock or nine o'clock every night. It was a sort of--when he quit working on Saturdays, and I don't remember quite when that--when he quite working on Sundays, it was one milestone in our lives. And then when he quit working on Saturdays--well, I suppose you can't say that he ever really quit. He just began to take some Saturdays off; he didn't work every Saturday. Finally, he went to Mayo's sometime this spring. I think he got a letter from Gerst Thompson, the doctor out there who worked on his kidney stones, that he, Gerst Thompson, was going to take a prolonged vacation in Europe, and that he might want to come and see him before the doctor left. I think Lyndon went out and they checked him over, and he did have obviously some stones, but they were fairly in abeyance that spring and weren't really causing him trouble. They just urged him to take a good long vacation when Congress was over.

G: On the natural gas bill, this seems to have been a very passionate issue on both sides, just reading over the correspondence and the speeches. Was he able to discuss this at parties with his adversaries and still maintain a certain diplomacy, or did it spark arguments, do you recall?

J: I don't remember it sparking any arguments at parties. I know there was some awfully

heated correspondence about it, and it did get abrasive. It pitted people against each other who were really natural friends. I never made any pretense of being able to understand it all. I believe Lyndon's feeling and the feeling of a lot of Texans was that they were giving away a finite and expendable resource from their own soil, at a lower price than if it had come from someplace else, that Texas was kind of getting rooked on it, and they were determined not to let that happen.

G: That was a regionalist theme.

J: It was a regionalist theme, very much. And also, the people on the other side were able to make it appear that the poor consumer was the one who was being shortchanged.

G: Did he see at all conservation as an element here as well? That this natural gas would be conserved more if the pricing structure were different, or if the regulation were different? Do you recall that?

J: Not from my own knowledge, I can't say that I do.

G: Did his support of the natural gas bill create any difference in his relationship with the large producers in the state, oil and gas producers?

J: Well, by and large they were never his friends, even if they owed him something. (Laughter) I think he helped out the whole industry in this, but I don't think it endeared him to them. However, it is an industry in which there are mavericks, and he had some friends, good sturdy friends, who were oil men, and liked him in spite of all his views. Although in this particular view, he was their man, wouldn't you say? He was representing the industry, because he thought it was Texas and one of their chief possessions.

I think it was June when Lyndon finally did get off to Mayo's.

A recurring theme that took place all through several of the years following the end of the war, and I can't say whether it began in 1946, 1947, 1948, somewhere like that, but kept on going and was still going in 1950, was Lyndon's interest in synthetic rubber and in tin, in industries that had been built up during war years with taxpayers' money to produce materials that we had been cut off from getting by the war. After the war there was a great impetus to sell those to industry at bargain prices, to dismantle them. Lyndon felt that the government should retain them, or retain some control over them, or at least get a fair price out of them, because they had been built up with taxpayers' money. The threat, although temporarily removed, would never be entirely removed as long as communism was active in Malaysia, Indonesia, in that part of the world. So he just set himself up sort of as a one-man watchdog over turning loose of synthetic rubber, for instance, and with an interest not quite as demanding of the tin that was smeltered in Texas. So there was always something going on that legislative front.

It was in June when we got off on our little vacation down to the Greenbrier with the Thornberrys, with whom we had become increasingly fond. We just loved going down to White Sulphur Springs. It's some of the most beautiful country the Lord ever made. Lyndon liked to play golf when he could. He loved to swim, and he was a lover of the sun and when he played, he played almost as vigorously as he worked. As well as I can remember, there were only the four of us that trip, although one time we went with the Bentsens, too.

At any rate, we were walking from the golf course back up toward the hotel, I

think perhaps getting ready for lunch, and we heard over the radio that South Korea had been invaded by North Korea and that President Truman had asked the Security Council to call on the United Nations to expel North Korea, and that he'd ordered U.S. Air Force to the aid of South Korea, and indeed authorized the use of American ground troops with the United Nations. So we all just sort of looked at each other and thought what we ought to do. We knew the answer. We cut short our vacation and got in the car and drove back to Washington. It seems to me it was a weekend. Lyndon the next day wrote a very strong letter to President Truman, commending him, and used some fine phrases. I reread it, and it sounds just as good now to me as it did then. He had a nice letter back from President Truman thanking him, and I suppose it was years later before Lyndon did indeed know how much President Truman did thank him.

G: Do you recall what else he did when he got back, if he made phone calls or went to his office, or how he responded, in addition to writing the President this letter?

J: No, I don't, and that's just one of those unfortunate things that you don't--we knew it was momentous, but we didn't know how much more important it was than all the other little things they were doing, we were doing. So I, no doubt, went to the grocery and store, and paid a lot of bills, and maybe took the child to the doctor, and did all the little things I did.

All of this, of course, added fuel to Lyndon's feeling about this synthetic rubber plants. He thought as long as the threat of communism hovered anywhere close to Indochina and Malaysia and all that part of the world, as long as there was unrest or instability, we didn't want to get rid of our capability.

G: Had he at all foreseen problems in that part of the world, do you think? Before the outbreak of hostilities had he predicted anything? Or was he concerned about this in particular or just concerned about the spread of communism in general?

J: He was always concerned about the spread of communism as far back as I can remember and until he died. I do not remember him ever saying anything precise about, "I'm afraid they're going to cross over the line into South Korea."

It was sometime this spring that we began to see a good bit of Frank Stanton. I think I may have mentioned that earlier, have I? At any rate, he looms as a big figure in our life, a very able, intellectual, forever youngish man, rather withdrawn, purely business. I don't know that I ever saw him in a totally playful mood. He was president of CBS for years and years. When Lyndon became president, I'm pretty sure that he asked him to take a position in his cabinet.

G: Do you know which one that was?

J: I am not sure.

G: Commerce maybe.

J: My own life with the Senate Ladies [Club] was a very congenial one. I loved to go to luncheon with, or tea with, Henrietta Hill and Betty Fulbright and Mary Ellen Monroney and Ivo Sparkman and particularly loved our Tuesdays. That was a fixed day for me from January on through--we usually adjourned late in June. Sometimes, any war years they would be in session through the summer.

I believe that about covers my memory of that spring.

(Interruption)

G: This portion is recorded on January the tenth [1982].

J: July got off to a merry start with Luci's birthday party. She was three. She was a delicate, fairy-looking little girl, gentle as could be. Her friends were our neighbors, our fellow members of the delegation's children: Molly Thornberry, Beth Jenkins, Lan and Lloyd Bentsen, Scott Carpenter. Rodney was there. He was the son, the adopted child of Josefa, who was living in Washington at that time, working somewhere in the government. I remember Rodney, age about three or four, in his cowboy boots walking across my dining room table while I shivered. He was redheaded and a cute, lively little boy.

G: He spent some time with you that summer, didn't he?

J: Yes. First and last, our house was a haven for all sort of people, for a weekend or a month or two months, for Lyndon's staff, for his family, for my visiting kinfolks, and of course, all the years until her death on January 1, 1947, for Aunt Effie.

G: Well now, was Josefa also working in the Senate office and staying with you for a while?

J: Yes, she was. She and Rodney. Now she was not working for Lyndon, and I don't know where she was working, but I feel sure he was helpful in getting her a job, as he was for everyone in his family always.

Hunter, that's the name of the little boy that was about Lynda Bird's age that lived close to us that we carpooled with. I'm sure I've mentioned Patty Nichols, too. The group was likely to be, in the case of either Lynda's birthday or Luci's birthday, in the range of both children. Because it was summertime, the back porch and the backyard were the scene of the birthday festivities. That back porch was the heart of our house.

How we did love it! It was high, screened, looked down on the garden, had a ceiling fan, had a great big double reclining chaise lounge that the Tom Clarks had given us, just a real luxurious place to pile up on with lots of pillows and read, and turn on the electric fan. It also had sort of a sloppy swing that I had gotten secondhand somewhere for next to nothing. It's the sort of piece of furniture that one no longer sees, but it's meant for the patio or the yard, and it sways gently back and forth. Then I had a whole lot of Chinese peel furniture, which I had also gotten for a song, and a Chinese peel mat on the floor. It was the first place that visitors always headed to come June and on up into the cool days of September.

I had not been feeling well that summer. I was pregnant. There were a series of visits to Dr. Radford Brown.

Important things began to happen in Lyndon's life after we got back from the Greenbrier when President Truman had committed United States troops to working under the United Nations to expel the North Koreans from South Korea. Lyndon made an important speech, a long speech for him, in which he bore down strongly on the necessity for all-out effort, strong defense, unity of purpose for keeping defense prices down so we could get all the materials that we needed, and get them quick. Quick, quick, quick was the story of his life. He wanted to do, achieve anything that he thought was worth achieving, fast.

It was this summer, and I may already have mentioned it, that he was appointed by the chairman of his committee, Senator Tydings, to head up a subcommittee, sort of a watchdog subcommittee of Armed Services, to ride herd on the military and on the

manufacturers of munitions, to try to see that the services got their money's worth, to make sure that all the contracts were handled with the dollar in mind.

G: Do you recall where the idea came from to establish this committee or essentially reestablish it?

J: It was, I am quite sure, just a descendant of President Truman's own similar committee that had operated during the second World War.

G: Do you have any idea how LBJ happened to be named chairman of that committee?

J: I'm quite sure that he went to Tydings and sold him on the necessity of such a committee and without saying, "and I ought to be the chairman" made such a good case for the need for it, that it just became apparent to Tydings that here is the man to head it. You know, committees sort of work that way. The person who has to name the chairmen, if he sees somebody who speaks persuasively, cogently, determinately about the need for getting X job done, he's likely to turn around and say, "All right, you do it. You head it up." Of course, it was bipartisan.

G: How about the selection of the other members on the committee? Do you recall who selected the other members?

J: Well, I'm sure the chairman, Tydings, did. I remember there were some that Lyndon felt he could work with--I mean, he felt he could work with all of them. I believe even [Wayne] Morse was on there, but first and last Lyndon worked fairly well with Morse, and [Styles] Bridges, a Republican, who was anathema to a lot of Democrats, was our good friend and he visited us down here at the Ranch.

G: Let me ask you as long as we're on the subject of the committee, about committee staff. I

understand that there were limitations on the amount of money and the size of the staff.

J: Oh, Don Cook came over from the SEC [Securities Exchange Commission]. He was already vice chairman. I think later on he became chairman, I'm not sure. He came over and I don't think he was paid anything.

G: Did he have to persuade Cook to come over and take that job, do you know? Did it involve any degree of arm-twisting?

J: I wouldn't call it that. I think it was sort of a call-to-arms, comrades at the barricades. They had worked together before, you know, and I think he just made clear the need to Don and his unique qualifications for filling it, and Don came. And there may have been times when he thought, "My God, why did I get myself into this?" But the committee apparently performed vigorously and well. I know it got acclaim from lots of sources. Lyndon went to see President Truman, talked to him about it, I'm sure asking his advice, because Truman had handled so well just such a committee himself, and not too many years ago. It's frightening to think what a short span of life, of time, that was between the end of that war in 1945 and the beginning of this Korean conflict, just time for us to get rid of all, or at least a large part, of our defense mechanisms.

G: Did you ever go to any of the hearings, preparedness committee hearings?

J: No, and I was always aware of the fact that that is where, at the committee hearings, that's where a lot of the real meat of legislation took place. I always knew the importance of them. I always was going to--I went to a few committee meetings, but I do not remember that I went to any of these. But I sort of have pictures engraved on my mind of a number of them because a lot of pictures were made, and they hung in Lyndon's offices,

and some hung in our home. So I remember the faces looking down at me. Lyndon went on the radio, the Texas Network, and talked about the Korean situation and called for all-out military and industrial mobilization. He really got the word to the folks back home, wanted to stir them up and sell them on the seriousness of this and the necessity of it.

One pleasant little note and funny little note in that summer was going to a barbecue given by Senator and Mrs. Kerr out at the Kenwood Country Club. We had already been to dinners at their home, or homes, because they had several in the course of a few years. We knew that they did not serve a thing to drink, but this was a big barbecue. A lot of people had never been with Senator Kerr on a social occasion before, and they kept on wandering around the grounds of the club, where there were nice big tables just set up just loaded with every kind of barbecue and beans and slaw and all sorts of good things, and barrels of lemonade. They kept on looking for where the beer was, and there was no beer. In a kind of an apologetic manner they'd say, "Which direction is the beer?" (Laughter) It really was a funny note in Washington.

So, early in August, since it looked like no one could tell when we would adjourn there, because of the Korean situation, I went on home to Texas. As it happened I got there just a few days before Aunt Lucy died, and sent Lyndon a wire about it.

G: She had been in bad health.

J: In sort of fragile health. She was always one of his favorite relatives because she was so matter of fact and always helpful and always dependable. I think I've mentioned somewhere that she either left us in her will, or gave during her lifetime, a nice little sum of money, three thousand dollars I think, for our Luci, which was a lot for her. I had a lot

of affection and respect for her and a great part of it was because she and Mrs. Johnson were always such good friends, and anybody who stood by Mrs. Johnson and helped her in her difficult life of shepherding that big family, had my affection. Aunt Lucy was buried in Blanco though, beside her husband, where they had lived, and not at the Johnson family cemetery. Lyndon did not get to come down to the funeral, as well as I recollect.

It wasn't long after that that I had a miscarriage and went to the hospital in Austin. Lyndon did come down then and stay a few days. I never had a doctor in Austin with whom I had the same rapport that I did Dr. Radford Brown. This was disappointing and sort of saddening, but it was no great wrench in life. One of the main things I remember about it is going back to the house at Dillman Street and the doctor told me to stay off my feet and be very quiet for a while. So I spent a lot of time lying on the sofa in the living room looking out of a big picture window that looked toward the blue hills, one of the beloved ornaments of Austin. Everybody who knows Austin remembers the blue hills. There was a very nice live oak growing up right in front of the picture window, and a dove lived there. It was much too late in the year to be nesting I thought, although I don't know much about the habits of doves. But that dove sat there and fluttered around among the branches of the trees, and it had very coral feet, coral-colored, and a lovely mixture of grays and white. Sometimes it's interesting to just sit very still and watch the world around you without reacting to it. I spent eight or ten years in pleasant sort of combat cooperation with that tree, wanting the tree to grow and flourish and do well, and yet wanting to retain the view of the blue hills. So I was always getting Mr. Erb to trim it

out a bit.

I was doing the same thing there at Dillman that I had begun earlier at 4921 Thirtieth Place, N.W., and that is decorating. A Mrs. Ferris [?] was making some pretty draperies in my always favorite colors. I loved chintz. I loved yellow, coral, and she had a beautiful chintz pattern that was extremely inexpensive. We really were beginning to get the place to look very nice. I think if anybody asked me what I did with my life, in a way I'd have to say I made little lists and then I scratched them out. Whenever I went from one house to the other, that is sort of the story of my days. I would see to getting the light fixtures washed and the rugs cleaned, polish and clean the furniture and take all the books out of the shelves and dust them and put them back and get the roof man to come out and see about mending that roof, and wash the outsides of the windows as well as the insides. And get Mr. So-and-so to clean the downspout and always Mr. Erb, or his counterpart, to work on the trees. So it's a very sizeable part of my life, is conservator of what we had and purchasing agent of what we ate, wore and lived with, as well as had to save and invest.

G: When you would go back to Austin, would you become more active in the day-to-day operation of the station?

J: Well, by 1950, of course, with Jesse Kellam there, I did not feel the urgency, the necessity to, but yes, I would see the people, talk to him, read the reports, and for years and years and years I signed every check except the payroll checks. I do not remember whether--I think I was signing them--well actually until we went into the presidency. It could have been some time in the vice presidency. I just did it for many, many years.

The package of mail would come to me, I'd handle it, and then I'd mail it back.

A big event, a happy event in our lives that summer, and how could I have been so lucky, was to meet and hire Helen and Gene Williams. Patsy had earlier announced her need to go home and live. I think maybe she was already pregnant. In any case, she wanted to go home and start a family, and her husband wanted to. And so, Patsy was going to leave us. I've forgotten whether she stayed until I got Helen. I think she did. I think I remember a sweet and sort of tearful farewell with Luci, because Luci was her particular possession. Helen and Gene came over and I interviewed them while I was still sort of not being very active and lying around the house in late August. They went to work for us right away, and it was one of the good lifelong things, because they stayed with us from August of 1950 until about March of 1969. Wait a minute--yes, 1969, because Lyndon left the White House in 1968--wait a minute.

G: Well, January 1969.

J: January of 1969, and they came home with us just long enough to get us established and the house set up. That is something I like to remember, that I had people for nineteen years, twenty-five years, for as long as nothing removed them except some important event in their own lives, like getting married or very, very bad health.

G: What did Helen Williams do and what did Gene Williams do?

J: Helen Williams took over Patsy's job, which was tending to the children and being the maid, cleaning the house, washing. She didn't do the cooking; Zephyr did that. On off days she did cook, on her off days Zephyr did tend to the children and clean the house.

G: What about Gene?

J: Well, Gene was a man of many parts. He could work in the yard, he could be a very good butler, although we would never have called him that, drive the car to Texas or anywhere else. Gene was just a man for whatever needed to be done, and one of the most obliging, genial-natured people I ever knew.

G: Did he chauffeur for you all, too, in Washington?

J: Not particularly. I always drove and liked to drive, and when we finally arrived at the majority leadership, Lyndon of course was furnished a car, and occasionally I would have the use of it. If I needed him to, he would. One of the funny things he did was break in, as the expression was, Lyndon's shoes. You know, new shoes have a way of hurting one's feet a bit, or so the old-time legend goes. So Gene would always wear Lyndon's shoes when they were new and when they got just a little bit softened up, Lyndon would take them over. And we were able to pass on a lot of things to Gene because he could wear lots of Lyndon's clothes.

G: I've heard that Helen was particularly good at anticipating LBJ's moods, and knowing how he felt that day and one thing and another.

J: She and Zephyr both were. I'm sure you remember Mary's story about during the war years when there was rationing about the coffee.

One of the things that happened was that the GSA [General Services Administration] said that there would be no more sale of government property until it had been run through a real fine comb to see whether it could be useful to the war effort. So that was slowed down and virtually stopped. Lyndon called for a reduction in non-defense spending and even on things that he cared about, like rural roads, he found

himself voting against projects that were very much in his heart because he thought for the time being that had to be put on the back burner. All of his life he was aware of the communist threats, both during the period when they were active, real and everybody believed them, and when it was unpopular, old-fashioned and laughed at to believe in it.

G: Do you recall any of his feelings about the Korean conflict, if he thought it was something that would spread if it were not contained, or something directed from Russia?

J: Yes. Oh, yes. Indeed he did. He just thought it had to be stopped there or once fed, it would go on to gorge itself. It was very real and lasting and omnipresent to him. And of course, the temperature of the country went up and down. We'd all be very excited and concerned for five or ten years, and then we would forget about it and think those people who were concerned about it were looking for communists under the bed.

G: Any more particulars of his advocacy of preparedness and cutting down on waste in this committee work that he did? Do you recall any particulars that he was especially involved in, in terms of either sav--

Tape 2 of 2

J: No, unfortunately I don't, although I'm sure he must have come home night after night with stories about it. I just know it was what he spent his passion and his energy on, and what most concerned him, for that time. His concerns, some went on forever, like REA [Rural Electrification Administration] and the need for better education and the importance of good teachers. Some had their time in his life and ours, and then were sort of laid to rest. Preparedness was a constant theme from beginning to end, but of course it was center stage during the years from about 1939 or 1940 through 1945, and once more

became center stage in 1950 until that conflict was over. I remember talk about some war material that went up from as much as 50 per cent or even 500 per cent and his anger that anybody producing and selling that stuff would let it do that.

G: Did he travel much in these investigations or was most of it conducted from Washington?

J: Most of it, as well as I remember, was conducted from Washington.

G: How did the administration react to his investigations, do you recall?

J: With cooperation and approval as far as I remember. I know President Truman promised that. I seem to remember some sort of abrasive relations from time to time with Louis Johnson, I don't remember just what they were. I may be all wrong. Was there, do you remember?

G: I'm sure there were from time to time. I notice that *Time* magazine did an article on him, "The Texas Watchdog."

J: Yes. I feel sure if you did a graph on Lyndon's arrival on the national stage, that the summer months of 1950 and the fall, that would be a time when he made a decided appearance on the national stage.

G: Do you recall how he reacted to this publicity? Was he happy to get the publicity, say the *Time* piece, or other articles? Did he not care about it? Was it an important thing to him?

J: I don't remember much about it. I remember that if something was inaccurate or unfair he'd get more annoyed than I thought he needed to, but I don't think it fed him. I don't think he needed it. I don't think he paid all that much attention to it.

G: He seems to have announced that the committee was not going to try to make headlines and--

J: Absolutely, absolutely, because he thought if it was going to get the job done it would have to be impartial and with cooperation between Democrats and Republicans. It could not be any witch hunt; it just had to be sort of a judicious holder of the line and overseer. Papa was going to look at it good and hard.

G: Anything else on the watchdog committee?

J: No, not that I recall, except that it was a very good, comradely relation. It was one of the cherished things of our lives, with some of those men, especially Don Cook.

[End of Tape 2 of 2 and Interview XXVI]

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LYNDON BAINES JOHNSON LIBRARY

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

by Patti Ehrlich

Allison Fawcett 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~~ Assistant Archivist For Presidential Libraries on 5-10-2011.

Mrs. Johnson's Oral History Interviews:

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

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