

INTERVIEW XXX covering 1952

DATE: March 22, 1982

INTERVIEWEE: MRS. LYNDON B. JOHNSON

INTERVIEWER: MICHAEL L. GILLETTE

PLACE: The LBJ Ranch, Stonewall, Texas

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J: Out of all the trips to Texas that spring came the return of an old romance, my love affair with the Hill Country in the spring. It'd been a long time since I'd been in the countryside repeatedly in February, April, May, June, and I saw it all unfold. And there's just nothing in the world as green, and as new, and as fresh, and as sure of the revival of the earth, as the first green in springtime in Texas. It's just something to be intoxicated with. And by summertime, I was as much in love with the idea of living at the Ranch as Lyndon was.

I had sent down this van full of furniture, including a lot of things that we had bought from the old lady. I went to Oetting's and worked with a Mr. Clark there, and I went to [Louis] Shanks, of course, and bought things for several of the rooms.

The first thing for Lyndon was always a phone right by the bed, a good reading light, make sure there was an ashtray handy everywhere, and, in the living room, wherever he was going to sit, a good reclining chair, with a good light by it. We put the brass bed up in Aunt Georgia's room. The bed that was in Lyndon's and my room is the very one that now is in his room here. I had bought it from a Shreveport store in 1936 through my father's account.

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I think it must have been that spring that I bought for Lynda and Luci a new suite of furniture for their two rooms at 4921 Thirtieth Place--a lovely French Provincial canopy bed for little Luci, going on five, and a sort of a light-colored Italian Provincial--these names mean very little--for Lynda. And so I shipped down the contents of their room. It was an accumulation of, by now, fifteen--oh, no, let's see--seventeen or so years of marriage and some purchasing. Even so, there was nothing in the big room with the fireplace except some Chinese peel furniture, and Lyndon, who likes to get everything done in twenty-four hours, as I look back on it, was exceedingly patient with me.

I can't remember whether--I think I just must have preceded him. I think I must have come in June, and stayed, and he joined me, I distinctly remember, on July the eleventh. That was when Congress adjourned. I already had the children down with me.

One thing we bought that serves us well still, and will for the rest of our lives, was a good, round, cherry dining table--early American. It had many leaves, and I think for the very first night we put all the leaves in, and they stayed in that way practically until, well, certainly until Lyndon's departure from Washington, and then we may have taken a few of them out during his retirement years.

There was also in the van, quite by chance, a swivel chair, an executive swivel chair with a sort of a brown and white cowhide seat. It had been in one of his offices somewhere. It was placed down by the moving men at the dining table. Lyndon sat down in it the first time. He liked it fine. He said, "I'll just use this one for my chair." And so he did, until many years later it was replaced by another, somewhat bigger, somewhat better, but also an office chair, a swivel chair.

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G: Was there a telephone at the dining room table?

J: Not immediately. That did follow a little later.

I bought an antique chest from my friend, Betty Long, for forty dollars and put it up in one of the little guest rooms. We had downstairs, of course, our own room with the bow windows, where you and I are sitting now and which is a sitting room at this point in our lives. Then we had another guest room, and as I recall, we thought of that as Mrs. Johnson's room, because stairs were a little hard for her to deal with, or for Daddy, in case he should come to see us. I think we were going to share a bathroom. That is where we put Betty's antique chest, where very soon we had Mr. E. H. Perry come out and spend the night with us. He remarked on the fact that there was no mirror in the room. Quite true. Lyndon didn't wait until everything got finished before he started inviting folks. He started inviting them the minute we got there. Mr. Perry sent me a mirror when he returned home, which has remained happily above that chest ever since. It's been put upstairs in the west carnation room, but they serve well together.

G: Sam Rayburn was quoted as saying one time that he was glad that LBJ got the Ranch because now he could talk about something besides politics. Did this become a favorite subject with him?

J: Oh, absolutely. He wanted everybody he knew to come see it. He was full of talk about his bulls and the merits of white-face Herefords, and he built fences by the headlights of automobiles--I mean he was in such a hurry to get things finished that he would drive up behind the fence crew, if they were fixing to stop at sun-down, and he said, "How about working another hour, boys? I'll turn the lights on." And cheered on by his ambition,

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they did. And he had gotten Marcus Burg, who had done the house, to build a dam. The road had been--well, we did not get the one that I walked out with Jac Gubbels, winding through the trees. We used a more prosaic one, along, up parallel with the fence, and considering what was going to happen to it, it's just as well we did. When the sidewalk was laid in August, it had, thanks to Max Brooks, a very nice little curve to it, winding out to the front gate under the master tree--one of the glorious trees of the yard. Lyndon picked up a stick and wrote in it, "Welcome. LBJ Ranch. August 1952."

We soon established habits. We would buy eggs from some old ladies who lived in a stone house up the road. They were the Hodges sisters, I think. We planned a garden. I got my groceries at Weinheimer's in Stonewall. I went to visit the Johnson City school where Lynda would begin going in September. And so, we settled in to be country folk.

G: Did you feel isolated at all at first?

J: Oh, no, no, no. We had constant company. Besides, I was born and raised in the country. I had twenty-one years of background living away from folks.

G: But after Washington and Austin, it seems like this might have felt remote, initially, to you.

J: Just the sort of remote that brought a smile to my face.

G: What about travel back and forth to Austin or San Antonio? It must have been more difficult then without the highways that we have now.

J: The roads were good. True, they have been much improved since then, if you call widening them improving them. Lyndon always pointed out the section of road that he

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had worked on as a young man, and at that time, there was a stretch of it that had not been changed a great deal.

An interesting thing that happened in his legislative work is a bill for research into how to make saline water economically feasible, how to turn it into useable water for agriculture and household use in an economic fashion. He worked on that with [Congressman] John Lyle. It was of interest to him, not the absolute most paramount, but he was excited by it, and that was also the beginning of the Guadalupe River project and of Port Mansfield.

The subcommittee kept right on doing its work, and he was joined by Senator Joe O'Mahoney, who was head of an appropriations committee, and they were examining the use of manpower in all branches of the service, and deciding that there were too many armchair corps, entirely too many high-ranking officers sitting in Washington.

Lyndon went on the Joint Economic Committee, because Senator Tom Connally was going to be leaving at the end of the term.

Something very good had happened. Truman signed the G.I. Bill of Rights for the Korean veterans, offering free schooling and good loans on homes and businesses. But there was a nasty buildup of anger against Truman, particularly in Texas. I do not know how nationwide it was, but down here they were very mad at him. Tidelands a major reason. Tidelands was blown up out of all proportion. You would think we were snatching the last bit of education from the minds of the schoolchildren of Texas, and that tidelands had furnished every dollar for their education, to listen to the anger.

G: Was this hostility transferred to Texas political figures who had supported Truman?

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J: You bet it was. You bet it was. And the FEPC [Fair Employment Practices Commission] also was something that they were mad about, scared of, also socialized medicine. The fall, the real hot summer--that is, July and August and into the fall--was a period of great pressure on politicians who were in, and Lyndon was right at the front of it, because he was always doing something. He had voted for more spending bills than a good many of the Texas delegation. Of course, there was some that just didn't vote for any, like old Clark Fisher, who represented actually the district that we moved into. We were about a mile inside Gillespie County, a fact that we could not help, but did not speak of. Aunt Frank and Uncle Clarence had simply settled here, regrettably, and nobody had gotten the county lines changed, because Lyndon voted in Blanco [County] always, from the beginning, as I still do.

The Republican National Committee met in Chicago. [Robert] Taft's drive simply fizzled out. I don't know exactly when and how it lost all its steam; I don't remember. But at any rate, the Republican one was over in rather quick time with [Dwight] Eisenhower nominated and [Richard] Nixon nominated for the vice presidency. It was instant honeymoon for Eisenhower. He was the only person on the--well, he was, in a period of dissatisfaction and anger, he was universally approved, as far as I can remember.

G: How about the choice of Nixon as the vice presidential nominee?

J: [I] don't remember much about that.

G: Did LBJ think the Republicans would win? Do you know?

J: I know he thought it was going to be a very hard fight. He would never have said so

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publicly, that they were going to win. It's just one always sounds optimistic, whatever one may feel.

Senator [Richard] Russell, and this is sad to look back on, because Senator Russell was fighting what was doomed to be a losing battle, and he was putting everything into it, including his heart. It just wasn't the time for a southerner to make it to the presidency. He really felt he could. He made the statement that he could defeat Eisenhower. He actually softened his views on Taft-Hartley; I find that hard to believe, but to read some of the newspaper articles, he may have been saying that he did.

The Democratic Convention in Chicago was one of the worst of the many fights that we have had. There were two delegations from Texas and two from Mississippi, and a regular donnybrook between them. At first, Adlai Stevenson was uncertain and said he had no desire for the presidency. Other candidates were [Estes] Kefauver and, of course, Russell, and [Averell] Harriman, that indefatigable man, and Senator [Robert] Kerr of Oklahoma. LBJ remained at Stonewall, and looking back, it's hard for me to really believe he did, but he had no stomach for this one. He thought it was a lost cause for Russell. I can't help but believe that if Russell had wanted him to, he would have gone up there with him. And yet, there was Kerr, who was very close to him, too.

There was--for Lyndon, there was pressure on both sides. There was no satisfying the liberals: Maury Maverick; Jane Y. McCallum; Fagan Dickson, oddly enough, of Austin; Stuart Long; our banker friend from down in South Texas, Walter Hall remained staunch. But they were so mad at folks like Shivers, that if you weren't equally as mad and as full of invective as they were, they would think you had turned a

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traitor. Maury Maverick used the expression, "You've cut our throats." Mrs. McCallum wrote some pretty tart letters. Stuart Long, cynical and had some cutting phrases, but I think he kept some hope for Lyndon. I know that Walter Hall knew Lyndon would live to fight another day and that they would be side by side.

G: A lot of the controversy revolved around [Allan] Shivers, and what should be done about Shivers, and this sort of thing. Do you recall LBJ's attitude towards Shivers at this point? Did he think he would support the nominee, or did he feel like Shivers should be challenged but now is not the time to do it?

J: Well, I believe he thought if we didn't shove him too far, he might stay in the Democratic Party and not be--maybe just go fishing. Not get out and actually urge people to vote for Eisenhower, which, of course, is what he finally did. But I think Lyndon hoped up until the very last that he would just be quiet. Of course, it all came to--when was the time, at what point did Shivers make his trip to Springfield? At any rate, when Shivers did go to Springfield after the nomination and talked face to face with Adlai Stevenson, who told him that, yes, he was going to be against the tidelands and for federal ownership, against our side of it and for federal ownership, that was when the jig was up.

G: That would have been late August.

J: Yes. There was a lot of talk about a party loyalty resolution. I think maybe the Democratic National Convention finally adopted a plank on that, didn't they?

G: I think it was a non-binding--

J: Non-binding, and Shivers made much of that and said that what he promised was just that the nominee of this convention's name should appear on the ballot in Texas. He didn't



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promise to vote for that person, just to put the name on the ballot.

Harriman withdrew in a gentlemanly fashion, you know, when Truman's own alternate delegate cast his vote for Stevenson, so that cinched it for Stevenson, and he chose [Senator John] Sparkman as his running mate, and there we were, and we knew it was going to be a hard fall and a campaign which Lyndon always knew he was going to support the nominee, but in which his heart was not high about it. It's remarkable, the polarization in Texas, and I think we can get more polarized than most people anywhere. There were the liberals on one side, pulling at him, and there were the conservatives on the other side, some of them writing measured, philosophical, reasoning, earnest letters, and some of them writing insulting, threatening--well, both sides were insulting and threatening. But there was a particular audacity to some of the very wealthy people of Texas who would write and say, "If you don't answer this satisfactorily within a satisfactory period of time. . . ." They didn't say exactly what they were going to do to you, but they were going to see that you never got elected to anything as big as dog catcher ever again in the state of Texas, was the general trend of it.

Nobody gave you credit for trying to think what was best for the whole state in the long run. Lyndon tried to be soft-spoken and placating to the insulting letters, but he could dish it out himself when he was pushed too far. And yet, a lot of folks cared about Lyndon, were very strong for Eisenhower, gave their advice, but were not going to push him and shove him. Those, I would say, included some of our old-time, good, newspaper friends.

G: I'm thinking in particular--

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J: Houston Harte, I would say, headed the list.

G: How about Amon Carter?

J: That was one of the saddest chapters of this sad fall. We lost his friendship over this. I do not think we ever really regained it. And it had been a very good friendship, filled with admiration and respect on Lyndon's part and, I think, on Amon Carter's. Perhaps it might have been averted if Lyndon had written him, early on, and said, "We differ, you and I. I am going to be for the nominee, and I will, of course, accompany him through the state of Texas, and sometime in the course of that, I will bring him to your hometown, but I want you to know, before I come to your town, I want to tell you I'm coming and respectfully hope that we may remain friends," or something like that. But you know, in a way, Amon Carter sort of considered that his fiefdom, and you asked if you could come.

G: Was that what happened when he went with Stevenson to Fort Worth?

J: I think he neglected to--well, you couldn't exactly get his permission because it wouldn't have been forthcoming. But perhaps a letter could have been so phrased that he would have been mollified, to some extent. I don't know. At any rate--

G: Did LBJ try later to repair this, mend this fence?

J: I think he did. It's my recollection that he did.

Sid Richardson, Clint Murchison, of course, Houston Harte--lots of good friends sent him their earnest recommendation that he better consider, long and thoughtfully, whether his future wouldn't be better served to be out of the state when the nominee came and to have nothing to do with him, preferably to announce for Eisenhower.

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Let me see, at some point, Lyndon--I believe it was in August--made a newspaper statement, "I am for Stevenson and Sparkman and the Democratic Party, and I hope all loyal Democrats in Texas will vote for them. I am urging all my friends to do the same." It was a simple, straightforward statement. He always coupled it with the fact, "that I disagree with Governor Stevenson on tidelands and on several issues, but that doesn't make Eisenhower right on all issues. And you have to remember," he said, "that the Democratic Party, the bulk of it, the most of the people--the farmers, the working men, the poor folks--have been better served through the years by the Democratic Party than by the Republican Party."

G: Did he ever consider supporting Eisenhower?

J: No, never really considered supporting Eisenhower. Knew he had a heavy load with Stevenson, liked him personally and admired his intellect, but they were just two very different sort of people. The rough and tumble of politics was certainly not Adlai Stevenson's style. You almost wonder how he became governor of that tough state of Illinois.

G: Did he talk to Stevenson about the tidelands?

J: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. And neither one of them got anywhere.

Somewhere along then, something big and important did happen to us. We got our TV permit. Now, getting the materials was another matter again. They were still hard to get, but we had applied for our permit long, long, long ago, and we had put in orders whenever it was appropriate and sensible to do so. We prepared as much ahead of time as we could, and I think I've told you that was one phase of it that I took pleasure in

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doing in the previous year is walking all over those hills around Austin in boots and the oldest pants I had, and climbing through the cedar and over the rocks with our engineer, Mr. [A. Earl] Cullum. And finally deciding on Mount Larson as the tallest and best.

G: Was the radio transmitter already up there on Mount Larson?

J: No, no. It was a new purchase. We bought, I think, sixteen acres around the top, in order to have a long stretch to put the guy wires in. You see, that country then was practically Indian country, fit only for goats and adventurous picnickers.

G: Who was the seller, do you know?

J: I don't--oh, I should think some of the Polks--some of the Sheltons. I don't remember. Maybe several families. The Sheltons owned a lot of land out there. They were an old family. You remember Polk Shelton was one of Lyndon's people who ran against him in 1937.

G: Well, did you have any trouble getting the permit, other than the fact that it took a long time?

J: I don't think we had any trouble, except the usual lengthy red tape and lots of filing of reports and information, but we felt that we had an excellent engineer in Cullum, and we just put our trust in him. In fact, at that time, there were several openings--let's see, there was V[H]F, both sets of frequencies were open--and we were a little uncertain which one to do. We finally came down on the side of what remained the best one for a good many years, and I guess maybe still is.

G: I wonder if these conventions, these national conventions, were on television, and if that was not one of the early broadcasts of television that perhaps demonstrated the political

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potential of television.

J: I think it must have been. Frankly, I cannot remember having watched. We were not on the air, of course, until Thanksgiving. There was, I think, the Houston station that belonged to Oveta Culp Hobby was on--had been on for a number of years--and I don't know what opportunity we would have had quite to have seen it.

Adlai expressed his appreciation to us promptly after Lyndon came out for him. All in all, it was about as painful and frustrating a period in Lyndon's political life, just for the wear and tear, and for knowing that you were going against the grain of what a lot of your friends wanted you to, and feeling that it was something you ought to do, and must do, and yet it was very hard to do. Particularly when you didn't think it was going to result in success.

But one of the most exciting events of my own life took place in early September. We were already--Lyndon had begun to make trips around over the state. We had company all the time at the Ranch. Stu Symington was with us--I believe it was he--for the weekend. I think it was on a Monday morning--at any rate, the whole crowd dispersed. Our guest, or guests, left. Lyndon went down to the Valley to make a speech. I put Lynda Bird on the school bus early that morning. There were low rain clouds. This was the first time in that brief period of months that we had been alone at the Ranch, just Luci and I. I do not remember Helen and Gene [Williams]; perhaps they had taken off after a busy weekend. Or maybe they were here, I'm not sure. In any case, that morning it began to rain. It rained all day, harder and harder and harder. Finally, it was obvious that the river was rising. There was no high bridge, and Lyndon had told me all of our

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married life tales about the river rising and Uncle Clarence and Aunt Frank or whoever lived on this side, his grandfather, of course, and he himself as a child, being cut off from civilization. So I phoned in to Johnson City to the school, and got the teacher on the phone, and Lynda Bird on the phone, and said, "Now, darling, I don't think you better come home, because it's just possible that school bus might get there and you could not cross the river. So ask Cousin Ava if you can't spend the night with her." Anyway, I got that all arranged. [see Lynda Johnson Robb's oral history for her memory of the flood]

From then on, the day began to take over the quality of one of those suspense novels set in an old English country house during a bad storm. Dark came early. Lightning was flashing in just great sheets. The thunder was rolling across the heavens, and the river was rising, and then, up from the dark, staggered Mr. and Mrs. [Julius] Matus and their children, saying that the water between their house and ours was just already just--they barely got across the flooded slight waterway--you can't call it a creek, it's just a run-off, but the run-off from the fields that had been so dry.

G: This is to the west of you, is that right?

J: This is to the west of us. They barely were able to wade through that water and get up here and they were scared. We were on little bit higher land than they were. So I said, "Come right in. We'll all spend the night together." And we could see that trees were already going down the river. The river was making an awful noise. Between the rushing waters, and the rain, it was just like squadrons of airplanes were going right overhead. Noise filled the world. We talked about what we should do if it got up as high as the house. We had all sorts of schemes. One was to saddle the horses and somebody

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hold Luci in front of them and start riding up to the north to higher ground. Although there was nobody, no house, no friends, nothing up there. The only shelter we could find was the doubtful shelter of being under big trees. We decided to stay in the house. By that time it really was pitch-black night. We kept the coffee pot going all night. We ate I don't know what, probably just grabbed soup on the run. We decided when it was bedtime that somebody had to stay awake all night long, and we would take turns sleeping, and somebody would go out with a flashlight and approach as carefully as possible to see where the water was. Actually, what proved by all odds the best vantage point was the upstairs porch. And the flashes of lightning really lit up the *whole world*, so that the flashlight was a silly thing if you just wait for the lightning.

The night was full of marvelous drama. It was like having a front-row seat on one of nature's big explosions. It reminded me of Wagnerian music, "Götterdämmerung." And yet, I was just terribly sorry, just because I knew it was going to wreak havoc on a lot of people's houses and fences and cattle and topsoil, and, as it turned out, indeed it did, including five lives lost. Out of the black night, here comes Cousin Oriole, her gray hair streaming in her eyes and just looking like a wraith, and she was just bending over with grief saying "Oh, my new stove! Oh, my refrigerator!" Alas, she knew they were going to be washed away. Now she had had a dangerous time getting here, because the same sort of a waterway that almost prevented the Matuses from getting here two hours earlier flowed between her house and ours, and she said that she walked in water up to her shoulders. I can't quite believe that, because I think it would have carried her away, but at any rate, it frightened her.

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G: And she got here unassisted, is that right?

J: She got here, poor thing, unassisted and scared to death. And so we made down a lot of extra beds and kept hot soup going and the coffee pot on all night, and I tried to comfort Cousin Oriole, but her new stove or refrigerator, whichever it was, was the pride of her life, and she just knew. She'd say, "Oh, my new stove! Gone down the river!"

Somewhere between sixteen and twenty-six inches of rain fell in less than twenty-four hours. It had begun at a fairly moderate rate on the morning after school started. It had gone on all day. It just became a sheet, a curtainless, staccato, almost bullet force that night. Somewhere along toward dawn, we realized that the rain was stopping. When the lightning would flash, we would see huge trees still floating down the river. We knew enough to know that when no big things were floating anymore, that meant it had crested and was going down. When dawn came, it was like looking at a battlefield. What had been huge pecan trees, and sizeable live oaks between us and the river, and on the other side, all on this side were gone. Many on the other side were gone. Lots of them were lying there uprooted; many had just been simply picked up like the other matchsticks and carried down the river.

G: Were any of them as large as the trees that you have here in the yard?

J: I'm sure some of them were. The water crested and stopped right out there at the southwest corner of the fence. The fence was a picket fence at that time. But there was a little pump house exactly there, and it lapped against the edges of that pump house, and it began to retreat about dawn.

I was pregnant at the time, and when one is absolutely helpless and something



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awful is happening at least *I* often have nervous reaction or feeling like laughing. I just wondered what is the best costume to flee before the flood, and I wondered what on earth I should put on, and should I pick up Luci and carry her in my arms and start walking up to the northward?

Well, anyhow, we stayed right here, relatively snug in our beds. I forgot to say that in the classic tradition of the suspense story in the English country house during the storm, the phone went out, rather early on, about seven or eight o'clock that night. Miraculously, the lights never went out. We did check to see where the kerosene lamps were, because most country people keep them handy. And we did have kerosene, good wicks in them, and we knew where the matches were and plenty of flashlights. So we were prepared in a fashion.

Well, the landscape was devastated. I thought, "When will I see somebody coming to rescue me and what will it be? Maybe it'll be the N27W, Wesley's [West] plane, and I'll look up and there it'll be, circling above me." Actually, sometime during that morning, Lyndon arrived in a tiny Piper Cub. He had flown up from the Valley, landed I don't know where, gotten in this little bitty plane, and I believe, to my horror, that he had Lloyd Bentsen with him. I think it was awful if Lloyd, too, was putting his life in jeopardy because indeed, it was, because they landed on that little country lane up there west of the house which was gutted with potholes and crisscrossed by timbers, trees. How they found room to land, I don't know.

At any rate, when I saw him circling, I began to wonder, "Oh, what shall I do, what shall I do? We're all right. He ought not to land. He'll just be killed landing. [It's]

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no place to land." So I got some sheets and went out in the yard and tried to make the word "OK" outlined, the letters, meaning, "We're okay." And then I thought, "Oh my God, what if he [thinks it] means it's okay to land?" At any rate, he paid no attention to my poor little sheet symbol and landed, somehow or another, came down, saw us--we were all right. He was enormously relieved, except my heart was full of pain for him, to look at this place that he'd already come to love so much, and it was so ravaged. The dam, Lord knows, it must have been a complete loss.

G: Was it really?

J: I don't remember exactly. I know later it was worked on, and how much of it was left, I don't know. But it had taken an awful battering, from timbers.

G: How about Cousin Oriole's stove?

J: Whew! Cousin Oriole's house, there was water in it up to three or four feet. Everything was soggy, awful. Big things were lying on the floor. And down at the Matuses, the mattresses had floated out the door and floated down and landed in trees way down the river. They recognized it by the ticking. It wasn't worth using. Much of their furniture was sadly damaged or unusable.

G: Did LBJ get reports on this flood while he was in the Valley?

J: He heard about it. How much he heard, I don't know.

G: Did he go down and look at the trees?

J: Oh, yes. He was supposed to go to an important and long-planned barbecue in the Valley, which he had just taken time off from, but which he knew he was going to try to get back to. So he looked; he didn't stay long. He reassured himself that we were all

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right. He was going to make arrangements to get A. W. [Moursund], Melvin [Winters], somebody to come in and try to get to us, coming in through back roads, or rather non-roads, across pastures in pickup trucks. Then he got in that little Piper Cub and started to leave and couldn't take off--too muddy, too many trees across the road. They crashed into one; I don't know how much damage it did to the little plane. In any case, they got in a pickup truck and somehow made their way out to higher ground and got back to where they could catch a really feasible plane and return to the Valley.

It was somewhere along about this point that I looked up and saw Mr. Stehling--gosh, I can't remember his name. Albert Stehling?

G: Albert or Arthur, one of the two.

J: Arthur! Arthur Stehling, who was a very dignified, sedate gentleman, [on] horseback, in a business suit, not at all looking like he was trying to rescue somebody from the flood. He was just coming down the road. And I had an almost giddy inclination to say, "Doctor Livingston. I presume?" (Laughter) And he said he'd heard about our situation, and he wanted to reassure himself and find out if he could do anything for us, and were we all right? And I told him we were, and we recounted all that we knew. He told us about the neighbors up the river and down the river, and the damage, and five lives were lost, and a lot of cattle. Untold number of trees washed out, *all* up and down the river. Some *magnificent* cypresses that it would take a hundred years to regrow farther down. And then he said he'd go back on his horse. He'd come down, I guess from what we now call the Double Horn Road, which was then a little one-lane dirt road. And I do not know who arranged it, or quite how it happened, but predictably enough, it was, I believe, A.

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W. and Melvin who arrived in a pickup truck and loaded Luci and me and whatever we needed to take with us, in, and we went to the Moursunds' house to get properly fed and bathed and clothes changed. And then we were going on in to Austin. The Matuses--I'm not sure. I think perhaps they stayed on in our upstairs, the two north, the two carnation rooms, as we call them now and I think perhaps we called them that--I forget what we called them then. But they were covered with identical wallpaper in very much the same coloring as they now have.

G: Did you then go to Austin and stay with Mrs. Sam Johnson?

J: Well, you see, we still had Dillman, so we went right on back to Dillman.

Sometime that fall, Jim Rowe wrote Lyndon and asked him for some assistance, a contribution, for Mike Mansfield who was running for the Senate in Montana against a Republican. I daresay it turned out to be one of the few Democrat wins that year. And so, Mike was already in the House, but I don't remember having known him well.

Shivers had already been, in late August, to see Adlai in Springfield, and that's when the jig was really up. That's when we knew there was no containment for Shivers, and that he was going to go for Eisenhower and take everybody with him that he could. On the other hand, he was going to see that the Democratic nominees were on the ballot. There were actually as many, at one time, three Democratic Parties in Texas. Well, one of the biggest brouhahas that ever was.

Stu [Symington] was running for the Senate, so the Senate was changing its complexion, with at least two people that were important in our lives, or were to become.

G: Did LBJ help him at all, do you know? Did he go up and campaign for him?

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J: Stu? Yes, he went to Missouri, and made two or three speeches up there, and he traveled all over Texas, with Stevenson, when Stevenson finally came down here.

There were two conventions. I really know virtually nothing about the hierarchy of conventions, but the first one was in San Antonio, and that's when the pot began to boil. But the real one was in Amarillo later, and at that point everything had already been gelled.

Lyndon made speeches all over Texas for Stevenson with such stalwarts as Wright Patman and Speaker [Sam] Rayburn. Hard to get an audience, hard to get your friends out--the whole thing was hard. To enliven the scene a bit, there was this article about Nixon, saying that he had a secret slush fund, which he used for personal purposes. And Nixon hotly replied, in a very dramatic speech, that the fund was for campaign expenses and not personal use, and he spoke very effectively. The reaction was very good; he won that round, and Eisenhower, I must say, was late in coming to his support. But the overall reaction, I think, although at one time it could have been a bad minus for Nixon, it ended by him winning it.

Lyndon dedicated a new building in Austin, the Texas Medical Association, and reminded them that he was on the board of Scott & White [Hospital], and also said, as he said many times, that he was against socialized medicine. This was in 1952, and the FEPC and socialized medicine were both things, just mention the word and Texans got mad.

G: Do you know when he joined the Scott & White board, and under what circumstances?

J: Well, he had a lifelong affection and admiration for the place, and I don't remember

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exactly when he joined it, but in 1952, he was already a member and had been for a while.

You see, his mother had gone there several times for serious operations. Both of his sisters had. He himself had a number of times. He was there in 1948, I know.

The Council of Chambers of Commerce of the whole organization of Texas were harassing all the congressmen for spending too much money and listing their votes. And Lyndon came out on their list as a heavy spender.

Stevenson did have a friend in the AF of L [American Federation of Labor], not that that would matter much to him in Texas, because their vote was not great here. It remains to this day a mystery to me how Lyndon survived all these years and all these turmoils in Texas. I think there was a real hope at that time on the part of a lot of people they could put an end to his political career by his coming out for Stevenson and accompanying him around over the state. And lots of his friends would say, "No use kidding yourself, Lyndon. They're out to get you."

G: Did he think that Shivers was going to run against him?

J: I don't know that he did. I really don't know. I don't believe he did.

G: There was an awful lot of speculation--

J: Yes. It was a natural sort of thing to happen. He always liked Shivers, although as we know, there was a pitched battle. And I guess, golly, that pitched battle had to be--

G: 1956.

J: --1956.

G: But was he at all concerned that Shivers might run against him in 1954? Because it

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seems like during 1952 and the following year, 1953, there was a good deal of press speculation that Shivers was going to run.

J: Yes. Well, he always ran scared. He always tried to be prepared. He always tried to keep himself so strong that he could withstand whoever took out after him, and I don't think he went around worrying particularly about Shivers. If he did, I wasn't aware of it.

The drought had already gone on twenty-seven long months in Texas. It was on when we bought the place and had been on. Then came this horrendous flood, and then, amazingly, the drought returned. It--nature, in the fifties, at least for some five or seven years in the fifties, was as unkind as it had been kind in the forties. I guess we needed it so much to feed ourselves and then feed the world and feed the army in the forties, so we were lucky, really.

One nice little thing was that Lyndon won the Hap Arnold Man of the Year award from the Air Force Association jointly with Senator Joe O'Mahoney.

And one thing that--and I do not know exactly when this did occur, but perhaps in late September, or perhaps in October--I did have a miscarriage, and so the end of another set of hopes. But it was in no way actually the result of the flood, because I never suffered any damage or anything, except the greatest excitement and sympathy for all the people who lost their savings and their cattle and their fences and their furniture.

We were undaunted. We did not for one moment think about walking off and leaving this devastated landscape. We just began to get truckload after truckload of debris hauled up and taken away and burned. I'm sure Lyndon went right back to work on the dam. That same dam has had a lot of work done on it through the years.

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And so, that bitter fall continues.

[End of Tape 1 of 1 and Interview XXX]



NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND RECORDS ADMINISTRATION

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

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

Assistant Archivist  
For Presidential Libraries

## Appendix A

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

Mrs. Johnson's Oral History Interviews:

**Assistant Archivist  
For Presidential Libraries**

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

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