

INTERVIEW XXXVI covering 1955

DATE: August 1994

INTERVIEWEE: LADY BIRD JOHNSON

INTERVIEWER: HARRY MIDDLETON

PLACE: Martha's Vineyard

Tape 1 of 2, Side 1

M: Oral history, Lady Bird Johnson, year 1955. Mrs. Johnson, the big event of that year, obviously, was the President's heart attack, but let's go into some things that happened before that. That was a year in which he being mentioned quite often in the context of being a possible candidate for the White House. If you have any memory of how he felt about it, I think it would be useful to record it. But it would be just as useful to record how you felt about it if you were aware of it at the time.

J: Well, yes, didn't take it seriously, didn't encourage it. I personally think he was scared to death of such a prospect. And really and truly did not want to bring it about.

M: How about you? Would you have been scared at the prospect?

J: Yes. I think any sensible person would be, that had lived closed to it. And we had lived close to it since 1937, and seen the weight of it, the difficulties of it. Yes, greatly respectful of the office of the presidency and not seeking to be tapped. I know that doesn't agree with a lot of thinking. (Laughter)

M: Well, I know, but that is the way--(Laughter)--we're not trying to do that.

J: I can only talk about it from my own feelings and what I believed to be his.

Johnson -- XXXVI -- 2

M: Absolutely. How about any of the people around him? Do you know that any of the people around him were pushing him or hoping that he would--that lightening would strike?

J: I think that for a long time Speaker Sam Rayburn did think he was good enough to be and did hope that he would be. And the same about John Connally. Although John would get mighty put out with him when he, John, though Lyndon was right up within shooting distance and Lyndon wouldn't make the effort.

M: That was the year Amon Carter died. Was he important in your life?

J: Yes, he was. He was a giant on the Texas scene, and enormously colorful. A common name was "Mr. Fort Worth" and a deserved name. He did so much for that town. And one of the things I love that he did and I'm pretty sure, I'd love to hear somebody research it, was that he put together this big stretch of land on which first, he built his own museum, the museum of western art [the Amon Carter Museum], and I think he had in future plans and dreams for Fort Worth a row of museums there. I don't know that I've got any facts to back it up. I wish somebody would tell me. But it was good city planning, and it came to pass with the addition of the Kimbell [Art Museum] and I think there's a Children's Museum. I think, there are perhaps four there.

M: Had he been a supporter, a political supporter of LBJ's?

J: Yes, he'd been a supporter, and we'd been with him a number of times on marvelous occasions with him and Sid Richardson. They were perhaps the two biggest citizens in Fort Worth and both good friends of Lyndon.

Now, Amon Carter was--he had a sizable ego; how could he not? He thought that

Johnson -- XXXVI -- 3

young politicians should pretty much obey what they knew to be his feelings. And his feelings were opposed to Adlai Stevenson, period, and ardently supportive of [Dwight] Eisenhower as I remember. And Lyndon, who believed that, as he would express it, from the court house to White House, on balance, adding it all together historically, that the Democratic Party had been best for the people, and "the common people" was the phrase used then without all that much pejorative as it perhaps is now, a feeling. And so, not that Adlai Stevenson was cut from the same cloth that Lyndon was, and Texas in general was, but just because that he was looming up as the leader of the Democratic Party, Lyndon was for him. And that was unforgivable to Amon Carter. And so sadly, sadly, he checked Lyndon off his list. I mean, it was sad for us; I don't whether it was sad for him, because we never ceased to regard him with great respect and liking and a certain amount of awe. We couldn't follow him that path though.

M: That must have been a wrenching experience for the President, well, Senator at that time.

J: It was. Not so much as later experiences with even more intimate friends, for instance, Dick Russell. But yes, hard.

We have the most marvelous picture of Sam Rayburn, and--no, I think this one is Sid Richardson up on a wagon, with Amon Carter, and there's some big annual to-do at Amon's place, a barbecue to which all the politicians of note were invited. And both of them grinning from ear to ear. And both of them such characters in Texas history.

M: Amon Carter and Sid Richardson are, in general, identified on the conservative side--

J: Absolutely.

M: --of politics.

Johnson -- XXXVI -- 4

Now the next note that I have here is about one on the other side of the other side of the spectrum, John Henry Faulk, who would be, I think, certainly identified in those years as being on the left side.

J: Absolutely. (Laughter)

M: Do you have memories of him and an agreement that was almost made between him and LBJ to go to work for him.

J: I do. And they are not really happy memories. Lyndon heard him at some sort of entertainment for, was it the Texas State Society? I don't know where it was. Anyhow, John Henry Faulk did his wonderful imitation of a Texas, real country boy. And he was hilariously funny. And Lyndon had a marvelous time. And he came back telling me all about him, and he wished he would go to work for us. And they did come close to making an arrangement.

My recollection is that John Henry's wife at that time, who was not his wife later on, came in with an ultimatum, said that he should get X amount of salary, which was not the amount that they had agreed on. She did not really want to go to Texas. Lyndon didn't want to be given ultimatums, and so he called it off. And it wasn't gracefully done, and I felt bad about it because I kept right on being fond of John Henry.

M: You were right to the end of his life, as I recall.

J: Yes, yes. And I want to tell you this. Many years later, at one of those annual parties that are given on Lyndon's birthday, at San Marcos State Teacher's College as it was for many years, and is now Southwest Texas University [and later, Texas State University], John Henry gave a talk. The talk on Lyndon's Birthday is always about Lyndon at that school.

Johnson -- XXXVI -- 5

And he gave one of the best I ever heard, about Lyndon's talks and achievements and his-- what I got out of it was his gradual change toward being on the liberal side of a lot of legislation that was being born in that decade.

M: I heard him make that kind of observation many times, and that was certainly his conviction.

Well, you know, how do we get into this now? The big thing that happened in 1955, which certainly had a decided effect on your life, was Senator Johnson's heart attack. And I guess I've heard you talk about it, particularly in the film that Charles Guggenheim did. But it would be good to record that, historically. From your prospective, how did you learn about it? And what were your reactions? And how did you cope with it?

J: The date was July the second. Luci's eighth birthday. Wait a minute, this is 1955 and she was born in 1947, yes, eighth birthday. She was of course, going to have a party. And who puts on the party? Mama. The day, as I recall, I think it was a Friday.

M: I think it was Friday, yes.

J: Lyndon was going down to George Brown's place called Huntland in Little Bird, Virginia, which was sort of our paradise. We adored getting to go to Huntland. It was an old pre-Civil War red brick house way out in the country. The Browns lived there for a few day weekends, days, maybe at the utmost sometime for a week. And used it as a retreat for themselves and their friends, and made it available to us at times. Well staffed, casual nevertheless, had a swimming pool, beautiful gardens. Lyndon went down there with George and a bunch of their special friends.

Johnson -- XXXVI -- 6

I stayed at home to put on the party, which always included about ten or twelve little girls and/or boys. And very often they would be members of the Texas Delegation's children. And a little conclave of mothers. And the mothers would sit up on the screened porch, and the children would play in the yard, and we'd have all sorts of games like, be blindfolded and pin the tail on the donkey. Sometimes I would have entertainment, like a fortune teller. Zephyr [Wright] was our cook; she'd have the things that Luci like best. Little miniature hamburgers was one of our favorite things made out of homemade rolls in the shape of hamburger buns and lemonade and, of course, a big cake, which was inside on the dining room table. Although, the party itself was always in the backyard.

We had the party. The party was close to over, as I recall, and I get a call from Little Bird from a member of George's family--it may have been George himself--saying that Lyndon was sick. The local doctor had been called. He said it looked like a heart attack. He wanted him to go into Bethesda immediately. They had called an ambulance, Lyndon was in it and en route to Bethesda, and I should go out there and be prepared to meet him. So I went, arriving in a pretty good state of ignorance.

M: You drove?

J: Yes, I think, because he had gone down--we did at that time, the Majority Leader has a car at his disposal, but Lyndon had, of course, to Huntland in the car. I went out and met the doctors. I was told to stand close to a certain entrance. They were in touch, by I don't know what, but they knew that he would arrive in X number of minutes.

A doctor who had been in the navy and who had lacked X number of months, not much, when the war was over had been called back to duty to finish that time at Bethesda

Johnson -- XXXVI -- 7

Naval Hospital. He was a heart specialist; his name was Willis Hurst. There was also a young doctor on duty whom Lyndon always called "the little doctor"; I can't remember his name right now.

We stood by this entrance, and all of a sudden, the rear doors of the ambulance opened, Lyndon on a stretcher, was brought in. I looked at him; he looked just like himself. I was enormously relieved. I don't know what I expected. And the doctor was bending over him, taking vital signs and then in a minute, two, and three, and a whole clutch of doctors bending over, working on him. And one of them looked up at me--no, I think first thing they said, "Senator, you are going to have to give up cigarettes." And he said, "I've got to?" And the doctor said, "Yes, absolutely." And he said, "Well, give me one more." And the expression on his face as he smoked that cigarette was really quite marvelous, because it was the ultimate enjoyment and drawing out of the pleasure into lengthening moments. And then the doctor looked up at me and said, "I must tell you he may go into shock any moment." I had never seen anybody in shock. I thought, "He looks just like himself." He had reached in his pocket and handed me his billfold. I think he also told me where his will was. If not, he told somebody standing by his side, a member of our staff, but I think he told me. And then he began to go into shock, and became as gray as the cement sidewalk. My first experience with anybody in shock. I was *horrified*. He was no longer Lyndon. He passed the cigarette over. I cannot tell you whether he was conscious or not, but it was a totally different person.

Meanwhile, there are more and more doctors doing more and more things, and then they put him on a big trolley and wheeled him into the Intensive Care Unit and told

Johnson -- XXXVI -- 8

me I could wait right outside the door. I asked them where could I spend the night. And they showed me to a room close by. And I called home to let Zephyr know, and Luci, and Lynda if she was there--funny, I cannot recall about Lynda at this moment--that I would not be home. That Daddy really was very sick. So for them to just send up prayers and love, and not to worry anymore then they could, because they just had a wonderful bunch of people working on him.

And from the first moment I became acquainted with him I just had a hand-in-hand feeling for Willis Hurst, and it was a great gift from the Lord that he happened to be in that place at that time. He had trained under an extremely well-known doctor called White.

M: Paul White?

J: Yes, [he] was a cardiologist at the top of his field. And I learned later that Willis had been one of his favorite students. He is a Georgia man. Well, as soon as they had put all the tubes in Lyndon that they could, done all they could, everything that they could, in that state of the art to stabilize him, Willis came and talked to me. And said, "Your husband is a very sick man. I have seen men who are sicker than he is get well. And I have seen men as sick as he is die. And all that I can tell you is that every hour, every day, that he responds to treatment and that he lives is a victory. And the first twenty-four hours is the biggest victory." And I said, "I am going to be right here." And so they made arrangements for me to stay in a close by room or cot in that room, for the first--no, they wouldn't have let me stay in Intensive Care. Anyhow, I was very close by. And I called his mother. I made such staff calls as I thought should be done. I think, in the few

Johnson -- XXXVI -- 9

seconds after arrival and between going into shock, he told me who to call. He was a very in-charge, forethoughted man, even in that situation.

So the gist of it was that he stayed in the hospital about six weeks, which was the current practice for anybody with that serious a heart infarction.

M: And you were there through most of that time.

J: Yes. But after he began to get better, he began to want better food. So, I was a kind of a taxi service between home--I went home to get a night gown, and makeup, and food didn't enter into for forty-eight, seventy-two hours, I don't know when. But as soon as food was wanted and acceptable for him to eat, Zephyr and I went to work, providing him with all of his favorite things within the limits of what he could have.

Actually, this had been a year--1955 had been a year of mounting health problems.

And, beginning in January as I recall, and--well, how far do you want me to take this?

M: Well, I want to ask you this. A couple things occurred to me. In the months leading up to it, were you aware of any particular tensions?

J: Yes, yes, yes. How could you not? In fact, that very day Lyndon had had a press conference that had some very difficult questions that made him angry, he probably responded to poorly. Well, I think at some point at the cost of taking more time on this then you want to, we might go back and begin in January.

M: What time do you have now?

J: I don't know. Right behind you on that table there should be my watch.

M: It is a quarter to seven, Mrs. Johnson. Can that be right? No, it's six fifteen; I'm sorry.

J: All right, let me have that. So it will take me--it will probably will take you longer. But I

Johnson -- XXXVI -- 10

am dressed with the exception of shoes and a few things.

M: Why don't we take--let me see how we are doing over here on the tape and we can keep going for as long as it is--all right.

You were going to start back, you said, back at the beginning of the year, talk about some of the things. Before we finished that part of it though, there is that story that has been repeated so many times.

J: Oh, you mean about the suits!

M: About the suits. Was it true?

J: Yes, it was true. He had gone to the tailor two or three days before and had bought, I think it was a dark blue suit, could have been dark gray, and another suit. (Laughter) The poor little tailor--the calls we had, of course, were so very wonderful, important, loving calls, *jillions* of them. And then this poor little tailor, his call was just wondering if he was going to be fixing up about five hundred dollars' worth of suits for a dying man. Must have taken a considerable amount of nerve, but he called me and said, "Mrs. Johnson, did you want me to proceed with those suits?" And I said, "I'll have to get back to you." Actually, this must have been about the third or fourth day. I wouldn't have done it the first twenty-four hours of the first forty-eight. But every day Willis would tell me with a mounting beam, smile, he said, "Every day is a victory. Every day that he lives and improves, and is improving, means that he is going to come back all right." So about the third or fourth day, I repeated the poor little tailor's question. Lyndon sort of smiled sardonically, "Tell him to go ahead with the navy blue one, anyway. Whatever way it goes, we'll need that one." (Laughter)

Johnson -- XXXVI -- 11

M: Did it strike you as funny at the time?

J: Yes. (Laughter)

M: In the film that Charles Guggenheim did you expressed your feelings at the time that this happened. And one of the very interesting things out of that was that you remembered it, you remembered rage.

J: Absolutely. It is--and I'm sure for everybody of our age, that is the perfectly natural reaction. You felt embattled against death. And absolutely enraged that it could dare to overtake you and your husband. He was forty-six, I believe; I was forty-two. And my thought was, "We are not through yet. We've got things to do. We've got each other. This can't be. We're going to oppose strength to strength and beat it." And I think that is sort of universal reaction.

M: Do you think the girls were ever conscious of the severity of the situation? They were pretty young.

J: Eight and eleven. Lynda must have been. Luci probably. I'm sorry to say I may not have helped them enough; I may have kept them more in the dark. The simple fact is that I did not leave the hospital for any length of time. I did call them on the telephone and talk to them, every day.

I got Willie Day Taylor, God bless her; she was already my great reliance with the children. She was on Lyndon's staff. She had been married, years earlier, and divorced. She loved children, and was good with children, and she particularly loved these two children, and bossed them. And they needed both love and bossing.

M: When the Senator's mother came, he was still in the hospital at that time?

Johnson -- XXXVI -- 12

J: Oh, you bet. And her first plane flight, I think. Their closeness was a very strong bond indeed, because not only was he her child, her first child but he was also her reliance. He was the strength in her life. He was the one who helped take care of all the rest of them. And it was just like his death would have--it would have been just an incalculable loss to her.

M: You reflected earlier today on some of the relationship with members of his family. Do you feel like going into that at all for this record? Or would you rather not?

J: No, I don't mind. There were five children; Lyndon was the oldest. Next it was Rebekah, who never needed Lyndon's help; she was intelligent, beautiful, ambitious. He helped her get a job; in fact, he helped her get two jobs. The first one teaching school, the second one after he came to Washington, and I think still as a member of the staff of Congressman [Richard] Kleberg, a job in the Library of Congress. She did it well. She was a source of pride. They were never as congenial as I would have liked, as Lyndon's mother would have liked. But she stood on her own feet, was always somebody to be proud of.

Josefa, the next child, was not quite the same story. She was far more warm and outgoing, and she and I were closer and better friends. But she had a measure of instability and bad luck, and let's see, in the course of time, two failed marriages and a degree, sometimes, of drug dependency, or alcohol dependency, or something which in those days we did not quite identify, understand, sympathize with, attack in the way that, thanks to so many good people, and among them Betty Ford, bless her, we have begun to do a better job on. I wish that things could have been solved for her. She solved a great

Johnson -- XXXVI -- 13

many of them for herself. And she was always warm, friendly, pretty, outgoing. But her life was a lot of problems and Lyndon was always getting her jobs, or straightening out things for her, and winding up with disappointments. And Mrs. Johnson--every one of her children, she was going to help them with her last breath, and she was going to appeal to Lyndon to help, when it was to the last level of strength that he had to take care of the situation.

And then there was Sam Houston was the next, and his is a better known and even more difficult story. Person of great charm, great jokester, very amusing, good personality, sizable measure of ability, but instability.

And then there was the youngest one was Lyndon's favorite, and he just loved her dearly, and she loved him just as dearly. And she called--she managed her own life in her own way. Eloped and got married at seventeen to just about the best man in the whole wide for her, an old family friend named Birge Alexander, and it nearly killed Mrs. Johnson and her father at that youthful age for her to marry, but it turned to have been a great beneficence to everybody concerned, because Birge was a rock for her, [and] for other members of the family, good man. So, but we are digressing. Now, where are we?

M: This was an appropriate time to bring up the members of his family. While we are on that, let me ask this question. Do you think he ever, because he did have so much responsibility, did he ever resent--

J: Resent it?

M: --the responsibility?

J: You bet he did. And he would think, "Mother how *can* you do this to me?" And I would

Johnson -- XXXVI -- 14

say, "Lyndon, she can't help it. She's their mother, just as she's your mother, and you are the strongest figure in her life, with her husband dead. And you are just going to have state your limits and stand tough or go ahead and try it with your last breath to help them."

M: How about you? Did you ever resent it?

J: Yes, but not terribly, because we were always--Lyndon and I always had a comfortable home, however small it might be, and an assurance about ourselves and his future, and worry about his health from time to time, and worry about many things. But no, I resented it, but it was not all that severe a load, but I was in some *strange* places doing some *strange* things from time to time, because he sought help from me, just as Mrs. Johnson sought help from him.

M: Why don't we cut it off here, and then tomorrow we'll pick it up--back to the heart attack and the one thing I want to ask you about that was what kind of a patient he was as he was recovering.

(Laughter)

But let's cut it now.

J: All right.

Tape 1 of 2 Side 2

M: We're talking about the heart attack, but I want to go back. You said that year was filled with health problems.

J: I think we'd better go back to the chronology. Do you have a copy of this?

M: I do. I looked it over this morning, here is--let me ask you if it'd be all right to do it this

Johnson -- XXXVI -- 15

way. Talk a little bit about his election as majority leader. And then health problems--it was one manifestation of [a] health problem that kept him away from the Senate when the SEATO [Southeast Asia Treaty Organization] Treaty was signed.

J: I think that is an interesting point.

M: And then--side two of 1955 with Lady Bird Johnson's oral history. Mrs. Johnson going back to the beginning of the year, that was the year that LBJ was elected majority leader of the Senate, according to the chronology that's been given to me, and I did not realize that at the time that we were going through this yesterday. But it was a year, you said yesterday, of many tensions, and that would certainly be part of it, and also a year of health problems that culminated in his heart attack.

J: Quite true.

M: One of those health problems showed up early, and that was a kidney stone that involved his having to go to the Mayo Clinic, and he was recuperating from that when the SEATO Treaty was signed, and that kept him away from Congress. Do you remember anything about--later that became quite important to that man who had to make some sense of that treaty as President was not there at the time that it was passed. But do you remember anything about its significance at the time, or his discussion of it?

J: Not intimately. I knew, of course, that the bones of the treaty were that basis on which a post war foreign policy was built was to contain aggression, to prevent its spread. If one nation started to eat up another nation, we, the United States, were committed to stop it.

This SEATO Treaty extended that kind of world operation to--it's S-E-A-T-O, South East Asia Treaty Organization. And interestingly enough, the two main figures

Johnson -- XXXVI -- 16

who had to deal with that, that is, first, [John] Kennedy, succeeded in multiplies by Lyndon Johnson, were not present, did not sign it. Lyndon was in Mayo having a kidney stone operation. That was something that plagued him much of his adult life. For reasons I don't understand, he was prone to them. And President Kennedy had a back problem, and he was either having an operation or recuperating. I think, as a matter of fact, they were both recuperating from those two things when SEATO, which shadowed so much of their, particularly Lyndon's, future years was crafted and signed by the Senate.

But do you mind if I go back a minute?

M: Please do.

J: 1955 was a very important year for us. Lyndon was elected Majority Leader when the Senate convened in January, and by a very *narrow* count, because the 84th Congress-- there were forty-eight Democrats and forty-seven Republicans, and Wayne Morse. And Wayne Morse voted with the Democrats to organize the Senate. Wayne Morse was the burr under the saddle of countless people, leaders and presidents. Lyndon always--he chafed as much as anybody else under his recalcitrance, but he also respected him and liked him.

And in a conversation with a staff one time when we were all sitting around having supper out at our house, he made the statement that every Senate should have a Wayne Morse, which we thought was just craziest thing, because what you want [is] smooth sailing and Wayne Morse didn't permit any smooth sailing. But Lyndon said, "You can always count on him when you are seeking a vote related to," I think, he said, "labor and education."

Johnson -- XXXVI -- 17

M: He would have, yes.

J: I'm not sure.

M: Do you remember Wayne Morse yourself?

J: Oh, of course I do.

M: Do you remember any--what was your impression of him, personally?

J: Bristly, highly independent, sort of rejoicing in being the burr under the saddle.

Interesting man, scared of nothing. I sort of liked him but he was an uncomfortable person.

M: Uncomfortable--

J: --to be around, I mean to have on your team, sort of, because he wasn't on anybody's team; he was an independent.

A lot of firsts happened to us that year. The biggest and most important, by all odds, the majority leadership which was a stepping stone beyond all others to us. But there was one little tiny bit of finding the world of travel and recreation, and Lyndon had lived a life of work, work, work, which I had gone along, big eyed and enthusiastic. But early that year we went to Florida with Tony Buford and August Busch, and Earle Clements, and it seems to me [George] Smathers, Senator Smathers, of Florida was a moving figure in that trip.

I think that was the time that we meet Bebe Rebozo, the great friend of Nixon, whom we liked. And I believe it was the time when A. W. Moursund came over and joined us and looked at us like we were idiots because we wanted to sit out in the sun and get a suntan. And that is what he, A. W., had been avoiding all his life out riding for

Johnson -- XXXVI -- 18

cattle. Finally, he did consent to sit on the top step with his hat pulled down over his face the best he could, us all laughing. Well--

M: Where you on the beach?

J: I think we were on the steps of the beach house that we somehow were living in.

M: Back to the majority leader, when he was elected, he was the youngest majority leader, I think, in the history of the Senate. Do you remember any of the circumstances of why he was elected and who were some of the moving forces in that?

J: The most important thing that happened to us, I regret to say, I don't remember. I just know it was marveled at, and very much commented on, in the newspapers. And it was a year of knife edge walking-your-way-through Senate problems, because of the makeup at the Senate, forty-eight to forty-seven and Morse. But in a way, it suited Lyndon and his abilities, because he came to truly like and appreciate Eisenhower. And Lyndon and Speaker Sam Rayburn were good folks to have at the helm in a time when they were-- their philosophy was, the opposition party is not supposed to just oppose; it should go with and support the President when they think he is right and what he is doing is best for the country, and then oppose him very toughly when they think he is wrong, and they did some of each. It took a lot of skill to manipulate those waters, and those two gentlemen really had it.

M: When LBJ was elected, what was your own reaction? Where you proud of him?

J: Oh yes, I thought that was great recognition. I was proud of him. I do not think people really understood the awe with which he, Lyndon, regarded that job and later regarded the presidency. It's not--and I also felt a sense, "Am I up to this? Can I do it? Well, I'm sure

Johnson -- XXXVI -- 19

going to give it the best try anybody ever did." His ego, which certainly did exist, just did not believe he was the smartest fellow in the world, could handle easily all those things; he just thought he'd have to work twice as hard as the next fellow to competently conduct it.

A lot of sort of sweet things, to me, happened that year, too. Grace Tully, who had been FDR's personally secretary, who had befriended us in the early days from 1937 till FDR's death in the spring of 1945. She would always try to work it out for Lyndon to get an appointment if he wanted one with the President. And she was a lovely person and she was left somewhat bereft when FDR died, because that had been her life. She stayed on with, I think, the Library as it was formed for a year or two. But, by this time, she was out of a job, and she needed something. And Lyndon asked her to come with him, which she did for several years. She was a great fount of information, great companion. We enjoyed her. She was our good friend, until she really felt that she was getting old enough that she wanted to get out. We also hired Isabel Brown, the daughter of George Brown, who wanted to have a taste of Washington life and smart as she could be and a pleasure to have in our facility.

M: This is a digression, but it's appropriate to bring it up here, it has been my observation, on the basis of the people that I have known, that you became personal friends on a basis that they all called you by your first name with all the presidents' secretaries through the years: Mary Rather, and Dorothy Nichols, and all of them that I have seen.

J: Absolutely. They were wonderful bunch of fellow workers, and adventurous, and I joined in with them. They were rare folks and remained, until their death or their very old

Johnson -- XXXVI -- 20

age, close to me and dear to me and, I think, Mary was godmother to Luci.

Yes, you were mentioning a few minutes ago about ill health. That year, as you remember back across it, was just full of forerunners of physical troubles. In January, we took the train Mayo to have some kidney stone tests, and I remember Lyndon and I thought we'd live it up and so we got a bedroom on the train. And we sat there and looked at each other in opposite seats, and we said, "We ought to celebrate." So what we both did was order a glass of milk. Lyndon was fighting overweight and fighting having three or four drinks at the end of the day, because of the stress of the day, and I was always fighting overweight. But nevertheless, our favorite drink was milk, so we decided that we'd just sit there and have a glass of milk and look out the window.

M: Was it ever determined what caused his kidney stones?

J: No, no. If medical science knows, I don't, and I don't think they do. They told him to omit a few things from his diet, actually things that he never ate anyways. So I just do not know. Something about the chemical makeup of the body, which I don't understand and I doubt they did.

M: It was something that plagued him in his early life, but I don't think it bothered him from the presidency on through until he died, did it? I don't think he ever had a kidney stone then.

J: I don't believe so. It seems like the Lord tempered the wind to the shorn lamb in those days, and we had generally pretty good health.

So at Mayo we did have some work on kidney stones, and, I think, it was a full scale operation. I don't quite understand, I guess because it was in a certain spot, because

Johnson -- XXXVI -- 21

in 1948 they had been able to reach in with forceps and crush it. But that, I think, all depends on where the kidney stone is lodged. Took us a long time to get out of Mayo. And when we left Mayo, we went to the Ranch to recuperate, and that is when they signed the SEATO Treaty, which I think is always one of the odd little footnotes of history.

M: You went by private plane.

J: That would have been Wesley West's, I'm pretty sure. Wesley and Lyndon from opposite poles of political values had become close personal friends. And I certainly was, both of Wesley and of his darling wife, Neva.

M: Did you have a fear of flying in those days?

J: By that time, I had pretty nearly conquered it. In my youth, I didn't. In fact, I went up in one of [those] planes when I was either eleven or thirteen years old, that use to land in field and charge anybody, adventurous enough or crazy enough, two dollars to go up and fly around the village or city below them. And then I made my first trip on a commercial plane to the University of Texas in April of 1930 to take a look at the University and see if I wanted to go there. But later on, and oh yes, that made me sick as could be. And I was scared of planes. Not scared, just sick and uncomfortable, for years and years, and then you finally overcome it.

And among his many problems was this business of having to wear a brace on his back because of a disk problem. He was unusually tall from the hips up, and this just was one of the things that plagued him.

That spring was also a time of social activity. We had never been in the social

Johnson -- XXXVI -- 22

swim of Washington very much. *I* had. I went to everything that it was respectable to go to without your husband, because I always had some Senate lady friends or some wives of the House members whose husbands, like Lyndon, didn't get off to go to diplomatic receptions and garden parties given by Mrs. Merriweather Post and such things.

But this one was a party we gave, a lovely reception in the Carlton Room for Bess and Tyler Abell. Bess was the daughter of our staunch dear friend, Earle Clements, and his pretty, gentle wife. And Earle made it possible for Lyndon to be majority leader in many, many ways. So knowledgeable and smooth and easy and staunch. And when Lyndon was off in these long absences with illness, he, Earle, who had been very popular governor of Kentucky and then, at that time was senator from Kentucky, stayed there and kept things running. Well, this was a beautiful party, and Tyler was the stepson of Drew Pearson and the son of Luvie Pearson. Two of the most interesting figures in all of Washington in my whole life. I was crazy about them.

We had a kind of a love/hate relationship with Drew. I mean, every now and then he would cut Lyndon up in his column, and every now and then he would praise him. By and large, I thought Drew had really meant it in all those four years when he was exhorting us all to, what was it? To fight, to strive to make democracy live. And I thought he really meant it, so I went along with him. He sort of looked like a sophisticated Britisher with his sort of aristocratic face and bristly mustache.

M: Would you yourself take it rather personally anytime that the President was criticized or the Senator was criticized in a column like that?

J: Nobody but friends could ever hurt me. And he was kind of arm's distance, and no. He

Johnson -- XXXVI -- 23

certainly didn't.

M: Well, this is the first appearance of Bess Abell in this oral history, and she became important to you later. Let's talk a little about her. Had you worked with her before this?

J: Not really. I remember her mother, who was one of these gentle, planning, Southern ladies, would ask Bess to sort of help Lynda smooth her way a little bit. We went to the beach one day, spent the day, Mrs. Clements and Bess, who must at that time have been, oh gee, she is probably eight or ten older years older than Lynda, quite a lot older, and Lynda was kind of an awkward fourteen or something like that. I don't know quite what she was. She was born in 1944, no awkward eleven in this year and Luci eight. And she was helpful and nice to my children, and she was to everybody. Mrs. Clements and--she was sort of getting Bess to do that. I could see that Bess was a very bright, capable young woman. I did not foresee at that time that she would one day be my right arm, but all of that was to come in the future; six years and more later.

M: She and Tyler eloped. Did that surprise you?

J: No, not particularly. I mean, I didn't know them all the intimately. But I think they were independent young people and I presume they didn't want to go through the long folderol of--whatever the reason, they did elope.

M: So you gave a party for four hundred people for them.

J: Yes. To introduce them to the whole bunch of people that they already knew but to sort of give a special stamp to saying this is a new marriage starting among two families that matter in this town, and we care about both of them.

And that was also the year that we took almost the one and only vacation my

Johnson -- XXXVI -- 24

children can remember taking with their father. We went to Daytona Beach with a bunch of congressmen. They had something, sort of a, called the congressional baseball teams, which were largely figments of the imagination. But they went down for "spring training," in quotes, to Daytona Beach. And Lyndon and all of us, his two daughters and I, the Ickards, their two sons, the Thornberrys, their three children, several more people whose names I have remembered through the years but can't quite lay my tongue to now. Daytona is one the most beautiful beaches in the world, and we really just lived it up and the children just remembered that. You'd be surprised how important it was to them to be with their father on a vacation. You rent some sort of a beach car that was low to the ground and that any number of folks in bathing suits could sit in, cling to, manage to stay on top of, and we did that. It was very much of a family time and a laughing time, and something that we should have done more of, obviously, since it meant so much to the children.

M: Here's where--since we are going through this chronologically--here's where Liz Carpenter shows up for the first time, as a reporter. Did you know her well as a reporter, when she was a reporter?

J: Yes. She paid a call on her congressman, Lyndon, when she first arrived in Washington. He liked her bright sassy nature, and he was a big one for bringing everybody home, for dinner unexpected. She and Les, her husband, and I'm not quite sure just when they married but we were--we did attend the wedding. They were in our home from her very first arrival in Washington on.

And there is one more thing I want to mention here and I don't know whether--do

Johnson -- XXXVI -- 25

you remember when Jim Forrestal, the dates of his being head of the Department of Defense?

M: It was in the Truman years, so it would have been before this. It was in the 1940s. He committed suicide, I think, when--from a hospital--I think President Truman was still in office.

J: Then I no doubt have told about our relation with him. He was one of the most attractive men I have ever known in power in Washington. But I am noting here that we went on the *Sequoia*, taking the newspaper men who came to--every April in Washington was like a, it was stormed by two groups every year, the American Society of Newspaper Editors and the DAR [Daughters of the American Revolution]. And every congressional wife had plenty of duties in relation to those two groups, and I certainly did.

I'm looking at this chronology here and I cannot image though with Forrestal gone from the scene how we happen to have the use of the *Sequoia*.

M: I take it the *Sequoia* was run by the navy department then?

J: Yes, it was, but it was at the disposal of the president, and he normally made it available to members of his cabinet, but Lyndon was the leader of the opposition, and Eisenhower was president, wasn't he?

M: It's interesting.

J: Sorry, can't remember.

Lyndon also became the object--teamed up with Rayburn and they were always teamed up in those years. And they were a marvelous team. In being honored by some group such as the Texas State Society.

Johnson -- XXXVI -- 26

M: And I see that Scooter Miller was president of that society.

J: Yes.

M: Have you ever talked about Scooter and Dale in this chronology at all?

J: I don't remember, but they were the quintessential Texas--it was sort of the glue that held a lot of groups together. They were the most convivial, and the best mixers, and knew everybody, and were the sources of information; if you wanted to know something, you asked Scooter, Dale also. Dale was the son of a fabulous old former mayor of Corpus Christi, whom Lyndon had known, respected, liked very much when he was secretary to Congressman Kleberg. So he, in a way, sort of inherited a relationship with Dale. And they were quick to take all young people under their wing, if they liked them. And they liked a wide variety of people. He was one of my most fun friends during all the years of our lives together. I still find myself, years after her death almost headed for the phone to call Scooter when I return to Washington.

M: Do you remember the eulogy that Jake Pickle gave for her? He said, "All those years I never knew her name was Scooter." I don't know what her name really was.

J: Virginia, I think.

M: We come here to something about Allen Shivers, but let's wait till next year on that, because next year he becomes very active, and let's talk about his role then, so let's skip over this one.

J: I don't know when Lyndon's confrontation with him was. Was it 1952 or 1956?

M: 1956.

J: But I definitely remember Lyndon's reluctance to do it and efforts to make it up

Johnson -- XXXVI -- 27

afterwards. He was a reluctant opponent, but a vigorous one.

And among Lyndon's new-found social activities was going to the Kentucky Derby, along with Senator Earle Clements, because, as a former governor of Kentucky, it's a ritual. You always go to the Kentucky Derby if you are from Kentucky and have been a governor or a senator, or just love Kentucky as so many people from there will do till the day they die, and they all want to go to the Derby.

(Interruption)

Are we running?

M: Yes.

J: There is one of Lynda, age eleven, all dressed up, a bit plump, and including white gloves, on the White House grounds, shaking hands with President Eisenhower, some congressional wife was nervy enough to ask the President to met the congressional children at a cotillion.

(Laughter)

I doubt a cotillion still exists, but this was an organization at which you learned, hopefully, some of the social graces. And I sent Lynda, and maybe she learned how to dance; I don't know. I doubt she learned how to courtesy, but it didn't prove terribly necessary, and I sort of laughed to myself about the poor President having to endure that. But here were all these little girls and fewer boys herded into a dancing class and going to the White House to be introduced to their President. Very American, very kind of the President, and that's my, I think that may be the only picture I have of Eisenhower, framed on the walls.

Johnson -- XXXVI -- 28

M: What is your own memory of President Eisenhower?

J: Extremely affable and easy going. At the same time you would not--you had the feeling this was a commanding man and you would not have crossed him with impunity. I mean, you knew that he could rise in majesty and swat you down, sort of. I liked him. But he was ideal for Lyndon and the Speaker to work with. They respected each other; both the Speaker and Lyndon had a great respect for the office itself. And in some ways it was the job to which Lyndon was most suited in his entire life, I thought. That and the National Youth Administration, which he just ate up like cake.

M: Did you have any relationship with, to speak of, with Mrs. Eisenhower?

J: No. I went to innumerable parties for her, and later on, in our own tenure in the White House, I made every effort to get every former first lady to come to parties there. And she responded more than anybody, and what's more, she called by name the staff members, the butlers, the waiters, the people she'd known, and I liked that about her.

It was an odd time in American history. *Everybody* was crazy about pink. *Everybody* had to try it wearing bangs. The feeling toward her was extremely warm, affectionate, and yet both she, and later Mrs. Truman, were so unlike their predecessor, Mrs. Roosevelt. Maybe the country needed a surcease from striving with its darker side, its troubled lives, which is what, of course, Mrs. Roosevelt had specialized in.

M: Is there anything in this chronology here that appeals to you before we go on to the--

J: I do want to say a moment about meeting General David Sarnoff, at a dinner at the Waldorf Astoria in New York. He made a speech that sort of introduced me to the difference between us, the United States, and a large part of the world. And he used a

Johnson -- XXXVI -- 29

sentence something like this, "For two thirds of the world--" I will not swear that percentage, but anyhow it was an overwhelming portion of the world--"life is a dirt floor and a wooden bowl that is half empty." Pretty bleak description of the poverty of many countries.

There was a good deal of talk around about Lyndon's being a possible candidate for the presidency in 1956. On the other hand, to my thinking, his sole thrust was to try to fill that role he had with as much ability as he could.

M: How about your own reaction? Was there ever a vagrant stray thought in your mind that "Gee, I wish the light would strike him, and he would--"

J: *No*. Good Lord, no. First place there was a hundred Senators, maybe at that time there were only ninety-six. I forget when Hawaii and Alaska came in. I just remember he was for them, and played a good bit of a role particularly in the case of Hawaii. Well, he happened to know the--

M: Governor.

J: I guess he was called governor--delegate maybe he was called.

M: Jack . . . I don't know; I can't think of his name.

J: Anyhow, there's a hundred of those people and maybe every one of them think he might be, and I didn't think it would happen, and it was a pretty terrifying thought anyhow, and I certainly didn't yearn.

M: Are you on page five or six of the chronology?

J: I'm on thirteen and fourteen.

M: Oh that's right, You've got a different--

Johnson -- XXXVI -- 30

J: A blown up copy.

M: A blown up copy, right.

J: I talk about, once more, rumors he might become a presidential candidate, and then talking about the *Brown v. Board of Education*.

M: Okay, yes. The main *Brown v. Board of Education* case, the decision was the year before that and I'm sure you've commented on it. This is one in which the Supreme Court made a decision just implementing that case. So if you've commented on that landmark case before, we don't need to go into it, but if there is anything that you recall and you might not have said, let's go into it here.

J: I do not know whether I have or not. I just do want to say that Lyndon's gradual coming to the so-called liberal side of . . .

Tape 2 of 2, Side 1

M: Oral history interview. Side three [Tape 2, Side 1].

Let's go back over that again. You were just beginning to talk about, in light of the Supreme Court 1954 decision and its implementation in 1955, about LBJ's gradual coming to a the position that he eventually came to on civil rights.

J: Yes. It was not a leap; it was a growth. And when you serve a constituency, if you are a member of Congress, it's a combination of expressing, and trying to achieve, their needs, their philosophy, and trying at the same time, perhaps, to lead, direct. Now you can't drive them. You can, perhaps, lead, persuade, but you grow up in the philosophy of those around you. And if you don't express it, you soon get booted out of office. For example, the two Texas members some years before, quite a few years before, when the first

Johnson -- XXXVI -- 31

minimum wage bill was passed, which was the lordly sum of twenty five cents an hour. And there were three daring members of Congress who voted for it: Maury Maverick of San Antonio; I forget his name, although I know it so well of Wichita Falls' and Lyndon Johnson of Blanco. Both of the other two were defeated next time. Texas is not a liberal place. Texas would not be for most liberal stands. And socialistic medicine was the devil's word; socialized medicine, I mean. And I'm sure *Brown v. Board of Education* you would have to walk gently. I don't know Lyndon's inmost feelings, and I expect he had a sense of unease because of his experience in Cotulla as a youth about segregation.

I do know that as the fifties passed he tended more and more toward the liberal side. He dared to try to lead a little more, and one of the high points in his life, as far as I'm concerned, was the civil rights legislation of 1957, but that is still in the future. And when *Brown v. Board of Education* was passed he did not get up on stump and go around beating the drums for it.

M: In talking about his evolution, how about yours? Did you keep pace with him? Or where you ever a little ahead of him or a little behind him? Where were you on that whole issue? You came out of a somewhat deeper southern background.

J: I came from the real South. East Texas is just part and parcel of a Louisiana, Alabama, Arkansas, Mississippi. But I was also not charged with the responsibility of leading and not--I did not have the fire inside of me that Lyndon had, and so, no. I went along, quite comfortably, and was mad at the ADA [Americans for Democratic Action?] for taking out after Lyndon, sort of mildly mad, I guess. I think we--I think a great part of the country sort of began to change in those years.

Johnson -- XXXVI -- 32

M: We are practically up to his heart attack now. Do you see anything preceding that? I think--

J: Well, I do think that I want to say that it was as hard working a summer as I remember, as stressful a summer. And all of that lead up to what happened on July the second. I mean, when I went along, my very interesting routine. I still went to embassy parties with my eyes out on stems. And I went almost every year to Tregaron and I'm sure that these were in the fifties. Time all melts together.

Mrs. Merriweather Post, who you know whose name changed. It was for a while Mrs. Joseph [Joseph E. Davies]--her husband was ambassador to Russia. First ambassador after we established relations with them, I think. She was the daughter of the Post fortune. One of the most glamorous houses in Washington. Garden parties just absolutely elegant and belonging to another age.

M: And when you did that, did you look forward to going, or did you do as a social--

J: *Oh*, I just did it for pure personal delight. You know, like going to the circus. (Laughter) I liked to see all those folks and all that way of living.

M: Did you ever have a gentleman escort, or did you always go by yourself or with another woman?

J: Always with another woman. And sometimes we would see the same senators there, and then go over and have a nice little chat with them. For instance, it was a matter of great annoyance but, and also laughter to Lyndon, that the senator from Rhode Island, Senator Green, who's very elderly, and pretty elegant, and pretty intellectual, but pretty parsimonious, and when he took somebody out, he'd take them on the street car instead of

Johnson -- XXXVI -- 33

in a taxi.

(Laughter)

But he very often showed up at these parties. Theodore Francis Green, that was it.

M: I remember that.

J: And one time he asked Lyndon to handle a certain bill for him. He says, "I've got an obligation I have to do at five o'clock. The Senate was going to be in session late and Lyndon managed to work it into his overfull day to do it for Senator Green only to have me come and report to him, later on, that I had been to this embassy party and had *such* a nice time chatting with Senator Theodore Francis Green.

(Laughter)

Lyndon had the oddest assortment of friends in the Senate, from very different backgrounds. And Green was one of them. And I think he made perhaps one of the nominating speeches for Lyndon for majority leader. A New England family background going back before the Revolution, and intellect, and sort of petrified elegance.

One of the interesting things that summer was there was a dinner in the Driskill [Hotel] honoring Governor Miriam Ferguson on her eightieth birthday, and Allan Shivers--can you believe it?--was master of ceremonies and Lyndon and Jimmy Allred were at the head table. And Ma Ferguson--Ma and Pa were not what they were represented in the papers as, as sort of country hicks. Far from it, they were some of the most intelligent and well to do period of that simple time in Texas history. And she was not a figure head by any means. She very likely did pretty much what her husband asked her to do, but I feel sure that if she hadn't believed it or wanted it, she would have done

Johnson -- XXXVI -- 34

differently. She's a--they were unique people, and they were caricatured in history.

M: It was rather bold of her. There weren't many women running for statewide offices at that time.

J: No. But there were many people who loved the Fergusons, and put it in quotes and blow it in capital letters. The common man to whom he appealed and believed in him. And he had been indicted and impeached, and when you get impeached your civil rights are lost. And so, some years later, he got his wife nominated, and she was elected, and she did restore his civil rights.

One time Lyndon sent me to see her. He used to send me to do the most extraordinary things, which I had neither the talent, background, nor wish to do. By a mixture of persuasion and making me believe I could--he'd say, "You mean that you've got two degrees from the University of Texas and you can't do that?"

(Laughter)

It was real funny. But I went to see her to solicit her help in his race for the governorship, I mean, for the Senate in 1941. And she got out that storied book, the little black book, in which he had put the names of all their good friends, also the names, it was alleged, of their enemies and detractors. And she said yes she could and she would. And they did, in 1941. Unfortunately, they did not--wait a minute, am I forgetting? Oh, gosh, you cannot trust memory. No. In 1941, they didn't. In 1948, I went back to see her, and she did. I think by that time, Governor Ferguson was dead. Anyhow, it was an interesting adventure. I am glad to recall here the Democratic Party finally got around to paying her a due salute on her eightieth birthday.

Johnson -- XXXVI -- 35

M: We've talked about the death of Amon Carter. That summer, the Symingtons show up. I've always been curious, weren't LBJ and Stuart Symington close at one time? And then less close eventually?

J: Yes. Stu was one of Lyndon's early good friends in the Senate. And of course, like every woman, I was halfway in love with Stu Symington; it just goes with being Stu Symington and being feminine. He was a most attractive, most courtly man.

And then Smathers was another one of his friends, of Lyndon's, but not of quite the degree that Stu was. And Stu was always trying to have an effect on our lives, like getting us to join the--put our names up and he could have made it possible for us to join, quite possibly, the Chevy Chase Club, or taking us to Hob Sound [?] sometime with him. Those things didn't develop. And it is just as well they didn't, because we were not cut out for that type of social life, which didn't keep me from being interested in it or Lyndon from being crazy about him. I'm trying to remember what caused the rift, and I can't quite.

M: It would come later anyway.

Okay, I think we are--all of this has to been fill in the year before the heart attack and we've talked about that. Now I want to bring up a couple of things about the heart attack. He was visited in the hospital by the President, by President Eisenhower. And you've--I was going to use this as the occasion to ask you about his relationship with President Eisenhower, but you've commented on that. But Eisenhower himself was to have a heart attack later in the year. And that must have been something of a wrenching experience for somebody like LBJ who had just--suffered from his own. I mean, it was

Johnson -- XXXVI -- 36

somewhere it's bound to have affected his relationship with the President in some way, but did it--is there anything about Eisenhower's heart attack that you remember?

J: I just remember that we heard of it at a--we were discussing it at a Texas congressional dinner and all talking about what effect it would have on his future, on the country's future, and I believe Lyndon's--[of] course Lyndon's I know forever was on July 2, 1955, and I think that his was later on in the summer, maybe September.

M: It was later on. That's right.

J: I think Lyndon's whole thought as he began to recover from his own heart attack was not concentrated on any possibility of him being a candidate for the president, but being--whether he would be well enough, strong enough, to resume duties as a majority leader. Should he resign? Was he up to being that? Could he take it on? And all during the fall there go with heart attacks periods of depression. It is absolutely a clinical response, and Lyndon was not immune. His face was very drawn. His whole--he was down a good deal of the time.

I remember sitting there one of the few times that we were alone, in the living room, just looking at him. And his face was just a picture of gloom, and my thoughts went to a cabinet off of the kitchen where there were about six deer hunting guns. I don't think there were any handguns of any sort. They were just something to hunt deer with. But it was a deep gloom. He lost, on doctors orders, lots of weight. When he went into it, he went into it hammer and tongs. And we had a secretary then, it's absolutely essential that I think of her name, and I will in a minute.

M: Wasn't it Juanita?

Johnson -- XXXVI -- 37

J: Juanita Roberts, who had been, in her first career, a nutritionist. She had graduated in that. She knew an awful lot about fat and calorie counting, and all of that. So she got us a scale that weighted by ounces for the kitchen at the Ranch, and we used that all the time. We did an awful lot of substitution. We gave him desserts, which he simply just yearned for, made out of egg whites and artificial sugar which was pretty new then and mashed up, *frappéed* fruit. It became quite an art. An art which she had already mastered and which I learned, on how to have a varied and fairly interesting diet on a very low fat, low calorie bunch of stuff. He ate more vegetables than he'd ever done before. He had always like everything fried. We learned to broil a roast, a lot of things. It really denied him almost everything that he really liked, which was something heavily sweet or juicily fried. But he just attacked it like it was an enemy, overweight I mean. And he did lose, lose, lose. Unfortunately, a lot of it was in the face, and that has become drawn, and you do not look well when you lose a lot of weight real fast. And he didn't.

M: He gave up smoking too, didn't he?

J: Absolutely. He did not have a cigarette for about sixteen years. And he was told by the doctors that it was quite possible that, although the heart would mend itself gradually from whatever infarction it had suffered, that he would no doubt have something called angina pectoris, which would not kill him, at least not immediately, but which would be awfully painful and restricting in his activity.

He did not have one single attack of angina in all of those difficult years [of] the majority leadership, or the decision to give it up and go with Jack Kennedy and the vice presidency, or the presidency. It was--he hadn't been out of office but--I'm trying to

Johnson -- XXXVI -- 38

remember whether it was March after leaving office in January of 1969, whether it was, I think was March of 1970, I think it was fourteen months later, that he had his first severe attack of angina and from then on, it was his constant accompaniment at unexpected and unpredictable times. Terribly restrictive in a life. But I'm getting way ahead of myself.

M: How--what was his--depression, I know you said he was gloomy. Was he irritable?

J: Yes, yes. And he--it was a period of ups and downs. A part of him realized that life is so temporary that you had better start doing some of the things you'd put off. The pleasures of family life, the pleasures of comforts, even luxuries, and that's when he decided to put in a swimming pool. And we put that swimming pool in jig time in the fall--gee, we must have started--we reached home from the hospital, and I think we came in Wesley West's plane, and landed at Fredericksburg, I believe; [it] could have been, of course, the West Ranch because they had a very good airstrip always. And on about a day or two before his birthday, say maybe August 25 or 26, because Lyndon set a childlike importance by his birthday.

M: It does say you were on the 25th and you did land at Fredericksburg.

J: And from then on, life was a kind of a roller coaster, gloom and depression or else elation. There is no high like the feeling of, "I'm alive," after you have thought you were dead or dying, and to realize that life is returning, you are going to be strong, you are going have the opportunity to do all those things you had stored up to do.

And I think that was the genesis of the time when he decided he'd better take me on some foreign trips, which I had always just yearned for. And I'd hear all these congressional wives talking about going to NATO conferences or Inter-Parliamentary

Johnson -- XXXVI -- 39

Unions, or all the marvelous trips and they'd come back and talk about them. And I never had been on any. (Laughter) I think then is when he decided he would start taking them, and start taking me, and we did, beginning the next year. But once more I am getting ahead of myself.

And during that time a dear Jim Cain came down from Mayo to see us at the Ranch, and Willis Hurst came from Atlanta and sort of laid out a routine for us. And they were two of the best friends that anybody ever had. How fortunate we were to have them in our lives.

M: You had a host of people coming through the Ranch that--

J: Oh boy, yes sir. It was a revolving door.

M: And was that good for him, or not? That many people.

J: I think actually it was. Also it was good for him that in the hospital, President Eisenhower came to visit him. And it was very kind of Eisenhower and very much in line with his general character. And years later, of course, Lyndon did the same with him.

M: Vice President Nixon also visited him in the hospital.

J: Yes, he did. And that was nice of Nixon. And actually, they were just like two gladiators from two different camps, respectful, never close, but never--I don't think they ever, either one, took unfair swipe at each other.

M: Down at the--when you got to the Ranch, one of the visitors coming into the Ranch was Adlai Stevenson. Do you remember much about his--

J: Oh, yes. (Laughter) Adlai Stevenson, I was crazy about him. But he was just not destined to be the sort of person that Texas politicians would like. He was intellectual, he

Johnson -- XXXVI -- 40

was sophisticated--Lyndon, once more, was respectful but at a distance.

And some of our dear ones came to see us, like Dick Russell and Stu Symington, and Smathers, and, of course, Clements. All of those came to the hospital and even [William] Knowland, and, of course, good old timers like Tom Clark, and Don Cook, and George Brown, and John Connally, of course.

(Interruption)

M: Among the visitors at the Ranch, Ed Clark, I don't know that you've talked about Ed Clark in your oral history before, but this is the first time that he comes up in my review of it. He was a sort of a constant or--he was there in your life for a long time wasn't he?

J: Yes, he was, and he is an original, a unique person, a sort of--he's surprising, too. A titled lady in Australia where Lyndon had appointed him, many years later as ambassador, took me aside, and she said, as though I didn't already know all this, she said, "Mrs. Johnson, I want you to know that Ambassador Clark is a very sharp man and," she did not use this language but what she was meaning was that you may think when you first met him he is a buffoon, but he is not. He is deep, and serious, and able. But you can catch a person's meaning without them putting it in precise words. And he was all of that, and manipulator, and he could get people to do what he thought they ought to do. And he had a wonderful way of speaking which was typical East Texas, sort of professional East Texas. And I could understand him because that is where I was from, although I could speak other languages. Well, we are the richer for having known him and shared his life. And gosh, he got lots of things done.

M: And A. W. Moursund, he was a good, close friend of the President.

Johnson -- XXXVI -- 41

J: He was a close friend, particularly in those days. Lyndon had a real--his heart was really in ranching and really in land and knowing about it, and improving it, and making a living off of it, whereas, mostly what we did with ours was put money into and not get money out of it. But we did a lot of basic good things to it. A. W. too, was a surprising man, because he was lawyer by training but a rancher by preference, by heart. And I still see a great deal of him. And yes, he was never daunted by any of the things he encountered. He considered himself their equal but he was different in the Washington milieu--I mean--it must have been a surprise to some of the Washingtonians.

M: I'm sure he was, and yet it was always interesting to me that he and Arthur Krim struck up a friendship.

J: Absolutely, they both saw in each other what was really there. The real mental ability, the real capabilities, and. . . .

M: In September of that year, it is an interesting note, I think, that you wrote to somebody in Ysleta, Texas, to ask about the proper planting and care of wildflower seeds since your efforts so far had not produced good results. That is the first time I've seen the mention of you and wildflowers. How long had your interest in wildflowers, at least to the extent of planting them and wanting them to nurture them and so forth, how long had that existed?

J: All my life. And I do not remember this Mr. O. F. Garrett[?] of Ysleta, and I do not remember the incident. But I had been, ever since we got to the Ranch, planting just about the only thing that was on the market. Not quite true. There were small collectors by hand who would send out some kind of pamphlets, but it was a very tiny industry--the collection and sale of wildflower seeds--except for bluebonnets which is the state flower,

Johnson -- XXXVI -- 42

and Texans all but genuflect when you mention them. They are not the easiest ones to grow but they are typical and they're so well loved.

But yes, I had been spreading them out just about every fall since we got the Ranch and [we] got it in October 1951 but I expect the first I ever put out must have been in 1952. And then, of course, you know along came that heart attack in late September of President Eisenhower, himself, which we watched with great interest but. . . .

M: And among your--that fall, I hope I am not getting ahead of you here, Senator and Mrs. [Hubert] Humphrey came. What was your relationship with the Humphreys during the Senate years?

J: Affectionate. I will tell one little incident. One time Lynda remarked to me rather pathetically, "Mama, the Congress is an interesting place for the congressman and, I guess, for his wife. But it sure isn't for the children." And that is true. We were invited to parties all the time, not many of which Lyndon when to. But the children were never invited. Well, the Humphreys invited us over for a Sunday night supper and said, "And be sure and bring the girls." Well, my eyes kind of stood out on stems, but by all means I took them. And they had the best time, and the Humphreys had a kind of a family room in which there was a jukebox that you fed quarters and it played music, and that was for the children's entertainment, for the adults if they wanted, but mostly for the children. And they did just love their little piece of the action. And that made an impression on me.

But they were extraordinary warm and outgoing. He was one of the most arms-open, enveloping people I've ever known, and I was crazy about him. And so was she.

Johnson -- XXXVI -- 43

She was--years later, she would be the first person I would call to say, "Let's go over and have a few games of bowling," after we went into the presidency and used the bowling alley across the street in the bowels of the State Department Building. I believe it was called the Executive Offices, EOB.

M: Yes, the Executive Office Building.

Your first, or at least, the Senator's first public appearance after his heart attack was in Dallas in October and there was a Johnson-Rayburn day at the state fair. Does that stand out in your memory at all?

J: Not much. It was just one of the recognitions, and we were always, I mean, nothing very different about it. That was the year in which began to be noticed by the press and by a lot of organizations. And we were always put in tandem with the Speaker, which was just fine. And I do want to tell you one more thing about the visit to the Ranch of the Humphreys.

Lyndon, as he was recovering, he had just a necessity to be building a fence, digging a tank, building a house. He couldn't stand inactivity, and he got in touch with some sort of a company that had prefab houses. And he also got interested in doing over what had been the foreman's house and what we decided to make into a guest house. Wait a minute. I think I'm--no, I'm getting this wrong. He decided to build a guest house, so we did. As always, everything was done by our dear friends, Roy White, who was a part of the Brooks Bar Firm. And it was a very functional: four bedrooms, two bathroom, combination kitchen and dinette.

And we went down there and he proudly showed it to Hubert. And Hubert

Johnson -- XXXVI -- 44

sketched it off room by room and foot by foot. I think we even provided him with a set of plans. And he said he was going home and build one in Minnesota. Now it wouldn't have been equal to Minnesota weather, and I'm not quite sure whether he did or not. But I think he did build something on the lake in Minnesota based on that. And we have a wonderful picture of Hubert on a tractor, that big grin which was sort of his trademark.

M: Do you think that Lyndon Johnson and Hubert Humphrey in those days were good friends?

J: Yes, yes. No doubt about it. Lyndon recognized all the differences; Hubert recognized all the differences. But those people--it is my thinking, that they really sort of felt to themselves as professionals who represented their constituencies, maybe to a measure led them, tried to, got kicked out for it, or maybe successfully lead them. And no, I--there was no hostility or distrust between them. Lyndon used to just joke a lot about Hubert. Well, I can't remember it, so I better not try to tell it. What he meant was he wished he could get him not to talk so much and so long.

M: I remember--

J: He was a lovable man.

M: One of the visitors, this name used to show up a lot, and it shows up in your guest books at the Ranch, and then it disappears, is Arthur Godfrey. He came at that time and then all of a sudden he didn't come any longer.

J: Well, it wasn't because of any falling out. I think somewhere along that way he had a series of illnesses, including cancer.

But he did come down and I'll tell you some things I may or may not have

Johnson -- XXXVI -- 45

recorded anywhere; I don't guess I have. He flew himself in a fairly small plane. There were two incidents that make it memorable. He flew into Fredericksburg at twilight, just as dark was setting in. He never had been there before. It had no lights; it was a chancy, hazardous thing. He should have looked at it and have taken off and have gone on to Austin and phoned us. But he landed. And oh boy, did we heave a sigh of relief when he landed. And later on he sent the city, as a gift, a set of lights for their runway. And we have some marvelous pictures around the still-being-built, not-finished swimming pool of Arthur Godfrey, and Melvin Winters, and A. W.--

Tape 2 of 2 Side 2

M: --[oral hi]story interview. You were talking about Arthur Godfrey landing.

J: And, of course, in the group, Lyndon, looking so gaunt, and thin. When you lose a lot of weight very quickly, it leaves your face gaunt and older-looking and far from the buoyant image of health that you want to project. He did fill it out. He did get a suntan. He did look much more fit by the time he was back in Washington. But to my thinking, what was on his mind that whole time of recovery was, "Am I up to resuming the leadership? Can I do it?" He wasn't looking toward the presidency, in my thinking; he was looking toward the majority leadership or a bleak stepping down.

And speaking of Arthur Godfrey, two things: he had his ukulele with him. He taught Luci then about coming up eight years--no, just having passed eight years old and being so plump she does not like to be reminded of this picture, but she is sitting maybe on Arthur Godfrey's knee or sitting right close to him, and he is teaching her to play, was it a banjo or a ukulele?

Johnson -- XXXVI -- 46

M: Ukulele.

J: (Laughter) Ukulele. It's a darling picture. I've had a lot of fun out of it, not so Luci. And then, there was another time when Arthur Godfrey invited us down to his place in Virginia, which was at some springs. And he had a lot of exotic animals, and he took us up in his helicopter, flying it himself, and we looked down. I think he had buffalo, among other things, which are not exotic, they belong here, but he had other animals that were. It was quite an establishment, and he was quite a figure in that day. For entertainment, for philosophy, for just as a piece of Americana, and we sure did like him, and he us, I think.

There's one more little heart-in-mouth incident about him, and that is when he left the Ranch, he left from our own airstrip. It was daytime. I feel sure we had taken him up and down the airstrip, but I can't swear it. Anyhow, he started off in his little plane back there where the hangar is, and apparently in the few seconds that it takes to get to where you come to what's called the apron and then you turn a very sharp left and take off to the north, apparently he thought that--from the hangar to the apron--was all of the runway. He thought for that split second, and there we stood just gasping as he revved his engines and made an attempt to rise into the air, close to the end of the approach, right at the apron. And he cleared the fence, by a little, and went off into the sky. But it--whew! We certainly didn't want that sort of thing happening again.

M: Ernie Goldstein, he does show up in this, but do you think he was--did you know him that early?

J: I do not believe I did.

Johnson -- XXXVI -- 47

M: Okay.

J: Now, Mary Margaret [Wiley Valenti] did, and Mary Margaret was already Lyndon's secretary, but I think Lyndon had talked her into going back to finish what few courses she lacked at the University. So I don't believe she was at the Ranch with us that summer. But I do believe that that was the summer that Lyndon asked Mary Rather, who had been separated from us for a year or more by the tragic death of her brother, who left three children. He and his wife were both killed simultaneously in an automobile accident, leaving three children, the youngest one six weeks old, and the oldest one about six or seven years old. A boy and two girls. And do you recall whether that was the summer that he'd persuaded her to come to back?

M: Well, all I see in here is that you and Mary Rather and the Wests went to Los Angeles in November in the West's plane, so he must have had her come back that--

J: Yes, I think he literally talked her into coming. And saying, "Aw, you can take the children to Washington with you all the time." Their grandmother was just determined to get them, too. So those children were sort of--they had a grandmother who had a stable home and wanted very much to have them. She was the mother of their mother. Mary was the sister of their father, and those were the two claims to the children's stable future life.

M: Well, if you had Juanita Roberts there that summer and if Mary Rather came back and worked for [you], which one had priority, had seniority?

J: (Laughter)

Listen, wherever she was, Juanita had seniority.

Johnson -- XXXVI -- 48

(Laughter)

And she was a great influence in our life. She was also a little abrasive to some of the other secretaries.

M: Your relation with Juanita went back a long way. I remember--

J: She was the wife of Ray Roberts during National Youth Administration days, and capable, and a good managing woman, and very helpful to Lyndon in his race for the Senate in 1941. But she had had some, I don't whether she'd already any--maybe she hadn't had any--military experience; maybe when Ray went off to the war she just decided she wanted to go, too. And she did, and she, eventually, was a colonel before she--

M: She was a colonel. At least, that was her rank when she retired.

In December, you all--you and the majority leader--returned to the capitol for the first time since the heart attack. One of those dramatizations that has been made recently of his life shows you and the Senator coming into the Capitol while--in the hall and the Senators are all convened and there is a rousing standing ovation. Do you remember anything that dramatic happening when you went back to the Capitol?

J: Isn't it odd? Frankly, I don't. I just know that 1955 was a crescendo year in our lives and there was a lot of love, and interest, and concern expressed for Lyndon by his fellow Senators and by just a lot of people. He even had a wonderful letter from Bernard Baruch, and just a cast of characters you wouldn't believe, during that heart attack and the long recuperation. That would have been the most important of all, to have his fellow senators express their feeling, and it is pretty awful I don't remember it. I do want to go back on minute--

Johnson -- XXXVI -- 49

M: Sure.

J: and talk about another visit to the Ranch.

M: Okay.

J: And that was from a man who greatly affected our lives and whom we greatly admired, Bob Kerr of Oklahoma. Tough, cut you up on the Senate floor and serve you raw or roasted--

(Laughter)

--and I mean anybody that he thought deserved it. Now Lyndon was one of his favorites. He liked him, he helped him, and we just responded tremendously. He, in his life, had had a brush with drinking through his brother, who, like Lyndon's brother, had been a victim of alcohol, and he just didn't want anybody to have a drop. And he would fuss at Lyndon and try to get him to swear off and never have another drop. He called me into his office one day and told me that I must work it out to make him do that. Well, first place I couldn't. Second place, it did not reach problem portions with us, except as to health and gaining weight, or so I thought, and still think. Was a little relief from the tensions of that very tempestuous life. But Bob was an evangelist for whatever he believed in, and Oklahoma was one thing he believed in, and not touching liquor was another.

M: Since you brought up the subject of President Johnson and liquor--I was--by the time I came into his orbit, of course he was president, but one of the things that always impressed me was that he just could not understand why anybody would ever want to drink before five o'clock in the afternoon. The idea of somebody having a drink at lunch

Johnson -- XXXVI -- 50

was just anathema to him.

J: Because it would, in a way, affect your being able to do your work. No sir, he was not the two-martinis-at-lunch type of person.

M: When you got back to Washington, another name comes up here that I want to ask you about because you had him to dinner. You had Averell Harriman to dinner. Where--I don't know that you remember that or not, but I'd sure like to know how you felt about him and what the relationship between Harriman and the Johnsons was.

J: Not close, because they come from two different milieus. But I remember him sitting on the couch at 4921 30th Place, Northwest, and there was the three of us that night, and I would leave them for periods of time. They were both sort of sounding each other out and learning about each other. And I was thinking "*My*, what a handsome man this is." (Laughter)

"And what an interesting family and life," because I'd read some little bit about him. I'd say our relation was respectful, somewhat distant, and admiring in many ways. I remember Lyndon saying, after he had left, just sort of murmuring to himself, "Gee, they really play for keeps in New York." I don't know what Harriman had told him, but from these "go of it all" books I'm now reading, manipulating the political scene in New York had its hazards.

M: And I think, unless something occurs to you, the final figure I want to ask you about is Estes Kefauver, who announced his candidacy that year. Have you commented on him that you remember? I don't recall that you ever have. But I'd like--if you haven't, this would be a good place to get your observations on Kefauver.

Johnson -- XXXVI -- 51

J: He was a sort of a meteor through the sky, great personality, great rapport with the press, and people. And yet he didn't have long term staying powers.

And some funny things surrounded him. I remember, and I think it was at a time, a year later, when--I really just better not say when it was. But he was coming to Texas; Lyndon was going to meet him, and escort him around, and introduce him. And I would think that happened after Adlai Stevenson was nominated for the presidency in 1956, and not in this year, 1955. Anyhow, Lyndon would meet him at the town and he would tell him three or four capsules about what the people there did for a living, what the main industry or makeup of the area was, what degree of conservatism, what they were like. And he was going to be in Waxahachie, and he says, "Now this is a word that would give nearly anybody trouble, Waxahachie (pronounced WOX-uh-HACH-ee). Why don't you say it a couple of times?" Estes did, and then he was supposed to go make his speech some hours later. This little briefing session would occur earlier in the day before he was going to some other--because as many as thirteen speeches a day for candidates in those days. Rough life. And Lyndon--it was night time; they were both bone tired. Lyndon introduced him at Waxahachie. And he got up and said, "I am so glad to be here in Waxahachie (pronounced WAX-uh-HACH-ee). Oh, I'm sorry. I meant say Woxahootchie." (Laughter) And the crowd would just roar with laughter, and he was delighted with it--he, Estes. And he would drag it out and mispronounce it every which way you could. The people and the press were all equally amused. He was a likeable man, but he was a sort of a meteor that flashed across the sky and burned out. And too bad.

Johnson -- XXXVI -- 52

M: He had a reputation as being a great womanizer. Is that something that was common knowledge at the time?

(Laughter)

J: Well, I don't know from personal experience. I don't think he found me all that delicious a morsel, certainly. And besides, he had a darling wife, Nancy. And she made one of the--acute observations about being a political wife and about when you first wake up, you first begin to come to, on the morning, two-weeks campaign trip around the United States, and you don't know where you are, and what state, what town. And that's the way it happens. You wouldn't, at first. He died just a few years later. I can't remember of what.

M: I think it was a heart attack. I remember meeting his wife several--before I went to work at the White House and several years after he had died, at a party but I think he died long before 1960.

Well, the year ended with a Christmas party at your mother-in-law's house. Do you remember anything about that?

J: Yes, yes. We--as long as Mrs. Sam Johnson lived--we would have a gathering at her house. Usually, it was on Christmas Eve, because she was no longer strong enough to have a big party and have turkey dinner for all of her--she had five children and all at that time, I think, with spouses, and she did not have a host of grandchildren, but our two and her youngest daughter--one, a girl, darling girl. And did I say Sam Houston had two?

M: You didn't say that, no.

J: And then [the] oldest daughter, one [child], Philip Bobbitt. So we would all be around

Johnson -- XXXVI -- 53

the Christmas tree, and I have some very dear pictures from successive Christmases there, with Mrs. Johnson growing, although we did not see it then, progressively less vigorous. But all of those children vied for her love and attention. They really--every one of them wanted more of it for himself, and herself. Lyndon remained her great dependence from beginning to end.

And she remained my very good friend. There is a difference, a great difference, between loving your in-laws and liking your in-laws. And I had the great good fortune to feel both. For instance, she was the sort of person that if you suddenly found yourself with two hours on your hands before your plane was going to leave by some fluke in timing, two absolutely unused hours, what do you do with them? What friend do you call up and say, "Let's have lunch." Or, "Let's just go--come over at chat or something." Short list. But Mrs. Johnson was always at the top of my list, because she was very literate, very--she liked me very much, and I liked her very much. And I spent a lot of time at her house when we were doing over the Ranch house in preparation for really going there to make it our home in the year 1952. I'd spend the nights there and I'd drive out the next morning to Ranch and see the contractor or the architect, or take books of wallpaper with me, and a friend, and we would go from room to room and chose. I think I'm going to have to excuse--

M: 1955.

End of Tape 2 of 2 and Interview XXXVI

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 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~~ on 5-10-2011.

Mrs. Johnson's Oral History Interviews:

**Assistant Archivist
For Presidential Libraries**

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

CTJ Appendix A -- 2

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