

INTERVIEW XXXVIII covering 1957

DATE: August 1994

INTERVIEWEE: LADY BIRD JOHNSON

INTERVIEWER: Harry Middleton

PLACE: Martha's Vineyard

Tape 1 of 2, Side 2

M: This is side one, Lady Bird Johnson oral history interview [covering] 1957.

J: I can talk about [Estes] Kefauver and JFK [John F. Kennedy], except it's not very nice to say about--well, Lyndon was fond of Kefauver, but he thought he was a lightweight, and that is not nice to say.

M: Well, sure, that--he is long gone; his wife is long gone. And anyway, when you see the transcript, you can take out anything you want. But I think you ought to--

J: All right, you begin wherever you like, let me put it that way.

M: I think we do better going with the regular chronology. You have a nice flow when you do that. So let's start with the Congress convenes, the party ratio in the Senate is close, and how was the Senate organized?

J: 1957 was a razor edge of the division of power, with forty-nine Democrats and forty-seven Republicans. And just think about how many of the Democrats, southerners mostly, tended toward the Republicans, and you know that it was a hard role for the Majority Leader.

Another hard thing was, we lost dear Earle Clements; I mean, he was not in the

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Senate anymore. He had had to run for re-election himself in 1956, and Lyndon had thrust upon him, in July of 1955, more work than he should have done. He should have been home mending fences, tending to his own re-election. And he had been trying to fill two roles, as majority whip and substituting for Lyndon, so we bore some blame for that, Lyndon felt. And he had a strong affection for Earle, got along with him so (inaudible). Senator [Mike] Mansfield he admired intensely, but Mansfield was much more an independent man (inaudible). So that is the way we began the year, just like trying to ride two nervous horses at once like some figure in a Roman circus. (Inaudible)

M: There was something of a conflict between Senator Kennedy and Senator Kefauver, not between them, but because of a situation on the seat on the Foreign Relations Committee. Do you remember anything about that at all?

J: Frankly, I don't. I do know that Lyndon wouldn't even [have] considered him. JFK was more studious, more directed toward foreign relations than Kefauver. I do not know what Lyndon as majority leader had to do with that. I thought that came from some committee in the Senate. Was it an appointment delivered by the Majority Leader?

M: The Senate Democratic Steering Committee gives the committee assignments, but the majority leader has pretty much control over that; or had. I'm not sure whether that is true now or not. At any rate, because of Senator [Frank] Lausche--was it Lausche [pronounced lou-shee]?

J: Lausche [pronounced lou-shee], I think.

M: And the interim Senator from Texas--

J: [William] Blakley.

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M: Blakley--voting with the Democrats, it once again was a Democratic Senate.

J: That too; Blakley especially I remember was--we waited that one out on a knife edge.

He was a mean, conservative, West Texan as I remember, but living in Dallas at the time.

Lyndon was very glad to get him in the Democratic Party, but not really sure that he would go. He did, however.

I remember a very nice luncheon being given for him in one of those old Senate rooms that I just loved. It was not a Senate room, actually it was the old Supreme Court room. It had so much dignity and [was] just steeped in history, and it was our favorite place to have a luncheon when we could. I remember Lyndon trying to introduce him to the people who would be working with him, and especially his fellow Texas delegation.

M: And you were off to Florida again, for about a week's vacation. Anything different about that Florida trip that you remember from the last one?

J: Sorry, I don't. I guess we just omit those if I have nothing to remember about--

M: Then I think the next big thing was the special senatorial election. Senator Blakley was there for a few months, but then the regular election and--

J: Four months later [Ralph] Yarborough, who had been trying and trying, finally defeated Martin Dies and Thad Hutcheson. And we had a little dinner at our house, that old house at 4921 Thirtieth Place N.W.; in the eighteen years we had it, it really--heaps of people went through it. So much of our life was lived there.

Anyhow, we had a dinner for the Texas delegation and their wives, to listen to the election returns, and Yarborough won. He finally got there.

M: He became a factor in your life from that moment on, Senator Yarborough did, to some

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extent.

J: Yes. And he and I had a common thread in that he was very interested in national parks, very interested in the Big Thicket. I expect we [would] really never got it at all [into a national park], although we did get it in a truncated form, if it hadn't been for Senator Yarborough and his ardent work in its behalf.

You know, the Eisenhower years, as I look back on them with the dates before me, seem to have been more relaxed years, for all the knife-edge [inaudible] number of Democrats against Republicans that we had.

But we did get away a number of times. We were home at the Ranch on Easter recess, and we looked around for a building site for KTBC. KTBC moved about four times in its life before we finally sold it in 1972. And we did not build at this time; we moved to the Driskill [Hotel]. And I think the Headliners Club was also in the Driskill. It was sort of--the Driskill had a long heyday, and the sixties were a high point in its life, I expect, although all the governors' inaugural receptions, I am told, have been held there through the years, for about a hundred years, before they finally ceased to be, before the town grew up, sort of.

M: You have some fond memories of times spent at things like that as the Driskill, I presume.

J: Oh, yes. The walls were just steeped in history. And there were some chandeliers that were said to have belonged to the Empress [Carlota] of Mexico, at one period of time during our Civil War when Mexico had a French Emperor and his beautiful wife, imposed on them by the second Napoleon. It is surprising, [considering] the short period

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that they had, the styles they set; the park benches there, hundreds and hundreds of them, I am told, in all sorts of Mexican parks were designed and executed during that time.

A flower that I am very fond of, a big tall, rangy, brilliant yellow fall bloomer--September, October, whenever, is the Maximillian daisy, or Maximillian sunflower. It is a very sad story, and he really (inaudible).

Mary Margaret Wiley became a big part of our life in that year and succeeding years, until she married Jack Valenti. I think she came out in 1957 and took over what we had previously called the Mary Rather room. It became the Mary Margaret Wiley room, the purple room. There was the same wallpaper, having been put in way back in 1952, and here it is 1994. And we changed it another time; I mean we have added a dressing room there, enlarged it. But we still, however, managed to get the last little bit of that same pattern of wallpaper, by searching all over. And Mary was so fond of it.

M: That was the spring that Senator Joe McCarthy died.

J: It was, and Lyndon's role in that--it was interesting to me, because he hated to bring any senator down. He hated to see any glimmer of anyone in tune with Senator McCarthy, and yet it was an unhappy task to have to plan in his removal from the scene, which he did, Lyndon did, getting the most respected senators to take over the job of being on that committee that--what shall I say?--judged him. No one wanted to be on it, but he just appealed to their patriotism, and love of the Senate, mainly. He got (inaudible) to do it and he got the unpleasant job done. And Senator McCarthy was already a man who drank, but who had, fairly recently, acquired a handsome, nice wife and lots of people hoped that that would change his life greatly. I think it came along too late, perhaps. At

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any rate, he died that spring and people said it was because of heavy heavy overdrinking.

M: Before all that, if you have not already recorded it, it would be interesting to have your own memory of your personal reaction to Senator McCarthy. Was he a likable man?

J: He was a very macho man, and very masculine in a sort of a frightening way; handsome. But no, anybody that Speaker Sam Rayburn finally decided was a no-good so-and-so, I could not come to like. And McCarthy said--I cannot quote him, but the implication was very strong that General George Marshall was a traitor, and he'd said something pretty similar about Speaker Sam Rayburn himself. And from then on, there wasn't anything that he could have said that would have ever washed that out.

So that was sort of the gospel for me too, because George Marshall was just a man in whose integrity I had 100 per cent confidence in, and that was a widely shared view. And to have it pretty much against the President, Eisenhower, who seldom did anything that you could get really mad at. But he did not repudiate McCarthy when he said that. He did not come to Marshall's aid, and I felt that he should have. I think it occurred in a campaign speech in Wisconsin. I just remember the hot flare of indignation of a lot of folks, including me.

But yes, he was an attractive man, in a wild sort of way.

M: Were you ever in his company socially?

J: Some, yes, I think so. There was one funny time when I went out to meet Lyndon at an airport, and there were a bunch of senators who had been off on some sort of mission, and they were coming home. And a tall figure, very brunet, with a sort of a bent head, came walking out of the plane and I thought that was Lyndon and I said, "Lyndon!" And it

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was Senator McCarthy, and I felt so sheepish. (Laughter) This was before all of the House Unamerican Committee.

M: There were a number of insurance company failures in Texas about this time, but does that mean anything; does that jog anything in your memory?

J: Nothing, nothing. We just knew who Ben Jack Cage was, and regretted very much that anybody with that last name was connected with it.

So many nice things happened to Mrs. Johnson when she would come to visit us. And if I haven't mentioned it before, I'll mention a couple. It wouldn't be this year; it would have been the year before, Earl Clements gave a party for her, just for her. Not for Lyndon, but for her. I'm not even sure I got invited. He just invited senators, and it was (inaudible) at the Capitol. That was one more thing to love him for. There was a lot to love him for: His darling wife and the Sundays we spent over at their house, eating biscuits and Kentucky ham, and talking politics, and then the Kentucky Derby.

Another time when Lyndon's mother came to Washington, it was late April or early May, and Lyndon said, "She's always sending me on missions for which I might or might not be well-equipped." It was so funny. He said, "Go out and buy mother a real good-looking dress and hat, or suit and hat"--I think he said, "for Easter." Well, she had the most soft, lovely, pale complexion and white hair. She was really a beautiful woman in her youth, who had zero vanity, didn't dress up a bit. Her daughters would shake their heads and get mad at her, and try to dress her up and put lipstick and rouge on her.

I remember that particular--whenever this happened; it might have been this year, it may have been the year before, maybe the year before. It was already late in the year

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for a wool suit, but we saw the prettiest lavender wool suit, and a printed blouse, and a great big straw hat just loaded with flowers. And she looked so elegant and pretty in it that neither one of us could resist. For once her lack of wanting for things manifested itself, and we got it and Lyndon just beamed at both of us. He was very proud. It was a cool spring; it turned out to be a very useful purchase. She got to go to lots of nice places.

Another thing we did, she and I, was to pursue her hobby, which was genealogy. And true to her nature, she was starting not on her branch of the family, but on her husband's branch. And her sources were always the most authentic available: the court house, the tombstones in old cemeteries, the DAR. The DAR--Daughters of the American Revolution--have wonderful records, and one of Lyndon's direct ancestors was one of the founders, and there was a bust of her in the garden right down by the DAR building on, I think, 16th Street right before it went into Constitution Avenue. And Mrs. Johnson spent a lot of time there. I had very little interest in the subject. I did love going across the Virginia countryside. I was a happy chauffeur and a finder of the proper tombstones.

Mrs. Johnson also loved to go looking for antiques, particularly early American pressed glass. And every now and then she would buy something so big, like a piece of furniture with a rounded glass front, which was much used, and almost an antique at that period of time--her visits were in the forties and fifties. It was a china closet, where you put your best china so it can be viewed through the glass. I said, "Mrs. Johnson, that is a huge thing and it will cost a lot of money to get it crated and shipped to Texas; this is silly

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of you." And she said, "Oh, have you got room to put it in the trunk of the car?" The antique dealer said, "Well, if you'll let me prop the trunk up and rope it tight we can get it in there." So he did. And dadgummit, we stored it in our basement and it wasn't more than two months later when one of Lyndon's secretaries was going home in a station wagon to Texas, and Mrs. Johnson got him or her, I forget who, to take it to Texas for her, where she filled it with her precious glass.

She was a great companion, and I was so glad for every one of those trips she made. And we went to New York--well, I can't say that I know much about that. I do know that I took her to a play or concert.

Another interesting thing I remember about her: on one of her very first trips to Washington there was a man, a well-known Texas name, a big old family--perhaps I'll think of it later--who had courted her in her youth, and he asked if he might come over and take her to a Sunday afternoon musical concert. So he did. And I am quite sure that he asked her for other times, too. But she refused, and she didn't like to be teased by her children, who promptly began to tease her about having a date with So-and-so. And she said, "If I had ever wanted to further my romance with whatever-his-name-was, I would have done it back before I married your father." We just thought, my gosh, why not have a little second romance?

M: That was an interesting digression there. You talked about her children teasing her. The President was a great tease, wasn't he?

J: Yes. He was just a bad tease. I'm sure you've heard the amusing really mean story about him teasing Glynn Stegall.

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M: No, I haven't.

J: It must have been a quiet morning; for whatever reason, and he was standing in his office, looking out the window down at the parking lot. And Glynn was working for us at that time, and in fact both of the Stegalls came to work us upon the death of the Texas Senator. He brought them both up there to work for him until Glynn's death; that happened early, and Mildred stayed with us until eventual retirement not many years ago.

Well, he was looking out the window with a serious look on his face and he said, "Glynn, did you just buy a new Plymouth?" And Glynn, who was an enormous man and very gullible, said, "Yes, sir; Yes, sir." And then Lyndon said, "And did it have a Texas license with the last numbers 467?" "Yes sir; yes sir." That mean Lyndon said, "I just saw somebody driving out of the parking lot with it in a big hurry. Who do you reckon that is?" (Laughter) And the words were barely out of his mouth before poor Glynn was running down the hall into the elevator and down to the parking lot, where safely sat his new Plymouth with nobody in it, and Lyndon was just laughing fit to kill. But that was cruel.

This was the year that we get (inaudible) to visit Arthur Godfrey. I think I had talked about that before.

M: You have talked about Arthur Godfrey coming to the Ranch but not about your going to his ranch.

J: We did. We had great fun on the weekends down there. It was called Something-or-another Springs [Beacon Hill]. It was close to Leesburg, and it was a big area of acreage, and he had lots of animals in it. Seems to me he had buffalo, among

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others. And it was his great pleasure to go up in his helicopter, take any guests he had with him, and look down at the animals, and he would swoop down low to get a better view of them and swoop back up, to Lyndon's great pleasure, somewhat--however holding on with sweaty palms. Interesting man, and I liked him very much.

That year Sam Houston had more than his usual number of bouts with bad health and bad luck. He broke his leg, and it had to be set several times and reset; that was really a problem. His wife, Mary, was an admirable woman, an artist among other things, and I still have one of her paintings hanging in my house.

A little aside about Lyndon's character which pleased me: one of the times when Sam Houston was having his troubled times, Lyndon went to see him, and he put a twenty-dollar bill in Mary's hands and said, "Now, I want you to go out and buy--don't go out and get flowers or anything special for this hospital room; you go to the beauty parlor and just tell them you want give you anything you can think of, whatever you like to do to make yourself look pretty." In those days a twenty-dollar bill went a great deal further than it does now. But he was thoughtful, in the usual ways.

M: Once when you and he were over at our house in Austin, he learned from someone, not from me, and certainly not from her, but he learned from someone that it was Miriam's birthday, and as you were leaving he pressed a one-hundred-dollar bill in her hand as he left, and never said a thing about it. But those little spontaneous acts of generosity are things that people remember about him a great deal.

J: Absolutely, and I do. And you know, you like to see somebody that you care about do good things and appear in a good light, and just as he sometimes made me very mad with

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bad moments, he also made me very happy by small spontaneous kindnesses. Lyndon was always much more stunning in thinking about it all. I would say he was genuinely generous, although sometimes not quite just, in his assessment of people.

M: This is certainly leaping far ahead, but it is pertinent to ask the question. Do you think that he repaired all of the relationships that had been damaged that he wanted to repair before he died?

J: I don't know. I passionately wished that he had repaired the one with Bill Moyers. I wished even that he had repaired the relation with Sam Houston. There would have been nothing further that Sam Houston could do to hurt us, and there was no need in refraining from seeing him in the last months of our life. Goodness knows he had caused us a lifetime of grief. But it should have been repaired.

M: As I recall, he was quite wounded by a book that Sam Houston wrote about that time, which--

J: Yes. Somehow some author who wanted to write a book in cooperation with--you know, one of that type--hooked on to Sam Houston and got him into writing *My Brother Lyndon*. It was a great deal about Sam Houston, and whatever was about Lyndon was mostly derogatory, and [how] really Sam Houston had thought up the good things for him to do. It was a wounding book. It made me furious, but on the other hand, Sam Houston--well, there was simply no need in being hurt by anything that Sam Houston could do, whatever it was [?].

M: One of the things that I remember, because I was involved in it at the time, was that it wasn't just anything that he said about him, but the book strained the President's

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relationship with Senator [John] Pastore in a way that really hurt President Johnson. I do remember that very--

J: Yes. Yes. Lyndon mourned that. He did wish that he could restore that relationship. I don't think that he ever did.

M: He didn't. He tried, but he couldn't.

J: Did he try? Well, I give him high marks for that. I'm so glad he did. And I hope that sometime in his life Senator Pastore understood and forgave. And I don't know what it was. I don't think that Lyndon ever thought anything bad or did anything bad toward Pastore. But whatever Sam Houston said would have you believe that he did.

M: That's right. It was a damaging way of referring to Senator Pastore and how he looked. It was quite insulting, and it obviously wounded Pastore's vanity. The President's brother put those words in the President's mouth, and that was what caused all of the friction. But I was there at the time that the President called Senator Pastore and tried to explain it. But the man's pride and vanity had been so damaged by it that there just was no way for the President to get through to him.

We are not quite getting into civil rights yet. Let me ask you about--because I think we need a lot of time when we get into the 1957 Civil Rights Bill.

J: Yes, we do, and I have a lot to remember about it.

M: But before we get into that, there is this one item about LBJ going to Independence, Missouri, to attend the dedication of the Truman Presidential Library. There is no reference to your going. Did you go?

J: I have such memories of it. Wait a minute, the Truman Library? I may be mixing it up

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with the Reagan Library, so I better not say. I'd have to see a picture. Aren't there pictures of it? I can't believe that I would let an opportunity like that pass. But I frankly cannot tell you.

M: Then why don't we stop it here then, and pick up with the civil rights next.

Tape 2 of 2, Side 1 (first part of 1957 is on second side of 1956)

M: I think we decided when we stopped the last time that we would pick up with the 1957 Civil Rights Bill. And there are a lot of things that you remember about that; why don't you just talk freely about it, whatever you remember, how it began, anything that--in some kind of orderly sequence, obviously, if we can. But at any rate that deserves a lot of attention.

J: Let me go back one moment to say just where did we end? Do you remember?

M: Sure, we ended on whether or not you went with President Johnson to Independence, Missouri, to the Truman Presidential Library.

J: On what date?

M: On the sixth of July. And just before that note is the note about Jim Rowe's memo to President Johnson on the civil rights bill--and you had commented on that, not on tape--which was July 3.

J: Did I comment on that?

M: You commented on that, but not on tape, on the memorandum that Jim Rowe sent LBJ on the civil rights bill.

J: Jim Rowe, who was certainly extremely forthcoming in all his memos to Lyndon, said he thought this was Armageddon for Lyndon Johnson. "To put it bluntly, if you vote

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against the civil rights bill you can forget your presidential ambitions in 1960. The important thing about civil rights in 1957 is to pass a civil rights bill, which the southerners can accept and which the northerners think is reasonable, solely for the purpose of getting this absurd issue off the Hill for a few years." That did loom in front of Lyndon as one of the two most important things in the year 1957, I think. But he never would have used the word "absurd." I think he was getting around, himself, to thinking--he was bending in that direction and trying to *carry* as much of his constituency and the South as he could with him, and to prevent it just from winding up into just a bog in the Senate, just knee-deep in words and filibusters.

But what I remember about it is the long, long, prolonged strain. He early on had a cot put down in his office so he could catnap from time to time, and be prepared to stay there as late as it took; let the members know that regardless of their personal social life, we were really going to go at that thing hammer and tongs. I would bring him down, every two or three days, a set of clean clothes. And sometimes I would bring him down a meal cooked by Zephyr [Wright], because eventually you get tired of those Senate meals.

Something I enjoyed very much in the difficult times in the Senate was going down there and having dinner with him, just sitting in the office until he thought there was a sufficient lull of thirty minutes or forty-five minutes to go down to the Senate Dining Room and get a bite to eat. And there were always the people who went with us; it was always fun, or at least it was a window on history, a window on the world, to listen them talk. Sometimes a very distressing kind of window.

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Lyndon's main worry at that time, and it was two-fold--some of these senators were in their eighties. Some of them were feeble. Some of them had real physical problems. He was scared that some old senator was going to die right there on the Senate floor while we were talking on civil rights, and all those long, long nights, and yet at the same time he was determined to hold them in session until some decision was reached. The Senate did pass a civil rights bill, finally, on August the seventh. Those facts are well known, and I am just quoting from your notes here that it was 72 to 18 at 8:15 p.m. And *five* [southern] senators break tradition and vote for the bill: Lyndon; Yarborough, no surprise. In all the years they never had a great personal rapport. In fact, they sort of scratched each other--their personalities--and Yarborough was heartily disliked by many of our staunchest friends, especially John Connally. But he never failed us on joining Lyndon--well, let me put it this way; not so much as joining Lyndon as his philosophy agreeing with Lyndon's on many big and important things. Then there was Kefauver; [Al, Sr.] Gore--no surprise--and [George] Smathers.

M: Some surprise there.

J: I am surprised there. But the bill then had to go to a conference committee. So we weren't over all the hurdles.

M: In all of that long time that it took while you were taking meals down to him and sometimes listening, did he ever just talk to you personally about the problems of getting the bill through?

J: Yes, just in the sense that "Here I am walking this tightrope, trying to prevent endless filibusters, trying to get something that the South can live with, and"--he was proud of the

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South. He loved so many of the southern senators, and he just thought it's just going to be better for them if finally, now, when we are within grasp, we fail to rise to it. Just on that basis, just on the basis [of] his conversations with me, he thought it was best for the South and the future of the South, the respect of the world, its economic progress, were all somehow tied up with it, its peace within the nation and among ourselves. And then this fear about some of these old senators just keeling over.

M: While we are on it--because this is a perfectly appropriate time to talk about the whole issue of civil rights--Bill Moyers says that Lyndon Johnson hated Jim Crow, hated it and couldn't do much about it until this came about. But he personally hated the whole concept of Jim Crow. Do you think that is accurate?

J: Oh, I do. You see, he had never grown up in a real southern milieu. There were no blacks in Johnson City. There were no blacks from Austin on west n those days, or really not now. He had seen that it was a crippling thing in relation to the Latin Americans, who were also subjected to segregation, in his school teaching days. I don't know when that sort of eased off, when they entered the fold.

And then too, there were some painful but funny things, like Gene Williams, who was Helen Williams'--our nursemaid and our good friend and as fine a citizen as you'd ever want--her husband--Lyndon gave him the job of taking one of the cars to Texas, carrying Beagle. I forget just when this was, but anyhow, Gene's usually happy face went long and--I can't say angry or sour, but troubled, dismayed; he was not a happy man. And Lyndon says, "What's the matter, Gene? You don't want do this." And Gene said, "Lordy, Mr. Johnson, it is hard enough for a nigger to drive through the South without

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giving him a dog." (Laughter) Lyndon couldn't help but laugh at that.

And I think I've told you long ago my own experience, driving the car to Texas with one or two small children and a black nursemaid, and one of Lyndon's male secretaries was helping me as driver, and that incident in Memphis, Tennessee, which I think appears in here somewhere. Do you have any recollection?

M: No, I don't. Why don't you go ahead with it?

J: Well, at any rate, this was earlier, a good bit earlier. But Memphis was a town that we always tried to avoid because it was the very acme, I felt, of a hard place to spend the night and get good accommodations for whatever member of our black staff was accompanying me. But we couldn't avoid it this time. We just got tired and the day got late and we decided to stay there. And I drove up--we stayed, in those days, in motels; it was really better to get right on the road the next morning, having two small children.

I believe Otha Ree was the name of the very nice, sweet, good-natured, young black woman who was taking care of Lynda--I'm not quite sure Luci was born, but--no, I think maybe it was just Lynda. And I forget which secretary was helping me drive. We drove up to this place, and we said "We would like to get some rooms." And one for me, and I would have the [children], and one for the young secretary, the young man, and one for Otha Ree. And a woman who represented--who could walk right onto the stage in a play about this, without any makeup, said, "We ain't going to take no niggers here."

Well, that was offensive, and I bridled, and I was hurt for Otha Ree, and angry, too. But I was also tired, and so I said, "And where would you recommend that she stay, then?"

And my tone of voice did not placate the woman at all. But she did--I was white and it

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was a fairly prosperous-looking car, and she probably needed the money, too. And so she said, "Well, down there across the road there's a black family that will sometimes take in folks. You can see if they will take her in." And then she kind of put her hands on her hip and she said, "And are you all married?" (Laughter) I said, "We certainly are not." (Laughter)

I wish I could remember that better, and I hope it is recorded somewhere else, because we got so mad it sort ruined our digestion. But [the] child was cranky; [the] day was late. We did all that. We put Otha Ree in a room across the highway. I went in, met the lady, a black family, asked her if she could rent a room for the night, paid her. Otha Ree, I must say, maintained her good nature and her dignity commendably throughout--nicer than she should. And we all went out to the closest fast food place and ate. But it really was; it was most unpleasant to travel through the South.

And Virginia [Durr] has a marvelous story about that, concerning the wife of the president of Tuskegee [Institute]. When equal accommodations were passed, the law that made it illegal to refuse a room to a black--she, Virginia, was in the presence of this woman, who was a friend of hers; they were together listening to it over whatever they had at that time. And she just shouted, "I'll throw away the bottle!" And Virginia said, "What are you talking about?" And she says, "Well, how do you think we've been taking these long cross-country trips? You don't think that when I had to go to the bathroom I'd get out and go behind the bushes, particularly if I were on a big highway." And she said, "I just carried a screw-top bottle and made use of it the best I could."

It was a ridiculous and appalling situation, as you look back. We didn't know

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how appalling it was. You can live around things and be inured to things that you just ought not to be.

At any rate, he was always kind of laying in wait until he could do something about it, because he was not one to tilt at windmills and had a real--I won't say contempt, but a real dislike of some of his excessively liberal acquaintances who would rather go down in defeat every time rather than inch forward and get a half a loaf, and three-quarters of a loaf, and finally be within striking distance, and go for it.

So I remember the door flew open after voting was over, and Lyndon marched in feeling triumphant, and I believe it was Skeeter [Felton M.] Johnston who was secretary of the Senate. Do you remember?

M: I don't. But I think his name--

J: Of course, you were not there then. Well, he immediately got Skeeter, and then I forget who all came in, but a surprising group, a really surprising group. Bill Moyers will know, I think, and I would like to get him sometime to fill us in, because I must say, memory is a poor servant, and I wish that I had done this twenty years ago. I am continually amazed at the diary I did keep for the five years and two months of the White House time. It is so much wiser to keep it before time saps your memory and glosses over your feeling about issues.

I do remember there was a little incident; it was just a short while later when William Proxmire wins a special election in Wisconsin. He was a Democrat, and got off the plane announcing--this was on August 27 or thereabouts--that he was Lyndon Johnson's birthday present--(laughter)--because it eased the situation in the Senate just a

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little bit.

For once, because of the press of things in the Senate we did not get to the Ranch for his birthday, and his birthday was always an enormously important time to Lyndon. But the staff gave him a surprise party, and a bunch of senators came in, and I notice that [John] Kennedy was among them and, surprisingly, [J. William] Fulbright. No surprise at all [about] Senators [Sam] Ervin and Kerr, and Senator [William] Knowland, who was his opposition, the Republican minority leader who had--it was a knife edge, absolutely knife edge, forty-nine [to] forty-seven.

And so Knowland could, so many times, get enough of the conservative southerners to join him that he had pretty much control of the Senate. He was also not as skillful as Lyndon, I think. A good man, a kind, hard-working, highly responsible and respectable man, but not Machiavellian in any sense. He could not wend his way through the Senate quite like Lyndon could.

And Humphrey came in, and that was sort of a joy to me because I always had my eye on Humphrey as one of the nicest people I knew.

M: Why did you say it was something of surprise that Fulbright would be there? It was my impression that he and Senator Johnson were rather close during this time.

J: Well, they were. I guess it's looking back on it through the spectacles of--that's why I say this about memory is a poor servant. I guess it was no surprise then. I guess it is just now I am surprised, as I look back on it.

M: Because it was only in the presidency and the divisive issue of Vietnam, I think.

J: Yes. And there was really a time when we went to his house and had a wonderful time

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with him and his wife. I believe her name was Henrietta, [who was] a very bright, attractive woman.

M: Fulbright? Wasn't it Betty?

J: Betty, that's right. I guess it was Betty, because I'm getting mixed up with another Senate wife.

M: Your White House diary has, in the early years, a number of references to your being with the Fulbrights, having them into the White House, and I'm not sure [about] going into their house, but at any rate there were a lot of--

J: Yes. It is much more reliable when it's done on the spot, and I have to remember that.

But then we had to get around to the amendments of the Civil Rights Bill, and that was once more a devil of a time. And Senator [Strom] Thurmond had a one-man filibuster which beat all the records, with twenty-four hours and eighteen minutes, the longest in Senate history. I think, if we were to go back over the *Congressional Record*, we would find that he gave a bunch of recipes--

M: I'm sure.

J: --for such things as how to cook turnip greens and black-eyed peas. (Laughter) But we did pass it on August the twenty-ninth. And so, so much for that. I don't know that I ever felt a greater sense of elation; I suppose I did in several of the White House years.

Then we got to go to the Ranch to rest.

And then a lot of trouble erupted, as you will remember, in Arkansas and the first black children trying to go to school and Orval Faubus getting out the [national] guard to prevent them, and saying that he had to keep the peace. Well, that's right, but it did put

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the South in a bad light.

And Lyndon really felt that a southerner could not be elected, which was patently unfair, because the Lord didn't distribute brains that unevenly, or patriotism, or any virtues, but he really felt that prejudice against the South, ill-founded or well-founded, was so deep that it was a chasm that could not be closed, as we just read yesterday on a monument.

M: In that month of September I see the name John Kenneth Galbraith for the first time in this chronicle. He came to the Ranch. Do you have any memories of him during those early years?

J: I regret very much I don't, really. I do remember--oh dear, another eminent figure of those times coming to the Ranch, an unlikely one, newspaperman Walter Lippmann. I remember thinking, "He is very ill at ease; he is very . . . out of his milieu here," and he is a good bit kind of looking down on us." I don't mean us, the Lyndon Johnsons; I meant us, Texas, this whole way of life and society. But we often had been to parties at his house, which is right across from where the girls went to school at National Cathedral. And he always had fascinating people to his house. We saw a good deal of newspaper people in those days; chiefly, of course, the Bill Whites, but by no means only. We saw a lot of the old-time newspaper people who represented Texas papers, whom we'd known during House days and in the early Senate days on.

M: Did you like Lippmann?

J: I can't really say that I did. He was a bellwether, that's what Lyndon at some time came to call him. I mean, the big ram jumps over the fence, all the other sheep follow. He said

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what the facts were and all the other newspaper people were quick to copy, imitate, go with, most of them. But I liked good talk, and I liked going to his parties, being in his house, liked his wife, but felt aware of what I considered he thought of my state, us, a large portion of the people that make up this country. Superior, is what he thought, in my mind.

And Eisenhower, well, of course, Eisenhower was reaching--in 1957, he knew he would not be running in 1960, so I suppose it was not difficult for him to issue an executive order directing the use of federal troops to carry out desegregation in Arkansas. He had a stroke somewhere along then. But he lived; it was not a bad one, and he resumed his duties pretty soon.

And so our lives marched into the fall and some very significant things happened to us. Not one of the big significant ones, but an interesting and valuable one was going to Houston to--somebody among our friends had assembled a bunch of young businessmen, thinking that Lyndon should get better acquainted with the younger generation. When he thought of important Houston businessmen, he thought of George Brown, and--oh dear, sorry; I might insert a few names later on, but the group that used to met in a certain hotel room--

M: Wesley West would be one?

J: Oh, Wesley West, yes indeed. But I was thinking of a big insurance company, and yet others.

But the most significant event of that fall, to my mind, was an October evening when Russia put up the first satellite, which was called a Sputnik. It was just a small

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thing. Lyndon was enormously interested in, and drawn to, and seized upon, and never left, the thought that space could have a great effect on the future of this country. He was on a committee called a--it was a Senate committee on space is what it was, but I'm sure it had more words in than that. Can you tell me exactly?

M: No, I can't. I don't think the word space was in it, but it was the precursor to the space program. At any rate, you were at the Ranch when you got the word that Sputnik went up.

J: Yes, and Jim Rowe and Tom Corcoran came down to see us. I do not know who else may have been there, but those two, Lyndon and I, and whoever was there walked down--the old familiar evening ritual of after dinner, walking down to the cemetery, maybe stopping at Oreole's [Bailey, LBJ's cousin]. A great big owl went flying over our heads--they are just sort of all feathers and float thought the air sort of like spirits--and perched, flew from the woods on our right toward the river and landed on the closest perch on the left. And we were all looking up at the sky, and we were all thinking the same thoughts. Nobody was talking; it was a very silent, expectant group: what did this hold for us? We'd always looked up at the sky as a scene of sort of romance, with stars and the moon and just a dear, familiar part of our world. Suddenly, there might be menace in it. Suddenly, there might be some unknown thing that could do us harm. We knew it was pregnant with something happening, and none of us could predict what. But it's a night that made a great impact on me, and I was glad to spend it with two people like Jim and Tom.

That was one of the several times that Tom Corcoran left a great big overcoat at

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our house. It wasn't cold enough in Texas to be needing it in October, so he just walked off without it. And I had to box it up and send it back. We were always boxing up things and sending them back to visitors. We had so many visitors and there were always some things left, and if they were left long enough, and if nobody wrote back and we couldn't identify them, we would eventually give them to the church bazaar. But we tried to make sure--and Tom's we could identify because it had a label in it from Hong Kong, and I think somewhere in it, his name.

M: Another digression but an interesting one, in case it's never been talked about before: you said the nightly ritual was to go to the cemetery and perhaps stop at Oreole's. That relates to the President's cousin. And it is a matter of Johnson folklore that he would take people in to see his cousin Oreole. Talk about that a little bit. Who was she, and why did he do it? And what was the--?

J: (Laughter) Well, he did it out of mischief, I think. Oreole was a cousin--not a first cousin--of his father's, perhaps a second, which made her kin to him. And he was one of the last people who would care much about her, and he was always giving her things, including money, and looking out for her in many ways, in such things as designating a secretary to go out and buy some new dresses for Oreole. I bet he bought her three hearing aids, none of which she would ever wear. She'd wear them for a few days and then she'd say, "I'm not going to wear that anymore; it makes a humming in my ears. It hurts my ears. I just don't like it." And he would fuss with her, because he saw that she was so cut off from the world, and he felt sorry for her. And she hungered for human companionship, and she was very lonely in her world. And yet she absolutely refused to

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wear it.

I know that a lot of those people that she was a figure of fun; indeed she was. Her clothes were always ridiculously mixed up in the colors. She couldn't see very well, and if she put on lipstick, it was likely to be awry. And her hair could have used an awful lot more brushing and trips to the beauty parlor than it got. But she had good sense, and she didn't hold Lyndon in any awe, whatsoever, in any of his roles of office. He was just Sam's oldest boy, who lived up the road and had done well. And of course he cared about his cousin Oreole; he just took that as a right.

M: So he would take some of your guests in to visit with her.

J: Yes, and I think he, in an odd sort of way was saying, "Here's my hillbilly cousin, and don't you laugh at her." I cannot quite go into the psychological reasons why, but they were there.

Oh, I know; it was the Senate Preparedness Subcommittee. And he began right after he went back; he lost no time. As soon as he got back to Washington, which was in November, he started committee hearings on that missile program. What was that thing doing up in the sky? Why was ours--because we had programs, drafts on the table to make such an object--why did the Russians beat us? Why didn't we go to work faster and outdo them and achieve superiority? And the people who were trying to do it were going to have a constant communication from him that would not be very relaxing to them.

Oh, I forgot to mention one important thing. In that meeting with young businessmen in Houston, he met Jack Valenti, I think. They took to each other right

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away. Besides that, very importantly, Jack took to his secretary, Mary Margaret Wiley. And he began to come up, presumably to visit us and Lyndon, but very much to see Mary Margaret. And that was a troubled courtship, because work didn't quit till there wasn't any work left to be done. And Lyndon didn't at all expect his secretary to go off and have a date when six o'clock came, or seven or eight or nine. (Laughter) He was perfectly welcome into the family and at the dinner table; [he would] tolerate them going off a while after dinner. And there was one funny time when mischief got the better of Lyndon, and he and A. W. [Moursund] decided to get Jack drunk. I don't know if they wanted to get him so drunk that Mary Margaret would be disgusted and would not have him around anymore, and thereby insure Lyndon's not having to fill her place--(Laughter)

M: Did they succeed?

J: I think they did succeed, but I think he survived it with good humor, and it certainly did not impair their relationship, which--gee, he kept on coming to see her. I've forgotten when the wedding took place, and I think it did take several years to get to a wedding.

M: Jack Kennedy was back in your life again at Thanksgiving time. He was making a speech in Dallas and LBJ introduced him.

J: Yes.

M: And you had dinner with him there.

J: I'm sorry. I just don't remember anything about it. My only keen memories of him are one time when he did visit us at the Ranch. I guess he was in 1956 campaigning, as so many senators did, for Adlai Stevenson. A whole flock of senators came to Texas campaigning for Stevenson. [But] it was in 1956, and Texas was not going to be for

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Stevenson. They didn't make much of a dent, but we hosted them; Lyndon introduced them, Lyndon traveled with them, Lyndon worked for Stevenson himself.

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J: And then our first satellite effort did get launched at Cape Canaveral in December, but it blew up, which only fueled Lyndon's determination that we were going make up ground and get ahead in that race. He said, "What happened this morning is one of the best publicized and most humiliating failures in our history." From the very beginning, he felt that it was closely tied up with the future of not only us *vis-à-vis* Russia, but of the whole future. His interest in the future was marked, and willing to accept all sorts of different sorts of things happening.

And the Bill Whites came to see us with their two children, and Lyndon bought them cowboy outfits, and we took them everywhere we went.

Once more we went through the Christmas ritual at Mrs. Johnson's house, the house at 2519 Harris Boulevard that I remember for so many things; one of them, Lyndon standing in front of it in his navy uniform, right after Christmas, heading--before New Year's, I believe--for the West Coast, back in December of 1941--by now a long time ago. And me going with him, which was one of the best things that ever happened to me, because it opened up a lot of new worlds to me.

Another ritual we had at the Ranch for as long as Christmas came and we both lived there, Lyndon would just love going around on Christmas morning delivering Christmas presents. He wasn't about to let the U.S. mail do it for him or a secretary or anything else. He just loved to load up the car. And his favorite gifts were a box of

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candy and a bottle of bourbon or scotch, or whatever he knew to be, or thought to be, the favorite drink of the person.

There were two houses across the river, one of which is now in the LBJ State Park; people were still living in it at that time, an elderly couple. And he would go over, and take his liquor and his candy, and they'd talk about old times and Lyndon's father and mother, mostly his father, because his father was much more attached to the surrounding area and much more neighborly with them.

And there was always Aunt Kitty, and Aunt Frank, and Melvin Winters and, of course, the A. W. Moursunds. The latter two were very much a part of our lives for years and years.

M: There is a wonderful picture--it's a snapshot really--of President Johnson, this was in much later years, in a Santa Claus suit. Is that something that he did very often?

J: No, only once in his life. And that was the very last--as I recall, it was the very last Christmas of his life, which would have made it 1972. And rode around on a riding lawn mower, which has a cab on the back of it, or one can be attached, and it was loaded with Christmas presents. And he was in the hangar delivering them to the children of the folks who worked on our place and the surrounding place. And then it was followed by a movie.

I cannot remember exactly [in] what period of our lives, and it may have been Lew Wassermann, I do not know who it was, that gave us the moving-picture machine that was used, and then what became nicknamed the "Johnson Bijou." And we had chairs lined up, just folding chairs, except the front row were reclining chairs, two for

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Lyndon and me, and we may have had two more for elderly or honored guests. And then little children--we'd sometimes old provide quilts or blankets for little children to lie on the floor and roll around and play, if their parents wanted to put them down there, and they wouldn't interfere too much with the screen. If they got up and ran around, you could sometimes see the little heads bobbing across the screen. The people who would remember the dates of that--no doubt you have already done many, many oral histories, and I hope so, although I think there's been a tendency to omit the women in our lives. I hope not too much.

M: I hope not either. We'll find out.

End of Tape 2 of 2 and Interview XXXVIII

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LYNDON BAINES JOHNSON LIBRARY

Legal Agreement Pertaining to the Oral History Interviews of

CLAUDIA TAYLOR JOHNSON

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

This assignment is subject to the following terms and conditions:

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

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

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