

INTERVIEW I

DATE: November 3, 1983
INTERVIEWEE: JAMES DAVIS
INTERVIEWER: Michael L. Gillette
PLACE: LBJ Ranch, Stonewall, Texas

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G: Let's start by my asking you how you first happened to come to work for the Johnsons.

D: Well, the Johnsons at that time owned KTBC and they had advertised for a couple that wanted to work on a ranch. I had no idea it was for at that time Majority Leader Lyndon Johnson. I came from a country town, so I decided, well, this is a good time for me to go back to the country. So I answered the ad. I was asked to come out to the Ranch, which I didn't know at that time where it was, but I was given instructions. I came out. I was interviewed by Mrs. Johnson and Jesse Kellam, who was general manager at that time. I thought no more of it, and I went back, and in about two weeks I got a telegram wanting me to come to work immediately, me and my wife. I thought well, I had to give my present employer two weeks notice, because it might be I'd have to come back. Anyway, so I did, and after two weeks notice they agreed to it, then I came out and I've been working ever since.

When I first come to work out here I had the good fortune to meet Helen Williams and Gene Williams, Gene has later passed, but he is the one who was instrumental to me in remaining on the job, because he had told me in so many words what type of people they were and easy to get

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along, just do your job and so forth and on. So I had taken that as good, sound advice, and I've been here ever since, which has been twenty-four years plus ago.

G: That was in 1959?

D: That was in 1959.

G: You said you were from a--

D: Small, yes.

G: --small town or from the country. Where were you from?

D: I was born and reared in a place by the name of Brookshire, Texas, which is in Waller County. It's about thirty-six miles west of Houston. It's eight miles from Katy, Texas.

Of course, I had been to the navy and various other places prior to that, but anyway, I had come to Austin. A good friend of mine was cooking here in Austin, and he asked me to come up, so I did. I worked with him until I come to the Johnsons.

G: Anything about that original interview with Mrs. Johnson and Jesse Kellam that you remember?

D: Well, there was some skepticism about my wife being able to handle the cooking portion of the job, but then I told them that I was a cook by profession and that would be no problem. So she taken the advice and hired us. It worked out real fine, because basically speaking, since then on I mainly most of the time cooked the meats for the Johnson family whenever we have I guess dinner parties and when they have their relatives in. Usually they'll want meat cooked to broil. That's been my responsibility ever since then.

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G: I see. And you had done that before, is that right?

D: Yes. Of course, like I said, I was a cook by profession. See, I was cooking in Austin when I got this job. Of course, I never really was bent on making it a career, cooking, so that's why I decided to come out here and try my hand at the country life a while.

My responsibilities here, when I got here they told me was to maintain the yard, and we was on call twenty-four hours a day due to the fact that the intercom for the plane was in the house and all the wind indicator, everything, was situated here in the house at that time. We lived upstairs; there was just the two of us so we lived upstairs. We would stay here twenty-four hours a day; every two weeks we were given three days off. So that any time a plane was in the area and they needed the lights turned on, even the lights for the airport were in the main house here, in the kitchen. The little weather--where you had the weather balloon sometime that if it'd get cloud-heavy or foggy, sometimes during the President's visit from Washington and they was over at the [Wesley] West's, I would have to try to give him a weather report the best of my ability and sometimes I'd have to send up these balloons. They had a measuring instrument to tell how high the ceiling was.

So I had a great responsibility. Even though I was responsible for a lot of things that didn't seem important to other people, the Senator thought [they] were very important to him to make him happy. Because I had the pool, we had the pools to maintain. Later on years, we acquired about four pools while he was living that I had

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to maintain at different ranches and different places. I had thirteen yards to maintain, and I did my best. Sometimes I reminisce with Mrs. Johnson now about all the things that was assigned to me while they was in Washington. She gave me a little laugh and thought I did a pretty good job of it.

G: Did you have any help on--?

D: Well, the only help I had was later on. In later years the kids would help me try to cut the yards and stuff like that. While they was kids, they didn't do too much, but they would go along with me when school was out. Mainly I did most of those jobs by myself.

G: Was there anybody that you replaced?

D: Oh, yes. Edgar Graves [?] was supposed to have been--him and his wife, whose name was Leatrice [?]-here, but for some reason Edgar had quit, was no longer working for the Johnsons, so they just had his wife. So when I first come here it was three of us; it was Lee Greggs [?], myself and my wife. But later on when he was vice president, he taken Lee to Washington with them and there just was the two of us; just myself, my wife and kids was running the household. Until when they came back, they would bring a staff with them. Helen and Gene would head the staff up.

Sometimes after he was president he would bring some navy staff that would come down with him to help, because we had an average of twelve people per meal, that's including breakfast, every day he was here, and a lot of times he had house guests. Most of the time, his busy season is when hunting season would come in. He would have

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Senator [Richard] Russell and a whole lot of other guests that would come down. So we did have a pretty good staff when he was in residence.

G: What were your first impressions of him when you met him?

D: Well, my first impression of him was kind of a standoff impression. I always tried to stay out of his way, try to feel him out. I didn't want to get him aggravated or anything, because I thought maybe, well, I'd heard a few things that he'd jump you if he caught you wrong. So I always stayed clear of that. I was lucky. I always did the things that he wanted done. Very seldom I run foul of him. My relationship with him was real good up until he passed.

But the biggest thing he required is that you kept the yard looking good and kept the pool in good shape. Every morning I'd have to get out and clean the pool when he was here because he would go swimming practically every day when he was a senator. After he was president he didn't do as much swimming here because, I don't know, he was too busy doing other things I guess.

G: Was the pool a problem for him or for you?

D: No, the pool never was a problem. It was just that I think after he had the heart attack that the doctor had put emphasis that he should exercise, and I think the pool was playing that part.

G: Did he ever ask your help or your advice on the cattle part of the Ranch?

D: Yes. I sometimes was asked to--
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Yes. During the slow times I would go out and help with the cattle. He would sometimes call down from Washington at night, and if he didn't find the Ranch foreman he would ask me about the cattle and what had we been doing and so forth, how many calves been born and et cetera, et cetera. For some reason I was lucky enough to always have that information, even though I wasn't a part of that part of the Ranch, the staff taking care of the cattle, but sometimes I did help and I would have that information.

G: Did you have anything to do with the station, KTBC?

D: No, other than when they would come. You know they had a penthouse there. Sometimes me and my wife would have to go and serve luncheons when he was there, because most of the time he liked to be out here. That's the only time we had to come in contact with the station other than when he were in town. Of course there was plenty of things out here to do that we didn't have--he had a lady that was employed that was at the penthouse at all times. First, Lee used to go. Then she had a lady that finally married into the family by the name of Gertrude. I forget her maiden name, but Gertrude was working at the station, so it would relieve us, wouldn't have to go in, just stay out here and do things out here.

Our busiest time of the year was doing the gardening. See, I was also the vegetable gardener. He liked corn, so we'd put half of the garden into corn, and we'd plant string beans, peas, black-eyed peas, bell peppers and tomatoes. He really liked tomatoes so we had to have tomatoes and stuff.

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G: Who decided what you would plant?

D: Well, strangely enough the President decided what we'd plant. What happened, when I first come here the Ranch foreman by the name of Mr. Kevin [?], I don't remember his first name, but anyway, he was taking care of the garden and the cattle, and I just observed what he was planting. So when he left then they dumped it on me, then I just taken over and planted what was planted every year. Also we planted Irish potatoes. The corn we'd plant, we would harvest it and put it up so that when he'd come home, all during the winter months we'd have fresh corn and fresh string beans, black-eyed peas, et cetera.

G: Do you remember what part of 1959 you went to work for them, whether it was the late part of the year?

D: Yes, it was in the fall, the twenty-second of September when I first come to work here for them. So I mean I fell right into deer season. As if it happened yesterday, one time the President had I guess it was some senator--Senator Russell I guess it was. We went hunting that [next] day and we stayed up until--then we celebrated. I forget now what they were celebrating, but everybody went to bed at two o'clock. We were going hunting the next day, so we got up at four. That was the shortest day of my life since I had been working for him. We got up at four o'clock and went hunting, and the next day he didn't feel like going hunting so he asked me and Gene did we want to go hunting. We looked at him and laughed, and said "No, we don't want to go hunting. We're tired and sleepy also."

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But I guess the time he enjoyed most here at the Ranch was during the fall, during deer hunting season, because then he'd invite various people which had never hunted, and I guess he got a kick out of telling them how to hunt and all that kind of stuff.

G: Did you have an opportunity to get to know Russell at all when he was there?

D: Yes, because the Senator would always exit through the kitchen and he always brought his guests through the kitchen. He would come in the kitchen, introduce any of his guests to the staff. We got to meet everybody that ever visited this Ranch; he'd bring them through the kitchen and introduce us individually. Sometimes--it depended on what was cooking--he would get him a spoon and dip out of it, and his guests would be in line and he'd give them the spoon and say okay, taste it. We thought, at least I thought, Senator Russell was a very good man and a good friend of the President.

G: Now, Senator Robert Kennedy came out that fall, too, to go hunting.

D: Yes. That was a kind of strange one, because I don't believe--was he a senator at that time?

G: No.

D: He was a--

G: He worked on the Senate staff.

D: Senate staff. Oh, yes, that's right. Yes, he came out. He had never been hunting a day in his life, and that was kind of a strange thing because they were trying to show him how to handle a gun. They proved that he needed some more instruction because, you know, those deer

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guns kick and it kind of--once he shot at a deer, I think he got the deer down. We eventually had to shoot him again. But he did kill a deer, but the gun kicked him and hit him in the face. I think he would have never forgotten that. That was the end of that I guess.

G: Were you there? Were you along?

D: Yes, I was there. I was there. He always carried me and Gene along to gut the deer, so later it could be carried to the locker plant. What he would do, we'd kill a deer. We'd go in two cars, or maybe three cars, because when he got to be vice president he had Secret Service and they'd have their vehicle. But we had a station wagon that we would follow in behind with him, and when they'd kill a deer we would gut them, prepare them to take to the locker plant, and after that day was over, then myself or Gene would take the hunt to Johnson City to the locker plant.

G: Someone suggested that a lot of times the deer would spoil. Is that right?

D: Well, I haven't had the experience of having a deer spoil because usually it would be cold. Not really cold, but usually when we were hunting it would be kind of chilly. That was such a short space of time I don't see how a deer could possibly spoil.

G: Anything else on that Robert Kennedy visit? Do you know what they talked about?

D: Not really. That's been so long ago I wouldn't remember that anyway, because the only thing I remember is his visit and that we did go hunting and stuff like that. I don't know whether him and Robert

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really discussed anything of importance, because when we were hunting with them, see, him and his guests would be in a different vehicle from us. We were just in the back of them to take care of the hunt.

G: Did they normally use that hunting car or would they use--?

D: No, at that time he would use the Lincoln, the convertible Lincoln, and that was his hunting car, a convertible Lincoln. Of course, I think at that time that hunting car had seen its best days when I got here. They had a couple of old Cadillacs, convertibles. Any car he rode around on the Ranch had to be a convertible.

G: Why was that?

D: I think it's self-explanatory. If you're going to hunt, you don't want a covered vehicle you know. And by him having a convertible, all during summer long he could utilize it as a convertible and an open space vehicle, and when the hunting season come along it was ideal for him to hunt in.

G: Who did he normally go hunting with? Who were--?

D: Well, at that time Judge [A. W.] Moursund, they were big hunting buddies. Every time they'd go hunting, Judge Moursund would be available. That would be one person, because they'd interchange. Lot of times we'd go to Judge Moursund's place because he I think at that time had more acreage. Then sometimes we would hunt at the Scharnhorst, what was known at the Scharnhorst, but most of the time we would go hunting over at the Judge's place.

G: With all the guests, did he ever exceed his limit?

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D: Well, I doubt that very seriously, because he hunted practically every day but what he would do was invite a bunch of guests in, and when the guests were successful he would have us to carry it to the locker plant and he would have it processed and he would send it to them. So it meant that the guests weren't there shooting deer for his use; we'd get it processed and then ship it to them.

G: Anybody else that went on those trips that you remember in particular?

D: Well, usually a lot of times he would take some of his staff from Washington hunting, so a lot of time it wasn't distinguished guests, a senator or a representative. Then sometimes we'd have Jack Brooks over to hunt with us. But a lot of time it would be people that everybody wouldn't know. It would be just friends that would come in and go hunting with him, and sometimes it would be some of his staff that he would take hunting.

G: Now let me ask you this. Did you travel with him much?

D: Yes. In 1961 or 1962 I traveled all over the country--he was campaigning--with him. In fact, that was the closest time I've come to getting in trouble. I left his pillow in Fargo, North Dakota, I believe.

G: Really?

D: Yes. I left all his pillows. We finally got the pillows shipped to him, but that wasn't a very good day when we got to Washington and I had lost--

G: Well now, he had a special pillow that he would use?

D: Yes. Always had a special pillow.

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Anyway, no, I traveled quite a bit with him when he was campaigning.

G: That was when he was running for vice president, the 1960 campaign?

D: Well, no, he was running for president, but he just, you know--

G: Oh, this was before the nomination? Yes.

D: Yes. And what happened, then I think Kennedy picked him to be vice president, but he was campaigning for the presidential [nomination]. He had acquired a pretty large-sized plane. It was a Convair. Eventually it got cracked up; they crashed it here about I guess ten miles from the Ranch just south of here.

But anyway, we was all over the place in that plane. I mean, you know, it would take us practically all night to fly from Los Angeles to Washington in that plane. I remember one night we were coming from Los Angeles. We had went to Nevada and we stopped in Reno, and then we went on over to Los Angeles and he appeared over there, I don't know whether it was the Cow Palace or what. Well, anyway, we left there about ten o'clock one night and about two o'clock that morning-- he carried the press with him, and they was sitting around him inquiring about this and talking about that, and it was two o'clock in the morning. I told one of the press persons, a secretary, to tell him that I wasn't serving any more drinks, I was tired, I'm going to hang it up, because it was two o'clock that morning. And so I didn't make no enemy. Everybody stopped drinking and went to bed. We landed in Washington that morning I guess around four-thirty or five o'clock. See, those planes, they were slow. We could carry twenty-eight or

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thirty people but they were very slow, because they were propeller-driven.

G: A story is told that one night he landed one of the big planes out here at the Ranch that they'd never landed out here before, and it kind of put ruts in the runway.

D: Well, I know they landed a plane, I don't know if it was General Electric, it was called the Electra, which is the largest plane ever landed here. But I don't remember--it was a little too heavy. I imagine they did have to--but it came in a couple of times.

G: Really?

D: Yes. A couple of times. But they had to keep the engine running all the time because they had no way of starting it. But I don't remember that it rutted up the runway or not. But those were the heaviest planes we ever brought in here. I imagine that it could have, but not to the point where you could see it with the naked eye.

G: Tell me about the plane crash, the Convair.

D: Well, I don't remember the date, but at that time I was assigned to the plane as a steward, and we was getting ready to go back to Washington that morning. Luckily I was not on the plane, but the pilots lived in Austin and they insisted that--well, didn't insist, but they wanted to stay in Austin that night with their families. So I decided, well, I'd stay at the Ranch. That morning we was waiting for the plane, and I was on intercom talking to the pilot when all of the sudden there was no more conversation. I guess I was the last person to communicate with the pilot, because he was asking me, did I hear the noise of

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the plane. I told him no, we don't hear anything. Well, see at that time we didn't have a radio beacon or signal for the Ranch. It was just flying blind, especially if it was foggy, and it was foggy. Harold Teague [?] was the pilot. I was talking to him when his voice faded out and we didn't hear it anymore.

G: Did they think it was too foggy to fly? Did the pilot think they shouldn't have been flying in that weather?

D: Well, what happened, I don't think the pilot used good judgment. I don't think we had had any communications with the pilot that morning. We just that night had decided what time we were going to leave and we were just waiting for the plane to land. The only time we heard anything from him was when he couldn't see or know where he was, and he called in and asked could we hear the noise of the plane. See, he thought he was over the Ranch. I told him no, we couldn't hear a plane, because he was south of here. That was that. No, he wasn't encouraged to come out; he used his own judgment.

G: One of the critics of LBJ said that LBJ ordered that pilot to fly to the Ranch in bad weather when the pilot didn't want to.

D: No, no, that wasn't the case. That wasn't the case.

G: Are you sure that that wasn't the case?

D: I'm sure that wasn't the case. What happened was that the pilot could have been out here, but they wanted to stay in Austin because their family was there. What happened, he was supposed to be here at a certain time and we were just waiting. We'd got everything ready. And then he called in on the intercom and estimated how much time he

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was out. Then he called and I was still talking to him and he asked-- he said it was foggy--can you hear the motors of the plane. I went outside and I couldn't. I got back on the intercom and he was still there, and I told him no, I couldn't. Evidently he made a right turn, turned north, and that's when he run into the mountain.

G: What was the plane going to do after it left here?

D: We were going to fly to Washington that morning.

G: Was LBJ going to go to Washington?

D: Yes. All of us. Yes. Mrs. Johnson, the President, and everybody else, all his staff. He had a standing staff waiting for the plane's arrival, so we'd go back to Washington.

G: But you don't remember any discussion between the pilot or anybody else about the weather not allowing the plane to fly?

D: No, because I'm the only one who talked to him. The President, he was in his bedroom, because, see, we served him breakfast every morning in the bedroom. The intercom was in the kitchen.

G: But the pilot never said anything about "I don't think we ought to fly in this weather" or anything like that?

D: No, well, he'd have to make a phone call for that. See, when I was talking to him he was airborne.

G: Okay. What happened after that?

D: Well, I don't remember. I think Mr. West's plane came and picked him up and took him back to Washington, because prior to him getting that plane the Wests used to fly us back and forth to Washington. No, the decision would have had to be made by telephone and much earlier. The

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only communication we had with the pilot that morning were [mine], to my knowledge, unless the President called him from his bedroom on the telephone.

G: But the pilot wasn't complaining about the weather to you?

D: No, no. No, no. You see, I'll tell you why it don't make sense that he would, because it was his judgment to go there in the first place, and he knew that, well, we were leaving in the morning for Washington. But he wanted to be over there with his family.

G: How did you learn that the plane had crashed?

D: Well, after there was no more communication on the intercom, then I assumed that something had happened to the plane. But we didn't know till hours afterward that the plane had crashed. It was hours after that we found out the plane had crashed.

G: Did someone see the wreckage, or spot the wreckage?

D: Yes, but I don't remember. There was so much confusion when that happened that I don't remember that part of it. But I do know that the President later even bought the place that the plane crashed on.

G: Now, let's talk some more about the 1960 campaign. Do you think he wanted to be president then?

D: I had the idea that he wanted to be president, because his constituents and his friends was urging him and convincing him, and I'm sure he wanted to be president.

G: Really?

D: Yes. Because if he didn't he sure went to a lot of trouble. And lost a lot of sleep and I lost a lot of sleep with him.

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G: Really?

D: Yes.

G: What was he like on the campaign trail?

D: Well, I thought he was--well, you see what happened, when he was campaigning, remember from my perspective I was a steward on his ship. My job was to keep everybody comfortable and serving what we had on the plane, and then when he would go off to make these campaign speeches, well, normally I stayed behind or stayed in the hotel room. But I always find that he was always in good spirit. I think [Horace] Busby, Mr. Busby, was writing, doing all his campaign speech writing for him, Mr. Busby and several other people. I remember Walter Jenkins, I think he was still in there. My remembrance of him is being--I had no problem, he seemed to be in a good spirit. He was always talking politics, you know, with his strategists, so I had no way of knowing.

G: Do you think he was more temperamental when he was campaigning than he was when he was just in Washington or here?

D: Well, that could go either way. You know, a man of that caliber, anything could set his temper off regardless of where he was or when it was, if something went wrong. But it didn't come down to me as of such because of my relation to the operation; I wasn't messing up things, I wasn't straightening up things either.

G: Tell me about the pillow now. Tell me about the pillow.

D: Oh, oh, the pillow. Well, you see, even before king-sized beds and things was in, he always had his beds made long and made his pillows bigger. You notice the bed in there, it's not a normal-sized bed.

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It's not a king-size, not a queen-size, it's just a big bed. The pillows always went along with the bed. He carried his pillows everywhere he went. He never enjoyed sleeping away from his own bed. The size pillows he would carry with him would more or less make him comfortable and wouldn't miss his bed so much if he didn't carry the pillows. That was part of my job, hauling those pillows around. In the course of things, sometimes you get in a hurry or rush and I just walked off, and I regretted many a day that I left that pillow because I don't remember all the things he said, but he didn't like it so well. But why I didn't get in too much trouble [was] due to the fact that we were going back to Washington where he could get in his regular bed.

G: I had heard at one point you either left the campaign or said you were going to leave, you were going to give him your R.S.V.P.

D: Yes. Well, I don't think it was about the pillows. Like I say, when we was coming from Los Angeles that night, you know, that getting up early and staying up all night, and you got twenty-five or thirty people asking for Scotch and sodas and God knows what else, there's no leisure time for you because the job you've got is to make everybody else happy. That was really--at two o'clock, everybody seemed like they was just waking up, and I was tired. I think that's where that come from. I guess Mary Rather might remember that part of it because I think she was on the campaign with us. She might have mentioned that, because I told her, I believe, that this is getting too much for

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me. I think I threatened to resign soon as I got to Washington or something. But anyway, I soon forgot about it.

G: Did you go to the convention in 1960 in Los Angeles?

D: No, I didn't. I didn't go to the convention. I don't know what happened that I didn't go. Oh I think what happened, the plane to carry everybody was too [crowded]. I think I got bumped. Somebody taken my place as the steward on the plane, because I know at the inaugural I got bumped. I was steward on the plane when somebody else wanted to be.

G: Now after he was nominated for vice president, he did have President Kennedy down to the Ranch?

D: Yes, he did. Yes. President Kennedy came down and he went hunting also.

G: Tell me what you remember about that visit.

D: Well, I thought--all the Ranch staff thought President-elect Kennedy was our man. We voted for him, we was pulling for him and all that. He gave him the same treatment he gave everybody, brought him in the kitchen, introduced us to him. At that time President-elect Kennedy, he talked to us and he gave us some little mementos to remember him by. We thought he was a God-sent man and all that thing. He went hunting with the President. I think he fared better hunting than his brother Robert did. He taken on to hunting like a duck take to water.

But we were sorry that--we were all geared up and waiting for him to return when they got to Dallas and he never made it, because we

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were anxious to meet Mrs. Kennedy and she never did get a chance to visit the Ranch.

G: Do you think that Mr. Johnson enjoyed being vice president?

D: No, I really don't think he enjoyed being vice president because he impressed me as being the head of things and most people that like being the head of things is never happy at being second in command. But I think he taken the job in stride, but I don't think he enjoyed it.

G: Did he seem unhappy during that period?

D: Well, he seemed disgruntled. I don't know whether he was unhappy, he just didn't like the job and the way it was run. I constantly always could hear him saying things about the job, about being in that position. Of course I never taken it too serious, but he impressed me that he didn't like being vice president.

G: Do you think he would have continued another four years if Kennedy had lived?

D: No, I don't think so. Personally I don't think so. I don't think he would have.

G: Did he say or do anything that gave you the impression that maybe he had other plans for the next four years?

D: I don't recall. I'm sure if you had asked me six months after I would have had a different story. But you know, I don't guess you'll know and I'll ever know, but I think he would have just got out of it, I don't think he would have went along with it. In fact, I think he didn't like Robert [Kennedy] in the business, because you see Robert

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was attorney general. He was having problems with Robert and certain things that he was doing he thought should have been done different. I don't think he would have run with Kennedy as the vice president the second term.

G: Did he mention anything in particular that the Attorney General was doing that he didn't agree with or that irritated him?

D: Well, it was some things. It was during the civil rights things that was going on, he did say some things. I couldn't quote them verbatim so I won't even try to remember, but I do know he was disgruntled with some of the things that Robert was doing and the way he was handling that thing. But I don't know in particular now because it's been so long.

G: Was it the legislation, do you think, or the wiretaps?

D: I think more or less the wiretaps and things. I think that's what it was. But you remember now, I wasn't his secretary. I was just a person on the staff that was a servant like. I just did things to keep him happy.

G: Let's talk about civil rights. If I said that I thought he was not really in favor of civil rights, how would you answer that?

D: Well, being a politician sometimes your constituents, you have one thinking one thing, another thinking something else. Myself, I say, as a black person, I always thought Lyndon Johnson was sincere. Now if he wasn't, he had a lot of us fooled, and if you don't believe that, you can talk to the average black now and we still thought that he was sincere. And to back that up, you take like if it hadn't been

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for him that civil rights bill would never have passed. Now if he had not been sincere, he had a chance to put the monkey on somebody else's back, but he did not.

G: Now let me ask you this. You worked for him for what, thirteen, almost fourteen years, whatever, and were around him a lot of the time. What evidence of his sincerity did you see firsthand?

D: Well, I started paying attention to Lyndon Johnson I believe in 1948 and Speaker Sam Rayburn at the Cow Palace when they had that convention. You see, a man has a right to change his mind. We thought that Lyndon, you know, having the constituency that he had here, in a lot of cases sometimes you can't very well get out and say the things that you think or feel because you'll blow your cool, because people will vote against you because that's not the way they think. I think Lyndon tended to think this for a long time but didn't have an opportunity to do so. Because if he had to say "I'm for this, I'm for that," he wouldn't have got elected to office during some of that time.

G: But I'm talking about just in his private life. In his relationship with you, for example, what was he like?

D: Well, here's why I'm convinced that he was a sincere man is because he would sometimes discuss issues of discrimination and unfair play with us. He would tell us that if you wasn't black, such and such a thing would happen to you. He would talk to us from an economical point of view, say, "Why do you pay so much for this and so much for that?" We'd say we can't help ourself, we have to pay. He would take us

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sometime and talk to us just like he was our father, meaning this whole staff. So we sincerely believed what he was telling us and that he was sincere. It proved that way. If he had any other intention, he got the world fooled.

We had a little place built for his electric cars, the little golf carts, and he sometimes would get us back there, all of us, Hispanics and blacks and everybody else, before dinner, and he'd sit down, we would discuss all kinds of things. He would tell us how he got Thurgood Marshall appointed to the Supreme Court by first appointing him solicitor general, because he told us that he knew if he appointed him as a Supreme Court justice they would say he had no experience. So he appointed him solicitor general and he'd win most of the cases that came before him so they couldn't say he wasn't qualified. So he got him in the back door. And he would tell us things that normally, you know, I guess would be kind of confidential that were some of the plans, plays. Some of this stuff I wouldn't mention and I'd forget about it anyway.

G: Do you think he had personal biases against blacks himself?

D: No, I don't think so. But I think in some ways he had to act that way in order to get where he was going with the issue.

G: Do you think that instances of discrimination against you, say, or Gene Williams would affect him?

D: Yes, it had, because I remember Gene used to travel back and forth from Washington with the President's dog. He carried him a couple of times and then he refused to carry the dog. He told them out there,

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he said, "Senator Johnson, I can't get no place to stay, much more with that dog." It irritated him very much because here he had some people that he had all the confidence in the world in being mistreated coming from Washington, bringing things that he sent down. Yes, he indicated that he didn't like that at all.

G: That story of course he himself, the President himself, told a number of times. Are you aware of any other instances of discrimination, say, against his staff, against you in particular or anyone else that he reacted to?

D: Well, when I first come to work for them, at that time when we'd have our Christmas party the blacks or Hispanics the first year or two were not invited. After that, then we all used to go to the party. So since most of my tenure with him was at the Ranch, it wouldn't have happened to me as much as it would to someone that's traveling all the time. But I had some--in fact, I know one time he had me to bring a car to Washington. We stopped in Little Rock, Arkansas, wanting to use the bathroom, but I was aware of the fact that sometime you have that problem, not all the time. So when I pulled up to the service station I asked them did they have a bathroom, they said no. So I went across the street and asked the man, did they have, he said yes, and then we filled gas. But that happens. You know, I can't explain it to you as a black, but there are certain things you had to have two lifestyles, you had to know two lifestyles in order to survive the system. To us now, we laugh about it. But I never brought it to his attention.

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[There was] only one time that I did have a problem brought to his attention. I was in Washington with him for six months, and at that time he couldn't find anybody to run the Ranch, to take care of things for him back at the Ranch, so he conned me into coming back. But while I was there, I was going to buy a trailer, a house trailer, because I had a family. I was going to move my family to Washington. I was able to purchase the trailer, but where I wanted to locate the trailer, it was owned by a black man, and he had a problem. They wouldn't loan him the money to fix the park like he wanted to and like the government said it should be. I brought it to the President, he said, "Well, James, he's a black man. That's why Small Business won't loan him the money to bring the park up to date." But before I could follow through on it to find out did he ever fix the park, because I wanted to bring my trailer there, the President shipped me back to the Ranch. And while I was there I was also trying to buy a house in Maryland. But anyway, the President wanted me to come back here, so I agreed to come back. I come back and I've been here ever since.

G: What happened to your trailer?

D: Well, what he did, he made the people give me my money back, but they wasn't going to give me the money back if it hadn't been for him. That's right. I'm glad you asked that.

G: Did he call them?

D: Well, he called the senator from Maryland, and the senator from Maryland--see, I was buying it from a firm in Maryland--made them give me my money back. Other than that I would have lost the money.

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G: What year was that that you were up there for six months?

D: 1963 I believe it was. Yes, 1963.

G: Well, did you replace Gene at that time?

D: No, I didn't replace Gene. What happened, I don't remember how--no, that was the time I decided I was going to resign and so what he said was "Well, we'll take you to Washington." Then I went to Washington. By that time I had gotten it out of my hair I was going to resign. So then I came back here. I was there six months.

G: Did you work at The Elms?

D: No, I was working for the government. I worked as a messenger at the state [national] Capitol.

G: Oh, I see, essentially for him. In his office.

D: Yes. Yes. In his office, yes.

G: Was he generous?

D: Yes, he was very generous. That's why most of his staff really liked him and enjoyed him. Because if you did a good job--and you never know when he was going to be generous--but if you did a good job, had a party that he enjoyed, the guests said that everything was all right, he was very generous. You don't find people like that with the type of money he had. Very few people are generous in saying, "Well, here, take this and go buy you a window shade or something." Most people it's not like that. But that's why we all liked him, because he was generous. And Christmas time, before he had grandchildren, his whole Ranch staff would have to come down here Christmas Eve and he would give everybody a present and give everybody a watch or something,

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and help him open presents and stuff like that. It was really a fascinating thing. After the grandkids come along he didn't do it so much as it was before, because he had the grandkids to live for.

G: You mentioned that the blacks and Hispanics weren't included in the first [parties].

D: Yes, the first couple of years I was there.

G: What do you think changed that?

D: Well, I think time changed it. I think the attitude of the country at that time was changing and I think that's what--I don't know no one particular thing that would change because I don't think the blacks--we was grumbling about civil rights and all that, but I don't think it had really an effect--if people was being treated fair without the action of the civil rights movement. But I don't think he at no time was for it [discrimination]; it was a tradition, true enough, that it didn't have to really get too bothered by. He did a lot of things. He lost a lot of enemies on account of his actions toward blacks; a lot of his friends turned against him because of his attitude toward [blacks].

G: Anybody in particular that you remember?

D: No, but he always intimated that, he always told you he had lost some good friends on account of civil rights and his attitude toward blacks.

G: Now, he is known for having a tendency to argue or debate, to be very good at winning arguments or disagreements. Did he argue with you about how something ought to be done?

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D: No--well, one time--you know, I catch on pretty quick in some instances. Anyway, one day he asked me about something, I said "Well, I just assumed such and such thing was the case," and I shouldn't have said that. He went on, philosophied on that I assume--I forget now what he told me. But I knew then not to--you know, say yes, sir and go head on. A lot of time I know it being just the opposite of what he would say, but I never argue with him because he was the type of guy you didn't win no arguments with. Being in the position I was, so far down the ladder, there wasn't no use in starting no argument. So I solved a lot of my problems by just going ahead on.

G: Did you travel abroad with him any?

D: Oh, yes. The only place I ever went with him was Mexico. We went to Las Pampas and Acapulco and places like that. I didn't get to go around, you know.

G: Any of the vice presidential trips? Senegal or--

D: No. No, no.

G: Well, a little bit out of the chronology, I know, because it happened later, but let me ask you a little bit about Las Pampas. Can you describe that to me, what it was like?

D: Well, literally, when you saw Las Pampas you would say it's a lost place in Mexico. But I don't know how to describe it. I don't know how they found the place. But anyway, it was a big cattle ranch. It had a well-built, maintained house. The main house was huge and had many rooms. It had a lake--well, it had a couple of dams around it. It had a swimming pool. We was I guess ten or twelve miles from the

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nearest little town. I never did go to any of the towns, the little villages while I was down there, because of course my job was either cleaning or painting the swimming pool or manicuring the yard or getting things ready all the time. So I never did get to go any place. But it was way out in the boondocks. It was huge acreage; it had plenty of cows on it, I don't know the ramifications of all of it, but I know we used to go down there when he got out of office. We used to go down there oftener than I wanted to go. After the first time I went down there I didn't want to go anymore.

G: Because it was a lot of work?

D: Well, it was out of civilization. We always had a problem with the electricity because of it being way out. We never did have enough electricity for all the things that he wanted to go on.

G: Well, what attracted him to that place?

D: Well, I think at one time he had wanted--and I think his friends kept talking him out of it--to invest, he really had wanted to buy a place, some acreage in Mexico. But you know, it was against the law in Mexico for a foreigner to own anything, and people kept telling him, you know, watch it, you're going to get beat out of your investment. But I think he invested there with some Mexican people that they trusted. I think Walter Jenkins played a part in it. I don't know the whole ramification.

But he enjoyed going down there. He also started a little school; there wasn't no school down there. He was a sympathetic and a good person. He was very generous, because you know a man comes out

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of this walk of life and go way into another country where he can't own property and get a school started for the poor people of the community, he had to be very good-natured person. But he enjoyed being down there. He'd take those people [gifts], every day would be [Christmas]. If we went down there three times a year, it was Christmas three times a year for those people, because he always carried--I guess he felt obligated to do that due to the fact he was partly responsible for them doing the work that they were doing. Because he had an investment there, which was cattle, and they were working for him and also working for two other I guess partners. But anyway, he always carried a lion's share of the responsibility for the poor people there.

G: Was President [Miguel] Aleman one of the partners in that?

D: No. I think he was instrumental, and I think he had owned the ranch or something before. It was kind of a complicated deal, you know. You couldn't put your hand on anything other than that it was three people involved. I guess it was--what's his name, not Aleman. It might have been Aleman, but the guy that was taking care of it. What was his name?

G: Mike Guajardo.

D: Mike. Yes, Mike Guajardo. He was the front man in the deal.

G: When is the first time you went down there, do you remember?

D: No, I don't remember the first time I was down there. If I had known that I was going to be asked questions, I probably would have kept me a diary. But I was so busy doing something else. I do know we was

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carrying refrigerators and stoves and tractors. I don't know how much all stuff we carried. I don't know. They had that place irrigated, they were irrigating some of it. He liked to take nothing and make something out of it. He really was good at that. You know, he would buy property around here and he'd redo the house and redo all the fences. I think he got a thrill out of taking nothing and making something out of it.

G: What was his favorite ranch other than this one?

D: Well, I guess at one time it was the Scharnhorst, and then the Lewis. But it was hard for me to pinpoint because he had so many investments that he had to attend to. When he was home he was all over the place. But I know when I first come to work for him they had just acquired the Scharnhorst, and that was the main attraction. They had the main house there and the cowboy house. That's where he used to entertain a lot of the guests, and when he was away that's where KTBC would entertain a lot of the people that was doing business with them, use it to entertaining people that were buying air space I guess.

Then he bought the Lewis place. But I have to say I guess the Scharnhorst was his favorite because of the proximity and it had two houses that could be utilized for entertaining. Because I know a lot of time the staff would come out just like they come round here to the guest house now. They would hunt and just enjoy themselves. Cactus Pryor, that's where I met him out--

G: Really?

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D: Yes, out there. And then after that he bought the Lewis place. It had only one house, and the acreage--it wasn't as good a hunting area as the Scharnhorst. They just used it to stop over and just to ride around and do a lot of visiting. But the Scharnhorst I think was his favorite.

G: The Reagan ranch he got later, is that--?

D: Yes. But the Reagan ranch was never as interesting place to him as the rest of the ranch, because it was just right down the road here. I don't ever remember him hunting on it. I don't think they ever used it other than we used to do a lot of entertaining at Reagan house down there due to the fact that we had Christmas parties and stuff. I think Mrs. Johnson more or less utilized it in that respect, because when he had a Christmas party for the staff it always would be in Austin.

G: He would also spend a lot of time at Wesley West's ranch, too, wouldn't he?

D: Oh, yes. Yes, that's right. Wesley West. But see, Mr. West wasn't over there as regular, I mean all the time like Judge Moursund, see. But when Mr. West was in residence they would go visit over there and hunt over there.

G: Did he ever try to get you to buy a ranch?

D: No. I at one time had a place in mind to buy, but I had other problems so I didn't bother with it. But I did wind up with eighteen acres of the Scharnhorst. He was instrumental in me buying a home in Austin and now it's paid for.

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G: How did he help you in that respect?

D: Well, he just went out and bought the place outright and then it took me several years to save the money after the house had depreciated, and I paid cash for it. I was saving two hundred dollars a month, and in seven and a half years I had enough money to pay cash for it.

[End of Tape 1 of 1 and Interview I]

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