

INTERVIEW IV

DATE: August 8, 1978
INTERVIEWEE: WILLARD DEASON
INTERVIEWER: MICHAEL L. GILLETTE
PLACE: Mr. Deason's residence, Austin, Texas

Tape 1 of 1

G: Let's start with the period in which you were in San Antonio and I guess he was at Cotulla, or still at San Marcos perhaps.

D: No. I graduated in the spring of 1930 at San Marcos, and he graduated in the summer. See, he had dropped out to teach school one year. He went to Cotulla--or Pearsall. Professor Tim Donahoe was his superintendent, and I was in San Antonio. He stayed there a short time I think and got this job over in Houston as debate coach at Sam Houston High School. I was teaching in San Antonio, and he was teaching in Houston.

Every month or two I'd go to Houston to visit him or he would come to San Antonio to visit, or he'd come up there with his debate team. I'd say I saw him on an average of once every two months during the year and a half in which he was coaching debate at Sam Houston in Houston. As you'll recall if you've read the history, while he was there he got the job with Mr. [Richard] Kleberg, Congressman Kleberg, as his secretary and went to Washington and stayed there until 1935 when he got the NYA job.

DEASON -- IV -- 2

I did not see too much of him when he was in Washington with Congressman Kleberg because I was still teaching in San Antonio most of the time and going to law school at night, and he was working up there. But when he would come home--the Congress then stayed in session fewer months than it does now; and they would come home usually in July and stay until the next January--I did see quite a bit of him then, because Congressman Kleberg's district at that time represented San Antonio, from Corpus Christi to San Antonio. He would cover the district helping out the Congressman. I saw quite a bit of him during the summer months but not much during the time the Congress was in session.

G: Did you ever get any insight into how he got that appointment as Mr. Kleberg's secretary.

D: Yes, I think I knew about it from the beginning. As I recall now, after some forty years or so, Welly Hopkins probably instigated that. Are you familiar with that story? I won't repeat it if you are. Would you like for me to?

G: Go ahead, yes.

D: Welly Hopkins was a young state senator who lived in Gonzales and represented several counties in that area. I had first met him when Lyndon and I were at school in San Marcos together. San Marcos was in his district; he was running for re-election, and he asked Lyndon to head up his campaign in San Marcos, which he did. So he enlisted the aid of me and Wilton Woods and Slat Frazer and a few other fellows around there who were his friends. So in a small way we were active

DEASON -- IV -- 3

in promoting Welly Hopkins for the state senate. That's the way I guess the friendship between Welly Hopkins and Lyndon started.

Anyhow, Dick Kleberg was elected to Congress in January, as I recall. Old Congressman [Harry McLeary] Wurzbach died, and there was a special election. Kleberg was elected in January or February, and his district also embraced most of Welly Hopkins' state senatorial district. Welly Hopkins had helped Kleberg in his initial race for Congress, so he knew that Kleberg would need a staff when he got to Washington, and he knew of Lyndon's exceptional ability. So I think more to help Kleberg than to help Lyndon, he recommended to Kleberg very strongly that he consider Lyndon for his secretary. They got together in short order, and it worked out. So he quit his school-teaching job in Houston in the middle of the term to go to a job in Washington.

G: Did he come up to San Antonio much while he was working for Kleberg?

D: Dick Kleberg? Yes, he did. Yes, as I say, when they would come home, usually July or August, whenever the Congress would adjourn for the year, he did quite a bit of work in San Antonio. Of course Kleberg, as I said, was elected in a special election, and when the next general election came around he had to run for re-election, which he did. Lyndon was in San Antonio quite a number of times and a number of days during that campaign for Kleberg's re-election, had a campaign office there in some building, I forget where it was. I helped out a little around there.

G: Did you? What did you do in that campaign?

DEASON -- IV -- 4

D: Well, just run errands, whatever he wanted me to do. I had no particular assignment.

G: What did he do in that campaign? Did he head up the San Antonio office?

D: He and Welly Hopkins. Welly comes in again now. Welly was a senator and a lawyer in Gonzales, but he came up there and brought his secretary with him, Opal Gibson. I believe it was in the Gunter Hotel they set up temporary headquarters. Welly was there for a week or two or three. During the peak of the campaign he and his secretary were there every day working at it, as was Lyndon. Of course Lyndon was working the entire district. He wasn't devoting all of his time to San Antonio because, being the Congressman's secretary, he had to make all the counties and go with the Congressman some time. But many times he didn't go.

You asked what my duties were, that reminded me of one of them. Old Judge [W. C.] Linden was a prominent lawyer in San Antonio. They're prevailed on him to do some campaigning for him. So there was a rally set up at Taft or Sinton, I forget--one of those South Texas towns. I drove the Judge down there and aided him, helped him around while he made his speech, drove him back to San Antonio that night in the middle of the night. I was just a general flunky doing things like that, whatever needed to be done.

G: I gather that the President also worked in Maury Maverick's campaigns both in 1932 and 1934 and helped out there.

D: In 1932 and 1934? I can't remember my dates, but I rather think in 1932 Dick Kleberg still represented San Antonio.

DEASON -- IV -- 5

G: Well, no, this was not a congressional race. I'm sorry. The first race I think was a tax assessor race or whatever position [he held].

D: I don't know about that. But what I started to say, after they redistricted, after the 1930 census got around to it and they made San Antonio, Bexar County, maybe with one or two adjacent, a new district, Maury later became congressman from that district. Dick Kleberg no longer represented it. But I wanted to make sure there was no overlap, him helping Maury out when he might have been running against Dick Kleberg. They never run.

G: I gather they were allies at this point.

D: Yes, yes.

G: That Maury was helping Kleberg and Kleberg was helping Maury. But do you recall the President working in that tax assessor race or whatever in 1932?

D: No, I don't. I'm just sorry to say I don't have any recollection of that.

G: How about 1934? Were you still there when he was working in Maury Maverick's congressional race?

D: I don't remember too much about it. Matter of fact, no, I left San Antonio in the spring of 1934 and went to Houston. So I would not have been involved in any of it.

G: I gather that while he was working for Kleberg there was an effort to prevent Dan Quill from assuming that postmaster's job or getting some degree of permanence in that job, and the President [Johnson] helped block this, to keep them from doing that. Do you recall that?

DEASON -- IV -- 6

D: No, I don't. I don't. I've known Dan Quill for many years. I have just forgotten. If you can give me a little more detail I might remember it. Who was blocking him? In those days the congressmen pretty well named the postmasters, and Dan Quill was Kleberg's appointment, wasn't he? Or did Maury Maverick appoint him originally? I think it was Kleberg.

G: Kleberg.

D: That's what my recollection was. It was Kleberg.

G: It may have been Ralph Morrison, but I'm not sure.

D: Ralph Morrison, that doesn't register with me. When Kleberg ran for re-election in 1932, or maybe the first time, Thurmon Barrett ran against him, but he beat Thurmon Barrett. I just don't remember about any blockage of Dan Quill's appointment.

G: Did you ever get a chance to meet Roy Miller during this period?

D: Yes, I just saw him a time or two. He was a great friend of Kleberg's and of Lyndon Johnson's. I don't remember where I saw him or met him. He was in and out of Austin here, and San Antonio. But I guess he popped [in] in the summer, the campaign headquarters or something, but I couldn't say that I really knew him. But I saw him, recognized who he was, very distinguished-looking fellow. One of these kind of fellows when he walked into the room everybody sort of came to attention. He just had a magnetic personality. I don't mean that he tried to be domineering. He dominated without being domineering is the only way that I know to express it.

G: I gather he thought highly of Lyndon Johnson and tried to advance his career.

DEASON -- IV -- 7

D: Oh, yes, very definitely. Very definitely. Because, see, Roy Miller represented among other folks the Intercoastal Canal, which I think he helped promote, which goes all up and down the Atlantic Coast and around the Gulf of Mexico and down Texas. Of course he was interested in the Texas part of it, and Dick Kleberg's district embraced a lot of the Texas coast. So he naturally was around Dick Kleberg's office a lot when Dick was congressman and got to know Lyndon Johnson very well because he was an active and dynamic secretary, made his mark in life as secretary to Dick Kleberg. So naturally Roy Miller saw him and recognized his ability. Any man in the position of Roy Miller that sees a young man with that much ability, he embraces him if he can.

G: My impression is at one point he even tried to get Mr. Johnson to go to work for him.

D: I don't know about that. I don't know. I know he was offered a number of jobs.

G: What were some of the jobs he was offered?

D: One that he told me about, as I recall, and it sounded awfully big then, was one of the big companies, I would say General Electric--maybe that's not right--or Westinghouse. Somebody like that asked him to go to work at a salary of sixty or seventy thousand dollars a year. That was an unheard-of salary back in the thirties. But he told me. I said, "Why didn't you take it, man? You'll never get a job like that." He said, "No. No. It's not in keeping with what I want to do. Money doesn't mean everything." So he turned it down.

G: Is that right?

D: Yes, sir. Yes, sir. He told me that in confidence.

DEASON -- IV -- 8

- G: This would have taken him to New York, I guess, to their office.
- D: No, [it] might some, and then it would put him, as I guess they would say, as lobbyist in Washington. He wanted a career in government and not a job as a lobbyist. He had to help run the district with one hand and hold the lobbyists at arm's length with the other one. He knew what was expected of them.
- G: I'd heard that one time he received an offer to be president of Texas A & I in Kingsville.
- D: He may have. I don't know about that. I don't know.
- G: And that on another occasion Senator Wirtz and Welly Hopkins were trying to get him a job in the attorney general's office in Texas with [William C.] McCraw, I guess was his name.
- D: I don't know about that one either.
- G: What was he like while he was working for Kleberg?
- D: He seemed to enjoy his work. He was always on the go in any job he ever had. He was always a young man in a hurry, trying to do as much in one day as the average man would do in two or three days. He worked from the time he got up in the morning until midnight. He never stopped working. Even if he was trying to play or visit he always had two or three projects going that he never let up on. You could meet him at a football game. During the half if you went out to go to the restroom and run into him, why, you had a session right there. He was working all the time, wasn't talking football. He'd watch the game, but when time out came if somebody was around him, why, he was busy. He was promoting a project or something.

DEASON -- IV -- 9

G: My impression is that he really ran the Kleberg office.

D: I was never around the Kleberg office much, and I cannot say that he did. It was sort of my impression that he did, but it was not my observation. That might not be true. I wouldn't want to say it. I wouldn't want to say it. But I know he worked hard at it. There have been all sort of stories about conflicts and so on, but I don't think there was ever any conflict, really, between him and Dick Kleberg. Each one of them had a high respect and a high regard for the other one. Some of Kleberg's relatives, I think, felt, well, you know, a little jealousy. He was carrying the ball too fast, or something like that.

G: Do you think any of it was related to the fact that he handled the finances and doled out the money evidently?

D: I don't know. I don't know. I don't know. I don't know about that. I never got that impression. No, that's the first time I've heard that angle raised. I had not thought about that part of it, and I have no evidence or any recollection of anything like that.

G: I get the feeling that by the time he got that NYA appointment that he really was distressed with the situation in the office, not so much because of Dick Kleberg but because of Mrs. Kleberg. Do you have any insight here?

D: Let me tell you what I think about that. I think you're researching forty years after the fact, and little stories grow and grow and grow in the telling. I think that part of the story is vastly blown up over a period of many tellings. I think there was very little if any conflict between him and Mrs. Kleberg, though I've heard--not at that time, but

DEASON -- IV -- 10

as the stories grew I've heard it. That's the reason I think that it's grown with the telling. That's my impression of it. I was around him during those years. I never met Mrs. Kleberg, so I don't know anything from that point of view. But I don't recall ever hearing him express any conflict there. I think those stories came later, after he left. As I say, I think they grew and prospered and bloomed with the telling.

G: Do you think his decision to come back to Texas and take that NYA job was one that he'd thought about or was something that he instinctively saw as a better opportunity?

D: Well, I think he saw it as a better opportunity. He had sort of reached a plateau where there was not a lot of other places to go. Mr. Kleberg was the congressman, and he was the top man in his office. He certainly wasn't going to run against him. He had been speaker of the Little Congress. You're familiar with that. He had done many things working through Mr. Kleberg for the district. He could look around and he could see men there fifty and sixty years of age, fine men, who had been there as a congressman's secretary for thirty years. I don't think he considered that his future. He was looking for bigger things.

G: Did he ever express this to you, or was this just a [feeling you had]?

D: Oh, I don't recall that he did. I don't recall that he did. But I think I was around him long enough to know him and read him well enough to know that he would be moving into something with a bigger challenge.

G: He did seem to have some sense of destiny about his own potential didn't he, though?

D: Oh, yes. So did I.

DEASON -- IV -- 11

G: Did you?

D: Yes. That's the reason the things that he has done never surprised me, never surprised me. When I say "so did I," I mean I had a sense of destiny for him. I want to make that clear--for him.

G: I gather also the decision of coming back to Texas and building a political base here and working from here and then going back to Washington was wiser than trying to elevate himself while staying in Washington.

D: Well, if you stayed in Washington you'd be a staff man all of your life. He could have moved probably from being a congressman's secretary to a staff director of some committee. If Kleberg stayed on longer and longer--seniority was even more rigid then than it is now. They became chairman of a committee if they stayed long enough, and the secretary could become staff director of that committee, which gave you some more latitude, some more authority and maybe a little more money. I don't know about that angle of it. But that was as high as he could have hoped to have risen. To make an analogy of it, as a secretary he was top sergeant. But he would have not gotten over into the officer class where he could go on to be general without making that step somewhere out of the staff work. He had to make that.

G: Did you ever go down to Corpus and see him when Congress was out of session and he was down there.

D: I went down there one time at his suggestion, to a meeting of the Young Democrats. Do you have anything on that?

G: No.

DEASON -- IV -- 12

D: At that time the Young Democratic organization was fairly active over the state, as it may still be today. I don't know. At my age in life I don't pay much attention to the Young Democrats any more. But Wilton Woods and I and a few other folks went down there at his urging to attend the Young Democratic meeting. We stayed in Corpus Christi for two or three days, and he very promptly took over the meeting and the mechanics of the Young Democratic organization for the next year or two. I don't mean that he was elected president of it, but his friends were.

G: How did he do it?

D: Well, how did he do a lot of other things? Work and selling. He's the best salesman I've ever seen, on a one-to-one basis. He'd just persuade folks that this is what ought to be done. He was a tireless worker, worked till one or two o'clock at night if need be, just lining up folks. I forget even who the other group was, but some group that was unfriendly to some of the things that he wanted or he thought that the Texas delegation wanted, or something.

G: Was it a liberal versus conservative or New Deal versus non New Deal philosophy difference?

D: I'm trying to remember now. I'm trying to remember. But I think it was a group who wanted to--oh, at that time the Congress was all Democrats. But I think it was sort of a rebellious group that wanted to grab that and then use it for a vehicle for furtherance of their own desires. I think he, working for Mr. Kleberg, felt like that a thing like that would be more problems than it was advantage. So after he got his friends in control of it, it became a rather subdued organization.
(Laughter)

DEASON -- IV -- 13

G: Was this a state-wide thing?

D: State-wide thing, yes. But they met in Corpus Christi.

G: So this was a convention I guess.

D: This was a state convention. That's what it was.

G: And he called you down and Wilton Woods. Who else?

D: Yes, and some other. I can't remember. E. C. Barksdale, the debate coach in San Antonio, he came. Oh, I don't remember who was made president, but Barksdale and myself and Wilton, I think, were all made directors. I just can't recall. Maybe I'll think later on who was-- maybe a fellow out of Wichita Falls; I can't remember him now.

G: I know this was a long time ago, but after you got down there did you have a strategy meeting somewhere with his group?

D: Oh, many of them. Yes.

G: Do you recall where they were?

D: Yes, in the old Nueces Hotel.

G: Then was there a particular strategy for making sure you had the necessary votes, or rounding up extra votes?

D: After forty some years it's hard to remember, but he never sat down. He was moving and talking to folks all the time. As I say, on one-to-one he'd buttonhole them. If there was a problem then he might send by somebody else to see them and talk to them, "You talk to that one and you talk to that one." He was giving assignments all the time and didn't assume any office in it at all. But when the meeting was over his friends controlled the mechanics of the Young Democrats of Texas.

DEASON -- IV -- 14

- G: Did he have you work on some people and try to [persuade them]?
- D: Oh, I think so, but I don't remember now. I guess so.
- G: It's a good story, and it's one I've never heard before.
- D: I hadn't thought about it. You asked me if I ever went down there, and I hadn't thought about it in thirty or forty years. Because as I say, once we got control we just sort of let it go dormant. That was the strategy, to keep the other folks from getting control of it and going off at a tangent is what it amounted to.
- G: Anything else on that episode that you remember or feel is important? Any details?
- D: No. No. I'm sorry I don't. I don't know why that one popped in my mind. You said did I ever go down there. I never went to the King Ranch with him. But they headquartered some, maybe had an office in Corpus Christi. I may have gone there. I just don't remember. I saw Congressman Kleberg several times during those few years.
- G: I read somewhere that Congressman Kleberg had a large boat that he would sometimes take guests out on.
- D: Probably did. I never did go and I never saw it, so I can't shed any light on that.
- G: Did you have an opportunity to observe the relationship between Lyndon Johnson and Sam Fore during this period?
- D: Oh, yes. Yes. Sam Fore was the editor of the Floresville paper. I grew up in the same county, in the little town of Stockdale, so I had known Sam Fore all of my life. I knew that they became good, close, fast friends I guess after Lyndon became secretary to Kleberg, because

DEASON -- IV -- 15

Sam Fore was the power in Wilson County, really in a lot of South Texas. But he had the leading paper in Wilson County, the Floresville Chronicle-Journal. A very, very dynamic man. And they were close friends.

Lyndon would depend on Sam Fore for a lot of his advice and counsel, just kind of considered him like he would his uncle or something like that that he went to for advice on many things.

G: How about Harvey Roper, who I think was a relative of Mr. Johnson's? Did you see them together or get any idea of their relationship?

D: Not Harvey Roper.

G: I think he was in Robstown.

D: Oh, oh, oh, no. No. I don't know. I never knew Harvey Roper. Yes, yes, that's right. That was a Robstown family. Nope, I can't help you out any on that one.

G: Do you remember the first time you met Mrs. Johnson?

D: Well, I think I do. I think it was shortly after they'd married and I was over in Houston, maybe visiting Uncle George Johnson. That was Lyndon's uncle, the schoolteacher in Houston. I think that I met her there for the first time. I believe that's right.

G: Anything about your first impressions of her?

D: Nothing other than she was a very charming young lady. I felt like he'd sort of outmarried himself, but was glad he had. But beyond that I don't have a lot of recollections. That was 1933, 1934, something like that. When did they get married, do you remember?

G: 1934.

D: 1934. That's what I was thinking. Well, that's forty-four years ago.

DEASON -- IV -- 16

G: Let's get on to the NYA then, unless you have something else that we've left out of this.

D: No. All right. All right. You ask the questions, I'll try to fill in as best I can.

G: All right. I might say at this point that the more we can get like that Young Democrats thing, the better. The idea is not to do a Q and A at all. My questions like that one are really designed to trigger memories.

D: You just want a soliloquy.

G: Yes, sir, that's it. I want as much of you and as little of me as possible.

D: All right. All right.

G: So anything that is triggered that you feel is interesting or might not be on the record.

D: Do you want me to start by putting myself into the NYA and tell you how that happened?

G: Yes.

D: All right. In the spring of 1934 I got a license to practice law by going to night school in San Antonio and left there and went to Houston to work for the Federal Land Bank--incidentally, with a recommendation from Congressman Kleberg, which I'm sure was instigated by my friend Lyndon. I went to work for the Federal Land Bank in Houston. Oh, they called me a lawyer, but it was just sort of a legal clerk doing paper-shuffling work primarily. The bank had twenty, thirty of them then, was loaning a lot of money on farms and ranches. The legal department had a lot of routine work to do, and I was in that. And [I] stayed from spring of 1934 to July of 1935.

DEASON -- IV -- 17

I got a call from Lyndon one day in Washington, and [he] said, "Have you had your vacation this year?" I said, "No, why?" He said, "Well, how about taking it and meeting me up in Austin next week?" I said, "Well, what are we going to do?" He said, "I've got a new job up there, and I may need you for a while. So see if you can't get your vacation and meet me up there Monday morning." I think this was a Friday. I said, "Tell me about it." He said, "Oh, hell, we're talking long distance. That will cost too much money. I'll tell you about it when we get there." So I met him Monday morning down in the Littlefield Building where he'd told me, and then he explained to me about the NYA. I'd never heard of it. It was a brand new organization, just been set up in Washington by executive order of the President. He had been named state director and come home in a hurry to get it started. What he said to me [was], "I want you to help me get some people together." He had phoned L. E. Jones, who was in law school at the University. L. E. had opened up the office in the Littlefield Building and had Marie Lindau there helping. Those two were there and Lyndon was there when I checked in Monday morning.

I didn't know I was reporting for duty, but he said, "How much vacation you got?" I said, "Two weeks." "Well, stay around and help me get this thing started." We were trying to get furniture and get people and get the program started. So I pitched in to help him do what I could. Toward the end of the two weeks he said, "Well now, we don't have this thing under way. I still need you some." Being the great salesman that he was, he said, "Why don't you go back over

DEASON -- IV -- 18

to Houston and get them to give you a six-months leave of absence?" See, that was my first legal job, and I felt like that was a stepping-stone toward maybe being a practicing lawyer some day. But he said, "Get six-months leave of absence and help me get this thing underway." He was beginning to see what it was all about now. So I said, "All right, I will."

I went back and talked to the personnel officer and the president of the bank and told them what the situation was. So they gave me a six-months leave of absence. I'm still on it, some forty-five years later. Which is another way of saying I never went back at the end of my six months. I stayed on with NYA until the outbreak of World War II. Then I went in the navy. But this story is not about me, it's about LBJ. So let's back up and talk about NYA in the early days.

G: Do you know how he got the appointment to be NYA director?

D: It's my recollection that Dick Kleberg helped him some. I think Maury Maverick maybe helped him some. I think maybe Sam Rayburn, I'm not sure, and maybe old Senator [Tom] Connally. Anyhow, being a political appointment I'm sure he had the endorsement of Senator Connally. He was a close friend with a fellow named Jackson. I'll think of his first name in a minute.

G: Bob Jackson?

D: Bob Jackson was Senator Connally's secretary. So I'm sure through Bob and Senator Connally he was given the proper endorsement, and I think maybe a strong hand from Maury Maverick and Dick Kleberg and maybe a pat on the back from Sam Rayburn. I would guess that he touched bases

DEASON -- IV -- 19

with all of those folks. He never went off half cocked on something like this. If there's a question, "Do I touch base or not?" he always touched it. He was a great fellow to touch base with everybody. That was his strategy, and it was largely responsible for a lot of things that happened later on, always touching base with people, saying, "What do you think about this?" Maybe he had his mind already made up that's what he was going to do, but he had enough foresight to touch base with them and [they might] say, "Yes, that's the thing to do. You ought to do it." Then he had their blessing in doing it. Of course the boss was Aubrey Williams. Aubrey did the appointment. But I'm sure he had endorsement from at least those four men, maybe others. I don't know.

G: There is some indication that Aubrey Williams was considering appointing another man to that job and that the President [Johnson] had so many supporters that--

D: It may have been. I don't know.

G: You don't recall?

D: I don't recall that story at all, and I don't know who the other man was. He was setting up a new organization nation-wide, just like we were trying to set up one state-wide in Austin. I'm sure that he had other recommendations.

G: I've heard the story several times, I guess, that Maury Maverick [was] on the phone to Aubrey Williams trying to get them to pay LBJ more money than they'd originally designated. He kept saying, "Pay him a living wage." The salary would go up a little every time he said that. Had you ever heard that story?

DEASON -- IV -- 20

D: No, I never heard that one.

G: I just wonder if it's accurate.

D: I don't know. I don't know.

G: So you were really in on it from the ground floor, weren't you, just as soon as he got down there?

D: Yes, I guess I was the fourth employee. He would be first, and L. E. Jones second, and Marie Lindau third, and maybe I [was] fourth. Well, at the same time Sherman Birdwell might share fourth with me because he called Sherman on about the same type of mission he called me, and Sherman came in. Esther Mae Kinney came in really early in the game. She was working somewhere else. He prevailed on her to come help him out. I don't recall how he knew her, but he brought her into the picture. Then Jesse Kellam, he had Jesse working around there two or three weeks before he had him on the payroll. He was a deputy state school superintendent. He sort of enlisted him to help him get started like he enlisted me. After he got Jesse there and tried to get Jesse from a state department, they wouldn't release him for, I forget, thirty or sixty days. So he worked I guess without pay or maybe was still on the payroll of the state department. But it took a while for Jesse to get loose, though he was there from the beginning.

Roy McWilliams came in pretty early as sort of the bookkeeper. Then we started setting up district offices and brought in originally C. P. Little, Ray Roberts, Tony Ziegler, Fenner Roth, Hershey Johnson in San Antonio, Arthur Bullock out in Lubbock, W. O. Alexander in Houston, Ben Jackson out in--he was from Coleman. Those were the

DEASON -- IV -- 21

district directors. I probably missed one or two. Initially I think we had eight districts. Later on, as the program got more under way, we broke it down to twelve or something like that and brought in more district directors. But his initial appointments--oh, I forgot one, Joe Skiles from Denton was one of the early appointments. Joe worked in what we called the college assistance program. It was for college students.

G: Now when he first tried to get you to spend your vacation with him and also when he tried to get you to take a leave of absence, did he have to persuade you or were you willing to do it right off the bat?

D: No, no. I was willing to do it. As I say, when we were in school together in San Marcos I recognized him as a fellow of unusual ability, and I like to give myself credit for having sense enough to try to tie on. I was willing to go along with him. No, no, he didn't have to twist my arm.

G: Did he touch base with Governor [James] Allred when he got to town?

D: If he didn't when he got to town he did shortly thereafter, yes. He did that himself. He didn't send anybody else to do that for him.

G: Do you recall his going down there and seeing the Governor?

D: Yes, but I don't recall much of the details because he went and took care of that himself. When he got back to the office he had other things. He was moving on to the next project. We just knew he'd been to see the Governor, touched base with him. But the details of it, why, he didn't spend a lot of time telling us, because we had other things we were having to do to get the organization set up, get people, get office space, get desks, get typewriters.

DEASON -- IV -- 22

G: He, I guess, moved into Doctor Bob Montgomery's house on San Gabriel.

D: Yes, he did. I don't remember if he moved in immediately or maybe it was September or October, but he did move into it.

G: Where would he have stayed in the meantime?

D: I'm trying to remember. I guess he stayed the first day or two at a hotel, or maybe stayed with some friends. I just don't recall where he stayed before moving into Doctor Bob Montgomery's house. He may have moved in there fairly early. Again, I don't remember.

G: Now you stayed there, too, didn't you?

D: Yes, a little later on. But I didn't stay there when I first came up. I stayed I think at the Williams Hotel probably, a little boarding hotel up on East 10th Street. But later on when he moved into Dr. Bob Montgomery's house it had two bathrooms, several bedrooms, and he and Lady Bird didn't need all of that space. So L. E. Jones and I, being bachelors, moved over there and lived upstairs for several months. I don't remember just how long.

G: That must have been fun. What was that like?

D: Oh, of course it was fun. We were working ten or twelve hours a day, and of course we weren't off duty when we were home because he could yell upstairs and say, "What did you do about this?" "What did you do about that?" or we'd meet in the living room and have night sessions. There wasn't a lot of time for fun in those days. It was during the deep days of the Depression. We had a mission to get the young folks to work as fast as we could and get the educational program set up so they could continue their college education, or in some, help in high school.

DEASON -- IV -- 23

If they were over sixteen years old and were still in high school and came from families that were destitute, there was a little help there. We had all these programs to put together. There wasn't a lot of time for fun, other than just being around him and Lady Bird.

G: Was her Aunt Effie there for a while?

D: Yes, she lived there with them at that time.

G: Did you get a good impression of her? What was she like?

D: She was like a piece of Dresden china. She didn't see very well. But she was like something out of a storybook, immaculately dressed with lace around her neck and long, flowing skirts and things like that, and very well-educated, very refined. I suppose she's probably the most refined person I'd ever been around at that stage of my life. She had but one mission, and that was to try to take care of Lady Bird. Of course Lady Bird was grown and able to take care of herself then, but Aunt Effie thought she was still taking care of Lady Bird. As a matter of fact, Lady Bird was taking care of her. But she thought she was taking care of Lady Bird, and Lady Bird very graciously let her think that.

G: How did she interact with Mr. Johnson? Did they get along well?

D: Aunt Effie?

G: Yes.

D: Oh, yes. As far as I know they did. See, she had raised Lady Bird. She was an old maid, had no children of her own. Lady Bird's mother died when she was just a few years old, and Aunt Effie actually raised her. So that was her chick [who] had married this young fellow that

DEASON -- IV -- 24

was blowing and going. But as far as I know there was no friction between the two. And I think I would be in as good a position as anybody to observe it.

G: What were they like together? It seems like you'd have two very different personalities.

D: Now you're talking about Lyndon and--

G: Aunt Effie, yes.

D: Well, of course you did. Of course you did. But bear in mind that though we all slept in the same house, we were busy Saturday and Sunday and all that. You didn't sit down and have family meetings like you might envision it, so I never observed one as against the other, so to speak. It never occurred to me to make an observation like that. And frankly, I bet I've been interviewed fifteen or twenty times, and you're the only man that's ever raised that question.

G: I gather that there was a side of his personality that just liked to have people around him, and she evidently spent a lot of time with him when they were in Washington and again here. And not everybody likes to have your in-laws come and stay with you. I was just wondering how he brought her around and how she complimented his life.

D. Oh, all right. All right. As I said to you, I never noticed any conflict. She was a part of the family. I misinterpreted what you were asking me.

G: No, I'm not assuming there was any conflict. I'm just trying to get a picture of what they were like together and how she fit into the situation there.

DEASON -- IV -- 25

D: I think she fit in all right. I think she fit in all right. But you're asking me a question which at that time I just took for granted, you see. So I don't have a definite reaction to it, whether she fit in beautifully or whether she didn't fit in so well. But as between the two, I would have to say beautifully rather than not well.

G: Let's talk about the projects.

D: All right.

G: I guess probably the initial urgency was to get all the regulations down and understand everything.

D: That's right. That was the hardest thing, for people to understand the regulations. And bear in mind it was a brand new agency in Washington. They were sending out bulletins every few days, and sometimes one would countermand something that they'd sent a few days earlier. If it didn't countermand it, it took it in maybe a little different direction. So we had lots of frustration in trying to interpret them all. The phone rang to Washington many times. We had to get clarifying bulletins. But to me that's understandable after serving in Washington for ten years, where all bureaucratic rules originate. But at that time it was difficult for us to understand why rules had to be changed a week after they were put out. Well, they found out it didn't work or that it violated some earlier rule, or something like that. So there was a lot of confusion and a lot of frustration in trying to put together a program and get it going in a hurry. He wanted to get it going in a hurry because, as I say, whatever he did, he did in a hurry. He was pushing all of us hard and pushing the Washington office to give us the

DEASON -- IV -- 26

information, give us the go ahead, give us the things that we needed to get the program under way. So there was a lot of confusion in the beginning.

G: I gather that there was a certain point where the WPA officials in San Antonio almost tried to assert control over the NYA.

D: Well, yes. NYA was sort of a stepchild of WPA. Rules worked through the WPA, so there were administrative problems there. But some of our projects and things had to flow through there for certification, so that was a problem.

I want to tell you a story I've told before. You may have [heard it]. In the early days, after we got these first eight district directors named and were trying to get a program under way, we'd work all week and we would have meetings on Sunday. We worked on Saturday, too, and Saturday afternoon come to Austin for a meeting Sunday morning, all day Sunday. I remember LBJ standing up one time after we'd been meeting from eight o'clock Sunday morning till about three or four o'clock in the afternoon, and he was about ready to adjourn and about ready to send the boys home to their districts for Monday morning to hit work again. He stood up, making a pep talk. He put his left hand in his left coat pocket and his right hand in his right coat pocket, and he started rattling them. He said, "I carry Ex-Lax in this pocket to get me going." And then with his left hand he rattled the other, and he said, "I carry aspirin in this one. And that's what you've got to do to get this program under way." (Laughter)

DEASON -- IV -- 27

G: Did he reach an understanding with Harry Drought about who was going to make the decisions?

D: Yes, over a period of time. He had a number of meetings early in the history of NYA with Harry Drought, who was the WPA director for the state, who felt like most everything should flow through there and they should look over his shoulder. They had considerable conflict. To try to work it out, I was sent to San Antonio and given an office in Harry Drought's setup as the expediter for NYA. Instead of calling Harry Drought or calling some of his people to try to keep the projects flowing through and from getting bogged down and stuff like that, I was down there as a liaison man or an expediter, where I served for almost a year. There were a lot of things in the beginning that didn't flow easily and didn't flow smoothly, but over a period of time it finally straightened out. Finally he brought me back to Austin and sent Fenner Roth down there to do the job, and Fenner did even a better job than I did. After I had been there and sort of broken a lot of ground and so on, why, Fenner came along and he got along beautifully with the WPA people. Actually, after a year or two, why, we got used to the flow and it went all right.

[End of Tape 1 of 1 and Interview IV]

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