

INTERVIEW I

DATE: August 11, 1972  
INTERVIEWEE: NANCY DICKERSON  
INTERVIEWER: JOE B. FRANTZ  
PLACE: Her office in Washington, D.C.

Tape 1 of 1

D: When I left Wisconsin, I went to Washington and the one place I wanted to work was the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. I guess it was part the romance, but also the great interest I had in foreign affairs.

F: As an undergraduate, had you been interested in political science?

D: Marginally. I was a Spanish and Portuguese major. I wanted to go to South America and set the world on fire. Instead I taught school for two years and then went to Washington and got this job on the Committee. You know, the Hill was a lot different in those days. This was in 1951, and I was quite young then. And although I don't admit to being nineteen at this precise moment, I was about that at that time.

F: You know, the past few years makes an old-timer of you in a hurry.

D: Absolutely. I worked for Tom Connally then, and Senator Tom Connally was chairman of [the Senate Foreign Relations Committee].

F: Was Edith Parker still with him?

D: I do not remember. He had Emmett O'Grady as his secretary then, a male secretary, a young man from Texas who was very effeminate in his mannerisms. Emmett worked for him as his secretary for

Dickerson -- I -- 2

a long time. That's when I met John Connally, who would come in very often to see Senator Tom Connally, the very grand, as we know, chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. As I say, I was hardly out of Wisconsin and working on the staff, and they took me to New York to work at the United Nations and all those kinds of things. But that is how I got to know John Connally, whom Senator Connally wanted to run his re-election campaign. John Connally refused him. There was really very little doubt that Mr. Tom Connally would have been defeated had he run for re-election at that time.

F: What do you think was John Connally's reasoning? My own assay, and you can correct me, was that Tom was over the hill and didn't know it.

D: I think that was about it. He hadn't been home; he had been very much involved with foreign policy, and when you get to that exalted position-- at that time, you know, they were fussing around a lot about starting the United Nations; Chiang Kai-shek; Madame Chiang was over there all the time. There were all these kinds of problems. I suppose the Pedernales and the various REA problems of the state of Texas were somewhat remote to him. But they were not remote to Lyndon Johnson. At any rate, Senator Tom Connally had not kept his fences mended in Texas because he was so preoccupied with Washington and foreign affairs.

Incidentally, I'm sure you've talked with Bill White, but Bill White tells a marvelous story about committee assignments and how Tom Connally told Lyndon Johnson just to be satisfied with a few of these lesser details, and he, Tom, would take care of the grander things.

Dickerson -- I -- 3

But I remember very distinctly meeting Lyndon Johnson. I was in an off room of the committee. Remember I was right out of college then and, for the record, I had been elected a Badger Beauty at the University of Wisconsin. He came in and he saw me, and Lyndon Johnson likes beautiful women or pretty girls, as the case may be, and he sat down in the corner of this room which was rather a historic room. We had in it at that time a low, comfortable armchair without any arms. It was heavily stuffed. And it was that chair that Winston Churchill loved the best of all the chairs in America, he said, because he failed to find very many comfortable ones. Senator Johnson came and sat there and put his feet up on my desk. He wanted to use my phone. I raised an eyebrow at him, making it clear that even for the distinguished Majority Leader of the Senate that wasn't the proper place to put one's feet.

I remember he had on what I would call a Texas-style suit. It was a light beige and was much baggier in the pants and the cut was quite a bit different from the Eastern Establishment cut. After his phone conversation, we talked a little bit. He's a powerful, forceful man, as everybody knows, and so of course he made an impression.

I didn't see him much after that until one night maybe a year later I was on the board of the Women's Press Club. He came and he was seated at the head table. I know I was chairman of this particular dinner. It was a dinner that we gave annually for the members of Congress on the opening day of Congress. As a matter of fact, we always gave it on Speaker Sam's birthday, which was January 6.

Dickerson -- I -- 4

As you will recall, in those days when there was a certain amount of romanticism and even sentimentality about the Congress, when senators looked like senators and congressmen did, too, as opposed to now when everybody looks like an IBM or a plastic man, there was some sentiment about opening the Congress on Speaker Sam's birthday.

I remember this very well because it made a big imprint in my life. Mr. Johnson came in, and he was seated at the head table, of which I was chairman, and we had a little talk. He said, "I want you to come and have lunch with me in my office. I want you to bring five or six of your friends." That particular night was a very happy reunion of Congress, they'd been away for several months.

F: That's when they used to go away.

D: Yes, very happily, they did. I remember the next week Life magazine had a centerfold and they had pictures of everybody laughing. They had all the senators, Humphrey, Kennedy, Johnson, Symington, all of them--I still have that copy of Life--and me. There were about six pictures of us in Life magazine. I remember I had on a green moire dress. I bought it at Dior in Paris and since it was my first Dior, I happen to remember it more than anyone else would. But these pictures were of all of us laughing, with mouths open wide. It was a very pleasant and interesting night. There were no wars. Ike was President and life was rather less complicated. I was then working at CBS news.

A short time later we did arrange for this luncheon, wherein I took some of my best friends with me to have lunch with the Majority

Dickerson -- I -- 5

Leader and Mrs. Johnson in their office. I'm sure other people have told you about the luncheon where you were always served hamburgers which were marvelously good hamburgers, marvelous Texas prime beef, of course cut in the shape of the state of Texas, then a novelty. I suppose as we get jaded we might call it corny, but at the time I thought it was very amusing and still do. It was an effort to be interesting.

I remember taking with me Eric Sevareid and Howard K. Smith, both of whom were at CBS then, as was I. I was not then a news correspondent. Mr. Johnson, as you know, did not have very good press relations although he was running Capitol Hill. He still didn't know many of the reporters there.

I remember very well when he became president of the United States there weren't a handful of the White House press corps who knew Vice President Lyndon Johnson. Even the reporters up on the Hill didn't; oh, a few from Texas [did]. But he never really had a very cheery feeling about the press, which is a euphemism, a vast understatement.

But to get back to the story, we had a very nice luncheon. It was his attempt to tell these people what he was trying to do. After all, Sevareid and Howard K. Smith were then as powerful as they are in fact now or even more so.

So that's how our relationship really grew. And Lady Bird was always there and was so dear and so wonderful about everything.

Dickerson -- I -- 6

A short time after this--when I say "short time," I would say maybe about a period of a year--CBS News decided to make me its first woman news correspondent. As you know, the Johnsons owned a radio-television station which was a CBS affiliate primarily, but they had that unique arrangement whereby they were the recipient of programs from all three networks; they had all three of them going in Austin, but primarily they were affiliated with CBS. On the day that I became a news correspondent, the majority leader of the Senate, God love him, Lyndon Johnson, gave a party in my behalf. Now this is no bad way to start your assignment as a news correspondent! He took the precaution of inviting to this party the president of CBS, Dr. Frank Stanton, the president of CBS News, who at that time was Mr. Sig Nicholson, every one of the then-ninety-six senators, because we didn't have Alaska and Hawaii then. When the majority leader of the Senate and his wife invite you to a party, you pretty generally show up, particularly if it's at the Senate. I remember the day very well, February 20. It may have been the twenty-second, but I believe it's the twentieth.

F: Where are we now in time?

D: We are now in 1960. Everybody flocked to this party. Liz Carpenter was in some capacity working there, but not the total capacity she worked in later. This was when he was still majority leader, and it was before the Democratic campaign and the Democratic convention in Los Angeles. It was in February of that year.

Dickerson -- I -- 7

You mentioned earlier that John Connally gave you detail. I can tell you I was wearing a Bergdorf-Goodman Dior suit that day because I had been made a news correspondent. The war correspondents always had a belted, sort of hacking jacket that they wore, so I got myself one made from Dior. I arrived at this party which was lovely. But that was the day that the civil rights debate, the major big civil rights issue of 1960, started that day. And that was the day I became a news correspondent.

F: I've seen Johnson in the social realm, and he can be the most relaxed, charming host in the world. I don't know of anyone who can make you feel that you're more welcome. But does he have something on his mind on a day when a big civil rights about is about to begin or is he able to segment one particular part?

D: He was able to segment them. I didn't realize that that particular night, I was so busy thinking about myself. And I must remember to tell you that Lady Bird had on a black satin princess-styled dress and she looked superb.

F: Was he still picking her clothes or had he quit by then?

D: Yes, he was still picking her clothes very much then. As a matter of fact, he used to call me or have his secretaries call me and ask me where I got my clothes so he could send his new secretaries there, or who waited on me in what store, or where I got my makeup. He'd want Lady Bird to have either that kind of makeup or that kind of dress.

Dickerson -- I -- 8

After the assassination I sent over three or four black coats, three or four black suits, a whole bunch of hats, and those are what Lady Bird wore for the next month. She never wore black, and the reason she didn't is that he didn't like it. But I happened to think, one, it was chic, and, two, it was good for traveling. I was going hundreds of thousands of miles and I'd have a coat made to match a suit to match a skirt, and then changing blouses, and then I'd only take one suitcase.

F: You don't have her lines. Did you have a quick dressmaker who could make things look good? Maybe I should have said that the other way around. She doesn't have your lines.

D: She could wear my clothes. In those pictures of her after the assassination, she's in black. I've noticed one that's on the cover of some book, and she's completely in one of my outfits. She said to me at the time, "How come you have so many black clothes?" I had a whole closet full of them because I think they're very good for traveling.

But I'm getting away from that night. The civil rights debate started and CBS then decided that since the Majority Leader was going to be handling the civil rights fight himself, that they would assign me to cover it, which I then did. I was assigned Congress, which is a marvelous assignment for a new reporter. And you've got to bear in mind, I'd never been a reporter for anybody or anything up to that point--but I did know Congress and I knew about civil rights.



Dickerson -- I -- 9

You asked me the question: "Could he segment his life?" He could indeed. I didn't realize it, as I started to say a moment ago, but he was running for the presidency of course, and I just didn't know it. There are a lot of other people who didn't know it either, and he denied it vehemently of course at the time.

You say you're interested in details. I remember the big cake was a mammoth cake. And it had the big CBS logo on it, the eye, the CBS eyes, as you know, that's on all their cameras, and it said, "The eyes--meaning the CBS eyes--of Texas and CBS are upon Nancy Hanschman," which was my maiden name.

Incidentally he, as well as President Nixon, both call me Miss Hanschman in news conferences from time to time, but since they can both spell it, I don't mind. It dates us both.

But I followed him for that entire period of the civil rights fight, then the whole 1960 campaign. Then I was assigned to cover him during the 1960 convention in Los Angeles and went through the whole period of when he accepted the vice presidency, a shock to everybody. But at that convention--and they have all the tapes of this--you would find me on the air interviewing him constantly. The reason was that I was one of the few reporters outside of his old friends from Texas who knew him very well. As a matter of fact, if you want to hear about the convention--

F: I do indeed.

D: Some of the funny, amusing things: After it was all over and he had lost the nomination for the presidency, we had expected him to come

Dickerson -- I -- 10

out of his room and give us a statement. We had been told he would, and we were waiting out there. I remember our camera was down in old Senator Kerr's bedroom, the one where they had the fisticuffs. But I was waiting for the Majority Leader, as was everybody else, about twelve of us reporters. Walter Cronkite was in the booth vamping it; he was saying, "Well, we expected Senator Johnson to come out. We understood he was going to make a statement. Now we understand that he isn't, that he has put on his pajamas and he has gone to bed. We switch now to Nancy Dickerson, who's covering him." I never heard about it until after the convention was over.

F: It's a good thing you didn't hear the introduction.

D: I would have collapsed. Absolutely! I took the LBJ statement that came from one of his aides that he himself was supposed to read and went running down the hall and then gave it on television. After I was all through, I got a call back to the Johnson suite and Mr. Johnson said: "I was going to come out and give it to you, Nancy, but I just decided it would sound better if you said it." It was a typical Johnsonian comment. There was Walter Cronkite trying to vamp on it, and of course I never told that story to a soul! I was so embarrassed when I heard about it. About three or four years later Ray Scherer told me that LBJ was telling that story all over Texas. He thought it was one of the funnier things.

F: A mark of pride, I guess.

Dickerson -- I -- 11

D: I tell you, I never give a speech now but I don't open it with that. I always say I'm not used to introductions on television, but that was one night when I did have an introduction. This year, which is 1972, I gave a speech at Baylor [University] in Waco, Texas, and I began by telling them that story, and it brought down the house. Then I got to the point at Baylor, when I was talking about presidents and the press, and I talked about all the presidents starting with Washington and I got to President Johnson and said: "Now, his press relations couldn't have been worse," at which point, I swear to you, thunder came from the sky, a bolt hit the auditorium in which I was speaking to three thousand young people without one window in the place, and all the electricity went off. No loud speaker, no lights, and it stayed off for half an hour. I thought it was heaven.

So I wrote Mr. Johnson, I told him what had happened, and he immediately fired back a letter and it said: "That'll show you, to dare attack me in my own back yard!" And then he reiterated the story that I had heard him tell so many, many times, which was that I believe it was his grandfather on his mother's side who had been the president of Baylor University.

F: That's right.

D: Yes. He was so proud of that. He said that it was his grandfather rolling in his grave at hearing me. I hadn't told him what I said about him, but he accosted me on that.

So, that's the story of how I really got to know him and how I got to cover him.

Dickerson -- I -- 12

F: Did you have the feeling during that spring of 1960 that you were backing a loser? Was there that kind of an attitude among the Johnsonians or did they really think they might could pull it off?

D: They thought they could pull it off. Sure they did! Bobby Baker was the one who kept the little sheets of papers on delegates. But what we found out was that although Mr. Johnson really knew Senate politics, he did not know national politics any more than, say, Wilbur Mills now, who knows how to run the House and has such power, knew in this most recent convention. Neither LBJ nor Mills understood how to approach national power and delegates and convention politics, which are entirely different from the machinations at Capitol Hill in the Senate and the House.

F: Did you ever get the feeling that Mr. Johnson fell in that same trap that some other people have fallen into, not necessarily politicians, that is, that Washington is the nation? And that if you have it fairly well sewed up, you've sewed the place up?

D: I'm sure he fell into that trap, but he did have always a great sense of the ground and the land and his forebears. I think that his Washington trip was mitigated by that sense of the land and the belonging to it. I remember in that campaign--you may have gone over all of this and I hate to say anything that you've already taken, but I suppose with five million interviews--

F: Don't worry about that.

D: In those campaigns and when he was running against John Tower, they always stressed his bigness. Then when we were following him campaigning out in the Southwest, they always talked about his size.

Dickerson -- I -- 13

Because to people who were cowboys or farmers or ranchers, this was of some importance. And the fact that Jack Kennedy was not so big and not so strong was put up as a contrast. Then of course there was always the problem of health during that time.

You know, as we think back on that campaign, I can tell you a hundred million funny things. Bob Waldron, you know, was his secretary, borrowed from Congressman Homer Thornberry. Another secretary was Mary Margaret Valenti. Bob Waldron was then always impeccably dressed, even as he is now. I'll never forget the day, we were in Montana someplace--it may even have been Helena, but it seemed to be terribly remote--and he had on spats, a Homburg, a chesterfield complete with a black velvet collar, a sort of a walking stick, not a cane. He went everywhere with Mr. Johnson, and Mr. Johnson was taking a little side trip from the campaign. He was then the vice presidential candidate, I believe, or else he was still trying to get the presidential nomination. Waldron was to go with him and they were going to go down to Senator Kerr's ranch, so that Mr. Johnson could buy some cattle. They weren't so far away, and they were going to go on a little plane. Bob came out in this outfit that would have looked grand even on Fifth Avenue, and Mr. Johnson took one look at him from head to toe. He swore loudly, as any rancher would, and he said: "You're not going with me," and sent him back. And to our knowledge it was the only time Bob had not accompanied Mr. Johnson on a campaign foray. Had anybody told you that story?

Dickerson -- I -- 14

F: No.

D: Oh, God, we laughed; we laughed so hard. That campaign for the vice presidency was amusing. People who follow campaigns will tell you that the Kefauver campaign was particularly amusing because of the camaraderie and it was a switch from the old train campaigns when Kefauver was jumping all over the country.

We got into Montana, I guess it was Helena, and Mr. Johnson always liked to go first-class--he always said that--and he wanted the people who went with him also to go first-class, which meant we had superb accommodations. A side note on that, he had an Electra fixed especially for him by C. R. Smith, the president of American Airlines. It was conditioned especially for him. Liz Carpenter and I hated to fly in that plane because at that time the bugs had not been ironed out in the Electra wings. I remember Senator Johnson calling me and saying, "Nancy, don't worry, I've got the plane fixed. You and Liz can go in it." He wanted the coverage but he also--

F: I guarantee you that didn't reassure Liz, who's not reassured yet.

D: She isn't yet. You can't get her anywhere near a plane still. I've traveled all over with her. But he was very sensitive to that.

We got to Helena. I was drinking only vermouth in those days and a special kind, and, by golly, they had it flown in so it would be there. But the only delicatessen in town to service our plane was somewhat leery because the last campaign plane that had flown through there was Senator Kefauver's, God love him, and the

Dickerson -- I -- 15

Kefauver campaign hadn't paid their bill yet. The delicatessen didn't want to incur further debts and refused to do business except in cash. That was one of the amusing things that happened on that trip. There were so many of them.

F: When you were covering him there in that bedroom, did you expect him to come out of that in sort of a really evil temper or in terrible dejection from it? In other words, how did he accept defeat? You were one of the first--

D: Yes, I was sitting there with him after the Kennedy victory. He was controlled. I suppose the thing that best describes him is the description he gave to me one time of himself. He said, "I am like an animal." I've often thought of this and I don't recall whether he said "fox," and I believe he didn't say a fox, but an animal, "a wild animal on a leash. I always keep that leash in a very tight rein." And he did it as I'm doing, as you can see me now, pulling back the reins as if it were a wild, runaway horse. He said, "I am like a wild animal, but I keep myself on a very tight leash. My instinct is always to go for the jugular. Somehow I have an uncanny way in life to be able to hit the jugular of most men, but I keep myself on a tight leash." So I think that really describes the way he has handled himself in much of his life.

F: It seemed to me that the greater the crisis, the more controlled and restrained he was.

D: Absolutely.

F: The Johnson blow-ups you hear about are usually [over] trivia.

Dickerson -- I -- 16

- D: Indeed they are. Of course I think Mr. Johnson has the thinnest skin in America. For a politician to have that thin a skin is almost incredible. It really is, because he was terribly bothered. I think he was bothered mostly, as you say, by trivia, but these things were hurtful trivia. They were what he called the Georgetown press, as I'm sure others have told you. Have you talked to Carroll Kilpatrick? You should.
- F: Yes.
- D: Good. Mr. Johnson was terribly sensitive about that Georgetown press that would dine out in those candlelit drawing rooms and make jokes about him, about the size of his ears, the cut of his pants, the way he tugged at his ears, all these kinds of things which were totally irrelevant, the fact that he came from Texas. None of this mattered much as far as his policy was concerned. But these were the kinds of things that were held against him, and I think it was a very unfair judgment that was made against him. I think it's really one of the saddest chapters in the history of presidential press relations. Not that he was without blame, because there was plenty of blame for him, but there is plenty also for the press.
- F: It always struck me that in talking about his parochialism so much of the press was equally parochial on its own side.
- D: Absolutely, totally. They never understood him, and I've always felt that the press was a microcosm of other people who would see Mr. Johnson and, although it wasn't his fault that Jack Kennedy had



Dickerson -- I -- 17

been assassinated, that he somehow just by being his successor was blamed in part.

F: He was there.

D: He was there, and any successor would have been so blamed. And then you add to it the fact that he came from Texas and the assassination happened in Dallas and that just exacerbated an already very difficult situation.

Going back to those Senate days, I had written a note here, when Admiral Lewis Strauss was up for nomination and he was defeated by one vote, I happened to be that night with the late Paul Niven, who was a brilliant correspondent. He was up on the Hill, and we ran into LBJ and he invited us into that room of his, off of his Majority Office. We went in and had a drink with him and Senator Clint Anderson. Anderson, of course, had engineered the vote against Strauss. LBJ was absolutely jubilant that night; he considered it a great victory. I don't think it was that he took any great pleasure out of bringing Strauss to heel exactly, but it was showing how he could use power and count votes. He said he [Johnson] was going to win by one, and he did, by God!

F: Just the sort of the thrill of the hunt.

D: Yes, thrill of the hunt, indeed! There was a lot of that, you know.

F: Got your quarry.

D: But in knowing how to run that place--speaking of how to run that place, while I'm thinking of it if I can jump and I know this may be difficult for you and your--

F: No, I don't expect order.

Dickerson -- I -- 18

D: I remember the night so well of the assassination, and I'll tell you about that. But the night after the assassination, the twenty-third of November, I was on a television program with Martin Agronsky, Elie Abel, who is now head of Columbia School of Journalism, and Sander Vanocur, who has left NBC and is with Public Broadcasting. And they were talking about what kind of a president would Mr. Johnson make. I want you to know that none of those men who had been covering this city for years knew Lyndon Johnson.

Now Sandy Vanocur had met him one time at our house when Mr. Johnson came back from a Pope's investiture. Anyway, they didn't know very much about Mr. Johnson. They were talking about how Sam Rayburn, the speaker, had been against Mr. Johnson taking the vice presidency. Martin Agronsky gave that story in some detail and the other men talked. I was somewhat intimidated; after all, I hadn't been on that kind of program and live television that often. Although during the assassination period, I was on ABC, NBC, and CBS constantly because they resurrected all these old interviews and I was almost the only one who had ever interviewed LBJ. So they had reams of them over at CBS; I had by then gone to NBC.

F: They really combed the library.

D: Right, they just were getting out everything they could find on LBJ, and mostly what they found were interviews with me because he hadn't been interviewed by anybody else.

But Martin Agronsky had said that Rayburn didn't want LBJ to take the position, so they were going on to another subject and I was

Dickerson -- I -- 19

not the moderator. And I said, "Before you change subjects, I just want to say one thing here. Only history I suppose will really tell us if Speaker Rayburn wanted him to take that job or not, but if I could, I was there, and it seems to me the way I would interpret it was this: As you say, Martin, Speaker Rayburn did not want him to take it, but he then later changed his mind and he was all for it and he approved of Mr. Johnson's taking it."

That was maybe twenty minutes into the program of half an hour. We weren't off the air but what Walter Jenkins was on the phone and he said, "Nancy, I've got somebody here who has been anxious to talk with you." Well, of course, it was President Johnson! He'd been watching the television program and he got on the phone--you know, we were all under a tremendous strain at that time, I'd been on the air about forty-eight hours, and I must say a tear came to my eye. There he was, and he said, "Listen, you just did it right on the air. When I was a young congressman I wanted some bridge down in Texas--I've forgotten where it was--and I wanted it very badly. I was up against another congressman. I got that bridge, but in the debate I made a fool out of this other congressman. He never forgave me, he was an enemy all my life. Afterwards, Speaker Rayburn called me in and he said, 'Now look, young fellow. You've got yourself a bridge, but you've also got an enemy for life and the former isn't worth the latter. You could have gotten the bridge without getting the enemy. You didn't have to cut him down.'" So the new President Johnson said, "Look, what you did was, you cut that fellow off but you didn't make

Dickerson -- I -- 20

a fool of him. You corrected him and you got your point across, but you didn't make an idiot out of him."

This is the way LBJ has always run the Congress. This was his secret. Have you heard many people explain that?

F: No.

D: He explained that to me. That was his whole philosophy about how you did it. You gave the other fellow something that he wanted, or maybe even in this case it was correcting it, but you didn't do it in such a way, as he said, to use the old phraseology, "you didn't make him eat crow." This was the whole Johnsonian philosophy of running that Senate.

He said to me, "Where's Dick?" Meaning my husband. And I said, "Oh, I guess he's at home." He said, "I'm sending a car for you right away. I want you to come out and have dinner with Lady Bird and me."

F: What time of night is this?

D: About nine-thirty. And so the car went to our house on Wyoming Avenue and picked up my husband and then came to get me, and we went out to The Elms and stayed there until two or so in the morning.

F: What was it like out there?

D: It was incredible.

F: It had changed, I'm sure. The floodlights had come on, and the Secret Service had surrounded the place and all that sort of thing. What was the atmosphere?

Dickerson -- I -- 21

D: First of all we walked in and he said, "You know, Nancy, I thought of you last night when I drove in here." I was there the Friday night when he came back from Texas. NBC had sent me out to his house and I had seen him come in.

F: You were in Washington at the time of the assassination.

D: Yes, I was. As a matter of fact, I was out at the airport trying to get on a plane to go down to Texas and cover whatever might have been left, when they came back. So NBC sent me out to his house in hopes that maybe he might stop and talk to me, which he did not. But I remember the car going by, and I'd never seen Secret Service men with rifles out but they had them out, they had them at the ready. Jack Valenti was in the car with him--just the two men and maybe six or seven Secret Service people. I was standing there with the lights on, the television cameras were out there, and they came by and the President waved to me as they went by.

So the following night, Saturday night when I got there, he said, "Last night when we drove by I wanted to call you inside but I couldn't. They wouldn't let me, it was late. Lady Bird said maybe I shouldn't because I'd have to bring in all the rest of the group. But I was wishing then, and I knew you'd be interested in this, if only Speaker Rayburn were alive."

A million people have told you the influence Rayburn had on his life, as in fact Rayburn did on mine. I might not have been a news correspondent but for him. The first time I went on television was because Rayburn

Dickerson -- I -- 22

said, "You go back and tell them I won't go on that network unless you go on with me."

F: Let's go into that a minute. I know that he disliked interviews and that he gave you one.

D: Mr. Rayburn?

F: Yes.

D: Oh, he was marvelous about this.

F: How did that come about?

D: We talked about how the House used to open on his birthday, and it was his birthday and I said, "Could I interview you," and he said, "Yes." Of course I arrived with cameras and cables and he said, "I said you could interview me, not all these people!" Of course I was intimidated to death, I was scared stiff. I said, "But, Mr. Speaker, I can't interview you without a camera." And he said, "Well, all right, come on in here," and he was very gruff. But I interviewed him, and he was totally charming. I asked him questions about what he hoped Congress would do, what kind of bills, what kinds of problems he would have with the Republican President at that point-- it was Ike's last year--and he answered them very nicely. Then I asked, "What's your one birthday wish?" And he said, "To be back here next year." I said, "Well, I hope we're back here too. Now, back to Douglas Edwards in New York," who was then the Walter Cronkite, the anchorman. And it was because of that interview that I was made a news correspondent. So I felt very strongly about Mr. Rayburn. He was dear.

Dickerson -- I -- 23

One time earlier when I was producing radio programs for CBS he said, "You go back and tell them that I won't go on unless you do." The big news male chauvinist network nearly died at that, so I had to go back and say, "Well, they won't let me do it, Mr. Speaker." He said, "All right, I'll go on it." I remember the news correspondents were Seavareid, Bill Costello, and Bill Shadel, who were the big three at CBS Radio at that time, and the Speaker went into the radio-gallery. He said, "Now, there's a young lady around here who wants to marry me, but I'm not going to do it. Instead, I'm going on this program. Where is it?"

Just as we started to go on, he looked at each of them and eyed them rather sternly and said, "Look, if any of you asks me a question which I don't like I'm going to get up and walk right out of here." One assumed he wouldn't, but one never knew.

But getting back to the night after the assassination at the Johnson's house, it was so amusing, because there was Mr. Johnson with that big green phone. He loved phones, and when he was vice president it had all kinds of buttons and lights. I remember Luci Johnson used to be so irritated because every time she wanted to call a boyfriend or talk to a boyfriend late at night the light would go on, and the light would awaken her father, who would go storming into her bedroom and say, "Get off the phone." But as complicated as the phone was, I'll never forget the picture of Mr. Johnson over there pounding up and down on the phone, like this, trying to get an operator, trying to get Dean Rusk. He said, "Here I am, president of the United States, the whole

Dickerson -- I -- 24

country could be blowing up, and I can't get hold of the Secretary of State!" Mrs. Johnson, who was in a dressing gown, said, "I'll get him, Lyndon," and she went over and got him.

I have notes about it at home and I suppose I should have had them here; I wrote them all down and I asked my husband to please write his memories down too because of the historic moment. But I remember a couple of things that were so interesting. I'm sorry I don't have my notes with me, but the first thing he did upon being president was try to get hold of Bob McNamara and say to him: "The most important thing to me is to have you continue on in office." I remember his using this analogy, and saying, "If you're going to leave town, I'm going to have the Secret Service get on a motorcycle and chase you out of town and bring you back because this is the one essential thing, that you must stay here with me." I don't know if anybody has told you that, but that was--

F: No. I would say that would be irresistible.

D: Yes, irresistible and also as President Johnson himself described it to us. I said to him, "What's the first thing you did?" And he said, "That's the first thing I did." Jack and others have been able to tell you--you see, they were all in this confusion; they didn't know. There were rumors that they had tried to assassinate Speaker McCormack and everybody else, and they just didn't know quite where they were for a long period of time nor were they certain more assassinations hadn't been planned. He was thinking that night mainly how to bring everybody together and get as much unity as possible.



Dickerson -- I -- 25

F: By and large he didn't know the Kennedy staffers; they didn't know him; and his staff didn't know their staffers.

D: No. But of course the Kennedy staff was not treated by Kennedy the way the Johnson staff was treated by Johnson--almost as part of the family. I remember Mike Feldman going upstairs in the yellow drawing room of the White House when President Johnson was president, and it was the first time he had ever been invited up there because Jackie Kennedy did not believe in having staff parties and that kind of thing. She wanted to dissassociate her primary social life from her business life.

An interesting thing also that I said on television that night, I quoted Lady Bird, and this was one thing she liked so much. There is a great black and white water drawing, or charcoal picture, but it also seemed to have water in it. I never quite knew what the material was. It looked like charcoal, but it wasn't; it looked maybe like a black and white painting done by an artist that Senator Kerr commissioned to do of Lyndon Johnson. LBJ later had photographs made of it and gave them out when he was vice president. It had his hand resting on a chair such as mine is doing now, with a very tightly clenched fist, and it looked like a powerful hand. And that night that we were all out there--no, it was before then because I used it that night on the air--I said to Mr. Johnson, "Is that picture of you while you were majority leader or as vice president?" And Lady Bird said, "That was when he was majority leader, because he was a man of action and doing things then. He never would have posed like that, he never would have looked like that, his hand

Dickerson -- I -- 26

never would have been like that during the time he was vice president." Which gives you some notion of how he was just champing at the bit, straining on the leash with the inactivity in the secondary role as vice president.

But anyway, that night on the air I said, "Now Mr. Johnson's hand will once again be like that, because he wants to take control and take charge." That's what he liked to do.

F: This follows up something you said and gets ahead of the story, but let's pursue it now. Did you get the feeling that he valued Robert McNamara because of his position or because of Robert McNamara? I've sort of had the feeling that this was the one man whose intellect he had an almost inordinate admiration for.

D: Mr. Johnson was intimidated by several things. One, he was intimidated by the Kennedys. You know that "Austin to Boston" rhyme for the campaign? Mr. Johnson was intimidated by people who went to Harvard. He didn't particularly respect them and want to really emulate them because he didn't believe that they were all that much better, but he was intimidated by them. I don't know whether he was intimidated or not by Bob McNamara. He certainly wasn't later when he got rid of him. I think the fact that McNamara was with the Kennedy group had much to do with it. Mr. Johnson was anxious to have an easy transition from one administration to the other for the good of the country. He didn't want to shake things up any more than they were, so he would have a tendency to keep people on whom he didn't really respect and like and admire, just for the sake of having it an easy transition.

Dickerson -- I -- 27

F: This is not the time to replace the plugs in the ear.

D: Absolutely not. As far as his actual feeling about McNamara himself, I can't answer that other than he was a Kennedy appointee.

I think if he were not a Kennedy appointee, he wouldn't have been so intimidated by him. I'm pretty sure of that.

F: He never felt of Rusk, though, that he was a Kennedy man, did he?

D: No.

F: I get a greater empathizing sense from Johnson and Rusk.

D: Yes. And he really did his best for Rusk in the end and in a way exonerated him from some of the dreadful criticism Rusk had to take.

LBJ insisted it was Rusk who said first to stop the Vietnam bombing. I think I've never seen Johnson more moved or really a more lovely, gentler send-off than the two nights before Johnson left town at the party for Dean Rusk. Johnson gave a very fulsome statement and made Rusk out to be something of a saint. It was one of the things that gave Mr. Johnson a great deal of pleasure.

Incidentally, getting back to that night after the assassination, incredibly, some very funny things happened besides LBJ swearing a little and saying, "Here's the President of the United States who can't get the God-darned Secretary of State on the phone and the country could explode!" Homer Thornberry phoned. Homer was at home, and Homer's young daughter was there. LBJ wanted to talk with the daughter. He talked to her and said, "Hello, honey. What are you doing?" Well, she had a date. "What is your date's

Dickerson -- I -- 28

name?" "His name is Buddy." "Oh," said the President of the United States, "Put Buddy on the phone!"

F: Oh, no!

D: So Buddy got on the phone, and I've often thought of whoever in the world "Buddy" might be. There was some young man in Texas and all of a sudden he was thrust into a telephone conversation with a strange man whom he had never met who happened to now be the new president of the United States! Can you imagine! "How are you, Buddy?" he said. "Take care of that nice girl down there. She's a sweet girl."

F: I'd guess Buddy was useless as a date the rest of the evening.

D: I guess so. I don't know what his situation was before, but he must have been somewhat agitated after that phone conversation.

Then the President sat there. We were watching NBC, and he was terribly concerned about the reaction throughout the country. He didn't want to stir things up; he was trying to calm everything down and bring back some meaning; he wanted to emphasize the continuity between his administration and Kennedy's and that's when he started thinking about his slogan, "Let us continue." Every time David Brinkley or Chet Huntley would get on television, he'd give David Brinkley the devil! He'd disagree with him and he'd say, "Lookit! Now you say that, everybody's going to be up in arms protesting, striking around this town! Don't you know what you're doing?" He talked to the television set all night long. Then Chet Huntley would get on and he'd say to Chet, "That's it, podner"--you know, using the Texas partner--and talk to Chet. I remember that was kind of amusing.

Dickerson -- I -- 29

Then we all went into that little breakfast room in The Elms with the little circular table, and we had dinner. And the only people present--I must say I've read over the years of who was there that night, and it would make enough for a grand ballroom.

F: A real state dinner.

D: Yes. But as I recall, it was of course the President and Lady Bird; Marie Fehmer was there; my husband and me; and a Texas editor who had flown up with him.

F: It might have been Harry Provence.

D: It might have been. And one other Texas editor. And that's the group. Now later on Horace Busby arrived. Horace was working on speeches and so on. But Horace came later. There were newspapers all over the President's and Mrs. Johnson's bedroom, all the headlines. They were set on the floor so he could see the headlines and the way the story was being played.

F: Was there any attempt to make The Elms a real temporary White House in the sense of what you have at San Clemente? Did you have workmen just crawling all over the place installing telephones and new facilities and so on?

D: No, they had put in phones. The only thing different was a lot of Secret Service, because, you see, there wasn't any precedent.

I was there the morning when Jackie Kennedy called Lady Bird. The President, Mr. Johnson, was going off to speak to the Congress. President Kennedy was killed on a Friday, and I believe Mr. Johnson spoke to the Congress the following Wednesday. I was out there,

Dickerson -- I -- 30

taking out some clothes really for Lady Bird. Jackie called and they talked about the school that Jackie had for the children at the White House, and Lady Bird said of course she'd love to have it continue to the end of the semester, which would have been right after Christmas, for the sake of the other children who were going there. Lady Bird said, "I know that Lynda Bird and Luci would be very pleased with that and would want to have it there."

There were a lot of problems about clothes at that time. I don't know if Liz Carpenter ever told you about this, but we couldn't get Lynda to go out and buy a new dress. Lynda didn't like clothes at that time and Liz, because she was so tired and had worked so desperately hard--I was just walking through, after all, I was a reporter, not an employee, but I was a good friend of the family too--and she said: "Will you do something with Lynda?"

I really perhaps was a little abrupt, but I went upstairs and I said, "You go on out and buy yourself a new dress. Your father's going to be making a speech and you can't be wearing that thing you've got on." She had some Swedish dress on. I said, "The one thing he wants is to have you look well." And if looks could have killed, Lynda would have killed me. But we're good friends to this day. But she was a teen-aged daughter, and if you have any teen-aged daughters, you know they have very real problems of their own. I remember that little incident.

F: One of the metamorphoses of Lynda B. Johnson itself is the story of what came over her.

Dickerson -- I -- 31

D: Absolutely.

F: You keep check on your time, and I'll just keep talking.

D: We've been going over an hour and a half.

But that night I cannot tell you what we had to eat; I've forgotten that. My husband might remember. I wrote it down.

F: What's going to happen to your notes?

D: Well, I'm going to do something about them sometime.

F: Are they readable for someone else? Are they the sort of thing that if they wound up in an archive someone else could use or are they the sort of thing you have to [work on yourself]?

D: I have to do something with them. That one page somebody else could use, but I wrote down a lot of the things that--

F: Just to be a catalyst in this thing, since you undoubtedly have my problem, which is human, and you're if anything busier, I'll push you into sitting up with the notes and let's get it on tape for you, if not for me. That would be the simplest thing.

D: Because you have it all transcribed.

F: That way you'll get them back and they will be full. I've been used by a few people this way, and I'm glad to do it. Liz, for instance, in Ruffles and Flourishes. To a certain extent, I did the raw draft for her. I'd send her transcriptions over and she'd hone and polish and say then what she intended to say and not what she had said.

D: Maybe we could do that. Also, what I think I could do is I've got a whole box of memorabilia from LBJ of parties and when I was his hostess at--

Dickerson -- I -- 32

F: You know, things like that trigger memories that don't come just out of the blue.

D: I'm writing down various things here as we go on about "Buddy." I had forgotten about him. And about that hand in that picture that Senator Kerr had commissioned, the Senator had had it done. Some of the amusing, marvelous things that happened. You know, it was a very gay and happy period after we got over the dreadful assassination. The White House was extraordinary. It just blossomed and it was open.

And then the terrible war came. If it hadn't been for the war, it might have been one of the golden periods in American history. I was there again when the Philadelphia, Mississippi civil rights tragedy occurred, and how Johnson used that when the astronauts came back. They were in the euphoria of the success of the astronauts, and at the same time that came at Philadelphia, Mississippi, and he seized the euphoric state of the country and combined it with the tragedy at Philadelphia, Mississippi, and got a civil rights bill out of it. It took only his kind of manipulative mind that could have taken that one tragedy and combined it with great accomplishments and brought out of it legislation.

F: In a sense, that is the instinct for the jugular.

D: Again, it is, yes.

F: I mean, you put things together.

D: Right. This is why he was such a master at getting things done. He could seize the moment and the time and recognize what people



Dickerson -- I -- 33

would take and what they would go for, and then put them together and push to the limits of people's endurance and get it done, and thereby get things out of Congress that nobody else could ever have done.

F: Let's go back to Los Angeles a moment. This is kind of a demon variation Bach thing in which I'll keep bringing you back to this point or that point. Did you have any inkling that he would accept the vice presidency?

D: No, and it taught me a great lesson in politics. I didn't have any inkling he would accept the vice presidency, and those people who tell you that they did--

F: Or that it would be offered? Anything you scented?

D: No. No way I scented it, no way I knew, and I don't think there were many people in the Kennedy camp who even thought about it.

Charlie Bartlett tells this story, which I think is a charming insight into history. As you know, the whole Kennedy camp was downcast, distraught, just dreadfully upset at the offer to Lyndon Johnson. And then when he accepted, everybody was really unhappy. Old Ambassador Joe Kennedy was out at that house in Los Angeles and Charlie Bartlett was there, and old Joe Kennedy said, "Look, Jack, don't worry about it. A couple of weeks from now, everybody will tell you it's the smartest thing you ever did." Charlie Bartlett always tells that story.

F: I always rather gathered that Joe Kennedy was in Lyndon Johnson's camp.

Dickerson -- I -- 34

D: Oh yes, he was, as opposed to the other people who were not.

I was there, of course, when Jack Kennedy came down that morning, and I guess Lady Bird told you about how she answered the phone.

F: No.

D: Well, she answered the phone when Jack Kennedy himself called that morning. They were sleeping, if history is interested, in a double bed and she answered the phone and she said: "Wait just a minute, Senator Kennedy," and she handed the phone over and said: "Lyndon, it's Senator Kennedy." It was not a secretary; it was Senator Kennedy calling, and he said: "May I come down and see you?" They arranged and I was there when Jack Kennedy did come down.

Then later on we all know about when Bobby Kennedy came down to see the Johnsons. I wish somehow someone would be able to really get the true history of exactly what happened there and the conversations that went on. I myself have different opinions from those I've seen in the press. Bobby came down and was assigned to speak to Sam Rayburn, and Sam was very angry about that. I guess everybody has told you all of that. They had coffee sent into Sam's suite. Sam and I walked down the hall afterwards together, I remember it very well, and Mr. Rayburn was swearing forcefully and was talking about sending "the younger brother." He was highly incensed that they sent Bobby down to see him. But Bobby mollified him a good deal because afterwards Rayburn wasn't quite so rambunctious. But Rayburn was mad as a wet hen at that point, and John Connally kept running in and out, and of course you know about Phil Graham going in and out.

Dickerson -- I -- 35

An interesting thing at that point, Luci was a recalcitrant teenager also at that time, and she was a problem. She had just lost a hundred dollar bill, a point well publicized in all the papers, but she didn't have the proper clothes to wear, and there isn't a teenager in America who would have. So her mother asked me if I would please take Luci shopping. You know, I was a reporter and on the air until two and three in the morning, but anything I could do for Lady Bird. I was very fond of her.

F: This wasn't your town either.

D: No. We had all talked so much about clothes; I didn't know where to take a teenager shopping, and everything we saw was something that a twenty year old would wear. Luci was at the time fourteen, telling everyone she was nineteen and looking about twenty-five. So Luci and I had a harrowing afternoon shopping. But I remember going through the hall where Phil Graham had his daughter and was taking her up to see LBJ, and I was taking Luci out to go shopping for a dress so that she'd have something proper to wear that evening.

[End of Tape 1 of 1 and Interview I]

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