

INTERVIEW WITH MR. TOM DUNLAP

PB: This is September 23, 1968. We are talking with Mr. Tom Dunlap in the Office of Economic Development in Austin, Texas. What is your present position, Mr. Dunlap?

TD: I'm a Project Review Officer with the Economic Development Administrator, Paul.

PB: For the Office of Economic

TD: Yes, for the regional office here. We handle eleven states out of this area office.

PB: Mr. Dunlap, I understand you were at San Marcos in Southwest Texas College at the same time as Mr. Johnson. We are trying to get the recollections of people who knew Mr. Johnson during that period. What do you recall of those days at San Marcos?

TD: Well, of course, Paul, that's been a long time ago, and I wasn't there the entire time that the President was there. But I was there about a year and a half before he finished. He had already gone to school some, and I believe was out one year, and taught school and returned to get his degree. During that fall when I was a freshman and he was either a last-term junior or a first-term senior, I'm not sure which. The President was on the debate team. He had been on the team the year before. I was also on that team. Everyone of the students in those

days, at least a big part of them, got a job and worked around the campus some place.

PB: You mean, everybody had to work to stay in school almost.

TD: Well, as I frequently said, you could take all of the boys there and turn us bottom side up and shake us good and you couldn't raise a dollar cash if you had to! It wasn't a matter of money; it was just a matter of getting a job to stay in school, to pay your room and board and things like that.

PB: What sort of work did you all have to do?

TD: Oh, some worked on the campus; Lyndon was editor of the College Star. Of course, that was one of the preferred jobs; that was the college newspaper. And others had janitor jobs. I worked in the library, then later worked in one of the cafes down there.

PB: As a waiter?

TD: Yes.

PB: Washing dishes?

TD: No, I was a waiter. I had one of the top jobs in the whole town and college!

PB: How did you happen to get it?

TD: I Guess I got by at the right time.

PB: I see. You say you were on the debate team at the same time that Mr. Johnson was on the team. Do you recall any of the subjects that you debated?

TD: No, it's been too long, Paul.

PB: Too long ago.

TD: Too long ago.

PB: There has been some talk about rival organizations on the campus and how Mr. Johnson organized a group to take over control from the athletes at the school. What do you know about that?

TD: Oh, a little bit. Of course, I was going out for athletics, and they looked me over real close before I was invited to join. I think about ten or twelve was already in the organization before I came in. But as we liked to say, our group consisted of the brains and the others consisted of the brawn.

PB: Well, you say that you were going out for athletics; how come them to invite you?

TD: I wasn't very good in athletics, I guess you'd say.

PB: Oh! You were better in debate then, eh?

TD: Well, a little bit.

PB: How did your debate team do?

TD: I don't remember, but we won some and lost some, if I recall correctly.

PB; Did you have any personal contacts with Mr. Johnson during that period?

TD: Oh yes.

PB: What do you recall of those contacts? What sort of a guy was he while he was in school?

TD: Well, he was about as energetic then as he is now, maybe more so, because he was younger. Very energetic I'd say. And in the formation and development of the political group, that you referred to, we were very successful in getting control of the student council which had a certain number of jobs including the Pedagogue and the College Star and some of the other jobs at their disposal.

PB: What's the Pedagogue?

TD: It was the college annual.

PB: Oh, I see.

TD: In other words any jobs, or any honors, that were to be passed out, both for the girls and the boys, we thought it was part of our obligation to the student body to see that they went in the right hands.

PB: The right hands were the members of your club?

TD: Either members or good friends.

PB: Sympathetic to it. I see. This club I understand still has its annual meetings--dinners. Do you go to those meetings?

TD: Sure.

PB: Do you remember whether Mr. Johnson has attended any of them?

TD: He hasn't in recent years.

PB: Not in recent years.

TD: I imagine it's been impossible for him to do so.

PB: On the debate team, where did you debate? Did you go to other schools or were the debates all on campus there?

TD: No, it was with the other schools. However, because it was in the bottom of the depression we didn't travel near as much as they do now.

PB: How did you raise money to make these trips?

TD: That's the \$64 question. Usually we'd all go in one car.

PB: How many of there were you? were on the debate team?

TD: We usually took well, there's two on the team I think we usually took three or four fellows besides the coach.

PB: And you had to raise the money; you didn't have any appropriation from the college?

TD: Oh, no, no. I think about half the time well, frankly, I just don't know where the money came from. There just wasn't much money around.

PB: Mr. Dunlap, what contacts have you had with Mr. Johnson since those days down at San Marcos? I understand that you were elected to the legislature. When was that?

TD: 1934.

PB: 1934.

TD: Yes.

PB: From San Marcos.

TD: Yes, from that district. In fact, I'd been to law school and came back down there, and while I was a student I was elected. At that time, the President was secretary to Congressman Dick Kleberg. He had already been head of the Speech Department down at Sam Houston High School in Houston, and when Kleberg was elected to Congress, Johnson went with him, and he was secretary to the Congressman at that time.

PB: Did you hear from the Congressman when

TD: Oh, yes, I have some fond memories along that line. I know the night after I was elected the first person to from outside of town, to wire me that night, or to congratulate me, was Lyndon Johnson.

PB: Is that a fact?

TD: I don't know how he found out that I had been elected, and the Western Union office in San Marcos was already closed. A couple of us had to go out to the railroad switchyard; the only place we could get a wire at that time; it was sometime around midnight, if I recall correctly.

PB: Western Union didn't stay open all night?

TD: Oh, no, they closed about sundown.

PB: You served in the Legislature for two terms at least, didn't you?

TD: Well, yes.

PB: And after that time, did you have any contact with the President?

TD: Yes, I never did work for the President. I never did work for NYA. I came up here to Austin in the Legislature, and Mr. Bill Deason, who is also a very close friend of the President, was attorney for the Federal Land Bank in Houston. Roosevelt appointed Lyndon Johnson head of the National Youth Administration and he called Bill Deason in Houston, and Bill Deason called me and came up here and we met the President when he came in from Washington to set up an office for NYA. I believe that was in '34 may have been the early part of '35, I'm not sure.

PB: I believe it was '35, yes.

TD: '35? Saw him then, and then of course

PB; How come Bill to call you?

TD: Well, several of us were always pretty good friends, and I happened to be here in Austin and this is where they were planning on setting up the state headquarters. In fact, I guess Bill was the first person who was employed to go to work with NYA when Johnson began to set it up. In fact, I'm sure he was.

PB: Did they want you to go to work for them then?

TD: No, I already had a job. I'd been elected to the Legislature!

PB: Oh, that's right, you were in the Legislature then.

TD: That paid real good in those days.

PB: Ten dollars a day.

TD: Ten dollars a day. But, that was ten dollars a day you couldn't get any other place.

PB: That's right. That brings up something that I'm very interested in. People who did not live during the depression days don't have any concept of what people went through, do they?

TD: Oh no, no. In fact, one thing that can always be--and I've repeated it many times--the President didn't get where he is because of the money, or the prestige of his family, his parents. Because they, like most people in those days, didn't have any money. Mr. Johnson--Mr. Sam Johnson, Lyndon's father--had a good job with the state, which was lots more than many people had in those days. His parents did not live in San Marcos at the time he was in school. Shortly after then, when more than one of his brothers and sisters were in school, they did live down there so the children could live at home and go to school. In fact, one time, if I recall correctly, there were three of Lyndon Johnson's brothers and sisters in

college at one time. You just couldn't go off and pay for room and board and go to school all at the same time.

PB: Unless you got a job somewhere.

TD: No!

PB: You couldn't get a job.

TD: Well, just wasn't that many jobs around.

PB: Yes, I see what you mean. Okay, well, in other words, Lyndon was your constituent in a manner of speaking, since his home was in San Marcos.

TD: Yes. Well, I don't know whether he considered his home in San Marcos or up at Johnson City at that time. I doubt if Mr. Sam Johnson ever moved his legal domicile-- I just don't know, but the family did move down there for several years.

PB: I see.

TD: And then later on, of course, they moved back to Johnson City. When Mr. Sam (Lyndon Johnson's father) had his first heart attack, he had moved back to Johnson City. Lyndon flew down from Washington and I drove him out there. He came into the Driskill Hotel and I drove him out there.

PB: Out to Johnson City.

TD: Yes. They had moved back to Johnson City at that time.

PB: To go back just a little bit, Mr. Dunlap, to the meeting that you had with Mr. Johnson and Willard Deason when they formed the NYA; Johnson was a pretty young man at that time, was he not?

TD: Yes, because we are within our age is within two or three months of each other. If I recall correctly, it was said then that he was the youngest administrator of the National Youth Administration of all of them in the United States.

PB: Is that a fact!

TD: I think I'm correct in that. That Roosevelt had appointed him in spite of the fact that he was so young. Of course, he had had a good deal of experience even then. He learned how, if he didn't know already, to work with people in college. He taught school I forget, two or three years; his students won some state championships in debate and public speaking while he was in Houston, and he had been secretary to a Congressman, which gave him an excellent background for it. And the National Youth Administration was very, very active after it became organized.

PB: By the way, did you know Senator Wirtz?

TD: Oh, yes.

PB: What kind of a man was he?

TD: Well, he was about as brilliant, stable, capable man attorney, I guess, of anyone. In fact, I think, if I recall correctly, he was appointed as chairman of the advisory board, or whatever they called it, of the NYA for

this whole area when Lyndon was National Youth Administrator.

PB: Senator Wirtz also had a tremendous influence, I understand, upon Mr. Johnson.

TD: Well, unquestionably he was. Anyone who knew him well, greatly admired him, and because of Lyndon Johnson's contact with him--working with him in the National Youth Administration, and other things--I am sure that he highly respected Senator Wirtz's opinion in everything.

PB: Now, what were your subsequent contacts with the President? You never worked for him.

TD: Now, I never worked for him. Oh, nothing much other than what all the rest of the group have done from time to time. Whenever he was involved in a campaign we all tried to help out best we could.

PB; You would say that the San Marcos group was sort of the nucleus then of his campaign organization.

TD: Well, I don't know whether it was the nucleus or not, but we probably knew him as well as anyone could have, and when you get involved in politics, sometimes some false stories get started. And we were in a position to know whether they were true or not. We've had to correct many of them.

PB: Do you recall any in particular?

TD: No, not specifically, but it was stated back there in one of his campaigns may have been the first campaign he made for Congress, which if not, was one of the early ones that he had a lot of money and this his wife's family was very wealthy and things like that. We just happened to know that that just wasn't correct! We worked in all of his campaigns.

PB: Anyone who had any knowledge of his family at all would have known that it was not correct.

TD: Oh, yes. But a lot of people even when they have knowledge, they're a little careless with the facts.

PB: Mr. Dunlap, a question that I've asked a large number of people in making these tapes for the National Archives is for them to give me a frank, candid opinion of the man's abilities and character--whatever you would like to say about him.

TD: Well, of course, time will write the history of this administration. But, I for one, think it's most unfortunate that some of the peculiar circumstances have developed during this administration, because I am reasonably certain that no one has ever become president who was better qualified, both by part of the country he came from, his training, education and long service in the national capital. I think he had a much better insight as to the real problems of the country than most

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people have ever had an opportunity to acquire. And I'm of the very definite opinion as time goes along, that the man as a President, and the policies he has pursued, will stand very high and that he will be considered one of the great presidents. Beyond question, I think that will be the fact, and that all of the new ground his administration has plowed--it has caused disturbance, it has caused controversy. But anything that's new and progressive usually does that. And as times goes along it will be seen in its proper perspective and he and his administration will be one of the great ones in this country.

PB: Thank you, Tom Dunlap. You've been very helpful.

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By Thomas J. Donlap

to the

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