

## INTERVIEW I

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INTERVIEWEE: NADINE BRAMMER ECKHARDT

INTERVIEWER: Michael L. Gillette

PLACE: Mrs. Eckhard's residence, Austin, Texas

### Tape 1 of 1

G: Let's start by asking you to recount how you and Billy Lee [Brammer] ended up working for LBJ.

E: We ended up working for LBJ because our installment debt exceeded our income without buying any groceries. So we decided we had to make some money, and the quickest, best way to do it was to go to work for a politician, a politician who could pay us, or pay him. So he went through Paul Bolton. He heard that Lyndon was looking for a quote "liberal couple" unquote, and he said, "I think I'll try to go to work for LBJ," and I said, "Fine, fine." So he got the job. It happened real fast.

G: Had they made any overtures toward you before this?

E: I can't remember. Billy Lee was working for Ronnie Dugger on the *Texas Observer*, which was a very new, young little paper. Billy Lee was making such a small amount of money--he was doing really good work, but we needed more money. We were motivated by money at first. Then we both started liking LBJ.

G: Let me ask you what impression you had of Johnson before you went to work for him?

E: It was not favorable. We were Ralph Yarborough liberals. I was from the [Rio Grande] River and Valley, and I just was convinced that all those people were so ugly and nasty to those poor Mexicans. I joined the NAACP when I was a sophomore. I was just a real

Eckhardt -- I -- 2

liberal Texas girl rebelling probably against my parents' politics. Lyndon Johnson was considered very conservative in Texas at that time, and part of liking him was in seeing him move more left. Probably we were working for him because he was trying to balance out his politics so he could be president, even at that time.

G: Did he ever talk about wanting to be president or what it would take to be president?

E: No. He didn't talk about it.

G: Well, now initially only your husband was employed by him, is that right?

E: Yes.

G: This was in late 1955, am I correct, that you went to Washington?

E: Yes. Yes.

G: Did you both go initially?

E: Bill went up there at first and I followed in just a short time, like two weeks or a week or something like that.

I can't remember how it happened, but I know I interviewed with Walter. I don't think that I had really thought very much about going to work for Lyndon. I don't think the deal included me at first at all. I don't know how the decision was made but somehow I ended up being interviewed by Walter and he said, you know, "Fine. I'd like to have you work on the staff." I had been working for Charlie Green, who was the editor of the *[Austin] American Statesman*, and before that I had been working in journalism and for the journalism director at North Texas [State College]. I had switched from art to journalism when I got involved with Billy Lee, so I had a lot of journalistic background from working, from just being a journalism major and being a secretary to the editor of a paper and stuff. So they put me in George's [Reedy] office putting Lyndon's speeches

Eckhardt -- I -- 3

together, because they were just scattered everywhere. So I spent my time trying to trace all those speeches down and compile them.

G: When your husband was hired, was he told what he would be doing in the job?

E: I can't recall. Let me think about that a second. I'm trying to think if Billy Lee articulated anything about that. I don't have any recollection of what--

G: Did you see him as a writer?

E: Yes. Yes, as a press secretary. He was somebody to help with the Texas press, making him look good, and thinking and writing letters, whatever there was to do, because he was pretty cranked up.

G: Well, what was the reaction of your friends in Texas, the Ronnie Dugger and Willie Morris types, to your going to work for LBJ?

E: Well, we felt a certain rejection. We were always friends, but something happens when young people--Washington was like doing post-graduate work after you've lived in Austin for a while. You know, that's the real thing there, so you grow up some when you see how our nation operates. And then Lyndon was really patient with young liberals. I know how I feel about young liberals now, and I'm sure that he probably felt much the same way. He was real patient and schoolteacherish, and he was right I think. He wanted to get things done. At any rate, we felt that we kind of had superior knowledge now that we'd been in Washington, that we kind of knew more than Dugger did. So there was always a little bantering going on about being sold out and so forth and so on.

G: Where did you live when you first went to Washington?

E: We lived in McLean for a short time. We moved, and it was so cold. It was snowing when we got there. We had two little kids, and Bill had found a romantic cottage out in

Eckhardt -- I -- 4

McLean that turned out to be way the hell out. I went to work immediately, and I was just suddenly driving in to Washington from McLean every day going to work and not knowing where in the world I was. You know what it's like, it's so deadening to crawl into the Capitol every morning before it gets real light and then crawl home at night after dark. I felt a lot of guilt about leaving my children, and Lyndon was always very empathetic about those problems on the staff. He even imported this really nice black girl at one time to live with us. Of course, she got so depressed we had to send her back home, because Washington or Arlington, one of those places, was pretty dreary in the wintertime for a young woman staying in a house with kids all the time. But at any rate, I've forgotten what you asked me.

G: Where did you live?

E: We lived in McLean, we lived in Arlington, we lived in Falls Church. Billy Lee liked to move around a lot and so we moved a lot. I was really tired of moving.

G: When you worked for LBJ, did he give the impression of a man who had a heart attack just six months ago?

E: Well, I didn't know him before, see. God, if he were any faster before, he really was burning it out, because he seemed so energetic. I don't know. He didn't give me the impression of being sick at all.

G: He didn't operate at a slower pace?

E: He operated as if he was really trying to take care of himself and [he] operated at a much slower pace for some time. And I think intermittently from time to time he'd get hold of his situation and give himself some time to rest.

Eckhardt -- I -- 5

G: I want to ask you, did he talk to you about his liberal adversaries in Texas, the *Observer* crowd or what he called the Red Hots, I think?

E: Oh, he said funny things. One time I was defending Ronnie Dugger and the *Texas Observer*, and he was trying to tell me that Ronnie was wrong. And he said, "If you look back there far enough, honey, you're going to find a dwarf in that family." That was his way of telling me, you know, listen, that guy's really screwed up. Of course I agree with him now. (Laughter) I love Ronnie, I think Ronnie is a first-rate reporter, but even then I knew that the way he thought was kind of weird. He's just a real biased person.

G: Did LBJ try to use you as an intermediary?

E: I don't think so. Well, maybe he did a little bit, but I don't think so.

G: I noticed, for example, that maybe some articles from the *Observer* would be reprinted in the *Congressional Record*.

E: Yes, I'm sure that Billy Lee was--I was the paper clipper, and we had a big conference table piled with Texas papers, weeklies. We used to sit in there and I'd clip papers. We could sit in there and laugh our asses off about these funny articles. If you read all the Texas papers, they're hilarious. I'd send in stuff to [LBJ]. Oh, we very carefully cut it out--he was very particular--anything that I thought that was of interest to him or that he, you know--I was his clipping service. So Billy Lee was very careful to be sure to scan the papers and let him know what was going on.

G: Were these the weeklies or the dailies or both?

E: Dailies and weeklies.

G: Both? What sorts of things did he want to see?

Eckhardt -- I -- 6

E: Well, anything that was of--the Texas papers are so good for local politics, and then the national papers, anything that was national we combed those, too. Usually just the local politics, things that he ought to know about.

G: So it wasn't necessarily stuff about him?

E: Well, it was stuff about him, too.

G: But things related to Texas politics as well?

E: Yes.

G: Was he partial to one Texas paper or another?

E: No. I don't think so.

G Let me ask you now, who worked [on what]? Divide up the work force for me. By this time he had a Texas office and a Policy Committee staff and a majority leader's staff, I guess.

E: It seemed to me that he was gearing up for something. This is the feeling that I have. You don't grab off a bunch of bright young people unless a politician's got some fire going, I mean, he's really going someplace. So it seemed to me our energies went into saving him time. He was in a hurry. The big message was, "I'm in a hurry. I'm going someplace. If you want to go along, fine. But I'm going. I'm on my way, and I need you to help me get this all done." We had no idea what it was. It was not articulated, but that was the underlying message. And so we worked really hard, really hard to please him. And we made fun of him and all those sorts of things, but nevertheless we really moved.

G: Did LBJ have a group of liberals on his staff that sort of--?

E: Well, Harry [McPherson] was considered a liberal at the time, and of course Grace Tully was considered a liberal. If you look back, he just had such--I call it just superb political

Eckhardt -- I -- 7

sense. I mean, you can say it's good or bad, whatever, but he just had superb political sense. He knew exactly how to pick and choose people to balance out and so forth and so on. So he had his liberals and he had--let's see, who all did he have? Let me think. I can't remember. But he did have a few liberals sprinkled in with him.

G: Where would, say, George Reedy fit in?

E: George would be a liberal.

G: How about Horace Busby at this time?

E: At that time Horace was a Texas liberal probably, kind of liberal. Horace was kind of a conservative liberal, I guess. (Laughter)

G: Well, in your office, the office that you were working in, who was [there]? You and Billy Lee were there, or you and George Reedy or who?

E: Okay, let's see. I was working in the Democratic Policy Committee room, I think it was, in the Capitol at first. Then a few months later I went over to the Senate Office Building to a conference room, maybe the Democratic Policy conference room. I don't know what they called it, but it was right below Vice President Nixon's office. One of the things we always entertained our guests with was getting to listen to Richard Nixon flush his commode, because it came right down into ours. Booth Mooney was in there and Billy Lee and me, and from time to time we'd have other secretaries come in when the load got big, and we had Sam Houston [Johnson] on our couch most of the time, because he was either frail or drying out. But he was always good company. We just had great fun and worked real hard in that room. Let's see. It seemed like as long as people got strokes from LBJ, they could do most anything, they'd work--looking back at the [Allan] Shivers

Eckhardt -- I -- 8

campaign and so forth, I remember being called at 3:00 a.m. one morning to come to the Capitol to run those rotype machines.

G: Really?

E: Oh, he was demonic at this time, really running. But that was part of the job. You worked hard, but it was really good.

G: Who did he want to write letters to at that point, do you know?

E: Constituents, just all kinds of people.

G: Where did he spend most of his time when he was in Washington?

E: Down in that suite in the Capitol, in the majority leader's office. He'd go over to the Texas office sometimes and out at their house. I don't know where else he went.

G: Others have described his having staff around on weekends and maybe cooking hamburgers in the backyard or something like that. Did he do this when you were there?

E: A lot.

G: Did you go over to their [house]?

E: Yes.

G: Let me ask you to just describe one of those weekends.

E: He would call, himself, and say, "Why don't you come over and eat dinner" or whatever, "Bird's got some this or that or the other." Really informally. It made you feel good.

G: Was it a spur of the moment thing or would he call ahead of time or would it generally be Saturday or Sunday?

E: No, he was very impulsive that way. Sometimes he'd have a secretary call, but by and large I'd say he called, which always blew my mind that he was doing that himself. At any rate, we would go over there, like in Washington, and it was always real pleasant. I

Eckhardt -- I -- 9

always kind of looked forward to it. The only thing that I had a reaction to probably had a lot to do with my own stuff about I didn't want to feel obligated. I didn't like the feeling of I *have* to be here, you know.

G: Did you have that feeling when you went, or could you tell him "no, we're busy today"?

E: No, we couldn't. I mean, I couldn't. It was really bothering me, too, because I couldn't do that.

G: What about Billy Lee?

E: Billy Lee couldn't either.

G: So you--?

E: So we just went. After we'd get there we'd have a good time, and he was funny.

G: What did he do in these sessions?

E: He was just himself. He was always talking.

G: Was he talking about politics? Was he reliving what had happened that week, say, in the Senate, or was he talking about--generally, what would you expect to hear in a situation like that?

E: Oh, let's see, that's just hilarious. I can't remember any specifics. Let's see. God, I'm trying to think of some of the things he said. I can't think of anything specific. He used to kind of gossip but I can't remember what we gossiped about. He was just full of kind of down-home philosophy.

G: Would he invite other prominent politicians to these things? Would he have Sam Rayburn or Dick Russell?

E: Yes.

G: Give me an idea of who he might [invite].

Eckhardt -- I -- 10

E: Well, let's see, he and Hubert Humphrey hung around together a lot. If you can imagine, when I first went to work for him Stu Symington was--these guys were all still viable hot guys. Wow! I mean, they were like in their--they must have been how old?

G: Early forties.

E: Early forties. And I always thought that Hubert Humphrey was really a cute man, because he had a cute little ra-ra-ra-ra-ra voice. I admired his liberal politics and all that. He had Stu Symington and George Smathers, whom I think we called El Greaso. George was a suavely good-looking guy from Florida. I always thought there was something really tacky about him. Stu Symington was really hot, too. Of course, the hottest was Adlai Stevenson. (Laughter) And I remember Mary Margaret [Wiley Valenti] saying that she wanted to marry a man who was no less than Adlai Stevenson with hair.

(Laughter) Anyway, he'd have guys like that around and they had a real good time. They were just like little boys. They drank a lot. I don't know what all they did, I really don't.

G: Would these generally be on Sunday rather than Saturday, or Saturday as well?

E: I'm trying to remember. We'd usually go to their house; they'd have things at home on the weekend. That's when we'd go there. And then we'd go to the Ranch if we were in Texas.

G: Did Johnson generally tend to be in better humor, better temperament, at his home on these informal things than, say, in the office?

E: Yes.

G: If he were going to lose his temper, would it be more likely to happen at work or at home, would you think?

Eckhardt -- I -- 11

E: I don't know. I'd say probably he was better humored at home. The thing is that I never did feel as uptight around him, so I think it's kind of hard for me. Because the thing is that I just felt such approval by him that--I can't remember--I used to see him do really tacky things, say really tacky things to people, and didn't think any better of him for it.

G: For example?

E: Well, he was particularly ugly to Bird one night at the Ranch, which made me feel real bad towards him. I can't remember what the issue was. It was just stupid stuff, little stuff. So I don't know if he was reacting under some kind of pressure or what he reacted under, whether it was the way he was not handling his stress. Something weird would go on with him and he'd get real caught up in little picky stuff that didn't mean anything. But somehow he never did [that to me]. He only got on my case one time when I didn't put a call through from W. A. Moursund.

G: A. W. Moursund.

E: A. W. See, I even got that wrong. Anyway, I didn't know who A. W. was. I didn't know he was one of Lyndon's cronies, so I didn't put him through to Lyndon. But he was really okay about it; he was nice about it. So I didn't have that fear of him, because I felt at ease pretty much.

G: Did he generally intimidate men more than women, would you think?

E: Yes. I don't know whether he just attracted men who could be intimidated or what. I don't know what his deal was with men like this.

G: Well, let's talk about some of the legislative issues that year in 1956. Of course, one of the big ones was the natural gas act. Do you have any recollection of his efforts there to get the bill passed?

Eckhardt -- I -- 12

E: Yes. He really helped try to pass that bill. I think that he tried a lot more than he wanted people to know that he did, because I know that we were really busting ass in the office, and the office was being used by various lobbyist friends from Texas.

G: Anybody in particular that you recall?

E: I think Ed Clark was in there quite a bit and John Connally. I can't remember who else. But I remember as a secretary thinking, ugh, these yucko lawyers from the . . .

G: Did you as a liberal have a problem with his supporting it?

E: With supporting it?

G: The natural gas [act], yes. Since a lot of the liberals, like Paul Douglas, were on the other side.

E: Yes. I remember we had a ticker tape in our office that we could keep up with all the wire services. So when it came over the wire that Eisenhower had vetoed it, I was really secretly glad, my little liberal jerk-leg self at that time. However I don't think it really made all that much difference.

G: What was LBJ's reaction to the veto?

E: I can't remember. I can't remember.

G: Now, Senator [Robert] Kerr was very involved with that. Do you recall their working together on it or anything in particular?

K: Oh, Senator Kerr, yes. He was one of Lyndon's Senate cronies.

(Interruption)

G: Senator Kerr.

E: Okay. Senator Kerr was just a darling man. He was a superb politician, too. He kept all the girls on the staff jollied up all the time in the Texas office, because his office was

Eckhardt -- I -- 13

across the hall and he'd come in. He had a wonderful personality, cute, cute man. We all loved Senator Kerr. And of course, I don't know what he and Lyndon were doing together at that time either. Let's see. That's all I know about him. I do know that he was probably involved heavily with that oil, the whole question somehow, but I don't know exactly how. If I knew then I've forgotten.

G: Well now, did you get any pressure on natural gas from the liberals in Texas or the *Observer* people?

E: No. I don't think so.

G: Anything on John Connally's role in the lobbying effort?

E: Well, I think--

G: John Connally didn't register, you know, as a lobbyist.

E: Oh, that's right. That's right, he didn't.

G: Did this create problems for LBJ?

E: Well, I think it was probably kind of an embarrassment of some kind, but I don't understand that whole thing. I never did have good perceptions about John Connally. There was something about him I never did trust. And he was always coming in the Texas office, kind of, you know, trying to make it with the secretaries, that kind of low-rent behavior which I just didn't--he wasn't my cup of tea.

G: But you don't recall anything on LBJ telling him he should register or being--?

E: No. I was too far away from those kinds of little things.

G: Now, after Senator [Francis] Case blew the whistle or said that somebody had tried to bribe him, LBJ sponsored an elections bill that was designed to clean up some of the abuses of contributions and bribes. Do you remember that? Did you work on that at all?

Eckhardt -- I -- 14

E: I remember working on that but I can't remember specifics about that. But I know that LBJ wanted to come out of that looking like Mr. Clean, and I think Eisenhower, the administration, was talking about elections maybe at that time. I don't know. But at any rate, Lyndon was going to be Mr. Clean about all that, I think, come out looking really like Mr. Clean, Mr. Integrity.

G: Now, shortly after that Jim Rowe joined the staff as counsel to the Policy Committee.

E: Yes.

G: Let me ask you to discuss Rowe and his role on Johnson's staff.

E: Well, I think Jim basically was hired--let's see, I guess he was being paid. He was taken on, and I don't know under whose auspices, whether it was even on the Democratic Policy [Committee] --whatever payroll he was on I don't know. It's probably irrelevant. But it was my perception that he was brought on to help Johnson, you know, kind of hone him a little bit politically. He obviously thought Johnson had a lot of potential and was a good prospect for maybe power brokering. And you know, I think that Jim is an interesting person and that's exactly what he's done in Washington all these years is just spot people and kind of broker all this. He was fascinated by Johnson, just absolutely fascinated by Johnson. He was brought on to help him.

G: Was Rowe pretty independent, do you think, once he joined the staff?

E: Yes. He was a very dashing Harvard graduate who wore really nice three-piece suits. He was about fifty-two years old at that time, you know, just really hot-looking and real smart and would not take Lyndon's bullshit at all. He'd just walk out. He was skilled in dealing with assholes, so he didn't get hooked into Lyndon's--see, Lyndon had people buffaloed. That's probably the reason I never kind of doted on him at all, is that I always

Eckhardt -- I -- 15

felt okay. I mean, he couldn't do that to me somehow. He made me feel really good, because I think he had some basic respect for me and he liked me. He really knew how to use people.

G: What do you mean?

E: Well, I think politicians just think that way about how to pick up people that they know are going to be of some use down the road; they're putting it all together all the time. He was such a smart person, he recognized smart women, smart men. He *was* sharp.

G: The liberals attempted to get a civil rights bill through that year and failed. Do you recall that?

E: Yes, that's right. Yes, let's see. Oh, I can't remember anything about that. I know that I was kind of never sure of why Lyndon Johnson became such a civil rights person. But he was on his way to the presidency, he had to create that. He had his plan by then, that's what I'm trying to say. This whole thing is that he had his plan going by the time I went to work for him, and he just had to do certain things in order to be president.

G: Well, let me ask you this in that regard . Did you ever get a sense of LBJ's own personal feelings of race relations, or do you think he was personally prejudiced against blacks or was not personally prejudiced against blacks? Did he ever reveal his own racial attitudes?

E: Oh, let's see. Well, I can't remember anything specifically, but my perception of him is that he was very paternal towards the black people who worked on his place, just like he was paternal towards women and to some of his staffers. You know, that can be good and that can be bad.

G: How was his paternalism manifest?

Eckhardt -- I -- 16

E: By caring but controlling. It was like a parent who cares about you and will give you things, but there's a condition. That's "do what I want to do when I want to do it and accept me being this raging, angry child, a lot." He acted so bad at times and was so disgusting that I'm sure that he must at times have thought "oh, my God, how could anybody live with this jerk-off that I am? So I've got to make up. What can I do for you? Like me, please!" So I think he spent a lot of time just kind of trying to be nice and suck up to people who surrounded him. He never did learn that he didn't have to be that asshole.

G: Yet that didn't prevent him from being difficult?

E: That's right. He never would face that part or take responsibility for that part in himself. It would have been so easy if he had done that.

G: Well, you hear a lot about LBJ's tantrums and what Billy Lee refers to in that letter as "LBJ scenes," and he's describing a weekend in which there were none. How common were they? Was it be once a month, once a week, once a day?

E: They were real common. (Laughter) He drove himself so hard, and he didn't know how to handle stress either. Well, you know, that's what would make him blow was that he would work so long and so hard. I just loved this thing [LBJ Chronologies] you sent me, because I mean all this stuff each day, all this stuff that he was doing, and then see all the things that he was doing that aren't in here.

G: Really?

E: Well, think about that. He was running around like a maniac, and so he would get tired and have to be up late. Then he'd get under pressure and that's when he would blow. He didn't have Mary Margaret buffaloed either. I mean, Mary Margaret was firmly

Eckhardt -- I -- 17

entrenched. Let's see. Well, people really lived in terror. A lot of people on the staff just did not want to be around him at all.

G: Why didn't they quit?

E: I don't know. I don't know.

G: It's odd, because you think in a politician's environment that the objective is to get closer to the central figure in order to be more important on the staff. And yet if they tried not to be around him, well, then their objective is quite different; they were trying to stay out of his way all the time.

G: I think they really wanted to be close to him. Let's see. Let me think of someone. They were uncomfortable, but they still wanted to be around him because they were next to the power. And he was paternal, nice, asked about your family. He knew how to stroke everybody up, you know. But he was strenuous.

This is an aside, but do you read the *Austin Chronicle*?

G: No.

E: It had an article by Babe Schwartz' son, John Schwartz, who's a wonderful little writer. He wrote a take-off on the papers that were [forged], Hitler's dairy. They had a picture of LBJ on the cover and it said, "LBJ's diary has been found," and it was a bunch of Red Chief tablets in the back of a car. There was a wonderful little dialogue that John Schwartz wrote about LBJ saying, "I just hired a guy named Billy Lee Brammer as an aide. He gave me some pills this morning. I took one of them and I've been cleaning out my desk and I've been running around all morning." It was like he was on speed all the time. He was just always really speedy. So he was strenuous, because he was just doing stuff all the time.

Eckhardt -- I -- 18

G: They did go to Florida that year in January for a vacation--do you remember that?--with the Thornberrys.

E: I vaguely remember that. I vaguely remember that.

G: You mentioned LBJ's paternalism. You talked about his having brought someone up to help you with your children.

E: Yes.

G: What did LBJ do for you in terms of being paternalistic? Did he, say, help you either financially or personally in some way?

E: Let me think. He gave us air flights. I could get on the plane with the staff or someone. That was really important, to be able to catch a flight here and there.

G: These would be private flights?

E: Yes. At that time there were airplanes going back and forth all the time. It was some kind of Housean [?] time when things were really fun. I had so much fun, even with all the guilt of leaving my little children at home and all the bad things about it, I had fun. I didn't take all of it so seriously.

G: These were private planes, Brown and Root or Wesley West?

E: Yes. Now, some of them were old planes and were unpressurized and weren't so comfortable, and some of them were really executive-type airliners. I don't know how many trips I made back and forth, but I know that Mary Margaret was always going back and forth with LBJ.

G: Would you go on the weekends or would you go during the week?

Eckhardt -- I -- 19

E: I don't think it made any [difference]. Well, it probably depended a lot on his Senate schedule. He really was interesting to watch in the Senate. I was just amazed how he really controlled that thing.

G: Describe what you would see if you watched him from the Senate gallery?

E: Okay. For me as a very young woman, as a liberal woman, this had a big influence on me, because my big bitch was, oh, it takes the government so long to do anything and la-di-da-di-da, you know. And then I watched the Senate; I mean I'd go in there and watch it every chance I got. It just seemed like nothing ever got done. Then I realized that it's a grist mill. It's a good thing nothing gets done. I learned that congressmen and senators are there for some reason. They're not stupid. And that they know some things that are very important, and that's probably one of the things, that it is a grist mill and it's a good thing that it moves slowly, because so much is ironed out in the slowness of the way the wheels of government turn.

So that part was really good. Lyndon, he was just magnificent working the floor of the Senate. Because he knew what he was about so much that he just had it all--he would work the floor and then it would all fall into shape just like he wanted it to. He was really a master at that.

G: Does this entail just talking to other members? When you say "work the floor," do you mean he would go from one senator to the next talking to them?

E: Yes. Right. Yes. And he'd have his little trips all lined up, and he'd have all those strategic telephone calls he'd make. Bobby Baker would count heads for him. It was just a wonderful thing to watch.

G: When you have more time, I want you to go into detail. But the last thing I'd like to ask you to talk about today is that birthday party for Eleanor Roosevelt.

E: Oh, okay. About two weeks after I got to Washington, Grace Tully came in one day and she said, "I've got somebody I want you to meet." And I looked up and it was Eleanor Roosevelt. She knew that I was an admirer of Eleanor Roosevelt. So Eleanor Roosevelt was the cutest lady. She was smaller than I anticipated. She had crimson nail polish on, and she said, "Honey, I'm going to go down here to Senator Johnson's office for a birthday party that he's having for me. Why don't you come down?" So I thanked her and went back to work. Then the phone rang, and it was LBJ. Willie Day [Taylor] was gone and so was George, so he said, "You're a new staff person. You're a staff member?" and I said yes. And he said, "Well, why don't you come down to my office? I'm having a birthday party for Mrs. Roosevelt." So I did. And when I got there it was all senators and Mrs. Roosevelt. I don't think that there were any other staff members in there at that time. I mean, I just walked in his office and there were all these people that I didn't know but whom I had admired for a long time. So I remember sitting down and LBJ came over and introduced himself, and that was the first time I'd met him, and I'd been on his staff for, I don't know, a couple of weeks. He was very gracious, very kind, and I had a real good time. I enjoyed it.

G: Why do you think he invited you, because he knew you were a friend of Eleanor Roosevelt's, or admirer I guess?

E: No, I think that probably Grace had something to do with it. Now that I think about it, it was probably Grace, because Grace liked me a lot and kind of was showing me the ropes

about this, that, and the other, and she introduced me to Tommy Corcoran, too, that way and probably to Jim. But I can't remember.

At any rate, Eleanor Roosevelt was the most gracious, wonderful woman, really relaxed.

G: The other day when we talked, you mentioned that one of the things that you observed about LBJ in situations like this was how readily some of the liberal senators would respond to him when he'd say, "Hubert, do this" or "Hubert, do that."

E: Well, at that same party I got a little insight into the relationship between LBJ and Hubert Humphrey, because I had been standing with Hubert having a drink and talking to him. Then I think I walked away, and I heard LBJ say, "Hubert!" and he snapped his fingers at Hubert. It was just gross, snapping your fingers at another senator. I mean, oh, yuck! Hubert jumped just like he had a little spring in him, you know, just right over like "Yes, Lyndon," [panting], and that really bothered me about Hubert Humphrey, because I had been thinking about going to work for Hubert. He had an opening, and I was not real happy with LBJ at first.

G: Why not?

E: I don't know. I was unhappy with everything. I was unhappy basically with my marriage. I was bummed out with living in McLean with two little kids. It was just a bummed time. If I hadn't been really stimulated by LBJ, just being there, very young and by that time I think I'd cranked up an affair with a reporter for *Time* and was having little trysts on the side, you know, to spice up my life a little bit.

I remember telling Dugger at some point that the fifties were kind of strange years. We had jazz, which was good, and LBJ was a high. I wish sometimes we had old

Eckhardt -- I -- 22

LBJ back, because he was really such a hyper guy. He was just like a Tasmanian devil, just whirling around, and if you were not emotionally involved with him, he was really something to watch! I don't think that I must have had the emotional involvement that Billy Lee did with him, and certainly there with Ronnie.

G: That's interesting. Well, why don't we break here?

End of tape 1 of 1 and Interview I

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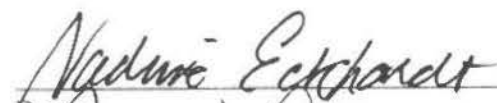
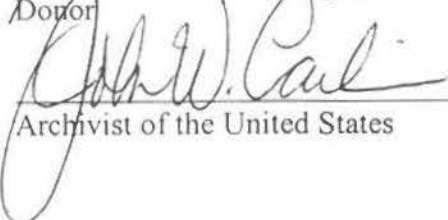
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NADINE ECKHARDT

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