

## INTERVIEW II

DATE: March 21, 1984

INTERVIEWEE: NADINE BRAMMER ECKHARDT

INTERVIEWER: Michael L. Gillette

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

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G: Here we go.

E: Okay. I want to start beginning with--I've been reading those notes and the layering of events during that period, and I can see now how busy [LBJ was]. I knew he was very busy all the time. Billy Lee [Brammer] and I were hired really for political reasons, because he was gearing up so much for a political--well, he had always been. I don't know who he had doing stuff for him. I know it was Horace Busby. But I know that we were geared up. He needed to become more liberal in the state; he needed to be perceived as being more liberal than he was at the time we were hired. And I think maybe we were helpful in that regard.

Then he had the [Allan] Shivers conflict, which was very exciting for me to live through, because as a young woman, even though we had to go to the Capitol at times and run the rotype machines at three o'clock in the morning--

(Interruption)

Let's see. I've lost my train of thought here.

G: Go to the Capitol at three o'clock in the morning [inaudible] Shivers--

E: It was a really hard race and so the whole staff was working all the time. And who knows whether or not it was the right thing to do to use the rotype machines. I don't

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know whether they were brought in. I don't know--ask no questions about those things.

All I know is that we worked very hard. I think his staff was considered one of the most hard-working staffs on the Hill.

G: Any particular recollections of that fight with Shivers over control of the Democratic Party? Did you go to any of LBJ's speeches? Did you sit in on any meetings?

E: No. I was staying in Washington, and I think Bill was maybe down here with him some. I was aware they were going on, and I was aware of the Kathleen Voigt conflict, because the liberals and the conservatives were trying to get together and they were having personality conflicts. Shivers was involved, Price Daniel was involved, all the big boys in Texas were involved at that time. And Lyndon was wending his way toward the goal of being perceived as this populist liberal among liberals and as a pragmatic, go-getting politician among the conservatives. He played it right.

G: Yes.

E: And I know that Bob Eckhardt always credited Mr. Rayburn with killing big city liberal organization. I've forgotten how Bob perceived that. But at any rate, I know when I married Bob he was very anti-Lyndon Johnson.

G: Was it a result of the 1956 [fight]?

E: Yes. Also it was a result of Lyndon being successful, because Bob never perceived himself as being successful, and he was jealous of people like John Connally and Lyndon and Jake Pickle because they were all kind of contemporaries.

G: Well, you were hired at a time when LBJ wanted to improve his relations with liberals, and yet they seemed to worsen dramatically in 1956 after this convention thing. Did Johnson do anything after that to shore up his ties with the liberal-labor group in Texas?

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E: Let me think. Let's see, that was in the late fifties. Of course in 1960 along came John Kennedy, which helped a lot. I can't remember anything specifically, how that happened or how it segued into his being an acceptable liberal. But somehow it did.

G: Let me just ask you about a variety of things. Now, his relationship with Vice President Nixon, what did he think about Nixon?

E: I have not the foggiest idea.

G: He never talked about Nixon?

E: No.

G: What did his staff think about Nixon? Did the staff have any attitude toward Nixon?

E: I can't remember any attitude toward Nixon.

G: How about the Republican adversaries, [William] Knowland and later [Everett] Dirksen? Do you recall his--?

E: Oh, Johnson and Knowland got along fine.

G: Did they? How about Dirksen?

E: He got along with Dirksen.

G: Do you recall any aspects of their relationship that is significant?

E: Oh, gosh, no. I remember seeing Dirksen so many times. He'd come in the office frequently and everything, but I can't remember any intercourse between them.

G: How about Johnson and Rayburn? What do you remember of their [relationship]?

E: Yes, I remember there was a very personal sort of thing. Mr. Rayburn would come over; he would go through Johnson's office. I mean, talk about a master politician, he not only politicked his constituency, he politicked all the staffs. At least he did [Johnson's]. Johnson was very special, apparently, so he would come through and shake everybody's

hand, talk to them. He was such a cute little man, and he always had dandruff on his shoulders. I remember I had my arm around him because he was just so cute--he was a cute man--and I remember brushing his little dandruff off. He was old by that time and just darling. Very, very gracious. Loved the women.

G: Did he seem to be more assertive than Johnson in their relationship?

E: No.

G: Was Johnson more assertive?

E: It was my perception, and I have a vision in the office of Johnson running the show.

G: Now, Rayburn proposed that Johnson be the favorite son nominee and chairman and head of the delegation, thereby challenging Shivers. Do you recall that and Johnson's reaction to it?

E: Yes. I recall--here's where I fall down. I don't have any empirical information here. But I do recall that that was all wired. I thought it was interesting that George [Reedy] said the other night that Senator [Richard] Russell wanted Johnson to run for president. He wasn't sure how that came about. Johnson had a little cabal or a little coterie, whatever you want to call it, of supporters like Rayburn and Russell and [George] Smathers and [Stuart] Symington and [Hubert] Humphrey, all these different guys that he called on, drew on. But I don't know--I think it would be really interesting to find out how his running for president and how the whole focus of everything became toward the presidency. Even in 1955 you could see the course of events were kind of colored by his desire.

G: What do you think was the basis for his influence over the other senators, the people, for example, that you've just named? His ability to get them to do what he wanted them to do.

E: Oh, that was his personality I guess, his incredible ambition and drive and motivation and ability to get other people to do what he wanted them to do.

G: Was money a factor, his ability to raise, say, campaign finances for them?

E: Sure.

G: Did you see evidence of this? Did you have any evidence?

E: I don't have any evidence, I just know that I remember Bill talking about it and probably Harry [McPherson], probably some of the other people on the staff, about [how] they needed some Texas money. He was a source of Texas money for people from like the Midwest or other senators who might not have access to money, unless they went through another [source]. There was a lot of back scratching, I'll scratch your back, you scratch mine, a lot of paying of IOUs and that sort of thing. It was such a little clubby sort of thing.

(Interruption)

On October 18--this is 1956--let's see [reading 1956 Chronology], "*Houston Post* reports that when [Estes] Kefauver visited New York State recently, not a single member of the Democratic hierarchy showed up to greet him, including Averell Harriman. An aide to Kefauver said that Harriman wants the Democrats licked so he can jeer, 'See what happens when you pick the wrong candidate.' LBJ goes to Lockhart for a Democratic rally where he and Rayburn deliver speeches. One newspaper reported that LBJ did not mention Adlai Stevenson or Estes Kefauver's name once during his speech." And then on

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the twentieth, "Claudia flies to Dallas to attend a tea for Mrs. Ives, the sister of Adlai Stevenson, at the home of Mrs. Wright Matthews, returning to Austin that evening."

Well, now, I got it wrong. Let's see, he just didn't mention Adlai. He was so shrewd that he knew not to mention a liberal politician in Texas. And of course I can't fault him for that. The fact that he was playing these [games]--you know, stroking Adlai's sister with Bird and not mentioning Adlai shows his incredible staging.

G: Well, was he urged to support Stevenson more enthusiastically than he did that [time]?

E: I'm sure he was. But I don't have any recollection of any specifics about it. Oh, yes, that happens all the time in Texas.

G: Was he urged to support Eisenhower by conservatives?

E: I don't know.

G: Do you have any recollection of the convention? You didn't go to the--?

E: No, I didn't go to any of the conventions.

G: Or the selection of the vice president, of Kefauver--?

E: No, I didn't.

(Interruption)

G: --press, both in this connection.

E: Okay. I don't remember whether this was told to me, whether I read it or what, but my general impression was that everyone needed to downplay the heart attack. It was my perception that the heart attack was much more severe than Eisenhower's, but that was something that we didn't want generally known by the public because it would interfere with presidential politics. And the whole thrust, the political thrust, was to make Johnson look like more of a liberal, more of a national politician, and everything was going in that

direction. So George was wooing national politicians; Booth Mooney and Billy Lee Brammer were wooing Texas journalists.

G: Was Reedy wooing the press or the political leaders?

E: I think mostly the press.

G: How was this translated to you that Johnson wanted to downplay the heart attack or make it seem milder than it was? Was this something that was articulated, say, through the office or through Johnson himself or Reedy or Walter Jenkins? How did you get the word?

E: It's like when you grow up in a family and you pick up on the unsaid things. You know how kids always know what's going on no matter whether it's said or not, or articulated or not. Well, it was like that, and I can't remember anything specifically. And also of course, Billy Lee and I would talk about the situation and discuss whether Johnson would ever be acceptable to the East Coast types. Billy Lee was really thrilled that every time he would enlist someone like Eliot Janeway or somebody, he'd enlist more and more people into his camp. Maybe they didn't like him at first, just like we didn't like him at first, but then when we got to know him, we liked him. It was a matter of feeling like if we could expose this man to enough of the country so they could understand him, they certainly would want him as president.

G: What was it about him that made you like him later but not initially?

E: It was just the perception of a liberal Texas person.

G: But was it his stands on issues or his votes or his philosophy?

E: Basically it was--

G: I mean, did you decide philosophically that he was acceptable, or that the programs he endorsed were acceptable to liberals or what?

E: That's a really good question. I think that I probably didn't base any of it on real logic. It was mostly that he was maybe anti-liberal or there was an anti-conservative sentiment in the state. I can't remember anything other than being for [Ralph] Yarborough and that Johnson was just a conservative guy. But the thing is that I began liking him on a personal level and at the same time watching him be this great force in the Senate and being very impressed by it and proud of the fact that although he embarrassed me personally because of his rude habits, he was a power in the U.S. Senate.

G: Yes. Now, the southerners signed the Southern Manifesto and Johnson did not sign. Do you have any recollection of that?

E: I remember that real well because I had to type that a lot. (Laughter) He didn't sign it because he wasn't there or something. I can't remember how it was. But I know that George was in on that. I think they finessed that by just kind of omitting it or not signing it.

G: Anything on the reaction to his not signing it? Did his constituents object to that?

E: Oh, let's see, I can't remember. I read something about that and I can't remember what the reaction was. I wish I could--I can't remember that. I remember reading something about that in here.

(Interruption)

G: --say if you analyzed what Johnson--

E: I haven't thought it out clearly, but what he was doing was so impossible, it's just mind boggling. Because basically--okay, maybe you can help me with it. He was trying to



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appear liberal. He was saying liberal things and he was trying to advance the civil rights thing. Basically he had personally kind of a conservative philosophy. What I'm looking for is the conflict involved there that throws everybody off. That he really manufactured and--I don't know how we can analyze it, but the thing is that he was an insecure person. He even sent those girls and Lady Bird to Elizabeth Arden; he was trying to improve his image, trying to control everything. When you go to extremes like that, he was possessed to be able to do all that he was doing, especially after a heart attack. And he orchestrated so much. Sometimes I think he may have--and I think all of us use hypnosis, self-hypnosis. All that business about all that caring and so forth about the black folks and all that, I really sincerely don't think that he meant anything. I think that he sincerely believed that he believed it. He was a masterful politician, but he was also a real scum bag. He was not honest with himself.

G: In terms of what he would say, you mean?

E: In terms with what he was.

G: Any examples of this? Can you recall, say, where you were disillusioned or disappointed with the gap between what he said and reality?

E: Well, I think we excuse people a lot of times for being disrespectful to other people. I don't think he had much respect for himself and that's why he didn't have much respect for other people.

G: Is this, say, his treatment of the staff or his treatment of other senators? How is this reflected?

E: Well, let's see. I'm really lost here, but there was something about him that told me that he was a total opportunist. But I think that his ability to make himself believe what he

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wanted to believe in order to get the approval that he wanted is what put me off. But there was a genuineness about him. You couldn't resist; looking down his old long nose and his big thick glasses and stuff, he had all that paternal force. I mean, I never would have thought of bucking him on anything. I mean, I used to argue with him a little bit about old Ronnie [Dugger], because Ronnie was my friend and I was a liberal girl. I believed in equality and all those things, and he tried to make me understand and he did. I became much more pragmatic knowing him. But I don't think he was really sincere. Whatever he espoused, it was not integrated in his life.

G: You mean he would preach one thing and do something else?

E: Yes. Because he was onto the perception part of politics. It's what people perceive, it's not what's true. That's the way he played it, and that's how he won.

End of Tape 1 of 1 and Interview II

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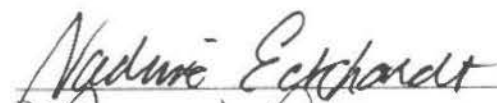
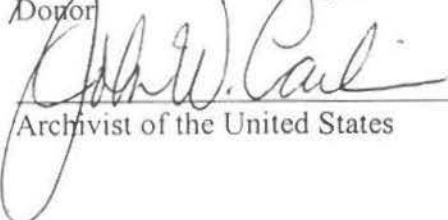
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