

## INTERVIEW I

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INTERVIEWEE: JOE B. FRANTZ

INTERVIEWER: DAVID G. McCOMB

PLACE: Dr. Frantz' office, Sid Richardson Building, Austin, Texas

### Tape 1 of 1

M: Okay, we might as well start from the beginning. First question: when did you first get the idea, or how did the idea arise for an oral history project on President Johnson?

F: I suppose I might as well assume the stance of a historian, which I will admit is unbecoming to me, and go back. As far back as the 1950s I had decided, which is not exclusive with me, that Lyndon Johnson was going to amount to something in the nation's history.

M: You didn't know him then?

F: No. And [I had decided] that I might as well start thinking about doing something with him and with his career. But I made no moves, I just thought about it. I did talk to Walter Webb about it once, after Webb went on Senator Johnson's staff, and said I would like to meet the Senator. Webb said he would arrange it, and that was the last of that. I may have met Johnson in a crowd somewhere, but nothing that's worth recounting. The first time I ever met him was when I had the responsibility--this must have been in the fall of 1961 and the spring of 1962--for the keynote speaker each year of the state meeting of the Texas Council of Social Studies, which was held on this campus. I thought the time had come to invite now Vice President Johnson to be the keynote

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speaker. We'd had educators, and we were going to have newspaper publishers and so on, but we'd never had Mr. Johnson in any of his several roles.

M: When was this now?

F: The occasion was to be in March of 1962, and sometime in the fall I started it. I knew Mary Margaret Wiley from her student days, although I hadn't kept in very close touch with her, and I knew she had gone to work as a secretary for Senator Johnson. I wrote him, and as I recall sent a carbon of the letter to her asking her to do what she could to follow up on it. She did agree, I feel rather strongly, because she probably said this is a good thing and he's a decent sort. She more or less recommended it.

I'd had an experience once with former President Harry Truman when I was program chairman of the then Mississippi Valley Historical Association, later the Organization of American Historians, in which for months I had camped on President Truman's doorstep as a dinner speaker for a meeting we were having in St. Louis at which he had agreed to be the speaker, only to cancel in the last twenty-four hours and leave me in a somewhat exposed situation, not to mention the association and the hotel, which had put on a lot of extra help. This wouldn't of course be the same sort of thing, but I was a little bit wary where national political figures were concerned for fear that you could, often with good reason, get stood up.

M: This made you a little bit wary of inviting Johnson?

F: It made me wary of inviting anybody, but particularly made me wary of, having invited him, whether he might say yes and then later on say no. So I wrote with some frequency

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to check up, wrote Mary Margaret, and got reassurance from both of them that they would be here and that she'd do what she could to ensure that he would come, *et cetera*.

Somewhere in there I got through an intermediary, and I don't remember who that was, somebody local, saying I ought to send up a speech.

M: You'd write a speech for him?

F: For the keynote address, what they wanted him to say. So I went to work and labored on that--I'd never done any speech for Vice President Johnson--and more or less said what I thought ought to be said. You've got to remember this was a period in the early sixties when the state of Texas was part of an anti-intellectual reaction against teachers particularly. You had that traveling road show that the state legislature put on, and was largely sponsored by J. Evetts Haley out in Canyon, to the effect that our teachers were selling our students down the river to the communists and the left-wingers, *et cetera*. The textbooks were being combed by super-patriotic societies to see what anti-American and anti-capitalist statements, allegedly, they might contain.

So this was crucial. It wasn't too long either after the Central High School episode in Little Rock. That had of course settled down, but the battle wasn't over yet. So we had a theme that was a natural, the right of teachers to teach and students to read and write, and that was about it. I wrote something along that line, I don't know whether I have a copy of it or not, probably, and sent it in. I wasn't altogether prompt with it, and somewhere in there got a call from his office saying how was I doing and when was I going to get it in. So I got it in several days ahead of when he was coming to Texas.

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Now Jim Wilson, a local attorney [who] had been an assistant to Senator Johnson, an administrative aide of some sort or at least on his staff, held a little party the night before and I was invited. I went over there, and Vice President Johnson greeted me rather warmly. It was just a nice party at Jim Wilson's home, nothing out of the ordinary. Somebody somewhere in the evening said to the Vice President, "What are you going to say tomorrow, Mr. Vice President?" And he said, "Well, whatever Joe has written for me," at which I kind of gleamed a little in a quiet way.

The next morning then as the local major domo we had President Joe Smiley of the University present and on the stage, and someone had come in with the seal of the vice president and put it up on the stage. There were various Secret Service and other vice presidential assistant types and convoy types around. I made a few remarks to the audience. It was held in what's now the movie theatre, maybe was then, of the Texas Union, which had been fairly recently expanded. We had been at great pains to be sure that the place was overcrowded with standing room, and it was. We might could have gone to Hogg Auditorium, which was larger, but we thought it was better to hold it in a smaller auditorium.

M: When you say pains, like what?

F: This was the keynote address at nine o'clock in the morning, and you know professional meetings--people drift in.

M: Right, especially at nine o'clock in the morning.

F: Yes. You start out a meeting with three people and it looks real painful at first, and by the time the guy's through, why, you've got maybe two-thirds of an audience. If he'd

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come that afternoon you'd have a houseful because they've got to drive in from Muleshoe and other places, and they just don't get there on time.

M: So what did you do?

F: I'd gotten my students out. I was chairman of the department, and I'd worked on the department to get some people there. I'd also circulated it to the faculty and so on that Johnson might be going to make a major statement on education. I'd also, I might say, gotten some criticism from some of the faculty who even then felt that Johnson represented kind of the wheeler-dealer image and not the liberal image. I remember particularly John Silber had been antagonistic toward me on it, wanting to know why I couldn't have gotten someone with more intellectual content.

M: This is when Silber was chairman of the Philosophy Department?

F: I guess he was chairman of Philosophy then; it was when he was the young Turk before he grabbed the coattails and became an administrator.

M: Right.

F: But I felt that here in the state of Texas and given the time, that if the Vice President could make a ringing statement for freedom that it might help the teachers immeasurably. I must say that the teachers responded, they came out. I mean, it wasn't an artificial crowd, really. I just tried to be sure that there was a sufficient one, but I think probably I could have just sat back and let the teachers do it because the place was full.

M: This means a couple of thousand people, a thousand people?

F: Oh no. The auditorium--I don't know the capacity, but I'd say it took two hundred and seventy-five people and we had three hundred there, something like that. That's why I

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say we quite possibly could have whipped the crowd over to Hogg and done well, but we chose the small auditorium. Also, there was to be a reception afterwards, coffee sort of thing, between it and the start of the first regular session, at which the Vice President would be present. He had agreed that he would come to that.

M: You introduced him then at the speech.

F: My job was in a sense sort of emcee, but I turned over the introduction to Joe Smiley. I gave the audience a little etiquette, that I would say, "Ladies and gentlemen, the Vice President" when I saw him coming, and they would stand up as he came in, whether they were Republicans or Democrats.

M: You didn't have any obligation to be sure he got around to places on time?

F: No. So in due time there was that little buzz, and he wasn't very far from on time. He came in, came striding like he does, long, almost loping strides down to the stage. You had to kind of go around and disappear through a door and come out on the stage. He came out and sat down, and the crowd was enthusiastic, and Joe Smiley introduced him and he gave his talk.

I brought in that bit about he was going to say whatever Joe Frantz wrote because I did not recognize a single word. I never did get any further comment on the speech from people like George Reedy, whom at that time I did not know. I knew of George. It was the first time, incidentally, I'd ever met Jack Valenti. That was before he married Mary Margaret, and Jack kind of became my local man in the auditorium. He came down early and talked to me and saw that the edges were smoothed over in preparation for the Vice President's coming and afterwards. Johnson did make a good speech; it was

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along the sort of lines which we had hoped for. But if I had any hand in it it was beautifully disguised, because I couldn't recognize any pride of authorship.

Then we went upstairs. Well, he went out first before the crowd was dismissed. I remember Colleen Kain, who was then my secretary in the Department of History, being down on the front row. He loped down off the stage and reached over and took her hand in both of his big ones and shook it mightily, to her great surprise, and then went on up the aisle and out and upstairs to the faculty lounge--or it may have been what they call the Blue Star Room, but up there on the second floor. We all adjourned up there, and he was very gracious and visited with people. After it had gone on a certain amount of time we naturally had some Austin brass out besides administrative, including the Chairman of the Board of Regents and a long-time Johnson confidant and supporter, W. W. [Bill] Heath.

In that same room Johnson suddenly just quit receiving school teachers and went over to Heath, and they got off in a corner. It was a scene that we've both seen repeated many times either in person or in pictures; Johnson sitting with his legs crossed and kind of leaning back and studying Heath while Heath talked very confidentially and then Johnson talked very confidentially, and the two men are up in each other's faces, talking whatever it is they were talking about. The crowd didn't mill around them, but stayed off at a respectful distance and talked. I suppose most of the crowd thought, well, they're hatching big deals. Anyway, that was Johnson with his chin back, with his eyes kind of looking down.

M: Did you have any idea what they were talking about?

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F: No. End of my association with Lyndon Johnson.

M: Wait just a minute here. A few questions. In the first place, was there any kind of feedback or results of this speech down here? Did anybody say anything to you about the speech?

F: John Silber came up right after the speech and said, "Well, what did you think of your Vice President," with an emphasis on your. I said, "Well, it certainly suited me," and he walked away without any comment. So I never did know what that meant, and it didn't worry me. Beyond that, I don't remember any specifically. I mean, it went off well and I was satisfied, and a lot of teachers from Monahans had gotten to shake hands with the Vice President of the United States and could go home and tell their high school superintendent they'd been somewhere, that sort of thing. Also, if they got in any trouble with the local PTA they could say, "Well, the Vice President said in Austin--," which was one of the things I had hoped for. We got good press coverage, I might add. KTBC, as you would guess, Channel 7, covered it.

M: One of our stock questions is to probe these first impressions of Lyndon Johnson, which you've been talking about. You've mentioned his loping gait, his greeting the people in the reception afterwards and getting off into the crowd and talking face-to-face. Any other impressions, say, his physical size, for example?

F: Not really. You see, this is kind of like visiting Afghanistan after you've been reading about it for thirty-eight years, everything on it. You don't really have many surprises because you probably know it better than the natives. Way back there in the spring of 1937 I had an instructor named Ray E. Lee, who had been editor of the *Austin American-*



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*Statesman* and had resigned and was piecing out his income as a part-time teacher with the University until he could get into something else. I was struck with Ray Lee because life was in some ways more formal in those days, and he was the first professor or teacher of any kind I'd ever had who, one, sat on the desk with his legs crossed, and, two, smoked a pipe in class. Neither of these things had I ever seen. He taught a rather good class, but he taught it quite informally.

Lee suddenly announces early in the semester that he is giving up his job to go campaign for a young NYA director named Lyndon Johnson, who didn't really mean anything to me since we didn't have television to tell us every day who everybody was. I was vaguely aware of the name and vaguely aware that the congressman for Austin had died, but I didn't know much about it. I was also vaguely aware as a callow student that they were building some kind of a dam up on the Colorado River, but they called it Marshall Ford in those days and not Buchanan Dam. No, I guess this would be higher than that; this wasn't the same dam, I take that back. That became Mansfield Dam. Buchanan Dam was on up there. But this was way in the future, so none of these things were very vivid to me. It was a class in which a number of the students knew each other, and we sat around and talked about the fact that Ray Lee must be half-crocked if he would give up a steady two hundred dollar a month University of Texas instructorship to go working on a wild hare scheme for some twenty-ish young man whom we didn't know.

Now you had any number of kids who were making their way through school at the time on NYA help. In fact my roommate, a boy named I. B. Hand from Weatherford,

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worked in the library on a NYA job. I think he got twelve dollars a month, and it was the difference between his staying in school and not. The average kind of modest person in those days could go through school--board, room, tuition--for about thirty or thirty-five a month. The University average a year or so later, I remember, was fifty-five dollars a month, which means that there were a lot of people under fifty-five, because you had of course, as always, a few wealthy ones who knew how to come down here and spend a hundred a month, something like that, which brought the average up. But you had a lot of kids going through college at sixteen to twenty dollars a month. Now they weren't eating much, but they were staying alive and they were going to school. So you can see what eight or ten or twelve dollars a month could mean in their lives.

Actually my roommate, I suspect, could have made it through college with some humping on his family's part without NYA help, but it certainly eased it. His father was a bank teller back in Weatherford, made a hundred fifty-nine dollars a month and only had the one child. That put him really in the upper echelons in Weatherford salaried people, because most people were making sixty to ninety dollars a month, and they weren't going to college either. So I. B. could have gone to college with his father humping a bit, but this eased the family strain considerably for him to have this NYA job. Jobs were so tight in those days, and my father could afford it without any strain, so I didn't even try to get one. You were actually discouraged from getting a job if you didn't have to have one, the same way they wouldn't let wives work or they wouldn't hire teachers whose family lived in that town because they could live at home; they had a place to live and eat, and they only hired people to whom it meant starvation.

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M: You were aware then, of the NYA?

F: We were very much aware of the NYA. It was all around us. There were NYA workers all over this campus, as you might guess. The University of course was working very closely with the state director.

M: Did you realize who the state director was?

F: No, not really, any more than I would say the average undergraduate now, even the bright average undergraduate, and I think kids are much more politically conscious. As I say, among other things, they're bombarded with state names all the time, and local names. I didn't every night for supper have Mayor Tom Miller's face looming up at me like you do Roy Butler now. Everybody knows who Roy Butler is. The students didn't have a vote, so the town just passed them by to a great extent.

So we were very much aware of the NYA, less aware of the director. We were very much concerned because Roosevelt the year before had been re-elected for a second term, carrying forty-six out of forty-eight states. That had intrigued people, to say the least. Then you had the Supreme Court fight, which was the first major dent in Roosevelt's popularity. You had had a lot of Texans turn on Roosevelt already because they thought his domestic program was too far out for their consideration. And Eleanor Roosevelt had made a number of unfortunate statements from the standpoint of Texas mores and morals, like you've got to teach your young people to drink, which had brought all the church groups down on her. And she had sat down in Tuskegee with the blacks there and had eaten, so that had raised the racial specter. You had a batch of

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things like that. And she didn't have enough sense to stay in the kitchen, which is where a president's wife belongs.

M: Then when Johnson ran--

F: Johnson comes out, and he's running on a "I'm for the Supreme Court bill." This is intensified by the fact that Hatton Sumners of the House was a congressman from Texas who led the House fight, and I believe the chairman of the Judiciary Committee then, against Roosevelt. In the Senate Tom Connally led the fight. So Texas was very much in the middle of the Supreme Court controversy. Mr. Sam, who by now was going to be majority leader--he became majority leader in 1937, and I can't remember whether it was before or after the Supreme Court thing--made the statement which was widely quoted when Roosevelt came out with his Supreme Court enlargement plan, "This is it." He was terribly angered over it, even though he was the most loyal of party men and a real stalwart for Franklin Roosevelt through the years. So the intensity on this was--I don't want to get off into other subjects--just fevered heat, and it was led by the same people who twenty years later are going to say, "Impeach Earl Warren" and "Damn the Supreme Court" and so on. Right now the Supreme Court as it was was their ideal, the greatest institution that God ever devised, to keep that mad President in check. Later on we're going to need the president to keep the Supreme Court in check, and it's exactly the same people who put up the same fight. So there was more than normal interest.

Now then, I'm not clear on my chronology.

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M: Let me ask you this. You're an historian and you've read a lot about this and interviewed a lot of people about it. What we've got to be sure about is how much you've learned about it influencing your story and how much you actually experienced.

F: I'm telling you a lot of what I learned about. I didn't know Hatton Sumners and David McComb.

M: What I'm curious about is, in 1937 when you were on the scene were you aware of Lyndon Johnson and what he was doing?

F: I was merely aware that Ray Lee had quit his job, which gave me a certain personal involvement. From that time forward I was interested in how he was coming with his campaign, because our instructor had got up and walked out on us to go look after this man's career, which we thought was plain foolish. We wanted to know, now is Ray Lee going to be shortly out of a job? Has Ray Lee, in other words, burned his britches--bridges, I mean?

M: Britches is all right.

F: Yes. Or is he moving on to something else?

Then we were very much aware of the Supreme Court issue because that was unavoidable. Lyndon Johnson was just one of ten or eleven or twelve, I mean he was out there running with the pack, except that he stood out because he was going down the line with Roosevelt and making a great deal of it. And then [we were aware] because we were interested in Ray Lee.

Okay, he's elected. Also, I might add that I stayed out on the periphery of student politics, but did a little. I suppose my closest local political friend, student political

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friend, was John Ben Shepperd, who later became something of a name in Texas politics. But I did very vaguely know John Connally, I was very much aware that Ida Nell Brill was sweetheart of the University, and I also was very much aware of Jake Pickle. What I can't remember, but I think it was Connally who was first student body president and then Pickle. I believe they're in that succession. But I did know that these fellows quit, at least they went with them, and later on I was particularly aware that Connally, who looked like a real comer in those days, rather than going into law practice when he finished law school went to Washington with Lyndon Johnson. And then Jake Pickle went.

You know, you begin to feel like these are kind of like number one law students at Harvard going down to clerk for Justice Frankfurter or Justice Holmes or something. All presidents of the University of Texas student body are going to go work for Lyndon Johnson! This makes you, looking at it as a student, much more aware if you are interested in student politics. I'll grant you that even now there are lots of people who don't know who the University of Texas student president is, and couldn't care less, but I did care and did pay some attention to it.

I had then this long consciousness. I also was aware of charges and countercharges through the years. Johnson was the local congressman; I was in and out of Austin through the years. Claudia Alta Taylor was maybe four years ahead of me, I don't know how many years ahead of me, in the School of Journalism. They took pride in her after he was elected. She was one of their girls who had made good by marrying this young congressman. So I'd hear her name around. She was more than an ordinary

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congressman's wife to me. And as I say, Ida Nell Brill then married John Connally, which was kind of the wedding of two number one people, male and female, in the University of Texas. Both of them also were big Curtain Clubbers, which was the dramatic group. John Connally was president of the thing, and she was active. So when the sweetheart of the University marries the president of the student body and they go, in effect, live with Lyndon Johnson, lines just keep feeding in to Lyndon Johnson.

I was very much interested, for instance, when Roosevelt ran for a third term in 1940. Johnson, unlike a lot of Texas congressmen, came out for him, and you've got all kinds of ugly rumors. It's hard to remember, for most people at least, how unsophisticated we were in those days. But we got all sorts of rumors that the New Deal and organized labor, which to most Texans was equivalent to the Politburo, were pouring money into Johnson's campaign here in Texas, and poor Texas people, honest Texas opposition couldn't stand up against this great plot that was hatched in far-off Washington. They always used that sort of thing against him.

The 1941 campaign was a real cliffhanger against Pappy O'Daniel. I've got some memories of that. Johnson had a lead, of course, and you can checkout the statistics on this, but I remember particularly that he had something like a thousand-vote lead with less than three thousand votes out, which you ordinarily would call unsurmountable. When they went to Pappy O'Daniel--this sort of titillated me--to ask him would he concede, he said, "Mrs. O'Daniel is in the Governor's Mansion praying." He got nearly all of those votes, which was either prayer or political maneuvering or loyalty at the forks of the creek or something. It was like a good World Series to most of us.

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I'm giving you a long answer to the fact that always Lyndon Johnson was a factor in my life. I didn't have to get acquainted with him as the years went by. He was very much, as he was in so many people's lives around here, on the scene. I remember after he was elected senator my father, who always suspected the worst of government, every time I'd go home would say, "Well, I was against Johnson, but he's turned around and is shaping up," meaning he'd voted against Taft-Hartley or something like that which he'd approved of. He would brag on Johnson: "Well, he's better than I thought he would be," and so on and so on. I was here when they had that very nasty campaign in 1946 with Hardy Hollers, which is where so many of these charges against Johnson really emanate. I couldn't avoid that.

Things were always coming up. I was apartment hunting following World War II, and there was a vacancy--I've often wondered if I had humped a little and made it what it might have done--at 1901-B Dillman out there in the sort of West Enfield area, very few vacancies in those days. I went out and looked at it. Helen and I were charmed by the place, but we couldn't afford it. Johnson owned the place, we heard. We weren't quite clear on it, but he might even have lived in one side of it. I'm sure if he didn't, in the oral history project we have any number of references--Connally lived out there at one time, and apparently Johnson's associates, when someone would come along and need a place to stay he'd say, "Come out and stay in my duplex." So I'm sure we would have gotten in just a neighborly way involved with a lot of Johnson people, but we didn't do it. But I was aware of that.



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So the years went by. I remember though--this is moving way ahead--the night of March 31, 1968, when he announced he was no longer going to run, a feeling of real emptiness, quite apart from the news, that this was, in this year of 1968, the first time in my whole adult life that Lyndon Johnson wasn't either running for office or had just run for office or was somehow a political factor in how I was going to vote. That had been going on now from 1937 to 1968. It was almost like losing if not a father image, an avuncular image. Suddenly part of your world's gone, like they just tore down the old homestead.

So here we are many hours later, in answer to your question of what were my first impressions. My first impressions were just confirmations largely. I may have even seen him in there over a period of time, but not anything spectacular enough that it's etched on my memory.

M: I have a feeling that in this oral history project, Lady Bird played a large role. So where has Mrs. Johnson come into this? When did you meet her?

F: I'm going through this somewhat tedious recounting of my life with Lyndon Johnson, although it may have something to tell you. I didn't see Johnson then after that--

M: After that 1962 speech. I went through the bread and butter bit and that was about it. The next time I had any dealings, I think, I'm pretty sure I called him when Walter Webb was killed. He was still vice president, and I told him that Webb was killed. It took a great deal of temerity on my part, but I don't have a very clear memory of that. He was president when Frank Dobie died, and I did call him that night, called him out of a dinner at the White House. The White House operator said, "Well, he's having dinner." I said,

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"Will you get word to him that J. Frank Dobie has just died and that I have Mrs. Dobie here." In a minute he came on and he said, "Joe, tell me about it." I told him, and he said, "Well, let me speak to Mrs. Dobie." I turned him over, and evidently what he told Mrs. Dobie helped assuage the grief considerably, to have the President of the United States comforting you at a time like this. It was over at Mrs. Dobie's home. He issued statements on both occasions about the loss of the two men.

He would come occasionally to a football game, and he would sit about the thirty-five or forty yard line, about midway up. My seats were probably eight or ten rows above. He did like--part of this is Johnson. This is not Johnson the politician, this is Johnson the man, who, as you know, tends to run late. He would come later. It is a cliché around here that all Texas politicians come to the game late and leave early so that they can be seen. I don't think Johnson does it that way, I think he's just late. But he would come, and he's got of course such a sharp eye, and he'd look around.

I remember one time he stood up, to my utter consternation because I wouldn't have thought he would have remembered me really because we just really had that one meeting, and he saw me back there about eight or ten rows back. This was in the latter days of his vice presidency. He reached across, as you can, whole rows of people, obviously looking at me. So I got up and reached down, and we shook hands across a number of rows of people, both of us leaning like two panels of an arch. He said in a voice that could be heard for a section around: "Joe, I've got to get you out to the Ranch. There are a batch of things that I need to talk to you about." Everybody looked at me, and there was another moment when you felt like--I knew that he just happened to spot

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me as the one familiar face, that he did have that great ability to call up my name, that he very much knew how to say the right thing. A number of my friends who were within earshot kind of did figurative sucking in of the breath: "Old Joe must be up to more than we realize." I knowing all the time that he was no more going to have me out to the Ranch to help straighten out the nation or anything, but it's a good hooker.

Okay. I don't have any more to do with him that I know of. Somewhere back there in 1960, I don't know how this came about, I signed a full-page ad for the *New York Times* for the Kennedy-Johnson ticket. The Nation's Artistic Leaders--it was people like me and Bette Davis and Frederic March. I think Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., must have set that up and picked me out of a hat. Actually Arthur, Jr., did contact me, but I didn't know Arthur, Jr., that well. I got to know him real well later, but I didn't know him that well then. Knowing Johnson's voracious reading habits, I'm sure he saw the ad endorsing him and tucked that away somewhere in his mind. But there's not very much to go on that.

I'd have to check chronology here, but I'd say in 1967 Liz Carpenter, whom I just knew very casually--Liz was behind me in school and we were aware of each other's name, that was about it--called me and asked me . . . . I'm trying to get this straight. No, she didn't call me. Stewart Udall asked me would I come by his office. By then I was on the National Parks Advisory Board.

M: Okay, that may be an important link. How did you get on that?

F: In fact there's one before then. I don't know for sure how I got on there. I think I got on there through two things. One was that I made a speech in Philadelphia at the meeting--it must have been the Organization of American Historians in the spring of 1964, I don't

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believe it was the American Historical Association. I made a luncheon talk in which I took for my topic a paper I never published on the fact that, again this is with Goldwater striding across the nation as the one independent American, the West was the most subsidized section of the United States and the most vociferous in denying it. I thought I made a very careful brief to support that through history practically everything about the West, grazing land which was on government pasture, the military which fought the Indians and brought money into the area and built the bridges and surveyed the road and so forth, it was all federal money.

That got picked up by the nation's press for some reason, because it was I think politically apt. Any number of columnists quoted from it; in fact, occasionally one still does. Somebody will send me a column saying where some guy--

M: Even though it was never published?

F: Yes. The AP picked it up. All the wire services did. "Texas Historian Discounts Independent Westerner," or something like that. I suppose there's another chapter to this, the fact that I came from Johnson's home state, and the fact that he and Goldwater were hot copy at this time, and the fact that I was taking historically an anti- Goldwater stand. At any rate, it got very much wide attention. I got a fan letter from Stewart Udall asking for a copy of the speech, which of course I was pleased to send him. The rarity there is that I had a copy. I have a bad habit of not finishing speeches but just having to give them ad lib, but I did have a copy. And he sent me a copy of a speech he made. I sent him something else, and he sent me something else. I had mail forwarded to me that summer. I was out in California for some reason. It may have been I gave a talk

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somewhere in there to the Pacific Coast branch of the American Historical Association in San Francisco, and that may have been what it was. A letter was forwarded from Udall out there asking me would I be on the Parks Board and describing what it was. That's one way.

Another way is that Udall had an inordinate admiration for J. Frank Dobie. He talked to me any number of times. He thought among authors Dobie and [Carl] Sandburg were the two greatest. He got Sandburg's house into the national park system. He talked to me about how we were going to get Dobie's, and could we please leave Dobie's study intact and all the grounds intact, *et cetera, et cetera, et cetera*. I picked this up through inference, that he wanted to name Dobie to the National Parks Advisory Board and that Dobie felt that his health wasn't up to it and said to Udall, "Why don't you try that young fellow, Joe Frantz?" I wasn't that young, but I was younger than Dobie. Dobie probably had a hand in it; in other words, I was second choice.

M: But you don't know that for certain?

F: I don't know that for certain, but there've been little hints dropped. None of them by Udall, but something out of the Dobie menage makes me think that was possible.

M: So you get on the National Parks Board then?

F: So I'm on the National Parks Board. I'm up there to meet him, and word is sent down to where the board is meeting that "Secretary Udall would like to see you this afternoon." I went up there, and he cautioned me to silence. He said, "Tell me what you know about the Big Bend," where I had visited, but there just wasn't as much as I would have liked to have been able to tell him. He said, "Well, I have a good reason to believe that Mrs.

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Johnson wants to take a trip out there, and you might keep it in the back of your mind because we may need more information."

So I kept it in the back of my mind. In fact, I began to read on the Big Bend and get better acquainted with it. Somewhere in there then Liz Carpenter contacted me one time and asked me would I come over to the White House and have tea with Mrs. Johnson. This was my first adventure into that area, except as a tourist in 1954 when I'd carried a three-months old sound-asleep baby like any other tourist on one of those ten o'clock morning tours. My greatest memory of that particular occasion, besides my impression of the White House was standing in line and so forth it took probably two hours, and Jolie started out weighing maybe sixteen pounds and weighed ninety at the end of the tour. It was summer and hot and against me, you know, our body heat giving off against each other [made it] kind of a miserable morning.

M: Your second visit was somewhat in contrast.

F: Yes. I went, and Mrs. Johnson received me and we went down to what was called the Gold Room. She sat on one divan and I sat on another divan, kind of love seat sort of things facing each other. Liz sat somewhere. And we visited.

M: Did you have tea?

F: And we had tea. It was ten-thirty or eleven in the morning. I told her what I knew about the Big Bend.

M: That's what she asked you about?

F: Yes. It was the first time I had been exposed to her, really. I was struck by her searching questions. Every time I'd generalize she'd particularize. "Well, now, Mrs. Johnson, if

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you go at a certain time you can in areas get blankets of wildflowers." "What wildflowers?" "Desert verbena." "Well, is this the Y-brand or the Z-brand?" I squirmed a little bit because I didn't know that much about flowers and herbs and whatnot.

M: Did you feel sort of like a graduate student in an oral examination?

F: Yes, I did. I felt, really, that I was somewhat less than sensational, but it was a pleasant time.

M: Did she just question you then and turn you loose?

F: That was all she said. She just wanted to know all about it. Liz took a fairly big hand in it. It turned out Liz had already been out there, kind of advancing it. As I recall, I may have even worked up a little kind of a projected tour. I'm not very clear about that. We talked about what she ought to see in the Big Bend, where she ought to stay, and that kind of thing.

Then, some time after that, I was called and told that I was invited on the group on the tour, and that I would board an Electra and away we would go. So I go. This was the Washington female woman's press corps, and we went on the trip. They had an evening out there on the flat above the basin campground; they had Cactus Pryor and me; they had Brownie McNeil, otherwise known as Norman, president of Sul Ross, to sing border ballads; and they had some young rock group come in from Sul Ross. We made jokes about the fact that they had an amplified sound system. Someone said, "Where's it hooked?" And we said, "Well, it's hooked to a power plant back in Alpine a hundred and five miles away, and they had quite a job getting that line a hundred and five miles out here." Some of them believed it.

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They were an odd crew, some of whom I've enjoyed and gotten to know real well over the years, and others who are easily forgettable. I remember one girl, I think with *Mademoiselle* magazine, came out there in satin slippers and a cashmere sweater to go walking on a trail in the Big Bend in which, to perpetuate the cliché, everything sticks, stinks, or stings--areas that would just tear a pair of satin slippers. She came for an afternoon garden party, which it wasn't. Mrs. Johnson on the trail wore a red-checked shirt and blue jeans, sneakers, and a straw hat.

M: The purpose of her going to Big Bend was what, then?

F: The purpose of her going to Big Bend was twofold. She had already done the Snake River with Udall. This was the first time, incidentally, that I had ever seen anybody jogging. We met at the airport in San Antonio, and Udall got off the plane and he led those news hens jogging. He would jog forward, and then he would turn around and jog backward while they caught up, up and down the runway while we waited for things to get set up. John F. Kennedy had started that march up the Chesapeake and Ohio thing, and Udall had been active in that and was a great physical fitness man.

M: On this trip was Mrs. Johnson and Stewart Udall and you people who were the entertainers and the news ladies.

F: Yes.

M: And that totals to about what, fifty people?

F: I imagine fifty people. There were a number of interesting things on that. Charlie Boatner had been a Johnson press man back in his senatorial days, and in the vice presidential days he had gone over to be Udall's press relations man at the Department of



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Interior. And he had been borrowed back for the trip. He set up the press facilities. We flew out to an abandoned military air base at Marfa, and as we came down in the Electra to land we had to gun back up because there was a herd of white-tailed deer on the runway. We never really got it answered whether, one, the National Park Service, or, two, Charlie Boatner, or, three, Liz Carpenter had gotten out there and whipped them onto the runway. Of course there were squeals of delight.

Then we got out, and there was a receiving line that must have been a quarter-of-a-mile long.

M: At an abandoned airfield?

F: Yes. There must have been six thousand people at the airport, in an area where there ain't six thousand people. They'd come from all over. It was a great welcome. Everybody who had any kind of position, I think, in West Texas was there in the receiving line. Mrs. Johnson was very delighted, and everybody was delighted because you presumably were a hundred miles from nowhere. We were picked up by a bus and taken over through Alpine. There were a number of signs in Spanish, "Bienvenidos!" "Pájaro de la doña." Bird of the Lady, or would it be Lady of the Bird, the other way around, and so on?

As we're going to Marathon, which is where you turn off the regular San Antonio to El Paso highway to go down into the Big Bend, of course everybody was worried about press coverage and how to get their stories out. Charlie Boatner was passed riding Mexican-style back on the rump of a burro, with a sign on the burro saying "Press Headquarters," which was a beautiful little touch, as you might guess. But they did set up

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a press headquarters. It wasn't all done by burro. They did have some problems. They had regular cars that went in and out to Alpine to take messages and get them out.

We went to Panther Junction, which is the park headquarters, and there we had an outdoor luncheon, a barbecue and beans sort of thing, with the wind just whipping like mad. I sat respectfully two or three tables--they were all long tables--away from Mrs. Johnson.

Just on personal memories, I had bought new white jeans, two pair of them for the trip, permanent press, wash and dry. This is my first trip of this sort. I had joined it that morning in San Antonio about eight-thirty or nine o'clock. Now we're having lunch in the Big Bend, and somewhere a plate of barbecue and red beans flew up in the air and just went right down the front of my shirt and all the way down. I was a plain mess from chest to at least knee, not only wet and miserable, but everybody was having to sit with elbows on their plates to hold them down. And Mrs. Johnson, I was struck with how well she did. They had of course the mariachi [band] that strolled around, and the gals were very interested in them, told them to take off their hats, and Mrs. Johnson had her picture made in big charro hats and all that sort of thing. We went around and examined all the identification of the plants and picked out all the various cacti identified right outside the park headquarters.

M: What time of year is this?

F: This is Easter.

M: Easter? So the weather is still relatively cool.

F: Thanks to Mrs. Johnson, I was not home for two Easter Sundays running.

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M: This is the first one.

F: Yes. Then we got on the bus and went on down into the basin. We checked in and at a certain hour we regathered and went up Lost Mine Trail, walked about two miles up it with Mrs. Johnson.

M: You're staying at the lodge up on the mesa?

F: Yes, motel-like accommodations, the newer motel sort. Now they've added accommodations since then that weren't there then. They didn't for instance have that fine dining room that they have now. If you ate like the public, you ate in that kind of Quonset dining room. The food, I might add, was uniformly sorry and overpriced.

Anyway, we did that. We went up the trail, and we came back down the trail. Mrs. Johnson exclaimed over things. Liz went around--was very much struck; this was the first time I'd seen this in real operation--and told everybody what Mrs. Johnson had just said, "My, isn't that a beautiful view!" And the next day you'd see in the *Newark Evening-Ledger* that Mrs. Johnson had said, "My, isn't that beautiful!" and so on. They took it all down. I'm not trying to demean, but I was struck with in a sense how eager they were to capture even the most offhand of statements and give them out to their readers, things that I probably would have just ignored. But we looked at the views and we discussed the plants and we had a park naturalist to tell us what it all meant. Then we went back.

That evening we went out on that flat. I gave my stint. I also introduced Cactus Pryor, not as Cactus but as an old-timer who'd lived in this area for years, all his life; that he would never talk to strangers, was extremely shy, but because of Mrs. Johnson we had

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persuaded him to come out and tell a few of the things he'd seen, and so on and so on and so on. There was a slight delay. Cactus was not on time because he'd been there to eat--this was all done by firelight, you know, and it was really a very lovely evening with the stars all out, the shadows of the cliffs around and kind of ghostly really. I think everybody felt they'd come to the end of the earth and were enjoying it. Cactus couldn't get past the Secret Service because they didn't have anybody on their list who looked like him. He was made up to look like a real old sourdough type. He'd ducked out as Cactus Pryor, looking like an Austin radio program director.

M: Which he really was.

F: And he had come back looking like an utter tramp. He had to talk his way in, and that slowed him up. He came on and he did his bit, and nobody knew who he was. That came off quite well. Brownie McNeil did what Brownie always does, and that is talk about the songs and sing well in both languages and go on far too long. If Brownie ever gets the stage, then he's got to sing every song in his repertoire. He has never learned how to sing three songs and sit down.

M: Didn't Mrs. Johnson know Cactus Pryor, though, personally?

F: He was program director of Channel 7, which she owned.

M: Yes, but she would recognize him when he came out as a sourdough?

F: Oh, yes, she knew. This whole thing was set up by Liz and Cactus and so on.

M: But it was a rather pleasant evening.

F: They were the in-group who had established it. It wasn't any surprise to Mrs. Johnson, but it was to most of the newspeople.

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I have one particular memory of that. Afterwards, I guess it was NBC by then, Nancy Dickerson retreated from the group and went further up on the flat. NBC TV cameramen went up there, and they taped her giving her telecast of this. She was all in white, and she was in something rather filmy. It was really like a gown. I don't know what it was, I'd almost swear it was organdy. She was up there with that wind whipping, and there in that dark night, which is absolutely dark, of course, since you have no artificial light except down below the cliff you've got the campground and the basin. But up there on the hill you've got nothing. Here's this bright spotlight and this almost apparition and good-looking person standing up there talking about "what a day it has been" and how "we have come out to the end of the earth" and so on.

I don't think I ever answered your question, which was, that Mrs. Johnson wanted, one, to publicize the Big Bend, which has always been an undervisited park. As you know from personal experience it's hellish in the summer, excellent from October till about the end of May--no, that's a little late, through the middle of May. It's not too bad in September, but down there in the river bottom it sets heat records every day. It's almost unbearable for a casual person.

The next day they got us up and took us by bus. Mrs. Johnson didn't travel on the bus, she traveled by a Park Service car from Marfa on. They took us by bus down to the upper edge of Mariscal Canyon. There are three canyons, and this is the shortest one. The view is presumed to be just about as good. It's the only one that can be done in one day, and they didn't want her to be overnight in a canyon. They had rubber rafts there,

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and we all got in. It wasn't quite that simple. By that time there must have been a hundred people.

M: That means twenty or thirty rafts or something?

F: Yes. The river was low. It was a real staging operation. It reminded of nothing so much as some of the commando raids we used to set up in World War II in the navy in the Pacific, and had all the confusion and shouting and swearing. The Park Service was in charge, but Liz was in super charge and she was just having one nervous breakdown on top of another. She was screaming at people and being ugly. One Secret Service man confided to several of us, "I keep this gun for just one reason." "Why is that?" "To shoot the first son-of-a-bitch that tries to rescue Liz Carpenter in case she should fall in."

But she was excellent in that role. She didn't plan for anything to go wrong. She was all the stories you've ever heard about top sergeants. Eventually we got everybody in. We had to get somebody in the water to push off because the water was low. We could have done with six more inches of water, and it was from that standpoint a somewhat miserable trip, because we hung on every boulder and rock and twig. One of us was always having to go over the side, sometimes all of us, to get the raft over the next little rapids because there just wasn't enough water. We rode sometimes. Mrs. Johnson rode. We had one young park guy, a temporary employee, fall in the water over his head, and we ended up rescuing him. It wasn't dangerous, except for the moment of panic when he disappeared from view and we had to bring him up. He hit a sinkhole somewhere. He left us for a moment.

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Basically it was just a pleasant trip. Cactus was in with kind of the grandmothers--if any of them read this, they'll deny it--of the trip. They were among the more matronly, or more mature, of the news hens. So they made all kinds of jokes. He was the only man on that particular raft. As I recall there were six or eight to a raft. Cactus had to do all the getting in the water. He said, "I did not know--" We had a philosophical talk about it when we finally did put in on a sandbar, and he said, "I've got to figure out at what point fun becomes work in your translation of things, because I've never worked so hard in my life." He christened his raft the *S.S. Menopause* and also in between times maybe referred to it as the *S.S. Change of Life*. No, I take that back, *S.S. Lydia Pinkham*, that was his boat.

Ours was not so spectacular. The only thing that was notable about ours, which did make it notable, the bikini had not become the professional uniform at that time, and a *New York Daily News* reporter who was young and had a good figure named Judy Axler got in ours. Judy had on a black and white polka dot bikini. So every male somewhere in the thing rode by ours and rode alongside ours, and we met everybody several times. Our raft had one other thing. It developed a leak. It sank. We had to have another raft brought.

M: These are rubber rafts?

F: These are rubber rafts, and it started a slight escaping of air. We didn't particularly notice it because there was enough noise going on. Particularly you had a lot of people who went around and around in circles.

We haven't gotten up to the Johnson project yet.

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M: I've got you a lead-on question and that is, how much actual contact did you have with Mrs. Johnson on this trip? I can see that you might be back in the crowd and say a few words to her, but just how well did you get to know her?

F: I was noticeable. I didn't get to know her. I was noticeable because, one, I made a talk and did some emceeing and she was sitting there, as you might guess, in the front row in a somewhat superior seat, even by firelight. Liz Carpenter, who is a great pet of mine, has certain attributes which I find negative--not just in her, but it has always puzzled me [that] I've got friends and relatives who do this. Liz from time to time when there was a lull in the proceedings, out on the trail, sitting around the luncheon table, would shout at me in a loud voice and say, "Joe, tell us a good West Texas story at this time." I never can think of anything when somebody asks me to tell something. Now then, something can happen or you can tell me something and that will remind me of something, and maybe you can't shut me up. But just to be asked to say something funny at a given time or to tell a humorous story . . . . So this came up several times, to my embarrassment, and I'd just look blankly at her and say, "Later, Liz, later." Because at that moment I couldn't even think what county I was in.

That was really about it. The party was small enough that everybody got looked over a batch of times. There was a bunch of those news hens, and there were a number of males along, too. Frank Tolbert, for instance, from the *Dallas News* was in a neighboring raft. In fact the only picture I have of me in a raft, he took from a neighboring raft. I remember he burned, quite a number of them burned, but he's got very pink skin. He wound up wearing a piratical-looking bandana around his head to keep the sun off.



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Everybody was given straw hats and bandanas for both practical reasons and also as part of the gift giving, souvenir giving, that goes on at that time. And then everybody was given a kind of scroll afterwards, suitable for framing, full of whereases and signed by Mrs. Johnson and Stewart Udall, dubbing you as a rogue of the Rio Grande or something, talking about all the hazards we had survived.

We finally disembogued at the southern end or eastern end of the canyon. I should mention a couple of other things that went on, one of them being slightly political. The canyon is quite narrow in spots. On the left side going down it's the United States and the right side it's Mexico, and sheer walls going up and here and there sandbars. Of course it's lonely. Mainly in some areas you can see straight out overhead and not very far forward or back. So people would beach their rafts, and when a sandbar appeared on the Mexican side of the river just land in Mexico. We made several stops like that. Mrs. Johnson would never get out. She was very careful not to get off U.S. soil, or to put it the other way, not to violate Mexican soil without proper credentials. So hers never went over to that side of the river.

As you would guess, the Park Service had advanced the trip beforehand and had picked a halfway spot where there was conveniently a rather grassy, more of a knoll than anything else, that came out from the mountainside. It could have been fifty yards long, and at its widest, from just a little old spit width, probably went up to thirty or forty feet. They brought in two gleaming Cen-Tex portable toilets, and the sun was directly overhead. The sun was beating down, and they gleamed in the sunlight, this aluminum, with no shade naturally at that stage of the game. We were told that when they had been

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erected several days before by the Park Service, although Park Service people are supposed to be nonpolitical when there are Hatch Acts and other such acts, that the park employee who was responsible for the construction of these two portable facilities had finished his work and had stood back at a distance and looked at it, and I presume in his heart had pronounced it good, but he had said, "I have the perfect title. I hereby christen thee the John Towers."

So we all ate a box lunch and climbed back in our rafts. Our clothes had dried while we were on the beach. Now Mrs. Johnson in a situation like that is utterly informal, very friendly, and sometimes it's almost difficult to remember that she's the first lady. She's not a professional glad-hander or anything like that; she's just enjoying herself and talking with everybody. Anyway, we get back in our rafts and go on down and in the water and out of the water the remainder of the trip. About, I'd say, four in the afternoon we come out of the canyon's mouth. There are buses waiting for us, and they take us on down to the area opposite Boquillas.

One other thing, as the canyon narrowness began to recede at one point, high up on the Mexican side with the sun behind them so that they were just black silhouettes stood a half-dozen or so Mexican horsemen aboard their steeds, looking down on what must have been to them a strange delegation down there. It just enraptured, of course, the White House women, the Washington women, because it looked like it had been etched out of some piece of medieval chivalry or at least frontier land. Because here are these black horses and these black riders outlined against that vivid blue sky. This was a

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perfectly poetic scene and not planned by either Charlie Boatner or Liz Carpenter, it just happened. They just came to see what was going on down below.

We picnicked then. In fact we had a steak dinner down there brought by the Odessa Chuckwagon Gang, which is a group of roughly two hundred Odessa men, some of whom are even the reputed millionaire types, who go all over the country as a civic activity. There's an interesting little fillip on that. They'd gotten steak for this group--it's roughly two hundred miles to Odessa--and they had come down and set up and gotten out the steaks and decided that whoever supplied them had given them subpar steaks. They are two hundred miles from any kind of real facility for trading them in, so frantically they had gone to the nearest telephone, wherever that was, probably back at the Basin, and had called Odessa and explained the problem, I judge with some outrage and some frantic quality. So a refrigerated truck had left Odessa, and they had sent their truck that had their meat in it back to meet it. The drivers met half way and exchanged trucks, and we got a new load of meat. In other words, they put on about eight hundred miles trying to get the meat there and back again.

There was a soft breeze sighing through the huisache trees and all that sort of thing, the willows, and it was just a very pleasant evening. Also, there was a mild violation, without any complicity on Mrs. Johnson's part as you might guess, as a number of the people forded over to Boquillas. In fact, there was a Boquillas liquor dealer waiting on the far shore for them, and he supplied them with things that the Park Service did not supply. So they came back then with a case of tequila and Carta Blanca beer. Also it had a kind of frontier and wetback quality about it. A good many Mexican kids

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and women and grownups stood on the Mexican bank and watched the party, so that you ate with an audience. Then we got in the buses and went back to the Basin.

This was my one physical contribution to the trip. I had suggested that they take a diagonal road, which was a farm-to-market road, back into Alpine rather than going back through Panther Junction. I had done that back in Washington, and that had caught on. It's a little shorter, and it would save some traversing of the area, most of which looks like all the other area. So we did that, and went on into Alpine and then went right on up to Fort Davis, where Mrs. Johnson dedicated the sort of renewed Fort Davis National Historic Site. Everything was bright sunshine, what Liz Carpenter always calls Johnson weather, and the fort looked good. Again, lots of townspeople [were] out, a great holiday spirit, and that backdrop. Then we went to the airplane and got aboard and came back to Austin.

One other little fillip on that trip of no importance to the Johnsons. This same Judith Axler, the girl in the bikini, came with the rest of them back here to Austin. They all went down to the Driskill, and a good many of them spent the evening in the Headliners Club. She's Jewish and it was some kind of a Jewish holiday, Passover maybe, and she went looking for a synagogue. In the course of the evening, without going into all the vagaries of the situation, she met a young Jewish psychologist at the University of Texas named Lester Turner. She went on back to Washington, and he dropped her a note and she had a slight vagueness of remembering his face. Somewhere in there he showed up in Washington on some kind of a trip and called her, and they went out together. He continued to drop her notes, and she started answering them.

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She was going to the West Coast on some kind of an assignment and coming through the Dallas airport, and by this time he was teaching at our medical branch in Dallas. So she arranged her schedule for something like a two-hour layover in Dallas, only her plane was way late. She got off the plane with just fifteen minutes to get to the next plane that she was transferring to, and he met her as she came in the line and walked her to the next gate and in between gave her an engagement ring. They've argued ever since whether this was the most romantic way to do it, but it was filled with shouts of "Which way?" and "Are you sure we're going the right way" sort of thing. Meanwhile he's trying to stick a ring on her finger and jostle through the crowds and get checked in.

M: Did Mrs. Johnson come back to Austin with you?

F: Yes, and went on out to the Ranch or somewhere. I mean, she disappeared.

M: And that was the end of it.

F: That was the end of the trip, as far as that was concerned.

I might add, incidentally, that those things are prorated, and that I eventually got a bill for my part of it.

M: You mean you helped finance this trip?

F: Yes. They just take the cost of the plane and charge everybody so much per head.

M: You mean this was not done at the expense of the Department of Interior?

F: No. The Johnsons were always very careful about that, and while they were quite generous people, they were also just good--and I think this may go to other administrations. You get a dollar's worth of travel, you pay a dollar sort of thing. It's a

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business arrangement. But being green, I was a little surprised when the first bill came. I got used to it later.

M: You mean this happened again?

F: It happened any time you took some kind of facility they'd chartered. I believe this was American Airlines.

M: Now we've got the lines established between you and the President.

F: This is taking it from my standpoint; I don't remember what the bill was--seventy-five dollars for the whole business? But it was seventy-five dollars that wasn't in my budget. But at the same time, how many people would pay seventy-five dollars for several days with the First Lady, including floating down the Rio Grande? I more than got my money's worth.

M: Yes, if you want to put it that way.

F: Okay, now then, I've got to go back in this long-winded thing. I had dropped an occasional note to some contact, at least in the days of Kennedy. I had sent Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., a note or two or three on things that I thought might be worthwhile for the administration to improve itself, according to my lights. I had used principally as my contact under Johnson Jack Valenti, whom I had met there in the spring of 1962, since I knew his wife. I didn't know Jack except I just knew who he was. Jack was always very responsive. I remember sending him one on how you could break that federal aid to education impasse and so on.

Somewhere in there I had said that I thought that the Johnson Administration would be remiss if it did not do something about history while he was in the White House

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instead of having to reconstruct after the scene. I know others must have been doing the same thing. Somewhere in there one of the historical associations, I believe it was the Organization of American Historians, had sent a kind of an official message to the White House saying that they felt that Mr. Johnson's administration needed the presence of a historian. Somewhere in there, and this is about January or February of 1966, Jake Jacobsen--he was a White House special assistant at that time--and I had discussed the problem and evidently it had reached Johnson and someone had been told, I don't know if it was Jake, to "do something about our history." The upshot was that Jacobsen contacted the two major historical associations, the Organization of American Historians and the American Historical Association, and had asked them to prepare a list of five persons who would be suitable for running a White House history program in the Johnson Administration.

Somewhere in there, too, I know that Martin Ridge, who then was at San Diego State and is now the editor of the *Journal of American History* at Indiana University, had written the White House, and he had some kind of at least semi-official capacity with the OAH then, and had said that he thought Johnson was ill-served by people like Eric Goldman. He thought the type of historian Johnson should have would be someone who did not try to measure Johnson always against a Princeton or Ivy League mold and fault him where he didn't fit, someone who did understand his references to the caliche blinding your eyes in the hot summer sun and that kind of thing and all of those homey references, who understood how Johnson operated--in other words, who had the kind of a background to absorb Johnson.

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M: Okay. Wasn't there a certain resistance by the White House to an historian because of the former presence of Eric Goldman?

F: I don't know. I've got hearsay on this.

M: You don't know if there's a barrier to overcome then because of prior experiences with historians?

F: No. I think Goldman was in some ways so little known to Johnson. He had put together this White House Festival of the Arts, which was, in my opinion and lots of other opinions, a really fine conception but was not very well checked out in personnel, particularly that Robert Lowell situation. No, I think most anybody with judgment would have known that Dwight MacDonald is one of the better frauds in the country and just simply adores being prickly and uncourteous, would have known that he would do something like he did, which was to come to the White House with an anti-Johnson petition and try to pass it among all the guests while he was sipping Johnson's wine. I've had my fingers burned by MacDonald in other ways. But Goldman was over in the women's wing of the White House and I think was totally ignored by Johnson.

M: One other question about all of this. They started talking about this in 1966.

F: I should say one thing. The two organizations did get together, and they did agree on the list. They did send in five names, and I was one of the five.

M: Okay. Are they talking about oral history at this time, or just some kind of history project?

F: They're talking about history.

M: But they're not specific.



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F: No, they're not telling the President how to run his program. They're just saying that he ought to have an historian in the White House. You're asking how I get mixed up in things. My name shows up there.

M: Yes, but you're not talking specifically about oral history as such, just an historian on the scene?

F: Yes, someone to stand around to know what's happening.

M: Do you have any idea who recommended you?

F: The Organization of American Historians and the American Historical Association.

M: Just on the list?

F: Yes. I had been active in both groups and had been on the executive council of one and was program chairman one year. I had been on the American Historical Association's Committee on Committees and had had a hand in putting together most of the committees. In fact, I think I was chairman of it, a batch of things like that. I was known and useful.

M: So then what happened?

F: So then what happened is that Jake Jacobsen quit to retire into private practice. You've lost the man who's got prime responsibility, and Vietnam gets bigger and history just gets submerged. They've forgotten about it. Now then it stays there.

I meanwhile had made another trip with Mrs. Johnson. I had gone out once to their ranch on Lake LBJ when Laurance Rockefeller was down and had given a talk on what Texas was all about. There were other people there, but Laurance Rockefeller is the one I remember best because he was interested in backing Mrs. Johnson's beautification

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program. I had gone with John Connally to talk about Texas, he and I kind of shared it, when all the foreign diplomats were brought down for the opening of HemisFair. We had gone from HemisFair on a bus tour up to the Ranch. I had sort of run the bus public address system and told them what it was all about. I had recommended to Cactus Pryor and Liz that they get the Albany Fandangle to bring their sampler down to the Ranch for that group, and that had worked out and had gone off beautifully.

I had gotten into some other things that don't come to mind right now. I had gone out to talk with Mrs. Johnson some time about restoration projects there in Johnson City. I was just kind of always showing up. Somewhere in there, in appreciation she had Helen and me and some more people out to the Ranch. I had never seen the President on these occasions, but he was there on that particular occasion. About the only thing he said to me directly was--I mean, I figured again that he was not very clear on me--he just comes up and looks down at me and says, "You're a friend of Mary Margaret's, aren't you?" I said yes, and he said something like "Uh-huh" and walked on off. You know what that was worth, my epitaph. So any knowledge he had of me really would have come from her. I had gotten to know her by this time fairly well.

M: Her being Mrs. Johnson?

F: Her being Mrs. Johnson. I think Ransom must have talked to him; Ransom was always talking to him about transfer of papers down here and that sort of thing. Ransom and I had talked together a great deal about what ought to be done with Johnson's papers before there was a library here and how these must not get out of Central Texas, and preferably not to any other university or college elsewhere. We didn't want a repetition of the Sam

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Rayburn thing, stuck off in a corner somewhere and lacking any kind of official sponsorship. So he and I would occasionally talk about that. Once, there, Ransom had talked to me about my getting involved in it. I remember when it was first mentioned he said, "There are two very difficult women that I can't work with, and I think they're slowing up the whole process." They were Dorothy Territo and Juanita Roberts, both of whom have great attributes. But some people leave them cold, and evidently Ransom was one of those who couldn't communicate with them.

Then comes the March 31 speech, 1968, saying he will no longer run, and my guess is he'd begun to think rather heavily about a history program. In there he told Doug Cater it was now his responsibility. Somewhere in there I was called by Cater, this would be in April, and asked to send in a list of five names of young historians who might could help him with a history program. They wanted comparative fledglings. That's where I sent in your name, and Paige, *et cetera*. I think I may have contacted you and asked you could you go, that this was in no way an offer or anything else, but would you be interested if it came up. After contacting people I sent in names and heard no more about it, got an occasional query from someone I had queried like you saying, "What do I do next?" And I said, "Nothing, it's out of my hands."

Meanwhile, of course, the White House had gotten busy, getting all these individual histories of the agencies and bureaus and departments written. They were to have an outline by June and a rough draft later in the summer and a final draft by November. Each agency was to treat this as a high priority assignment, not put some lowly clerk on it but to get somebody who was high in the hierarchy and who does have

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access to the materials, and so forth. That was about the only guideline they gave them because they didn't want them to look like they were White House dictated or mechanized or anything else. With the result that one agency in its first outline sent in about a six-page outline and another one sent in a forty-page outline. The eventual histories ran the same way, from compact fifty-page affairs to some that ran more than a thousand pages. You can guess whose were easily read and this sort of thing. And it was to play down personalities. Now you've got a history program of a sort going, to bring some sense at least of date and direction out of all of this mass of what went on. But I had no hand in that.

In late May I had been asked to give the commencement address at Schulenburg High School, and I had been sick for several days, a virus or something. I was actually in bed, and the question was whether I could make it. For some reason Helen couldn't take me, and we called Colleen [Kain] and Suzanne [Kain] and they agreed. I mean, I was not able to go down by myself.

M: For the sake of this tape, you ought to say it was your secretary and her sister.

F: Colleen Kain, who was administrative secretary at that time at the Department of History, and her younger sister Suzanne Kain, now Mrs. Suzanne Rhoads, who was a secretary in the Department of Computer Sciences. They took me and turned me over to my host, the local school superintendent and a good Schulenburg German named Winkelmann, and then they went off to Schulenburg's lone movie house to see whatever was playing that night and get a bite of supper themselves. Winkelmann had me to dinner at his house. I went out, and the commencement was held in the Schulenburg High School stadium in

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the night air. I gave my talk and then stood around while everybody filed up to get their diplomas and various honors were passed out. But the thing was, the combination of my illness and I guess the night air, I believe thirty seconds after that--the superintendent shook my hand and said the usual amenity like "That was a fine speech," and when I went to thank him I didn't have any voice. It lasted through the talk and quit immediately when I did. So I didn't talk the rest of that evening, just coughed now and then, and that was mainly my conversation.

The next morning someone called, I think it was Doug Cater, and said the President wanted to talk about a history program and when was I coming to Washington. I was coming up, I think, for the Committee on International Exchange of Persons, some meeting in Washington I was coming to, on Tuesday. He said, "Well, why don't you come on Monday?" I think I may have offered that I could come a day early. He said, "Why don't you come right straight to the White House?" Somewhere in there, too, Mrs. Johnson had had Helen and me up to spend a night in the White House, and we had stayed in the Lincoln Room. On that particular occasion we did have a little visit with the President up there on the second floor, and then we went out in the Sun Room. There were several of us that were there; the Roy Butlers were over in the Queen's Room, and Jewel Malechek from the Ranch, Dale's wife and her kids, and that was about all. So we had that little bit of contact, and I had been to the White House now on a couple of occasions. I also knew something; therefore, when they invited us they sent a White House car to meet us at Dulles and bring us in, which did happen.

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So I said to Cater, if it were Cater, "I believe it would be simpler if a White House car met me and took me to the Washington Hotel and let me check in and then brought me right on over to avoid the delay of buses and taxis," *et cetera, et cetera, et cetera*. He agreed. So they did that. I took what we now call the Jake Pickle Special, that nonstop morning flight up there, and got in I would say around one. By one thirty-five or so I was at the White House and in Cater's office, talking mainly to him about what was going on and not getting a very clear picture of what was going on. The President evidently wanted some kind of an oral history program. Somewhere in there then they said, "The President will see you now." So Cater and I went up to see the President, and we had a short visit in which we just talked about all that needed to be done and all that was being done, no great insights in the talk, more or less like a small committee meeting.

M: Was he talking in terms of oral history, too?

F: Yes.

M: Did this surprise you at this time, or did you have in mind that this was going to be an oral history project, or what?

F: Yes. I think Cater had mentioned it that morning when he called me. My problem was that I didn't have my voice back very good, and about half of the things Johnson asked me I responded by going into a coughing fit first, or starting a sentence and then breaking it up with a bunch of hacks. It was for me a somewhat humiliating performance, in which I felt I was at something less than my best.

Then the day was, as I came to find out, an almost typical Johnson day in an appointment way, in that I was turned back to Cater, who took me around and introduced

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me to other people. Somewhere in there they were having a meeting of the labor press. The President was going to receive them in the East Room. He said we ought to come to that. We went to that, and he or Cater one introduced me to a number of people. Hubert Humphrey came in, and Humphrey's status was still unclear. But Johnson said that Hubert was going to make the finest president that ever was, and a smile wreathed Humphrey's face. I met Willard Wirtz for the first time, and I think Ramsey Clark was there, as I recall, and a bunch of editors of labor newspapers and magazines and so on. I picked up a lot of people there.

Then I suppose I wandered back with Cater. I never could see where I was quite dismissed or could leave. I had made several overtures because I knew Cater had things to do besides entertain me. But somewhere in there, why, the Johnsons sent the word down, "Cater, get your wife over here for dinner." As I recall, she had already eaten; she being used to that kind of White House widowhood never bothered to wait for him. But she came on over anyhow. Johnson had me eat up there on the second floor. Mary Rather was there, Doug Cater and his wife who just came and sat, and Johnson just talked like he does. I was fascinated, of course, also fascinated by the fact that he liked the dessert and ordered a second helping, and he got a second helping. They had some cookies that he particularly liked. His weight concern was a matter of public knowledge at that time. He was trying to cut down. About the third time he sent back for cookies, I believe it was Mary Rather who said, "Mr. President, you know Mrs. Johnson wouldn't let you have those if she were here." And he said, "Now Bird's out there having dinner with Barry Goldwater tonight, and if she can run around in Arizona with him I think I can

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sit in my own house and eat whatever I want to." So he got some more cookies, and he ate quite a few.

Then we moved into the upstairs sitting room and he sent for Cyrus Vance, or Cyrus Vance came in with Mrs. Vance. McNamara was sent for, but he wasn't available. Vance was back from Paris to report in on whatever there was to report, and there was a good bit of talk about this and that. Somewhere in there, I felt this illustrated the problem. You know, Vance was one of Johnson's most loyal and efficient people. Johnson got to talking about how he and A. W. Moursund had rigged up a set of signals for dominoes so that they could beat anybody in Johnson City. It was a matter of words. "The double-six was the 'old lady,' and I'd say to A. W., 'Moursund, have you seen the old lady around town lately?' He'd say, 'No, she hasn't been in for some time,' and I'd know he didn't have a double-six so I wouldn't move with that in mind." They could just beat everybody. The point of this is that Vance leaned over to me some time in the evening and said, "Just how do you play dominoes?" Kind of just a little flash of insight. This was part of Johnson's problem with some people. They don't understand how you play dominoes. They don't understand so many of the references that he goes to.

From the time of the industrial editors' meeting in the East Room until I left the White House about midnight that night, it was just an intermittent crossing of paths with Johnson, either by accident or because he'd send for me to come be in on something. Somewhere in there, I think it was as early as the industrial editors' meeting--in fact, I know it was--he introduced me to one or two people. He said, "I want you to meet Joe Frantz. He's running my history program." Now he never had asked me, and I never had



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said yes. You got that feeling that others have gotten of saying, "I am?" or "What history program?"

So anyway, I went out into the night about midnight and went back to the Washington Hotel feeling that it had been quite a day. The next day I had my regular meeting, and I went to it. Doug Cater said I ought to come back and talk before I left town, and I did. That would have been Tuesday when the cabinet met. Doug said, "I looked for you this morning," and I said, "Oh?" He said, "Yes, the President looked up in the cabinet meeting this morning and said 'Where's Joe Frantz? I thought he'd be here.'" I wasn't there. He told Cater, "I wanted to introduce him to all the cabinet since they're going to be working with him." I was sorry I missed it because I never made a cabinet meeting: my one opportunity that I didn't know I had, and I innocently blew it.

I came on back to Texas then. I had at least tacitly agreed that I'd do it. I went in and told Robert Divine, who was then chairman.

M: You'd agreed to do it. Did you know what you're going to be doing?

F: I knew I was going to run some kind of an oral history program.

M: One side question here. What experience had you with oral history at that point? Did you know what you were doing?

F: I had a very limited experience in my younger days as a newspaperman, which consisted, among other things, of taking interviews. I had concluded, and I had actually done the major portion of a videotape series with the more or less forty leading historians in the country. Walter Webb had conceived it and had started it. We did ninety-four videotapes altogether, and there were twenty-three done when he was killed in an

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automobile accident on March 8, 1963. So I did then seventy-two of them, and he did twenty-three. I had that sort of experience. I guess basically that was about it.

I did agree to come back home Tuesday or Wednesday, it must have been Tuesday, and wind up the week and whatever else I had to do around the University and come back to Washington. I was back up there the following Sunday to stay, and without being very clear on what I was doing. They gave me an office in the EOB, 121, and I'm in and out with Johnson. Johnson asked me to prepare a budget, which I did during the week I was back here. I prepared a budget which, as I recall, ran about a hundred and twenty thousand dollars for a year and was projected two years. When I got back to Washington Cater and I went over it and agreed to redo it at two hundred thousand dollars, and said we might as well go after it. We did that. We never did spend that much. We were allotted that much for the first two years. The first year I think we spent something like a hundred seventy-four thousand dollars, so we had a carry-over into the next year. It wasn't very clear where the money was coming from, and my status was never clear. It was the sort of thing that I think would have driven a precise person up the wall.

Somewhere in there Johnson asked me, "You're going to need a secretary." I said, "Yes," and he said, "Do you know any here in Washington?" I said, "The only one that I know is a cousin of my assistant director down at the Texas State Historical Association, a girl who works for the CIA." He said to somebody, "Get her name and get hold of her." So the next thing that I knew, Mary Dale Ellis had been given me on loan as a secretary. Mary Dale was not really a secretary. She wasn't [a secretary] at the CIA: I think she

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was some kind of an analyst. But she had secretarial skills of a sort; namely, I think she always thought of herself as co-director, or maybe as director and I was working for her. Again, she wasn't the right person for the job except for one thing, she knew how Washington worked, and nobody ever told me anything. I was just stuck in the EOB and told to get to work without having any idea even of how to get stationery or anything else, in a messy old room that looked like it was ready for a fire sale. I moved in there about Friday, moved in being a euphemism, or Thursday. The next morning I came in, new gold carpeting, new furniture, it had been completely cleaned. And used to the more slow, bureaucratic ways around the University of Texas, I was flabbergasted. They had come in overnight and completely redone the whole thing, a small suite, two rooms, high ceilings, looking in on the inner courtyard.

M: Did you have access to the motor pool, too?

F: Yes. I never knew how I got it. I was there two months before I ever ate at the White House Mess. Somebody happened to take me down there one day and said, "Why don't you ever eat there?" I said I didn't know I could. There was no kind of manual of what either my perquisites or my restrictions were, and as I say, Mary Dale was invaluable because she could scrounge and she was always talking to people. She knew everybody in the building before she left, and she knew exactly what she could get out of whom and what she could get invited to and what she couldn't and so on and on and on and on.

M: Were you officially a member of the White House staff?

F: No.

M: What was your status?

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F: I had no status. I was terribly unclear what I was doing. Johnson talked to me once about it and said, "I'd kind of thought I might put you in John Roche's place." John Roche was resident intellectual, as they liked to call him, and later dean at Brandeis. He had come out of the academic world. But I never went on the White House payroll. The only income I had that summer, I had a half-time job back here as director of Research in Texas History. I just kept an account of my expenses and borrowed money at the bank and held on with faith, and among other things tried to work out the finances.

Doug Cater and I went up to New York and met with the Columbia people one evening. This was very early, while Columbia was still under siege.

M: This was the Columbia oral history project.

F: Yes. We had to be let in and out. Louis Starr and that group. We tried to find out what they were doing and what they thought we ought to be doing.

M: Did you get budgetary information from them?

F: Yes, except that you can't transfer their experience when you talk about full-time faculty and staff people who incidentally do oral history. I think they got fifteen dollars, maybe eighteen dollars, for an interview. Well, you and I know it's not worth it, but we're talking about full-time people who are doing other things and are drawing their pay regardless. This is just a little extra frosting that they get when they do an interview, and that kind of thing.

I told President Johnson in there that I would like to bring somebody from Austin--because I had three people down here that I had worked with and I thought they were better than anybody new that I didn't know in Washington--but that they'd come

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high. He said, "How much?" I said, "Well, around ten thousand dollars a year." And he said, "Well, that's no problem. Get her." That's how first Ruth Mathews and then Colleen Kain came into the picture. The third one I would have brought was a girl named Judy Borgsteadt, who became Judy Boyd, but she preferred to marry an Aggie and move to Houston to coming with me. She was the fastest gun on the campus as far as a typewriter was concerned, with a strong work compulsion, known principally while she was in the History Department before she moved over--I raided her when I left the History Department--for hitting unwitting professors in the groin with her typewriter. Somebody was always clutching himself and running out in the hall and sitting quietly on a bench because that smoking carriage on the typewriter was just whang, whang, and somebody would be coming along, the office was crowded, and down went another professor. We looked on her as a menace.

M: To probe a little bit further into your relationship with the White House, you just sort of had to figure out where you fit in then? You were never given any specific guidelines on what you could do and what you couldn't?

F: And I must say it fit my nature. Nobody ever checked on me either. I could have spent the summer over there sleeping.

M: Okay now, in regard to the University of Texas and your status, what did the University do? Did they put you on special--?

F: No. It's summertime, so I'm automatically off teaching budget, and I've got this twelve-months' appointment as half-time director of Research in Texas History. So I just in a sense ran it long distance. I had Tuffly Ellis as an assistant, and he could run it, although

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I think that may have been the summer that Tuffly was gone. I guess Ruth Mathews ran it. I came home some.

M: As the project went on, were you given leave of absence from the University, or did you just sort of continue everything you were doing?

F: I never took a leave of absence from the University. I never left the University payroll, because what I did when we finally got some money was present the University a statement of my expenses for the summer and got recovery, which helped get me out of the hole a little bit, at least back even. I never got any salary for that period, except for the half-salary I was getting, but I did get my expenses back.

They did think that I ought to get a strong advisory board, I was talked with about that.

M: Who was they?

F: They being first of all, Doug Cater. He's the one I worked most closely with. In this matter of personal relationship, Doug and I were always correct and friendly, congenial but never really got warm or intimate. I would have worked maybe not as well, but more closely with someone else. Joe Califano and I have always--or at least I have felt a closeness to him. I presume he must have reciprocated or I wouldn't feel it, that sort of thing. But Doug's and my relations have always been quite correct, quite cordial but no warmth, which is neither here nor there. But we saw a good bit of each other at that time. He was really my White House contact.

George Reedy is another person that's easy to warm to. I never was clear what George was doing there, but I would go over and talk with George kind of on the

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philosophical side, which George was good at. As the President once said to me, "George is just primarily a talker, and there are times when he talks too damned much and doesn't get off that big butt of his," which I think is probably true of George.

I had a little difficulty with the board of advisers. They wanted to put several people on that I didn't want. Cater, like most kind of intelligent periphery persons, knew who names were and "Why don't we get so-and-so?" I knew so-and-so from, pardon the expression, a different vantage point, and I didn't think he was anyone I wanted fooling around with a project in which I was closely involved. So we hashed that back and forth some.

M: This is with Doug Cater?

F: Yes. This is the only time I got a chance to look at the FBI files because Mildred Stegall, who was in charge of those, when I had completed my group--and you've always got that ticklish thing, anything associated I suppose with the White House, and certainly with Johnson, they didn't want to invite anyone who wouldn't accept. So I'm writing those ambiguous letters about "This isn't an offer, but be thinking about it and if it works out, would you?" and so on. So I've got my ten acceptances in, and then Mildred Stegall calls me in and I think every last one of them flunked the FBI test, which horrified me.

M: What's the FBI test?

F: I mean *her* FBI test. She runs the routine check on the White House records. Okay, you've got names like Allan Nevins, John Hope Franklin, and so on. They'd all, at some time or other, been seen at some rally for this, that, or the other, and they all had black marks against them by the FBI. She showed me the files, and I was horrified and had no

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desire to see mine, because I almost conferred sainthood on two or three of these people, you know, and still do. But the other thing was that after she'd told me they wouldn't do I said, "Well, in my book they *are* the best historians, the best Americans, the best everything. They're the kind of people that I approve of." I refused to believe any of it, and that's the last I ever heard. I suppose if there's a list of more suitable names, I don't know.

I have since then, when I've heard people talk about the dangers of the FBI file and all of this intelligence gathering, been on the side of the people who think these files ought to be destroyed, ought never to have existed, that they ask questions and accept information and so forth, just based on my experience with a half dozen or so files. Frank Vandiver, acting president of Rice at the time, nothing disloyal, but why in the file "supported Henry Wallace in 1948"? That was the first year he was old enough to vote. With the *ipso facto* or some sort of inference that this is somehow pro-communist.

But anyway, I got my board. Cater felt there ought to be a Texas historian on it. I want to bring this up for just one reason. This is what you call falling in a pot and coming up smelling like a rose. Cater wanted Bill Goetzmann, who had just won the Pulitzer Prize, and a hot young property, very good, very creative. He didn't know Goetzmann, but he knew we had a Pulitzer Prize winner here at the University of Texas and that he was going to be the new chairman of the department and all that, and he was thirty-two, a ridiculously young age. I'd seen enough of Goetzmann to know that I wouldn't be my own director, and I kept saying no. I must have said no eight or ten times on that, and he kept saying, "But I think it looks bad you don't have somebody from



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Texas." We put Harry Ransom on there because he was a natural, but only in an ex-officio position as chancellor. I said I'd like Frank Vandiver, for whom I have a great deal of admiration both as a historian and as a person. Finally he consented to Vandiver.

Okay, meanwhile I've gotten together on one occasion with McGeorge Bundy out here at Lakeview to talk about a Ford Foundation grant to the project, and we've done this thing and that thing and are trying to raise money and talking to foundations to get something started. I really think probably, I mean this kindly, that President Johnson thought as far as financing was concerned, without my going on the federal payroll or the whole project on the federal payroll, which he and I both agreed was not a good idea, that we ought to keep it away from any official government status. Because then we'd be captured and be open to the charge [of bias], no matter how objective we were.

I'd like to say in his behalf that his attitude in this whole thing has been absolutely circumspect. It has been a lot better than I had any reason to believe it would. He has never interfered, and I know he hasn't liked some people I've seen and some things that have surfaced and so on. But if he has been unhappy he has muttered to someone else and never to me and told me I ought to do so-and-so. His sole advice, and it's not interference, but I mean if you want to look for any intrusion, is to say, "You ought to see David McComb before he dies," that kind of thing, which I look on as just helpful hints. Once in a while he'd tell me about someone who was relatively obscure but that he used for that fellow's particular moment in the Johnson history, and that he was a good man. One name that comes to mind that I probably would have run on to but I didn't know at the time--"Listen, now, you put Bob Jackson down in Corpus Christi on your list. He

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was a good man when I needed him." I mean that kind of person. I didn't know Bob Jackson in Corpus Christi. I think you may have interviewed Bob Jackson.

M: Yes. You're saying then, that President Johnson--

F: President Johnson kept hands off, except to make an occasional personnel suggestion.

M: Okay. Given Johnson's sensitiveness about what's said about him, newspapers, articles, *et cetera*, don't you think that's a little bit unusual? Why wouldn't he try to guide what history is going to say about him?

F: I think in this case he's acting like an historian.

M: Why? I mean, that's out of character.

F: That is, "Gather the evidence, and I'll come out good. I may temporarily be annoyed, but if you'll get the whole story--" Now this is jumping ahead, but through second and third and fourth parties I judge he was rather rightfully upset with the Keppel-Lodge, Martin Waldron interchange in the *New York Times* when we first made available those tapes at the time of the opening the education papers this past January of 1972. You know, in effect, "Is this what oral history is going to do to me?" So that didn't set well. But this is a problem you face, particularly on the momentary sensation.

We had in those papers some good Keppel stuff. We had for instance several interviews with James Gaither. I had Harry Middleton look at all of them because they were the first ones they'd seen, and he felt from a historical standpoint that Gaither was sensational. It's all solid, meaty stuff on how programs were put together, but that wasn't the sort of thing that reporters were looking for. They were looking for Henry Cabot Lodge saying to Francis Keppel that he used vulgarities to get Johnson's attention, which

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is not really fundamental. But Johnson must feel at times on something like that like, you know, in 1863 they concentrated on Lincoln's telling off-color stories. But that's not what he's remembered for today, and therefore, "I've got to live through that and hope it all comes out down the line." He's a human being, and he's got to want to see some of it to come out now.

M: How about Mrs. Johnson, or even the White House staff? Did they try to put any pressure on you to guide the President?

F: No, I've had a completely free hand. I have periodically, and this is not too frequent periods, without any kind of a schedule, I'd say we've averaged once every nine months, gotten together with Mrs. Johnson and gone over the status of things and have received from her the sort of question: "Who's he? Why would you want to fool with him?" Or the other one: "Why haven't you seen so-and-so?" That sort of thing, which is just an interested person looking at it from the outside. But then when it would break up, I'd go my own way and do it my own way for better or worse.

M: Conversely, did President Johnson or Mrs. Johnson or White House staff open doors that would not otherwise be opened for you?

F: I've got to say yes, without any concrete evidence. Let's put it reversely. If Johnson had let the word get around, "Don't have anything to do with that damn Joe Frantz and his tape recorder," he could have closed doors all over creation. But I do know that here and there in some public fathering or some private gathering he would say to someone once in a while, "Say, have you done an interview for the project yet?" He is not specifically interceding for Joe Frantz with David McComb, but David McComb looks on it as

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friendly. I even went to a few parties in Washington which were almost divided into a have and have-not party. Half the people had been interviewed and half hadn't and were wondering why they weren't good enough to be interviewed. I've talked with Mrs. Johnson about a few people, especially Mayor Daley, whom I haven't been able to get to.

M: You mean talked to her to ask for her help in getting the appointments set or something?

F: She has said she would, but we never have kind of worked out a time. Like right now would be good for me to go see Mayor Daley, but I'd say that between now and November there's no point in my trying to see Mayor Daley. He's got his own slate to elect in Illinois, and he'd be bound to give me short shrift.

I know for a fact a number of people before they consented undoubtedly checked one or the other of the Johnsons, because I've been told, "I checked you out, and it's all right." Where else could they have checked me out?

M: You know, on my interview with A. J. Taylor, before he consented to be interviewed, this was in Santa Fe, he picked up the phone and called the Ranch and talked to Mrs. Johnson and in my presence asked if this were all right.

F: After you'd already gone to Santa Fe?

I don't look on that in a way as opening the door, but it is. So I'd have to say yes, they've opened doors--at the most negative end not being against me, and at the most positive seeming to be for me, much more so than if I'd just started up in Midlothian College in Midlothian, Texas, with an oral history project and said to Secretary of Transportation Boyd, "I want to interview you."

M: Let's take a break at this point.

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F: Yes.

(Interruption)

F: Do you have on record your abortive interview with H. T. Zachary?

M: No.

F: Tell me about it, speaking of interviews that didn't come off.

M: There's really not much to say about that except that his connection with LBJ was made reference to in one of the books and he obviously knew him, and that he had some anecdotes to tell.

F: Zachary is a San Antonio contractor?

M: Contractor with an obvious connection with Johnson, obvious in the sense that he's met the man and according to the anecdote did some work for him on a short-time basis.

F: You mean political work?

M: No, contracting, road work type thing.

F: Zachary's the type who winds up on boards of regents at colleges and universities and that sort of thing, which are, after all, political appointments.

M: At any rate, I went to San Antonio to his office.

F: The date had been made.

M: Yes, the appointment had been made. I went to his office, told his secretary I was there; she told Zachary. I sat in his waiting room for a while, and he came out, actually spoke to me and told me he would be with me later. He disappeared into a meeting. Later came along, meaning thirty minutes. I guess the total time I waited was an hour or so. He returned. We went into a session, I had the machine set up, and then he said he had

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nothing to say. He didn't deny having contact with President Johnson, but he just said that he had nothing to say about it and that his contact was insignificant and refused to say anything more in spite of my trying to get him going on it. So I had no choice but to pack up the equipment and leave, which I did.

F: Was he apologetic for the trip you'd made, the time?

M: Not particularly, no. He wasn't particularly apologetic. I kind of wonder why he had me come down there if he was going to do that. Maybe he had changed his mind at the last minute, but I don't know. So I left.

F: Did you get stood up by anybody else that way? That's not exactly getting stood up, that's worse than getting stood up, I guess. I've had people who'd say, Well, look, I'm sorry about this. I made this date, but things have come up." I had the feeling maybe they were putting me off, and they'd always hold a carrot out down the line, that, "We'll try it again after October."

M: Yes. The only other case of being stood up, if it can be called that, is with Congressman Mahon. I had an appointment with him, went up to Capitol Hill, and after standing around and watching congressmen come in and out, *et cetera*, I went into one of his inner offices. He was surrounded by aides. He asked me about the project as if he'd never heard about it before. I explained it to him. He was in complete sympathy with it, wanted to participate but couldn't do it at that moment. So I left, and about every week thereafter for I would estimate three months in the spring, as I recall--

F: It was probably the spring of 1969.

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M: One of our secretaries would make a new appointment, and invariably, I could get so I could rely on it, the morning of the appointment his secretary would call back in and cancel it. A new appointment would be made for the next week, and this would go on to the next week.

F: You never made more trips to Capitol Hill? It always got cancelled before you got there?

M: It always got cancelled. His secretary was always polite enough to call back before I got there, but it was obviously a tactic to avoid the interview, at least for that moment.

F: I've interviewed him now.

M: Have you?

F: Yes, at some length.

M: So he finally got around to it.

F: I even got to watch him brush his teeth.

M: But that went on all through that period of time.

F: I'm pleased to tell you that he ate off a tray which was sent in, a plastic tray, and he's very neat in his habits. But he uses his own knife and fork, which he got up and washed after he brushed his teeth. He talked to me all the time he was brushing his teeth.

M: Which gave me the idea that the congressmen, as a category, were the hardest to deal with, as far as making appointments at least.

F: I'll agree with that.

M: And getting cancelled and short snatches.

F: You could come nearer getting at cabinet people than Congress people. Maybe their schedule is less organized because they're involved with a hundred other people.

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M: I don't know your experience about this, while we're on the subject, but I was always under the impression that a congressman or a senator who was in active politics and would be for some time would probably be more hesitant and cautious in what they said.

F: By and large I think they are.

M: There were some who were rather candid, so it's not a hard and fast rule.

F: On my day with Mahon--I could be sympathetic with this--we had, as I recall, an eleven or eleven-thirty date, and I duly showed up and was told that he was in the Appropriations office over in the Capitol. I had gone to the House Building, and so I went over there and reported in. He did come out and take me into his inner office and say that he had an unexpected VIP delegation from Lubbock that he had to give priority over me, and go away somewhere and have lunch and come back at one-thirty, which I did with no great confidence. I think I got back about 1:10 because I had nowhere to go. That's how I happened to come into his inner office. I again reported in, and he invited me on in and let me watch him finish up his lunch. It gave us a little opportunity for informal chitchat, after which we sat down and got into our session.

M: Which reminds me, have you ever said anything on tape about your interviews with Everett Dirksen, how you kind of caught him on the run?

F: I don't know that I have. I have used that in a speech, while we're reminiscing. I always saw Dirksen in the Senate minority leader's office, which had an outer office with scenes of Illinois and medals and strong on reminders of Lincoln and Sandburg. Then you went into a long, rectangular office, high-ceilinged like all those Capitol offices. It might have been somewhat lavishly furnished, old style, except that everything was stacked with



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books and mementos and so on. His desk was about halfway back to one side. The first time I went I took Ruth Mathews because he was her hero and she just had to meet him, and I said, "Well, come on." We were introduced, and she sat quietly over to one side and participated no more.

He started a sort of halfway stern dressing-down of me for intruding on a busy life and so on, and he'd never get it done, and caught me in a semi-truculent mood, I guess. I couldn't quite figure whether this was just mock sternness or real sternness. I just told him that he was the boss and we'd do it under any conditions but we would do it, that I'd trail him the rest of his life--I didn't know it was going to be that short--that I could tape him in fifteen-minute takes or half-hour takes or on the run, but that in my mind he was one of the most essential people, and that both history and the project would be harmed if he weren't in it. So that was just about all we got done that day. He agreed to do it.

I may be a little confused on details of chronology, but the next time I went back I went in and started setting up my machine and there was a *New York Times* man who was doing an article on the project, so he sent the photographer out with me and we got pictures of my interviewing Dirksen, which he didn't seem to mind. But the photographer was dismissed, and he told me again how busy he was. This, I think, was the time I decided I'd just always turn on the tape as soon as I sat down, for I was using those big old Signal Corps things, and you couldn't just do it snapping a button. You had to get your equipment out, and it was a small engineering job to get going. So it was quite noticeable.

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Anyway, this was when he started sounding off on what a damned rat race this was and how little pleasure there was in being a senator and how little profit and how much more he could make if he'd go on the lecture circuit, and particularly he thought he might just chuck it all and start going around the country giving poetry recitals. He quoted a little bit of poetry, which I thought I recognized but I never checked out, as from Gray's "Elegy in a Country Churchyard." He did get off on the fact that Thomas Gray was the most neglected poet in the English language and that he wished somehow that the reading and listening public could come to know Gray for all his greatness and so on. None of which had anything to do with politics, and after which time was up. We got absolutely nothing on Dirksen and Lyndon Johnson.

We played that way, and he told me in there that I'd helped him come to a decision that he just could not continue to see people every day, and that he'd decided and had talked it over with his secretary that she was going to keep his life so that on Mondays and Fridays no people would get at him. Of course, he couldn't avoid the congressional calls, which were mandatory, roll call votes and committee meetings and that sort of thing, but otherwise there'd be none of the Illinois delegations let in and none of that sort of thing. He said to me, "I'm making it a rule just to avoid people altogether on those days, and I'll tell her that you're not people. So you can be included in part of my business."

Well, I'd go up there, with I might say scant hope, which was usually realized--the scant hope--and hang around the outer office and read the tributes to Carl Sandburg and Everett Dirksen and go home. I know one time I got in, and we were going pretty good.

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We always did a lot of preliminary talking. We had agreed that I'd block out about twenty-five fields in which he had a relationship, and he'd start kind of doggedly down them, whether it was ten minutes or thirty minutes or an hour, and whether we got more than surface scratching. If we just scratched the surface I'd come back and would get in two more sentences, and we'd just gradually piece it together. We were going pretty good on one occasion I thought, this was when the surtax was crucial and the American balance of payments was crucial, and he had said he was not to be disturbed. I heard him say that to his secretary, under no circumstances was she to disturb him, and she said, "It's Senate Majority Leader Mansfield, and he says he has got to talk with you." I hear Dirksen saying, "Yes, Mike. Sure, Mike. You bet, Mike" sort of thing, and he looked at me kind of ruefully and he said, "They've got a crucial vote coming up on the surtax, and Mansfield says that he's going to need me there to hold whatever Republican votes they've got. So let's say goodbye again."

Well, you can't interfere with that sort of thing. What I'm trying to do I don't think ranks alongside [a crucial vote]. So I never felt he put me off in that sense. We'd have gaps of considerable time, as you do with so many people, when I wouldn't even be able to get to go up there and sit in the outer office. We also made the mistake of picking the sort of easy topics first, which is unfortunate. The really meaty things that he could have given real insights on we saved, because we thought we would get rid of those almost superficial topics like a check-off list, kind of like you do on an exam sometimes, where you go down and answer everything you know immediately and then go back to wrestle with the problems. So it's not a very significant couple of interviews.

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M: What would you say you got?

F: Basically I got two interviews out of about seven tries. We covered very superficially federal aid to education, which he goes back to somewhere very early in the career. One of the few times that President Johnson ever gave me any advice he said: "I sure will be eager for you to get Dirksen. You ask him, some time after you get to know him, what I've had to pay him through the years to get him to come around on issues."

M: Did he ever tell you?

F: Dirksen?

M: Yes.

F: No, we never got that far. I've picked that up other places, superficially again, from people who would say the President wanted some thing and so the President picked this fellow to go on this board, not because he wanted him but because Dirksen wanted him and he was an old friend of Dirksen's back in Illinois or Florida or somewhere. There was a crucial vote coming up, and the President figured that he'd better let Dirksen know that he was still his favorite. So you get this inferential thing, that the two men understood each other.

When Johnson got down to the time of quitting, of all people John Tower invited me to come over to a farewell that the Senate was having for him in some reception room as his guest. I went and the President came in, and the senators were there, and it was really, I thought, a kind of a moving occasion. There were some who were public enemies of his, but they'd all turned out. But the obvious affection between Dirksen and Johnson was noticeable--they not only gave each other good public *abrazos*, but the way

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they referred to each other, both in little informal remarks that each made and the way that Johnson was always turning to Dirksen, you know, for confirmation of something that he had said, kind of like you would to your wife or best friend, saying, "That's right, isn't it, honey?" sort of thing. Dirksen would just always be right there, and both of them did that. Of course Dirksen had been in the House when Johnson got there, so they went back a long way.

M: While we're kind of on this line, which is the most difficult interview you had? And why?

F: I'd have to look at my notes to get her name.

M: I'll tell you about my most difficult interview while you're checking through that list. The interview I had with Rufus Youngblood of the Secret Service was difficult, not because of the circumstances where the interview was taken or the lack of cooperation by Rufus Youngblood, but because of the nature of the material. The job of the Secret Service being to protect the president, you can hardly interview a man about his job and relationship to the president without asking him what is essentially essential information and sensitive questions which if he reveals will diminish his capacity to protect the president.

F: Yes. How did he get at it?

M: Well, we kind of went halfway. Every now and then he'd ask me to turn off the recorder and say, "Now, you're getting too far along this line. I can make some generalization about it, but I can't go any further." Then we'd come back on, and I'd have to rephrase the question.

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The most interesting thing that came out of that interview was that at that point in time the Secret Service had no female agents. So the question came up, "Well, how do you protect the first lady and people of female nature?" He admitted that that was a difficult problem. After all, you can't follow them into a restroom, or something like that. The only protection for them being that they were usually in a group, and at least it seems that it had not yet become a problem along that line. At any rate, it was a rather interesting interview but difficult because of the content of it.

F: Of course, it depends on what you mean by difficult. I had virtually to give the Boy Scout salute and the Catholic pledge and the American Creed and everything else before John McCone would start talking to me.

M: This was former CIA.

F: Yes. I had been cleared and all of that. "How do I know you have? What proof have you got to prove to me that you're worthy?" Like you're saying to me, "Prove that you've never had a dirty thought in your life." Where do you start? What do you say? And so that started rather badly. I've had a bunch of interviews that never really got off the ground. I don't realize how many I've done until I start looking for a name in it. I've had interviews that don't show up well. I had one with Frankie Randolph, who died a couple of days ago, in which she would not talk with the tape recorder on but would let me take notes. She was pretty close-mouthed. I had an interview with Coke Stevenson in which he would not let me even take notes because he wanted it strictly to be his word against mine in case he didn't like any of it. But he talked. Lord, how he did talk for three hours! I got in the car and tried to Truman Capote [Capote's technique for *In Cold Blood*]

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driving back in from Junction, which I guess is a hundred and fifty miles from here, and talked with the tape recorder on the whole distance and did as nearly total recall as possible. Then I said and then he said sort of proposition. So I've got a long tape on him, but it's all reconstruction.

The person I was thinking of was Mrs. Dorothy Nichols, who had been in junior high in Cotulla when Johnson had been teacher there.

M: The most difficult interview:

F: Yes. There were two junior highs, one for Mexican-Americans and one for Anglos, and Johnson in after hours had organized girl softball teams for both of them. He evidently was as hyperactive then as [he was as] a public figure, and he'd come over and coach their girls' baseball team. About the only thing she got out of it was that he told her she'd never make a first baseman.

Now this goes a long ways back. She had eventually become a White House secretary. She's one of these people that you get so much of around someone like Johnson, who appears and reappears. She gets married and wanders off, and then he's in a bind for assistance and he calls Dorothy and Dorothy comes running back from wherever she was and works another several months and so on. That just goes on through forty years or better. She has known him ever since. She was with him, I think, in the NYA days, early congressional days, and just on and on and on and on. She didn't remember a thing. I could never get any information out of her on anything, and she told me somewhere in there that she just closed her ears and eyes to everything, that all she

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did was take in the papers and bring out the papers. I kind of halfway believed her, that she was like the old English butler who was there [but saw and heard nothing].

[End of Tape 1 of 1 and Interview I]



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JOE B. FRANTZ

In accordance with the provisions of Chapter 21 of Title 44, United States Code, and subject to the terms and conditions hereinafter set forth, I, Helen Frantz of Austin, Texas do hereby give, donate and convey to the United States of America all rights, title, and interest in the tape recordings and transcripts of the personal interviews conducted with my late husband Joe B. Frantz on September 7 and September 10, 1972 and prepared for deposit in the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library.

This assignment is subject to the following terms and conditions:

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