

INTERVIEW WITH GORDON FULCHER

PB: This is November 22, 1968; we are talking with Gordon Fulcher, the publisher of an East Texas newspaper at Atlanta. Tell us about what newspaper it is that you publish now, Gordon.

GF: I publish the Atlanta Citizens Journal, a weekly newspaper, in Atlanta, Cass County, right over on the Arkansas, Louisiana, Oklahoma border.

PB: How long have you been over there now?

GF: I was born and reared in that country, but I left there and came to The University of Texas and spent a great part of my adult life here in Austin and I have been back over there after having left here and gone to Illinois and to Tennessee and to North Carolina--I've been in Atlanta about five years now.

PB: During the early thirties you were a student at The University of Texas.

GF: That's right; I came here in 1928 from junior college and I was at the University through part of 1931.

PB: And during that period you were employed by the Austin American-Statesman, is that right?

GF: That's right. I worked on the morning paper, the Austin American. Both papers, of course, were owned by the same company.

PB: You were ..... you became the managing editor or the chief editorial officer on the Austin American.

GF: That's correct.

PB: And what year was that?

GF: Oh, let's see. Probably about 1935 or 1936, somewhere along in there. I had worked as a copy desk man, as a news editor, and so on. Mostly as a news editor.

PB: Now I want to ask you to do a rather difficult thing. I want you to go back some thirty years in your memory to the time when you first met Lyndon Johnson. That would have been in the 1930's, about 1935 or so, would it not?

GF: That would be correct. He came to Austin as National Youth Administrator in the early part of the Roosevelt administration and that's when I first became acquainted with him.

PB: Did you have any knowledge of what kind of job he was doing there as National Youth Administrator?

GF: Oh, yes, I had a considerable amount of knowledge because he was frequently in the newspaper office and he was a very diligent, a very active and enthusiastic person on his job and he came in our office many times and he prosecuted his job with all energy and dispatch, with, I think, great foresight for a man of his age,

particularly. In addition we, and our wives, became fast personal and social friends and very dear friends.

PB: As an active newspaper man at that time, did you ..... you didn't personally cover any of the NYA--you sent your reporters out to get it--

GF: Oh, that's right, yes.

PB: Do you know of any particular jobs that he did as NYA Director that were noteworthy?

GF: I don't know that at this moment I can recall singly a particular job that he did, but I think what you have to look at in his administration as NYA Director was his overall job of bringing assistance and help to young people, to students and to school districts and ..... in a time that ..... gosh, so many people today wouldn't even realize the hardships and the difficulties which many people lived under economically at that time. There just wasn't enough money. I think, rather than a single thing, I would just have to say that his outstanding accomplishment was the overall administration in which he put the whole concept to work on a state-wide basis in a remarkably fast and efficient time. It was what most impressed me and what I most graphically remember about him as NYA Director.

It was a magnificent effort of organization and

it was done so rapidly. It always was, and will be, remarkable to me that a man of his age and previous experience could put together a statewide program in the manner that he did.

As has, I think, been characteristic of him all through the years I have known him, he not only had the ability to put an effective program together, he had an almost phenomenal ability to gather able, loyal, energetic and highly intelligent people into his personal staff.

The list would be legion nor would I know, by any means, all of the fine people he has attracted to his service. But most of those I have known have contributed so much, all along the way, to the making of the man.

There've been his wife, Lady Bird, and John Connally, about both of whom I will have more to say later on in this interview.

But to name a few of my contemporaries--Jesse Kellam, Willard Deason, Jake Pickle, Mary Rather, Walter Jenkins, Ray Lee and, by no means least, you, Paul, yourself.

PB: Gordon, there is one particular thing that I am particularly concerned about. There are not too many people now who recall the days of the depression--middle '30's. Is there any way that you can sum up the situation as it

was in those days that will bring it home to our .....  
to today's affluent society?

GF: Yes, I think so, Paul. I think today's affluent society and most people like your daughter and mine who were contemporaries as they grew up here in Austin, and the people of that age and the people of later age, have utterly no conception of what things were like then. Gosh, I remember that when Ruth and I got married in 1931 I was making \$45 dollars a week which was at that time a real good salary. Then the depression set in and we began to get salary cuts and I wound up there with four or five jobs on all of which put together I was making \$26 and a quarter a week. I remember one time going home at Christmas time to see my people over in Northeast Texas. I went in my father's general mercantile store. There were people who came in there who had been, all my life, substantial landowners and citizens and who then just didn't have any money. There just wasn't any money. Some of those people had to put their children to bed in the daytime to keep them from freezing and they went around with their feet tied up in cotton sacks. I well remember--it was on Christmas Eve--a fellow named Robinson whom I had known all my life came in and said to my father, "Mr. Clarence, I

have a 300-pound hog out here I'd like to give you for \$3.00 in trade. My kids haven't got any Santa Claus." And my father said, "Well, I've got so many hogs and so many cattle I've taken in I can't take another one, but I'll tell you what you do. You just come in and get whatever you need for the kids for Santa Claus and you pay me when you can." Well, in addition to that, here in Austin, Paul, in our office we had most emphatic evidence of distress. I don't know how in the name of God I held the job, because men who had been foreign correspondents, had been on the wire services, had worked for papers like the New York Times, the Chicago Tribune, would come through our office anywhere from one to any number a day. They just wanted to work for just something to eat for that day. And it was terrible. There was a hopelessness and a despair I shall never forget ..... and just nowhere to turn. Lyndon came in when the Roosevelt administration came in and the government began to do something for people at that level. And like I told you a moment ago, I don't think I would measure him by any particular thing ..... I really don't recall, any real single instance that he did was a big thing in itself. But he did put the NYA program together where people even back in the rural areas where they

didn't even have electric lights got some help. Maybe it was two or three or four or five dollars, but good gracious, that little bit of money then was like a mountain, just like a mountain, and it was wonderful.

PB: Now, the NYA, as I understand it, and I was not reporting local news at that time, but the NYA was designed to give jobs to younger people and among other things, I believe, didn't they do some work out on Zilker Park, do you recall?

GF: Oh, yes, they certainly did--that and many more worthwhile things. It wasn't just a give-away thing, it wasn't that at all. They had projects and programs in which these young people and children, you might want to call them, worked at various and sundry jobs, and I'll have to say, for Lyndon's administration of the NYA the so-called "leaf-raking" prevalent on some jobs of that day was held to a minimum. I think most of the things that those children did to earn their money were constructive and educational--not educational in the sense of school books, but educational in the sense of learning how to care for themselves and how to work and how to make a living and how to earn money, and I think it was highly worthwhile. I'll have to say for Lyndon Johnson, he worked night and day. There weren't

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any fixed working hours and he worked and drove the people who worked for him and even, as you would say today, he had the characteristic then of being, ..... of having the great ability which so few people have, of being able to get good people and to mold an organization and to hold them together despite everything in the world. He had loyal, wonderful, hard-working people who worked night and day over there at the NYA. He didn't close up at five o'clock. He worked all night if it was necessary and his people worked all night. Why, you might say that he drove them hard, at the same time he accomplished a great deal; within his means he rewarded them for it.

PB: Now, this was ..... I believe he took the NYA job about 1935, and held it for a couple of years and then decided to run for Congress. At the time he ran for Congress in 1937 to succeed the late J. P. Buchanan, what was your job at that time?

GF: At that time I was the newly-made managing editor of the Austin American, morning newspaper here in Austin.

PB: Now, then, going back to that 1937 campaign, do you have any particular recollections of how that developed or what happened?

GF: Yes, I surely do. When Mr. Buchanan died, Lyndon, or



Mr. President, as I should say, although it's somewhat difficult for me to remember always to say that--I mean not that I don't have respect for the great office which he holds and the accomplishments that he has made, but after most of a lifetime it's hard to change the habit and if you'll excuse me, I'll just say Lyndon instead of Mr. President. Well, Mr. Buchanan died and of course there was quite a scramble for the job, naturally. Lyndon got organized in a quite typically, for him burst, of energy. He got people together in a hurry from over the district and announced for office. At that time I think perhaps I was one of the limited number on the paper who really was for Johnson for Congress. He got his campaign going and so-to-speak, to use an old East Texas expression, "he just hit the ground running."

PB: Now, you say you were one of the few who were for Lyndon, for Congress; what was your reason for being for him?

GF: Well, because I thought that--number one, he had the courage to come out and say where he stood. At that time--if you will recall--the issue of the Supreme Court in Mr. Roosevelt's administration was the paramount issue, the so-called "Court-packing Plan." I personally

felt that the thought of the Supreme Court, the way its majority felt, was inimicable to the way of progress. I didn't feel like that its rigidity and philosophy should be allowed to retard people and hold people down and oppress them. My conception of what our country was and our government was was not that. He came out ..... he just came out flatfooted in support of the President's program, and that was one thing. Another thing was that I felt like he was a young man, he had energy and he had ability, that he would work and that I could see no real good reason for us not to get the best young man we could in the job. You've got to start at the bottom when you put a new Congressman in, that's just per se. Well, I could see no reason for our not picking the youngest and, in my opinion, the most able man to put in there to build and to grow and to bring prestige and influence to our district.

PB: Along during this campaign, there are a couple of things I'd like to ask you about, during the campaign. One was that you and your staff made a sort of a public opinion poll at a time when public opinion polls were not as widely used as they are today. Can you tell us something about that public opinion poll that you all made?

GF: Well, yes, as a matter of fact, as you say, polls hadn't come into the influence and status that they have today. I don't recall that, as such, they were even born at that time. And as ..... oh, I think probably what set off my taking the poll was that Lyndon came in my office late one night about 12:30 or one o'clock, and he was telling me how good he was running all over the country. And he said, "Why don't you get out and find out?" And so I said, "Well, that's not a bad idea." So I did. I worked on it with Tom Whitehead, who later left our paper and bought the Brenham Banner Press and was publisher of it and for all I know may still be. But anyway, we conducted the poll and we went all over the district--smaller towns, larger towns--and we would take what we thought was a fair cross-section of all categories of people ..... you might say an across-the-board deal and we would ask them who they were for for Congress, who they thought was going to win, and amazingly enough, the survey that we made and printed in the paper, contrary to what a lot of people thought, that Johnson was just a young upstart, came out amazingly accurate in the final results of the election.

PB: I believe the Dallas News made a survey at the same time and arrived at a different conclusion. Do you recall that?

GF: Yes, I do! And I think it ..... well, it ..... naturally I'd think that I'd be right and the News would be wrong. As it turned out I was right. But I don't know that the News made its survey in depth the way that we did. We did not make our survey basically in Austin; we made it over the entire district. We tried as best we could at that time to apportion the percentage of opinion or reaction we got in various areas to the portion of the total vote of the entire district each place had. And that was the basis upon which I arrived at the conclusion that he was going to win over all opponents and quite substantially.

PB: Do you recall the number of people who were running in that race?

GF: Oh, I don't know that I know specifically--I think that there must have been somewhere around four or five or six--something like that.

PB: I believe that there were seven or eight.

GF: There was a substantial number, yes.

PB: To review some of the candidates, you remember Polk Shelton.

GF: Oh, yes, indeed. He was a quite successful criminal lawyer here and had gained some status. I believe he had been an assistant district attorney and had quite an extensive law practice.

PB: And then there was Merton Harris.

GF: Yes, he was from Smithville. He had previously run against Mr. Buchanan and unsuccessfully. I think his previous race had been either one or two elections before Mr. Buchanan died and this race to fill the seat his death vacated came on.

PB: Then there was Judge Sam Stone over at Georgetown.

GF: That's right, a very fine gentleman, a very dignified gentleman, but not really able to unbend and reach the people in the sense of the feeling of the people at that time.

PB: And then there was Houghton Brownlee of Austin.

GF: That's right. He was from one of the older Austin families and a successful lawyer and former state senator. One of his brothers was a doctor here and, well, I would say, and I mean no disparagement at all to a very fine friend of mine which he was--he just wasn't able to bring an appealing political campaign to the people, at that time.

PB: Those were four of the top--

GF: And then there was Mr. C. N. Avery--

PB: Yes, Mr. C. N. Avery, I'd almost forgotten him.

GF: Yes, he was running, and he had been a very, very close friend of Mr. Buchanan's. A big supporter of his and

was a very, very delightful person, a very lovable man,  
and .....

PB: He was a very wealthy man, too, was he not?

GF: Well, yes, I suppose he was; he had a background in  
that regard, I think. Perhaps Mrs. Avery's wealth was  
the basis of their affluence, but they were certainly  
one of the older, more established families in Austin  
as far as resources and society were concerned. They  
were sort of what you might call the elite crowd or  
among the topflight people.

PB: Then there was a guy running on the Townsend Plan.

GF: Oh, yes. Gosh, I don't even remember what his name  
was, but I remember that, because the Townsend thing  
was going strong then with a lot of desperate people.  
He wanted to give a pension I think of something like  
\$100 or \$150 a month to everybody past a certain age,  
whether they needed it or not. There was quite a wave  
of Townsendism, but that candidate didn't take very  
well--gosh, I don't even remember what his name was.  
Was it Ayres K. Ross?

PB: Ayres K. Ross?

GF: Ayres K. Ross, yes, that's right. He was an attorney  
here who was ..... oh, more less of a J. P. lawyer who  
had come down here with a set of Oklahoma licenses and  
practiced law here in Austin.

PB: There was a guy named Smith, I believe, who was a candidate who tried to withdraw.

GF: Yes, that's correct. I really don't remember all the details of that .....

PB: In any event, he did have six opponents.

GF: Oh, yes, he had ..... there was a number of opponents. As I said, I don't recall whether there were six, seven or eight, but there was a ..... well you might say a multiple field in that election.

PB: The other question that has interested me about this campaign: late in the campaign--I should say here that I have this information from a man who served as his publicity officer, possibly his general manager, Mr. Ray Lee.

GF: Yes, Ray was, and is now, a fine friend of mine and, as a matter of fact, when I first came to Austin he was my first boss.

PB: He was the editor of the American .....

GF: Well, he was the managing editor when I came to Austin.

PB: Anyway, Mr. Lee told me about the sudden illness which Mr. Johnson suffered late in the campaign. He suffered an appendicitis attack. Do you recall any of the details of that?

GF: Yes, as I recall, about two days before the election he

became ill and I believe he went to Seton Hospital and it was determined he had appendicitis. His closing campaign speech I believe was to have been delivered in San Marcos or ..... I don't remember just exactly where, but I believe it was San Marcos. Anyway, he became ill and he had an acute and a severe attack of appendicitis and had to be operated on and, as I remember, Senator Wirtz sat in for him on his last speech.

PB: That was Senator Alvin Wirtz.

GF: Senator Alvin Wirtz. And, in any event, the operation did occur a couple of days before election, and he didn't get to finish out his campaign.

PB: Now, the story that Mr. Lee told me, and let it be said for the purpose of the record here that I have not talked with you about this beforehand, but the story that Mr. Lee told me was that he went out to Mr. Johnson's home and found him very ill and he had to write a story for submission to you as the editor of the Austin American and he went down and talked with you about whether or not he should put into that story ..... let's see, they went to the Courthouse where Johnson was to make a speech, he tried to make the speech and collapsed at the Courthouse .....

GF: I believe that's right.



PB: And he went down to the Courthouse and ..... I mean, he went down to the paper after Mr. Johnson had gone to the hospital and you and he discussed whether or not he should put into the morning edition, the upcoming edition, the fact that he had been operated upon for appendicitis. Do you recall any of that at all?

GF: Oh, yes, I remember very distinctly that he did, and if I remember correctly, I think I ..... I'm not entirely clear on this at all, Paul, but as I remember it, I think I overrode Ray's idea about it and I think I put an eight-column, seventy-two point banner on the fact that he had been operated on.

PB: Could be. I haven't consulted the paper so I don't know whether it is .....

GF: Well, I do know that I ran an eight-column banner on the fact that he had been operated on and really and truly, I don't remember the details too distinctly. I think that Ray was somewhat fearful that perhaps it might be a bad thing politically ..... gosh, I don't even remember distinctly, I really don't. But I do know that I ran the story on it and I think that I ran it, I believe, on my own judgment alone.

PB: Now, when Mr. Johnson had this emergency operation for appendicitis, according to the information that I've

had from Mr. Lee, the operation was performed by Dr. Joe Thorne Gilbert who at this time is still practicing in Austin, and it's my understanding ..... I have been told by others that Mr. Johnson requested that Dr. Gilbert be assisted by a brother, or at least a relative, of Senator Brownlee in order that there would be no question about it being, you know, some put up job or something. Do you recall anything about that at all?

GF: Well, yes, I do. About Mr. Johnson's requesting it, that I do not know. But it is my recollection that it was Senator Houghton Brownlee's brother--I believe that his name was C. R., or something like that, I don't recall right now, but anyway, his nickname was "Happy"--Dr. "Happy" Brownlee, and I am satisfied that actually he did participate in the operation and assisted Dr. Gilbert in it, and I remember, oh, writing Mr. Johnson a little note and saying to him, so to speak--I don't remember the exact words--"Go on and get operated on. The only thing you're going to have to worry about is what kind of tie you wear for your swearing-in ceremonies." He took a great fancy to that and through the years has mentioned it many, many times. It was just an incidental thing; it wasn't any great vision. On my part, I was fully convinced at the time that he was going to win the

Roosevelt's program drew attention. It just happened that Mr. Buchanan died and the election came up at the time the fight over the Supreme Court was at its height. Well, it focussed national attention on the race. Here was a young man, relatively unknown, you might say, who was running against very substantial people, very well known people, very much entrenched people, and he outstripped them all. He didn't equivocate, he just ran over them, on an all-out Roosevelt support program. And I think that, naturally--and I don't think there's anything unusual about it--put him in a status with a President that a freshman Congressman ordinarily does not have. And then while it is a fact that he did have what you might call a "head start" with the President, you certainly cannot discount the tremendous ability and drive and incessant work and insistence upon accomplishment that the fellow had; the way that he went after that job hammer and tongs. I don't know anything about it--I wasn't there--but I would suspect that he was probably knocking on the White House door for something all during the time. I think he parlayed the thing into great, great accomplishment for his district far and beyond what, in my lifetime as a newspaper man and as a businessman, I can recall any other freshman

Congressman's having done anywhere in the United States. For instance, the Lower Colorado River Authority, the development of the dams here, had just been started through Mr. Buchanan's efforts. Mr. Buchanan, I believe, was chairman of the House Appropriations Committee, at least he had been in Congress for a long time and he had high ranking committee status. Well, when Lyndon came in there, he extended the Lower Colorado River development within a matter of months to many, many times more than what Mr. Buchanan's original conception or anybody else's original conception of it had been. It might be hard for a lot of people to realize, now that electricity and electric lights are so commonplace to everybody everywhere, that at that time, Paul, even, gosh, a mile or two out of Austin people didn't have electric lights. And that was true of most cities whether they were served by a municipal system, as Austin was at that time, or by a power company. It just wasn't conceived that rural electrification could ever support itself or pay. And rural people just didn't have any except a few who had small home operated plants. Well, he started in on the Pedernales Electric Cooperative and the Lower Colorado River Electric Cooperative and in just a matter of ..... oh, a small amount of time, less than a year or so,

electric power lines were being built all over this country here, electrifying farms and bringing lights to people that ..... well, nobody ever had even dared dream they would have electricity.

PB: To amplify what you say there, and perhaps as a little background, it's true, is it not, that at that time the private utilities believed that it was not possible economically to go into the rural areas with their electricity .....

GF: That's entirely true; they didn't think it was possible and they bitterly fought the concept of the rural electrification co-op, and I remember that when this thing had been going on for quite a while, one time Max Starcke and .....

PB: Who was Max Starcke?

GF: Max Starcke was then the operations manager of the Lower Colorado River Authority. And he, Lyndon and I met at that time with a fellow by the name of McDonough--Clarence McDonough, I believe, who was general manager of the Authority. Max Starcke had been called in, more or less, to implement the distribution of electricity and to make the transition from construction to operation. Anyway, they came to me and asked me if I would take a leave from the paper to try to put the program over. It was sort of

a press agent job, and so forth. And I did do that. I worked very closely with Lyndon in implementing that program and in ..... oh, publicizing and carrying any information over all this area as to what low cost rural electrification meant. It went over in quite a tremendous fashion.

PB: It might be of interest in that connection to detail some of the difficulties that were encountered in connection with bringing rural electricity to that section of the state, particularly the Pedernales section. That was in the hill country. Again, this was prior to the time I had any association with or knowledge of the President, but I've always understood that there was a great deal of difficulty in ..... oh, such matters as setting the poles in the solid rock of the hills, and that sort of thing. Do you recall those difficulties?

GF: Oh, yes, they were quite tremendous. In the first place, at that time, that country was sparsely settled at best, and it was, generally speaking, a poor country. The top soil was thin and it was a cedar brake, limestone country, and you couldn't dig, in many places, three inches, much less three feet, to set a light pole without being in solid rock. It was a tremendously difficult construction job to start out with in an area in

which you just couldn't support many people or livestock or even wild animals per square mile. There just wasn't much of anything there then for them to go on.

PB: How long were you on this job as press agent?

GF: Oh, I'd say, as on a leave from the paper devoting my time fully to it, for about a couple of months. Then after I went back to the paper, as a sideline job, I did do publicity and advertising for the Lower Colorado River Authority and for the co-ops for two or three or four years, something like that. Of course, you have to understand that at that time, outside of the city of Austin--which had a municipally owned power system and still does and which was never a part of the Lower Colorado River Authority--the other towns were served by privately owned power companies. Some of them were served by Central Power and Light and some of them by Texas Power and Light and I don't recall, perhaps some other companies, but in any event, it became an issue of whether these smaller towns were going to vote to go municipal and join up with the LCRA and put in municipally owned systems and rural electrification or whether they would want to stay with the power companies. That was the issue, and I remember that at that time, the first conference I had with them about it, Lyndon

asked me, "Well, what would you do to carry it?" and I said, "Well, the first thing I'd do would be to put me out a newspaper." He said, "What do you mean?" and I said, "Well, I'd just write one and have it printed." "What would you call it?" he asked, and I said, "I'd call it the Colorado Light and I'd just print all the information about the benefits of low cost electricity and distribute it by the bulk mail rates to every rural box holder and every post office box holder in this whole area." I think out of all the elections, Paul, I don't believe we lost a single election in something like ten or fifteen cities, or smaller towns, over this area.

PB: Well, now, to ask you a personal question which perhaps you won't want to answer, was there no conflict there between your job as managing editor of the Austin American and your job as press agent for this .....

GF: Well, there wasn't any conflict at the time we were carrying these elections because, number one, the people whom I worked for and who owned the papers, Mr. Charles E. Marsh of Austin and Mr. E. S. Fentress, of Waco, had decided that Mr. Johnson was a pretty good man and they had become rather strong in their support of him. There was no conflict as far as that's concerned,



during that initial time that I did the press agent job that put it over, or better, I should say, contributed to its success, I don't mean to say put it over single-handedly. There were many things that put it over. Not the least of which was Mr. Johnson's getting out into each one of these towns and making speeches and having so-called town hall meetings and taking the issue squarely to the people. I did something to publicize those things but, certainly, his personal attention to the campaign was the major factor in its carrying. Well, anyway, to get back to your question, there was no particular conflict because I just took a leave of absence from the paper and when I came back, my working for the LCRA in advertising and publicity was with agreement of my immediate bosses on the paper as well as with the publishers.

PB: In that connection I have recently talked with the Mayor of Bastrop ..... the former mayor of Bastrop, Will Rogers, who went through one of these elections. Do you recall that particular election down at Bastrop?

GF: Yes, I surely do.

PB: Was that pretty awful?

GF: It was pretty hot, and some of them got a little snug from time to time. But as I said, certainly you can't

attribute the success to any one single thing. I would say, however, the thing which contributed most to the success of that program or implementing it, was the fact of Mr. Johnson's own personal effort and his own influence and the fact that ..... just like he's always been on everything that I've ever known anything about ..... he just won't give up, won't quit until he wins. That's all, he just stayed with it and he'd just keep on until finally the guy would just say, "Well, anything, o.k.!"

PB: Anything to get rid of him!

GF: They would just give up in despair!

Let me digress a moment here while it is on my mind. It wouldn't be correct to say that people acceded to his wishes "just to get rid of him."

Most people who know him know he is a very tenacious man. Upon occasion I've read about his using "arm twisting" tactics to get over his programs or to persuade people to do as he wished. I don't know about that, perhaps the commentators and the columnists, as sometimes they do, have magnified it out of proper proportion.

Then, too, when he first became President, many commentators referred to him as a great "compromiser."

I remember an occasion shortly after he became President when one of the television stations in Shreveport, because of my earlier friendship with him, asked me to come over there for a broadcast interview, the theme of which was "What Sort of a Man Is President Johnson?" The interviewer referred to him as a "great compromiser." I told him that I would consider the term "persuader" more aptly to describe the man.

That is more of what I meant a moment ago in answering your question. No, people didn't give in to "get rid of him." His was a most magnetic personality and, in some respects, he was a consummate actor. He would wheedle, he would cajole, he would pout, he would use logic, he would make a personal appeal, he would be lofty or humble, he would, upon occasion, throw a tantrum, he would be magnanimous and expansive or cold and dissident, quote eruditely from a master or resort to homespun humor and rural wit. In short, he would fit his histrionism to whatever mood and to whatever height necessary to persuade a person to his point of view.

And he had the tenacity of the proverbial English bulldog. Most "compromises" he effected, in my knowledge, resulted for the most part in the other fellow coming 99 per cent of the way. And, strangely enough, in most cases, liking it.

Another digression--if Lyndon was "too" anything in those early days I would say that he was too serious, too intent upon his purpose, that he drove too hard. His work and his political life were paramount to him. And even in supposed moments of relaxation and play he never laid them down more than momentarily. His mind always was whirling and he had an objective in his sights.

I can't remember his ever having gone to a movie or a play or a musical. Occasionally he would play golf or swim but I don't recall his ever going fishing and seldom hunting.

One of the big jokes about him among his close friends was his lack of recognition or contact with phases of life outside his own sphere of politics. It was at the time when Lana Turner the actress was in her heyday as the movie sex symbol. You could hardly pick up a magazine or a newspaper without seeing some exotic picture of her or sensational story about her. One day a bunch of us were together and somebody, Jake Pickle, I believe, asked somebody else, "Have you seen Lana Turner?" Immediately Johnson pricked up his ears. "Who's she?" he demanded to know.

His biggest pleasure was to get those people closest to him and his top staff people who were, incidentally,

some of his oldest and dearest friends for a few beers or drinks, food and conversation. I was fortunate to be among that group and some of my fondest memories are of those occasions when we'd all gather at one of our houses or in our backyards--the Jesse Kellams, the Bill Deasons, the John Connallys, Jake Pickle and Sugar Critz (she later became his wife and was a delightful person whose days were all too short lived), sometimes Ed and Anne Clark or Everett and Mary Looney.

None of us had a lot of money but we were young and ambitious. The track ahead of us was clear and we wanted to run. We consumed a lot of hamburgers and chili and barbecue, beer, whiskey and soda pop. I am sure in our youthful impatience none of us really knew how happy and wonderful those days were.

I remember that Lyndon and Lady Bird had a cook whose name was Zephyr and whom they had persuaded to come from Lady Bird's home area in Northeast Texas to work for them. Zephyr, I believe, married a fellow named Wright and has continued with the Johnsons through all these years. One of the greatest "persuasion" performances Johnson or anybody else that I know about ever did was his in always persuading Zephyr not to quit. Occasionally in those earlier days she did want to quit.

As I remember it, it always was Lyndon who talked her into staying. When, if she ever has, Zephyr decided to yield to fate, I don't know. But she was a wonderful cook and a fine person.

Then, too, from time to time at our little meetings there was Lyndon's mother, Mrs. Sam Johnson. She was a woman of great charm and of culture, cordial and sweet. She had a great gift quieting troubled waters among divergent personalities, including her own flock. The difference in our ages didn't matter a great deal. She fitted in when she was there and she was fun.

Excuse me, Paul, for straying so much. Let's get on with your interviewing.

PB: Subsequent to 1937, of course, he had to run for reelection every two years. Were you or your paper interested in these subsequent elections?

GF: Oh, yes, we supported him all the way through.

PB: Do you recall any particular areas of contests in there? For instance, the first one that I recall anything about was in 1944. I believe in that year a fellow named Buck Taylor was running.

GF: Yes, that's right. I'd forgotten about that.

PB: Were you still editor of the paper at that time?

GF: In '44? Yes, that was ..... yes, I left the paper in

'45. Yes, Buck Taylor was running. I'd forgotten all about that. That's right.

PB: Do you recall anything about Mr. Taylor? That you can tell us?

GF: Well ..... as I say, you just .....

PB: Is this too sudden?

GF: No, but you just awakened a whole old memory in me and as I remember, Buck Taylor's race was very largely a personal assault upon Mr. Johnson. Right at this moment I can't recall who inspired it. But it was largely just a mud-slinging campaign as I recall it now, just on sudden notice, largely a mud-slinging campaign against Lyndon in person.

PB: It was an anti-Roosevelt campaign.

GF: That's right. A person is human; Lyndon may have made some mistakes, but as I recall it, as I said, it was largely a baseless mud-slinging campaign against Johnson, against Roosevelt, but particularly Johnson as a Roosevelt supporter. I believe that's right, Paul, I really and truly don't have a whole lot of recollection about it.

PB: O.K. Well, now to go on to something that you probably will have some recollections about. You left the paper in '45; then what did you do?

GF: Well, I went into the contracting business. I had been

for a long time building things and doing things in the construction business and it just finally got to where I had to either be a fish or a fowl and I got out and decided to be a fish or a fowl, whichever you want to call it, and went in the construction business and I left the newspaper business at that time. I never was back in the newspaper business until I bought this little paper over in East Texas, but, after leaving the paper, in a couple of Lyndon's campaigns I did come back in and help insofar as I could, and I think that perhaps I interested some newspaper people in coming in and doing some press agent work for him that I did not actually do myself, but I was responsible for having gotten done.

PB: I'll want to come back to that for a minute, but first let's tread a little bit on some dangerous ground. You went into the construction business full-time in 1945. During that period Johnson's opponents--Mr. Johnson's opponents--started a large number of rumors about the fact that ..... well, they took different forms, and one of the forms I remember they took was he owned every property in Austin.

GF: Oh, yes, according to the rumor mongers he owned everything I built and did. I was just a stooge for Johnson



and that I was representing him. As a matter of fact, Johnson never had anything to do with anything I ever did in the building business.

PB: I think one of the first things you did was to build an apartment house.

GF: That's right.

PB: Where is that located?

GF: Oh, that was over .....

PB: Just off 19th Street.

GF: Yes, it was between 18th and 19th Streets on Brazos Street.

PB: It was one of the first apartment houses .....

GF: It was the first centrally air-conditioned apartment house in Austin. And the rumors were riot and everybody believed--I don't say everybody believed--but there were any number of stories and suppositions that because he and I had been very close friends and very dear friends I was fronting for Johnson on building everything that I built and did. This was utterly untrue. He never--we never were in any joint ventures--business venture in our lives, not ever. Not in the most insignificant thing.

PB: Did he ever do any special favors for you?

GF: Oh, no, I don't recall he ever did any special favors

for me. That is to say in connection with a business venture. We used to ..... when we wanted him to do something we thought ought to be done here, why we used to tease him, you know, and we'd say, "Johnson can do it --if he wants to." That would kind of goad him on. No, as far as any special aggrandizement or as far as any monetary or any appointment or anything like that, he never did anything like that for me, and I neither wanted him to nor expected him to, and we were real, fine friends and whatever I might have done to help him I did it because I thought it was in the best interest to do it and because he was my friend. Likewise, any courtesies he showed me, and there were many, were motivated by the same sort of feeling on his part.

PB: But you do realize, of course, that you were accused in these .....

GF: Oh, yes, I do. I certainly do. I was accused and confronted with it many, many times.

PB: That you were able to do all these things because you were Johnson's friend.

GF: That's right. But Johnson never got a permit for me to do anything. And as a matter of fact, I don't recall I ever asked him to. Not one time.

PB: I'd like to draw on your memories a little bit more to

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discuss another prominent political figure who is now dead and I regret that we cannot have an original tape with him, but perhaps you can fill in some of the gaps. I do know from my interviews with other persons that during the first campaign that Mr. Johnson ran from this district in 1937, that Mayor Tom Miller of Austin, who was a considerable political figure in the city of Austin, was for Mr. Avery rather than for Mr. Johnson. And I know that in his later years, Mr. Miller, Mayor Miller, was one of the most ardent supporters of Mr. Johnson. Now, are you able from your memories of politics in those ..... in that era, to fill in the gaps how this arose that Mr. Miller came over to Mr. Johnson's camp or some of Mr. Miller's activities? Anything that you can recall about that connection in the early days.

GF: Well, let me see, I will try to recall as best I can. First let me say that I think both Tom Miller and Lyndon Johnson were great people. Tom Miller came into a position of influence and power and into the mayoralty of Austin at the time that it was, so-to-speak, on the brink of developing and with all of his sensitivity and his thin-skinness and his taking affront and seeing an insult when none was meant, certainly you have to say

that Tom Miller contributed a vast, vast amount to the progress and the welfare and many other things that are so fine in Austin today. He, basically, laid the groundwork. Well, to start out as I said, Mayor Miller was very temperamental and a very high-strung sort of a fellow. As I recall, in the first Johnson election he was for Mr. C. N. Avery, and then, like I said, Mayor Miller would take offense when none was really intended and he would, so-to-speak, fly off the handle and get mad and this he did at me many, many times. He and Lyndon, in the early part of his tenure as Congressman, didn't get along very well.

Tom Miller was a big Roosevelt man, just a real big one, from the very start. You might say, as they'd say over in East Texas, "from who laid the chunk." He was a Roosevelt man--all out.

I think Mayor Miller's and Lyndon's friendship probably came about through the fact that Johnson was able to control his temper, and whatnot, and to string along with the tide until he got to the place where he could get in. Finally, gradually, step by step the fact that Tom Miller did have a very deep and sincere desire to accomplish things for Austin, as did Lyndon, brought them together.

Lyndon, being in the position he was in, could contribute vastly to the things for Austin Mayor Miller wanted, and he did.

I think probably that, more or less, as a matter of just progress Mayor Miller grew into support of Johnson. Tom Miller was a great, big man physically, and big equally in heart. When he went one way or the other, he went big. And when he finally came over to support Lyndon he was 100 per cent. Now just to pinpoint specifically how it came about or when or at what moment, I don't think I could.

PB: Gordon, there is one campaign that in this series of interviews which I have done with various people, to which I have not done justice. And that is the 1941 campaign for the United States Senate, which Mr. Johnson lost. Were you involved in that campaign in any way?

GF: Yes, I was. I did the press agent work and helped with the campaign in every manner that I could, not as a hired employee, but as I said, my publishers at that time were for Mr. Johnson and I was fortunate enough to have a good staff which took over for me on the paper and I let them run the paper most of the time while I went over and worked in the campaign. We worked on, as I say, on statewide publicity, and I don't remember

now who he had traveling with him as press agent, but I know I stayed here in Austin. I just don't remember .....

PB: Do you recall how that campaign developed--how he happened to get into it?

GF: Well, yes, W. Lee O'Daniel ..... let me see now ..... O'Daniel was running, wasn't he?

PB: Yes.

GF: O'Daniel was running for United States Senate and he was governor of Texas at the time. I don't think he resigned. He ran while he was governor, and Johnson got into the campaign, and it was right at the beginning of the wartime and I think characteristically of him, he had the faculty or the ability to see and to sense things which lay ahead.

PB: Characteristic of whom?

GF: Of Johnson. That he can see impending events, you might say. And sense those things. And he ran on the proposition that we were on the brink of war at that time--as a matter of fact, it happened that we did get into it later that year. As you recall, we already had a great many troops in training and had called up some of them. Of course, this was prior to December 7, but I think he reads the signs very, very accurately, very well. He was running on the basis that America had to get ready

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and had to do it in a hurry. His big campaign slogan was, "It's later than you think." He based it on that. Well, O'Daniel was running and Johnson took him on and it was an uphill fight all the way, Paul, we were short on money, and it was a difficult, tough campaign.

PB: There were some fairly eminent political figures in that campaign, too, were there not? I recall Jerry Mann .....

GF: Oh, yes, Jerry Mann was running.

PB: He was a .....

GF: He had been a great football star at SMU and a former attorney general and was and is a very fine gentleman. And, let's see .....

PB: Martin Dies.

GF: Yes, Martin Dies, who had built his reputation largely as chairman of the House Committee on Un-American Activities in Congress, and was what you might call an ultra-Conservative. And like I said, Johnson got in there with certainly not the statewide exposure that some of the candidates had. Either Dies or Mann or ..... who else was running in that campaign?

PB: Oh, I don't recall all those persons' names .....

GF: But there were .....

PB: Seven or eight of them.

GF: Yes, there were some other statewide personalities in there, too. And, like I say, Johnson got in there and as it came out it got to be just a dog-fall race between Johnson and O'Daniel right down to the wire. And I don't ..... oh, I don't have any proof at hand or anything like that, but I ..... it was my feeling at the time, and it still is, that actually Johnson won the race and I think that in the voting count manipulations over in Deep East Texas principally, he was counted out of it. I thought so then; I think so now.

PB: Who was running the campaign for Johnson at that time?

GF: Well, ostensibly, Alvin Wirtz was the campaign manager, but actually the fellow doing the real work on it was John Connally.

PB: Present governor of Texas.

GF: Yes. And ..... oh ..... Senator Wirtz was occupied, you might say, with other things. Actually the fellow that really had his shoulder to the wheel and I would say the man most responsible for Johnson's showing in that campaign was John Connally. A big help then as he is now, and always, even from youth, standing far above his fellows in intelligence and acumen.

PB: What basis ..... in other words, Johnson was a Congressman from one small Congressional district .....



GF: That's right.

PB: And he had no particular reputation outside the Congressional district, how ..... what approach did he use to make his statewide appeal on? Do you recall any of the details of it?

GF: Basically, he ran on the support of Roosevelt and he ran on the support of the necessity of this country's getting prepared for the impending world events and conflagration that later came on and came on in that year in World War II. That was the basis of his campaign.

PB: What was your job? You wrote press releases and did you write the speeches for him?

GF: Oh, no, as such I wasn't much of a speech writer. John --that is, Governor Connally--and I would sit down and collaborate quite often on writing speeches or suggested speeches to give to him, parts of which he used and some of which he threw away entirely and some he used entirely, but basically my job was to see that we had press coverage on a statewide basis each and every day, and I had it organized to where some 25 or 30 papers would take and pay the telegraph tolls on a daily press release. And I don't remember, Paul, whether we had Buck Hood traveling with him or just who he had traveling with him, but anyway I had

it lined up to where we had so many papers that would take and pay for the press release wired to them each day from the field and we had coverage through the wire services insofar as we could get it and by mail, too, direct to both daily and weekly papers.

PB: Gordon, you were pretty active during that 1941 campaign. I believe we were talking about the people who were in charge of the campaign that year and you said that Mr. Wirtz was--Senator Alvin Wirtz, that is--was ostensibly the head of the campaign but that you thought John Connally did most of the work. Is that correct?

GF: Yes, that is absolutely correct. I think that Connally's ability and his work and his brains and ingenuity were the major factor in it.

PB: That was lost by a very small majority, oh, I think in the neighborhood of 3,000 votes, something like that.

GF: That's correct--I think it was less than 3,000 votes, if I recall it was 2,200 and some, I don't know. Anyway, it was certainly not in any great excess of 3,000.

PB: I understand that you have some opinions as to why Johnson lost that particular race, in other words, factors other than the election of O'Daniel had played a part in his winning the race. Can you enlarge upon that?

GF: Well, yes. You have to understand, as you said, I have some opinions about it. Now, they certainly are opinions, my opinions, and I certainly believe them; however, I do not have any specific or any written proof or even anything like that. But from my participation in it, my feeling about it is that actually Johnson won the race. Along early in the afternoon of the election Senator Wirtz came down to our headquarters in the Stephen F. Austin Hotel and gave orders to us to call all of our county chairmen in counties where we thought we were strong to get the votes in and counted as quickly as they could. And we did do that. And they did. And it became apparent as election night wore on that we pretty well had the Johnson vote in. He was leading until the vote counting dragged on and on and on. It was then, and it is still, my opinion, and I have had no reason to change it, that a sufficient number of votes was switched, or, to just put it baldly, stolen in a number of the counties in Deep East Texas to defeat Johnson and to put O'Daniel in the Senate. And it was the general opinion and it was certainly thought so by many other people, in many circles, including by me, that the object in that was not particularly to make O'Daniel Senator, but to get

him out of the governorship and get Coke Stevenson in there.

PB: Stevenson was Lieutenant Governor.

GF: Yes, he was Lieutenant Governor then and he would-- would and did--succeed to the governorship when O'Daniel was elected to the Senate.

PB: Now, to get back to that opinion of yours concerning the 1941 campaign, to enlarge on it, I should say, a little bit, I have a recollection--I was at that time a reporter, a political reporter in the State House-- that the Senate, members of the Senate, a majority of the Senate, I should say, were very anxious that Mr. O'Daniel should be elected to the Senate seat. Is that your recollection too?

GF: Yes, that's right. I think Mr. O'Daniel had not fit into the political pattern and it was by accident that he got elected and he just didn't fit in. I think that politically the people in authority then, in particular those in the Senate, wanted to get shed of him; that's right.

PB: "Get shed of"--that's a good old East Texas phrase!

GF: That's right.

PB: During that campaign, did you ..... the Johnson temperament is somewhat famous--did you ever have any, oh, shall

we say, run-ins with the Senator when you were working for him?

GF: Oh, I, personally, didn't have any personal run-ins. We never have had one. As a matter of fact, it was a little bit different, I never have actually worked for him. I've never worked in the sense that he ever paid me for it--because he never did. I was .....

PB: Never on the payroll.

GF: I never was on the payroll. I was working for him, to be sure, but under the circumstances not as an employee, but a friend and supporter, and I was happy to have it that way. It's been my experience that the greatest people whom I've known in my life, by and large, were people who had a great deal of temperament and I don't think that that's necessarily any detriment to the man. Johnson certainly does. He is one of the most high-strung and one of the most temperamental people that I ever knew in my life, but I don't think that's a disparagement. I think, in many respects, that it goes with greatness. And more than a few times his famous temperament has been the vehicle which he rode to accomplish his desires.

PB: He didn't see fit to contest this election return in 1941. Do you recall any of the conversations that occurred at that time?

GF: Well, I don't know that I recall any specific conversations about it. We talked about it yes, but I think that in general, without having to quote anybody per se, his feeling was that nobody ever wins contesting an election; that you just better lick your wounds and wait til the next time around. He didn't feel like it would be advantageous to contest the election--I think, very wisely, he made that decision with no equivocation of consequence.

PB: I believe that also was the campaign--again I'm depending upon hearsay rather than on personal knowledge--in which he said that if he were ever compelled to vote for war he would go to war himself.

GF: That's correct.

PB: And 1941 was the year, of course, that .....

GF: Pearl Harbor occurred.

PB: Pearl Harbor occurred. And he did .....

GF: And he did go to war. And served with quite some distinction.

PB: Following the 1941 campaign and you went out of the newspaper business and into the construction business before you had any further contacts with Mr. Johnson. What were your next contacts with him?

GF: Well, of course, we--during that time--were social ..... friends ..... just mutual friendships ..... I went to

his house one time; he came to mine the next; we went out socially together and in the same groups. The next association in the sense of a political association that I had with him was when he ran for the Senate in 1948. At that time I was involved with my own business to the extent that I did not feel like that I could take off and personally devote full time to assisting in his campaign. I did what I could in my spare time and I employed a newspaper man to go with him and to do the press agent work that I normally would have done had I been in the campaign full time.

PB: That reminds me of another question that I wanted to ask--did you ever travel with the Senator?

GF: No.

PB: Never did.

GF: No, I never traveled with him as such. In 1941, as I said a while ago, I don't recall who he had traveling with him--Buck Hood, I believe. In '48 I did not travel with him, but I ..... as you know, when you are out of a business ..... the newspaper business ..... the newspaper people are rather clannish people, like they are in all industries, I suppose, and you don't ..... well, you just don't have the same feeling and I don't think that they have the same feeling toward your asking them

to do something when you're out of their business. And the best that I could do then, which fortunately I was able to do, was to pay the bill for somebody to do press agent work who was still in the newspaper field. And which I was happy to do and I did, I might say, unsolicited, and so far as I remember without Mr. Johnson's ever knowing that I did.

PB: Following his election in 1948, have you had any business or social connections with the President since that time?

GF: Oh, on a very limited and a very casual basis, because my interest and my location laid elsewhere and so did his and of recent years we have had far less contact than we had before. There's never been any time that so far as I know we still weren't the good friends we always were, but we just weren't thrown together.

PB: You say that you were social ..... well, you were social friends of Mr. Johnson and Mrs. Johnson, I assume, during the period ..... well, during the entire period that you knew them. What kind of a person in your judgment was Mrs. Johnson?

GF: Well, let me say this, Paul, that I think probably the greatest single asset that Lyndon Johnson has is his wife, Lady Bird, and I think she has been absolutely



tremendous, ever since the earliest days. Now, I don't think it's any secret with anybody about his temperament --his temperamentality--and gosh, how that woman let the storms roll over her back and kept everything on an equilibrium! When you went over to their house back in the earlier days, and as far as I know may still be that way now, instead of eating dinner at 7 o'clock or 8 o'clock in the evening, maybe you didn't eat until 12 or whatnot. She'd never let anything ruffle her. She always played it to the hilt. Besides that she's a darned smart woman and has a good head on her. I think that more than any other single thing contributing to his success has been her great good judgment and advice and her serenity, her sweetness, and her ability to just roll with the punches, so-to-speak, and to do things and to take things big and little, good and bad. She has been a tremendous help to him.

I would say, in my opinion, that the second person contributing most to his success was John Connally. From early in Lyndon's political life, John was a part of it and a tremendous part. He contributed greatly in many, many ways, Paul, as an assistant and later on as a friend, as a campaign manager, and just ..... well, he's always been a tremendous help and I think he still

is and always will be. I think if I had to say two things ..... other than his own ability ..... made the man, I would say number one it was Lady Bird and number two it was John Connally.

PB: Gordon, I think that you ..... I appreciate the statements that you have made; you have been very frank and unrehearsed in your answers to my questions. I have one final question that I have tried to ask different people, and that is, what they think of the man, what they think of Lyndon Johnson, what they think his place will be in history and I assure you that I want your frank and honest opinion without any sugaring up or anything of that type, I'd like just exactly what you think his place will be in history.

GF: Well .....

PB: If that's not too big an order.

GF: Well, I don't know if I'm big enough to answer it or not, Paul, but I'll try the best I can. First off, let me say that everybody is a human being and they are given to the goodness and the greatness and mistakes and the fallacies, the weaknesses that we all have, some in larger and some in smaller degrees. But now, to start off with, let me say this about him. It's a heck of a long way from Johnson City to the White House

--a real long way. Look at it from the standpoint of here is a youngster who was born in a family that had, to say the best, limited resources, which is certainly no criticism of anybody. Many of us have had that difficulty. When you take into consideration that he went all that way in that time you've got to say that the man has got a great, great deal of ability, that he is a great person. I think that goes without saying. Now, as I said, everybody has his failings and his weaknesses. I would say about Lyndon Johnson that if you struck up a balance sheet you'd have to come to the conclusion that he had a tremendous net worth as far as what he has contributed and what he has done, and I think the fact that he has been so much of a force and so much of a climber, he bridged that long, long gap from Johnson City to the White House and to greatness. He could not possibly have done it, to come that far and done that much, without a great deal of drive and a great deal of force and a great deal of personal sacrifice and desire beyond everything else. So he became President of the United States and he became a great person in this country and in the world. He became a historical figure because he did have that drive and because he had the ability and he had the foresight.

Now, you would have to say, back through the years, that I've seen him do a great variety of things ..... have a temperamental fit bordering on childishness and rail and rant and bawl somebody out, but on the other hand I've seen him do some of the most magnanimous and some of the kindest and some of the most generous and thoughtful things for people that you can imagine. So you have to weigh all of those things in determining your regard for the man. Well, you start off at the beginning back in '37 when he ran, and you measure what he did for the 10th district in Texas in implementing electrification, in bringing so many fine things to this district and really in turning what was actually, oh, a pretty sparse and a pretty poor country into what is now one of the garden spots, one of the most blooming places I suppose in the nation. A great, great deal of that was his foresight and his insistence; his desire to do it; that really indescribable element that is greatness. Then you go on into his career as a Senator and you consider that here is a fellow who goes up there and I don't remember, it must have been certainly not more than four or five years, from a freshman senator to the Majority Leader. Well, you just don't get there barefooted, fellow, you've got to have something on the

ball when you accomplish things like that. Then when he was projected into the Presidency, into a most difficult situation, I think, that he has been responsible for probably greater social and civic and humanitarian and scientific progress in this country than possibly any other president ever was in his entire career. And I think that it has all come so suddenly and so fast that really and truly you can't measure it; you can't appraise things which happen so suddenly and so quickly. Now, my thought about it is that, on reflection through the times to come, the people of this country and the people of the world will come to realize that therein was truly a great man who had a great heart, who was inspired to do the things he did, and I would have to say that I think that the inspiration--much of it--came from the difficulties in which he lived as a youngster growing up and his family's lack of many things others more fortunate had. I think he's contributed greatly to the world and I would have to say for him that in spite of many, many things he has stood steadfast upon, in my opinion, a sound foreign policy and a program, no matter how unpopular for the moment it was. He stuck with it and he stayed to the tasks at hand. There's no doubt in my mind but for his

persistence that the spread of communism today would have been near to overwhelming and that terrible shadow would have fallen upon a great deal more of the world than it has. I think that he knew, because he's a sensitive person; I think he knew that in taking this stand and sticking with what he thought was right that he was sacrificing, or jeopardizing personal popularity. Now, I think that like all human beings, he's made some mistakes. It would certainly be expected as far as I'm concerned that anyone would have--you or I or anyone else. I think he would perhaps have done better if he had made a clearer and a more marked change from the Kennedy people to people of his own when he assumed the Presidency. I don't think that ..... and I'm saying this entirely as second guessing because I have had no personal contact or any other reason, just my thought about it--that he would have done better to have more quickly surrounded himself with his own people than to have kept the people of another administration, no matter who they were or how good they were, and I think that was a mistake. I think that perhaps it was a mistake not to have taken a firmer stand against rioters and lawbreakers. By that I mean to have said, with emphasis, to them: "I want to help you people, but

we're not going to have you rioting, we're not going to have you looting, if we have to call out all the policemen and all the firemen and the National Guard and the U.S. Army and deputize people to stop you."

I think that perhaps that would have been better, but again I say ..... gosh, I wasn't possessed of all the facts, I wasn't President of the United States, I'm just sitting here from the position of saying what I think without anything whatsoever to go on; I might be just entirely wrong.

But I think most of the people in this country are good people. They are solid people and I don't for one minute think that we're going to the dogs at all.

I think that the President has done a tremendous amount for America. Upon reflection and in time I think that he will be recognized as and be appreciated as one of the people who has contributed most greatly in his capacity as President of this country. And that he did so in some of the most difficult and complex times in the history of our Republic.

Lyndon Johnson is and always was a man of great strength and possessed of great gifts and great powers.

Perhaps one of his big difficulties has been that too few people could keep his pace or match his strides.

Maybe it was impossible to expect that they could or would.

So eloquent and persuasive to a small group or an individual, he never, to me, seemed quite able to impart those charms personally to people en masse in the sense that a Roosevelt or a Churchill, or even less personages than he or they, could.

This year he and Lady Bird did a typically sweet thing. They invited something like 250 old friends from all over Texas and from many walks of life to the White House for a gorgeous, wonderful dinner and lawn party. All of them were friends from the past, many without any particular importance politically or financially. Others most certainly were but most of those there couldn't have done a great deal to have helped him with any of the problems which confronted him.

There certainly could have been no ulterior motive in his and Lady Bird's asking them to the White House. He was leaving political life. Many never had been there and most likely never again will be. It truly was a gathering of old friends in the late afternoon of their lives for most of them.

The President talked off the cuff, informally, with all the charm and the eloquence and the warm friendliness



of those long gone days of our backyard gatherings. It was a beautiful occasion and Ruth and I were entirely grateful for having been asked to come.

One of the society reporters who covered the event for a Washington newspaper, I think, most aptly pictured the intriguing and paradoxical figure who is the real Lyndon Johnson. Of his warm, humorous, wonderful talk she wrote: "It was a Lyndon Johnson the television audience never saw." To me those few words said about all of it and added a rather pathetic note on the man as I have known him. He never, really, could impart, despite all his political success, his warmth and charm to people on a mass scale.

It was a great shame, too. How much it might have helped him to have accomplished much more of all the great things he so deeply and sincerely wanted to do. As President, I think, he wanted to do it all. He, of course, did not. No human, dealing with the caprices, the frivolities and foibles of other human beings, could have. As a young man he wanted to do the most, be the best at whatever it was he was doing. And, by and large, he did and he was.

There is no question of his great and passionate love for his country or of his sincerity in wanting to

better the lot of the unfortunate everywhere. From his political beginning he has accomplished more than most any other man ever did in that regard.

I do not recall that a great many people ever characterized Lyndon Johnson as an idealist. Rather a great many, particularly in his closing years as President, set upon him as a conniving, cunning, calculating, domineering man. To some extent those people always did. In my opinion, Lyndon Johnson never has gotten the credit that he rightfully deserved as a man for the great passionate depths of idealism which are his.

The course he had to take to get from Johnson City to the White House had to be a dedicated and a determined one and, perhaps, from time to time a hard and, in some measure, a ruthless one. But as I said earlier, it is a long, long way.

Long after his detractors and their columns and commentaries and cartoons have been forgotten, I think that Lyndon Johnson will be remembered, respected and revered as one of America's truly great men.

PB: Thank you very much, Gordon Fulcher.

GENERAL SERVICES ADMINISTRATION  
NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND RECORDS SERVICE

Gift of Personal Statement

By Gordon Fulcher

to the

Lyndon Baines Johnson Library

In accordance with Sec. 507 of the Federal Property and Administrative Services Act of 1949, as amended (44 U.S.C. 397) and regulations issued thereunder (41 CFR 101-10), I, Gordon Fulcher, hereinafter referred to as the donor, hereby give, donate, and convey to the United States of America for eventual deposit in the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library, and for administration therein by the authorities thereof, a tape and transcript of a personal statement approved by me and prepared for the purpose of deposit in the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library. The gift of this material is made subject to the following terms and conditions:

1. Title to the material transferred hereunder, and all literary property rights, will pass to the United States as of the date of the delivery of this material into the physical custody of the Archivist of the United States.

2. It is the donor's wish to make the material donated to the United States of America by terms of this instrument available for research as soon as it has been deposited in the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library.

3. A revision of this stipulation governing access to the material for research may be entered into between the donor and the Archivist of the United States, or his designee, if it appears desirable.

4. The material donated to the United States pursuant to the foregoing shall be kept intact permanently in the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library.

Signed

Gordon Fulcher

Date

January 13, 1969

Accepted

James B. Rhoads  
Archivist of the United States

Date

April 7, 1969