

INTERVIEW I

DATE: December 2, 1970

INTERVIEWEE: REYNALDO GARZA

INTERVIEWER: JOE B. FRANTZ

PLACE: Judge Garza's Chambers in Brownsville, Texas

Tape 1 of 1

F: Judge, let's talk a bit about how you first came to know Lyndon Johnson and a little bit about your own background. You're a native of Brownsville, is that right?

G: Yes, I am. I was born in Brownsville on July 7, 1915.

F: You took your degree from the University of Texas in Austin?

G: Yes, I did. I got a B.A. and an LL.B.

F: And an honorary doctorate from St. Edward's, I believe.

G: Yes.

F: You came back here to practice law.

G: I came to practice law in September of 1939 and I practiced until February of 1942, when I went into the service. Then I came back after the service in November of 1945 and practiced law in Brownsville until I was appointed in 1961 as a United States district judge.

F: Where did you first get to know Mr. Johnson? What period in his career?

G: While I was a student at the University of Texas Law School, I received a letter one day from a man by the name of John Barron, who was the county superintendent of schools in Cameron County,

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who I understand was a roommate of Lyndon Johnson's at San Marcos. He told me that a friend of his by the name of Lyndon Johnson was running for Congress from the Austin district and that he had written him a letter and told him to come by and see me. And one Sunday afternoon, I was studying in my room at the boarding house where I was staying, and a tall, lanky fellow came in and introduced himself to me. He told me his name was Lyndon Johnson, and I told him, yes, that I had gotten a letter from John Barron asking me to help him. I said, "You know, I don't vote here in this district, but I'll be glad to help you all I can."

F: Is this when he was making that first campaign?

G: First race for [Congress]. It was the unexpired term of Congressman Buchanan, I believe, who had died.

It was Sunday afternoon, and I asked him, "What are you doing tonight?" He said, "Nothing in particular." I said, "Well, I'm going out here to the Guadalupe Catholic Church in East Austin. They're having a bazaar and I'm supposed to help the Father out there." They had a microphone and advertised the different booths they have at the bazaar, and people would dedicate pieces to certain girls. He went out there with me, and I introduced him around to as many people as I knew out there in East Austin. I used to help the church out there all the time. I even introduced him there to the crowd that was at the bazaar, told them he was running for Congress. I did campaign for Lyndon up there in Austin, especially in that east end of Austin where most of the

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Mexican-Americans lived, and he did very well there.

F: Did you find them pretty receptive to him?

G: Yes, very receptive. If I'm not mistaken, he got a tremendous vote in that east end of Austin there. So he and I have been very good friends ever since.

F: I see.

G: Then when I came back from the University, I ran for the school board here in 1941. In April of 1941, I was elected to the school board. One of our local elementary schools had been condemned, the old Washington Park School, and that put quite a crimp in our facilities, because it used to be a pretty large elementary school. But the building was so old it had been condemned, and they had to put a fence around it because they were afraid that the roof would fall or something. At that time the school district was in very bad financial shape.

So I remembered Lyndon. He wasn't even our congressman or anything, but I got in touch with him. He said that he was going to go talk to the National Youth Administration people. In a couple of days a man came down from Austin at Lyndon Johnson's request and, through the NYA, we restored that building at a cost to the district of only about twenty thousand dollars that I went and raised by collecting delinquent taxes. So Lyndon did something for us and for Brownsville in helping us restore the old Washington Park School, which is now the Annie S. Putegnat School still in existence.

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F: How do you spell that?

G: Putegnat. P-U-T-E-G-N-A-T. Mrs. Annie S. Putegnat was one of the principals here; taught school here for many, many years, and they named the school after her.

That was the first time that I actually called on Lyndon for anything, and he sure came through and helped us. Then when he ran for the Senate, I handled his campaign down here both times that he ran: the first time that he lost and when he got elected. I was his campaign manager down here in Brownsville.

F: You had a pretty good candidate on your hands, then, in that 1941 campaign, as far as selling him in this area?

F: Yes, yes. He always carried Brownsville and the Valley pretty big, Brownsville especially. He always carried Brownsville by a big vote.

F: How did you handle his campaign? Because you did have a problem that he was a congressman in another district and wasn't here. He was three hundred miles from here.

G: He came down here. I don't remember which of the campaigns it was, but he came down here one time and landed in a helicopter.

F: That was the 1948 campaign. In the first one he was running against Pappy W. Lee J. O'Daniel and Gerald Mann.

G: Yes.

F: You had a football hero and a very popular governor.

G: Yes, But I remember one time he came down here in a helicopter,

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and we got him to land at the parade grounds of the old Fort Brown. By that time the Brownsville Junior College had moved out there already.

F: Where was that? About where the motel is now?

G: No, no, no. Where the civic center is.

F: Oh, yes.

G: He landed there, and we got the students at the college to be dismissed from class to come and hear him. He had a pretty large crowd there. It must have been in the 1948 campaign, because a lot of GI's that were studying there at the college came out to hear him. But we used to campaign for Lyndon just by going and talking to people, putting up his posters, and things like that.

F: You never had much trouble selling him down here, did you?

G: No, never did. For some reason or other, he was always very well liked down here.

F: Did you get the feeling that he did relate fairly well with the Mexican-Americans?

G: Yes, I think he understood them perfectly. I think that Lyndon has always had a genuine love for the Mexican people, and I think it all stems back from his early days of teaching in Cotulla. I always felt that he had a genuine love for the Mexican people, and we never had any trouble selling him down here. He was an amazing man.

My next contact with him, as far as helping him in an election was concerned, was when he ran for vice president with

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Kennedy. Now before that, I remember that he was trying to gain control of the delegation to the national convention away from Allan Shivers.

F: Yes, that was 1956.

G: And I had been very close to Allan Shivers, close to Lyndon too.

F: I was going to ask. Shivers, in one sense, was a neighbor of yours.

G: Yes. I was sort of put in a bind. I had both camps calling me.

Lyndon was going to appoint a one hundred man statewide committee that was going to be announced in the papers on Sunday, I remember, and I had calls from both camps. Finally Lyndon called me himself and he told me, "Reynaldo, Allan Shivers is going to be out as governor and I'll still be up in Washington, and I know I can do lots more for you than he can. Let's be practical about this thing. I want you on my committee." I told him to go ahead and use my name. Allan Shivers called me and I told him that I had just told Lyndon he could use my name, and I told Allan Shivers what Lyndon had told me. After I got appointed federal judge some years later, I ran into Allan Shivers at the airport in Dallas one time. He remembered that incident, and he told me, "Well, he was right, wasn't he? He could do something for you."

At the time he was running for vice president, and I was the one that introduced him at a Valley-wide rally we had in Harlingen on the Sunday before the election.

F: Where did that "Viva Kennedy" idea get started?

G: I don't know. I didn't have anything to do with that. No. I

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think it started in California.

F: Yes.

G: We didn't have it down here. But we had a big rally, I remember, and we got some mariachis and taught them how to play "The Yellow Rose of Texas." The mariachi band was playing that when he landed at Harlingen for the rally. We had a wonderful rally there.

At the end of the rally, [Congressman] Joe Kilgore told me that Lyndon Johnson had told him, "Reynaldo has always been my friend, and I have never done anything for him and he has never asked me to do anything for him." And Joe Kilgore told me that he told him, "Why don't you appoint him in place of Judge [James V.] Allred?" There had been a vacancy since Judge Allred had been dead for almost two years. Then Lyndon had said, "You know, that's the job for him." Joe Kilgore told me that right after the rally in Harlingen, and I never gave it any thought or anything until I had a call from Washington asking me if I would accept the appointment if offered to me. So I would imagine that he had a lot to do with my appointment as a judge.

I remember when I went to Washington for my appointment, after I was notified that my name would go to the White House for appointment the next day--Lyndon was vice president then--he called me at the Justice Department. Ramsey Clark and I met him, and he took us over to his office. He had a file there that surprised me, because he had a file with every letter that I had ever written him, every letter that he ever wrote me, all

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the newspaper clippings about his campaign and everything. He kept telling me, "You remember this, you remember this?" But he kept a complete file of all the correspondence that I ever had with him or he had with me, and newspaper clippings, and everything. It was amazing that he would have kept all that.

F: Who called you that you were going to be offered the judgeship?

G: The first one that called me was Ramsey Clark; he was an assistant attorney general then in charge of the land division, but apparently was a sort of a liaison man. Ramsey Clark was the first one that called me.

F: Did you know Ramsey?

G: Yes. And then after that, Robert Kennedy called me, and I was asked to come up to Washington, and I did. I met with the Attorney General Kennedy, and then he was the one that told me my name was going over to the White House for appointment.

F: Did he mention Vice President Johnson at all, as far as you know?

G: No.

(Interruption)

F: We were talking before the break just now. Let's get back.

G: You asked me if Lyndon Johnson was mentioned. No, when I was talking to Bobby Kennedy, Ramsey Clark and I were there with him and, when we got through, Bobby Kennedy told Ramsey that he was notifying the Vice President that my name was going over to the White House and for him to notify the two senators, who at that time were [Ralph] Yarborough and [William] Blakley. I

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went back to Ramsey's office with him, and Ramsey contacted the senators from his office.

And while I was there at Ramsey's office was when Lyndon Johnson called me and asked me to meet him at a certain door of the Justice Department building, [told me] that he was on his way to his office in the Capitol, and [said] for me to bring Ramsey with me. That's when we went over to his office, and it was there that he showed me this file, you know, "You remember this, and you remember this."

E Did you know both senators?

G: Yes, I knew them both.

F: I presume they approved.

G: Yes. If they hadn't, I wouldn't have gotten it.

F: That's right. Did you have any trouble at all in confirmation?

G: No, no trouble at all. Congress was just going in recess for Easter recess at that time, so I had to go back for my hearing before the Judiciary Committee. But I had no trouble. In fact, I was confirmed by the Senate the same day that I went before the committee.

F: Blakley and Yarborough stood up with you, in effect?

G: Well, Senator Blakley was on the subcommittee of the Judiciary Committee that was interviewing me, yes, and gave me the hearing. And Senator Yarborough and Congressman Kilgore and Congressman [John] Young, all spoke for me there. I went with Senator Yarborough and Congressman Kilgore to the hearing.

F: Were you presented, then, to President Kennedy himself on that?

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G: Yes, when I was nominated, then my name went over to the Senate, I was sitting in the gallery in the Vice President's box when my nomination came over from the White House. They read my nomination to the Senate. Then Vice President Johnson waved to me and he got off the rostrum and let some other senator preside. I went down and met him in his office, and he gave me a copy of the message that had come over to the Senate from the White House for me to bring to my wife Bertha. He said, "Take this to Bertha. I know she'll like to keep it."

Then that afternoon, I was coming back home, and I had this call from Lyndon. He said he wanted to take me to the White House to see President Kennedy, and we went to the White House, and we waited in the President's office there. Mrs. [Evelyn] Lincoln, who was the President's secretary, told us he was at the State Department making a talk to some foreign students, but that he'd be right back. We went into the Oval Office there, waiting for the President, and the President came in, and Lyndon introduced me to him. I had a very nice talk with him there. I have a picture that I prize; we're standing around the rocking chair, and Pierre Salinger, who was the press secretary, had some pictures made. And later on, I got some picture autographed by both President Kennedy and President Johnson. So I have a picture taken at the White House with two presidents.

F: Good. That's rather unusual. Immediately on confirmation, are you, as of that moment, the federal judge for this district, or

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is there a waiting period?

G: No, there's no waiting period. I was confirmed on the fourteenth of April, I think. I had already been appointed in March, but I was confirmed in April, after the Easter recess. But I couldn't take my oath right away, because I was trying to wind up my own personal business. But our district was short of judges, and Chief Judge [Allen E.] Hannay, at that time, was urging me to get on, and come on and get to work. So I was sworn in on April 29.

So, even though my commission was dated the fourteenth of April, I didn't take my oath until the twenty-ninth of April.

F: Who swore you in? Another judge?

G: Yes, Judge Allen B. Hannay from Houston.

F: How far does your district extend?

G: My district extends all the way up to Houston and Galveston. We sit in Houston, Galveston, Victoria, Corpus, Laredo, and Brownsville; so we have six places that we sit. It covers all the way up through College Station, and down to Galveston, down the coast to Brownsville, and up the river to Laredo.

F: So you've got a fair amount of traveling.

G: Right now, I'm only responsible for Brownsville, but I still travel. I used to take care of Corpus and Brownsville, until we got two more judges.

F: Now this put you in a new relationship with the now-Vice President Johnson, because you're not in a position where you can campaign anymore.

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G: No, I don't. No.

F: What happens when 1964 comes along? Did you just sit it out and act like you're a private citizen?

G: Yes, yes. I didn't campaign or anything for him. I couldn't. But he didn't have any trouble.

F: Right. Who took over your duties down here? Just as sort of campaign man for the area.

G: I don't remember. I don't know.

F: Did you continue to see him from time to time?

G: Oh, yes, yes. My wife and I were very lucky. We got invited out to the Ranch several times.

F: On what sort of occasions?

G: Well, different occasions. One time when he had the recently elected president of Mexico, [Gustavo] Diaz Ordaz at the Ranch, Bertha and I were both honored guests. Another time when he had a barbecue there for the ambassadors to the Organization of American States, we were there.

F: I remember that. When he had someone like President Diaz Ordaz, is it fairly formal, or does he manage to make his foreign visitors relaxed?

G: Oh, no. I think that he had them very well relaxed. There was nothing formal about it. It was very informal.

F: What did you do while you were up there on this particular occasion, you and your wife?

G: For the Diaz Ordaz [occasion]?

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F: Yes.

G: When we got there I ran into a man from Matamoros by the name of Dr. Enrique Martinez Manatou, who was the personal secretary to the President, Diaz Ordaz. The doctor didn't know anybody there, but my wife and I had known him for a long time, because he had married a girl who was a member of a family that was very close to both my wife's family and mine. I remember I told the President Johnson that this man is going to be President Diaz Ordaz's secretary, he'll be a very influential man. So immediately President Johnson made him welcome there, made him feel good. And I remember Dr. Martinez Manatou commenting what a wonderful host he was.

F: Yes. Did you stay at the Ranch or did you go back to San Antonio?

G: No, I didn't stay at the Ranch. I had a boy going to school in Austin and we went back to Austin to be with him that night. And I had to come back, because I was trying cases.

F: How big a group was it?

G: I don't remember, but I would imagine he had about two hundred people there. I remember the Ambassador from Mexico to the United States was there, and the Ambassador from the United States to Mexico was there.

F: Hugo B. Margain?

G: No, [Antonio] Carrillo Flores was the ambassador then.

F: Yes, yes. I've interviewed him.

G: And Mr. [Fulton] Freeman was the ambassador from the United States

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to Mexico. They were both there.

Now when Lyndon Johnson was trying to get the nomination for the presidency against Kennedy, I received a call one morning from him--I think he was in the state of Washington then--asking me to please go to New Mexico and help him out over there. And I spent four or five days in New Mexico.

F: Did he tell you who to see or did you pretty well know who you needed to see?

G: Well, no. He told me who to contact, and I did. I spent about four or five days in New Mexico, and I think he finally ended up getting the majority of the delegates to the national convention. But he didn't get the nomination; he got the nomination for the vice presidency.

F: You weren't a member of the delegation then?

G: No, I was not. No. I had an opportunity to go to that convention, but I deferred in favor of an old Democrat down here who asked me to please let him go. I figured I had many other conventions I could go. I don't guess I'll ever make one now as a delegate.

F: This was before you knew you were going to be a federal judge.

(Laughter)

Back in 1956, when you declared for Lyndon Johnson as against Allan Shivers, did this give you much trouble locally?

G: No.

F: Did Shivers take it in good grace?

G: Yes. Allan Shivers is a very fine man. I've always thought the

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world of him. His wife's family and my family, his father-in-law, Mr. Shary, and my father were very close friends. There's always been sort of a close relationship there. I always found Allan Shivers to be a very fine man.

F: He understood the practical aspects of politics.

G: Yes, he understood the practical aspects of politics. No, I didn't have any trouble. You see, my trouble was that I was in politics in a sense that I helped people that got elected, but actually, you know, I didn't depend on politics. I was practicing law and making a living practicing law.

F: You weren't looking for anything for yourself.

G: No, I helped people because I thought they'd make us good public servants. And Lyndon Johnson impressed me right from the very beginning, the first time that I met him in that room in the house where I stayed.

F: It's rather unusual, in a way, although I think typical, that he would come to your rooming house rather than somehow getting in touch with you and having you come to him.

G: No, no. He came. It was a Sunday afternoon. I was studying, I remember, and he came. I had a little table where I studied, and my bed was over here on the side, and I remember him sitting on the bed. We talked about his campaign for Congress. It was the first time I had ever met him.

F: Did he feel pretty confident then that he could get it?

G: Oh, yes. He wanted to win without a runoff, and I think he did.

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F: Well, this was one of those plurality things.

G: There were thirteen candidates; I think they had thirteen candidates running.

F: Yes. Some of them dropped off.

G: He got elected. I know that. I was just a young fellow then in law school. One of the only things I ever asked him to do for me was to help me with that school, and he sure came through and helped.

F: Yes.

G: He had been with the NYA here in Texas, and he knew what they could do, you know.

F: When Joe Kilgore moved from down here up to Austin, was there a feeling that he was moving to get a more central base to run for the Senate?

G: I don't think so.

F: Or was that discussed there?

G: No, it was not discussed here.

F: There wasn't any feeling, as far as you know, that he might be being used to knock off Yarborough in 1964?

G: No, I don't believe so. In 1964, wasn't he still in Congress? Did he run that year? I think he did, didn't he?

F: Yes. 1964 was when he quit. He moved to Austin, and there was some talk that he might run against Yarborough.

G: Well, you know, Joe Kilgore and I had been very close friends for many, many years. The impression I got from Joe about moving to Austin was that he had this offer from this law firm to go with

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them, and the fact that he had children that were reaching college age, and he wanted to be near a college town. That's the impression that I got.

F: Yes.

G: As to whether he wanted to run or not, I never was in on the know on that.

G: Because, by that time, I was already a federal judge, and I was out of politics. So I wouldn't have any reason to know who was going to run.

F: Did President Johnson ever talk about the sort of technicalities of Mexican-American relations insofar as . . . I'm talking about international and border relations now, some of the problems that go on between the two countries.

G: No.

G: No, I don't recall him talking to me in particular about those things. I do remember that when I was appointed federal judge, he told me, by God, not to be like other federal judges who got so high and mighty that they wouldn't talk to the people. He said, "I want you to be the kind of a judge that anybody will feel free to come and talk to," and he was very interested. The first time I saw him after I became a judge was when Senator Tom Connally died, and I went to the funeral. By that time Judge Ben Connally, who is our chief judge now, was chief judge. I went to the funeral of Senator Tom and, after the funeral, we all went to a relative of Senator Connally's there in Marlin

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to have some coffee and cake, and Lyndon was there. I remember, at that time, he asked me if I knew of any good men, Mexican-Americans, you know, that could fill government jobs, to send him the names of somebody that I knew.

F: He was pushing it that far back.

G: And one time, I think it was Cliff Carter that came down here, and I gave him some names of people that I thought could fill jobs in the government.

F: As far as you know, did he ever--

G: But he's always given me the impression, like I told you at the beginning, that he had a genuine, sincere love for the Mexican people and that he was trying to help them.

F: Now, you have had a problem in this part of the world in the last several years in the relations between the Texas Rangers and Chicanos. You've had a problem with the agricultural workers and the employers.

G: I can't discuss that with you, because there's a case pending in this court right now under a three judge panel of which I am a judge and that case has not been decided yet.

F: Well, I didn't want to get [into that]. The only question I want to ask you on that is whether the President showed any interest in this as far as contacting you is concerned?

G: No. No. In fact, President Johnson has never contacted me with regards to any case pending in my court.

F: Were you ever asked your opinion on turning Padre [Island] into

a national seashore?

G: Was I ever asked my opinion?

F: Yes. I'm not talking about a legal opinion.

G: No, no.

F: I'm talking about either the politics of it or--

F: No, before I was a judge, I was interested in the establishment of a park. I was very friendly with Judge [Oscar] Dancy, and that was one of his pet projects. Later on it became my lot to try three or four of those condemnation cases. But they were all tried before a jury, and the jury just decided the value of the land. I had nothing to do with the decision of either the park or no park, or even the price of the land. They were all jury cases. Even though President Johnson is not a lawyer, you know, he knows well enough that you can't talk to a judge about cases that are pending in his court. Nobody has ever tried to contact me about any cases.

F: Now, does the presence of Falcon Dam up here with certain international water implications raise any problems for you?

G: No. None whatsoever, other than the fact--

F: (Laughter) Getting time to go fishing?

G: No--that there's another bridge there.

F: Yes.

G: And more people get caught trying to smuggle things that finally end up in my court.

F: As far as you could tell, from a judge's position, was there any change at all in sort of border techniques during the Johnson

Administration?

G: Well, he created some kind of a border problems commission that Raymond Telles was the head of.

F: Yes.

G: I think that helped to get the people of Mexico and the people of United States together on their common problems. I think that helped immensely. I think they called it a border development commission [United States-Mexico Commission for Border Development and Friendship]. Raymond Telles was the first head of it.

F: As far as you could tell, did Johnson's popularity as president hold up in this part of [the state]?

G: I think it did. I don't believe that his popularity ever dwindled.

F: Were you watching TV the night that he said he wouldn't run again?

G: Yes, I was, and I cried.

F: I was going to say: What was your reaction?

G: I cried. I have some boys that have grown up with the idea that Lyndon Johnson is a fine man. And one of them, in particular, my boy David, my second oldest boy, was there, too. And he cried together with me, you know. My boys think that Lyndon Johnson is the greatest president that ever lived.

F: Did you ever go to the White House?

G: Yes.

F: What was the occasion?

G: You mean while he was president? Oh, no, no. I never went back to Washington.

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F: You haven't been back since confirmation?

G: No. He invited me twice. Once he asked me to go and swear in a man by the name of [Vincente T.] Ximenes that was appointed by him to be head of some committee on Mexican-American [affairs]. He was going to work with people in the Cabinet. [Inter-Agency Committee on Mexican-American Affairs] He sent me a telegram asking me to please go and swear this man in, but I was right in the middle of a jury trial, and I couldn't go. Then another time, he invited my wife and myself to go to some dinner--I can't recall what it was--but it just happened that I was in the trial of cases.

F: The timing was off.

G: The timing was always wrong. I never did get to go to the White House while Lyndon was there.

F: Have you seen him since he got out?

G: No, I have not.

F: He hasn't been down here, has he?

G: He hasn't been down here. I hope to see him up there this weekend. I'm supposed to ask him to [come]. My youngest boy is graduating from high school. He's president of the student council and I think he spoke when he should have been listening; he told them he's going to get Lyndon Johnson to come down here and give the commencement address.

F: Yes.

G: So I'm going to ask him if he can; I don't know if he will.

F: Right.

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G: I think that if he can, he'll come. I think he's always loved Brownsville.

F: Yes. That's the sort of thing that appeals to him, too.

G: He's always loved Brownsville. I'm going to ask him to come. I don't know whether he'll come or not.

F: All right. Thank you, Judge, very much.

[End of Tape 1 of 1 and Interview I]

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