

INTERVIEWEE: MRS. ASHTON (JOHN) GONELLA

INTERVIEWER: DOROTHY PIERCE MC SWEENY

February 19, 1969, 4836 Van Ness, N.W., Washington, D.C.

M: Today is Wednesday, February 19, 1969. It's around noon. This interview is with Mrs. Ashton Gonella, who has been a personal secretary to the First Lady. We are in her home at 4836 Van Ness, N.W., in Washington, D.C. And this is Dorothy Pierce McSweeny.

Mrs. Gonella, I have some dates and in our previous [pre-interview] discussion you elaborated on them, but let me give them now and tell me how they are changed. I have down that you officially went on as personal secretary to the First Lady February 2, 1964, through September 30, 1966. I know you've had some previous contact, and let's just begin the interview with you giving me a little elaboration on your White House contacts--or when you had your positions with the White House.

G: I guess what we ought to do is start back when I went to work for the President, which was in October 1957. I went to work in Austin, Texas, for him and came up here January 1, 1958. At that time he asked me if I would become one of his two personal secretaries. Mary Rather had left at that time. She had been with him for seventeen years. She had to go back to Texas to take care of her family. So I worked in his Majority Leader office in the Capitol with Mary Margaret Wylie--now Valenti--and worked through the campaign when he became Vice President up until 1962 when I left.

Then when the assassination occurred in November '63, I called the Johnson house, The Elms, to see if I could be of any help. Mrs. Johnson

asked me if I would come out and help them with telephones and mail because I knew the family and the personal friends and so forth, so I did at night time and then through the days and so forth. And when she moved into the White House December 7, I started working for her as her personal secretary through January 20, 1969.

M: I think we'd probably better continue back at the beginning. First, let me ask you to give me a little background on yourself and bring it up to the time that you first met members of the Johnson family and how this happened. I take it you're from Texas.

G: No, I'm from Louisiana. I guess back in about 1955 or '56 I was very interested in the League of Women Voters at home. I was president of the Shreveport League and was extremely interested in politics and people who made the government work. I had read about Mr. Johnson and all of the things he did and was trying to do, and I just simply wanted to go to work for him. I had never met him nor any member of the family.

M: Where was this?

G: I was in Shreveport at the time. I did have a mutual friend who knew some of the Johnson staff members. They said that they would contact him and see if there were any openings or anything. In September '57 I did get a call that they were looking for people to go to Washington to work for Mr. Johnson. So I sent in a resume and was accepted sight unseen but was told I needed to go to Austin to learn a little bit more about Texas and the office and what have you before I went to Washington.

I had twin boys then who were seven years old. So the three of us moved to Austin and got an apartment, and I worked in the office there.

M: You were born in Shreveport, Louisiana?

G: Yes. Right.

M: And was your schooling there?

G: Yes, I did go to Hockaday Junior College in Dallas, which gave me a little taste of Texas. But in these days I think every Senator had only people from their own home state, but I think Mr. Johnson was awed by me wanting to go to work for him. He couldn't understand anybody with two children wanting to pick up and go to Washington and work for a Texas Senator. So I think he took a gamble on me.

M: Could you tell me a little bit about your first meeting with Mr. Johnson?

G: I guess, number one, I was scared to death because he was about ten feet taller than I thought he was. I had been given a job in Texas. They didn't really know what to do with me and weren't quite sure that I would fit in, and it was just before Christmas-time. They had decided to give a Christmas gift to every county man in Texas. I think there were 254 counties, if I'm not mistaken. They decided to give them a gold pen signed by Mr. Johnson. So they couldn't figure out anything else to do with me, so they gave me the project of trying to go down and get the boxes and get the paper and get all of these wrapped with mailing labels and so forth. So I went in the back room and figured this out and went down and bought the boxes and paper. I was in the office, I guess, about 7:30 or 8 one night barefooted, wrapping these hundreds of pens, and Mr. Johnson walked in and said, "Who are you?" So that was our first encounter.

M: Could you tell me a little bit more about what you were doing in the Austin office in '57?

G: That was the beginning, so to speak. I just did various typing. I worked some, took some shorthand from George Reedy with speeches and

what have you. That's about it.

M: Did you have occasion to meet Mrs. Johnson during this period in Austin?

G: Yes, I did, and a couple of times I went out to the ranch and met them and visited with them in the home. Then when I went home Christmas in my couple of days off to tell my family goodbye before I drove to Washington, I got a phone call from Mrs. Johnson, and she asked me where I was going to stay when I got here. I told her I didn't know. I guessed I'd go to a motel or Alamo Plaza or something. I didn't know a thing about Washington--never been here. So she asked if the twins and I would like to stay at their house--that was when they lived on 30th Place--which was one of the nicest things I think I've ever had happen to me. So when we came to Washington, we went straight to their house and stayed there, I guess, for three weeks before we found an apartment.

M: How large was his staff in 1957?

G: I guess ten, fifteen people. Of course, he was head of several committees, so he had people on various committees. But the Senate staff was not too large--say ten people--because in those days it was according to the population of an area of the State. So he had what he was supposed to have being from Texas.

M: It sounds as if you got to know the family very well very quickly. I know that they are inclined to be this type of people anyway, but could you kind of explain that--how you got to know them so well?

G: Well, I don't know. I think I was just very lucky and very fortunate in that we did all seem to get along. I think that's one thing about the President that's not recorded and has never been in the newspaper or anything else--is his feeling about anybody who works for him. He doesn't believe in the caste system exactly. If you work for him, you're

practically a member of his family, and he treats you that way. He was as interested in what I was doing, what I did on weekends, what the children were doing, how they were doing in school, when they had the mumps, the measles, the chicken pox, as if they had been his own.

M: And when you first came to Washington, did you go to work in his Senate offices there?

G: Yes

M: What were your duties there?

G: I wasn't in the Senate office. He asked me at the house one afternoon, he said, "I would like to take a gamble on you. Would you go in as one of my two personal secretaries?" So I went to work in the Majority Leader office in the Capitol, which was in G-14 back in a little corner.

M: If I have these dates down, you were in that position from '58 through '60 and his election--

G: We went through the campaign in '60. Well, we went to [the] Los Angeles--

M: Convention?

G: Convention. I was out there for a month working in sort of a small little group of the various people who were attempting to get Mr. Johnson nominated for Presidential candidate.

M: Let's kind of approach this chronologically. What do you recall about your working with the Johnsons from 1958 to 1960?

G: It goes into two different categories. Number one, I say again, their personal feeling toward staff members--their interest in me and concern over me and how I got my car paid for and what the children were doing--plus the fact that legislations is my love and I liked that end of it more than I did the Executive Branch.

It was fascinating to see the way he would walk into the Senate floor and practically know what everybody was thinking and how they

were going to vote and what they were going to do and what needed to be done. In those years he kept the Senate until 8, 9, 10, if it needed to finish work. I've never seen anybody that put in the hours and energy that he did.

I guess it was that fall of '58. No, it was that summer--Congress went out in June or July because that was a campaign year. And he asked me if the twins and I would like to live on the ranch because we would be down there from, say, July until January 1st. So I did, and the twins went to Johnson City school--the same school he had gone to, and rode the school bus. It was an experience for them. Again, I saw another side of him because he would take interest in them. He gave them each a baby pig and told them to feed it and so forth, and then take it to the Johnson City auction. And, of course, being from the city, this was an opportunity that two little boys would not have had if he had not provided that.

M: Do you recall what seemed to be to you some of the crisis situations?

G: I guess the Labor Bill of '58 or '59 was perhaps the most important thing that I remember. That's when we had round-the-clock sessions for about three nights. They moved a cot in, and Mr. Johnson slept on the cot. We took shifts of eight or ten hours. We would come in and work and then go home because it was around the clock. I guess that, perhaps, was the biggest crisis of legislation. Then, of course, the Civil Rights Bill was in--what, '59 or '60?

M: That would have been '60.

G: '60, yes, that's right. Which was another reason I think that he did not come out and say he would be a candidate for the Presidency because he wanted to finish his Senate job first. He was criticized, I know, by a lot of people, but I still think he did right in his own mind.

Of course, in looking back now, I wonder if it wouldn't have been better for the country to be another way.

M: When you first began working for him, did you think of him in terms of Presidential material?

G: Oh, I have to say "yes." I think all of us did. It also worked the other way. The staff members--I guess we almost idolized him almost to the point of not being very objective. I thought he could do no wrong, and that he would be President. I think everybody else did too.

M: Do you recall when in 1959 he committed himself to run, or when he first began and then publicly announced his Presidency--that he was running for the office?

G: Actually, I don't think he did until we went to Los Angeles if I'm not mistaken, because--I know there was kind of an unpleasant situation--there was an office opened up downtown and a sign that went up, "Johnson For President." I think Bobby Baker had been responsible for that. I remember Mr. Johnson calling him in--and that must have been in May or something--April or May--and bawled him out for going this far ahead, and had him take the sign down and close up the office. He still was not ready to publicly announce that he would be a candidate. So it must have been closer to the time we went to Los Angeles. The convention was in July, and we went out in June. So it must have been in June.

M: He didn't talk about it among the staff members?

G: No. We just quietly went on our way, thinking and hoping and working. He just went right along his bit doing the Senate business.

M: Who were the members of the staff that you were working with from '58 to '60?

G: Actually, I worked just in his office so I wasn't working with any

members of the staff. It was just Mary Margaret and me in his office and did only his personal mail and phone calls and that type business--appointments with the various Senators and so forth.

M: What was a work day like working for the Senator?

G: Full of surprises. Every day was different. It usually started around 9:30 and, as I say, would always go until 7:30 or 8 and sometimes much later, depending on the Senate business. As the session would get into the year, the actual day's work was longer. Then, on the weekends, I think one of the happiest things was every Sunday a lot of the staff members would go out [to] the Johnson house and we'd sit and talk. They used to call it the "Johnson togetherness" because we never seemed to have any outside friends or anything. We just sort of stuck together. When I'd go to lunch, I'd go to lunch with a staff member--or weekends. We just seemed to be a little clan all of our own.

M: Had you met the daughters by this time?

G: Oh, yes. When we lived in the home, of course, I had. Luci was just a year older than my twins, and Lynda was 9-10.

M: Let me ask you here. How would you characterize the various members of the Johnson family, including Mr. Johnson at this state?

G: Oh, golly, that's difficult to say. As I say, he was just at that time a very powerful person who was very much in command of everything. Mr. Johnson to me at that time was just something almost unbelievable as far as his energies and beliefs and what he was trying to do and everything.

Mrs. Johnson at that time was to me sort of an ideal companion or wife or helpmate or what have you. I know we used to call sometimes at 7:30 or 8:00 o'clock, and he'd say, "I'm bringing fifteen for dinner." Whereas I would have thrown my husband out and said, "Go to the Hot



Shop," she was perfectly calm, happy, always had a smile on her face, and learned every night to have expandable meals that also could stay on the stove for about five hours, if necessary. That's something that I'm sure she did many years before I went with them, and it continued on through White House days and everything. That was something about Mr. Johnson. You never knew when he was coming to lunch or when he was coming to dinner, whether he was going to be alone or have twenty people with him. But she always made everybody feel welcome, which is quite an art. I guess some credit goes to Zephyr [Wright], the cook, but then I think Mrs. Johnson's handling of it is most unusual.

Luci at that time was a little girl who had taken up sewing and was already a very mature little girl, very religious, very deep. She always was a deep-thinking little-bitty girl, which she still is--a very deep thinker.

Lynda was, I guess, 10 or 11, and I was not as close to Lynda at that time as I was to Luci. But then as the years went on, I grew closer to Lynda. It's hard to say "closer" to any of them. I love all four of them, and they've been very nice to me.

M: Let me ask you to kind of recall what you remember about the 1960 convention.

G: I worked in, I think, it was the Statler Hotel which is separate to where the convention headquarters were and so forth. There were six men. Each one of them had an area. The country was divided up into six parts. They took that area and contacted the delegates to see if they were committed or if they would support Mr. Johnson. As we know now, it wasn't too successful, but we were sort of amateurs at it. These were just friends, so to speak, of Mr. Johnson's. Some of them

had worked for him, but mostly friends. They weren't, you might say, professional politicians. They did it more on a friendship basis than a hard-nosed politician who knew the ropes of getting the various commitments.

M: Did it seem to you at the time that the Kennedys had already--to use the vernacular that has been expressed--had sewed up the delegates in the convention?

G: No, but that was my own ignorance. I did not realize how powerful an organization they had, and that this had been something that apparently had been planned and worked on for years and years and years. As I say, we were all naive to a degree. I can't express exactly what I mean, but we did not realize the Kennedys had the strength nor the determination nor the operation that they had.

M: Did you see any problems with cars or rooms at the convention?

G: No, because I was not involved with any of that.

M: Could you go ahead and tell me a little bit more about what you saw at the convention?

G: As I say, I was sort of locked up in this room with six men. I've often laughed about that. I would take care of the phone and the messages, and they would go out and contact the various delegates and then would come back. We kept a tally and what have you. We knew sort of after two weeks of work out there that we didn't have enough delegates. But I guess we still thought that perhaps once it got to the floor it would snowball and maybe people would catch on, or maybe they weren't telling us the truth. Those that were uncommitted, we thought we possibly had a chance to get them.

M: About what time was this in terms of days in which you realized what the problems were going to be?

G: You mean the time of--?

M: Yes. You said you had gone out there in July.

G: We went four weeks before the nomination. I can't remember just right offhand, but it was four weeks we were out there.

M: So it was within the first week that you really realized--

G: We were beginning to realize toward the second week. As I say, the people who worked on it were not the hard-nosed, dirty politicians that would go out and say, "You are or you aren't for him." If someone said, "Well, I'll think about it," we would put them down as a possibility, or thinking perhaps they might change. Of course, our tactics were a little different. But maybe I'm prejudiced.

M: That's fair. Were you surprised by Mr. Johnson's accepting the Vice Presidential spot?

G: It's not a matter of surprise. I guess in analyzing it at the time, there was nothing else he could do. It was shock more than surprise. It was shock to know that he had been put in that kind of a box. The way I felt about it was that if he had said "no" and gone back to being Majority Leader, he would have been a very ineffective Majority Leader because then if Kennedy had been elected President without him, and whoever was Vice President, they would have said, "We don't need you." So he just had to go on as Vice Presidential candidate.

M: Do you think John Kennedy needed Mr. Johnson to win the election?

G: Yes, I do, and I don't think that he would have won had it not been for the last seven days in Texas. My own personal opinion is that Dallas won the election for Mr. Kennedy, because when we were in Dallas-- I guess it was six or seven days before the election. That was when Mr. and Mrs. Johnson crossed the street and got spit on and paint was thrown on them and so forth. Texas had not really been that much for

Kennedy-Johnson. They're sort of a conservative state and a lot of people felt that Mr. Johnson had deserted them by going on the ticket. But for some reason, the people then felt, "This is disgraceful; They've done something to our people," and sort of changed.

I think it was two days later we were to go to Houston. We were told ahead of time that Houston was really going to be ugly to us because they're very conservative and were at that time anti-Kennedy-Johnson. We got to Houston. I couldn't have been more overwhelming. Everybody had signs, "We apologize, we love you!" I think that changed-- and in the other votes if Texas had not gone for Kennedy-Johnson, they would not have been elected.

M: What other parts of the campaign did you participate in?

G: I went on all of the trips.

M: You've mentioned the Adolphus Hotel incident. Did you travel on the whistle-stop tour?

G: Yes. That was lots of fun.

M: Can you tell me any of the things that occur to you on that?

G: This is not very significant. The only thing I can remember is we didn't have a bath for four days. It was a unique thing for me and for all of us to see someone who could make fifteen-twenty speeches a day. When we'd hit the beginning of a state, we'd pick up the state people and they'd ride with us through the state and get off at that end, you know. To be in close quarters like that with someone and listening to them and what have you, it was just an unusual type of campaign more than flying in and having an airport stop where you didn't really get to talk to people. We would go to airports and have a welcoming committee and so forth and then go to a hotel and make a speech and go back to the airport, leave, and that was the end of it. Whereas on the train, you

really got to know the state people, which I think was a far more effective and better way of campaigning.

M: Did you meet the Kennedys during this period? That includes a lot.

G: Yes. There was never any time when I was in a room where there was social conversation or anything. Just met them--met him, rather, at various places. Of course, they didn't campaign together. They didn't go too many places together, but sometimes our paths would cross at airports.

M: Were you in New York when they had that meeting with the Democratic Liberal Party of New York, and they were not supposed to be very well-received up there?

G: No. That was one I was not on.

M: Do you remember any personal stories, things that occurred to you, with the Johnson family during this campaign?

G: No, nothing that's particularly significant. I think a campaign like that is a test for everybody, to be that close together, morning, noon, and night, and working until 2 and 3 and 4--working on the next stop and then the various speeches and so forth. I think the fact that everybody survived without killing one another--that is a test of a group, and that's why I think Mr. Johnson's staff as a group is a very unique organization. I'm talking about the old Senate staff.

M: Who were Mr. Johnson's principal staff members during this period?

G: There was Walter Jenkins, of course, without whom none of us could have survived; and George Reedy; Jerry Segal, for a time; Bill Lloyd; Jim Blundell was in charge of the advance, of the scheduling of the various stops; and then Bill Moyers was coordinator with him. George was chief speech writer, so to speak. That was just about it. Then, of course, on the female side, there was Willie Day [Taylor]--she worked with

George; and Geraldine Williams traveled I guess the whole time, typing speeches and so forth; and Mary Margaret and myself. It seems to me during '60, Liz Carpenter had gone to work for Mr. Johnson--right--and she traveled with us on a good many of the trips. She helped Mrs. Johnson with some of her remarks that she would make. In '60 she was not as active as she was in '64, as far as full-blown speeches. But she would go with him and be called on to make a few remarks every now and then. When there was a men's luncheon, she would go to the ladies' luncheon and make a short speech.

M: During this campaign, what were you doing?

G: Everything. Traveling and typing. It's hard to say, "what do you do in a day's time." But Mr. Johnson had a habit of always changing a speech about twenty minutes before the plane landed. It seemed like every landing, with the typewriter buckled down, we were trying to re-type a speech card. There was something that he had decided he wanted to say a little bit different.

M: Do you remember any stories or incidents--funny things that occurred during this campaign?

G: I should have put my mind to this to think. It seems so long ago. No, nothing of particular--

M: Let's go on into the Vice Presidency then. What were your duties then--when he became the Vice President?

G: Basically the same. We moved then down to another office in the Capitol which was right off the Senate floor, called P-38. Mary Margaret sat on the inside office, and I sat in on the outside office. Then when he became Vice President, he was given military aides. The Navy military aide was moved over to the office and he sat outside with us--and Liz Carpenter. At one time, Grace Tully was there--I guess for about six or eight months.

M: And so you stayed at the Capitol offices?

G: Yes.

M: Can you tell me anything that occurred to you during that period-- during the Vice Presidency--what your work was, what your relations with the Vice President and his family?

G: That remained the same. I think work-wise there was a period of frustration because Mr. Johnson had been so used to actually doing something as far as the Senate was concerned. And he was, I felt, reduced to just a figurehead of not really--I'll backtrack.

I think his basic love was legislations, also. He liked to accomplish something in the Senate, and when he became Vice President, he didn't have that responsibility nor that authority. In the beginning it was sort of making speeches. I will say this--which I thought was a little bit too tight of a rein to hold on the Vice President--his speeches had to be approved by the Kennedy people. To a man who was used to saying and doing what he thought and what he believed in, this is sort of a curb that I thought was unnecessary and unfair.

M: Do you recall when there began to be any sort of a breakdown in the relations between Kennedy staff people and Johnson staff people?

G: Oh, I don't think there ever was a breakdown, because I don't think it ever enjoyed any particular successful relationship. I think they were resentful of our being there, and we were resentful of their being there. It was sort of a stalemate, but certainly we got along together and what have you. We worked together because we were working for the same purpose, but it never was the happiest, most cordial relationship.

M: Why do you think so?

G: Just what I say. I think that we felt Mr. Johnson should have been President. I think the staff members did not really think that Mr.

Johnson was needed to be Vice President.

M: There has always been a little bit of talk about this period in Mr. Johnson's life in which he really had to take sort of a back seat to a very strong and almost colorful Presidency in Mr. John Kennedy. Did you see the personal effects of this for a person of Mr. Johnson's nature?

G: No, because I think Mr. Johnson is a unique person in thinking the best of everybody until proven differently. I think the staff members had perhaps more resentment than he did. I think he felt that he was just trying to do his job as well as it could be done and contribute as much as he could. As I say, on the speech bit and what have you, I think perhaps he did feel a little--when you've got to ask permission to go to this city or that city and then have your speech approved, you feel like a two-year old that's being told by your parents what you can and can't do. But he never did feel or express or seem to have the feeling that we did. I think he just felt he had done what he had to do as an American.

M: You didn't see any frustrations in him or evidences--?

G: I think he had frustrations in that he didn't have as much responsibility and as much authority as he had had when he was Majority Leader.

M: Did you go on any of his travels during this period of the Vice Presidency?

G: Yes. We went on the round-the-world trip--the two-week whirlwind trip around the world.

M: Can you tell me a little bit about that?

G: I guess one thing that did impress me was we had a feeling that Mr. Johnson being a man from Texas who had grown up in a rather humble background with a lack of, say, sophistication or knowledge of international



things, I was surprised to see the warmth that came from the people in Asia, say, when we were there. He would walk around with a stack of gallery passes and pass out to the little Indian children, and say, "Get your mama and daddy to bring you to the Senate and Congress and see how the government works." We thought this may be so corny people would laugh at it, but everybody loved it. And I wonder now how many little Asian children are still holding these gold and white cards that admit them to the Senate gallery. But it was a sincere approach if it were not a sophisticated approach. That was as successful as someone who might have been more sophisticated.

M: Any other things about that trip?

G: I think, too, that it was good that Mr. Johnson was exposed face-to-face to as many leaders, heads of state, as he was, because there's something about him that does not seem to project by a letter or by TV or by a message or this, that, and the other. When he sits down and talks to you and looks you in the eye, it gives a different feeling. I think he did a lot of good that way--to sit down with various heads of countries and talk with them--because he is sincere. It's not a put-on. He deeply feels what he does.

M: Where does the staff go when the Vice President goes into these meetings or is received by heads of state?

G: We would take turns on the typing and what-have-you. Whenever you have a meeting, there were always communiquees that had to be typed up and transcripts of discussions and what-have-you that had to be typed. There were always schedules that had to be typed and given to everybody--hotel assignments, room assignments. We took a very small staff on this, so everybody had certain responsibilities like that. Keeping up with him, keeping his diary, where he was and what he did every five

minutes of the day--that was a job that had to be done. We'd take turns on that. Making sure that both President and Mrs. Johnson knew the customs of the country and were briefed, particularly Mrs. Johnson, on what colors were appropriate to wear, whether she should wear a hat or not, what she should do so that you wouldn't offend a country. It sounds small, but it took research and then briefing and so forth. There really wasn't much spare time because we went so quickly, and time change and what have you--it was sort of a survival test more than--

M: Did you bring your own equipment with you, such as typewriters and paper and everything?

G: Right. Everybody had to carry their own typewriter, their own supplies. You were each a little unit, and it was up to you to have your pencils and pen and typewriter ribbon and shorthand notebook, pads, and everything.

M: Did you go on any other trips?

G: I don't remember any other of any significance during the VP days, because as I say, I left after the one year.

M: 1962?

G: Beginning of '62. It was just the one year of '61.

M: Do you recall some of the occasions out at The Elms during this period?

G: No, except we were all a happy family. We would go out on Sundays and go swimming and take the children. There were Walter and Marjorie and their children, and George Reedy and his children. Even though you were still talking work and still talking what had to be done--there was always something to be done--it still was a relaxed time, just where you were friends, so to speak.

M: Then in 1962 you sort of retired for awhile, very briefly.

G: Right.

M: And this carried you through the '63 assassination.

G: Yes.

M: You were here in Washington during that time.

G: Yes.

M: Can you bring me up to date in 1963 surrounding the events, your hearing of the assassination and calling?

G: I was at home, and my husband called me and said he had heard on the radio that Mr. Kennedy had been shot, and they didn't know how bad it was or anything. I think in the beginning it was supposed to have just been a shot that grazed his hand or shoulder or something. No one knew. So then he came home and we called, I forget who I called-- I guess it was George Reedy's office-- to see what the report was.

Then we realized what the situation was. I called the house, I guess around 4 o'clock in the afternoon to leave word that if there was anything I could do or what-have-you, that I would. Mrs. Johnson called me the next day and asked if I could, because the minute that Mr. Kennedy died the White House phones were immediately installed in The Elms, with a White House switchboard. And of course they didn't know any friends, any family, and those were the ones who were calling in the beginning. They didn't know what to say to them or who to put through and who not to put through. The telegrams were coming in and so forth.

M: And so it would have been the day after the assassination that you did go out to The Elms?

G: Yes. And then there were a lot of business things that I remember typing and doing when the Johnsons put their television station in trust and what-have-you. A.W. Moursund had come up. They were working out the details of this. I typed up the various documents to be signed and so forth.

M: You stayed right there in The Elms during that period?

G: Right.

M: What did you feel was the sort of overall feeling at The Elms regarding what had happened?

G: Shock is about the best word you could possibly use. But still, through it all, Mr. Johnson maintained a calmness, very much in command of the situation. You never felt like, "oh, he doesn't quite know what to do." He just was in command. But it was a period of shock, of people sort of walking around in a daze, not realizing that this really had happened, yet knowing it had and knowing that there was work to be done immediately.

M: And it was at this period that Mr. Johnson asked you to come on as Mrs. Johnson's--

G: Mrs. Johnson herself had asked me after I had worked with her during the day. Whereas, the President had things that he had to do, he wasn't as concerned with mail and phone calls and so forth, so that sort of fell in Mrs. Johnson's lap. In working with her and realizing that the house had to be sold and so forth--I was working real closely with her, and she asked if I would stay on and handle her personal things, bank accounts and family mail and personal friends' mail and so forth.

M: The Johnsons, of course, moved into the White House in December.

G: December 7th.

M: And you came on then and began working in the East Wing?

G: No, I didn't work in the East Wing. I called it the DMZ--I worked in the Mansion. I had an office on the third floor of the Mansion, so I was neither East Wing nor West Wing.

M: I didn't realize they had this arrangement.

G: It was more convenient because I was just one floor above her bedroom.

I could just scoot down real quick if she needed something and just go back and forth.

M: Before we continue, do you recall any personal conversations that you've had either with the President or with Mrs. Johnson?

G: You mean, regarding going to work or anything? Yes, I was there during the day, and we'd have lunch together or dinner together and what-have-you. There wasn't much conversation about it, she just simply asked me if I would at the time. The baby was three months old, and that presented a problem as to who to get to take care of the baby. I did get a live-in maid to come and so my work was limited until I got the maid in. I guess about Christmas-time it all got pretty well straight.

M: Then what did your duties become and consist of in working in the Mansion?

G: As personal secretary to her. As I said beforehand, her finances--writing checks, keeping the books, doing personal mail and family mail, gifts that would come in to her personally from friends--and also helping to close up The Elms. Everything had to be inventoried--deciding what needed to be put in the Archives, what needed to be put in storage for later use, what could be used in the White House.

M: Mrs. Gonella, could you tell me what it was like working for Mrs. Johnson?

G: It was a totally different thing, having worked for him. I guess I watched her--grow sounds like a corny word--but I watched her grow, because Mrs. Johnson back years ago was very shy, which a lot of people don't realize. She didn't like to make speeches. She was scared to death to make a speech; and realized that she had to. So she went and took a speech course--public speaking course. And to see her master

this feeling that she had--and she did it very quickly. I would watch her when she had a speech to make. She would do her homework. She would sit down and read all about wherever she was going, and read whatever she needed to do. Then she would tell Liz, who did most of her speeches, what she wanted to say. Liz would put it down, then bring it back to her, and she would change it. Then she would get a speech teacher to come, and she would actually rehearse it for two or three hours until she had it down to perfection. She put this much work into every speech that she did, whether it be five minutes or thirty minutes. This was an interesting thing to see--the perfection that she wanted. She wanted everything absolutely perfect.

And to see her energies. I don't think in the twelve years I've known her I've heard her say, "I have a headache," or "I'm tired." I'll take that back. I guess in the last year I've heard her say it. But I could tell that she was beginning to get tired. But in all the other period, she always had a smile and did what had to be done and enjoyed doing it.

M: During this period of '64 and '65 and part of '66, did you do any traveling with Mrs. Johnson?

G: Yes. I went with her on the Lady Bird Whistlestop, and made a good many trips with her. I tried, with a small child, not to go as much. I have an absolute horror of flying. But I did make a good many of the trips--not as many of her beautification trips as I would like to have made--but when she would go some place in one or two days, I went on those with her. And whenever she and the President traveled together, I went on most of those trips.

M: Can you tell me about some of them?

G: They were actually no different than the earlier trips, except that she

was more active in getting out and having projects. She would go her way and he would go his way, and they'd get twice as much done. She would plant a tree and dedicate it and have her own schedule. Sometimes I thought she had more drawing power than anybody, because I don't think there was ever any unkind words or thoughts or anything about Mrs. Johnson--which to me in almost six years is an incredible record. She just didn't make any mistakes.

M: You spoke of the whistlestop tour, and that of course goes into the campaign of '64. Can you remember some of the highlights of that?

G: No, not particularly. I remember the one time I think Mrs. Johnson should have gotten an Academy Award in South Carolina when we got off the train and she went out to make this speech, and the college students began booing her and throwing things at her. I think they threw ink bombs or something. She maintained her composure, which I don't think many people could have, and handled herself beautifully. She has that knack for being able to compose herself and go through any situation, which a lot of people do not have.

M: How did she manage to calm those students down?

G: She just waited very quietly for them to calm down a bit. And I wish I would remember the remark she made. It was in the newspaper and I can't remember it. It was something about being a gentleman. I cannot remember it, but she had one remark that just quieted everybody down.

M: Did you become involved in the Arts Festival?

G: No.

M: That was later?

G: That was in '65. I was not involved in that. I handled only personal affairs--dinners and luncheons and what-have-you when they were just having friends--

M: Private?

G: Right. Nothing official.

M: Has Mrs. Johnson's personal correspondence grown as First Lady?

G: Oh, yes. People became known as personal friends after they'd write four or five times. Through the years, we picked up a lot of personal friends. Some of them weren't so personal, but they considered themselves as such. And the mail did increase.

M: Did you help on either of the daughters' weddings?

G: From the personal end, yes, not from the official end of the ceremony and what-have-you. But as far as helping with the guest list and clothes to wear and what to do--just various little things--and helping the girls with clothes and deciding what to do here, there, and yonder.

M: What arrangements had to be made for getting clothes for and to the First Family?

G: She used to go in and buy clothes off the rack in Garfinkel's and Woodie's [Woodward and Lothrop]. But she got to the point where she did have to go to New York and get clothes more or less made for her. She herself did not care if someone else had on the same dress, but I think realizing her position, she knew she had to. Clothes were never an important thing to Mrs. Johnson, but she got to the point where she had to make it a project--which she never did like. She's not the type of woman who likes to try on dresses and spend as much time on it as she had to spend on it.

M: She's always very immaculately groomed.

G: Yes. But she was a very--when people say thrifty, I think sometimes it's misinterpreted as being stingy, and she was not stingy at all--but she would buy a suit and then she would buy a pair of shoes to go with that suit, but also keeping in mind that they would go with two



other dresses, which is just sensible. But as I say, that has been misinterpreted, I think, as being stingy-thrifty instead of being sensible-thrifty.

M: Did you ever help out on the select of gifts for the family among themselves?

G: Yes, as far as Christmas gifts. I've always had the chore of helping the President with his Christmas presents for both the girls and Mrs. Johnson.

M: Can you tell me a little bit about some of those?

G: Year before last, I think, when he went on a trip to--where was it, Hawaii, when he went and got back Christmas Eve. Just before he left on that trip--I think it was December 20 or 21st--he called me over about 5 in the afternoon. He said, "I want you to get a new dress for Mrs. Johnson, for Luci, and Lynda, and have it ready for me when I come back." Of course, at that time of year, all of the clothes are gone, particularly at a holiday time. So I called New York and we did get some things. I went down on Christmas Eve, which was Sunday, and he picked out what he wanted and we wrapped them, and he put them under the tree. He loves to buy clothes for all three of them--and has excellent taste.

M: I believe he used to, before the Presidency, make all of her selections.

G: Right.

M: I think there has been some comment to the fact that since she has been doing it herself, she has improved. Do you think that's so?

G: I think she has had a little professional advice. He loved to see a female dressed in black--morning, noon, and night. He felt black silk was the prettiest dress that any woman could wear. Fortunately, she had enough advice that she got away from that.

M: Mrs. Gonella, could you tell me what it was like working for the President?

G: That would take about six hours. It was sort of a challenge to keep up with what he expected of you. He, also, expected perfection. I don't think either one of them had much tolerance for mistakes, for errors, which is good. It might be to the point of being--I know he has been accused of being a slave driver and so forth. I've never felt that way. But he's a perfectionist himself; she is too; and they expect it of their staff. They expect them to put as much time into things as they do. Each letter that we wrote, we thought, "That may be the only letter this person will ever get from the President or the First Lady, and it may go up on the wall, so therefore that letter ought to be the very best letter." When you do that you get in thousands a day, it's--

M: That's quite true. There has been a lot of things written about Mr. Johnson's temperament. Can you tell me a little bit about that?

G: I've been the victim of it a couple of times. I feel like a person has to blow off steam if they're normal, sometimes. He never did it without a reason. True, there were times when he would yell at the closest person there even though it was not that person's fault. But if you realized that he was a normal human being who simply had to release a feeling, then you forgot about it. And the thing is, he forgot about it before you forgot about it. I have seen him, shall we say, criticize somebody very highly, and thirty minutes later call them in and give them a promotion or give them a pat on the back or something. That was his way of not saying, "I'm sorry," but just meaning, "I didn't mean that personally."

M: Have you ever seen his great persuasive talents at work?

G: Yes, I have. In the Senate. I didn't see it much during the Presidency, because I was not exposed to that. I wouldn't call it persuasion. I remember an example he gave one time--it wasn't an example--of something he did one time. When a Senator came in and said, "I don't like this bill you're pushing, and I'm not going to vote for it. I don't think I should because I don't like it."

M: What was the bill and who was the Senator?

G: I think it was Senator Eastland or Senator Hill--I've forgotten which, and I cannot remember the exact bill. But the President said, "All right, Senator. I'll give you twenty-four hours. If you can come up with one better, then I'll be for your bill." Well, the twenty-four hours passed and the Senator couldn't come up with one better, and it ended up that he voted for the one Mr. Johnson wanted. I don't call that persuasion. It was an art, but not necessarily persuasion. It was more an art of--well, like his old adage from the Bible of "Come, let us reason together." That was the way he felt. He didn't try to persuade one against his own beliefs. He just tried to sit down and get the best for the most.

M: Did you see, over a period of time working with Mr. Johnson, any connection between, say, his mood or his temperament and either problems of the day or frustrations of not being able to get something through or done?

G: Yes. As I say, I think he's a perfectly normal human being. And you would have the same feeling. I would too. In fact, I think he controlled it far better than probably you or I could. He had a terrific amount of pressures and a lot of responsibility, a lot of things he wanted to get done. And if it didn't go as quickly as he thought it should or as far as he thought it should, he naturally had frustrations.

It's just like I get frustrated with my children when they don't do what I think they should. I think to a degree he felt like the Senate sometimes was--they were his children, and if they didn't behave properly the way they should, then he got frustrated.

M: Have you ever been called to the White House--I should back this up--at odd hours? Mr. Johnson sometimes, I know, has the reputation of working at strange hours.

G: Yes, I've been called down on Saturday afternoons late and Sundays and what-have-you. But I would go in late. I would go in 9:30 or 10:00, and I usually was there until 7:30 or 8:00 or 9 o'clock--

M: Any in the middle of the night?

G: I can't remember any middle of the night.

M: Do you remember some particular events or crisis, either domestically or internationally, that you particularly worked on? This would be all through any of the periods.

G: Being in his Majority Leader office, there were just the two of us who typed the various things. Yes, there were, but I can't remember any one specific one that stands out in my mind. But there were lots of events that we handled as far as the dictation and typing and what-have-you. For a couple of years I would take down important phone conversations and what-have-you, like conversations he had with President Eisenhower back in the Senate days and several he had with President Kennedy and so forth.

M: Were these just to back up the procedures that were being done?

G: Yes, and to keep a record of what was said by whom. Mr. Johnson is very good at keeping good records, which the library will now enjoy.

M: What social occasions have you gone to at the White House, Mrs. Gonella?

G: I guess my husband and I have been to several State dinners and various

receptions. Then during the summertime when they have gone out on Sequoia, we've been with them on that many, many weekends and spent the night on the boat, and just had a weekend thing on the boat which is very informal. It gave the President some relaxation when he was with friends where he could just relax and not be on guard for what he said or did. It was a very happy time.

M: What did the President do in moments of relaxation?

G: Talk about work. I think his hobby was the Senate when he was in the Senate, and his hobby was the Presidency when he was in the Presidency.

M: What changes did you see take place in President Johnson over the years?

G: Oddly enough, I don't know that I have seen any changes. That may sound funny. He still has the same drive he had when I first met him. He still is trying to accomplish the same type things. He has the same principles; I don't notice that he has changed.

M: You said that you did leave in '66.

G: No, I didn't. The only reason you have that is because of the change in payroll. I continued on--no break at all--working until the 20th of [January] of '69.

M: Now you've retired.

G: Yes. Not by choice.

M: Did you have any conversation or discuss among the staffs, or with the Johnson family, the Viet Nam war?

G: No, except that I felt he inherited this and did about the only thing he could do. But we never analyzed things like that. Well, I haven't in the last few years because as I say, not being in the East nor the West Wing, I didn't have the closeness that I did back in the Senate days.

M: Would this same thing apply to all the domestic legislation that Mr. Johnson has--?

G: To a degree, yes. Except things like--we all worked on the Beautification Bill because it affected something that Mrs. Johnson was interested in. But as far as actual legislation, no.

M: I was thinking of something to ask you and it has gone out of my mind. I wanted to ask you what your feelings were on, and what forewarning, if you had any, of the March 31st withdrawal.

G: I guess I had the feeling of it before '64, because I felt then that Mrs. Johnson particularly wanted him to get out because I think her feeling seemed to be that he would live longer and be a happier person if he were back home and out of the pressures and the criticism of the press and people and his own friends and so forth.

But I had a feeling in '65 when the Inauguration occurred, I felt then that he might possibly say something about not running again so that he could maybe get more accomplished during those four years. But I felt he has always wondered whether he should stay in or should not stay in. I did not know what he was going to say March 31st, but it had always been a threat--knowing that it was in the back of his mind.

M: Did you ever hear Mr. Johnson or Mrs. Johnson talk about not running?

G: Not in those words. Many times I've heard him just in conversation say--one time I remember he said, "Give me ten good reasons why you would want to be President." And knowing that this was in his mind, that perhaps it was not the most effective way to deal with the things he wanted to do--I think he was happiest in the Senate. That's just my own opinion. But I think he could accomplish more .

Being President, he was criticized not only by the press and by other people, but within the Democratic party, which he never was to

this degree during the Senate days. He actually could start something and get it done in the Senate more than he could in the Presidency.

M: In talking about the press that you just mentioned, did you ever have any dealings with any members of the press?

G: Very little. The first piece of advice Mr. Johnson gave me when I went to work for him was to stay out of the newspapers and stay out of jail, and I've always done both. So I very rarely ever talked to members of the press other than just socially.

M: Was Mrs. Johnson very affected by criticism of the President?

G: Sort of. I will say this. She was not an avid reader of the newspapers, and I think that had something to do with it. She did not like to read criticisms. She read the paper very little--even reports of her own trips and her own speeches. I would come in the next day and I would say, "Gee, did you see what was in the paper this morning?" She'd say, "No, what?" And she really did not like to. I get up every morning and read the newspapers from cover to cover. She did not.

M: Mr. Johnson's popularity, of course, declined toward the end of his Presidency. Around March 31st I think it was at one of its lowest points. Having had personal contact with him, why do you think that this is so?

G: Because I think the Kennedy faction had a lot to do with his becoming unpopular, if indeed he did become unpopular, which the polls show. But I think he had this force within the Democratic Party pulling against him and trying to make him [appear] in a bad light so that they could come forth as the savior or something. I really think that was mostly the reason. I do not think it was any particular thing he did that was a poor decision, or a bad judgment. I think it was politics.

M: Did you do any work or organization toward the President's potentially

going to the convention in 1968?

G: No.

M: What do you recall about this last year in his Presidency? Through working with Mrs. Johnson, I should say.

G: I think after March 31st he had a relief that was very noticeable that everybody could tell--a feeling like, "Well, now I've done what I have done and now nobody can criticize me for standing in the way and I can go on and do the things without having politics enter into it." I think he very much hoped to end the war before he left. Then he felt not being a candidate would take away this--

M: Did you by any chance have any association with the now infamous ladies' luncheon when Eartha Kitt spoke out?

G: No.

M: You weren't there either?

G: No.

M: Can you recall any times where there were occasions when you were there witnessing it socially or officially?

G: No. I very rarely went to those kind of official social functions.

M: How would you describe Mrs. Johnson's relationship with her husband?

G: I wish I had a tenth of what she has to offer a marriage as far as understanding and never questioning her husband's motives. She always believed in him. She criticized. In other words, if he would give her a speech, which he did quite often, and say, "Would you read this, and what are your opinions?"

She was a very good critic. She would say, "Well, I don't think this is good," or, "I do think that's good," or, "Why don't you hit harder on something like that." She believed in him. I think too, the fact that she just always had a smile on her face, was always glad to



see any friend that was his friend at any hour of the day or night-- was not a complaining type female. If he came in at 3 o'clock and said, "We're going to Texas at 4," she didn't say, "Oh, I haven't had my hair done," or, "Oh, I've got this to do," or, "I've got that to do," or, "I haven't packed." She just simply got up and did it. And was on the plane at 4--which is incredible.

M: Did you have many occasions in the more recent years where you went down to the ranch?

G: Yes. I spent, I guess, every fall--about two months. I would come home about every six or seven days to take care of the family and what-have-you--but helping them with mail down there and Christmas gifts and so forth.

M: Do you see a difference in the family from when they're at the ranch and when they're up here?

G: Yes. The minute I think he lands at the ranch and puts on his khaki clothes he's an entirely different person. He loves to ride over the ranch and show everybody his cattle and his deer. Every afternoon at 5 or 5:30, we'd get in the car. Everybody piles into one car--if it's ten people it seems like--and we ride and we look. And he loves it. He loves his land. He loves to look at it. He loves to show it to people. I guess that's something that he, again, is master of. It's his possession, and that he has done something with it.

M: Did you ever see any occasions where Mrs. Johnson was very much a temper to something that was occurring as far as relating to her husband?

G: No. She had a remarkable capacity for controlling her temper. If she lost it, she did not show it.

M: I was thinking of tempering in terms of calming him down in situations.

G: Yes. She had a way also of--I can't give you any specific example--but

of talking to him and calming him down and getting the subject on something else so that he wouldn't have a tirade over one particular thing.

M: Did you have occasion to work with Bess Abell and/or Liz Carpenter?

G: Yes. Not a great deal. We coordinated more than anything because Bess had the official, social things, and Liz had the speeches, official trips, and so forth. So obviously we had to have a coordination of schedule. I kept Mrs. Johnson's calendar, diary, or what-have-you. In other words if Liz wanted to accept a speech for a certain date, then she had to check to see if there was a conflict. So it was a coordination more than a working with.

M: How would you describe those two women having been long associates with them?

G: I don't know. It's difficult to give a description of either one of them. Liz, I think, brought something to Mrs. Johnson personally in her sense of humor, her wit. She always would come in and give Mrs. Johnson something to laugh about. She had some cute little story of the day or something. She was good for Mrs. Johnson that way--and has amazing energies for writing speeches, for planning trips. I think if she had had her way, Mrs. Johnson would have been on the road 360 days. So it was sometimes Mrs. Johnson having to say, "No, Liz, I can't do that. I've got to do things here."

Her relationship with Bess, I think, was a delightful one in that she admired Bess' talent for unusual things, and for handling of the State dinners and receptions. Bess would always come up with a clever idea or something new--a new entertainment or new decorations or what-have-you.

M: In thinking about the people who surrounded the Johnsons, they seem to be predominantly Texans, Southerners. Do you have any reasoning in

your mind for this?

G: I think that's understandable. As I say, every Senate office or Congressional office only had staff members from that state or that district, which is sensible because they know the people. They know a little bit about where the person's from and those people stuck with the Johnsons. I don't ever remember anyone being fired. And we just stayed on. So when we went in the White House, they were predominantly Texans or Southerners. It wasn't done deliberately after they got in the White House--to pick Texans or Southerners.

M: There also has been some talk about the turnover in the staff members, I think the reasoning behind it being that Mr. Johnson is such a demanding boss. What is your opinion of that?

G: You mean turnover of people--

M: Staff members, close staff assistants coming in and going out.

G: Actually, I haven't noticed that from the old-timers. I think some of the men, after a certain number of years, realized that they had to devote more time to their families and what-have-you. I haven't mentioned Horace Busby. He, of course, goes back to the old days, too. He had small children, and you can just go for so long working eight days a week, twenty-five hours a day. I think his family felt the need for him to stop, and he did, and quit a couple of times, but then came back when needed. And the same way with George Reedy. He quit. But after sixteen years! I mean, I don't think there was that much of a turnover in the old Johnson staff. You've still got Mildred Stegall and Willie Day and Juanita [Roberts]. Many of these people have been there fifteen, sixteen, seventeen years.

M: Were you ever with the President on the occasion of his couple of illnesses? The times he had to go to the hospital?

G: Yes, I was there both times. Well, when he had the gall bladder operation, I went out to the hospital with Mrs. Johnson and stayed and worked from there. She just stayed at the hospital. Then the second operation, I think she had a cold at the time, so we just moved the office out there. I would go out and take dictation and give her the mail and go out and bring it out again, and she would sign it.

M: Was it a pretty full day with Mrs. Johnson?

G: Yes, indeed.

M: Five days a week or six days a week?

G: Would you believe seven?

M: All the time. Did you have to go into the office almost every day of the week?

G: Yes. Sometimes I would go in on Sunday just for an hour or two, because I spent a great deal of every day with her, which gave me very little time to get the typing and the bookkeeping and the filing. So I would sometime go in on Sunday in self-defense to get caught up.

M: Mrs. Gonella, we've talked about a lot of different things. I'm not sure if we've covered it all. Do you have any further thing that you can tell me?

G: No, nothing I can think of. I didn't do as much preparation on this as I should have.

M: In thinking back about the time, is there any one particular event or incident or story that sort of either sums up the Johnson family or working for them?

G: No. All I can say is the one thing that will always stick in my mind is their thoughtfulness and concern of staff members. I remember I went to the hospital in, I guess '59. I had an ulcer that perforated. The next thing I knew the President had called out and had me picked up and

had me brought out to the house because he knew there'd be nobody to cook for me or anything else. Mrs Johnson took me in, gave me the guest bedroom--I mean, just a true concern for somebody that had nobody else to help take care of her. Whenever there's a single girl up here, during Christmas, if they are left alone or anything, they're moved in so they're made to feel a part of the family and not lonesome. It's just something that I feel like nobody has every really captured--their thoughtfulness and concern for the people around them.

M: Did you see this sort of not normal procedure for things, such as with President Kennedy's staff?

G: Of course, I wasn't that close to anybody, but I never saw this kind of concern with anybody as far as feeling toward their staff.

M: Has the President on any occasion given you mementoes of working with him and the family?

G: Yes. We have the bust which we're very proud of, the painting he gave to us one Christmas. He's a very generous person. I think if I went to him and asked him for a nickel, he would get mad at me and say, "No." But he likes to think it up himself, and he's a very generous person. He always is saying, "Do you have a lighter?" And he'll give you a lighter. Or, "Do you have a medallion?" He gave me medallions to keep for the children when they grew up. He went to Germany and came back and brought us a clock. He's always doing something like that.

M: He has--I know it has been talked about, his capacity for initialing things.

G: Yes. We have a few autographs and a few pictures downstairs.

M: Do you think he particularly overdid this aspect of it, or is that just part of his personality?

G: I think it's part of his personality. I never thought of it as being

particularly egotistical or anything. I think, number one, he realizes how much it will mean to all of us in the years to come. We've got some beautiful autographed pictures downstairs that I treasure--but more than that, my children will treasure.

M: That's very true. Another thought that occurred to me. In your capacity of working personally for Mrs. Johnson, did she see and sign everything that you worked on?

G: Everything I did, yes. But then I only did the very personal things. A lot of things went out over Bess' signature that were from John Q. Public that just could have an answer like--asking a question about a piece of legislation or asking a question about beautification. Bess would write and say, "Mrs. Johnson has asked me to tell you..."

But she spent an amazing amount of time on her mail, and I've had her write a letter three and four times, being sure that it was the way it should be. Then every couple of months, she would ask to see what little critical mail she did get. She got an amazingly small number, but she wanted to read it and see what people were criticizing her for. And some of them, we answered. If they were from a sensible person who had a legitimate criticism, she would sit down and labor over an answer.

M: What did they criticize her about?

G: Well, we got a lot of letters criticizing Luci when she went out and danced the frug and had a party in which they served beer when they were nineteen years old. She got so few, but they were things like that. Or, "Why don't you talk to your husband and quit sending our sons to Viet Nam," and those kind of things. But never any personal criticism.

M: Over the years, who were some of the closest friends of the Johnson family that you felt--?

G: I guess their closest friends include the Abe Fortases, and the Bill Whites, and the Bill Deasons. They made some close friends within the Cabinet after he became President. But they usually socialized with staff members. Marjorie and Walter Jenkins--for years they had dinner together and so forth during the weekend--and the Thornberrys when they were here, but not very many outside friends because they had very little outside interests.

M: Any others.

G: No, not that I can particularly think of.

M: Do you recall any really great problems that occurred in any sort of situation that evolved from your working there?

G: Oh, golly, we had problems every day, but none that have not been solved.

M: Just trying a different approach. I don't have any further questions that I can think of. Do you have any further comments?

G: No. As I say, I should have done a little more on my homework.

M: Let me just conclude this then with, how you think history will sort of treat the Johnson family?

G: I think that depends upon the historians, whether they know him, or whether they analyze him from other points of view. I don't think anybody can write a true report of any of them unless they know them personally. And that has been a bad thing. The newsmen and the historians have not had the opportunity to know them personally. The ugliest stories that have ever been written in the newspaper have always been written by people that I guess, have never been in their homes, have never been in Mr. Johnson's office. They've written on what they think. But I don't think there would be the criticizing articles if these people sat down and talked with him and knew him.

M: I want to thank you very much.

G: Thank you. I've enjoyed it.

GENERAL SERVICES ADMINISTRATION  
NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND RECORDS SERVICE

Gift of Personal Statement

By Mrs. John Gonella

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, Mrs. John Gonella, hereinafter referred to as the donor, hereby give, donate, and convey to the United States of America for eventual deposit in the proposed 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.

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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

Mrs. John Gonella

Date

August 17, 1973

Accepted

Harry J. Winkler  
Archivist of the United States

Date

September 12, 1974