

INTERVIEW I

DATE: October 20, 1982

INTERVIEWEE: BERTHA ALLMAN GRAEF (with comments by Mrs. Graef's daughter)

INTERVIEWER: Michael L. Gillette

PLACE: LBJ Library, Austin, Texas

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G: Well, let's start very briefly with how you ended up going to San Marcos, the Demonstration School.

BG: Well, we lived in Williamson County, a small town of Liberty Hill, and they had a Grade B school, not a very [good school]. In fact, it would have been awfully hard to go to college from that school, and my brother wanted me to go to San Marcos to the Demonstration High School, and then from there I could go ahead and enter into the college.

G: Yes.

BG: This was in 1930, so the Demonstration High School was there for the purpose of the people who went to college there to do their practice teaching. So my senior year, 1930, was the year that Lyndon Johnson graduated from college there, and he taught civics and government, which I took, both of them, under him. He was such a good, interesting teacher and he made the civics [interesting]. In civics he taught us so much about citizenship, what we should do and how we were obligated to vote and that the voters made the politicians and how it was our duty just to keep up and know what was going on and find out.

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So then in government, which followed the civics class, he taught the stages of government and all about government. I'd never been terribly interested in government before, but he was such an interesting teacher, and he made it sound so real, that it was really a government of the people and that we had a part in it. He explained it so carefully and vividly that I've always felt like I just knew what was going on up there.

G: How did he explain it vividly?

BG: Well, he'd give illustrations and you know--

G: Can you give me an illustration of his illustration?

BG: Well, I doubt if [I can] anymore; that's been quite a number of years ago. I don't exactly remember any of his illustrations, but he was a good speaker.

G: Did he talk about individuals in, say, Texas politics or national politics or government? Did he stress individuals more than institutions, would you think?

BG: No, he did say that the individuals that were in there, that people should know them and keep up with them and know what they stood for and things like that, and he did mention, I think, a few of the Texas politicians, but at that time he never did mention anything in the federal government.

G: Were his courses more oriented toward Texas government and politics, or national or international?

BG: No, it was definitely Texas and national because he wanted us to be sure and know what went on up in Washington, he said.

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G: Yes.

BG: To keep up with that. But nobody went to sleep in his classes.

G: Yes.

BG: He was very vivid. He walked around, and he slung his big, old long arms out and pointed and gestured, and so everybody was always just right at attention and watching and looking.

G: Could you get any indication of his own political beliefs from attending his classes?

BG: Well, yes, he did talk about his father and his grandfather and of course I knew he was a staunch Democrat, and he talked about their beliefs and their politics and how much that he admired them and how hard it was in the years that his grandfather was in the legislature and all, and that he really. . . . So I think he had a good background in government through his family that way.

G: Did you feel that he knew much about national politics?

BG: Well, not really, but he knew about government. He made the government--but he didn't know much about national politics at that time. Didn't even seem terribly interested in the national politics.

G: Really?

BG: But he was interested in the Texas [politics] at that time.

G: Yes. You said that he knew about national government.

BG: Oh, yes. Well, he would tell us about the House of [Representatives and] Congress and the Senate and how it worked and how that they were just as powerful as the president and that, you know, it depended on. . . . And he told us about the different parties, how they voted

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and how they. . . . So he had a knowledge even then of some politics although I don't think he intended to go into politics at that time.

G: Do you have any idea what kind of books or readings he would have you read for the courses?

BG: Oh, we had a lot of reading to do. He gave us references; we spent half the time in the library.

G: Do you remember any of the books?

BG: Oh, I'm sorry. I don't think I do.

G: Would you read campaign speeches or biographies?

BG: Oh, no. We read biographies and, oh, government policies and things that had to do with forming governments.

G: Did he ever bring any guest speakers to the [class]?

BG: No.

G: Did he encourage you to read the newspapers?

BG: Oh, yes, he did, and he said that as soon as we got to be eighteen, those of us were eighteen, to register and vote. He always hammered that into us. I don't think I've ever missed voting one day in my life, one election. We've always done that.

G: He worked in a state senate campaign in April of that year, I think, Welly Hopkins' campaign.

BG: Is that [right]?

G: Do you have any recollection of that? Did he talk about it?

BG: No, I don't think so. I can't remember if he did or not.

G: Now, let me ask you to back up just a little bit and to elaborate on

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some of the earliest things you said. Where was the Demonstration School?

BG: It was on the campus in the--and I tried to remember the name of this building--it was a little long, low building right in front of the main room. It was called the Demonstration Building at that time.

G: In front of the Main Building?

BG: Yes, Administration Building, that was the name of it, and it was a big, long building right in front of the main campus.

G: Yes.

BG: And it had all of the grades in the high school--at least a few.

G: Yes.

BG: I don't know how I got in there. I don't know how they got me in there because they didn't take--they had other high schools in town, but they took a selected number. I think they must have taken them from a lot of rural towns around that didn't have very big high schools because I know some of my closest friends were from Poteet and Cheapside, which is a little town, you know, down towards Three Rivers, and Florence, and just a bunch of small towns around. So I think that's what they did, they selected these from the smaller schools that didn't have a Grade A high school.

G: How many students were there in your class?

BG: There was about--oh, I didn't bring that book, and I looked at it last night--not over fifty.

G: Really?

BG: There wasn't very many. But Professor [E. O.] Wiley was I guess the--

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I don't know whether he was the administrator, but he was the head of it, of the Demonstration School.

G: Was the Sub-College the same thing as the Demonstration School, or was the Sub-College something else, do you know?

BG: I don't know what a Sub-College was. I guess maybe this is what you heard.

G: Yes.

BG: But it was on the campus, and we went on the campus and we were treated just like college students.

G: Oh, really.

BG: We thought we were. We weren't, but we thought we were. (Laughter)

G: Assuming there was a student who was of college age and ready to go to college but had gone to an unaccredited high school, I understand that they would first have to prove their credits or something like that.

BG: Yes.

G: Before they could [enter college].

BG: Yes, that's right, and so that's why I think they were having this from those smaller schools.

G: Did they prove their credits at the Demonstration School, do you know, or was there another facility?

BG: No, at the Demonstration School we had tests and everything, you know, and we had the administrator. When we got our high school diploma then we were ready to go into the college, which I did later, the next year.

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There's one little incident I want to tell you about. At the end of the year the Demonstration School had our pictures in the Pedagog-- they called it the Pedagog that year--and our dean--Professor Wiley was our dean, that's who it is--and our officers and some of the activities of the Demonstration School were in the Pedagog. We had our pictures made and of course all of the class bought Pedagogs. So when I went to pick mine up and paid for it, well, got to looking at it, examining, my picture was not in the students' [section] where it should have been, with the other students. Then I looked all over the book and finally I found it in the Newman Club, which was a Catholic organization, and it didn't even have my name under it, had someone else's name.

I was rather upset so I went back and told the librarian about it, and she said, "Oh, well, you can go to see Lyndon Johnson. He's head of the Press Club. He'll know what to do about it. He'll talk to you about it." So she sent me over to his office, and I went in and told him about having been in his classes, and he said he remembered me, and I think he really did because he seemed interested. He wanted to know what my problem was, and I told him. He said, oh, how sorry he was and that he didn't know how that could have happened, but he gave me my money back and told me that he just regretted it and that he felt like I was still a credit to the school and all of this.

G: Yes.

BG: So then he asked about my future plans and everything, and he talked to me, I thought, so sincerely and was so kind to me, so I told the

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girls back at the boarding house when I went back that he was so charming that he made me feel like it was just an honor to have my picture [omitted]. They didn't put my picture in it, or they didn't even have my name under it. So that's an incident I always tell my children and grandchildren about. (Laughter)

G: That's a good story.

BG: He shook my hand when we left and said that he--but I didn't get him to sign the yearbook. I didn't think about it, didn't know he'd ever be president of the United States.

G: Yes.

BG: I knew he was a brilliant teacher and a very charming person, but I didn't ever know that he would be the president.

G: Well, what was he like as a teacher? You talked about his courses. Was he a strict disciplinarian?

BG: As far as I can remember I don't think he ever had any problems with that. When you came in, you sat alphabetically in class--we did, we sat alphabetically in class--and he quickly looked over and if there was a [vacancy]--he didn't always call the roll, but if he saw someone missing, since we were a smaller group, you know, he marked them missing, but otherwise, he knew if you were there. And nobody ever came in late because he didn't like that.

G: Really?

BG: He made it clear that he wanted people to be prompt, and I can't ever remember. . . . Everything went fast, you know. He just talked in a

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rapid tone of voice, and I don't think there ever was any time to get in trouble.

G: Was he humorous?

BG: Yes, he was. He was very humorous at times. Oh, he never did tell many stories, but once in a while he would tell us stories about his little sister, Josefa. She was in school down there at the same time. She was a beautiful young lady and in some of my classes, but he'd tell a few little things that she'd get into he'd have to get her out, but he never did tell us too many stories of his home life.

G: Yes. Did they pay him for teaching, do you know, or was it simply a practice--?

BG: I think this was just a student-teaching project, I believe, because that was the purpose of the high school.

G: Yes. Well, was there anyone to observe him teaching?

BG: Yes, they had observers to come in, and he graded papers, but they checked everything, and that was Dean Wiley. He may have had an assistant or two, but he was the dean, and he always oversaw the [classes].

G: Yes. The year before he had gone to Cotulla and taught down there at the Welhausen School.

BG: Before 1930?

G: Yes.

BG: Because he didn't graduate until 1930.

G: Yes, that's right.

BG: Oh, but that's right--then he came back.

G: It was 1928-29.

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BG: Yes. Then he came back.

G: Did he ever talk about that experience?

BG: Not to us, he didn't. I think that that was a grade school, and this was more of a high school and more of a--you know, government, and he taught more like. . . . He didn't get off the subject too much as far as the classes were concerned.

G: He seems to have studied a lot under Professor [H. M.] Greene. Did he ever talk about Professor Greene?

BG: Well, he was loyal to all of his classmates and things, and to his professors, but I can't remember definitely whether he talked any about him.

G: Yes. Did you have Professor Greene when you were in college there?

BG: I don't remember.

G: Taught history, I believe.

BG: Well, history was my major, but I guess probably I did then. But if I did, I don't remember. Maybe I didn't take history the first year. You know, freshman year you have to get so many subjects off.

G: Yes. Tell me about his exams. Did you recall some of the exams that you took under him?

BG: No. See that was in 1930, and this is 1982. That has been a long time ago. (Laughter)

G: That is fifty-two years.

BG: Yes.

G: That is not long.

BG: Not long? Well, it's long to remember what exams were like. I know they were pretty hard, but everybody liked him so much and studied

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real hard that I don't think any of them ever made bad grades in there. Because everybody--I know I did make fairly good grades all the time except in math. I never could do math very well, but I made all As under him because he was interesting.

G: Did he have office hours where you could go and discuss your work with him?

BG: Well, I don't know. He had an office, you know, for the Press Club, and he was in a good many other things, but I don't think any of the students ever went to him. They would have to go to Dr. Wiley, I think, first.

G: Now, he also worked in the President's office, I understand.

BG: Yes.

G: Did you ever go to that office when he was there?

BG: No.

G: In the Main Building? Any other incidents in class that you recall?

BG: No, not really. I just remember, you know, that he was such a good teacher.

G: Was he nervous or highstrung?

BG: No, but he talked fast.

G: Yes.

BG: He talked loud.

G: Yes.

BG: And you understood it. He made his points in a good strong voice, but he wasn't nervous or highstrung. He walked around all the time.

G: I see. He didn't stay up in the front?

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BG: No, he'd walk around, and he never sat down to lecture. He stood and talked and walked.

G: He later became a debate coach.

BG: Yes. Yes, I know. He went up--

G: Coached as a debate teacher. Did he emphasize that aspect of education in your class at all?

BG: Not very much. He did say, you know, that was a good thing to go into if you wanted to be in any kind of public speaking or anything like that, that a debating class was good for that, but he didn't dwell on it too much.

G: Your classes didn't debate?

BG: No. Not civics and government.

G: You mentioned that civics was largely voting and--

BG: And citizenship.

G: How can you distinguish a little more between these two subjects?

BG: Well, I was wondering about that. They don't even teach civics anymore I noticed, but at that time it was more or less about the citizen and how to become a citizen and the citizen's voting rights and how you received those rights and, you know, what your duty was in voting, and this and that and the other. Mostly that was about all it was. It did have a little bit touching on government because the government class followed that one.

G: Yes.

BG: They went along together. But I don't know why they had them separate. They don't in the high schools anymore.

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G: But they were two different classes?

BG: Yes.

G: Held at two different times, or were they held at the same time?

BG: No, just one would follow the other one, the same term.

G: How long were the classes? Do you recall how long each class would run? Averagely?

BG: No. Now, isn't that strange? I really don't know.

G: Did he teach every day?

BG: Yes. When he was teaching, he taught every day. I think that's quite different when a student's teaching now. They teach for about six weeks only, don't they?

G: But this lasted how long?

BG: A term.

G: Oh, it did? I see.

BG: Yes. The civics was first, and then the government followed in the same term.

G: I see. A term.

BG: Yes.

G: Well, is there anything else we haven't talked about?

BG: No, I don't think so. I just don't know.

G: Did you see him any after that?

BG: Well, not personally. I kept up with him very much, and I read all of his books, and I kept up with all of his life, you know. I read Lady Bird's book and Liz Carpenter's and all of these. Well, I haven't

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read all of the books out about him but just about all of them, but I never did see him anymore after that.

G: He never came to your community to campaign?

BG: Campaign? (Laughter) The community I live in is very small, so he didn't get out that way. It's a little bit off the beaten path. We live on a two-hundred acre farm and it's kind of far away. But I really never lost touch with him all through his life. The children and grandchildren always tease me and say that LBJ was Grandma's hero, and he has always been sort of a hero personality to me because I knew him when he was younger that way. And I never could believe too many--well, you know he was human of course, but he was so dedicated and so smart and so talented that I never could believe very many bad things about him.

G: Yes.

BG: I think he was just an amazing personality.

G: What did he look like?

BG: He was very tall and thin, and he had black, curly hair. Well, I've forgotten what his eyes looked like, what color his eyes were. He was very strong, but he was thin. He was thin and tall.

D: Could I say something?

G: Sure.

D: Did the girls have crushes on him? I can imagine--

BG: Oh, yes, of course. All the girls had crushes on him--so handsome. Everybody wanted to take his classes, but they just limited them to so many. I don't know how I was so fortunate to get [in]. I think maybe

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because I was going to have a history major. My major was going to be history in college.

G: Yes.

BG: Maybe that's why they chose some of us, because, you know, since they limited the classes, he couldn't teach [everybody], you know, and I don't know if he taught any classes other than those two or not.

G: Well, I certainly do thank you.

End of Tape 1 of 1 and Interview I

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