

INTERVIEW I

DATE: November 10, 1977
INTERVIEWEE: ESTELLE HARBIN
INTERVIEWER: MICHAEL L. GILLETTE
PLACE: Miss Harbin's home, San Antonio, Texas

Tape 1 of 1

H: I was reared in Corpus Christi and had known Mr. Kleberg since I was a young teenager. I had worked for Mr. Roy Miller, who was quite a power and who had been our mayor in Corpus. He was one of the greatest lobbyists in Washington, a very prominent man. I had grown up near his house and used to play in his yard with Mr. Miller and his three boys. We'd play football and other games. So I had known him very well.

When I finished school my father was quite ill, and Mr. Miller, who was the editor of the Corpus Christi Caller, called me and asked me if I would like to work for the summer. I said, "Oh, yes, I would be happy to," because we needed the money. Mr. Miller was working on getting the port of Corpus Christi officially designated a port. I went down and I worked and I worked. So my summertime job lasted two and a half years, but he got the port of Corpus Christi designated a port.

Then one day he called me in and said, "Now, this work is going to terminate. You go down to the Corpus Christi National Bank and go to see Mr. Ernest Miller"--no relation--"and they will give you a job down there." Mr. Robert Driscoll was president of the Corpus

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Christi National Bank. So I went down there and went to work and just loved it. Mr. Driscoll died in late spring 1930. The Crash had come, but it didn't affect us; it affected New York more than us. We were just bewildered with Mr. Driscoll gone, and Mr. Miller said he was going to move to San Antonio. I said, "Well, with you gone and Mr. Driscoll gone, then I'm not going to work here anymore." So I quit.

In 1931 Mr. Kleberg had run for Congress and was elected. I went to see Mr. Roy Miller and said that I wanted to go to Washington with Mr. Kleberg. He said, "All right, I'll see what I can do about it." In just a few days his secretary called and told me to go to Mr. Kleberg's house at such-and-such a time, that he wanted to see me. I went and we talked about it. He said, "Well, all right, Estelle, I'll take you to Washington with me. I've already pretty well decided on a young man to go along."

The young man was Lyndon. He had been to Corpus, but I hadn't met him. He went to Washington in December with Mr. Kleberg, and I presume that's when they were assigned an office in the House Office Building. Washington was about two hundred and fifty thousand at that time, a beautiful place. Our world was an altogether different world than it is today. Even in the depths of the Depression, it was a better world than it is today.

There was a House Office Building and a Senate Office Building across the way. That's all there were. There were none of these plush suites like they have today, like the Sam Rayburn Building that

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cost millions of dollars. We had one room which had a divider back about halfway that came up part way and the windows were on the side that faced an inner court of the building. I don't know if you were ever in the old House Office Building.

G: I've been in the building, but I'm sure it's remodeled.

H: Every congressman was in that building. There was nothing plush, no plants, no pictures. There were just Lyndon and I; that's all. We had thirteen counties including Bexar, with all of its military establishment. We worked our hearts out seven days a week. I lived in a rooming and boarding house on Massachusetts Avenue. I rode from there to the Capitol every morning for twenty cents in a taxi, which was very nice, because it was cold. Lyndon lived in the Grace Dodge Hotel. He and Bob Jackson were roommates. Bob worked for Mr. [Ewing] Thomason, the congressman from El Paso. His office was around the corner. They worked hard, too. Mr. Thomason had one lady secretary, a Mrs. George, and Bob handled the publicity, newspaper stuff. He had come from San Angelo and the Harte newspapers.

Lyndon and I did all the physical work in the office. Mr. Kleberg never came to the office in the morning, but came to the Capitol around eleven o'clock and phoned us from over there. He'd have lunch and then go in for the Congress convening at twelve o'clock. He never got to the office until four-thirty or five o'clock when they adjourned. We just had to struggle to find out what to do and do it the best way we could. We opened the mail and tried to sort it and get it in the best shape we could. We conferred

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on answering the letters. There weren't the big problems then that there are now. You could have the Department of Agriculture send someone something they wanted and they'd be happy. You know, they didn't want a billion dollars for another dam someplace.

Mr. Kleberg was paid ten thousand dollars a year as a congressman, and he got five thousand dollars a year for his office help. He divided it between Lyndon and me. So that's what we lived on in Washington. You just had to make your money stretch. But when you can ride for twenty cents in a taxi you know that everything else was in proportion. The post office was in the building, and there were men in the post office whose wives made sandwiches to sell. Lyndon would run around there about ten-thirty and pick us up a sandwich and sometimes a piece of cake. The sandwich would cost fifteen cents and the cake would cost a dime. If you got any coffee, you had to go outside in the zero weather, so you didn't go. There was no such thing as coffee in the office. That had not yet been instituted. We just had a sandwich and a piece of cake and kept right on working.

About seven-thirty at night when we were ready to close up, lots of nights we counted our money to make sure we had enough to eat on at Childs' Cafeteria, which was across the Capitol grounds, right across from the Grace Dodge Hotel. Lyndon ate there all the time. He knew what everything in there cost every day of the week. So many times we put our money on the table and counted it and left

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me out twenty cents so I could go home in a taxi. Then we would run over there to get in before eight o'clock. He knew everyone there so they never would turn us down. Then after we ate, I'd get a taxi and go home.

G: Let me ask you, I know this is going to tax your memory here, but do you recall whether or not Lyndon Johnson ever went to or met Mr. Kleberg at the King Ranch or went to that area before he took the job?

H: No. He met Mr. Kleberg in either Houston or Corpus.

G: Before taking the train up in December?

H: Yes.

G: Is that right? They rode up in December together?

H: Yes. They rode up in December. When we were riding up on the first day of January, I met Mr. and Mrs. Kleberg and Lyndon here at the Missouri Pacific depot that morning.

G: Here in San Antonio?

H: Yes, in San Antonio. That's the first time I had ever seen Lyndon.

G: What were your first impressions of him?

H: Oh, I thought he was a nice young man. He was extremely thin, very, very thin. We were riding along in the afternoon, juggling along on the train. He leaned over and said, "Estelle, have you ever ridden in a Pullman before?" I said, "Yes." He said, "I never had been in a Pullman until I went to Washington with Mr. Kleberg in December." And I said, "Well, I have. Lots of times." We had a nice trip up and Lyndon and I talked a great deal. Of course, the four of us all ate together and it took two days and two nights to

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get there.

When we arrived I had already made arrangements for a place to stay, so I went there and took my luggage. Then I just got a taxi and went back to the Capitol. They had told me to come to the House Office Building. Lyndon and Mr. Kleberg were there. We went in right then and went to work.

G: On the train up, did Mr. Johnson tell you how he got the job?

H: Well, through some political people in Austin and Mr. Roy Miller. Somebody approached Mr. Miller. Lyndon was teaching school in Houston, I think. He hadn't ever done anything but teach school. I'd been working in an office, in a bank. His father had been a politician of sorts, so someone had approached Mr. Roy Miller and said that he would like to have this job.

G: Did you ever talk to Mr. Miller about that in later years or any time?

H: No, I never did. Mr. Miller was in Washington lots of times while I was there.

G: But you think it was Mr. Miller who talked to Mr. Kleberg?

H: I think it was.

G: And this is what Mr. Johnson told you, that Mr. Miller had talked to Mr. Kleberg?

H: I don't recall that he specifically told me that, but I think that's the way it happened, because Mr. Miller was very influential and he had known all the Klebergs for years, very intimately. I know if he had gone to Mr. Kleberg and told him this young man was well qualified and had promise and so forth that Mr. Kleberg would have believed it.

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G: My notes indicate that Welly Hopkins was one of the people that talked to Mr. Miller--do you have any insight on that?--who then talked to Mr. Kleberg.

H: Who was Welly Hopkins?

G: He was a state senator.

H: Well, that could be. It was through political maneuverings. Now mine wasn't through political maneuverings. I just went to Mr. Miller and said I'd like to go.

G: On the train up did Mr. Johnson tell you about his teaching experiences in Houston?

H: Yes, he mentioned it. He had taught at Cotulla. He told me he'd had a hard time going to school, and had had to work to help pay to go. He was a winner. He never did go out to lose. He was willing to work to achieve it. There was nothing lazy about Lyndon, nothing.

G: What kind of accommodations did you have on the train? Were they Pullman accommodations?

H: Pullman.

G: Were they? I see.

H: I don't know if they even had roomettes that long ago.

G: I'm wondering how Lyndon learned about the Dodge Hotel.

H: I presumed he learned about it in December when he went up there. I don't think he'd ever been east of the Mississippi River. They had gone up there and, I presume, were assigned this office. Mr. Kleberg was a freshman congressman coming in, so he didn't have his choice of rooms, like a corner room or anything like that. We were

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on the inside.

Congressman and Mrs. Thomason went up on the train with us, too. We met them in Palestine. The trains merge there, so they were along on that trip. Bob Jackson was up there. I don't know. I met him during the week I got there. Arthur Perry was Senator Morris Sheppard's secretary. Arthur lived over at the Grace Dodge, but he was in the money and had a private room upstairs. Bob and Lyndon shared a basement room with a little window at the top. I guess having been up on the Hill he found out about the Grace Dodge. I don't know if he roomed with Bob right away or if that came a little later. But the Grace Dodge was just across the Capitol grounds from the House Office Building.

G: Did Mr. Johnson ever tell you about his Uncle George in Houston?

H: No.

G: You never had any contact with him?

H: No.

G: How about his association with Senator Alvin Wirtz?

H: He never did mention it.

G: Never talked about Senator Wirtz?

H: His father was a representative in the [Texas] House [of Representatives] at Austin when he was a little boy, and he used to go up there with his father. Knowing him, he took in everything.

G: Did he talk much about his father in those days?

H: No, not very much. He adored his mother.

G: Did he talk much about his mother then?

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H: Yes.

G: Really?

H: I later met his mother here in San Antonio, and she was a lovely lady. We became very good friends.

G: I gather that they wrote quite a bit to each other in the early years.

H: Yes, they did. He wrote to her at least three times a week and when he'd get a letter from her he was just buoyed up.

G: Really?

H: Oh, yes. He adored her. There's no doubt about it, he was the apple of her eye.

G: You think she approved of his going to Washington?

H: Oh, yes. I think Lyndon did everything she would have wanted him to do.

G: He got pneumonia once while he was up there, at least once.

H: Well, that must have been after I was gone.

G: I believe it was in 1932.

H: Well, it could have been the next fall.

G: He was hospitalized.

H: Well, he wasn't hospitalized when I was there.

G: I see, okay.

H: It could have been the next winter, you know, November, December of 1932. We went the first of January.

G: I believe you're right on that date.

What about his reading habits? Did he read lots of newspapers or the Congressional Record?

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H: He read lots of newspapers, but his greatest strength was in meeting people and getting to know them and ingratiating himself to them. He could do that.

G: He made a good first impression.

H: Yes, he did. And he had enough to back it up. There are people that can make a good first impression and that's it, that's all they have. But Lyndon was very gracious and very mannerly, particularly with older people. They liked that.

G: He wasn't impatient at all?

H: No.

G: Really?

H: And he was an impatient person. But Lyndon and I never had a disagreement. Of course he had no power and no more money than I did, and that wasn't much. When I heard in later years how he would chew out somebody in his office, I thought, "They always say power corrupts. Maybe it has." But that was hard for me to imagine because we never had a disagreement. We didn't have time I suppose, we were working so hard.

G: On one occasion he went to hear a speech by Alfalfa Bill [William Henry] Murray from Oklahoma. Were you there when he did that? Do you remember that?

H: No.

G: I think you did go with him on the occasion of a joint presidential message.

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- H: Joint session of Congress. It was on the twenty-second of February. He came running in the office door breathless and said, "Come on, Estelle, I have two tickets to the gallery. They're having a joint session of Congress." I was wearing a straight skirt down to my ankles. I put on my coat and we locked the door and away we went. When we got outside Lyndon as always got me by the hand. He walked and I was running behind him because his legs were so long. He'd get me by the hand so I could keep up, and I kept up by running. We had to find out where to go because we didn't know our way around. Lyndon found [it], and up we went. I think we were about the last two people in. We got in there and sat on the steps. Mr. Hoover was the president; Mr. Garner was the speaker of the House, and there were some descendants there of George and Mary Washington. This was the twenty-second of February, honoring Washington's birthday. We just sat there like church mice, just enthralled with it all. I thought that was the greatest place and the greatest collection I'd ever seen. You know, we were young, never had been anyplace either. A couple of years ago I was up there on a tour and we went clomping around in the Capitol. We went up to the House in the gallery and I felt, "Gee, this sure does look little and dirty. Why don't they clean it up?" It didn't look like it did on the twenty-second of February, 1932.
- G: He was in favor of the repeal of Prohibition, I understand back then.
- H: Well, I would have been, too. It was a farce.
- G: Do you recall any of his opinions here?

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- H: No, none of that came up while I was there.
- G: Do you recall any instances of him trying to persuade Congressman Kleberg to vote a certain way on a bill, or trying to influence him as an adviser?
- H: No, we didn't know anything about what was going on over there. It was after I had come home, maybe the next year, that he got real interested in the Little Congress, and later was made speaker of the Little Congress. Lyndon was a born politician.
- G: But he was not active in it while you were up there?
- H: Not while I was there, no. He knew nothing about it. There were a lot of other young men that lived over at the Grace Dodge, and I'm sure he learned a lot from them. But when we were in the office, we were just so overwhelmed with work that work was it, period.
- G: I guess a lot of your work dealt with service-connected disabilities?
- H: It did. He got lots of inroads into the Veterans Administration where we could write letters and help these people. As I said in the beginning, our world wasn't complex like it is today. We were in the Depression. People didn't have jobs. It was terrible. We were just lucky that we had that job, getting twenty-five hundred a year. That was a fortune.
- G: Do you recall any specific cases where he was able to do something for someone?
- H: Well, I wouldn't recall the names, but I remember he got a pension for an old Indian fighter. He was thrilled to death the day he heard that that pension was coming through, which was to be maybe

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twenty dollars a month. But he was an old man and Lyndon had worked on it.

G: I have in my notes something that indicates that he also got some pensions for retired Texas Rangers who had done some Indian fighting, too.

H: Yes, he worked on that.

G: Do you remember that, what he did there?

H: I don't recall any specific case, but he did work on that. I know a retired colonel came up there trying to get some kind of pension. He used a walking cane. I do recall his name but I'm not going to put it in this record. He used to come in the office frequently, and Lyndon was working through the Veterans Administration to try to help him. He was real nice. Sometimes he'd get there early enough to get his name in the pot to get a sandwich from the post office. One day he was in there and when he started to leave he just got up and walked out. In a few minutes he came back and picked up his walking cane and said, "I would be in a hell of a fix if somebody saw me walking outside without this stick." We just died laughing because we never did think that it was for real. We thought he was a fake. But Lyndon was trying to help him get some kind of disability that he wanted. That was about all anybody could do in those days.

We were there at the time of the Bonus March. We were simply flooded with letters. They brought us letters in the big mail bags on a dolly every morning. There was nothing you could do except

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just spot check them. You couldn't open all of them in one day, let alone read them. We had several people that came up there for that march. I know one was a man from Corpus. He said he had been a wrestler, and he was kind of punch drunk. He had ridden the rails to Washington. He knew Mr. Kleberg. He came up there and came to the office and talked to Lyndon and me, and eventually talked to Mr. Kleberg. Those men were desperate. They had no jobs. They were due to get this bonus at some future date but they needed it then. They finally got it after I was gone. But the mail of that incident nearly killed us.

G: Do you recall when Mr. Johnson and Representative Kleberg and Bob Jackson all went to Johns Hopkins in Baltimore to make a speech for Mr. Garner in 1932?

H: No, I guess I was gone.

G: Were you able to see what Mr. Johnson's attitude toward the 1932 campaign was, and the Democratic National Convention and which candidates he favored?

H: I wasn't up there then.

G: I suppose you were back here then before he got word of FDR and became a supporter.

H: Oh, yes. I came home to Corpus. Mr. Ernest Miller, who had been the executive vice president of the bank in Corpus, came to Washington, and he came to the office. I happened to be in the office by myself at the time. Of course, I was bowled over when he walked in the door. He had moved to San Antonio from Corpus. He said, "I have been

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approached in San Antonio to come to Washington." He had come to Washington to go to the Reconstruction Finance Corporation to try to get a loan to reopen a defunct bank in San Antonio. He would be the president of it. He said, "If I get this money to open that bank, do you want to come home?" I said, "Yes, I do." So he said, "Well, when the decision is made about the bank, I'll phone you." So that afternoon when Mr. Kleberg came over I told him, "Mr. Ernest Miller was in here today." Mr. Kleberg's brown eyes just shot at me and he said, "Does he want you to go home?" because they were good friends. I said, "Yes, sir, he does." He said, "Do you want to go home?" I said, "Yes, sir, if he accomplishes his mission, I do." So in about three days Mr. Miller called me and said that he was going to get the loan and asked me if I wanted to come home. I said, "Yes, I do." He said, "Well, I think you better go home and get your mother and have a vacation. You look terrible." I said, "Well, all right." So with that I wound up my business there, and came home a few days after that.

G: What month was that now?

H: It was the latter part of June. I came on home, went to Corpus and got Mama--I had a Model A Ford--and we did have a little vacation. Then I came to San Antonio and looked for us a place to live and went back to Corpus and got Mama and came up here. I've lived here ever since. We did open that bank and it did succeed. I was very happy.

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G: On one occasion Mr. Johnson met with Ogden Mills, who was the secretary of treasury then.

H: Not while I was there. I am sure it came later because Lyndon was just small fry then. It must have been after he was elected to Congress.

G: No, it was while he was still secretary to Mr. Kleberg. Also at one point he evidently had an interest in becoming president of Texas A & I College.

H: Well, you see, that was in Kingsville. The Kings and Klebergs had been very instrumental in establishing it, so if he had thought he'd like to do that, I'm sure Mr. Kleberg would have helped him.

G: You don't have any specific recollection of that?

H: No, I know nothing about it.

G: Okay. Did you see much of Dr. Bob Montgomery in Washington?

H: No.

G: He didn't visit Congressman Kleberg's office when you were up there?

H: No.

G: What can you tell me about Mr. Johnson's relations with Mr. Kleberg and the Kleberg family?

H: Well, they were good as long as I was there. Mr. Kleberg was wonderful to both of us. Mrs. Kleberg stayed up there about a month when we first went up. I know she came to the office one Sunday and said, "I just think it's terrible the way these children have worked. Why, Estelle hasn't even been down to F Street"--which is the main street, like Congress Avenue used to be in Austin--"and we're going to leave

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this place and take a taxi and go down there and walk up and down the street." Which we did.

She stayed about a month. After that, about every two weeks Mr. Kleberg would say, "Well, all right, come on and I'll take you all to dinner." That was just great because the place to go was the Occidental Restaurant. That's where all the great and near great went. We knew we could get bluepoint oysters on the half shell and Mr. Kleberg would be paying the bill. We would go and have a real nice time, because Mr. Kleberg was lots of fun and so good to us, so nice to us. You know, he treated us just like we were his family. He saw to it two or three times that we got to go to dinners where the tickets cost ten dollars. He bought our tickets. Then Lyndon would take me to the dinner. Oh, our eyes would just bug out at seeing all of the people.

G: What kind of a dinner was it?

H: Well, we went one time to the Jefferson Day Dinner, and Al Smith was the speaker. We were just thrilled to death to see Al Smith. He probably was three sheets to the wind but that didn't matter, it thrilled us.

G: Let me ask you something here: did LBJ ever tell you that he had seen Al Smith years before during the 1928 campaign, either in Houston or Oklahoma City?

H: No. I don't recall that he did.

G: Was he impressed with Al Smith?

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- H: Oh, yes, we both were. He was a Democrat. He had been a good governor of New York. We just knew that he was going to win, but he didn't. But Mr. Kleberg made those things possible for us from time to time.
- G: Was there another dinner that you went to that you recall?
- H: We went two or three times. I can't recall any special one other than when we heard Al Smith.
- G: Did other congressmen go along with Mr. Kleberg?
- H: Well, he wasn't with us. He just gave us two tickets and we went.
- G: I mean when you would go to the Occidental Restaurant.
- H: No. This would be eight o'clock at night or something when we closed the office, and we'd just get a taxi and go there. Mr. Kleberg lived on Connecticut Avenue, I lived on Massachusetts Avenue, and Lyndon lived back up there. So we'd just part. We could ride in the taxi with Mr. Kleberg and they'd let me off where I lived, because it came first. Then he'd go on to Connecticut Avenue.
- G: Did LBJ have any association with other congressmen besides Mr. Kleberg, like Wright Patman or Sam Rayburn?
- H: Well, he knew them. I knew them, too. But association, no, not as long as I was there. I'm sure there was some fraternization later, after he'd been there two or three years. You know, you get to know people better. But Congressman [Joseph J.] Manfield was down at the end of the hall, and he was head of Rivers and Harbors [Committee]. The girl that worked in his office and I were good friends.
- G: What was her name?

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H: Ann Kopecky. She came from Hallettsville. Congressman Mansfield had been Judge Mansfield. This Mansfield Dam up here is named for him. He was a grand old man. He was in a wheelchair. Everybody was so nice. People from Texas were all around us. We were just a new family welcomed in.

G: Do you think Mr. Kleberg ever felt that Lyndon Johnson might eventually run against him?

H: Not when I was there. No.

G: Really?

H: Another thing that was nice, every state has its organization. Once a month they'd have a party, a dance. So toward the end of January, they had the Texas party and dance and we went. There we got to meet other people from Texas, the congressmen, their wives, people that worked for them. Anybody from Texas was perfectly welcome to come. So we went to two or three of those while I was there.

G: I believe [Edwin Williams] Knippa quoted you in his thesis ["The Early Political Life of Lyndon B. Johnson"] as saying that Mr. Johnson would dance more with the congressmen's wives than [with anyone else].

H: Well, of course, that's good politics! He was a young man and they were older ladies and they were flattered that he wanted to dance with them. And he loved to dance.

G: Even then?

H: Oh, sure. One time we had a party at the boarding house where I lived and I asked him if he would come as my guest and date. He

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said yes, he would. So, bless his heart, he went out and rented a tuxedo for five dollars. That was a lot of money. He came all dressed up and he was nice as he could be. We had such a good time. The girls where I lived just thought he was darling.

G: Did he enjoy living in Washington? Did he miss Texas at all?

H: I think he enjoyed it, and I know he must have later on. But it's an unnatural world. It is the hub of our country. Maybe I can't express it just exactly right, but after a while you get the feeling that you're the center of attention. I think there are some up there now who think they're it. You sort of lose track of the world outside of that congressional hill. I think if you sit and watch the television every evening and see what goes on at these congressional committees and such things, you can see for yourself that they've lost touch with reality. No older than I was then, I could see it, I could feel it. It's an unreal world. And if I thought it was unreal in 1932, I shudder to tell you what it must be today.

G: Did he ever express to you his desire to move back to Texas?

H: Oh, no. He was charmed with all of it. It was what he wanted, always. Lyndon was just a born politician.

G: I understand that on one occasion you and Mr. Johnson met Will Rogers.

H: We did.

G: Do you want to tell me about that?

H: Yes. Well, two or three weeks before, Bebe Daniels and Ben Lyon had been at the Capitol. Mr. Kleberg came to the office that

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afternoon after five o'clock all bubbly, as he always was, and told us that Bebe Daniels and Ben Lyon had been there. You probably don't even know who they are.

G: That's right. (Laughter)

H: Well, they were very famous movie stars who had gotten married many years before. They had both been stars, and had gone to England to live. Well, he just had mutiny on his hands there in the office because he had not called us over to the Capitol to meet them.

So about three or four weeks later he called and said, "You all get over to Mr. Garner's office quick!" So we locked up and again here I went running, because Lyndon had me by the hand. We went whipping into Mr. Garner's office, and Mr. Rogers said, "Well, Dick, I guess these are your children." Mr. Kleberg said, "Yes, that's right." There was Jesse Jones from Houston, who was head of the Reconstruction Finance Corporation, and Mr. Kleberg and Mr. Rogers. So then Mr. Kleberg told Mr. Rogers the incident about Bebe Daniels and Ben Lyon having been there. He said, "I could not have gone to that office this afternoon if I hadn't had this pair over here to meet you. I think they would have just walked out."

So we chatted and Mr. Rogers acted just like you knew he would. He was standing there with his hat on the back of his head and this lock of hair down on his forehead, like we always saw him, had his coat over his arm. He just couldn't have been nicer. I told him I'd been downtown the night before to see his new movie. I said, "As a matter of fact, Mr. Garner walked out of the theater right in

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front of me." He said, "I know when a movie is released, it's never going to be a flop. It's always going to have one person go see it, and that's Jack Garner." I said, "Well, he was there last night, Mr. Rogers." It was a thrill to meet him.

G: Was Mr. Johnson impressed with Will Rogers? What did he say about him?

H: Sure. Anybody would be impressed.

G: Do you recall his reaction?

H: No, no more than mine. We were just thrilled to death.

G: Do you recall any exchange of conversation between the two?

H: No, I don't, because I was busy telling him my little bit. I'm sure he said some things, but I don't recall what.

G: How about Jesse Jones?

H: Oh, he just stood there like a puffed-up frog.

G: Was Mr. Roy Miller up there quite a bit?

H: Oh, yes.

G: What was he like?

H: He was great. He was just marvelous. Mr. Miller was a very handsome man. He was the mayor of Corpus Christi when he was thirty-five years old and he had beautiful snow-white hair at thirty-five. He was a magnificent speaker, just a marvelous speaker. He has a son in Washington today who is a lobbyist. Dale has done very well. A long time ago I heard Dale on radio two or three times, and he sounded exactly like his father, but he doesn't look like his father.

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G: I get the feeling that Roy Miller was sort of a mentor for Lyndon Johnson in these early years.

H: He was.

G: How so?

H: Well, he liked him. As I told you, Lyndon was very capable of ingratiating himself to someone. Nothing was too much trouble for him to do for you.

G: Did he ever do anything for Mr. Miller up there?

H: I didn't know that he did, but I imagine he did. But by the time we got up there Mr. Miller didn't need me or Lyndon. Mr. Miller was king of the hill.

G: Did he help Mr. Johnson with some things?

H: He could have.

G: Well, Mr. Miller and Mr. Kleberg were quite close I gather.

H: Oh, yes, they were real close friends.

G: I get the impression from reading the literature and talking to people that Lyndon Johnson was really the congressman, that he did most of the work and except in name and prestige, he really ran the office.

H: That's true. He really did. I know after I was gone--well, he'd had to expand and I'm sure that it became more complex, because our world was coming out of the Depression. Lyndon was an apt student. There just weren't enough hours in the day for him to cram in all of the things that he wanted to do.

G: Well, what did Mr. Kleberg do all this time?

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H: He was a jolly good fellow. Everybody liked him. He was one of the most gracious people who ever lived. By virtue of his being a son of the King Ranch, he'd already met all the great and near great in the United States. He knew them all. Many of them had been guests down at the King Ranch. He really never had worked very much in his whole life so he wasn't going to take that on as a lifetime job. But a more gracious, charming gentleman never lived than Mr. Kleberg.

G: Do you think Mr. Kleberg enjoyed being a congressman?

H: Oh, I think he did. It was something new and different.

G: But he wasn't the workaholic that Lyndon Johnson was?

H: No, Lyndon was the workaholic. Mr. Kleberg wasn't going to work like that.

G: I hear that Mr. Kleberg used to play polo.

H: He did. Of course, he was a marvelous horseman. He grew up on a horse, and they had their own team at the King Ranch.

G: Did he play up in Washington, too?

H: No, he played golf in Washington out at the Burning Tree [Country Club].

G: Did he play quite a bit?

H: Oh, as often as the weather would permit, because he didn't take any of the work very seriously.

G: Now, here he's the congressman and he's got a secretary who pretty well runs the office and keeps up with everything and he's content with that situation. Did Mr. Johnson, as the fellow who was on top of everything, try to advise Mr. Kleberg on how to vote on things?

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- H: Well, I don't know that because that would have come later when I was gone. As long as I was there Lyndon and I were equal, and we were both working like slaves to do the best we could.
- G: But Mr. Kleberg must have sought his advice on things that were going on while he was gone.
- H: Later, maybe.
- G: He didn't while you were there?
- H: No, this was the formative time. Lyndon didn't know any more than I did or Mr. Kleberg did. He was feeling his way around. He was getting acquainted primarily over the telephone and learning who to talk to in bureaus on different subjects. He was very persuasive on the telephone, as he was in person. It wasn't too long, especially if he could get some old lady at the other end of the line, before he had the whole deal downhill with the wind, because he could just charm her right out of her chair.
- G: Did he do most of it on the phone rather than in person?
- H: Oh, yes, he did, because you couldn't go to all those bureaus in a day. So it had to be telephone contact, and he was great at it.
- I didn't stay long enough to get in on what came later.
- G: One of the indications that I get is that Mr. Johnson didn't get along with Mrs. Kleberg.
- H: I don't know. As long as I was there, it was all right.
- G: Is that right? There was no [disagreement]?
- H: Oh, no. Whatever came later, I do not know.

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G: Did you ever hear from Mr. Miller that maybe there was a rift between them?

H: No. Mr. Miller died in it seems to me like the late thirties, very suddenly. I don't remember that I ever saw Mr. Miller after 1932. I don't think I did, because I moved to San Antonio.

G: What about Lyndon Johnson's brother? Did you ever get to know him?

H: I met him one time in Corpus Christi.

G: He succeeded his brother I guess as secretary to Mr. Kleberg. He took the job after Mr. Johnson left.

H: Oh, did he? Well, I don't know.

G: But you didn't know him in that capacity at all?

H: No. I met him in Corpus through some mutual friends, the only time I ever saw him. But I'll tell you this, if he did succeed Lyndon, he couldn't do the job Lyndon did.

G: I also have in my notes that Mr. Johnson worked for a while as a House doorkeeper.

H: I don't know. That must have been when he was with the Little Congress or something.

G: I see.

Is there anything else with regard to his work with the departments? You mentioned the Veterans [Administration].

H: Well, he was just learning and just feeling his way around. He went on to bigger and better things. You know where he ended up.

G: Do you have any other anecdotes or memories that I haven't reminded you of?

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H: I don't think so. One time before he married, I went to Austin to a football game with my nephew. We had just walked in the Stephen F. Austin Hotel and someone grabbed me from the back and picked me up off of the floor. I turned around and looked and it was Lyndon. [The entry] going into the Stephen F. Austin was just jammed with people. So we greeted each other in a big way. I introduced my nephew and Lyndon said, "I'm going in for breakfast. Come on in with me." So I went in. He said, "Estelle, I have found the girl I'm going to marry." Then he told me all about Lady Bird. He said, "I'm going to marry her if there's any way I can get her to the altar."

G: Is that right?

H: I never have met her.

G: Let's see, this must have been in October, is that right?

H: It was in the fall--football season. I'd gone over to go to the football game with Franklin. It was a Saturday.

G: He was still working for Representative Kleberg at that time?

H: Yes. Because he married her before he ran for Congress.

G: Did he have a good sense of humor?

H: Oh, yes, just divine. He was at his best when he was the center of attraction and telling all the stories. Mrs. George, who was in Congressman Thomason's office, had come from Texas. Mrs. George and her husband had no children. They'd been up there a long, long time. She was a lovely lady. She liked all of us, and called Bob, Lyndon and me her Texas children. Once in a while on Sunday morning she would invite us for brunch at eleven o'clock. That would mean fried

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chicken and biscuits and gravy. Most of the time we'd still be there at five o'clock, Lyndon maybe sitting on the floor in the middle of the circle, the center of attention. He would keep all of us in stitches for hours. He was great company.

G: What would he do?

H: Oh, it would be tales he would be telling.

G: About his activities on the Hill?

H: Anything.

G: Were they generally political stories?

H: No, it could have been about when he was going to school, or anything. But whatever it was, he could make it interesting.

G: He had a great gift for mimicry and I'm just wondering if he could do that back then.

H: Oh, yes, sure he could.

G: You heard him mimic?

H: Sure.

After a couple of months, we would get one night a week off and usually Bob and Lyndon and I would go together on Thursday night to see the wrestling matches. Seemed like everybody from Capitol Hill went to the wrestling matches. We had to sit up in the dollar seats while the congressmen were on the ringside seats. That was fun because we would sit up there and not only could we see the wrestling, but we could see everybody from Congress and we'd see who all was there. We had a good time doing that. You see, you had no television then, so you had other pleasures.

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G: I get the impression that Mr. Johnson spent most of his time talking politics, even while he--

H: He ate, slept, thought, dreamed, lived politics.

G: Did he ever indicate to you that he might want to run for something himself?

H: No. When he did run for the Senate and was defeated, I thought he'd been elected and I tried all evening to phone him and never could get him. The next day I learned he hadn't been elected.

He came in the bank to see me several times in the thirties after he was a congressman. One day later on during the war, I'd gotten home from work and Lyndon phoned me. I laughed and talked about an hour to him on the telephone. He wanted me to come to Washington to be secretary to a man who had been elected to Congress in absentia. I said, "You're a dreamer! I've been to Washington." He said, "I know. That's why I want you to come back. I'll put everything in my office at your disposal and I'll help you every way I can." I said, "No, thank you. I've been and I'm old and fat and have grey hair. I have no desire to go back to Washington." He said, "You're a liar. I'm coming by the bank tomorrow to see you, to see if you're not telling a lie." I said, "Okay." So he came the next day just about noon. He said, "I knew you were telling a lie," though I did have grey hair. But he said, "You're not fat and you're not old. You just don't want to go." I said, "No, I told you last night I didn't want to go." He had on a double-breasted suit and he unbuttoned his suit. I said, "Lyndon, you should be

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ashamed of yourself." He had a pot belly. I said, "Just like all the other old men covering it up with a double-breasted suit." I was going over to the St. Anthony to the beauty parlor, so he told Mr. Miller goodbye and we went streaking out the back door. He reached back and caught me by the hand. He always had me by the hand trailing him wherever he was going.

Then I didn't see him again for a long time.

G: You saw him once while he was president, didn't you?

H: Yes, I did.

G: Visited the White House?

H: He always wanted me to come to see him when he was a congressman. He said, "Now we can ride the little train down in the basement," because occasionally we stole a ride on it when we were there. Then when he was a senator I wrote him and congratulated him, and he wrote and said, "Now we can ride the little train in style. Come any time." Well, I never did get there. I have two good friends in Washington who lived in the boarding house where I lived. We've maintained a friendship all these years. After he got to be president I was going to New York so I decided that I would go to Washington and see him. So I wrote that I'd be in Washington and heard right back. He said, "There would be no one more welcome," and asked me to let him know when I got to town.

Well, I got to town and the next day I tried to call and got a run-around all day long. So finally, late in the afternoon, I thought about the name of Juanita Roberts. I'd seen it in the paper

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or something. That was the only way I knew it. So I called her, and she said, "Yes, he has been expecting you," just like I was the only one coming to town. That night about ten o'clock Lyndon called. They go through all this routine, "The White House is calling Miss Harbin." So I went to the phone. "Just a moment, Miss Harbin. The President is calling." Lyndon came on the phone and said, "Stelle, this is Lyndon." I said, "Yes, honey, how are you?" He said, "Well, I want to see you." I said, "Well, I want to see you, too." He said, "I'm going to send a car for you right now." I said, "Lyndon, it's ten o'clock and we're all ready to go to bed." "Put your clothes on because I'm going to have a car on the way. I want you to come down." So, you know, it's not very easy to say no to Lyndon. In a minute or two the phone rang again, we went through the same routine, and he said, "My apologies. You may bring your friends with you if you would like to." I said, "Thank you very much. I'll see if any of them want to come." So Marie said she would go with me.

So we went down to the White House. We went to the South Portico and it was all dark. The car stopped, the lights began to come on and we were greeted and taken inside and into the elevator and upstairs. Lyndon was sitting up there by himself watching television. Well, he got up and told me hello. I introduced Marie, and we sat down and had a visit. It was the first time I had seen him in a long time. I'd forgotten how huge he was. We had a nice talk. I said, "Well, I think it's time for us to go because it's getting late." He said, "Come on. I want to show you the house." I said,

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"That isn't necessary." "Come on. I want to show you." So there was nothing else to do. He got me by the hand, pulled me up off of the couch and we went trailing him through the rooms. He was turning on lights, and I said, "You're going to have your name in the paper in the morning for turning on all of these lights," and he laughed. We went all over the second floor. In his bedroom he said, "Come here, Stelle, I want to show you something." We stood there at a window looking south. There was the Reflecting Pool and the Washington Monument and the Lincoln Memorial all lined up, just a beautiful view. He said, "When my spirit is the lowest I can always come in here and look at this view and get some kind of inspiration."

So we came back into the living room and he said, "Did you ask the car to wait?" I said, "I don't know about these things." He said, "Well, I'll get the car for you." So as he was phoning, he reached back to me and I went over and stood by him. He put his arm around me and asked the car to come back. Then he told me, "Now I want you to come back in the morning and I'm going to have Mrs. Roberts call you. I want you to see the working place." I said, "All right, that will be awfully nice." So he went downstairs with us, clear out to the car. He bid Marie good night and kissed me good night and put me in the car. I said I guess they were all standing around gawking wondering who this old grey-haired lady was that the President was kissing good night.

The next morning about nine o'clock Juanita called me and said she'd send a car for me at ten-thirty. It came and I went

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to the West Wing of the White House, which is the working area. There were two men sitting there, and I told them my name and where I was supposed to go. That's also the reporter's pool and the place was teeming with men. Of course, I didn't know anybody. So in nothing flat this man came back and got me, and I went through a little door into this place where the four girls were, Juanita and three others. They were all four from Texas. We had a nice visit and she said, "Is there anyone up here that you'd like to see that I could call?" I said, "Well, Arthur Perry." She said, "Oh, he's across the street in the Executive Office Building. I'll call him." I told her he used to look at Lyndon and me like we were so pusillanimous. So she phoned him and said, "Arthur, there's a lady over here who says you used to look at her and the President like they were so pusillanimous and she would like to see you." So Arthur came over. Well, poor Arthur was a little old dried-up man, but very correct and dear as he'd always been. I was glad to see him.

Then she said, "Now the President is coming over in a few minutes and he's going to address a group of Peace Corps people right out here if you all would like to step out on the veranda and watch it." So we did. Then Lyndon came and talked to the group in the Rose Garden. Arthur and I stood by and listened. I told him, "Well, Arthur, our boy has gone far, hasn't he?" He said, "Yes, he really has, Estelle." Arthur had been with him a long time when he was in the Senate.

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Lyndon was this kind of a person: if he was your friend, he was your friend through thick and thin and he would never forget you. If you needed a job or if you needed help or anything, he'd see to it that you got it. I feel confident that any time during his time up there if I had written him that I wanted to come back, or called him and said I'd like to come back, I'd have had a job when I got there. I don't doubt that for a minute.

G: What did he talk about the night before? Did he reminisce about the old days?

H: We just talked in generalities. I asked him, "Will you ever forget the Bonus March?" He said, "Never, if I live to be a hundred. Wasn't that an experience?" We just talked. I reminded him that he had come to the house where I lived for a dance and he'd paid five dollars to rent a tuxedo. He said, "That I did, and that was a lot of money, wasn't it?" I said, "It sure was because we didn't have very much."

So, anyway, he got through and he came by, shook hands with Arthur and kissed me, and went on in his office. The flash bulbs on cameras were just popping all over the place. So I came back in the room where the girls were and Juanita said, "If nothing better presents itself, I would like for you to be my guest for lunch." This was on Saturday. I said, "Thank you very much." Juanita said, "When the President got your letter saying you were coming to Washington, he just sat back in his chair and seemed to dream a little. He told me all about you, Estelle, and about your

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early days when you came to Washington. He just seemed to go off in another world. Really, he was looking forward to your coming." I said, "Well, I've been looking forward to it, too. He'd invited me to Congress and I never did get there. So I wrote and asked him if I could transfer the invitation to the White House." She said, "Well, I'm sorry you didn't get in early enough. He really wanted you to be a guest here." I said, "Well, that would be a little much. I have friends in town."

I picked up a paper and said, "If you'll give me a pencil, I'll sit over here out of the way and work a crossword puzzle, because I know you all have things to do. In a minute her phone rang and she said, "Yes, sir. Yes, sir. Yes, sir." Then she hung up and turned around and smiled and said, "The President said to tell Stelle to stick around and he'll buy her lunch." I said, "Well, I guess today he can pay for it. Many times we put our money together to count it to see what we could eat." And the girls almost in unison said, "Oh, tell us about him!" I said, "No, that's as far as I'm going." But Juanita had taken me all over the entire West Wing of the house, introduced me to every one she came to, and told them, "This is the lady who came to Washington in 1932 with the President." So I met everybody in that wing. I didn't know anybody.

Then Lyndon came in and we walked over to the entrance of the White House and went upstairs, and Lynda was there. He had called Lynda the night before and said, "I want you to come down and meet a friend of mine." She told him she was undressed and studying.

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He said, "You dress and come and meet my friend!" So Lynda dressed and came down and I met her. He apologized because Mrs. Johnson and Luci were out of town. So Lynda was there the next day for lunch and Bill Moyers, Jack Valenti, Horace Busby, and Lyndon and I. Lyndon was sitting at the end of the table. There were six of us. We had a very pleasant lunch.

G: Let me ask you one thing about the early years, too. When he was secretary to Mr. Kleberg, did he type the letters, the answers to the constituents?

H: I did.

G: You did that. Would he dictate to you?

H: We just talked about it. We made us some form letters, because a form letter can cover most any situation. Both of us would open the mail in the morning, because it was voluminous. We just sorted it out the best way we could. If there was a problem, then we discussed it. And if it was beyond us, then we took it up with Mr. Kleberg.

G: I realize that he didn't have much money back then, but I'm wondering if he had much of a social life, anyway. Did he go out much? Did he date much?

H: No. He didn't go in for social life much. His was all political life.

I told him how to open a bank account. He had never had a bank account. I told him a couple of months after we had been there, so he went downtown and opened a bank account.

G: Is there anything else that we have left out here?

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H: I don't think so. I contacted him only occasionally. I wrote to him at the Ranch after he had had the first bad heart attack, when he came home. I had a nice note back from him. He added in long-hand on the bottom, "Why don't you come up and see me?" I'm ashamed I never did go.

G: Well, I sure do thank you for your time. You've been very generous.

H: I've enjoyed it.

[End of Tape 1 of 1 and Interview I]

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