

INTERVIEW I

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INTERVIEWEE: BETTY CASON HICKMAN

INTERVIEWER: Michael L. Gillette

PLACE: Mrs. Hickman's residence, San Antonio, Texas

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G: Okay, let's start at the top. I want to simply ask you to describe how you went to work for Lyndon Johnson.

H: I was office manager for an oil company in Fort Worth, Texas, and a friend of mine had urged me to move to Washington, saying it was a very exciting experience. Just before this, Olin Teague had offered me a job. I met him through a friend that I knew in Washington, and at that time I didn't feel I was ready to move to Washington. But a little later on when I decided that I would like to live in Washington, Walter Jenkins called and asked me to come over to Austin for an interview, which I did. After some dickering back and forth concerning salary, I accepted the job. On the first day of January 1959 I started to work in Washington, D.C.

I worked in the Texas constituency office in which Walter Jenkins was in charge. I was assigned to work with Lloyd Hand to answer constituency mail. At that time I was the only one in the office who could take shorthand; most of them were using a dictaphone. If anyone called with a message, I would take it down in shorthand and type it up, you know, if it was for the Senator or for Walter or whoever. One Saturday morning Johnson came over to the office and found a stack of

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unanswered constituency mail and he went right through the ceiling. So he issued an ultimatum that nobody could leave the office at the end of the day unless they had typed fifty letters. Now, most of the letters were quite concise and short. However, Lloyd dictated rather long, lengthy letters, plus the fact that I was constantly being interrupted to take telephone messages in shorthand. Finally in tears one day I went in to Walter and told him, "Walter, there is no way I can do fifty letters a day and do everything else I do." And he told me, "Well, this rule doesn't apply to you. You certainly are working as hard as you know how to work."

After a short while--this was in the Old Senate Office Building--we moved over to the New Senate Office Building. I worked a great deal with Arthur Perry, also, whom I loved very much. Arthur told me--we called him Mr. Perry, with great respect--he said, "If you intend to ever go home to Texas, do it within two years or you'll never go back." He said, "I planned to come for a couple of years and I've been here"--I think he'd been there forty-something years at the time. He was a very special person and had a very calming influence on the office staff. When things would really seem to get very tense and out of hand, Mr. Perry just with that calming little shuffle through the office would make everything seem more peaceful. He was a very understanding person. And Walter Jenkins also was a very--a jewel; he was just a fine man. I've never known anybody to work any harder than Walter worked. He had his whole heart and soul in that job, almost to

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the point, I think, his family often felt almost neglected, because sometimes he worked I think twenty-six hours a day. (Laughter)

G: Was he nervous around LBJ, or was Jenkins?

H: Walter was a very nervous person, period, a very extremely high-strung, very nervous person. But I believe it was because of lack of rest, and I don't know when he ever ate a regular meal. He worked, as I say, very often I know of twenty hours a day, sometimes twenty-two, and had very little sleep or rest. I remember one real funny incident when Bill Moyers came on the staff--this was some time later--Walter had just become so fatigued, he stretched out on the couch in his office for a few minutes. And Bill, thinking it would be funny, opened the door and in Lyndon's voice said, "Walter," and Walter leaped off the couch almost to attention, and he said, "Bill, don't you ever do that to me again!" So there was I guess a certain feeling that he did not want to let the Senator down, although he could never have been accused of that. He really was devoted to his work and devoted to Senator Johnson and the constituency.

I think the episode of the fifty letters a day shows that Johnson really gave the constituency what they were paying for; he really took care of them. No letter was to be in that office over twenty-four hours without an answer, and you know he had one of the biggest constituencies there was.

G: Did you also contact the various departments?

H: Oh, yes, yes. At this time part of my job was the appointment of the [military] academy people, the young men for the academies. But also

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when someone wrote in, for instance, and they had a military problem or some other problem, we would contact the particular department to check on it. We got their answer back, and then we wrote the constituent a letter over Johnson's signature. Of course, they were approved by someone else. But as a rule, we did our own composition of the letters.

G: Who divided up the mail when it came in?

H: Walter. It came through Walter, and then it was divided up into certain groups. Legislative matters were taken care of by one and something else by someone else and so on, Health, Education and Welfare, and so forth. Of course, this academy work did not take all of my time, but during that period of appointment it took a great deal of the time. I contacted the boys, I kept in touch with them, and made the announcements of who was appointed to each academy.

G: Did LBJ spend much time in the Texas office?

H: Seldom ever. In fact, I was there about three months without seeing him. He was in the Majority Leader's Office, which took most of his time. However, he stayed in constant contact with the Texas office through Walter, and mail was constantly being taken over to him. Walter would go through the mail, and the mail that Johnson needed to personally answer himself was sent over to Johnson to the [Majority Leader's Office]. We called it I think it was P-38 at that time. [It was sent] to his office over there and it was answered over there. But the more mundane, routine things were taken care of in the constituency office.

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We welcomed the visitors; they came to that office rather than the Majority Leader's Office, the constituents, when they came up there to visit. We gave them passes for the Senate gallery and so forth and arranged tours for them. And often--he was very strong on this, which I think is very right--he stressed to the girls answering the phone, "Your voice may be the only contact they'll ever have with this office. So make them feel welcome and make them feel that you care about their situation" and so forth. I think that was a good learning point for the girls there in the Texas office.

G: You indicated earlier that you had met Mrs. Johnson before you met LBJ.

H: Yes. She gave a luncheon for the new girls on the staff. She always made us feel that her home was our home and that she really cared. She was such a lovely person and so gracious and so warm. I'm really sorry that she doesn't project more in the newspaper pictures. They always seem to get a bad angle. She's a beautiful woman. My husband, I know, was just amazed at how lovely she was when he met her, because the pictures are never flattering of her. I think she projects pretty well on television with that warmth that she has, but not as much as she really shows. She really cares about other people. And this came across very strongly to someone who was in an area where they had never lived before.

But that's how I met her. And then a little later on, I think it was at a hundred-dollar-a-plate dinner--you know, there were lots of those--I met the Senator. Within a short while, he and Lady Bird--I

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don't know whether Lady Bird had suggested it to him or which came first--but anyway, I was promoted and sent over to the Majority Leader's Office. So that's when I moved over there, that was after several months.

G: What was your assignment there in the Majority Leader's Office?

H: I answered the mail, not all of it but the bulk of it. I was always amazed at the quickness of LBJ's mind. He was just sharp as he could be and he could go through a stack of, I would say, a hundred to two hundred letters in an hour or so. He would scan a letter and say "Regret it" or "Tell them I'll look into it" or whatever, and we took little shorthand notes on the letter itself and composed the letters to go out. But he did sign all of these letters. These letters were things that really needed his personal attention. But I was amazed at the rapidity with which he could go through the mail and answer it. There was so much mail.

G: Now, who worked in that office, the Majority Leader's Office?

H: Ashton Thornhill [Gonella] was on the telephones, and I was doing secretarial work, and Mary Margaret Wiley [Valenti] was his personal secretary. The three of us were in that office. A little later on, oh, quite a while later on, Bill Moyers came to that office and we worked together. Bill was a very bright young man. When he first came there he was a very skinny young man and he had a rather milque-toast appearance; he had little steel-rimmed glasses. But he was bright as a new dollar, really sharp and a great help, I think, in keeping things on schedule and in harmony.

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G: Did anyone else work out of that office?

H: No.

G: How about Bobby Baker? Did he spend some [time there]?

H: No, Bobby Baker--wasn't he secretary? I can't remember now.

G: To the majority.

H: To the majority. No, he did not work out of that office. He came into our office frequently, but he did not have a desk there, did not work in that office at all.

One funny incident that happened in the office, you may have to fill me in on the man's name here in Texas who owns all the newspapers and Sarah McClendon works for him, for one of his papers.

G: Was it Houston Harte?

H: No, not Houston Harte. I knew him; he was from San Angelo, my home town. I can't remember the man's name. But anyway, right before--I'm getting a little ahead of the story, but it is a funny incident--when Johnson had not announced but was definitely planning to put his hat in the ring for the nomination, and he had told me that morning, "Now, Betty, I've got a real busy day. I've got lots of votes on the Senate floor. Whatever you do, there are going to be some men from Texas up here and we're going to talk about this campaign. And I do not want Sarah McClendon in this office or asking questions. I don't want this news to be broken till I'm ready. Whatever you do, you keep her out of the way and don't let her be questioning people in my office." I told him all right, that I would.

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Well, sure enough, it wasn't long until these men had come in and I had gotten them something to drink and Sarah McClendon comes popping in the office. She goes right over to one of these men, and I had never met the man before and did not know who he was. So she's talking to him a little bit. I couldn't go over and say something in front of her very well, so I typed a little note to the man and I said, "Senator Johnson does not want you to say anything to her. She works for a newspaper." So I went over and I said, "You had a call just before you came in and I thought you should know about this." He said, "Oh," he read it, and he said, "Thank you very much," and put it in his pocket and he went on about his business. Well, I found out a little later in the day that she worked for him. (Laughter)

G: Oh, really?

H: I was just sure I was going to be fired right there on the spot, and I was just waiting for Johnson to buzz me and tell me this is it. But instead he and the man I'd given the note to said I had done a fantastic job and handled it so smoothly without Sarah knowing what I had told him. But Sarah McClendon, while she did print a lot of things ahead of time sometimes, she was a very good person and I think very loyal in a way.

I traveled with the Johnsons also after I went over to the Majority Leader's Office. I traveled with him and Lady Bird.

G: Tell me about the logistics of traveling with the Majority Leader.

H: It was just pretty hectic. For instance, I had a child twelve-years old--oh, I guess, she was only at that time about ten or eleven--and

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he would come in at six o'clock and say, "We're leaving in the morning at seven o'clock" for the Ranch or here, there or yonder. And I would say, "Senator, how long do you think we'll be gone?" because I had to arrange for my child's sitter. He'd say three days. Well, we might be gone three weeks, so it was a little bit hectic. We all met at the airport, and we had to carry a minimum amount of luggage, because there were usually several [of us]. Sometimes I was the only one that traveled with him and Lady Bird, or sometimes Mary Margaret and I traveled with them. But anyway, we carried a little case with our secretarial needs in it. It was usually set up--after Bill came over to that office he set it up; I think before that maybe Woody [Warren] Woodward had set up the arrangements, sometimes Walter had. But the trips were all worked out pretty well.

G: Now, did he normally fly on private planes or did he fly commercial planes?

H: Oh, no, we flew private planes.

I never will forget the first trip I took with them. I was a little nervous, you can imagine. Being a Christian Scientist, I read my Bible lesson every morning from the Bible and Science and Health, our textbooks. So when we got on the plane at seven o'clock that morning, he was dozing and Lady Bird was reading a book. So I slipped my books out of my little case and began to read. In a few minutes Lady Bird asked me, "Betty, what are you reading?" And I said, "Oh, I'm just studying a lesson." And she said, "A bridge lesson?" She knew I was an avid bridge player. I said, "Well, no, it's the Bible."

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I was a little reluctant, you know. And she wakes Lyndon up, she says, "Lyndon," shakes his knee, "Betty's reading the Bible." He laughed and said, "Boy, when we get down to the Ranch"--we were going to the Ranch--"I'm going to put you down there with Cousin Oriole. That's all she does is read the Bible. She can't even vote for me because of her religion." I'm sure you're aware of that.

G: Christadelphian.

H: Yes, I don't know what religion she was. But from then on, he had nothing but the highest regard, it seems, for me. And one of the things that angered me a great deal was that people would say during the time he was running and campaigning, "Oh, well, he just goes to church to make a big show." And that was not true. When we were at the Ranch, we went to church every Sunday. In fact, he laughed, we went to different churches, we didn't always go to the same one. He's a member of the Disciples of Christ or Christian church, and Lady Bird and the girls I think were either Presbyterians or Episcopalians.

G: Episcopalians.

H: We went into Austin to that church some, but we would go to the Lutheran church or this or that or the other from the Ranch. He said to me one day, "Betty, you're going to be so mixed up by the time you get back to Washington, you won't know what religion you are." But it really was something that--he would go through the house and say, "Okay, Bird and I are getting ready to go to church. Anybody that wants to go is welcome." So it wasn't something he did just for show. And I think he really had a sincere feeling about it.

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G: Why did he go to different churches?

H: Well, I don't really know [except] in that they were close to the Ranch, I think that was possibly it. I don't really think he was trying to make an impression on anyone, because this was long before he was running for the nomination. This is when I first went to work for him. But I was impressed with the fact that they did go to church every Sunday, because it would have been very easy, after the vigorous Washington week, to have just crashed, you know, relaxed.

G: Well, we talked about the planes. Did you generally fly on the same plane or did you fly on a variety of private [planes]?

H: Well, if there was just the few of us, we usually took the same plane and I don't know who it belonged to or anything about it. Many times after he began to campaign--well, actually it was before he was campaigning, but he was getting better known all over the country, getting ready to campaign--and then we sometimes had as many as twenty to thirty reporters with us, so we had a large plane. But I think, too, it was a private plane, it was not commercial.

I never will forget one instance. We were flying to Colorado. We had a rigorous schedule; twenty minutes after we hit the ground he was to give a talk on TV. We had all these reporters flying with us covering him. There must have been twenty or thirty reporters on the plane, and they almost all became airsick because it was so bumpy over the Colorado mountains. So between trying to type up a speech and wet-nurse all these reporters, all I could think of was getting to the hotel, getting a shower and changing clothes. Well, the minute the

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plane hit the ground, Johnson said, "Betty, get up to the suite immediately and get Buzz"--meaning Horace Busby--"in Austin on the phone. He's going to dictate the speech to you that I'm going to give in twenty minutes on television." And he said, "I'll be listening on the other line." He had such a sharp mind that he could hear that talk on the phone, because he had told in essence Horace what he wanted to say--or Buzz as we called him--and then he would put it in the proper form, and Johnson could deliver it almost verbatim with the written text.

I was taking the dictation over the telephone and Buzz was reading the speech and Johnson was listening on the other line. About halfway through the speech Johnson boomed out and he said, "Damn it, Buzz, I told you to make me humble! Make me humble, damn it!" (Laughter) Well, of course, Buzz and I both laughed, and he said, "What are you all laughing about?" He didn't think that was a bit funny. But it really struck us as funny. I was still typing on the last page of this talk that he was going to give on TV when he said, "I've got to go. I'll be down in room so-and-so. Bring me that last page when you finish it." Well, when I got down to the room, there were TV cameras, wires, things set up, there was no way I could get to him, and he motioned to let me know he could handle it without the last page. But that shows how sharp I feel that his thinking was. He had a very photogenic mind.

But these trips--from there, there was a big reception that night, and one of the jobs that I had was to stand behind him and Lady

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Bird and count the number of people that came through the reception line. In many ways Senator Johnson was very inconsiderate of other people, and then he could turn around and be so considerate. You could just almost shoot him one minute and love him the next for the way that he acted. For instance, on this particular trip, or the trip just before this I believe, he had told someone on long distance that we would be leaving for Texas within the hour, that he was going to go vote and then leave for Texas. Thinking that I was being very efficient, I said, "Senator, I'll call the pilots and tell them to have the plane ready." Because it took a good hour to get the plane ready. He said, "You'll do no such thing until I tell the pilots; I'll say when to tell the pilots." And with that, he turned and went onto the floor to vote. But knowing the pilots had been sitting in the hotel room three days waiting to find out when we were going, I called them and told them to be ready, we were going to be leaving very shortly. Then when he came in, he said, "Now call the pilots." Then when we got to the airport he walked up and down and ranted because the plane wasn't ready to go.

But at this reception and the dinner given in Colorado, I was just so touched by the courtesy and the consideration he expressed to an elderly waitress. He always loved older people and had a great deal of respect for them. There was this waitress who was waiting on him that night at the head table--the tables were in tiers and I was I think a tier below his--and this little lady was serving his dinner. The waitress who was waiting on us said, "Oh, Miss So-and-so is in her

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element tonight. She's worked for this hotel thirty years, and this is the biggest thrill of her life to get to wait on Lyndon Johnson." So I wrote a note to this effect and passed it up to the Senator, and from then on he just treated her like a queen. He took her hand at one point, said, "Honey, I just never had such magnificent service." You could see it just put her in orbit, and I thought how dear of him to take the time to be so kind to someone who might seem to be in a lower station of life than he was. But he was very thoughtful in that way. However, he could be very hard on his staff at times, very inconsiderate and then turn around and do something so magnanimous and so dear.

G: Why did the staff continue to work for him in view of his treatment of them?

H: Well, I think there are several reasons. Possibly it was a sort of awesome job; everybody sort of stood in awe of you because you were on LBJ's staff. I know I could pick up the phone and order something from one of the departments, and they were knocking on the door before I hung up. I know I was appalled when I came back to Texas to find you don't get that kind of service from a stationery store or whatever, you know. But it was partially that, and I think they respected him, I think most people who were pretty intelligent people realized that the man was under a great deal of pressure and that he was really--he was married to the job. There was no such thing as making personal plans.

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Walter Jenkins had promised me, because I had told him when I took the job that I could not work overtime every night, as I had a child, and she needed me, but any time it was really essential I would work overtime, but not regularly, that there would be little overtime I would have to work. But once I went to P-38, that went out the window. I was told, in fact, I believe it was Juanita Roberts who told me, "When the Senator tells you to do something, don't ask him anything, just do it." She said, "For instance, if he says, 'Set yourself on fire,' don't ask him, 'Do you want me to do it here or go outside?' Just do it." (Laughter) So that was kind of the attitude that the staff had, but I think that they respected him a great deal for his wisdom and the good job he was trying to do.

G: One of the explanations that you always hear is that no matter how hard the staff was working, he was working even harder.

H: That's true. He didn't play golf, he didn't socialize much. He did have to go to a lot of dinners and events, but it was not of his choosing. He worked in the car; he had a phone in the car. He would think nothing of calling you up at four or five o'clock in the morning to dictate something to you.

G: Really?

H: Yes. Oh, he just--I mean, it wasn't a constant thing, but if something came to his thought. That showed that he was working around the clock.

One instance--it was always difficult for anyone else to understand how difficult it was for us to get a day off or even to know

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whether we were going to get a weekend off or not. I had a friend I was dating in D.C. There was a big party in New York, he was with the Surgeon General's Office; he was a major. All the drug companies were having a big party, and he had also wanted me to meet his parents who lived in New York. He had asked me some six weeks or a month ahead of time to go to New York, and I said, "Well, I don't know whether I'll be able to get off that weekend." He said, "Well, just go in and tell him you're going to take off. You work every weekend almost. Just tell him you're going to take off." I laughed and said, "That's like going in and saying, 'I need a quart of your blood.' You just don't do that." So I did not know. I finally told my friend, "You better get somebody else to go that you can count on, because I may be in Texas that weekend. I don't know." He said, no, he wanted me to meet his parents and he didn't want to take anyone else. Well, sure enough, it worked out that I could go, but I did not know till Friday night about nine o'clock whether I was going to get to go that Saturday or not. And that was the way your life was. But you did feel, because he was so dedicated, that you were kind of responsible to be just as dedicated almost.

G: Another element seems to have been that he would involve himself in the personal lives of his staff.

H: Yes, he certainly did. He very often commented because I did not drink or smoke. I think I was almost the only one on the staff who did not. He later on made the remark to Sarah McClendon on a trip they took after I had given notice that I planned to resign, and he

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told me I didn't have to go on this last trip; he made the remark to this group of reporters--I think there were probably twenty reporters on the plane with him, because it had been a campaign-type trip for just the day, a talk he was to give. He said, "Betty's leaving us to go back to Texas." And he said, "I don't know very much about Christian Science, which is her religion, but it must be a very fine religion because she doesn't drink or smoke, but she's always so happy and she has more fun than anybody else." And he just went on about it in his folksy way. He said, "You know, she always seems to know what I need before I know I need it." So I thought it was rather kind of him to make that kind of remark and it made me feel very good. Sarah McClendon called me about midnight that night when they got back to tell me about it, because she thought it was unusual for him to make such a nice comment and she knew it would please me.

G: There are indications that if someone on his staff was ill he would help them, or if someone needed financial help, he would do that.

H: Oh, yes, he was very, very thoughtful in that vein. He could not do enough for you. And another thing, for instance, my mother, who had never hardly been anywhere out of Texas, was from San Angelo, and I had asked her to come up and spend a week or so with me. I took her in to introduce her to him, and oh, he just went on, he told her, "I just couldn't run this office without Betty." You would have thought truly that that was true, which it wasn't. But he made her feel so great in bragging on her daughter, you know, that I thought that was a

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very special thing. He did this, I think, to make parents feel good and also I guess to make the staff feel really good.

But he was a little short sometimes on complimenting you when you had done something. For instance, we went to I believe it was Idaho. At that time I think it was Congressman [Leonard] Wolf who was congressman, and they had a big bean feed once a year and he spoke. This was at the time Johnson was trying to become better acquainted around the country and he was the Congressman's guest and was also to speak. On the flight--he had had this list of things, which were the points of interest in his speech that he was going to give, in his pocket from the minute we'd left Washington. He waited until about thirty minutes before we were to land, and then he hands the list to me and said, "Betty, get this typed up and run off enough copies for all these reporters. I expect you'll need fifty or a hundred copies."

Well, it turns out it's a two-page stencil we have to cut. We had the most crude set-up in the plane. So we both had--I tore the sheets apart--there were two pages--and gave one to the other girl. I don't remember now who even was traveling with us. And we typed up the two stencils on portable manual typewriters. With Bill Moyers' help we ran off the stencils. Bill had already gone up to the pilot and told him that we wouldn't be able to go in with the rest of them in the limousine, so to get some conveyance left at the airport for us, that we were going to be busy doing this. But with all of us working together we ran off the hundred copies of a two-page resume of his speech and stapled it together with a little fountain pen stapler

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and had it ready when they got off the plane to hand out. And do you know what Johnson's comment was, "You girls should have hit these damn keys a little harder. They can hardly read this." (Laughter) That's when you have the urge to kill! We thought we'd been so efficient, done such a fantastic job. But then he could turn around and do something really great to show his appreciation in a different way. But it made it a little trying at times.

G: You were talking about smoking a minute ago. Did he stop smoking after the heart attack?

H: Yes. He had already stopped smoking and drinking when I went to work for him. However, he did still have an occasional drink, but he drank a half a jigger of Scotch in a tumbler that must have held ten ounces, filled to the top with club soda and it had three ice cubes in it, not two, not one, but three, not four. He would raise Cain if it deviated from that in the least. So in essence he was drinking very little, but at least it gave the appearance he was holding a drink while the others were.

G: Yes. You never saw him smoke at all after that?

H: Never saw him smoke a cigarette as long as I knew him.

Another thing that happened on this trip to Idaho that I thought was rather funny, Johnson was very folksy and he had a wonderful way of making people feel "I'm just one of you." However, he was very particular about his podium. He had had a very special podium built because of his height. Most of them were too short for him. Also he he was quite vain; he didn't like to wear his glasses, and that's

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understandable. This Idaho bean feed was held in a big arena where they showed horses and had rodeos. They had put Johnson up in the back of a pick-up truck with his podium and were driving him out in the middle of the arena. Well, the podium collapsed, and he just went all to pieces. (Laughter) But they finally got it all set back up, and he got into his folksy speech.

Another job, I had a copy of the speech he was giving and I was to mark the applause, the points where they applauded quite heavily, et cetera. Usually then we would leave out the parts that didn't get much attention and those that got a lot were used again. Very often he deviated, naturally, from his speech and he'd get real folksy with them. This happened to be a group of farm people. Oh, and that afternoon we had gone out to a farm and we were out in a hog pen, if you can believe, walking through this hog pen, and some lady put this big, fat baby up in Johnson's arms and said, "Oh, I just want the next president of the United States to hold my baby." Johnson very reluctantly took the baby, holding it out gingerly, and then he handed the baby to me. I think he was afraid of getting wet. This was the type thing that people very often would do. Back to the arena--he gave his speech and in it he got so carried away with this folksy bit he said, "Why, I'm a farmer just like you are, and tonight I'm going home to Texas and slop my hogs." And at that point I thought to myself, "Yes, and I imagine I know who's going to be carrying the slop--me." When we got on the bus to go back to the airport with all of the reporters, they made up a recipe for Johnson hog slop, and it included caviar and

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champagne. (Laughter) The reporters enjoyed making jokes like this because they realized of course that he was standing up there in his two-hundred-dollar silk suit, which back then was a lot of money, and he was not going home and slop the hogs that night.

G: Could he laugh at something like this? Would the reporters cue him?

H: I think so. They did not say it in front of him, but I think he possibly would have, yes. It would be according to his mood, I think, that he was in.

G: Were you able to kid him about himself?

H: To a certain degree, yes. One time, a funny instance that shows his sense of humor, we were having to work very late that night; the Senate was still in session, and he was dictating some things to me at his desk. Gene, a precious man who worked for us--he was a black man and sat right behind my desk.

G: Gene Williams.

H: Williams, yes. I loved Gene and his wife. His wife was the cook for the family, and Gene was just a dear man and we became very good friends. But anyway, he told Gene to bring us a drink, and I told Gene I would just take a Seven-Up, and he asked for his usual Scotch. When Gene brought the drinks over, while Johnson was dictating he reached over and picked up my glass and I said, "Senator, you have my Seven-Up." And he laughed and he said, "Oh, I don't want that Christian Science drink," and sat it down with a laugh. But it showed his sense of humor, you know. He had a good sense of humor and he

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could laugh at himself, but he didn't really want you laughing at him, I think. But there were certain times I think when you could do that.

G: When he was campaigning, did he generally tend to give the same speech over and over with some changes for the location?

H: Well, it wasn't of course identical. He would just take out certain parts that went over very well or that would fit with that locality or group. He tried to, and I'm sure the people that helped him with his speeches tried to write them around the locality where he would be to fit in with that locale. For instance, if they were farmers, well, they brought out something about farming, whereas if they were ranchers, there'd be something in it for them, or oil people, something about that business. I think the speeches were more or less written for the group that he spoke to, but many of the same things, yes, were used if they got a good reception from a former speech.

Another thing that concerned me a great deal was how the news media would take a statement out of context and use it to make it sound like he had said something totally different from what he had said. That was very annoying, and yet you don't have any recourse really on it. I was very wary of the news media because of many of these instances.

G: In 1959 when you went to work for him, he seems to have been very ambivalent about seeking the presidency, 1959 and 1960. Let me ask you to recall anything you can about this and how he made his decision to ultimately get in the race and why he didn't decide sooner, for example.

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H: I think that he wanted to be president more than anything in the world, but I think he wanted to be sure that he was in a position where he would win. He didn't want to go into it feeling that he would be a loser, because there's one thing Johnson didn't want to be ever was a loser or number two in anything. Perhaps he felt like he could do more good at that time as majority leader and then maybe run at another time. However, I feel like he had a great deal of pressure from others who felt it was the right time for him to run and that he should get in the race. My own personal opinion is that he did not relish the idea that he might be defeated, and therefore he was a little reluctant to get into it at that time. However, as the time drew closer, I think he actually felt that maybe he would win.

I remember about a week before we went out to Los Angeles to the convention in 1960 I was in his office talking with him and I said, "Senator, do you think we have a chance to win this nomination?" And he said, "Well, Betty, not really, but we're going to give them a hell of a fight." But once we got to Los Angeles, and once he saw how things were going, I really think he began to think he could win the nomination and he got very excited about it. That was a very trying time. I believe I was on the seventh floor of the Biltmore Hotel for one week without leaving the seventh floor of the Biltmore Hotel. Now, that's the kind of pressure we worked under. At first I was going down to the Johnson suite about eight-thirty in the morning, and then it got to be eight and then seven-thirty and then seven. And I believe the morning that Kennedy called after his nomination I was

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down there at six-thirty. The phone was just ringing constantly, and the pressure was very great.

G: Who in particular pressured him to enter the race in the first place, do you recall?

H: I don't really know specifically. Some of the news people, some of his supporters from Texas who were behind him, influential businessmen, I think they were probably the nucleus of it.

G: You know, at one point some aides or supporters put up a Johnson for President sign at the headquarters, opened a headquarters, and he ordered it taken down. Do you remember that?

H: No, I don't. Was that in Texas or was that in Washington?

G: No, in Washington.

H: In Washington. Yes, I do recall that. He said, "It's premature. Don't do it." I think he just had kind of cold feet about it, really, although it was not like him not to be confident. But again, as I say, I think he did not want to be a loser at any cost and that he was waiting to try to feel the waters.

After he made the decision to run with Kennedy, so many of us were disappointed that he decided to run with Kennedy. I had asked him that same day in his office when he said he didn't think we probably had a chance to win, but we were going to give them a fight, I said, "Senator, would you consider running as Kennedy's running mate, as vice president?" He said, "I am uno number one and I do not play number two to anybody. No. Under no conditions would I consider it." So that's why I think it was such a shock to many of us when he

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decided he would run on the ticket. But he gave us an explanation for that, too.

G: Yes. He seems to have had an attitude that he could run for president and get nominated from his position as majority leader, using his friendships with other senators rather than going out and campaigning hard in the states and marshaling delegates. Did he in fact seem to think that, say, he could carry Arizona by way of his friendship with Carl Hayden or Ernest McFarland or somebody?

H: I think he felt that they would play a big part in this. On the trip to Colorado I mentioned earlier, after the dinner that night, we had to be in Wyoming at seven o'clock for a breakfast the following morning. Then for lunch we had to be in another state, and for dinner that night, still another. So he was really campaigning. It was sort of concise and all together, but it was hard, it was rigorous.

In Salt Lake City he had a dinner where he spoke and then he had a meeting the next morning with some people. To show how traveling with Johnson was, everybody said, "Oh, this must be so glamorous and so wonderful. You go to all these places and see all these things." That just wasn't the way it was. As an example, I had always wanted to hear the Mormon Tabernacle Choir. Well, they were rehearsing Saturday morning. So while he was in this morning two-hour meeting I thought there's no possible way anybody could need me for anything, so I told the staff where I was going. I said, "I'm going to run over across the street to the Mormon Tabernacle and hear the choir for just a few minutes and I'll be back." I hadn't been there ten minutes

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until somebody came and got me. Johnson needed something. So there was never any time to sightsee or relax.

But again, to show his consideration, on Saturday night we were all gathered in the suite and someone said something about they sure needed a little rest, wished we could go to Las Vegas. And Johnson said, "Betty, get Alan Bible on the phone for me," so I did. And he told him, "I'd like to arrange a trip out there. Could you set up a reception for me tomorrow afternoon, say around five o'clock?" That really was not much advance notice. Johnson said, "Well, we'll fly to Las Vegas first thing in the morning." And I said, "Senator, you mean we're not even going to get to hear the Mormon Tabernacle Choir?" He said, "Betty, if you want to hear the choir, we'll hear the choir." So he said, "We'll all go over and hear the choir and then we'll fly to Las Vegas." So we went over and heard the choir for about ten minutes. Then he rushed us out of the church to the airport. We flew to Las Vegas and were there for less than twenty-four hours. Bible had set up a reception for us, and it was not as well attended as Johnson felt it should be, but, after all, that was awfully short notice, [on] Saturday night [to] call someone at nine or ten o'clock and say, "Have a reception tomorrow afternoon for me." But I think there were probably three or four hundred people there, as I best recall.

G: Did LBJ have set advance men on his staff or on the campaign staff who would go ahead of him and advance him?

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H: Yes, once he really began to campaign. Remember now, we're still back in the era that I'm speaking of when he was just getting known.

G: But even then he didn't have an advance team?

H: Yes, he had an advance team, but this Las Vegas thing was just kind of a cooked-up-on-the-spot, spur of the moment thing. No, he had advance people going ahead and making reservations and looking into things and setting things up for him, like the TV interviews and so forth. And they did that very well.

He was very, very secretive. My sister, whom I had not seen in two years, had a new baby I'd never seen, lived in St. Louis. Johnson had told a certain newsman on the telephone, "We'll land in St. Louis and I'll give you an hour's time." I very much wanted to see my sister and yet I knew that he would not approve if I let anybody know we were going to be there. So I slipped down to the lobby just before we left and called her and gave her the number of our plane. Her husband is an airline pilot for Ozark Airlines. I told her that we would be landing at approximately such-and-such an hour and that was the number of the plane, and would she please bring the baby to the airport so I could see him. There was no such thing as getting a vacation. I think in the two years I worked for him I had a week off. Anyway, he never could figure out how my sister and the new baby and her husband and two little girls happened to be at the airport when we landed. But he was very gracious to them and had his picture made with them and the new baby, holding the new baby. But that's sort of the way you had to do things. Of course, I would not have done

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anything harmful to him at all in any way, but I knew this certainly couldn't hurt anyone. And he met the newsman and visited with him for an hour and then we took off and flew back to Washington.

But things were very unpredictable. For instance, one time we flew to West Virginia when Kennedy and Humphrey were giving talks, along with Johnson. Johnson had used his podium. This was another one of those funny instances. He had his podium set up and he gave his talk first, and then he decided we'd fly to Texas to the Ranch for Mother's Day, which was the next day. His unexpected decision to fly to Texas was quite a disappointment to my little daughter as I had promised her I'd be back in Washington to spend Mother's Day with her. This was a difficult part of the work--never knowing where I'd be from one hour to the next. So he said, "Betty, go down there and tell them we want the podium." Well, here was Senator Kennedy standing up there speaking at Johnson's podium. I couldn't very well see us just jerking the podium out from under him, so I said, "Senator Johnson, couldn't we have them take it back to Washington?" He said, "Well, all right, but you tell them not to let anything happen to that podium." So I went down and tapped Senator Humphrey, who was waiting for his turn to speak, on the shoulder and told him that we needed the podium to be taken back to Washington, please not to let anything happen to it. That was the only way they got to keep the podium to finish their speeches. It was, as I say, very unpredictable because we were supposed to go back to Washington that night and instead we

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flew to Texas and [stayed] in Texas about three days. So you never did know where you were really going to end up.

G: Did he seem more temperamental on the campaign trail than when he was in Washington?

H: Yes, I think he was pretty uptight about the whole thing. At times he would seem very relaxed, and at other times if something had set him off or gone wrong or didn't go just according to the way he felt it should, he would be quite upset and you could tell he was uptight and feeling a little pressure. The staff often bore the brunt of it.

G: What did he do to help Humphrey in West Virginia, do you remember?

H: Well, no, I think that he had a lot of respect for Humphrey in many ways, but I don't think he thought Humphrey was probably the best candidate. And certainly he didn't think Kennedy was. I think maybe that's one of the reasons which prompted him to get into the race. I really feel that he felt he could serve the country so much better than anyone else who was running. Now, Stuart Symington I think he respected and admired a great deal.

Let's go for a moment to the convention in Los Angeles. That night--as I say, I'd been on the seventh floor of the Biltmore about seven days and nights without leaving and had all my meals at the desk in the Johnson suite and often got to bed at two in the morning. Three televisions were always going in the same room, tobacco smoke, everything, reporters pushing down the big double doors to the suite. It was a trying time, tiring time. Every time I'd walk from the Johnsons' room two doors down to my room the reporters would attack

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me, "What's going on in there?" and this and that and the other. I really did lose a lot of respect for the media at this point. They gave you no peace, nor respect, but they were doing their job, of course.

Anyway, the night they were going to take the first ballot was Wednesday night, and I really almost felt like I was under such pressure I was about to explode, so I went in and I said, "Senator, would you mind if I went to church tonight?" "Oh, no, honey, that's fine," he said, "I'll send for the limousine." I said, "No, it's only three or four blocks from here. I'll just walk." Today I wouldn't have thought of walking three or four blocks at night in Los Angeles, but I did and just going in that church was like walking into heaven for me, it was so quiet and so peaceful after all that hub-bub for that whole week. But when I got back, much to my chagrin and amazement--we thought it would go at least three ballots--it was almost over.

One of the things that really gave me a great deal of respect for Johnson, he really took the loss like a man. I'll never forget, he was sitting there, I think he had on his slacks and a pajama top and his house shoes. I think Bill Moyers and I believe Mary Margaret Wiley and Lady Bird and I were in the room. I know John and Nellie Connally were over at the convention center. So I believe that was just about all that were there, just this small little group. He said to us, when the balloting was over, "Well, I lost fair and square." He took it really well. He didn't get upset, he didn't show any display of anything. My heart really went out to him. I could see

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how weary he was, how tired he was, how hard he had worked, and how much he wanted the nomination. My heart really went out to him at that point. He looked much like a small boy who'd lost all his marbles in a match.

G: Were there some states that he thought he had in the balloting that went against him?

H: Yes, I feel that's true.

G: Do you remember which ones they were? North Carolina?

H: No. I really tried to block it all out when it was over and I really don't remember, but I know that he was disappointed because he was so sure that he had some of them sewed up that weren't. That night he asked us--and this was something he would often do, he'd ask the staff, "What do you think I ought to do about this?" He didn't always do what we suggested, but I thought it was interesting that a man of his stature would turn to people, his staff, and say, "What would you do in a case like this?" But he said, "Do you all think I should get dressed and go over tonight and congratulate Kennedy, or send him a telegram tonight and see him in the morning?" Knowing how tired he was and the pressure he had been under, we all recommended that he send a telegram and then see Kennedy the following morning when he was more rested. So he decided to do this and we composed a telegram.

G: Who worked on the telegram?

H: Bill Moyers and I, and of course Johnson had his input, too. He just told us to work something up and then he approved it, you know.

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G: Let me ask you if you can remember as much as you can about the evolution of the telegram. What did LBJ add to it, can you remember the language?

H: Well, no, I can't remember that he really added anything to it off-hand; it's been a long time ago. But I know Bill and I put our heads together and I think the gist of it was "Congratulations. I'll support you and work with you in any way that I can, and I want you to know that we are a united party," or something to that effect. In other words, there will be no sour grapes or anything, that I will work with you.

G: There was some phrase I think: LBJ stands for Let's Back Jack, or something like that. Was that in the wire?

H: I don't think that was in the telegram, but it could have been. But I don't think it was, I don't remember it as such.

Then the following morning before he even woke up, I was down in the suite about six-thirty to answer the phones, because we figured there would be a lot of calls early and a lot of telegrams coming in from Texas and other places. The phone rang I think it was around seven, seven-thirty, and it was Jack Kennedy. He said he would like to speak to Senator Johnson. I congratulated him and told him, "Just a moment." I didn't know whether to wake Senator Johnson or not, I knew what a rigorous night he had had. So I went in, and decided I would wake Lady Bird and let her make the decision, so I woke her. This was a very touching moment to me and something that will always remain in my thoughts: the gentleness with which she went around to

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his twin bed and knelt down beside him and gently shook him by the shoulder and told him that Jack Kennedy was on the phone, did he want to talk to him. Johnson shot bolt upright in bed and said yes. He told me, "Betty, get on the other line and you listen to every word that's said." So I did. Jack said he wanted to come down and see Johnson, and Johnson said, "No, I'll come up there, Jack. I was coming up this morning to congratulate you in person, so let me come up there." And Jack said, "No, I really want to come down and talk to you in your suite." So finally Johnson said, "Well, fine." They agreed that he would be down in about an hour.

Johnson then jumped out of bed and running for the shower told me to get the living room cleaned up, and to get some coffee sent up, and then he told me, "Stay within earshot where you can hear every word that's spoken, but don't make it obvious of course that that's what you're doing." It was obvious to me that he did not want people later on to say that he was bought off or this or that or the other.

Kennedy arrived about an hour later, and I went to the door and greeted him and again congratulated him, and then Johnson came in and congratulated him. They sat down on the couch and I was sitting at the little desk which was very near the couch. At this point Kennedy did not offer him the vice presidential spot, but he said to him, "You know I need a real good strong running mate, Lyndon, because I am known as inexperienced and I'm rather new at the game." He did everything in the world but say, "Will you run with me?" He was really trying to get Johnson to volunteer that he would run with him, but

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Johnson told him, "You have some good strong men to support you. You've got Hubert Humphrey and there's Stuart Symington who would make good running mates." But never once did he say he would run with him, and never once at that point did Kennedy ask him to. He stayed for quite a little while and they talked, and then he left. Johnson assured him that they would work behind him with the Democratic Party completely and so on.

Then a little later in the morning Bobby Kennedy came down, and I don't remember who was with him; there was another man with him. They came, and then they went off with Johnson to another part of the suite and talked and I do not know what was said. They left. Then later on Sam Rayburn and John Connally came in and talked with Johnson. Well, all this while I was feeling very secure in the fact that Johnson would not run with him, and I think Lady Bird was, too. But at one point he went in and talked to Lady Bird after Rayburn and Connally's visit. They were standing very close to me when they were talking and he said, "Well, honey, what do you think I ought to do?" And she said, "Well, Lyndon, you know more than anything in the world I would love to go to the Ranch and just retire and relax and enjoy life and our children, but I will do anything you want to do and I'll support you all the way." This is just the kind of person she was.

A little later, I think it must have been just before noon, around noon, I had to go down to my room to get something. While I was in my room I flipped on the TV for a minute and they announced

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that Johnson had agreed to run with Kennedy. Well, I just couldn't help but cry. I just was crushed, because--

G: And you were right there and didn't know that he--?

H: Yes. Did not know it. I went back to the suite and I could tell that Lady Bird looked like she possibly had shed a few tears, too. Anyway, I was very disappointed. We began to get many telegrams stating "Judas, you've betrayed us," and so on. They flooded in. Many people were very disappointed in his decision to run with Kennedy.

G: Now, did Bobby Kennedy come twice to the suite?

H: No, I believe he came once. Now, he could have come twice, but I believe it was just once. As I say, I don't know what went on in that conversation.

One of the things that was rather interesting, you know, Lynda Bird was sort of like a Philadelphia lawyer. Luci was just as bright as she could be, but she was very melodramatic and at this time she, I think, was twelve years old. The morning after her daddy had lost the nomination to Jack Kennedy, she came out of her room dressed in black from head to foot. I think she even had on black stockings. Her mother was just aghast, "Luci, where did you get those clothes? Go take them off immediately." And she said, "My father has lost and I am in mourning and I want the whole world to know it." (Laughter) So her mother immediately sent her back to the room to change clothes. The girls were really sad for their dad.

G: Well, now, Kennedy came back about eleven or so--

H: Yes, he did, he came back.

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G: --and that's when he offered the [nomination]? Were you there then when that [happened]?

H: I was there and welcomed him in, but again they went off to another area of the suite and talked. Then I guess was when the media came on with the twelve o'clock news that he had decided to run, they'd finally gotten word of it.

Now, John Connally, I had told you, and Sam Rayburn had come down and talked to him, and it was my feeling that possibly they were encouraging him to run at that point with Kennedy, feeling it was best for the Democratic Party.

G: Why do you say that?

H: Well, I have a feeling that they possibly felt like Johnson.

A few days later, when we all returned to the Ranch, Johnson said, "I'm going to tell you"--well, he put it this way, "I'm going to tell you Christian Scientists and you Baptists why I decided to go to bed with a Catholic." That was the way he put it, although religion had nothing to do with our feelings, I don't think. I think it was more the fact that for months we'd been hearing how inefficient and inexperienced Kennedy was and he [Kennedy] did have the poorest voting record of any senator of the hundred. He was never there for roll call, it seemed. Of course, his reputation for being a womanizer, while it was not well known throughout the country, was known in Washington. And we just felt like he was not the man, he was not heavy enough for the job, and we could see, between him and Johnson,

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that there was just no comparison. So I think that was one of the reasons we were so terribly disappointed and upset.

At breakfast the next morning after we got to the Ranch, Johnson said, "I'm going to tell you all why I decided to do this." He said, "If I had elected not to run with Kennedy and Kennedy lost, the Democrats would blame it on me, I couldn't even be elected dogcatcher much less majority leader again. But if I run with Kennedy and he wins, then I'll at least have a chance of steering him in the right direction so our country won't go down the drain. Because he really doesn't know all that much about running the government. And I will be in a position to help. He has assured me I'll be the strongest vice president there's ever been, and I can at least steer him in the right direction. I feel this is where I can serve the country best." And he said, "If I run with him and he loses, I will be elected majority leader again and I'll have more power than the Republican president has." That made sense, you know.

G: Did he say anything about not wanting Nixon to win?

H: No.

G: About running to keep Nixon [from winning]?

H: No, nothing was ever said to that effect. Nixon was known the whole time I was in Washington as Tricky Dicky, and none of us really thought he ever had a chance to win.

G: Well, you don't think that LBJ's campaigning or running was at all motivated by a desire to block Nixon from the White House?

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H: No, not particularly, because I think he felt even if Nixon were elected, as majority leader he would still be stronger and in a way have more power than the president did, because of the majority in the Senate. I never did hear him voice that opinion at least. That might have been certainly part of his motivation, but that was not among the reasons that he gave us.

G: Do you think he was tired of the Senate, LBJ, because--?

H: Well, no, I think he loved what he was doing, he loved his work, and he did a fantastic job of it.

One time I remember on the Senate floor, it was quite late at night and I had gone to take a message to Johnson. Wayne Morse had been giving him some trouble on a bill. It was very late at night and everybody was tired. The little page had taken my message to Johnson and I was standing there waiting for the answer. I could see the little page had taken my question over to the Senator and Johnson was talking to Wayne Morse and he grabbed the little page by the black tie--you know, they wear the white shirts and black ties--and he was shaking the end of the page's tie in Wayne Morse's face and saying, "You better vote for this bill." "You scratch my back and I'll scratch yours." Johnson was great in getting people to pull together. Of course, the little page, his eyes were round as saucers, you know, he thought he was going to be choked.

Johnson had a tremendous knack for getting people to work together and getting bills passed, getting things done. He never wanted anybody

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to say, "We can't do this"; he said, "I only want 'can-do' people around me."

G: A lot of the liberals were attacking his leadership at this point, though, at about 1959 and 1960, and saying that [this was] one-man rule and he was really dictating to the Senate.

H: Well, he was very strong, he really was. But he knew how to get the job done.

G: Did this bother him at all?

H: Yes, I think it probably angered him a great deal that they took this attitude, because I think he thought, "Well, there's a job to be done, I've got to get it done, and let's get on with it and do it." I think he realized it wouldn't have been as effective if he hadn't been so strong. In fact, I think if he had been as strong as president as he was when majority leader, instead of trying to please all people, he would have probably gone down in history as a stronger, better president. But I think he wanted to be president so much, and I think that he let down after he became president to a certain degree in his firmness. Everyone said he was much more relaxed with his staff, and he was not as rigorous in his work schedule, although he certainly never did in any way neglect his work. He took a short time to rest during the work day, which I had never known him to do as majority leader. He had a more relaxed attitude about his work from what staff people have told me. He was doing the best he could for our country, he felt.

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I know on one visit in the White House I had tea with Lady Bird and was telling her what a lovely job I thought she was doing as first lady and I was very proud of her and the girls. They were living in a fish bowl, and they were doing a fantastic job I felt. She said, "Well, Betty, this is the easy part, being gracious to people and all. But the hard part is making decisions, for instance, like this civil rights bill. These things, are we doing what's right for the best number of people?" She said, "Lyndon lays awake nights and we talk about it many times. It isn't an easy job." So truly it wasn't, and I know he was very conscientiously trying to do the best for all the people.

G: Let's go back to Los Angeles.

H: Okay.

G: The Johnson people had some pretty strong material to use against Kennedy. Some of it evidently was used by John Connally and India Edwards. I think you were going to tell me this story before we turned on the tape about the leaders of the Democratic Party coming to him and getting him not to--

H: Well, yes, in other words, if he was nominated they didn't want any smear that could be used on him later in the campaign by the Republicans.

G: Right.

H: However, the Kennedy people--this is something and I know Jack Kennedy had nothing to do with this, but some of his staff made some disparaging remarks about Lyndon Johnson to his two daughters in the lobby one

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day at the Biltmore Hotel and they came up to the room in tears. Well, I was just livid; I was furious that they would attack Johnson to his little girls. There were some ugly things that were said, but these were by staff members, lower echelon. I thought it was terribly indiscreet that they would hurt the girls in this way. It didn't benefit anyone.

There were a lot of things said and I happen to know--I was told this by John White and Morris Jaffe--that every delegate was furnished anything they wanted to drink sent to their room; anything was provided that they wanted for their amusement or entertainment, including women companions, by the Kennedy group. It was felt that the campaign was bought by Joseph Kennedy for Jack, that was the general feeling I think of everyone. It was a regrettable thing that it was that way.

I think also Senator Johnson did not come across strong on the debate with Kennedy. Kennedy had a lot of charm.

G: Were you there at the debate?

H: Yes.

G: Tell me how Johnson got into the debate to begin with.

H: Well, I think he was encouraged by many [who] thought that because he was so much sharper, and I think he felt because he was so much sharper intellectually on government matters and affairs and better learned or versed, that he would come off with a real good showing and reveal Kennedy's inexperience. But it didn't really work out that way. I think the charm Kennedy turned on kind of turned it the other way around. I think the debate was a mistake.

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G: Did LBJ feel that he had made a mistake?

H: I think so, yes.

G: Did he say anything to that effect?

H: I hate to be definite about this, but it seems to me that I did over-hear him say, "I should have never gotten into this"--the debate.

G: Let me get you to tell us in detail about some of the Democratic Party people coming to him and asking him not to use that material that he had. Who came, first of all? Do you remember?

H: Well, that part I'm not sure about, I don't remember it, and I would hate to name any names and be wrong about it. But there was just a constant flow all that day of the leaders coming and deciding what should be done and how we should handle this and where we should go from here, because I think most of them felt as Johnson did, that Kennedy was very inexperienced.

G: Was this material dealing with Kennedy's health, do you recall?

H: Yes, part of it was. Part of it was brought out in the campaigning that was done when I was still with Johnson, that, you know, he had this back problem, and he had some health problems. However, there was sort of a gentlemen's agreement in Washington that you don't talk about my private life and I don't talk about yours, back at that time. I'm grateful now that it's coming to light. Not for the people that are already gone, I hate to see it brought out because of their children, but I think now our politicians are realizing they have to live a cleaner life and uphold the morals a little better, which I think they should.

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- G: Do you recall LBJ's reaction? He withheld the material or didn't circulate it very much in order to--?
- H: He knew that in order to stay in a good light in his party's eyes that he needed to maintain their respect, because I think he felt there was a good chance that he and Kennedy would lose. And if they lost, he still wanted to be majority leader, so he was protecting that I think very carefully. Because he felt in his heart that he could do the most good for our country as majority leader, unless he could be vice president or president.
- G: Now, let me ask you to recall anything that you can about some of the other people who were in his suite while the decision was being made.
- H: Well, John Connally was there very often, and John Connally was one person that Lyndon Johnson would really listen to.
- G: Really?
- H: He would ask other people their advice, but he seldom ever really seemed to value it, but John Connally, he held him [in] very high esteem. He would ask John about things, and I think that he really did respect John's opinion and really knew that John is a very brilliant man, very intelligent. I think he really respected his know-how.
- G: How about Senator Kerr, Bob Kerr from Oklahoma?
- H: Yes, he was in the suite some during that time.
- G: Did you get an indication of what kind of advice he was getting from Senator Kerr?
- H: No, not really. While these people were coming in and out, bear in mind he was telling me to get Governor So-and-so from So-and-so on the

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phone. None of them were in their hotel suites. I was having to call all over Los Angeles trying to find these people. He would sometimes have me looking for as many as three and four governors at one time and wanting to know why I couldn't find Senator So-and-so. So I was trying to usually locate people that he needed to talk to during the time he was conversing with these men. Usually they got to a corner and were kind of by themselves and were sort of hashing things out, I think.

G: How about Bobby Baker? Did you get any--?

H: Well, Bobby Baker was fairly prominent when I first went to work up there, but he was not as much in favor towards the end. I think Bobby had made some poor judgments on doing some things.

G: Do you have any knowledge of Johnson's awareness of some of these--?

H: Oh, yes, yes.

G: Let me ask you to recall that in some detail.

H: Well, I can't remember specifically what it was except that I believe that at one time maybe he had--I don't know whether he had given money or favors or something to someone and it was very poor judgment. It became known, and it seemed to hurt them somewhat. I don't even know who it was to or what it was to or for or anything else, but I know that it seemed to be poor judgment. It seemed that he got a little carried away with his part and maybe overstepped his bounds quite a bit.

G: Do you think the fact that he opened a law office had something to do with that?

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H: No, not really. I think it was his poor judgment on some things that he did possibly, or they felt he used poor judgment. I can't speak--

G: Did Johnson then put more distance between himself and Baker?

H: Yes, very definitely, very definitely toward the latter part of the time I was there. I don't even remember Bobby Baker being in Los Angeles. Maybe he was. But he was certainly not evident around our suite.

G: I think he was in the suite at one point in there, but it doesn't show up on this page [of LBJ's diary].

H: Well, many people dropped in and out to offer congratulations or to--

G: How about Jim Rowe or Phil Graham? Do you remember either of those being there?

H: Yes, they were in and out some, too, but I don't remember at what point or what went on while they were there. They were close friends of Johnson's, you know, and I think he really was a person who would listen to others and then he would weigh the material and decide himself what was best.

G: Yes. In retrospect, after he got this flood of opinion from Texas after he had accepted the vice presidential nomination, do you think he regretted having taken it?

H: No, I think that he had made up his mind he was doing the thing that was best for the country, and I think that really in his heart he thought, well, maybe they would recognize it sooner or later, that he had done the thing that was best, which he evidently did, as it worked out.

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G: He came back to the Ranch then and he explained the next morning?

H: Yes, we stayed I guess all the next day at the convention and they worked out the arrangements for running together and so forth, and then we left I believe the following day, or maybe it was two days later, but I believe it was the following day, and we flew back to the Ranch. On the way, again, how considerate and thoughtful Johnson could be and yet how things got turned around. On the plane he came over to me and sat down by me and he said, "Betty, you've really worked hard and been invaluable. Bird and I are going to Acapulco for a week when we get to the Ranch and we'd love to have you go as our guest." This was something he was very nice about doing. He said, "I know you've got your little girl down in Texas in camp and your mother's there in San Angelo, if you want to take the week and go visit them, whichever you'd rather do. But we'd love to have you as our guest if you'd like to go." And I told him I really appreciated it, but I felt I did need to see my child and my mother. I hadn't seen my mother in quite a long while and my child in several months. So he said, "Well, no problem. You just go ahead and plan to do that."

That was on a Friday night and Saturday we were getting things all in order for their trip to Acapulco and getting newspapers collected and all that. He called me in Sunday morning. I had already called my friends in San Antonio as they had told me that if I ever got down to the Ranch to please call, they'd come get me. I had known them for years. They [the Johnsons] were leaving sometime Sunday for Acapulco

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I believe, and so I was planning to go over [to San Antonio] Sunday and spend the night with them and go on to San Angelo from here. I'd called and they were going to drive out and pick me up that afternoon at the Ranch.

So that morning, Sunday morning, Senator Johnson said, "Now, Betty, while Bird and I are in Acapulco, I want you to be sure and take all these newspapers and go through and clip all of them and keep every account of what's gone on and what's happened and everything." I said, "Senator, I won't be here. I am going to San Angelo to see my mother and my little girl." He said, "Hell, does everybody think this is just time for a vacation, we don't have any more work to do?" It really angered me, and I slammed out of the room and went back into the office at the Ranch. In a few minutes he came in and he said, "Now, honey, if you need the plane to go to San Angelo, I'll send you down there in the plane if you need a way to get down there." He realized he had overstepped his bounds and gone back on what he had told me I could do, and he was very apologetic. I told him, no, thank you, that I had made my own arrangements to get there. But this was another one of those little conflicts. I think he was under pressure and that sort of thing.

G: Now, you stayed another month, didn't you, after--?

H: Yes. I was trying to stay until the end of that session, which I think was going to end in August, mid-August, somewhere along in there. So I left toward the end of August and moved to San Antonio.

G: Did you explain to him why you were leaving, or did you--?

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H: Well, it was rather interesting. Lady Bird, one day we were at the Ranch by ourselves, and she could see I was a little upset about something, so she asked me. She had come by my desk and wanted to know what I wanted for lunch, just the two of us were there. I told her it really didn't matter, I wasn't very hungry. So she said, "Don't you feel well?" And I said, "Oh, yes, I feel all right. I'm just a little upset." She said, "Well, come on, let's go out and sit under the tree and talk about it." So we went out and sat on the ground under a big tree, shade tree. And I told her I was concerned about Johnson running with Kennedy, that I didn't feel that Kennedy was going to let him be a strong vice president, that I was afraid that they were just going to use him to get elected, and that I really was opposed to the idea of him running with him. I said, "I just don't know that I can support that ticket, because I don't believe they're going to be just and fair to Johnson in this, and I just don't want to see him used." She said, "Oh, dear, they have really promised that they will make him the best vice president, strongest one that's ever been, and I really think that they will." And I said, "Well, I certainly hope so. My prayers will certainly be to that effect and be with you all."

We went to Hyannis Port to visit in the Kennedy Compound, and I went with them. One of the impressions that upset me very much after President Kennedy was assassinated, I believe it was [Arthur] Schlesinger that wrote in a magazine article--it might have been Time, I don't remember which one--that on the plane, Air Force One,

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returning to Washington, Lady Bird Johnson looked down at Jacqueline Kennedy's gloved hands and wished that she could be half the lady Jacqueline was. I was so angered, infuriated, at the man who wrote the article and the magazine, too, because Lady Bird was such a lady. And for them to write this just infuriated me! For instance, when we went to Hyannis Port, there was a reporter from France interviewing Jacqueline. She was pregnant at the time, as you know. And here we were, Lady Bird and of course LBJ, and there were one or two members of the staff with him, and we went to Kennedy's--his parents' home actually is where they took us. We went there, and Jack Kennedy could not have been more gracious. He came over three or four times, "Betty, can I get you more coffee? What can I do?" And [he was] very gracious to everyone. Jacqueline didn't even speak to Lady Bird.

G: Really?

H: She hardly acknowledged that we were even in the room and took the reporter and went off to another part of the house to give her interview and was just above it all. To me, that was not being a lady. That sort of thing really disturbed me and I was afraid that the Johnsons wouldn't be treated with the respect that they were due.

G: The promises of a strong vice presidency and that sort of thing, do you recall the specifics? Did they have to do with appointments that Johnson would have a say in in Texas?

H: No, I don't think as much with that possibly, although I am sure that was one of the things he was probably told would come about, but I

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think it was more regarding foreign affairs where Johnson was so much better versed and with, you know, bills and issues, legislation. I think that was mainly the idea, that he would still be [in] a strong or stronger position as vice president as he had been as majority leader.

G: Did they ever focus on the need to carry Texas, and Johnson being on the ticket in order to help the Democratic Party carry Texas?

H: Very definitely. In fact, when we were at the convention in Los Angeles we wore western hats--we were given western hats; Neiman-Marcus supplied the outfits that we wore. Our picture, my picture [was in the paper], and I've forgotten now who the other person was whose picture came out in the paper on the front page of the Los Angeles Times. In fact, it was funny because we went [to Los Angeles] a day or so before the Johnsons, and I had never been to a horse race, so some of us went to the horse race. We were looking around for celebrities and all of a sudden we saw a newspaper with our pictures pasted on the front page. We said, "Well, we're the celebrities," as a joke, of course. We had on white pleated skirts and red and white short-sleeved jackets and western-style hats. The western theme was being used very definitely, and yet when it had to do with a farm group, we were farmers. (Laughter) But the western image was projected, not southern, definitely not southern.

G: Was this a decision that LBJ participated in as well?

H: Yes, I think it was, and his advisers I think also concurred in this,

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that it should be that way. They wanted to get away from that
southern image. They didn't think a southerner could ever win.

End of Tape 1 of 1 and Interview I

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