

INTERVIEWEE: REV. LUTHER HOLCOMB (Tape #2)

INTERVIEWER: THOMAS BAKER

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B: This is a continuation, the second interview with Rev. Holcomb.

Sir, we left this after about 1961 or so. The next thing would be in '62 when you were appointed by President Kennedy as chairman of the Texas Advisory Commission to the Civil Rights Commission.

H: Yes. This was of course done at the recommendation of Vice President Johnson. It was also done because of the interest I had taken in Dallas in this particular realm. It turned out to be a very interesting experience because, as I mentioned in the earlier interview, one of Mr. Johnson's closest and long time associates was Irving Goldberg, who now serves as a judge on the Fifth Circuit. Mr. Goldberg agreed to become vice chairman of the Texas advisory group conditioned on my becoming chairman. So we were a very active chairman and vice-chairman. We conferred together rather frequently. We had meetings in different parts of the state. We conducted a survey of the various public libraries to see whether their facilities were available for minority groups. We even had a meeting in the Texas valley with the emphasis on the Mexican-American. I received maximum cooperation from Archbishop Lucey. He designated one of his priests to devote any time that we needed with the Commission. We also had an annual meeting in Washington.

Perhaps I should have said in the very beginning that I was also urged for this by Dean R. G. Story, who was at that time Dean of the Law School of Southern Methodist University. Now Dean Story had served as a member of the national Commission on Civil Rights, and, as I recall, had resigned from

it. There was some thought to my succeeding him but the conclusion that was reached, and I shared in it, was that the best role for me was this Texas Advisory Committee on Civil Rights. Little did I realize that in reality that was the forerunner to my being where I am now. In all of my appearances before different Senate committees this fact has always been brought out.

As I have continued a very warm friendship with Irving Goldberg, he likewise says that when he appeared for his confirmation to go on the Fifth Circuit, that uppermost in his biography was that he was vice chairman of the Texas Advisory Committee on Civil Rights. Even though mine is, of course, a much lower echelon it's been rather interesting that we work together so closely. He now sends me various opinions and naturally there are more opinions coming from the court where he is serving in regard to civil rights than any other.

B: Was that work in the early '60's in any way frustrating--more advisory than action?

H: Yes. But again it has prepared me--see, the present commission on which I serve--of course this is a full time responsibility--but I'm trying to enforce a law where we have no power. So maybe my role in an advisory capacity helped condition me for this because we, frankly, had to go into different areas of Texas, sit down with mayors and housing officials, and appeal for a sense of what was best for the state and try to bring out the best in each of them. So I would say, yes, an experience like that is always frustrating but I am of a temperament where I likewise construe it as a challenge because sometimes I think results that are achieved through negotiation in the long run have some significance that we often lose if we look at it only for the present.

B: Did Mr. Johnson as Vice President get actively involved in this work? Was there any idea of Texas being a kind of model state?

H: Yes--not because I was connected with it, but I did share with him not only the minutes but would give him personal reports of it. Of course I was living in Dallas at that time, but when some visitor from another country would come where they had a vital interest in what we were doing civil rights-wise in America Mr. Johnson would always ask them to come and see me in Dallas. So, since Texas was his native state and all, that added to the challenge. So, he took a real personal interest and his staff likewise did.

At that time, as I recall, a man named Clifford Carter was active on his staff and I believe that Mr. Walter Jenkins had more or less assigned this area to Cliff Carter because I remember whenever we were filling a vacancy on the advisory committee why I usually discussed a great deal of it with Cliff Carter.

It should also be noted that at that time Mr. Connally was Governor of Texas, and Mr. Connally did not support entirely the civil rights program But I shared with him different meetings that we were having. I would say that on a personal basis he gave real cooperation. His main cooperation came about by a willingness to discuss with the heads of various departments of state government their minority employment. I expect the record would substantiate that there were more individuals from minority groups employed during his six years as governor than any other period in the history of Texas. I don't mean to take credit but we were somewhat working with him on those endeavors.

B: Did you ever have to call on Mr. Johnson for help in your discussions with Mr. Connally or with anyone else in Texas?

H: No. Because of my friendship--not friendship--but my support and being involved with President Johnson, it brought about a degree of understanding. I had been rather active in Connally's first campaign. That was a real difficult

campaign because even though he had been active in politics he did not have the identity that is necessary for a candidate. In fact, I take a great deal of pride that in his first campaign I handled the various precincts in Dallas County that were predominately of a minority persuasion and, as I recall, we got 85 percent of the vote in those areas. So, no, I would say that I have never been involved in any misunderstanding or friction between Mr. Johnson and Mr. Connally because I felt like I understood the profound respect that each had for the other. And, after all, I think that the test of any relationship is when two men can differ and continue the friendship that these two men have enjoyed for more than thirty years.

B: This brings us up to '63, the time of Mr. Kennedy's and Mr. Johnson's visit to Dallas and the assassination. I might point out here too, you are still at this time Executive Director of the Greater Dallas Council of Churches. When did you first hear that the President and Vice President were going to visit Texas?

H: I became aware of it and had knowledge because of my friendship with Governor Connally. He told me privately of the desire on the part of President Kennedy to visit Texas. So, I offered to assemble, just by telephone, some twelve or fifteen what you might call community leaders in Dallas. We assembled them at the Adolphus Hotel. I remember I was out to lunch and received a phone call --I believe it was when Howard Rose was in the Governor's office in Austin-- saying that Governor Connally was arriving by private plane at a suburban airport. So I went out to get him alone, driving my used Ford, and I never shall forget as we went into the Adolphus Hotel that we were talking about the visit and how important it was for all concerned, for not trying to stage anything but for Texas to really give a real welcome.

Governor Connally had some very warm friends in Dallas. The community leaders liked the way he talked to them so when we went into the meeting that day it was a little larger group--for political purposes at times we'd brought small groups together but we had people as I recall, of different political labels. I remember we had the old time Mayor, R. L. Thornton, who was in the group because when Governor Connally finished his presentation Mayor Thornton had a way of phrasing things that was a bit unique. Mayor Thornton's name was synonymous with the State Fair of Texas. So the Mayor said, "Well, I've always wanted the President to open the State Fair, but if that is not feasible why I would like to, as Mayor of the city, say that we would go all-out in planning for this visit."

B: When was this meeting? How long was this before the actual visit?

H: This would have been in the late summer. I don't remember the exact date, I could probably verify but it was not too far ahead. It was either late summer or early, early, early fall.

B: Was this group of civic leaders--would it roughly coincide with the council that is sort of the--

H: I would say that practically all in that meeting, maybe with the exception of four or five, were a part of what is known as the Citizen's Council in Dallas. As you know they were the ones--there always has been a great deal of misunderstanding about that group. A man whom I've mentioned, Mayor Thornton, during the worst part of the depression assembled a group in Dallas to try to continue to seek business for the city. It was at the time when they wanted to have the Texas Centennial and have it on what was the State Fair Grounds. So, that was really the--it was to launch and to undergird the financing of the Texas Centennial that brought this group into existence. They have no staff. They

have never participated in a political campaign. They, as I have said, have no organization but they're the type of group that one in the group would write the entire group and say, "we need a \$100 from each of you for a given project." In regard to the visit of President Kennedy, they wanted it to be non-partisan, wanted it to be at a civic level.

It had already been decided that the only fund raising dinner was to be in Austin. As I recall, I think Jack Valenti had come up with the idea of honoring the Congressmen in Houston and then the visit to San Antonio was to relate to the military. Then they included the breakfast visit in Ft. Worth. I believe that Ft. Worth decided for the Chamber of Commerce to finance and host the breakfast that morning. Then in Dallas there were to be no tickets sold. In other words it was not to be any type of event other than to really welcome the President of the United States and his wife. The visit that I'm talking about at the Adolphus Hotel was where that was first started. The question of the citizens council was not discussed at that meeting. It was more or less a group telling the Governor informally, "Go ahead and extend the invitation; we want Dallas included; and we will work out the details as the time draws nearer."

So as we approached that day, of course many of us had never had any experience with a Presidential visit and secret service men were coming in every other day to see some of us and checking out various buildings and discussing all of the details of it. It finally had every evidence of being one of those occasions that you just never dreamed--even the details, the behind-the-scene problems of any personal jealousies, things of that nature, all smoothed out. I happened to be on the Reception Committee, and as I have indicated my background is that of a clergyman, so I had been invited to offer the invocation at the luncheon--

B: Excuse me sir. Before we go any further, had there been prior to that time any real worry on the part of people like yourself that there might be some sort of difficulty?

H: The worry would have been because of just some happenings in Dallas that would-- as you remember, the Adlai Stevenson incident, and then I think I mentioned in the previous tape that I was present for this very unfortunate happening in the Adolphus Hotel lobby. So I would say those things, coupled with any concern that a community--it had been quite some time since Dallas had had a Presidential visit. I think that Mr. Truman visited there on a campaign. But so far as it being a tense or nervous state I don't think that was true at all.

I think that, as I try to reconstruct the period, that President Kennedy had been subject to considerable controversy. Maybe that's an understatement. From strictly a political viewpoint, Texas would have been viewed as unfriendly territory, not in a sense of physical violence; but we did an informal check, by having leaders come from various parts of the state strictly, on a political basis, and the only area that we gained any encouragement that President Kennedy would carry in the election was what we termed the El Paso area. But the rest of the state--I would not describe it as super charged emotionalism but just really circumstances that, times being what they were, that President Kennedy would have perhaps overcome. I would not want to be in a position of saying that if he had lived that he would not have carried Texas. That would be too highly speculative. But at the time of this visit--well, I would think that we would have to say that that was one of the purposes of the visit. That was certainly one of the purposes in Mrs. Kennedy coming because she had a certain charm and an appeal and it was a way of lifting it out of a strictly campaign or pre-campaign approach. It would be only natural that all of these

things that I've mentioned in these different cities would not only had to have been cleared by the President but certainly carefully gone over by his advisors. So the types of visits that were being made were calculated to satisfy some of the critics.

B: Some of the churchmen in Dallas have been pretty actively involved in the controversies.

H: If you want to just think of one denomination, in the campaign of 1960 I was one of two Baptist clergymen where they were identified with what was known as the Kennedy-Johnson ticket. The religious issue, yes, was still real in 1960. I think maybe I mentioned it. We discussed the Houston Conference--

B: Yes, we did sir.

H: --that did more to overcome. But in answer to your observation, there were what you called distinguished churchmen, laymen as well as clergymen, that were on the radio denouncing President Kennedy. But I would say that he rapidly gained considerable favor even with a conservative group like the Baptists.

B: You mentioned that a secret service man visited you--

H: Not a--numerous secret service--

B: What kind of things would they come to see you about?

H: Not about individuals--they wanted to check the routing from the airport. We first explored what was known as the Women's Building on the State Fair Grounds. It offered much more parking--not much more, but there was ample parking facilities. So they would go in a building. They have their own formula for determining whether they can protect a President. Then we explored, I believe, the Municipal Auditorium. I would not want to say that they did not select any of these sites because of danger. It was a process of elimination.

The place that was selected was in close proximity of the airport. President Kennedy was following a tight schedule and at the time that it was selected

we were not aware of this downtown motorcade. You see, he could have come from the airport to the Trade Mart in a matter of just minutes. It is of course uncanny that the Parkland Hospital was in the same area, of course, where he was taken after the tragedy. But it would have been possible for him even to come by helicopter from Love Field to have gotten to the Trade Mart I'd say in three, four, five, minutes.

Now the decision of the motorcade has been written up in various books. The decision of the motorcade--I'm not trying to document anything, but to the best of my knowledge was made at the level of the White House staff. I was standing by the car when President Kennedy made the decision himself to travel in an open top--I mean they had this bubble top. There was nothing dramatic about it. I just heard him give the order for it to be down.

As I say, I was on the reception committee. Governor Connally introduced each of us by name to him. When Governor Connally got to me he turned to President Kennedy and Mrs. Kennedy and said, "Is it all right to have a Protestant prayer today."

So President Kennedy, being the sharp wit, why, he said, "Governor, didn't you know I requested it?"--something like that. So we exchanged one minute a bit of pleasantries and I was overwhelmed by his charm. And then she was very cordial in the greeting. Then of course we then moved over to the car. He also went over to a fence and greeted people around the fence but I would say all of the airport reception, as I recall--I think there was maybe one person that had a sign that they tossed around--but the airport reception was far surpassed and it just achieved at a degree of perfection.

I must have been in about the sixth or seventh car in the motorcade. I'll never forget sights as we saw. We had passed a Catholic school and watched

the children and the Catholic sisters and then passed other areas where fathers would be holding little children on their shoulders to see him. The general comments were one of, not just cordiality, but of some degree of almost hero worship. I remember saying--it must have been about two minutes prior to the tragedy--to the person seated next to me, that "I wish everyone could have seen the Dallas that we have seen today." That you saw something on the faces of people. Where you had worked in behalf of the visit, day and night, as I had for several weeks, I was beginning to experience a sense of well, "it's just terrific."

Then all at once the motorcade came to a stop. At first I would have to say it sounded like maybe a car backfiring. I do not happen to be a hunter. Men who are hunters, as Governor Connally and Congressman [Earle] Cabell and others have said that they recognized it, I believe, as gun shot. But I did not. But the fact that it seemed to stop momentarily and then took off with such great speed--I didn't want to believe that anything had occurred. I guess I was stunned by making myself realize that we wouldn't be traveling at that speed.

Now, the car that I was in--the motorcade wasn't stopped but they stopped long enough to let me out because I went in to the Trade Mart because the men that I had been so closely associated with were all there and I still did not know the degree of the tragedy. I just knew that something had occurred. So when I got in the Trade Mart there was a doctor there who communicated with a doctor at the Parkland Hospital and that was the first--they did not pronounce him dead but we knew that it was-- Everything in the Trade Mart was very orderly. I did not detect any hysteria or anything of that nature. Finally, the man who is now Mayor of Dallas, who had been chairman of that event, a

man named Eric Johnson, came to me and said, "I think this is a time when perhaps we ought to have a prayer." He said, "I realize it will not be easy but I'm going up to my mike and will call on you for the prayer." So he got the attention of the people and said in a voice that conveyed the sincere grief and concern he said, "The President has been shot and likewise the Governor of our State." Then he just turned--maybe just called me by my first name, said, "Luther, will you come and lead us in prayer."

To be sure I had a prepared invocation but if I ever offered a prayer that came from my heart it did on that day because I was still somewhat in a state of shock. We offered the prayer and Mr. Eric Johnson came back minutes later and called for another prayer saying that the President was dead and that the Governor was in a critical condition.

The man that is now the Chief of Police in Dallas was at that time the Deputy, a man by the name of Charles Batchelor. People left the Trade Mart about like I've seen them leave a funeral. Some had already eaten prior to the announcement but no one touched a bite of food after the announcement. They just--husband and wife, sometimes with maybe their arms across the shoulder, some of the people more mature in years. I noticed younger people being rather attentive to them and each one was quietly leaving.

I went with the deputy Chief of Police in his car to the Parkland Hospital. I arrived there, I had been there a matter of minutes when Mrs. Kennedy, as you recall the picture, in the blood-spattered dress and the casket came out. I stood there for that moment.

Then I remember seeing Mr. and Mrs. Lyndon Johnson when they left Parkland. That was at the time that they had telephoned Irving Goldberg and he helped locate Judge Sarah Hughes to come to the airport. I did not make any effort

to--I'm not the type of individual to go rushing up and I was in a state of grief and somewhat speechless myself. I saw the Johnsons leave.

Then I stayed in the room with Mrs. John Connally during the period of surgery. We kept an open line, just took the phone off the hook, to the Governor's mansion in Austin. I remember the doctor coming in and asking her if Governor Connally was allergic to penicillin. We could not reach his doctor but I recall, you remember, he had been nicked in the eye when he was Secretary of the Navy inspecting some troops and I believe it had occurred in Texas. So I happen to have presence of mind to call the Brackenridge Hospital, I believe, in Austin and they very quickly said that he was allergic to penicillin. Then different ones, the members of the Connally family began coming in. I remember his pastor from Ft. Worth days came in.

Then I was called out of the room and some of the leaders of Dallas said, "We figured where you were. We are still in a state of shock and wanted to know about designating the following Sunday, I believe, as a day of prayer"--or it may have been Saturday. I left to write a letter or statement that would go to all the churches asking them to have their buildings open for a period of hours. Then I went that night to a television station, it was WFAA, to mention about what the churches were doing and then to offer another prayer.

But I would say it was four days, at least as far as I'm concerned, I will never, never, never forget. It was also my responsibility--not my responsibility--I happened to be the one to arrange to move the body of Oswald from Dallas. After he was killed we just didn't know what might occur with someone trying--so we kept the body at Parkland Hospital and moved it, as I recall, in a plain car in the early morning hours and then were met at the county line in Ft. Worth. I also talked to Oswald's brother to get permission

for all of this. He was at a motel with Mrs. Oswald on the outskirts of the county there.

Then Eric Johnson and myself decided to come to Washington for the funeral and the spirit in which we came is that we were not going to make contact with any political leaders; we were not going to try to seek a place in the church or cathedral; but that we came to stand with bowed heads in behalf of our city during the funeral of President Kennedy. Of course, Mayor Cabell, who was the mayor of Dallas at that time, he came and Judge Sarah Hughes did but they did not come with us. We left Dallas at 1:30 in the morning. I remember just before we took the plane we saw the man who was in charge of all the Secret Service in Dallas, and if I have ever seen a man who looked like he had spent his last ounce of energy that man did. So we spoke to him and then got on a plane. Naturally we had been up for several nights but we arrived in Washington about 6:30 and did not try to check into a hotel, just went and shaved and freshened up. Then over in the general area of the Mayflower Hotel is where we stood, and then we went on and returned to Dallas that night. So that much about the assassination if there is anything else that you can think of--

B: No, you told the story extremely well. Did you ever discuss those days in Dallas with Mr. Johnson later on?

H: I do not believe that there has been any occasion when I discussed them with him. I discussed them, not as much in detail as I have with you, with Walter Jenkins because Walter Jenkins was, I believe, the first one to arrive at the White House. He had an office in the Executive Office Building. So when he learned of the tragedy he moved in his own style and manner into the White House and he's told me that the first thing that he saw when he turned on the television, I believe--or this may have been in the Executive Office Building--

was the picture of my offering the prayer. So we have talked about it at various times.

Now, I was due to have gone on to Austin that night for the rally and was to have shared a room with Bill Moyers in the Commodore Perry Hotel. I even had the room number because it was on the ninth floor, and I was due to just go on in in his room. He had been asked to come to Austin to coordinate some of these different activities and he had called me several times requesting that certain personalities make certain that they had seats and all in Dallas.

B: There has been a lot of speculation about strained relationships between the Kennedy staff and the Johnson staff immediately after the assassination. Did Mr. Jenkins or Mr. Moyers ever indicate that?

H: No, I never did get any of that feeling on their part. I have heard them speak very highly of Larry O'Brien. Mr. Jenkins has spoken in a special way about Ken O'Donnell. I'm sure that the normal strains--just like, you know even in our own small family circles--with my background as a clergyman--I've seen people say and do things that did not reflect. But I was not privileged to-- I did not go to Love Field. I was entirely at Parkland; because of my instinct I moved from--the minute Mrs. Kennedy left why I moved right on into the hospital into this room where Mrs. Connally was. So I do not know of any--I'm sure that from things I've read and heard that there were maybe words spoken and thoughts expressed. But I'm certain that Walter Jenkins did not participate in any of it.

B: There were also at the time stories that went around about certain reactions in Dallas that, to put it mildly, were in bad taste.

H: That is mildly--one about school children, I believe, cheering and maybe some comment about when a teacher announced--

B: I phrased it that way because it has never been made clear to me whether those stories were true.

H: I'm not trying to tell this as though I'm defending Dallas at all. I was deeply involved in all of it. I'm certain that there were some where there were thoughtless statements made. This matter about the school situation, we checked into it rather thoroughly and that never could be substantiated. I knew the clergyman very well who told it. I always had a feeling that he was very sincere in what he had said, but again it was an expression of grief and I think it's human nature in time of serious grief to maybe, not that you want to blame someone but we're looking for things to say. I'm sure that everyone who served as even an undertaker has had people make some statement about a car or about the manner which turned out to maybe not be quite accurate.

I would have to say that Dallas is a city--I knew about the thousands of people who all hours of the day and night would quietly go into their places of worship and stand there. I knew of my telephone at an office that had two lines--of course I have just a regular phone in the home--but they rang constantly and every call with a thought of something that people could do, something that folks wanted to do. So I would think, just like I have quite often asked individuals, "Where were you on November 22?" I have had some tell me they were in England in a parking lot. But it's uncanny how people can remember where they were. So, I think the grief that was experienced in Rome and London and Paris likewise was experienced in Dallas, but Dallas had the terrible shock of it occurring in their own city.

B: Did you have any further connections with the Oswald family?

H: Yes, I'm just trying to think. The brother--I believe his name was Robert Oswald--was a very stable individual. He had a job in Denton, Texas with

ACME Brick Company, I believe. He was an individual who, in my opinion, was the most stable one in the family.

I did not view Oswald's mother as a stable person under any circumstances. Mrs. Oswald, the widow of the alleged assassin, would arouse your sympathy and she at that time--you couldn't help thinking about her being so far from any of her family and very ill at ease with English. I handled some funds where I transmitted them to her that just came spontaneously. But I could not say that I really--I have not tried to keep up any friendship.

The friendship that developed out of it for me was with Steve Smith, the brother-in-law of President Kennedy. It was decided in Dallas that I would more-or-less be the liaison with him--not in any official capacity but I made all the contacts with him to see if there was anything that the community could do. Then as weeks went by why we invited him to come--he was the first member even close to the family to come to Dallas.

I met him at the airport and at first we managed to take him to the Sheraton-Dallas Hotel where we had the mayor and a group of people there. By that time Mr. Eric Johnson had become mayor of Dallas and I remember Mr. Eric Johnson's political affiliation would be that of a Republican, but I remember him greeting Steve Smith by saying, "With the tragic death of President Kennedy, we do not think in terms of a Democrat or Republican. We all lost our President." I would think that Steve Smith gained an insight into what I have sought to convey, that he realized that he was being surrounded by men who shared the grief of the family.

Then, much to our surprise, as we were getting ready to leave for Steve Smith to return to New York, he asked if it would be possible to go by the area where the President--we had purposely come into the hotel from another route--

so we drove by. He did not ask to get out. We did go rather slow and I explained to him about the movement of the motorcade and gave him just what I've given here about my being stunned.

Since then--I saw him just a few weeks ago because Dallas is, the early part of next year, going to have ceremonies for a Kennedy Memorial, which will be some block and a half from the actual site. It's to be a rather simple design. It's to carry the passage of scripture from Ecclesiastes about a "Time to live, a time to die--". It's also to carry one line from his inaugural address and it will largely be grass. All of that was my responsibility to check with Steve Smith and Steve Smith would check it with the then-Mrs. Kennedy and other members of the family.

B: Originally there was a plan for a much more elaborate monument--

H: Yes, oh, there were all kinds of ideas. There has even been a bill before the State Legislature to turn the building from which the shot was fired into kind of like a museum. But I would say to most of us that never did seem--I think from time on people will always stop by that spot and there is a small marker there. I think the Texas Historical Society put the marker there. I remember it was my responsibility to clear with Governor Connally about his name being on it, and his name is on it. But that's just as a dignified historical marker. There is another practical--in discussing issues you don't want to be practical--but where this occurred will forever constitute a traffic hazard because it's an incline going to an underpass. So, as a secondary thought, we thought to do something at that actual site. We had traffic surveys made, and we were strongly urged by engineers who were thinking strictly about the safety of the people in the future for us not to place it there. Because anyone who wants to go there and stand, which thousands do around the clock, they can

still do so. But this other will somehow be at least in a modest way trying to express the spirit and feeling of a city.

B: Have you got time.

H: Here, I do want to say that at the beginning of this interview I have acknowledged that my relationship to President Lyndon B. Johnson was made possible by Walter Jenkins. My acquaintance and friendship with Walter Jenkins dates over now beyond 25 years. It is strictly that of a personal friendship. I do feel that Mr. Jenkins had more to do with the making of the Lyndon B. Johnson career, the making of Lyndon B. Johnson, a United States senator, a majority leader, a Vice President and finally a President more than any other one man.

Up until a very tragic development, Mr. Jenkins was not well known. One of his traits, one of his strengths, was in a desire to be anonymous. He was completely dedicated to one man--Lyndon B. Johnson. Individuals like myself who would call him and say, "Walter, we'd like to do something for you."

He'd say, "Whatever you want to do for me, let it be translated into activity for Mr. Johnson." My use of the phrase "Mr." comes from Walter Jenkins. I never heard, under any circumstances, Walter say "Lyndon." It was always--I mean it was a relationship that was characterized--sure you could be in the heat of a political campaign--but it was characterized by a dignity and a profound respect.

I would like to include in my informal statement here one of my hopes that somewhere along in history that Walter Jenkins, the stigma that has been attached to him will somehow be removed, because I think that I'm a realist. I'm not an idealist but I have still always been unwilling to believe the truth of the charges that were made against him. I have no evidence or anything

other than my knowledge of him as an individual. I know something of that complete dedication. I know that I had had lunch with him at the Hay-Adams Hotel, I believe about ten days prior to this occurrence. At that time I found him to be an individual that was completely exhausted. He was flushed of face, I remember his hands. He showed it in his--he was even a little bit--his comments. In fact Irving Goldberg was present at that luncheon and it was just as we had gotten together for twenty years or more, he was inclined to snap back at us a little bit that day, but of course that was beginning to draw to the close of a campaign.

B: Did you try to discuss his physical state with him, suggest that he take it easier?

H: I did that. That's one thing that he will always remind anyone, that I'd been doing that for years upon years because I just never did conceive how an individual--there was always a coming campaign. There was always coming major piece of legislation--keeping in mind that Senator Johnson and others had people to protect them. But Walter Jenkins never would permit anyone--when he would come to a midnight hour and realize that he had fifty long distance calls that he had not responded to, I actually think he endured a certain anguish. He was a perfectionist in every sense of the word. I would say this, that the folks that labored as either volunteers or staff members were devoted to him. Even after the tragic occurrence you let any member of the Johnson staff have the slightest ailment--. I remember one time when one of them developed appendicitis, the first one that would always be telephoned was Walter Jenkins. You let any member of the Johnson family--I'm talking about his brother or his children--Walter was always the first one to be contacted. And he wanted it that way, I think.

I realize that in politics someone would say, "Well, are you suggesting that he was framed." I'm basing it on my knowledge of him prior to that one night, and I'm basing it on a continued close friendship with him that I think that he would rather for it to be a closed chapter. But somewhere maybe it will come after he's gone or President Johnson's gone and all--But somewhere I think the story will somehow come out that it was not true.

Now, I was in Dallas the night it occurred. The Washington representative of the Times-Herald telephoned Mr. Felix McKnight of the Times-Herald and said that Walter Jenkins had been arrested on a moral charge. Mr. McKnight called a very close friend of mine and this friend called me. I immediately, of course, began making contact up here and within a matter of days came to Washington while Walter was in the hospital. He didn't want to see anybody, but the main concern he had was the effect on President Johnson in that particular campaign.

Now, let me just shift to another scene. As you see, this occurred in October, the election in November, then we come to the inauguration. I arrived in Washington for that and telephoned Walter. I called him the night before the inaugural ceremony, and I said, "Where are you going to be tomorrow?"

He said, "I'm going to be right here."

I said, "Well, I'm going to be right there with you."

He said, "No you're not. You're going on to the parade. You are going to first be at the Capitol for the ceremonies. You already have seats right near the White House and you'll be down there. You've lived for this moment."

I said, "Well, Walter, I think that I would rather come to your home."

About that time Walter's wife was on another line in the house and she said, "Walter, you're not going to tell Luther he can't come to our home." And Walter said, "Oh, Luther understands he knows he's always welcome but--"

So to make a long story short, there was a terrible snow and all, but I made my way out that morning, it must have been 9:00 or 9:30, to Walter Jenkins home. We went to kind of a basement or recreational room where just with Mrs. Jenkins, Mr. Jenkins and myself we watched the inaugural. That likewise was an experience I shall never forget because Walter sat there. I never will forget. When we came to the time of Mr. Johnson actually taking the oath, just a minute prior to that--Walter--the children that were around were very young but I remember they were playing around and he called I believe two of them in. In other words, he wanted his two children to be there when Mr. Johnson actually took the oath. After he took the oath you know how they were going into the Capitol for lunch, so there was a little bit of lull in the actual commentary.

So it was rather interesting. We were still moved by the event and I think I said, "Walter, I wish that Mr. Sam"--referring to Speaker Rayburn--"could have been here."

I'll always remember Walter saying, "I wish that Glen Stegall could have been [here]." Glen--his wife is perhaps the longest time employee on the staff of--and for many years why Glen Stegall and Mildred Stegall worked in the office. But I thought that was rather--that Walter's thoughts turned to a person that so many people never heard of. So we talked along those lines. But I would say his facial expression--one was very much like a battle-scarred soldier who was maybe watching the Armistice.

I couldn't help as the announcers would mention "We see Jack Valenti here, we see Bill Moyers here. We see--" You know, how staff members will be mentioned and here was the Number One of all'.

I would say that throughout all of these recent years, Walter has done everything possible beyond any thought that anyone could have of wanting to

stay away from anything that would look like he was a--. Like in other words, I would say the most difficult experiences have been with the marriages of the two Johnson girls, especially Luci because Beth, Walter's daughter, had introduced Luci to the young man that she married. So when Beth came for the wedding she stayed in our apartment. Of course the wedding was televised. Walter saw the wedding by television in Austin but then he had business in this part of the country and was taking a plane that evening from the Austin airport about the time that a chartered flight was then returning from the wedding. So it is difficult for any of us to realize--I don't claim to comprehend it but I've been kind of in the shadows of it with his daughter being in our home. She also had staying with her the young man she was engaged--I mean he likewise was a guest in our home. Well, Beth went on and stayed most of the time at the White House, but the young man stayed at our apartment.

Then later when they were married--of course as I've said all along, Walter Jenkins is a Roman Catholic convert, and the family are very devote practicing Roman Catholics. So the Roman Catholic Church made a concession and let me participate in the wedding of Walter Jenkins' daughter. I never shall forget. It was in a Catholic church in Austin when Walter entered with Beth on his arm.

But I have no particular light to throw on it other than--I think that I have been in a position to realize the meaningful relationship and the devotion that existed between President Johnson and Walter Jenkins. Now, I believe that Walter Jenkins was employed and perhaps introduced to Mr. Johnson by John Connally. That was when they were all just sure enough very young men. Connally was in and out of the office for brief periods of time but when Walter came in he stayed until the resignation was tendered as a result of the tragedy.

B: Have you ever discussed with Mr. Jenkins that night in October?

H: No one ever has outside of perhaps the psychiatrist and any FBI agents.

I think maybe that has been part of the secret of our friendship is that he has known my complete confidence in him. I suppose if he was going to talk to anyone about it he perhaps would have talked to me. I think he is such a courageous individual until with the story anything that he would say to me or anybody else would appear as though he was trying to build a defense for himself. So that's the reason that I say I think that he wants his own life. The very fact that he could go back to Austin, Texas; that he could open an office there; that he could sponsor his daughter in a marriage that was-- people from fifteen or twenty states to say nothing from every section of Texas came; the fact that he has demonstrated success in his chosen business, I don't claim to be the only one; there are no doubt hundreds more of people just like myself. They wouldn't think of going to Austin without spending some time with him. If he comes into any areas where we are living--but, no, in answer to your question it has never been discussed. Even the times when I was in the home, shortly after he returned from the hospital, it was not discussed. No effort at evasion, it was just one of those things that was just not mentioned.

B: Has Mr. Jenkins done any services for Mr. Johnson after this? Any sort of contact between them?

H: Just on a basis of friendship. Naturally, you know, it's difficult to do something when a man is President of the United States. To the best of my knowledge Mr. Jenkins has never been to the White House since--I mean, he returned that night. I don't recall--I don't think he was there very much even the next day because at that time--I believe the next day or evening he entered the George Washington Hospital here. But the things that he would have done in

regard to President Johnson would have been--you're bound to know a man's life as entwined--there'd be an awful lot of questions, unfinished business. So, I'm sure even though he did not have those visits in person I would think that largely through Mrs. Stegall--in other words when President Johnson had a question about something that Walter Jenkins would be familiar with I'm sure that he would transmit it to Mrs. Stegall and then she would get the information from Mr. Jenkins.

I'm sure it would be all right with President Johnson for me to divulge that since President Johnson has returned to Austin, once he relinquished the office of President, why quite naturally there's a very close friendship. I mean that Walter is welcome at the Ranch. But again, he is very sensitive--not sensitive. He doesn't want to do anything to embarrass the President. So the visits would be of a nature about like if I were maybe to see you three years from now and would say--you know, we'd tell each other what we'd been doing these years. They would be visits talking about the children, talking about the ranch, talking about different--. So I would think that just as Walter Jenkins was an important factor in the active years of President Johnson, I would think that during the remaining years of his life that it will be just like--I don't know if you can pick up where you left off.

In other words, I would think President Johnson would no doubt talk about it very much as I've talked about it to you. He'd talk about it as a tragic experience, he'd probably talk about it as the saddest experience of his life. I mean if something had occurred to one of his members of his family, I do not believe that he could have been any more grief stricken.

You recall, when the Pope visited this country, and you remember when President Johnson went to New York. That was an unprecedented development.

But I was quite moved that the next time the Johnsons were at the Ranch why the Pope had given a small medal that he blessed, one for the Johnson children and there must have been one for some member of the family. Anyway Mrs. Johnson herself took the medal to the Jenkins home on the next visit there.

Now, like when I mentioned about Walter's daughter Beth's wedding, Mrs. Johnson and Lynda attended, sat right down near the front; of course Luci was in the wedding. President Johnson talked a great deal about attending the wedding but I think the decision was made by him personally that he wanted to be there more than anything else but if he had it would have reopened all of this in the press again. Now, Mrs. Johnson even attended the reception. There was a photograph taken by one of the wire services of her greeting Walter Jenkins at the reception. So the only place where I fit into it is as I've said in the opening of the interview, that I was with Walter Jenkins when he planned the meeting at Lake Whitney which was a crucial one after Mr. Johnson's heart attack. I've been with him in all of the political campaigns and at the national conventions. I've sat with him many an hour when I would be sitting in silence while he'd be engaged in a fifteen, twenty minute telephone conversation with Mr. Johnson. Knowing Walter as I do, I would never ask him to share a confidence with me. I respect confidences and I would say the friendship or the relationship whether you want to call it an employer-employee--any way you want to put it--I think that President Johnson would be eager for anyone to acknowledge the place that Walter Jenkins had in his fantastic career.

B: I'm afraid we better close now.

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By Luther Holcomb

to the

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