

## INTERVIEW I

DATE: April 10, 1969  
INTERVIEWEE: PETER HURD  
INTERVIEWER: ELIZABETH KADERLI  
PLACE: His studio at Sentinel Ranch, San Patricio, New Mexico

Tape 1 of 1

K: I have come here to talk to Mr. Hurd about a painting he did of President Johnson which caused a good deal of interest all over everywhere. Mr. Hurd is going to tell me about the incident, and also about the things that led up to the incident itself, with very few questions from me.

I would like, before we begin the actual story telling of the incident itself, to get a few of the details out of the way about it. Concerning, for example, who it was that commissioned you to do the portrait, and about when this was, and your reaction to it, and so forth. The first question I would like to ask directly is what led to the invitation for you to do the portrait of President Johnson?

H: The first inkling I had of this commission was a xerox, or I think probably a carbon copy of a letter, from my friend Stanley Marcus to Mrs. Johnson, Mrs. Lyndon B. Johnson. In effect it said, "Dear Lady Bird"--I remember he addressed her by her first name, and the gist of the letter was this: "When the time comes, as it must soon now, for you to choose a painter for the official portrait

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of President Johnson, I hope you'll consider Peter Hurd. Because I've just seen a comprehensive show of his"--this was a retrospective show of my works at the Amon Carter Museum in Fort Worth--"and I recommend that you consider him." This is my recollection of the letter, signed with a pleasant "Kind regards to the President" by Mr. Marcus. Stanley didn't even bother to ask me. Of course, he knew that I would be tremendously honored to paint a president of the United States, and correctly so. Then I forgot about it, didn't hear anything further, and certainly didn't pursue it in the least myself.

I'd met Mr. Johnson on two occasions before. First, when he was United States senator from Texas and was present at a party of I'd say about eighty people held at the residence of the late Senator Chavez of New Mexico. I found at that time that Mr. Johnson was a very difficult man to communicate with. At least he was for me, and that's very rare in my life. I seem to be able to make some kind of sense with almost anyone who comes along if he speaks English, or Spanish for that matter. Mr. Johnson and I just simply were unable to make much headway.

The next time I met him was on the yacht Sequoia, where I was invited by Fred Korth, who at the time was secretary of the Navy. He, Mr. Johnson, was then vice president. And again an impasse, an absolute block, in any communication. So I just abandoned him and walked off and talked to some of the ladies present on this small yachting party, mostly Texans. I had no

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problem with anyone else aboard, but Mr. Johnson and I simply could not make any headway.

So time went along, and I forgot all about it. A letter came from the director of the Whitney Museum in New York City, Lloyd Goodrich. I didn't actually know him at the time, but I've met him since and we've laughed about this whole incident. The letter went something like this: "Dear Mr. Hurd, There is a man, a very important man and man whose name you'll recognize at once, who wants a portrait of himself done and he's requesting photographs of your work. Would you kindly send them for us? Unfortunately, I can't reveal the name of this man. But, as I repeat, he's a man whose name is quite well known. Yours truly, \_\_\_\_\_."

So I thought, "God, this sounds like a kook, probably, who won't even give his name. I don't want to paint any darn portraits. I've got plenty to do here," I said to myself, and my wife agreed. We didn't even answer the letter, which was rude of me, I admit.

Time went along, perhaps three or four months, and I was painting Mrs. Alice Roosevelt Longworth, elderly and most charming, amusing, witty lady, in a studio in Georgetown that friends of mine had lent me. The telephone rang--we were painting on the studio floor which is four flights up, which, incidentally, octogenarian Mrs. Longworth trudged up, refusing any help, each day and down again; quite a gal--so, somewhat annoyed, I went downstairs.

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"Peter Hurd, this is Lloyd Goodrich. I'm calling you--" "Oh, yes, Mr. Goodrich. I know what you're calling about, and I apologize for not answering your letter. It just didn't seem like anything I'd want to do." "Well, look, I think you ought to consider this a little more." And I said that I was put off by the fact that I didn't even know who this man was, or whether he would pose for me or not.

"Well, I'm sorry. As I told you in my letter I can't give you his name, but I do think he probably will pose." And I said, "If I weren't sure that he was going to pose I certainly don't really much want it. I hate copying photographs. I'm not good at it. I'm not trained in it, in that technique, at all." He said, "Do you categorically then and completely turn it down?" I thought a minute and said, "No, I don't believe I should do that. Why not send you some of my photographs that you requested, and we'll see what happens from there." "Could you do that? Time is of the essence." "Yes, sir, I promise. I'll get hold of my secretary in New Mexico and have him scout around and send 35mm transparencies of some of my better portraits." "Okay, fine." That's the way it terminated. Again I forgot it. For some reason I didn't tie it in with this other matter, because I had dropped it and thought no more about Stanley Marcus's letter. Months had gone by in the interim.

Well, Mrs. L., as everyone calls Mrs. Longworth, gave a luncheon

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for my wife and me and for the John Walkers. The director of the National Gallery of Art, the great Mellon Collection. He and his wife, who was a British noblewoman, my wife and I, and Mrs. Longworth were at the lunch. It was a wonderful and amusing luncheon. It lasted a couple of hours. We were getting toward the close of the portrait then, and we could take the time.

He came up in the course of the luncheon and said, "By the way, Peter, we've got a client that's a very good friend of the National Gallery who has interest in one of your portraits. He would love to get some information about them and see more of your work. I'm sorry to say I can't reveal his name, but you would--" I said, "This is where I came in, John. I know who that is by now." "Oh," he said, "yes, I see. Well, the cat's out of the bag then. What are you going to do about it?" So I said, "Well, I'll send you some photographs. I've already sent them to Lloyd Goodrich, but I'll send some more to you." So they were duly delivered to the White House, and I've to this day to see them again. I suppose they are lost or swept out, long since.

What now, next? So now you have the preamble, I'll say. Now you have the preamble to the great opus, how it all began.

K: All right. It began there, and then what was the next step, actually? Did you then get another letter or another phone call? Or how did it come about that you began the actual work?

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H: I'm just a little hazy about the next step in this momentous, historic, history-making occasion. But it seems to me the next step was a telegram that read like this; this was addressed to my wife and me, "The President of the United States and Mrs. Johnson invite you to a formal dinner and dance following honoring President and Mrs. Park of South Korea." And then the request, "Please reply to the social secretary at the White House. Lyndon B. Johnson, President of the United States." So that was quite an occasion. We of course accepted and were in fact guests of the President at the White House in the guest quarters. The ensuing three or four days were absolutely great and unforgettable and a marvelous experience. The most intriguing, and as I've said before, unforgettable experience, which has done much to erase the somewhat unhappy sequel to all this which you will learn about later in this interview.

K: I believe I remember reading in one of the accounts that you stood next to the President in the reception line. Is that incorrect? I thought I read that in the paper, and that was the first word you had had from him.

H: No. That's not quite correct. We were in the line, and a Marine officer, one of the wonderful, handsome young Marine aides to the President, was giving all of us guests of the White House who had not been there before little brief lessons in certain factors of protocol. One was, which was amusing to me, that the man, the husband, precedes his wife. The escort precedes his lady in the

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line. And that is incorrect, I was not in the receiving line. I was in the line of visitors who were being received by, first of all, the President of the United States, then his wife, and so on down the line in order of their precedence.

The interesting and amusing thing was that as I was introduced to President Park by the President of the United States. The introduction ran something like this: "Mr. President, this is Peter Hurd. He's an American painter. He's going to do my portrait." I was absolutely amazed at this. That was the first official revelation I'd had of this. So I gulped and said, "May that come to be, Mr. President," or something silly like that, probably. [I] went on down the line.

We had a wonderful evening. My wife and I were just entranced by all of these glittering guests. Some of them we'd known before, and others we had read about and known of. Others, like ourselves, were more or less anonymous in this group. So, it was an unforgettable evening. We spent the night and two successive nights there as guests of the Johnsons.

I think at this point I'm going to interpolate a little anecdote which will give some leaven to the more serious things that are going to be related later, unhappy things, some of them. We slept very late in our sumptuous quarters upstairs in the old part of the White House. There was a living room, bath, and one very nice bedroom. I had just barely awakened in the morning when I was astonished to hear my wife's voice on the telephone, the

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intercom, the telephone that operates within the White House, saying this: "Oh, Johnson, Johnson, would you please bring up our breakfast now? This is Mrs. Hurd, and I'm in room four." I bounced out of bed and said, "Woman, you're losing your marblelitos! What's going on?" She looked at me archly and said, "I happen to know the butler's name is Johnson, and he has told me when I need him . . . ." She did it, I think, to amuse me about this. So presently a very nice colored servant appeared with our breakfast, and his name was indeed Mr. Johnson.

Well, I'll wait for a question now from my interrogater.

K: At that occasion, any of the time that you were in the White House, was the portrait mentioned again by Mrs. Johnson or by the President?

H: Yes. Mrs. Johnson the next day said, as we met after our breakfasts, they in their quarters and we in ours, "I would like to . . . ." No, I believe it was the night before. She said to me, "Peter, I think a nice time for us to meet about this portrait would be tomorrow morning. And supposing we, you and Henriette and I, will gather on the Truman Balcony. We'll discuss the problem of your doing the portrait." I said, "Very well, Mrs. Johnson, that's just fine. We'll all meet there." So promptly at ten o'clock, with cups of coffee served us, we sat down and looked across the beautiful mall toward the--which way does that face, now? I remember the green. It was in the spring, and it was a beautiful time of year and wonderful. It seems to me that



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looks--doesn't matter. It's in my mind. Much of the following few minutes is in my mind quite clearly.

I remember that I asked Mrs. Johnson if the President would pose for me, that that was pretty important. "Yes," she said she thought that there would be a certain time allotted for that, and how much would I require. I told her that in doing an ordinary portrait, by which I meant a portrait of someone who could pose the full time, I would certainly need a minimum of thirty hours. Well, we both knew that was absolutely impossible for any head of state. So she said toward the close of it, "He should be able to give you a little time."

The size was discussed and the background. She suggested using the Capitol. And I said I wondered if they wanted to use their ranch in Texas. My own feeling about that was that it would probably not be very appropriate among the other portraits in the White House. She stressed that she wanted a small portrait, which bothered me a lot because I always paint life-size. And had we made a small portrait it would've not contained any implication of his big, massive, rather impressively massive, figure. So that I didn't like very much, nor did I think much about the idea of the Capitol at the time. But one evening when I saw it illuminated by artificial light as the sun went down I thought, "This is the way I'll do the Capitol, and please Mrs. Johnson and at the same time please myself, I hope."

So, I made the painting large and made three versions of it

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in this way. As one prepares a mat for a watercolor, I prepared a masking mat for the painting so that President and Mrs. Johnson could look at it in two other versions than the full version. In other words, one version middle-sized and one much smaller, which would be acceptable to me, as the artist, and hopefully one of them would meet their demands. But I'll tell you what happened about that later when we come to the big day, the dark day, at the LBJ Ranch.

K: After that you and Mrs. Hurd came back here to New Mexico? Or did you do any sketching or planning there at all? You just came on back home again and began? At what point did you do these sketches that you're talking about? You said the three that you did. Is this after you came back, and then you were to send them to them?

H: I must not have made myself clear about sketches. As I did the portrait much later--I realize that I'm breaking the sequence, the time sequence of this; the continuity has been broken. When I did the final portrait, having brought it up to date practically to conclusion, I sent it to the LBJ Ranch with two masking mats, such as the ones used on watercolors, that hid parts of the portrait and showed how it could look if cut down. It's done on a gesso panel, and it could have been reduced in size to something like what they had wanted. So, I'm sorry, I realize that I had made that mistake in telling it.

Well, as to what we did afterward. I remember we

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spent three nights there. I looked up some old friends in Washington and did some chores that I had to do and made preparations for departure and beginning on the portrait immediately. I don't just recall the next thing that happened. Perhaps you will have a question that will lead me to what happened after that.

K: Now we're getting to the point in all of this that has to do with your actually having the President sit for you, I would think. In other words, you probably did some work in between, with your ideas, but you had not actually, as yet, had him sit for you.

H: I'd done a portrait for Time magazine of Mr. Johnson when he was selected as Man of the Year. At that time Time lent me numbers of photographs, or, really, gave them to me. So I had quite a number of things from which to work. I went home with those photographs and some others that the White House sent me of the President, and immediately began putting [them] together--using one photograph for the way he stands, another photograph for the look out of his eyes, and another one for the turn of his head, and so forth, and really using several photographs. After looking through perhaps fifty or sixty photographs, I boiled it down to about twelve. And of those twelve I should say about four were the principal ones that I used.

Then I began the actual work on the portrait. I think the whole operation probably took me close to four hundred hours, as compared to the usual thirty hours when the subject actually sits

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for me. I was lucky in finding a rancher neighbor--I say neighbor in New Mexico term of neighbor; he lived seventy miles from our ranch on a big cattle ranch beyond Carrizozo, and made the round trip many times, a hundred and forty miles, to pose for me. Not for the head of course, but he had a very similar figure and wonderful, big, farmer hands, which the President has. And his hands really greatly resembled the President's hands Henriette and I both agreed. So that's how the "sittings," in quote, began.

The sittings were nonexistent except for one weekend, which I spent at Camp David going back and forth to the White House where I was a small pea in a big pod over the weekend. Everyone but the skeleton staff had departed, and it was a very strange, wonderful experience to be in the guest quarters then, full of the ghosts of the past, as you can imagine. At Camp David it was a very busy weekend. The President was extremely tired and literally began to doze as he began to sit the one-half hour that I was allotted in the little sideroom in the main building that President Roosevelt had built many years before for his residence, then which was the residence of successive presidents, of the succeeding ones I mean, Mr. Truman and so forth.

Anyway, the sitting wasn't at all a sitting. And when I saw this great, Roman emperor head nod, he had his chin on his chest a couple of times, I said, "Mr. President, I can see you're absolutely dead tired, and I think we ought to terminate this." "No," he said, "I promised my wife I'd give you half an hour, and

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I will." It was then fifteen minutes of time he had been with me. When twenty minutes had come I looked at my watch, and then five minutes later. And then, meanwhile, his head had nodded once more, his eyes swimming. He was really very, very tired, and not put on I'm sure. I said brightly, "Well, time's up, Mr. President. Thank you very much." So he got to his feet and lumbered out, this great lumbering walk of his. As he looked at my sketch, which I admit was very little, having hardly had a chance to begin, [he said], "Looks like an old drunk to me." So that was that. I had no remark to make at that. I don't think I was particularly chagrined. I more or less agreed with him, really. It wasn't much.

Present at Camp David were some very interesting people: Valenti, whom I'd gotten to know on the White House staff, Secretary McNamara, whom I really only saw, I don't think I actually shook hands with him or spoke to him or anything of the sort, but I watched him and other Cabinet members in conference. It was a rather dire time because the war was escalating and things were not very happy. I sat at the President's table at lunch on that Sunday that he posed for me, which was a tremendous honor I felt. I was really much delighted at the turn of things. And I hoped that somehow I'd be able to get a likeness that would be acceptable, even though I would not be able, under any conditions, to have him pose for me. So, I trotted on home and began the opus.

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And now I turn the microphone back to Mrs. Kaderli for another question.

K: This was then your only sitting? That was the only sitting with the President--that brief twenty minute business? Then you came back and worked from your photographs and from your rancher friend from that point on. Okay. This was, I believe, in 1965. I think that it was. I believe that it began then, at least the initial part of this began. It went over into 1966.

Now then, you spent the better part of your working time on this particular portrait? Once you begin a work you sort of stick to it? You don't do these other things in between?

H: I don't specifically remember whether I did other things, certainly nothing of importance. I might have gone out landscaping, making field notes, and that sort of thing which I do regularly just to break the tedium of this long operation. In the long operation, as I've just called it, my wife was so valuable to me, she being an excellent portrait painter and I think the real portrait painter in the family. So her criticism, she having watched Mr. Johnson just as much as I, was enormously valuable. We did our best to put in this portrait the President at his best, which I think should be the aim of any portrait painter whether he's doing a head of state or anyone else, without making it saccharine or without making it affectedly changed. By that I mean without making him years younger, or her years younger, but at the same time putting him in the most interesting light,

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both literally as well as figuratively. That was my entire aim in this portrait.

Incidentally, speaking of this, I did make two changes. I did alter reality in two ways. I shortened his rather oversized ear, the one that showed, by one-quarter inch, and I removed some blubber from under his chin. I don't know just what poundage, perhaps a quarter of a pound, which I hope some portrait painter would do to me if I was equipped in this wise. As far as that [goes] the rest of it was just the way he looked to me. I gave him a faraway look because I wanted him to have the look of a visionary, not have his eyes focused on any spot in the immediate vicinity. I chose the twilight sky in behind him because I wanted to have his face in this certain form of illumination that I felt would be most effective. And since the Capitol had to be in it, it was most interesting at night, too. That was another factor.

K: This took approximately what length of time? Would you say several months' time to finish it?

H: Well, there were four hundred hours, we calculate, of work. So certainly there was a great deal of elapsed time. My working day is usually all the way from eight to ten hours, depending upon what I'm doing, of course. I would say that certainly several months elapsed, and it progressed as fast as I could make it. There were certain small changes, but no really very important or drastic changes in the original concept.

K: When you finished you were pleased?

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H: Yes. I was pleased to this degree: I would love to have painted him from life, as I would any subject that I am commissioned to do; but within the limitations imposed upon me I thought it was the best I could do. And I still do feel that. It's nothing that I'm very regretful about. Taking into account my own limitations as an artist, and more particularly as a portrait painter, I think that I reached the ultimate within my limitations.

K: Then the portrait was crated and sent to the Ranch. I believe that would be the next step.

H: That's an interesting story. The curator of paintings at the White House was a young man who was most congenial, most helpful. I'd asked my brother-in-law to come down, and he arranged for us to see the portrait in the White House. The President was away at the time, and it was unfinished so I didn't want him to see it anyway, nor Mrs. Johnson either. But he had arranged to have it shown to some of the people on the White House Historical Association special committee for the passing on works of art and artifacts of other nature that are purchased by them for inclusion in the White House collections. In other words, the White House Historical Association has as its principal function supplying interesting artifacts, mostly of the past, for the White House, for permanent inclusion in that very impressive building. They include hangings, draperies, rugs, furniture, and I think they've done a great job of it. Incidentally,



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particularly under Mrs. John F. Kennedy they certainly did great things.

Well, David E. Finley was the head of the particular committee, or subcommittee, and approved the painting immediately, saying, yes, he thought that was just fine. Although it was not finished, it was well enough along for him to see what it was like. My brother-in-law thought it was fine. And my brother-in-law, Andrew Wyeth, and I know each other so well that he would [have] immediately pounced on anything or told me anything that he did not like about it. Had he plain, period, disliked it, he would have told me. Just as I would have told him if the same had happened in reverse.

So then I went back home and worked on it. No, that is not correct. There was work to be done. I believe I'm right in all this. Some changes were to be made in it, just minor things. But it was practically as it was to be. It was decided that on the way to New Mexico it would be sent first to the LBJ Ranch, and then on to me to be reframed in a dignified and fine [way], a frame worthy of the other paintings worthy to be included, you understand what I mean, in the other paintings in the White House collection.

So Jim Ketchum, the curator, and I agreed that the best way to get it there in order for me to put it in the proper actual physical light, the proper electric lighting or day lighting that it would receive, to set it and to check for any

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blemishes on it and so forth, and to have my two masks that I described to you earlier ready to superimpose on it showing the President and his wife how it could be altered, [would] be [to send it] in the courier plane with my wife and me from Washington. We arrived there and found that the portrait had arrived. As we sat down to lunch Mrs. Johnson said to me, "Peter, I must tell you there's been a little static about the portrait."

"Oh, Mrs. Johnson?" I said. But in honesty, the fact [is] certain spies had told me there'd been some static breaking out about it. I don't think I enjoyed that meal particularly, and I'm afraid nobody else around, for various other reasons, did either. Because Mr. Johnson was in a rather evil mood, and his recent gall bladder operation, I think, was still bothering him to a degree. The war situation was God-awful, and on top of that a suitor for his daughter had appeared on the same plane, and though he's since, I'm sure, been absolutely received in the bosom of the family, he was far from being happily received that day.

The company sat at this long table, like a boarding house, and we all tried to keep up some sort of merry conversation. But it was somewhat glum. Afterward the servants were invited in, along with the guests, to contemplate the work of art. I was appalled to find that it was tilted backward, in a storeroom of some sort that was not in use, against a lot of piled furniture and under a bank of florescent lights. It couldn't possibly have looked worse. It just couldn't have been more God-awful. They couldn't have possibly put it under any light that

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would have made it look anything like that bad.

So people were called in. One felt an atmosphere of tremendous tension as they walked in, as I say, the colored servants and numbers of other people, some well known, some not. I think Judge Moursund was there and his wife and numbers of other people. Oh, I do remember William S. White was one of my friends. I had two friends in court that day. Jimilu Mason the sculptress. A very nice girl who did, I think, an excellent job of doing a sculptured bust of the President. She was present, and she defended it. But Mr. Johnson rudely turned down all their, William S. White's rather tacit approval of it and Jimilu's and said, "That's the ugliest thing I ever say" and strode out across the room.

I was stunned by this discourtesy. And Henriette my wife has an elephantine memory, and she does remember, and now I do remember too, and my answer was, "That's very interesting, Mr. President." I realize that it has a sarcastic implication, but I was stunned. It wasn't done with sarcasm at all. I really didn't. But it could've been taken that way. The inference could be either way. I wasn't clever enough to be sarcastic at the time. Besides, I respect the man's office tremendously, and I could do nothing more than hurt my own self if I was being sassy to him and it got into the press. Mr. White did defend me. He's an old friend of the President's in a mild way. And Jimilu certainly did not agree

with the President. So then, I'm not quite sure whether I said to my wife, "Let's get the hell out of here," which I ordinarily would have said, or whether I deleted the "hell" out of my suggestion, in a loud voice. I hope I left the "hell" out of it. But we did get the hell out, and very quick.

Time rolled along, and--oh, the portrait was returned, as I suggested to Mrs. Johnson, C.O.D. It got there C.O.D. Well, the reason for that is my spies had told me when it arrived at the Ranch it arrived C.O.D. because Jim Ketchum wasn't about to pay for it, and I don't blame him a damn bit. He'd never get his money back. I was not on hand to pay for it, and we both had considered it would go on the plane with me. So it arrived there, and they were mad as hell because it had been an act of arrogance on my part to send something to the President of the United States C.O.D. I knew nothing about it. Not one damn thing at all.

Well, that's the way it all goes. I think that you've heard the principal part of all my adventures with the President, and so forth. And I do want to say that there's not the least animosity toward Mr. Johnson on my part. I doubt if I'll ever be able to communicate with him. I hope if I ever meet him again it will be on different terms, and I can say just exactly what I mean.

I perhaps was a little too much of a boy scout. I'm going to illustrate how, perhaps, one should treat the President if he is in any way obligated to you.

One morning at the LBJ Ranch, this was on another occasion

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my wife and I were there, we were invited summarily by the President to go and drive across the Ranch with him. It was a Sunday morning, and he got in a big Lincoln with the top down, and I sat in the back with Mrs. Johnson. He sat in the front with my wife and began to drive across the lovely live oak studded country of that part of Texas. Suddenly Mr. Johnson was seized with telephinitis. He grabbed the ship-to-shore, intercom, or whatever he had, ship-to-shore telephone, and said, "Unit One to Unit Two, over. Come in. Unit One to Unit Two, come in. Over." Very proper. And a voice came back after a moment saying, "Unit Two to Unit One, over." "Unit One to Unit Two. How are you this morning?"

We realized it was the foreman he was talking to, and from then on I don't remember the conversation very much. It was just chit-chat between the President and his foreman as he drove along with one hand on the wheel. The Secret Service guards out of sight in front of us and out of sight behind us. We were all alone driving along. Finally Unit Two was over and out or One was, I mean the President signed off. He picked it up again and called this man, his foreman, and said, "Why don't you burn that oak brush I told you to burn last time I was down here? Over." There was a long pause, and this sort of weary voice came over, the same voice, but in a weary way, said, "Unit Two to Unit One. Drive on a quarter of a mile and you'll see where I burned it. Over and out." That was amusing.

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A little farther on we came upon the man he was addressing, and his name was Dale Malechek. It just took one little look at him, by me, a Southwesterner born and raised, to know there was a cowman. From the top of his Stetson hat to the bottom of his handmade highheeled boots, he was a cowman. And the President wasn't about to fire him. I think that's the way you deal with him. Only thing, in my case, I was damned sure not important enough to rate with Mr. Dale Malachek.

Oh, I could go on with wonderful little anecdotes like this, but I think we've had the whole thing.

K: Where did this happen, when the President turned around and strode from the room? Did Mrs. Johnson talk to you at that time, or did you just get out so fast that there wasn't anybody . . .?

H: No. We just arranged for the Secret Service to send us to an airplane and head for home.

K: She didn't come to you and say, "I'm awfully sorry."

H: No. No apology on anybody's part. No, none at all. It was very formal, and very, I wouldn't say bitter, but sort of grim on everybody's part. I went on home and told everybody about it. I didn't make a secret of any of it. As far as secrecy goes, this conference, I'm not a damned bit ashamed of it. It can be opened to the world. I don't want it to be published. I would request it not be published immediately because nothing good could come of it. But as far as it being heard by people, okay. I'm telling the

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truth as I remember it.

K: I just remembered something about the sketch that he took from a drawer. Did you like it?

H: Oh, yes. I forgot to tell you about that. That was something that happened after "the ugliest thing he'd ever seen" had been pronounced. I said, "Well, what do you like, Mr. President?" I think I was getting a little hot under the collar, but well-controlled anyway. "I'll show you what I like, " [he said], and he lumbered across the room and opened a drawer and pulled out a very creditable painting, obviously from a photograph. If you're an old pro at being an illustrator, as I am, and a quasi-portrait painter, you can spot photographic lighting in a second. You just know if the photograph was used. This was by a very competent well known, greatly beloved American illustrator named Norman Rockwell. So I said, "Well, why don't you get him to do the portrait, Mr. President? He's worked from a lot more photographs than I ever have." I meant it not in the least bitterly toward Mr. Rockwell, whom I respect completely. I don't recall the reply to that sally on my part.

K: Was there any discussion, I was wondering . . . . I had read again that as far as the cost of it, the charges, you had done it for less than you usually charge for these things.

H: Oh, yes. The White House Association is allowed, I think by the terms of their charter, to offer up to six thousand dollars for

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a portrait. And that's just half my usual price for a portrait of that size. We portrait painters mostly go by size, the head and shoulders is one amount. I've never done a three-quarter one that I can remember, but hands are terribly difficult to paint. The portrait price goes up by the amount of the sitter that you show, you see. So that's how that went.

Something was popping in my mind just as you asked a question. Let's hold a moment and perhaps it will come back. I don't think this is what I started to say and which dropped out of my mind, but this is more or less an amusing conclusion to the whole thing. I have not totaled the number of letters that came in the following several weeks, or even months, mostly from complete strangers to me, and every one completely supporting me, but there were over five hundred in our last count and a hundred and thirty-seven cartoons. [They] always, if not tacitly or implicitly supporting me, were certainly not against me in this thing. I'd like it to be known to whoever's listening to this tape that I'm not in the least bragging about my own portrait, because I think it has many shortcomings. I think it could have been better had Mr. Johnson been able to pose for me.

But one of the principal things in my flunking the job, from his point of view and from anyone else's who doesn't like it, is this: that from the beginning I was unable to communicate with Mr. Johnson. There was just a dead-end effect. I would ask a



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question, I would get a grunt for an answer. No humor was funny except his humor. He's a strangely, strangely odd man to me, really a curious character. And he's not the first head of state I have painted. I've painted others and never had any of this problem at all.

K: Would you say there was a lacking of human warmth? Certainly in your relationship there was. Is this what you missed?

H: No, I think [just] toward me. [I'm] reading a recent book by Goldman called The Tragedy of LBJ. I haven't read it all through completely, but I have browsed it quite extensively. The theme of Mr. Goldman's book, in part at least, is that Mr. Johnson has throughout his career been absolutely unable to communicate with or form any firm foundation of mutual understanding with two groups of people, not necessarily the same or overlapping, and that is the group known as the intellectuals of America and the artists of America. Sometimes those two groups merge, but in both cases he's on very shaky ground, and in my opinion he needn't have been. If I were in a situation like his I would just simply learn instead of bluntly behaving the way he does. I think I could learn from such conferences and such contacts with people of the intellectual world in America as well as America's artists.

Mr. Goldman's book went into the great debacle at the White House when the Festival of the Arts was held. Henriette and I were invited there, and we were completely unaware of the background of

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all this trouble. We didn't even know it had gone on, nor was in progress then. We had a great time and were delighted to fly up from New Mexico and be guests of the President and his wife, special guests there, and partake of the function. It was lots of fun. The only inkling I had of trouble was when Dwight Macdonald was seen circulating a petition among the guests in which the President was being excoriated or damned in some way. I thought it was darn poor taste since he was a guest at the thing, and it was to some degree, I understood, paid for by individual, by private funds. That may or may not be true, but the story was that this was more or less given by the Johnsons themselves, with their own resources.

K: The point that you made about his having difficulty with the intellectuals and artists, do you think that this represents a defense on his part?

H: The President's basically deficient in taste in the arts as taste is understood nowadays. He just is. He has cornball taste, let's face it. And that can be interpreted by my listeners any way they like. I perhaps qualify as a complete cornball, because he apparently likes some of the things I do. I'll leave that to the listener.

At one time on a tour through the White House, I'm back-tracking in sequence now, when we were first there. I think it was the time of the presidential dinner, the dinner honoring President Park. No, I wrong. It was when I was doing the Man

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of the Year cover, sitting in the Oval Room of the White House doing that. Afterward he offered Henriette and me and the two Time people who had interviewed him that morning a tour of the private quarters of the White House. It was very interesting to go through, and as we went through his bedroom he pointed up on the wall to a painting of mine, a landscape I'd done many years before of San Patricio, where I live, and which he'd borrowed from the collection of the Metropolitan Museum in New York. He said, "Recognize that, Peter?" I said, "Yes, sir, I do. San Patricio." He said, "I tell people it's West Texas." "Well, if you do, Mr. President, I guess it must be then." Grunt for an answer. Stupid answer on my part too really, but that's our communion.

K: I think as we were talking last night you said to me, perhaps in his position, in his situation, he might have said, "You know, I really don't know much about art or artists. Why don't you help me with it?" Then you would have been so willing to. It would have given you some point of communication.

H: Completely so. If he had just absolutely relaxed. I was relaxed with him up to the point that he put me on guard, really, or not, let's say, on guard, but [he] made me realize that there was a tense atmosphere. There was a lack of communication there. It's a strange thing to me that a man who, let us say, has reached majesty, as he certainly did as the head of the greatest country

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in the whole planet as of today, should have such a strange insecurity. I can call it no other name than the common word we hear everywhere, "insecurity." But insecurity combined with majesty is odd to me.

K: This, I think, is interesting. Because if he had to feel that he knew something about everything, which no man can do . . . . But he refuses to admit his inadequacy in any respect? Is this true?

H: That is exactly what I mean. I might have said those same words myself. But in summary I'd like to say this, as I close this: it was a great, wonderful, unforgettable experience, and I do hope the Johnsons look at it with sort of humor by now. I hope to goodness they do. Incidentally, we've had two nice letters from Mrs. Johnson in reply to ours, to one from Henriette and I believe one from me, or maybe both from me, I can't remember--to her. In neither of which, in none of these letters, this exchange, did we refer to the portrait. And there's no reason to. The portrait has now been presented by me to our nation and is to hang in the National Portrait Gallery and will be put on permanent exhibition next month, with a small gathering of friends of mine and of the Smithsonians to witness this "great" occasion.

K: I read in one of those newspaper clippings that it had been lost in Dallas.

H: Yes, it was. It was someone at TTA, Trans Texas Airlines, [who]

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goofed on the matter somewhere. It was supposed to land in Carlsbad, New Mexico, I believe, and it went out to L.A. and was overdue.

I would like to tell a little about this before I do close. The portrait had received such vast publicity and had seemed to arouse the interest of the American nation as neither Mr. Johnson nor I could ever have foreseen. Neither of us envisioned the spate of publicity that resulted. So locally I was asked, in fact all over the country many offers were made to me to buy it. The top offer was fifty thousand dollars, and it was by a man in St. Louis whose financial assets we inquired about and found to be absolutely bona fide in his wanting it. He was a promoter in St. Louis and was interested in showing it in the arch that has been constructed, this stainless steel arch, the Gateway to the West I think they call it, that spans the river there.

Throughout the whole mess I had resolved not to allow it to have any undignified, if that's the proper word, exposure. In other words, I didn't want to make fun of the whole thing or in any way impugn the President or anything of that sort. But it did travel around our part of the country particularly a lot and earned several thousand dollars. If my business manager were here he could give us the exact amount, all for charity. No nickel of it went to me, nor did I want it to. I consulted with my fiscal agents, and they thought that it was a good idea to give it to the

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country rather than to accept the six thousand dollars that I was offered. So that brings up one other matter, too, that perhaps would be interesting.

Mr. Clark Clifford was the lawyer member of the White House Association, Historical Association. He wrote me a letter enclosing the six thousand dollar check when all this scandal broke out which I promptly returned, saying, no, that I didn't care to sell it since it had been refused for the White House; that I preferred to keep it, at least for the present. My letter was absolutely polite and not in the least rancorous. Back came a letter from Mr. Clifford saying, "Why, you can't possibly do that. You're under contract. You're under contract to sell it to us."

I had my lawyer look at it, and he said, "He's just bluffing you. This is just absolutely impossible. It's not being hung in the White House which was what its purpose was and what you were to have been paid for. Of course, you're not breaking any contract. It's your work of art until it's accepted." So Mr. Clifford received a four paragraph, Chesterfieldian letter from me which I worked over quite a while. It had no sarcasm whatever, nothing like that, but the most rounded English, full of all sorts of phraseology that I normally would not use. No reply has come from the great man since then, nor from me.

K: Now, it was to have been the official portrait of the President,

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then?

H: The official portrait. It was to have been hung with the other official portraits in the White House. And to have put a small painting there along with the other mostly large things, a small painting life-size of a very big man with a Capitol behind him, just would not have worked.

K: Well, I understand they've had another one done. Do you know anything about that at all?

H: Only what I saw in Life magazine.

K: I didn't see that.

H: No, I know nothing about it from firsthand.

K: But that will be, then, the official one?

H: That will be the official one, right.

K: Was it a larger one than you had done?

H: No, much smaller it looked like.

K: Much smaller?

H: Yes, head and shoulders or something. I really didn't pay much attention to it.

K: I have a question here. I guess it had to do with where it was to hang finally and eventually. It will always then be--

H: Presumably it will be in that collection from now on, in the National Portrait Gallery, along with other people, not all presidents or vice presidents but people of note, noteworthy people of the United States. I'm not entirely impressed with the collection. It's very uneven. There are some rather dreadful

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things in it, and a certain number of very good things, in the way of portraiture. But this is not an age of portrait painting. There are not many top portrait painters.

K: What was the size, by the way?

H: Thirty-eight by forty-six, something like that, I believe it was. It could have been cut down to approximately twenty-five by thirty, or along in there somewhere.

K: I wonder why they wanted a small one. Did she ever say?

H: I have no clue to it except perhaps in order to deny, in part at least, the rather flamboyant idea that people have of the Johnsons and for that matter of Texans in general, Texans in politics. I think it was to counteract that, but that's purely surmise on my part. There was no clue given to me. Mrs. Johnson, by the way, was just wonderful throughout the whole thing. I have nothing but great admiration for her in her attempt to smooth things over for us, to make life better for us. Her cordiality and her hospitality were just top, and she helped make the thing-- had the thing been a success it would have been largely due to her efforts, really. That may be a funny way to word it, but what I'm trying to say is that she did everything within her power to make it a success, though she herself didn't like it.

K: Oh, you think she didn't like it either?

H: I don't think she did, no. I think that she still sees the President as he is reported to have seen himself. I read



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this in some article about him by a reputable newsman. He's supposed to have said to his public relations people, pointing to a picture of a TV character named Matt Dillon--I don't know TV, we don't have one on the ranch and I've not seen very much of it, in fact I think I may have a world's record; I've been on a lot more than I've ever seen--"That," he said, "is the way I want to look. That's the real me. This man." [Dillon is a] big he-man, western sheriff or something of this sort.

K: And you mean she also had this--

H: I assume that's true. I don't know if it was Hugh Sidey's article that told about that or not. But we've all got our foibles, and we've all got our vanities. And I think that's the whole total answer to it.

K: I'd like to ask just one question in general. This was, by way of being a criticism of your work, one man's criticism of your work. Now, how do you ordinarily react to criticism of your work? Do you think that it cut a little deeper because he was the man that he was? Are you able to rationalize most criticism? How do you handle this?

H: Yes, that's a good question, and the answer is very simple. Had he merely used common politeness instead of the rude and absolutely unnecessary impoliteness, why, I would have accepted it. He's entitled to his view of it, sure. I would have answered it soberly and said, "Perhaps I could change it. We might be able

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to work on this." I would have also told him that the frame was temporary on it. It was just there to seal the edges on the gesso panel to keep them from chipping in transit. I would also have told him that that light was the worst possible light he could put it under, that the surroundings were annoying, and they made a noisy background, noisy in terms of form and shapes, which just couldn't have been in worst taste.

This is another point that burns me slightly. In retrospect nothing [really] burns me, because life's too short to hold any grudges. I have certainly none whatsoever. I wrote on the crate, or the big box in which it was sent, presumably to go on the courier plane as I related, "Please do not open until arrival of Peter Hurd," or words to that effect. No such thing. They absolutely disregarded it, pulled it out and had, as Mrs. Johnson said, a great deal of static over it. It was my property still. They had no business opening my property. It was mine until accepted by them or sold to someone else. That's the arrogance of some people.

K: It was the manner of criticism.

H: That is right. I would take criticism from anyone, and I will evaluate it soberly. But when the criticism is in a rude and unprincipled way like that, I did bridle a little. I admit it. Now I just laugh at it, and you saw how I've gotten over all my rancor. You saw my drawing. Right. If we could speak the

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drawing, we'd know.

K: I would like to make one final addition to this tape before  
we turn the recorder off.

[End of Tape 1 of 1 and Interview I]

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POST-INTERVIEW NOTES by ELIZABETH KADERLI

I would like to make one final addition to this tape before we turn in the recorder. The interview ended on that note. We had some talk about it, however, at lunch afterward because Mrs. Hurd's interview followed Mr. Hurd's, and we were all busy discussing it. Several stories were told that neither of them thought of at the time.

One of them had to do with the fact that something was said about Mr. Hurd's doing another portrait of the President sometime after this. I take it that it had been by correspondence that this came up. Mr. Hurd implied that he might be willing to do so but he wasn't very definite about it. He told me that at least six months after this incident the phone rang one day and he was in the yard planting a tree. The person who came to tell him he had a phone call said there was a Mrs. Johnson calling. He supposed it to be a friend in Fort Worth and said, "Well, tell her I will be there presently, as soon as I get this tree planted."

So he kept on at his business and maybe five minutes later went to the phone and found out that it was the White House and realized which Mrs. Johnson it was. He said Mrs. Johnson then came to the phone after a series of secretaries had answered. He does accents very well and he did Mrs. Johnson's almost perfectly in her very southern way.

He said that she said, "Peter, this is Mrs. Johnson. I was just wondering how you were getting along with the portrait?" He said, "Mrs. Johnson, I'm afraid it isn't getting along very well. In fact,

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I've done nothing on it." She said, "Well, I certainly can't blame you. That was such a terrible time at the Ranch. If I live to be a thousand, which of course I won't, I shall never forget it. Everything happened that day that could, except that the government of Vietnam didn't fall."

There were other stories but that one I thought should have been included in the tape. The picture Mr. Hurd had drawn to relieve his rancor was a cartoon that he had sketched one day at lunch on the back of an envelope. It was certainly not very complimentary to President Johnson, but very funny.

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