

INTERVIEW V

DATE: October 30, 1995
INTERVIEWEE: J. WILLIS HURST
INTERVIEWER: Ted Gittinger
PLACE: LBJ Library, Austin, Texas

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H: Let's see: May 22 [1971], when the Library was dedicated I was here and Nixon was the chief speaker.

G: How did LBJ look and appear on that occasion?

H: He looked pretty good at that point. And I remember him commenting about the Library, that it was "all there with the bark off," meaning that he wanted everything you could dig up and put in the Library.

G: Do you remember any of these mishaps that were reported? They had trouble with the fountain, apparently.

(Interruption)

(Apparently a question about the JFK assassination was asked at this point, off tape.)

H: I recall my taxi coming from National Airport going to his home, [The] Elms. We were listening on the radio, and then *Air Force One* landed and he was giving his announcement that he would do the best that he could for his country. I went on to The Elms. In a little while he came in. There were reports that he was having arm pain. In discussing it with him I determined that he was having no troubles. And so I was with him then until probably eleven o'clock the night of the assassination.

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G: Did you spend the night?

H: No, I spent the night with Horace Busby, Buz. Busby and his wife, and Bill Moyers, Jack Valenti, Cliff Carter were there. Rufus Youngblood, of course, was a member of the Secret Service that had been with Johnson and had actually pushed him into the floor of the back seat of the car when they were traveling in Dallas. And Johnson was ever so grateful and kept talking about Rufus and how heroic he had been. He also was looking at TV, sipping orange juice. He would occasionally look up at a photograph of Sam Rayburn that was on the wall and he'd sort of tip his orange juice to Sam Rayburn. And when there would come on TV a replay of what the news had about the assassination and Jack Kennedy's face would appear, then Johnson would grimace. He obviously thought an enormous amount of Jack Kennedy; he liked Jack Kennedy very much. And each act that night was that of reverence toward him.

G: When was the next time you saw him? Did you see him the next day, or the next week?

H: No, no, [the] next day I went on back to Atlanta, and he had his work cut out for him. He obviously was planning the approach he would use. All those years in the Senate certainly prepared him for what he needed to do; obviously, showing the respect that was proper for Mrs. Kennedy and the family, assuring the country that he had the reins of government in his hands, and meeting with appropriate people. I don't know just who he met with the next day, but he obviously was meeting with various people that could assist him in the transition.

And I think that his handling of the transition under those circumstances was magnificent, and if a less capable person had been in the situation the country could have faltered a bit. But he handled it beautifully, and the country recognized that he'd been there a long time [and] knew what he was doing, and therefore that aspect of this great tragedy was minimized.

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G: According to my notes there was a dinner on May 7 in the Dinkler Plaza Hotel. You were there with Governor [Carl] Sanders, William Wallace of Seven-Up, Robert Woodruff of Coca-Cola, Mayor Ivan Allen, Mills Lane of Citizens Bank, Sherman Drawdy of the Georgia Railroad Bank, Jim Carmichael of the Scripto Corporation, and W. Brooks of the Cotton Producers Association. Do you recall that meeting, that dinner?

H: What year was that?

G: 1964, May 7.

H: I do remember that dinner. And you can see by this list of marvelous people that--I was not quite in that category. (Laughter) And as I recall there was no big gigantic agenda, necessarily. As you know, he would often have business people come, not only to dinners like this, but sometimes at the White House where he actually would ask each one, at each table--they'd have multiple small tables--he'd ask each one to stand up and say what was he [LBJ] doing wrong. . . .
(Interruption)

G: Okay, we are talking about October 5 [1965]; LBJ announces that he will have his gallbladder out. What do you remember about that business?

H: I arrived at the White House and found that he was not feeling well--this must have been, let us say, October 3 or 4--and that he was having pain in [the] right upper portion of his abdomen. It was not clearly that defined, but that was the general area, and as a doctor the three things that came into mind [were]: an unusual distribution of his coronary problem and [he was] having a heart attack; [or] was it the gallbladder; and also was it kidney colic, because we knew he had kidney stones. In fact, earlier at the Pope's funeral--I accompanied him to Pope John's funeral--he had kidney colic.

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G: Yes, you tell that story in the book.

H: And during that trip he developed kidney colic, severe pain, and I might add that during the long, long ceremony which lasted for hours that he was having pretty severe kidney colic all during that period. And I arranged on our flight back to have that looked into.

I digress to tell that because again, knowing he had kidney stones, knowing he had coronary problems, we had to be sure that this pain that was somewhere in the right upper portion of the abdomen--we had to be sure it was gallbladder. We got the appropriate studies done and it was the gallbladder. We initially treated him with medication and then planned to go into surgery, which was obviously about October 6 or 7, 1965. And then he had a huge dinner at the White House prior to going into the hospital for surgery.

G: Right, I show here that you had dinner on the next day, on the sixth, in the family dining room with LBJ, Mrs. Johnson, and Dr. [James] Cain.

H: Yes, I called Jim Cain, who was a gastroenterologist, and so Jim came and he agreed that it was gallbladder colic, an acute infection, and we prescribed medications for a few days but were making plans for the surgery. Then he had a huge dinner to announce this; I recall it distinctly because I happened to be at the table with Frederic March, the movie actor, and John Steinbeck, the author. But [there was] a huge number of people there. And he called on me then to stand up and state his condition and what we planned, which I did. I guess that is a good place to make this point; that at no time ever did he even suggest that we didn't tell it like it was. And we always did.

So he went to the hospital for the removal of the gallbladder, and removal of the stone that had lodged in a place that required that it be removed. So Dr. Hallenbeck from Mayo Clinic, and Dr. Kulp from Mayo Clinic--Hallenbeck, a superb general surgeon, was to remove the gallbladder and Dr. Kulp was to remove the kidney stone. And both went well and I stayed with him, along with Dr. Cain, for several days. And then he

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recuperated without any difficulty. Later he developed what we call an incisional hernia in the area of the incision.

G: We are going to come to that when he has the polyp taken out of his throat as well.

H: Same time.

G: Right.

H: I suppose it's time, at that point, to interject the story about him showing the scar. That date, I believe, was October 29 that he--

G: Well, October 21 is the day the *New York Times* carried the picture.

H: Okay, the twenty-first [*Times*] carried the picture. The hospital at Bethesda, as you know, is surrounded by a golf course. He wasn't playing golf, but he was out in the sun and reporters were around him. I was not immediately at hand right there. And they asked him about the operation and, being uninhibited, he just pulls up his shirt and shows it to them and made comments about [how] Dr. Hallenbeck had been in there messing around and removed the gallbladder.

(Laughter)

And then Dr. Kulp came in and messed around a little bit and removed the stone.

(Laughter)

And that incident, of course, went around the world. My view is, first, he is uninhibited in the first place. And about this time the press was giving him a hard time about withholding information and hiding information, so I think he was simply showing what went on. Later on when Liz Carpenter had her appendix out he sent her a note and said, "Be absolutely certain you don't show that scar to anybody"--

(Laughter)

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--because he had been ribbed by the press pretty much about that.

G: I see he had a pretty good dinner on the twelfth at Bethesda. Did it take him long to get his appetite back after the surgery?

H: We met in the dining room area of the suite that was in the hospital at Bethesda. When he had his first heart attack way back in 1955, they did not have a suite at the hospital that could manage someone like a president that would have many duties to perform, and so since 1955 they had built this rather nice area that had a sort of a living room-dining room area, and several bedrooms. As a matter of fact, I urged our own people at Emory Hospital in Atlanta to create a similar kind of facility for individuals like him.

You know, people may not understand that you really have to work hard to be sure that the president, or some other famous person that is known to the public, gets the same care that other people get. Sometimes a thing like a VIP suite is viewed as preferential treatment to celebrities or to well known people. The fact is, if you don't do that, you cannot believe how many things can happen that have nothing to do with their care. Curious and inquisitive people will just walk into their room. You'd be surprised how many different reasons people have of going in somebody's room if they are popular, well-known people.

So it really should be looked at as the only way you can give peace and quiet to a sick person that's in the public [eye] as much as a president or anyone else that's well known. And so this dinner--

G: I take it he was eating well by that time again.

H: Now, I'm not sure that he ate all of it, though. I do recall the dinner of filet mignon and mixed vegetables and so forth, but I doubt very much if he ate all that. I'm sure he wanted to, you understand.

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G: Did you advise him to go back to Texas for recuperation, or was that his own idea, do you think?

H: Yes, I don't remember specifically, but as a general rule we always tried to get him to the Ranch. He loved the Ranch, and he was at peace at the Ranch, and he could rest at the Ranch, and anything you could do to get him to the Ranch was what he wanted. So I'm quite sure he did.

G: Okay, the next entry I have then is, there is a state dinner honoring Ludwig Erhard at the White House, December 20. It's here on the first page.

H: December 20; state dinner. My recollection is that that perhaps took place at the Ranch.

G: Well, that's probably right.

H: That is my recollection. I think I recall photographs of him sitting out front with the other dignitaries.

G: Do you have any recollections of that visit?

H: No, I was not there.

G: Okay. Then on February 20 the next year you were a house guest. There were no other notes than that.

H: I commonly visited with him and Mrs. Johnson. By then I was on, I believe, two commissions--one commission and one committee. One was [the] Human Rights Commission and the other was the council of the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute. When I would go to these scheduled meetings I would commonly stay at the

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White House.

G: I see. Okay.

H: And when I did I would go over him as a physician, and we would almost always have meals together.

G: Then you were a house guest on May 11, I imagine under similar circumstances.

H: I'm sure it was.

G: And on that same visit on May 13 you had lunch with LBJ, Luci, Jack Valenti, and Vicky McCammon.

H: Right, I'm sure that was the same type of thing.

G: Then on August 2 there is a phone call from LBJ to you in Atlanta. There are no details on that.

H: Right.

G: That wouldn't be the time when he called and wanted to know why you were on the Governor's platform, was it?

H: Not that time. This time he called and, as you know, he often would make calls and not say who he was, just start talking. And these calls could come at any hour. I think this one was about nine o'clock at night. And I believe the first words were, "I want you to go to Nicaragua." And I said, "What for?" I thought that was a reasonable question.
(Laughter)

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And he said, "Well, the leader there has had a heart attack and I would like for you to go down and see him." And then I looked over at my wife, and I said, thinking, you know, I didn't know how long I'd be there--I muttered on the phone, "Well, how long do you think I'll be there?" I thought it was a reasonable question at the time. But in typical LBJ fashion he says, "Don't you think you ought to see the patient first before making that decision?"

(Laughter)

So Tom Mattingly, who was one of Eisenhower's physicians, and I went to Nicaragua. They picked us up--picked me up; Mattingly, I think, was in Washington at the time. But they picked me up the next morning in a Jetstar and we flew to Nicaragua. Regrettably, the patient died [as we were] on the way. And when we got there they were waiting for us, so we checked in with the embassy but went straight to this facility where the leader was and where he'd died. My recollection is (inaudible) that when we walked into this rather large room the patient, who had now died, was right in the middle of the room, draped, of course, and all of the people who had participated in his care were lined up with their backs virtually pressed against the wall around the entire room.

And so nothing was being said. It was a quiet and sacred moment. I went up then and looked at the man and agreed, you know, that regrettably he had died. And then we left there and I went to the embassy and called the President and told him that we were sorry we got there too late.

G: The next item is August 11, a reception in the Mansion honoring Vicki McCammon and Simon McHugh. I suppose that has to do with their announcement of their engagement.

H: Yes, I remember that, and that's about all I remember about that one.

G: Then on September 7 you were again visiting, it says first with Mrs. Johnson and then LBJ joined you.

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H: I don't recall details there, but each time you see the entry, I would, of course, examine him. Dr. [George] Burkley was White House physician, as you know, and had the appropriate equipment, and we would see him usually early in the morning.

G: What would you do on these visits, medically speaking? Would you run an EKG, for example?

H: Oh, yes. Each time, I think, there was an EKG. He actually had no detectable difficulty with his heart during the entire presidency.

G: Okay, I want to come back to that. Then on November 3 he announced he would have the surgery to repair his gall bladder incision and to remove the small polyp from his throat.

H: Yes, he had become hoarse, and despite the usual methods it had persisted. And by then the incision--a rather large incision--had developed what we call an abdominal hernia, just a weak area that bulged out at the region of the scar. His abdominal muscles and tissues were not the strongest in the world and in many ways it probably could have been predicted that he would be more likely to develop an incisional hernia.

And a interesting thing happened there. I was in the army before I went in the navy. I was in the army at Fitzsimons [Army Hospital in Aurora, Colorado], and I knew a young man that was on the ENT service named Jay Gould. And Dr. Gould became an extremely well-known throat specialist in New York and actually dealt with a lot of the singers who had difficulties with their voices. And so, just by chance, he was the one that was chosen to remove this polyp from President Johnson's larynx, off the vocal chords. And then Dr. Hallenbeck repaired the incision, eliminating the hernia.

G: Apparently, there was some indecision about where he was going to have this done at first. Would you know what that was about?

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H: I think he kicked that around as to whether he would have it at Brooke [Army Medical Center], which is a very good hospital, as you well know, or at Bethesda, and he finally settled on having it in Bethesda.

G: On January 12, 1967 there is a phone call from LBJ to Dr. Hurst, presumably in Atlanta.

H: I'm trying to think if that's the time he called--one of the memorable calls dealt with the fact that he was kidding me. I think that was the time--see, January would be about the time new governors would begin their term.

G: Yes.

H: And at that point I was certainly not a fan of Lester Maddox, although I might add that Mr. Maddox was a very honest, good man, there's no doubt about that. But I thought others might be a better governor. I may be wrong about that. But anyway I voiced my views to the President, and at the time I was talking about it I didn't think he was taking this in as a permanent kind of intellectual bit of information that he would use, you know. And he called and started off, I think, something like this, which is--

G: Let me pause it.
(Interruption)

H: He started off something like this: "Bird and I and some friends here just been sitting around and our conversation wandered to you." And I had to think, "Now, why would the President of the United States, who has a lot of things on his mind--why in the world would the conversation be directed toward me?" And he went on: "Well, I just want to thank you for all the things you've done." When he started that I always knew something was coming. And he says, "And by the way, I've been looking at television tonight and--

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why were you on the platform when Governor Maddox was inaugurated? You had been telling me"--you know, his voice is getting firmer--"You've been telling me that you were not for him and now I see you up there on the platform!" And as I remember it I don't think I was ever able to even say, "No, no, that's not right," or whatever. It just went on and on like that.

(Laughter)

G: That's a good story, too, from your book.

You were a house guest from February 15 to February 17. That was a fairly long stay. And it says--oh, I see, February 16 you received the Distinguished Service Award of the American College of Cardiology.

H: Actually, that is not correct. I received the Gifted Teacher Award from the College of Cardiology.

G: The person keeping the diary may have made an error. I see in October, and I don't have the date, that LBJ had a couple of skin cancers removed from his left heel. Do you recall any of that?

H: Well, he had lesions on his hands that were early skin cancers. They are easily taken care of if you do the right thing. So that's that was, nothing serious about that.

G: Was he sensitive about any publicity that might come from that? Because I don't think it ever made the newspapers.

H: I recall some comment in the press about that at one time. I don't think that was a big issue with him.

G: February 28, 1968, you were in the Cabinet Room with members of the President's Commission on Human Rights, with Chairman Averell Harriman.

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H: Right.

G: Any memories of that visit?

H: Of course that is a very meaningful type committee, and I think this is the one where he is meeting with commission members and--if it's not this one, this point ought to be made: I was on [the] Heart, Cancer, and Stroke Commission and the Human Rights Commission, and then on the council at the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute. But on one of the commissions when he was charging the members [with] their duties he made a sentence that I feel is an important one. It might not have been this meeting. But the point that he made is as follows: He said, "I'm fully aware that you can restate a problem where it sounds like you have solved the problem. And I want you members of the commission to know that I understand that, and I want you to solve problems and not restate the problem." And there is a lot of truth to that. Many times, not [only] in government but anywhere, it is not uncommon at all for people to restate a problem and have people believe that they have clarified the problem. He was trying to say, "I understand how you can make it sound better, but I want the problem solved."

G: June 18 and 19 you were again in the White House, and there were two dinners recorded.

H: I think the one June 19, one of these with the Thornberrys. It may not be this one but there is a sort of interesting story about that, at least interesting to me. It may have been earlier but the Thornberrys were involved. When I knew and sensed that he was going to ask me to move to Washington and become White House physician--

G: Oh, yes.

H: If it was not this one--

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G: I think that was a good bit earlier.

H: A little earlier with--the Thornberrys were there. The point about that was this--this went over a full weekend--I knew I should not do that, although I revered and thought so much of him. I would like to do that; I would want to do that, but I knew it was not best to do that.

So he did make his moves to have me move to Washington and be the White House physician.

G: You tell that very well in your book, how you eluded his grasp.

H: And in doing so I pointed out that it was not wise for a patient doing well to have a doctor working with him every day. And I also pointed out that for a doctor to retain his competence he needed to see sick people every day. And that as consultant I would serve his needs, I thought, better because then should any problems come up, they wouldn't feel that I was working directly under him and so forth. And so he offered remedies for those remarks. I could do various things in various facilities while I was up there, deal with the air force and the navy and whatnot. I knew I could never really do what he thought I could do in those capacities.

And so the next day, Sunday, we went on to church, the Thornberrys were with us, [and] Mrs. Johnson. I recall he was fussing at Bird for leaving the lights on. He was going through a phase of conserving energy, and just went on and on and on about how he's trying to save energy for the country, and there she is leaving White House lights on. He just went on and on and on. And then he began talking about me moving again. And I said something, probably wasn't quite right thing to say because I recall Homer Thornberry squeezed my arm, and I sensed that was a signal I'd better shut up, which I did.

(Laughter)

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And we went on to church and sat in the middle of the church, about the middle of a row. And Reverend [George] Davis was the minister, and Johnson had his right arm around my shoulder. Reverend Davis began to talk about service to your country and that you should serve when called, and just about when he said that, the President pushed his thumb deep in my back. And I've always wondered if he and the minister framed up a little bit on that.

(Laughter)

But also that day the air conditioning in the church was not working properly, and these two ladies back of us, seeing the President perspire, used old-fashioned fans to keep him cool. And when we got up to leave, he turned and thanked them gracefully for the air conditioning that they had provided.

(Laughter)

But years later, toward the end of his presidency, we were riding with him in the back seat, my wife and I, and without looking at me he said, "A patient shouldn't have a doctor seeing him every day, and a doctor needs more than one patient to remain competent." That's simply testimony to his fantastic memory.

G: Do you remember this next visit when you and Mrs. Hurst and your son were house guests?

H: Yes.

G: Anything special about that?

H: That's July 24-28.

G: That's right.

H: That's actually, I think, when we were sitting, my wife and I were sitting with him in the

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back seat of the car going out to the yacht and when, without looking at me, he made the statement that I had said some years ago, that a [patient] doesn't need a doctor every day, and a doctor needs more than one patient to remain competent. He then began to kid me that I did not want to help him, et cetera.

G: Well, that fits, because I have a note here that on July 27 you were aboard the *Sequoia*.

H: That's it.

G: That would be it.

H: That's exactly right.

G: Do you have any memories of that boat ride itself, on the *Sequoia*?

H: My son Phil was with us. What I remember is that he was sitting in a chair at a time when the President came up and wanted to sit in the chair, and you have never seen a kid get out of a chair quicker.

(Laughter)

And I remember a conversation with Scoop [Senator Henry M.] Jackson from Washington State, as I remember at that point.

G: July 28 would have been a Sunday then, because I see you have gone to church at the National City Christian Church with LBJ.

H: Right.

G: And then to lunch with the Johnsons and Earl Deathes and son.

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H: Right. I went to church with him several times, and that's one of them.

G: The next one is in November 14, the East Room ceremony commemorating the twentieth anniversary of the National Heart Institute.

H: Right. Well, he invited a number of key people, most of them cardiologists, and most of them I knew, of course. But at that meeting I was just one of the group and we were lined up around the--

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G: Okay, let's see, here's a dinner in the mansion with--

H: And on that I think it might be worth--about the East Room Ceremony on November 14: As I say, many of the people that were on councils, or have had committees, or had something to do with the Heart Institute, were summoned to the White House because Johnson wanted to commemorate the twentieth anniversary of the National Heart Institute. And he really did personalize this, because he reminded them of his own heart attack in 1955. He blamed me for the fact that he'd lived all this time and had to pay tax all this time. The point he was making, though, with the story is that rehabilitation, following a heart attack, back to productive work makes those individuals able to contribute like anyone else to the tax pool. He pointed out how much better that was than as it used to be, years and years ago, of retiring and contributing very little then, or certainly a diminished amount, to the tax structure of the country.

So he personalized his comments that day because he himself had had the 1955 attack. And although I had advice from many people that he should retire then--that was pretty much still the custom--I had worked with Paul White in Boston, who has championed the fact that the individual should go back to work after a heart attack. And most could go back to work. And not only that, they ought to go back to the same job; it

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isn't easier to go to another job, it's easier to go back to the same job.

His rehabilitation in 1955 and return to his position as majority leader, then on to the vice presidency and then to the presidency would, he hoped, be encouraging to many people who also had coronary disease. And I'm sure it was, because not only Eisenhower but Johnson's attack, both occurring fairly close together, were excellent examples of rehabilitation after a heart attack. For years doctors would use these two people, both of whom had heart attacks, to encourage their own patients to return to work and that they could get over it.

That was about the break point, you see. Prior to 1955 it was fairly common for the individual to retire and do nothing after a heart attack. And Dr. White is the one that deserves the credit for insisting that patients be active. And now you see that's moved all the way over to vigorous rehabilitation programs.

G: I see on December 18 that LBJ was admitted to Bethesda with an upper respiratory infection.

H: As I recall, they called me about that. Dr. Burkley was quite good in keeping me and Dr. Cain notified about--but as I recall I don't believe I went to see him at that time.

G: He seemed to have a propensity to get these upper respiratory infections.

H: He did. He had a little bronchitis but not a lot. And he would do that periodically, but--
(Interruption)

G: That's the last item on the list from the presidency. Do you have any other recollections from the presidency that you want to add before we move into the post-presidency era? Did you see him before he went--?

H: I ought to add this. The date was October 4, 1967, only a short period before he made the

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announcement he would not run again. I was at the White House, staying two or three days. Oddly enough, neither one of them were there. They were both at the Ranch; they were coming in on Sunday. And as I recall, I probably arrived on Friday for my work with the National Heart Institute and was hoping I would see them when they arrived on Sunday.

And when he arrived, as I recall, on Sunday, he obviously was not feeling well; he looked tired. I had not seen him that way before. And it concerned me a lot. So I talked with Lady Bird on the phone. As I recall, the hour was perhaps five o'clock, I think Sunday, because she was coming in later. I talked with her and I said, "Bird, I'm very concerned about him, he seems all spent," I think were the words I used. And she said, "How long are you going to be there?" And I said, "Well, my plane is scheduled to leave in an hour or so." And she said, "Can you stay until I get there?" I said, "Sure, I'll stay." She arrives then at Andrews. I go in the car from the White House to Andrews to pick her up. As I recall, it must have been eleven o'clock at night. We picked her up and I discussed again--I'm concerned about it; he needs some rest, he needs to get away from this mess. I knew he had been at the Ranch, where he usually gets rejuvenated, but he was not, so I sensed that something was going on. I suspect that this was about the time that he was coming to grips with the fact [that] he wouldn't run again. I don't know that, but just putting things together.

But he needed to get away from the whole thing, and of course he couldn't. And she asked me, "What do you think about him running this next time?" And I said, "Now, Bird, you know the first time I along with Dr. Cain said yes, that we thought he was doing well, and there is no reason that he shouldn't run." That was when he was to run against Goldwater. This time I said, "It's beyond my medical knowledge to determine what the result might be." And she was--I guess the word might be pensive, thoughtful. (The reader should read page 573 in *A White House Diary*, by Lady Bird Johnson.)

I remember also sort of fussing at her, that I knew she had not been seen by a physician, which I thought was not good when we wanted good preventive measures taken, for all people, and [for] women her age there were certain things that should be

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done, and as far as I knew they hadn't been done. And she promised that she would. We parted at the entrance at the White House. I went on to my room. As I recall it, I caught a plane at 5:00 a.m. or something like that.

But as I put it together, I think that this was one more piece of the puzzle. I think that there were many reasons that he didn't run that last time, but I think the health issue was one of them--but not the only one.

G: Did she relay your opinion to LBJ?

H: I don't know. I don't know about that. I don't know.

G: Were you surprised at the March 31 speech when he announced that he was not going to run?

H: In that conversation with Bird I continued, "But I know he is not through with what he wanted to do." And she said something like, "But you're never through in this job. You're never through. There isn't any time you can say you are through," she was saying. "Your goals are never totally met, because I suppose you always get new goals, don't you see."

So I think all of it was coming to a head at this point. I was not aware that he was going to make that announcement, but I was not totally surprised at it. But I was not aware. I believe she and he probably knew at that point in time. But I don't know how many people really knew before the announcement.

G: How would have you evaluated the state of his health at this period, in the spring of 1968?

H: Well, he'd had no heart symptoms. But he was bone tired, bone tired. He did not have the good robust appearance that I was accustomed to.

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G: Okay.

H: Now, that takes us back--although I think I discussed this to some degree in earlier tapes. But we should go back during his presidency to the period prior to his choosing to run at the time he ran against Goldwater. Because at that point, the way that was handled, medically, was as follows: I was asked to come to the White House, as I recall it, and so was Jim Cain, and a friend of mine, and former trainee of mine also, Larry Lamb, and Janet Travell who was still there. Dr. Lamb was at the Wilford Hall hospital in San Antonio and had occasionally seen the President. So we saw Johnson during the day and felt things were good, and then Mrs. Johnson asked Jim Cain and me to go with her out to George Brown's Virginia home. Luci and a friend were also there. I have a vivid recollection of this. It was a nice old Virginia home, with a fire going. We had a nice dinner and then Lady Bird wanted to know from me and Jim Cain how we felt about him running. And this time there was really no reason to say that he couldn't. I mean, he had no troubles, he was as active as any human has ever been. So we said, "Yes."

And she wrote a note, and I cannot remember who took the note back to the President. I think Mrs. Johnson stayed out at the house. Jim Cain and I went back to the White House. Either one of the Secret Service or one of us took the note. And I think the story goes, as I put it together, that that note appeared on his bed. I've never seen the note, but the note, I think, meant, "Yes, we'll do that, and we'll run again." I think that's the note also that has in it her prediction. As it happens with every president, I suppose--that it would be tough; that bad things will be said about us, but we'll barge along, we can handle that. That's the kind of insight that Lady Bird has.

G: I think that note appears in her *White House Diary*, her book.

H: It may. You may find also some of what I'm telling you about when I found him bone tired, and she was flying in from the Ranch, and I stayed over so I could go over it with

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her. All of that is in her *White House Diary*.

G: There has been a lot of speculation from observers who believe that LBJ's opinion of his own health was one of the reasons he decided not to run again. What do you think he might have thought?

H: I think that was one, but I was not privileged to know all of the other aspects that well. But as I have said, the best honest appraisal I can give is [that] I think that his health was one of the factors, but not the only one.

G: What I'm trying to get at is, as a cardiologist, you think--there having been no symptoms until this point, what could have been worrying him besides his heart?

H: Well, the thing that--he's bone tired because he was in the midst of the terrible, terrible conflict of Vietnam, and difficulties of bringing that to a head. As John Connally said, which I think is the nicest way of saying it, he found himself engulfed with a war he didn't start and couldn't end. And he was bone tired with it, and I suspect he felt maybe a fresh person might bring it to an end. It took Nixon several years to bring it to an end. But I think his concern about his health played a role. I cautioned Lady Bird that I wouldn't want to promise this time. The amount of time that had gone by was such that, since the disease does at times recur and he had gone quite a number of years without trouble--all the vice presidency, and five years as president--that he was getting into a period when he was more vulnerable.

G: Yes.

H: But couple that with his fatigue that went with twenty-four hours of intense worry, [and] I felt that I couldn't promise. I didn't say, nor was it my place to say, "He must not do that." But I implied, "I cannot promise."

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G: Just a few months after he left the White House, Bob Hardesty had a heart attack. Were you involved in that in any way? Did he call you?

H: Who was?

G: Bob Hardesty had a heart attack then in April.

H: No, I did not get involved with that.

G: A report in June of 1969 says that "LBJ is enjoying his retirement, he is not depressed, and he has turned to ranching with a vengeance, and he is exercising and dieting." Is this an accurate description?

H: (Laughter) He was very good about several things, and I might add--I think this is a good place to say this--that many people would say to me, "Well, it must just be awful to give advice to LBJ," because notoriously they thought he did his own thing and was an individualist of a high order. The fact is that he really did fairly well with what we wanted him to do. Following the 1955 attack, he stopped smoking, abruptly, absolutely abruptly. As far as I know he did not smoke then until, I would guess, 1971, somewhere in there. And I might add too, if anyone questions the addictive characteristics of tobacco, that he would always say that he missed it more than anything, absolutely anything, compared to alcohol, or whatever you want to compare it to. Tobacco was number one as far as his concern about addiction. I mean, the addictive power of cigarettes was at its zenith in him, and so he deserves a lot of credit for stopping smoking.

I might tell this story about the tobacco. When he had his heart attack in 1972 in Charlottesville I was asked to come. I went up two or three different times, two that I'm sure of. This was a large heart attack. At this point he didn't have a regular press secretary, and Lady Bird didn't either. And the press was all gathered and it fell my lot to

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sort of fill them in, in the absence of a professional type of spokesman. I think this was when he had played a little trick on me. He had a toy cigarette that he put up to his mouth to see if I would fuss about it. But this time also, when I talking to the press I took a three-by-five card, which I often carry, and I had rolled it up. I didn't know the camera had spotted this after it was rolled up, and it must have looked like a cigarette. And so here is Johnson's doctor with this thing. I want you to know that I got letters as far away as Hawaii! One of the prominent people in the Heart Association of Hawaii wrote me [asking] how could I dare do that on television? And Luther Terry, a friend of mine who had been surgeon general and was the one who put the warning on the cigarette package, called me: "Willis, how could you have done this?" At that point I was president of the American Heart Association, seeing the president of the United States, and now they saw me with a cigarette. So I had to explain to them, which sounds a little weird--

(Laughter)

--but I hope they believed it, that I had never smoked, and I had nervously rolled this thing up, a three-by-five card. The TV camera caught my hands after it had rolled up, looked just like a cigarette.

But he started back smoking. And his approach to it was like this: He said, "Now, Willis, I don't have a lot of pleasures and I really enjoy that." And, "Can you guarantee me that I will live a lot longer if I don't smoke?" And I said, "No, I can't guarantee that in an individual. I mean, we know that smoking is bad for a group of people that have had heart attacks, that some of them that smoke will be in more trouble than those that don't, but when you get down to an individual, no, I can't. But I really would rather you wouldn't. First of all, it may be a benefit to you individually. But secondly, it will set a bad precedent all over the country." But he decided to smoke, so he smoked the last year and a half of his life.

Then, as to diet, he did extremely well after that first attack in 1955. He tried then to stay on a low-fat, low cholesterol diet.

G: He did put on some weight during the vice presidency, didn't he?

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H: Oh, yes, he began to gradually pick up his weight, which happens to a lot of people, including me--lose and gain--that's a characteristic.

Back to the 1955 attack. Because I had worked with Paul White--he was one of the leaders, even back then, even in the late forties when I worked with him, insisting that you should be on a low-fat, low-cholesterol diet long before the absolute proof came in. This was his forte; he taught that all over the country. And so Johnson stuck pretty well to a lower-calorie, and low-fat, low-cholesterol diet and lost considerable weight. And [he] did that fairly well but began to break through it as time passed. He was not as obese as he appeared. As I said before, the abdominal muscles were very relaxed and made him appear fatter than he actually was.

But as time passed he did not stick to the diet that he did very well [on] after the 1955 [attack]. His approach to that would be, when I'd be at the White House, he'd come bolting into the room and before I could say anything he'd begin to discuss how much weight I had gained.

(Laughter)

G: You make that point well.

H: So that I was in a weak position to even bring the subject up. But we tried, and for a long, long time he did pretty well with it. And I'm sure it helped.

G: What about his drinking habits?

H: He would drink scotch and soda, but I'll tell you, it was the weakest-looking scotch you ever saw. There was not very much in it. And he did not, day after day, as I saw him, break very much from that. Very weak; you could hardly tell the change in color. So that was not excessive.

Exercise, which we urge now under good direct supervision--he'd get out on the

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Ranch and walk all around and speak to every cow and do all those things. But he did not participate in a really regular exercise program. He bowled some, he swam some, but as to the discipline of daily, or three-time-a-week scheduled exercise, he didn't do that.

G: He of course became dependent on Brooke Army Medical Center for his care in retirement. Did the doctor there stay in contact with you?

H: At Brooke?

G: Yes.

H: Dr. Robert North was the cardiologist from Brooke that was seeing him. We worked well together and talked often. Dr. North retired and Dr. McGranahan followed him.

G: Where there any significant differences of opinion between you?

H: No, not that I know of. We were all worried about him after his attack in Charlottesville. That was a very large heart attack.

G: I have a note here in October of 1969 that he took a brief nap on a chair at eleven a.m., and then later complained that he wasn't feeling well and spent the rest of the afternoon in bed. And when they went to San Antonio that night, LBJ said he still wasn't feeling well. He was a notorious napper. Everybody who knew him knew that. But was this something--was this an omen, do you think?

H: Not enough to say anything definite, no.

G: Okay.

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H: But Robert North and McGranahan were very capable cardiologists. And they were handling it day to day and would call me about any problems that were going on.

G: Okay, we are still now in the early part. I'm on page two; this is 1970. In February he went to visit the Engelhards in Florida, and he developed a severe pain in his side and was examined for it. And the symptoms to me suggest that it might have been the beginning of diverticulitis. Does that ring any bells?

H: Well, he certainly had diverticulosis, and that--I was not involved with that. Let's see, 1968, 1969.

G: 1970 is page two.
(Interruption)

H: Is that 1970?

G: Yes, that's 1970, 2/27, that's February 27.

H: That's Tom Mills. He had chest pains, so (inaudible) called Dr. Hurst in New Orleans twice.

Yes, as I remember--(Laughter)--I was at a College of Cardiology medical meeting and they reached me in New Orleans. And I made arrangements, my wife and I, flew in the next day and saw him at the Ranch. Like it says, no mention of how they got there, and at this point I can't remember how I got there--

(Laughter)

--except I'm sure by air. And whether we landed at the Ranch, I doubt it. So I suppose somebody picked us up in either San Antonio or Austin. And I'm sure I went over him carefully, and by then things must have been better because the next entry says that Hurst seems to have left.

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G: No mention of a physical.

H: No mention--but I'm sure I examined him.

G: Do you remember what your judgment was about his health at that time?

H: I'm sure it was--you see, all of this, from the--does this precede his Charlottesville heart attack?

G: Yes, this is before that.

H: He was beginning to have some angina pectoris. I suspect this was about when this was developing.

G: If you will turn to page three, and look at the top entry, this is just two days, or one day after you left, you see that he's having the same pains again.

H: You see, that supports what I said, that this was the beginning of having angina pectoris, which is due to coronary disease. Angina is not quite as severe as a heart attack.

G: They say here that the doctors say he has hardening of the arteries, or arteriosclerosis, I suppose is the right term.

H: If angina of that type was occurring today--1995--in a patient the approach would be different.

G: What would you do today?

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H: Today, with these complaints we would have a coronary arteriogram performed, and consider whether we should go ahead with angioplasty or surgery or something of that sort.

G: The bypass operation was being done in those days, was it not?

H: Yes, but only being done for certain restricted categories, and even then [it] was a bit primitive compared to what it is now. It was only used for disabling angina that could not be controlled with medication.

G: He was never a candidate for that procedure, in your opinion, at that time?

H: Well, not at that time. If he were here with us now, with this kind of complaint he would have an arteriogram to determine which vessels were involved and to what degree. Knowing that, a decision regarding treatment would be made. After looking at the arteriogram you'd have to choose between further medical management, angioplasty, or coronary bypass surgery. See, it was not until around until 1977 that it was pretty well proven that coronary bypass surgery would improve survival. You would use the surgery for disabling angina pectoris. At that point in time his angina had not become so disabling to justify a procedure that was still being developed. When was his heart attack in Charlottesville?

G: That was in March of 1972.

H: I will discuss that later. In 1970 it was proper to try medical treatment for angina pectoris. If the angina quieted down, then you wouldn't go to surgery then. The idea of surgery in the early seventies was to relieve pain that had not responded to rest and medical management. If they got better with medical management then you didn't go to surgery, which at that point was not as refined as it is now.

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G: Right.

H: Then, after the Charlottesville heart attack, you have another reason why coronary bypass would not necessarily improve survival. He was having a lot of trouble with lung congestion at that point. A lot of the heart muscle had been damaged. It was a large heart attack. Back then in 1972, coronary bypass surgery was not used after a large heart attack that caused lung congestion. But if you saw him today, now, twenty-three years later, the approach would be very different.

G: Yes, right.

H: See, by 1973--"LBJ free of pain." LBJ improving by the third, "walking around, called Jim Cain." Excuse me, that was the ninth, rather the eleventh you say, "still improving."

End of Tape 1 of 1 and Interview V

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J. WILLIS HURST

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