

INTERVIEW II

DATE: October 14, 1977

INTERVIEWEE: LUTHER E. JONES, JR.

INTERVIEWER: MICHAEL L. GILLETTE

PLACE: Corpus Christi, Texas

Tape 1 of 1

G: One thing that you didn't mention in that earlier tape that I'm going to ask you to recall is the first time that you met Lyndon Johnson. I know you were one of his students on the debate team there. Do you recall your first encounter with him?

J: No, I don't have any definite memory. I just enrolled in debating, and he was the teacher. Very soon I got acquainted with him as a teacher, and then later on more intimately when we'd start taking these trips. I don't have any memory of being aware of him until I got in that course.

G: Had you been on the debate team before?

J: No, no. You see, he came there the same year that I was a senior. He was new and I was new. I got in his class. In other words, he hadn't been there the year previous to have a reputation. I think that is correct.

G: How would you describe him as a debate teacher?

J: Very enthusiastic, very demanding. He was infected with the idea of winning; he talked a lot about, "Let's win."

G: How many students were there on the debate team at this time?

Jones -- II -- 2

J: I've forgotten, but the class wasn't large, perhaps twenty in the class.

G: How did you decide on the team?

J: Of course, [when] we started out it was just a regular class with lectures and assignments from him. Early in the game we were assigned debating topics, and I suppose that's the way he isolated the four that became his team. I worked real hard in it. I loved it. So did Gene [Latimer] and so did these two girls. And very rapidly we were sort of isolated and started getting special attention.

G: Did you think of him as being too serious then?

J: I don't know. I don't remember especially how I thought of him, except that his enthusiasm was contagious. I remember there was a book by a former governor named Pat Neff called The Battles of Peace, a book of orations or speeches that this man had made in his race for governor. [They contained] a lot of purple rhetoric by present standards, and Mr. Johnson just loved these speeches. There were speeches on motherhood and a whole bunch of stuff--very beautifully said, but very purple, the rhetoric. He would read these speeches to us with much gusto and stimulate our enthusiasm for beautiful language.

And I remember there was one speech [by] Bob Ingersoll. You know who he is, don't you? Well, Bob Ingersoll was a great speaker maybe seventy-five years ago, a public speaker, and many [of his] orations have been put in books. One of his orations was a speech at his brother's grave. Many declaimers used this speech in

Jones -- I -- 3

declamation contests. Lyndon used to read that because it's filled with beautiful language. But he did that with a lot of other people who wrote well. He loved nice language, beautiful language, and he tried to stimulate in us a love of beautiful language.

I didn't have the impression that Lyndon was a scholar, as such, but I did get the impression that he really loved beautiful language. In this sense I compare Lyndon a whole lot to Lincoln, who I think is the world's greatest master of the English language--you know, a simple and homespun guy just like Lyndon was in a way. This was one of his main characteristics; Lyndon could handle the king's English. A lot of people don't realize that unless they've worked with him, but he could handle it very well.

G: I suppose another one of his teaching characteristics was a tendency to challenge his students to take the opposing viewpoint and argue with them or put them under pressure. Was this something he did?

J: Oh, I can't remember details, except I can remember that he was very restless in his teaching in the sense that he'd roam all around the room. He didn't stand in one place. He was liable to be over in the corner or in the back. You couldn't sit still and not do anything. He was challenging, yes. That would be a correct word. He was a very unusual teacher. If he hadn't been president, he probably would have been a great teacher, or could have been.

G: I have in my notes an item that indicates that he went to Austin to the state legislature to lobby for the Houston teachers association or something in favor of a cigarette tax in support

Jones -- II -- 4

of education or something like this.

J: I don't know anything about that.

G: Anything else on the teaching angle that was not covered in that first interview?

J: Perhaps it's worth mentioning that his Uncle George, he called him, was also a teacher of history. Lyndon was exceedingly fond of the old man. He was much older.

G: Did you know his Uncle George?

J: I got to as I got to know Lyndon better. I have memory of occasions when Lyndon and I and Gene, for example, would go into Uncle George's office after school, and Lyndon would run something by him, use him as a sounding board. In other words, there was a lot of respect for Uncle George, and I have a feeling that Uncle George played maybe a pretty important part in Lyndon's life at that stage, for good advice. Lyndon's sort of an impetuous sort of a fellow, and I'm sure it didn't hurt him to have an older man cautioning him once in a while about the quicksands.

G: Were they much alike?

J: No. No, not at all. Uncle George was solid and staid and conservative and Lyndon was peppy and enthusiastic. Not at all alike.

G: Did he talk to you much about his earlier life? His youth? His experience in California?

J: No. No, he did not. But he did talk some about his daddy being in the legislature. Every now and then he'd talk about Roy Miller. In those days Roy Miller was one of his heroes. I assume that Roy

Jones -- II -- 5

Miller had something to do with his going with Kleberg; I'm not sure. But Roy Miller apparently had been a good friend of his father.

G: What did he say about his father?

J: Nothing, except he'd tell legislative stories. Politics, of course, fascinated him. I can't repeat any of them, but occasionally we'd get a story of something that had happened in the legislature, and he'd bring his daddy into the story.

G: Did you ever meet his father?

J: No. Well, now I might [have]. No, I don't think I did. If I did, I've forgotten. I met his mother.

G: A number of historians have put forward the thesis that he was much more influenced by his mother than by his father, and yet he chose the profession of his father.

J: I wouldn't have any way of evaluating that.

His mother impressed me. I saw her several times. She impressed me as a very forceful woman with very definite views, and she was very articulate and obviously a woman of some education and refinement. I would assume that many of Lyndon's good qualities came through her side of the family. I didn't know the father.

G: Before he got that job with Representative Kleberg, did he talk much about politics and the possibility of a career in politics?

J: I can't recall anything special, but my impression now, looking back, is that Lyndon Johnson was always focused on an individual problem and that options came to him just automatically. He did today's job, and then first thing you know he'd have choices. All

Jones -- II -- 6

during the time I knew him he was always getting opportunities to do other things that would advance him. Like, for example, I told you-- do you want me to stick to the school period?

G: Yes. I think we're just about done with that, so let's work up to the Kleberg.

J: I don't quite know how to put this, but in my own life I've done a lot of daydreaming, and I've been associated with people who've done a lot of daydreaming. I think this is not untypical of young men who go to school and get an education. But on looking back I have the impression that Lyndon Johnson was not a daydreamer. At least, that's my impression. Lyndon was a "doer." You know, "Let the others dream, just give me a job to do and I'll consume myself with immediacy." I really don't think that Lyndon worried about the future the way some people do, the way perhaps typical students do. I think he was conceited enough, assured enough to feel that he could do anything that fate put in front him, as long as it was within his physical and mental abilities. He was completely confident. This was really his long suit, and it was totally contagious. I mean, even people who disliked him would join him many times. It was contagious. It would absolutely grab hold of you.

G: Do you recall any association that he had with Representative Kleberg other than, let's say, through Roy Miller before he took that job?

J: I had never even heard of Kleberg. The only time when I heard of Kleberg was when Lyndon Johnson informed me that he was going to work for Kleberg. That was the first time I ever heard of him.

Jones -- II -- 7

I think at the time he informed me--I'm mixed up on my dates--I had finished high school, and I was in Rice or I was about to go to Rice.

G: I think that's right.

J: I had never heard of Kleberg. I didn't even know he existed. I barely knew there was a King Ranch. Then the next time I saw Kleberg was when I went to work for him. I'll never forget that day. I drove up there, nineteen years old, [to] the big house on the hill--there's a Catholic church there now--where Kleberg lived. They were having coffee out on the porch when I got there about four o'clock. It looked very sumptuous to me. And I had heard by then that he was one of the rich men of the state. So I had a lot of awe in me when I approached it. He put me right at ease, though.

Kleberg loved to demonstrate that he was a master of big words. He immediately started off throwing big words at me, but it didn't bother me because I'm a master of big words, too, you know. (Laughter) You know what I mean. He threw nothing at me that I wasn't familiar with.

G: He was also fluent in Spanish, I understand.

J: Yes, very much so.

And he wrote an atrocious letter, the way many people do. It lacked informality. The contrast between his letters and Lyndon's is just terrific. Lyndon wrote informal letters, the way people talk. It's a gift to be able to do that. Most people freeze up when they have to write a business letter.

Jones -- II -- 8

Have you studied Lyndon's letters? This would be an interesting--

G: Oh, yes. Oh, sure.

J: Some of them reached as good as Lincoln. You know, Lincoln had this ability. Did you ever study Lincoln's letters?

G: Not much.

J: Oh, it's a joy. He wrote his out in longhand. Lyndon dictated his.

G: What can you tell us about the relationship between Lyndon Johnson and Richard Kleberg?

J: Extremely friendly. Lyndon was devoted to him, dedicated to him. Of course, Lyndon was imbued with an idea that I would imagine he got from his father--it's the central idea of all politicians--that loyalty is the number one trait. Everything is subordinate to loyalty. You must be loyal. And he pursued his job under the dominion of that kind of thinking. He was going to be loyal to Kleberg, first, last, and always. And he expected people who worked for him to have that attribute and characteristic, to be loyal. He could forgive you if you were stupid, if you made mistakes, but he'd never forgive you if you displayed any disloyalty. This was the theme that he iterated and reiterated many, many times in different ways. It was the cardinal sin. It was the mortal sin to be disloyal.

G: He seems to have been considerably more of a liberal than Representative Kleberg in the early thirties.

J: I know that would be easy to imagine, but I'm not sure that's true. Not really more liberal. In the Dodge Hotel in the discussions we'd have between Bob Jackson, who later became the editor of the paper



Jones -- II -- 9

here, and Gene Latimer and me--of course I just listened; it was Bob and Lyndon usually--Bob was liberal. It may come as a surprise to you to say that Lyndon often talked very conservative. I can remember there was a discussion about Huey Long's book. Lyndon found a lot of things in that book worth remembering, but he also was critical of the part about spending so much money--you know, just spend, spend, spend, spend. I think at this time Lyndon was reflecting Roy Miller's influence, and I think that Lyndon's spending propensities were, I would say, just expediency. Any politician adapts to whatever's required of him, and the climate changed and Lyndon changed. I don't think Lyndon was either a conservative or a liberal. I think he was whatever he felt like he needed to be. You can't stay in politics if you don't have this philosophy. If you want to be like Goldwater, you get defeated.

G: I get the impression that he persuaded Representative Kleberg to support some of the New Deal measures.

J: I don't think there's any question about that. They had lots of arguments. Kleberg would come back from these committees just shocked at the suggestions, but he finally voted for the AAA.

G: That was the one I was thinking about.

J: Yes. Lyndon and Roy Miller and Kleberg had lots of discussions about this. Of course, I wasn't in on them. I could hear them, and then Lyndon would talk about it later. But I think that Lyndon's conclusion, and Roy Miller's conclusion, too, unless I'm mistaken, was that we had to do it. It was terrible; it was a

Jones -- II -- 10

break with the past, but it was a necessity. We had a terrible emergency. It was like a war. This was Lyndon's attitude, that if you've got a war you can't ignore it. You've got to meet it. You've got to adjust to the crisis.

G: Do you recall any other specific examples where he persuaded Representative Kleberg to support something that he wasn't [for]?

J: No, I really don't. There probably were some.

G: Before we turned on the tape you mentioned that a great part of his day was spent with veterans and service connected disabilities. Would you talk about that?

J: When I first went to work for Mr. Kleberg, a large part of the work of the office consisted of helping veterans of World War I get their claims for compensation service connected to show that any ailment they then had was connected with some injury they sustained in the war. Lyndon spent an enormous amount of time on this on the telephone, and doing other things, too. Anything that was required to be done to help these people, he did it, and he was very successful. He service connected hundreds of them.

G: Is that right?

J: Oh, yes. And, of course, his reputation developed as this happened. Because he was coming in contact with a lot of people. He was having parents naming children after him and a whole bunch of things. I know that happened several times, in gratitude.

G: I get the impression also that he developed a lot of close contacts in the various departments.

Jones -- II -- 11

- J: Yes, I'm sure that's true, mainly as a part of this effort. In order to succeed he had to have lots of contacts with lots of officials at all levels.
- G: Do you remember the case of the--I think he was a customs inspector at El Paso or somewhere near the border who was too old to be given civil service status, and he [Johnson] went to one of the civil service commissioners and got him reinstated?
- J: I don't remember that.
- G: He had a friend, I guess, who worked with Jim Farley in the Post Office Department, Bill Bray or Bob Bray.
- J: I don't remember him.
- G: What other things would occupy his time?
- J: He was absolutely intent on, insistent on getting the mail out. He wanted to answer every day's mail every day. And listen, that's a job. Sometimes two hundred letters would come in. Just doing his routine duties kept him very busy. It kept me busy and Gene busy, too. We worked real hard. The days flew by.
- G: Did you get the feeling that he, rather than Dick Kleberg, was in reality the congressman?
- J: Oh, there's no question about that.
- G: Was this all right with Representative Kleberg?
- J: Absolutely.
- G: What were his days like? Did he just play golf and kind of--
- J: I've got an impression that Dick Kleberg enjoyed hobnobbing with powerful people, and he was able to do it because he was accepted.

Jones -- II -- 12

as being a very rich, powerful man himself. I think he enjoyed it. I think that's where he got his kicks, being able to pick up the phone and call Jim Farley and talk to him on a personal basis, and countless others, too. But I don't think that he cared at all for the routine of that congressman's office. He could not care less. The little petty details and getting these things done I don't think he cared [about]; he was just delighted to have Lyndon do it.

G: Roy Miller seems to have exerted a lot of influence on that office and have been very close to LBJ.

J: He was in there every day when he was in Washington. I used to take his letters. He'd come in and dictate twenty or thirty personal letters. And, by the way, he was an artist with words, too. Did you ever hear any stories about him? He was a great storyteller. He'd always stop and tell us a few new stories that he'd heard, and they were always well told and very funny. He wrote a beautiful letter, or dictated a beautiful letter. He was a real artist with words. I just loved to take his dictation.

G: Did most of his activities up there concern Corpus [Christi]?

J: I don't really remember. I understood vaguely that he was a lobbyist. I actually never saw what he did. I know that when I got my law degree and Lyndon was trying to help me get a job Roy Miller exerted lots of help. He had the contacts. Even though Lyndon was congressman, Roy had more contacts than Lyndon. You have to have a vacancy before you can get a job, but Roy had the way paved for me for a dozen jobs just as soon as [there was] a vacancy. Finally I got one in the

Jones -- II -- 13

Justice Department, and Lyndon was backing up everything. But Roy went all out for me. You see, I had been a young man that had helped him and worked for him. I loved him, too. I thought Roy was great. But I was never conscious of his modus operandi. I don't know what he did. I don't know how he did his job.

G: Did you see much of Senator Alvin Wirtz during this period? Did he come up?

J: I had worked in his office when I was in law school.

G: Oh, I guess I did know that.

J: When I was a senior in law school I was an apprentice in his office.

G: In the Interior Department in Washington?

J: No. No, no. In Austin, when I was in law school. And then later on I worked for Wirtz as an executive assistant when he was under secretary of the Interior. Mary Rather was his secretary. I saw him every day.

He and Lyndon were very close. Lyndon loved Wirtz and thought he was very astute, and indeed he was a very astute, very good lawyer and very smart politician. In fact he was a very, real bright lawyer.

G: Was he sort of like a mentor or a father to Lyndon Johnson?

J: Yes, that would be my impression. I can recall one instance that will illustrate the relationship. The day that Lyndon Johnson decided to run for Congress I was in the office. I was an apprentice in Wirtz's office. I was taking dictation from Wirtz, and Lyndon came in the office. Lyndon was with the NYA then.

Jones -- II -- 14

And in my presence they discussed--they had apparently previously discussed it, but this was the final discussion--"Am I going to run or am I not?" It was settled in that discussion that he would run.

The problem in the discussion was, "What will the issue be?" I don't know who brought it up, whether it was Lyndon or Wirtz, but one of them suggested that maybe the court packing plan would be a good issue. And of course Wirtz being the fine lawyer that he was, all his instincts rebelled at Roosevelt's position on the court packing plan. I remember he voiced those objections, but he agreed with Lyndon that it would probably be a popular issue and that a do-or-die issue was essential. Something had to dramatize Lyndon, and this was just as good as any. There would probably be more people with him than against him. Most people don't feel like lawyers. Most ordinary people would be inclined to follow Roosevelt. So it was agreed in that conference that the issue would be the court packing plan, and Lyndon lost a lot of lawyers and lost a lot of the intelligentsia who thought the court packing plan was an act of tyranny and subjection of our democracy. But as it turned out it was a good issue, because it did dramatize.

After all, there were a bunch of candidates in that race, some of whom were a lot better known than Lyndon. I remember there was one lawyer in there who had been in Austin twenty years. Was his name Shelton? Polk Shelton?

Jones -- II -- 15

G: Polk Shelton.

J: I don't know whether that suggests [this] to you, but Wirtz helped him make that [decision]. His attitude toward Wirtz was, "I want your advice. I'll be guided by it." I think if Wirtz had said "Don't run," my impression is he wouldn't have run. He might not have. Wirtz thought he could win. He wanted him to run.

G: What did Wirtz think of him?

J: Of whom? Lyndon? I think he loved him.

G: Did he ever talk to you about Lyndon Johnson?

J: No. But most people who had anything to do with Lyndon loved him. I'm sure he had his detractors. I know he did. But the people that worked with him liked him. He had some faults, but most people were willing to overlook them because the guy was obviously a genius in politics.

G: I want to ask you some more about Senator Wirtz, but I don't want to jump ahead too much here. You mentioned that while he was working for Representative Kleberg that he had lots of options and that he was considering other job possibilities.

J: One in particular that I remember was--and the timing I can't tell you; we'll say maybe a year after I'd been with Kleberg--Lyndon discussed the fact that he had been approached by somebody connected with [Texas] A&I University, somebody in authority, [and told] that if he wanted the presidency he could have it. Lyndon at that time couldn't have been over twenty-six, [twenty-] seven years old, and there was a lot of discussion about whether the other professors

Jones -- II -- 16

would accept him. Also, there was some talk on his part about what he would do if he got it. He was thinking in terms of improving it, getting better professors in and doing things in agriculture that had never been done before, and turning it into one of the top universities in the world. In other words, this was the way his mind worked. Instantly, he started thinking about, "How I can make this the greatest school in the country." What happened to this I don't know. I don't know why he dropped it. I do not know why it didn't come to fruition.

G: You recall also, I think, about the offer from G.E. in New York.

J: I recall there was discussion. Lyndon talked about the fact that if he wanted to--you told me the man's name was Adams, I'd forgotten-- Mr. Adams would hire him and subject him to a training program and after that he'd be a lobbyist. I remember the amount of money he would make was very attractive, because it was larger than anything most people his age could make any other way. Lyndon speculated about taking it. I think he was tempted very much. Then somewhere in this, along about this time, he got this NYA possibility of a job, and that probably threw him off the track of the General Electric lobby job.

G: You said that Vice President Garner had a role in the NYA thing?

J: That's my impression. I have memory of Lyndon talking about the Vice President being on his side.

G: How did he put it?

J: I can't remember how he put it, except I just have the impression



Jones -- II -- 17

that he was giving the Vice President a lot of credit for the fact that he could have the job. I think the Vice President liked Lyndon very much, maybe because of Kleberg, because the Vice President and Kleberg, as I understood it, were close.

G: Did you have an opportunity to see his work in the Little Congress?

J: Yes.

G: And how he was elected speaker of the Little Congress? Do you remember that?

J: Well, I remember he was elected. And I remember we went on a trip to New York.

G: That was one he organized, I guess.

J: Yes. We went on a train trip, and I remember we went into the New Yorker Hotel. I ate a fish dinner, and I was not accustomed to drinking but I drank some highballs and got deathly sick that night. Oh God, I can still remember it. (Laughter) That's about all I remember of that trip, is that I got sick because I had too many highballs.

I can still see Lyndon going up and down the train shaking hands. I don't know what we were trying to do. He was always mobilizing people. I remember one time, I think this is correct, Huey Long came over and spoke to the Little Congress. Has somebody else mentioned that?

G: Right. I think that's when the photographer's flash exploded and it scared him.

J: Yes, now that you mention that I sort of have a vague memory of it.

Jones -- II -- 18

- G: Did he get Huey to speak?
- J: Yes, I'm sure he did, because Lyndon saw a lot in Huey that attracted him.
- G: I get that impression.
- J: Oh, yes.
- G: What do you think it was?
- J: I don't know. It looked like Huey might be presidential material, a great leader. Lyndon may have seen himself in the same role.
- G: I gather he admired Huey's speaking ability.
- J: Winning votes, his ability to win votes against the big interests.
- G: Populist instincts.
- J: Yes. Yes, that would be the word.
- G: Did LBJ ever express these sentiments to you?
- J: Oh, not in terms, but I know that he was very much impressed with that book, Every Man A King.
- G: I wanted to ask you one more question about Vice President Garner. One book indicates that Garner had the idea of taking over some of the patronage appointments of Texas congressmen and giving them to the vice president, and that while he was Kleberg's secretary Lyndon Johnson helped generate opposition to this and defeated the proposal. Does that ring a bell with you?
- J: No. I knew nothing about that.
- G: Let's talk about his career in law school. You enrolled in law school with him.
- J: He didn't have much career. He was out in just a few weeks.

Jones -- II -- 19

From the very start he didn't show any particular aptitude for it. Right at the beginning we were given assignments where we had to brief a lot of cases. He did it for a couple of nights, and it became obvious that he wasn't going to do it anymore. (Laughter)

G: Why?

J: I don't know. I don't know. It just didn't hit him right. Because he was not a stranger to tedious work. Working for these veterans, he'd work all day for one veteran, the most tedious kind of effort. I don't know. I don't know why. Maybe it was because he was preoccupied with other things. At this stage in his life--if my timing is right--I think he was in the throes of being in love and wanting to get married, and I suppose that would cloud any man's vision. (Laughter) Bird was much nicer than any law school.

G: You would go to class together in the evenings, I guess?

J: Yes. Then we'd come back to the office or go home to the Dodge Hotel, and I'd start studying. You need to study about an hour to get the assignment, or maybe two hours. But he very rapidly indicated that that's for the birds. He wasn't going to do it, and he dropped out of law school very soon.

G: What led him to enroll in law school in the first place?

J: I don't know, except that he had noticed that most of the people he admired were lawyers.

G: But he waited until you came up there before he did. He waited until the fall of 1934.

J: My memory is coming back to me now. I know from things that he told

Jones -- II -- 20

me that Wirtz kept telling him, "If you'll get a law degree and get a license and come to Texas, either join me or I'll set us up some way. You can make a ton of money and be a very powerful man." In other words, the law was another option. I know Wirtz was stimulating him to go to law school. My memory now is that Wirtz kept telling him that, "You can better yourself, I mean tremendously, if you'll become a lawyer."

G: Do you think one of the reasons that the material did not really catch his interest was because it seemed abstract to him rather than real?

J: Oh, I can't believe that, because everything he did in that office-- That may be. He liked to play with actual people, not dry-as-dust abstractions. That may be. I don't know. Who knows? It may have been his impending marriage, though. That's enough to distract anybody away from [study].

G: Tell me about the Dodge Hotel. What was life at the Dodge like?

J: Just a bunch of young men down there on the bottom floor surrounded by old ladies. In Washington all the young men were pretty ambitious. Most of them were all going to law school, and they all had dreams of going home and being in politics or being in law firms. I did. I dreamed about being a lawyer; that's what I wanted to be. Just a bunch of young men. John Connally was down there for a while. He came later.

You know what I remember about John? (Laughter) I remember several things, but one thing in particular--the way he loved his hair.

Jones -- II -- 21

Bear in mind this is a very young man. He's three years younger than I am. He devoted much more time than you would imagine to combing his hair, brushing his hair. You know, he'd look at his hair, and he'd brush it, and he'd brush it, and he'd brush it. If we'd kid him about it he'd say, "Well, this will guarantee that it will never come out, it will never be thin. I'm going to keep it like this all my life." In those days hair was short. They didn't have it full like they do now. But boy, he'd lovingly caress it. Do you think that is a footnote for history? (Laughter) I think he's still got his hair, hasn't he? That's his hair, it's not a wig, is it? He's got beautiful hair.

G: I guess it worked.

J: Listen, before we leave this period I was just looking backwards, and to put everything in proper perspective, my impression is that Lyndon was basically no different from any other young man. I mean any other intelligent, bright, aggressive, modern young man. Lyndon wanted to do the best he could with what he had. He was keeping his eye open for the main chance, always. That is the impression I have. It's like all the other people I know who are bright and aggressive and energetic and intelligent. I don't think he thought of himself as ever going to be president. I think he thought in terms of today. I don't think he ever looked very far into the future.

Now he did have to make decisions, like he had to make a decision to go to be NYA director, but I think he made it fast.

Jones -- II -- 22

I don't think he dreamed about it ahead of time. I think he got wind that it was a possibility, that it would be a good thing for him, and made the decision. Now that's another characteristic of Lyndon. He could make decisions. He had no trouble making decisions. I would put that down as a very important characteristic. I don't ever recall him worrying about making a decision on anything. Do you know what I mean? He either did it or he didn't, very rapidly. And I'm sure made some mistakes.

G: I suppose after the sessions ended you'd be down here in Corpus?  
In the area?

J: You mean when he was working for Kleberg?

G: Right.

J: Yes, he came down to Corpus.

G: And was this when you lived in that house on--

J: Well now, when I first came down here is when we lived in the house on the water. Lyndon and Gene and I lived up in the top floor.

G: Do you want to tell the story about the bathtub?

J: We had been in this house for three or four months, five or six months; I don't know how long. Very comfortable, very nice place to live, but I think Lyndon--or somebody, it might have been Gene--left the shower running. Maybe the tub got plugged. In some way the water overran and came down and dripped through the ceiling, and the landlady was very irate. She called Lyndon and chided him, and I suppose to her surprise his response was equally strong. He very rapidly told her that if that was the way she felt, we'd just move

Jones -- II -- 23

out, and we did. We moved out that day.

G: And found another--

J: Yes. We moved into a hotel.

G: Did he spend much time at the King Ranch?

J: I don't think so. If he did I wasn't aware of it. No, I'm sure he didn't. He was in that office every day.

G: You indicated that he helped Maury Maverick, that the three of you went down to--

J: San Antonio.

G: In that tax assessor race.

J: I have no memory of how it happened that he did this. I suppose that Maury Maverick asked Kleberg to borrow Lyndon. In any event we went, and I'm sure with Kleberg's blessing, otherwise we couldn't have gone. What we did, we just assisted in the campaign. We got there two or three days before the actual election. One of the problems was distributing money to these Latin families. If a particular family had five voters, then that family would be given five times X. I don't know how much a vote. Like if it was five dollars, you'd get twenty-five dollars. Lyndon and some other people, there were several workers like Lyndon, were mistaken, handing this money out. And also there was a lot of paperwork. We were writing ads for the papers and writing speeches for the radio. Lyndon was supervising all of this stuff. He was doing everything. He was dictating speeches for the radio. I wrote some of the ads, but Lyndon would redo them. He had the final say on

Jones -- II -- 24

everything. I don't know where the money came from. I suppose Maury was supplying the money, or some of Maury's contributors. And this was the stage where I think Dan Quill gets into the picture. Dan was one of Maury's buddies, if I'm not mistaken, and this was where they got acquainted. Later on Dan became postmaster and one of Lyndon's staunchest advocates. Is he still alive?

G: Oh, yes. Yes.

J: I guess he's retired now, isn't he?

G: Right, yes. I saw him about nine months ago.

J: He probably could supply you with some facts about Lyndon. They were very close. Lyndon liked him.

G: Let's talk about Lyndon Johnson and Maury Maverick. Did you get an opportunity to see them together?

J: Not then, but later on Maury came as congressman to Washington and lived in the Dodge Hotel for a while down on the bottom floor. We saw him every day.

G: Is that right?

J: He was quite a character.

G: What was he like?

J: Oh, unusual, unorthodox. He'd go out to supper with a bunch of us younger men and regale us with his unorthodox opinions. He was very liberal, of course. I think he enjoyed shocking people. If you were easy to shock, why, Maury could shock you.

G: I get the impression that FDR was quite fond of Maury Maverick.

J: Probably. I don't know.



Jones -- II -- 25

- G: Do you think he was much of an influence on Lyndon Johnson?
- J: I doubt it, but I don't know. I don't know. Because I don't recall Lyndon ever doing anything that was just sensational. Do you know what I mean? Lyndon didn't try to shock people. At least that's not my impression of him. I mean, Lyndon always, at least in his public appearances, wanted to seem to be in the middle. I believe that was his nature, too. I think that that was where he wanted to be and tried to be, although necessity put him on a little left of center sometimes. But I don't think that Lyndon was--I wish I could find the word for that. What's the word for being in the center? I think Lyndon was the happiest when he was in the center. Is it centrist?
- G: Dick Kleberg seemed considerably more conservative than, say, Maury Maverick.
- J: I would think so, yes.
- G: And I'm wondering--
- J: He's got so much more money. (Laughter)
- G: I'm wondering if there was ever a problem of loyalties here?
- J: Well, as they say, politics makes strange bedfellows. I don't really know. I don't know what the background is between them.
- G: How about Welly Hopkins? He was another friend that we haven't talked about that I guess was a state senator at this time.
- J: When Lyndon was a teacher in high school he would talk about Welly Hopkins. It seems that Welly Hopkins went to the senate, and Lyndon worked in his campaign, maybe managed it, while Lyndon was in college.

Jones -- II -- 26

This experience made a tremendous impression on Lyndon.

G: He did talk about it?

J: Oh, yes. He talked about things that happened in the campaign; you know, little victories they won, mistakes they made. He talked about it a lot to his debate class, to his debaters. He would illustrate things. Oh yes, I heard about Welly Hopkins. I met him later on and got to know him pretty well, but I heard about him a long time before I ever saw him.

G: So that would indicate a pretty active interest in politics while he was teaching.

J: Oh, yes. This campaign made an impression on him.

G: Do you recall any particulars?

J: No, I don't. I know that in every campaign you make mistakes and you have victories and you have defeats, and Lyndon was painfully conscious of every victory and every defeat. It's very obvious that Lyndon felt like he personally had a lot to do with Welly's success. In other words, he did a good job.

G: Let's see. I guess we're ready to go to the NYA period now.

J: The NYA period was a very hectic period. Now, let's see, to get oriented: I was in law school, living with Lyndon in Dr. Montgomery's home. Willard Deason was my roommate. I would go to law school in the morning and then work in the NYA office as a secretary in the afternoons. I just have two or three impressions about that. It was routine secretarial work, but I have these impressions about Lyndon.

Jones -- II -- 27

Lyndon had a staff of people that were very loyal to him and that would argue with him. They were picked for that reason. I mean, they would have very heated discussions about tactics and what should be done and how the money should be spent. I know Ray Roberts, for example, who later got to be a congressman, was one of Lyndon's good lieutenants. Lyndon loved Ray because Ray would tell him the truth. He had some woman there, whose name I can't remember, that would upset him. She would upset Lyndon, I've forgotten why, with her attitudes. But anyway, the only project in NYA that I really remember about was this program that produced these parks that we have all over Texas.

G: The roadside parks.

J: The roadside parks. Herbert Henderson--do you remember him?

G: Oh, yes.

J: He had been Lyndon's speech writer in his race for Congress. No, wait, he was later a speech writer. But Herbert was helping out. You had to write a brochure justifying these things. This was a big problem, putting it in words. They had many heated discussions on whether this was a good way to spend the money. They had to spend the money, and they had to do it fast. This was a decision that Lyndon had to make. This was one time in his life when making the decision was hard, and they had many, many conferences. There were a lot of viewpoints. I don't know what the alternatives were. I don't know what Ray wanted or what the other people wanted, but everybody had a different idea on how this money ought to be spent.

Jones -- II -- 28

I remember Herbert Henderson was adamant for the parks. One of the things that I think persuaded Lyndon was that Herbert rationalized it so beautifully. Part of it is telling why. He could write well. Finally the time came when Lyndon made the decision, and then they had to put it in writing. I typed it up, and Herbert did most of the writing. God, he sweat blood on it, believe me. He was a very talented guy. I don't know what his addiction was. Was it whiskey or something? Was it dope? He had some addiction. As long as you could keep him off of whatever his addiction was, he was a brilliant guy.

G: I think he drank too much.

J: It was whiskey. But he could write, boy; I mean he had a golden pen. He was a very valuable man, too. He wrote some beautiful stuff for Lyndon. All the time he was with Lyndon, for example, if they had to write a letter, or somebody died and you needed a beautiful letter, Herbert wrote it. (Laughter) Perfume the rose.

G: Did you get any insight into Lyndon Johnson's attitudes toward blacks during the NYA period?

J: Not really. I don't recall anything about blacks at any time I was with Lyndon, which leads me to the impression that Lyndon's position on blacks was purely expediency. That possibly might offend some of his friends, but that is my personal opinion. And I don't regard that as being derogatory. I just think that's one of the realities; if you're in politics, you've got to go

Jones -- II -- 29

the way the wind blows. I think that once he got into it, though, he got enamored of it and did a wonderful thing for the country. What's the name of that act? It was the Civil Rights Act. Wasn't that passed in his--?

G: Oh, there were several.

J: I think that that's done more good for the country, in terms of race relations, than anything that's happened. It's given the blacks and the other minorities a say in the government. But I don't think his heart was bleeding for the blacks at the time it was started. I mean, I don't have that impression. I never saw anything that would make me think that.

G: Well, the only thing [is] that he seems to have earned the esteem of Mary McLeod Bethune, who was on the national board of the NYA back then. She was a prominent black leader at the time. I'm just wondering if there were a set of circumstances here that you recall that warranted that?

J: No. Of course, it might be explainable in that undoubtedly it was the wave of the future at this time in his life. Anybody with any sense could see we had to do something about his race problem. It had to be, if you were intelligent, and Lyndon was intelligent. Here again, it was a problem that had to be solved, so he dropped everything and addressed himself to it. I don't think you should write any significance into his [actions], at least I wouldn't, other than that that would come from any politician adopting a position that has to be taken, ought to be taken, because things have changed.

Jones -- II -- 30

You know, the climate's changed. We're ready for some changes now. Maybe that's an oversimplification. I don't know.

G: As NYA director, did he have any problems with the WPA?

J: I don't remember. I don't remember.

G: They were officed in San Antonio, I guess, at this date.

J: I don't know. I don't remember.

G: Okay.

J: Are you getting any viewpoint from other people about his black position?

G: No. Really, what brought that on--

J: Any different from what I've just expressed?

G: Oh, sure, we've really gotten an array of viewpoints. But the reason I tied it to the NYA period was because of this fact with regard to Mary McLeod Bethune.

Well now, did Senator Wirtz play much of a role as an adviser to him while he was NYA director? I guess Senator Wirtz was on the board, wasn't he?

J: You know, I don't remember. I'm sure that if Wirtz was around, Lyndon would talk to him. I just can't imagine him not using him.

G: There was also General H. Miller Ainsworth from Luling.

J: You know, I just barely remember that name. I don't remember anything about him.

G: Do you remember LBJ going to conferences in Washington to meet with the national NYA officials or anything like this?

J: No.

Jones -- II -- 31

G: Anything on his attitude toward Aubrey Williams?

J: Aubrey Williams.

G: He was the national NYA director.

J: No. I haven't heard that name in many years.

G: Anything else on the NYA at all that you recall?

J: No. Have you talked to Ray Roberts?

G: Oh, yes.

J: Is he still alive and happy?

G: Oh, he is.

J: He's not in Congress still, is he?

G: Sure.

J: I didn't realize he was still there.

G: He's a good source, all right. Yes, he is.

J: He could give you some good insights in it, because he was just right in the middle of all these discussions. I touched them only on the edge. I was just typing things. I didn't sit in on the conferences.

G: I guess Jake Pickle was there, too, wasn't he?

J: Well now, Jake wasn't, I don't think, a part of the NYA.

G: Oh, wasn't he?

J: No.

I remember Ray got married soon after he went with NYA and then later divorced. And then later still this first wife, in World War II, had a job in the White House, if I remember right.

G: Juanita Roberts.

J: Yes. Is she still around?

Jones -- II -- 32

G: Oh, she is, yes.

J: Where is she now?

G: She's in Washington. She's retired.

J: I wonder if she ever got married again?

G: I don't believe so.

J: Boy, I tell you, she and Ray really had a storybook romance. Ray just floated on cloud nine for many weeks. We couldn't get him to touch ground. (Laughter) I don't know what happened to the marriage, but it sure did start off well.

G: I guess we ought to get to the 1937 campaign. You've mentioned the conversations between Lyndon Johnson and Alvin Wirtz.

J: Of course, the most significant thing about that campaign that I remember was the employing of Claude Wild to be the campaign manager. Claude Wild, as I understand it, had been the campaign manager for Allred, previously, when he ran for governor. And the organization that he had created was still intact for the particular area that Lyndon would run in. I can remember that Claude asked a fee. I can't remember the amount of it. I think it was five thousand dollars; it might have been ten. I can remember that Bird had a check for whatever the amount was, and I took it to the bank to deposit it to be sure he got it. He wanted his fee in advance.

G: Do you know who got him to do it?

J: I don't know. I was conscious all through this thing that he was doing a very able job.

[Interruption]



Jones -- II -- 33

G: [We were] talking about Claude Wild.

J: Oh, yes. I had the impression that Claude Wild did a very able job. Now I remember one of the conditions on which Wild accepted this employment was that he would make the decisions on what was to be said and when it would be said. In other words, he wanted to dominate the campaign, and Lyndon agreed to that.

G: Did Wild do it?

J: Oh, sure. He sure did. Wild was a very intelligent lawyer, in addition to being a campaign manager. I remember that near the end of the campaign we had all this radio time--these were the days before TV. We had all the radio time earmarked that we could get, and the plan was that Lyndon was going to make the speeches on this last night. At some point as the last day approached, Lyndon's side began to hurt. It was diagnosed as appendicitis. And so the question arose, "Should we put off the operation and take a chance or not?" It was decided that they would let him be operated on immediately for the publicity value that it would bring, and that Wild would make the last speeches. And by the way, Wild was a lot better speaker than Lyndon was, golden voice, very articulate. My memory is that those speeches came through beautifully. [Wild had] just the right touch. The man had been stricken, but "He's doing fine, and he'll be up in a couple of days. So sorry he couldn't be here, but he sends everybody good wishes." You know, the real baloney stuff, but it was very effective. I think it was a real coup. Of course, some people were unkind enough to think that Lyndon didn't really

Jones -- II -- 34

have appendicitis, but I know he did. He was doubled up with pain.

G: Were there others that felt like they ought to hold up the operation?

J: I don't remember the details of it, but I do have the impression that there was some option, that it wasn't so bad that he couldn't have made the speeches himself. But the decision was made that since this might be a good chance to--I have a memory that some of the people in the campaign didn't think Lyndon was making good radio speeches. He was not a good speaker. Claude wanted a chance to make the speeches. Now, that's my memory. If that offends anybody, I'm sorry. (Laughter)

You know many people thought Lyndon couldn't make a good speech. My reaction to Lyndon is, if you take Lyndon away from a prepared text, where he was extemporizing and where he didn't feel like posterity was watching him, he could do a marvelous job, be extremely articulate, clever, and could tell a story well. But you tie him down to a printed speech, with the thought that perhaps posterity was watching him, and I thought he became terrible. I thought his TV speeches were awful, a lot of them. But see, I've seen both sides of him. Now in the classroom, as a teacher, he was dynamic and articulate and exciting and interesting. That last night at that last party we went to at the White House he was making speeches, ad-libbing and my wife--she had never heard him except on TV--said, "My God, he's like a different man. Not even the same person." This deserves to be commented on, what happens to a man who freezes with a printed [text].

Jones -- II -- 35

G: Why do you think he froze like that?

J: I don't know. See, here is man who was a public speaking teacher. John Connally used to do this. I think he's improved a little bit. I always felt like John would pose. He became suddenly conscious of his own importance, kind of like Napoleon with his hand in his coat. As a historian, you might play with this a little bit. Has anybody else ever commented on this difference between his informal style and his formal style?

G: Oh, sure.

J: They're two different people.

G: Did you travel with him any during that campaign?

J: I drove a sound truck. I'd get into these little towns and tell everybody he was coming, and maybe twenty people would show up in the square and we'd have a little speech. That's a very disheartening experience. Nobody really gives a damn, or you kind of get that feeling. But listen, he'd make the same speech to twenty people that he'd make to a hundred. (Laughter)

I have a memory of a speech--I can't tell you where the place was, but it was in Austin--and we were out someplace where the audience was sitting on the grass. The thing that sticks in my mind is that we had prearranged to be sure that there was plenty of clapping at the right time. I don't know what the signals were, but as soon as we got them we'd all clap vigorously. It was a pretty good crowd, but I can't remember where it was.

G: Did you think he was going to win?

Jones -- II -- 36

J: Oh, yes. Yes.

G: You talked earlier about the court packing-bill as an issue and Wirtz's advice on this. The people of Austin seemed to have been much more in favor of the court-packing bill as a group than, let's say, your average sample elsewhere. I'm wondering if people tied it to the Supreme Court decisions with regard to use of PWA funds and the building of the dams, like the dams that were under construction there on the lower Colorado.

J: I have no idea. I just have the impression that the middle class American in that area liked Roosevelt. I don't think they thought this thing through very much. I don't think the implications of the court-packing plan were realized by most people at that time. That's just the impression I have. But in any event, I think they liked Roosevelt so well, or they wanted an end to the Depression, and they thought Roosevelt was the way out.

G: Was Charlie Marsh much help during that campaign?

J: I don't remember him. Let's see, Charlie Marsh. Who was that?

G: He was the publisher, Charles Marsh.

J: You know, I don't have any memory of that name.

G: How about old Colonel E. H. Perry?

J: Down in Corpus?

G: No, I think he was in Austin.

J: I don't remember him. There was an oil man, a Perry down here.

G: Did Wirtz play much of a role after the campaign got started?

J: I don't remember. I'm sure he did. He probably helped get money.

Jones -- II -- 37

That would be the main way he could help.

You know I never got the impression that Lyndon had too much money in his campaign. I always thought they were strapped for money. You know, just little remarks. I don't think it was a well-heeled campaign at all. I could be wrong about that. I think his backing Roosevelt was really a correct decision, because he got the benefit of a lot of good will.

G: Sure.

J: See, when I got out of law school I naturally wanted to be a lawyer. I went back to Houston, where I lived, and tried to get a job. I found I could get a job in one of the big law firms there, but the most they would pay me was seventy-five dollars a month. I wanted more money. So I got in touch with Mr. Johnson and told him my plight, and he said, "Well, come on up to Washington. I'll let you work in my office, or somewhere we'll get you a job, and then we'll get you an attorney job when one opens. Staying in my office will just be a holding action until we find you something in the attorney field."

So I decided that's what I'd do. I worked as his secretary, but I really got paid as an elevator operator. I could be wrong on that. I may be mixed up on my dates, but I think I got paid as an elevator operator. I had to work as an elevator operator for a few hours a day, then I'd come in and work in his office until about midnight. I think I got a hundred and fifty dollars a month for that, and that wasn't enough either. I wanted more money.

Jones -- II -- 38

It was almost a year before I got a job in the Justice Department, though, and I had Roy Miller and everybody I knew up there trying to help me.

G: So you actually worked there quite a while?

J: Well, several months. I said almost a year but-- And I really was chafing at the bit to get out. I didn't want to stay there.

G: Why was that?

J: The pay was low, and I had a law degree and I wanted to become a lawyer.

G: Did he use your legal expertise?

J: Oh, no. I was still a secretary. I don't think he was impressed with my law degree, not near as much as I was.

G: I guess this is a good place to stop unless you can think of something that we've missed here.

J: No, I can't think of a thing. I hope I've helped you a little bit.

G: You sure have.

[End of Tape 1 of 1 and Interview II]

GENERAL SERVICES ADMINISTRATION  
NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND RECORDS SERVICE  
LYNDON BAINES JOHNSON LIBRARY

Legal Agreement Pertaining to the Oral History Interviews of Luther E. Jones, Jr.

In accordance with the provisions of Chapter 21 of Title 44, United States Code and subject to the terms and conditions hereinafter set forth, I, Luther E. Jones, Jr. of Corpus Christi, Texas do hereby give, donate, and convey to the United States of America all my rights, title, and interest in the tape recordings and transcripts of the personal interviews conducted on June 13, 1969 and October 14, 1977 in Corpus Christi, Texas and prepared for deposit in the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library.

This assignment is subject to the following terms and conditions:

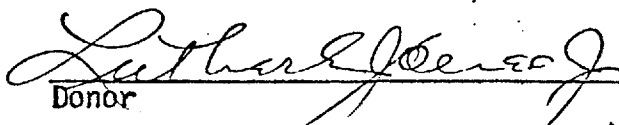
(1) The transcripts shall be available for use by researchers as soon as they have been deposited in the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library.

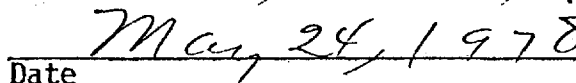
(2) The tape recordings shall be available to those researchers who have access to the transcripts.

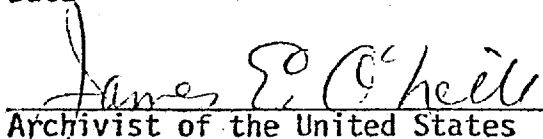
(3) I hereby assign to the United States Government all copyright I may have in the interview transcripts and tapes.

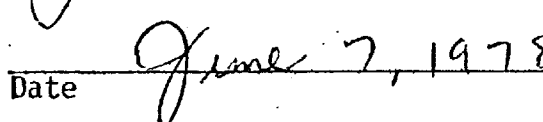
(4) Copies of the transcripts and the tape recordings may be provided by the Library to researchers upon request.

(5) Copies of the transcripts and tape recordings may be deposited in or loaned to institutions other than the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library.

  
Donor

  
Date

ACTING   
Archivist of the United States

  
Date