

## INTERVIEW I

DATE: April, 1963

INTERVIEWEE: Carroll Keach

INTERVIEWER: Eric F. Goldman

PLACE: Austin, TX

G: I believe Willard Deason spoke to you the other day and I was wondering if you have a moment now to talk to me a bit.

K: Oh, yes. I'll try but that has been a long time ago.

G: When did you first know the President?

K: When he was teaching in Houston.

G: Were you one of his pupils there?

K: Yes.

G: One of his debate pupils?

K: No, I wasn't a debater.

G: Well, we want, as well as the important details, some of the colorful ones. Could you give me a picture of what he was like as a teacher?

K: He was very dynamic, just like he is now.

G: Pacing up and down in front of the room?

K: Yes, he was a real debate coach, I'll say that.

G: Do you recall any of the things that he especially emphasized in his teaching?

K: No, I really don't since I wasn't a debater -- the fine points of his coaching techniques I wouldn't be familiar with.

G: After Houston, you went with him to the Congressman Kleberg job?

K: Yes. This was later on, of course, after he became secretary to Mr. Dick. He took a number of young people to Washington with him, you know.

G: Could you give us some picture of what it was like working with him up there?

K: He was just as aggressive as a Congressman he is a leader now. He was known on the Hill as one of the top Congressional secretaries. For instance, there was always quite a bit of competition between the Congressmen's office and say, one of the U.S. Senators to get a telegram out announcing approval of a Texas project or something like that. Of course, he was very active in Hill politics. I remember when he was elected Speaker of the Little Congress. And that was quite a feat for a newcomer.

G: Could you tell us how he managed to do that?

K: Just like he does now -- he campaigned for it.

G: Our impression is that he actually attended only one or two meetings before he was elected. Is that right?

K: That's too far back. That I can't remember.

G: But he was a comparative newcomer. Would you describe the way he worked in office?

K: He was just like he is now. He pushed his staff hard but he pushed himself hard too.

G: Do you remember when he showed up in the morning and when he went home at night? Do you remember any of these little details?

K: He worked long hours then just as he does now.

G: Are there any stories or anecdotes of that period which you recall that would be especially characteristic?

K: Well, I can remember times when Mr. Kleberg probably did not appreciate the political significance of a particular piece of legislation. The President would argue with him and try to convince him that he should act this way or that on legislation, you know.

G: Are there any particular pieces of legislation that you recall that the President was instrumental in calling the Congressman's attention to?

K: Oh, yes, there were a number of them, especially in agriculture. In those days, Mr. Kleberg was on the House Agricultural Committee, headed by Marvin Jones.

G: How about veterans legislation?

K: That's one of the bills that I remember hearing him try to convince Mr. Dick that he should be for.

G: Were there any other fields that the President was especially interested in?

K: I'm sure there were scores of them back then that I don't remember. Agriculture was real, of course, because of the Triple A Act and then there was the economic condition of veterans. This type of thing, of course, he was vitally interested in.

G: Did you then go with him into the NYA (National Youth Administration) work?

K: He had already come to Texas and set up this NYA program before I left Mr. Dick's office. But I later joined him. I forget now how long it was that the NYA had been in operation -- probably a year or so.

G: I wonder if there are any particular anecdotes or stories you might recall that would characterize the way he worked then?

K: I think there are many anecdotes or stories, but I think his present program on poverty for young people is a continuation of what he did in NYA -- this learn-by-doing, you know.

He had some outstanding projects in Texas, and I think this is a carryover in his experience to see what you can do with young people if you give them a chance.

G: Harry Ransom at the University of Texas told us -- he was a reporter then around Austin - - that he thought that the NYA was a kind of turning point in the President's thinking because here for the first time the President was directly involved in something where the Federal Government was doing something the states couldn't do. Moreover, the Federal Government was operating in a very personal and human way, and this experience meant a great deal to the President. Does this check with your knowledge, Mr. Keach?

K: Oh, yes, I think so because he actually would visit these projects.

He stayed in his Austin very little. He was on the go all the time, all over the state, visiting these camps, every type of NYA project that he possibly could.

G: Did he, in his conversations with you, in staff meetings, etc, do you recall his saying anything which along this line he expressed what was going through his head, apart from getting the job done?

K: He took particular delight in seeing a youngster who had no economic opportunity to learn a skill and be able to do something for himself.

G: He took personal delight in it?

K: He took a real personal interest in every little project, no matter how small.

G: Were you at these meetings that would go on often in his home?

K: Yes, I lived with him at that time. I lived in his home and I drove him as kind of traveling secretary, valet, etc.

G: Could you give us a little picture of what Mrs. Johnson was like in those days?

K: She didn't take very much part in public affairs at that time.

G: Was her manner somewhat shy, not having gotten used to the hurly-burly or was she --

K: No, I think from the very beginning, he realized, in fact as she has said herself, she didn't know what he had hold of but she was sure he had hold of something.

She began to stay with him real early. Whatever his program was, was hers. This was from the very start.

G: As a friend you were associated with him in the first Congressional campaign, weren't you?

K: Yes.

G: In your view, what was the President's basic strategy?

K: I think he used the same technique when he first ran for Congress that he does right now -  
- to see as many people as he could, to shake as many hands as he could.

G: It was a very personal campaign -- that did it?

K: Yes.

G: We were told that you were one of the people who drove him around during his campaign for the first Congressional election?

K: I was an employee.

G: I understand t hat the car that you drove around was painted with slogans and signs -- is that correct?

K: We had a campaign car.

G: What did that campaign car look like?

K: It had loudspeakers on top and a turntable inside. But he personally traveled in his personal car. This was sort of an advance car.

G: What sort of message did the sound track carry?

K: Well, if he were going to speak on the courthouse lawn in a small community, we would circle the town and announce that he was going to appear. Then we would sort of set up location a little bit in advance and, until he got there, with the microphone we would play recorded music and that sort of thing.

G: Were there any slogans painted on the car or on his personal car?

K: His campaign car did but I don't remember any particular slogan that we had on it. I think it just had "Lyndon Johnson for Congress" and that sort of thing.

G: Was there any particular theme?

K: Of course he was extremely interested and in favor of the New Deal.

G: Did he have many billboards around?

K: Not too many, no.

G: Is it correct that the car was a 1937 Chevrolet?

K: I couldn't verify that. I don't remember that far back.

G: Could you recall where the campaign started? Is it correct that it was an address to the student body at San Marcos? Caravans with Johnson banners converged on San Marcos led by personal friends.

K: That's right.

G: Do you recall anything about that initial announcement of his candidacy?

K: No, I just remember that he attended the funeral for Mr. Buchanan and he went back to Austin and met with a group of his friends and advisors. Two of the outstanding things that I recall about his early days in the Congressional race were when we were going up to see Governor Jimmy Allred. I wasn't in the Governor's office but when Jimmy and Lyndon emerged from his private office, Jimmy Allred had a Stetson hanging over a

hatrack out in the receptionist's office. Allred walked over and picked up this Stetson and said, "Well, this has been a successful campaign hat, wear it" or something like that.

G: And he gave him his own campaign hat?

K: Yes, his campaign hat.

G: Did Mr. Johnson use that hat during the campaign?

K: Yes, he did.

G: Whatever did happen to it?

K: I don't know.

G: Did Governor Allred ever declare for his candidacy during the course of the campaign?

K: I can't remember whether he was openly supporting Lyndon or not. But he gave him his own personal backing, I know.

G: Mr. Keach, one other thing. At the end, there were victory celebrations. Were you at these celebrations?

K: I think so.

G: Do you remember where they were and what happened? Perhaps it might refresh your memory; he was in the hospital the night of the election. Were you at the hospital?

K: Yes. I was probably at the hospital.

G: Do you recall anything that happened that night of the election?

K: Nothing particularly.

G: To move on to the meeting with President Franklin Roosevelt after the election. All we know about that is that it was Governor James Allred who suggested that the two get together and somehow they got together on the Gulf Coast and somehow President Johnson was invited to get on the train. Could you fill in the story? In some places we

have heard that while they were out on the fishing boat, among other things, they may have discussed the Naval Air Station that was later to become the Naval Air Base at Corpus Christi.

K: I don't think Lyndon ever went out on the boat itself. If I remember rightly, the Presidential headquarters was set up in the old Galvez Hotel and either through Jimmy Allred or some other way we made contact with McIntyre.

G: Were you with the President when he went to see FDR?

K: Yes. Actually the greeting took place outside of the hotel when the President got off the boat and came to his car.

G: Does the Galvez still stand?

K: Yes. Lyndon had had contacts with Marvin McIntyre before through Jimmy Allred. He had another close contact with the President's son, Elliot. I remember that before the night the President came ashore, Elliot flew from Fort Worth or from wherever he was living into Houston. We went in the President's private car at the depot in Houston to pick up Elliot. A White House Secret Service man drove the car and Lyndon and Elliot rode in the back and of course there was a contact there with the President's son.

G: Incidentally, was it Elliot who sent that telegram during the course of the campaign?

K: It could have been. I don't remember. Of course, after we got back to the Galvez, I was not in the proceedings, so I don't know just what all transpired then.

G: How long did they stay together?

K: If I remember right, the President was going to College Station the next day and of course this White House train car would -- because the President was crippled -- it would take him to the depot or the train and then it would race off and meet him at the next stop. So



Lyndon rode on the train with the President and his party from Galveston to College Station and I think that's where he really got acquainted with him.

G: After he met FDR, he was very excited about Roosevelt, wasn't he?

K: Oh, yes!

G: Do you recall any of these things he said?

K: No, but he did probably felt about FDR as he did toward Sam Rayburn. I have heard him comment many times on him.

G: Incidentally, on Sam Rayburn, you know Juanita Roberts, don't you?

K: Yes.

G: Juanita feels that the story has often been mistold about the President's relationship with Rayburn. The President is often made a protégé of Rayburn. But it is her understanding that actually Rayburn and the President were both kind of protégés of Lyndon Johnson's father. Is this your understanding?

K: I would go along with that. But I don't know too much about the relationship between Mr. Rayburn and Mr. Sam Johnson.

G: The actual ages of them would make that make sense.

K: Yes.

G: Harry Ransom told us that, as a young reporter at the time, he recalled that during the course of a campaign several groups organized spontaneous demonstrations and paraded. Various segments of the community, ranging from university students to Negroes and Mexicans. Are you familiar with anything of that sort?

K: I don't remember any particular demonstrations except that wherever he went he had all races, creeds and colors there.

G: Do you remember any specific speech that the President made during the campaign or a specific even that might have been significant?

K: No. But I remember how conscious he was of farm groups and people like that not seeing him ride in that old brown Pontiac that he had. I remember we went to a farm meeting in a little community below Brenham one day and he had me park the Pontiac back about a mile from the meeting place and he walked. It was a Pontiac, four-door sedan, and he thought it looked a little too elaborate for a man running for Congress.

G: Mr. Keach, what was he like as a campaigner in those days?

K: He took off his coat and he took a special delight in ribbing the newspapers who were opposed to him. He called the *San Antonio Light* the San Antonio Blight, the *San Antonio News* the San Antonio Blues. He was a rip-roaring young New Dealer in those days. He really took off his coat.

G: Lots of gestures?

K: Lots of gestures and he haggled with the hecklers in the audience.

G: Did he take on the hecklers?

K: He would take them on. He always held his own, you know that.

G: Could I take you back to the Houston school -- this is really taking you back a very long way. Nobody has described what this high school in Houston looked like.

K: By today's standards, it was a pretty drab building.

G: By the standards of that day?

K: It was an old high school by then, the old Central High School originally. There was no campus. It was right in the heart of downtown Houston, right in the center -- back of the old Post Office building.

G: Was it in the downtown commercial district?

K: Yes, down in the heart of Houston.

G: What was his classroom like?

K: They were all similar, you know.

G: Did he have any personal decorations around the room -- pictures, etc.?

K: Not that I remember. They had those great big windows with these double draw shades and they had student armchairs, most of them dark, all the woodwork was dark. They were pretty drab.

G: Back to the campaign, if I may. Did the President distribute buttons or cards or anything?

K: I don't remember buttons, but of course he distributed cards, leaflets and, if I remember right, he had a sort of brochure in red, white and blue. We used the National Capitol for background and that type of thing.

G: Thank you very much, Mr. Keach. You have been enormously helpful.

K: That is quite all right. Glad to help.

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