

INTERVIEW I

DATE: March 10, 1981
INTERVIEWEE: EUGENIA BOEHRINGER LASSETER
INTERVIEWER: MICHAEL L. GILLETTE
PLACE: Mrs. Lasseter's residence, Henderson, Texas

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- G: Let me ask you just one general question about your family. Your family lived in the Karnack area on the Caddo Lake and you had six brothers and sisters, or three brothers--
- L: There were three boys and three girls.
- G: What was your father's name and your mother's name?
- L: My father was from Stuttgart, Germany. He came to this country when he was twenty-two years of age. His name was Gottlieb Emanuel Boehringer. He called it Boehringer, but in Germany it was "o" with an umlaut, B-O-H-R-I-N-G-E-R. [It] then was anglicized to B-O-E, which is the "oe" sound that "o" with an umlaut produces.
- G: He died when you were--
- L: He was killed when I was just three years old. I barely remember having seen him. But my mother was a native of Port Caddo. Her father and mother had lived there. Her mother's family had lived there since 1838.
- G: So she raised the six children.
- L: Yes.
- G: I see.

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- L: And we had a happy childhood. So happy we never knew we were poor. That was great. But being poor is a relative thing. You know, we had a piano and a telephone, which not many people had in those days.
- G: You mentioned when we were talking this morning about Minnie Lee Pattillo [Taylor] campaigning, I suppose, for a county commissioner's position.
- L: Yes. And as it turned out, the candidate [she opposed] was a first cousin of my mother.
- G: What was his name?
- L: His name was Robert Hope. Cousin Bob, we called him. He had not gone to World War I because he was necessary to the agricultural economy of the area. His father had a large plantation and was a cotton grower and Cousin Bob stayed home from the war. He was deferred by the draft board, and made the crops. So I don't know. Mrs. Taylor was an activist in politics long before the days that women took part in politics. She did campaign throughout the precinct against him.
- G: You described her coming to your house.
- L: Yes. I guess it was the summer of 1918, perhaps. The war was still going on, and I remember she came and had with her a daughter who was Lady Bird; I guess Bird was about six years old. But I remember her out on the long porch of our home and Mrs. Taylor talking with my mother, I guess. Women didn't have the vote, but she was just going

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around in the precinct campaigning against Cousin Bob and calling him a slacker, which was a bad word in those days.

G: And her candidate won, I gather. Is that right?

L: Yes. Because Cousin Bob was not elected. I do not remember who won the election.

G: You moved to Austin. When?

L: Yes. In October, 1926.

G: And then did you go to the University [of Texas]?

L: Well, I worked full time, but Mr. [C. V.] Terrell had told me I would have an opportunity to go to the University. I had finished Marshall High School with honors and I was the valedictorian. Then I went two years to what was the College of Marshall then. It is now East Texas Baptist College. I had a teacher's certificate, so I was given a school at Lee where I had only one pupil. I didn't really teach but a month or so, because then I had this opportunity to go to Austin. So I gave up the school and went to Austin, my first time away from home. But then I enrolled for about, let's see, I took two or three classes per day. I took my noon hour and went to school and then I took one course at night, and in the summer I took a course from seven to eight in the morning.

G: I see.

L: So I studied the entire time I was there.

G: Now, I gather you were not really close to Mrs. Johnson when you were--

L: In childhood.

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G: In childhood.

L: No.

G: When did you begin to become closely associated with her?

L: Well, I don't know whether it was in 1929 or 1930. She was a student at St. Mary's in Dallas and I invited her to Austin to visit me, and we had such a good time. She was so favorably impressed with Austin that I think that is when she decided she would like to go to the University. She had graduated from Marshall High School in 1928. So I guess it was about in the fall of 1930 that she came to the University.

G: What was she like in that period?

L: Oh, just a delightful young girl.

G: Was she shy?

L: I don't recall her being very shy. She was interested and so bright and so well-read. She read so many books and was interested in everything good. And she had gone one summer, I believe, to the University of Alabama at Tuscaloosa and I think her father had plans to send her back there. But I wanted her to come to Austin, and I told her father once on a visit to her at Karnack, I said, "You should let Bird come to the University of Texas. If she plans to live in Texas, she should have Texas friends and not go way back to Alabama." Although her mother's people were there, and I think her father's, also.

G: Was he reluctant to do that?

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L: No. He didn't seem to be. He wanted what was best for her. I remember he said to me, "Well, if you promise to look after her, I will let her go to the University of Texas." And I said, "Oh, I'll be happy to, to do my best."

So she came. I think she stayed at Mrs. Matthews' there on I guess it was Whitis Avenue--I've forgotten--close to the University.

G: Well, did you look after her?

L: As best as I could. We had such a good time together. I was living at the Austin Womans Club, a beautiful place, in Austin on Eighth and San Antonio, the lovely house that's still there. But Bird often visited me.

Then when she got her first degree, her B.A. in journalism in 1933, that's when we went out to Taos, New Mexico and then on to Santa Fe and visited her brother Tony, who lived in Santa Fe, he and his wife, Elizabeth Steele, formerly of Marshall, with whom I had been graduated from high school.

G: Well, let's talk about her adapting to Austin. It must have been very different from [St. Mary's].

L: She loved Austin. She thought it was beautiful, and she enjoyed meeting all the people and doing all the good things in Austin there were to do. And we had fine picnics and had such interesting friends.

G: Well, it must have been very different from the cloistered life at St. Mary's.

L: Well, I'm sure it was. But she always had a lot of young men, you know, beaus in those days.

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G: Was she popular with the--?

L: Yes, she was. With boys and girls.

G: Did she have a car there, do you recall?

L: Yes. And Mr. Terrell, the man for whom I worked, was so cute. Bird always had sticks of ribbon cane or bags of peanuts or something in her car. She always had a good car. And I remember one day, we took Mr. Terrell home or something and he said, "Bird, you'll never get married carrying all this stuff around in your car," all the sugar cane and peanuts and things like that. But she was popular. She was a real individual.

G: Did she have to study a lot?

L: I don't recall that she did. She was just so naturally bright and made good grades.

G: What courses was she most interested in?

L: Well, her major was journalism. I don't really know what she liked best, probably history and English, poetry, literature.

G: I see. Did you all go to plays together?

L: Yes. We had fine plays at the Hogg Auditorium.

G: Why didn't she act? I gather she was interested in drama, but she never did any [acting].

L: No, I don't know that she--see, the University had the Curtain Club and Austin had the Little Theater, and I belonged to the Little Theater and I played a lead in a play once. I don't remember the name of it. I wasn't very good, actually. But we did enjoy plays.

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G: Well, was she interested in your job at the Railroad Commission?

L: Yes, and all the people, because we knew all the politicians and everything. I think Governor Miriam Ferguson was the governor then, and her secretary, Gladys Little [?], was a great friend of ours.

G: Well, was Mrs. Johnson at all interested in politics during this period?

L: Well, not actively, as I recall, but I think she was interested in meeting the various officeholders and the politicians.

G: Do you recall her pledging a sorority, I think it was Alpha Phi?

L: Just vaguely. But I don't know about that.

G: You were not in a sorority, is that right?

L: No. I lived at Mrs. Randolph's before I moved to the Austin Womans Club. I lived at Mrs. Randolph's where everybody there was a sorority girl except me. But I worked and you couldn't belong to a sorority unless you were in school full time. But we had the Kappas, had the Kappa beauty, Elise [?] Jester from Corsicana, and Dorothy Johnson from Giddings and then Felicia Holloway. Vivian Walker was a great friend, she was a Pi Phi.

G: A number of them seem to have been Pi Phis.

L: Pi Phis and Kappas.

G: Well, do you recall if they wanted Mrs. Johnson to join their respective sororities?

L: No, I don't. I don't know that she knew them too well. I don't remember that. She pledged, but I don't think she was ever initiated.

G: She didn't. She decided not to, I gather.

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L: Perhaps she wasn't too compatible with all the girls. I don't really remember much about it.

G: She didn't talk to you about that?

L: No. Alpha Phi was considered good. I think Mrs. Moody, Governor [Dan] Moody's wife, was an Alpha Phi, as I recall.

G: Well, you worked there in Austin, but would she generally spend the summers back at home?

L: Well, she would come for visits, or then when I would go home to Marshall, I would see her. She and my sister and brother, who were younger than I, were great friends. Emma and Karl.

G: How did the University change her?

L: Well, it wasn't very discernible. I don't remember that it changed her very much. She enjoyed it, and I'm sure learned a lot and got her degree and was really so happy in it that she decided to go for her master's, which she did. She won her master's degree in, I think, 1934. Then she was out with two degrees and she thought she would just go home and spend her time restoring their house at Karnack, which was a wonderful house. She was going to have an architect to redo it. Of course she laughed and said whenever she wanted anything done to the house, her father would just send Jack Moore, who worked for him at the store, out with a bucket of paint to paint something. But she was going to have it all redone in a beautiful fashion. But about that time she met Lyndon and then the house redecoration was off.

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G: Well, you were directly responsible for that since you introduced them, and I would like for you to recount how they met, if you recall. I understand it was in your office at the Railroad Commission.

L: Yes. Lyndon was in Washington as secretary to Congressman [Richard] Kleberg at that time, and he came to Austin, I don't know why. But anyway, Bird was visiting me. He asked if I would get him a date, and Dorothy Johnson Muckleroy was there. Her husband had been killed in a gas explosion at Monahans, and she and I had been friends since we lived together at Mrs. Randolph's there on Lavaca Street. So I did ask Dottie to have a date with Lyndon, and she did. She liked him, and he liked her. She was a beautiful girl. But not too much, you know, not the kind that he wanted a date with her the next night. So then I think he came by the office and Bird came by the office and I introduced them and they had a date that night.

It was really a whirlwind romance, because she came into the office a day or two later and she said, "Gene, Lyndon has asked me to go to the King Ranch with him this weekend. What do you think about it?" I said, "Well, you haven't known him but twenty-four hours and I don't know. I think maybe you ought to wait until you know him a little better." But anyway, she went on, and I think they had a fine time and a fine visit with the Klebergs. She told me about the ranch, how big it was, and that the ladies wore compasses instead of wristwatches, you know, how to get around on the ranch. That was in September. Then she went on back home. I guess Lyndon proposed to her.

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G: And he went back to Washington.

L: Yes. Because I remember, I think she had come down on the bus instead of driving, because I remember driving her to the bus station, I believe, to go back to Marshall or to Karnack. She told me that Lyndon had asked her to marry him, and I was a little unhappy about it. I thought she had not known him long enough, you know. Although I knew his mother and father and was fond of them. And I knew he was a nice person, you know, but I didn't realize really how much they were in love. But she went on home, still intent on redecorating her home, but then I think he went up to see her, maybe before he returned to Washington, and probably asked Mr. Taylor if he might marry her. But Mr. Taylor liked him from the offset, he did.

So that was, I think, the last I heard until one morning, I guess the eighteenth of November, 1934. I think Lass had gone somewhere on a deer hunt and Juanita Miller from Tyler, whose husband, Kenneth Miller, was the nephew of Aunt Daisy Bradford, on whose land the oil well came in to begin the East Texas oilfields, was spending the night with me, and the next morning I had a telephone call from San Antonio and it was Bird. She said, "Oh, Gene, Lyndon and I committed matrimony last night." It was so funny, and that was the first I knew that they had really married.

G: During the time they were courting, did she seek your advice on the thing?

L: No. But I remember talking with her while we were waiting. I can hardly believe she rode the bus, but I remember driving her down there,

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because she always had a car. But I said, "I just don't know. I think you're too young to marry," or something like that. I really didn't want her to marry just then.

G: You know, that really seems atypical of her, because her whole life she seemed very judicious--

L: Ordered.

G: And used very careful judgment and yet she just seems to have been swept--

L: Yes. But Lyndon was the type who would just sweep her off her feet, I'm sure. But it all ended happily.

G: How did you first meet him?

L: I was secretary to Mr. Terrell, and the legislature had passed a bill putting the regulation of motor buses and trucks under our jurisdiction and had given us appropriation for four jobs as inspectors. I said to Mr. Terrell, "I wish you would give one of these jobs to Mr. Sam Johnson, whom I've met here in the Capitol." And he said, "Oh, I know Sam. We served in the legislature together." And he said, "I will do that." So he did appoint Mr. Johnson to one of these places, and Mr. Johnson was very gratified because it was in the days of the Depression and jobs were hard to find and money was scarce.

So Mr. Johnson was so grateful to Mr. Terrell and to me. He kept telling me that he had a son, I think that first year, who was teaching in Cotulla, and he wanted me to meet him. But I didn't think anything about it, you know, and then later he said, "My son is teaching speech and debating at Sam Houston High School in Houston

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and is bringing his debating team here, and I want you to meet him." So I said, "Oh, good, I'd love to." So then Lyndon came with his team and Mr. Sam brought him in to meet me, and Lyndon invited me to go to the University with him to hear these boys. And the boys were so attractive, L. E. Jones and Gene Latimer. I remember their names, such bright boys. So I went, and they won. So Mr. Johnson really was so happy for me to know Lyndon, and then I did have some dates with Lyndon and liked him. You know, we would go out to eat or just have fun. That was in early 1931. But in the meantime, I had met Lass, the representative from here, and I was going with him, really. And Lass had already asked me to marry him, so I did in September of 1931.

G: I see. Well, was LBJ interested in politics while he was still teaching debate?

L: Well, I think he was. I really didn't know him well enough to know what his main interest was. I supposed it was just teaching, but I don't think he would have been happy in it for the rest of his life. I never did know, I don't believe, how he secured the appointment as secretary to Mr. Kleberg. Did Speaker Rayburn get it for him? I don't remember.

G: I've always thought that it was Welly Hopkins and Roy Miller.

L: Yes. It could have been, because Mr. Miller lived in Corpus Christi. Welly Hopkins was a state senator from Gonzales.

G: But he was still teaching when you went out with him?

L: Yes.

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- G: Okay. Well, his father had, I gather, fallen on hard times in the Depression. Is that right?
- L: Yes. So many people did. You know, there were hard times in Texas. I never realized it because I had a good job and a good salary and clothing was cheap and so was food. I never really suffered in the Depression, I'm thankful to say.
- G: What was Sam Ealy Johnson like? LBJ's father.
- L: Oh, he was a nice man. You know, sort of a rugged Texan, pioneer type.
- G: Was he as aggressive as LBJ was?
- L: No. I wouldn't say that. I don't think that he was aggressive, but he was a smart man, and a forceful and attractive personality. But I don't remember his being pushy or forward in any way.
- G: What did he do in that capacity as an inspector?
- L: Oh, they worked hard. They traveled and reported any violations of the weight laws. You know, Texas always had weight laws for trucks and things like that and then buses, and setting rates, too, I think, for buses.
- G: Do you recall the other inspectors, who they were?
- L: No. No. I think there were three commissioners, and each one had an appointment and then I guess they all agreed on the fourth, but Mr. Johnson was Mr. Terrell's appointee. And he was a good one, and performed it well, you know.
- G: Did you ever have a chance to meet LBJ's mother?

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- L: Oh, yes. I knew her. Later, when she lived in Austin, Bird and I, I knew her then and had spent a night or two in her home. But I remember going once with Lyndon to their home in Johnson City and spending the night in the house that is now a museum in downtown Johnson City.
- G: What was his mother like?
- L: She was a lovely lady. Very refined and sweet, gentle and smart, too. Well-educated. And Lyndon [was] the apple of her eye. I think all of her children were, though. She had two boys and three girls.
- G: I gather she was very proud of LBJ?
- L: Yes, she was. Didn't she predict on the day of his birth that he would be president of the United States, I think?
- G: Let me just ask you some more about the activities that you and Mrs. Johnson would engage in at U.T. Captain Aldridge's?
- L: Oh, such fun. Captain Aldridge had a beautiful place out on the Manor Road, a big two-story house with long galleries and a wonderful library of Texana. And he had a zoo, all sorts of interesting animals, including a big red timber wolf from East Texas. I think it had been captured near Huntsville. We would go out there and have the greatest picnics. We had a cute boy, a friend from Shreveport that we loved and adored, Gordon Abney [?]-cute. He's an oilman in Shreveport, Gordon Abney Oil Company. And F. D. Brown [?], a boy from San Antonio. We'd go out there and have wonderful picnics, and Captain had big fields of bluebonnets there, and we'd have pictures made in the bluebonnets and these fine picnics. Then playing with the animals

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in the zoo and looking at all of his interesting--he really had sort of a museum. He had fought in the Boer War, if you remember how long ago that was, and he had had contact with the Zulu tribe and he had all sorts of instruments from the Zulus and various African tribes. They were intriguing to us, you know.

G: How did you know him?

L: I knew him in the Capitol, I think in the Adjutant General's department. You know, it was there on the first floor. He was an old Texas Ranger, and of course fascinating to any young person.

G: So that's how you gained the entree to go out there, is that right?

L: Yes. It was through my friendship with him. But he liked Bird and Gordon and F. D. and Cecille [Harrison Marshall] and all the people we'd carry. We'd just have big picnics, a lot of cute people and take all this food out there and make sandwiches, all sorts of Dagwood sandwiches. Get the best ham and bread and good marmalade. We'd just make the funniest sandwiches, but all so good.

G: How about renting horses at Steiner's?

L: Bird did that, I was always scared of horses. I never did like to ride, but I did a time or two. She did. She rode a good deal.

G: I notice in one of your letters that one of the horses ran off with you.

L: Oh, that was up at Bob Buford's [?] ranch out there. Oh, a horse just ran down that mountainside with me. We were fox hunting and learning to ride to the hounds. But that was a terrifying experience. But the next day Bob said, "You've got to go back and ride the same

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horse again," so I wouldn't be afraid. I did, but I was still afraid. So I never did like to ride. I think paying a dollar an hour was--or maybe it was just fifty cents, I don't remember--but I didn't like it well enough to spend my money doing that. But Bird was rather an expert horsewoman, I think.

G: Had she ridden here?

L: At home?

G: Yes.

L: Probably so. I don't know whether she did. I'm sure they had horses.

G: What about music? Did you go to concerts or listen to music?

L: Well, down on Caddo we didn't. I remember we listened just to funny country music or something like Jimmy Rodgers records that were awful. I remember my friend Don Brown who was an artist, he'd say, "Why do you listen to that? Why don't you play Bach or Brahms or something good?" But we just played kind of funny stuff. I had a portable victrola, you know, and we just [listened to] popular [music]. We didn't go in for the classics then. We learned that later.

G: But at the Womans Club you would listen to music?

L: Oh, yes, Saturday afternoon opera broadcasts and then radio, too. We had all the beautiful music.

G: What was Mrs. Johnson's philosophy then? Was she liberal or conservative?

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- L: I don't think those two words were in our vocabulary. We didn't know much about politics, you know. There was just one party, and you either liked the candidate or you didn't. Our candidate nearly always won. (Laughter) No, but we didn't have parties then, political. We didn't take much stock in politics.
- G: I gather she wrote for the Daily Texan somewhat.
- L: Yes. She was always interested in journalism and a good news gatherer, I'm sure.
- G: Did you expect her to have a career?
- L: No. I really didn't know. I thought she would eventually marry some lawyer or somebody interesting, settle down somewhere and have a family. I just never had thought she'd go in for a career, and I don't believe she planned to. I never heard her express a desire.
- G: Now, after she got that first degree, there was some uncertainty as to whether or not she would return and secure a second degree. Is that right? Do you remember that?
- L: No. That would have been the fall of 1933. No, she came on back but I don't remember where she lived, whether she still lived at Mrs. Matthews' then or not. I don't know.
- G: Well, now, you were older than she. Would she seek your advice on matters?
- L: Well, not particularly that I remember. I don't think so. But there didn't seem to be any major problem disturbing her. We just went along with life and were happy. Didn't know much else. But I don't recall having ever been unhappy or seeing her unhappy.

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G: Didn't she go to St. David's Episcopal Church?

L: Yes, she did. She had become enamored of the Episcopal church I think at St. Mary's, and I had in Austin because almost every roommate I ever had or family with whom I lived were members of the Episcopal church, and communicants of St. David's. So I remember we talked about it and she said she was going to be confirmed, and she was confirmed by Bishop Quinn [?] in 1933. But I had not gone to the instruction class then, and I was not confirmed until the fall of 1934. So she went into the church a year before I did. But we both loved St. David's. Bishop Quinn confirmed us both. Then she kept on. You know her little Episcopal church at Stonewall is nice. St. Barnabas, I think it is. Then she went in Washington, I know she has taken me to the National Cathedral several times when I've been there.

(Interruption)

G: Well, let me ask you about Aunt Effie. Did Aunt Effie visit during this period?

L: Aunt Effie was so lovely, just like a little flower or a piece of Dresden. She often visited them in Austin and I guess in Washington, too. I don't remember. Of course, she didn't come to Austin while Bird was at the University because there wouldn't have been any place for her to stay if Bird just had a room. Maybe Aunt Effie was staying back in Alabama then. But she was always at home when Bird was there in Karnack.

G: What was she like?

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L: She was a lovely little spinster lady, who was just very fragile and looked like in ill health, but I don't think she was. I think her death was caused by cirrhosis of the liver, because we thought how strange, when Aunt Effie never had anything stronger than a cup of cambric tea, if you know what cambric tea is. My grandmother used to drink just hot water with milk and cream and sugar in it.

G: Well, was she along as sort of a chaperone when you'd go places?

L: No. She never really went out with us. She really wasn't strong enough to do that. But after Bird and Lyndon married and lived in Austin in the Montgomery house, I believe Aunt Effie came there, and I think she would go out. But she was cute. I remember we went through the period of liking Ruth Etting records; that's before your day. I have every record she ever made, and one of them was a torch song called "Body and Soul." We laughed because Aunt Effie just loved that record. Wasn't that funny, that cute little lady liking [that record]? She'd ask us to play this record "Body and Soul." Funny.

G: Let me ask you about Mrs. Johnson's interest in nature and flowers and the out-of-doors. Was that evident then?

L: Not that I recall. Well, I know she loved bluebonnets. She loved everything about Austin and Texas, and she loved the hills and the dirt and everything in Austin. We all did. Picnics on Bull Creek, Hamilton's Pool, and all the beautiful places around Austin that we'd go.

G: Was Aunt Effie also kind of a nature lover?

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L: Not that I recall.

G: Really?

L: No. I don't know that she was.

G: One of the things, a theme that seems to run through your letters is sort of the interesting life that newspaper people lead.

L: Oh, we had so many wonderful newspaper friends. And, you know, through Dawson Duncan, and Bird liked Dawson and Dawson liked her, and Whizzie Berry [?] and Harry Benge Crozier, Gordon Shearer [?]. We had so many newspaper friends. And whenever they had parties, they always invited us, you know. But we did like them. They were really more interesting. Well, most of them were older. Except Dawson, he wasn't. He was about the youngest one of the group. He was a Dallas News correspondent until he went with the Associated Press.

G: Do you think that might have had an influence on her decision to go to journalism school?

L: Yes. It could have been, because those people were interested and on top of everything, every topic of the day and world affairs. We were interested in that.

G: Anything else? Any social events that we haven't talked about.

L: At the moment, I can't remember. It's been a long time ago. Let's see the outline. What else was on the outline? Let's see if anything else--

Oh, we haven't talked about her trip to Washington. She and Cecille went on a boat, I think, to New York and then had the trip

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to [Washington]. I believe she hadn't met Lyndon. I think I gave her a letter to meet him or--

G: Call him or something.

L: And she didn't. But that was a nice trip for them. Our friends, the M. D. Bryants from San Angelo were on that same trip, I think.

G: Why did they decide to go to New York and Washington, I wonder?

L: Oh, that was sort of the thing to do, you know, then and to go by ship from Galveston. That was fun. Sort of like going to the Caribbean now or Cancun or somewhere. Everybody, it goes in cycles, you know.

But I remember when she went on that. But she didn't meet Lyndon. I had told her to meet him, and he would show her around. But I don't know why. Maybe she just didn't have time.

Well, that really is about all I can think of.

G: Well, that's marvelous.

L: Until her marriage. But we really had happy times together. I remember it with much happiness, and I hope she does.

G: You know, I've always thought of her as being rather bashful during this period, just having some natural shyness, but perhaps it was more just being quiet.

L: Yes. She never was loud or rowdy or anything like that. But she had a wonderful sense of humor.

G: Really? How would you describe it?

L: [She'd] laugh, and she saw humor in so many situations that ordinarily people don't.

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G: Were most of you in your circle from East Texas?

L: No. Not necessarily, because Cecille was from San Antonio and Nell [Colgin] from Waco.

G: I guess so.

L: And the Jesters from Corsicana. Well, Bird had beaus from Marshall, Tommy Solomon [?] and Shelton Zachary [?]. I can't remember all now, but they were from East Texas, of course.

G: Well, now, she got married, of course, and they, I guess, lived most of the time in Washington and then would come back when Congress [adjourned].

L: Well, they lived in Austin during Lyndon's tenure as director of the National Youth Administration, NYA.

G: Did you ever have any indication of how he got that employment?

L: Through his friendships with the Roosevelts.

G: Really?

L: Oh, yes. And maybe Governor [James V.] Allred had something to do with it, too.

I remember he called me from Washington to rent offices for him, and my friend Bob Buford, who originally came from Henderson and was married to a Littlefield, Major Littlefield's niece and adopted daughter in Austin, owned the Littlefield Building. And we were great friends. He and my husband were close friends. He had a ranch at Bastrop and one at Llano where we'd deer hunt and then one out from Austin where the horse ran away with me, you know. But, Bob--

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Mr. Buford--rented him I guess a floor in the Littlefield Building.

Then I helped him with his staff.

G: Did you?

L: He hired Gladys Little, who had been Governor Miriam's secretary.

She worked for him there. And Jesse Kellam, who was a kinsman of Mr. Terrell--

G: I didn't know that.

L: Yes. And they worked for him at NYA. And Lyndon did a wonderful job with that, building all the roadside parks. Every time you stop and have a picnic at one you must thank him.

G: Well, let me ask you about setting up the office. You got the office in the Littlefield Building. Was there at issue whether or not to locate it in Austin as opposed to San Antonio where the WPA headquarters were?

L: No. Lyndon, I didn't know that San Antonio was a contender for it. He just said he needed offices in Austin, and I said, "I'll ask Bob to do it," because I knew him so well.

G: Did he try to get you to work for him?

L: No. Oh, no. I had my good job. You know, later he did want me to come to Washington, but I never--

G: I had heard that one of the first things he did when he got back to Austin was to go see Jimmie Allred who was then governor. Do you recall that? Is that [true]?

L: Well, when Lyndon ran later and had his picture made between President Roosevelt and Jimmie Allred, they were close friends. Then

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I remember when Governor Allred--I don't remember which year, but I think it was after I moved to Henderson, there was a race for the United States Senate, and it was Governor Allred and Dan Moody, wasn't it?

G: Dan Moody and W. Lee O'Daniel. 1942.

L: Yes. And I was for Governor Moody. I remember Bird and Lyndon called me and asked me to be for Allred. I knew Governor Allred, but I really liked Governor Moody's politics better.

G: Well, he had a lot of support in this area, didn't he?

L: Yes, he did, and was more conservative. But O'Daniel beat everybody just like when Colonel [Ernest O.] Thompson ran against Bill McCraw for governor. And then at the end, W. Lee O'Daniel swamped them both and Colonel Thompson said, "Well, I did what I started out to do, beat Bill McCraw."

G: Did you have any other contact with him when he was NYA director, when LBJ was?

L: No. They had a house out beyond the University that had been Dr. [Robert] Montgomery's.

G: On San Pedro.

L: Yes. Dr. Montgomery had gone to Washington to be a brain truster. They had Lass and me out for dinner, and I believe Aunt Effie was there.

G: Yes. That's right. Can you describe the evening?

L: Oh. Wonderful, wonderful house. Good dinner. We had a good time I remember. And I think they were happy living there.

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G: Well, were you in Austin much of that time? I guess you were if you were still working.

L: Yes.

G: When did you move to Henderson, what year?

L: In 1936.

G: I see. Okay. Well, was Mrs. Johnson happy to be back in Austin?

L: I think she was. She loved Austin.

G: Did she have any role in the NYA experience that you recall?

L: No. And I don't remember what all she did to pass her time. I think she joined a bridge club, and I thought it was so awful, because I really thought anybody who played bridge, you know, it was a waste of time. I later changed my mind. It's fun. It sort of keeps your brain active. But at that point, I think--but she enjoyed it.

G: Well, you had moved to Henderson, I guess, by the time he ran for Congress in 1937?

L: Yes. And I didn't work in his campaign.

G: But you did work in the 1941 campaign.

L: Yes.

G: How did that come about? How did you happen to work in the office?

L: Well, I was clerk of the draft board here; it was during the war. And I just took--

G: No, excuse me, it was before the war.

L: Before the war, but the draft board, Selective Service was active.

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G: That's right.

L: We were sending boys to training camps.

G: "Over the hill in October," I think was the expression.

L: But anyway, let's see. Oh, yes. I just said, "Well, I'm taking a leave of absence and going to Austin. Lyndon asked me to."

G: How was the campaign organized, the structure of the headquarters of the staff?

L: Oh, we had an interesting chain of command. John Connally was the top man. He was on the top floor of the Austin Hotel. And Jim Blundell and then a lovely man who had been an assistant attorney general, was his name Dick Waters, I think. I was crazy about him. Then we had cute girls. I've forgotten the woman's name who was head of the woman's [division].

G: Marietta Brooks.

L: No.

G: Julia--

L: Yes.

G: Brydon?

L: Yes, she was the head knocker. And then Jerry Wilke [English].

G: Was Claude Wild active in that?

L: No. He had been in the 1937 campaign.

G: I see. What about Senator [Alvin] Wirtz? What role did he play?

L: Oh, he was the power behind the throne. I think he was the adviser. He was a smart man. You know, very fond of Lyndon.

G: Did you see them together?

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L: No. I think we didn't ever see [him]. I don't think he ever emerged down--we had our office on the mezzanine floor of the hotel.

G: What was your role in that?

L: Oh, I don't know. Just sort of liaison man, and then just getting in touch with people in all the counties.

G: Would LBJ come back from a day's campaigning with names of people to write and send letters to, things like that?

L: Yes. And then Lyndon became ill while he was there, and we all went to Scott and White [Hospital] during that time.

I don't know, we thought we were going to win. We really did and were just so surprised, because we were in there to beat Gerald Mann. It was Gerald Mann and Martin Dies and--

G: O'Daniel and--

L: But there was another man, a fourth man, wasn't there?

G: Well, Dies, O'Daniel, Johnson, and Mann.

L: Mann. But we thought Mann was the candidate we had to beat, you know. But O'Daniel came in. I know Mrs. Stevenson was still living, Faye.

G: Or Ferguson.

L: No. Faye Stevenson. Then I think I saw Governor Jim and I said, "I want you to be for Lyndon." And he said, "He hasn't asked me." That was funny, wasn't it? And let's see, something else. Faye Stevenson and I were good friends, and I said, "Oh, I want Lyndon to win this." And she said, "Well, I love Lyndon, but I love Coke more,

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and I want O'Daniel to win so Coke can be governor." See, Coke was lieutenant governor.

G: Well, now, you had about a five thousand vote lead on Friday or whenever, and by Monday it had evaporated to a deficit of thirteen hundred and eleven votes.

L: There was skullduggery in one of the East Texas counties, I've forgotten which, Shelby.

G: Did a lot of the Dies supporters switch to O'Daniel, do you recall? Did a lot of people vote for O'Daniel so that Stevenson would be governor?

L: I don't remember that. I guess it's logical.

G: Did you ever talk to Miriam Ferguson about her role or Jim Ferguson's role in this campaign?

L: No, I did not. But it was a strange phenomenon how O'Daniel came in and won it.

G: What was LBJ's reaction to this defeat? Do you recall?

L: No, I don't. I'm sure he was disappointed because we had been so hopeful, you know.

G: Of course, he still had his congressional seat.

L: Yes, he was still in Congress.

But then I came on home. I think I came on home a day or two before election day which was May 27, I believe, wasn't it? Isn't that strange that I remember that day? May 27. You know, to get the votes here, but I don't really recall the number of votes.

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G: I want to ask you to recount the story of Erich Leinsdorf coming to the United States.

L: Oh, that wonderful man. Yes, as well as I recall it, I went one summer to Washington to visit Bird and Lyndon, and Lyndon said we were going down into Virginia for a weekend to a beautiful house of a mutual friend of ours. It was a lovely house, and it was a sort of a house party and among the guests was this interesting couple. He was a Viennese, Erich Leinsdorf, who had recently come to the United States from his native Austria, where he had been assistant conductor, assistant to Toscanini at the Salzburg festival. It was there that he met Mr. [Charles] Marsh, who owned the newspapers in Austin and Waco and the Marsh-Fentress papers. Mr. Marsh became interested in Leinsdorf because Hitler was rounding up all the Jews and exterminating them at that time. So Mr. Marsh was a friend of Lyndon's, and he got in touch with him to try to get Erich Leinsdorf brought to this country to save his life. So Lyndon did. I think he had him flown to, I believe, Cuba and then under an immigration quota of Cuba he was able to enter this country. Lyndon and Mr. Marsh had a friend in Austin who owned the theaters there, Mr. Novy--perhaps you knew him, Louis Novy--and he stood as his sponsor and brought Erich to this country.

Erich was and is one of the great conductors in the world. He soon got a job. I believe his first job was with the Met as conductor of the German wing. And so Erich, Mr. Marsh helped him buy a farm in

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Virginia. He named it The Sixth, you know, Beethoven's Sixth, the pastoral. Isn't that darling? We went there.

But he and his wife, Anne, who was a native of New York, were houseguests of this lovely house where we were guests, so we had a good time swimming and playing tennis and riding on the mountain tops and having fun. But Erich was a great man. He didn't claim to be an artist, he claimed to be a laborer. He said, "I labor with my hands," and would hold his hands up. So I was on the board in Dallas for the springing of the Met each season, you know, in the spring, and he knew that I knew Mr. Kramer. Arthur Kramer, Sr. at that time was president of the Metropolitan Opera Board in Dallas. His son Arthur Kramer, Jr. is now. But Erich, when he found out I was from Texas, he said, "Would you ask Mr. Kramer to please schedule the 'Rosenkavalier' so I can come to Dallas and conduct?" So, I don't know that I ever asked Mr. Kramer to do it. But anyway, he has been to Dallas and conducted the "Rosenkavalier."

But he was conductor of various symphony orchestras throughout the United States. I've forgotten at the moment, I believe he's in Boston, isn't he?

G: I think so.

L: Yes, he was in Detroit around various cities. But he was a lovely man, and I never see his picture that I don't recall our happy time together there.

G: Tell me about Charles Marsh.

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L: Well, I would say he was a superman. He was a very powerful man.

A king maker. He made Governor Moody governor.

G: Did he really?

L: He did.

G: How did he do that?

L: Governor Moody was a native of Taylor. He was attorney general, and made an outstanding record as attorney general. I've forgotten the main issues of that period. But Mr. Marsh liked him and ran him for governor and he was elected. And he was a fine governor.

G: Was that primarily supporting him with his newspapers?

L: Yes.

G: Or what did he do to get him elected?

L: I guess newspaper and money.

G: Did they have a falling out?

L: Not that I know of. No. No, Governor Moody served two terms. He was a fine governor. He was succeeded by Governor Miriam.

G: Well, Marsh, I gather, was a New Deal supporter. Is that right?

L: I guess he was. I guess he was a friend of President Roosevelt's.

G: Do you recall that third term issue and the fight between the [John Nance] Garner forces and the pro-Roosevelt forces in 1940?

L: No. I knew Mr. Garner, but I don't remember--I knew there was a bitterness there, because he really was not for Roosevelt's third term.

G: What was LBJ's position here? Do you know? Do you recall?

L: No, I should think he was for Roosevelt.

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G: But they managed, evidently, to secure a delegation that would not oppose Roosevelt.

L: And his third term.

(Interruption)

G: Okay. Carl Estes.

L: Carl Estes was one of the most fabulous men who ever lived in Texas. When he died, it was the passing of an era. He had the greatest funeral I've ever been to in Longview. But he really was a wonderful and a powerful man. The builder of Longview, he brought most of the big industries to Longview: Texas Eastman, LeTourneau and so many others. Lone Star Steel, I think, in the Daingerfield area. But [he was] a powerful man in every respect, molding public opinion, putting out a great newspaper, the Longview Daily News and Longview Morning Journal and also some weeklies in the area, you know, Greggton and around.

G: How would you compare him with Charles Marsh?

L: Oh, Carl was so much more loveable. He was very profane, but his profanity never infuriated you. You know, it was just part of his personality. And he was just fun to be with.

G: Were they each king makers?

L: Yes. But Carl in a more amiable way, and Carl was not ruthless. I should think Mr. Marsh could have been on occasion. You know, he could have been--

G: How about Houston Harte? How did he compare?

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L: He was a lovely man. I knew him when I would visit in San Angelo.

He was a great friend of my friends in San Angelo, the Virgil Cottinghams [?] and the M. D. Bryants, and he wrote that wonderful book, In Our Image. Do you know that?

G: Yes.

L: With Guy Rowe. That was a beautiful book. Carl loved that book and bought stacks of them and gave them to people for Christmas presents. But Houston Harte was a fine man. I guess he's dead now.

G: He is. Tell me about Carl Estes and that campaign in Philadelphia.

L: Carl Estes was a friend of the Pews, P-E-Us, who owned Sun Oil Company. They, I think, were dissatisfied with the Democratic regime in Pennsylvania and wanted to change and elect a Republican, and they knew Carl's power as a press man, and so they had known him in Austin during the oil, the proration fights and all that. Some of them lived in Dallas--Jack Pew--but the main, big Pews lived in Pennsylvania. So they had Carl come up and handle the publicity for Mr. James, Arthur James. Anyway, Mr. James, Governor James, was elected and Carl had all the patronage of the whole state. He had a suite at the Bellevue-Stratford Hotel in Philadelphia that he always referred to as the wagon yard. Then he had a suite in the executive mansion in Harrisburg. So he stayed there throughout Governor James' tenure.

Then later he came back to--I don't know whether he'd already bought the Longview papers or not. He had been publisher of the Tyler paper that his wife, Sarah Butler [?], had owned, but then

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he and Sarah were divorced. Then he came to Longview and he bought the Longview papers.

G: Well, now, did he support Lyndon Johnson in 1941? Or did he support--?

L: Oh, yes, I think he did. Because, yes, as I remember, he knew Bird. He liked Bird really better than he did Lyndon, I think. I don't know. He may have supported Lyndon because of his friendship with Bird.

G: I wanted to ask you about LBJ's experiences overseas and his visit with [Douglas] MacArthur. Do you recall what he told you about that?

L: No, he gave me a picture of him, I think taken at a map or something in Melbourne when he was a lieutenant commander and went to the navy, I think it was in 1942, wasn't it? I believe. And he told me he was sent to Australia to keep check on General MacArthur.

G: This is in President Roosevelt's behalf?

L: Yes.

G: For political--?

L: Probably. Maybe President Roosevelt thought General MacArthur was becoming too powerful politically. Which he really was. You know, Truman was jealous of him, too.

G: Now, what was Carl Estes' position in the 1948 campaign?

L: I don't remember whether he was for Lyndon or for Governor Stevenson, Coke Stevenson, that is. Not Adlai. But I really don't remember.

G: But he was basically a Republican.

L: I was for Lyndon and my husband was for Coke Stevenson. He'd served

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under him as speaker of the house and thought he was the greatest man who ever lived. He really loved him.

G: How could someone like Carl Estes, who I guess was nominally a Republican--he did support [Thomas] Dewey, didn't he, in later races?

L: I think so.

G: How did a Democrat like Lyndon Johnson get his support in an election?

L: Well, I think it was because he was a personal friend of Bird's.

G: I see.

L: I really do.

G: That's a good point.

L: He adored her.

G: Was she active in getting people like Estes to support Johnson?

L: Oh, yes, she worked at it. And Julia Acker. Julia was working for Carl, but he just let Julia go and work in the Johnson headquarters, I think.

G: Anything else on East Texas politics?

L: Politics. Not that I recall at the moment. But I think we've talked enough. (Laughter)

[End of Tape 1 of 1 and Interview I]

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