INTERVIEW II

DATE: October 5, 1979

INTERVIEWEE: GENE LATIMER

INTERVIEWER: MICHAEL L. GILLETTE

PLACE: Mr. Latimer's residence, Denton, Texas

Tape 1 of 2

G: You mentioned in that interview with David McComb that your first glimpse of LBJ was when he came in to teach the class. Would you contrast his style of teaching and coaching to that of his predecessor, I think it was G. Preston Smith.

L: His predecessor was G. Preston Smith. Smith was a very plump, red-faced man, who apparently belonged to a very old school of teaching speech. He tended to try to teach the students how to be bombastic and be loud, as if they were up on a podium without a microphone speaking to a thousand people. This was so different when the Chief came in. His style was always from day one, "Act like you're talking to those folks. Look one of them in the eye and then move on and look another one in the eye. And always be conversational. Never be anything but conversational." This made me later understand one reason that he was so effective in dealing with groups of people, small groups, whereas for some unknown reason, as we all know, he was never anywhere near like that on television. He just came across as being stiff.

But from this style which he had, if you contrast it with Smith, it would be totally different. That was one reason, I suppose, that

when he immediately tried to convert all of us to his style, I sort of rebelled. I think one day I said something to him, maybe like, "Well, that's not the way Mr. Smith used to tell us to do it," because we thought we were pretty good, you know. I remember that he didn't say anything, but after we had won the city meet and the district meet and we had come within one vote of winning the state interscholastic championship at Austin, after he had gotten over losing by one vote--which took a little while--he asked me if I thought that--"Do you reckon I know as much about this as G. P. Smith?" He obviously didn't think very much of the way we were taught.

G: Can you trace his own interest in debate? Do you think his mother had anything to do with it, or his Uncle George? Did he ever talk about his own experiences debating in college or anything of this nature?

L: No. I know, of course, that he did. Looking back afterwards, we've all read a lot about him, but I really didn't know anything at all about his college background until after I got out of high school.

G: How about Professor [H. M.] Greene? Did he ever talk to you about Professor Greene or his influence on him?

L: Not about his influence, no. When he got in Washington, that's the first time the Greene name ever came up. In many, many things relating to himself, he just didn't talk to me or L. E. Jones about personal matters, or about official matters for that matter, because I think that he had--I couldn't figure out for a long time. I think I know now. He was so single-minded in not wanting us to get off of

the track of the job that he had for us to do that he did not want us to be frittering away our time talking about something that we didn't have any need to know. He was always that way unless it was something [about us]. We didn't talk about personal things unless he was talking about my personal things, in which case he'd get right down to the nitty gritty real fast. But he was this way with almost everyone that I would say he dominated, because we were dominated. We didn't really feel that we were, because when we had real needs and something would really happen and we were frustrated, or something had happened back home or something like that, he was always the one to call us in and make it all right when you really needed something and you were at your wits' ends.

G: Now the public speaking class was separate and distinct from the debate team, is that right? The debate team was an extracurricular activity?

L: Yes.

G: What did you do in the public speaking class?

L: I don't think that I did anything except practice the debate question, as I recall. The first year the debate question was about Governor [Ross] Sterling's proposal for a highway system in Texas. So you'd just keep on acquiring information. He could never tell us that we had enough information. You could work in school on it, but after school every day there was practice, and I would practice. But if we didn't have practice--there were some days we didn't--then it was the city library down by the city hall. I don't know if it's still

there or not. But we would go down there--Marjorie [Nelson] and I together--and we would be there two and three hours just trying to get information, more and more and more, about whatever the subject was for that year, the subject for debate.

G: So the public speaking class was, in effect, a class in debate?

L: For me.

G: How about for the students?

L: For the others he had them each make speeches, make talks. He would sit in the back of the room in one of the student's empty chairs and make notes on their speech, or maybe not if he had a lot of them, too many speeches, then he would make little notes, and after it was over he would chew them out then and tell them what was wrong. I shouldn't say chew them out, but he would review what they had said and would tell them what they did do that they should not have done. I don't know, back that far I don't remember ever having read about such things as eye control in speaking and so on.

G: Did he have a textbook that he used?

L: No, I don't remember any textbook.

G: I have read that he would have students read famous speeches, in particular some of Joe Bailey's speeches.

L: Joe Bailey.

G: Or Jim Ferguson's too. Do you remember?

L: Well, he was a great admirer of Ferguson's, of course, and also of Senator Bailey, but I don't remember much about his talking to a class about politics.

G: But do you remember reading those types of speeches, though?

L: No, no. I don't say that they didn't but I just don't recall.

G: Okay. Did he encourage all the students to join the debate team or go out for it, or was this a more select group?

L: Well, as I recall, I don't think he really encouraged them to because my guess is that he didn't want to encourage them to do something and then drop them. It seems to me, I remember in the case of Cesar Ortiz--I think after he would hear a few talks and readings and things like that, that he would pick out two or three that he thought might [work out]. You see, it wasn't only debate, it was extemporaneous speaking and declamation and something else and debate that they had the contest in at the interscholastic level.

G: Was he interested in the others as well as in debate?

L: Oh, yes.

G: Really? You always hear about debate rather than extemporaneous--

L: That's right. There was more work to debate, of course. Extemporaneous speaking was not emphasized. Declamation was something that you just sort of learned it, like Cesar learned Patrick Henry's "Give me liberty or give me death." It's just pounded in your ears ad infinitum and that was it. But he did put most of the emphasis on debate, I suppose because at the high school level that is a little more important than declamation.

G: Did he upgrade the debate program there at Sam Houston?

L: Well, I do know that when he came there and took G. P. Smith's place, I was already on the debate team but Sam Houston High School had

never won anything. So I think it's evident that he helped upgrade it, all right. Actually, he upgraded it within the school itself. Students didn't even know we had a debate team. But after his first either semester or year--he was there three semesters--after his first go-round, we were more important than the football team.

G: How did he do this?

L: I don't know. I don't know how he did most of the things he did. He didn't tell me. I just know that there was a certain pattern to things. I know that he could, by talking, get people to do things that they would under ordinary circumstances never think of doing.

G: Well, one was publicity I suppose, is that right?

L: Publicity. At that time there was a newspaper called the Houston Press and it had an editor named Mefo, at least that was [his by-line]. He was really M. E. Foster, I think, but he wrote a column and he used to sign it Mefo.

My parents were going through the Depression and money was pretty scarce. L. E. Jones, somehow or other, got enough money to buy him a suit. The Chief always wanted us to look good. I had a cousin who was about a foot taller than I was, and mine was cut down and baggy. I don't know whether this is why he did it or not, but he went over and talked to M. E. Foster, and he got Foster to put up I think it was a hundred dollars for the best debater, or maybe there were two of us. I think I got fifty dollars of it, because only high school was involved, you see. So the paper came

out with pictures and the Mefo Award; you know, it was going to be an every year type of thing. I don't think it was, but I got a new suit out of it. I don't know but what that suit made him do it, but I doubt it because he was always very interested in publicity.

G: Why do you think he went to M. E. Foster instead of--

L: Oscar Holcombe? [mayor of Houston]

G: Yes.

L: I don't know, because Holcombe was a liberal. Everyone thought he was, you know, that he was sort of a purple-faced liberal.

G: But I wonder if he had ties with Foster in addition to--

L: I don't think he did. I think he just walked over there cold one day and asked him to remember something to this effect, that maybe I asked him about it or something. He could do that. We didn't know how he did it and what he said. You'd get some indication when he called <u>you</u> in and he was going to get <u>you</u> to do something you didn't want to do or you never thought of. Why, it sounded like you'd rather do that than get the croix de guerre.

G: Did he also get the principal, Mr. [W. J.] Moyes, to do things for the debate team or give the debate team things? Can you recall anything there?

L: Well, Mr. Moyes was a very reserved type of man, absolutely opposite to the Chief. I didn't notice that they were immediately on a buddy-buddy basis, but he saw to it that every teacher, including Mr. Moyes and the Assistant Principal--I don't recall his name right now [Loescher], but first the assistant principal got interested--I guess he

wanted it to go up the chain of command. And then Mr. Moyes got interested.

There was a lady named Verner Benton--you've probably run into her name--who was a teacher. She was also in charge of the activities of the Black Battalion, which was the group of girls with a special uniform like the Dallas Cowboy Cheerleaders. Sam Houston High School at that time was built around a sort of a half of a block, and it had a very large area in the middle. Every day those girls would go out there to practice marching and they would have their uniforms on usually. They were really the creme de la creme of the girls in the high school, and it was supposed to be quite an honor to get in there.

So the Chief, I recall, went to see Miss Benton. She was a lifelong spinster so far as I know. She was at the reunion several years ago. He had her so sold on things that he promoted her into having the Black Battalion, her activity group, have a banquet for the debate team, and that's the one that Welly Hopkins came down to speak to. That was with Verner Benton. He'd dreamed that up and had her do the leg work and get out the invitations all printed and big deal. It appeared spontaneous that they were doing this, that they had gotten the speaker and had gotten all of the [arrangements]. It was a big banquet deal. He happened to be the teacher of this debate team instead of the prime mover of the whole affair.

G: He invited Pat Neff to that, I understand. Do you remember that?

L: No.

G: Welly Hopkins came though, didn't he?

L: Welly was the principal speaker; he was on the program. I've got the program around here someplace.

G: I gather that LBJ admired Welly Hopkins greatly.

L: Oh, yes.

G: Did he talk about him a lot?

L: No, but you know of course one time he put us all in a car and took us down to South Texas to debate for practice.

G: Do you want to tell me about that trip?

L: Well, when we were in school there we practiced against each other in debating. Then before the actual contest business, he would have us practice against the other teams in the other three high schools I think there were then. But that wasn't enough, and somehow or other he decided that what was needed was to go on a tour and debate all the potential teams that we might meet in Austin at the state meet, for practice I suppose and maybe a little education for all of us. There was L. E. Jones and Marjorie Nelson and Myrtle Lee [Robbins] Kamin and me and him.

G: So this was the second year, is that right?

L: Yes. Well, no, I'm not real sure whether it was the first year or the second.

G: If it was the first, then wouldn't it have been Margaret Epley and Evelyn Reed.

L: Yes. Yes. The reason I know it was Marjorie is because we went through San Antonio and stopped there to debate the boys at one of the high schools there and Marjorie had an aunt or some relative there. Somehow or other she went to see her but she came back and got in the car after it was all over the next morning and maybe she stayed all night with her aunt, I don't know. We usually stayed all night with the debaters' families. But the reason I know it was Marjorie is because the following morning we were all driving down the highway going someplace on the road and all of a sudden we started smelling something that was very fragrant. Marjorie started turning scarlet and the Chief smelled it and said, "What in the world is that?" It turned out that her aunt, I think it was, had given her a bottle of wine to take to her mother--her mother was French--in Houston and the bottle had busted. Marjorie never took a drink in her life I don't guess. Especially, I know she hadn't up until then. It was just that the Chief ribbed her about it and everybody else all the way home.

G: Was this when you went to Pearsall or was that on another trip?

L: No, this is when we went to Pearsall. We went down to South Texas. We went to San Antonio, we went to San Marcos, stayed all night with his folks there.

G: Can you recall that evening in San Marcos? His father was there?

L: Yes. I remember that--I think the whole family was there. I know that the first time I saw his father, he was lying down in the

bedroom. His father was pretty bald, you know. I don't know whether he dipped snuff or chewed tobacco, but underneath his his bed was a tin can. His daddy was spitting in the tin can. Josefa was about my age. We were waiting for dinner to be cooked so we could all eat together, and Josefa asked me, "Do you want to get in the car and drive around?" I said, "Sure." So we got in the car--and of course, this was during Prohibition--she had a short pint of booze. We drove out in a cornfield someplace and stopped, and we thought that was the most daring thing in the world to drink that booze. We did get a little tipsy, all right. We got worried about coming back to dinner. We were only worried about the Chief smelling it on us, not about her mother or daddy or anybody else. But we were scared to death he was going to notice it. But we did sit down to dinner. I know his father was at the head of the table. It was a large table. I don't think Sam Houston was there, I don't recall him, but I believe all the girls were there, and Mrs. Johnson.

I don't recall the specific subjects discussed but I do know that he and his father got to arguing about politics. There was some other occasion, I don't know when it was, that I was there, and it seemed like every time he'd meet his daddy they would have an argument, friendly argument, about politics. He seemed to like to try to outdo his father in whatever it was about. And he did. But they'd both get pretty loud about it. They weren't mad at each other, but he was just trying to diagram this thing out

for his father and saying, "Now, you know it's this way and this way." No one else did any talking much except him and his father, and maybe there'd be somebody else saying, "Pass the gravy."

G: Did you see any similarities in their styles of argument?

L: No, no. His father was rather quiet. He wasn't bombastic.

G: By implication LBJ was.

L: Yes, just the opposite. He was very involved. He would never talk about anything that he wasn't completely involved in, or it wasn't worth talking about, regardless of what the subject was.

His mother--you know, a lot of people have such ridiculous ideas about his mother. His mother was a wonderful lady, but they have given entirely too much emphasis to the psychology, and all this business about his mother's [influence], his having a need to please his mother, something that affected his psyche in some way.

G: You didn't see that at the time?

L: Never. As a matter of fact, I know--you remember Doris Kearns' book [Lyndon Johnson and the American Dream], that's the craziest thing in the world. She must be absolutely out of her mind. She talks about that relationship and the letters and so on. Well, what she didn't know was that he never had time to write his mother from Washington. That was my job. And Doris Kearns went over to the LBJ Library and read all those old letters. I was assigned every week to write a two-page letter to his mama and tell her everything that was going on about--you know, a family letter, like I'd write to my own mother. And he'd sign it and away it would go.

G: It would be a typewritten letter, is that right?

L: Yes. Now his mother did write him very often. Of course, as far as I know I read all of her letters, and they were the letters of an educated lady who loved her son very much and was very interested in him obviously. It wasn't only his mother, because he tried to get something out of everyone if he thought it was any good. He would ask his mother to write him something about what she might think about something, and she would go to tremendous efforts. I know that she kept a scrapbook probably bigger than the one in the LBJ Library of everything that ever came out about him.

G: Did he ever receive letters from his father?

L: As far as I know, no. I've never seen one.

G: You described during that evening what seems like, rather than trying to please his mother, more or less a competition with his father.

L: Well, you see, I think there was something like that in there because his father really--I don't say that his mother didn't have a keen, incisive mind, but his father seemed to me always to be the politician in the family. Winning an argument for him was just something to be enjoyed, but first you have to win it. There was a spirit of competition between him and his father insofar as knowledge about who was going to get elected, who was doing this and who was doing that at the state level, local level, every level.

G: Did his father seem proud of him?

L: Well, his father didn't live too long, and I didn't get the opportunity to know his father. I'm sure his father never got an opportunity to know

me. But I'm sure that he was proud of him. He was more reserved about emotions than the mother. The whole family is pretty emotional in one way or another, including him, of course. But his father seemed to be rather reserved.

G: Did you notice, particularly during the course of the argument, any differences in political philosophy--if one was more conservative than the other or anything?

L: I didn't pay [that close attention]. I listened to him talk all the time, you know, every day, all day. If I'm not listening to him, I'm talking so he can tell me what I'm doing wrong. So that's why I just know that they were talking about political matters and I didn't know any political figures. I didn't even know the mayor of Houston, I imagine.

G: You mentioned that one year the topic had to do with the highway program. I just wonder if, since his father had been involved in state government, I think had worked with the highway department at one time, if he got any information from his dad on that?

L: No, I wouldn't think so, because the subject is set for the whole state there in Austin, so far as I know. There is so much material available that I doubt that he would try to get some information about it from his father. His father, after all, had this job sort of as a way to keep the family together. It was just a job to try to be on a payroll during the Depression I think. Of course he was later on the Texas Railroad Commission and I think he was in the legislature a time or two.

G: Anything else on that visit to San Marcos? Did you see the campus?

L: No. Well, I think maybe Josefa and I did in going by. But I remember the house itself, a green frame house, two-story and not lavish by any means, but adequate.

It's something that I thought was [unusual], I remembered it because it seemed a little uncommon to me at the time. I remember when he left and when he saw his father, he kissed his father and when he left he kissed his father. He kissed him on top of his head. He was bald-headed. But this was his way. There was nothing unmanly about it, because I think that's probably one reason I kissed my father. I'd never come in the house without kissing my mother and dad, or leaving. That's the way he was.

I don't at all want to give the impression that he downgraded his mother, because he obviously looked up to her, and certainly he felt [proud of her] because he thought education was just about the most important thing in life for someone who was trying to get ahead. And his mother was educated, at least in those days.

G: Anything else on the trip to Pearsall? He had taught there I think for a month or so.

L: I think that's where Hollis Frazer was from. I'm not sure about that. Yes, I am sure about it. I think Hollis Frazer was from Pearsall.

G: Where did you stay at Pearsall?

L: I don't know where he stayed. I'm not sure whether he stayed in the same house or not, but I stayed--and L. E. did, too--at the house of one of the debaters.

G: One of the Pearsall debaters, I guess?

L: Yes. That's what we did at all places so we wouldn't have to stay in a motel or spend any money.

G: How about Carrizo Springs?

L: Carrizo Springs. . . . I just don't know. As to the trip itself, I remember that we were getting up fairly close to the competition for the city and the district, state, so on. It made us all feel real good that there wasn't a team that we met that we thought had anything like the information that we had or was as well coached. He trained us I guess just like a football coach. He wanted our spirits to be high. He wanted us to always be on the upbeat. Later in life he didn't have time for so much of that. But he took the time because right from the day he got there I guess he decided he wanted--"Well, what do I want to do here? I want to win the state championship."

G: How was he able to persuade members of the team to put that much after-hours time into their debate work?

L: I don't know, but he never had any strain with me or the rest of us. He had lots of ways to do it. There were a million ways I guess. He could sort of make you ashamed that you didn't put in the time. Other times he'd brag on you and make you want to go do some more. He liked to pit one against the other. "So-and-so said you hadn't even read about that, you don't even know that. Now you get down to that library and find out something. There's no use trying to get up before a bunch of people and do this when you don't

know as much as so-and-so." So he had a variety of ways to get you going and keep you on the ball. He just did it naturally, it came to him instinctively, I'm sure, because no one before or since has ever motivated me like he could motivate. I guess if he told any of us to go get up on a roof of a building and jump off, we'd all pile up there and do it.

G: Was he interested in your other classes, your non-public speaking classes, your non-debate classes?

L: Well, not particularly. I'd just say he wasn't. He wanted to be sure that we didn't flunk because I guess we couldn't [debate if we flunked]. He wanted us to make good grades all right, but he wanted us to use any spare time we had on his class. I know Mrs. Ball that we mentioned before we started here taught me history. I was strictly a C- student and she came to him. She was pretty independent. She'd been there for years and years. She said something to him about, "You're taking up all of Gene's time. He doesn't have time to study history. He's going to flunk!" I wasn't privy to this, but she told me this in later years. I know that it happened because I remember that after they had talked a while, she not only didn't say anything else about my grade, but she would stay after school herself and come down and help him evaluate our speeches and our debates. She became the biggest fan that the team had. There's a telegram in here someplace from her to us at Austin, wishing us all good luck.

G: What do you think he said to her?

L: I don't know! I don't know how he did all these things. She thought that if I tried I could make a better grade, and she took a personal interest in me for some reason or other. As a matter of fact, before I left Sam Houston High, I told her, "All right, for one semester now I'm going to make an A, but no more! That's all I'm going to do!" So I made the A in history. I said, "Now, I just did it to show you I could, and now I've got to go back and do some debating before the Chief gets on me."

So I don't know how he could pull off these things. There wasn't any set pattern, because obviously the ways he kept all of us in line, got us to do things, were always different. So I don't know. Somehow or other he could size people up immediately and knew what would work with them.

G: Was he interested in sports at all?

L: Not really. Not at all. Only when he needed to be interested in it momentarily. He wasn't interested in sports.

G: Could you earn school letters for debate as you might for basketball?

L: No. If you did, you couldn't have a sweater like a football player or basketball player. I'm not sure, though, about that because maybe he could.

G: That seems like something he might have been interested in.

L: That sounds like something he wouldn't have passed up, in retrospect. I just don't remember.

G: There was a Mrs. Scott who was a teacher there, do you remember her?

L: What did she teach, do you remember?

G: No. Perhaps history, I'm not sure.

L: Well, Uncle George taught history. I don't know whether they had another history teacher or not.

G: Did LBJ have as much interest in the girls' debate team as he did the boys'?

L: Oh, yes.

G: Did he?

L: Yes, sir. He wanted to win both of them. He didn't want anybody to lose.

G: Did he push the girls as hard as he did the boys?

L: Oh, sure. He pushed everybody he was around to do what he felt he wanted them to do.

G: In driving around Texas I guess five of you would go.

L: Yes.

G: And would you take his car?

L: I've thought about that and I don't know who that car belonged to. I guess he had one. I believe that at that time he was living with Uncle George, at least for part of the time. But I believe while he was there he got Bill Deason a job at the Federal Land Bank, and I think he got Sam Houston a job over there. So it may be that he and Bill did something about a car. I just don't know. We may have borrowed someone's.

G: I think in your earlier interview you mentioned, as you were driving across Texas, singing and joking and practicing debate.

L: Yes.

G: Do you want to elaborate on that?

L: Well, not really, except that all his life I guess--and I didn't think of it then, but I think of it now--he seemed to abhor being where there was not conversation or voices or a news program or something for him to listen to and be involved in. I've driven from Washington to Texas a couple of times with him, and he's always got to have something going. He's not going to sit there at the wheel and just keep his eyes on the road and not say anything. He used to talk to people if he didn't like their driving. He'd lean out the window and yell at them, honk the horn and tell them to get off the road, this kind of business. As a matter of fact, we were going through one town one time and someone wouldn't go by and he got on the horn and he went by. As he went by he said, "You son of a bitch," and we just kept on going. This guy, he got teed off, so he hit the foot feed, and he caught up with us and he passed us just as we were getting out of town. And he leaned out and said, "You son of a--", you know, like that. He just kind of grinned and we went on.

But he couldn't stand just to do nothing.

G: Would you generally talk about school or other teachers and his life there, or were you joking?

L: He liked to joke, but not in the sense of telling a dirty joke or something like that. I never heard him tell one in my life. Oh, I'm sure he knew and has told many. But he was sort of a father figure to me all his life, in addition to my own father, of course.

G: He was a great mimic.

L: Oh, he could mimic anyone, their voice, their mannerisms. And when he'd tell stories they were invariably nothing short and snappy, he liked to elaborate on them, set the scene. The more he told them the better they got. I've heard some of them maybe a year after it, and they changed up. It's three times as long, but it's better. He liked to kid you, he liked to kid us and play us kind of one against the other.

G: Let's talk about Uncle George.

L: I don't know very much about Uncle George.

(Interruption)

G: He did live with Uncle George and Uncle George's sister, is that right?

L: You see, I really didn't know that Uncle George was living with his sister. That's how little [I knew]. He didn't feel that was necessary for us to know, or even that he was living with Uncle George. I didn't know he was living there.

G: You never went over there in the whole time?

L: No. I haven't the faintest idea where he lived. I do know that he would sometimes say to his class, "I'm going up to see Uncle George," on the next floor of the school. But Uncle George didn't come down

there. I don't know whether he was told to stay up there or not, but he didn't want to mix Uncle George up I think with us in his class. I think, as I say in hindsight, he wanted to be the only one in that class and he didn't want any outside influences unless he brought them in. Like he brought in Mrs. Ball to get her off of his back and get her into the act, and involve other people as he wanted to involve them. It's apparent to me now he didn't want Uncle George involved probably because Uncle George might not quite agree, might make some suggestion to him. After all, he was an older man and he might think it natural that he would follow Uncle George's suggestions and so on. If he made them it was never in front of us. Uncle George was not a magnetic character by any means. He was a nice man, grey-haired, who taught history. But with no similarity at all to LBJ.

G: Anything more on the relationship between the two?

L: No, I don't know anything else.

G: Any other teachers there that LBJ was close to?

L: I remember the name of that assistant principal now. It was Loescher, L-O-E-S-C-H-E-R. And Dr. W. J. Moyes, Mrs. Ball, Verner Benton.

(Interruption)

G: How about this banking course that he would teach? He, in the evenings I understand, would teach some group of bankers, some night school. Do you know anything about that?

L: I've never even had it mentioned to me but it seems to me that there was something there for a little while. I think he did perhaps teach something but I don't have any details at all about it. I can't even confirm it for sure.

G: I've also got a note that he would go up to Austin and lobby with the legislature for bills affecting teachers. Do you recall this at all?

L: No, I don't. The only time he could do it I should think would be when school was in recess or something like that. I don't believe he ever missed a day of school.

G: Did you have any problems when you would miss class to go on one of these trips?

L: Oh, no, no. Not if I was with him.

G: Did this require any special doing on his part to enable you [to go]?

L: I would think so.

G: You don't recall any specifics though?

L: No.

G: Well, would you talk about the state championships? That was a tournament, I assume.

L: Yes. The first year L. E. Jones was the captain of the team of the debaters. He was a year ahead of me in school. I don't recall now. I know that in the city we beat--I don't know exactly how it was handled, but we used to always try to take dead aim at San Jacinto High School, because one of the debaters was Johnny Crooker. His father wanted his boy to really win everything in debate, and

Johnny studied awful hard on it, too. I don't know whether you know or not, but his father was with a large law firm then, and one of the big firms in Houston right now, is Crooker's--

G: Fulbright, Crooker, [Freeman and Bates].

L: Well, that's Johnny Crooker. Johnny was short like me, and he wore dark horn-rimmed glasses. We always liked to beat Johnny because he was so earnest about it, and his old man wanted him to win so desperately. San Jacinto was the high-toned part of town and Sam Houston was the middle class or lesser high school. We called them the tea-sippers out there, for some unknown reason. Seems to me that we beat San Antonio at the state that year. Then I don't remember how many times we debated, but I do recall that we lost in the finals to Sherman I believe, or McKinney. I believe it was Sherman, Texas high school. We lost by one vote.

Usually L. E., as the more impressive looking of the pair, had the job of starting out.

G: He was the first affirmative.

L: He was the first, yes, and I was the second. Also there's a final summation. L. E. usually did that. He had a rebuttal and I had a rebuttal. Well, the Chief didn't trust me too much in refutation I think because once in a while he would say, "You can't win by being that sarcastic. Don't be sarcastic to your opponents. Be nice to them. Show that they're real wrong, but don't be so sarcastic to them." I got a lot of kick out of being sarcastic to them. I thought that was great, to run them down.

But then, in any event, we lost by the one vote. When he got back from upchucking in the men's room and we all got back together, he was pretty resigned to it although I know it killed him, made him sick at his stomach. But I remember he used to--even, I don't care where we were debating, especially at the state, but he would sit back in the audience, and with his height, you know, you would immediately pick him out. He would gesture to us. It's a wonder they didn't throw him out for all this. If he thought you were doing well, proceeding along a cogent path of argument, he would nod his head and smile. He'd urge us on back there in the audience. We kept our eyes on him because that way we knew when we were doing well. Sometimes he'd frown like that: "Better get through with this part of it and get on to something else." But he coached us from that vantage point also.

G: I gather he even coached the audience. He would perhaps sound very astonished.

L: Oh, this is the way he would do to us. I don't know about the audience.

G: Eyes open wide. Sit up back--

L: Yes. Well, he did this all of his life. He really would be very extravagant about it so that you couldn't miss it. "Is that so?" He'd raise his eyebrows real high. He could crease his forehead even then very well when he was frowning.

G: Do you recall if you took the affirmative or the negative when you lost by one vote that year?

L: I remember his saying he wished I'd done the final summary or whatever it was then. I don't remember.

G: Did he think you'd won?

L: Yes. We did, too. You know how they'd hold you in suspense like it's a prize fight or something. If it's close they only give one this side, one for the affirmative, one for the negative and then there's the last vote. I'm sure he thought we won it by far.

G: Did he try to console you?

L: Well, I don't know. He did not chide us, I know that. Because that's the way he was about things. If it was over and done with, you couldn't change it.

G: It didn't stay on his mind and he didn't talk about it on the way home?

L: No, not that I recall. He was always that way. He lost an election. You will have heard many times that he put that aside. He didn't fret over it. He went on to the next one. He didn't beef about it. I'm sure now that one reason is that it's bad politics to beef about it unless you can perhaps change the final outcome.

G: Did you have any other indication that he was really distraught by the loss other than the fact that he was physically sick?

L: I just don't remember. We drove over there and I have no real recollection of coming back.

G: Where did you stay in Austin during the tournament?

L: I think we stayed down at the hotel there on Congress. It seems to me it was the same hotel where he had campaign

headquarters when he first announced for Congress. No, wait a minute. Yes, that was the first one, all right. It was later over in that old building that Brown and Root at one time occupied, over in that old residence, that was another campaign.

G: The girls' team didn't fare as well as yours.

L: Well, no, they didn't. I don't remember who beat them. Well, I just don't remember.

G: You were going to say something, though weren't you?

L: I was just remembering. The second year T. J. Foye and I got beat by one vote, the first one we had. But it was by San Antonio, who won the state championship. So we sort of felt like, well, we must have been fairly okay because we lost by one to the state champions. After all, he was with us most of that year, you know, or half of it, for one semester.

G: I guess he left in December, is that right?

L: Yes.

G: Anything on the atmosphere in the debate class? Was it in one of the classrooms?

L: Yes.

G: Did they meet after school?

L: Yes.

G: Every day?

L: No, not every day. I can't be positive about this but I would say probably three times a week. The other days were library days or something like that. The library, as I said a while ago, was over

close to the city hall and it was I guess about six or seven blocks over there. We'd go over there a couple of hours and get home in time for supper.

G: Did he ever go over there with you?

L: I don't remember his going?

G: Well, any indication of how he got that appointment to be [Richard] Kleberg's secretary?

L: You know more about it than I do. I mean, at that time I never--

G: Had he worked in Kleberg's campaign, do you know?

L: Well, I've heard someplace that he had a county or two or something that he was working in. I believe I've heard that, but I don't know for sure. It seems to me that--didn't Welly Hopkins say that he'd helped some in that campaign? That may have been some other member.

G: I don't know.

L: I just don't [know]. You know more about it than I do.

G: You got word of it in Houston, that he had been [hired]. He didn't talk to you about it?

L: No, not until it was all set and he was leaving.

G: Then, what? Did he announce it to the class or did he tell you individually?

L: I don't remember.

G: Was there any sort of going-away party for him?

L: Not that I recall. Not by us, as a class. There may have been by some teachers that I don't know about.

G: Let's see, he went up--

L: I think he must have seen to it that [Hollis] Frazer replaced him. Have you any evidence to that effect?

G: Well, it certainly seems like Frazer. . . .

L: I mean, they both went to San Marcos, same school. You know, if he was going to get out of a job he always wanted to appoint the fellow that followed him. The same way when he was a congressman from the Tenth District. I don't think anybody ever was elected that he didn't name himself. I remember his bringing Homer Thornberry, telling him to come over to his office, "I want to talk to you." That's when Homer became his successor.

G: Was this in Austin or Washington where they talked?

L: Austin. Austin. I think he was from Georgetown, wasn't he?

G: But Homer Thornberry was agreeable?

L: Apparently. He was elected. But if you notice him wherever he was, he wants to not only take the next job himself, but he wants to get other people jobs so that he will have something to say about what's there.

The very best example I can really think of at my level was the Rural Electrification Administration. Do you remember?

G: The REA.

L: The LCRA and the way he ran them. They couldn't have a meeting even unless he was there. He called the meetings. Then somehow or other, perhaps with the exception of the administrator, I think he got everybody at the national level their jobs that was of any

account. You know, they were all killed in a plane crash, all of them, the administrator and his deputies. But he ran the REA.

G: You went to Washington in December of 1932.

L: Right.

G: So we'll pick up again there. I notice that in 1933 he enrolled in--

L: Georgetown [University]?

G: No, it was George Washington [University] the first year.

L: Are you sure?

G: And then he enrolled in Georgetown the fall of 1934.

L: I didn't know he enrolled in George Washington. I mean, if I did I've forgotten it.

G: It was National Law School, I think it was called then.

L: Oh, no, I went there.*

G: Well, so did he.

L: Well, he didn't tell me about it.

G: When did you go there?

L: Well, if you'll stop the machine a minute I'll find out.

(Interruption)

I'm surprised that he would go there unless-- [inaudible]

(Interruption)

G: No, I thought she worked for Kleberg?

L: She worked for either him or Kleberg.

G: Really?

L: One of them.

* Error: I went to Washington College of Law.

G: Well, in any event, let's start with your getting the job. How did you get called to Washington?

(Interruption)

Well, in any event, the indication in your earlier interview was that LBJ brought you to Washington because your girl friend lived up there.

L: Yes, that was the real reason I wanted to go.

G: Did you have a patronage job?

L: Not for the first two months. For the first two months I think you'll find the first month I made fifty-seven dollars, and the second month seventy-five. And the third month I went on patronage in the House post office.

G: Did LBJ run the Kleberg office?

L: Well, for all practical purposes he was the congressman. Mr. Dick did attend most of the Agriculture Committee's meetings. I don't know this but you'll note on that little sketch that the Agriculture Committee is right across from Mr. Kleberg's office. I don't know whether he got that office because of the Chief or not, for convenience.

G: How active was Richard Kleberg as a congressman?

L: I can only judge, you know, because I have some idea of how much time he spent in his office. He lived out at the Shoreham Hotel. The only letters that I can recall his writing were letters dictated on one of the first ediphones, I think, that he would dictate in Spanish to some of his friends in Mexico. These were always very

long and since I knew a little Spanish I had to transcribe them. He didn't do this often, but when he did he went into things fully with whomever he was communicating. It used to take me maybe three hours to transcribe a letter because I didn't know that much Spanish and he was a Spanish scholar. We had a big, two volume Velasco's Spanish Dictionary in the office, and many, many words, he had a perfect pronunciation, but I'd have to look them up in the dictionary. Of course, he never showed it to Mr. Dick, but one of the supreme frustrations, I think, of the Chief's life was that I had to take time out from writing letters into the district for votes and influence and so on, and transcribe these letters of Mr. Dick's and get them out. He complained pretty vociferously to me, not in a complaining way but he just couldn't help it. He would just rail at the whole shebang and try to get me to hurry it up. I couldn't hurry it up. A fourth of the words I'd never heard. He wanted it on Mr. Dick's letter [desk] in case he came back that day to sign it.

He did, at some time or another, find out from Mr. Dick--once in a while he'd have Mr. Dick sign the mail, I think just to let him know how much he was getting out. He'd catch him in there and he'd load up that desk in Mr. Dick's private office with mail, just put hundreds of letters in there for that day to be signed. Mr. Dick would sign maybe fifty or sixty of them and say, "Lyndon, you sign the rest of these. I'll see you later." I think he just wanted him to get an idea of how hard he was working.

G: Would LBJ sign Kleberg's name, or would he sign his own name?

L: No, he signed in almost every case Mr. Dick's name. As I was going to say, at some time or another he must have gone over with Mr. Dick perhaps town by town, county by county, the people that he knew by their first names or what he called them. Because when he signed the mail or when letters were written we always--we kept record of what he called everyone; we had a card on them. When he would sign the mail--of course, Mr. Dick had a signature that was very easy to duplicate--if we had hundreds of letters, why we'd all sign R. M. Kleberg if they were a form-letter type of thing, I guess the hardest thing about his signature was when he'd sign it Dick. He kind of printed it, you know. But the Chief could do that perfectly. and it wasn't all that hard, I guess.

At some time he must have gotten with Mr. Dick and said, "Now what do you call him?" and "Do you call him this?" Sometimes I know that Mr. Dick was so conservative, unless he really knew someone he'd be reluctant to call them by their first name. And the Chief was much more outgoing, so that if he came to know a person himself either personally or where he'd talk to them on the phone or something for Mr. Dick, then we would get into a first-name relationship and it would be "Dear John, how's your wife and kids?" We kept on the card his wife's name and his children's names and how old they were, if possible. So the first thing you'd do when you'd get your mail in is go pull the card on a man if he's not a new correspondent. And most of them are really repeaters. Those you don't know, you'd go pull the card. You had to pull the card anyway, because an entry

had to be made on that card of every letter that was written and the date of it.

G: Did he have a policy then of answering the mail the same day or was this something that came later?

L: Oh. yes. That came from day one.

G: Was that Kleberg's policy or was it LBJ's?

L: You know whose policy it was; Kleberg didn't care one way or the other. He was interested in playing par at the Burning Tree Country Club. No, we had a very definite policy. It was worse than adultery to leave a letter over unanswered. Now you could get it out, if you just had to, by sending them an interim note. Usually I'd think up some lie about, "I just got your letter and all the departments are closed. But I wanted you to know I'm going to get on it the first thing in the morning." And that would just take up about this much space. If we really had to get them out I'd crack out a few of those. On some days you'd get your heavy mail, like Mondays and over the weekend. And we'd have maybe a day or two in there kind of light, so we could sort of judge.

G: When the mail would slack off, did he generate correspondence by, say, sending congratulatory letters?

L: Sure.

G: What would you do there?

L: Well, most of it came out of the papers. We all had to read papers. Of course, he read them for things other than something he could tell us, "I want you to go through here and get all the births."

And all the deaths. We wrote letters of condolences to people we had never heard of. That one seems a little funny to me, but we did nevertheless.

Someone gets an award at the Rotary Club or the Kiwanis Club, we'd write them a letter. Any kind of an award. A fellow who wins a track meet, write him a letter. Any excuse. If a woman--we find out she's pregnant we'd send her a baby book. Certainly when the paper lists the birth we'd write the parents a letter and send them a baby book put out by the government by the millions of copies. We sought for other enclosures that we could use as excuses. I think it was maybe Wright Patman's committee that put out a little bulletin on how Congress worked or maybe your government, something like that. We didn't use it too much because it had someone else's name on it besides Dick Kleberg. It's all right to seek for things that have a department's name on them, but not another member of Congress usually.

G: How about newspapers? Which newspapers did he read for information?

L: He read every single one of them.

G: Every one in the district?

L: Every one of them.

G: How about national or Washington newspapers?

L: Well, I think he read all the Washington papers. I don't think he read the Wall Street Journal or the New York Times at that time. He just didn't have the time.

Now he would leave the office, be gone from the office for an hour or two or three. If he wanted us to know where he could be reached he'd tell us. Otherwise he'd say, "I'll be back after a little while. If Mr. Kleberg calls, tell him this." But he did a lot of visiting, and now of course we know that he was visiting people on the Hill that he could get information or help from, that he was visiting people who had charge of patronage, the doorkeeper, anyone who could be of benefit to running the office better. He visited departments, of course, and came to know a lot of the people.

G: My impression is that a lot of your correspondence and casework included helping veterans with service-connected disabilities.

L: Well, most of it was with veterans who couldn't service connect their disabilities. It is a very hard thing to do, because if they really should be service-connected they probably are service-connected. It is very, very hard to get one service-connected that isn't already. Now, he did get some service-connected all right, but more helpful and more common--well, the ordinary one is that you take it up with them, they reiterate that there's nothing they can do and that's that, and you're awful sorry. Sometimes, however, if a man's receiving 20 per cent disability, times were hard then, you know, the Board of Veterans' Appeals or the office in San Antonio could be prevailed upon to raise the percentage, which in turn raises the disability pay. So, you just don't do this by correspondence. At least he never did it by correspondence. And I personally don't think you can do it by correspondence

unless you've got an open-and-shut case. The American Legion and the DAV [Disabled American Veterans], both organizations represent veterans at hearings and so on, but they have so many it's just their run-of-the-mill work. I think LBJ was very careful to pick those that he thought he could do something about. He's not going to waste his time on one if he's not going to be able to do anything.

G: Any of them in particular that you recall that he was successful on?

L: No, not by name. I can't even know by location except that I know it was done because I can remember even the building in San Antonio where the Veterans' Administration regional office was.

G: Do you recall his help to Arthur Perry when Arthur Perry wanted to get--

L: No, I don't, although I understand that he helped Arthur get something about it so he could get a job. However, it's not something that he would tell me about because Arthur wasn't from that district.

G: I have a note here about a woman named Hinajosa, whose son was detained on the border as an alien. You spoke with her in Spanish and got the case fixed up, and then she confronted Congressman Kleberg later and thanked him, and he had no idea what she was referring to. Do you remember that?

L: No, I sure don't.

G: You were the Spanish speaker of the office?

L: Well, for whatever it was worth. I've been studying on it for the last forty-five years and I realize now I sure didn't know very much.

Your mentioning the border does make me recall that he was very interested in knowing and helping the Border Patrol. He got to be personal friends with several of those, helped them get raises. I don't recall their names, unless Dewey Thom was at one time one of them. He was later postmaster at Corpus Christi. But those fellows down there, they thought he was [influential]. I mean, all through his political life as far as I know--well, I don't know about the last part of it, but when he was in the House I know that he had a good deal of influence, and also in the Senate. I'm sure you've heard of this incident. Someone down on the border at some rodeo or something made some disparaging remark about him--I think he was a senator then, I'm not certain whether it was representative or senator--and this fellow shot and killed him. I think he was a member of the Border Patrol. I don't know whether both of them were drunk or whether the one that got killed was drunk, to make the remark. But some people thought so much of him that they would go to extraordinary lengths to show their devotion to him. That's pretty extraordinary lengths to go, to kill a man.

G: I gather he was also helpful in getting the pension for retired Texas Rangers.

Tape 2 of 2

L: You'd asked me to talk about the time in 1933, I guess. I think that was the year the Twentieth Amendment went into effect, the Lame Duck Amendment. I believe Roosevelt took office in March probably

instead of January, so that Hoover was a holdover there. A couple of weeks ago I just accidentally remembered that while President Hoover was still in office there was an occasion when Mr. Johnson asked me if I didn't want to go over to the White House and meet President Hoover. I'm pretty vague about this, but my recollection is that there must have been a reception for members of the Senate and the House of Representatives, and I believe that Mr. Kleberg did not want to go, had given the invitations to the Chief, and that one of them was for the Congressman and the other was for the Congressman's wife.

There used to be a place downtown in Washington along about where Woodward and Lothrop's department store is, where you could rent evening clothes. I think it was there that we rented a couple of tuxedoes and went over to the White House in a cab. I don't think I had the nerve to get in the receiving line, but my best recollection is that the Chief was in the line, that I watched him shake hands with President Hoover. Someone standing by him apparently had the invitation and introduced him as Representative Kleberg. I'm not positive, but it also seems to me that Arthur Perry, who was the assistant to Senator Tom Connally, also went along but I'm not certain about this. I don't recall anything that was said after the occasion. I did drop a note to Mrs. Johnson to suggest to her that perhaps this was the Chief's first look at the White House and that he may have been sizing it up for future occupancy even then.

G: Anything on LBJ's work with the Agriculture Committee?

L: Let's see, Ewing Thomason [Marvin Jones?] used to be chairman of that committee, I believe. Mr. Johnson then became acquainted with a lady whose name I can't recall, although I saw her when I visited the Capitol some three or four years ago. She was from El Paso. Mr. Johnson and she were friendly. I think she was helpful to him in getting information regarding hearings and other matters pertaining to agriculture and particularly the cattle industry for Mr. Kleberg.

G: She was on the committee staff, is that right?

L: Yes, she was on the committee staff.

G: Okay. I guess his chief interests were cotton and cattle.

L: Well, we know about the cattle all right. And of course if we're talking about Mr. Johnson, he was interested in anything that people of the district were interested in. I recall I hadn't been there but a couple of months when Sam Fore wrote him about freight rates for watermelon, particularly those from Wilson County. The boss entrusted to me the job of drawing up a brief oral presentation to the proper regulatory commission. I spent a good deal of time doing this although he was careful to tell me to do it, quote, "on my own time," unquote, whenever that was. I don't know the outcome of the watermelon case.

G: Let's talk about life at the Dodge Hotel. You roomed there. Did you room with L. E. Jones?

L: No, I roomed with Mr. Johnson first. When L. E. came up he had the next room. There was a shower in between which the three of us shared.

G: Can you describe that room that you shared with LBJ?

L: Well, it had two single beds in it. It was rather small, but it was in a corner basement room. Had there been any windows it would have been facing the front of the Dodge Hotel. One thing about all the basement rooms, nearly, was that the steam pipes for heating the upper rooms were exposed and occasionally there was considerable clanking during the night from the steam pipes.

I had a sort of schedule beginning the first of March of 1933 because I had to get up in time for the first mail delivery from the House post office. So at about four-thirty I was up and at the post office by five. Mr. Johnson came along sometime later, but usually no later than seven-thirty or eight o'clock. Luther Jones used to either go ahead of him up to the office to start opening the mail or occasionally he would walk over with him. Bob Jackson and Arthur Perry usually went over a little bit later. Once in a while we would come back from the office to the Dodge, Bob Jackson and Arthur and L. E. and I and President Johnson. I guess it's about a half a mile from the House Office Building to the Dodge. This is about the only time I ever saw the President engage in a little roughhousing. Once in a while there would be a little wrestling going on but always he seemed to be in a good humor.

G: What time would you generally leave work and head back to the Dodge?

L: Well, it depended on which one you were. If you were I or L. E. and there were still some letters to be answered you ordinarily left when you finished answering the letters.

G: Was there usually a standard time, though, when you would wind things up?

L: No, there was no standard time except that standard time is when you finished answering the mail and he couldn't think of anything else for us to do.

G: How long did that usually take?

L: Well, it takes all day if you're not getting enough mail to keep you there until dark. Then he would always generate some more mail or we could [make cards]. I know that we had to make little cards on letters and county people and things like that. We didn't buy them. The government printing office prints, at no cost to members, white franks, such as the kind you put on a brown package. These come in large perforated sheets that have to be all torn apart in order to have your thousands of cards. So when we were absolutely out of anything to do we could always make some more of these cards by tearing up these perforated sheets or also making new file folders. We didn't buy any file folders since you could get from the folding room as many boxes as you wished of large envelopes which were the same size as file folders. We would simply take a letter opener and cut off the top and use them for file folders. So in this way we didn't have to use our stationery account for file folders and it could be used for other things.

G: When LBJ wanted to communicate with Kleberg would he ever write memos to him?

L: No, I don't recall his ever writing any memos to Mr. Dick. I'm sure that he felt that he wanted to personally talk to him about things. When Mr. Kleberg came into the office he went into his own office and Mr. Johnson would usually pick up several letters and take them in ostensively to seek advice on how to handle them, but I feel fairly confident that he simply wanted to apprise Mr. Dick of what was going on in the district and so on.

G: Was there a certain time in the day when they'd get together and talk about things?

L: No, Mr. Dick had no particular time for coming to the office. Many times he didn't come at all but would try to be at the Capitol by twelve o'clock when the Congress was in session. He was faithful about attending meetings of the Agriculture Committee and made nearly all of those. They have a regular committee day.

G: Where would you eat dinner in the evenings?

L: Well, of course you know about Childs' that was over there. And I'm sure that you know that on Sundays sometimes we would eat at the Dodge Hotel, which had a very fancy dining room. Mr. Johnson, as we all know, was very fond of hot food, and immediately behind Childs' there was a chili joint. We frequently went there. It was always a little too hot for everybody but him.

G: We've often read the stories that he would finish his dinner quickly in order to be able to talk politics while the others were eating.

L: Well, this is true although he certainly did not stop talking politics to eat. He talked all during the meal. There were never any

silences around a table that had him seated at it that I know of except for a momentary pause after the blessing. And he didn't want these to be too long.

(Interruption)

G: There was a Mrs. George at the Dodge Hotel. Do you remember her?

L: Yes, she was a--let's see, didn't she work for Marvin Jones?

G: She may have.

L: I think so. She was a good deal older than Mr. Johnson, at least it seemed so in looking back. But they were friends. I don't quite know why he selected her for a friend. I think it must have been because of the member for whom she worked; that's just a guess.

G: Was she also employed at the Dodge?

L: No, if it's the Mrs. George I'm thinking of, no, she wasn't employed there. She worked at the House Office Building.

G: She did live at the Dodge though, didn't she?

L: I'm not sure.

G: You mentioned when you lived in Corpus that you would stay in a hotel.

L: Yes. I think it was the old Nueces Hotel that's been torn down now, but it was right down by the beach. We had two or three rooms down there. One or two of them were the office and we lived in the other one I believe. They were interconnecting so we didn't have to go far to work, just open the door and you were there.

G: Did you ever go to the King Ranch or spend any time there?

L: I only went once. I don't know why but Mr. Dick and I drove down there once. The reason I remember it is because he asked me if I'd ever shot a deer, we were seeing so many of them. I told him no. The car had two or three guns in it. We saw a man someplace on the ranch and he was a game warden. Mr. Dick told him that I was maybe going to shoot a deer, and if we did we'd come back and get the license to shoot the deer. But we didn't see anything but doe after that. In any event, I didn't need the license.

We did go in the ranch house and I was impressed by its size. It had a high chain-type fence all the way around it, and inside this enclosure were numerous deer that would come up to be fed at the house. We'd go two or three places at the ranch, Mr. Kleberg and I. There were no roads and I remember asking him how he was able to navigate, and he told me that he did it by the windmills. But I think that was the only time I ever went to the ranch.

G: Did LBJ spend much time there?

L: Not that I know of. I'm certain that he spent more time than I did, but since I saw him or knew where he was practically every day, it would probably have been on a Sunday or something like that. I feel sure that he must at some time or other have talked to Bob Kleberg, if for no other reason than to work out some way to handle Mr. Kleberg's bills.

G: Did LBJ handle the personal accounts of Dick Kleberg as well as the congressional business, do you know?

L: We didn't pay any accounts in Washington of Mr. Kleberg's. What they did is just put them all in a box, and about once a year they were sent down to Bob Kleberg at the ranch and paid there. I know that there were merchants occasionally who never heard of the King Ranch and would call the office and want to know when a bill of Mr. Kleberg's was going to be paid since it was overdue. But so far as I know none of them ever got paid [by us].

Mr. Kleberg did carry some money with him. I don't really know how much or what for, but I do remember the day that Roosevelt closed the banks, and Mr. Johnson and I got a hundred dollar bill from him because we didn't know for sure when they were going to open back up and cash was hard to come by. There wasn't any around with all the banks closed. I don't think I got much of the hundred.

G: What were LBJ and Dick Kleberg like together?

L: They were cordial. Mr. Johnson approached him with a certain amount of--I don't know that deference is the right idea but respect I suppose for their situation. He took pains to try to avoid any possible grounds for irritation between the two, and he tried to give Mr. Dick information that would be useful to him, even discussing, on an occasion or two that I was around, how a vote should be cast on the floor.

G: I gather he was more liberal than Dick Kleberg was.

L: Oh, yes. Mr. Dick was very conservative. In looking back on it I didn't know what a conservative was then.

G: Was LBJ able to persuade Mr. Kleberg to vote the way he, LBJ, would want to vote?

L: I don't think he consciously did this. I think that if he felt that certain interests in the district whom it would be politically wise to please, he would bring things of this kind to Mr. Kleberg's attention if legislation affecting them were before the House. But I have heard it said that he perhaps even went beyond the norm of recommending how Mr. Kleberg should vote, but I really don't think this could be true.

G: Well, two examples that I've read about of LBJ trying to persuade Kleberg to override the President's veto on the soldiers' bonus. Do you remember anything about that?

L: Well, I don't remember the vote. I remember the soldiers' bonus and the bonus marchers and where they camped and all this, but except by accident I was not privy to conversations between the two of them. The method of operation was for him to go in Mr. Kleberg's office, close the door, and that he did not take our minds off our own typewriters to tell us what they talked about.

G: The other instance reportedly was the Agricultural Adjustment Act which Mr. Kleberg was against. Reportedly LBJ persuaded him to change his vote on that.

L: Well, I just don't know.

G: You don't remember anything about that?

L: No.

G: Were they social friends?

L: They may have been to some extent but not around me. In other words, I've never been into their home as a guest. Although I know of course that Mrs. Kleberg, at one point at least, came to rely a good deal upon Mr. Johnson.

G: How so?

L: Well, she was said to be a somewhat neurotic person and perhaps had fears and insecurities that Mr. Johnson could allay and Mr. Kleberg could not. There doesn't seem to have been a lot of harmony in their marriage.

G: Do you think this affected LBJ's job in terms of having to deal with Mrs. Kleberg?

L: He never discussed this with me but I can only remember one occasion when he commented perhaps to himself that Mrs. Kleberg wanted him to talk to her immediately all the time or something to that effect. Apparently she had some confidence in him that she didn't have in other people. It even may or may not have been related to Mr. Kleberg. I don't think she went to Washington. She may have gone up there one session. And of course he was staying out at what was then Washington's best hotel.

G: The Shoreham.

L: Yes.

G: Well, did she make demands on him, like escorting the daughter around or anything, or running errands?

L: I don't think so. I think the demand was more for his time, that she would call on the phone and sometimes I would pick it up and she would

say, "Let me talk to Lyndon," in a rather demanding way. It seemed to me that perhaps most of it was a process of trying to cool her off of some imagined hurt, or actual, I don't know.

As to the daughter, Mary Etta, even for me she was rather wild. I say that because the first office Kleberg had immediately upon his election was in a room in the back of their home in Corpus Christi. So I did see Mary Etta once in a while imperiously waving around a champagne glass, and I think she must have been about sixteen. Little Dick, of course, was about maybe ten or twelve years old, I guess.

(Interruption)

G: How did LBJ pronounce the Congressman's name?

L: Klayburg.

G: Really? It wasn't Kleeburg.

L: No, a lot of people announced it Kleeberg, but Mr. Dick didn't and he didn't either.

G: I see. Let's talk about some of the associates of Dick Kleberg and LBJ during this period. There's Roy Miller. What role did he play in that period?

L: Well, as I say, I'm at a disadvantage because I just didn't know his complete role. I did know, of course, that he was a lobbyist for Texas Gulf Sulphur and perhaps others. I had heard that he had an unlimited expense account. I did know that we all, everyone felt that he was a personal friend of Roy Miller. He just made you feel that way. Sometimes he would come up to the Capitol at night and

sit down and talk to the lowliest one in the office and act as though he were enjoying it just as much as if he were talking to the President. He'd usually wind up taking whoever it was out to dinner. But this was sort of his way of operation, because people got to know after he had been up there a little while that Roy Miller started out by getting to know the elevator operator, then the person immediately inside the door in the congressman's office, then who answers the phone. He made friends of every one of them so that when he really wanted to see the congressman or the senator everyone would break his neck so he could get in there, just do anything to see that he got to see him, if that's what he wanted. Or anything else he wanted.

G: What issues did he have particular interest in?

L: I really don't know. I just don't know what issues Texas Gulf Sulphur was interested in. To us he was just a fun man to be around, who knew a lot of good stories and always seemed to enjoy the people he was with. Now that speaks only for me and not for Mr. Johnson, because I know the two of them for many years were close associates, so they had something better to talk about than cocktail parties.

G: Would he use Mr. Dick's office?

L: Yes. He'd come in and make phone calls sometimes. No one ever minded; it was perfectly all right. It was something you liked to have him do.

G: Had he played a role in Kleberg's campaign, do you recall?

L: I don't know. I feel sure that Texas Gulf Sulphur must have played a role in almost every congressman's campaign in Texas.

G: Was Roy Miller sort of an adviser to Kleberg as well, do you know?

L: I think to have been an effective lobbyist he must have been adviser to all of them. There were very few better lobbyists on Capitol Hill that we were aware of. As a matter of fact, I thought a lobbyist was a bad word until I became acquainted with Roy Miller and I decided they were a fine breed.

G: He was not exactly a New Dealer, I understand, in philosophy.

L: Probably not. I just don't know what he was trying to do in Washington from time to time. I do know that his acquaintanceship was not confined to Texas members and their staffs by any means. There used to be a little girl from Alabama, I think it was, and a fellow named John Foscue. I can't remember the name of the congressman they worked for, but it seems to me he was minority leader of the House or perhaps the whip. I used to drop by there sometimes on my way home because Mr. Miller kept the congressman's office stocked with fine whiskey. Many times he was there himself. The congressman wouldn't be there but he would sit around just as though he were. We'd all just party up and then he'd take us all out to dinner. I suppose he spent more time with little people than with their bosses.

G: Were he and LBJ particularly close, did you observe?

L: Well, they were at one time. I don't know whether there ever came a time when they weren't. It seems to me that Dale Miller was also a good friend, as far as I know.

G: Anything on Maury Maverick?

L: Maury Maverick was just a lot of fun to me. As you know, he was a World War I hero and half of his back had been shot off. He was very much a liberal. He was always writing a book or something and he wanted it to be as provocative as it possibly could be. He wanted to shock people. Maury was a short, heavy-set fellow with a face like a bulldog, with no inhibitions whatever. I remember Carroll Keach worked for him for a while, and we were walking in front of the Capitol one time and Maury got to laughing about something, and he got to laughing so hard he just lay down on the sidewalk and rolled over and over and over laughing. There were crowds all around us, they thought he was having an epileptic fit or something. He was just laughing, rolling around in front of the Capitol. But that's the way Maury was. His wife was a very quiet type and Maury was just a character. But we enjoyed him.

G: I understand that LBJ worked in his campaigns. Do you remember that?

L: He worked in the first one because I was there, too.

G: Can you recall what you did?

L: Well, I can recall what little I did. That was just typing and whatever I was directed to do. Dan Quill, who had a pretty heavy hand in labor circles in San Antonio, was interested in Maury getting a job. Mr. Johnson and I stayed over there for, I don't know, maybe three or four weeks, I'm not certain. He was usually gone, so he was out politicking some place with Dan Quill or others for

Maury. Also Malcolm Bardwell was in that group. Malcolm, of course, later was Maury's secretary.

G: Do you have any recollections of Sam Fore?

L: Oh, yes. Sam Fore was the editor and publisher of the Floresville Chronicle Journal. He was a huge man, must have weighed at least 275 pounds, and he wore overalls all the time. He was a big man. He had a real good friend named Denver Chestnut who also had a newspaper, a weekly. What was the name?

G: Was it the Kenedy Advance?

L: Yes, the Kenedy Advance. They used to pal around together and both of them were interested in politics. They'd just get in the car and go out to make friends for their friends who they wanted to get in office. I don't know who got Sam Fore into the Kleberg picture, whether it was Mr. Kleberg or whether it was Mr. Johnson. I do know, of course, that Sam Fore and Denver would do anything at all for Lyndon Johnson. When James J. Buchanan died and Mr. Johnson opened up campaign headquarters in Austin, I arrived there from Washington two days after the announcement. The first person I saw was Sam Fore from the Fourteenth Congressional District almost running to climb the stairs and try to help Lyndon Johnson be elected as congressman from the Tenth Congressional District. He worked all through that campaign hard.

G: Would you ever travel through the Kleberg district with LBJ and stop at Floresville or stop and see Sam Fore?

L: No, not me, because the mail had to be answered. That was my job. But Mr. Johnson suggested, I think to Mr. Kleberg, that there should be a car for office use and one was bought, a Ford or a Chevrolet I think, and Mr. Johnson used it and made rather frequent visits over the district. But even then he had already begun his love affair with the telephone, and if it were possible to handle the business by picking up the phone he thought there weren't enough hours in the day to get in a car and drive someplace to get the same thing done. But he traveled selectively to see people when he thought that was what was required.

G: Let me ask you about LBJ's law school experience. Do you recall if he ever wanted to practice law? Did he ever express that interest?

L: No, he never expressed any such interest to me. We know that he took a brief fling at law school himself, but I personally think he must have decided early on that he could get lawyers with their expertise by the dozen, and he'd rather be in the process of using them than being one. Of course, Alvin Wirtz may have talked to him about being a lawyer; I imagine he did.

G: Do you have any recollection of that, of Wirtz talking to LBJ about that?

L: Not about that, but when the President was first elected to the Tenth District--well, while the campaign was on--Wirtz was someone who was seen regularly. After the election, when we had offices

in the old Federal Building, Wirtz' office was right across the street in that building, the same one Walter Jenkins is in.

G: The Brown Building?

L: In the Brown Building, yes. Mr. Johnson would go over almost daily to talk to Senator Wirtz.

G: Did LBJ attend law school very long?

L: Well, you've told me that he apparently registered at Washington College of Law. I did not know this. I do remember his enrolling in I thought it was Georgetown Law School.

G: He did.

L: But attending maybe ten days or two weeks. As I say, I think he decided his time could be put to better use.

G: Did he express those words to you?

L: No, but I noticed his putting in time at studying for a couple of hours for two or three nights, and this just wasn't his way. If he wanted to know what was in a case he'd have somebody else read the brief and say, "Put it down in one paragraph and I'll read it."

G: Did you ever hear him recite in class? Was he good at giving a recitation?

L: No, I don't think I ever heard him recite. He used to tell stories and things like that, but as to recitation I've never heard him recite.

G: Do you think he considered the curriculum too abstract?

L: No. You mean law school curriculum?

G: Yes.

L: I really don't think so. I'm sincere about that. I think he decided that his best talent was moving men's minds, not reviewing and practicing law. He's a mover of people. He could have been a lawyer if he'd wanted to. Lord knows he was smart enough. He had such a tremendous memory that he could have been anything he wanted to in a technical sense, I think, or as a lawyer. Do you know that he taught mathematics sort of a part-time, one of his courses in high school? He could handle figures I guess as well as anyone I've ever seen, and he applied these to my budget and to anyone else's budget, or to the government's budget. He was very glad to get someone who was supposed to be an expert on something and get them up to a blackboard and show them where they were wrong.

G: Who were his heroes then?

L: Well, I don't think it was a hero, but he had some sort of an admiration for the politics--not of what he thought, but of the way he operated--of Jim Ferguson. And, of course, Senator Bailey. You'd only know that from hearing him, you know, tell a little story in which they'd feature because he has never told me, "I really think he was a great--" whatever.

G: Did he have an interest in Huey Long?

L: No, I think only as sort of a spectator of the Huey Long era.

G: Would he go listen to Long's speeches in the gallery?

L: Everybody would. When Long was on the floor, if we could get off, the whole Capitol would rush over to try to get in the gallery. He usually wore a red shirt and had a Bible. He was a pretty good Bible thumper.

G: How about FDR? Did you ever get an indication of LBJ's attitude toward Roosevelt while Johnson was working for Kleberg?

L: No, but I'm sure we were all talking about Roosevelt. Everyone was, particularly in Washington where politics is sort of the name of the game. Roosevelt grabbed hold of the country real fast, and legislation proposed by the White House in the first few days after his inauguration would maybe be drafted by [Thomas] Corcoran or someone up there and they wouldn't even take time to [have it printed]. It seemed to be emergency legislation. There were one or two pieces of legislation they just sent mimeographed copies up to the House and the Senate. They didn't hold hearings on them. They were automatically handed to the chairmen. They were reported back to the House or Senate with a recommendation to pass them and they were passed and signed into law the same day. There were one or two instances of that, without ever even going to be printed at the Government Printing Office until after the fact.

I suppose--well, you are more interested in your other things, but I was just recalling that when Mr. Johnson ran for Congress he went along with Roosevelt's idea to pack the Supreme Court because of the decision on the NRA. Of course, I'm sure this was a political [move]. I think that he had a reason for doing this and that of course was to be closer to Roosevelt.

G: He was elected speaker of the Little Congress, as you know. Do you recall how he pulled that off?

L: I just recall the part I had in it. I think it was Arthur Perry and Bob Jackson and he had apparently discussed it. There came a time when he told me that he was going to be running for the speakership of the Little Congress. He laid out the plan to me, that is, of canvassing people that were on the Capitol payroll, not just clerks in the office but anyone who was on the payroll. And at that time I was working in the post office, and I was asked to rather covertly line up as many young fellows who worked at the post office as I could to attend the next meeting of the Little Congress when the new slate of officers was to be selected and to vote for Johnson for speaker. At that time it had already been decided who would nominate the speaker, who would nominate the clerk, who would nominate the sergeant-at-arms; this had already been determined when I and many others were asked to contact a certain part of the Capitol complex with which we were acquainted and ask those we knew to come to the meeting and to vote as an ally. That's the way it came off. There was a large crowd there. The meeting was held in the Cannon House Office Building in one of the committee rooms, and it was jammed full. Mr. Johnson had Huey Long over to speak one evening and you could hardly get in the place.

G: Who arranged that, do you know?

L: Mr. Johnson arranged it. I don't know how but he was the one. It may have been done with the help of Perry over on the Senate side or something like that. But the idea, I'm sure, would be an LBJ idea.

G: Was this to beef up attendance or do you think it could be--?

L: No, I think that that was certainly an element in it all right, but Huey Long was about the hottest thing in town then. Newspapers covered the meeting and took pictures which appeared in the papers, with the Speaker [of the Little Congress]. As sensitive as he always was to newspaper and media people, I think that he was probably thinking of that, too.

G: Getting back to his election as speaker. Could anyone belong to the Little Congress, anyone that worked on the Hill, or did it only include certain types of employees?

L: So far as I know it included anyone who was on the payroll of the Congress, because everyone in the House post office was eligible. They were just patronage jobs. We had some policemen, some elevator operators that we rang in. I don't think they attended previously.

G: Now this is the point that I wanted to ask about. There was some indication that before, the organization had either formally or informally been made up primarily of young men with an active interest in politics, and that LBJ had more or less managed to induce a lot of middle-aged women and people who had never thought about going to come to that meeting and vote for him.

L: I'm sure this is quite true. I don't remember anyone that I talked to that had even heard of the organization. And neither had I.

G: But do you recall this being, in effect, what happened?

L: Well, when it was talked about, and people were talking about what was it like before this happened, it was very apparent that it was just a little sort of a bridge club or something that could meet in

a twenty-foot square room. Apparently nothing interesting was going on and no one cared to attend much, just a few of the fellows would go down for social purposes and shoot the breeze a while and that was it.

G: Was there any sort of platform that LBJ ran on? For example, having more speakers?

L: No. There wasn't time for all that.

G: Was there any political significance to his election? For example, representing a more progressive group as opposed to a--

L: I really don't think so. I think that's the way it came about, and it turned out that way because what was a little organization dying on its feet suddenly became a huge organization that was going full blast for as long as he decided he wanted to be in office. I think the terms--it seems to me they corresponded to the sessions of Congress. He served one term I believe and then he sort of lost interest. But before leaving, as usual, he picked out his successor. I forget who he was. I know he decided I should be the clerk, so I became clerk. But he became rapidly interested in other things and it wasn't long until it was moribund again.

G: He did organize some trips I understand, or at least one.

L: I think he had one to New York up there but I don't remember any other one.

G: Did you go on that New York trip?

L: I didn't go. I couldn't get off. (Laughter)

G: Do you recall any other speakers that they had?

L: No, I really don't. I don't even remember who the speaker was when I was clerk.

G: Have any recollections of the Texas State Society, the dances they had and the parties?

L: Yes. They used to have about one a month.

G: Was LBJ active in these?

L: Yes. He was always active in it. Well, it's no longer rare because everyone knows it's merely his method of operation. He became a great favorite of the representatives' wives and he saw to it that no one was left out. It didn't make any difference whether the lady was well endowed or was not, she was danced with, and when it was over, she knew with whom she'd been dancing. So he came to be very well liked. Of course, there were a few that at that time he didn't know--the members. This was another way to get to know the members and their families. And, of course, also, he had other secretaries and other people. It wasn't just the people on the Hill, you know. It was anyone in the District of Columbia from Texas.

G: Now, I was going to ask you about his appointment as NYA director. Do you recall the circumstances of that, or at least how you learned about it?

L: The only part that I recall is that one day, one afternoon, Mr. Kleberg was on the floor of the House and Mr. Johnson--I don't know whether he told us that he'd be back in a little while or not, but he did absent himself. He came back in maybe an hour, I'm not sure,

and told me that he'd just been to see Senator Morris Sheppard and that he was going to become the state NYA director. I had the impression, and it's only an impression, that he had not talked to Mr. Kleberg about this. He had a habit, as you well know, of not saying anything about something he wanted until he got it because just in case he didn't bat a thousand per cent, he didn't want to tell you about the things that he didn't get done, if there were any.

G: Do you think it was his effort that enabled Sam Houston to succeed him as secretary?

L: Oh, I'm certain of it, yes. I don't think Mr. Kleberg, of his own volition, would have said, "Send me Sam Houston." Well, I was going to say that it seemed a little bit mysterious, but in point of fact it wasn't, because Sam was pretty young then. He was not as single-minded and as dedicated perhaps, but he was, to start with, a very interested secretary to Mr. Kleberg.

G: Now you saw Lyndon Johnson, knew him in Houston before he went up to Washington, and you worked with him in Washington, and of course knew him all through the years after that Kleberg experience. Was that an important point in his life? Did it teach him anything?

L: You mean the NYA?

G: No, no, the period that he worked for Dick Kleberg in Washington. How was he changed by it? How did he grow as a result of it?

L: Well, obviously he grew, but he came on me--seemed like he was full grown already, because the moment he became a teacher to me in high

school he started performing miracles and that continued all my life until the day he died. So it just seemed to me that he was always that way, that he was born with all these things. Although this is certainly not possible, that's the way the evolution of it seems to me. I was always amazed by him.

G: But you didn't detect any noticeable impact?

L: Well, there were always impacts where he was. I was accustomed to impacts of startling things. If you were around him things happened that you'd never dream of happening if you weren't around him. So if you started with that in high school you'd be disappointed if you came to Washington and this still didn't go on although in another sphere of activity.

I guess there was perhaps something that became a little bit noticeable, now that I can think of it after all the years. Early on he seemed to spend at least a little bit of time in having fun. Then I don't know, but along about the time that he left Mr. Kleberg, it seemed to me that his fun was always in things political. I know, for example, a long time ago, back in those early years, he used to like to go to picture shows or play dominoes. As far as I know he didn't see any more picture shows after that until he got to be president, where it became a sort of a something to do, so it'd [be] "get some people over here where we can talk about this that I want done, so we'll get a picture out of Hollywood and Jack Valenti will have it in here."

He had lots of fun, but his fun was not the type of fun that I would enjoy, first, because I'm not capable of having that type of fun. He enjoyed so much the challenge of working something out which would never have happened had he not come along. If those things didn't surface themselves to be challenged he made them surface. He thought of things that he could do that he could put himself up against, and to me this was his play as well as his work. He pursued it all of his life with almost no time off, night and day.

(Interruption)

G: Dan Quill, I believe, was in San Antonio and attempting to get a permanent appointment as postmaster.

L: Dan had some terrible times with Maury Maverick. Because of his help, I suppose, during Maury's successful campaign for the congressman's job in San Antonio for Bexar County, he was named acting postmaster of San Antonio by Maury. This, of course, required approval by the Senate. Maury Maverick was an inveterate joker. He used Dan Quill as his foil upon many, many occasions. Dan was a worrier and he was constantly worrying about being made permanent postmaster. Maury, on the other hand, could see possibilities of recreation in the matter and never went to the trouble to ask one of the senators to get Dan's nomination through the Senate Committee on the Post Office.

I remember one time, although there were several, but one time in particular when Mr. Johnson was involved. Dan called Maury and

asked him for the fifteenth or twentieth time about his permanent appointment and Maury told him on the phone that he thought the whole thing was off, that he'd just heard through the post office department that they had sent an investigator into the field and they had found evidence that Dan Quill was unfit to be the postmaster, that he had had unlawful intercourse with a Mexican woman in Jim Wells County. Maury led this into Dan pretty hard and Dan denied everything. Maury finally said, "Well, if you can prove that it's not true, maybe we can do something." He suggested that Dan go over to the county seat of Jim Wells County and get some sort of an affidavit from the county judge to the effect that there was nothing pending against him and to bring it to Washington by airplane and he, Maury, would see what he could do.

Well, Dan did this. In the meantime, because Mr. Johnson and Maury's secretary, Malcolm Bardwell, were good friends, we all came to know about the situation and participated vicariously in the fun. This time up Dan brought the affidavit. They were waiting for him. I didn't get to go, but as I understand it Dan burst into Maury's office and there was Malcolm Bardwell and LBJ and one or two others. Maury denied ever having called him and said, "What are you doing up here?" This was just one of several times that Dan had been doublecrossed.

So later they all went over to the Dodge Hotel and Dan had a room upstairs and Maury did, too--Maury stayed at the Dodge for a while. So I went up when I got off of work and Maury and Mr. Johnson

were in the process of getting as much liquor as they could down Dan Quill. They asked me to help on the project, and Maury said he would try to get the appointment through if Dan would take us all out to dinner to the finest place in Washington, D. C. Dan barely knew he was in Washington, D. C. but he said, "Fine." And we got together about a dozen, headed by Maury, and we went downtown to a fancy place to eat. As we went in I remember you have to step down about half a dozen stairs, and Dan fell down them. The next day he still didn't know where he was and Maury had some new deal. He told him to go on back home, he'd call him. This went on for a long time. Maury would call Dan collect and just anything to cost him money or upset him. It was just one joke you could always depend on, for months, I think over a year. Finally somebody wore out, and Maury let Dan be made permanent postmaster.

G: Well, I certainly do thank you.

[End of Tape 2 of 2 and Interview II]

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