

INTERVIEW I

DATE: July 27, 1971

INTERVIEWEE: MRS. KITTIE CLYDE LEONARD

INTERVIEWER: DAVID McCOMB

PLACE: Mrs. Leonard's home in Johnson City, Texas

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M: This is an interview with Mrs. Kittie Clyde Leonard. Is that the name you use or do you use your husband's name?

L: Well, in all the school work and everything I do, I use Kittie Clyde

M: That's your professional name.

L: My husband's initials are J.B.

M: The first thing I'd like to ask you about, Mrs. Leonard, is life in Johnson City when you grew up here. I might mention, for the sake of the tape, that you and Lyndon Johnson are contemporaries, that you grew up in the same period of time in Johnson City. So, can you tell me a little bit about life in Johnson City?

L: Well, life in Johnson City then was so different to life in Johnson City now that it's hard to make people understand how different it was. The families were closely knit families in the community. Everyone helped other people. Lyndon's father has often said that he liked this country because people knew when you were ill and cared when you died.

As children, we did things with families most of the time. There were gatherings of families, for picnics, barbecues, fish fries. We gathered for revival meetings arbor style when

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they'd have two weeks union meetings. We were taught no particular prejudices: religious or racial or anything of that type.

M: So family units so to speak often did things together.

L: Yes. Parties, evening parties in homes, that was the entertainment. We had a silent movie upstairs in what is now the bank building.

M: How many people were in Johnson City then?

L: Oh, two hundred.

M: Did you know everyone in town?

L: Oh, yes, everyone all around the area, we knew.

M: Not only in town, but in all the farms around.

L: Farms around us.

M: So all the children knew the other children, then.

L: Yes.

M: So what did children do for entertainment in Johnson City? They would go with the families and so forth, but--

L: Go with the families, and then we'd have parties. As smaller children, we'd gather at someone's home and play on Sunday afternoon, or late in the evenings we'd play games, baseball. If it was moonlight, we'd even play in the street and play baseball in the street, kick the can, hide-and-seek, the older games that children now don't play so often.

M: What kind of church life did they have in Johnson City then?

L: There were about three churches in Johnson City at that time: the Methodist, Baptist, and Christian. Of course, the congregations

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were not very large in either one. I believe Lyndon joined the Christian Church when he was younger, and these churches would go together in the summer and have union revival meetings.

M: You mean they'd band together then?

L: They'd band together and take turns at having a preacher from the Methodist Church and then one from the Christian Church and Baptist Church, alternate summers.

M: Was that a big affair then?

L: Oh, yes.

M: The whole town would come?

L: Oh, everybody in the community came to these.

M: Was it fun for the kids?

L: Oh yes. Bring the meals on Sunday and have preaching all day and dinner on the grounds. (Laughter)

M: Didn't you get tired of the preaching?

L: Oh no, it wasn't actually preaching all day; it was just the noon [service]. Then we had a meal after that, and visited.

During the summer there were barbecues. And on election years, all the political candidates made speeches.

M: Oh, did the town turn out to hear them?

L: Everybody went because that was part of the entertainment for the summer. I believe when Lyndon was a teen-ager, that was when he made his first political speech for a candidate who was a friend of his father's. This candidate was late arriving or something, so Lyndon took over and made his speech.

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M: Then there was a sort of an interest in politics?

L: Oh, yes, interest in politics.

M: And they'd turn out.

L: There was an interest. It seemed that since Mr. [Sam] Johnson was in politics as a representative, a Texas legislator, he would gather the kids in the community area. [They] would gather at his house, and he loved to have them come. We'd gather around the fireplace in the winter time and he'd start arguments about different things. And we also had spelling bees, out of an old blue-back speller. Then we would have popcorn cooked over the open fire. We roasted marshmallows or something.

M: This was Lyndon Johnson's father who did this?

L: Lyndon Johnson's father.

M: Do you remember any of the topics of conversation?

L: Well, we argued mostly over political candidates. Our teachers at school encouraged things like that. They encouraged us to talk about different subjects that came up and, if we disagreed with each other, have debates on it. There could be no personalities-- I mean there could be nothing derogatory about a person--but we had to give very logical reasons why such and such was true or there couldn't be any arguments. They wouldn't allow it. So they made us think, and made us study, and made us read.

M: What did you read then?

L: We read everything we could get. We read the paper when we could get it.

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M: This would be an Austin newspaper?

L: It would be an Austin newspaper. Of course, our mail at that time came from Marble Falls, and it came finally by car, but there was a time when it didn't come by car. It came up to Marble Falls on the train, and our papers were late, of course. But we read them anyway.

M: If it didn't come in by car, how would it get here?

L: Well, it'd have to come by horse and buggy or wagon.

M: By a horse and wagon?

L: ---a wagon. We had no trains here, and our freight came in by wagon and four-mule team. We studied by kerosene lights.

M: Is that right?

L: [We had] no lights, no electricity. Living standards were somewhat different. I don't recall any dire poverty in the area, neither do I recall any great wealth. People lived comfortably for this area, not comfortably according to city standards of living at that time, and certainly not comfortably according to standards of living today. But we had all we wanted to eat and wear and friends, and those things were important.

M: But there was no great wealth nor great poverty either one?

L: Or poverty. Most everyone had--well, a lot of people had some bathtubs and lavatories--all outdoor toilet facilities.

M: It was traditional in an earlier day in America for everybody to take a bath on Saturday night. Was that true in Johnson City?

L: It was true in Johnson City. Many families had to bring washtubs

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into the kitchen or some place where there was a fire, and take baths in the washtubs. We had no water heaters; water had to be heated for baths in the winter time on the wood stoves. I recall that our stove, and I think the Johnson's stove, had a reservoir on the side of the wood stove that kept water warmed and hot.

M: You'd use that for baths and washing purposes?

L: Well, now, washing was something else. Many people had wash stands with bowls and pitchers in bedrooms. Usually there was a wash stand on a porch at the rear entrance to the house. This had a wash pan with a pitcher of water. This was used by all the family after work or play outdoors. Near the wash stand a bucket of water with a dipper would be found. This was for drinking. We had wash pots and furnaces outside. People thought clothes had to be boiled at that time and built fires under these wash pots and boiled the clothes, washed them with lye soap on rub boards. Rain water which had been stored in cisterns was used for washing clothes.

M: That must have been an all-day chore.

L: Very much so. Especially when families were large.

M: Yes, what did you do about things like refrigeration?

L: We didn't have refrigeration for many, many years.

M: Didn't you have ice?

L: The only way we had ice was that it would be brought in on these wagons.

M: Freight wagons?

L: Freight wagons, then later on trucks and stored. Individuals had ice-- well, my father built a concrete ice box and put a lot of sawdust in it and kept the ice that way. This was usually kept in a storeroom

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away from the house.

M: So he'd bring in a load of ice and store it then?

L: And then later of course there were refrigerators that you could put ice in and later someone put in an ice house, and you could go there and buy ice for the refrigerators. The refrigerators would hold fifty or a hundred pounds of ice. But early you couldn't store meats or anything like that. Meats had to be cured or dried or cooked immediately when they were fresh.

M: I see.

L: But they had coolers, and the milk and butter and leftovers were stored in these coolers. They were metal and had water in the top with a cloth around, so that the cloth would absorb the water and keep the things inside cool. They were outside, you know, on a screen porch or someplace where the air would blow through and keep it cooler.

M: When did electricity come to Johnson City? Do you remember that?

L: There was a small electric plant that furnished limited electricity to the town, but the system we now have is one of the things we have Lyndon Johnson to thank for.

M: Is that right?

L: I'm sure we have electricity because Lyndon Johnson had a dream when he was a boy that someday this country could have electricity in every home. It was during the time he was in Congress that Buchanan Dam was built, Lower Colorado River Authority organized, Pedernales Electric Cooperative, and we have had electricity. Now there are no areas around here that don't have electrical appliances.

M: That must have changed your way of life.

L: Completely. Completely changed the way of life.

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M: Gave you refrigeration and other such things, lights.

L: Lights, refrigeration, electrical appliances on farms and ranches. Windmills were replaced by electric pumps. Windmills are not plentiful now. People could do things with electricity. Dairies were put in where they have milkers and refrigeration. It completely changed things. Before this our way of life had been really arly American.

M: Now, you grew up with Lyndon Johnson?

L: Yes.

M: Is there any time you can remember when you did not know Lyndon Johnson?

L: No. Of course, I can't remember knowing him when we were tiny, but his father's brother married my mother's sister and the families were together often, and his cousins were my cousins. We played together so much of the time, so actually there's not a time that I can remember that I did not know Lyndon Johnson.

M: What was he like as a child?

L: Oh, like any other child. He played. We played all sorts of things that children play and fussed, squabbled, all the other things that kids do.

M: Do you remember having any particular difficulty with him? Did he get in a fight over anything in particular?

L: No, no, not particularly. Just the usual arguments that children get into and then get in a good humor before the day is over. Of course, the boys fought some - nothing serious.

M: Did he show any of the characteristics of leadership that he later asserted?

L: Yes. He was president of the graduating class. There were only six of us in the graduating class, four girls and two boys.

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- M: Yes, this is from high school.
- L: High school. He was president of the class and we always felt that with his ability and personality, he would go far.
- M: Did he win unanimously the election?
- L: Oh, yes, he had no problems. All of us liked Lyndon. He always said that he never would have graduated if it hadn't been for the girls in the class, but that isn't true, because his parents saw to it that he didn't come to school unprepared.
- M: What did he mean by that? Did he mean that the girls helped him with school work?
- L: Helped him with school, did his work for him. But we didn't.
- M: Yes, he was just flattering you.
- L: He was just being flattering, that's all. (Laughter) Polishing the apples.
- M: Was he a good student?
- L: He was a good student when he wanted to be. He was like boys--if he just didn't want to do something very much, he didn't put out an awful lot of effort to do it unless his mother or father found out about it and got hold of him. He was just like all other children as he grew up.
- M: Do you recall if he showed any particular interest in a specific subject?
- L: Oh, he was more interested in history most of the time.
- M: I don't know whether you studied this, but how about government or political science?

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L: Well, history and government, it was all combined; we just studied it all together in those days.

M: What kind of a school did you have?

L: Well, the school was so different, and always there were two grades, sometimes three, under one teacher.

M: Combined.

L: Combined.

M: So this'll mean how many children under one teacher?

L: Well, possibly not more than twenty-five or something of the sort but that probably included three grades. You have that many in one section of class now or more, thirty-five in a section possibly.

M: Was it difficult for a teacher to organize something like that from your point of view?

L: It must have been. We didn't realize that it was, but it must have been rather difficult. It would be difficult for me to organize something like that and I've taught school a long time. But they seemed to get along quite well with it. We listened and enjoyed listening to classes that were higher, that were more advanced than ours, so we learned things from them, we thought. It was quite interesting if we could learn something that they were doing. And actually we're going back to something like that in education right now. It isn't new; it was practiced way back there in the country schools.

M: Did the older children help younger children in the classroom like that?

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- L: Yes, yes, they did. Some of the better children would go help somebody in a class lower than they [were in].
- M: Can you remember your doing something like that?
- L: Yes, we did. We helped them. I like math, and that was the thing I helped with. I was never particularly interested in history. I like math and English.
- M: So, then, would your teacher assign you to help other children with math?
- L: If I was through with my work and wanted to help someone else, the teacher would allow me to go help someone else and likewise other students [would do this].
- M: Do you think Lyndon Johnson did the same sort of thing?
- L: Oh yes, we all did.
- M: Did you take a lunch to school or did you go home?
- L: We took a lunch to school part of the time. I just lived about a block from school and Lyndon's home of course was about two or three blocks, but some of the times the superintendent had regulations that we didn't leave the school ground during the day, and those times we took our lunches to school. [There were] no lunch rooms. We just took lunches.
- M: What kind of clothing did students wear then? Did they wear blue jeans? Or overalls?
- L: All kinds, overalls and blue jeans and khakis. Lyndon always liked to wear a necktie.
- M: To school?

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- L: Yes, sir. Many times he would come to school with a white shirt and necktie.
- M: And then a pair of slacks on him or something like that?
- L: Yes, pair of slacks.
- M: Wonder why?
- L: I don't know. He just liked to.
- M: Did he get on well with his teachers?
- L: Oh, yes. He had a real persuasive way about him and he might do some bad things, but they never seemed to hold it against him. Most children do mischievous things at times.
- M: Can you give me an example? Do you remember anything in particular?
- L: Oh, no, not specifically.
- M: Did he in those years as a student express any particular interest to you or ambitions about what he wanted to do that you recall?
- L: Not particularly. We always felt that he would be involved in government some way.

After we graduated from high school, it was a year or so before he started to Southwest Texas, and I went to the University. I went one year there [at Southwest Texas], but he wasn't there when I was there. Then I transferred over to the University of Texas and I didn't see him as often then. For several years in there we didn't see each other too often. Then I heard he was teaching and was somewhat disappointed because I had felt that he had qualities of leadership and persuasiveness, and I felt government was the thing he should be involved in, some phase of government. Then when he went to Washington

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as secretary to Mr. Kleberg, I thought, well, that's good, he'll be involved with people and things that I know he's been interested in for years. And I have watched with a great deal of pride and admiration his climb up the political ladder.

M: So then when he finally got into politics, you thought, well, this is--

L: That's it.

M: That's it. That indicates that you must have suspected earlier that that's what kind of life he needed.

To go back a little bit, you were talking about the way people lived: you had to have wood for the stove and water had to be hauled in. That would seem to indicate that there was a lot of work to be done, and the children did some of this.

L: Children had many duties at home and, of course, there wasn't very much ready cash, so boys in the area had to make their spending money. They did it in various ways. They went varmint hunting, and then sold the furs, foxes, and racoons, ringtails, skunks.

M: You mean, you could sell skunk fur?

L: You could sell skunk hide; you still can. We didn't like the boys to come to school after they killed a skunk. (Laughter) They ran trap lines. Lyndon shined shoes in a barber shop. There he sat around and listened to the men talk politics. He was listening, learning, and enjoying it. And he worked on ranches and farms, just any kind of odd jobs, because children in those days did "pick up" their own spending money.

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M: Was there cotton farming going on?

L: Picked cotton. Yes, there was cotton farming in this area at that time. There were cotton gins in Johnson City and all the surrounding communities. Johnson City ginned five hundred to six hundred bales of cotton per year. My dad bought cotton.

M: So the children helped pick cotton.

L: Helped pick cotton.

M: Did the children in that period of time date the way children do now?

L: No, the dating wasn't like it is now. The dating was more in groups. A group would get together and go someplace. On Friday nights, some parent would have a party for the youngsters at their home, or maybe Saturday night it would be. But sometimes during the weekend some parent would have a party at their home. The kids would all go in groups mostly, not dating as such.

M: Yes. Then if there was a dance and the groups of boys and girls would go I assume, would everybody take turns dancing with everybody else?

L: Yes.

M: So there was not an idea like they have today of a boyfriend with a girlfriend and that sort of thing?

L: No, not like it is today. Today when you go to a dance, you dance with the boy you go with most of the time. Then we danced with everybody.

M: Okay. Well, what I'm trying to figure out is did Lyndon Johnson have a girlfriend in particular?

L: He had several girlfriends. I went with him some.

M: Would you count yourself as a girlfriend as girlfriends are considered today?

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L: Not as they are today, no.

M: Did you go steady, for example?

L: No, there was no such thing as going steady in those days. We didn't go steady.

M: But you did go around with him some?

L: But we did go around together for a while.

M: Do you have any memories about that?

L: Yes, you know, we were talking about that not long ago when we were together. He and Lady Bird invited us to the Ranch and we were talking about it and he said, "You know, Kittie Clyde, I just can't even remember. Things aren't like they were when we went together, are they? I don't even remember ever kissing you!" And I said, "No, I don't think so." (Laughter) That's quite a switch from dating today.

M: Yes. This may be a little sensitive, but how did you know that you were his girlfriend? Did he say so, or did he hold your hand, or something like that?

L: Oh yes. And we talked. He was just with me as much as possible at school and other places and that's one of the things we just took for granted.

M: Then the senior class elected a president, and you had a graduation ceremony. Did he give a speech or anything?

L: Yes, he gave a speech. I think he was salutatorian possibly, I'm not sure, but I believe he was. It's been a long time.

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M: Did you exchange gifts, presents?

L: No.

M: Then you went off to San Marcos, and he went off to work on the road crew then?

L: California.

M: Or California first.

L: He went to California, and then he came back and worked on the roads here. I think that when he finally got out and began to work on those roads and, with the experience he'd had in California, he decided that Lyndon Johnson had become of age and he better do something about it, that he wasn't going to spend the rest of his life doing that. So he went to school.

M: Was his mother a deep influence on his schooling?

L: Yes, she was.

M: Was she? I've read this.

L: She was a very soft-spoken, gentle woman, but she had a great influence on Lyndon, on his life.

M: Would you explain that a little bit further? Influence in what way?

L: Well, she could counsel in her soft-spoken, easygoing way; she was able to counsel him, and most of the time Lyndon listened to her. He didn't [always] listen because, had she had her way, he would have gone immediately to school. That was one of the times he didn't listen, but he realized later that she was right.

M: Did she encourage him in reading and schoolwork and that sort of thing?

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L: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. Very much. They had books, good books, to read.

M: How about his father--what kind of influence did his father have?

L: Well, his father was in politics, and his father was very interested in politics. He was also interested in doing things that would benefit his part of the state. Lyndon got much of his political interest from his father.

M: Yes. Then, after graduation, did Lyndon Johnson come around to see you some?

L: We saw each other when we were home for weekends. Then when he went to Washington I didn't see him too much. After he and Lady Bird married, and they would come back here often, we would see them. Then as he went on up and became more powerful, more influential, more famous, he did not forget his friends.

M: That's interesting.

L: He was always one of the first to congratulate a person, one of his friends, on success. He was there to express or send expressions of sympathy in their sorrow. I shan't forget that he was vice president when my mother died, and he happened to be in Texas. He came by the house to express sympathy and even brought some preserves from the LBJ Ranch. Just an expression of thoughtfulness and sympathy, knowing that someone cared. He also attended the funeral.

M: Then, you saw him only every now and then after that.

I might ask you a little bit about your own background, just to keep that part of the story straight. After you finished college, what did you do? Did you come back here?

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L: I didn't finish college when I first started. I went three years and married. My father died, and my husband, mother and I operated a hardware store, bought wool and mohair.

M: In Johnson City?

L: In Johnson City and had a funeral home.

M: My goodness.

L: My husband and I became licensed undertakers. Then in 1943 it was so hard to get merchandise and everything had hit rock bottom, so we sold the hardware store. That's when I started teaching school and went back, got my bachelor's degree and master's degree.

M: From the University of Texas?

L: No, I got it from San Marcos, and the reason I did is because a group from here would be commuting on Saturday for Saturday classes. At that time I had a family. I did it the hard way, responsibilities with family and so on.

M: And later you became superintendent?

L: Superintendent of schools. Was elementary principal first and later became superintendent of schools.

M: In that connection, did Lyndon Johnson ever talk to you about education and the way schools should be [run]?

L: Yes. You know, he came to the school when he was senator and gave a graduation address. He came back, he was invited back when he was vice president and gave a graduation address. And when he was president in 1964, May, I knew that he was going to be in Texas on the weekend of our high school graduation, so we asked him if he

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would come. A president doesn't do that, but he came. I felt it a very special, personal honor for him to come and give the graduation address that evening.

M: Do you remember what he said?

L: Yes, I have a copy of his address and a copy of it is in the Boyhood Home also. He stressed upon the students the value of an education.

That was almost forty years from the time he graduated, almost forty years to a day from the time we graduated that he came back as president of the United States and gave the graduation address.

M: Do you think the students were impressed?

L: Oh, yes. Very much so. They really were.

M: How do you know?

L: From the way they talked and how excited they were in preparation for it.

You know, it does take a lot of preparation to have a president.

M: Oh, it does? What does it take?

M: Secret Service people all over the place, television people all over the place, and this one saying we have to have this, this one saying we have to have this, telephones all over the building and even a hot-line to Washington.

M: This was in your school building?

L: Yes, sir.

M: Did you ever wonder if maybe you shouldn't have invited him?

L: No, I never doubted that. I didn't realize how much preparation it would take, but it was worth it; it was worth it to the students;

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it was worth it to the community.

M: Did the town people turn out for that?

L: Oh, my, the place was so crowded that people from all around the area were clamoring to get in.

M: Was he able to stay very long after the speech? I mean, did he just come in and give the speech and leave or did he stay there?

L: No, he visited. Several of the people that graduated with him were there. There's one of the members who is deceased and the other boy was not able to come, but the others of us were there. We had quite a nice visit.

M: What did you talk about?

L: Oh, old times, things we used to do. And we had some pictures made.

M: Did the President seem to enjoy this?

L: Oh yes, he did. The evening of the graduation, television people were in there, and the man who had worked so hard in our systems getting all the lights and everything in order had thought he had done a very good job and I did too. Well, this particular television man came in just raising Cain: "Here we have the President of the United States, and you don't have enough lights! Got to have more lights around here for the President of the United States!" Well, the man who had done it was very upset over the situation. I said, "Don't worry about it. It's too late to worry about it. Just don't worry about it. The television people are going to have to take it as is."

The President came in and he said, "What are all these lights doing around here? I don't want all these lights. Tell them to

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turn some of them off!" He said, "I just wanted to come home. I'm just coming home." He was not that interested in all of the fanfare and so on. He was just interested in a sentimental journey.

M: Did you ever have occasion to visit him down at the LBJ Ranch?

L: Yes. He and Lady Bird have been so wonderful through these years; they've given us opportunities. The impact of his career, his and Lady Bird's career, on my and my family's life has been tremendous because we've had opportunities to do so many, many things and participate in so many events that have historical importance that I shall be eternally grateful.

M: Do any of these events stand out in your mind?

L: Oh, yes. They surely do.

M: Which ones?

L: Well, one of the greatest thrills, I think, was [when] we were planning to go to his inauguration, and we had reservations on a plane from San Antonio to leave on Sunday. We'd been to Austin on a Saturday doing some last minute shopping. Came back in, I'd hardly been home any time and the telephone rang. The man said, "Mrs. Leonard, hold the line for the President." He came on the line and he said, "Kittie Clyde, are you going to the inauguration?" I said, "Yes, if I can get everything together and into San Antonio by ten o'clock tomorrow morning, we're going!" He said, "Ah, don't get upset over it, come on up here tomorrow afternoon and go to Austin with me and ride up with me." Well, I got so excited that I phoned San Antonio and cancelled reservations, and I didn't

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tell them that I wanted reservations to come back. I just cancelled reservations! We got started up there and I said, "Jimmy, you know what?" He said, "What?" I said, "We don't have a way home." He said, "What did you do?" I said, "I cancelled our reservations." We left here, it was, oh, seventy degrees I guess and we got into Washington, the temperature was 3° with snow everywhere.

M: You went to Austin and rode Air Force One?

L: Air Force One to Washington. That was quite an exciting trip. We landed and went by helicopter over to the White House.

M: Lyndon Johnson went with you all this time?

L: Well, there were several loads of us, but we went to the White House and he was with us all the time. Then we were transferred to our different hotels where we had reservations. But that was one of the most exciting things to get to participate in all the special activities of the [inauguration].

M: Did you get to go to some of the ceremonies involved with the inauguration, some of the other things?

L: Oh, yes. We were busy all the time. He saw that we had tickets to everything.

M: So you went to some of the dances and that sort of thing?

L: Oh, yes. Went to everything.

M: Did you see President Johnson some of that time?

L: Yes, yes, saw him at nearly everything we attended.

M: Did he say anything to you that you recall?

L: Oh, just spoke and of course, you know, so many people around him

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and so much going on that you don't have time to really have a visit or anything at that time.

M: So then how did you get home again?

L: As soon as we got to Washington, we started phoning the airlines for reservations. They said they didn't have anything out, but if we'd go to Baltimore, we could get reservations out of Baltimore. So we rode a bus to Baltimore and got a plane out.

M: So you got back all right?

L: So I got home!

M: Well, you went to the inauguration. Were there other events that stand out?

L: Oh yes, when he has had a group of people up at the Ranch and had one of his barbecues, he would invite us to the barbecues.

M: Do you remember any of those in particular?

L: Well, there have been several of them. The celebration when Adenauer was here,[we] went up to that one. He had a bunch of foreign dignitaries of some kind, I can't remember who they were, but we went to that. There were people from all over the world whom he entertained with barbecues. And when he was vice president, he had this camel driver come over.

He brought the camel driver to our school one day to let the children see the camel driver. He does things on impulse.

M: Did you enjoy that?

L: Oh yes, very much.

M: Did that disrupt the school?

L: Oh no. The children were excited to death. [It] did them more good

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than a lesson. (Laughter)

M: Did Vice President Johnson bring the camel driver around and introduce him then?

L: Yes, he brought him in.

M: Told the kids who he was and that sort of thing?

L: Yes. Just drove up in front of the school and we invited him in.

M: How did the camel driver like it? Did he enjoy himself?

L: He seemed to. He seemed to. Of course, there was a translator with him, and he told us how much he enjoyed the visit. We didn't know what he was saying but the translator interpreted.

M: Were there other events like this? Do you recall any others?

L: I think one of the things I have enjoyed the most, one of the things that was the nicest thing I've been to in a long time, was the invitation to the dedication of this Library.

M: Oh, this recent LBJ Library in Austin.

L: Yes.

M: You went to that.

L: Yes.

M: Did you get to speak to the President then?

L: I didn't speak to the President. I spoke to Mrs. Johnson.

M: Yes. This brings up something. You've known Mrs. Johnson a good while, too.

L: Yes, practically ever since they married.

M: Do you have any impressions about her?

L: Oh, I think she's the most wonderful person. She's most charming,

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kind, considerate, and her interest in people is genuine. There's no false interest. She likes people.

M: What makes you say that? What kind of contact has she had with you that would give you that kind of impression?

L: Well, we've just been around each other often. She participates in activities here in town, civic things. We built a hospital. I happen to be on the hospital authority, and she has been interested in beautifying the grounds.

M: Does she help with the hospital?

L: Yes, she helped with the hospital. She's been interested in getting pictures in the hospital and things like that. She visits it and is quite interested in all of it.

M: You mean the Johnsons, Mrs. Johnson particularly, having been first lady and all of these things, is still interested in what goes on in Johnson City?

L: Oh, yes. Oh, yes.

And let me tell you something about President Johnson. He's quite a character. They've started a kindergarten at this Lutheran Church across from the Ranch at Stonewall. Well, he likes children and he went over there one day, and got invited into this kindergarten. So he buys some carpet for them; then he buys a television for them, then he buys some paint so they can paint the walls and gives it to them. So they get all this fixed up. Then he interests somebody in donating some jelly beans for the kids, and I think he must have gone nearly every day or at least he went once a week and took jelly beans,

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so that they had jelly beans distributed to them. (Laughter)

He's quite interested in them.

He loves to come to town and visit with old friends.

M: You mean he does that even now?

L: Yes.

M: It wouldn't surprise you to go out grocery shopping or something like that and see Lyndon Johnson talking to somebody?

L: No. Wouldn't surprise me at all.

M: You would seem to indicate that Lyndon Johnson has had a rather large impact on your life.

L: Yes, he has.

M: And also on the life of the city.

M: Life of the city; life of the community. We have many, many things here that we would not have had had it not been for the life and career of Lyndon Johnson. Well, for instance, we have this Boyhood Home over here; it's a National Historic Site. There's the LBJ State Park; there are many, many roadside parks. The Birthplace is a National Historic Site. It's unbelievable how many tourists these bring to this area each year.

M: So it's helped the economy, then, of the town?

L: Yes, before this Boyhood Home became a National Historic Site and the National Park Service took it over, it was operated by the Johnson City Foundation. And the people all over the county volunteered services to keep it open. That was when he was president. I worked over there many, many days.

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M: As a hostess?

L: As a hostess. We would have five hundred to one thousand people in an afternoon on Sunday--we kept it open all day during the week and in the afternoon on Sundays--come through there during the day. [It was] just unbelievable how many people came through from all over the world. People were represented from every state and many, many nations.

M: I notice there's a very good highway coming out here. Suppose he had anything to do with that?

L: Well, that highway has been built for years. We have good roads through here. However, I remember the days when it took a half day or more to go to Austin by automobile. Texas has the best roads anywhere around, I think, anyway.

M: So you might have had those anyway.

L: There was a time when the only hard-surface road we had was six miles out here at this creek where the Y turns off, one road goes to San Antonio and one to Austin. That was our first hard-surface road--six miles of it, little narrow thing.

M: How about all of these Secret Service men and people like that that would come through--did they help the economy of the town, too?

L: Yes. The Secret Service people lived here, quite a few of them.

M: In the town itself?

L: In the town, and sent their children to school here. When President Johnson was in Congress and came to the Ranch between sessions, Lynda Bird went to school here until time to go back to Washington. Later they had a residence in Austin and the children started school there. They came to the Ranch on weekends.

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M: And how about how many reporters would come to town? Was that difficult for you?

L: There was a center set up downtown, a communications center, and they put in telephones, and reporters would be there when President Johnson happened to be here and was going to have a press conference. They used that as headquarters, anyway, when he was in Texas when he was president.

M: Yes. But that didn't particularly disturb the town?

L: No. Some of the reporters were nice and some of them were not nice. Some of them would ask for interviews and just start the interviews of people in the area, and not tell it as it was. We've had some bad experiences with some of them.

M: Did you have some bad experience?

L: Yes.

M: So that part of Lyndon Johnson's career was not so enjoyable?

L: No, some of the people that came for interviews left a bad taste in our mouth. I think they didn't really mean to, I think they just didn't even try to understand the people of the community or of this area. Most of them came from the North and East and they weren't accustomed to anything like this. They couldn't believe it, they couldn't understand it, they didn't understand it, they didn't think it was true. So I think it was just one of the things that they just didn't understand. Perhaps they didn't mean to do that, but they did give us a very bad time, some of them.

Some of the times we would want to write, but one of the men who was very close to President Johnson said, "He doesn't want

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you to. Just ignore it. The better off you'll be, by just ignoring it."

M: Was that the attitude that most of the townspeople took when they would read adverse criticism or something like that?

L: We'd get irritated, but we just ignored it.

M: You think that was the best policy?

L: They seemed to think perhaps it was. I don't know. Of course, people in other areas believed it.

M: Yes. Well, this exhausts the questions I have. Do you have anything else you'd like to add or any comments you wish to make?

L: Yes, I'd like to say that I've never known two people who have given more of themselves for their country than Lyndon Johnson and Lady Bird, and I know that their love of their country is sincere. And whatever errors, if Lyndon Johnson made errors, he honestly believed what he did was for the best interest of his country.

M: Very good. Thank you for the interview.

L: Thank you.

[End of Tape 1 of 1 and Interview I]

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This assignment is subject to the following terms and conditions:

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Kittie Clyde Leonard
Donor

June 27, 1978
Date

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Date