

INTERVIEW I

DATE: May 28, 1970
INTERVIEWEE: HELENE LINDOW
INTERVIEWER: JOE B. FRANTZ
PLACE: Her office in the Federal Building, Austin, Texas

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F: Helene, we may as well go back to the beginning. You came out of Michigan, I think.

L: Yes, I was born in Flint, Michigan.

F: And wandered down to Washington at what late age in life?

L: I was about seven or eight years old, I think. My father got a new job in Washington.

F: Well, basically you are a Washingtonian, as far as you're concerned.

L: I am a Washingtonian, yes, as far as I'm concerned.

F: How did you happen to get mixed up with the Johnsons?

L: Well, when we moved to Washington, my parents entered me in a private girls school called National Cathedral School for Girls in Washington. I started there in the fifth grade, and when I was in the eighth grade one of the new girls who came in that year was a girl named Luci Johnson, Luci Baines Johnson. She was in my class.

F: I'm trying to get my ages straight.

L: It was 1960.

F: She was a senator's daughter at that time?

L: Yes, she was a senator's daughter and that was the fall of the 1960 campaign.

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F: He was going to be vice president.

L: Yes. I had been away at camp that summer. I really wasn't very interested in politics, and I really didn't know who the candidates were that much. We just sort of vaguely knew that her father was running for vice president, but it was a very Republican school, so this was not an asset, as far as she was concerned, really.

F: You didn't know it was going to affect your life?

L: No, not at all, not at all. I don't know, we were sort of drawn to each other, and developed a very nice friendship which grew during those years and we became best friends all through those years at NCS.

F: And you remained together right on through graduation?

L: Yes, so we went to school together for five years, eighth through twelfth grade.

F: Where did you meet her parents? At some school function?

L: No, I imagine it was at her home, at 30th Place. I remember going over there, we'd double, or she'd have me over for cokes in the afternoon. I can't remember meeting them for the first time, because they were her parents; it wasn't a big deal.

F: No. Was it a fairly free-flowing place? Did kids come and go a good bit, or was it fairly stiff or what?

L: Oh no, no, it was a very nice home; it was a small house, as I remember it. It was very unpretentious, like any house of any of my other classmates.

Her parents traveled a lot, so I remember her father especially seemed to always be away. So we didn't see them that much in the vice-

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presidential days, at least.

F: I presume you kept on going when they moved to The Elms?

L: Yes, that was--

F: That was probably a little less convenient, wasn't it?

L: Well, no, that wasn't. I lived on Massachusetts Avenue so it wasn't more than a ten minute drive or so. And we loved The Elms. That was great fun, because there was lots of room. It was a big house, and I spent the night over there sometimes, you know, with her. I just have very happy memories of the times that we [were there].

F: Whenever you spent the night over there, if anything was going on socially were the kids involved, too, or did you all sort of live a segregated life?

L: Well, I think the children might be brought in to say hello to everybody, and then sort of went on with their own business, because we usually would have our plans to go out with friends, or to be doing homework upstairs or something.

The Johnsons, as I will remember them, always wanted people to meet their children, and were very proud of them, and wanted them to be introduced around at least.

F: Did you see much of Lynda?

L: Yes, because Lynda was going to National Cathedral School at that time also. I'm trying to remember, when we were in the eighth grade, Lynda was a junior or a senior. You can check that, but anyway--

F: She was probably much older, at that time, I imagine.

L: Oh, she was quite older. She would give me rides home from school

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with Luci and sometimes she wasn't too happy about it because she had other things to do. But I was really on the way to the Elms, so she often gave me a lift home. We got to know Lynda, but Lynda was Luci's older sister and we were, you know--

F: A generation removed.

L: Yes, yes, absolutely. But I got to know her. I was probably a little scared of Lynda at that point, but I got to know her much better later on.

F: Did the Johnsons set much in the way of strict ground rules for Luci on her comings and goings in those days, because she is fairly much in the limelight.

L: Well, I remember, during the vice president days their philosophy was trust and they would believe that if they trusted the girls, the girls would not violate that trust and that they would be home at a reasonable hour.

I remember one occasion Luci and I were out and I think we might have been out with a couple of young men, but maybe not, anyway, we were just out with some friends for a coke and maybe to the Hot Shoppes for dinner. We ended up being out later than we thought we were going to be and Luci dropped me off first at my apartment and in the lobby when I went in, the receptionist said that Vice President Johnson had been calling and urgently wanting me to call. So I didn't even go upstairs to my apartment; I called from the lobby phone.

F: Probably with a little bit of a tremble. (Laughter)

L: Yes, I was! And both the Vice President and Mrs. Johnson got on the

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phone--I don't know if they were on extension phones but they were terribly concerned about Luci and wanted to know where we had been and everything. I said, well, Luci had just dropped me off and would be home; in just minutes she would be walking in the door. I told exactly what we had done and, as I say, we had probably been to the Hot Shoppes which is just a nice family type restaurant and I think time had just gotten away from us. But they were very concerned. It was very nice. They were very aware of it.

F: Then both girls, I presume, pretty well stayed within the rules and didn't try in any way to embarrass their parents.

L: No, they didn't. There were times, of course, when they wanted to do things like anybody else and they'd debate it, and sure, they snuck off and did some things. But they don't smoke and they don't drink and they are such good people that they'd never do anything bad.

F: Did you have much trouble when you went out with Luci with reporters or the public sort of tailing you, or were you pretty free to go around on your own?

L: Sometimes she would be recognized in a restaurant. People would come over to ask for autographs and she'd always be very gracious. It was always with us, but sometimes it could be fun. Because I remember one time we went to the Black Angus which was a restaurant in Washington, very good with steaks and roast beef. It was just the two of us and we had lunch. Then I remember people coming up for autographs and the chef sent out the menu asking for Luci to autograph it. But they insisted on treating us to lunch. So you see that works [both ways]. Sometimes it

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was very nice. We said, "Oh no! No!" But they insisted, so we--

F: That helped your allowance, didn't it?

L: Yes, it did! So sometimes it could be . . .

F: Where were you at the time of the assassination of President Kennedy?

L: I'll never [forget]. As every American, I'll always remember where I was. I was at school. Luci was at school also. I had just come back from lunch and I had an art class and I was in my art room and Luci, I think, was in her Spanish class.

F: You had lunch about twelve to one?

L: About twelve to one. Yes.

F: It must have been right after one o'clock.

L: Right. It was about one o'clock or one-ten, but I remember we hadn't quite started class yet. We were sort of standing in the room and somebody came in, somebody had been listening to a portable radio coming back from lunch, and said they'd heard that President Kennedy had been shot. Of course we couldn't believe it and we thought it wasn't right and then somebody said, no, it was true and we started getting reports.

Then somebody heard the report that Vice President Johnson had had a heart attack or something because he was holding his hand on his heart. And that's the point where I just broke down because it was Luci's father and I just couldn't imagine anything happening to him.

F: Now, Luci wasn't near you.

L: Luci was in her class still, but then the bell started to ring. And we'd never had anything like this before, but somehow everybody, scattered all over that school, knew that we should go to the chapel which

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was our gym, Whitby Gym, which was used in the morning for a chapel. But nobody told us to go there. But somehow that bell kept ringing and we just all converged on the chapel. And then our principal did speak to us and gave us the straight story from the newscast of what happened. And I did see Luci. We just sat together and held hands and everybody sort of grabbed hands and we just all prayed very hard.

F: Did they turn out school?

L: Well, I don't remember because I stayed with Luci. She then went into the vice principal's office and was told that President Kennedy was dead at that time. I believe that's when she found out that he had actually died. They sent Secret Service over to pick her up and take her home.

F: They were there pretty quickly?

L: Yes, we went back over to--

F: Did you go on home with her then?

L: Yes, first of all she went over to one of the girls who lived there, one of the resident's room to lie down and rest for a second until they came. She was in shock, as we all were. Then the Secret Service did come and pick us up and Luci asked if I could be allowed to get out of school and come with her and Kitty McGee who was a year ahead of us in school and a friend of hers from Texas came with us. So the three of us got in the back of the car with these strange men--

F: Was that George McGhee's daughter?

L: No, I don't know what her father's name is. But she was a boarder up there from Corpus.

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F: Did Luci drive her own car home that she drove to school, at that time.

L: No, because it was 1963.

F: I guess the Secret Service took her back and forth.

L: Yes, she wasn't--

F: I was wondering if she drove home, but I guess the Secret Service then took her home and you too.

L: Yes and me too. I remember, too, going through the gates of The Elms and the people standing outside the gates.

F: They'd already gathered.

L: Already gathered. The gates were closed for the first time that we'd ever seen them. The driveway had always been open, but the gates were closed. They opened them up and we drove up and went upstairs. Luci said, "What can I do for my parents?" Because they were on their way home and she said, "Well, the best thing I can do, Daddy always wants his girls to be well kept and pretty. My hair needs washing and the next days I won't have a chance and I'm just going to wash my hair." It was a very practical idea, because she didn't have time the next few days. So we stayed in the bedroom and we had the TV going and listened to everything we could.

F: She didn't, though, in effect, kind of panic by the thing, and she just started picking up what was practical to do.

L: What to do. After shedding the tears and, of course, many tears were shed that weekend. She gathered herself and we just tried to provide strength for her and she was wonderful.

F: Did the Secret Service, on the way out, sort of give her an uncle-like

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talk on what this portended for her, or did they pretty well just drive?

L: No, I'll tell you the truth, I cannot remember. I remember being in the back of the car, but I can't remember conversation. It was numbing. You know, the feelings that we were having. I doubt if they did. I imagine they were fairly close-mouthed.

F: I would guess also that if I could have put some kind of recorder on you at that moment, you couldn't have expressed very much of what you were feeling anyhow.

L: No.

F: Because mostly you know you're caught up in something, but it is sort of inexplicable.

L: It was an awful, awful moment in our history.

And we watched then as President Johnson landed at the airport and made his very strong statement to the country.

F: You didn't consider going out to Andrews?

L: No.

F: When did he get back to the house?

L: Well, it was that evening. I don't think he went straight to the house; I think he probably went to his office. And I think Mrs. Johnson came; I remember her coming up the stairs and I remember Luci running in to her and being with her. And I think that's when I left, once that Mrs. Johnson came home.

F: You weren't there when the President got there?

L: No.

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F: Did Mrs. Johnson look worn?

L: Yes.

F: What did you do in that next several days? Were you involved in it at all?

L: Yes. I was over there. I was just with Luci that whole weekend, trying to help out in any way I could. You really need your . . . It was just a time of being drawn together. And I just wanted to--

F: A time for friends.

L: It was a time for friends and you really needed them.

F: Did you have a lot of people coming through the house over this long weekend or were they pretty well kept away from the house?

L: I sort of remember people. You know, I was observing, but there were people in and out and lots of Secret Service agents around.

F: Did Luci ever seem to express any fear for their safety at this time?

L: No. I don't remember it. I don't really remember thinking that, you know.

F: Did you see anything of the President at this time?

L: Very little, very in and out and I really don't have a clear recollection of it. It was such a jumble, those days. I just couldn't even sort them out.

I just remember watching television a lot. We all had the TVs going, watching everything. I remember the Sunday, we were out. I think I was out taking Luci's dogs for a ride and a romp and I can't remember if Luci was with me. I don't think she was, but while I was out, Lee Oswald was shot and I remember coming back to my apartment

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and I just couldn't [believe it]. You know it was just another blow, after all that had happened.

Anyway, I was with her a lot, and they just did beautifully. They just had great strength, but it was an awful time because it wasn't--

F: Was Lynda in Washington when this happened?

L: Lynda flew to Washington, I believe. She was in Texas when it happened. She was attending the University of Texas at that time.

F: Did you see much of her over the weekend, do you recall?

L: I don't really remember. I was more of Luci's friend at that point.

F: Luci did not participate in any of the funeral services, did she?
She stayed home.

L: I think that they stayed home. There might have been one occasion, I don't know, you'd really have to check the files, I can't remember. But I seem to remember being with her and watching it all on TV as her parents would go out.

F: I hate to approach this negatively, but you probably cannot sort your impressions on this, but do you have any idea of a teenager's reaction when suddenly she realizes that a man she has known for some years and has accepted as somebody's father is the president of the United States.

L: It took me quite a while to realize it because I had known him first as Luci's father. And I frankly wasn't that impressed that he was a senator because at National Cathedral, we had ambassadors' daughters; we had lots of senators' daughters, congressmens'. Everybody . . .

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F: . . . was somebody. (Laughter)

L: Yes. And it wasn't too special. Vice President--of course I had respect for him, but still I wasn't overly impressed with it. You have to be impressed with the presidency and slowly it dawned on me that this man was running our country. And of course, I came to know him as Mr. President, but it did take a while. It was hard.

F: Were you around at the time they left The Elms?

L: No. I remember Luci calling me, though, the day they moved in, which was December 7, I believe, because it's my parents' wedding anniversary.

F: Also Pearl Harbor Day.

L: Yes, also Pearl Harbor Day. All sorts of things. I remember my parents were out of town, and I was staying with another girlfriend, while they were away. She called me that night to tell me that she had moved in and just kind of talked to me about it. She told me a funny story. She had had a friend, Beth Jenkins, stay with her and they had lit the fire in her bedroom and almost burned down the White House because, apparently, the flue wasn't open or something; smoke had been billowing. So she was telling me all this.

But I, in the days to come, went over there and it became just another home.

F: A little nicer than most of your friend's homes, but it's still a house where people live.

L: Yes. She'd have me spend the night when my parents would be away, or if they would go on a trip for a week, I'd just move in there.

F: Did you get a feeling that the White House was a place in a sense

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where an American family lived? I don't mean in an official sense, but was there kind of a family feeling about the place?

L: There is. It can be a very cold and lonely place. I think anytime you have young people in the house, it just immediately brightens it up, and you get the feeling of a real home. When you have dogs running through and eventually little babies as we did at the very end.

My impression about the White House, though, is when it doesn't have the people in it, it's a very eerie place. I remember one night I was spending the night and I guess Luci was out and President and Mrs. Johnson were out and I was alone on the second floor. And it was of course dark up there. I love the view from the Yellow Room, looking at the Washington Monument and the Jefferson Memorial lit up at night. So I sort of went across the hall from Luci's room into the Yellow Room to look out that window and look at the view. And you really could feel the ghosts. It was a very still, quiet place. But nobody's up on the second floor, if the family's not there. And the Secret Service agents all stay on the ground floor or the first floor.

F: Really quite isolated, in a sense.

L: It really is.

F: In there, with the world fenced out.

L: Yes.

F: You're beyond the traffic noises and nobody walks on the streets below without authorization. It must be . . .

L: It's a very eerie feeling and it's not a friendly feeling particularly.

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Once you get people there that

F: Where did you usually stay when you were there?

L: I always stayed in Luci's room. She had a big double bed.

F: Did the Johnson encourage the girls to have guests?

L: Absolutely. They did.

F: They liked to have young people around.

L: They liked to have young people, and they liked to have the feeling that their girls could have friends over just like they always did.

F: Now, when the girls occasionally had a party, did it take a kind of preparation that goes into either the president's party or one for Mrs. Johnson, you know.

L: No. It was very much do-it-yourself affairs with the White House staff maybe helping out and just being wonderful, if they did, but it was

Luci's favorite room was the Solarium.

F: Yes.

L: Which was on the top floor of the White House and was used by General Eisenhower as a card room and by Caroline Kennedy as a school.

Luci redecorated it herself and made it into a very comfortable living room-type with a record player up there and book shelves.

F: I've spent an evening up there just visiting. It's a good place for that sort of thing.

L: It is. It's just a good place. And we would have most of our parties up there or gatherings. They might be impromptu. Luci was a great

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one for giving surprise parties to her friends.

F: If you wanted to have hot dogs and fritos and cokes, that was fine.

L: And we'd send out for pizzas all the time. Another great thing about the White House that--

F: Now let me ask you about that.

L: Okay.

F: When you sent out for pizza, did you just ask somebody on the White House kitchen staff or someone like that to go get it, or did you call and have it delivered?

L: Well, I'm not really sure, because I never worried about it. Luci always would figure out a way to get it.

F: She was a great kind of a get-up-and-do-it girl.

L: Yes. Sometimes we'd go get it, or if there was a young man on his way over he'd go pick up the pizza. But many times we had pizza there. Perhaps someone on the staff sometimes went to pick it up; maybe they delivered, but I really don't know.

F: Was it sort of known around Washington that you were a friend of Luci's?

L: Well--

F: What I mean is, did the news people ever try to use you to get information?

L: Yes, they did; they did. But they soon found I was very close-mouthed, and I had absolutely no information to give. Luci always would kid me because I was so close-mouthed that I never told my parents anything, and of course she was very close to my parents.

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She'd say something like, "What did you think about what happened yesterday to me, Mrs. Lindow?" And Mother would say, "What happened?" And she'd said, "Well, didn't Helene tell you?" And Mother would say, "No, she never tells us anything!"

That's true. News people did call, and I just was never very helpful, I'm afraid.

F: Now you went off to college.

L: Yes, I went to Bennett College, which is a girl's college.

F: Did that affect you? There's a chance that, no matter how much you downplay it, you can't avoid the knowledge going with you that you are close to someone in the White House.

L: Well, I did downplay it; I didn't mention it to anyone but, I guess it first leaked out--well, I'll tell you the story because it involves Luci. In the fall of 1967 Luci called me one night, at college, from Washington.

F: Well, that let's that out the minute they say, "This is the White House calling."

L: Well, that sort of doesn't help. But anyway, it was funny because that night, school had just started, and it's a two-year college, and the seniors, the second year girls were sort of terrorizing the freshmen. It was part of a Hell Week, or something like that.

F: Where is Bennett?

L: Millbrook, New York. You know, all schools have that sort of thing. It was sort of a ritual. And so my roommate and I had locked our door that night, because we were scared they were going to come in

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and get us during the night. So we just locked the door. We were both very sound sleepers, so apparently Luci had called, and they had knocked on my door to get me, and no answer. We were sound asleep. Well, they banged and banged and banged. Finally they tried again and reached me and I staggered to a hall phone in my sleep, and got Luci back on the phone.

And she said, "Pat and I were calling you because when we first called, we wanted to tell you that we were going to come up with Daddy to New York City." I think it was when they went to the Statue of Liberty to sign the--

F: Immigration.

L: Immigration. I think that was the time. She said, "We're going to come up with Daddy and we thought maybe you could come down to New York and see us," she said, "but since we called, earlier in the evening, we've decided to get married. So we want you to be one of the first to know." And she said, "I want to ask you right now to be in my wedding. You know, all the girls talk about it, but I really want you." But she said to keep it a secret and everything.

So I went to New York City to meet them, and that's a story in itself. Have you ever been in New York City when the President's visiting one of the hotels?

F: No, I haven't.

L: They cordon off, like blocks around the hotel.

F: Where were they--at the Waldorf?

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L: He was at the Waldorf in the Towers there at that presidential suite.

So here's this little college girl, walking. I'd gone on the train early Sunday morning.

F: And, of course, no identification of any kind.

L: Well, you know, I had some time to kill before I was supposed to meet her. She told what time to be at the hotel, and I decided to walk from the Metropolitan Museum down to the Waldorf which is quite a long way, twenty blocks or so. It was a beautiful day. So I finally get there and the policemen, you know. So I talked my way into the Waldorf, and I finally said, "Well, if you'll find a Secret Service agent--" because I knew so many of them. I was hoping to find one that knew me.

Anyway I finally got upstairs and saw them, and they had decided--somebody was giving a dinner for them that night. I don't remember if it was Ambassador [Arthur] Goldberg or not. Anyway, Luci and Pat had been invited but they declined, and they took me out to dinner that night. We went to P. J. Moriarty's, a steak house. Then they insisted on driving me back to college, which was about a two-hour drive, upstate New York.

Then I wanted to show Luci my room, so Luci with Secret Service agents comes through this girls' dorm. And then the cat was let out of the bag, I'm afraid. I'd kept it very quiet; no one knew up till that time that I knew her. But she came up to my room.

F: And everybody was out in the hall.

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- L: Oh, all the girls were saying, "Man on the floor! Man on the floor!" And this agent was just adorable; he was young and blond and of course all the girls were wondering who this was. So that was quite a stir.
- F: I can imagine. Did you go out to the Immigration ceremony?
- L: No, I just met them afterwards, I guess it must have been.
- F: What went on, from your standpoint, as far as the wedding was concerned? I mean, we can get Luci's version of the thing from another angle.
- L: Well, as a bridesmaid . . .
- F: What happens to the bridesmaid in something like this? How far in advance did you begin to, in a sense, get ready and get fitted, et cetera, et cetera.
- L: Well, I gave Luci the first engagement party which was in February around Valentine's Day.
- F: Where did you give it?
- L: At the City Tavern, which is a private club in Washington. So that was, really, sort of the kickoff of the whole wedding preparations. That was February and the wedding was in August.
- F: How do you hold down the guest list on something like that to keep it from just running away from you?
- L: Well, it was hard, but we asked Luci for suggestions, and she said she wanted friends, young and old, so we had everyone ranging from our age up to Perle Mesta, you know.
- F: The youngest one there, probably. (Laughter)
- L: Absolutely, in spirit. But we just had a good old mixing of official

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Washington and friends from Texas. Luci has a wonderful way of bringing all sorts of people to her, and so it was a fun mixture. It was a dinner dance and a very elegant one, but it was great fun and President and Mrs. Johnson did come, so it was very special.

That was the first time that they met the Nugents, at that party.

F: Oh. Did you do the introductions?

L: No, they had driven down and they met them at the White House earlier, but that was the first occasion [together].

F: Did you get to see much of the Nugents or were you too busy being hostess?

L: No, I did, I got to see them.

F: Were they fairly unbending by now? This is a bad position to come into.

L: It's a very difficult one, but they were very, as Mrs. Johnson would call them, I think, "home folks." They're very easy-going, very outspoken in a nice way. I mean, they just say what they feel and they're not pretentious. They're just wonderful people and they fit in, and everybody liked them. I remember that everybody was very impressed with them because they were so friendly. It was a good meeting, I think, on everybody's part.

F: Did Luci ever talk to you about turning Catholic?

L: About her turning Catholic? (Laughter) I thought you meant trying to convert me for a second. Yes, we talked [about it].

F: How did she get started in this direction?

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L: I think it had been building up for years, really. She was always a very religious person, always took the church seriously. And I think she needed something in her life.

F: Where did she get exposed to the Catholic Church? You know, most people just get deeper into their own particular church.

L: I think she had Catholic friends and learned about it and, really, by the time she met Pat Nugent she had already decided, I think, by then, to go ahead with it.

F: That just sort of confirmed the fact. Was she concerned about the political repercussions, or what it might do to the family?

L: I think, a little. I think, a little, and, of course, there was some bad publicity at the time. The one thing Luci never wanted to do was hurt her father in any way.

F: Did she worry over telling him or her mother?

L: Well, I think they all had discussions about it before. I don't think it was ever--maybe there was one time when she finally gave them the big announcement, but I think it had been discussed over a period of time.

F: Just kind of eased into it, so there wasn't any great dramatic moment.

L: I don't think it was a great shock. I think they knew that this very well could be happening and that this was a possibility.

F: As far as you know, they never threw any roadblocks.

L: Not that I know of. I think they wanted to make sure that she had thought about it carefully before she went ahead and did it, but

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they were behind her when she did it.

F: And you're convinced she had?

L: That she had thought about it? Oh, yes, this was not a whim of a young girl at all. And to this day, well, just knowing her today, I know it was the right decision for her. She's very happy.

F: Getting back to the wedding and the approaching wedding, how did you handle, or did the White House take over--I'm sure every reporter at least every society reporter, in town wanted to crash the thing. and they wanted to grab everybody coming out to say, "What's going on in there?"

L: Absolutely. Well, what the White House did--and this was Liz Carpenter's office, who was handling Mrs. Johnson's press relations--

F: Was this your first real contact with Liz?

L: I got to know Liz, probably, very well then. I had known her, but not [well].

F: Your life seems to be always running into people who you are going to get mixed up with later.

L: That's right, really, I'm a very lucky person. But they decided--there were twelve bridesmaids, including a maid and matron of honor. And that's a lot of girls, and that's a lot of--there's no way to control what twelve girls are going to say, in a nice way. And you just don't want--

F: You've got twelve potential leaks there.

L: Yes, absolutely. So, the White House decided that it would be best to choose two, one from Texas and one from Washington, to

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represent all the girls and to speak to the press. They asked me to represent the ones on the East coast, and they asked Warrie Lynn Smith in Texas to handle Texas people, and the people down here. And so, if anybody wanted to interview bridesmaids, they came to one of us. I did interviews.

F: The other girls kept closed mouths, then.

L: Yes. I guess they thought I could handle myself well. But anyway, it was a responsibility, but I did interviews for NBC and CBS and ABC and various newspapers and Mutual, so I got in the interview business.

F: Yes.

L: Always hoping I'd never say anything--

F: It must have been a little awesome at first, but I suppose you got rather casual about it.

L: Yes, yes. You know, "I'm going off to do my NBC interview on television!" But it was fun, it was an exciting period of time.

F: What was it then, just a matter of the rounds of parties and the various preparations?

L: There were lots of parties; there were fittings. I remember being in New York with Luci. We went up to try and choose bridesmaids gowns with Charlotte--

F: Did Luci have a pretty definite ideas of what she wanted?

L: Well, yes, but she wanted to--you really have to see a few, and then you get more ideas. And anyway, so we'd go on shopping trips and have people bring things in.

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Of course, it was all under great secrecy, because you don't want all your wedding plans to be on the front page of the paper months before they happen, and it's difficult. There was lots of tension because people were always trying to find out. Like Women's Wear Daily and they have lots of sources, so that was always hard.

But there were lots of parties, everybody was giving them parties, and it was fun. It was a very gay time.

F: Well, now, Luci must have had a little bit of a problem; maybe this is outside your purview. I would think that everybody in Washington with an ax to grind would be wanting to give her a party.

L: Well, that was a problem.

F: So you could just be snowed with [them]. How did you hold the number down?

L: I imagine that Bess Abell, Mrs. Johnson's social secretary, and Mrs. Johnson and Luci sort of got together on that. I don't know for sure, but it was a problem. And maybe, looking back, there were too many. But, I don't know, Luci had a lot of friends, and it was the first White House bride--

F: She cut a fairly wide swath. We hadn't had anything like that in a long time.

L: In fifty years or so. And the Johnsons, after being in Washington for thirty-some years, did have a lot of friends that they wanted to include. So it worked out pretty well. I think when Lynda got married there weren't as many parties, and, you know, it was kept down a little bit.

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F: They had experience with it.

L: Right, well, we learned.

F: Did all the girls come in for [fittings]? Did one fitting take care of the girls, or did they have to come several times?

L: Well, I imagine what they did is, I think they got the girls' measurements and had them send them in, and then they made the dresses, and then the week of the wedding, we had final fittings in the Lincoln Room. We'd have appointments with Priscilla, and we'd--

F: Did you all have them at the same time in the Lincoln Room?

L: No, we'd come in singly.

F: You didn't have that excitement of a bunch of girls looking at each other.

L: No, because they had to concentrate on each person. Maybe there'd be one other person in there with you, but we had that excitement getting ready for the wedding. But it was fun being in the Lincoln Room, because you had that big, long mirror and there you were in your beautiful long pink gown.

F: You could just swirl and admire.

L: Yes, and it's a very historic room.

F: Right. Did the dressmaker seem to be keeping her cool all right?

L: Oh, she was mavelous. If I ever get married, I'm sure I'll be very lucky if I get Priscilla. Because she handled it beautifully, and there were lots of tensions for her, I'm sure; twelve girls trying to get their dresses, and some weren't right at

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the last minute, and had to be re-done. She had two men there, I think, who were dressmakers, with their sewing machines set up in the Lincoln Room, doing last minute alterations.

F: How long did your fitting take you?

L: I don't remember. I think mine was pretty good, it was probably about fifteen minutes or something. And then trying the veil on, you know. Then we had a little lesson on how to kneel, and again they had a kneeler set up in front of the mirror of the Lincoln Room. How to kneel in that dress.

F: Okay, now we come down to the event.

L: Yes.

F: We have the traditions of the night before and so on.

L: The rehearsal dinner.

F: What's it like, from your standpoint? Must have been fairly exciting.

L: Absolutely. Are you talking about the wedding day itself now?

F: I'm talking about the rehearsal dinner, going to that, and how you got there. Did you go in your own family's car?

L: I think I went--

F: Did you have your own car?

L: Well, my mother had helped out. You know, the parents of the groom give the rehearsal dinner, but Mrs. Nugent did live in Illinois, and so Mrs. Johnson and Mrs. Nugent had asked my mother, who's a very creative, talented person, to help make arrangements for the rehearsal dinner. So she had done a lot of work on it and they had

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asked my parents to attend the rehearsal dinner. So I think I probably went with them. It was held at the Georgetown Club.

F: Yes.

L: Oh, and it was just, again, very elegant. It was a very exciting evening. They had a little band for dancing, and then they had a young man who was currently in the Broadway production "Mame" come down and sing love songs, you know. It was just sort of a magical evening.

F: Did Luci seem to be soaring, or was she getting pretty weary by this time?

L: No, she didn't show any signs of weariness. She was absolutely soaring, and looked beautiful. And then, the next day--

F: What did you do all the next day until the wedding time, just get ready?

L: Well, let's see, the wedding was at noon, wasn't it? So I guess I got up fairly early, tried to sleep a little late, and went down to the White House. Of course, the girls from out of town were staying at the White House in various rooms, so they were there getting their hair done.

F: Must have been a real sorority.

L: Oh, it was. It was just all these girls and their hair all ratted up and trying to get ready, and hairpieces, and dresses and shoes all over. You know, we were all trying to tell each other that we must have a little bit of breakfast, you know, because we were all

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getting very excited. I was terribly calm. At least I thought I was, you know, not showing any--

F: Outwardly--

L: --any outward signs at all. I just thought, "I'm so calm I can't believe it." And they got us all in cars, and we had a motorcade to the church. I remember being in the anteroom of the church with all the bridesmaids. The President and Mrs. Johnson came in to see us all before we went down the aisle.

Then we walked down the aisle, and that was a very long aisle! I don't think any of us will walk down one that long. And you had to go singly.

F: Now you knew you were going to be on national television. You couldn't avoid this. They were going to catch the party somewhere. Did they put special make-up on you, or did you just--?

L: Oh, no.

F: You went as if you'd--

L: Oh, yes. We just made up like for the wedding; good heavens, no, no special make-up at all. We went down singly, one by one, down the aisle, and there was a long separation between each one. And you have all these people looking at you, you know, as you're walking down the aisle. Then we went to our places.

F: Sort of like running a gauntlet, in effect, wasn't it?

L: I'm sure it looked lovely to have us all going down because they were bright pink dresses. The one memory I have of the ceremony-- I am not Catholic, and it was a high mass, an hour and a half,

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approximately--it was very hot. It was August 6, and it was a very hot day and very hot in the church.

F: Too many people, for the amount of air?

L: Well, it wasn't necessarily the people, but there were lights on it, because it was being filmed by us--by the White House for a film. So we had hot television type lights on us, and we, the bridal party, had no chairs. We had to stand or kneel for an hour and a half.

We were in these long sleeve, heavy dresses, and I fainted. It's nothing I'm very proud of, but there was a headline in the next morning's paper, which of course was practically totally devoted to the wedding itself.

F: I remember the fainting, but of course I didn't know you from Adam.

L: No, well, there was a headline in one of the papers that said, "Helene Lindow--the first to go." The first, because Lynda felt faint after that, and then another girl just about collapsed on the way out of the church. But when you're not Catholic and you're not used to that, and you didn't even have a chair to sit down in! And I felt myself getting very--and I've never fainted in my life, I'm not the type, but as I said, I'd been so calm, you see, I must have been keeping--

F: Had you had breakfast?

L: Well, I'd had a couple of pieces of bacon or something, but I hadn't eaten much.

And I sort of felt myself going, and I sort of shot a look to

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the side at the row of priests, and one of them caught me before I tumbled over completely, and sort of dragged me off. There was a nurse, thoughtfully provided by the White House, who was there with smelling salts. I lay down, and she got me back in shape and I sort of slipped back. Most people didn't realize it had happened.

F: It didn't make any commotion.

L: No, oh no. I would have felt terrible if I had. But then Lynda Bird felt faint right after that.

F: Then you rush off for the reception.

L: Then back to the reception.

F: What was that like, from Helene's standpoint?

L: Well, first of all, we had the formal photograph of the wedding party on the steps, on the South Portico there. That's when you just saw all the television cameras, and all the press of the world it seemed, looking up and making notes furiously.

Then we went inside, and it was just the family in the receiving line. And it was just a wonderful reception. It was for me, because I knew so many of the people there; I know so many of the Johnsons' friends that it was just as Luci would say, like old home week, you know. It was people all brought together because they love Luci and Pat or had known them for years. And there was dancing, and it just went on and on, it seemed.

F: Where was Pat during all this?

L: (Laughter) I haven't mentioned Pat, have I? That always happens to the groom.

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F: Yes, I know.

L: He takes second place.

F: Did he take all this in stride? He must have at times felt like he was just an excuse for something to happen.

L: I think it was hard on Pat. Pat was not used to the [press]; well, Pat is a very private person, and he resented the press invading his privacy at all. That was always something that was difficult. He didn't enjoy talking to the press, and he didn't make any bones about it. He has a wonderful personality, but he was defensive about certain things, but I think it went off very well. I hope he enjoyed it. He had lots of his friends from Wisconsin who came, and old fraternity brothers, and they sort of livened up the party, too.

F: Did the party kind of, toward the end, just fade out?

L: I think the young people were the ones who stayed the longest, dancing. We just sort of danced on and on.

F: When did you go?

L: Well, I remember it had just about wound up. There were just a few of us left. I went upstairs to get my stuff; I went up alone, I remember, and I was walking past the Oval Room and Mrs. Johnson was in there, and I don't remember if the President was in there or not--I think he was, I'm pretty sure he was. And their relatives, in other words, the Johnsons' family, were in there. They had invited them to watch Nancy Dickerson's special which was on, following the wedding.

So Mrs. Johnson saw me sort of tiptoeing by, and she asked me

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to come in. And she introduced me to the relatives and said, "This is one of the bridesmaids." Obviously, in my pink dress, I was sort of marked. And then she did a very sweet thing: she took one of the lilies of the valley which had been on top of Luci's wedding cake and gave it to me as sort of a souvenir of the day and I have it pressed in my scrapbook.

F: The press can be quite critical and captious of anyone in the First Family, and the Johnsons were certainly no exception. Were they in kind of a wedding spirit for this?

L: Absolutely. All the world loves a lover, and the press just melted, I think, especially the ladies who can be very hard-core. Sometimes you don't think they have a heart, but they did, and they enjoyed it. They loved Luci to start with, and they were thrilled to have a wedding to write about. They just wanted every single little detail they could get their hands on.

F: Yes. Did you have any repercussions from somebody who was left out of the wedding?

L: Not through me at all. I remember people trying to get invitations to the wedding through various staff members and offering to do things if they could get in. It was quite a status to be invited, I imagine.

F: What did you do with your dress?

L: It's hanging in my closet in my parents' apartment in Washington, D.C.

F: Your brush with history?

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L: My brush with history. I've never worn it. You know, we talked about this. She [Luci] wanted to get a gown that the girls could wear again, because she knows it's expensive to get a bridesmaid gown, especially if you're in several weddings. But somehow, I never could wear it to a ball. It's too special to me, so I'm just saving it for my daughter maybe one day.

F: You'd never forgive yourself if you did tear it or spill something.

L: Or if somebody spilled something that stained on it, some wine, you'd just die. So I think I'll save it.

Warrie Lynn Smith has given her dresses from both Lynda's and Luci's weddings to the Library, which was a very generous thing for her to do.

F: Incidentally, where is Warrie Lynn? Is she still in Chile or has she come home?

L: She is going to come home in October, this fall, I believe.

F: I haven't seen her.

Okay, you have now gotten somebody married in the White House. What happens to you?

L: I went back to college.

F: How dull!

L: I want you to know I held a summer job that summer, too! I only took off a week or two to be in the wedding. But I went back to college. No, I was really wrapped up in college, I was very happy. I have never gotten a big head about it all. I've enjoyed it while I've had it, but I never dwell on it. And I kept up with Luci, but

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of course not as much, because she was in Austin then, and phone calls are expensive that far, so it would be a little--

F: She was making a new career.

L: --less communication, but we always kept up.

F: Okay, now how did you get back in the White House orbit?

L: Well, I graduated the next spring, next June, of 1967, from Bennett, and I decided that I wanted to work instead of going on for two more years.

I was looking for a job in television production, which I'm very interested in, in New York.

F: You went with WTOP that summer.

L: Well, I had worked two summers for WTOP as a production assistant and then I thought I'd work for one of the networks. I'd just about gotten a job with CBS as production assistant on a new television show. And Liz Carpenter had a sudden opening in her office, and wondered if I would be interested. I thought about it, and I decided it would be a wonderful opportunity and a terrific job, so I gave up my dreams of New York and my career at that point and went into her office. And I'm very glad I did, because it was fascinating, the year and a half or so I had there.

F: Did Liz have this divided somewhat as to duties, or did everybody just kind of pitch in and work together?

L: There were, in some ways, areas--

F: Little divisions of labor.

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L: Like Simone Poulain was probably her second in command, I'd say, in Liz's office; Simone was especially concerned with television/radio people. She had some experience in this, so if a network was filming a special of some kind, she would be the one assigned to coordinate it all. And, because of my interest in television, my desk was in Simone's office and I worked with her a lot on television crews coming in, which I loved.

F: What did you work on?

L: All sorts of things. Now, television-wise, Julia Child came and did a special program for NET. I think it was probably about an hour-long program, I'm not sure. What was it called? "Dinner and Diplomacy." It was on a state dinner and all the behind-the-scenes preparations for a state dinner. They were down for many days and there was lots of preparation going into that.

F: Did she actually follow one state dinner through from beginning to end?

L: Yes. It was [Prime Minister Eisaku] Sato of Japan that we did.

F: Very major.

L: It was a very major one. And I think it turned out to be a good show. It was fun to get to know Julia Child.

F: Right.

L: I learned a lot about [it]. Well, after working with Simone some, then I could take off on my own and I might have my own project of a crew coming in to do a segment of a show or something. I would be given responsibility for just getting it coordinated

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myself.

F: Were you active in these filmings of "a month in the White House?"

L: The monthlies of the President? No. That was done mostly on his side of the [White] House and by the Navy.

F: You also got involved in some of the trip planning?

L: Yes. The Discover America trip I did. That was my first advance and I was sent with Nash Castro to Hannibal, Missouri, to help advance that portion of it and the Illinois and Mississippi River boat ride. And it was fascinating because she--

F: Well, now, did you do a dry run on this to see that times were accurate and that sort of thing?

L: Yes, we did lots of dry runs. There is an awful lot on this advancing and I am not the person to describe it all, because there's so many advance men who could tell you all. But it's just unbelievable all you go through, because you go to a town and you've got to make contact with the proper persons. You've got to set up with the mayor of the town and all the city council or whatever.

First you find out what they want to do; you tell them what you're hoping Mrs. Johnson can see and do. You're working with the local police force. You're working with the local media, from not only that city but maybe the state, plus the national press that'll be traveling through with Mrs. Johnson. You're setting up hotel accommodations if they're spending the night. You're figuring out what routes, actually, on the streets to go down, whether to let the school children out so they can see and how to get a crowd.

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It's just unbelievable.

F: Now you, in the midst of this, are just barely into your twenties.

L: Yes.

F: Did the impress of the White House sort of compensate for your obvious youth?

L: I hope it did. Most people didn't know how young I was and I wasn't about to tell them, because I was in the position, at age twenty, of telling people often what to do. People sixty years old, a mayor of a town, I might be suggesting that it would be best if he did a certain thing. If he knew I was twenty years old, I'm sure he wouldn't have been as happy. But something about being from the White House does give you a little edge up and you just don't abuse that. You try and--I'm always very respectful.

F: Were you able to impress upon people the necessity for secrecy until such time as you were ready to release information?

L: You tried. You tried. That was difficult, too, because there was always a local newspaperman who was sort of hanging around the mayor's office or whatever.

F: The mayor can hardly resist telling somebody the fact that someone from the White House came to see him.

L: It was a great opportunity. Absolutely. And then the word does get out when the advance people get there and do set up in a hotel room and start planning. It's deciding what to let them know at what point.

And of course, you're working with the Secret Service at the

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same time. They're there working with you; they're in on all the meetings to help give guidance on security.

F: Then they always contact the local police force.

L: Yes. They do; they work with them very closely. The Secret Service is just marvelous on these trips. They're so professional and they're a great help.

F: Did you ever run into real obstacles from local people in doing what you wanted to do?

L: Oh, I don't know. They have their own ideas and it's usually to try and, well--

F: They want to do too much, don't they?

L: They want to do too much. Every little group wants to present Mrs. Johnson or, in the President's case the President, with the red roses; the Girl Scouts wants to present something, the Brownies, the Boy Scouts, the local civics club. Everybody wants to get in the act and it's just awful hard. If you have a program where twenty people are marching up to present different awards, you just have a very dull program, and so you've just sort of got to see it from above and try and make it be interesting. You have a time schedule of the whole trip to keep, too.

F: Yes.

L: Now, this Discover America trip that I was involved with, which was my first one, was not a political trip. So, therefore, it's different from a campaign trip. You're trying to avoid politics in this case. And of course everybody on that trip was

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accusing us of playing politics, but we really weren't.

F: Of course, you could hardly step across the street and buy a newspaper without it being a political move.

L: That's true. But really, this was not for political reasons that she did it. She did it to open everybody's eyes to all the wonders of America and how much there was to discover.

F: In general, is she a good traveler?

L: Oh, she's marvelous. Mrs. Johnson's the kind of lady that starts off the morning looking fresh and rested and stays that way until twelve o'clock that night.

F: Kind of disgusting, isn't it? (Laughter)

L: Everybody in your entourage is weary; their hair's all straggly and you're windblown.

F: I've seen Liz at the end of a day.

L: And, you know, we all looked just like we'd had it. Mrs. Johnson looks wonderful, she floats through it all. And she does a lot of work; it isn't that she hasn't been doing anything. She's been making speeches, she's been shaking thousands of hands, she's been trying to remain interested in everybody. And it's quite a strain, but she just does beautifully.

F: I'm looking at it from the outside, you, from the inside. I never could see any signs of cynicism on her part. The enthusiasm always looked real, not strained to me. Is that true?

L: It's true. I think so. She is a very alive person who's very interested in a great variety of things in life. And she does get

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excited about learning about a new project or something that she hasn't known about before. And she really wants to hear about it.

F: She's a learner.

L: And it really doesn't go in one ear You know, you might think it's one thing to be interested and sound like you're really listening. But I've heard her so many times repeat what she's heard, days later, weeks later, years later. She'll retain it. Which is the true test, I think, of learning. She remembers it.

F: Yes. Did anything ever go wrong on any of these trips?

L: Well, yes. On that Mississippi River boat ride, I'm afraid Nash and I--

F: You must have been scared silly, in a sense.

L: Well, I'm afraid we goofed, but there really wasn't anything we could have done about it. We advanced that trip. Well, the thing was to go from Illinois down to Hannibal, Missouri on a barge. And we were going to have luncheon on the barge. Well, we didn't have a barge at that point to do the advancing, so we did it in a motorboat, figuring, we were told by the barge company, how long it would take on a barge. Well, then Liz or I don't know who decided, "Wouldn't it be wonderful if the barge was actually toting material down the river." So we added, I don't know if it was wheat or what it was, but in other words, well, we didn't quite--

F: You got a real working barge. (Laughter)

L: We got a real working barge and we didn't realize that it was going

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to add quite a bit of time, because when it pushes something it's much slower. So it ended up, with delays and everything, probably being about two and a half hours late which is quite a lot on a day's schedule.

And of course Liz was frantic and thinking we were just awful. Of course, Nash is one of the most thorough people I know. I don't know how it happened, but it was a combination of events. Anyway, we were very late, and it sort of threw off the day.

When we got to where we were going--where did we end up? We went to another state that night and it was dark instead of daylight when we got there, and the parade . . . You know, it just threw the whole day off. So Liz has always teased us about advancing a barge trip in a motorboat.

F: How did Mrs. Johnson take it?

L: I wasn't really around her that much. I was scurrying around doing so many other things on that boat trip, but I think she takes things pretty much in [stride]. She doesn't get upset about it. I think she figures that Liz is there to worry about these things, and there's nothing you can do once you're on a barge. I mean, you can't get off. So, she was there and she enjoyed it. It was a beautiful day, at least.

F: Then I would rather gather that Mrs. Johnson would be extremely interested in the detail of your planned trip, but at the same time would pretty well leave the forming of the details to Liz's office.

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L: Absolutely. She doesn't care about how you get the results. She just cares about the results.

And again, Liz would be somebody to know more because Liz would be the one to have the first discussion about a trip with Mrs. Johnson. Mrs. Johnson would give her guidance on what she wanted to see and then Liz would take it from there or Liz would come back with suggestions about what she had found in a first advance and then let Mrs. Johnson decide what she wanted to see. But Mrs. Johnson I don't think had time to worry about how we work with the local police force so that we could go on a certain route or whatever.

F: Were you directly involved in Lynda's wedding?

L: Yes. I saw that wedding from the other side, because I was a bridesmaid in Luci's and then I was a member of the working White House staff for Lynda's.

F: What did you do?

L: Well, I was helping Lynda. One of my duties in Liz's office was helping Lynda with her mail at that point, and with gifts that came in.

F: Was this fairly considerable?

L: Absolutely. We were absolutely snowed with mail.

F: What did people write her about?

L: Congratulations mail, asking for pictures of she and Chuck.

F: Are these private individuals or are these news agencies?

L: Oh, private individuals.

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F: Private individuals.

L: Oh, from little children, to classes writing, to little old ladies knitting doilies.

F: Yes. Did you try to comply with these requests?

L: Every one was answered. We couldn't always comply with the requests for wedding invitations or for pieces of the cake.

F: What about pictures?

L: Pictures, we complied with every single request.

F: You did. That gets to be a fairly large order.

L: It does.

F: You're running a first-class shipping department.

L: That's what it was.

F: Yes.

L: But there really were some funny requests. Of course, then you had requests from people, from musicians writing to say, "Can I play at your wedding?" And, oh, it was an awful lot of mail in connection with it.

F: Did anyone write her, suggesting she had chosen the wrong man?

L: No, I don't think so. (Laughter) I think everybody was very happy with her selection.

F: Well, I was wondering if there was some old boy out there in the forks of the creek thought she might do better with him or something.

L: Well, yes, but I would classify those. There were, but I classified them as nut mail.

F: Did she get some proposals?

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- L: Oh, certainly. She did have proposals.
- F: From unseen people.
- L: And she had some young man who would write constantly, saying, "I love you madly," and "I want to take you away," even before she was engaged. You know, but they were a little unbalanced.
- F: It's a little difficult, though, when you say, "I want to take you away from all this," and this is the White House. I wonder what they've got to compensate. [Laughter]
- L: Yes. It's kind of sad some of the mail you see from people around.
- F: Yes, it is. Okay. So they're going to get married. Now then, where does Helene get mixed up in this?
- L: Well, there were interviews to be set up both in television and magazines, photographs to be taken. I think probably I just worked on helping her do whatever I could. Just kind of being an assistant to her and help her with her mail.
- F: Were there any unusual problems? The wedding itself is unusual, but I mean over and above that.
- L: Well, it was different from Luci's because it was held in the White House, so it was a very much more limited guest list. There were great problems in Liz's office about what the coverage would be. Lynda's an even more private person than Luci is.
- F: Yes.
- L: Luci, I wouldn't consider very much of a private person. She is very open.
- F: Quite outgoing.

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L: Lynda is a very private person and the less of the news media that she saw, the better. And this was her wedding, and she wanted it to be perfect.

Of course, the news media demanded that they be able to be in on part of it, and so it was a question of where to set up cameras. They did have closed circuit TV in the White House, so that the reporters sitting in the East Wing could watch her come down the steps, et cetera.

F: Did you advise on where things should be set up, or did the TV people have their own ideas?

L: Yes. They had their own.

F: I know they had their own ideas.

L: I think Simone worked with them on what could be done and what we would allow; she really was the one [handling that].

F: How did Women's Wear Daily get that in advance?

L: Well, they didn't really have it right. I'm trying to remember and my memory's a little hazy because that's four years ago. But I have the feeling that the gown that they showed was not quite Lynda's. It was almost, but it wasn't exactly it. Who knows? They have so many sources.

F: Yes.

L: In the trade.

F: I presume then that the wedding went off pretty much as planned, and that your role in it was taken care of automatically.

L: Well, everyone in Liz's office sort of had a post. And it's funny.

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I was invited to the wedding and yet I couldn't even go. I mean, I couldn't be in the room because we were all assigned to pools of reporters. I was with the pool of reporters who stood at the bottom of the stairs when Lynda and the President came down. So the minute she had turned the corner to go into the East Room, I took my group of reporters and rushed them back to the press room, so they could report to the rest of them, all the press sitting there and to the world, what had happened. And that's how we'd do it. Each girl would take her pool as it happened, and rush them back so they could get immediate reports. Therefore, I couldn't be in the East Room.

F: How did they choose who went in each pool?

L: Well, Liz did, I imagine.

F: Liz made the choice. After all that, then you went back to your routineless routine. At what point did you decide to come with Mrs. Johnson?

L: Well, the summer of 1968, Mrs. Johnson called me one day. She was down at the Ranch at that point. She called me from Texas and asked me if I would consider coming down to Texas and being her personal secretary. She talked to me for a few minutes, and I said that I was terribly flattered and I wondered if I could think about it a few days. And she said, "Certainly."

F: This is a big wrench for you because you have been a Seaboard girl ever since you could remember.

L: Absolutely. And I didn't know anyone in Texas, really.

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F: But you had been to the Ranch, I presume.

L: I had been on visits to the Ranch, but I certainly--

F: It's still a foreign land.

L: Yes, and halfway across the country. And I'm an only child and very close to my parents. At age twenty, that was quite a . . .

F: How long did you think about it?

L: I thought about it probably for about three or four days. I think I had really made up my mind, though I talked to a lot of people and I talked to my parents and wanted to consider it carefully. I probably made up my mind about a day or two after that I did want to come. Because it was a wonderful opportunity, and I'm young and I had no roots in Washington. I didn't have a family to keep me there, meaning a husband. It's the one time in my life, I can pick up and go.

And I love the Johnsons so much and it was an opportunity I felt. Well, it was a very difficult time leaving the White House after you've been there for five years, and I knew they would need all the people who had known them and loved them to be with them at the beginning. And I wanted to be one of those people.

F: Did you fly home with them?

L: I came back on Air Force One with them. Yes.

F: What was that like?

L: Well, the crowd at the airport that saw us off, saw the Johnsons off, was a wonderful mixture of the oldest dearest friends and White House staff.

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And it was sort of a sombre trip because it was a Republican administration coming in and obviously it wasn't--

F: End of a chapter.

L: It was the end of a chapter.

F: End of a book, really.

L: Well, I was in the White House that morning until about eleven thirty or so packing up. At that point, I was working in Ashton Gonella's office. Ashton was her private secretary. For the last few months I worked in her office so I could get to know what Ashton did because that was what I would be doing down here. So I remember we were there until the very last one moment, till noon. We all had to be out by noon, we were told; that was the magic bewitching hour. Packing up--

F: I suppose you almost got a little frantic, watching the clock over your shoulder.

L: Yes. You know, every little thing had to be out.

F: I suppose everything Johnsonian was carried out at noon.

L: Yes.

F: And when you walked out there wasn't any need to look back or send somebody back for something.

L: No. No. We had been packing for months. But it was a very emotional time, and, of course, it was emotional for me because I was leaving my parents and all my friends.

So it was quite a ride back. Then when we landed here in Austin there was a lovely crowd of people to greet them there.

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F: Did you stay here or did you go on out to the Ranch?

L: No. I stayed here in Austin. Luci very kindly--Pat was in Vietnam at that time, and I didn't have an apartment to stay in yet. I hadn't been down to find one. So Luci asked me to come and live with her. I ended up living with her for two months, practically, until I found an apartment. But, as long as Pat wasn't home, she had plenty of room and we kept each other company. So I went home with her that night. She had some friends to meet her and to take her home.

F: What have you been doing?

L: Down here?

F: Yes.

L: Everything. I'm it as far as Mrs. Johnson's concerned.

F: Did you help on the reduction of the diary? Which is what it amounts to a great extent.

L: Oh, really. The editing. Not that much. I've been helping get books together, but I haven't worked that much on it. I've transcribed some tapes.

F: You've tried to keep the daily job going.

L: Absolutely. And she still gets a lot of mail.

F: How often does she come in town?

L: She comes in quite a bit now. This has been unusual. The last few months when she's been working on her book, she's come in almost every day. She's had her editor from New York, Maggie Cousins, here, and she's been coming in every day to work with her, but usually--

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F: Does she fly or drive?

L: She drives. She drives by herself, drives her own car. She has since the day we came down.

F: Does she drive alone?

L: Yes. I was a little worried when we first came back from the White House.

F: Did the Secret Service approve that?

L: Oh. She's just fearless. She just goes off by herself. And at night she'll drive that road and I just--

F: She enjoys it, doesn't she?

L: She loves it. She loves the independence. When she first came down, she loved the feeling of proving to herself that she could do it. She could get around on her own. Of course, she had been so used for five years to having the Secret Service agents there to take care of her. She wanted to just prove that she didn't need anybody; she could learn how to parallel park again and how to get around these one-way streets in Austin, et cetera.

F: You've worked in two capacities for Mrs. Johnson, as part of Liz's press operation and then for Mrs. Johnson directly. Does the President move in occasionally on her personnel, or does he pretty well leave it alone?

L: Well, I feel when you're working for Mrs. Johnson, you're working for the President, too. And sometimes when I'm out at the Ranch and his secretary's not there, I'll work the desk with him and help

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him just in any way I can. He's always very appreciative of anything I do do for him, which I think is very sweet. He doesn't have to thank me, but he always says, "Oh, thank you so much for helping me out. I really appreciate it."

F: Did he dictate to you?

L: Not very [much]. I haven't taken any real dictation. Just short notes, like, "tell him this," or "write back a real nice acknowledgment."

F: Does he, and does she, give you a certain leeway to write your own answers to their letters?

L: Well, I don't want to speak for him, because I'm not really able to.

F: Yes.

L: That's sort of a hard area to go into.

F: Well, I mean it's well known that no one human being could handle all the correspondence that comes in. And both Johnsons have been sticklers about answering.

L: Yes, they are.

F: There's nothing more criminal to the President than an unanswered letter after twenty-four hours.

L: Exactly. And luckily, Mrs. Johnson's not that much of a stickler. I'm so glad because I would do it. I've learned her style. I know how she speaks and I know what she wants to say and she will often dictate a letter completely or sometimes just a few phrases and I'll weave it in. She's very much on top of her correspondence,

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though, and knows what's going on. Takes an interest in it.

I must say I have to ride herd on her a little, because she has many demands on her time and she has told me this herself. She's said, "You've just got to make me sign that mail. You're going to have to get after me." Of course, I was a little shy in the beginning, because I didn't want to be telling her, but I've gotten much bolder and sometimes I say, "Mrs. Johnson, you have to sit down here and sign this mail. It can't wait another day."

F: "Don't leave until you've signed it."

L: You know, she says, "I don't want to," and I say, "You have to."

But I just love working with her, because I have gotten to know her. She's a very special person and she has a delightful sense of humor which I don't think many people that don't know her well know. We have a good time working together. She enjoys life and I enjoy being with her.

F: Great.

[End of Tape 1 of 1 and Interview I]

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