INTERVIEW I

DATE: July 8, 1969

INTERVIEWEE: CHARLES M. MAGUIRE

INTERVIEWER: DOROTHY PIERCE McSWEENY

PLACE: The National Archives Conference Room, Washington, D.C.

Tape 1 of 2

Mc: This interview is with Charles M. Maguire, staff assistant to the President. Today is Tuesday, July 8, 1969. We are in the National Archives Conference Room. This is Dorothy Pierce McSweeny.

Mr. Maguire, I'd like to open our interview with just a brief notation of your appointments in government. They were: In October 1965 you were appointed White House Fellow; following that, a year later at the end of the White House Fellows program, you received an appointment as staff assistant to the President. Also it later developed you became Secretary to the Cabinet and I don't have that as a specific date. Perhaps you can fill that in for me.

I'd like to have you begin by asking you to tell me a little bit about your background, how it led you to the appointment on the White House Fellows program, and who brought you into this program.

M: My background is mixed. I am basically a professional in communications, who has worked in the media of newspapers, television, government public information programs for the State Department in Germany where I was Mission Chief of the old United States Escapee Program in Nuremberg in the early fifties. I also had considerable experience in advertising and public relations.

In early 1960 I decided to leave that world of advertising and public relations and return to Columbia University in New York City to take a master's degree at the Russian Institute, and a Ph.D. in public

law and government.

Towards the end of the doctorate, I literally happened upon a program called the White House Fellows Program; applied; and to cut a rather long and somewhat tedious story short, was, in about ten months, selected as one of the first fifteen White House Fellows.

I decided at that time to leave the University, though my dissertation was still hanging, because I could not resist the irresistible, which was a chance to work for the State Department. I thought my appointment would be to the State Department because of my foreign policy background and my previous State Department experience. But upon arriving in Washington the first day for a two month briefing period, I was summoned by Mr. Jack Valenti and in his office given the opportunity to work on his staff as a speech writer. I remember that my initial reaction was one of surprise and shock. Jack recalls to this day that I protested that my purpose had been to get rid of a typewriter for ten years, and here he was, putting it on my back again.

Mr. Valenti won the argument in the presence of Dick Goodwin by assuring me that I would be "writing on stone." I also recall asking him did he mean soapstone?

From there it was rather a dizzying ascent as assistant to Jack Valenti for a period, I believe, of some seven to nine months until Jack left the White House staff.

Mc: You've indicated that you had heard of the White House Fellows Program on your own, and it wasn't anything--

M: Yes, I was very typical, or, as it turned out, typical of the first year's fifteen Fellows and I believe also of later years. The vast majority of us simply read about it in the newspapers. Publicizing the program has

been a continuing problem, which is explicable in terms of funding and the lack of a proper information program. Many individuals also heard about it through word of mouth; that is, as the program went on through the years. But initially I know of only two people who seemingly heard about it through a university source, which you would think might be fairly normal.

We came to Washington to spend our first two months with the Brookings Institution. At that time Tom Johnson had already been contacted by Bill Moyers and was working full-time in the White House Press Office. After my initial contact with Valenti, I was also working full-time--and by full time, I mean sixteen to eighteen hours a day--with Jack Valenti in the speech writing and speech management areas. Simultaneously we were attending these morning briefing programs at the Brookings Institution.

The White House Fellows Program is generally, and I believe accurately, credited to John Gardner. However, it would never have come to pass without Lyndon Johnson. He adopted it for an explicit purpose--and he made it explicit on many early occasions and thereafter regularly through the years of his presidency--the purpose being to expose some of the brightest young minds in America to intimate and high level contact with the workings of their government. The slogan, if you could call it a slogan, of the first year was that we wanted participants and not spectators.

Mc: When did this lead into your first meeting with Mr. Johnson, and what were your first impressions?

M: My first meeting was upon the occasion of the presenation of the White House Fellows' certificates of appointment. This was in the East Room of

the White House in, I believe, July of '65, and it was a most splendid and memorable occasion. I had been in the White House before, working as a consultant on several projects for President Kennedy. In the mid-fifties I had also come down and met President Eisenhower on an anti-inflation program that the Advertising Council was running. But I found being one of fifteen young men seated in two rows in the front of the East Room, surrounded by dignitaries from government, academia, press, the business community, and hosts of other illuminaries, a very moving experience; and I suppose one that, for all my other uncommon experiences on the President's staff, is perhaps the one that I recall with the greatest feeling. That may also be because my wife was there, along with the over wives.

The selection process had been very arduous, comprising a weekend of face-to-face interviews with a panel at Airlie House. The panel had the not enviable task of choosing the fifteen winners from the penultimate group of forty-five applicants, men and women from all regions of the country. In fact, three of the applicants, or perhaps two, had come from abroad. One had been found in Africa, another in Europe. Both had been interviewed by American ambassadors in nearby countries, and the jury, that is, the Commission on White House Fellows, had accepted their recommendations and brought these two young men clear across the world. One of them, I'm happy to say, was one of the fifteen winners. That was David Mulford, who went on to become assistant to Secretary Fowler.

But to get back to my story. The weekend was a confrontation not only between each and every one of the forty-five chosen, but also between each of us as individuals and such renowned protagonists as John Oakes of the New York Times who, I might add, earned the sobriquet

at the Airlie House weekend of "Tiger" Oakes because of the intensity of his questioning.

We spent the three days in small groups, and it was most common for three of the commission members to spend an hour interviewing. In my case, I can remember one panel was John Oakes, John Macy, and John Gardner, which was about the best panel you could get.

Somewhere along Sunday night the interviews terminated and David Rockefeller was kind enough to open the bar, so we had one enjoyable evening at least, with all the tensions removed. The commission members had retired to their final selection labors. The next morning, very early on Monday morning, all forty-five finalists left for the Brookings Institution by bus.

Somewhere around noon we were invited to ascend a most monumental and forbidding staircase, enter a suitably darkened room where on a gleaming mahogany table there rested an assortment of white envelopes, one addressed to each man. I can recall quite literally the sweat on my own fingertips as I reached for my envelope, but it was all very simple. You pulled out a piece of paper and it simply said "You have been chosen as a White House Fellow." All the rest was white space.

The rest of that afternoon is lost in the confusion of my memory of great happiness and great disappointments, because some of the young men and women that you had, in a very short but intense weekend period become very fond of and admiring of, had failed. There were also some fleeting thoughts that some better men may have well stood in my place.

But somehow or other we arrived in the afternoon at Blair House where Vice President Humphrey performed as only he can in an ebullient welcome to Washingon.

That evening the fifteen finalists went upon their appointed rounds to the East Room of the White House where the President personally presented each certificate, standing at the dais. I remember Mrs. Johnson was sitting front and center. When it came my turn to go up to the front of the room to receive my certificate the President asked me where I was from. I replied, "New York City, sir. I'm not a farm boy." He laughed and said, "Well, if you're a city boy, you'd better turn your face around and get it in the camera."

So, as far as my first meeting with Lyndon Johnson, it was a very happy one, and I must say it preceded and signalled many, many happy experiences like it.

Mc: What did you come to think were the requirements that determined the fifteen successful Fellows?

M: I have given a great deal of thought to that, both in the sense of a participant and of a man who knew John Gardner a long time before we met in the circumstances of the White House Fellows Program. I have given it some thought as a working member of the White House Fellows Association, because we did encounter problems and we do want this program to succeed and to improve itself. I have talked individually with at least a half-dozen commissioners and asked them the same question you're asking me. And the answer I suppose is predictable. It seems to be a mix of the paper record--that is, the formal background of achievement--plus those magic ingredients of personality, or, in a political sense, style. There are certain skews implicit in the selection process and deliberately designed so.

The age limits were twenty-five to thirty-five, or they may have been just a few years below that at the beginning end of the scale. This means

that a young man, one of the younger, is competing against men of considerably more maturity, and, most importantly, demonstrated professional experience. I emphasize experience because it does not necessarily designate competence or ability or brilliance. I know, and many of my White House Fellows peers know, of at least two young men who were turned back with the greatest of reluctance by commissioners such as Judge Hastie, David Rockefeller, and John Oakes. Their only problem was that they were simply too young to compete against their rivals in this given circumstance. Both of these young men were asked to stay in intimate touch with individual members of the commission, and one of them, I believe, was assisted by the commission to win a Marshall Scholarship. And of course, it goes without saying that they were then invited back. So age, as it relates to professional achievement, is an inherent skew.

There are some factors encouraging the selection of female candidates, but I doubt if they are any more prevalent or important than those obtaining generally throughout society. The same might be said of minority representatives. The first group had one Negro, a most wonderful young graduate of West Point who went on to become assistant to Postmaster General Larry O'Brien, stayed under Postmaster General Watson for awhile, then left to take a very high position at the University of Michigan, and has now been asked back by President Nixon to be one of the assistant postmasters. There have been at least one, commonly two, and I am told in this year's group, four Negroes.

Now the rest of your question was the selection.

Mc: Let me back you up a little bit and ask you what your impressions were of Mr. Johnson on your initial contact and how did they fit with what your

ideas were of Mr. Johnson.

M: The clearest initial impression I have was of exclaiming, I hope to myself, "My God, what a big man!" His size, of course, was and is always magnified by standing on the podium. But in that first brief encounter, he did appear every inch a President. I don't recall whether or not I was impressed by his speech, or the speech he gave at that occasion. I probably didn't hear a word he said.

Afterwards, the entire party--I suppose it must have been several hundred people--moved into a most splendid reception in the State Dining Room, and then outward onto the south lawn where Bess Abell--and I will give her all the credit at this stage, even though I did not know who had contrived such a spectacle at that stage--had arranged a most magnificent buffet supper: dancing, striped tents, and little tables scattered around the lawn.

But even in that honey pot there was a bee. David Ogilvy, the famous advertising executive, went through the line with me and complained bitterly about "Texas roast beef."

The President circulated and stayed quite awhile, but I don't recall meeting him again on that first occasion. I did spend some time with Lady Bird and was utterly charmed, and I may have stayed that way in her case even more than I have with the President.

Mc: Now let me have you go back to the White House Fellows Program and tell me a little bit more about it--who was directing it, and how you were assigned, and what your understanding was of the development of it.

M: This, I take it, is after the fact of our appointment. It is a very difficult story to present accurately, and even more so to place in intelligent perspective. I have had occasion to describe our initial group as the

guinea pigs. We were just that. Now that we have the advantage of hindsight, it was an extremely rough month for thirteen of the first Fellows chosen. The two exceptions were Tom Johnson and myself, who had been plucked out of the nettle patch into the White House.

The difficulties were all inherent in the assignment of posts. I have heard a great deal of gossip, speculation, and some informed guesses as to what the hell the commission and the director, who at that time was Tom Carr, thought they were doing. All that I can affirm is that it was a cruel and protracted punishment. Fellows were assigned one-a-day, two-a-day, two-and-a-half-a-day, with the half being thrown back into another post the third day. And all the while, as you must understand, this was the most important matter of each Fellow's life. It was also the matter of greatest concern to his wife. So we had unfortunate scenes where wives would pick upon wives at our happy little group gatherings as to why "X" got the Justice Department when he was basically a farm boy and "my husband edited the Harvard Law Review."

I suppose I may fall back on the guinea pig appellation because it was all quite upsetting, and yet very predictable. I know even without the virtue of hindsight that had I been in the position of the director of the program, or one of the actively involved commission members, I probably could have done no better. There was a great tugging and pulling. The program was terribly new and brittle. Even with the President's demonstrated support, the powers that be were obviously stepping on eggs, and if the Fellows were the eggs, at least I don't know of anybody who became an omelet.

In the last analysis, looking at it from the broadest view, the first year's assignments worked out. One Fellow may have had a disappointing

year, but I believe it was that small a minority; two at the most could have done better in matching their abilities and needs to their assigned posts. But that still leaves a dozen or more who have nothing but the greatest satisfaction coming out of their year.

I think it is also important to note that of those satisfied today, perhaps as many as half a dozen were dissatisfied with their initial assignments. Come to think of it, I was one of the most dissatisfied for the first two weeks, at least, until I learned what a good Jack Valenti really was. And it was my problem that I quickly returned to some competence at the typewriter, forgetting the four years I had put in at Columbia University as a means of lifting that monkey from my back.

Mc: What reasons did Mr. Valenti give for yours and Mr. Johnson's appointment to the White House?

M: That at least is very simple. Both Jack Valenti and Bill Moyers are very candid men. Moyers simply looked at Tom Johnson's poop sheet, reached for the telephone, called him in Macon, Georgia, and said, "You're a young man with some newspaper background and I need a good young man in my office. How about nine o'clock tomorrow morning?"

Valenti took one look at my resumé, saw some ten years demonstrated writing experience in a multitude of media, and likewise clapped his hands and snapped his fingers.

Mc: The rest of your associates were all assigned to the various departments?

M: Yes. They were each assigned as an assistant to the Cabinet officer. I should be able to recall whether or not one of them was also assigned to the U.N. in New York. I know members of subsequent classes were. That is one practice of the program that has not worked out, probably for the evident problems of geographical separation, and I believe it has been

abandoned.

The norm imposed by being "assistant to the secretary" is an interesting one and fraught with all kinds of happenstance and, I suppose, peril. It does seem, however, that the norm has been sustained in the working experience of at least two-thirds of the first four years' Fellows. Think of the questions confronting a Secretary when some bright, or supposedly bright, young hotshot is assigned to him. Think also of the reactions of high-placed bureaucrats or career officers around the Secretary. Think too of the sometimes forceful personalities of the Fellows, inflated by a considerable triumph, knowing little or nothing of the ways of Washington but quite certain that they could do a better job probably than the Secretary himself. I hope that it was no more than the first flowering of an over-developed pride that was later tempered by experience.

To cut it all short and to put perhaps the best or most important point on it, in my subsequent role as Cabinet Secretary, and in my subsequent years in the White House and Washington, I know of no Cabinet Secretary who has ever criticized a single Fellow. I know of eight to ten, and perhaps more, Cabinet secretaries, under secretaries, assistant secretaries, who consider the program something of a miracle in the really good people it manages to discover and assign.

I myself, were I writing about this program or were I to analyze it as a political scientist, would feel compelled to even greater surprise. All the odds were against a program of this kind. There were precedents why it should fail. Leaving out all of the political dimensions, and by that I mean most importantly the President's personal support, the bureaucratic dimensions of the problem alone were enough to strangle it.

The commission members were in a very significant way plowing a new furrow in the initial search for candidates. They did not rely exclusively or even as heavily as some other more or less similar programs upon the paper profile, the test type of interview. Neither was there even a hint of psychological testing, of questions and answers, of pushing blocks into little holes.

I remember truly enjoying my final regional interview in New York City. It was given in Columbia University, my own campus, which was rather a frightening coincidence inasmuch as I had only a week before been put through the fires of my own orals-- my oral defense for the Ph.D. And I think it was a unanimous feeling by the Fellows who were interviewed by the five different regional panels--each composed of leading educators, businessmen, lawyers, bankers, newspapermen, from that given area--that this group made the interview very enjoyable, and in some cases very instructive and very rewarding for the individuals. Even some candidates that I encountered later who had not been accepted to go beyond the regional interview said that they had really learned something about themselves from this interview. And I've even heard of cases where friendships were formed between an applicant and members of the regional panel.

What I'm getting at is that I was most impressed to learn, two years after the fact of my own appointment, that in the finishing stages of the Commission's search period they actually held conference calls between groups of commission members in different regions of the country. And the point of these calls was to argue the choice of Boston versus the choice of Dallas versus the choice of San Francisco. So I admire that pattern and the intent and, of course, the intelligence that I believe it reveals. And I attribute a very, very considerable part of the success

of this program to the initial screening process and the way that these men went at it. Implicit in that of course is the selection of the regional commission members themselves. This is a nationwide search first of all for, let us say, a half-dozen good and wise men in four or five sections of America, and that is the building block. In the case of the first two, perhaps even the three years, I think this held true.

Mc: Mr. Maguire, would you tell me a little bit about the format of the program, what you were doing as a White House Fellow, and I thought you were edging into it, but let me ask you how much your responsibilities--

M: I thought I was edging into it too.

Mc: How much responsibility you had.

M: I keep trying to compress so much of this, and you keep on going to the heart of controversy, which defies compression and probably even intelligent answer.

The first year's group of White House Fellows split almost in half on the definition of what a White House Fellow should be. We were an extremely vocal group, and I don't doubt but that for the first month in town we had the biggest egos in Washington. I hope there's some salvation for some of us in being able to look back and realize that now. We did not realize it at the time.

One group of Fellows waxed very eloquent and angry to defend their definition of the Fellows' role as one of an "observer." If one of this group were a lawyer, he insisted that he did not come to Washington to practice law or to be even an activist in the Justice Department. He wanted "to observe"; that is, to learn something other than the law, something new, something to broaden him, something to complete him, something that he could not achieve by way of experience in a law firm

or the law faculty of a university. There were many of these.

On the other hand, there was a group--and I include myself preeminently among them--who had simply come to Washington to work. In my case, had I not stumbled upon the incredible good fortune of the White House Fellows Program, I would have come to Washington two years later and gone to work for the State Department. For me it was simply a step up in time, and of course a step up in position compared to what I might have expected on the State Department ladder. I would place Tom Johnson also in that class because he was most willing to go to work his first day in the press office of the White House, and I do mean go to work.

This second group, in other words, were much more pragmatic, much more utilitarian, and it has to be said, and it was said by the opposite group, much more eager for the actual arena of battle and the workaday pitting of one's self against the great intractable problems than some who preferred by nature and habit the quieter activities of intellectual reflection and the university habitat.

I can recall some of the commission members who would come by once or twice a year just to check in, and to check up on us I suppose. Some of these men, that most magnificent man Bill Friday of the University of North Carolina among them, would simply advise both of these groups to go slow. They also made the point that the group had been more or less deliberately chosen to give representation to both feelings. And I think here again is this flexibility that if it does not assure the success of a program, will destroy it if it's absent.

There is much more to the story than in my retelling. At one point we had literally reached the point of paralysis as a group. We had moved

from criticism of the so-called educational program offered by the Brookings Institution to outright damnation of it and violent verbal assaults upon lecturers. Looking back on this stage of the activity, the problem that Brookings faced and perhaps failed to perceive was that it is an extremely difficult task to choose lecturers and instructors for a group that holds seven to eight Ph.D.'s from six or seven of the greatest universities in the world, and have not been chosen for their softness either of mettle or opinion.

I could also add that at one meeting of the Fellows in Florida, which was something of a mid-year review, the group almost came to blows among itself about this definition of what is a White House Fellow and what is not. That quite violent encounter was precipitated by the feeling of the observer group that the mechanics--as they were now calling my group when they were not calling us a lot worse--were jeopardizing the future of the entire program. We were summarily charged with selling out and selling ourselves as hired hands to the likes of Valenti, Moyers, and Lyndon Johnson.

But just to wrap up this phase and move on to more important things, it is hard to look back on even this amount of internal conflict and not feel that it too was conducive to whatever success the first year's group had. I might make a point by saying that the first year's group of White House Fellows still stands apart. We are somewhat notorious among the three classes who have followed us and perhaps deservedly so. The shorthand is "a bunch of trouble makers."

Mc: Would you tell me a little bit more about the format of the program? You've mentioned the educational aspects at Brookings, and you've mentioned Fellow meetings. Was this on a regular basis of so much education, so

much meeting together, and observation?

M: Yes. The first year group, again, was distinguished by the programming of its experience, and I say programming advisedly. The guinea pig class was given, I would say, a four-by-four foot box of books to read in advance of arrival in Washington. They were sent to our homes. And of course the trouble started here because a lot of it was judged to be kindergarten rubbish. And quite frankly some of it was. It was just an insult. But there were some good materials in the required reading box.

The first six weeks were structured to include at least two, and often more, formal lectures every morning at the Brookings Institution. These were given by instructors from the Brookings staff. I remember Walt Rostow came over from the White House to give one; heads of regulatory agencies, Nicholas Johnson, the Housing Administrator, and people of that caliber showed up every day. There was nothing remarkable about the format of those sessions. They were most commonly a fifteen to twenty minute presentation, followed by a like amount of questioning.

The regular luncheon period was also a working session. You rarely, if ever, had a luncheon alone. There was a speaker such as John Gardner himself, who had now, incidentally, been appointed Secretary of HEW. That happened just a few weeks after our group came to Washington. These luncheon speakers would spend approximately two but sometimes three hours with us. I remember Sarge Shriver spent a good deal of time.

Then we would move out by bus and run around town. You would visit the Supreme Court and have a meeting with Justice Byron White in his chamber, again question and answer. We went to the office of Chairman Rand Dixon of the FCC, to the Congress, to congressional staff rooms, and even once, to the NIH and some agricultural station out on the Beltway.

I must say that I did not leave my White House desk to attend many of these meetings, nor did Tom Johnson. And every time we didn't we were given a black mark, and the conflict between the "observers" and the "mechanics" sharpened.

In my own fashion I tried to soften the problem and also advance the purposes of the program by arranging for Mr. Valenti to meet in his lunch hours in his office in the White House with very small groups of Fellows--no more than two or three--and these meetings, even from my prejudiced viewpoint, were an outstanding success. Valenti is marvelous in small groups, as of course the President is too. And come to think of it, once or twice the sliding door between the offices crashed open and the Man appeared, much to the awe of the small group sitting on Valenti's couch munching bacon and lettuce sandwiches from the Mess.

But here again is one little insight into Lyndon Johnson that I think is rather typical. He always stayed for five or ten minutes. He always remembered the names of the Fellows he met with. He always demonstrated intense interest in their own activities as Fellows. And sometimes he would ask them quite frankly, "Do you think we're making a go of it?" Sometimes also when Valenti and I kept on giving him optimistic reports on the progress of the Fellows and one the success of the program, he would cock an eyebrow at us in skepticism.

Now I've lost my track again.

Mc: You were talking about the format of the program and the luncheon meetings.

M: Yes. So, to glide along, the initial six weeks of the White House Fellows Program was deliberately designed to be intensive and comprehensive. We worked damned hard, at least we told ourselves we did.

Along about the fourth week I think people stopped reading the required reading but nothing serious came of that. I thought it was

fundamentally a well meaning orientation program. It simply had no way in the process of its own designing to anticipate the unique and uniquely volatile and talented persons that it was supposed to instruct.

It is significant of course that the orientation program has now been dropped. It was dropped after the first year. They simply found it didn't work. What has happened since is apparently much more satisfactory to the Fellows, and while there may be some question as to its satisfying the intellectual or practical needs of individual Fellows, it works as the Fellows themselves design it to work. In other words, it is looser, more informal, and individual Fellows devise and serve as moderators on group meetings or get-togethers with their own department principals. There is, I believe, some of the formal lecture opportunity left available, but there is simply no comparison in terms of flexibility and openness between the rigid first year and the ensuing three or four years.

Now, apart from the BrookingsInstitution program the Fellows also in the first group and later groups tried to get together in the evening with people of their own choosing, or perhaps even just among ourselves. I can remember a most enjoyable evening spent avoiding a blinding snow storm, sitting on the floor of Jack Vaughn's apartment. Jack Vaughn is the kind of man that the Fellows knew, enjoyed, and felt free to relax with.

If I can skip ahead and yet stay on the track, Lyndon Johnson played an enormous role with the first year's group in terms of personal contact. The Fellows as a group must have met with the President at least half-a-dozen times from the occasion of their appointment on to a two-hour session in the White House Mess of an evening. Doug Cater, Bill Moyers, Jack Valenti, Harry McPherson, and myself and Tom Johnson worked very hard to bring these meetings about. But the President was always willing to give

us his ear and to agree to the meetings.

It is hard to imagine any more significant experience for the group, as a group, than these long, quite candid, and I suppose, very intimate sessions with a man who, after all, was the President of the United States. We had them in his office, in the Fish Room, in the Mess, in the Cabinet Room, quite often inviting Lady Bird in, and quite normally he would then add the embellishments of autographed photographs, singling out individuals by name whose accomplishments somehow or other he had come across in their departmental work.

What I am saying is that in the case of the White House Fellows Program you had another example of what I have in my own mind come to call the personalized presidency of Lyndon Johnson. Many presidents before him, most of them, and it appears the president who has now come after him, would I think have delegated this--I'm pausing because it's an important word, not opportunity, not responsibility, probably this chore. It's just one more damned thing on your day's calendar! And yet I never heard Lyndon Johnson say that about a proposed meeting with any group of young people. I always heard him say the opposite about the White House Fellows.

I know clearly and intimately of two occasions where he made adjustments to his calendar to fit in the White House Fellows, that I recommended he not. And yet in each case it was my work, that is, speeches, that would have gone up the chimney. But both days turned out to be extremely and painfully hectic. On one of them he was quite tired at the end of the day, and yet on both occasions he went ahead and not one White House Fellow in the room ever knew that he, the President, was under pressure or feeling weary.

What I am saying is that certainly the first and second year's group of Fellows had an intimacy of exposure to the President that even the commission members or the program conceivers had never dreamed of, and the same was true of Lady Bird. She had her own receptions for the Fellows and their wives. And without making either the President or the First Lady appear in any way overly gilded, the memories of these meetings are the sharpest and brightest that I think the White House Fellows keep with them through the years. It is simply that we did not expect it, and to look ahead through somewhat of a dark cloud I think those days are over for the program.

Mc: What did Mr. Johnson usually talk on and how did he determine what he was going to speak to the group about?

M: The President never determined in advance the subject of his meetings with any group of young people, not that I know of at least. Certainly his choice of topic may have been designed in a formalistic sense by a speech prepared for him or a small yellow card with talking points scribbled on it. But I think anyone and everyone who ever served in any and every writing capacity in the White House quickly learned that when it came to young people Lyndon Johnson seemingly just wanted the comfort of having a few formal words on paper. He would glance at them from time to time, but generally pursue his own line of thinking.

And also, as a general rule I believe, the President would open his remarks with what was on his mind at that moment. If he had come from a meeting in his office, as I have seen him come, with George Meany, he would talk about labor. If he had come from a Vietnam briefing he would talk about that. Or he would talk about the current state of legislation. Obviously Lyndon Johnson never had any problem talking to any group in his life.

In these situations, to use the current idiom, he could always find the handle to "relate" to the group. And then midway or towards the end he would always ask questions. He would always want to know what was on your mind, and I must say sometimes I marvelled not only at his patience, but at his tolerance in responding to some of the questions put to him.

Mc: I take it that the issues of the day were raised at some of these sessions.

M: I have said earlier that certainly as far as the first year group goes, and I suppose as a general rule, the ultimate characteristic of the White House Fellow is that he is not bashful. He is also, by his selection and by the title he wears, well informed, concerned, involved, and he is also working every day on departmental problems. So, these meetings were perhaps a little out of the norm in terms of the meaningfulness of the dialogue, the grittiness of the exchange, and the candor evident on both sides.

I am not saying, however, that they were all the ultimate in satisfaction. They were just better than the average, a lot better than you would expect of any President of any country meeting with any group of bright young people. And it was because Lyndon Johnson had not only a pride of authorship in the program, which he was certainly entitled to because the idea had been kicking around for quite a few years according to John Gardner, who should know, but Lyndon Johnson also has said to me that he wished he had had the opportunity when he was a young man. He has said to me, to Tom Johnson, to Bill Moyers, and many of the staff that he wants this program to succeed, that he expects to see many of these young men back in Washington.

Now, one does tend to get cynical when you hear these statements perhaps once a week, applied to different situations where the youth of America meets the President of America. One's cynicism is necessarily reinforced when you are writing the words that may or may not come out of the President's mouth. But my honest opinion, having come out of all of this, is that the President had a genuine, deep, and I would almost say a priority interest, in the White House Fellows Program.

Mc: Do you recall some of his remarks and the topics that he discussed? Or any explanations of how various programs or legislation or issues had developed? That's a nice big question to throw at you.

M: It's necessarily too big. But I can think of a category of explanation, one could almost say of revelation, that occurred in presidential meetings with the White House Fellows, as well as meetings with other groups of young people, congressmen, and casual visitors to the White House who happened to have a good friend on the White House staff--dropping in to see them on their honeymoon as Kirk Douglas once did--and found themselves in the presence of the President.

Now what would happen on some of these occasions is that Lyndon Johnson would begin discussing Vietnam as the President of the United States, treating the visitors as if they were the Secretary of State, There is a minor element of exaggeration in that, but it was not at all uncommon for the President to walk from his couch to his desk, pick up a document and show it or read it to the visitor, and that document was the latest intelligence estimate of a given situation in Vietnam, or it was the latest breakout of troop concentrations in a given Vietnamese location.

Let me illustrate by recalling a very important meeting. I had

arranged, with the help of another White House Fellow, Charles Ravenell, who had served in Treasury, to bring to the White House a group of forty young men from the Mutual Fund community in New York. These young men, meeting with Ravenell on Wall Street after he had left the Treasury and returned to his own brokerage house, had complained of a very serious communications gap with the White House. By the White House, they meant the entire executive complex and perhaps all of government. Without going into all the nuances of their complaint, Ravenell and I thought it was worth bringing to the President's attention after we had checked it out with Gardner Ackley, Charlie Schultze, CEA and some others of the White House staff.

Anyway, the group arrived and was scheduled for a fifteen or twenty minute meeting with the President. It turned out to be a two hour meeting in the Cabinet Room. Twice I recall in that meeting either Marvin Watson or Jim Jones brought the President highly classified and highly delicate material from the Paris peace talks. The President, sitting at the Cabinet table facing this group of Wall Street executives, hinted at the first message when it came to his hand. When the second message came he read it to the group.

Now the President knew full well what he was doing in all of these situations. It would be presumptuous to think otherwise. But my mind keeps reaching ahead to the larger implications of this. The President likes to meet people, he likes to talk to people, he likes to hear from people. And by the nature of the man, the office, and the circumstances of his very hectic days, I think it only human that he would want to share some of his problems and some of his insights; that is, to expand perhaps the decision-making process.

I do know that out of many meetings with President Johnson there came memos, letters of suggestion, sometimes small ring-binders, each proving that a man, or men, had been so stimulated intellectually stimulated, by this kind of meeting that they had gone home, done some homework, and then literally tried to hold out a helping hand.

I am categorizing here not a document prepared by a professor, although that has happened too,or an analysis made by someone whose expertise would qualify him as exceptional. The occasions that I have reference to here are much simpler, much more human, and they always struck me as, in a very important sense, a man, a woman, or a little group trying to say thank you. Many of the letters did make that point. They were from citizens somewhat overwhelmed by the time the President had given them, and the depth of the conversation.

Looking back, I can even recall one or two days when, driving home at night,I might have some of that feeling myself. That's a long way off what the White House Fellows Program is supposed to be. The point, I think, is that the program, however singular it is to its own experience, relates to the larger experience of Lyndon Johnson, the way he conducted the office of the presidency, his views of American youth as youth, his habits as a man, his thought processes, all of the things that go into the making of a President.

Mc: Let me ask you one more question on this program, the issue, which was raised by this program, and you have mentioned it, and the philosophy of the Fellows as being observers versus participants. And along with this, more or less hand and hand with it, is the concept of this being an exposure to government or in part a recruitment program.

M: Yes, that's a good point. The recruitment point particularly was a source

of the group conflict. In other words, the "observer" faction would argue that by accepting a job as a "hired hand" you were seeking a job in government, or forcing that eventuality, and thereby denying, vitiating, or destroying the purpose of the program as interpreted by that faction.

We got down to the nitty-gritty and put this question to John Gardner. I was not present at that meeting. My reports are pretty accurate, and I have once or twice joshed John Gardner about it. Of course he never answered the question. Why should he? To put the question is to miss the point.

But the view of the program as a recruiting device was never held by anyone that I know of, not by any of the Fellows, myself very much included, any of the commission members, any of the staff, any of the Cabinet.

Let me clarify that a little. This was never a formal expression, but frankly I find it very hard not to assume with whatever degrees of intelligence and experience I possess that this eventuality was not suspected. It would have to be suspected.

Lyndon Johnson, for one, knew very well that out of any given group of fifteen placed in a position of such unique importance or prestige you're bound to recruit one or two. Yet look what happened in the first group. I, as one individual, based my final White House Fellows application on the simple coincidence of my planning to enter government and a program coming along which gave me that opportunity. You were required to write a two hundred word statement, and I hung my whole statement on the simple fact that--I think I said, "It's a very nice program, and I'm four years ahead of you."

Now Tom Johnson, I believe, had roughly the same motiviation, although

he was not planning to come into government. So, out of fifteen you had two in the first month that you knew would stay in government; as it happened you wound up with four who stayed in government, including the Congress. And while judgments may not be in order here, I think that's about a perfect mix. Get four out of fifteen who will give an extra year or two and then go back to the community-at-large, and that would seem to be a very fair and very effective balance; whereas, of course, if you had twelve of the fifteen, or even perhaps half, you just might get yourself kicked in Congress, because of course there were people who would see the program not only as a recruiting device, but a political Democratic recruiting device and that day may now be upon us. If it isn't upon is, it may come.

Mc: Before we leave this area of the White House Fellows Program, we've covered several aspects of it, but are there any other areas you think we should go into or that you can contribute on?

M: There are probably too many. No, I would simply wrap it up by saying that it is a most remarkable and rewarding experience for the individual, and I do believe a very significant contribution to the governing process. I hope very much that the program manages to survive whatever political obstacles can normally be expected. And I might also hope, though I'm not sure about this yet, that the program would be expanded above the present annual intake of fifteen to eighteen Fellows. John Gardner has always had the thought that some program, perhaps not necessarily this one, might bring in as many as a hundred. He is thinking in the right direction.

There is an innate elitist principle at work in the White House Fellows, but it is at once a demonstrated strength and a potential weakness.

Perhaps you've got to live with both, I don't know. All I know is that it was a benchmark in my own life, and I mean that in the sense of all the years of my life to follow.

Mc: Mr. Maguire, could you tell me a little bit about your activities with Mr. Valenti, a little more specifics on that, as to how it developed?

M: As I said, Jack Valenti saw in me the potential for a hired hand. He saw in me what I must assume many Cabinet department heads saw in their assigned Fellows; that is, a warm body that you didn't have to pay for. There is normally more than enough work to go around at these high levels. Now that is a typically hard-nosed view of mine, but it was--and make no mistake about it--the basis of my selection by Jack Valenti. He had a job to do, he needed help, he thought I could give it. It was that simple.

There was a natural separation in my period with Jack--that's a great story. I guess we have time and I'll try and tell it. At first I was assigned to the EOB [Executive Office Building], along with Will Sparks and Bob Hardesty--the writing unit. Jack was the editor and manager of this small writing team. I think it important to note that we were not the only writers in the White House. Most, if not all, special assistants wrote speeches, messages, and drafts of one kind or another. It was simply our task to have the formal responsibility,to be the fingers on Valenti's hand.

Some three months later I moved over from the EOB to Jack's office in the White House, where I became his assistant sitting at a desk outside his door.

Mc: This would be at the beginning of 1966?

M: Yes, it wasn't very long. In fact, it may have been two months. It was

two or three months after my first meeting with Jack.

To give you an idea of how both the White House Fellows Program worked and how the speech writing operation in the White House worked, let me recall my first day in the White House. I had arrived on a Saturday morning, untutored and most critically untaught in the ways of the White House. Sitting at my desk in the EOB, I was summoned to Valenti's office, along with Sparks and Hardesty. There was a crisis. The Highway Beautification Bill was stalled in Congress. The writers had been summoned to help. How, I had no idea.

Within thirty minutes our small group had moved into the Cabinet Room where we found a battery of high placed government officials sitting at the table. I remember Alan Boyd and Bob Weaver were there. This was heady wine for one who had not even been in the White House for more than three or four hours. The door suddenly opened and the President walked in to conduct an hour-long examination of the pros and cons of beautification. It was a virtuoso performance, complete with his famous rendition of a congressional headcount from memory. Larry O'Brien, sitting across from the President, had his checklist out but the President didn't need a checklist. He knew every vote of every man and the way each wind was blowing.

Hardesty, Sparks, and myself were lined up in the staff chairs along the wall. Suddenly, toward the close of the meeting, the President stabbed his finger across the room at Sparks and snapped, "You know what you're going to do?" This his finger, following its natural course, came to me, and I saw his eyes widen with surprise. Later I was to learn that he said something like, "Who the hell was that?" I remember Valenti making some small commotion at the end of the table, gesturing to reassure the President

that some member of the press had not snuck in.

Anyway, on my first morning in the White House I went to work as a working member of the staff. Now that is the difference between what one group of White House Fellows thought was desirable and what I thought was heaven! And this despite my protest to Valenti, that the last thing I wanted to do in the world was to write for anyone, including the President.

I did not leave the White House for the next two days. I spent that Saturday night sleeping on a couch in the EOB, worked all day Sunday, and got home some time in the dawn of Monday. Sparks, Hardesty, and myself had churned out some thirty or forty statements on beautification for delivery by chosen members of the Congress. It was a great beginning.

Now does that answer any question you asked?

Mc: Yes, it does.

Tape 2 of 2

Mc: Mr. Maguire, when the tape ended before, I was about ready to ask you what led to your moving from the EOB into the West Wing with Mr. Valenti? And would you tell me a little bit about your office space?

M: I'm glad you reminded me about my office space. It's recently been the subject of a cartoon in Life Magazine. But putting first things first, my move into Jack Valenti's actual office was one of perhaps three or four very important circumstantial breaks that I received in the White House. Perry Barber, Jack Valenti's assistant of title, had resigned quite suddenly. Jack called me in on Saturday and asked me would I take the job, pointing out that it was not exactly what had been envisioned in the White House Fellows Program, nor was the job supposedly adequate to my supposed talents. But I took it with pleasure, having formed a great affection, as well as a high admiration, for Jack Valenti in my first two or three months.

I came on, nominally, as assistant to Jack Valenti, and I performed the routine and often dogsbody duties called for in that role. It is always difficult to specify the exact duties or activities of any special assistant and of his staff. Mine emerged as generally an attempt to lift the routine from Jack's shoulders, that is, the routine of office management--report writing, letter writing, etc., etc. in infinite and often tedious detail.

However, I also somehow stumbled into,or was pushed by Jack into,the position of penultimate editor of the writers' drafts, Jack being the ultimate editor.

Looking back, I am surprised that this process seemed to have gone so smoothly, at least I think it went smoothly, though if I had been one of the EOB writers I might have thought otherwise. What I am getting at is the very swift ascension of a White House Fellow to a position of considerable authority and decision over other writers to whom he perhaps should have been subordinate. But anyway, I guess Jack Valenti knew what he was doing.

My time, I suppose, was split 50-50 between office management and speech editing. I also at that time continued as a writer myself, doing whatever drafting Jack asked me to, or volunteering drafts of my own upon occasions where I had a special interest or some special background relevant to the occasion. For instance,the Fulbright hearings on China were proceeding at that time--this is early '66--and I made it my business to attend the hearings incognito and do some memo and speech writing based on them.

To give you an idea of the way Jack Valenti worked and also an indication of how the White House Fellows Program could work, I recall a rather startling morning when a secretary deposited on my desk a memo on the Fulbright hearings that I had written for Jack Valenti, and which he had delivered into the President's night reading without telling me. I think it was the first moment when I actually realized what being in the White House meant. As a student of the presidency, and as something of a political scientist, I knew for instance that one

of the most profound, aggravating, and abiding problems of the executive branch and all laborers in the bureaucratic vineyard was the problem of getting the President's attention. Yet here was I, a greenhorn who had been placed by circumstance two offices away from the President of the United States and whose memos were being read by the President, however inadvertently! It was a sobering experience.

I recall mentioning my surprise and consternation to Jack Valenti,who just smiled and gave me a look that I understood at the time but find impossible to describe. It seemed to say, "Well, you're here and the President mightas well know about you, for better or for worse."

Jack Valenti at that time also had a role as Cabinet secretary, which seemed to me to be informal, though practical in application; that is, I do not believe he ever carried the formal title of Secretary to the Cabinet. There seems to have been a period following Horace Busby's resignation in early 1966 where Valenti and Joe Califano literally inherited the job of Cabinet secretary, either with or without the President's explicit urging, though, of course, with his knowledge and permission.

As far as the Valenti office went, it was something of a left-handed operation in the sphere of Cabinet affairs. We prepared what I recall as rather ponderous briefing books for Cabinet meetings, and I know that Califano did likewise. I did not attend Cabinet meetings at that time, so I have no idea--only dark suspicions--as to the eventual worth of these booklets.

Assisting Jack Valenti as Cabinet secretary meant that I wrote some

presidential statements for delivery at Cabinet meetings. I also recall this period as that when I first became aware of what I thought was a serious deficiency in the Johnson presidency. No minutes of Cabinet meetings were kept. The answer to my questioning of this at staff level was inevitably that the President did not trust the shorthand process; or that various but always unnamed department heads had indicated a reluctance to talk in Cabinet meetings for the record; or that no satisfactory compromise had ever been found.

It is interesting to me to look back on the coincidences of circumstance and personality that marked my first months in the White House. I sometimes wonder, had the circumstances and the personalities been different in the beginning, would my own habits have been different and would my own course within the White House hierarchy have been altered.

Jack Valenti's temperament suited mine. We were two of a kind in many ways of personality and working habit. I take some satisfaction in thinking that the accident of our meeting produced a happy and effective working partnership.

The days were very long, as anyone who knows Jack Valenti can attest. They were always conducted at a fever pace. Jack, I think, performed the jobs of three or four men. He had the appetite for it and the capacities to satisfy not only his own taste but most importantly those of the President he served.

The next four or five months seemed to go by like a subway train. And though the tunnel was often dark with mystification, there was usually light at the end.

Mc: Was the function of speech writing formally in Jack Valenti's office?

M: Yes. Jack had the formal role, if not the title, of speech manager and speech editor. The title was simply never formalized because the President considered, as many Presidents have, that it was none of anybody's business, knowing who was involved in the speech process.

Now at that time, of course, we also had Dick Goodwin sitting upstairs, who was a very, very important speech writer. His title, or rather his activities as a writer were widely known in the press, and we need not ask why.

Curiously, when it comes to someone putting all of these different pieces together, Harry McPherson was literally unknown at that time--unknown as a writer, that is. Now to leap ahead, McPherson, in my judgment, and I believe most objectively in the judgment of the President, became the most important writer, the singular man in the years '67, '68, to the end who, in his person, combined the roles of Valenti, Goodwin, Moyers, and I would add Cater. In short, Harry became the center of the writers' world in which there were many spokes.

But to go back to the Valenti operation, it seemed to be the happiest system, at least when I inherited the mantle on however an ad hoc or by agreement with the President basis. The writers would always cast their eyes backwards to the Valenti days as the best of days. This was a great tribute to Jack's personality and his skill.

Here I want to interject, in case I forget it, something that I believe is extremely important to the historical record.

There are interstitial functions that given staff members perform in the White House that almost defy explication for the historical record.

it is what goes on between the lines of allocated responsibility, and that often falls between the cracks of everyday experience that sometimes holds the whole house together. Now Jack, by my reading, played an enormously influential role, simply by being a friend to all the rest of the staff.

It was a rare afternoon or evening when, about 4 o'clock some special assistant did not come sweeping, or even sliding, into Jack's inner sanctum where the door would close and silence ensue for twenty minutes or half an hour. The door would open and the gentleman would depart. These little visits occurred with such regularity that I took them very much for granted. Frankly, I never remember questioning their purpose. It wasn't until much later, in talks with other staff members, some of whom had left the White House, that I learned that it was Jack Valenti's shoulder that was being used. It seems that many, perhaps even all the staff, would bring their little household, domestic, staff problems to Mother Jack. They knew, of course, that he had the President's ear. I don't want to downgrade the importance of that. There were not just meetings between two friends. Jack Valenti was the staff's pipeline to the President, and we would need a book to discuss the importance of that. It's sufficient to say here that the President knew about this dimension of Jack's activities; he had perhaps even created it. It bears thinking about. But however it happened, it had the President's blessing, and I have heard him say that when Jack left, he left many holes. But the hole of being staff psychiatrist perhaps, or staff confessor, may have been the greatest vacancy.

Mc: Mr. Maguire, when did you come into the position of what I've heard referred to as speech coordinating?

M: That's a long way down.

Mc: Is it much further along?

M: It's quite a ways ahead, but let me go on, and then we can come back. I have mentioned that my career in the White House, at least by my reading of it, was marked by a series of very fortunate coincidences. One of them was Jack Valenti's leaving. Jack has told me that he recommended me most highly to the President at that time, not necessarily as his successor,which was inconceivable, but certainly as someone who could backstop the operation until other arrangements were made. This was a time of great commotion and upheaval and uncertainty in the White House staff, as the analysts of the press and also some scholars have indicated, if they have not so documented. Even I do not have a clear picture of what actually happened to the writing operation when Jack Valenti departed.

The immediate period after was filled with the figures of Bill Moyers, Bob Kintner, Douglass Cater, Harry McPherson, George Christian, and others. Eventually Bill Moyers took hold of the writing operation in fact, if not in title. But simultaneous, or almost, with Valenti's departure came the arrival of Robert E. Kintner. The President gave Kintner formal responsibility for "managing" the writing operation. Kintner, a tried and experienced professional manager, seized his responsibilities with all three hands. But Kintner did no writing.

Moyers, on the other hand, could not refrain from writing. And I, in the meanwhile, had been asked by the President to "assist" Bob Kintner.

Looking at the fact instead of the theory, the writing operation continued as it had under Valenti, only without Valenti it continued unhappily. Working together,Kintner and I continued to assign speeches, receive the writers' work, send it to the President, talk with the President about speeches, plan speeches in advance--but Bill Moyers seemed to be running the writing operation. It was all very confusing, and perhaps Bill Moyers is the best man to explain it, though I am sure Robert Kintner would have an equal and perhaps contradictory explanation.

Sticking on safe grounds, which are those of my own experience, I found myself increasingly involved in the actual writing of speeches. It was somewhere here that the President, I suppose, began to regard me as a writer--not a manager of writers nor an editor. The President began, for instance, to call me on the phone to assign speeches to me directly, or to ask Bob Kintner to assign me a speech. And I must also say, it was at that period that I began receiving my own personal phone calls from the President berating me for "a lousy speech," which of course was the proof that you had arrived.

Let me also interject here something which could be useful for whatever wise men read these records, as to how it is that the President's eyes might fall upon a sparrow. One of my earliest chores for Valenti had been writing letters for the President. Valenti and I found a kinship here in that both of us could either dictate a hundred letters an hour,or roll a long sheet of yellow paper into our typewriter and bang out six letters to a yellow page. The President loved this ability because he preferred short and warm letters.

I had always been a good letter writer, probably because the circumstances of my own life had been such that I had been separated from my parents and most of my immediate family by oceans and great distances for long periods of years. So I wrote for some twelve years several or more rather lengthy family epistles a week. I furthermore enjoyed writing for the President.

These letters were the cream of the President's personal correspondence. At one point Jack and I calculated that the category included some sixty to seventy personal friends of the President of long standing or his family or those highly placed in Congress and government--and a few people that could only be called lovable oddballs.

I very quickly learned via the route of one swift presidential kick in the rear that when a letter arrived from Billy Graham it was to be answered in five minutes. The reply was to go out five minutes after. The reply was to be brought directly in to the President for his approval, no matter were he talking to Kosygin. The same, happily and economically, was true for correspondence with the Pope.

It is also interesting, looking back, to think how much I enjoyed and how much Valenti enjoyed what the overwhelming--and overwhelmingly relieved--majority of the White House staff considered KP or garbage hauling. The point of this little discursion is that I simply caught the President's eye by writing a good letter.

The deeper point is that Lyndon Johnson paid so much attention to even the smallest letter that you could not but help catch his eye. He was watching every phrase, every period, every comma. And as I once remarked only half in jest to Valenti, "Christ, he even picks up the commas to see what's underneath them!"

This is not an exaggeration, though there were exceptions to the eagle-eyes presidential routine. But from my own experience with the President's mail I would always single out this opportunity for any new writer that I was hiring, or any writer that was giving me trouble, and even to some writers who had left the White House and missed their chance because they simply refused to lower themselves to the level of writing letters.

Mc: How did you find out what Mr. Johnson's directions were to write a personal letter?

M: From Jack Valenti. That's a very quick answer, and you might think it's misleading but there again, Valenti had a talent for interpreting the President to writers. He knew the President, and to say that about a presidential staffer may be to say everything. Jack is not a saint, he's not psychic, he has his flaws as I have mine, but Jack and I just sort of swung together in that he could tell me what the President might like--and might not like and might not be good for the President even if he did like it--and I in turn could sit down and do it. Fast.

Now that's not as mysterious as it may sound. For instance, I have sometimes told Jack when we ruminate and sermonize and think what great good fellows we are, that we're really missing the mark completely. All it is is the ability of a good professional writer. There is no professional writer on earth who can't sit down and put a legal size yellow sheet in his typewriter and knock out six short, warm, interesting letters.

I can remember one letter, for instance, that Valenti wrote for Branch

Rickey who was in the hospital. Now this was for the President's signature. I can see it in my mind's eye. It was four lines long on a piece of presidential green stationery. It said:

"Dear Branch: I am delighted to know that you are rounding the bases and on the way to recovery," or some little thing like that. And those little things were all that Lyndon Johnson asked.

What he hated was anything remotely resembling, "in reply to yours of the 19th inst.," or big words, or the dull, dreary, routine that we condemn ourselves to use in our business mail. And Jack had a lively mind, a lively intelligence, a lively imagination.

Now having said that, of course, I am saying that there was a lack of professional writers on the President's staff. And having stumbled upon that thought here I'll stick to it. It was a big problem, the lack of professionalism. You are not a professional if you cannot write these little letters, you are not a professional if you refuse to write them, and we had both--writers who could not and would not and probably forever will not.

Mc: How were you informed of the degree of friendship that the President would have with one of these people you were drafting correspondence?

M: Yes, there was some hitting and missing and guessing and by God-ing. It imposed the obligation to study the President perhaps a little more carefully than you might otherwise. Jack and I had long talks, for instance, about the President's mail. This is one reason why we were there until 2 o'clock in the morning.

For example, we had the White House Governors' Conference on a Saturday morning, every Governor came to that conference. There was some very, very important business being discussed. A Vietnam resolution,

Rockefeller problems, civil rights. It was a very important meeting, and Jack and I, along with Califano and some other staff members, had the basic responsibility of readying the White House for the conference; of preparing remarks for the President, which were quite copious, and here he did stick to his text because we were dealing with delicacies.

Now, I believe it was on Friday night that Jack either suggested to me, hinted, or asked that he and I be prepared to stay as late Saturday night and Sunday morning as possible to write letters thanking the Governors for their being in attendance.

I can also recall laughing with Jack and pointing out the likelihood that some of these letters would beat the Governors home. And I can remember Jack rubbing his hands with pleasure.

Now you can nitpick and say, "Well, that in some ways may even defeat a President's purpose." A Governor coming home from a White House conference and finding a rather elaborate letter--these were more detailed than usual--waiting in his mail slot. You might suspect that some robot pen was at work, or that some computer had taken over the operation, but not Jack.

The thing I always--I suppose love is the real word--about Valenti is that he was always trying to stay one step ahead of the President in terms of pleasing the President. And I know from my own business experience, that were I to come in from a conference, say of a dozen executives--we had been away for a weekend at a conference--and coming in on Monday morning I found on my desk six letters thanking those men, I'd be very pleased and I might want to give the man responsible a raise. So both elements of motivation are probably in there.

Jack was always trying to do the job better. And there were

a hell of a lot of people around the White House, like every other institution conceived by man, who seemingly were always trying to do it worse. One of the greatest myths about the White House is that it's any different from any office anywhere. There are the obvious differences, but when it comes down to the day's work of typing and writing and talking and having meetings, man is man.

Mc: You mentioned Billy Graham as one person where there was a special emphasis on, or directions on. Were there other people like this, whom you were watching out for?

M: Oh yes. This is, of course, only one man's reading. I flag Billy Graham, and all of my secretaries were instructed to flag it for me, because I got chewed out for missing it the first time. There were perhaps no more than a dozen others who really should be answered right away and the reply presented immediately to Juanita Roberts for immediate delivery to the President. Among them would be George Meany, Henry Ford, John Steinbeck, Mary Lasker, Arthur Krim, and you can guess the rest from those personages.

What happened, however, either by the impulse of Valenti's drive and my kindred temperament, was that the President each night, either from Jack or myself or the both of us together, would receive some fifty to sixty pieces of mail for his signature, and this was every night. No mail was allowed to collect on my desk or Jack's desk. And after Jack left this was a part of my managerial function, in that, at one time or another, I must have set up twenty letter-writing systems. The number of alternating systems was dictated, quite frankly and quite fundamentally, by the resistance to what I always conceived of as the simple job of answering mail. We had by one count

or another within the White House and the EOB twenty men and women whose responsibilities either could be defined or stretched to include that of writing letters. The problem was that they could not do it. Or the problem was that they would do it at the end of the day, which meant that I must have spent in the year 1967 particularly every night of my life--Monday to Monday--rewriting letters.

We did have one very serious and severe explosion from the President in that year, involving the answering of the most vital category of mail in the President's mind. This was mail from Vietnam.

There is a book in this story and some day I may write it. Lyndon Johnson received twenty to forty letters from soldiers, sailors and airmen in Vietnam each day; that is, these were letters selected out by the formal EOB mail screening process for his attention. The yardsticks used are already on the record. It should be noted, however, that the mail was both pro and con, and some of the con mail was extremely emotional, aggressive, or polemical in the extreme.

The President had given orders before my time that he wanted to see all the letters. By the nature of the staff process, "all" had come to be refined to mean all that a President could reasonably expect to read in a day, even though he were Lyndon Johnson, a man in command of so much energy and embracing talent.

Anyway, I inherited the full responsibility for answering Vietnam mail. I suppose that happened because it interested me enormously, and I gave it a great and, I am sure, a disproportionate amount of my time.

Mc: You mentioned a severe explosion?

M: Yes. Despite my efforts, the explosion came when the President one day blasted off at the military aides whose own system was to receive some of this Vietnam mail, then send it to the Department of Defense for answer, then receive the DOD draft back, then send it to me. By the time it reached me in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred, I would simply toss it in the wastepaper basket. With all that time passing, the letters had gone from four days old to, God help us, a month old before they reached the President.

This day in Texas he had come upon a most eloquent and tragic letter from an infantry captain, killed in action since writing the President. The President's reply had been returned as undeliverable. And the President's point of irritation was that reply was a month old by the time it arrived.

It isn't the fact of a presidential explosion that is important as much as it is the cause. I personally received perhaps my severest tongue lashing--and they were very few and far between--and in turn I administered the same to the military aides. The upshot was that we simply wiped the military aides out of the picture completely. From then on all Vietnam mail was delivered by special messenger to me within ten minutes of its arrival in the White House Mail Room--at least that's how the system was supposed to work. And I must say, with justice to all, it probably did work that way more often than not.

Mc: Were there some letters that the President replied to personally, I mean that he dictated to only?

M: Yes. The President was no different in the handling of his mail, I think, than many executives, particularly of large corporations. A certain amount of preliminary drafting is necessary if the executive is to function at all. But the most satisfying part of working nights on this presidential mail, particularly Vietnam mail, was that I would send the letters up in batches, starting at about four p.m., and the second about six p.m. Then I would probably go at the hard bunch left, figuring to get it up in time for his night reading, which would be anywhere from ten to midnight--God help him! And that was the process that we together, the President and I, had agreed upon would be functional.

Now the same thing applied to the speech writing process. The President, for instance, would have four speeches the next day. We tried very hard never to give him two speeches together, or at least only in extreme emergencies, or in night reading when you assumed he had a block of hours available. So you would be sitting in your office late at night, working, for instance, on presidential mail, or presidential speeches--anything from a letter to Cousin Billy Joe or the State of the Union. And he would call because he was now going over his own paperwork, and he would discuss a draft that you had written to a Vietnamese soldier--I'm sorry--to a GI in Vietnam. We did get some from members of the ARVN.

The episodes that I recall most explicitly are those where he would consider the draft unsatisfactory. And as part of my own learning process in handling this category of mail, I would keep notes of how he had responded to this approach and that approach and this letter and that letter.

Now, again, like many executives, he rarely called to praise. He did sometimes, but most often when the POTUS line blared--the President's red-button direct line to key staff--he was simply inquiring as to the reason for this kind of a reply or to suggest, "Don't you think that it would be better if we told them this." Quite often he would suggest that we enclose a press release of a recent speech, because he thought that the boy might get more out of the speech than he would out of the letter.

I can remember several occasions where the President was very direct in levelling with me. He would say, "You chickened out. You didn't answer him. How would you like to be sitting in a foxhole? Don't you think that's a little bit mealy-mouthed?" Or he would say, "I can talk to them. Go ahead and tell them what the real situation is." Or things to that effect.

So it became an enormous challenge. That's kind of a tired word around Washington, but there's a very special dimension and I, being what I am, always associate the night time with it. I tried very hard for a period of two or three months to write these letters first thing in the morning. I had my three secretaries organized and they all thought it was the most wonderful thing that ever happened, because of course one secretary always had to stay nights with me. And it didn't work. The mood was always wrong, the phone was going, people were pestering me. And you were sitting there answering letters, say from a hospital in Danang, or the toughest letters of all, of course, were from the parents of the boys, and the toughest of the toughest were those from mothers and fathers whose sons had been killed. The vast majority of them were puzzled, humanly anxious, afraid, even in their grief.

But somehow, and the screening process had no way of contriving this, somehow these letters had a great understanding, something different than compassion, an understanding that this mother writing this letter about, say the death perhaps of her only son, somehow pictured the situation of a President reading her letter who was accountable for all these sons.

I remember the President telling me on more than one occasion about some of his inttial feelings as a Congressman and as a Senator in sitting in an office in Washington and receiving these outpourings--some of them--or naked revealings of people. A dirt farmer writing Congressman Lyndon Johnson in the thirties about what a drought really means to him. This is an experience that I don't think is too widely shared. I'm thinking and I'm pausing because by the same analogy I used above, one could assume that the President of the Whirlpool Corporation does read some letters from the consumers, and it is also conceivable that an icebox could be as important to the President of the Whirlpool Corporation as the building of a dam is to a Congressman. So it's worth thinking about, just in terms of putting all of this bathos perhaps, or sentimentalism, into some kind of perspective.

All that I know is that the President felt the Vietnam mail very keenly. And God bless him and God help him, he put an enormous amount of time, which is the President's most precious commodity, into this labor of sorrow and hurt, and I'm tempted to say guilt, but I don't think so. I don't think the President ever felt guilty. He felt stricken. I've seen him on many occasions stricken.

I've seen him walk into a staff meeting on Housing and sit on a couch and say nothing for ten or fifteen minutes and walk out, having said nothing. And the meeting, which had been faltering on in his presence and in his strange and unnatural silence, would come grinding to a halt. And what you'd usually find out is that he had just made some rather painful decision on Vietnam.

To leap to another aspect of my present circumstances, you see it very, very clearly in Lady Bird's Diary. He'd turn to her where, I suppose, he couldn't turn to anybody else.

That's a long way from Vietnam mail and the general patterns of presidential activities that literally are invisible. But they're tremendously intriguing to me and they're very revealing. I'm cautious about reading too much into it. I don't for instance, think that they are of any decisive significance either to the character of the President or the nature of the office as he conducted it. But they certainly are a part of it. And if he literally made of them such an important part, they must have some importance to our times.

My assumption is that he has taken these habits with him to Texas. In fact on one of my very first visits down to Texas, he asked me to take over the mail system and "set it up before you go home." It was just sort of a reflex action. Before I knew it I found myself down in the mail room with all of these unfortunate people.

Mc: Mr. Maguire, I'm looking at the time and I'm wondering if--

[End of Tape 2 of 2 and Interview I]

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