

INTERVIEW I

DATE: May 10, 1972
INTERVIEWEE: WILLIAM M. "FISHBAIT" MILLER
INTERVIEWER: JOE B. FRANTZ
PLACE: Mr. Miller's office in the Capitol, Washington, D.C.

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M: He [Lyndon Johnson] beat me [to Washington by] about eighteen months.

Joe, it's nice to have this letter from you dated just a few weeks back and saying you're going to be up here to, let's have a little gab fest about our mutual friend, the former congressman, the former senator, the former majority leader, the former vice president, the former president and now a statesman.

F: Our former friend.

M: No, he's not a former friend because he's still my friend. He and his wife have been my friends for a long time and I've been their friend. In fact, Lady Bird has said of me, when she and the President were getting ready to leave, "Now, Fishbait, there are two things I want you to remember. Remember our grandchildren and remember I'm asking you right now to wait till they get old enough to understand. Then I want you to take them through this Capitol yourself, personally, and I want you to tell them about their grandfather and their grandmother, how things used to be when they were here at that time."

F: Nice. When did you come up here, Fishbait?

M: I came up here with Mr. Colmer, William M. Colmer. I'm from his home town, to let me tell it, and he says that "I'm from Fishbait's home town" when he tells it.

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- F: Yes.
- M: But we came here with Franklin Delano Roosevelt in 1933 and this is now my fortieth year on Capitol Hill.
- F: He's finally going home, isn't he?
- M: I'm just trying to make up my mind.
- F: No, I don't mean you. Him.
- M: Oh, oh, yes, sir.
- F: Colmer.
- M: Bill Colmer is going home.
- F: I haven't seen him yet. He's somebody I need to see.
- M: I wish you would. He was telling the other day about a fellow that was a Negro preacher and then he says, "No, Mr. President, I can't tell it any more. I got to say he's a black preacher. But he had a mule, an old mule just as crazy as any mule can be, and his friend was asking him one time, he says, 'Tell me now preacher, how can you tell when the mule's gonna throw you?' 'Well, I'll tell you now, that old mule and I been friends for a long time, but the way he gets around it is when he bucks them eyes to me, I know he's getting ready to buck and I just gets 'off.' So, Mr. President, you're asking me why I'm retiring and I'll tell you. Bill Colmer's quitting before he sees the eyes of the Congress looking back at him and he gets thrown."
- F: I see.
- M: So he ain't gonna get thrown for that yardage of loss.
- F: Right. What did you do here, come up here as a secretary?
- M: No, sir, I came up here as a messenger to the postmaster. I worked

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six and a half years there and I learned everybody's name and where they were from and where they worked, and one time--

F: That's the postmaster here in the House.

M: Yes. Mr. [Finis E.] Scott was the postmaster, from Tennessee. Then it came time for me to move up so I became a messenger to the doorkeeper. Both of those jobs were paying the whole annual salary of \$1740 a year, but during those times, that was money.

F: Yes.

M: I think lunch cost us at the most thirty-five cents a day and we had a full-course meal. I mean, we had a soup, some kind of meat entree, two vegetables, a beverage and dessert all for thirty-five cents. But a nickel was worth a nickel then.

Then I became a special officer under the sergeant-at-arms and then they changed that title. Incidentally that job paid a new sum of \$1800.

F: Oh, you got a big raise.

M: So I got a raise. That was during the time that Mr. Johnson was here. Lyndon was here and he and Lady Bird were the office forces around here. Lyndon has always been a hard worker and a driver and he knew what it took to make the things tick. He did his ticking as far as the people were concerned and they kept sending him back and back and back.

Then the first time he ran for the Senate he won by a landslide, eighty-nine votes, I think it was. Isn't that right?

F: Officially, it was eighty-seven.

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M: Eighty-seven? Well, I'm being gracious for those two votes.

F: Yes, you're giving him two more. He needed them.

M: I know he needed them at that time, but nobody could have beat him if he'd have wanted to run this last time. They wouldn't have beat him. But he was ready to go back to the Ranch and I don't blame him a bit.

F: What was he like back there in those younger days?

M: Well, I tell you what he was; he was a great organizer. Back in the time when he was here before becoming a member of the Congress, I recall that we had an organization known as the Little Congress. And we would set it up just like the big Congress. We'd have a speaker; we'd have a clerk of the House and we'd have a sergeant-at-arms. Well, Lyndon would see to it that it was run properly. I remember one time he was the speaker of the Little Congress and we would debate a bill that the Congress would be debating. We would debate it two or three weeks later, but we would still get our debating period out of it. And if there were any elections to go on, Lyndon would get on that phone and get his lieutenants organized throughout the whole of the Congress. During those days we were bipartisan. We had no particular ax to grind with anybody and we used to have a wonderful time in Little Congress. But later on when they started thinking politics, it just died off completely. It was one of those things that--

F: Did it just kind of peter out?

M: It just petered out and then they drew up something called a

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Secretary's Club.

F: Yes.

M: And that is now giving the boys and the girls in the offices a chance to mix and mingle with each other and get ideas. They have a Bull Elephant's Club and that's for the Republicans. Then we have a Burro's Club for the Democrats.

We just still have one of those things, but the best thing that ever happened up here was that Little Congress. We would have anywhere from two to three to four hundred to meet when we'd have our meetings every two weeks, and Lyndon was one that would be right on the nose. (Snaps fingers) He wanted things to come just like that, like he always has and like he always will be.

F: Did congressmen ever come up to listen to you?

M: We'd have some of the members come and sit in the audience.

F: Did you find out what they were thinking?

M: I heard two or three of them say, "Well, I hope they never decide to run against me." He said that "They got 'em organized here."

I remember one time when I was sergeant-at-arms over there and we were going to have our meeting the same night that Joe Louis was going to fight.

F: Oh, no. (Laughter)

M: It was in the spring or the summertime, and it was hot weather so in order to have an inducement to coming, we decided we'd get a radio. We got us a radio, and I made a big, big old bunch of lemonade and we had all the lemonade the folks could drink. And as soon as the

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fight was over, we went on with our meeting. We didn't have to lose anybody because we advertised that fact that we were going to have the loudspeaker on and we'd be able to hear the top fight.

F: There wasn't much time to those Louis fights in those days. They were short.

M: They really were. He came up quick, real quick. And he wouldn't brag about it either.

F: Right.

M: He wouldn't give us a poetry-write. [?]

F: Then, did you break it down into committees and things like that?

M: Well, the Speaker had his committees, yes, sir. He was in charge of the whole Little Congress. It was an organization that was put through. We even passed a bill in Congress making it legal to have a Little Congress. It was one of those things that was established. We had a treasurer and a secretary and--

F: Where did you meet?

M: Met up in the Caucus Room of the Cannon House Office Building. That's the only building that we had at the time when we first came here.

F: I guess staffs were enough smaller then, too, [so] that people knew each other.

M: Well, they do. They only had two or three at the time in each office. Then they began employing and I think now the most they have is nineteen or twenty to the office, depending of course on how many people in the district. But during Lyndon's time, you had to really work for your district then. More so than you do now because it seemed

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to be that the problems in the district were just ones that were common to that particular district. Now it seems like each section of the country has its own problems, but they more or less overlap.

F: And they've gotten larger now.

M: They have, they have. And pretty soon we're going to have two additional people, one from [the] Virgin Islands and one from someplace down there in one of the islands. We're going to have a representative that's not going to have a vote, but he's going to have secretaries and everything else, so he can go to committees and learn the work. Guam.

F: Guam, yes.

M: Guam and the Virgin Islands. And they're gonna be here, I'm sure, right after the elections and start off in the 93rd Congress, and that'll give us four that we'll have now without any vote. We have Puerto Rico and the District of Columbia and Guam and the Virgin Islands.

F: Did anybody way back there in those early days think that they were looking at the future president in the skinny, long Lyndon Johnson?

M: No, and I'll tell you what happened in the 80th Congress. We had a fellow tell us this week that he had a request from Mr. Albert.

F: That's Carl?

M: Carl Albert, the speaker. Had a request. This gentleman who was the publisher of a certain picture book here wanted one of the 80th Congress where it showed a picture of Mr. Kennedy, Mr. Nixon, and Mr. Albert all in one little huddle. They were the only

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three in the huddle at that time. They've all been up in the world now as far as the legislative things are concerned and that's the way that thing went, so he said he couldn't have any. But he took his own personal copy, got it aloose from the place that they were in, took it out and brought the one to Mr. Albert that the Speaker wanted. I told him I thought that was mighty nice. And it was nice.

Now, when Lyndon was here as a secretary and prior to that he used to run an elevator and then he was a doorman, and it's just one of those things, it seemed like everything he put his hand to, it was just going to turn out just right for Lyndon Johnson.

He had two of the nicest daughters in this world.

F: I guess, as a doorman, he got to know every congressman that way.

M: He certainly did.

F: Yes, and be of service.

M: And you could either make yourself or break yourself as a doorman because courtesy pays, as you well know. Anything that's disrespectful, it just comes back at you in more ways than one.

F: Now, was being doorman a separate job from working for Congressman Kleberg or did he give up one to take the other?

M: No sir, here's what you did. We've always told our people who were going to be messengers to the doorkeeper, which he was at that time. We've changed the name now to be a doorman and the other name is doorkeeper. There's only one and that's the fellow that's in charge of all of these people here. Well, when Congress wasn't in session

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and had the morning hours and sometimes afternoons, he would go work in the Congressman's office. And then that's the way you would make up your time to stay out of mischief and to learn how the Congress actually worked from the standpoint of an office.

I have learned through my days up here that that's the best way to grow up on Capitol Hill is to be a doorman or a messenger to the doorkeeper and help in your congressman's office. Because we have had some boys who have come up here as pages and have come back as congressmen. They just put their mind to it. They've gone through the school and watched it operate it up here. Then they've gone off to school and applied their business stuff to what they had to do. And then they were ready to go again, come back up here. We got one right now that's a great fellow--John Dingell from Michigan. He was a page under his father and his father died, and a couple years back, I don't remember how many, but it's some few now, John Dingell, Jr., came in as a member of Congress. He was through page school and through college when his father died and he just ran in his father's footsteps and was elected.

F: You didn't know Lady Bird before Congressman Johnson came back with his fairly new bride, did you?

M: No, sir. I didn't.

F: Was she much in evidence in those early days?

M: Well, she was one who stayed close to the office work. She's always been a helpmate to Lyndon and she's been a mighty good helpmate at that. He and she both have reared those two girls to be

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perfect ladies.

F: Yes.

M: They were just sweethearts all their lives and they went to school just like anybody else, but they turned out to be real, real nice people.

F: Where'd you get the name Fishbait?

M: I came from a little town of Pascagoula, Mississippi, Joe, down on the coast where we use shrimp for fish bait. Being the size of one of those shrimp at age fifteen, after having all kinds of children's diseases, I was just big enough for a shrimp or a fish bait so they started calling me Garbait, Crabbait, Shrimpbait, Fishbait. So I go now under the nickname of: "This is Fishbait Miller. What can I do for you? May I help you?" or something like that.

F: Did you ever know a Mrs. Painter from Pascagoula who's been dead for some years?

M: Yes, sir. She and I were good friends.

F: Yes, she was an old favorite of mine.

M: Well, good. You know, this is not too big of a world if you stop and sit down and think about it sometime. Because there's always the game that you can play: do you know or do you remember or have you been?

I remember one time I was down in Texas and the Speaker didn't know I was coming. We were getting ready to dedicate his library and I wanted to go watch it cause I heard it was a beautiful piece of work. And I just loved the Speaker Rayburn and I wanted to go to

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Bonham. So I got in my old Dodge by myself and drove down and got in a hotel there and had my bath, put on my clean clothes. In those days, Joe, we didn't wear those sportshirts with the long, long tails on them. We just had a little short round all the way around, even all the way at the bottom. So I had on my shirt and pants and my shoes were shined and my hair was combed and my ears were clean and my face was washed good.

I walked into the library at Bonham and the Speaker looked over the top of his glasses and squinted his eyes a little bit and he says, "Fish. For God's sakes, come in here! What you doing down here? Do you know this is Texas?" I said, "Yes, sir." "Well, let me tell you one thing right off the bat. We in Texas don't dress like you do in Mississippi. Did you bring any clothes?" I said, "Yes, sir. I've got four suits, Mr. Speaker." He said, "Well, you go home and put on a suit of clothes. Wherever you're staying, go home and put on a suit of clothes. Then you come back because I want to show you this library, because I'm going to have you doing a job. Miss Bess and the President are coming and I think that my people down here know too many people and you have been trained to say no and not make too many people mad when you say no."

So I went and got my suit on and he personally took me all over his library. Then we came back to his office. And, Joe, I just cried like a little baby. I first tried to subdue it, but it wouldn't stay because when I saw his office, the exact replica like we have up in the corner here in this Capitol Building; it was just one of those

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things that got next to me. I'm one of those soft-hearted Americans, anyhow. I even get a great big thrill now when I introduce the president of the United States as such. I still get those goose pimples. I'm just that much of an American. It just thrills the devil out of me to be able to be a part of America and that was the part that I was doing now for him.

He said, "Fishbait, are you sure you're in Texas?" I said, "Mr. Speaker, I remember back here at the Arkansas line, it says 'You're now entering Texas.'" He said, "Well, you did right. Now you're in Bonham. This is my home town and I want you to make yourself at home. But I want you to learn this library as much as you can because we got to get up in the morning and go get the President and Miss Bess.

So I found out later that they were going to have a little reception over at his house. We went back, by order of the Speaker, to get Lyndon Johnson. I said, "Senator, the Speaker wants you!" Didn't pay me any attention. I said, "Senator Johnson, sir, the Speaker wants you!" "Now, let's listen here now, Fishbait. Damn it, I don't mind you bossing me around in Washington, but remember you're in my home state." (pounds table) "Maybe the Speaker did send for me, but you can't come down here telling me what to do." I said, "Yes, Senator. But are you coming?" He says, "You know damn well I'm coming because I want to bring you back like I want you to." So he came around, and we had our picture made on the front porch with the Speaker, with Mr. [George] Mahon and several of the colleagues of the Speaker who were there. I shan't ever forget that because Lyndon always

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told me after that meeting, "You know, I just had to call you down. You're such a sweet guy, but you have your ways of doing things in Mississippi and Washington and we have our ways of doing here in Texas. I wanted you to know, damn it, that you were in my home state and you couldn't boss me around."

F: You got to watch that whole Johnson-Rayburn friendship developing, didn't you?

M: Oh, I certainly did. I remember one time, way back a long time ago when Mr. Biffle was secretary of the Senate he came over here one day.

F: Les Biffle.

M: Yes, sir, from Arkansas. He says, "Mr. Speaker, I want to borrow somebody from you and keep him over there." "Who in hell could that be?" He says, "It's Fishbait Miller." He says, "No, sir. We're done training him now and we got him about like we want him but we're still going to train him some more and we want him over here." So I didn't have to go with Mr. Biffle. Mr. Rayburn kept me over here.

So after Lyndon had gone over there and got situated and had become a leader, he came over one day, so the story goes, and he said, "Mr. Speaker." "What is it, Lyndon?" Said, "I want Fishbait. He's a know-how guy. He's a guy that'd really do things and not go out of his way to make a big issue about it. He'd just go and get it done for you." He says, "Nope. I'll give you anything in the world you want, but you can't have Fishbait. He belongs to us. We brought him up like we want him to and we got him trained. He's just a regular fellow and he's a good fellow and he ain't afraid of work and he ain't

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afraid of how long he has to work or what time he has to get in. He'll just do it." He said, "I know, but that's why I want him." "No, you ain't gonna have him." So to me, that was two times that Mr. Rayburn showed that he actually loved me and it just got to the point where he was my great teacher, too. Not only for Lyndon. I wasn't his protege, but I was his doorkeeper and there wouldn't be a thing that I wouldn't do that was honest that would make him happier than anything in the world.

I remember one time that we were sitting in the Speaker's Lobby up there. We were listening to the Speaker and he looked up at the clock and he said, "Well, it's five minutes to seven. Fish, let me tell you something. Now, I want you to know that old John W.'s going to come by here," speaking of Mr. McCormack from Boston--just around seven o'clock." (Interruption) [I was sitting on] that couch there at the speaker's office, on that sofa and, sure enough, here comes Mr. McCormack, the majority leader. And he says, "Sam, reckon you and the doorkeeper can take care of things while I go down and have dinner with Mrs. McCormack?" He says, "I think we can, John. If we can't, old Fish here will take care of it anyhow." And he said, "Well, Mr. Speaker, the doorkeeper knows how to get me if we have to come back right in a hurry." So when Mr. McCormack got out of shot, he says, "Fish, that's a sweet affair, I'm sure. But aren't you glad that we ain't tied down that close?" You know, Joe, for forty years, more than forty years now, they were married, never missed a meal, breakfast and supper at night. He never had been away from her at night, ever,

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ever, until she passed away last December of 1971. It was one of the sweetest love stories, actually, that I've ever known. They never had any children. Neither one was ever sick. She was an opera singer. And by golly, it's just one of those things that--

F: She married him and then . . .

M: They married and then that was it. They just worshipped each other. They adored each other and they got along just wonderfully well. So Mr. Rayburn says, "Now, Fish, don't you ever get tied up that close." I said, "No, sir, Mr. Speaker. I'm married, but I ain't gonna get that married."

F: I presume now Sam Rayburn had the same affection for Lady Bird that everybody else has.

M: He did. Mr. Rayburn was a great soul. He had a love for everybody and, if you didn't know him, you would think that he was the meanest man in the world.

F: I'm going to ask you about that. Now, you come from an area that's about the same as Lyndon Johnson and Sam Rayburn in the way people kind of behave. I mean, some of them, when they say, "You old son of a bitch," it's affectionate.

M: That's true.

F: And you know it.

M: That's true.

F: But that doesn't always sit in some other people's minds.

M: No, that's true, that's true.

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F: Were they generally understood by people like McCormack?

M: That's right. That's true. But the thing is Mr. Rayburn just had a way of when he'd look at you, if you didn't know him and couldn't understand those sweet little eyes of his, you would just have to just quiver all over because you're afraid he's going to eat you up the next minute. Bite you off and chew you a spit at a time and spit it out. But nine times out of ten, his heart was much bigger than the bark or the bite that he tried to make folks think that he had.

Now he ruled with an iron hand. He and Joe Martin made the greatest team that I have ever seen up here as far as majority and minority is concerned. But the greatest team was John McCormack and Sam Rayburn--the Northeast and the Southwest, sitting as a team. They could just feel this whole situation out.

F: Did he seem to make a special effort to instruct Lyndon Johnson in the fine art of politics?

M: He did. He really did and he did a good job of it, too. Lyndon of course had his own ways but you could see, through Lyndon's operation, some of Sam Rayburn's work that had grown off of his operation. But Mr. Rayburn taught me many, many things, but one of two things I'll bring out was [that] Mr. Rayburn has always taught us, as an employee, to always remember the people that come through the Capitol, "They're the ones, Fish, who pay your salary. They pay their taxes. They're the ones that we represent. They might not be from our district,

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but they're still our bosses. Now, if you see anybody that's hesitant just a little bit," and Mr. Rayburn belonged to the old school and he'd say to everybody, "Howdy, Mum" or "Howdy, Suh." He never would say, "Howdy, Ma'am" but he'd always say, "Howdy, Mum." So he said, "Now, if you see any lady or a gentleman or a boy or a girl or a man or a woman that are the least bit hesitant in the halls of the Congress here, you offer your services as a gentleman and see if it doesn't pay off." And you know I do that seven, eight or nine, ten times a day here? Some of the people just like it so they just think it's wonderful that somebody in government will take time out to say howdy to 'em.

F: Probably surprises some of them to death.

M: It is. I had a letter here just this past day or two from a little girl who was eight years old from down [in] Hickory, North Carolina. When she came in, I was saying howdy to 'em and she was just such a little cute thing that I just had to kiss her on the left cheek and I says, "Honey, if I can find a spot to kiss your left cheek where there ain't another freckle, I'm gonna do it." So she said, "Dear Fishbait: Thank you for being so nice to us Monday and Tuesday. I took all the things that you gave me. I enjoyed the Fresca bottle. I've got it in my souvenirs now and I've got Fishbait written all over it. Love, Stacy. P.S. My freckles send a kiss to you." (Laughter) They were from North Carolina and they were just up here for the day, but they didn't know what they wanted to do, and I just suggested that they go up to the Rotunda and take our guided tour. Then when

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they came back we did them like we did you. We offered them a Coca-Cola and they were just tickled and the little girl had a Fresca.

F: Yes. Did Lyndon Johnson meet people pretty well and pretty easily in those days . . .

M: Yes, sir.

F: . . . or did he have to work at that?

M: No, sir. He had it real, real good; real cut out fine. He'd never meet a stranger. I remember one time when we were getting ready to go to the convention in California in 1960, it became more evident to me that we were going to have a candidate. And the more that the days went on and the closer the time came, the more we were in disrespect and out of kilter with the Democratic Committee. They wouldn't have Mr. Johnson. They wouldn't have Mr. Rayburn. They didn't like Fishbait because he was a Rayburn-Johnson man. But nevertheless we had some of that long green to be sent to us. The chief page and I were from North Carolina and we went to the convention in 1960 out in California. Our job was this at this time: we were assigned by a Texan to do nothing but to look after Sam Rayburn, and to watch out for Lyndon when we weren't taking care of Sam Rayburn. So one time we were there and--

F: You stayed in the same hotel with them?

M: Yes, sir. We were with them. Every time his car moved, we were right in the car with him. So one time he was there and saw a friend of ours who is a member of Congress from Philadelphia. Mr. Rayburn, if you will recall, was about five feet six or seven, if that

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tall, but he was a man and he looked up at this congressman and he said, "Bob, let me tell you something." He says, "I'm glad to meet your son and if you came from down our way we would say that, 'Robert, you've done a lot of upbreeding. You've done a good job.'" And right today that congressman is still here and his son is now one of the practicing attorneys up in Philadelphia. He's going to be placed on the bench within the next two or three years, I'm told.

F: Who was the congressman?

M: Robert N. C. Nix. One of our black members here. But Robert Nix is a tower of strength as far as we Democrats are concerned. And he and Mr. Rayburn, after that meeting, became such solid friends. It was just one of those things.

Of course, Mr. Rayburn went on home to heaven shortly after that time, but we had such a good time.

I remember one time there we were waiting for Lyndon to come and he had sent me down to find Mr. Gene Autry. And we had gotten around to the point where where Gene went, a crowd went.

F: Was that . . . ?

M: At the convention, prior to the convention but it was at the big hotel. So we went to the place and there we were. They had a little music going on and Gene was singing. And here comes Lyndon Johnson and we give him this hush sign and Gene says, "Now, Fishbait, what you gonna do?" I said, "Well, Gene, I think the best thing for me to do is just to introduce Senator Johnson to us, our majority leader." "Well, come on up here to the microphone and do it." So I

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introduced Lyndon B. Johnson to the people assembled there. And that was one of the first meetings that we had to start him toward the success of being on the national ticket. Not that I did it, but I just happened to be around when Gene Autry came because, through Mr. Rayburn and Miss Alla Clary, who was his secretary, I learned to know Gene Autry pretty well.

F: He came from Mr. Sam's home district.

M: Yes, sir. To start with--but he was from Oklahoma to start off with, but he finally became a Sam Rayburn man.

F: Yes.

M: And one thing led to another and we just watched him [Johnson] grow and right now he's a statesman down there on the Ranch.

F: Yes. Did your job go with the party, in that rare time when the party was out of office?

M: I was a minority doorkeeper only two times. Mr. Rayburn was the minority leader, Mr. McCormack was the Democratic whip.

F: That 80th Congress.

M: Yes, sir. And also the 83rd. That's when Mr. Eisenhower came in.

F: Yes, and Lyndon became minority leader.

M: That's true. He had to be minority leader over there. But it's one of those things that the only thing I can tell the difference is, when you're in the minority, as far as the office of doorkeeper is concerned, you have everything to do like you would if you were waiting on members all your life, but you have no administrative duties whatsoever. Now, you're gonna wait on a member just as long

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as the last breath in your body or the last ounce of energy that you got's gonna belong to the Congress. That's the way I've been working here for 10 these forty years.

F: Now you have had an unusual viewpoint. Has the Congress changed much in that time?

M: Well, we've lost some of our great big horses, I'm gonna call them. We've lost our men of stature. We used to have men who were here that would do nothing but center their fire on certain aspects of a question. I remember one time when Hatton W. Sumners from Dallas, Texas was chairman of the Judiciary Committee. Just let the word be known that Hatton W. Sumners is going to talk and everybody would come out on the floor. You could hear that proverbial pin drop, because he would just bring out the only subject that he was supposed to work on, which dealt with judicial matters.

F: Yes.

M: But toward the end of his term he, I'm going to use the word branched out a little bit, and they got to where they wouldn't listen as attentively as they would [earlier]. And he got discouraged and finally retired.

F: Lyndon didn't talk much as a congressman, did he?

M: No. No, sir. He didn't have to. He did his work behind the rail, talking to his colleagues and asking for this thing and asking for that thing and offering his services, any way he could help any member.

F: Now, you had four hundred and thirty-five congressmen then just like you do now which is a pretty fair number. I don't suppose a lot of

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congressmen ever got around to knowing all the others.

M: You know, it's a funny thing, Joe. During all my times here sometimes a flag will come down half-mast and the member will say, "Well, now, what's happened there?" And you'll tell him and he'll say, "Well, you know, I've been here for twenty years and I don't recall that fellow." That's just the way it is.

Now we had one or two members that would go around purposely. They were cashiers in a bank back home before they came here or they sold insurance, one. We had one from New York that was a cashier in a bank and he'd go by and make it his business to know everybody. Then we had another fellow, who sold insurance, from Oklahoma and he'd go by and make it his business to know everybody. He'd go shake hands with everybody, employees and all; he wanted to know who you are and where you're from and what district do you represent? And he learned to know everybody.

F: In those early days, did Congressman Johnson move around among people like that?

M: Lyndon was quite a mixer, always has been. And he was a party man above everything else.

Now, I have on the front of my mirror here a likeness of a donkey. It's painted white and it's painted blue, "Victory in '52." Well, I've been using that same donkey for, this makes twenty years. I got it at the 1952 convention in Chicago. They were tearing it off the side of a hotel, and I said, to the carpenter there, "Sir, if you'll tear it off real easy, I'll give you a dollar for it."

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He says, "We're getting ready to throw them away. Is one all you want to buy?" I said, "Well, I ain't buying this. I'm just giving you a dollar. You're getting ready to throw it away, and it'll do me a lot of good for me to tote it home and put it on my mirror back in Washington." Ever since then--and I'm gonna knock on the wood--that thing has come true. We haven't been out of power since 1952 when we got mixed up with Mr. Eisenhower. During his eight years in the presidency, he only had a Republican Congress for two years.

F: Did you see much of Lyndon Johnson after he moved over to the Senate?

M: Yes, sir, because of the fact that I was doorkeeper of the House and I'd always go over there to find out how the legislation was moving and see what I could do to get it brought back over here when it was time for it to come. Like a bill would be held up over there for lack of signature--I'd go get the enrolling clerk and he and I would get together and we'd get the thing signed and come back over here. And we'd also do that when it came time for adjournment. That was one of those times we got to see Mr. Johnson.

F: Did Mr. Johnson stay somewhat in contact with his old House friends?

M: He certainly did. All the time. In fact, he'd come back over here and would go to the [Board] of Education after hours, and they would have their--

F: Where was that?

M: That was on this first floor. A little office around the corner from the bank where the Speaker would meet his friends after the day was done. They would discuss the legislative problems of the

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day and those that were coming up and those they were going to be facing in days to come. In fact, he was there the day that Mr. Truman was in that office, when he got word that Mr. Franklin Delano Roosevelt had passed away. And they had to get Mr. Truman and Mr. Rayburn to go to the White House. Mr. Truman had to take the oath of office that night around seven o'clock.

F: That must have stopped the conversation?

M: That did stop the conversation.

F: Were you around?

M: I was here. But I don't recall that particular time of it happening. But I was here at the time, because it wasn't my duty as doorkeeper of the House, or even as a messenger to the doorkeeper, or special assistant to the sergeant-at-arms at that time, to even think about ever doing those things.

F: When Johnson and Rayburn were together, did Mr. Sam do most of the talking? Or was it about equal?

M: I would think it would be fifty-fifty. And if Lyndon wasn't listening, Mr. Rayburn would point his finger right in his face and say, "Now, listen here, Lyndon. I didn't bring you up that way, and I don't want you to do that way now."

F: He still let him know who was the senior member.

M: Absolutely. He certainly did.

F: And then did the two generally get along fine?

M: No, they got along wonderfully well. I remember one time we were at a party down at the Army-Navy Club, and two big ol' Texas boys, one

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from out in the western part of Texas and one from Dallas [were there]. We were having what we called the Paddle Ball Club Annual Meeting, and doggone, if those peckerwoods wouldn't put ice cubes in each other's pockets, and then they'd come along next thing and get salt and pepper shakers, and shake salt and pepper into each other's pocket. Well, Mr. Speaker kept that to himself as long as he could, and then he got up and grabbed both those big ol' boys--they were over six feet tall and weighed about 215-20 pounds--and he just shook them like they were little kids. "Now, listen, I don't want any of this damned foolishness. We've been thrown out of too many damned places already. Don't want to get thrown out of this place. We get invited once and don't ever get invited back again. Now, you damn fools, go over there and sit down and quit that damned foolishness." Then he'd call somebody and say, "Now, you, too. You ain't from Texas, but I'm going to tell you what I want done." And the thing would be quiet and orderly for the rest of the night. They just admired him. They respected every damned thing he did. He was the law.

F: Did Congressman Johnson get along pretty well with the opposition?

M: He learned how to do that real well while he was here and then more so when he was on the other side.

F: Kind of gave a man an out, didn't he?

M: Sir?

F: He always kind of gave a man a way out to save himself?

M: He did. He did. He frankly did. Well, they didn't make him any better, as far as majority leader was concerned or even as a vice

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president was concerned. Because Lyndon had been brought up in the world here on Capitol Hill as one of the better known interpreters of the parliamentary procedures. He knew by listening, by paying attention, and by reading. And he learned all the rules that were necessary to make the wheels turn. He was a good parliamentarian. And he knew when he could squeeze a little bit, give a little bit on this side. And he just worked masterfully well.

F: As doorkeeper, did you ever get involved in head-counting on issues?

M: Well, I'll tell you, as minority doorkeeper, Mr. McCormack always made me do the canvassing. I'd have to call the congressman's office who was head of that particular district, and I'd have to have his secretary make the count and then give it to me. Then I'd have to turn it in to Mr. McCormack, and Mr. McCormack would in turn let Mr. Rayburn have the results.

I think right today we have a whole lot of those papers downstairs, in my office down from here, that would show that we did a lot of that stuff. But Mr. McCormack, when he became majority leader in his own right in 1955 after the 83rd Congress under Mr. Eisenhower and Joe Martin, I used to get anywhere from sixty, to seventy, to eighty notes a week from Mr. McCormack. He would "Dear Bill" me and then assign a job. And many a time he'd refer to me as "his legislative angel."

F: I see.

M: That wasn't anything to be worried about, because he'd put it on paper, and all I had to do was have sense enough to pick out what he

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wanted to put on the program for the next week. Many a time he's called me "his legislative angel." But those two--Mr. Rayburn and Mr. Johnson--are two of the greatest people I think I've ever known in my time here on the Hill.

F: I judge the Speaker and McCormack became close friends with Lyndon Johnson?

M: Oh, they did. They definitely did. Mr. McCormack was one who was brought up under the Rayburn school. Also Mr. McCormack was one who came from a poor family and didn't have much of this world's good to start off with, and I understand Mr. Rayburn was the same way. Everything those two gentlemen got, they got it the hard way. Well, Lyndon was the same way. There's three boys right there that you could refer to as that old story writer's, Horatio Alger, Jr., stories. There are three good examples right there. It can be done if it has to be done.

F: Did you go to the 1956 convention?

M: I've been to all of them ever since I've been up here.

F: Were you surprised when Johnson threw Texas support to Kennedy for vice president over Estes Kefauver.

M: No, sir, I wasn't. Because at that particular time, I was on the platform, and Mr. Rayburn was presiding. He's always let me believe that you could recognize whomever you damn pleased when you are wielding that gavel.

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F: He could come very near looking right through a man.

M: That's the damn truth. So what he did in this particular instance, I said, "Mr. Speaker." "What the hell you want?" "Mr. Speaker, here comes Paul Douglas and Estes Kefauver." "Well, now, you and Les Biffle look after that. I got my own hands full right here." So I said, "Les, we gotta get busy. We gotta tighten up the screws here a little bit now. We gotta watch Paul Douglas and Estes Kefauver. They're gonna come to get on the platform." About that time, Mr. Speaker had yielded to somebody as chairman of the convention, and he in turn had a little bit of time. "Now, Fish, you put 'em back there. But don't you let a newspaperman cross over that railing to get to talk to them. And if there's any note-passing, you bring me the note." "Yes, sir." So we didn't have a bit of trouble out of Senator Douglas or Senator Kefauver. But that was one of those times when the man who was the chairman of the convention could recognize whomever he damned pleased.

F: Did you get any opportunity to see Johnson and Kennedy together in the brief time they overlapped in Congress with Nixon?

M: Yes, sir. You know, a funny thing happened, Joe. When it came time for me to think about being an officer of the House, I had no idea what the word "minority" meant. But there was a fellow from North Carolina who, two days after election, sent out a mimeographed sheet to all the Democrats who were going to be in the 80th Congress. Well, I didn't know what he wanted to do. He wanted to be minority

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doorkeeper. I didn't even know there was such a title. All I'd ever known [was] that there was a messenger to the postmaster, messenger to the doorkeeper or special officer, and a special assistant to the sergeant-at-arms. Well, I found out that it was a job that would be needed for it to be trained, so when the Democrats came back to take over Congress, they'd be ready to take over the work of the doorkeeper's position. So, I waited four weeks. But in the meantime I had seen all the people that had stayed in Washington, and I had got a pretty good idea that I should make my announcement. So I took my typewriter in hand, and I wrote each one a typewritten letter. We didn't have those that you'd just hit two or three keys and then push a button, and then the whole thing comes out.

And by golly, the guy that I ran against--he was from North Carolina--had no nickname. I did: "Fishbait" Miller. And when it came time for the vote that day, I was told by the Speaker, "Get the hell off the floor and don't even be seen; don't even stay around where anybody can even look at you." So I got out of the way, but I heard later that a gentleman from California came, and he said, "Mr. Speaker, I want to vote for that boy, Fishbait. How am I going to do it?" "Well, I tell you. I'm just going to take my piece of paper and write 'Fish' across it." So this fellow from California took his piece of paper, which was about the size of a little ol' three by five card, drew a picture of a fish hook and put a worm on it. All in one piece of drawing. Dropped it in the ballot box. And incidentally, at the start of each new Congress, we

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have a brand new trash basket that we use for our voting box. And when the votes were cast, the gentleman from North Carolina without a nickname got 42 and I got 117.

Well, when we got to the point where it came time to go to John Fitzgerald Kennedy's funeral, Mr. McCormack and I went, and we went to the graveside. Mrs. McCormack stayed in the car, and so did Mr. [Eugene T.] Kinnaly, his administrative assistant. They had assigned a colonel from the Army to be with Mr. McCormack, and the colonel stayed. So Mr. McCormack and I were coming back from the graveside, and we are walking stride for stride, and arm around each other. I was trying to console him, and he was trying to console me. And I said, "Boss, we sure have lost a good friend." "Bill," he says, "there's something I want to tell you. I've never told you this before. Let me tell you what a good friend he was to you. You know, when you first ran for minority doorkeeper in 1947, you got four votes that you have no idea that you had at that time, nor have had since then." I said, "I'd love to hear that story." He said, "Well, I got together with my boy from Boston and Sam got together with Lyndon. And you know that you got the vote of the late Speaker, Sam Rayburn. You got the vote of the man that we just buried. You got the vote of the man that's in the White House now, Lyndon Johnson. You got my vote."

I looked up at Mr. McCormack. I said, "Boss, why didn't you tell me that before, and I wouldn't have been concerned all these years about how I was going to get along?" "Well, I tell you, Mr. Doorkeeper,

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We didn't know you then like we know you now. We know now that we can give you any kind of thing to do, and we don't know how you get it all done, but we do know that you get it done, and it's done properly."

So I had a knowledge then [that] way back in the time, 1947, that Lyndon and John McCormack and Sam Rayburn and Jack Kennedy were making a fine alliance right there. They were learning how to work as a team. I remember Mr. Kennedy had back trouble, and he had to use crutches. And he'd have one bad time trying to maneuver on those crutches till we could get him to a place where he could just sit down and rest. But he did get that back cured. He made a good congressman. Then he was elected to the Senate, and then Lyndon was elected to the Senate. But eighty-seven was the number, not eighty-nine. Is that right?

F: Yes. Eighty-seven. Right.

M: There was a landslide.

F: It was a landslide, out of a million votes or so.

At the 1956 convention, did you get any opportunity to see Johnson and Kennedy working together?

M: I did. I remember particularly in 1956 when it came time for Bobby Kennedy to find out what Jack had to do if he was on the ticket. "What does he do?" he came and asked me, and I said, "Well, Bobby, I tell you what you do. You get him on the ticket. These plain-clothes detectives, and the men in uniform, they'll just come get him and take him back to that part of the office. There

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won't be a bit of doubt in your mind that he'll be the man that they'll look after. Nobody'll get to him, or he won't get to anybody unless he wants to see a certain person." And sure enough, that's the way it happened. But they got Mr. Kefauver then.

I thought I was going to get mauled--M-A-U-L-E-D--completely when I let it slip one time before it was generally known that John Sparkman was going to be the vice president with Mr. Stevenson the first time. "Fish, damn it, keep your mouth shut." "Mr. Speaker, I didn't say anything." "Oh, you did. You said John Sparkman was going to be vice president. Where the hell you been? What you been listening to?" He did, really. And I just learned right then and there I shouldn't say anything. I mean nothing.

F: To a great extent, you always were sort of accepted as another congressman, weren't you?

M: Well, no, sir. I'm just an employee and always will be. I mean by that--

F: I mean, though, that you had a kind of a special status.

M: I have always had. I don't know why. I still can't understand it. But they'll just let me be almost where anybody else wouldn't care to be. I guess one thing is I've proven my ability to have the know-how. And then I had the ability enough not to have the say-how. I remember last week--not last week maybe, but this particular time of the year--when J. Edgar Hoover died, and we brought him up to have him lie in state. The morning of the exercises, we had a brand new architect of the Capitol and we had some new people from the

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other side of the Capitol, and particularly the Army. They didn't know what all of this was about. So they asked me if I'd help them. And when it was all over, some of these members, I guess from jealousy, or I don't what you could call it, I hope it was teasing, [said], "Fishbait, damn it. You're the doorkeeper of the House. What you doing running that thing out there at the Rotunda for?" I said, "Well, Congressman, let me tell you something, sir. The way y'all have trained me over the years--and I've had a little sense enough to try to remember it--I was able to assist the Army and the FBI lay out this, that, and the other to make this thing come out right." He said, "Well, I'll admit it was a smooth operation." I just let my know-how be put to work. "Oh," he says, "you make me tired." I said, "Well, have a seat, sir, and rest." He said, "You go to hell," then. You know, if they don't tease you, they don't love you.

F: Yes. Did you get the feeling that Senator Johnson wasn't too fond of Senator Kefauver?

M: Well, I sure did. Estes was one of the boys that wouldn't play on the team. He was a loner. He had his own cotton-picking ways of wanting to do things. But he never would be a team-player. And that's no way to do the game.

I remember many a time I've heard Mr. Rayburn and Mr. Johnson say, "Boys, let me tell you something. The best thing you can do is look after your own interest first. But always remember. Your party comes ahead of that. Try to take care of your party. Don't

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vote against it. If you can't vote with them, take a walk and go out and see if it's raining or the sun's shining properly or something. And then just not vote. Or if you can't do either, just vote 'present'. And then you can explain that quicker to your people back home than you could say why you had to say 'No' or 'Yea!' And they would really mean that.

F: At that Los Angeles convention, did you have any idea that Johnson was going to be vice president?

M: Well, this is the way I did it in my home town. This chief page Turner Robertson from Scotland Neck, North Carolina, and I bought train tickets, round-trip. We left here on one afternoon and went to New Orleans, and from there to Houston, and Houston on over to L.A. Well, when we got within about three or four hours of my home town at Montgomery, Alabama, I got off and wired ahead to the newspaper people, and especially to a fellow who ran a restaurant, because I wanted some seafood.

I remember they came and took our picture of us leaning out the platform of the train, getting that seafood, and we were asked the question, "How about the ticket?" I said, "Well, from where I am now"--and I'm down in South Mississippi--"it's either going to be a Johnson-Kennedy, or Kennedy-Johnson ticket." And of course, I was looking after two of my boys that used to be in the House. I had no idea at that time who it was going to be. But I had a good feeling that it was time for some kind of something to get in there where we could get back in power. Because it was not good not having anybody

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in the White House.

So when it turned out to be Kennedy and Johnson, I remember we got Mr. Johnson into the morning after the nomination that night. It's always the problem to have the nominees come down for breakfast with the national committeeman and national committeewoman of the different states. I remember that Governor Stevenson was there making his speech. But Mr. Rayburn says, "No matter what they're saying or what they're doing, you come to the door and you get my attention. I'll nod back at you, and then you can make your announcement." So I did that. When Lyndon came I said, "Mr. Speaker, the Honorable Lyndon B. Johnson, the next vice president of the United States." Well, he came in and he got the applause and sat down where he was supposed to. Then it came time to bring in the gentleman from Massachusetts. Well, he came down by himself. He was late. I don't know if he meant to be purposely, but he came along and I was following my orders from the Speaker. I went in and he tried to catch my attention before I got in. Governor Stevenson was still talking. So I got in and made my pronouncement. And he said, "Well, I'll be a son-of-a-bitch. He ain't listened to me yet, has he? I'm going to have to tell Sam Rayburn to get rid of Fishbait." But they didn't. And he thanked me after it was all over. He said, "Well, I'm glad you did. I see what you had to do. I didn't know it was going to be that way. You see, I've never been a nominee before."

I remember one time I was down at the White House with our

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daughter. It was one of these members of congress receptions where you had to wear white tie and tails, and we got special permission the second time we went to take our daughter instead of taking Mrs. Miller. Our daughter was a late teen-ager then. She said, "Daddy, how are you going to do this?" And I said, "I don't know, honey. We'll have to wait and see." So when it came time for the President and his wife to come down, they did. This was very informal. This was the first time it'd ever been informal. All the time there'd been a line just as stiff as can be, and you did doddledydo, and go in there.

But here comes the President. I said, "Hello, Mr. President." "Hello, Fishbait." I said, "Mr. President, this is our daughter, Sarah Patsy. Sarah Patsy, this is our president." He said, "Oh, you're the one that we gave special permission for Fishbait to bring, isn't it." "Yes, sir, Mr. President, my daddy said that you were a great fellow." And before she could get out with why, he said, "Let me tell you something about your father now. I wish we had more like him." And it just happened that this was on a Thursday, and Tuesday before the hearings had come out on a Monday for a.m. papers on Tuesday morning. And somewhere I had put in the hearings that I had turned in ninety thousand dollars to the Treasury, miscellaneous funds for sale of newspapers and other trash paper that we had in our wastebaskets up here. He said, "Sarah Patsy, let me tell you something. Your father has done a great thing. He's turned in ninety thousand dollars to the Treasury.

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I wish we had more like him." "Well, thank you, Mr. President. I'm going to have a good time. Thank you."

So the next thing we ran into Jackie. "Mrs. Kennedy." "Hello, Fishbait." "Mrs. Kennedy, this is our daughter, Sarah Pat--"

"Oh, that's the one we gave special permission for you to bring tonight, isn't it?" And I said, "Yes, it is." "Sarah Patsy, let me tell you something about your daddy. When I was a free-lance photographer, Fishbait always saw to it that I got the word, that I got a good spot, because in those days I was really trying to work to learn how to do my profession real good, and he'd always see to it that I got a good spot. Sarah Patsy, you have a wonderful daddy. Fishbait, I'm glad you were able to bring her." And I thought that was a nice thing to do it.

F: Kind of fixed you up. (Laughter)

M: Well, I thought that was real nice of them.

F: Right.

M: I really did.

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

M: I was sitting right here. (Thumps desk) Sitting right at this desk.

F: What was it like around here?

M: Well, Congress wasn't in session.

F: Did you have a radio on? Or did somebody come in and tell you?

M: Somebody told me and then I turned the radio on. Then the next thing I know, here comes Spark Matsunaga, a congressman from Hawaii,

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and a lady with him. And the lady turned out to be the sister of the Governor of Hawaii, the Honorable John Burns. And not knowing anything about what the situation was, and even if we had, we would have anyway, all three of us got on our knees and we said audible prayers, all three of us, for the good of those who were mixed up in that dastardly thing down in Dallas. Particularly our President and our Vice President and Governor Conally and his people. And I shan't ever forget that time when we were here.

Sparky brings it to my attention every once in a while. Every time that I run into the governor he says, "Fishbait, my sister still thinks that you and Sparky are two of the greatest fellows in this world for getting down on your knees and speaking audibly to God for the good of our president." And that was the way it was with me.

And then the night before we had to have the church services, we had to go down to the White House six different times on official business to see what was going to take place up here in the Rotunda.

F: I was going to ask you, did you have a good bit to do with the arrangements?

M: Well, they wrote up in the book that I was sitting at the meeting, and I scraped my feet on the floor four or five times to attract attention. I didn't clear my throat, I just started scratching my feet. I said, "Sir, what are we going to do about the House?

Speaker McCormack's got to do something. He's got to have a part in

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this place somewhere. The House is going to have to be invited; you just can't have the senators to come over." And the story goes, "Well, Fishbait got what he wanted because the Speaker was happy from then on."

We were appointed by the House of Representatives, with a gentleman from the Senate. We were to go down in our high hats with our striped gray trousers and the vest and all that stuff, with long tails, to represent the House and the Senate, respectively.

We went down and we learned our parts there on a Sunday night.

Then when it came time for the actual proceedings to go on on Monday, we were pretty well versed in the school of what we had to do. We knew the senators had to go this way, and the congressmen that way, and other people the other way, and they could only have X number of people down there. They didn't have enough room for every member of the Congress to go. I think we had a hundred tickets, and that meant we had fifty members and their wives. It was all on seniority. And it was really something to watch and learn--that so many heads of state from so many foreign governments came over to pay homage to our late president, the Honorable John Fitzgerald Kennedy.

F: Where did you get the high hat and so forth?

M: We had to rent them.

F: Were there enough around here for everybody?

M: We got the word early and we went down. This fellow from the other body knew where to call, and I knew where to call to get mine, because I'd been renting tuxedos from them. I didn't have sense enough to buy

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one. We were just able to rent them.

And after the service was over, we just took our high hats right with us and went right on to the funeral. I rode in Mr. McCormack's car.

F: You were the doorkeeper then when Johnson came up for that first [speech].

M: Yes, sir. I remember particularly. Somewhere I got the idea that when Mr. Roosevelt died that two days or so after the funeral, Mr. Truman came up to make a speech. So I went to the document room and talked to the superintendent. Inasmuch as I was the doorkeeper, I felt that I should at least do that.

So some fellow from ABC came along and he wanted to know if I could get the last speech that a new president had made when he had to succeed somebody real quick. I said, "Yes, sir. I'll get you a copy." So I just got three copies then. I got one for our speaker, one for this man, and one for Lyndon. And I sent it down to Lyndon Johnson, and that was one thing that he used to help get the idea that he should come on up here and speak.

F: You know he saw it, then.

M: Yes, sir. I do know that he got that thing, because he thanked me personally. Verbally, too. Not in a handwriting thing. He thanked me personally. He said, "Fishbait, that's the damndest thing you could think of." He says, "I see now Mr. Sam still is training you."

I think this is the speech where he made his first remarks.
I'm not sure. Yep. This is it.

F: November 27.

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M: Yes, sir. I can see it right there. And there he is right there. And that was before he got to the point where he would build up the "silly box." You know the things you read.

F: Yes. It must have given you a peculiar feeling to announce him on that occasion.

M: Well, it did. Naturally it did. And as I told you earlier, it still gives me a great thrill to introduce all of them. In fact, I still get goose pimples.

F: Yes. Well, that must have been a particularly unusual time.

M: It was. It was. It frankly was. And I remember last time that he came in to talk to us. He said, "Well, Fishbait, I guess this is going to be it."

F: Was that at the time of the kind of farewell State of the Union Message?

M: Well, that's what he said. But I wouldn't take it for a no answer at that time or an aye answer. I said, "Mr. President, there'll be others."

So when he came in, I introduced him and we had started down the row, and he said, "Well, come on. Let's get it over with. I want to get through with this thing now." I said, "Mr. President, they're ten minutes behind in your teleprompter business." He said, "Well, I got my speech right down there. Somebody's going to pass it up to you, and you're going to give it to me, and then we'll put it on that thing and I'll just go." So with that he took off his watch and put his watch down, and he started his speech after the Speaker introduced him.

F: That was an [occasion]. I was there. There was hardly a dry eye that night.

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M: There wasn't a dry eye at all anywhere. There surely wasn't.

F: Did you see much of him while he was president?

M: Yes, sir. I remember one time I was so flattered, beyond my means of being a human being. I was having a birthday, and he had a visitor from overseas, the Prime Minister of Australia, the one that went swimming and drowned.

F: Yes. [Harold E.] Holt.

M: Yes, sir. Well, dadgum, if he didn't invite me to the luncheon.

F: Oh, boy.

F: I got to sit within about two tables of the Prime Minister of Australia. And we just had a good time. He mentioned the fact that I was there and that I had a birthday and he was glad to have an old fellow worker from Capitol Hill down here to "break bread with us at the White House," which I thought was mighty nice of him.

F: Johnson was always very good in treating everybody absolutely equal, wasn't he?

M: Absolutely. If he had any favorites, he kept them to himself. Outwardly, he didn't have any favorites to make over.

F: Well, I always have been aware that a secretary or anybody was just as important to Lyndon Johnson as, say, the speaker.

M: You know, his greatest thing that he ever did, as far as working conditions were concerned, he'd work a team of man and wife. When he was a senator, he had his office working twenty-four hours a day to keep up with the mail. But he'd have man and wife working together, so there wouldn't be any cold dinners and no husband coming home, or

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any cold suppers and no mama coming home. That was one thing he did around here. He taught that you can have a team of man and wife, and they can work and still get things done, and still have a happy home.

F: Did you see much of John Connally in those days?

M: Yes, sir. But I didn't pay too much attention to what was going on then. John was down here just recently with an exercise to put the flowers on the wreath of the Hoover. So he walked back with us from the Rotunda, us, being the Supreme Court, members of the Supreme Court and Fishbait. It fell my duty to lead them on from the place where they robed, over in the House Chamber Way, to bring Mrs. Burger and the Court right behind me, and then they brought in Secretary Connally.

When they got ready to leave, Secretary Connally was right there and he walked right with us. And then he spoke to all the members of the Supreme Court and especially to Mrs. Burger, the Chief Justice's wife. Then he and I walked back stride in stride, and we missed all the crowds. We took the way that Mr. Rayburn taught us how to go. He had a special passage way made in the very front of the House Wing of the Capitol and also the Senate Wing of the Capitol, where the tourists generally would not meander or wouldn't go down and block the passages. So Secretary Connally and I walked back, and I took him to where his boys were waiting for him, and here comes a fellow opening an umbrella. They went on out in the rain and got in his car. "Fishbait, I thank you. I see Sam Rayburn's been around you, too."

F: Did President Johnson always call you Fishbait?

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M: Yes, sir. No, sir, I've never been "Bill" to anybody except to Mr. McCormack. And the only reason that is, Mrs. McCormack did not like nicknames after a certain period in life.

But as soon as Mr. McCormack was not speaker anymore, I had the temerity to put my nickname in the directory: William M. (Fishbait) Miller, Fishbait in parentheses. I had a letter one time from a fellow, says, "I thought you was Fishbait. I don't see Fishbait mentioned at all in the directory." So the next time it came out, he said, "Well, I'm glad to see that somebody made you put your nickname in there. Now we know who William M. Miller is." But it's surprising how a nickname will stick.

I always say, Joe, that if it hadn't been for the nickname, plus the fact that I was not afraid to work, plus the fact that I had learned how to be loyal to the job and faithful to the people. I took the job of messenger to the doorkeeper and the coats and the hats and a friendly pat on the back, and a smile and a handshake when they'd come in, I always say that I took those and parlayed it into a pretty damned good job.

F: Yes. You made a career of it.

M: Well, I'm trying to. I'm trying to. I could retire, I guess. I'll be sixty-three in July and forty years of service. I don't know. I don't quite think I'm old enough yet to retire. What would I do?

F: You're far too vital for that.

M: I'd go to seed, I'm sure.

F: Did you ever have any opportunity to campaign, or did they usually

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keep you too busy here?

M: Campaign out where?

F: Oh, for the ticket.

M: The party?

Well, I'd do it right here. Because we ran a folding room where we'd get out all kinds of speeches, and all kinds of other pamphlets that we'd all say, "We fold, insert, and seal, and send it out for you." And we got to the point where we would almost work around the clock to get that stuff out. And then we finally got smart enough to get enough equipment to where we don't have to work around the clock now. All we have to do is work about sixteen hours out of twenty-four to keep up with the workload.

So that's one of those things. We'd always help the ticket this-a-way. There was a Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee. And we always knew that certain things had to be put out to each nominee, whether he'd be an incumbent, or whether he'd be a brand new one. We'd have to get that stuff out. And we would go to work, four of us: the chief page, the reading clerk, and the manager of the telephones, majority, that would be the Democrat. Well, we four would go and get this stuff put in the envelopes and mail it out. And we'd always feel like we had done our little bit of work to help keep the workload going, to keep the man on the field filled with stuff that he could use to give to his people, and by word of mouth. And that's one way we do right now.

Then the night of the election, we'd always go to the committee and

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get ready, and we listened for the results by two televisions and two or three radios, and four or five or six or seven or eight telephones.

F: You must, in your interest of doing things right, have done every conceivable sort of job around here from practically being a cleaning woman to [inaudible].

M: Joe, there's nothing that I won't do as long as it's honest and honorable that'll help the party.

F: Have you seen the president since he left office?

M: Yes, sir. Two or three different times.

I remember one time here, he was going to sign a voting rights bill. And they wondered where they were going to put some people they wanted to come and to watch them, where they were going to come and watch them sign the bill. Well, he couldn't have it in the Senate and he couldn't have it in the House. So he had it in the Rotunda of the Capitol. And they sent wires out to about two hundred friends of the party to let them come watch. Well, then, that night they told me that they were going to all come to my office. Well, I had my man, Carl E. Sommers, who's a gentleman of color. A fine member of the black race. He was twenty years in the dining room under Mr. Rayburn's tutelage. And I asked Mr. Rayburn one day if I could steal them. He said, "Yes, but do it before that get him back in there in the start of January." So I got him in December and worked him a month. And then when they wanted him to come back to work, they couldn't get him because I had him.

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So I told Carl to dress up real good and put on a white shirt and get his pretty blue suit to work and a shine, and get his face all clean and ready. And I was going to put him in charge of all these two hundred people. That suited him just fine because most of them belonged to the black race. And Carl was my boy. I went from the speaker's rooms, to walk way around the Rotunda to take the members of the president's cabinet around. And before I could get back, there was the President and the Vice President, and the Speaker and the Majority Leader and other leaders. "Fishbait, damn it, come on here. The President wants to get this over with!"

So I learned from experience--

F: Who said that?

M: Lyndon did.

F: He did, un-huh.

M: "Come on, Fishbait, I want to get this over with!"

So I learned from experience, that if you speak right into the Rotunda, it won't do any good. So I had to cup my mouth. I put my hand up by my mouth and talked like that and made it go around the room. And the next morning on the front page of the paper, "Fishbait Introduced the President of the United States--Y'all hear?"

F: (Laughter)

M: I swear. They can always think up something cute about it.

But he made a good speech, had a wonderful reception. Then after it was all over, we had to take our two hundred people with the other members of the entourage, and had to go over and let them see

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what he had done, shake his hand, get one of the pens, and go home and get him re-elected.

F: You have quite a number of jobs you supervise.

M: We do three hundred and fifty-seven people, Joe.

F: Do you get a good bit of pressure from the congressmen for those? Or can you pretty well--

M: I don't have to do a thing about them because they're all under patronage. When the patronage committee sends me a letter, we appoint so-and-so to fill so-and-such a job, via-so-and-so. Then that's all I've got to have. And I go ahead and do it.

We supervise thirteen ladies' restrooms, five gentlemen's restrooms here in the Capitol. We have five barber shops on the House side of the Capitol. We run two snack bars, one in the Democratic Cloak Room and one in the Republican Cloak Room. We have two telephone set-ups, one Republican and one Democratic. We have fifty-one pages, fifty-six doormen, thirty-three janitors who keep the House Wing of the Capitol clean. Each night that there is a night session, the whole House wing of the Capitol is swept down, washed down, mopped down, and waxed down and buffed. We've learned that this makes it look much prettier and makes it much easier for us to keep clean if we put a little wax on it.

Then we have a document room where all the bills of Congress that are introduced, sent to the Government Printing Office--either House or Senate--they're printed, sent up to us, same as the other body, for distribution. Then we have the folding room where all speeches,

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baby books, newsletters--weekly, monthly, or whatever it is--when they want to send it out, they send it to us with instructions. We take care of it. And that runs anywhere from twenty-seven to thirty-two million pieces every month.

Then we have a baling machine, where we have all of this wastepaper that I have previously mentioned. We sell that on an unassorted basis to the highest bidder. He furnishes the baling wire and a thousand dollar performance bond. He picks it up six days a week, sometimes two, three, four and five times a day. And we average about three hundred and eighteen thousands pounds of that a month. Right now we're getting fifty-seven and a half cents a hundred pounds on it. And week before last, last month, in April, we had more questions about the recycling. "What do we do with our wastepaper? Do we recycle it?" I said, "Yes, sir," or "Yes, ma'am," whoever it was that called us. And we do. We sell it to them--to the highest bidder.

F: Did they always do that?

M: Yes, sir. We've always done that as long as I've been here. And even before, I don't know how far back, but before I came in and some time before, the check belonged to the doorkeeper as part of his means of emolument.

F: That would give you a pretty good income.

M: They didn't give it to me.

F: I know that.

M: Because I learned before that I wanted that to go back to the Treasury. That wasn't for me. No, sir.

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Then we have to get ready for joint meetings and joint sessions by making all of the little old arrangements for people, like the Cabinet, the Supreme Court, the diplomats, the Chiefs of Staff, and then the distinguished guests and their friends, and the Congress has to have its share of the tickets, and the Executive Branch has to have its share, and the Supreme Court has to have their share of the tickets. And then you have to look out for the news media.

F: One other short area of exploration we haven't touched. First of all, was Johnson fairly close to Adam Clayton Powell?

M: Well . . .

F: Did they get along?

M: As things go, they got along but there was nobody that could be close to Adam Clayton Powell because Adam Clayton Powell was of the stature that he was going to outshine anybody and everybody that he came in touch with.

F: He was his own law.

M: Well, he was his own law and he could strut sitting down. I remember particularly that he would come by about on a Thursday or Wednesday, say, "We gonna meet tomorrow?" I said, "No, sir." "Well, thank God for that. I can go home and write me a sermon and be ready for Sunday. I've gotta make these girls happy. I've gotta have two sermons for Sunday morning." I said, "Adam, how many do you have a sitting in your church?" He said, "Oh, we got about eight thousand on the rolls, but we have anywhere for two to three thousand to come

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sit and listen to the preaching on these two services." I said, "Your daddy still helping you?" "Well, he's still got his name on the books and I have to do all the work." So as time would go on he got to where he would strut a little better sitting down, and he finally got himself in trouble and just recently God called him home.

F: Yes. Well, now when he was denied his seat, then he sued--

M: He sued us. He sued the chairman, [Emanuel] Celler, and the other two members of the subcommittee, the doorkeeper, the clerk and the sergeant-at-arms and I was told that if I wanted to run for Congress, now would be the best time for me to go because I'd been martyred by Adam Clayton Powell.

F: Right.

M: Well, I don't call that a martyr because I didn't do that but I do remember one time we did have some fun out of it.. It actually wasn't fun at the time, but something similar to like that happened and after the 1964 elections we had some misgivings about things not being right as far as the Democrats were concerned in Mississippi. So the people from Arlington who were members of the Nazi Party--we learned later--went ahead and practiced their run, oh, I guess three, four, five weeks before we came into session. And we had two members of the black race from Mississippi who wanted to be present on the floor to watch the proceedings of the Congress opening. Well, this young man from over in Arlington right across the river from Washington had practiced his lines real well, how long it would take for

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him to go to the washroom and change his complete clothing and put on white pants and white shoes and a straw hat and little red shirt and he came up one time when we were getting ready to call the roll and he came in and hollered real loud, "Mister Speaker! I's from Mississippi and I wants to be seated." Well, they picked him up from off of that thing. He wasn't knocked down. They just picked him up pants and all and they took him down to the place and found out who he was and he had to pay a fine and serve a sentence all at the same time for disrupting that proceedings of the Congress. And that's the only time I do believe that we have had any troubles, as such, from people. •

F: You didn't ever have any trouble with the black congressman because you came from Mississippi?

M: No, sir. I got their votes all the time. It was a funny thing. They knew I had Mr. Rayburn's vote. They knew that Mr. McCormack . . . being a Catholic, he'd look after the Catholic people for me and Manny Celler would take care of the Jewish folk for me. Then Adam Clayton Powell would be sure to take care of the colored votes for me. So they said, "Well, what the hell I want to run against that son-of-a-bitch for. I'll never get anywhere."

F: Right.

M: So actually I've only had two races during my whole lifetime up here. And one other was in 1949 when Mr. Truman went out on his own and won. He won by a hundred and eight majority and I won by a hundred and eight majority and I'll knock on wood again (knocks on table)

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I've never been headed since. Now, if anybody wants it, I'd be happy to test them, see if I got the vote.

F: In this Powell suit, was there anything that you could do other than just sit quiet. This was in--

M: Well, I'll tell you what I had to do. I had to receive a warrant and when the man came in the building to serve it, I said, "Sir, I don't think you have any privilege to serve a warrant in a public building." He said, "Well, in this case, it's different. We have the Speaker's permission. Here." I said, "Thank you, sir."

So all I did was take it and sign on the paper that I had received the warrant and then we got a lawyer from out of New York, he and his law partners. And I think we paid over two hundred thousand dollars a year retainer fees for them to work it out. Then it went to one court, to another court, to another court and they finally got it settled. And poor old Adam Clayton Powell got beat by Charlie Rangle who's a member from up there in that district and doing a hell of a good job.

F: He seems to be a good congressman.

M: We're gonna get a new one from Texas.

F: Yes, I know.

M: State Senator Barbara Jordan's coming.

F: She's a good girl.

M: And I was told yesterday by Charlie Wilson, a Democrat from California, that we're liable to get another member from the black race out there. Well, I have to keep track of these things so when they come up in November, I can be ready to greet them.

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F: Know who the people are.

M: Yes, sir.

F: Do you make a special effort to know the new ones?

M: I do. Don't you know, Joe, that there's nothing sweeter to a member's ear than his name pronounced properly and recognized at the same time?

F: You're dealing with a man who's a congressman who comes in a place like this where he's a relative stranger. I imagine they feel a little uncertain.

M: Well, you know, seriously speaking and I've heard this said over and over by incumbent members, they get the idea that they can come up here to Washington and be a big fish in the big pond. But we had one from Mississippi one time named Aubert Dunn. He came up and was going to be a big fish in the big pond and he turned out to be a little fish in a big, big pond. So he only stayed one term. But he was here long enough for his son to learn the facts of politics and his son was elected just recently to be the governor of Tennessee.

F: Did John Bell Williams leave here pretty bitter?

M: No, sir.

F: He didn't feel that Lyndon had let him down?

M: No, he didn't feel that because he was a martyr. He went home and [got] elected governor and he got out of it what he wanted. He'd served his time up here to be getting enough of a pension to keep him alive for the rest of his life and that's the way that goes.

So you're about out of tape, Joe, and I don't know if you're

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through with those words or not, but it sure has been a pleasure being with you.

F: Well, it has for me.

M: And God bless you and God bless Lyndon and Lady Bird and all of her family.

F: Fine. Good.

M: Thank you for letting me spend this little time with you.

F: Well, thank you, Fishbait.

[End of Tape 1 of 1 and Interview I]

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