INTERVIEW I

DATE: September 2, 1974

INTERVIEWEE: RALPH G. NEWMAN

INTERVIEWER: Joe B. Frantz

Place: Reception Room, Abraham Lincoln Book Shop, Chicago, Illinois

Tape 1 of 1, Side 1

F: How did you ever get in contact with the Johnsons in the first place?

N: My first word of the possible interest of Lyndon Johnson in my services came in a letter from Carol Agger, Mrs. Abe Fortas, who is, as you know, a partner in what is now Arnold and Porter. I am sure it was inspired by conversations with Sheldon Cohen, who had been a member of their firm but was at this time commissioner of Internal Revenue. Sheldon had been the person who had contacted me to do appraisals for some of the other clients of the firm prior [to this].

F: Had you worked on a president previously?

N: I had never worked directly for a president. I had worked on some material that had gone into presidential libraries; I had done small segments of things, but I had never gotten involved with the whole thing right virtually from the beginning. Carol wrote and said, would I be interested.

F: Did you know her?

N: No. Oh, I may have met her; I'm sure I met her.

F: But you weren't intimate friends.

N: No, we weren't intimate friends at all. And of course I responded immediately. This was in 1965.

I had met the President before that. I had met him as majority leader a couple of times, and I had met him as vice president. It was as majority [leader] and vice president that I met him three or four times at, among other things, Alfalfa Club Dinners. A friend of mine, Carl Haverlin, was president of BMI, Broadcast Music Incorporated, and a member of the club. His firm would provide the entertainment at the Alfalfa. They would always have a big party afterwards, and LBJ would come to the parties.

Then my first kind of close contact with him involved Lincoln's birthday, in 1965. I had mentioned to someone around the White House in a letter or conversation and Eric Goldman had gotten word through to the President that wasn't it strange the White House had never, ever recognized Lincoln's birthday and that nothing had ever happened in the White House on Lincoln's birthday in all these years. There had never been a Lincoln's birthday party.

F: I never thought about it, but I'm surprised that the Republicans didn't do something.

N: Well, they never did. And the President decided, "Great idea." If the Republicans were going to louse it up, he was going to correct the issue. He called in Eric and said, "I want to run a luncheon, Lincoln's birthday, a hundred people." I don't know what the conversation was between Eric and the President, but I know my name was mentioned. And the next thing I got a phone call from Eric saying, "Do you want to

prepare a guest list? Who do you suggest? Send us a list of a hundred people." Really, you know, ninety-six people or thereabouts, including yourself, who you think ought to go to this luncheon. I remember calling my secretary in and saying, "I'm going to dictate two lists. First of all, we're going to get rid of all our hostilities. Here's a list of people we're not going to invite." (Laughter) But actually we put together an interesting list of Lincoln students and Lincoln collectors and people like Raymond Massey who are Lincoln portrayers, and in the music field Aaron Copeland for example. The luncheon was marvelous. The President loved it. It was small.

F: Did you try to include certain politicians that--

N: That cared about it, yes. I remember I sat at one of those dinner tables of ten with Mrs. Johnson and Gregory Peck and Frank Vandiver; I remember that. Then afterwards the President arranged to have us tour that part of the upstairs that related to the Lincoln story--the Treaty Room and the Lincoln Bedroom and other areas. Then he had buses and cars waiting for us because he was going to the Lincoln Memorial, and he wanted us to accompany him. We all rode out and he laid a wreath at the Lincoln Memorial, and we said good-bye then. But it was kind of interesting. I remember later, after I began working on his papers, I went through the files and found the photographs of the occasion, including photographs of myself.

But anyhow, that fall Carol wrote to me [asking] would I be interested in the papers, and I immediately called her and said, "Of course." She made arrangements for me to go the White House and see

Jake Jacobsen. I went to Washington and called Jake Jacobsen, and he said, "Well, really, the person for you to call is Juanita Roberts." So I called Juanita, and she made arrangements for me to come in and I met her and Dorothy Territo. And it was love at first sight. We got along marvelously. I remember we had lunch at the Navy mess and they showed their operation, Dorothy's operation was in the EOB. President and Mrs. Johnson were away that day or those days, so we went up to the living quarters and they showed me some things there. They quite frankly told me they approved this, and they already had personally given me my clearance. I remember we got a White House car and went to the National Archives, and did a kind of a walk-through. They introduced me there and told them I would be working on the President's papers.

I immediately began to draft a method of approach. One, he wouldn't donate, while in office, anything that related to the presidency; it would be early material. I recommended that whatever he give be given in chronological and archival order so the institutions receiving it wouldn't get a kind of hopscotch deal but would get the papers in an orderly form, so whenever the work stopped and then continued, you'd know. I prepared a memorandum for Carol and for the President's eyes and for the eyes of everyone else who was concerned. I wanted approval in principle for this, because I didn't want to be checking every time. I remember writing and rewriting this memorandum and getting it back through Juanita; either the President was too busy or the President didn't agree. But Juanita realized the importance of

the memorandum and saw to it that it was always on the top of the pile, where he couldn't ignore it. Ultimately we did come up, after conferences with the lawyers and everyone, with a procedure that he would approve so I could just keep working without checking constantly.

F: Now, was Wayne Grover involved in this?

N: No. He was a recipient for the Archives; they were going to get what we gave them.

F: But you're running an independent operation.

N: My client was Lyndon Johnson, and I was doing what I thought best for him. There were papers in the suite of offices that Dorothy was using in EOB. There were some papers that were not at the Archives; these included special letters like letters from former presidents to the President, letters from intimate friends, and things that they didn't want in the general archives. I remember doing an inventory of those materials, not for gift purposes but for security purposes. That included, for example, the Jackie Kennedy letters to Lyndon Johnson, which are absolutely fascinating. I started working on this material, and also on a tremendous collection of original cartoons which he had started early in the game. He would write the artist if there was a cartoon in which he was the subject, whether it was flattering or not, and he would get the original. I recommended that these were independent of the papers, why not give these to the government, too, and he did.

F: Now let's talk about technique just a minute. You've had thirty years of appraisal experience. This is the first time you've hit a presidential archive. Did that pose certain problems? Did you have to do more than the usual amount of just plain old grub work and book counting and that sort of thing?

N: The thing that concerned me most in working with the presidential thing was this whole business of confidentiality.

F: Yes.

M: Someone else, an Edna Ferber, can have you work on their papers or give them away, and there's a limited interest. But anything a president has done at any point in his life is a subject of news and can be a subject of either friendly or very malicious interpretation, and I wanted to be careful that anything I did or anything I was involved in wouldn't inadvertently result in any kind of a leak of anything.

F: Did they give you any kind of clearance and investigation?

N: You know, it was very strange, there really wasn't, because I think I was so well known to Carol and Sheldon Cohen, though there may have been. I remember at a later date asking to get a clearance, but not for that. When I was working with Omar Bradley I said, "Why don't you get a clearance for me?" And they did, I remember even getting a letter, and it was kind of interesting to show that I had clearance. Few people have a document showing that they've been checked and cleared. But I just wanted to be certain that these materials weren't abused and misused. Here I was, a comparative stranger to the President, reading his letters and papers.

And you've got to remember one thing. This is true now and has been true in this whole controversy with Nixon's papers. The moment a man becomes president everything he's ever touched becomes particularly valuable. Because the number one collecting goal of any American autograph collection--someone starts out to collect autographs, and the one thing almost everybody starts to collect, and it's a cliche really, are the presidents. "I want something written by every president of the United States. I want something about every president of the United States." Well, even a letter written to a president is a piece of paper that has some value. It may not be worth a thousand dollars, but it's worth a dollar.

F: Yes.

N: If I had a letter written to a president of the United States, no matter how silly or unimportant, somebody would pay me a dollar for it. Or if I had a carbon of a letter a president of the United States wrote, somebody would pay a dollar for it.

F: Right.

N: Or some such figure, and the amount of material is so vast that you can't do a letter-by-letter appraisal, nor should you. So you come up with the averages based on quantity and based on the work habits of the individual. For instance, Lyndon Johnson liked to write letters.

F: Yes.

N: And he wrote good letters. So the carbons of his letters, which are his literary product, have value. And when you write good letters you provoke good letters, so the letters back would be good. The early

notations about his entrance into politics and his campaigning and the first campaign and various things are very important historically.

F: One nice thing about Johnson was that while he was very forward looking, he was also looking back over his shoulder all the time. So that if he had destroyed everything, say, prior to 1964, you still could reconstruct a whole lot of the early years just because of Johnson's references, "Back in 1933 when I was trying to do so-and-so." Everything always reminded him of something.

N: I know. I recall one incident. I was working at the Chicago Historical Society, and I encountered a small collection of papers by a black congressman whose name was Mitchell, from Chicago. Back in the very early days of Lyndon Johnson as a member of Congress he writes to this other congressman and says, "Fellow Congressman, I understand you're having some difficulties in Illinois, and I'd like to help. I don't have particular problems in my district." He sent him a small check, which is kind of interesting. Interesting in that people think that this sudden awareness of race and racial problems came to him suddenly in 1963. And this congressman writes back to him and says, "Yes, I am having problems and I have got money problems." LBJ goes out and literally passes the hat and sends him some more money and long letters of advice, and in the election that year Mitchell is the only congressman who was re-elected that runs better that he did two years before. The Republicans made gains. It was the off-year election, but he [gained]. So he xeroxed the letters and

sent them to him and got a wonderful letter back from the President just saying, "Your letter evoked a passel of memories." He remembered.

F: Right, right.

N: We talked about it at a later time. But, as you know, the Johnsons and his mother certainly were string savers. They go way back, and everything is there. It's marvelous for history. My job was just to be sure that I did it all. I went through the material. There are letters of importance to a president that are valuable. People forget. His letters, his originals aren't there, but his writing habits are--the notes he makes, the things he does, the annotations, the various things. And out of this you get a pattern. Plus the fact, in evaluating these things, once he becomes president the office produces so much paper. If you've had a long political career, no matter who you are, even a Nelson Rockefeller, if the papers are giveable you cannot absorb the tax value of the papers prior to July, 1969. So there's no point in the appraiser going overboard trying to generate as high a value. You work on the conservative side and your appraise them, but you figure, "Okay, I'll do a moderate appraisal." You don't have to squeeze every nickel out of it.

Plus the fact that you are motivated or governed by the Caeser's wife principle. It is a president of the United States you are working for. And he was very much concerned. The beauty of doing this job with him, and later I learned in comparison with others, is everyone talked to you. His staff talked to you; his lawyer talked to you; his accountant talked to you; his archivist. You knew what was

happening at every step. He was concerned, sure, in whatever benefits, but also in doing the right thing. He was very conscious of history. So that whatever you did had to be the proper thing.

On occasion I'd be asked for my opinion on things that weren't going to be given for a long, long time. For instance, reading the love letters exchanged between Lyndon Johnson and Lady Bird, which someday I hope will be published. They are publishable; there's not a word in them that can't be used. The most beautiful sentiment--they will be inspiring to people. But at the time he was just curious as as to my opinion, and, as I think I mentioned to you when you and I had breakfast, that's when I knew I had made the team.

F: Yes.

N: When they let me read those letters.

F: Right.

N: It was a joy to work with people like Dorothy Territo and Juanita, who cared so much about this job. I could come and go to Washington as I saw fit and did most of my work in the Executive Office Building, and [also] trips to the National Archives to look at the material. A rough cataloging of the material, a kind of study guide had been prepared for me. With his successor I didn't have that rapport. It was as if you were involved all alone; you didn't know if anyone knew what you were doing. Certainly I knew, for instance, busy as he was, if I wanted to get some information from President Johnson to find out how he felt I could always, through Dorothy or Juanita or directly,

make the inquiry, and an answer would come back in a reasonably [short time].

F: Did you send memos or requests directly to him, or did you let someone sort of intercede for you?

N: In this case, my relationship with Juanita Roberts was so good and with Dorothy, and they were so close to the President--

F: You couldn't have had better interceptors.

N: It was better to have them hand it to him or sit down with him and say, "This is the problem" and then write out the memo and do it. He was well aware of my presence.

F: What are the problems?

N: Oh, you know, do you give a certain type of material away? For instance, you hold back certain things, not because it's particularly valuable, but because it may be sensitive. For instance, before he became president or as vice president he may have exchanged letters with someone who is now head of state or who is now a very important [person] in government. And they might, in an informal way, have discussed important things that are still current. I don't think you should give them to the National Archives where everyone has access to them until after you've been president, because they may reveal things that could be misinterpreted. Because once you've made the gift to the government it is theoretically available to everyone. Not that you hold things back from the public or researchers or scholars, but you don't want anything to interfere with the process and confidentiality of the presidency, which I realize has become a very tender

thing these days. But there are certain types of things which require careful handling. You write a letter to an associate, or you may make a reference to someone which is not unkind but may be true, but you don't want it misinterpreted or to get out to the press. You could say so-and-so is a great guy, but he has this weakness or he drinks too much or something like that. It's true, but good taste says, "Keep it."

F: Right.

N: For limited eyes for a while at least. Or it may be an exchange of letters with J. Edgar Hoover. Some of them are completely innocuous, but some may be signficant. And you don't really quite know. The easiest thing to do is, "Okay, that's one file to hold back." Because value-wise it doesn't mean much but it may have use, and you can always transfer title. Or when Mrs. Kennedy, as first lady or later as a widow, was writing to the President on rather personal things. Remember when I came to work in the White House, and it's still true today, any Jackie Kennedy item is great and is sent to the press and everyone makes a lot of fuss about it. I just thought they ought to be reserved. Good taste dictates keep them out of prying eyes where they can be leaked. It isn't proper, and he quite agreed with me. As you probably know, having interviewed her, the letters from Mrs. Kennedy to Lyndon Johnson and Lady Bird are very warm and affectionate, and they are not phony. There is a real wonderful, warm feeling that existed between them.

F: When did you begin to feel that you were part of the President's

concern instead of just somebody who was doing a job? Because you did pass beyond that strictly professional relationship.

N: Fairly early. Little inquiries would be coming in. Juanita or Dorothy would say, "The President wants to know what you think of this." Either he had received a gift or some inquiry on some matter of history, and I began to find more and more inquiries coming my way, and little notes or invitations that came to me to attend things. I realized that the President knew I was around. He also knew I was around because his law firm was getting bills for me at moderately regular intervals, and Lyndon Johnson was careful about spending his money. At the beginning, I billed the law firm for my expenses, but I let my fee go for a while. So my first bill came rather late.

F: It had accumulated?

N: Yes. It was a large sum, a moderately large sum, and when they got the bill and told him about it evidently he said something like, "That Ralph Newman is very expensive." Carol Agger and I think Sheldon Cohen both made the same crack, which I loved, "Mr. President, you wanted the best." And the question was never raised again. As a matter of fact, he was very good. He paid his bills very promptly, I might add. So that there I knew that I made. . . .

F: Did he ever tease you about it publicly?

N: Oh, sure, sure. He said, "He's a very expensive man. Don't waste his time." I used to wonder why everybody at the White House would jump when I wanted anything. At the Ranch, in Texas, they'd jump, too. I'd say, "Gee, I'm getting this special attention." Then Dorothy told

me he said, "Ralph Newman is very expensive. I don't want you to waste his time. See that everything is done efficiently and promptly."

F: "If I'm paying for it, he's going to work."

N: And there were a lot of gracious gestures. For instance, I had founded a group in 1940 which started as a luncheon group and now is a national movement, called The Civil War Round Table or Civil War Round Tables--in a hundred and fifty cities including a couple in England and three in Australia; I feel like the founder of Kiwanis. The Round Table was going to visit Washington to tour Civil War Washington and environs this particular year. I think it was 1966. I arranged to have the group tour the White House and see a little more than you would in an ordinary visit. I drafted a memorandum to the President saying the Round Table was coming and explaining who they were and hoping perhaps he would greet them. I was advised that it might happen, but not to advertise the fact.

So I didn't tell The Round Table, but I thought I would kind of make sure the bait was particularly tempting to him. I discovered that a friend of mine, Robert Todd Lincoln Beckwith, the great grandson of Abraham Lincoln, who lived in Washington, had never been in the White House. It's incredible, but it was true. So I invited Bob to join us--The Round Table--and I saw to it that the President knew about it. Well, I knew him, that if nothing else, that would do it.

F: Yes, that'd bring him out.

N: We got The Round Table in to the tour of the White House, and after they'd seen everything the group ended up in the State Dining Room

just looking around and talking. And then suddenly, I didn't say anything to them, the door opened, in came the President. I said hello to him and I introduced him to various people, and then I introduced him to Lincoln's grandson. They had their picture taken under the Healy portrait; he was very gracious. They'd arranged that this group saw, in addition to the public rooms, the various Lincoln rooms. I thought it was very nice, because among other things he was doing it because I'd asked him to.

F: Yes. How did you arrive at a figure?

N: Well, I tell you, you do it by averages.

F: Yes. Do you allot more to [presidential items]? In other words, is an early Johnson boy, private citizen, worth as much as Lyndon Johnson, president?

N: As a rule, no, unless it's very important. Remember--

F: There is a kind of a sliding scale?

N: For some items there is. But you note how many items are there in his hand that are unique, annotations and corrections there are in a given batch of a thousand pieces of paper. You set a basement figure; something has got to be worth a minimum, maybe it's only ten cents, which is the cost of xeroxing a piece of paper. Then you will scale up to what might be quite a bit of money. If it were up at that auction, out of a thousand items 90 per cent may be the routine or garden variety, 10 per cent may be worth more. Of the remaining 10 per cent, maybe 90 per cent of that is only worth a couple of dollars apiece, and you may end up with half of 1 per cent of things worth

fifty dollars or more. You set a balance, a percentage, and then you sample everything and say, "Does it work out this way?" You try to be conservative, because there's no necessity in, as again I say, being higher.

The problem that comes up after when you have a dispute about evaluations such as the current one that I just finished on Mr. Nixon, is that people don't realize how even a minimum valuation adds up. Let's say his papers are worth so much. In the case of Nixon, it was six hundred thousand pieces of paper which were valued at a little less than a dollar apiece. But it's the president of the United States. Since then there've been several offers of a million dollars, and they're easily worth it. If they came up at sale, they would bring much more.

F: If you sold an item apiece.

N: Yes, they would bring much, much more. The propriety of whether it is or isn't yours to sell is a different thing, but we're not talking about presidential papers, which is a different argument. We're talking about your own personal correspondence, not the correspondence [or] the official records of government, but your informal records. There still is [and] there will always be this big argument about who this material belongs to. But President Taft, who was also chief justice, in discussing it pointed out that there is no solution, that if you say this thing belongs to the president or even a congressman or senator's papers belong to the government, it doesn't mean the government gets it. The alternative is destruction. Then the

shredder will be working like mad, and you'll get the most sterile collection of papers of anyone and history will be impoverished.

But when this original law came up giving tax benefits for papers the tax benefit was the incidental thing, and IRS, even in this revised tax law of 1969, [in] the footnote says, "Revenue benefit to the government is minimal." The main thing is preservation. The law was to preserve, and they put a little incentive in to help because prior to that we didn't have any collected papers. And there have been no major collections given since then. The law is kind of stupid, anyhow, because the widow of the man, if she chooses to, can give it away and get a tax benefit. So why should nice institutions, whether Library of Congress or the University of Texas, sit around inferentially hoping a nice man dies so they can inherit something from his wife. The government doesn't benefit anyhow. It was an unintellectual solution to an intellectual problem. It was curing a cold by lopping off the head.

F: Well, you've got enough historical precedent, and that is that most of the presidents walked out with their papers. Some disappeared into barns and some wound up at Mount Vernon, but I mean they all--

N: I'm president of the U. S. Grant Association. We're doing the collected writings of Grant. We've just finished the sixth volume. But it's an expensive, painstaking process to pull these things together from everywhere. The Grant family had some and they were very cooperative, but there are things all over. It's a good thing we're doing this. Grant happened to be an important president as a personality

and a fine writer, so it's worth doing. But many president papers will never be found. They're so elusive, and many presidents did destroy their material.

F: You can be sure that once you issue an edition that that'll bring them all out of the attic again.

N: Oh, sure, it's like doing a bibliography. The first people you hear from are the people that tell you what you've missed, not congratulate you on all you found.

F: Yes. In these days of speech writing staffs, Johnson had his crew of speech writers, but I always thought he fancied himself as maybe the best editor in the business. So I presume you must have a tremendous amount in this collection of, we'll say, Harry McPherson having written a speech and then Johnson having interlined and excised and everything else and put in his own comments, and each draft in a sense is a worthwhile document with a good bit of Johnson handwriting on it.

N: That's right. He was good at it, and had he had the time he could have written all of his own speeches and they would have been better. They would have had his flavor to them; though some of the people working for him got to know his own flavor. But sometimes you'd have so many statements or so many short speeches and messages to make he wouldn't have time to do a lot of editing. Whenever he did address it to them you could tell the Johnson touch, and it was awfully good. Sure, those things with his annotations and comments are marvelous. Sometimes he would completely change a speech. Sometimes even when the speech was all ready he would interpolate as he [went along], if

he felt relaxed enough, and it would come out a completely different document.

F: Right. How long did you work on this?

N: I worked from 1965 until the time of his death.

F: I suppose, in a way, it was never ending, wasn't it?

N: It was never ending. The 1969 tax law made the gift of papers on his part still possible but without tax benefits. I point out he did this, though he was always accused of being a person of great excess, with great moderation. There've been a lot of misinterpretations of this because the University of Texas was spending a lot of money on the Library and he was very proud of the Library. Not long before he left office, maybe December of 1968, I was in Washington, and he called me or Juanita or somebody called me at the Madison Hotel and said, "Ralph, the President would like an estimate from you by tomorrow morning of the value of everything he's got." Well, that was an impossible figure.

F: I can see that.

N: But I had enough notes, I knew enough, and I wasn't going to be hung by the thumbs in case I was wrong. So I [figured] so many papers and so many speeches and so many photographs and so many artifacts, and I came up with a figure of everything that would go into the Johnson Library. Not only his own, but contributions by his colleagues, and maybe there'd be somewhere between, let's say, thirty and forty million dollars worth of stuff. Not that he or anyone else was going to get those tax benefits, but the institution would be housing that

much. The next day, talking to some of the press, he very expansively said, "Do you know the value of everything that's going into this library Texas is building?" And he used this comment, which caused some of them to say that he was going to take a tax deduction for this, which was absolutely preposterous.

He gave a very moderate amount every year, and in those same years was very generous charity-wise. He made some very, very substantial gifts and, as you know and everybody knows, because he and Mrs. Johnson had a substantial income, made some very substantial income tax payments, so that the total of what he did every year was in beautiful balance. While he may have given away some things for a moderate tax benefit, he did in other instances make cash gifts to hospitals, et cetera. His gifts were balanced. He was very conscious of doing the right thing.

I remember being with him in late March of 1969. I had just been in California and spent my first long weekend with Omar Bradley working on his papers, and I came to see the President. I was going on to Japan shortly thereafter to run a Lincoln exhibit for the government. I remember going to dinner at the Ranch. He started talking about ex-presidents, about which, you know, I had some knowledge. He started telling me, "Do you know that being a former president impoverished Thomas Jefferson? He had to entertain so many people and it cost him so much." I began to worry whether I should offer to pay for my dinner. (Laughter) He had gotten carried away, but he was having fun, and we had a very good conversation on the subject.

Then he brought up the matter of the tax law. He said, "Nothing's been introduced, but there's been a lot of talk about amending the tax laws and they may get around to doing something about the papers. I know I could make a gift now since usually, though they can make a tax law operative at any date, it's quite customary to make a tax law effective as of the date it's first introduced, so that once it gets in the hopper you can't go back. Since it's been introduced," he said, "I could make a gift now, but I don't think it's appropriate for a president"--meaning a president or ex-president--"to be the last train through."

And that year, as I understand it, because he mentioned he was going to do it and I'm sure he did, he made a substantial cash gift to the Mayo Clinic, among other things, and didn't give any papers away. In subsequent years he gave things away that were not papers. As you know, he had a lot of art that he himself had bought and various other things, a vast variety of items that he'd accumulated in a long, long public lifetime. Incidentally, he very meticulously differentiated between things that were his and things that were head of state gifts. A head of state gift was immediately tagged as head of state gift and pegged immediately as government property and never, never for one moment considered Lyndon Johnson or Lady Bird's property, never for one moment considered something that he would receive and then later give away for tax benefits. It was the government's from that very second on. They were very careful.

F: That was none of your concern.

N: Except that I was aware of this because I worked on materials other than those things, other physical things, and then ultimately we'd handle the transfer of most of these things somewhere between 1970 or 1971 or so, or 1972. I remember working on maybe thirty or forty thousand items that had accumulated, and working furiously for six months and coming up with a set of albums describing these materials longer than the set of the Encyclopedia Brittanica.

But he was always so concerned with the good taste of doing things, that on certain things you never took any benefits. For instance--and he's agree completely--from a historical viewpoint and from a value viewpoint, the clothes he and Mrs. Johnson wore on the day of the assassination in the auto would be valuable, but neither he nor I felt that there should be any benefit to it. Sure, you give it to the government, but you by no means take any donation credit. And he agreed completely. Any time I would bring up something like that he would agree completely; [he] always leaned toward the side of conservatism. He had a great respect for the office he'd occupied, and he wasn't going to mess around with it.

F: Did he feel that this law doing away with the tax benefits or gifts was a punitive law aimed at him? Did he ever comment to you on that?

N: Never directly, though it would seem that Senator Williams, who pushed the law, was motivated partially by hearing the thirty or forty million figure and assuming that this was for the benefit of President Johnson. He wasn't so much concerned with that as he was with the whole principle of removing this tax benefit so that others couldn't

make their gift. He was concerned about others who might make their gift to the Johnson Library or other libraries, and he was worried about destruction. You know, they're going to get angry and they're not going to give anything away, and history's going to be the loser. This bothered him very much.

F: Well, as you know, in actuality it's frozen a lot of giving.

N: Oh, sure it has. I know of some collections that have been destroyed.

F: And when they're not given, even if they're not purposely destroyed, they're prey to all kinds of scattering.

N: Those people who talked about him as a wheeler and dealer--look, he was an experienced politician and a very smart man. Had he not gone into politics I think, and I think you'll agree, he would have been a fantastic success in business. He was a remarkable businessman.

F: Try to out-trade him on something.

N: Yes, he knew every possible angle, but when the chips were down he wanted you to know he knew all these angles but he wasn't going to use them. But the one way you know what to avoid is by being aware of those excesses and wrong things that can happen, and being very careful about it. He would discuss various things that could be done and had been done. He was worried about drying up the gifts of materials. But he could have taken advantage or had Lady Bird take advantage of the fact that on his death she could have inherited all of his papers and then in turn made a gift over a period of years of these papers, offsetting her income and making a substantial gain, because the law so provides. He deliberately placed them in his will in such a way

that the government received all his stuff without any tax benefit to his estate or to Lady Bird. Now here's a man who everybody thinks would take advantage of everything, except that he did it in a perfectly impeccable manner.

F: There was no unseemly hurrying and scurrying to get in under that law?

N: No, none; he didn't. That year he didn't do anything. I went to Texas in December of 1969 and we visited, and I laid out certain things he could have given away, paintings, sculpture, things, many of them are things he himself bought, not at all banned by the law. He decided, "No, I won't give anything away this year. Let's keep it clear. Let's not even have people misinterpret this."

I understand that when President Nixon's tax problems arose somebody in his staff or somebody had or took a peek at President Johnson's tax returns because they figured, maybe they would show some similar things, and then I suppose to say, "Well, look, we're not unique in it." When they drew out the Johnson returns they saw his moderate tax gifts of papers, substantial charitable gifts in cash and very large income tax payments, and they just quietly put it all back because it didn't reflect very well on the successor. He was aware of history. Very.

F: And aware of taxes.

N: Certainly he was, and he cared, sure. You can't be a successful leader, Senate leader, president, without knowing all the tricks. That doesn't mean you're going to do them, but you better know them. You better recognize them when others do them, too.

F: When he made that March 31, 1968, renunciation speech, did that change your tempo? That's the one in which he says he will not be a candidate for re-election to the presidency.

N: Yes, that was a funny thing. I should have known, suspected that was coming for a couple of reasons. One, somewhere during that week, or maybe ten days, within a ten-day period--and it may have happened to you, too--I received an inquiry from someone, it may have been Juanita, saying, "What presidents who had a chance to run again and a chance to win again really said, 'I don't want it'?" I went back and checked, and found that several presidents tried again but never had a chance. There were few who honestly renounced the second try who had a chance for election. I should have known that that was a clue to something.

Several months earlier Sheldon Cohen had been called one evening by the President to come down to the White House. I don't know if Sheldon mentioned this to you. This was in the evening, and he thought, "Gee, I wonder what emergency it is?" He got down to the White House between nine and ten. The President was in his robe then, or his pajamas, and he said, "I want to talk to you about my will." Sheldon said, "Why right now?" And the President said, "Well, I just realized that in effect no male member of my family for two or three or four or five generations has lived longer than X number of years." He was just about at that point. "I ought to get out of here." But he was aware of that, and he had said this, as you know, to a few other people, too, at times.

It didn't change the tempo. In a way it speeded up the tempo because, one, I had a certain amount of things to finish before [he left]. I knew that ultimately we would be better because it would all be transferred to Austin; there'd be an orderly process, and we'd have our own team and our own operation instead of going through Archives. And it turned out to be a very convenient and very pleasant way to work, much more pleasant to work in the Library or in the temporary library.

F: Did you do any of the superintending of the move, or was this just all done by the Archives?

N: All done by the Archives.

F: When they were stashed down in that Federal Building in downtown Austin, which was a temporary arrangement and only so-so, was that a workable [situation]?

N: Oh, yes, sure. The stuff was still in order. You know, they'd put it up in the same order that had been established in the Archives, so we could get at everything. By the time it was moved we had at least box labels and identification of boxes and materials.

F: Describe what you did when you made a business trip to the Johnson papers? What was your day like?

N: Well, I would usually--

F: You're unique, you know.

N: If I could I would come in to Washington on a Sunday. It would enable me to get set up, and I could go to work bright and early on the following Monday. I would always stay at the Madison Hotel; it was

convenient and it was first class. Usually I'd arrange even to have a typewriter brought into my suite, so if I had to work in the evening or in the morning, I'd often stay and work in the hotel for a while.

F: Now what would you do in the hotel when you were working?

N: I would be transcribing notes of material or elaborating on things I'd worked on at the Executive Office Building or Archives. Usually, the first thing the following morning, Monday morning--

F: Where are your papers incidentally?

N: My papers are still here, and this bothers the devil out of me because there's so much confidential material.

F: They're valuable historical items.

N: They are, and I've asked someone to come up with a solution. One of them would be to send the Johnson material to the Johnson Library, but that would be a problem.

F: I'd hate to see them broken up.

N: But for a lot of them, there would be no place. I asked, on a couple of occasions, the National Archives to come up with some general rules like, "Can I give all my papers to the National Archives with the provision that this material should be made available only to the principal or his family or anyone with permission of the heirs or to the IRS who may want to use this for comparison purposes against other collections?" You can't just say anyone can look at these records because these are like a lawyer's papers and I don't know whether it's proper for everyone to have access to them. But because it's unique no one has come up with a satisfactory answer, and I don't know what

to do about it. I wish they would come up with a reply. I can't, you know--it would be great, for instance, I always felt so close to him, to put everything in the Johnson Library, but does it make sense? I guess using the criteria of the Kennedy Library that, yes, these are all contemporary to Lyndon Johnson, but this is National Archives again. Can the Johnson Library make the same commitment that I asked National Archives [to make]?

I mean I'm not talking about any tax benefits or anything. On these I wouldn't gain nor should I gain anything. I don't want to. They're not "giveable" now, though my widow could donate them. But my main concern is that I want them available for scholarly use or reference use and not available for sensational purposes, where people are on a kind of garbage hunt. I don't know how to protect them. And I worry about it, because here I have a moderate size archive, big or bigger than the papers of many of the people whose works I've done, plus, of course, a lot of other papers which reflect my own career and work in the field of American history and the letters from some important or interesting people, whether it's MacKinlay Kantor or Bruce Catton or Allan Nevins or any of so many people. I don't know what to do with it. I would love to get an answer, and no one has given me one.

F: Let's go back now. You're transcribing in the Hotel Madison.

N: Well, on a Monday morning I would present myself at the Executive Office Building and go back to the area where Dorothy Territo was in command.

F: Dorothy Territo was your prime contact?

N: Yes. I would use the adjoining office in that suite, and I would work on some things that had accumulated--they'd always have some problems piled up for me--then I would work at the National Archives for part of the day and back at the EOB office. I was always trying to keep ahead. That I was doing was a kind of a running valuation of all the material the President had so that when I got close to the end of the year, when his lawyer or accountant would say, "Oh, the President's going to make a gift of forty thousand dollars worth of stuff," I could just run down my list and say, "Okay, at this point, ending with this unit." I wouldn't come up to the exact figure. I would try to end at a comfortable unit. It might run thirty-nine or forty-two, but I'd want to complete a series. I'd recommend that, and if they agreed with it I would make the general description, which would be this material in boxes number so-and-so to so-and-so. They could prepare a document of gift, and then somewhere between that time and the following April when he would make his tax return, I would do the detailed appraisal document, which I usually would complete here in Chicago.

F: Did the IRS ever challenge your appraisals?

N: Never. As a matter of fact, the Nixon appraisal was the first time a presidential thing had ever been challenged, and it would never have been challenged if it weren't for the--

F: The date situation.

N: --the date situation. You see, as I've said before, going through my records I have a couple of hundred letters and notes from Lyndon

Johnson to me. I don't know how many telephone calls I had with him. He played the telephone much like Rubenstein played the piano, superbly. And I always had access to him, either at the White House or through someone. Juanita could get me an answer immediately. I had complete, constant touch with his law firm, with Carol Agger, and Paul Berger, who handled his affairs, and with anyone who was involved with him--Mildred Stegall, you know, or any of the other people. I was never in the dark and I knew I could get an answer, so that I knew every step of everything that was happening.

In the case of Mr. Nixon, I worked on him till about 1971, when I just stopped working. If anyone had told me I would quit working for a president just because there was nowhere to go and it was getting to me, I'd say, "You don't resign that kind of an account." I had two notes from Mr. Nixon in that whole period. One was thanking me for some book I had sent him, and one was another inconsequential matter. I never had a phone call with him. I had two meetings with him. One was at a White House prayer breakfast, where I had been invited by the chief military aide in the White House, not by the President, but as I went through the line we chatted briefly. I had sent a memorandum about the general value of all of his papers, and I reminded him. He expressed surprise, and I said, "No, Mr. President, they are valuable." The second one was I called on him as chairman of the board of Ford's Theatre, in the course of which I stayed behind a minute or two to mention certain sensitive letters that I thought ought to be put in a secure position. He agreed with me completely, but, and this is

strange when you consider all his insecurities and secretiveness--the material which I designated as sensitive is still in the Archives, but separated so everyone would recognize it. They didn't do what I asked them to do.

But I had no contact. His lawyers didn't write to me; his aides didn't write to me. You'll find letter after letter in my files, as I told the various investigating bodies, from me to the President or to the President's attorney, from me to White House counsel saying these are various suggested things that ought to be done. No answer at all. With Lyndon Johnson you would get an immediate answer. He was concerned. I never unto this day have seen the Nixon document of gift for the 1969 date. Yet in the case of Lyndon Johnson I think I saw the document of gift every time, or knew what it was, and I certainly knew the date it was going to be issued.

F: Then you really got fairly close to all the people who were involved?

N: That's right. They were very concerned. But in the case of the Nixon thing I wasn't notified until 1970 by his attorney that he had made a gift the year before, presumably. And it was the accident of this news coming out that he had made a gift of papers which caused a Washington Post man to go to the National Archives, not expecting anything wrong, just wanting to do a normal news story. And the reporter noticed that there was a document of gift, but there had not been an acknowledgement. Obviously the National Archives had received the document, presumably late, and didn't want to refuse it and didn't

want to accept it, and so they just let it lie there. That triggered the whole thing.

Then came the questioning of the appraisal. Well, at that time IRS was under the gun. I guess when they ask for a reappraisal it's only because they're hoping someone's going to do it a different way. You know, you can get three people together, and one will say it's worth half as much and one will say it's worth twice as much. I think in the reappraisal someone said it was worth half as much of what I had valued it at. On the other hand, two different groups offered a million dollars, and there are record after record of even little fragmentary Nixon notes bringing two, three hundred dollars. And today, because of his special circumstances, the papers have become very valuable.

F: The value has gone up tremendously.

N: Yes, sure.

F: Did you make your contact, or did the Nixon people make their contact independently? Do you think they inquired of the Johnsons as to the worth of it?

N: It was a combination of things. Walter Trohan, who was a friend of mine and a friend of President Johnson's and of Richard Nixon's and who was head of the Washington Bureau of the Chicago Tribune, wrote to the President-elect saying, "You ought to use Ralph Newman." Then he suggested I drop him a note, and I did. Then the Nixons called on the Johnsons in December of 1968 where the Johnsons showed them around the White House, and evidently on that occasion President Johnson told

Nixon about his gift of papers and how he had handled it and mentioned my name. Shortly thereafter I received a call from Jim Jones at the White House saying, "President Johnson has recommended you to Richard Nixon, and chances are you'll be getting a call."

Shortly thereafter, in late December, I got a call from one of the members of his former law firm in New York. I happened to be in Washington for a wedding close to the end of the year, and they traced me down and said, "Look, can you come to New York and look at some material for the President? They're going to want to make a gift. He wants to make a gift." I flew to New York. I remember I had a broken ankle; I had slipped on the ice in Chicago and I was in a cast. I went to New York, and working in the Nixon law office all of one, I think, Sunday, I went through enough material to segregate a moderate gift and describe it. And [on] the material the gift was handled impeccably. The material was described. I had written out in long-hand a description, and they had had it typed. The National Archives came over the next day, just before the first of the year, and picked up and receipted for it. Then by the next April I completed an appraisal document for the President on that gift. I was involved, and I was advised I would be asked to continue with the papers.

But it never became a personal thing. I never had a place to work in the National Archives. I never had anyone to work with who was aware of what I was doing, no one. There was no Dorothy Territo. There was no contact with Rosemary Woods like there was with Juanita. Rosemary Woods wouldn't even recognize me. I got to know Haldeman

just casually, not because of that but because he was interested in the theater and he was vice president of the Ford's Theatre Society. But I only met him twice in all that period, though he recognized my name. There was just no one. It was as if you were working all alone. I would go to Washington sometimes and I'd work and I'd go in to see the President's counsel when I could, but no one had an answer for me. It wasn't until close to the end of 1969 that I finally heard from his personal attorney saying, "From now on your contact will be with me. I'm handling this. His old law firm is no longer doing it." But even then he wasn't very well versed in this and would never come up with answers. He'd have to check with someone--there was a remoteness about everyone in this thing, whereas in the case of the Johnsons [there was not].

F: You're just kind of on the outside, working outside the house.

N: There was no satisfaction. There was only a great deal of frustration, and I never quite knew what they were up to or what their plans were.

F: Let's go back to your working day, which we keep diverging from for very good reasons.

N: Well, you'd get sidetracked because you would always find extra things. I remember one day finding this long typed memorandum, unsigned, an original typed piece of paper. As I read it it was advice to the new President, and it had to be darn close to the 22nd of November. I realized as I read it was probably Dwight Eisenhower. I made inquiries to Juanita and others and we finally pieced the whole

thing together, that, as you know, when we got back to Washington on the night of the 22nd he met Juanita Roberts in the basement of the EOB and they rode up to what was the former Vice President's office. He wrote the two letters to the Kennedy children and he called the three living ex-Presidents, spoke to two of them and in one case spoke to Hoover's son, and told Ike, President Eisenhower, he needed him.

President Eisenhower came in the next morning; I think maybe he was flown in by chopper. I've forgotten how it was done. President Eisenhower I think said, "It would be handy if you had--" and he named some girl who had been a secretary to him who was still working for government, they had her at EOB, and he met with the President briefly. Then President Johnson went over to the Hill or wherever the Kennedy body was, where the family was looking at the casket, and President Eisenhower dictated his recommendations to the new President and told this girl, "There'll be no copies. Destroy your notes." [She] typed out this one, two or three-page advice: call a special session of Congress; see so-and-so; I recommend that you talk to so-and-so about financial advice; do this, do that, very, very sound. Here is Ike without staff showing his good judgment and why he'd been called on.

Well, remember you find that, and that will interrupt your work for a couple of hours while you try to identify it and run it down and you put in an appropriate note with it. You'd always be running into things, fascinating things like that, and every time I found something like that I thought it was best to do as much identification as possible to make it easier for some subsequent historian.

F: You're doing a certain amount of the National Archives work for them, aren't you?

N: Remember, in the case of Johnson or in the case of almost every client, Nixon was the exception, I have a better contact and a closer one than the National Archives. The ordinary archivist working there is intimidated or hasn't got the relationship with the client.

F: It's just a job for him.

N: He can't ask those questions, and I could. I could get those answers. And you'd always be finding odd or interesting things.

F: Did Johnson ever take a real personal interest to the extent of telling you to get rid of that, put that aside, and this sort of thing?

N: No. There was never, not to my knowledge, ever getting rid of that. Nothing was destroyed.

F: He had too much of a squirrel mentality, didn't he?

N: He quite understood the principle of certain things. If you're in doubt about the propriety of that becoming a public matter, hold it aside until we can consider it later. That he quite understood. He certainly was aware of the whole thing, and yet he was aware of the fact that history must be served and if you try to conceal things in history the result is usually worse than that which you try to cover up.

I'd gotten involved and did the appraisal of the Harding love letters which had turned up at about that time. I remember my talking to him about the Harding love letters and saying the Harding family would have been better if they had released it all, because everyone

knew he was--to use a word that he himself used--a womanizer. But he comes through as a better man and a stronger, wiser man, instead of which they've sealed them and everybody's imagination can run riot. He agreed completely that that was the way to do it, that the more you conceal or try to conceal the worse it gets.

I had the experience at the time of the Pentagon Papers. I was in Dallas when the Pentagon Papers story broke, and I had occasion to call him. He said, "Where are you?" And he said, "Come on down here. I'd like to have someone to talk to." So I went to Austin, and I visited briefly with Dorothy, I think, and then went to the Ranch. He spent the next day or two walking and riding and talking with me and kind of talking out his whole involvement and knowledge of and actions in relation to Vietnam, from the moment it became his problem until this very moment. That's when he told me that he had asked that everything be released on the Pentagon because 99 per cent of it is known anyhow, and if we release it all it's pretty darn dull, but to release this half is like releasing half of a stereo recording--you don't get it all. But State or Defense or the White House wouldn't allow it, and he was disappointed, because he felt you were better off just to give it all up. You know, you don't gain anything.

F: How did he feel about the Pentagon Papers? Did he feel that he was being badly used by that leak?

N: No, he didn't criticize the newspaper or the reporter. I think it was Neil Sheehan, whom I happen to know. They were doing their job. But he felt a little angry about some of the people who had been involved,

either in Defense or working for him, who evidently had been a party to this leak, in that they hadn't had the courage to make their reservations about certain things known to him but would do these things. He was a little bit critical of McNamara, too.

F: Yes, kind of come in the side door.

N: Yes, well, and to have him tell me about it. He didn't like it when you didn't agree with him, but at least he would appreciate it if you did it to his face [rather] than to have you carry two stories. He was always talking to me about the whole problem of the palace guard. You know, good news, they all troop in to give it to you, and they slide the bad news under the door. I remember one night at dinner [his] telling me how this is one of the things that Eisenhower suffered from until he finally learned you've got to find out for yourself. It isn't easy because you are isolated in the presidency, and he was always concerned about this filter that keeps you from getting it--you know, to use the same phrase he used at the dedication of the Library, "everything with the bark off."

F: Yes. Did you reach a stage where he would talk to you quite candidly about certain political problems or diplomatic problems that he had?

N: After the presidency he would. He liked to talk anyhow, and we shared certain interests and had enough friends and he knew me well enough. He knew the fact that as an appraiser I was somewhat of a historian, and he would be fairly frank. There were a few things he would not discuss. He would not discuss in any way except generally any other president. He wouldn't be critical. I remember on one occasion I

mentioned something in connection with the fact that I had no communication with President Nixon and his material. He just passed it up. He wouldn't discuss it at all, and I began to realize you just didn't discuss it. If he brought up the subject, some general thing relating to a president, fine, but you don't criticize even inferentially one president to him. It was just a subject that was not to be mentioned.

F: He never mentioned, for instance, that he felt some of his programs were going down the drain under the next administration?

N: In general he would mention that, yes. But without--

F: Not to say, "That so-and-so Nixon is putting me down."

N: Oh, yes, yes. He felt that it was too bad that certain things that meant so much were possibly being lost. He was great in discussing how you use your power; of course he did that more talking about the majority leader position, the due bills you build up and the power you've got, how he had to guide certain people and certain senators who were very naive about how things were done, and how he would establish things and help them get their bills across and tell them why they owed certain favors to other people, too. He was great at telling stories about various people.

F: Hold on just a second.

Begin Tape 1 of 1, Side 2 (at approx. 656 in.)

F: Okay. Let's continue. You were saying that he was great about telling stories on some certain people.

N: Yes, and you could get him going about it. Of course, I knew a lot of his stories, and if I were present when there was other company at the Ranch or even at the White House dinners or anywhere else and the conversation would lag, I would always make a good straight man. I knew the question to ask, like, "Mr. President, do you remember Huey Long?" I knew it was good for forty minutes. He enjoyed telling it, and I enjoyed hearing them.

F: The one that I could get going was, if it was the right group, on how you kept Maury Maverick out of jail. I don't know if you've heard that one or not.

N: No, I haven't heard that. But it was awfully good to get him going on Mr. Sam. That was always good for an hour at least. I remember when Pat and I went out to the Ranch, I think it was the second time he'd met her, and he just insisted and kept going. Mrs. Johnson was getting a little worried because he was getting a little tired, but he wouldn't quite talking and telling stories. They were marvelous. As you know, he was a great story teller, and one of my great regrets, as is yours, is that that didn't get into a book, because he was better than any writer he could possibly have. When he would describe things like, "And Bob Kerr would hook his two thumbs in his vest and his hands spread out and he would talk," it was graphic. It was marvelous, and the color that he added to an ordinary anecdote really brought the people to life.

F: I think we should say for the historical record that your wife Pat is

a real doll, and that's not extraneous. But my guess would be that Johnson really warmed to her.

N: Oh, he was marvelous to her. He was great. On one occasion he took her on a special tour.

F: Did he kind of act like you were nothing, I imagine?

N: He took her on a special tour and took her all over that part of Texas. I remember one night she and Mrs. Johnson had left and we talked, and he put his arm around me and he said, "Ralph, you did what I did. You did the right thing." I said, "What is that, Mr. President?" And he said, "You married above yourself." I couldn't wait to tell Pat. I thought it was a wonderful compliment. Then I remember I'd come back, and I'd come back on many occasions without Pat. "Where is that pretty wife of yours?" "Well, she's busy, Mr. President." Then he'd lean forward with his jaw jutting out, his nose right under your fact, "How did an ugly guy like you get a pretty girl like that?" And I would always look at Lady Bird and answer him, "The same way you did, sir." And she would laugh like the dickens. He would write to her rather cute notes. But sure, he appreciated a pretty woman, and particularly someone who cared about history.

F: Right. Did you work very closely with Mrs. Johnson?

N: Yes, I did, when I started going to the Ranch. One of the things that before the President's death they had earlier decided on [was] the possible transfer of the property to the National Park Service. I'd begun to work with Mrs. Johnson on an appraisal of everything that was to be given, in addition to which she and the President and the

President's sister and Mrs. Hobby and others had made gifts to the Birthplace and the Boyhood Home. I did the appraisal of those things. Mrs. Johnson and I spent many hours together going over every piece in both those houses and she'd give me the notations, what this is and who it came from, or this is a copy and so forth.

Then she was very much interested in first ladies. We'd often get off on the sidelines, talking about first ladies and books about first ladies and history.

F: In the presidential years did she take a big interest in the papers, or was that primarily his concern?

N: Primarily his concern. The only time I knew she was somewhat interested was in this whole business of their love letters, which obviously he wouldn't have turned over to me, neither of them, without the other knowing. I was very flattered to read this beautiful collection of letters, which can be published some day and would make a great and inspiring book. There's not a word in it that needs to be edited. There are two beautiful young people in love and concerned about the country at the same time. It is a marvelous combination of an emotional situation and their awareness of the world they live in. It'd make a great book.

F: Did he ever talk to you about Senator Fulbright?

N: Just in passing and without affection.

F: Did he feel a kind of a lack of gratitude on Fulbright's [part]?

N: A lack of gratitude, and he thought of it as a kind of opportunism, that taking the position he had was giving Fulbright some kind of a

base. He didn't quite know what he was going to do with that base, but. . . .

F: Did he talk to you about Dirksen?

N: Not very much, except that he respected Dirksen's professionalism. He talked a lot about Bob Kerr, who of course was an operator, and he talked of him frankly as an operator. A little bit about Morse, and he respected Morse, because while Morse differed with him he did it openly, and he knew about it. I couldn't get him to talk much about a mutual friend of ours, Clark Clifford. He felt rather strongly about it. Though on the other hand he did mention at one time that he should have brought him in earlier.

He did mention to me his disappointment in Bob McNamara, who would say certain things to him and then evidently go to the Kennedy Compound or the Bob Kennedy home and say the opposite. He told, for instance, how he worked so hard to get McNamara the World Bank job, though he had promised it to, I think, Joe Fowler. Then after he got it for McNamara, how critical McNamara had been of him. He just didn't think he played the game. Though always at the Ranch and at various things, the dedication of the Library and everything else, the McNamaras were there, and he certainly couldn't have been more gracious.

I remember spending an interesting evening; I was staying at the Ranch overnight while Westy was there, General Westmoreland, and they were discussing various things. Of course, Vietnam hadn't done either of them any good.

F: Yes. He never, though, treated you as an outsider, in a sense? In other words, "Westmoreland and I need to talk about something. You get out."

N: No, he never did it. Now they may have talked later or earlier in the morning. In fact, there were times he assumed I knew more than I did. But he figured I had the papers available and I knew everybody. But he would talk about various things. He knew about my friendship for Dick Daley, Mayor Daley of Chicago.

F: I was going to ask you about that.

N: He would always send messages up and back, and occasionally when he'd see Mayor Daley sometimes my name would come up. I remember when they dedicated the Johnson Library the Mayor and I arrived in Austin separately, and the first ten or twelve people the Mayor happened to meet happened to be people on the staff who knew me and they'd all say, "Oh, Mr. Mayor, we're friends of Ralph Newman." Finally the Mayor said, when I caught up with him at I think Harry Middleton's house, "Ralph, are you running for mayor of Austin?" (Laughter)

F: You have a real constituency down there.

N: That's right. But Johnson appreciated the complete professionalism of Richard Daley and his complete loyalty. Richard Daley was concerned with the President. He was concerned over the war. On several occasions at City Hall he would talk to me and say, "If you see the President, tell him to get out of this darn war business." The Mayor, as a politician, realized this is a bad business. He was the one who suggested early some kind of a conference between the President and

Bobby Kennedy and everybody to kind of agree on some way to disengage yourself, if you possibly could. He realized it was very difficult.

F: Did the Mayor ever talk to you about the President?

N: Nothing except his complete admiration for him and his regret he couldn't resolve the [war].

F: There never was an feeling, as far as you could pick up, of the Mayor defecting from Johnson's support?

N: Never. Never.

F: Conversely, did the President ever talk to you about Dick Daley?

N: Yes, he always talked of him as a real pro, a man with courage and a man he could always count on who always kept his word. He felt very, very warm about Richard Daley, and Daley did about him.

I remember when the President's book came out, and the President became kind of a bookseller. He wanted the book to sell, and he and I discussed various things. He said he wouldn't appear on television shows to promote his book and so forth. But I said, "You know, maybe you can do something. Would you like to do--?" And I said, "The Mayor will run a party in your honor at the Chicago Public Library to kind of salute you as an author. It won't be a book selling thing, but we'll announce. . . ." I was going to do what they did in Fredericksburg.

F: Yes.

N: "You'll autograph any books for people. It won't be selling books. They'll buy it anywhere." I talked to the Mayor, and he said, "Delighted to do it." The Mayor would do anything, and after all

I was president of the library board. It would create a lot of interest and it would have been good. The President was very touched that the Mayor was willing to do this, but then he decided it was taking advantage of the presidency, and much as you'd like to see the book sell you don't do things like this. This is always [the case], because he'd weigh these things and ultimately he would decide on the right thing to do.

F: He was very careful not to seem to commercialize the presidency.

N: That's right.

F: I've seen any number of good propositions that I would feel there's no harm in his taking, but he would back off from them because it might look as if they're using his presence in the White House to promote something commercial, no matter what the cost.

N: But the important, the great thing about working with him is, withal the fact that he was tough and impatient and everything else, he also was warm and considerate. And he always was aware of you as a person. If he liked you, he'd write you and thank you for a Christmas card, as you know. He would sometimes answer letters that he felt he shouldn't answer, but you felt warm about it. He appreciated affection and would also give it out. And he would remember. I recall that as you would leave him, whether at the White House or at the Ranch, he would often kind of fumble in his drawer, open the cabinet and want to give you some little memento, whether it was a tie clasp or a pair of bookends or something. It was incredible, his memory, "Oh, no, I gave you one of these." Something that may have happened two years before.

He didn't have books, he would remember. People counted to him. It was interesting.

F: An enormous capacity for detail.

N: That's right.

F: I was always amazed at that. You know Chicago, both as a second city and as a great crossroads of all kinds of things, figures very much in the nation's news. Did he ever talk to you as the expert from Chicago and ask what's going on out there or what should we do about it?

N: He would ask me about what happened in Chicago, although as you know he never had any problems in Chicago.

F: No, I know.

N: Chicago delivered the vote for him and delivered the support, and the congressional delegation from Chicago was always a group that he could count on completely.

I had discussed with him and written memorandums early in this business of Vietnam, and I had suggested this idea, one of the many people who suggested what ultimately became the Committee for Peace with Honor in Vietnam, with Paul Douglas as chairman. I got people like Allan Nevins and others involved in it. We all realized, as he did, that Vietnam was not a political asset.

F: Yes.

N: But how do you get out of it? He didn't have what Richard Nixon had, which was the mandate for peace. Richard Nixon could have gotten out early in 1969 by just saying, "The American public has told me to get out."

F: Right. Right.

N: Johnson never had that kind of indication. But people forget, though he and I discussed it. I reminded him, "Mr. President, they forget who brought the North Vietnamese to the peace table in Paris." People forget today. You ask the average person, and they think it was Richard Nixon. They forget it was Lyndon Johnson who brought them there.

F: Did he ever talk to you about Paul Douglas?

N: Yes, Paul Douglas' naivete in getting things done. Paul Douglas would get very, very stiff about certain little things, and he [Johnson] would have to say, "You've got to relent, Paul, you've got to give this one up. You've got to vote for this one. It doesn't mean much, but you're pushing something important, and the trade-off is going to be that you're going to get your thing for giving up very little." Paul didn't always quite understand the give and take of politics. Though he appreciated the fact that Paul was an honest man. He just, politically, wasn't sophisticated.

F: Did you ever hear him comment on William Dawson?

N: Just briefly. He spoke at a dinner in Chicago, and I was at the center table, right in front of him. I was at the Governor's table. I remember he was autographing things like mad, and I sent a note to him, "As your appraiser, don't sign so many autographs. You're lowering the value." He waved down and laughed and even referred to me as he made his opening remarks. Dawson was on the program, and Dawson, when he was feeling well, was a fantastic speaker. I remember

commenting to the President shortly thereafter, and he said, "That guy can really pour it on. He's an operator." That's about all.

F: How did you happen to be chairman at Ford's Theater?

N: My interest in the Lincoln story and my knowledge of the Lincoln story got me involved. Stewart Udall had asked me to get involved in the whole business, and it so happened that Ford's Theater was being dedicated the same year that Illinois had its Sesquicentennial. I was chairman of the Illinois Sesquicentennial Commission, and they had run short of money on various little extra things, like an opening party, and I said, "Hell, Illinois will take over. We'll make the opening of Ford's Theater an Illinois Sesquicentennial event." Someone in Illinois had found there's a certain place in the state where the soil is almost the same as in one of the better grape areas of France, and we were making Illinois champagne. So we decided we would finance the printing of the program and a party in Ford's Theater. I got some Illinois firms to do various things and one of the big radio and television broadcastings to help run an after theater party at the Madison Hotel.

Then I became a member of the board and ultimately the chairman of the board of trustees of Ford's Theater. It was kind of fun until the present administration started getting too involved in the operation of the theater. The theater was successful, we weren't even using our subsidy, and then all of a sudden we started getting pushed to put certain people on the board and get certain people jobs. And we didn't need them. Since I was doing this completely as a volunteer

I just lost interest, because to pay people forty thousand dollars as a producer when you have a play that's running for two years and you don't need a producer at all just seemed to me dead wrong. I finally got out of it.

F: Think of anything else we ought to talk about?

N: You know, if you had certain abilities and talents beyond the narrow thing of being an appraiser, he would appreciate it and he would be interested in it. He was aware of what went on. We've certainly had just a whole national upheaval about the White House and whether the President was or wasn't aware of what was happening, and in certain areas I'm sure he wasn't. You were always amazed at what he knew was happening. I've mentioned to you before this business of getting called once because Marvin Watson and Larry Temple had found out that someone in Texas had a collection of letters written by Lyndon Johnson to a woman other than his wife.

F: Why don't you tell that story.

N: This was kind of a surprising thing.

F: I should say for the record, this is pre-Lady Bird.

N: Yes. And they weren't going to go to the President and ask him about this. They knew that someone with a kind of--they had the last name, I think, of the person, and it was in one of the major cities in Texas, they didn't know which, and "How do you do this?" They finally decided they had to get the White House out of it and that I might be the one who would be able to run it down. They gave me the information and the name of the person, and I had Margaret April, my

secretary, who is really my assistant and who has been with me for more than twenty-five years, a telephone expert, go to work on calling everybody in the autograph, book business, or the antique business in several of the major cities until we might locate someone. We finally located the person who presumably had a collection of Lyndon Johnson letters. We didn't indicate we were interested in Lyndon Johnson.

Then I took over and at a later date called this person and said--it wasn't true--that I was coming to Houston, and as long as I had some time to kill I'd love to call on him to see if he had anything in stock of interest to me. I mentioned several things I thought I might be interested in, none of which, really, he had. And I said to him, as a throwaway line, "We're also interested in any presidential letters that you have." He said, "Well, the only thing I have is a collection of Johnson letters." And I kind of said, "Well, Johnson isn't really what interests me, but as long as I'll be in Texas anyhow I'll visit you." When I called on him I saw this collection of letters, and they turned out to be letters written indeed by Johnson to a woman other than his wife. But this was when Johnson was a very young man and had written to a young lady who had just been recently widowed. Her husband had been a chiropractor, and he had been killed in, I think, San Antonio by an irate husband who thought that the treatment administered by this chiropractor to his wife was not exactly of a professional nature.

F: Got a little more than medical--(Laughter)

N: I think she was kind of a distant cousin of LBJ's. Anyhow, they became rather friendly, and it was a series of letters in which he's giving her advice and telling her what she ought to do. He thought she ought to get more education, and he'd meet her from time to time. He was still pursuing his education. He was much too young to get seriously involved with anyone. But I realized this collection of letters,if it got in the hands of someone, could make kind of a sensational story, and I ultimately was able to buy them. We got them deposited where they ultimately would go to the Johnson Library to be made available at a later date. But I felt very proud. You know, I had accomplished this mission and kept this story a secret.

F: Was Johnson aware of what you were doing?

N: I finally wrote him a memorandum about what I had done, in a guarded way, just so he would know. But Larry Temple and [Marvin] Watson and I think Juanita Roberts knew. But then a couple of years later at lunch at the Ranch with a couple of friends from Washington present--and the President would get expansive about his friends, and you're always the greatest, never second best--he started telling how marvelous I was. I was just absorbing this like mad, and he told the whole story of how I ran down these letters. Here I thought I was keeping the secret from Lady Bird and protecting his reputation, and he thought it was kind of funny and marvelous.

F: Good old Ralph.

N: Yes, and my jaw dropped, because there weren't any secrets as far as he was concerned in this area. It is kind of an amusing story and an

interesting story. But he liked the fact that there were people he could trust with various missions, or he could ask to do things.

Occasionally I'd be asked to make a little bit of an input on maybe some Civil War or Lincoln anniversary, a holiday anniversary, when he made the Sandburg memorial speech. I'd be asked if I had any ideas.

F: He, of course, did a tremendous amount for libraries. Did he ever talk about this with you?

N: He felt it was very important. This whole business of education was something he believed in deeply, and though he was not a book reader he believed in this whole process of self education and the availability of it.

F: He believed you ought to be able to read it if you wanted to.

N: That's right. The Library Services Construction Act was completely his thing. He started it, and the plan he had was for an escalation of aid to public libraries, which was completely demolished by the succeeding administration. He and I would talk about it, because he knew I was president of the board at the library and chairman of the Urban Library Council and that this whole thing meant a lot to me. I would quote people like Carl Sandburg, who called the American public library every man's university and how important it was to have it. And we would discuss the changing problems--the urban library that has to deal with a growing disadvantaged population to whom the book is a complete stranger, people who are intimidated by the world of books whether it's a bookstore or a library. I mentioned the usual things I

would try to do to get people into the library and how important it was to have communication, to have some place in the community that gave people answers, that the lower you are on the economic ladder the more difficult you felt with getting an answer, that often a riot was no different than a child throwing a tantrum on your carpet because he or she wants your attention.

He was intensely interested when I told him the story of Chicago after Martin Luther King's death, when two miles of West Madison Street were virtually leveled in what the newspapers said were senseless destruction, and how I called the next day and asked the library what happened to our two library branches on Madison Street and found out that not a plate of glass had been broken. I said, "Mr. President, it wasn't senseless destruction. They had no quarrel with the library. We were their friends, and they treated us that way. They had an argument with the drugstore who maybe overcharged them or the grocer or the Social Security office," I said, "This is a significant thing." And he mentioned the library bill.

F: Did you get the feeling he understood the black discontent in the cities?

N: I think he did. I think he did. I think he was, like everyone, shocked at it in the beginning, but this is one thing I thought he was receptive to. He listened to the responsible black leaders, and he realized we had an awful lot of adjustment to make and that just being patronizing and just saying we care wasn't enough--you had to do something. He really meant this, and I was always impressed. Since I

was, as you were, in Austin when in that December conference, which was the last one before his death--and of course making all those speeches hastened his death. But he really cared. I remember spending a couple of hours with him and Barbara Jordan and a few other people and the intense way [he spoke]. There was no question about his caring. I remember, as you do, as we all do, Julian Bond admitting how wrong he had been.

F: Did you get the feeling that Barbara Jordan came across to him as a girl with a future?

N: Yes, very much. He would single her out and say, "This is a fantastic, bright gal, and you're going to hear a lot about her."

F: I think that about runs me out. How about you?

N: Well, it was an interesting experience. He was a warm human being. You enjoyed working for him because he knew you were around. He knew what you were doing, and you knew you were doing something for him. You weren't working in the dark; you weren't groping. You knew if you did something wrong you'd hear from him immediately and there would be no notes passing. He would just call and tell you, "Goddamn it," you know, whatever it is. And if you did well you were going to hear from him. He never hesitated to be publicly affectionate or publicly critical, which was great. You knew where you stood. He was just marvelous.

F: There was something about that big old paw going around your shoulder in public and his acknowledging you that made you kind of [proud]. Even though you'd seen it all, you still get a little elated.

N: You were always flattered by the little things he remembered about you that you've mentioned. Or I had some stories I would tell; we would often swap stories. He would remember some of my favorite stories and at a later time, "Ralph, tell that story. It was pretty good." He would enjoy telling things like the story of how he had gotten that Remington bronze which John McCormack was using that he called an iron doorstop.

F: I don't know this story.

N: He called me one day and said, "Ralph, I want you to see something." There was Remington's bronze casting of "The Scout," which is a great work. He'd been over at the Hill and saw this Remington used to prop open a door in John McCormack's office. It had been left over from Mr. Sam, and the President recognized it for what it was immediately. He said, "That's a nice iron doorstop you have," kidding. And Speaker McCormack said, "Oh, that was something that Mr. Sam left. Would you like it, Mr. Johnson?" And he said, "Yes, I think I could use it, if you don't--" You know, he played a straight face and had it moved immediately into his car. It was a very valuable bronze work, which is now in the Johnson Library, and he enjoyed talking about it and talking about how he had asked me what it was worth and so forth.

F: Did he have some knowledge and taste of who in the kind of art world and literary world was important?

N: He had some in the art world, though we had some arguments. As you know, he was very fond of Warren. What's his name?

F: Melvin Warren.

N: Melvin Warren. But Melvin Warren does portray a part of the life of an area that Lyndon Johnson is fond of. Of course, he painted that painting--oh, I think it was one of the first of the Johnson brothers' store. But Melvin Warren isn't a Remington or a Charley Russell. But LBJ bought a lot of his paintings, and we would argue. He'd say, "Well, it's a five thousand dollar painting, but he sold it to me for fifteen hundred dollars." I'd say, "Mr. President, it's a fifteen hundred dollar painting." He'd say, "What do you mean?" I'd say, "When an artist sells you a painting for fifteen hundred dollars, it's a fifteen hundred dollar painting. And if he charges you five thousand, it's a five thousand dollar painting."

Because we discussed ultimately giving them away. How would I appraise them? I said, "I'd have to appraise them at close to what you paid for them. Of course, if you paid fifteen hundred dollars and hold it for a number of years and the man's work increases in value"--it does to a certain percentage. He never gave them away for any tax benefit at all, but it was interesting to talk about. But he knew a bit about some of the things, and whenever he traveled, more as vice president, he and Mrs. Johnson bought some art. He liked these things. He liked looking at them. He didn't have a professional or even a semi-professional viewpoint, but they brought pleasure to him. And maybe that's the basic reason for any of us owning something, not because it's so-and-so's but because you like it.

On books, I was kind of amused at one thing, I mentioned once that, "Your autograph on a book will increase the value of it

ultimately because it identifies it as being yours." Well, a few months later I came back and I was working in his den and doing something in his books, and I noticed everything was autographed. Whenever he found some time he was signing his name, though he very carefully avoided signing his name in books written by people he didn't like. Inscribed some but in the main he just signed his name. I thought, "Well, Ralph, he did listen to me." It was kind of fun. Though the books were never given away for any tax benefit; they were just given away, period, as a freewill gesture.

F: In fact, he made that comment in my presence to somebody when he autographed The Vantage Point. He said, "Well, the book's not worth much, but the autograph will sure make it worth something."

N: That's right. But he cared, he knew and you knew you were working for someone. I've worked for an awful lot of people and some very important people, and no matter how tough they drive you, you love working for an Edna Ferber or an Omar Bradley or a William O. Douglas, who know what you're doing and care about what you're doing, because it inspires you to do more. But every once in a while you run into someone who's remote, who doesn't care, or you deal through lawyers or you're left alone and you kind of lose your interest, because you just don't match up the papers and the man. The man isn't present, he's just kind of a myth. He doesn't exist, but it's an amorphous thing. You can't pin down, you can't identify.

F: Kind of like doing a sculpture in absentia.

N: That's right. Those are the tough ones, and those are the ones which become two dimensional portraits.

F: Thank you.

N: Thank you.

[End of Tape 1 of 1 and Interview I]

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