

## INTERVIEW WITH DOROTHY NICHOLS

Interviewer: Joe B. Frantz

September 24, 1968

F: Mrs. Nichols, how did you first get to know Mr. Johnson?

N: I knew him when he taught school in Cotulla. That was the year of 1928-29, when he stopped going to college, as so many teachers did. He came to teach for a year to earn money to go back to finish his education. He was 19 and a teacher-- a principal, I think. I was 14 and a high school student in another school. So the gulf was quite, quite great. But everybody in Cotulla, which had 3500 people, knew everybody else, so of course I knew him.

F: Now you would have been in junior high probably, or the equivalent?

N: We just had grammar and high school.

F: Was he in another school from you?

N: Yes, He taught in the Mexican school. Any Mexican student who could speak English and wanted to could attend this school I went to and some of them did. Many of them didn't have English so they started them out in the Mexican school.

F: Did Mr. Johnson teach in English or in Spanish?

N: In English, though he did need to know some Spanish to get along.

F: How good was Mr. Johnson's Spanish?

N: Well, good enough. I don't think it was as good then as it is now. I'm not sure, but I believe he has practiced some through the years and has gotten better. You can't really tell how good he is, but every now and then he will surprise you with how well he can get along in the Spanish language.

F: Instead of formal Spanish his was more a kind of kitchen Spanish?

N: He must be a lot better than----he must be learning all the time. He used to have just kind of kitchen Spanish.

F: But he could get around with a non-English speaking group.

N: Yes.

F: What do you know about him as a teacher? Do you remember anything from those Cotulla days?

N: I remember a story that I think is very typical of Mr. Johnson. He found out the janitor of the Mexican school could neither read nor write. He was a very old man. Mr. Johnson bought him a primer and started teaching him. And spent time with him after school. And the old guy learned to read and write.

F: Do you remember what he read when he learned to read and write? Did he read papers or the Bible, or what was he interested in?

N: I don't know.

F: How long did it take Mr. Johnson?

N: He was there a year, and I think he worked with him from the minute he found out.

F: My knowledge of small-town school teachers, and I come from a small town, is that the school owns them about 18 hours a day, and I presume that was true in Cotulla?

N: That the school does what?

F: That the school more or less owns their time.

N: Well, he did all sorts of things after hours. I remember that he formed and coached a Mexican volleyball team. The school didn't have any money for equipment for them. He was always very close to the students, and he kept in touch with them after he left Cotulla.

F: He wrote to the teenage boys and girls there then?

N: Oh, they all loved him. They all loved him.

F: Did he finance the volleyball equipment out of his own pocket? He didn't have any money, did he?

N: Out of his own salary, yes! It didn't cost too much, I guess.

F: No, but then salaries weren't too much either.

N: They sure weren't. They sure weren't.

F: Did you keep in touch with him then after he left there?

N: No, I didn't. I went to San Antonio to go to work the next year. At age 15, by the way.

F: You wouldn't let a daughter of yours do that.

N: No, I sure wouldn't. Then I knew about his race for Congress-- just heard about it. Wanted to work in it, but I was working for the State by that time. I wasn't supposed to get into politics. But I don't suppose I saw him again until I landed the job in Washington.

F: Now, where did you make the application? Was it by mail or in person?

N: It went on for months. I wanted to come to Washington. I talked with our family friend Pat Moreland, and he said that he had heard that Mr. Johnson was about to hire a woman for the first time.

F: Who is Pat Moreland?

N: Pat Moreland was one of the Unemployment Compensation officials at that time.

F: Is he still alive?

N: Yes. Lives in Austin, I believe, and has a string of hamburger heavens and is doing very well financially.

F: When he told you Mr. Johnson was employing someone, what did you do?

N: Well, at that point, I guess I went to my brother, who was John's roommate--John Connally's roommate at the University and

said, "I'd like to get in touch with Mr. Johnson," or whoever it was proper to apply to. John was the one who passed on to Mr. Johnson my interest in it. So then Mr. Johnson had everybody interview me. Ray Lee interviewed me, Sherman Birdwell interviewed me---oh, some others I'm sure. Then I went to the Employment Commission and started taking tests. And took the 120-word shorthand test. The tester said, "You didn't have any trouble with that. Would you like to take the 150 one?"

I'd been practicing--I said, "Sure." And so I took it. There were several other girls who were applying for the job, and I did make the highest grade.

F: He had just the one job?

N: Yes.

F: And then you went to Washington directly, or did you ----

N: Via Johnson City.

F: What did you do in Johnson City?

N: We had an office there. He had an office there.

F: Where?

N: In '39. In the Co-op. [Pedernales Electric] From September 15 when I went to work until the first of the year, we worked there. And then the boys drove up to Washington and I spent Christmas with Bird at her home in Karnack. And she and I came up on the train, arriving here New Year's Day, 1940.

F: You were seeing the world?

N: Seeing the world!

F: Did you have any kind of a New Year's Eve on the train?

N: No.

F: It was a quiet trip?

N: Yes. John Connally took Walter [Jenkins] and me the next night to the Gaiety, the burlesque house. He said, "Well, I don't know whether I ought to do this or not, Dorothy, it's rough. I warn you--it's rough!" That was our celebration.

Mr. Johnson met Bird and me at the train in the morning and took us over to the Dodge Hotel, and we went in and had breakfast. It had a very nice dining room then. And he called L. E. Jones, who was living there at the time, to come up and join us.

F: Who is L. E. Jones?

N: L. E. is a lawyer who is practicing in Corpus now, and has been for many years. L. E. was at that point law clerk, I believe, to Justice [It was Justice Butler my husband says.]. He was one of the Supreme Court Justices.

F: He's a good friend then of Mr. Johnson?

N: Yes. One of the people he has helped along the way.

F: You lived at the Dodge House?

N: Yes.

F: How long?

N: Till I got married. Which was April of the next year.

F: You met your husband here in Washington.

N: Yes.

F: By yourself, or through Mr. Johnson.

N: That is a funny story. Not through Mr. Johnson. There were a large group of Mr. Johnson's young friends living at the Dodge. One of them was a Texan from Rhode Island named Russell Brown, who fell in love with Texas and Texans. Russ worked for Phil [her husband]. Phil was at the Justice Department then, head of a unit to write a manual on eminent domain. Russ got a raise. He wanted to do something nice for his boss. He took Phil and me to the Texas State Society dance and several weeks later Russ said,

"You know, Dorothy, I think Phil liked you. I think he might invite you to dinner if you'd give him half a chance."

I said, "Russ, I've had dinner with him every night since I've met him."

F: I see. Russ was running a bit slow, wasn't he?

N: Yes.

F: Was Mr. Johnson aware of the romance?

N: Oh, very much aware--very much interested. And when I said I was going to be married, he said, "Well, honey, Bird and I

have decided instead of giving you a \$50 ashtray, we're just going to give you your wedding."

They were living at the Kennedy-Warren. [A D.C. apartment house] So they asked us to make up a list of whom we wanted. Philip had been here a year and a half, and the list got so big that the wedding had to be moved from the apartment, where we originally planned to have it, to a public room on the ground floor of the Kennedy-Warren.

F: The Johnsons were more or less godfather and godmother to the wedding.

N: Yes. Bird gave me the wedding, and Mr. Johnson gave me away.

F: I've heard that Mr. Johnson in those days was something of a practical joker.

N: I don't know any stories along that line.

F: I thought maybe there was something related with your courtship or marriage that ----

N: No, if he played practical jokes, it would have been on the boys, because he was always very gentle with the ladies who worked for him. For instance, the boys worked until 3 o'clock in the morning. That was why, I think, he hesitated so long about employing a woman. He didn't think it was right to work a woman the way he



and the boys worked.

F: Were you the first woman to work for him here?

N: Yes.

F: What made him decide to get a woman, do you know?

N: No, I don't.

F: Were the men he had capable secretaries--technically?

N: I don't know whether any of them took shorthand or not. 'Course Walter took shorthand, but Walter and I went to work at the same time.

F: You don't know what he did about correspondence, then?

N: I think he just told people what he wanted to say, and they composed the letters; then he'd recompose them. Must have been that way because the two Henderson boys didn't take shorthand.

F: How long did you work for him?

N: Till election day of 1964.

F: It was intermittent, wasn't it?

N: Yes, I quit as soon as he could get some people to replace me, after I married, because Phil didn't want me to work.

F: Until you were married and had a husband, did Mr. Johnson see to it that you got home before dark, or did he see, if it were after dark, that someone took you home?

N: Well, we lived at the Dodge, you see. John and Walter and I all lived at the Dodge. And John had a car. So I was transported except on evenings, which were frequent, when I was going to meet Phil downtown for dinner.

F: What did your duties consist of in those early days with Mr. Johnson?

N: Well, I took all of the dictation. John or Mr. Johnson usually did the dictating. I answered the phone.

F: Was the work divided among you pretty stringently, or did everybody just pitch in?

N: We just pitched in. We had to reorganize the files, for instance, and we all did it.

F: What did you do about file space in those days? I know he was fairly junior and wouldn't have had much room for keeping materials.

N: We had enough.

F: Did you get as many visitors then as Congressmen do now, or did slower transportation tend to keep people away?

N: It probably did. You know when things build up gradually, you don't notice it. So it always seemed to me that we were as busy as we could be. With visitors and correspondence and phones.

F: Was Mr. Johnson, as a young Congressman, pretty available to his constituents.

N: You bet he was.

F: Did he have any sort of rules regarding answering correspondence, taking care of requests, and so on?

N: Yes, sir. Every letter was to be answered the day it came in. Sometimes we didn't quite make it, but he got real upset when we didn't.

F: You got to it the next day then--none of this waiting two weeks, or six weeks, or the like?

N: That was a rule that he kept--always.

F: You must have gotten behind at times during the busy periods?

N: Yes.

F: Did people write very much on issues or were they mainly writing him on local problems?

N: It seems to me that it was more local problems.

F: What sort of problems?

N: Well, of course, the big thing that he was working on then was the Lower Colorado River electricity project. That's what the number one project was when I went to work for him.

F: He gradually built a fairly impressive staff from the standpoint of size. Did he do that on his own. How did they work his Congressional budget in those days for his office? Did each Congressman have the same size budget?

- N: I don't know whether they did or not.
- F: Did he manage his own budget, or did somebody like either Jenkins or Connally handle it for him?
- N: Well, I think he managed it.
- F: Did you help any with any of his speeches or with any of his legislative interests at that time?
- N: I was simply a stenographer for him at that time.
- F: Who called him? What kind of people?
- N: Well, it seemed to me the most important people in Washington. Sometimes the President called him.
- F: Mr. Johnson was in his third term then?
- N: No, he had come here at a special election in '37, and this was in early 1940 I'm talking about. I don't know when the President called him. I don't remember if it was during that portion or not, but the President did kind of take Mr. Johnson under his wing.
- F: Did that give Mr. Johnson a kind of a status around the halls of the House Office Building?
- N: I think so. I think there were bound to be those members of the Delegation who were just a little bit jealous of the relationship.
- F: Was there much visiting then between Congressmen in their offices or did that take place professionally after hours?

N: Now, let's see, we had one Congressman across the hall. Nat Patton from East Texas . We had another Congressman next door to us. He was from the Hill Country. Can't remember his name. He was convinced that Bird and I were sisters. And he said, "I won't tell anyone if you'll just tell me. I won't tell anybody that you're her sister."

I said, "But I'm not."

F: I see. He was on the trail of something.

N: And, of course, I think a lot of the Congressmen would meet with Speaker Rayburn frequently. They called it the Board of Education.

F: Did they have the Texas luncheons then?

N: Yes. Once a week. Every Wednesday. Mr. Johnson would always attend.

F: Did Mr. Johnson have time for much social life after hours?

N: Yes, they entertained their constituents. When they came to town, they had them out to dinner at the apartment, and they were invited to a lot of things in those days.

F: There are reports, you know, that while others played, he worked. I wondered if he was considered something of a drudge, or did he balance it?

N: He balanced it, but of course the man had more energy than five other people. And apparently needs less sleep.

F: Did you get caught in any of those marathon sessions of long work with no sleep?

N: Oh, of course, campaigns, yes. Three hours sleep a night.

F: Were you involved in the campaign for Senate that he ran against W. Lee O'Daniel?

N: No, I wasn't. I had a three-months' old sick son, and he had just had an operation. I was nursing him back to health. I'm sorry I had to sit that one out.

F: Were you involved in the campaign that he ran against Hardy Hollers? Right after World War II?

N: All the other campaigns.

F: All the others. Do you remember the Hollers campaign very vividly?

N: They get mixed up in my memory, but ----

F: Well, I always understood that was one of his harder Congressional campaigns. Am I correct or do you know?

N: It was---well, they said some awfully ugly things.

F: What kind of things?

N: They accused him of everything they could think of.

F: Did he respond, or did he ignore it?

N: He ignored it. I think that in that campaign it was true--what usually was true in campaigns was that we did not mention our

opponent's name. There's no use in giving the other guy publicity. I think it was in the Hardy Hollers campaign that I went out to a schoolhouse where Hollers was making a speech, and it was a very small crowd, so I stuck out like a sore thumb. I had my shorthand notebook, and I sat in the front row and smiled at everybody and listened to everybody. And when Mr. Hollers started his speech, I just took down every word he said, still looking up at the right places and minding my own business. It was a good way to rattle the speaker. Though I didn't do it for that.

F: But he was conscious of it.

N: He was on the air, and he said something that made the stations, all of them, cut him off the air. So that when I got back to the hotel, I could tell our people what he had said when he was cut off the air. Because I had it in shorthand.

F: Do you remember what he said?

N: No. I have the most wonderful memory for forgetting unpleasant things.

F: Do you know whether your notes were retained?

N: I doubt it.

F: So we don't know what Mr. Hollers said.

N: We don't know.

F: Was Mr. Johnson rather sensitive to such attacks, or did he take that as part of the political game?

N: I think that he's extremely sensitive, and I think that it's not just a matter of emotion--it's a matter of the brain telling him he'd better be. All through his political life he has taken seriously criticism, and if he thought it was justified, he changed.

F: Can you give any instances in which he has changed?

N: Not specific ones, no. I'm sure that there are. Well, I'll let you know if I can bring some up, because there must be some good stories that would illustrate that.

F: Were you involved in the Coke Stevenson Senatorial campaign?

N: Yes.

F: What do you remember about that?

N: Three hours sleep. Reading--going to bed with a "Who Done It" every night. Reading the same sentence on page 13 every night and going to sleep. We'd get to bed about 3--this is when we were on the trail. Mr. Johnson did this every night. Mary Rather and Dorothy Plyler and I would go out a week at a time with a campaign group.

F: Altogether or separately?

N: No, see, he was doing it all the time. We were only doing one out of three weeks.



F: What did you do then? Come back to Austin?

N: We'd come back to Austin and work at headquarters the other two weeks. I was supposed to do it all when we first got down there, and they took one look at me at headquarters when I came back after the first week and said, "This will never do. We've got to divide things up."

F: What was your day like?

N: We'd get up at 5 in the morning, because Mr. Johnson would have an early morning broadcast on the radio station.

F: Was this broadcast live?

N: Yes.

F: Whom was he trying to get to? The farmers?

N: The farmers. We'd drive to the radio station, he'd make that speech, then we'd start out on the campaign trail. He was traveling by helicopter. We'd travel by car. We tried to make every speech, but at any rate, we had to get to the noon rest stop ahead of him, because we had his luggage. He would shower and change and was supposed to get some rest. But he was on the phone the whole time-- or had somebody--local people or somebody of the staff in there planning. And then more speeches in the afternoon. And there would always be something for the night stop, a banquet, a reception.

Then after that, the local leaders would have a meeting set up that he was supposed to attend. So you can see he got pretty darned little sleep.

F: How did Mr. Johnson build his contacts for a statewide campaign?

N: I don't have any idea. I wasn't one of the planners. I just did what I was told. And enjoyed every minute of it. I would say just by working and trying to help people mainly.

F: After the returns were in, and it was obvious that it was going to be contested, did you-all do anything in that period under contest?

N: You lose me after the first primary in this campaign. Because Phil's father wanted me to come to Cape Cod and keep house for him. And Phil and I tried our best to talk him out of it. And he said he wasn't going to live forever, and he put his foot down. So, I wasn't there.

F: Were you on Cape Cod at the time of the second primary?

N: Yes.

F: Did you keep up with what was going on down in Texas?

N: Yes, and it sure was hard.

F: What did you do--call daily?

N: Not daily, but I telephoned. I bought the New York Times. The Boston papers didn't report anything. The New York Times would have very confusing information, and I remember I called

the house one time from Cape Cod and talked to Bird. And Bird was very philosophic. She said, "Well, it looks like we've lost. I guess we'll just have to get real busy and work real hard in the radio business now."

F: Has she more or less been a tranquilizer for him in one sense through the years?

N: Yes, she's the most level-headed person I've ever known in my life, and when the going gets rough, Bird just puts one foot right in front of the other, and she doesn't lose her head. You know, she used to quote to us during the '48 campaign Kipling's If and I believe she really lived by it.

F: You think that if he had lost, she wouldn't have looked back?

N: That's right--she would have gone on to the next thing.

F: Did you rejoin him then when he came back as Senator?

N: Yes, I called to say hello one day, and he indicated that it sure would be nice if I'd come in and answer his phones for him.

F: How many children do you have?

N: Three.

F: What did you do? Just kind of piece Mr. Johnson around the children?

N: I don't know. I sometimes think I just pieced the children around Mr. Johnson.

F: Did you live in New York for a while?

N: Yes, for two years.

F: When was this?

N: Well, when I left on election day of '64 I went up to join Philip who had been on the Customs Bench for several months. And then we came back when Mr. Johnson appointed him to the Court of Claims, which was mid-June of last year. Well, I got down here in mid-June of last year.

F: Were you active in the campaign in 1960?

N: Yes.

F: Were you in Los Angeles?

N: Yes.

F: Were you pretty much aware of the Vice-Presidential possibilities?

N: People kept telling me--after Mr. Kennedy was nominated--people would keep telling me that Mr. Johnson was considering being Vice-President. I said, "That's ridiculous--he can't." But--- I was wrong.

F: Has Mr. Johnson always had this ability to keep all his options open and never to commit himself?

N: Always.

F: He did that as a young Congressman?

N: Always. It has something to do with letting his intuition operate, you know. It's not done just to make people uncomfortable. It's a path of wisdom.

F: He seems to me to have had plenty of publicity through the years, but not to have sought it. Am I correct in that estimate?

N: I don't think he ever minded seeing his name in the paper.

F: But what I'm getting at--where some public figures like to sound off on all sorts of issues, it seems to me that he has not done much of this.

N: Oh, no. He has chosen his words very carefully. And he always has approached any problem from the front, from the back, from both sides, and then he'd like to get up in the air and look at it this way before he makes a decision.

F: Did you get a feeling that he felt a sense of release when he became Vice-President and no longer was sort of circumscribed by Texas outlooks?

N: I never would have said a sense of release when he became different job. And he always tried to do the best one he could. Whatever his job.

F: Where were you when Mr. Kennedy was shot?

N: I was in Bangkok. We were on an official trip. Philip was Commissioner of Customs then. Phil represented Customs. Some people represented other Treasury interests abroad--bad money, for instance

F: Counterfeit?

N: Bad money. We all made this trip in Admiral Roland's plane. He was commandant of the Coast Guard. And each department--each little branch--had business at various places.

F: How soon did you get home afterwards?

N: Well, I came back with the Admiral's party. Philip was in the hospital on Okinawa with virus pneumonia. It had been decided that I would go ahead with the trip and do my best to represent him. Admiral Roland was in the Philippines. We had the plane in Bangkok. We couldn't get through. We had communications on the plane, but they jammed, you know, over Vietnam--over that area. I couldn't find out how Phil was. I knew that even should I get in touch with Mr. Johnson, if he knew the situation, he'd say,

"Honey, your first duty is to stay on the same side of the world with your sick husband."

We were back to Hawaii where Phil rejoined us by the time I was able to get through, and I didn't even attempt to call Mr. Johnson. I called Walter [Jenkins] and he wasn't there, he was at the President's house. I talked to Marjorie. Marjorie said comfortingly, "Dorothy, we have more help than we can use."

F: Who is Marjorie?

N: Walter's wife. And I said, "Well, Admiral Roland has offered from the beginning to fly me back on a space available basis, but I know that Mr. Johnson doesn't like for his staff to take for free anything that they might be criticized for. But I am available to fly any time." It was only three days, you see, when we were due back anyway. So I just waited.

F: What kind of situation did you find yourself in on your return?  
Was there much confusion?

N: No, by that time there wasn't so much.

F: How long was this after the assassination?

N: A week, ten days, in that neighborhood. Things had calmed down quite a bit.

F: Had Mr. Johnson moved into the President's office by then?  
Was he working out of E. O. B. [Executive Office Building] or what?

N: I don't remember exactly. I know it was a long period when he worked out of E. O. B.

F: What did he do--just let the Kennedys wait until they were ready to move out?

N: Yes, he insisted that they not rush. It took quite some time for the changeover to take place. About the House itself? I don't know, because I wasn't involved in any of that part of it. We were all

so busy trying to find a place to sit in the West Wing.

F: Where did you sit finally?

N: I ended up in Walter's office. We put another desk in.

F: Did you stay in there the whole time that you were at the White House until 1964?

N: No, I went over to work with Buzz. Horace Busby came to the White House. Mildred Stegall and I were both working for Walter, and we had recognized all the time that because of our experience, we were going to have to be spread thinner. Couldn't be working together.

F: Busby wasn't with the President when he became President?

N: That's correct. He was in private business then.

F: But you had worked with him in his Senatorial days?

N: Oh, yes. He was a wonderful guy to work with. So loyal to Mr. Johnson. That's the wonderful thing.

F: When the '64 campaign came along, you were active in this?

N: Where was I in '64? I was working with Buzz.

F: What did you do?

N: Whatever we were given to do. It has always been that way.

Whatever the day's assignments were, we did them.

F: Did that include speech writing?

N: Some speech writing.



F: Was there any sort of attempt to analyze Mr. Goldwater's speeches? Or was that done outside the White House?

N: I just don't know.

F: You said then you went Election Day. You mean you went to Austin?

N: No. Went to New York to join Phil. Moved up there. But I just couldn't see leaving before election day. Phil agreed with me.

F: Was it entirely hectic around the White House until then, or did you have much doubt as to the outcome?

N: Oh, I don't ever think we had any doubt as to the outcome.

F: Where were you on election night back in '60?

N: I don't remember.

F: That was the night, you know, that you went to bed not knowing for sure. Mr. Johnson came down to the Driskill, and waited until about 3 a.m. and then went home.

N: That's where I was. I was working with Bill Moyers down on the mezzanine floor of the Driskill.

F: What were you doing?

N: I think we were receiving returns. From various people in Texas. People phoning in the returns which put us a little bit ahead of the official tally.

F: Do you have some friend spotted who gets the local returns, and calls them to you while somebody is officially sending them in to

the Texas Election Bureau?

N: Yes. You get the information just a few minutes sooner.

F: Does Mr. Johnson get pretty anxious at times like that?

N: He doesn't appear anxious. No. Very keenly operating at top speed and thinking and analyzing and so on.

F: Did you keep written tabulations, or does he run them in his head?

N: We were writing them on everything in the world. You know, a little slip of paper and hand it this way, and somebody totalling them up and putting them on the blackboard. It's a confusing thing.

F: You say that right after you joined the staff in Johnson City, Mr. Johnson came on up here, while you and Mrs. Johnson went on to Karnack. This was your first time to spend any period of time with Mrs. Johnson. Right?

N: Well, yes, except during the fall. We'd all lived very closely together in Johnson City.

F: Where does one live in Johnson City?

N: Oh, that's a good story. Truman Fawcett, the druggist, had a wife and a baby. And Mr. Johnson said, "Truman, these three people--four people--Walter, John, Herbert Henderson, and Dorothy" (Herbert Henderson is now dead--I'll show you a picture of him.) "have to have some place to live. And would you like to make a little extra money by renting rooms to them."

Well, Truman didn't have a hot water heater. Mr. Johnson said, "That'll never do." He wanted his staff to have hot water. To bathe in. So he arranged to get Truman a hot water heater, wholesale, somewhere. And Truman bought the hot water heater, we moved in, paid Truman rent--it was just six weeks, you see. So everybody came out all right. But this is the big thing for us. The detailed way in which he takes care of the people who work for him. He fathered us all. And he and Bird lived at the hotel.

F: In Johnson City?

N: In Johnson City. There was a hotel. Oh, that's the best food I ever had in my life. We couldn't eat at one place all the time, because he said, "You've got to spread yourselves around."

And, oh, they made me the first female honorary member of the Lions Club. I was really living. 35¢ for a great big steak and sliced tomatoes and homemade biscuits.

F: Oh, great. So you ate around then so you would know more people and benefit more people.

N: Yes. It was a very pleasant six weeks.

F: Has he always done that with the staff--urged them to get out and make wider contacts?

N: Indeed, yes. He came into the office one time when he was in Congress and he said, "Where's John?" "John's at lunch."

"Where's Buzz?" "Buzz's at lunch." "Where's Woody?" "Woody's at lunch." "Are they eating together?" "Yes, sir." Mr. Johnson spoke: "\$30,000 worth of talent and all talking to one another!"

F: Have you been back to the house in Karnack in recent years?

N: No, not recently.

F: I wonder whether it had changed over the years.

N: I understand it has been painted a different color. It was always called the yellow house. The Brick House. It was yellow when I stayed there that Christmas. But I believe it's painted white now. I haven't seen it since then.

F: Can you place yourself back in a 1939 outlook? What was your impression of it?

N: It was a very substantial Southern plantation home. The rooms were beautifully proportioned, and it was a lot of house.

F: There was just Mr. Taylor and his daughter Claudia?

N: And her stepmother. I didn't tell you that they took me to the White House when I'd been there six weeks to a ball. A Congressional ball. He called me in and told me that they were going to do this. And I said, "Mr. Johnson, I feel like Cinderella."

He said, "You are Cinderella, honey. Now go on down and buy yourself a pretty evening dress. Get your hair fixed."

F: That was rather unusual, wasn't it? To take staff help?

N: Yes, but not by him.

F: What was the ball like?

N: Well, I remember Rebekah, Mr. Johnson's sister, and I went with the Johnsons. And Senator Tom Connally got mixed up and asked me to dance, and it became apparent fairly soon he thought he was asking Miss Johnson.

And I remember looking up at Senator Connally and saying, "Senator Connally, you don't act like you're having a very good time."

And Senator Connally threw his head back and guffawed to the ceiling. The idea of having a good time at a White House function was just more than he could take.

F: What did Mr. Roosevelt do during a period like that--just sit in his chair and watch?

N: I don't think they moved around. They stood in the Blue Room, and we went down the hall to shake their hands. The Cabinet was beyond in the Red Room. And the Under-Cabinet, Senator Wirtz was Secretary of the Interior then, and I think that's all we saw of them.

F: Did you know Senator Wirtz very well?

N: Yes. Mary Rather and I were roommates, and I knew him through that and through Mr. Johnson's friendship with him.

F: Did the President lean on Senator Wirtz as much as folklore says he has?

N: He would certainly never deny it. The folklore comes right from Mr. Johnson's mouth. And he did consult him. Mr. Johnson tells a wonderful story about a conversation with Senator Wirtz during a fight with the private power companies on the Lower Colorado. They had been in conference for days and days and days. And Mr. Johnson finally got fed up and he stood up and he told them how he felt. He told them where to go.

And later on Senator Wirtz said, "Son, you did a mighty brave thing. A young man standing up and telling the president of a power company where to go." Then he said, "Son, I'll tell you. It's one thing to tell a man to go to hell; and it's another thing to make him go there." He said, "Now, we've got to start over where we were a week ago in these negotiations."

That's one of his favorite stories. I'm sure you've heard it.

F: Did the utility companies give him a good bit of trouble in his campaigns in those days?

N: This is before I went to work for him, but it was a good fight.

F: He made friends of them though, didn't he?

N: Sure.

F: You've undoubtedly seen a number of instances of former political enemies of Mr. Johnson's become his staunch friends?

N: I have indeed. It's a pattern.

F: Can you name some?

N: It's a pattern. Oh, heavens, everybody knows who they are. I mean---

F: How do you explain Mr. Johnson's admiration by a number of really conservative Republicans like Senator Dirksen, Congressman Halleck, and so on? The personal relationship seems to be very close.

N: Yes, it is, but I guess it'll go back to Senator Knowland when he was Republican leader of the Senate and Mr. Johnson was the other leader. No, it'll go back further than that. You go back to Senator Taft. Their political philosophy was absolutely divergent. But they found they could work together. And Mr. Johnson developed a great respect for Senator Taft. And would be helpful to him in any way that he could, with the strict understanding that they didn't agree with one another. But he spoke glowingly of the character that he found Senator Taft to have. Later on, it was the same with Senator Knowland, and the same with Senator Dirksen; he has always been able to find some level where he could work with a man if he can be worked with. And they all could be. And they got things done, by gum.

F: Looking at it from a secretary's vantagepoint, how would you account for Mr. Johnson's very swift rise as a Senator?

N: It was amazing. He was the youngest minority leader and the youngest majority leader. He had a new job, and he decided he was going to master it. And he was helpful to as many of his colleagues as he could be. And he was mighty careful not to get up and shoot his mouth off, as freshman Senators aren't supposed to. And they just all liked him. And found out that he could do the job.

F: How did he help?

N: If they came to him with a problem and he could help resolve it or do them a favor or some little courtesy, he was always ready to do it.

F: Did he keep his contacts open with all his fellow Senators? Were there some that he could not work with?

N: He kept trying. He never gave up.

F: Do you have any memories of the period in the House when he was on the Navy Watchdog Committee?

N: Well, he put me to work on it. I was supposed to be a go-between between him and the investigators. We worked down in the Navy for awhile. It was understood that I spoke Mr. Johnson's language. And sometimes they didn't know him well enough to---for instance, we took a report up one day. [Mr. Johnson] started reading it, and he said, "What does that word mean?" Four syllables. He



read it, and he looked up, put it back on the desk and he said, "Now, you take it back and get it down to fifth grade, and I'll get it down to first grade. "

F: You worked also with the Preparedness Investigating Committee in the Senate? What did you do then?

N: Same kind of thing that I did on the Naval---- I was always a stenographer, you understand. Did that kind of work. But in addition to that, they would frequently ask my advice how I thought such and such would strike him. And it was very flattering.

F: Did he work a committee the same way he worked his staff?

N: He didn't have close personal contact with them.

F: There weren't such long hours?

N: Well, there would be when we were rushing to get a report out.

F: Did he have a strong sense of deadline?

N: Yes, because you have to. Because they'd work for months and months and months. You know how that investigating work goes. And then he'd get impatient and say, "I want that report, that first draft of that report, by 9 o'clock, September 15, on my desk. "

F: When he got interested in this matter of Space Aeronautics and became head of that first committee, did you have any idea of how much it was going to develop?

N: Well, yes. I was in Europe when Sputnik went up. I was not working. I got the Paris edition of the Herald Tribune, and it looked to us--we were on a freighter--it looked to all of us on the freighter as if Mr. Johnson was the only person in the United States who did understand how far behind we were, how hard it was for us to catch up. He was the leader.

F: Can you think of anyone else I ought to see?

N: Cousin Nat [Congressman Patton from Texas] is dead.

F: What do you mean--Cousin Nat?

N: Well, his letters to all his constituents always started out, "Dear Cousin Joe, Dear Cousin Bob, Dear Cousin So-and-So," so he was known in his district as "Cousin Nat." Everybody called him that.

F: Do you know Senator William Blakley?

N: Yes.

F: Did he and Mr. Johnson have much to do with each other in that brief period?

N: I think Mr. Johnson was as helpful to the Senator from Texas as he could be. And showed him all the courtesies.

F: But he wasn't more or less Mr. Johnson's candidate?

N: Mr. Johnson has this long-standing rule, and I've never known him to violate it, that he will not express a preference before

a primary. But he will always back the Democratic candidate.

And I've never known him to violate it.

F: Has Mr. Johnson become fairly well acquainted with John Tower?

N: I don't know.

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to the

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