

INTERVIEWEE: DOROTHY NICHOLS  
INTERVIEWER: MICHAEL L. GILLETTE  
PLACE: Mrs. Nichols' residence, Washington, D. C.

November 1, 1974

G: Mrs. Nichols, you have indicated that you might want to start with the 1948 campaign. That was when he ran against Coke Stevenson.

N: That's right. This was the primary of course, because that's the important campaign in Texas. It is to this day, I believe.

I was supposed to travel with the candidate and the press and the speech writer. After the first week when I came back dragging, just completely like that, he realized that I couldn't take it all the time, so three of us were put on and we alternated weeks on the road, Mary Rather and I and Dorothy Plyler. What it amounted to was we got up at 5:00 o'clock in the morning because he had a six o'clock broadcast from the local radio station every morning. From five o'clock we had the full day of going around to every speech he made, and he was traveling by helicopter, and we were traveling by car so sometimes we missed out on the speech. Then we (whoever I was with--whoever was driving me and I) had to get to the noon rest stop and get the hotel all in order for him to come in, unpack his suitcase, because he would have lunch and then he would get into his pajamas and get in bed and have a rest. So, that was my job. I was valet, in other words. Then at night, there always would be a meeting after dinner,

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a local meeting. So it was late hours. I went to bed every morning about 3:30, and I had to tuck him in bed and give him his pills and try to remember whether he had taken them or not, which sometimes was hard. I'd get to bed about 3:30 every morning and roll up my hair. Those were the days when we put pin curls in our hair, wet, and I would wake up at five o'clock the next morning and comb it out, and it was still wet, but I did it again the next night. I took along a book to read, and I read line 4 on page 13 for the six weeks that I was on the road.

There was one funny incident, you were talking about running out of gas. We were threatened with running out of gas again, so he had me get on the phone and call and make all the arrangements so we wouldn't. I got that done and went in and reported to him, and he had already gone to bed. We were in Tyler, Texas, and the next morning-- I can't remember his name--was in the room and I had laid out Mr. Johnson's clothes for him to put on, and then I left the room so he could get dressed. He knocked on my door as he went by and I went to the door, and he said, "Darling, last night you were wonderful. This morning you were going to let me go out with a rip in the seat of my pants." I hadn't examined the seat of his pants to see if there was a rip in them. I had to confess.

Oh, another funny story. I was traveling with Paul Bolton, and we were going into Palestine, Texas and the day before--we were

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carrying also, in addition to everybody's luggage, we were carrying the stationery and supplies and the day before Paul Bolton had said, "I saw a suitcase real cheap down the street and I think you ought to buy it to carry the supplies in." So I bought it, and it was pasteboard. And I put all this heavy paper in it, and I stuck in a bottle of bourbon, which we had left over from the weekend. We had very little time to have a drink during the week, but on the weekend we had had some liquor in Dallas. We drew up to the hotel across from the railroad station, and Paul had to go to the radio station to write a speech that Mr. Johnson was going to give in 20 minutes. So, I got the Negro man who took care of the luggage, and he picked up this suitcase, and it broke. There was a high wind blowing. Of course the bottle of bourbon broke, and the candidate's picture was on all the campaign literature, and it all got soaked with loud-smelling bourbon and blew all up and down the street. And I thought, "Oh, my Lord, this is a dry county; we've lost this one." Then the old Negro man went in and got a wet mop and came out and swept up the sidewalk and then dragged the mop full, reeking of whiskey, through the lobby where everybody was sitting and watching, and I with my tail tucked between my legs followed along and went up to my room. Mr. Johnson laughed like fury when Mary finally told him that story. I didn't tell him because I didn't want to worry him. I always went on the theory that I wanted to

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be the one to admit the bad things I had done so I would have told except I didn't want to worry him. We carried the county.

G: Did you?

N: Yes.

G: Well, that's great. Herbert Henderson was writing speeches at that time, wasn't he?

N: Not in '48. Herbert had died by then.

G: Had he?

N: Yes. Yes, I don't remember the year he died, but I remember Herbert from '39 when we were in Johnson City to about '41 when I quit for a little while to have a baby or so. Herbert was a wonderful speech writer.

G: What about John Connally in that campaign? What role did he play?

N: He was the manager of the campaign. He didn't have the title. Claude Wilde had the title. Mr. Johnson told John that he was too young to have the title, but Claude Wilde played golf every afternoon and John Connally ran the campaign.

G: Is that right? Was he effective?

N: Oh, extremely. Extremely. John is one of the ablest people I have ever known.

G: I've heard that during that campaign, even as young as John Connally was he had very definite ideas about how the campaign should be run, and Congressman Johnson had very definite ideas.

N: That's right.

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G: Can you recall any occasions where you had two strong-willed men. . .

N: Well, Mr. Johnson--when he had the kidney stone attack I think it was, and was flown up by Jacqueline Cochran to Mayo--sent word back to John to take him out of the campaign, and John refused to do it.

G: I think there was a question of publicity, too. Mr. Johnson didn't want any publicity, is that right?

N: About going to the hospital?

G: Yes.

N: Well, it sounds likely, because Mr. Johnson never wanted any publicity about being sick.

G: But John Connally thought it would be a good idea to publicize it, or something to that effect.

N: I don't remember exactly, but I'm sure knowing the two men that that is what happened.

G: What did Mrs. Johnson do in that campaign?

N: She worked with the women, and she traveled a lot making speeches to women.

G: Did they generally travel together?

N: No. No, they traveled separately. It would have been a lot easier on me if I had had Bird along. I tell you that. She had an accident which you may have heard about. You've heard that story, haven't you?

G: The automobile accident?

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N: The automobile accident, but she didn't tell him.

G: Oh, she didn't tell him?

N: No.

G: Well, can you recall what happened there?

N: She and Marietta Brooks were driving and the automobile turned over, I think, and Bird was all bruised up. Nothing broken, but all bruised up. She was meeting Mr. Johnson that night. She went on and met him and went through the evening's affair, and it wasn't until the next day after the current excitement was over with that she told him and made rather light of it.

G: What was his reaction?

N: Well, only knowing him that he would demand that she see a doctor and drop everything else and take care of her.

G: Can you remember any other stories regarding the helicopter, the "Texas Windmill?"

N: They took the door off because it was so blooming hot. So they got all the sand you can imagine. You can imagine how dirty Mr. Johnson was when he had come in for this noon rest stop, and a shower was the first order of business before he even had lunch.

There was one funny story about the helicopter. We had a little boy named Green, who was the son of Professor Green at San Marcos College, and he was with the loudspeaker truck. And he was trying to keep the crowd because the helicopter was late in some little town in

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West Texas. He said, "There it is! Here comes Congressman Johnson to address you! Don't anybody leave. Congressman Johnson is reputed to be one of the greatest congressmen in Washington. He is reputed to be the father of the 'little TVA,' the Lower Colorado River Authority. He is reputed to be. . .well, he is one of the most reputed men in Washington."

G: That sounds like a story that LBJ might have enjoyed telling at times.

N: I wonder if he ever knew it?

G: Well, did you think you were going to win?

N: Oh, I always thought we were going to win. There were many who didn't.

G: What about raising money in that campaign? Did you have any problems getting money?

N: Oh, hell yes.

G: Can you recall any incidents here, trying to get money from people?

N: John Connally did a great part, the major part, of the fund raising. John Connally went to see Harris Melasky in Taylor, Texas. Do you know this story?

G: I've heard it before, but go ahead.

N: I don't know whether I can tell it right or not. I can't remember the figures. He said. . .Harry said, "How much do you need, John?" And John said, "Ten." And Harry said, "Well, my partner is out hunting in the West, and I can't get in touch with him by phone, and

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I feel I have to talk to him first." And John said, "But Harris, we can't even pay the rent." And it finally turned out that John was asking for ten hundred and Harris thought he was asking for ten thousand. Now I think I've got those figures right. And he said, "Oh, if that's all you need," and he sat down and wrote out a check for it. And then he said, "There's more when that's gone."

Oh, money we had problems with. Charlie Herring was working in his campaign, and Charlie got the job of seeing the creditors. And one time Mary. . . somebody, she had a printing firm, and some more creditors descended upon the switchboard, and Charlie was informed that they were there. He had a ground-floor office with long windows that you could step out of onto the front porch, and he said, "Tell them I'm not here." And he stepped out one of those windows on the front porch, whereupon the creditors, who had been told he wasn't there, also stepped out the front door onto the front porch and there they were, face to face.

G: Who helped with that financing? Did you recall any real steady contributors?

N: I never knew that, Mr. Gillette.

G: . . . people that really supported him before he came to the Senate?

N: I never knew that; it was a well-kept secret and I didn't try to go into it.

G: What about Alvin Wirtz? What was Senator Wirtz' role in that campaign?



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N: In that campaign? Was he still alive, Mr. Gillette?

G: I think he died a few years later. He died in '51 or '52.

N: Well, during his whole lifetime, Senator Wirtz was one of Mr. Johnson's favorite advisors. I don't think Senator Wirtz was physically active in the campaign, but that wouldn't have been where he would have been the most help. It was his sage advice that was of such value. He was such a sane, sensible man, and when Mr. Johnson would get upset, he could calm him down if anybody could.

G: Did you like Senator Wirtz?

N: Very much. I was very fond of him.

G: What was he like in his dealings with you? What can you tell us about him?

N: He was a very friendly man. He was one of the easiest people you'll ever know, one of the kindest and one of the easiest people to be around. I always enjoyed visiting with him when he came to the office. I didn't know him too awfully well. He was Mary's boss when Mary and I were roommates at the Dodge. He took us out to dinner one night, I remember. He had some friend who was here from Texas, and he called Mary and me and said he would take us out to dinner. We had a delightful evening, but I really wasn't awfully close to him.

G: Did Congressman Johnson treat him with a good deal of deference?

N: Very great deference. He got him the job of Assistant Secretary of the Interior, you know of course.

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G: I've heard that. Were you there when that. . .

N: Yes.

G: How did he do it, do you know?

N: Well, I'm sure he went to the White House. That's where he got all his favors--from President Roosevelt.

G: Well, I suppose they worked pretty closely together then when Senator Wirtz was Undersecretary.

N: Yes. They sure did.

G: Do you recall anything that they worked together on, any occasion when the two of them were, say, working on the Lower Colorado or something?

N: Well, that's the thing I had in mind. I don't know about all the little things that Mr. Johnson would have called Senator Wirtz about when he was at Interior, but any time we needed help at Interior, I'm sure he called him, and I'm sure he got all the help he could get.

G: Do you recall Lyndon Johnson ever discussing the role that Senator Wirtz played in his early life or. . .

N: Yes. Yes, when he decided first to run for Congress, he went to Senator Wirtz and told him that he wanted to run for Congress. I think their fathers had been friends. I mean he had been friends with Mr. Johnson's father, and that's how he knew him. Senator Wirtz was the one who told him to go ahead and try. And then, of course, what happened then is that Bird went to Senator Wirtz. . .you've heard

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this one too, I'm sure. And she said, "Senator, I have ten thousand dollars to my name, and I would like to put it into Lyndon's campaign." I heard Mr. Johnson tell Senator Russell that story one time and then Mr. Johnson turned to me and said, "I bet you didn't know that, Dorothy." And I said, "No, I didn't." This was when Mr. Johnson and I had an office in the Capitol when he was Minority and Majority Leader. It was a more important office really when he was Minority Leader, because nobody else had an office in the Capitol, none of the Democrats. They all came up there when they wanted a little snort, and Dorothy poured.

G: That's great. Well, maybe we can talk about that some a little later, but Mrs. Johnson gave the money to Senator Wirtz, right?

N: Yes.

G: Why didn't she just give it to LBJ?

N: I don't know; that's just not the way she did it.

G: Do you think that she didn't want him to know that she had given the money to the campaign?

N: Maybe.

G: But that wasn't part of the story.

N: No.

G: Did you ever hear Senator Johnson talk about what role Senator Wirtz played in the idea of the Lower Colorado River Authority and the

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development of the Lower Colorado River?

N: No, not specifically, I didn't. He was just so much a part of it that he and Mr. Johnson were the LCRA.

G: Sure. Well, as long as we are on this phase, do you have any stories about LBJ and Franklin Roosevelt that you want to add, President Roosevelt?

N: No amusing ones.

G: Well they don't have to be amusing.

N: I can remember that he went down to the White House frequently, had frequent appointments with the President. He went in the back door, which is the favored way of going, and he would go before the President was up, see him in his bedroom. We always typed up a little thing for him to leave with the President for whatever project he was up there on. It was always one page and just as short as it could be, because Mr. Johnson said that, "If you can't say it on one page, you're just no darn good."

G: Who composed these. . . who wrote them?

N: Seems to me Mr. Johnson did himself.

G: Didn't LBJ used to take Grace Tully to work in the morning, sometimes, while she was President Roosevelt's secretary?

N: Probably; I didn't know about it.

G: I think one time when he met with President Roosevelt he showed him

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some pictures of dams, didn't he, what these dams could be in the Hill Country and. . . you don't recall that?

N: No, I don't know about it.

G: What about President Johnson's trip to Australia in 1942, do you remember that?

N: No, I don't. I wasn't working then. I was home having babies. I just knew he was gone, and I was with Bird and Nellie. They were living together then. No, that was when he was in the war; no, I just don't know anything about his trip to Australia. Well, he was in the war then.

G: Yes.

N: Sure.

G: This was '42.

N: Yes, Nellie and Bird were living together then.

Bird called me up about that time and said, "Dorothy, do you like venison?" And I said, "Oh, I love it." She said, "Well, there is some down at the freezer warehouse that I'd love for you to have. Nellie and I don't like it." So I went down there in a taxi and asked for the Johnson venison, and they brought out a whole frozen deer, head and all, pelt and all. It had been gutted, but that was all that had been done to it. So I talked to my taxi driver and I said, "Would you take this?" And he said, "I can't get that in the car." And I said, "Well, let's put it in the trunk." So we put it in the trunk and we took

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it out to my grocery store on Wisconsin Avenue and took it in, and they said, "We can't carve this; it's frozen solid." I said, "But I have promised my boss' wife some for a dinner party for tomorrow night." And they said, "Well, we'll do the best we can." Well, they did. Bess got her venison for her dinner party. But I left in the taxi a brand new evening dress that I had bought before I had gone down to get the venison. And we were mighty broke in those days. We had venison off of it a couple of times. I gave the maid some, and the rest of it spoiled.

G: What about his reaction when President Roosevelt died? Do you remember that, in April of '45?

N: Yes, I do. Yes, he was bringing Dorothy Plyler and me home the next day I think it was. I said, "He's gone; who do we have now?" And he said, "Honey, we've got Truman." I don't remember what I said, but he said, "There is going to be the damnedest scramble for power in this man's town in the next two weeks that anybody ever saw in their lives."

G: Do you recall where he was when he heard about FDR's death, the day before?

N: Yes. Yes, Bill White wrote an article about that.

G: Yes, I saw that article.

N: He was in the Speaker's office.

G: Well, it must have been quite a shock or. . .

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N: Oh, it must have been terrible. Dorothy Plyler was staying late at the office that night, and she called me and told me. And she said, "The press is just driving me crazy." And I said, "Well, Dorothy, do you want me to come back?" And she said, "Yes." So I got on a streetcar and went back down there, and by that time, all the excitement was over with.

G: That's really an interesting story. Can you remember anything else about the campaigns, those early campaigns that you won?

N: I wasn't in the 1941 campaign.

G: I knew that. You were at Cape Cod, I think, at that time.

N: Yes, I was. I had a three-month old child who had just had an operation for pyloric stenosis, and I was nursing him. I went down for lots of congressional campaigns.

G: Well, that '48, you gave us such good detail on that, I'm just wondering if there is anything else that you remember that we didn't touch on?

N: There probably are other stories. There used to be so many of them. But I don't think I can recall any right now.

John Connally--I'm going to brag--John Connally said that I was the most productive person in the Austin office when I worked there.

G: Is that right? That's great. Well, was Congressman Johnson in that '48 campaign for the Senate, was he happy campaigning? Was it something he enjoyed, or was it really a laborious task?

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N: I think it was drudgery.

G: Did he enjoy meeting people, pressing the flesh?

N: Yes.

G: But it was tiring, I guess.

N: Oh well, he just didn't get any rest. He got so thin, Lord, he got thin. And trying to run everything himself, of course. The man had a very hard time delegating.

G: Can you give us any examples of this, where he insisted on doing everything himself?

N: Well, one example would be like when we were about to run out of gas and he was the one who told me who to call, what to say, just exactly step by step what to do. He could have delegated that.

G: Do you recall his speaking in places where there were demonstratively pro-Stevenson audiences or people in the audience that heckled him or at least were hostile?

N: Well, I felt in East Texas, always, at every stop in East Texas, I felt not exactly hostility but, "Well, we came out to look you over. We'll hear what you've got to say. We're not guaranteeing anything." Then we left East Texas and went to West Texas, and they threw their hats in the air, and they cheered, and it was just as different as night and day. The friendliness that we met with and the enthusiasm in West Texas.



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G: How did he handle a group that wasn't very enthusiastic about him?

What were his techniques? Do you remember that? When he was speaking to them, how would he try to win them over?

N: Persuasion. I don't remember any of his speeches.

G: I see. I've heard that during that campaign that some votes were lost in Longview or someplace where, after the totals came in, there was an adjusted total in Longview that cost Lyndon Johnson about 212 votes. Do you remember that?

N: I heard about it at the time. I wasn't there then. I had to leave and go up to the Cape. I didn't quite finish out the runoff.

G: Well, is there anything else about that campaign that you recall, about him working with his staff? Any little crises or blunders that his staff made that gave life to the campaign?

N: I don't think so.

G: Other than the helicopter. . .

N: Yes.

G: Did he use an airplane at all in that campaign?

N: I don't think so. There just wasn't a need for an airplane. Now he might have, but I don't remember it if he did.

G: Well, let's go from there and just have you talk about him, as a boss and as a man and what sort of relationships he had with his employees.

N: Okay.

G: Was he a task master?

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N: Very much one. But no matter how hard he made us work, he was working harder himself, so you could take it. His outstanding traits, I think, if I had to name two of them, were his compassion and his limitless energy. I used to marvel how he would get on the phone and talk for thirty minutes to Mayor Miller in Austin about egg support prices and give it everything he had. Then he would hang up and he would pick up the phone and talk to Senator Russell about legislation and again giving it everything he had. He could shift gears and be just as enthusiastic about one thing, just as forceful about one thing, as he had been about something else; he never seemed to tire.

G: That's great. Well, I've heard that he would sometimes set his alarm for the middle of the night to call somebody and. . .

N: Oh, I don't know about that, but he had an alarm watch and we were on a campaign swing--George Reedy, Mr. Johnson, and I--for candidates in the West one time. This would have been in '54 or '55. We were at Sandy, Utah, which was a little bitty town, and he talked off the cuff. When he read a speech, he was boring, just plain boring. So he was talking off the cuff, and he had talked for about thirty minutes and his alarm watch went off. And he looked at them and laughed, and he punched it off and he said, "That's supposed to tell me to stop talking, but my friends, I've got just one more thing I want to tell you." And then he would proceed to tell them three or four more things, and he had that audience with him until the end of that speech, and he must

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have talked for 45 minutes, but they were with him the whole time.

G: Now which campaign was this?

N: It was a campaign when we were campaigning, for instance, for Senator McFarland in Arizona. I don't know who we were campaigning for in Utah; I can't remember. Then we went on up to Minneapolis and campaigned for Hubert Humphrey up there.

G: How did that go?

N: Oh fine, fine. They had a big dinner for us. Hubert had a big dinner party for us that night. It was my birthday, and they gave me a birthday cake.

And we were in Las Vegas on that campaign, and one night when we came in from one of the shows, you know the gambling places are in the lobbies out there. We passed through the lobby to go to our rooms, and Mr. Johnson stopped at the dice table and he took out twenty dollars and bought twenty dollars worth of chips. We stayed there and played. We lost the twenty dollars, and we walked away. Now that's the way to gamble. Because it is worth the twenty dollars for the entertainment or however much you decide it is worth for entertainment.

G: He didn't plan to win anything.

N: No.

G: Well, what else about him as a boss? He expected pretty much complete loyalty from his staff.

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N: Oh, he expected 100 percent loyalty, and that was the one thing that he would get down on anybody for, if they were disloyal. That was unforgivable. Anything else he would say, "Well, if he were as smart as I am, he would be the senator and I would be the clerk."

G: Is that right?

N: Yes.

G: I heard a story one time that one of the staffers was working on the files, I think Jake Pickle or somebody like that was doing the filing system and left them all out on the floor one night, and the cleaning lady came in and took them down to the incinerator.

N: Oh no! No!

G: And he had to rescue them from the . . .

N: That must have been quite an excitement.

G: Can you recall any occasions when he felt that one of his staff members was not loyal or had, you know, more or less . . .

N: Only once, and it involved a man who worked, not directly for him, but for the Preparedness Committee. And he fired him. That's the only time he ever fired anybody in his life. No matter what they did, he would stick by them unless they were disloyal.

One funny story was one that Gene Latimer told. Gene was living out with Mr. Johnson and working at the office, and he came and went with Mr. Johnson and was never out of his sight. Gene said one night

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going home, "Congressman, do you mind if we stop at the drug store so I can buy a package of cigarettes." And Mr. Johnson, "Gene, buy your cigarettes on your own time!"

I remember something that might interest you. There was a young married couple who came to work in the office, and he took them into his house. He did that so frequently with new employees. She got sick and had to have an operation, and he forked up the money for it. They paid him back, of course, but he advanced all the money for her illness, and they had only been there a matter of a few weeks. Well, of course I had only been there a matter of a few weeks when he gave me away in marriage.

G: Can you remember the name of the couple?

N: No, I can't. I'm sorry.

G: I understand that even when he would have to dress down his employees, he would make up with them very shortly thereafter.

N: You never saw anything like it.

G: Can you go into this in detail? What was it like?

N: Well, I'll tell you this. I used to get mad at him and he used to get mad at me, and we both had tempers, so we didn't keep quiet when we got mad. But fortunately we never got mad at the same time. When he got mad, I felt sorry for him, because it seemed to be he was getting mad about something so unimportant, and he had more important things to think about. But when I got mad, he tried to soothe

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me like you would a baby.

G: Can you recall any occasion in which you got mad?

N: Yes, but they were private fights; I don't want to talk about them.

G: Did you work on weekends much?

N: Yes. Yes, we worked every Saturday and finally we got to where it was every other Saturday. When I had young babies at home and no maid on Saturdays, I didn't work at all on Saturdays.

G: I heard that perhaps one of the reasons that he was so good with his staff and handling the people around him and dealing with them was that he himself had been an assistant to a congressman. Do you think this was a factor?

N: Probably so. He used to say, "When I was secretary to Kleberg, I had all the mail answered by 9:30 in the morning; I don't know why you all can't do the same thing."

G: How important was the mail to him?

N: Terribly important. He had what was called a letter count, which we all hated like poison. Somebody would make calls in the afternoon to everybody who typed letters, "How many letters did you write today?"

G: Could some people turn out more letters than others?

N: Yes.

G: There were some just slower than others? Who was the fastest?

N: A girl who didn't even take shorthand, who used . . . what do you

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call them . . . those things you listen to?

G: Dictaphone.

N: Dictaphone, yes. She would just sit there with that old, not even an electric typewriter, just sit there and turn out letter after letter after letter. Very boring work, but she sure did it.

G: I understand that Glenn Stegall was also a very diligent worker.

N: Oh, Glenn was the most conscientious worker we ever had.

G: Really?

N: He just worried so about things and was so careful to do everything just exactly right.

G: What about Walter Jenkins? Where did he fit in here?

N: When John worked in the office, John was head man. When John didn't, Walter was head man. He ran the office, and more and more so as Mr. Johnson became Minority and Majority Leader and had to stay on the floor so much. Walter did everything.

G: Was he pretty good at anticipating Senator Johnson's needs and wants?

N: He didn't have to anticipate. Mr. Johnson was on the phone with him giving him so much to do, he couldn't get it done in the next ten years. But he understood him very well.

G: Well, Mrs. Nichols, what do you think, as you look back working for him during this period, you're proudest of as having contributed to his career, his legislative career?

N: What am I proudest of?

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G: Yes. Can you recall any occasions where you really helped him out?

N: Oh, yes. I've got a good story. I had a desk in his office. This was in the Senate Office Building, so it was before he was Leader; it was when he was about to become chairman of the Preparedness Subcommittee. Bernard Baruch came down to talk to him. And when Bernard Baruch came in and sat at his desk, I quit typing, of course, so that I wouldn't disturb them. Baruch started talking, and I just picked up a pen and took down every word he said, and when he was gone, I typed it up and gave it to Mr. Johnson. And he said, "Honey, you were smart to think of that."

G: Well, that's great.

N: But I loved working with him in the Capitol. When there was just the two of us. He was a much easier man to work directly with than if you had to go through an intermediary.

G: Why was this, do you think?

N: The intermediary would interpret or misinterpret directions sometimes and throw in a few of his own, maybe.

G: I hear that he would sometimes . . . that Senator Johnson would sometimes assign two or three people to do the same thing.

N: Oh, he did. There was the Christmas when Mrs. McCormack got three boxes of candy because he told three people to send Mrs. McCormack some pecan pralines.



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G: You indicated earlier that you were unofficial hostess when Senator Johnson and Senator Russell and others would gather I guess, in the Leader's office to have skull sessions and things. What were these like? Generally at the end of the day?

N: Yes. After it got dark. He always worked until it got dark. That's why we hated daylight savings time so.

G: Was Senator Russell usually there?

N: Senator Russell was there a great deal. Mr. Johnson was very dependent on Senator Russell's counsel. He respected him greatly.

G: Can you remember any occasion in which Senator Russell gave him important advice?

N: I think he gave him important advice on the McCarthy thing.

G: Can you recall that specifically?

N: What the advice was? I don't think I knew.

G: I think he tried to get Senator Russell to serve on that censure committee?

N: He probably did. I remember Ervin was on it, and I can't even remember who else was.

G: I think Senator Clements, Earle Clements, also had some input there. Didn't he give Senator Johnson some advice there, too?

N: Probably. That was a beautiful thing to watch, the way Mr. Johnson handled that McCarthy thing.

G: What do you remember about that?

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N: Well, of course you know he always touched every base, so he talked to everybody. They came up with the plan that was followed to censure him, and he knew to a man the votes he had for it. He always knew the votes he had.

G: How did he . . . was it just communicating closely with other senators, or how did he . . .

N: Yes.

G: How was he able to count so accurately in advance?

N: Well, he would talk to them, and they would tell him how they were going to vote.

G: I suppose he admired Senator Russell considerably.

N: He certainly did.

G: Can you recall any conversations of the two of them together or any . . . give us a picture of . . .

N: I don't remember that conversation, but I remember the time that they were sitting at the big table in my office over at the Capitol having lunch. I was having lunch at my desk, and that was the time that he told Senator Russell the story about Bird and the 10,000 dollars. I don't think they were talking too much business that day. I think they were just sitting there visiting back and forth, which they enjoyed very much.

G: What was your impression of Senator Russell?

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N: Just one of the staunchest, most serious men you could know in your life. Just completely dependable. A Southern gentleman to the core. I liked him very much.

G: I've heard it said that he was, in effect, responsible or partly responsible for that more moderate civil rights bill in 1957. Do you know anything about that?

N: Who, Senator Russell?

G: Yes.

N: No, I really don't.

G: On the subject of civil rights, you know that President Johnson has been considered the great civil rights President in the twentieth century.

N: Yes.

G: Was there anything in your long association with him that anticipated this, that will give us an insight into his feelings on discrimination or things of this nature.

N: Well, he always had great compassion for minorities, all minorities-- the Mexicans, the Negroes, women - they may not be a minority, but they are discriminated against in some ways, and I'm not a women's libber. He showed it in his daily life as well as in his legislative actions.

G: Did he ever talk to you about his feelings here, ever go into these that you can recall?

N: No, I just don't think so.

G: I've heard the story that one time while he was teaching in Cotulla, I believe, he took a young Mexican-American boy home to Johnson City

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in the summer.

N: Mary wanted me to try to tell you that story, and the only trouble is I can't remember the boy's name. I've heard Mr. Johnson tell the story over and over again.

G: Wasn't it Juan Gonzales?

N: Was it?

G: In San Antonio, I think he owned a department store or something.

N: Well, he was a successful businessman in San Antonio, Mary told me. No, I was going to suggest your getting in touch with Danny Garcia in Cotulla to find out who it was, but if you know, there is no need for you to do that.

G: Do you remember . . .

N: The occasion?

G: . . . him telling the story.

N: I remember him telling the story. I don't remember the occasion. You see, I was in a different school in Cotulla. He taught in the Mexican school, and I was in the one up town. We had Mexicans in the one up town, too. Anyone who wanted to come up there could do so, but only the higher-class Mexicans sent their children up there, usually.

G: They were probably the only ones that spoke English.

N: That's it.

G: What else can you tell us about him as Majority Leader? His

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relationships with senators and committee staff members.

N: Well, he was on that floor all the time, I know that. And he was moving around from one to the other, putting his arm around them, trying to find out what their problems were, because that was one of his . . . one of the things he did that made him so effective. He tried to find out what their problems were and he knew all their problems, too, and he tried to help with them. When the time came when maybe it didn't make too much difference to them how they voted and it made a lot of difference to him, he had them on his side.

G: Can you describe his mannerisms in dealing . . . you know, you've heard of the Johnson treatment . . .

N: Yes. Mary McGrory's term. Well, putting his arm around them was one thing and getting up right in their face to talk to them was another thing. I can't remember him ever shaking his finger; that would be out of character, because that would be a little bit threatening, and what he wanted to do was persuade, but he would sway back and forth as he was talking to them, like this.

G: Of course, he was probably taller than the others.

N: Yes.

G: Well, he was a very tactual person, I understand; I mean, he would have his arm on you and his hand on you . . .

N: "Press the flesh."

G: Yes. He would sort of crowd people, and you couldn't say no to him

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as a result of it.

N: Well, that's true. That's true. People would come in with their minds made up, knowing they would go away having said yes.

G: Can you recall any specific occasions where he literally talked somebody into doing something that person didn't want to do, just as a result of the Johnson treatment?

N: No. No, there were many of them I know, but I couldn't describe any one instance.

G: In his talking with other people, would he sometimes enumerate his own problems and sort of complain of all the problems he had?

N: Oh, yes. He was the biggest complainer in the world. And he would use that to make them . . . anything he could use to make him feel sorry for him and want to help him, he would use it.

G: Well, what else can you tell us about him, just as a man and politician?

N: I'm running out of soap. Well, certainly he was one of the most interesting characters I've ever known in my life and was the most challenging man to work for that anybody could work for. He brought out the very best that was in his people. If it was there to bring out, he could do it.

G: I've often heard that he was a great raconteur.

N: He was indeed. He could keep you in stitches.

G: How did he do it?

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N: He mimicked and he could take off somebody he was mimicking to a tee.

G: Can you give us any examples of this humor?

N: I wish I could remember some.

G: I think he could do that German Hill Country accent, couldn't he?

N: Oh, he could do that, yes.

G: Do you have any favorite Johnson stories that you would like to share?

N: I swear I think I've told them all.

G: Any Crider boy stories you remember?

N: No, I've heard them, but I don't remember them. What were some of those funny things? One funny thing was that a secretary, Bird's secretary, bought him a pillow, a cushion in Florida one time that said, "This is my ranch, and I do as I damned please." And he was so pleased with it that he ordered seven more and had them all over the house.

G: Those are, I believe, still out there at the ranch.

N: I bet they are. I swear I think I've told you all I know.

G: Well, Mrs. Nichols, this has really been grand. I certainly appreciate your time. We've really gone back through some interesting history.

N: Well, I've enjoyed every minute of it.

(End of tape)

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NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND RECORDS SERVICE

Gift of Personal Statement

By Warren J. Nichols  
to the

Lyndon Baines Johnson Library

In accordance with Sec. 507 of the Federal Property and Administrative Services Act of 1949, as amended (44 U.S.C. 397) and regulations issued thereunder (41 CFR 101-10), I, Warren J. Nichols, hereinafter referred to as the donor, hereby give, donate, and convey to the United States of America for eventual deposit in the proposed Lyndon Baines Johnson Library, and for administration therein by the authorities thereof, a tape and transcript of a personal statement approved by me and prepared for the purpose of deposit in the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library. The gift of this material is made subject to the following terms and conditions:

1. Title to the material transferred hereunder, and all literary property rights, will pass to the United States as of the date of the delivery of this material into the physical custody of the Archivist of the United States.
2. It is the donor's wish to make the material donated to the United States of America by terms of this instrument available for research as soon as it has been deposited in the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library.
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Signed Warren J. Nichols  
Date October 21, 1969  
Accepted Sam J. M. - for  
Archivist of the United States  
Date October 4, 1974



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Gift of Personal Statement

By DOROTHY J. NICHOLS

to the

Lyndon Baines Johnson Library

In accordance with Sec. 507 of the Federal Property and Administrative Services Act of 1949, as amended (44 U.S.C. 397) and regulations issued thereunder (41 CFR 101-10), I, Dorothy J. Nichols, hereinafter referred to as the donor, hereby give, donate, and convey to the United States of America for deposit in the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library, and for administration therein by the authorities thereof, a tape and a transcript of a personal statement approved by me and prepared for the purpose of deposit in the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library. The gift of this material is made subject to the following terms and conditions:

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Signed Dorothy J. Nichols

Date February 10, 1975

Accepted Harry D. Minahan  
Director, Lyndon Baines  
Johnson Library for Archivist  
of the United States

Date February 18, 1975