

INTERVIEW I

DATE: October 5, 1979

INTERVIEWEE: MARIE LINDAU OLSON

INTERVIEWEE: Michael L. Gillette

PLACE: Mrs. Olson's office, Dallas, Texas

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G: Mrs. Olson, you're known in NYA [National Youth Administration] years as Marie Lindau.

O: That's right.

G: Let me ask you briefly to sketch your background. Are you from Austin? Were you born there?

O: I was born and raised in Austin and educated in the schools there.

G: You have the distinction of having been I think the second person hired on the NYA staff in Texas, is that right? Or you and L. E. Jones came on board about the same time.

O: L. E. Jones was there answering mail, just stacks and stacks of it, and some friend of mine when I was in shorthand school came busting in one morning and said she had a job that she couldn't handle and would I like to go down there and get some experience. In those days work experience was the big thing that kept you from a job. I needed this work experience obviously because I was so young.

G: Had she started in that job and quit or--?

O: No, she had just heard about it through a friend and the mail that was just coming in, and when I heard about this, they told me to get down there. I had to go home and take off

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my bobby socks, and they told me to put on powder and paint so I'd look older and act very dignified. I put on quite an act. Anyway, when I walked in there apparently L. E. had heard, we had been introduced by phone, because he didn't interview me one bit. He handed me a notebook and pointed to the chair and started dictating. We had about a twelve-inch stack of mail already opened and ready to go. He would dictate for a while; he would sign letters for a while; he would go downstairs and get another sackful.

This little, tiny office we had was an ante-office, a little, tiny outside room at 604 Littlefield Building. Tony Ziegler and Ruthie Adamack [?] were in the big office behind us. That's where Mr. Johnson was going to camp when he came to Texas. He hadn't been here, but he was instructing L. E. by phone just day by day what he was supposed to do. Our job was to answer the mail, and answer it we did. After about ten days we thought we had this thing pretty well licked. We weren't ahead of the mail carrier, but we did have a system going.

Then one bright August morning coming around the corner was Mr. Johnson and Bill [Willard] Deason. Mr. Johnson was all decked out in a white linen suit, big horn-rimmed glasses and a straw hat, the tallest person I guess I had ever seen, grinning from ear to ear. I never saw anybody so eager to get in there and get with it. From the time he showed up, things really happened; phones just sprang out of the wall. They were trying to get him equipped in an office across the way at 601 in the Littlefield Building. 603 was our reception office, and that whole corridor I think became ours. I don't think there were very many private offices; we were just all kind of jammed in there together.

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But the first thing we had to do was get jobs allocated to the schools because school was going to be starting real soon. They had these school allowances, I think about fifteen dollars a month when fifteen dollars would do you some good. I don't think it would today.

G: Do you remember what most of the mail was that you answered before he got there?

O: It was people asking questions about the program, people wanting jobs in the state headquarters, applicants, always applicants, we were swamped by them. Every morning when I showed up for work there were ten people out in the hall applying for my job. A lot of them were from schools that had heard this would be a school aid program, among other things, and they wanted to get into the program and get certain jobs started for their people.

G: You and L. E. Jones were there, and you mentioned Tony Ziegler and Ruthie Adamack. Were they actually there before LBJ came or did they come later?

O: No, they were part of either the WPA [Works Progress Administration] office or the Texas Relief Commission. I don't know who they really were, what series of alphabet letters, but they came to work later when he opened the reception office.

G: I see. Do you have any idea why that office was in the Littlefield Building, why it was located there?

O: Well, in those days Austin didn't have very many buildings, and this fifty-year-old building was where there were a lot of WPA and Relief Commission offices, either state offices or local offices.

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These building managers were really bugged by Mr. Johnson. He kept saying, "I want this, I want this," and he got it. You know, there was just no question about--when he wanted something, he got it.

G: Well, now, how did he get his way in that respect with the building people? Did he go to the people who owned--?

O: Well, I think he just knew how to ask. See, he just knew how to present [it]. This is a need we have, we have so much to do in a short period of time and you've got to help us. He just didn't take no for an answer.

G: Do you remember what was at issue here, was it a question of telephones or--?

O: No, it was a matter of moving other people out so we could have their office because the building was full. Then they did make this one corridor available to us just right off, but after that it was just inching, inching, taking over more space. We had people on this floor like Judge [Dave J.] Pickle and some attorneys named Harris and I don't know who all, but those were the ones that were in that first corridor by the window. Of course, Judge Pickle and the Harris brothers--they were relatives, I don't know [if they were brothers]. They were named Harris, I can still see them--they didn't move, so we couldn't get their space. Those that we could move we moved down to the other floors and took over their space.

When Mr. Johnson got there, like I said, the phones just popped out of the wall and then the hordes of friends and people that were reading in the newspaper, they made a--they had a news release and announced this program. Then everybody just came in. But this organized man would have the mail on his desk and he would not let anything short of his wife, his mother, or the national office interrupt him until he got through

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dictating his letters every morning. Just so organized, ready to put everything he had into it. I've worked forty-something years now and I've never met anybody that could go through the day's work like he did. He had so much energy; he had so much ability to get a job done. I can see why he was appointed as a state director of NYA even though he was quite youthful, too, at that time.

G: Well, now, after he got there, did he sit down with you and L. E. Jones and talk to you about the program or interview you or anything like that?

O: No, this first day all he did was sit on the buzzer and you brought your book. He didn't ask me a single question, but when he dictated to me, he looked over there and could read my shorthand. And he says, "You know as much as Gregg himself." So I thought that was real nice of him to say that, and I'd just stand on my ear to please him, you know. We all worked real hard.

The very first day I was there and worked with L. E. Jones, he asked me to stay over after five or six o'clock and he said, "I've got one more letter," and that was the one putting me on the payroll. I couldn't even breathe much less write the letter; I had great difficulty writing that letter.

G: You weren't on the payroll already?

O: I thought I was going down there to get experience, I really thought that I would be down there helping two or three days until they could get a staff and everything, because I wasn't old enough to have a job.. I was only sixteen years old.

G: Did he know this, I wonder?

O: Well, I said, "I'm going on eighteen," when the question was put to me directly. I never did let them pin me down, because it was so important that I have this job. My mother

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depended on something to happen pretty quick. Her little bit of insurance was running out, and it was so important. I think it was just providentially provided, that's all.

G: That was his way of telling you that you were hired, dictating the letter to you?

O: To the WPA, saying put her on the payroll. Apparently he had talked to Mr. Johnson on the phone and gotten an approval, because it was never mentioned when he got there whether I would stay or whether I would go. It was just assumed that I was on the payroll.

G: LBJ dictated the letter, though?

O: No, L. E. did.

G: Oh, L. E. did, I see.

O: So, you know, I worked ten days before he got there, and then he continued me on after he got there and they started hiring other people. A lot of these were friends of mine from the shorthand school where I attended.

G: Oh, really? Do you know any of these in particular?

O: Well, Mary Owens was one, Jackie Atkinson [?] was another one, that was later on. But apparently there were lots and lots of people who were unemployed, but there were not lots and lots of people who could do anything and this man was a real stickler. He wanted his things done quickly and he wanted them done right the first time. When they were talking at this gathering back in July about shortage of supplies, I remember they told me, "Don't put typewriter erasers on there. He won't buy you a typewriter eraser. If he sees where you use it, go write the letter over." He was just that thorough. I thought that was real nice, you know.

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G: I guess that in the records somewhere there is an indication that one of the first things he did when he came to Austin was to meet with Governor [James V.] Allred about the NYA and state agencies' cooperation. Do you have any recollection of that?

O: That would be one that he had to see surely, and then he had to set up an advisory board. Now, maybe Governor Allred had something to do with naming the people that were on this advisory board. I'm trying to think of who they were and can come up only with Alvin Wirtz and Beauford Jester.

G: That was really a blue-ribbon board. [Lutcher] Stark was on it and who else?

O: Yes, I can remember Stark, but these are the only names that come across right now.

G: I think the fellow in--Hayden Perry was on it, wasn't he, from--?

O: That sounds right.

G: Do you recall how he selected that board and how he got them to serve on it? Do you remember that in the day-to-day activity? Did he call them up? Did he go around and visit them?

O: I imagine he called on them, either set up an appointment to go to see them or have them come by the office, I don't know which. That would have been kind of beyond my realm.

G: I gather a lot of NYA advisory boards were composed of youth.

O: I can only remember one very beautiful young lady who was named to represent youth, and it seems like her name was Nita Hines [?].

G: But he got distinguished business leaders and educators and people like that type and put them on that board. Did you notice anything different about that or--?

O: No, I knew he had to have all the help he could get from state agencies to get this cooperation, and Mr. [Jesse] Kellam of course could help him a lot because he was with

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the I think Texas State Education Board and was a local man. You would almost have to be a local person to know who to put on this board, though they didn't stick just to Austin residents, they went all over the state to try to get broad representation, and I think they did.

G: Senator Wirtz, I guess, was chairman of the board. Did you see much of Senator Wirtz, or did he have much contact with LBJ in this period?

O: I'm sure they did personally and certainly away from the office, having lunch together and things like that, and of course through correspondence and phone calls they kept in touch. They had regular formal meetings, and these meetings had to be reported to the national office. We just had to make reports, reports to the national office. There was some guidance furnished by them but lots and lots of it was left to the discretion of the state directors.

I want to talk to you about our office hours. Our office hours were as early as you could get up, get dressed and get down there. And it usually lasted until about eleven-thirty at night. That's when the lights of the Littlefield Building would go off; they generated their own electricity. I can remember a couple of times going down the flights of stairs with lighted matches. I can remember one time we had something that was due and we didn't get it finished before the lights went out, so they said, "Come back in the morning," and we were playing with the gaslights that were on the wall that hadn't been used for years and all I could see was the place going up in smoke. I was very glad when the sun came up and we were able to continue. But everybody showed up. We didn't know what eight to five was; we didn't know what a lunch period was. We just didn't want it; it wasn't necessary, apparently. But you get swept up when you're working

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around somebody that is generating all this energy and has such enthusiasm for what he is doing.

Most of the men were people whom he had known at other times in his life, his college friends. I don't know, if you didn't graduate from San Marcos, I don't think you had very much chance. But these were good people; they really were. They were his type; they worked well with him. I could see why he would be interested in associating them with what he was doing.

G: As you look over this list of employees, early employees, not paying too much attention to the positions, can you describe who worked in what capacity? For example, Jesse Kellam is listed as assistant state director. Was he primarily concerned early on with education, with the school aid aspect of the program, or did he involve himself in work projects as well?

O: I think everybody did something of everything that was taking place, and because of his background I am sure Mr. Kellam's earliest days had to do with the education program. These men were the kind that delegated things. Once they got you started in one little corner, they just left you alone and let you do it, but they always followed up and they knew what was going on. Mr. Kellam started just part time and it was very obvious that he couldn't do justice to both jobs, and he knew exactly where he wanted to go even though it was a one-year program. He gave up his security, the security of a state job. But it didn't turn out to be something he had to worry about. I think all of us saw that June 30 deadline facing us many times, and it was a naughty thing, but we lived with it.

G: Was there a general secretarial pool, or did he have one particular secretary who was sort of his executive [secretary]?

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O: I think at one time we all worked for him, directly for him. Then he placed us where he wanted us to be in the organization. I got involved early in payroll and personnel matters and travel vouchers. You know, a federal government travel voucher is like a lawsuit, you have to establish a claim for the money. They kept telling you you'd go to the pokey if you didn't report it correctly, and what we avoided at all cost was an exception to a travel voucher.

G: I gather he was really a stickler about accuracy in that respect, and efficiency, too, in running this program with the least amount of overhead.

O: Well, they didn't have very much money, and I still don't see how they operated a program that was to cover all of that for the little amount of money that they had, especially in view of today's dollars that are allocated for things that showed no results. I think he got his dollar's worth. He was always aware of budgets. He was so limited on payroll, it was a matter of if you got a five-dollar raise, it was a great big thing. I see the name of Herbert Henderson down here. He was Mr. Johnson's first contact with the newspapers. He was I think a former reporter and he wrote excellent news releases. Just a very efficient man. I don't know what happened to him except he left early in the program and then his brother [Charles Henderson] came to work for us in the education section of it. Another fine man that knew how to dictate just volumes of mail in a short period of time and get it out.

G: There was some indication that Herbert Henderson might have been one of the originators of the roadside park idea, that he was a strong advocate of that.

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O: Somehow I don't associate that, it could very well be, but the state parks program really turned out to be one of the nicer things, one of the more permanent things. People still enjoy those parks.

G: Do you recall anything about the genesis of that roadside park program, how it began?

O: No, I really do not. I know it had to do with the highway department and I can remember the early applications, that we waited around for forms for days. Then we had about two days to get these applications in to the Washington office for approval. When it was obvious we were running out of time, I remember Mr. Johnson dispatched me and Ray Roberts up to the highway department so our type would [not] be different. I had to type a paragraph on there on their typewriter, and as fast as I was getting them out, Ray was proofing them and the highway man was signing them, and we got them back and got them in the mail. You know, everything was split second.

When we'd have an allocation of money for these jobs, you'd just have to stick with it until every school was notified, just overnight. There were two hundred and fifty-four counties in the state, and a lot of our correspondence would be to the county school superintendents.

G: This program began, I guess, right as the fall term started to open.

O: I think that was the goal, to get the kids in school.

G: What was the initial problem? Was it notifying the kids or notifying the schools or setting up the administrative part of it, do you recall?

O: It was a matter of allocating the jobs to the different schools. I still don't know what the criteria was for this, but each county would have, based I suppose on population, a certain number of jobs to allocate and then there would be a certain number of high

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schools. Austin only had one high school in those days, so it was very easy to allocate to Austin High School certain numbers of jobs. The universities all had the same thing. They'd submit requests for X number of jobs and if you had the amount of money to allocate them with, that was fine. And getting these notices out really had to be done very quickly. I still see one of these clerks we had that was operating the mimeograph machine in the middle of one of these pushes. It was a hot evening and he was stripped to the waist and the machine conked out. There he was, just cranking them out. I thought the man was going to faint, I really did, he was working so hard. And if you could have seen Mr. Johnson in there, he was stripped to the waist, too, doing the very same thing, you know, spelling him. We all worked together when something like this was transpiring. No one stopped to think about loss of dignity, our state director without an undershirt on cranking out-- (Laughter) You remember things like that; you just don't forget them.

G: Did you have any problems with Washington, not approving programs or--?

O: I think that probably every state director would be a little bit wary of what was going on, you were striving to please so much and there was so much competition between the different state directors. You wanted to be known as top man. And if Mr. Johnson wasn't top, I don't think he was far from it. He just couldn't have been. When that phone rang and it was from somebody in a Washington office, you dropped things and he wanted to be on that phone of course, he wanted to be available to them. I think that mostly they liked him real well, they really did, they cooperated with him. He probably got things that other state directors didn't get.

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G: Well, I gather that there was a constant prodding, that he was always after them for more money and this and that. Do you recall his efforts there to get the budget increased and get more travel allowance, things like that?

O: Well, I'm sure that did transpire. He just kept saying, "You know, I've got to have more to do [it] with. We have a lot of territory down here; we have a lot of travel expense." Just the width of the state dictates that you have more travel allowance than someone like, say, New York.

G: Did he feel that there was a lot of red tape in Washington, I wonder, did he think they were too slow in approving?

O: Well, not really, I think they were anxious to do a good job, too, so they'd get the congressional approvals for money that they needed. I think they really did their best. I can't really recall that they were non-cooperative or anything like that, certainly not.

G: Did you get the feeling that he had had Washington experience from the way he operated?

O: I don't see how he could have operated as a state director without those contacts because he was so confident in the way he approached his work. Somebody that hadn't had that experience would have been hesitant, maybe a little bit holding those people in awe. He did not.

G: He'd worked on the Hill, of course. I just wonder if he ever used some of those contacts he made on the Hill, either with congressmen or senators or anything like that?

O: He would have been on a personal basis and it would have been where it would do the most good. I don't know.

G: You don't recall any contact then with Sam Rayburn or--?

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O: I would be sure that there was, just because of the fact that I knew who Mr. Rayburn was, I knew who Mr. [Richard] Kleberg was, you know, the different people that we would write letters to that he did have contacts [with] on the Hill.

G: Did he talk much about Aubrey Williams? Do you recall any opinion that he had of Aubrey Williams?

O: I think mostly his contacts were with people like Richard Brown, that Richard Brown would be the person that he would call and tell his troubles to. Mr. Williams, I think he had an assignment on WPA that would take a lot of his time, so that's why we would go to a deputy director.

G: How about visitors from the national office? Did you get many field workers here?

O: We had some. We had some that came in, and they were always accorded what we could give them. Mrs. Roosevelt was there.

G: Do you recall her visit?

O: Very vividly. Awful to say. I thought that her pictures never did her justice and I thought she was a pretty lady. Her pictures always came out horrible, showing her facial expression always distorted or something. But she was just as generous and just as kind as she could be. I loved having her in the office.

G: Was LBJ there when she was there?

O: Oh, yes.

G: Do you recall where she went or what she did?

O: Not exactly. I think that he took her on a brief statewide tour and that she was probably just visiting Austin in connection with all the other travels, probably with all the other programs that she was interested in.

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I'm trying to think of the name of another young man that came in. But he was real popular with Mr. Johnson. I can't recall the other name. He was a financial director nationally.

G: Was that Sam Gilstrap?

O: That's it.

G: They got along well, it seems from the correspondence.

How about Mary McLeod Bethune? Do you remember her visit?

O: Yes, and it was along the lines that they talked about at the meeting.. We had to be very, very careful. I understand she did her best, she really did. She was very cooperative; she didn't want to get anybody in trouble. But she was interested in what was going on and she wanted to see it.

G: Well, in this connection, did you have any insight into Lyndon Johnson's attitude toward blacks at this stage of his life?

O: I don't think it was a problem with him. People that grew up around black people, we don't just tolerate them; we like them. I know I do, and I think that's the way he was. You know, he knew that this little boy here needed a job just as much as the kid next to him, and we always didn't understand why he wasn't given the same opportunities, the same breaks in school. After all, he was a teacher and he'd taught down in a Mexican school before he even went to work for Congressman Kleberg, and I know he had deep feelings for those youngsters.

G: Did he ever allude to this experience? Was it something he would refer back to?

O: He would talk about it in some of his letters, that he knew that they had a rougher time, that they had to be twice as good to get half as much.

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- G: I guess in some of the other states the NYA was little more than an adjunct or a subsidiary of the WPA and yet LBJ seems to have established in Texas a good deal of independence, one, by having the office in Austin where the WPA office was in San Antonio. Did they ever try to get you to move down to San Antonio?
- O: I was never approached. I was always aware that our payroll changes and whatever were sent to San Antonio, that our checks came out of San Antonio, that if we wanted supplies or approvals on travel vouchers we had to go to San Antonio. I know that we always had a strong person stationed down there so that they couldn't run slipshod over us. This man had definite ideas of what he wanted and he didn't want anybody standing over him, trying to dictate to him. Now, when you're talking about fiscal things, I'm sure that he recognized that they had tight reins there, but on his activities, on his projects, on things that he wanted to do within what was allowed to him, that was his baby and he wasn't going to let them touch it. I wouldn't either; I wouldn't have let them touch it. Some of the other states that didn't have strong directors, they could fall under that spell and just let somebody else just dole out a few dimes here and there, but he wanted Texas to shine brightly and shine it did.
- G: Do you remember Harry Drought, the state WPA director?
- O: Now, that's a name--the name that I remember mostly of San Antonio is Colonel Crain [?]-Captain Crain?--he was the man that they had to talk to about money. Harry Drought would not have given us any problems once it was established we were going to be a separate outfit. There'd be an occasional letter back and forth. I don't remember any problems with Harry Drought.

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G: There is some indication that LBJ managed to more or less get some of the WPA people working on his side rather than Harry Drought's side.

O: At one point we took over a section of WPA's and brought them into Austin. This was after we moved into the Brown Building and had room for them where we would type up our own project payrolls, where we would process our own vouchers, but they still had the proof of it. But the people moved over in a bunch; there were about twenty or thirty that came over at one time.

G: Remember Val Keating with the WPA? Mrs. Keating?

O: She would probably be one that would help and advise on the home economics type of projects. They had residency projects where the girls would go and actually live and learn homemaking and whatever.

G: Glen Rose I guess was one of these, wasn't it? Do you remember that?

O: Glen Rose, that would be one of them. And Effie Brooks was our expert that dealt with setting up this type of program around the state.

G: Do you have some more notes there that you want to talk [about]?

O: I want to talk about the type of person that Mr. Johnson was. We hear today about--or we heard it during his lifetime--he would say, "Nobody but my mother expected me to be president." That's not true, because every one of us knew he was going to be president and we knew it then and we wondered why it wasn't then, because we thought he could do anything. There was just no doubt about where he was headed, and when he ran for Congress we knew he was on the way. We hated giving him up, we really did, but Mr. Kellam was there and he was a strong leader, too. We enjoyed working with Mr. Kellam so much. Today when our eastern newspaper friends make some snide remarks, I all but

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want to fight. I can't help it. It's just that the loyalties this man gave, he got back in return. You know, loyalty has always been a two-way street, and his friends just were never let down; if you were his friend, it was for life.

G: Did he ever help you personally? I know that you had to raise a family because your family was orphaned I guess in the middle of this, weren't they?

O: He met my mother one night when we first started working together, and after she met him she said, "I'm not going to worry anymore about your being down there late at night." And she always kept us under tight rein. Then she took ill and it was a six-month terminal thing, and being kept so busy I was kept really too busy to worry too much about it, but when it hit me it was a blow. And he did call me in this one time and he told me, "I don't want you to worry. As long as I have a job you've got one." And that seemed to settle me down. After that, I never did worry about [my job].

But, you know, to have the confidence to carry on, I didn't know better; I just knew that I had to do this. I know now about the hand the Lord has in it, I know how He leads certain people together. And there could not have been a state agency, without his having a hand in it, where people were so closely united. You're bound to have seen this in the meeting that we had. Forty-four years later, to come together in a group to honor a man, it just isn't done; it's unheard of. My only regret was at the two that were missing, Mr. Johnson and Mr. Kellam, were not there. Because it should have happened way back there when he first first got out of the presidency. I thought as I would read the papers that he might be a lonely person and would like to have something like this. Why didn't we do it then? Time slips away from us, doesn't it?

G: Did you ever met President [Cecil E.] Evans, Dr. Evans, from San Marcos?

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- O: Yes, he was a little sweetie. He would come in there and was a favorite of all the girls. Very kind and very gentle little man, and I understand that Mr. Johnson worked with him when he was going through school, maybe as a secretary or something like that. He held Dr. Evans in such high esteem, just anything. You know he could take an afternoon to talk to him if he had to. He really liked him.
- G: I gather Dr. Evans might have even had some input in the NYA program.. Did he make suggestions?
- O: Very possibly, very possibly he did, because he was a wise and intelligent man. He seemed to have pretty [much] influence over Mr. Johnson, too.
- G: Do you recall anything specifically that he might have contributed?
- O: No, I can just see him walking in and out of the office and knowing that he was always accorded a first priority. He could always go into the office and see [Mr. Johnson].
- G: From reading the correspondence from this period, I gather that LBJ was sick a lot. He had the flu and one thing and another.
- O: Well, I'm not surprised, you know, that he would be down, but he would come to work probably when he shouldn't. Everybody does this. No, he wasn't sick a lot, but he would be there when he shouldn't be. I know his mother was worried about it.
- G: Did you see much of her in those days?
- O: She would be in and out of the office, his dad, the sisters, they'd be there, you know, dropping in from time to time. Mrs. Johnson, his mother, really exercised a lot of influence over him, very much so.
- G: How was this evidenced? Can you recall or anything?

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O: Well, just the fact that she was there that much, that she wanted to get his ear, and the very fine letters that he wrote her. You know, I think a lot of young men would skip writing home. Every time he had a chance he wrote his mother, and he always put in the lines that would please her the most. He kept acknowledging over and over the debt he owed her.

G: But Rebekah Johnson was in the office a lot, say, during the week or at times like that?

O: No, she lived in Johnson City; she didn't get in. It would be two months, six months, before she would be in there, but she was in there enough that everybody knew who she was.

G: How about his wife, was she in a lot?

O: Not a lot, but always--that was the sweetest little gal, really. You never saw a couple more in love; they were really something. I think about one time when she was talking about she was going back to school to learn something about formal entertaining. Isn't it nice that she could think of this? Who had more opportunity to use that knowledge? I think she went, you know, I just didn't follow up on that. But she'd drop in and go to lunch with him, or she would drop in and beg him to come home. You know, when he was working there night after night she would think it was too much and rightly so.

G: Did he work on the weekends as well?

O: Saturdays? Yes, we worked all day long Saturday. I remember it was quite a thing when we started knocking off on Saturday at noon. I don't remember much Sunday work, there may have been some, but I don't really recall that.

G: Did you ever get together out at his house? Dr. [Robert] Montgomery's house on San Pedro?

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O: No, not on a big basis. I remember a picnic we had when he first opened up the program.

I think we were all out at his home one time, but that was always a limited thing. Some of the people like Edna Dato and Jess Ybarbo [?] and those were more personal friends, and I think they probably entertained back and forth.

G: Edna Dato, was she Jesse Kellam's secretary or--?

O: No, she worked directly with Mr. Johnson. I think mostly one summer she was around and then [worked] part time after she went back to school. And when she married Hollis Frazer that was the end of that. We only saw her when she would come back to town once in a while. I miss Edna; I always thought I'd get to see her again.

G: Did LBJ make a lot of field trips around to the different districts?

O: He made quite a few trips around the state, and then they held more or less regular statewide meetings at different places. Most of the time I think they would be in Austin is how we got to know the directors. A lot of them would work at the state headquarters for a while and then they would go out into the field. I got to know every one of them. They're two or three names that I can't put faces with; I don't understand that because I thought I'd never forget them. It happens.

G: Can you tell me anything about his policy on publicity, getting publicity for the NYA?

O: I think he thought that news releases were very important, that when he didn't have Herbert Henderson around or--I can't remember who took over that function. Marion Fore did a lot of it. But they did get out statewide releases; he kept the newspapers fully informed and we had a clipping service at the University [of Texas]. I don't know where that book would be. Surely there were just volumes of it. Do you have that in the [LBJ] Library?

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G: I think we have some of it.

O: Well, there was a university clipping service, and these news releases went out at regular intervals. It wasn't necessarily publicity for him, but for the program, everything was the program, getting the job done.

G: Do you think he saw the NYA as a launching pad into Texas politics?

O: No, not really, not really. I often wondered what would have happened if Congressman [James] Buchanan had not passed on at that particular time. I don't know whether we could have held him at NYA or not. He had lots and lots of ambition. What he saw for himself I don't know, but it was just one of those being at the right place at the right time when this Congressman expired.

G: How did you know he had a lot of ambition, other than--?

O: Well, when you read the letters that he wrote as he dictated things to you, as you listened to him talk, you knew that he was restless, that he wanted many things to happen all at once. What fields and what horizons he was going to take, that wasn't always clear. But once he announced for Congress, it was. There it was, becoming president; I told you he was going to be president.

G: He must have gotten some offers to go into private business.

O: Whatever he did, he was going to be a success at it. Whether he ever got these private offers or not, I don't know.

G: You don't recall any specifics?

O: No, I sure didn't.

G: Of course, I guess the NYA was not a bad political organization because it was statewide and they did have advisory groups.

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O: And he had those contacts, and as it worked out when this opening for a congressman came up, he was known probably as well as anybody. He had the disadvantage of being opposed to C. N. Avery who had worked with the deceased Congressman, so those people always have a machine and they always have the contacts. He had to work extremely hard, of course, to overcome that advantage.

G: Did you work in that campaign at all?

O: We were not allowed to. It says.

G: (Laughter) Did you work in that campaign at all?

O: You won't get me to say that. No, we absolutely were not allowed to. The fact that we wanted to had nothing to do with it, we were just plain--you know, there was a Hatch law, and we were just not allowed to.

G: Well, how did you find out that he was going to run? Do you remember where you heard the news?

O: The bustle, the hustle, bustle in his office one morning. People were running in and people were running out. And then I just plain overheard it from him. He says, "Well, running for Congress now is the only thing that I want to do and I'm going to do it."

G: Do you recall who was advising him during that period?

O: Dr. Evans would have been one. We had our opening campaign, the original speech in San Marcos.

G: Oh, you remember that well.

O: Oh, yes. Very well.

G: You must have been there.

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- O: Oh, I went, sure, you couldn't keep me back. Mr. Kellam had a carload of us and we went down there one evening and came back. It was a big thing.
- G: I think they had all the students out, didn't they?
- O: I don't know who was there. I know that he made an awful good speech, and of course we thought he could talk on any subject and make sense. We thought once he made up his mind this was what he wanted to do, we would help him.
- G: Well, how important was Senator Wirtz in advising him during this campaign? Did you ever get an insight on that?
- O: I think Senator Wirtz was a little bit older and had a lot of political savvy, and he had a lot of friends and a lot of contacts. His niece was my friend. I really don't know the role that the Senator played.
- G: There was some fear at first that Buchanan's widow was going to run, do you remember that?
- O: That would have come out in the newspaper. No, that one didn't stick. Just the fact that his right-hand man wound up--
- G: Well, there was a field of a number of candidates. I guess Houghton Brownlee and Sam Stone and Polk Shelton and--
- O: Oh, yes, oh, yes, those people.
- G: What was LBJ's strategy in that campaign?
- O: I think it was the support of President Roosevelt. I think at about that time he was coming up for a third term or something. No, it had to do with the Supreme Court. The Supreme Court was stymieing every thing that President Roosevelt wanted to do. That was another time when the third term was an issue. That was when I was in Washington.

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I remember that because my friends at the Navy Department didn't like the idea of a third-term president, there were quite a few Republicans around. I've had to face Republicans and the stigma of being a Democrat for a long, long time, and I still do. I still am a Democrat; I'll always be one.

G: Was it clear to you during the NYA period that LBJ was an admirer of President Roosevelt? Could you tell this?

O: Oh, yes, very much, very muchly so. And I think vice versa. I think that he had taken note of this upstart down in Texas, that he was a figure to watch. He was awfully young to go to Congress.

G: Yes.

O: You know, throughout all this you don't always hear a lot about Bill Deason, but that man's support was something that Mr. Johnson could not have lived without. If I had people like Bill Deason and Jesse Kellam working with me, I think I could be president. I really do.

G: How were they crucial, how were they helpful?

O: Just being there, always supporting him, always running a few feet ahead breaking ground for him, opening ways, opening doors. When you are doing a lot of this travel, someone has to stay behind and do the work, and I think these two were unique in the way that they could handle things and do things in his absence.

G: Were they advisers to him as well? Did they--?

O: Oh, yes. He used them as sounding boards. He'd think of something and they would come back, and I think both of them had very fine minds. I never saw anybody though

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that could collate facts the way Mr. Johnson did, how he could listen to a lot of things and then come up with an answer and it would be the right one.

G: Can you recall any particular decision-making process on one issue or--?

O: Oh, I just couldn't do that offhand I don't think. It's just the general impression that I had that has lingered over the years, and I've had a lot of people to compare him with. Some of them were admirals and generals and vice presidents of huge corporations.

G: Was it difficult to change his mind, to argue with him, or--?

O: Not many people wanted to. Yes, they would tell him, but they didn't expect him to change it. If he did, it would be his own idea. You did not put anything over on him; I don't think anyone wanted to.

O: Were you afraid of him at all?

G: No, that was the thing that always startled me. I was green as grass, I just didn't know better; I didn't know better. I hear of girls that talk about when they hear the buzzer, they fly to pieces. My hand would shake sometimes. I don't know whether it was because I was tired or whether I did hold this man in awe, I really don't know. But he's the only person that ever did that. Anybody else buzzed me, I went right in and did my job; I still do. The things I learned here have stood me in great stead. There isn't anybody's dictation that I fear; there isn't anybody's vocabulary that leaves me cold and I go into technical areas all the time. It was a real learning experience for somebody that had the basic skills but the lack of formal education. But I've read a lot, read a lot throughout the years. I can't remember, till my daughter was born, when I wasn't enrolled in a class of some kind. So I don't have the formal degrees, but I can hold my own. And I never liked a job as much as I did this one. You know, if some of my later ones had been my first

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one I probably wouldn't have stayed with it all these years. Maybe I'm still looking for this one.

G: It almost seems to have been more of a crusade. Do you think that this was because LBJ was so committed to the particular job or because that's just the way he was, the fact that he just pushed himself no matter what he was doing?

O: I think it had to be both. I think he was thoroughly committed to this job and I think that he was a driven man. We all have a mission in life, and I think he was being prepared at each step for the job that he eventually filled. I've noted over the years, and I've thought about this many times, that at each particular stage of our government we've always had the right man in there. They are there for a reason. Sometimes it's just for a comparative purpose. But he fulfilled the job of president with great distinction in my opinion, and I think there will be a lot of people that will change their minds as the years go by. They have to.

G: Anything else that we haven't covered in this?

O: Oh, there were just so many fine, fine people. I look at this list and I think of all the talent, all the talent, all the fine men, the integrity. You know, there isn't just one of them that I didn't admire immensely.

G: Any particular projects that you recall other than the roadside parks?

O: The one at La Villita was one that they spent a great amount of time on and apparently it was a thing of beauty. I've never been down there to see it; my daughter has and she was impressed. And I said, "You know, that was something that was started way back there, forty years ago, in NYA." She says, "Really?"

G: Of course, that was after he was already in Congress, wasn't it?

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O: I think it was.

G: Did he continue to take an active hand in the NYA after he was elected?

O: He came back down to visit us at regular intervals and he would use our office or somebody's office in close proximity, sometimes mine and sometimes Mr. Kellam's office, just wherever he could find phones. Phones had to be there. And he kept in touch with the people he was working with. Oh, I don't know, the visits were bound to have been helpful to Mr. Kellam just in a supportive way. And he liked us, he just liked to be among us, and we certainly were delighted to have him each time he showed up. He had been such a teacher, such a counselor, such a leader. I've never known a born leader like him, just born, born to lead, just wherever he would go, people followed him. And I can't help but feel that when I knew him was a happy period in his life. I think illness plagued him later and that the responsibilities of some of the jobs he had got him down. But I knew him during the happy period of his life and when he was so full of idealism. Oh, my, he could lose all of it and still have a lot left.

G: Is there anything else that we haven't covered that you can think of?

O: No, I just know I am delighted to do this. I think something should be said for him, and I'm delighted to do it.

G: Well, I certainly thank you.

End of Tape 1 of 1 and Interview I

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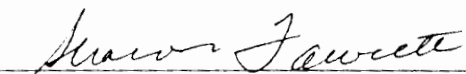
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