INTERVIEW I

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INTERVIEWEE: FRANK "POSH" OLTORF

INTERVIEWER: DAVID G. McCOMB

PLACE: Mr. Oltorf's home, Country Club Road, Marlin, Texas

Tape 1 of 1

M: First off, I'd like to know something about your background. Where were you born, and when, and where did you go to school?

O: I was born in Marlin, Texas, in 1923. I attended the public schools here and then later attended, before World War II, Rice Institute and the University of Texas. [I] went into the Army for four years, and when I came out of the Army, I went into the University of Texas again.

At the same time I was in the state legislature from Falls County.

M: All right. When did you go into the state legislature? What was the date on that, approximately?

O: Well, it was approximately 1944 or 1945, one of those years. I announced when I was in India and was elected immediately upon returning to the county, unopposed. (Laughter) It was right after the war when, out of one hundred fifty members in the House, I imagine some thirty five or forty of us were young veterans in our early twenties who were also attending the University of Texas.

M: I see. Well, was it somewhere along that line that you met Lyndon

Johnson?

O: Yes, I first met Lyndon Johnson when I was in the legislature.

For the purposes of this interview, I will refer to him as Lyndon, up until that time at which he was elected president. I called him that then, and after that of course I've always called him President Johnson.

But this group at the University, we were considered the liberals of the time. Looking back on it, I don't know just how liberal we were, but we did believe in better roads, and better schools, and better pay for the teachers. There was a lot of reaction in the state. And of course, they had had the [Homer] Rainey-[Beauford] Jester race and the trouble at the University of Texas.

While we were there fighting the liberal fight of the legislature we felt, Coke Stevenson announced for the Senate. And Lyndon Johnson let it be known that he was considering running against Coke Stevenson. Well, at the last minute, we heard word that he might not run. In fact, Jimmy Allred said that he was having a hard time lining up some of the support that he needed. He was in Austin at the Driskill Hotel. George Nokes, who was a member of the legislature at the time, and I went down to see him. We talked to him and told him how desperately Texas needed a progressive man in the United States Senate, and the problems that we saw that the state confronted, and how we hoped he would run. We talked to him, and he was

always kind enough to say that it had made a great influence on his decision that he had had a lot of discouragement from rather prominent backers, and the fact that these two young men from the legislature came and put the need to him so succinctly helped influence him in his decision to run. That's when I first met Lyndon Johnson.

Thereafter, when he organized his campaign and did announce, he asked me to head up this congressional district, and I went up to Waco and opened up a headquarters for this district which included several counties. It was Congressman Poage's district. I opened up headquarters in the Roosevelt Hotel in Waco for Lyndon Johnson for the Senate.

M: Let me ask a little bit about that. What did you do to organize this district?

O: Well, I got a manager in each county, tried to get somebody who was popular and who would work hard and be helpful. We set up a county campaign manager. And we funneled in literature and stuff from the state headquarters into the county chairmen.

M: Did this involve fund raising, too?

O: No, we didn't do any fund raising.

M: So your material and your financing came from the Johnson headquarters.

O: Well, yes. We tried to raise enough money to pay the rent ourselves at the hotel; tried to get some people [to contribute]. You know, in a rural community like this, if somebody can gave you fifty dollars, it was a big gift at that time on the campaign. So we

tried to relieve them of the burden as much as we could. But there wasn't any great money sent us. Everybody was a volunteer worker.

M: I see. But you were more or less self-sustaining?

O: Yes.

M: In the campaigning itself, what did you do?

O: As I said, I got the thing set up. I was the liaison between the state headquarters and the county chairmen.

At this particular point in the game, right after this was done, there was, as you recall, a three-man race between Johnson, Stevenson, and George Peddy. The Houston Post was supporting Peddy because he was a Houstonian, and I was a cousin of Governor Hobby's and just extremely devoted to him. And Johnson felt that one of the reporters on the paper, at least one of the editors, not the Hobbys, but one of the editors, was very much opposed to him and was just not giving him any play in the papers at all. And [Johnson] asked me did I think I could say something about getting him a little better exposure. I said, "Better than that, I'll see if I can't get a job covering the campaign for the Post."

So I went down and asked if I could cover his campaign. And the Governor thought about it and talked it over with the paper and said yes, I could. I had represented the Post while I was at Rice Institute as the Rice reporter for the Houston Post. So he knew I had some talent in reporting, and I was given that position. So I traveled then with Lyndon Johnson throughout the state, with the retinue of newspaper people who were covering him.

When I did, I turned over the job in Waco to Bill Boswell who was a lawyer up there. So I really didn't do too much, wasn't there too long.

M: Now isn't this the campaign where he used the helicopter?

O: Yes.

M: Do you remember that?

O; Oh, I remember it well. In fact, I remember I had an old secondhand Lincoln, and I would have to go around eighty miles an hour following the helicopter, to try to get ahead. I had at least a blowout every week! Don't know how many tires I had to get for that old car!

I remember going down to one town in South Texas, Victoria or whatnot. Anyway, he got out and he had to go somewhere, and I took a trip in the helicopter. I got up in it, and a lot of people thought I was Lyndon Johnson so I would just wave my hat at them from up in the air! Of course, I'm sure he let many people ride in the helicopter who had been following him around on the campaign.

M: Was the helicopter pretty effective?

O: It brought the crowds.

M: It did?

O: Yes. It would come over a town, and a lot of people would come out to see it. And it really was very effective.

But Coke Stevenson was just like the Coca-Cola. He was a state-known product. Everybody knew who he was. And the Dallas News had built up his image as "our cowboy governor," the John Knott cartoons. Here he was, this household word of conservatism,

and the old Texas goat rancher, and all this. And Johnson was just a congressman from Travis County, of course, well known in government circles because he had been so active in the New Deal, but really [had] not a great statewide following, though he had run for statewide office before.

I think this helicopter right after the war was a great contrast between the old staid goat rancher and the modern politician. So I think it was effective.

M: Was Johnson's problem then to make himself known?

O: That was one of the problems,and to gather a crowd so that people could hear what he was going to say. Coke Stevenson, as former governor of Texas, had an automatic following when he went into a town. People would come to hear the ex-Governor, who had just been ex-Governor. Congressman Johnson had a little different problem.

M: Yes.

O: And this did initially bring in the people to hear what he said. Of course, if they came there just out of curiosity to see the helicopter which was relatively new in Texas, they stayed to hear Lyndon Johnson speak. And he gave more or less the same speech in each town or sometimes a different one. And it went on and on, and it was very effective.

M: Do you remember what he talked about?

O: Oh, he talked about the main things that concerned us. He talked about the need for a more progressive state, and for the economy of

Texas, and that they really needed a doer. That always seemed to be his philosophy: that this was a hard job and they needed somebody who would work around the clock. Of course, that was his great forte. He was a person of unbounded energy, and Governor Stevenson was a person who was very slow moving. He used to call himself the great coffee cooler; he was going to never take a sip of coffee out of a cup until he had cooled it sufficiently not to get burned! (Laughter)

Johnson came over very well at these towns. He was very earthy in his talk.

M: What do you mean by that? I've heard that before, but what do you mean?

O: Well, he was very down [to earth]. He would talk, I remember one thing: he had been very moved when he was in the war by a young man who had shared quarters with him who had been killed on a mission. And he came back and, as he said, he had to wrap up his smelly old socks and send them home with his effects. It was more or less that he talked the language of the people of East Texas, Central Texas. He would always stay and shake hands with them when they'd come through or he'd take them through that line, look them in the eye and touch them on the shoulder.

M: Was he a good speaker?

O: Yes. These were not stump speeches; they were talks more than speeches. Now, at some of his rallies, of course, he'd have a big platform in the cities, and [he'd] make a speech. But when

he stopped at these rural communities, he would just talk and he wouldn't talk for over maybe ten minutes at each place. Just tell them who he was; he would identify himself: who he was and what he wanted to do. That was about the extent of that.

M: Was he pretty hard-working?

O: I believe he's the hardest working man I ever saw. He was up before daylight. He'd gather everyone in his room. He even worked in the bathtub! You'd be in a little hotel in this little town, and you'd get a summons to come into the bathroom to talk to the Congressman. You'd go in and he'd be in the tub, and he would talk to you and two or three secretaries would come in and take letters. He never stopped. At night, the conversation would go on during supper and right up to bedtime.

I would say that the press that followed him from all the papers, even the papers who were opposed to him, liked him and admired him, and were very impressed. And this was such a contrast to Governor Stevenson, who had an old veteran newsman from the Capitol--his name slips me right now; I know it just as well as I know my own--who was just about as played out through age and service, just belonged to an entirely different generation. The two of them would drive around in an old car and just see one or two people and never speak. Coke did have a very bright young man with him named Booth Mooney who later became associated with Johnson. I'm sure Booth wrote him a lot of good material, but to get him to use it would be an entirely different thing. It just wasn't his style. He thought he

had it sewed up all the time.

M: Did Lady Bird campaign?

O: Yes, she did. I never followed her, but I knew, as a matter of fact, that she was having receptions different places.

M: She went one direction, and he went another.

O: They didn't go together in this period that I followed them. During the second primary, I came back and helped work for him in this area. I just did this during the first primary.

M: I see. Then you traveled around with him and turned your stories in to the Post. Were they well received at the Post?

O: I think so. I never heard them criticized.

M: I mean, were they published?

O: Oh, yes! I was very factual. I just said what he said. I don't know that the man that was going to do it--in fact, no one ever started doing it--anybody, I'm sure, would have done a fair job, a good job, because I think anybody that is in the newspaper business tries to. But I just wrote it as I saw it, mainly the response of the crowds. They were short stories.

M: Okay. Then in the second primary, that's a pretty tough race.

O: Yes.

M: So you worked in this area, and you did much the same sort of thing, that is, sent out material and--

O: Well, I never went back to Waco to replace Boswell, because he was doing a good job. I just did what I could for him in general.

M: Did this include making speeches or anything?

O: Oh, I made a few speeches on his behalf, yes.

M: And did this section go for Johnson?

O: I don't recall. I have an idea that it did. I think it did. But it was close.

M: Yes, the whole election was close.

O: Yes, very close.

M: Did Johnson ever say anything to you about that, the closeness of the election?

O: No. I remember, after the election--this I think was very interesting--I had a call from the Johnson headquarters, and I talked to him. This was after the second election. I think that they felt that if there were any shenanigans going on, it was going on on the Stevenson camp, and they wanted to alert their people to watch these ballot boxes and make sure that the count was right. It was no suggestion ever that we try to pick up an extra vote. The suggestion was that we make sure that the other people didn't do it.

M: Did you do that?

O: Yes.

M: What did you do? Go out and actually watch?

O: No, I just talked. We had a very different thing here. This county, all the election judges and whatnot, is not an organized county. I knew them all as being very honorable people and there was no question of their allowing anything that was improper. I did talk to the county chairman and said, "I know you're going to do a fair job. Just make sure that nobody else on the other side doesn't

come in and try to do anything." And really, I didn't anticipate that the other wide would in this county, because Governor Stevenson's supporters here were all honorable men.

M: Yes. There was some problem in that election with a county chairman failing to report right away. Was that any problem?

O: No, we reported the same night. Yes.

M: There was no delay?

O: No change in our vote.

M: Then after 1948, what contact did you have with Johnson? Did you remain in the state House [of Representatives]?

O: I was in the House during his campaign, of course, but we were not in session.

M: Yes.

O: This was during the summer when we were not in session.

I remember two other things about the campaign that I might add that I think will introduce a couple of people who were very important in his life.

One is Senator Tom Connally. This was Senator Connally's home, Marlin. And of course, he was chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee, a high ranking member of the Finance Committee, the senior senator from Texas, and a very powerful man in the nation. He was from Marlin and a great friend of mine. I was just devoted to him, and we were very close friends. And the other, of course, was Will Hobby, who, as I said, was my cousin and had the Houston Post.

During the campaign, two things: one, Tom Connally had come to Marlin for the dedication of the veterans hospital here he had been instrumental in getting for Marlin, and his cousin, Dr. Frank Connally, who was a prominent physician in Waco, died. So Governor Stevenson came to the funeral in Waco.

We were traveling. I was his reporter traveling with Johnson. And early that morning, just at sunup--it might have still been dark--I was summoned to his hotel room. He was in the bathtub, and, oh, he was upset. He had read in some paper where it had said that Coke Stevenson was among the mourners at Dr. Frank Connally's funeral in Waco and had rubbed arms with Senator Tom Connally.

So he said, "Now, Posh, this leaves the impression that Senator Connally is for Coke Stevenson, and I know he's really not. This is a terrible situation." And said, "I'd like for you to get him to say something about it. You could if you could talk to him. I know how close you are to him." And I said, "Well, I'm going down to the dedication of the veterans hospital." Because I had tried to help to get it, too, only had a minor part, compared to the Senator, and being in the legislature, I was going to do it. And I said, "I'll mention it to him." Of course, I thought the request was a little ridiculous, but he was under tension, and he wanted so to win that thing. But anyway, I came down.

Senator Connally, by the way, was one of the great mimics of all time. He really could have been a great matinee idol during the Victorian age had he gone on the stage, because when he wanted

to express the importance of something, he'd swell up and make his body expand, and then he could shrink if he was belittling something. And he had this great Irish wit, and of course, always his cigar in his mouth.

I came. And after the thing, I told him, I said, "Senator, Lyndon was a little disturbed about this situation, reading in the paper about Coke Stevenson being at Frank Connally's funeral. And he knows you're not for Coke Stevenson. But he thinks you ought to say something to disassociate yourself from it, as a result of this." The Senator puffed on his cigar, and he said, "Now you go back and tell Lyndon that he must be getting mighty thin-skinned. He knows politicians just flock to funerals." (Laughter) I think he put it in its proper perspective, and of course, nothing was said.

The other time that I think I was helpful: we were coming into Houston, and this was still in the first primary. And I was still writing. So the Post, though, it was, you know, not only for Peddy, but the managing editor was the one that was so [involved]. He was really putting Peddy on the front page all the time. The Stevenson articles and Johnson articles were not as prominently displayed. At least, that was, I'm sure, Johnson's feeling and Stevenson's feeling. Now, whether it was true or not--but it was a Peddy paper. But he called me in and he said, "Now, I want you to talk to Governor Hobby." And he said, "My father loved him so much. He was in the legislature when Hobby was governor. He supported his program and was very fond of that." And [he] said,

"Now, I'm running for this thing, and everything is Peddy on the front page, George Peddy. I think I should get better coverage. Say something for me."

So I went out that evening, and I took it upon myself, knowing the tension the man was under and what I thought he really felt, to change his message a little bit. And I said, "Governor, Lyndon sent his love to you and Oveta. He said that he'd always remember the deep affection that his father had for you when he was in the legislature and you were governor. He understands that Peddy's a Houstonian and he's an old friend, and that the Post would have to be for him during this first primary, but he hopes if he and Stevenson are in the second race that it will help him."

And the Governor said, "Well, that's mighty nice of Lyndon. Why don't you bring him by for breakfast in the morning?"

Well, the next morning at seven o'clock, I took Lyndon out, and we had breakfast with Governor and Mrs. Hobby. And after he left, the Governor told me "I certainly enjoyed that visit." And said, "He talks like he knows what he's up to and wants to do. We can sure give a lot of thought to supporting him in the second race, if Peddy's not in it."

Now later, other friends of Lyndon's talked to the Hobbys, after the second race; and I'm sure all of them helped them make up their minds. But I always felt, and was later told by the Governor, that that visit was the very key thing at the time, because it showed that he understood about the first race and wanted to get in the

second. The Houston Post supported him with great enthusiasm in the runoff with Stevenson, where very few of the big dailies did. And I always felt that that visit was important.

Johnson handled himself very well. He talked about foreign policy, which he knew interested Mrs. Hobby, and there again, he was the well-versed man in foreign affairs. That's the first time I'd heard him talk about it, because he was mostly talking about domestic issues when he was out on the hustings in East Texas.

So those were just two stories that I thought might be interesting and had some bearing perhaps.

M: Yes. Then after 1948, what kind of contact did you have with him?

O: Well, the next contact I had with him--

M: To clear up an earlier point: did you stay in the legislature?

O: I was in the legislature.

M: At that point.

O: At this point. And I still am when I'm telling you about my legislative contact with him. I was in the legislature at this time. I think this was during the Korean War, but I'm not positive that this was the exact moment of it. But Johnson was a young freshman senator, a junior senator.

Let me back up here one minute and tell you about another visit which I think has some interest from a Texas history viewpoint. I'd give anything in the world if--I hope it doesn't lose in its telling the gestures of Tom Connally again, because this involved the senior senator and the then-to-be junior senator. Johnson had not been

seated, and Senator Connally was back in Marlin, staying at the Falls Hotel. I had a phone call from Lyndon, and he told me that he wanted me to set up an appointment with Senator Connally to talk about some very important matters.

I told him I would, and I called Senator Connally and Senator Connally said, "Well, he doesn't need an appointment. I'm going to be here in Marlin, nothing going on. I'll be glad to see him anytime he gets here."

So I reported the message, and Lyndon and John Connally flew in to Waco. I went up to meet them at Waco, drove them down here to Marlin , and we went up to Senator Connally's suite at the Falls Hotel. John Connally and I sat over on a couch, and Senator Connally and Lyndon in chairs. Lyndon told him that he had heard that Coke Stevenson had been to Washington, and had talked to Senator Taft and some other leading Republicans, and there was going to be an effort to keep him from taking his seat in the Senate. He hoped that Senator Connally would do all he could to stop that.

And Senator Connally said, "Well, now, Lyndon, that's just nothing to worry about at all. The Democrats have control of the Senate. As long as we've got control of the Senate, you're going to be seated. Stevenson's just wasting his time going up there talking to Taft about a matter like that. Don't worry. We'll all do everything we can."

Then Johnson said, "Now, the other thing I want to talk to you about is my committee appointments." He said, "Of course, I

would like to be on the Finance Committee."

Connally then pulled his glasses over his nose. He always kept them down on the bottom of his nose, and he had that big cigar. And he said, "Now, wait a minute, Lyndon, wait a minute!" He pulled out a book of committees, and he said, "Now let's see. Here's the Agricultural Committee. You could get on that. You could always be hollering about what you're going to do for the farmers." Said, "You're for the farmers, ain't you, Lyndon?" He said, "Yes, sir." Said, "Well, I thought I heard you say something about it during the campaign." And his eyes were just twinkling, Connally's were.

And then he said, "Oh, yes, the Armed Services Committee. Get on it, and you can always holler about what you're going to do for A&M." And said, "And then"--and he threw his hands out in the air--"after you have been in the Senate for some time, and they've stopped all this talk about this close election, then you can get on the Atomic Energy Commission, or the Foreign Relations Committee, and render a real public service."

Well, it was so comic, had put it on so, that John Connally and I both got tickled. We wanted to laugh,but we couldn't. But I think that Johnson got the message very quickly. And he always told me later, which I'll go into when we get to Connally's funeral, how much he'd appreciated all the courtesies Senator Connally had shown him. But that was the time I saw him before.

Then you asked about the next time that I had any close contact with him.

M: You didn't have anything to do with those legal maneuverings after the election?

O: Oh, no, I'm not a lawyer. I had nothing to do with it; knew nothing about it.

I was in the legislature; we were back in session. And this Mexican solder had either been killed in Korea or had died in the service overseas. His name was Longoria.

M: You know how to spell that?

O: Yes, L-O-N-G-O-R-I-A. I think this is interesting, because it was Lyndon Johnson's first real endeavor in the field of civil rights, you might say. This soldier had been killed, and they brought his body back to Three Rivers where he was from, a little town in South Texas. And the undertaker refused to bury him in the cemetery where the white people were buried; it was a segregated cemetery. There his body was, and the widow had desperately contacted the brand new junior senator from Texas, and Johnson had gotten him buried in Arlington Cemetery. So it of course was a wonderful thing for him to do. But it made some of those bigots down there so mad, the publicity that he got in all the papers about this soldier having been buried in Arlington, that they decided that they would have their representative, a man named Gray, call for a legislative investigation of the thing.

The speaker of the House was Durwood Manford at the time, he was more or less a Stevenson man. Johnson felt that this was really going to be an attempt to discredit him, it was going to be a stacked

thing. And Manford did appoint a committee, four of whom were Stevenson people and violently anti-Johnson people, and, as a concession to the other side, he put me on the committee as a one-man minority.

So we went down to Three Rivers and held this investigation. Johnson's attitude was that he wanted neither glory nor anything else out of it. He'd done exactly what he should have done; he would do it again and again; neither did he want to be a whipping boy and have it misrepresented. He sent me the correspondence from Mrs. Longoria, asking him to do this, and thanking him, and all this.

We went down, and I guess it was one of the most remarkable experiences in my life. This could only happen in Texas at that time; it couldn't now. They questioned this widow, and people, and everybody they could, all the Mexicans they could. And they tried to make it appear that the only reason they wouldn't bury him in the cemetery was that his widow had been having friends while he was overseas, and they were afraid of some sort of fight between the family at the graveyard. This was so ridiculous. They had no testimony to prove it, nothing.

Finally they had the young undertaker on the stand. He was a decent person; he'd been caught in this; he'd done it. And I asked him, I said, "Now, tell me just why did you refuse to dig the grave there and bury him?" And he said, "Well, some of the citizens talked to me, and they said the white people might object." Well,

there were just the exact words. I said, "This is what caused you not to do this?" And he said, "Why, yes." So, I mean, it was there, so spelled out that it should have ended.

But they came back, this committee from the legislature, these four members wrote a majority report that there was not discrimination involved in the thing. And it was just unbelievable that in view of all the testimony, it was so obvious, like night and day, plus the undertaker's remark that the white people might object. You couldn't believe they could do this. They might defend segregation, but at least they'd have to say it was involved.

So I wrote a minority report. I went around the House and started working on this minority report about it. And they realized that they could not get the majority report adapted. So we just filed both reports in the thing, but did not vote on either. And then after this was done, one of the members who had signed the majority report about a week later asked that his name be removed from it.

But all during this thing--all the correspondence, I'm going to give these papers to the Lyndon Johnson Library; I still have them--there was no doubt in my mind of Lyndon Johnson's real feeling about this thing: that this man had been discriminated against and that there wasn't any political consideration in what he had done. He was outraged.

M: Did that end the investigation; after they filed the reports, nothing more was done?

O: Oh, yes. They knew that I had the votes to keep theirs from being adopted.

M: They didn't want it to come to that point?

O: No. Well, they're bound to have been ashamed of it. (Laughter)

M: Yes. Was Johnson relieved at the end of this? Did he ever say anything about it?

O: Yes, he said he'd read my report, and he said how fair it was. I wrote just a half a paragraph, just quoting evidence. But it was a clear-cut thing. But it shows you that even on a thing like that, so bitter were some of these rock-ribbed conservatives that they would try to discredit him for doing a decent thing.

M: That incident of the Mexican-American soldier is supposedly one of keys to his strength with the Mexican-American community and the votes and things like that. Suppose there's any truth to that?

O: I just don't know. I'm sure they're bound to have appreciated it. Of course, I think he had a lot of votes in the Mexican community before this incident occurred. He had already been elected senator the first time. But I'm sure that they didn't forget that, because he not only did it, but then he stuck by his guns for why he did it.

M: Yes.

O: He saw it always as a matter of segregation and spelled it out as such; did something about it, by having the soldier buried at Arlington.

M: When was your next contact then with Lyndon Johnson?

O: Well, shortly after, I got out of the legislative to manage the campaign of Ben Ramsey for lieutenant governor, statewide, who is

an old friend of mind of whom I was very fond. I managed Ben's campaign, and Ben was elected lieutenant governor.

At this time, I was still thinking of finishing law school. I never finished law school. And Herman Brown , who was a contractor and president of Brown and Root, was a great friend of mine. I'd known him in the legislature. I was always on opposite sides. I was totally against everything he was for, but we were the closest of friends. He was a man who, if he thought you were honest and had integrity and imagination, the fact that you saw things differently from him didn't make a bit of difference. Anyway, I decided really that I didn't want to be a lawyer. My father had been, and my great-grandfather, and I was sort of expected to, but I decided I didn't [want to].

The Browns had a lot of property that they'd taken in through the years on payment notes, and I was going to take over the development of this property. It was scattered all throughout Texas. So I started. They gave me this job, developing real estate. The Korean War was getting pretty hot then, and they had a hard time getting their control materials, I mean the steel, the copper. And they had the control materials plan there in Washington. Herman called me in one day and asked me if I would go up to Washington; he said they had to send up the vice president about every three weeks to take an application over to the control materials; said would I just go up there and stay awhile, so that they could save this constant thing in taking the things over.

I said yes. I never will forget, I said, "How long do you think I'm going to be there, because I've got to know whether to store my car, or sell my car, or what." He said, "Oh, you'll probably be there not over six months." I think I was there four or five years. (Laughter)

But I went there. And of course, one thing led to another, and I finally not only did that, but we were building some tanks for the government, and tried to get the tools allocated through the Pentagon, and I'd do that. Then I'd call on the foreign embassies about overseas work and keep up with the Export-Import Bank. So I lived there in Washington at the Hay-Adams House for about four years. And I saw then-Senator Lyndon Johnson socially a great deal.

I will say this, which is an interesting thing, [because] everyone's always talked about the great closeness to the Browns. And it was certainly there. They were just devoted friends; in fact, Lyndon Johnson and George Brown and Herman Brown were like brothers.* But I was told by George Brown, when I went to Washington, "Never go on the Hill for any help. When you're dealing with government agencies or anything else, we find that these people resent that."

M: That's interesting.

O: And, "We can stand on our own two feet, and that is not what you're to do." So I never did any lobbying on any legislation, or tried to get business by using any of the Texas delegation.

M: You mean you didn't go to, say, Lyndon Johnson and say, "We're trying to get this contract. Will you help me?"

* Lyndon said this. I never heard the Browns say so. I think LBJ was closer to George than Herman.

O: Never. Never. I was positively told not to, or not to any of them. Because the Browns worked on the theory that this would hurt you [in getting] the contract, that the civil servant that was there, or the old admiral, or whoever, whatever branch you were dealing with, would resent interference from the Hill. In fact, sometimes there'd be some of the people who would hear about something and want to help you; not Johnson, but others. You'd have to tell them please not to do anything, because it would muddy the water, you felt it would.

M: That's interesting.

O: But still, I saw a great deal of the Johnsons and other members of the Texas delegation. There were several there that I'd served in the legislature with, like Jim Wright and Jack Brooks. So while I kept a great social contact with these people, because they'd been my friends before coming to Washington, I had very little business [with them].

M: Well, from your point of view then, from the work you did, the Browns got their government contracts strictly on their own merit.

O: They certainly did during that period. Practically everything was bid on. You had to have a low bid or negotiate it. The only time I would ever go to any member of Congress for help would be sometime if they had to have a man on a job they already had in Spain in three days, I'd go to Albert Thomas--of course, he was their congressman from Houston--and ask Albert could he help us speed up a passport. And that was about the extent of that. And when the Browns would come to Washington, of course, they would see Lyndon socially, but the old thing that he tried to get jobs for Brown and Root during the

period that I was there was a myth.

M: Yes. There's also the story that Brown and Root, the Browns in particular, contributed heavily to Johnson's campaigns.

O: I've heard that, but I have no knowledge of their doing it or their not doing it.

M: Yes.

O: They certainly never did through me. In fact, I never contributed a penny to his campaigns. I would have, because I admired him and thought he was great. I just didn't have that sort of money. Now, what the Browns did, I have no idea.

M: Well, the Browns had a ranch or a farm.

O: At Middleburg, Virginia.

M: Now, did the Senator go down there?

O: Occasionally. I bought the place down there for the Browns.

M: Oh, you did?

O: At Middleburg. George Brown, at the time had been on several commissions; one, under President Truman, the [William S.] Paley Committee, I believe it was called, on the needs of this nation for raw materials for the next twenty or thirty years. And then later, Eisenhower put him on a committee, too. I remember on that committee, Walter Reuther and Ernie [Earnest Robert] Breech, the head of Ford,[were] people on it. I just forget exactly what it was right now; a similar thing as the one that Truman had had him on; might have really been an extension of the two, of the same committee, I don't know.

But George Brown had to be in Washington a great deal. And he

told me, he said, "You know, I'd like to have a place that's not over an hour from here. I'm here so much." He always stayed at the Carlton Hotel. He said, "A place where I can have some pleasure and go when I'm here. And also, you could do some entertaining there with your business contacts." I, by the way, was not only calling on foreign governments, sometimes I'd go to New York to call on an industrial customer, just trying to get us business wherever we could get it.

So, oh, this had been said casually for about--well, a year and a half had passed without it ever being mentioned. I, in the meantime, had been looking around, and I saw this place and it was about one-third of what places not nearly as grand were selling for. I called George, and I said, "George, I have found the most beautiful place. It's the greatest buy; it has to be bought right now." And he said, "Well, I'm not going to be able to get up there." And I said, "Well, if you don't buy it, I'll buy it, because I can borrow the money. And then I'll sell it to somebody at a profit." He says, "Oh, I'll buy it!" (Laughter) So we got it, and it is a beautiful place.

The Johnsons visited out there; they'd come out for supper or dinner; and a great many, all my Texas friends. The Browns were awfully nice. They would let me invite my personal friends out, because it was just an hour's drive. They had a dairy on it, and I was in charge of seeing to it that the farm tried to pay for itself. I don't think it ever did. So, yes, they would come out. In fact, that's where he had his heart attack.

M: Right.. Were you there at the time?

O: I was.

M; Well, tell me about that, then.

O: Well, George and Alice Brown had come up. They were going to spend the weekend at Huntland, George, and Alice, and their daughter Isabel.

M: They called it Huntland?

O: Yes. That's the name of the place. And Isabel, who had worked for the Democratic Policy Committee in Washington, very smart girl, and really an extremely able and brilliant girl. The four of us went out.

George had asked Lyndon if he wouldn't like to come out for lunch the following day, which I think was a Saturday. I'm not sure, but it was the following day. And he said, yes, he had some matters in the Senate that were very important, but when he got through, he'd drive on out. He'd get there either for lunch or later, but not to wait on lunch. So we had had our lunch. Afterward George Brown decided he would take a nap, and Alice and I were going to go to a neighbor's house who had a swimming pool and swim. And probably Isabel, I don't recall.

But anyway, just as we were leaving, the limousine drove up with the Majority Leader Johnson, at the time, of course. And he came to the door, and we said that George was taking a nap and would he like to come swimming with us. And he said, no, that he felt badly, and that he'd had to stop on the way down; he had

terrible indigestion. Alice said, "Well, I'm going to wake George up." And he said, "Oh, no, don't do that. I think I'll go out and lie down on the couch." Well, Alice did, I think , get George up, but we went on swimming. When we came back, George met us at the door; he had a rather worried look on his face. He said, "Lyndon is sick. He's downstairs on the couch. I'm trying to make him lie down and rest, but he says he's got these pains, and I'm worried about him." He said, "Do you know a doctor around here, Posh?"--talking to me. He said, "It might be his heart."

I had a friend there who had a heart attack. So I ran down this friend; he was out at a party; it was dark by then. And I got hold of him and asked him who his doctor was, and he told me this young Dr. Gibson, and how to get in touch with him. So I called Dr. Gibson to come over to Huntland, that Senator Johnson was feeling very bad. So he came.

In the meantime, Senator Clinton Anderson had dropped by. Evidently, Lyndon had told him that he was going to be there, and Anderson was passing through coming from someplace else and wanted to talk to him very briefly about something. So he just stopped by. Well, when I got there--it seemed that Senator Anderson had had a heart attack at some time--he was telling him this symptom there and this and that, and actually, it was just making him more frantic and doing a lot more harm than good, I felt.

And I think George Brown had given him a digitalis which we later found out could have killed him. [He had it] because George

had a little heart murmur.

But anyway, Dr. Gibson sized it up. He told him, "Now, you have every symptom of a heart attack, and a bad one. I don't know; we could be wrong. It might not be. But my advice is to treat it as a heart attack. We do not have the oxygen and the things that are needed here. You should get on in to the hospital. Now, we'll call and make arrangements to take you to the hospital"--I think it was Walter Reed--"and rather than go to bed here, you better get in there, if you feel like you can do it." Johnson said, yes, he felt that he should.

So they got the ambulance, which was not only an ambulance but what they used for a hearse in Middleburg; the undertaker for the driver. They came out, and I asked him, I said, "Lyndon, would you like for me to ride in with you?" He said, "Well, I hate for you to have to do that, but I appreciate it." I said, "Well, I want to." So we got in the ambulance, and the undertaker was driving, and the doctor on the front seat, and Lyndon Johnson was stretched out on the back. I had a little chair that I put up there by him, so that I was sitting right over him, and we started in to the hospital. It was a very hectic ride. This had been a very serious thing, and it hit him again.

M: It hurt? In the hearse?

O: About halfway through. Yes, it hurt him desperately. It would come and go. And it hit him, and finally, he asked the doctor, "Could you give me something for this terrible pain?"

The doctor said, "Well, Senator, yes, I've got something in my bag that can relieve this pain, but it will mean stopping and doing it. I can't do it while we're going without getting this thing out. And I think getting you to the hospital where that oxygen tent is is the most important thing. Now, if you can't stand this pain, we'll stop; but if you can, let's just keep going as fast as we can." And Johnson said, "Well, let's keep going."

M: Was there a siren going? Or were you traveling at traffic speed?

O: No, I don't recall a siren ever being on, all the way. Might have been one; I think there was one on when we got into Washington. But I'm not clear. I know we didn't go all the way. At least, I don't recall that it was on all the way. It could have been.

M: But you were traveling at a high speed?

O: Yes, as fast as we could go to get in there.

It was an amazing conversation I had with him. I sat back there, and he was extremely courageous and brave. I always thought, you know, that if he had a toe ache, he'd complain about it, and tell you about how bad his toe hurt and how bad it was and expect a great deal of sympathy. He was just the opposite with this serious thing. He not only was extremely brave, but all the time with the pain coming and going, he was very interested.

I think he definitely felt there was a possibility that he'd die before he got there. Now there are a couple of reasons behind that. Number one, he reached up to me during the trip, and he said, "Posh, if something happens, I want to tell you where I think my will

is. I think it's in the bottom drawer of the desk at the radio station. I made it when I went off in World War II and I haven't seen it in a long time, but I made it when I went off to the war; I think it's there." But said, "If it's not, I just want to tell you what I want. I want Lady Bird to have everything I have." And he gave a great tribute to her; he said, "She's been a wonderful, wonderful wife, and she's done so much for me. She just deserves everything that I have. That's what was in my will. And if it's not found, that's what it says, wherever it is." And I said, "All right."

Then I had wanted very much to buy a ranch back here in Texas, a small ranch, which I now, by the way, own, got it some ten years later. A man named Dick Hooper owned it; Lyndon knew that I wanted this ranch, because someday I wanted to retire and put up a little place on it. It's at the back of this present-day ranch now. And he asked me during all this, "Did Dick Hooper ever sell you that ranch?" And I said, "No." And he said, "Well, I wish he'd do it, because I know how badly you want it and how you love the land." He said, "I wonder why he won't sell it." I said, "I just don't know, but I'm not going to give up on it." He said, "Well, I certainly hope you will get it." But it was concern about something he knew I wanted, and that he showed through all of this suffering.

The doctor would occasionally look back. And there was one rather--as I say, he's an earthy man, and I always later said, "You know, you hear about the last words of great men like Washington

and Jefferson, and others," but I'd say, "If you'd have conked out on the ambulance, I'd have had to do something about those last words." Because one of the few things, he's a great smoker. I think history ought to know this: he asked the doctor, "Doctor, let me ask you something. Will I ever be able to smoke again if this is a heart attack?" And Dr. Gibson said, "Well, Senator, frankly, no." And he gave a great sigh and said, "I'd rather have my pecker cut off." (Laughter) And I thought, I said, "This is either the greatest tribute to nicotine or the most cavalier dismissal of a pecker that I've ever heard in my life!"

Later, I told Booth Mooney and some people, some others, about it, and in Booth Mooney's book, he changed it to, "I'd rather have my seniority cut off." But that's not what he said. But I think it's amazing that, knowing of his condition, he could say that.

So, anyway, we got to the hospital. We walked into the hospital, and there were Bird and Walter Jenkins.

M: She'd been notified then?

O: Yes, they'd both gotten to the hospital. And they took him into the room and put him under the oxygen tent. I was exhausted, and I said, "Bird, is there anything I can do?" And she said, no, that Walter was there with her and that they could do anything that needed to be done. So I left and went back to the hearse-ambulance. And I understood, later, that he had had a second attack right after he got there, just after being put under the tent. So, I mean,

every minute was just so important.

Later, of course, he was in the hospital, and I had a call one day about two weeks later; it was from Bird. She said, "Posh, Lyndon can have his first visitors today." And said, "He's had to see Dick Russell about something. But he wants to see these three Texas friends that are here in Washington: you, and Bill Kittrell, and John Connally." She said, "He can't see you but about a minute apiece, but come out to the hospital."

So we went out to the hospital. I went out, and John was there, and Bill was there, and we were sitting around. When I got ready to go in, she said, "Say something to amuse him. You can always amuse him and make him laugh." I went in. And he said, with great sentiment, that he would never forget my coming in on the ambulance with him. So, to lighten it up, I told him, which is true, "Well, you think that the trip in was bad. You should have been with me on the trip back!"

And this has later become a favorite story of George Brown's, which is an interesting thing. When I got out of the hospital,I was so shaken by this thing, because I thought he was going to die all the way in. The young doctor looked at me, and he said, "Mr. Oltorf, I think you need a drink." I said, "I certainly do." So the undertaker pulled the hearse up in front of a bar there at Washington, and he and the doctor and I went in, and we had about three Scotch and waters apiece. Then we got back to the hearse; we were all three sitting up in front. Now the undertaker had evidently never had

anything to drink before and we'd also all three carried a bottle of beer to drink on the way back to Middleburg. Well, we were going; and the first thing I noticed that something was wrong, the undertaker reached over, nudged the doctor in the ribs, and said, "Say, Doc, I had an interesting experience last week. I moved an old cemetery down there near Upperville. Some of them have been buried twenty, thirty years ago. One fellow had nothing but his chin left; another, his elbow." Well, the doctor and I would try to change the conversation. I'd say, "What sort of crops are you going to make?" Or, "What's going to go on down there about this?" Anything to get off this macabre subject. Well, the undertaker wouldn't be stopped, and he said, "Now, let me tell you another thing, Doc. You know, you docs say that hair don't grow after you're dead, but that's wrong." He said, "I uncovered one little kid, and the old auntie said that when she died, she just had little short hair." He said, "She had one curl I could roll around my finger three times." Well, the doctor and I took another swallow of the beer. By the time the hearse hit Middleburg, it was just weaving down the street.

So I told Lyndon, "So you think we had a bad trip in. I had a perfectly awful time going back." What a trip it was, an amazing trip back!

But he stayed on, and of course I kept in contact with him. I'd drop over to his house when he was recuperating to see him, not often, but went out several times and usually in the morning, and

would never stay over ten minutes. [I'd] just ask him how he was. And he had on, I think it looked more like a nightshirt than anything to me up there in his bedroom. Homer Thornberry would come over, and Homer did more for him than anyone, in my opinion. Homer would play dominoes with him. And Homer would come in the morning; Homer would come in the afternoon;Homer just devoted his life to keeping the President amused playing dominoes.

M: Was Johnson pretty restless in that recovery period?

O: Yes, he was restless. He's always restless unless he's working, or doing something. And to be confined there--of course, he operated on the phone, and he did much more than he was supposed to do. His doctors would get out of patience with him. Dr. Lawn Thompson, who was his doctor, was a member of the Metropolitan Club of Washington where I was a member, and I used to play gin rummy with him. He got very angry with Johnson, because he was a rascal, he felt.

M: Johnson came down to his Ranch to recover part of that time, didn't he?

O: I don't recall that part of it. When I would see him, he would be at his house and in bed there. Of course, I don't know how long a period that was. Then he went back to the Senate.

M: Then what's your next contact with Johnson?

O: Well, of course, it continued on during that period. One interesting thing as a result of this heart attack, I got to see [what] I think is a classic story about how this man could really operate. They always rented their house out to people when they left Washington

when he was a senator. I was playing bridge one night; I'd left word at the hotel where I was. It was around eleven o'clock; the phone rang, and it was Lyndon. He said that Bird had gone back to Texas, and he had left the house and was at the Mayflower Hotel, and that he thought he was feeling good and all that, but he was just a little nervous about spending the night alone since his heart attack, and would I come down and spend the night with him if I had nothing better to do. I told him I was going to do it as soon as I finished the bridge game. So I went down and spent the night with him; we were in twin beds there at the Mayflower. We both went to sleep sort of late, talked for a while and then went to sleep, I guess around one o'clock.

Well, I was awakened at daylight by people bringing in papers and orange juice from downstairs, and all that. He was up. He got on the telephone, and he just did more work on the telephone there from six o'clock in the morning until eight than most people do in a full morning's work, just call after call, lining up his staff, telling them what to do, getting things done.

Then I witnessed one of the most amazing masterful political acts I'd seen in a long time, that he did right from his bed. Time has elapsed--this was almost twenty years ago or more or some period like that, so I might get the committee wrong or one of the names wrong, but I won't get them both wrong. There was a vacancy on one of the major Senate committees. Now whether it was Finance or Foreign Relations, I can't recall, but it was one there. It seems

that most of the Democrats wanted a liberal Democrat on it. And the committee was dominated by conservatives, Senator [Walter F.] George from Georgia, and others from the South. And I'm sure that Johnson had been given the assignment of getting a liberal on that committee, though he didn't say so.

But the conversation, the way he did this thing, was amazing. He called all these conservative old senators on the phone, and he'd talk about--this is early in the morning--the committee appointment. And he'd say, "Well, you know, the liberals, or a lot of them, they want Estes Kefauver." And you could practically hear the explosion on the other end; dynamite going off, gash! "Well," he would say, "I know. But I think that is not the best thing and that's not the place for him, but I don't know what we can do about it." And then there would be more screams from the other end. And then finally he would say, "Well, there's a long shot thing that maybe they would accept Hubert Humphrey. I doubt it, but it might be worth a try, I don't know if you think it's worth a try." "Oh, yes," they would say, "It's worth a try. Do everything you can."

Well, I just sat there with my mouth open, knowing on my own, without his saying so, that his desire really was to put Humphrey on that thing all the time, on the committee. And rather than confront them with him and have him turned down, he'd gotten them so frightened that Kefauver would be the one. I just thought what a masterful performance that you have done keeping everybody happy. And actually, also, knowing that Humphrey had the respect

of the conservatives, and even though he was a liberal, they didn't feel for him what they did for Kefauver, he had also performed a great service getting the right man on the right committee, but getting everybody happy about it.

And he misrepresented nothing about the situation. Because I'm sure there had been a lot of people trying to get Kefauver. But the way he had those people making the suggestion to him that Hubert Humphrey be the man, I thought, was just masterful. And he operated his whole day, as I said, in two hours. He had solved some great problems in the Senate just on that telephone. There may have been ten, fifteen, twenty calls, one right after the other. And there he was in his pajamas in bed.

M: Was he eating breakfast at the same time?

O: Oh, yes. He had his orange juice around. Yes. He'd eat a piece of toast in between. I was sitting there reading the Washington Post, just hearing half of it and not paying any attention to half of it. But he was a great craftsman. He knew that Senate; he studied it; he really had the respect of all factions.

One thing about him that I observed throughout his career, that--this was from the time when he was running for the Senate the first time-people who were violently opposed to Lyndon Johnson and would say terrible things about him and wouldn't like him, rather than be vindictive, he would come back and make a friend out of that person. And he'd go to great effort to do this. I think that he felt that he knew what he wanted, and he thought his goals were right, and

the things he believed in. He thought it was just a lack of understanding. He never held any ill feeling. Some people who would be his worst enemies during the campaign would end up his very close friends and remain that way from then on.

I've often thought about his connections and relations with the Kennedys--and I know nothing of this from Lyndon Johnson, but just from what you read in the paper or what you might surmise--that Bobby Kennedy and other members of his family could never understand. If they had only understood this about Johnson, they would have saved both sides a lot of heartache: that Johnson did not hold a grudge; that there was no time when, no matter what they had said about him, how they might have ridiculed him or anything they might have done, that had they come in, he would not have been overly anxious to make up. This was his whole mode of operation. And just saying, thinking it was a mistake, thinking, you know: "The only people that could really dislike me or do any bad to me are people that don't know me. They have a mistaken idea of me. But once I can get them to know me, they will." And they missed that opportunity because they had been brought up in this Irish-Boston politics where you cut an enemy's head off when you had to, or where, if a man crossed you once, you wrote him off.

And I mean not to say that was peculiar to them. I think it must be peculiar to certain areas. And it's probably a more natural approach than the Johnson approach. But Johnson was always ready for a reconciliation for anyone.

He went in maybe suspect by some of those powerful southern senators, because they thought he might be too liberal. They found out, though, that they were very devoted to him personally and he had a way of dispelling all the suspicions.

M: Then, from your point of view, Johnson was really the master politician that he has the reputation for being?

O: Oh, yes. He was a master politician.

M: He had a reputation for driving his staff pretty hard. Was that true?

O: Oh, yes. I'm sure from just secondhand observations. You could always reach them at the office at nine o'clock.

M: He also had the reputation of having a rather hot, quick temper. Is there any truth in that?

O: I've never seen that part of him, but I've heard about it. He expected perfection from the people who worked for him. I think he was capable, from what I hear, of sometime being a little sharp, if they did something that he thought was stupid or wrong. But then he would go to infinite pains to do nice things for them to make up for it. They had a great loyalty for him, and that's certainly the test of what it would all be about.

M: And from your observation, he was an intelligent man?

O: Oh, yes. He wasn't an intellectual, but he was highly intelligent.

M: He understood what was going on.

O: Always. Always on top of everything that was going on.

M: And a man of humor?

O: Yes, he was a man of humor.

M: I understand he could mimic, too.

O: Yes, he can. He wasn't in [Senator Tom] Connally's class. No one else was, unless it was W. C. Fields, or [Will] Rogers, or something. But, yes, he is a man of humor. The reason I hesitated, humor was not a part of his operation. It was a sideline. If he was amused, he would tell you something amusing. He liked a good story, and he could tell a good story, but he never used his humor to ridicule. I never heard him do it.

M: I understand, too, that he was very good at working with small groups of people or individuals, as you suggested. Is that true?

O: What do you mean?

M: Well, in persuading them to do something, or to see his point of view.

O: He used to have one thing. I used to hear him talk to people. Just at a social function, someone would say, "Oh, I don't believe so-and-so and that." And, of course, if it was somebody he didn't particularly care about, he'd let it go by. But if it was somebody whose opinion he respected, then he had a stop-face phrase. And I've always thought about it lately because it says a lot. He'd just look at them and say, "Now, I respect your intelligence, and I respect your viewpoint and your opinion, but your opinion is no better than your information. Let me try to give you some information, and see if that doesn't affect [or] make you change your opinion." And that's, of course, a true thing. No one's opinion is any better than their information. I've heard him say that many times.

M: His heart attack took place in 1955. Following that, what kind of

contact did you have with Johnson?

O: I returned to Texas sometime after that, oh, maybe a year or so after his heart attack. And I've had really very little personal contact with him since that time. When he accepted the nomination for vice president, I remember some of his friends were very disappointed about it.

M: Yes.

O: And some of them who were mutual friends said that they couldn't understand it: why he would leave this thing to go into the vice presidency. And then they felt a certain amount of bitterness. I picked up the telephone and I called him after he accepted this thing. I hadn't seen him for some time. I congratulated him on his acceptance of the vice presidency, and we talked about it. I said, "Well, you know, Lyndon, I have my own analysis of the situation. Number one is if the Democrats win, and you are not vice president, had you not accepted it and Kennedy won, you would have been the majority leader of a Democratic president, which is actually a sort of a rubber stamp. He carries messages, gets his program. Your great power of the majority leadership was because you were the leader of the party when Eisenhower, a Republican, was in the White House. So you were the top man. You formulated the whole policy for the Senate, rather than take on the obligation of handling the president's program." And I said, "On the other hand, had the Republicans won, you would have faced maybe a problem of getting elected to the leadership on account of refusing to help the ticket,

though I know you would have gotten it. And then, thirdly, of course, is if you've tried for the presidency, and you realize you can't make it from the Texas base. It's got to be from a . . ."

And he said, "Well, Posh, how clear and easy that it is for you to see. Isn't it amazing that people can't see that?" And I said, "Well, it is just amazing that they can't comprehend that and think that you have a choice under Kennedy of going back to the same power position of running the country that you'd been in during the Eisenhowever Administration, you and Mr. Rayburn had been in." Which they, of course, did under the Eisenhower Administration, did so much to run the country. So we talked about that.

Then I didn't see him again.

M: Did you campaign for him at all?

O: Oh, of course, I supported him on the ticket.

M: I mean help with the campaign or anything?

O: No. I was here. I was actually living in Houston, I think, at the time of the campaign. I supported him in every way that I could, but I mean I didn't work for him or take any active part outside of doing everything I could for the ticket.

But the next time I saw him was here in Marlin, when he was vice president, when Senator Connally died. They had had a funeral for Senator Connally in Washington, and they had brought his body back here and they were going to have some services in the Methodist Church, a short service, and then bury him out by

his first wife in this cemetery here.

After the services, Lyndon Johnson and Rufus Youngblood, who was with him, and Harry Provence had come down from Waco; they had landed in Waco. They came out here to my house after the cemetery graveyard services and had a cup of tea and visited with me for about an hour. Then I rode with them back to the plane. He had bought a little brass bird from Norway or some place where he had been,Denmark or one of those countries, and had Lynda Bird on it. He wanted to give it to Madeline, my little girl. So I rode out there with him to get it, and I had a visit with him.

I felt that he was very despondent, for him. One thing that upset him terribly was that there was not a delegation from the United States Senate there at Tom Connally's funeral. He went on and said, "You know, as powerful a man as this was and everything that he had done for the United Nations and everything, for there not to be one person here at this graveside, I think it's a national disgrace. I think it's a national disgrace that there's not a delegation from the Senate and the House here." And I'm sure there might have been some of them in Washington where they'd had services, but here, still, there was only one national official who had flown all the way down here, the Vice President of the United States, on his own, not to represent the President, or anything but to be here at a graveside service.

And I told him, "Well, I just want you to know how much I

appreciate it, and I think your being here, and everybody who knew Senator Connally around his home town." And he said, "You know, Posh, that Tom Connally and I were never extremely close friends, but he always treated me well and was kind to me when he was a senior senator and I was a junior senator and helped me. He always voted for me, and I always voted for him. He was a great man. He did a lot of great things for this country. I just wanted to be here to show that respect." He said, "You know, there's so little gratitude."

And I could tell he was in the strain of what he must have been going through in Washington, although he didn't say that. He said, "There's so little of this. If this man had died at the height of his power, you couldn't have gotten in here. There would have been so many planes and so many cars with chauffeurs coming down."

I also asked him how things were going. Another thing I thought was indicative, I asked him how Bird was. He said, "She gets awfully tired. You know, she works and works and will do anything. But right now, Mississippi and the South seems to be a bad name. They send up some campaign workers to Washington. No one at the National Committee or the White House will see them or have anything to do with them." He said, "These are not Dixiecrats. These are the hard workers that are trying to fight to keep it from being that. The very fact that they're from the state means that nobody wants anything to do with them. So Bird

takes them all over." He said, "She's constantly going and doing this. All those people want to come up here, just like from any other part of the country. They've stayed with the ticket; they've worked for it. They don't want any appointments. They'd just like somebody to shake their hand, look them in the eye, and say 'Thank you' from the high level, the national level." He said, "She's taken over all that. She does it." The implication was that Mrs. Kennedy wasn't about to do it.

M: Right.

O: He didn't spell that out. But he seemed awfully weary.

M: Did you hear from him after the assassination of Kennedy?

O: No.

M: When he became president?

O: No. I didn't hear from him. I didn't write him. We've had a very friendly relationship always. I'm a person whose loyalty and friendship he's never had any reason to doubt, and I feel the same way toward him. We don't have to reassure each other each time something happens that you're for him or that you understand what's going on.

I saw him when he was president, the first time, right after he had had his throat operation. My wife and I were down at Austin. I'd gone down to the Texas authors thing that they have each year. And my old friend Liz Carpenter was there that I love so, and she called. Johnson had just gotten out of the hospital; he'd had his polyps removed, and they'd gone down to rest at the Ranch. She

called and was talking to Bird, and Bird asked her how things were going in Austin. Liz said, "Well, I'm having just a good time because Posh is here, and we've had more fun." And she said, "Oh, please bring Posh and his wife down for lunch tomorrow. It'll just cheer Lyndon up."

So we went down, and we met them at this little church that he had just been made a deacon of or something, a church there that his family had belonged to. And we were there. Then he drove me over the Ranch. He was just out of the hospital. He got furious with the FBI people and all of them were following him. He didn't want that. And he went all over. He had jumped out of the car, and I jumped out and helped him to turn over troughs. He wasn't supposed to do this. He'd also had this operation on his hernia.

M: Yes.

O: But nothing anyone could do to stop him, and I just thought, "What a store of physical energy you have." Because he would jump out and turn over horse troughs; tell me to grab hold of the other end and I would. We had a delightful day. We must have ridden in his car for, oh, I guess, three or four hours after church.

We didn't come in to eat lunch until maybe three o'clock. We got on his little talkie and told them to have lunch ready. Nobody was there but Luci and Pat, Liz, Bird, the President, my wife and me, and this fellow from Life who had come down. They were going to give a little park in the thing, and the domino players were supposed

to be there. And Liz couldn't get them to play dominoes there. They wanted to play on the streets where they'd always played. But Time had done this, or Life, one of them, sort of in honor of the story that Bird had done for the publication that [she] wouldn't accept any money for. But they wanted to do something to show their appreciation. But he had been kept waiting while we took this tour. So after the three o'clock dinner, he realized that the man from the magazine who was doing all this hadn't been included. So he said, "Let me show you the Ranch." We said, "We have to go to Marlin." No, we had to go with him again. So we got the tour all over again. And we had a delightful time. Around five o'clock, I told him we had to go, and he indicated he wanted us to stay on for supper. But I told him we'd been there for eight hours, and we had to.

He went to the thing, and he said, "Posh, if there's anything in this world I can ever do for you, just get in touch with me is all you have to do." And I said, "I know that." But I've never asked him for a thing, never had the occasion. But he made it very clear. And I thought this--it was an interesting thought--that I was right by his side, I sat on the front seat with him when he drove. Here was the President of the United States. Some of the most tense things in the nation were going on at that time. How many people would have given anything for just two minutes of his time? I had six hours of it, sitting right by his side. We never once discussed a national

issue, or politics.

M: You talked about the deer.

O: We talked about farming, the deers, and just each other and what we were doing. We never once in an eight-hour period were burdened with that. He could barely talk which was horrible, but he still had his humor.

I remember a story. We saw one of his great bulls there and he went on; he said that reminded him of a story about Jim Ferguson. And he said, "I hasten to tell you I never believed it." He said, "Because he [inaudible] the Fergusons [inaudible]. And I never did believe it. But then anyway they used to tell it all the time back in the old days in politics." And he proceeded to tell the story, which of course we both knew, that a rancher had come down to talk to Ferguson about getting his son a pardon from the pentitentiary. Ferguson said, "Well, before we talk, come on, I've got to ride over to the ranch." Said, "I want to show you some of my cattle." And they went over and came to a particular wonderful looking bull, and Governor Ferguson said, "This bull here, you ought to have him. He would increase the value of your herd thousands of dollars. He'd upbreed them all; he's worth about ten thousand dollars but I'll let you have him for five thousand dollars, because I really don't need him. You just ought to have him. He'd just do so much for your herd. He won't be any trouble to get to your ranch. Your boy can stop by here and pick him up on his way home from the penitentiary!"

So we both had to laugh about that. He said, "Always see a bull, I think of that story!" "Of course, I don't believe it happened," he said, because he was grateful to the Fergusons. But he's a man who had all sorts of anecdotes, you know, about early Texas politics. And we kept it on just that, talking about old mutual friends and early days. That was a nice visit.

Then he invited us up one night to the White House, just before he went out, for dinner. He had nothing but his old Texas friends. I'd say that, of all the dinners that one could have been invited to, I considered it to be the one I would have preferred. There was no one there who were tremendous contributors or who had become friends after he became president. It was sort of a farewell with his staff and his early Texas friends. We had dinner out in the yard, and then we went in and had drinks and danced in the White House until after one o'clock. He was in a delightful frame of mind. This was not long before his term expired.

I've seen him a few times since he's been back in Texas. The one that probably has something of a little historical reaction to the office of the President was in San Antonio. This is after he had moved back to Austin. And Jessica Hobby Catto, who lives there, had a small dinner party for him. She had the President and Mrs. Johnson and Luci, and my wife and me; and she had the astronauts, at least two of them, had the [Frank] Bormans and the [Walter] Schirras and a couple of local San Antonio couples, and her brother Bill Hobby, and her mother Oveta. And that was it; so it was very

intimate, very small. We went down. And of course, the Secret Service was still there. I hadn't dressed before I left Marlin. So we had to hurry up and dress so we could get out of the downstairs bedroom, for the Secret Service who were going to sit.

But anyway, it was a very sentimental affair. He had been devoted to the Hobbys, and he talked about what their friendship had meant. And we all had our share of wine; it was also a wonderful wine served at the table. Afterward, we were sitting around, and someone asked him--which I thought was unnecessary; I wouldn't have asked him--how it felt to be out of the presidency, but someone did. And it was an intimate enough group that he could talk, and he said, "Well, you would just never know the relief. I just can't tell you this relief. Particularly when these last days, I was told that if any adventurer wanted to start an international adventure, that this would be the ideal time when I'm a lame duck; Nixon hasn't come in; I'm still there. And while they didn't anticipate this happening, this would be the time that they thought would be chosen, if it would. All during that last period of office, those last two months, I felt just like I did"--and he looked me--"when I had my heart attack. I felt only that some big man was standing right on top of chest. When I saw President Nixon sworn in to take this responsibility, it was the greatest day of relief of my life."

M: Good story.

O: I thought that was very interesting.

M: That brings us up to the present time.

O: Just about.

M: Do you have anything else you want to throw into this?

O: I can't think of anything right now.

M: I have one last question to ask you.

O: Sure.

M: How do you spell "Posh," your nickname.

O: P-O-S-H.

M: And where did you get it?

O: Well, when I was a little boy I had an uncle who called me "Pardner." A little cousin couldn't say it; said "Posh." Well, everybody's called me "Posh" since I was a tiny boy.

M: That's how you pronounced it as a child?

O: Well, a cousin pronounced it.

M: Oh, I see.

O: If people will meet [me] as Frank Oltorf, if they hear one person call me "Posh," then they call me "Posh." Everybody seems to prefer it to Frank.

M: Very good. Let me thank you for your time.

O: I'm just glad to have done it.

[End of Tape 1 of 1 and Interview I]

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Frank Oltorf
Donor

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