

INTERVIEW I

DATE: August 23, 1984

INTERVIEWEE: ARCHER PARR (with occasional comments by Pat Adams)

INTERVIEWER: JOE B. FRANTZ

PLACE: Charles and Pat Adams' residence, Corpus Christi, Texas

Tape 1 of 1

F: Let's go back. You were just a kid in 1948, weren't you?

P: I was twenty-one.

F: You were that old?

P: Yes, sir.

F: Okay. Well, you're a little older than I thought you were. Do you remember very much about it?

P: Yes, sir. Quite a bit.

F: Tell me a little bit about--what were you doing? You had grown up I guess in Alice, hadn't you?

P: No, sir, not in Alice. Actually I had grown up in Corpus.

F: Are you from Corpus originally? Are you a native?

P: No, sir, I was born in Mexico City, Mexico.

F: What were your parents doing down there?

P: My father was head of Ford Motor Company in Mexico City.

B: Now, you are the old Archer Parr's grandson and George's nephew?

Parr -- I -- 2

P: That's correct, sir.

F: Okay. We've got that genealogy straight.

P: My father's name was John Cyrus Willer [?]. He married my mother, Marie Parr, and I was a product of that marriage. He worked for Ford Motor Company and they moved to Mexico City where I was born. We stayed there for a short period of time and then we moved to Monterrey, Mexico. Subsequent to that period of time my mother and father were divorced, and my mother and myself moved to Benavides, Texas, to a ranch outside of Benavides. My mother remarried when I was approximately five years of age and we moved to Corpus Christi, Texas. She married a gentleman--

F: She was George's sister?

P: That's correct. About 1937, 1938, my grandmother and grandfather had my name changed to Archer Parr and in the sense of the word they sort of adopted me, not with any legal formalities, but they adopted me for all practical purposes.

F: You definitely became a Parr.

P: Right. And lived with them, especially in the summertimes and out at the ranch and what have you. I did this all the way through.

F: You remember your grandfather fairly well?

P: Oh, real well, sir. Yes, sir. I was going to school at Texas A&M when he died, and came home for the funeral. Shortly after that I joined the Marine Corps.

F: Where did you serve?

P: In the South Pacific.

F: This was in World War II?

Parr -- I -- 3

P: World War II, that's correct.

F: Where in the South Pacific?

P: Well, I started out in Noumea, Caledonia--

F: I've been there.

P: And I went to Guadalcanal and then to Eniwetok and Guam, to Okinawa and then China.

F: Where in China?

P: Tsingtao. Part of the occupation forces in Tsingtao, China, which is up at Shantung Province.

F: I was in the navy out there. I'm surprised that I didn't bomb you somewhere.

P: Well, you probably could have.

F: Right. We tried.

P: I'm sure of that.

F: We had a feeling we killed more Americans than we did Japanese.

P: Then after the war was over I came home and went back to school at the University of Texas. I was in the Marine Corps Reserve Unit in Austin when the Korean business started up again. So anyhow, our unit in Austin got called back into the Korean business. I was lucky enough to draw the black bean and get to the Korean business. So anyhow, after that Korean business was over, I received a commission by this time and went back to law school and finally got enough hours in there to take a bar exam. I started practicing law in San Diego in 1957, December.

F: Why did you pick San Diego?

P: Well, that really was my home. My roots were there, my people were there, and everything

Parr -- I -- 4

that I had was there, really, land, what have you. That was just home.

Going back to 1948 that you talked about a while ago, I was married at that time and we came home to vote, my wife and I did.

F: Was she a local girl?

P: No, sir, she was from San Antonio. Her name was Gloria O'Hearn. Anyhow, Gloria and I came home and we voted that day there in San Diego. And I voted a Democratic ticket, and stayed around there that day--well, for two or three days after that, and then we stayed out at the ranch and then went back to Austin and went back to school.

F: Did you know Luis Salas?

P: Yes, sir, sure did.

F: Which time do you think he was lying? You know, first he said that he delivered that list and that was it, and then later he came back and--

P: Let me say this to you. Luis Salas over there is an old gentleman who is trying to make a name for himself, to become somebody. Luis has never been anything in his life.

F: Precinct head chairman, yes. (Laughter)

P: I don't mean that derogatorily, but Luis has never been . . . But him meeting with Lyndon Johnson and George Parr in George's offices over there, that's all nonsense. That never occurred.

F: Okay. Did Johnson meet with George Parr?

P: No, sir.

F: My own look into that is that he never got out of Austin. He might have talked to him on the phone, but he talked to everybody else on the phone.

Parr -- I -- 5

P: He didn't talk to him on the telephone either, sir. After I was married and what have you, I lived with George for quite a while. And George and I would sit around and talk at night. We'd cook supper together; he'd cook one night and I'd cook the other. Both of us were batching at that time. We'd sit around and talk. And George told me numerous times that after he met with Lyndon prior to the 1948 election, the last person that he talked to about Lyndon was John Connally when John Connally came to George's office to solicit the Duval County vote. And from that day until the day that George Parr died he never did talk again to Lyndon Johnson.

F: Oh, really?

P: No, sir. He never did see him again. Oh, he saw him on TV.

F: Yes. Yes. But I mean--

P: I mean to sit down and talk to Lyndon Johnson, he never did talk to him. He never saw him again.

F: You don't think there was any deal of any sort down there.

P: No, sir, they wouldn't need a deal. Both of the men, they knew exactly what was going on in the world and they trusted each other and what have you. Any relationship that they had was conducted strictly through intermediaries, and that was it, period. And George Parr--in fact, we were coming back from hunting up in Chama, New Mexico one time, out at the Jicarilla Apache Indian Reservation. George and I were talking about the 1948 election. He said, "You know, a lot of people have said this, that and the other thing, but you know I have never seen Lyndon Johnson since prior to the 1948 election. I never talked to the man." The people who did talk to him were some intermediaries, one of them being a

Parr -- I -- 6

gentleman by the name of Edgar Linkenhoger, but Edgar's dead now. They were good friends. George and Lyndon were good friends in the sense of the word that they respected each other, but they just never had any business with each other after the 1948 election, except for the time that George got Edgar Linkenhoger to go see Lyndon--

F: How do you spell Linkenhoger?

P: L-I-N-K-E-N-H-O-G-E-R, I think is correct. His name was Edgar Linkenhoger and he's got kinfolks live here in town. His wife died not very long ago. She was originally from Robstown. And Edgar had a coastal transport company here.

F: Well, now, Coke Stevenson told me one time about ten years ago that he was very close to George Parr.

P: At one time, that's correct, sir.

F: And that he and George had a disagreement, which he didn't go into it. And that George told him, "You're going to be sorry." He said, "Sure enough, I was sorry." Now, did George have that type control or is he overrated in what people think about that?

P: No, sir, at that time he had that type of control. The disagreement came about over a judgeship that Coke was supposed to come about and do here in Corpus Christi and he was talked out of it by some influential people over here who were closer to Coke than George was. He didn't appoint the man who he had agreed to appoint, and this is where he and Coke fell out. That's exactly what that occurred about. The guy that they were supposed to appoint was a gentleman here in Corpus Christi by the name of Luther Jones, supposed to appoint him a district judge.

A: Is that our current mayor, Archie?

Parr -- I -- 7

P: No, ma'am. That's not, Luther Jones is an attorney.

F: This is going to be studied probably a hundred, two hundred years from now if the Russians don't mess up our history. How did George control those counties? I think it would be interesting to--

P: Well, let me say this to you. Actually, he himself did not control the counties. We have to go back until 1906 when my grandfather first became a dominant political power in South Texas, and this is the year that Dad won the election for county commissioner in Duval County, and from there this is where he built his base.

F: By "dad" you mean grandfather Archer?

P: That's my grandfather. Now I speak of him as dad. What Dad did, he had a group of friends all over the Valley: John Nance Garner out in West Texas, you know, it's a little West Texas affair; then he had the Martins in Laredo; then the Guerras down in Starr County; and then Cameron County and Hidalgo County was A. Y. [Anderson Yancey] Baker and that group. Coming up here north, he went into Kleberg County and there was Mr. Caesar Kleberg at that time. He ran the King Ranch. Then in Corpus there were a group of Dad's cronies over there; there was Pat Dunn and Jack W. E. [Walter Elmer] Pope, and the people in that category who really ran the politics. Then Dad went up into Floresville up there and there were the Connallys and those people up around there, and then people over there in San Antonio. You've got to understand that at that time that was one entire congressional [senatorial] district; that was the 27th [senatorial] District, and Daddy was a [state] senator and stayed in that office from 1906 to 1936. Well, thirty years is a long time, and consequently with that thirty years he built up a lot of friends.

Parr -- I -- 8

F: If you don't know everybody in your district, then you're not doing your job.

P: Well, he did his job, you know. The reason that Dad got beat was because of a road, and that was a road that they wanted to put through the King Ranch, and Dad promised Caesar Kleberg over there that he would stay with the King Ranch and vote against establishing the road. A gentleman by the name of Jim Neal over there, he campaigned exactly diametrically opposed to that proposition; he beat Dad. But in the next year, the next time elections came around, Dad and his cronies and his people, they got around and they beat Jim Neal. Jim Neal, as I've always heard the story, died a very bitter and disillusioned old gentleman. Now, whether that's true or not, I don't know. But any how, Rogers Kelly was the gentleman over there that was elected senator for the next time.

Well, all this period of time, George was kind of under Dad's wing, and he'd go with him and he'd drive with him and he'd meet this person and meet these people. After all this period of time, well, George graduated from law school and started practicing law in 1925 or 1926, but I think 1925. Well, of course he went around with Dad all this time, and with this he got to meeting all these people up there. Of course, after Dad kind of passed out of the picture--Dad finally got glaucoma and became blind--well, in the meantime George had accumulated some property and quite a bit of wealth, had an income of about thirty to forty thousand dollars a month at that time. This was back in the late thirties or early forties--

F: That is a whopping amount of money in those days.

P: --which is a lot of money, and it's still a lot of money. But in those days it was a hell of a lot of money.

F: Yes, when everybody was living on fifty dollars a month.

Parr -- I -- 9

P: Yes. But anyhow, this is the kind of income that he had by virtue of some oil leases that he acquired. So with that--and George did not mind spending the money for politics, now. He would put out the money; there's no question about it.

F: We're not talking about Dad, we're talking about--

P: I'm talking about George B. And George B. would put out the money for politics, much more so than Dad did. So when George wanted something, he'd go down there and he'd give this guy five thousand, whatever sum of money it took over there to control this situation, Hebbronville and Laredo and what have you, and all these people were his friends; they were political allies, and they all voted almost entirely for the same gubernatorial candidates. And a lot of these people were elected by virtue of the South Texas vote. I mean, it's not any great mystery. If you sit down and you look at this thing and say, you know, this thing didn't take place overnight. This was a twenty-five or thirty-year friendship basis for a lot of these people.

F: Dad didn't necessarily control the bloc of Mexicans, but his friends controlled them for him.

P: Right. The Guerras in Starr County, they controlled their people, and the Martins over in Webb County, they controlled their people. A. Y. Baker and his machine, they controlled their people in Cameron and Hidalgo Counties. The King Ranch people, they were controlled by Mr. Caesar Kleberg. This is the way it went. No one individual controlled anything; it was a question of friendship. Dad was just nominated kind of as a spokesman for a lot of these things because he was in the forefront, being a senator and what have you. But to say that he controlled it, no, that's not entirely [true]. But he'd go ask these people,

Parr -- I -- 10

say, "What do you think about this? What do you say we work this out? Let's do it this way, or you know, this way." There wasn't any question of anybody controlling anything; it was just a question of friendship.

A: How about respect?

P: True. A lot of it was respect.

A: How about good judgment?

P: Yes.

A: How about who do you trust?

P: Well, they respected him for it.

A: Nobody can know everything.

F: You eventually got the road through the King Ranch. Was this a diminishing of George Parr's powers or was it just a matter of change of times?

P: No, sir. No, George, later on he got involved with the federal government and the question of income tax evasion, and he was sent to the prison for it. Dick Kleberg at that time was congressman. Well, Dick said he wouldn't help George get out of prison, and George found out about it. So anyhow, when Dick Kleberg ran one time, his opponent was a fellow by the name of Johnny Lyle. Johnny was a major at this time and still stationed in Italy, and they put Johnny on the ticket over there and ran him and he beat Dick Kleberg.

F: Did you have the feeling that the charge against George on income tax evasion was a trumped-up charge?

P: Which one?

F: The one back there in the thirties.

Parr -- I -- 11

P: I don't know that much about it, sir.

F: That's before your time.

P: No, it is and it's not. I've heard too many conflicting reports. Actually it wasn't really over--

F: Well, you know, Truman and others restored his civil rights.

P: That's correct. They gave him a pardon.

F: Now, why would the president of the United States worry about this?

P: Well, I think mainly because at that time that was after 1948.

F: Yes.

P: And I think, and I can't prove this and I'm not positive of this, but I surmised that what occurred, that Lyndon was contacted in some manner of speaking and he was asked to talk to Truman to get George a pardon. But the first time he applied for a pardon, he was turned down.

F: Yes. Well, he never did get a full pardon, did he?

P: Yes, sir. They finally restored his complete civil rights.

F: Yes. Okay. You went back to the university after the election of 1948.

P: That's correct, sir.

F: Now, did you stay up there or did you come back down here?

P: No, I came back down, sir.

F: Were you here when, was it W. R. Smith was [holding hearings]?

P: Yes, sir, I was back down here off and on.

F: Did you attend that?

Parr -- I -- 12

P: No, sir, I did not.

F: Did George?

P: No, sir.

F: He just left it into the hands of the lawyers on both sides.

P: Yes, sir. The only thing that I--

F: Did Coke come?

P: Not that I recall. I take it back. I beg your pardon. I think he was here, too. I think he was in the courthouse.

F: Basically though it was a trial between lawyers at a hearing.

P: It was a trial between lawyers. On our side was a gentleman by the name of Ed Lloyd. He was the dominant factor on our side. And I guess Mr. [Kellis] Dibrell was the dominant lawyer on their side. The only thing that I attended after that, I had been selected as a delegate to the convention, and we attended the Democratic State Convention in Fort Worth. I was at the lobby of the Blackstone Hotel where the executive committee was meeting and hearing all this sort of stuff. Mr. Ed Lloyd came in there and made this last speech, and finally the last delegate came up there and they voted, and it was either twenty to twenty-one or--

F: It was a one-vote margin, yes.

P: One-vote margin. Anyhow, I was there.

F: They were out there dragging them in off the curb.

P: Right. Exactly. I was there that night. I remember that distinctly.

F: That must have been very exciting.

Parr -- I -- 13

P: It was, extremely so.

F: Did you have any role at all in the picking of Justice Hugo Black?

P: No, sir. No, sir.

F: That kind of put it beyond the Texas realm.

P: Yes, sir. It was Justice Hugo Black, but he was appointed prior to this time.

F: And you say Johnson never saw George Parr again?

P: No, sir.

F: Never had him up to Washington?

P: No, sir. They never spoke to each other.

F: Did Lyndon have anything to offer that George wanted?

P: No, sir.

F: Do you think that Salas was [inaudible]?

P: Salas is a lying son of a bitch.

F: That's fairly straightforward.

Okay. There was supposed to be a duplicate set of votes from Box 13 in the Texas State Bank I believe it was called, and they never were brought out. Were they there or was that just a--?

P: No, sir, that's all nonsense. There was one set of ballots in there and that's all there was in the old Texas State Bank.

F: What became of them?

P: They were delivered, and they were counted. They were delivered to the Jim Wells County Executive Committee, and they were counted then.

Parr -- I -- 14

F: Okay. In light of hindsight, do you think they were doctored?

P: Yes, sir.

F: Going back to Coke Stevenson, he told me, "I tried to steal them and I couldn't manage it."

P: A lot of people, what they don't realize, Coke Stevenson for example, now out in Brown County and up there, he had a whole bunch of votes up there that were--they stole votes out there from Lyndon all the way backwards and forwards. Coke Stevenson had a cousin, and as I recall I think his name was Arthur Stevenson, and he lived in Dallas, Texas, and he was a precinct chairman at a predominantly Negro precinct. They have yet to find the voting boxes for that precinct, the voting machines for that precinct to this day. They had just disappeared.

F: Did you ever know Hobart Taylor in Houston?

P: No, sir.

F: He was a black taxi king, and this was the first election in which Negroes could vote pretty widely. He told me, "We worked Houston like mad and gave Lyndon a 15,000-vote majority down there in Harris County. Hell, George Parr wouldn't have mattered if it hadn't been for us." I mean, you've got so many county claims on this thing. It just focused here.

P: That's right. It unfortunately was just--they did the same thing in San Antonio. I mean, votes were stolen everywhere, and Lyndon learned to do this over there because he got screwed the election before this. The election before that, he had that election won.

F: Oh, yes. There wasn't any way O'Daniel could have won that.

P: When Pappy Lee O'Daniel ran. You've got to understand something about Texas politics; you've got to realize that all this time you had two forces in conflict over there even down

Parr -- I -- 15

to 1948, and that's the wets versus the dries, or you could put it another way, the Ku Klux Klan against the white folks, so to speak. Or you could put it another way; you could put it the liberals versus the conservatives. Or even better still, when you really analyze it, it goes back to the days of Ma and Pa Ferguson. Ma and Pa Ferguson's people, those were Lyndon's people. And when you really analyze all this political situation in Texas back there, you can go back and it was the Fergusons versus the other folks, versus these Baptists. Really that's what it boils down to.

F: Lyndon just continuing a tradition.

P: That's all! The king is dead, long live the king. And it's just different people came in by virtue of time and took over these roles, that's all. Texas politics has been the same ever since then. There's no difference. These are different camps because as time goes on, people have died.

F: There's always somebody to step in place.

P: Sure. I mean, all these folks over there, when you really analyze this thing it goes back to the days of Jim Ferguson.

F: Yes. George Christian told me one time that every now and then when Lyndon was mad about something, he'd just turn to him out of the blue and say, "And you never voted for Jim Ferguson!" and George would say, "I wasn't old enough." "I don't care. You never voted for him." That was kind of the ultimate insult with Johnson.

Where did you get to know Johnson? Or did you?

P: Oh, I knew him, yes. I'd say I knew him--that's not correct--"How are you? Nice to see you, sir." To say that I knew Lyndon Johnson, I didn't know the man. He knew my first

Parr -- I -- 16

name and I knew his first name, but to say that we knew each other, no, sir, we didn't know each other.

F: Would Jim Wells, Duval County be considered a safe area for Johnson in the years ahead or is this just a one-time-only situation in 1948?

P: No, it was safe. It was safe.

F: Because of the Parrs or simply because he had the Hispanic vote tied in?

P: Well, because of the liberal situation. The majority of the--

F: Of course, when he put that guy [Felix Longoria] from--where was it?-- George West or Three Rivers in the [Arlington] National Cemetery with a Congressional Medal of Honor, Lord--

P: Oh, that helped. That helped. Don't think it didn't. You bet. You bet you it helped him.

F: And he really never worried about the Mexican vote after that.

P: Yes. That helped him tremendously.

F: You came back to San Diego. Did you just set up a general practice in law?

P: Yes, sir, I practiced law all by myself for a while. It was hard for a while. It was hard to make a living. Fortunately I had some land and had a ranch and had some cattle. Slowly but surely I got involved in politics again. Then I ran for county judge against a fellow by the name of Dan Tobin and a fellow by the name of Canales [?].

F: Now, Tobin had been a commissioner--

P: No, he had been a county judge.

F: County judge.

P: Yes, sir. And he turned against us. Anyhow, I beat them. Actually, he came out third in

Parr -- I -- 17

the race up there. And then I took office and stayed in office there for seventeen years, until the heat descended on us again.

F: Well, now, Canales became a judge, didn't he, later?

P: No, sir.

F: This is another Canales?

P: The Canales boy that I'm talking about, he died of a heart attack about 1963-64, somewhere in that neighborhood. The Canales I think you have reference to is--

F: He's the one that got disbarred.

P: No, sir. The Canales I think that you're referring to was a former state representative [José Tomás Canales].

F: Yes.

P: The gentleman that was disbarred that you're talking about was a fellow by the name of Olivero Carrillo, O. P. Carrillo.

F: Yes.

P: The representative was a fellow by the name of Armando Canales [?].

F: Do you still have the same type control in that area that you did thirty years ago?

P: No.

F: It's changed considerably, hasn't it? What happened, just grown?

P: No, sir, there's no more control in the situation. Right now I can't go back to Duval County.

F: Why not?

P: Because the judge that has me under probation will not let me return to Duval County.

F: Oh, you're restricted.

Parr -- I -- 18

P: Yes, sir.

F: Was that on the income tax situation?

P: No, sir, that was just--

F: He just doesn't want you around.

P: He doesn't want me in Duval County. He thinks I'm going to get back into politics.

F: Well, I mean, is it legal or is it just a strong-arm situation?

P: No, sir, under the provisions of the Texas code up there, the Texas Penal Code, he has authority to keep me from going into Duval County.

F: Well, you had kind of a palace revolution in that area with a bunch of young Turks coming along and trying to take--

P: Well, it wasn't so much young Turks over there, it was just an entirely different political group. They weren't really young Turks. A Turk to me is an individual who has been with you at some time, and these people had never been with us.

F: These are the outsiders then trying to get inside.

P: That's correct.

F: Have they changed things any or is it just a different group?

P: I don't know. I can't answer that. I don't go back, I can't go back, and I'm really not interested because if I do get involved in politics I know that I will be sent back to prison and I do not want to go back to jail.

F: Can they do that?

P: Yes, sir.

F: Do you think they set you up for the prison sentence?

Parr -- I -- 19

P: No, not necessarily.

A: Think of Geraldine Ferraro.

P: No, I mean, I was convicted.

F: Were you watched more closely than most people?

P: Oh, yes.

A: You'd better believe it.

P: Yes, I was sent to Marion, Illinois, first crack out of the box, and Marion, Illinois, took the place of Alcatraz.

F: Oh, really?

P: Yes, sir.

F: It's where you don't rehabilitate them; you just incarcerate them.

P: They incarcerate. It's a warehouse for bodies, that's all that place is.

F: Even for a victimless crime?

P: Well, that's correct. My crime was making false statements to a grand jury, and I was the only individual in that prison with that crime. I am the only individual in the history of the United States who has ever been sentenced to ten years for that crime.

A: We went to see Archer when he was in the Kingsville jail, and they wouldn't let us in.

F: You didn't have ordinary even criminal rights.

A: It's called a freeze-out treatment.

P: No, sir.

F: Why? Do you think they were scared?

P: I think the judge that sentenced me over there, I think he had a complete case of the red ass

Parr -- I -- 20

against me, to tell you the truth. In fact a lot of the prison officials asked me, "What did you do to this gentleman?" I said I didn't do anything to him. I don't know what the situation was, except that I found out later on that he was a Coke Stevenson man.

F: Do you think if you had kept your original--?

(Interruption)

P: That's second guessing.

F: Yes, that's hindsight.

P: That's hindsight. That's really not a fair question because it's problematical.

F: Well, but you can get thrust into a situation that's not really of your making.

P: Oh, certainly, sure.

F: And you're stuck with it.

P: Yes.

F: You still practice law or are you disbarred?

P: No, sir. I'm disbarred.

F: Yes. There's no way of getting that back.

P: Eventually, hopefully I can. Yes.

F: Do you have any kind of a pardon in the future?

P: Hopefully.

F: What do you need to get it? The right people?

P: Well, the right people, of course, that would help.

F: Are pardons, they're not really a matter of justice; they're a matter of contacts, aren't they?

P: Discretion. Yes, sir.

Parr -- I -- 21

F: What are you doing?

P: They're not blanket situations where, you know--

F: You don't go through a probationary period in which if you're--

P: I've done that. I've done all that, yes, sir. As far as the federals are concerned, I'm out of parole; I don't report to them anymore. I don't have anything to do with the federal officials anymore.

F: Who pardons you, the governor? Or is it a federal pardon?

P: For a federal [pardon], it would be the president of the United States. If it were a state pardon over there--

F: You don't have much chance right now, do you?

P: No, sir.

F: You're going to have to get past the 1984 election anyhow.

P: Right.

F: Did being in a sense a political prisoner in Illinois handicap you against the other people or did they leave you alone or what?

P: They left me very much alone.

F: They really didn't know what to make of you.

P: No, sir. I was the only individual in there with that type of crime, and they thought, perjury, you know, what the hell are you doing here?

F: What kind of false statements did you make?

P: Well, they alleged that I made a false statement in relation to my employment through the Duval County Conservation Reclamation District.

Parr -- I -- 22

A: Can I say something here?

F: Yes. I should add that the voice once in a while you hear is Pat Adams.

A: I had recently arrived in the city when all of this came up, and it's very relevant to today's world. There was a difference of opinion about the water supply for South Texas.

F: There still is.

A: Certain far, forward-looking people, knowledgeable people, came to a common conclusion that Corpus Christi needed a second dam, that Lake Mathis and the dam up there wasn't going to get the job done. And they all agreed that there was a perfect site and they called it the R&M site, which isn't too far out of Corpus Christi.

F: Is that that Choke Canyon thing?

P: This is another benefactor [?].

A: Well, not the Choke Canyon, another location. My husband happened to be one of those who thought that the R&M dam site was eminently well suited. He knew the territory because he walked it on foot in company with another man who wasn't able to go to work for two weeks afterwards after walking it on foot. There was a political squabble in this city the likes of which I have never witnessed. It got down to the point where wives, children, grandchildren, whatever, you could expect anything. If you and yours had taken to support the R&M dam site, friend, you were going to get it, because there were other groups that felt that the Choke Canyon dam site was where the dam ought to go. And my family outside of South Texas asked me about this, and I said, "There's not enough water to fill up a teacup up there, much less a dam." This is my family outside of South Texas. So now here we are, it's 1984, there's not enough water out there to fill up a teacup, much less a

Parr -- I -- 23

damn dam. The damage has been done; people were hurt. I contribute my daughter's death in an inadvertent-- I don't think they meant to kill her.

F: How did she die?

A: A hideous death. I'll tell you about it sometime. The tragedies that happened to the children in this town, you wouldn't believe.

F: You mean bad water or no water?

P: No. Drugs. Drugs and fights. The illegitimate children that were born. You cannot hardly touch a family in this town that hasn't had a sorrow that had its roots in the struggle for the dam. One of the biggies involved in this struggle was the head of the company my husband works for, Oscar Wyatt. When the thing came to a vote, this city voted for the R&M dam site. The power structure built the Choke Canyon. They ignored the public vote. This is standard for their way of thinking. Oscar Wyatt moved his corporation to Houston. He left a few people here. We happened to be left here. It's the damndest thing I've ever seen. It's not over yet. And for all these people who are crying in their beer about our water situation, we ought to all of us get up on the top of the tallest building and shout, "We told you so, you sorry s.o.b.s! Look at your power structure! They did it to you." And yes, I'm bitter.

F: Okay, good.

Let's go back to George a minute. Did Lyndon ever do anything further for George in the rest of his life?

P: Sure, he did.

F: What did he do, if you can--

Parr -- I -- 24

P: George was indicted for income tax evasion and got a ten-year sentence, was tried in Houston--ten or twenty years, I think it's ten years--he and a group of people. Tom Donald was involved in it, D. C. Chapa, O. P. Carrillo.

F: Now, Tom Donald had been very much in the news in that 1948 hearing.

P: Yes. Tom Donald in 1948 was the Democratic secretary. A fellow by the name of Clarence Martens was the Democratic chairman at that time. Donald was the secretary. And Tom was also the vice president of the Texas State Bank where the ballots were impounded. Anyhow, all those gentlemen, they were tried over there for fraud and income tax evasion and stealing school funds and mail fraud and I don't know what all, just a whole bunch of charges here. Each one of them had eight or ten counts of indictment. Anyhow, after they got tried and what have you, George sent word to Lyndon through Edgar Linkenhoger he wanted his head out of a trap. He sent him back, he said, "You go see or send your people to go see a gentleman by the name of Abe Fortas." And George's emissary at that time to see Abe Fortas over there was O. P. Carrillo, who was an attorney as well as one of the defendants in the case. Anyhow, he was the go-between between George and Abe Fortas at that time, O. P. Carrillo.

F: I interviewed Fortas.

P: Yes. To my knowledge, I don't think George went to see Abe Fortas.

F: But everything was always done by phone or mail, not in person.

P: There was no phone and there was no mail.

F: Was George's suicide a personal thing or was politics partially responsible?

P: Oh, I think it was a culmination of a lot of things. Unfortunately George toward his latter

Parr -- I -- 25

years became an acid head. I didn't realize this until I got in the joint and found out what LSD could do for you, or do to you. And you know, I got this by talking to people and I got [to] reminiscing over there about things that George would tell me and what occurred to him, like lights coming out of the ceiling and bouncing off the floor.

F: That would drive you nuts.

P: Like seeing people on top of roofs and shooting these people, this, that and the other. It took me a long time to figure out what they--I didn't realize what George was going through. I thought it was--

F: Just talk.

P: --just talk. And I come to find out later on, after talking to some of these guys who had been on LSD, what George was doing was hallucinating, and come to find out there that toward the latter part of George's life, the last two or three years, George was an acid head, strictly. This plus the fact that George told me one time over there he'd never go back to prison.

F: Was the threat of his going back to prison pretty imminent?

P: Yes. It was imminent to the point over there that he had to report that afternoon over there to be incarcerated to go back to prison, in a matter of hours.

A: I'd like to say something here about George's suicide.

F: Okay.

A: That spring I was teaching at something called West Oso Independent School District in the high school. The day that all this happened we had some kind of special program where all of the teachers were gathered as an audience. I forget the occasion. The gentleman who

Parr -- I -- 26

taught next to me was a Chinese refugee who felt that women should still have their feet bound and certainly not have degrees in mathematics and certainly not be teaching next to him.

P: He's not too far out of line.

(Laughter)

A: I strongly suspect that that gentleman's loyalty to this country is something that somebody ought to question. The day that we--

F: He's not going to vote for Geraldine Ferraro. (Laughter)

A: No, I don't know what his politics are. I never discussed it with him. What his feelings are about America versus Communist China is what I would want to know about. That wasn't my province.

But that day we gathered early in the morning and he sat right behind my chair in this public gathering and he just sat there and he patted his foot and he twiddled his thumbs and he could not take his eyes off of me. And I thought, well, I know I'm not your favorite, so what is the name of your game? Well, about noontime an old family friend came and tapped me on the shoulder and said, "Please come into my office." I went into his office and he said, "I think you should know that George B. is dead. It's not public yet." But dealing with the kind of student population that we dealt with, it was imperative to always have your cool and to always be on top of things. And I thanked him for alerting me and I went on about my business, but that Chinese gook--and he was a gook, he is a gook--he sat there and he was upset all day long. And I never knew why, but I always wondered if it had anything to do with the fact that some people may have known that George B. was

Parr -- I -- 27

dead and had hoped that it would be announced at a more appropriate time. Well, I wasn't about to go out and say anything about it, nor was I going to call in--my place was on the job. Well, that gook sat there and by the end of the day he was about to fall apart. He gave the indication he was waiting for something to happen, and the shoe didn't fall.

F: Oh, really? Let's get on the record, what's your relationship with George Parr?

A: Mine?

F: Yes.

A: I knew him very slightly. I respected him very highly. I liked him as a person.

F: Okay. Who in this family is kin to Archer here?

A: Archer, tell him about the kinfolks. My grandfather was some kind of a cousin to one of the founders of the King Ranch. That goes so far back that I haven't had time to deal with that. My grandfather told me that himself.

F: You're not a direct beneficiary?

A: Oh, no, no, no. Not the Klebergs, the originals, Captain [Mifflin] Kenedy.

P: Charlie and myself, we're third cousins. So you know, for all practical purposes, we're just "hello, there"--

F: That matters in Tennessee but not much here.

P: Especially in Texas, after you pass first cousins it really doesn't mean much of anything.

F: Unless she's pretty.

P: Unless she's real pretty, yes.

A: And you can get married if you want to.

F: Neither one of you ever wanted to?

Parr -- I -- 28

P: No.

F: All right. Well, can you think of anything else we ought to cover on this?

P: Well, not--I mean, all the stuff over there that Salas has said about him meeting there in the office with George and Lyndon, that's all nonsense. That's all pipe dreams.

F: Well, you know, he says he went over to the Texas Election Bureau and gave them the returns with something like 765 for Lyndon and 60 to Stevenson, and then the charge was that he came back later and gave him 220 more votes. That's all fabrication?

P: That's all fabrication. That's all nonsense. The other stories about he and George getting out and going deer hunting together at night with submachine guns, that's all a figment of his imagination.

F: You mean he's trying to be important?

P: Well, he's trying to be important, either that or the old man's senile, one of the two. You can say it which way you want to. But George Parr wouldn't give Salas the time of day. That's all nonsense on Salas' part. They never did go hunting together. The question about the machine guns and all that, that's nonsense. That's crap to the crows. That's all bullshit.

A: I'd like to say something here. Shortly after Charles and I were married in Austin we went to live in South America, where he had been living when he graduated. And someone in South America brought to my attention the *Saturday Evening Post*, which did a whole series of things about George B. Parr. I read that and I said to Charlie, "Isn't that one of the names on our wedding invitation list?" and so forth and so on. So the next time we came on vacation, I was out at the ranch and George B. was there and I asked him, "What about all these things in the *Saturday Evening Post*? The part that I know about just simply isn't

Parr -- I -- 29

true. Why don't you sue those people for libel or whatever?" And George B. said to me, "That's too much bother. The people that I care about know it's not true. The rest of the world I just don't give a damn." That was about 1951, I'd say, when he told me that. And that really was his attitude. The people he cared about knew better and the rest of the world, they wouldn't believe him anyway.

F: Do you get the feeling that if you hadn't gone back to San Diego and Alice that you would have avoided a lot of your troubles, that you were branded because you had the name Parr?

P: That's possibly so, yes.

F: You've got to make your decisions at the time.

P: Yes. You know, that's hindsight. You know, I made my bed and I laid in it. So what the hell?

F: What are you doing now?

P: Really truly looking after my mother.

F: She's eighty-nine?

P: No, sir, she's ninety. Ninety years old last week, on the thirteenth of August.

F: That's full time.

P: Almost.

F: Dolph Briscoe did that while he was governor.

P: Yes.

F: I try to get some oil deals together, which I do every now and then, but I'm just about three-quarters retired. I try to run a ranch by long distance telephone calls, which is hard to do.

Parr -- I -- 30

F: Where is the ranch?

P: Out west of San Diego, about five miles west of San Diego.

F: Where do you live actually?

P: In Alice.

F: In Alice?

A: Now you're forbidden to go out on the ranch?

P: Yes, ma'am, I can't go out there. How does that grab you?

F: You think that's going to be lifted?

P: Yes, it will, yes, as soon as my sentence is completed, which will be in 1989.

F: How long a sentence did they give you?

P: Ten years.

F: In 1979?

P: Yes, sir.

F: They going to give you any time off for behaving yourself?

P: No, sir.

F: Don't they usually do that?

P: Most people do, but I don't think this judge is going to give me anything but a hard time.

(Laughter)

F: Good behavior doesn't matter in your case.

P: I don't think I have any good behavior as far as he's concerned.

F: Okay. Well, I thank you for this. I've enjoyed it.

P: I have, too, sir.

Parr -- I -- 31

F: Okay. If you think of anything else that you want to talk about, well, we'd like to get it.

P: We've covered I think the important things.

F: I like excuses to come to Corpus, or as I say, I haven't been to Alice in a long time now.

End of Tape 1 of 1 and Interview I

NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND RECORDS ADMINISTRATION

LYNDON BAINES JOHNSON LIBRARY

Legal Agreement Pertaining to the Oral History Interview of

ARCHER PARR

In accordance with the provisions of Chapter 21 of Title 44, United States Code, and subject to the terms and conditions hereinafter set forth, I, Syleta Parr, do hereby give, donate, and convey to the United States of America all my rights, title, and interest in the tape recording and transcript of the personal interview conducted with my husband, Archer Parr, on August 23, 1984, and prepared for deposit in the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library.

This assignment is subject to the following terms and conditions:

- (1) The transcript shall be available for use by researchers as soon as it has been deposited in the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library.
- (2) The tape recording shall be available to those researchers who have access to the transcript.
- (3) I hereby assign to the United States Government all copyright I may have in the interview transcript and tape.
- (4) Copies of the transcript and the tape recording may be provided by the Library to researchers upon request.
- (5) Copies of the transcript and tape recording may be deposited in or loaned to institutions other than the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library.

Syleta B. Parr March 20, 2006
Donor Date

Allen Weinstein 4/14/06
Archivist of the United States Date