

INTERVIEW I

DATE: June 27, 1968

INTERVIEWEE: JAMES CATO PATTILLO (with MRS. NETTIE PATTILLO WOODYARD)

INTERVIEWER: A. K. JOHNSON

PLACE: Mr. Pattillo's Home, Clanton, Alabama

Tape 1 of 1

J: Mr. Pattillo, would you tell us your first remembrance of Mrs. Johnson as a child when she first came to Alabama?

P: My first remembrance of meeting her--I knew of her, knew who she was--she visited my daughters when we lived in Verbena, Alabama, and spent the night with us. We listened to the radio that night to some programs from Texas. I haven't seen her since, but I've been in correspondence with her. She was a daughter of my first cousin, Minnie Pattillo, whose father and my father were brothers.

J: Just keep on going.

P: My acquaintance with her mother was quite extensive. I visited them while she was a young girl living in Autauga County. But later my uncle wanted to--after his children had finished high school, and the nearest high school was at Marion, Alabama--give them a further education, so he moved to Oxford. They invited me to live with them and go to school, too. So I did and became very familiar with Minnie's habits. She read constantly. She read everything, read the reports and histories and magazines and everything.¹

¹ See footnote number 1 of appendix 1

PATTILLO -- I -- 2

Then after they all graduated from Oxford, they moved back to Autauga County, but they didn't sell their property up there. They kept that for some years afterward, and I visited them several times in Autauga. I had several conversations with Minnie, Lady Bird's mother, while they lived in Autauga, and her father, in later years I was his secretary. I worked for him up until his death,² and I was secretary to his son Claude for some years after his death.

When Minnie married, she and her husband moved to Texas, and her first children were born, two boys, Tommy was the older one, Antonio the second. The mother's health failed, and she sent the children back to Alabama. Tommy, the older son, lived with Uncle Luke, and Antonio, the baby, went to her half-sister, Mrs. W. M. [Emma Susan] Parker. They lived there for some years while their mother went to Battle Creek, Michigan, to a sanitarium. She finally recovered and didn't go back to Texas, but she came to Alabama and lived there for some two or three years, and I saw her frequently then.

I was talking with her once about history, about the great men of the country, and she remarked that no great man ever came from the common herd, that all the great men of history had had a parent or ancestors who were great. And I said, "How about Andrew Johnson?" She said, "I hope you don't call him a great man." So that ended the conversation then.

J: Now is this Mrs. Johnson's mother that you're speaking of now specifically?

P: Yes.

J: All right, sir.

² See footnote number 2 of appendix 1

PATTILLO -- I -- 3

- P: She went back to her husband in Texas, and soon after that Lady Bird was born.³ When Lady Bird was about five years old, her mother had an accident in falling down the stairs in their home, and she was badly injured and didn't recover and died. Lady Bird was just five years old, so her unmarried aunt, Effie Pattillo, went to Texas to take care of her, or to act as a mother to her. After a year or two there she brought Lady Bird back to Alabama with her.
- J: Did she bring her back, Mr. Pattillo, herself, or did Lady Bird come by herself?
- P: Well, I believe Lady Bird came by herself.
- W: Aunt Effie was here, I believe.
- P: What?
- W: Aunt Effie had come back here for a visit I believe, and they sent Lady Bird on the train, didn't they?
- P: Yes. Her father wrote out directions and put it on her breast and put her on the train in the care of the conductor to bring her to Billingsley, Alabama, which he did. And Effie kept her in Billingsley for some years. She went to school in Alabama some, and she later went back to her father in Texas. That's when she met Lyndon Johnson, whom she later married.
- J: Where did she go to school as a child here in Alabama? I understand she did go to summer sessions at the University of Alabama, but did she actually go to school here in her early childhood days?
- P: I think she did.
- W: No. No. She went back to Texas every year in September, Uncle Cato.

³ See footnote number 3 of appendix 1

- P: She did?
- W: Yes, sir. She would come for the summer months. Now, in those days we only had seven and eight months' school.
- P: Yes?
- W: Of course school was out usually the middle of April, or always by the first of May in the days before the nine months became a standard school term. She would stay the summer months in Alabama, but she always went to school in Texas. Aunt Effie would go back with her in the fall.
- P: I've got the old radio we listened to that night.
- J: You also told me last spring, I believe, that she practiced or took piano lessons using this piano that's in your home now. Is that right?
- P: I don't know that she did. I don't think she did, but her mother did.
- J: Oh, I see.
- P: And her Aunt Effie. They bought the piano when they lived in Oxford, and they took piano lessons and practiced on that piano in Oxford. After they moved back to Autauga County they brought the piano with them. Aunt Effie was the one that played the piano generally. Minnie was more interested in the reading than she was in music. So that piano was considered Effie's, and the books were considered Minnie's.⁴
- J: Mr. Pattillo, do you want to tell us about Mrs. Johnson's grandfather?
- P: Yes. When he came home from the war he had nothing except for the

⁴ See footnote number 4 of appendix 1

PATTILLO -- I -- 5

horse that he had in the Army, and he started to farm. My father owned the farm, and he started to farm on part of the land of my father's. After working a few days, he decided he could hire a man to do the work he was doing. He said he could hire him for thirty to fifty-five cents a day, and he knew he could make more money than that. So he hired a man to do his plowing, and he started into some kind of business. First it was lightwood kindling wood. He split up flat lightwood into small sticks and would bundle them and take them to town and sell them. They were in good demand in the city. So he would work up a wagonload of that kindling wood and take it to Montgomery and peddle it out. The money he got from it he would travel over the country and buy up wool and hides and things like that that were in demand in the city, and he'd take that to Montgomery and peddle it out. He accumulated enough money at that kind of business to start a store.

He started a country store, and then advancing people to make crops he built up an extensive business and branched out and had customers in every direction, as much as twenty miles out from the store. In the fall of the year he would ride around visiting his customers and collecting what they owed him and making plans for the next year. So he had a rival in the same kind of business and in the same little old country town of Verbena that he had his business established. This rival was Mr. F. A. Gullledge and he rode around in the fall of the year working his customers about over the country. He got in a conversation with a Negro man down

in Autauga County, and he asked the Negro man if he knew him. The Negro man said, "No, sir." And he said, "Well, who's the meanest man in Autauga and Chilton Counties?" He said, "Well, that's Mr. Pattillo." And he said, "No, it's not Mr. Pattillo. Then who's the next meanest man?" He said, "Oh, yes, that's Mr. Gullledge." So that's the way the Negroes and tenant farmers thought of them, thought that they were extortionists or bosses or masters.

But while he was particular to collect all that was due him, he never wronged anybody. He made profits off them, of course, but he made reasonable profits. He didn't extortion them. Sometimes he would fail to collect and the account would get old and about to run out of date, and he'd try to make another transaction with them to bring their account up to date. But if he couldn't collect anything and couldn't sell them anything more, he would manage to bring in something. So the tale was told that he was out visiting trying to collect from a man whose account was about to run out of date. He wanted to renew it, but the man said he couldn't pay him anything, and he didn't want to sell him any more to increase the debt. So he saw a cat pass along by, and he picked up the cat and petted it a little and said, "What will you take for this cat? I'll buy the cat from you." He said, "Oh, I'll just give you the cat if you want it." He said, "Well, I don't want you to just give him to me. I'll give you credit for a copper on your account." So he renewed the account that way.

J: On the basis of that gift of the cat.

P: Yes. So another tale was told on him. It was a Negro whose account was about to run out of date. [He] came into the store one day and wanted to buy something, but he told him he couldn't sell him any more until he paid some on what he owed. The man told him he didn't have anything, couldn't pay him anything, and he complained of having a headache. So my uncle said, "I'll give you a pill here. I've got some pills in the store here," he said. The pills were bottled in a big bottle of pills, a thousand pills to the bottle, and they only cost seventy-five cents for the bottle. But he gave the Negro man a pill. When his clerk came in he told him about giving the man the pill and told him to charge it to him, charge him a nickel for the pill. So he said all right, he would.

That night when they closed up the store and went to their rooms--he and this clerk slept in the same room but on different beds--he asked this clerk if he had ever charged that pill to the man. He said, "No, I haven't yet, but I will." He said, "Well, don't forget it." The man said along about midnight he awakened and turned and made some little noise in the bed, and my uncle across from the other bed said, "Joe, did you ever charge that pill to that nigger?" He said, "No, I haven't yet, but I will." He said, "Well, do it the first thing in the morning." So in charging the pill up he renewed the account, and it made it run another two years before it would run out of date.

J: Mrs. Woodyard, what is your relationship to Mrs. Johnson?

W: Our grandfathers were brothers, my father and her mother were first

PATTILLO -- I -- 8

cousins, so I guess that makes us third cousins.

J: What's your earliest remembrance of her as a child when she first came to Alabama?

W: Well, I remember when she first came to the store, when my father had met her at the train. He had the Christmas leftover toys hanging in the top of the store, and a little red coaster wagon appealed to Lady Bird. My father got a long hook and took it down for Lady Bird to play with and examine.

J: As she grew older, you as a group of children, what did you do in the summertime to pass your time?

W: I guess we went swimming more than anything else. We swam in the two local creeks. Several summers we made almost daily trips to Gores [?] Pond in Clanton. We had watermelon cuttings, and I went with her on many occasions to visit other relatives, because the other relatives had no children. We spent sometimes a week, sometimes two weeks with Mrs. Will Taylor over at Burnsville. I have visited with her aunt, Mrs. McKay, in Prattville, and occasionally we visited with Carolyn Johnson over at Wetumpka. Of course, we made trips to Montgomery. One time I remember we went to Birmingham to hear Jimmy Rogers. We used to be rather fond of country music when it first became popular. This is not the Jimmy Rogers that people know today, this was the yodeling Jimmy Rogers. We went to Birmingham to see him. We always had a lot of watermelon cuttings and the average rural parties.

J: Children always manage somehow to get in some sort of devilment. Do

you remember any experiences like this when you did something that you shouldn't have done, and you either got caught for it or you got by with it as a group?

W: Actually, the only things that I can remember that we ever did that we weren't supposed to were two things. Once we had a hay ride one night and decided to go in a neighbor's watermelon patch, and of course we were not very quiet. The neighbor recognized a lot of our voices, and consequently the next morning my father had to pay for the watermelons that we had swiped and cut and eaten.

But another time--I don't know that there was anything wrong with it, it just maybe was an indication of our poor judgment finance-wise--in the summer after I had graduated from high school I visited Lady Bird for several weeks before she came to Alabama for the summer. Aunt Effie was already in Alabama, and we had Aunt Effie's car. We were supposed to make the trip from Karnack to Billingsley, and we got over near Shreveport, Louisiana. They were having road construction. We were held up there for some time, and we had to spend one night in Shreveport. So we decided that we would just go all the way and see what there was to be seen. So we had gone out to dinner and had a real good meal and were staying at one of the best hotels in Shreveport.

We suddenly realized after we had got gassed up and so forth that we didn't have enough money to get all the way home. We came into Jackson, Mississippi; we drove that far. We were out of gas, we were out of money, and we put the car in storage and went to

the hotel in Jackson and started wiring. She wired her father, and I wired mine. Of course, it was on Saturday night, and these small places like Karnack and Billingsley didn't have a Western Union station open on Sunday. So we waited until about two o'clock Sunday afternoon, and no money had shown up. Then we started wiring Aunt Effie and Uncle Cato. Didn't you get a telegram from us about the money? Do you remember that?

P: I don't remember.

W: You sent money, so I'm sure you got the telegram. About an hour later Lady Bird's father called. Somebody had gotten him the message from Marshall, and of course the first thing he wanted to know is what happened. Lady Bird started to explain to him that we were held up by road construction, and of course as soon as she said "held up", he thought we'd been robbed. So he got real alarmed, but we finally got the true story across to him, that we had been held up on account of road construction. But he sent us enough money to get the car out of storage and buy a tankful of gas. We had all kind of money coming in there on Monday morning, but we decided we'd leave about four o'clock on Sunday afternoon. We drove from Jackson to Mrs. Ellen Taylor's, and got there about two-thirty in the morning and waked her up and spent the night with her.

J: Did you ever make any trips with her and others? I saw some pictures at Mrs. Higgin's last night down on the Florida coast, on the Gulf.

W: Yes.

PATTILLO -- I -- 11

J: Did you make any of those trips?

W: I made a trip down to Perdido Beach with Mrs. Higgins, Lady Bird, Aunt Effie, and Edwina Mitchell, and Uncle Claude was along on that trip. I got homesick. I didn't stay as long as they stayed. It was my first experience away from home to stay more than just a night or two, so I got homesick. They carried me to Pensacola and put me on the train and sent me back to Montgomery.

J: She showed me the pictures of two old Model T Fords, I think, that they drove down.

W: We made the trip in two Model T Fords. In one of the Fords the seat was fixed, had been cut apart at the back so that it would let down and make a bed. We stayed in a beach house that belonged to a friend of Edwina's. I did know his name, but I've forgotten. But it was right on the beach, and of course for the first two or three days I had a real good time. I'm sure they did the entire trip.

J: Mrs. Clark in Nashville is your sister?

W: That's right.

J: She showed me a photograph in which Lady Bird appeared, I believe, one summer you took a trip up in north Georgia.

W: In the Blue Ridge Mountains, yes, to Clayton and Franklin and actually made side trips. We made one trip over to Chattanooga and Chickamauga, and it was on one of those trips that Of course, when we'd get tired of traveling my younger sister, Lady Bird and I would divide up the back seat. One fellow would take the pillows and the floor part-time, the other two were on the seat. And sometime in

PATTILLO -- I -- 12

that round we had stopped to ask directions, and one of Lady Bird's shoes got kicked out on the running board. We thought we were on the wrong road. It was late at night, and we drove up to the filling station and asked for information as to how to get back to Rabun Gap. The fellow said, "That's the road you just came down. Where have you come from?" And of course he found the shoe, and I'm sure he wondered if we were all in our right minds. But he said, "Somebody's lost a shoe out here," and it turned out to be one of Lady Bird's shoes.

[End of Tape 1 of 1 and Interview I]

APPENDIX NO. 1 TO TRANSCRIPT OF PERSONAL INTERVIEWS CONDUCTED WITH
JAMES CATO PATTILLO JUNE 27, 1968 FOR THE LYNDON BAINES JOHNSON LIBRARY
OF MEMORABILIA TOLD TO DOROTHY PATTILLO GRAND BY HER FATHER,
JAMES CATO PATTILLO.

Footnote No. 1 "Next to her love of books, Minnie loved riding horseback,
and had a horse of her very own named Nell."

Footnote No. 2 "Before his death, Uncle Lute went to Battle Creek for
his health and just before he died he wrote me to come
and get him, which I did."

Footnote No. 3 "Lady Bird's father, Tom Taylor, was in Alabama, at the
time she was born and when he got the news he said,
'Lady-bird, Lady-bird, fly away home, your house is on
fire and your children will burn.'--an expression used
commonly at times of outstanding events. After that she
was always called Lady Bird, although she was named
Claudia after her uncle Claud Pattillo."

Footnote No. 4 "After they broke up the old homestead at Billingsley,
Effie sold me the piano for \$80.00 and this is it here
in my house. I am donating it to the Library."

APPENDIX NO. 2 TO TRANSCRIPT OF PERSONAL INTERVIEW CONDUCTED WITH JAMES CATO PATTILLO JUNE 27, 1968 FOR THE LYNDON BAINES JOHNSON LIBRARY OF MEMORABILIA ADDED BY DOROTHY PATTILLO GRAND, DAUGHTER O JAMES CATO PATTILLO, OF HER EARLIER RECOLLECTIONS OF LADY BIRD JOHNSON WITH WHOM SHE WAS VERY CLOSE IN CHILDHOOD AND TEENS.

When I was a child I would spend a week at a time during the summer with my mother's sister who lived in Billingsley when Lady Bird spent her summers there. There seemed to be a common bond between us. I was just one month older and both of our mothers were dead and we had step-mothers.

She'd come over to my Aunts and play chopsticks on the piano. We roamed all over the hills and woods around there and went swimming a lot. I'd spend the night with her at Uncle Claud's and Aunt Effie's and we'd lie awake telling ghost stories until we were almost too afraid to go to sleep.

We enjoyed reading the Sunday funny papers and one year after she went back to Texas she mailed me a very large bundle of funny papers out of the Texas papers.

Aunt Effie liked to go picnicing on Chestnut Creek which ran through Verbena, Alabama, where I lived as a child, and every summer they would come over in their Buick and bring Lady Birds cousins Nettie and Lucille Pattillo and pick up my sister Mell and me to go on a picnic down on the rocks in that pretty little creek.

One year when we were about twelve we were picnicing there. We pulled off the main road on a private driveway that ran through the woods along the creek to the Baldwin's summer home. I was 'sweet' on one of the Baldwin boys and I was mortified later that day to hear a car horn toot up in their driveway and we had to have our car moved so they could pass along their driveway. To further add to my embarrassment, we ran out of lemonade and Aunt Effie sent us, dirty from play, up to their house to get a jug of water.

One summer Lady Bird went away to summer camp in Texas for a few weeks and came back playing and singing camp songs. One was an Indian song with Indian words and she taught it to us. She played them on the piano my father had bought from Aunt Effie that Aunt Minnie had played on as a girl.

When she was only fifteen she and Aunt Effie drove all the way from Marshall, Texas to Billingsley, Alabama in one day, arriving around midnight and Lady Bird had done all the driving by herself without stopping except for meals and gas.

When she was sixteen and had finished highschool she and my cousins in Billingsley drove over to Verbena and picked my sister and me up to go out to the Higgins Camp, which belonged to Lady Bird's cousin, on Blue Creek, about seven miles out from Verbena on the backwater above Mitchell Dam. It was a beautiful place. Lady Bird had her guitar and played and we all sang. We also had a portable phonograph--the kind you had to wind by hand. There were no boys in the party but we girls danced together and sat around listening to love songs and talking about boys. We went boating, fishing, and swimming and had a grand time.

That fall Lady Bird went to college in Austin and I went to college in Montgomery and we corresponded regularly. We wrote about everything--all our dreams and ambitions--life--love--politics--prohibition--and the like. She was taking Journalism and wrote most interesting and entertaining letters. She was interested in a young man in her class who was the nephew of a Western writer but I can't remember his name now.

That was the last I saw or heard directly from her--I had news of her from time to time through my correspondence with Aunt Effie--until one rainy Sunday Afternoon early in 1942 she called me from a hotel in Los Angeles. I was living in Hollywood and my husband was sick in bed with the flu, so we made plans to meet for lunch Monday at Bullocks Tea Room. After lunch we took a taxi out to I. Magnins where she bought a dress to wear to a dinner she and Lyndon were going to that evening in Beverly Hills. It was a navy silk with large pink roses and cost \$75.00. She was trying to buy something to please Lyndon and I suppose it did for, years later, I saw a picture of her in Washington wearing a dress very similar to it.

I've corresponded with her off and on through all the years and cherish every letter I have from her.

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Legal Agreement pertaining to the Oral History Interview of James Cato
Pattillo and Nettie Pattillo Woodyard

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, Dorothy Pattillo Grand of Burbank, California, 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 a personal interview conducted on June 27, 1968 in Clanton, Alabama, 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.

Dorothy Pattillo Grand
Donor

March 20, 1979
Date

James B. Rhoads
Archivist of the United States

April 20, 1979
Date

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NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND RECORDS SERVICE
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