INTERVIEW I

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INTERVIEWEE: ARTHUR C. PERRY

INTERVIEWER: Joe B. Frantz

PLACE: Executive Office Building, Washington, D.C.

Tape 1 of 1

F: Mr. Perry, first of all, tell us a little bit about your background--where you were born, how you came to Washington, and what you have been doing.

P: I came to Washington in June of 1919 in response to an offer by the then-Senator Sheppard of Texas of a place in his office for the summer. I can well recall that at that time I had the understanding that the position was just for three months.

F: You are a Texan?

P: Yes, I was born and reared and educated at Austin, Texas. My plans after I came up here were to go back at the end of the summer and enter Texas University again. Senator Sheppard said, "Why don't you stay here and work in my office, and I'll arrange your hours so you can go to the University here?" This was a better arrangement than I had at Austin; in fact, I had no real financing and it was a problem getting up the tuition.

F: That way you could earn pay and go to school, too.

P: That's right. So the upshot of it was I stayed here and went to George Washington University where I took both the LL.B. and LL.M. degrees. By that time the Depression [of 1919] was on pretty strong, and I was lucky to be here. I had nothing to go back to in Texas, so I stayed with Senator Sheppard.

Tom Connally, who was then a member of the House of Representatives, came to Senator Sheppard later and told him that his secretary had died, and he had known of me and my experience and wondered if the Senator would object to his offering me a job as his secretary over in the House. Shortly after that Mr. Connally announced his candidacy for the Senate, and was elected. So I returned to the Senate with the new Senator from Texas.

F: So you had served two senators at that time.

P: And it was while I was with Senator Connally that one day in November, 1931, the newly-elected congressman from Corpus Christi, Dick Kleberg, came to the office and introduced to me Lyndon Johnson. He said that he had brought him up here as his secretary, and he wanted me to help him out as much as I could and teach him all the "ropes" that I knew.

As a consequence, Lyndon moved into the hotel where I was staying, a small hotel near the Capitol.

F: Was that the Dodge House?

P: The Dodge Hotel, its name at that time. The hotel had been operated by the YWCA during the war as a hotel exclusively for women.

After the war was over, there was no need for such a facility. Because of the widespread knowledge that the hotel had been used as a women's hotel, men were hesitant to enter. The hotel officials finally decided to offer their accommodations to men of their choice in an effort to try to "break the ice." I was the first man who moved into the hotel after this action by the hotel authorities.

F: It was tremendously convenient for a young man working on the Hill.

P: As I remember, the first month or so they gave me my room rent free. After that, I paid a very nominal sum, and as I remember, Lyndon moved

into the hotel in the room adjoining mine. That was our first association. Others on the staffs of Senator Connally and Congressman Kleberg also lived there for a time. It was a sort of Texas headquarters for personnel working around the Capitol.

We had many discussions at night in one or the other's rooms. Generally, it was all about our work and our interest in politics. Mr. Johnson was eager to learn everything he could. He naturally was in the forefront on all of the discussions.

F: Did he ask a lot of questions, or did he mainly listen?

P: No, he asked questions. When he wasn't satisfied with the answers he received, he would press his point further. We'd go to dinner together at a nearby cafeteria. Mr. Johnson would be the first in line, get his tray and get to a table and "wolf" his food and practically be free when we got to the table with our trays. This left him the time to ask questions, or to argue with us over the answers we gave him. He sometimes gave me the impression that he didn't even know what he was eating, he seemed so intent on arguing some political question or some situation that he had been confronted with during the day.

F: Now this is right in the depth of the Depression, isn't it?

P: That's right.

F: You had a lot to talk about then in the way of issues and what to do about them.

P: Lots of new legislation was being introduced under the Roosevelt Administration, and we would discuss these various bills and recommendations. Mr. Johnson always had a strong viewpoint. But when he didn't know the answer, he would sometimes argue with you, and it was some time before I

observed that this was a technique of getting more information on the subject. He would argue with you about your position on the matter, and whether or not you had been familiar with it enough to express the opinion.

I remember one time we were seated in a restaurant nearby the hotel. We got to discussing some heated issue, and without realizing it, we had raised our voices so as to attract other people in the restaurant that were interested in the debate or discussion we were having. They pulled up their chairs around our table, and I was very much embarrassed by it, but it was typical of how a dinner with Lyndon Johnson in those days went.

F: Did you have a fairly wide range of opinion among the group that got together at dinner, or did you tend to agree on issues?

P: There seemed to be a good divergence of views; generally, each man was reflecting the views of the member of the Congress with whom he was associated, and, of course, we had both Republicans and Democrats. We got into some heated arguments.

At that time, also, there was an organization here known as the Little Congress, made up of the personnel of the various congressional offices. It was patterned after the Congress, had all the rules and regulations and personnel procedures that the regular Congress had. Every Friday night we met in the caucus room and introduced bills and spoke on them and had a great time in discussing these issues, and it was a real good training ground also.

F: Were these bills you introduced more or less duplicates of what were being handled in the big Congress?

P: Generally, they were the bills--that's right. And we had gotten enough publicity in connection with it that we had many visitors come and listen to the proceedings. Finally Senator Huey Long, from Louisiana, came one night, and to our surprise he brought along a group of newspapermen, as well as photographers. He turned the session into a sounding board for his philosophy.

We held our elections regularly for the officers of the Little Congress, much in the fashion they are selected in the big Congress. About this time we were holding an election for the speaker and the various offices. The practice had more or less grown up whereby the ones in office were moved up in order of seniority. This got to be so prevalent that the elections were a foregone conclusion. By way of changing the procedure and putting more interest into the Little Congress, I suggested that Mr. Johnson offer himself as a candidate for speaker of the Little Congress, although he wasn't very well known here and hadn't been an officer in the Little Congress.

Normally this would have resulted in his being defeated, except for the fact that Lyndon Johnson doesn't take things for granted. He got out and along with several others of us who were supporting him, we canvassed the Hill and got every member we could to take an interest in it, and at least report on the night we were going to hold our elections. All of the personnel of the Hill were eligible for membership in the Little Congress. This campaign was carried on without the other side knowing anything about it, and much to their chagrin, when we came to the meeting, the room was overflowing with prospective members, or members who were eligible but who had never shown up previously.

The upshot of the election was that Mr. Johnson was elected speaker. This created a sensation among the other members who were taken completely by surprise, and some of them were very indignant at our action.

F: It wasn't etiquette?

P: No. However, it was entirely appropriate because any member of the staff of a member of Congress was automatically eligible for membership whether he wanted to exercise it or not. And the people that we brought in that night were eligible but just hadn't been coming, or who hadn't shown any previous interest in the matter.

F: Did you have to do much persuading to get Mr. Johnson to run?

P: None. I remember telling him that I thought it would give him an opportunity to express his views more widely than otherwise, and that he would enjoy it. So he offered, and we got out, and as I said later, got members out of the woodwork. This was an instance showing his intensity and organizing ability. It was this tremendous drive that he always put into any activity or end that he wanted to accomplish.

F: The Little Congress still doesn't continue now, does it?

P: No. It flourished for several years, and personnel in the meantime changed with the change of the membership of the big Congress, and, finally, it was abandoned although it was a wonderful training ground for youngsters who wanted to learn about legislation and legislative procedures. We had some excellent debaters, and they would always take different sides on bills. In fact, some of us took a different side just by way of giving opposition to a viewpoint that was being expressed.

F: Sort of a superior debating society.

P: That's right.

F: Then Mr. Johnson left to become NYA director back in Texas.

P: Yes. I remember one night we were at dinner, and I told him that they were going to appoint a NYA director for Texas, and Senator Connally was turning over in his mind someone to recommend for the place. And I said, "Lyndon, this would be a good job for you." And he said, "Do you think so?" I said, "Yes, I do seriously." I said, "If you are interested, come over tomorrow morning to the office and I'll speak to Senator Connally in the meantime and see what he thinks about it."

Mr. Johnson was there the next morning, and, as I recall, the Senator had a little conversation with him and then sent him down to someone in the department. The outcome of it was, with other help that may have been registered, Mr. Johnson was selected as NYA director for Texas and was the youngest director in the United States. He made a marvelous record and got a great deal of publicity, at least locally, and this was the basis of his finally offering for Congress, for the seat in the Tenth District, where a vacancy had occurred through the death of Congressman Buchanan.

F: Did you work in that 1937 campaign?

P: I worked as much as I could.

F: Were you still with Senator Connally at that time?

P: No, at that time I was in the legal division of the Internal Revenue Bureau.

F: In Washington?

P: In Washington. And I wrote letters to all my friends and acquaintances and told them about Mr. Johnson and urged them to get active in his

behalf, and I remember that one of the other candidates in the contest took offense at my activity as a government employee in the campaign and tried to make some trouble for me with respect to my own position. However, when Mr. Johnson got elected, there was nothing done about it, and I never had any thought that there would be anything done about it, although it was supposed to scare me out of my activity in his behalf.

F: So then you welcomed him back up here as a congressman.

P: He came back as a congressman, and then--

F: By that time, he was married. Were you married?

P: No. I married later.

Congressmen's and senators' offices worked close together, but there was naturally competition between us in the jobs we were doing, always wanting to try to get the most credit for the congressman or the senator in connection with any political action that was taken or primary appointment made. Mr. Johnson, of course, realized the advantage I had of being with a member of the Senate, and he got a particular delight in being able to accomplish some result and notify the constituents before we did. This competition was good for both of us; it kept us on our toes. But when Lyndon was finally elected to the Senate, he notified his staff that he didn't want them to be carrying on the competition with Senator Connally's office because we were going to work together, and he knew of the competition that had been generated before, and he didn't want us to do that. But it showed how keen he was and active he was in his work as congressman and previously as secretary to Mr. Kleberg. He notified his staff right at the beginning of his taking his seat that he didn't want them to be engaging in any competitive con-

test with me or Senator Connally's office with respect to matters of mutual interest.

F: To go back, did he talk with you about his decision to run for Congress the first time in 1937?

P: Yes. He made a phone call from Austin to me up here telling about the suggestion that had been made that he become a candidate for the place as congressman for the district, and what did I think of it? I knew of the many friendships he had made with the young people in the NYA and also knew of his activity and thoroughness in campaigning. So I told him I thought he had an excellent chance, and I also knew that once he undertook it, he'd be the most active man in the race. There were a number of candidates--all locally well known politicians--and they took Mr. Johnson's candidacy as a foregone conclusion that he wasn't well enough known to figure in the contest. However, he covered the district from every cotton row to every political center and saw as many people as he could possibly reach day and night. The outcome of it was when the votes were counted, he had more votes than any other man in the race. Since this was a contest where the high man wins, it turned out that Lyndon Johnson, practically unknown, had won out over eight or nine other well known politicals, for the district.

F: Did you see much of him in his early days as a congressman, or had your paths diverged at this time?

P: No, I didn't see as much of him, of course, and, too, he was married by that time and there was never the opportunity for the close associations we had such as that at the beginning of his residence in Washington. Of course, we saw one another at social affairs at times, but in later years, his activities took him in different fields.

F: When he decided to run for the Senate against Pappy O'Daniel and Gerald Mann in 1941, did you have any contact with him in the making of that decision?

P: Not that I personally recall. I was interested in it, and confident that I had talked to him about it, but above assuring him that I'd do everything in my minor way, I don't believe I took any active part in it. I, at that time, was in the Internal Revenue Service, and I was restricted in what I could do in a political way.

F: Did you later rejoin Senator Connally's staff?

P: Yes. I well remember one day the Senator called me on the phone down at the Internal Revenue Bureau and wanted to know why I hadn't been up to see him lately. Well, the next day at lunchtime, I went up to the Capitol to see the Senator and was glad to greet him. I was puzzled about what he wanted because I knew he just didn't happen to think of me and call me to come up and see him. Congress had, in the recent months before that, created the position of administrative assistant for each senator. The position had a great deal more prestige and salary than had previously been provided by Congress.

F: It wasn't just a name change from secretary to administrative assistant? It actually did involve different responsibilities?

P: That's right. But, by that time, I had been in the government service long enough that I was beginning to realize that it was going to be my career, and I was interested in establishing my eligibility for retirement eventually. This position paid considerably more than I had previously been paid, and so I was happy to accept the Senator's offer and return again to Capitol Hill, thinking that I would be there prob-

ably four or five more years, but that it would give me a higher base for retirement. However, as my experience has been around Congress, your plans are often changed without your having any responsibility for it. Senator Connally finally decided that he wouldn't run for re-election and didn't run. This left me as an unemployed annuitant of the Civil Service, but it only lasted one afternoon. The afternoon after the final adjournment of the Congress, when Senator Connally went out of office, Mr. Johnson called me and asked me to come over and have a little visit with him, the substance of which was, how about my coming with him now?

F: He was in the Senate by now?

P: He was in the Senate by that time.

F: Let's go back just a minute before we go ahead with that. Had you been close at all during the 1948 contest in which he came to the Senate, this one in which he nicknamed himself Landslide Lyndon? The one against Coke Stevenson?

P: By that time, the Hatch Act was in the law, and I couldn't take any active part without jeopardizing my own position, and so other than talking to friends and trying to influence their vote, I couldn't take any action that would smack of political activity.

F: Yes, sir. So Senator Johnson, now, offered you the position as administrative assistant with his office?

P: And the next morning I reported to his office, having been retired for one day. This is the only break I have had in my service up until now.

F: What did you do with him, then, during the 1950s?

P: Well, I acted as his assistant for the management and operation of the office. By that time, Mr. Johnson's activities were very widespread

and, of course, he had a much larger staff than we had known before, and it was a beehive of activity. I was acting as assistant in this new position with him and stayed with him, of course, throughout his career in the Senate up until today where he was successfully moved up finally to become president.

F: Did you run the office, more or less?

P: Well, I couldn't take credit for running the office more or less. That was my own title and my function. I tried to do what the job required on the basis of my experience and knowledge of the work, and knowing Mr. Johnson's policies and of his deep interest in everything he undertook.

F: Was he Senate majority leader at the time you went with him, or did that come--that came a little later, didn't it?

P I think that came later, in the next election.

F: Do you know any of the circumstances surrounding his being selected to be the Senate majority leader?

P: I don't believe I know anything personally about it. He had been just as active in the Senate as he had always been, and I think he brought about the favorable notice of such leaders in the Senate as Senator Russell of Georgia and so forth, and they are responsible at the caucus that always precedes the opening of a new Congress. They were the ones who had suggested his selection, and his selection, I believe, established him as the youngest majority leader in the history of the Congress. You know his career from then on. He finally became vice president and then president.

F: Now, he developed several jobs growing out of this position as Senate majority leader so that he had a staff for the Preparedness

Subcommittee and one as majority leader and one as chairman of the Space Committee and one as chairman of the Policy Committee. Right?

P: That's right.

F: Did he tend to let these various jobs overlap, particularly I'm thinking about from the standpoint of the working office, or did he keep the office staff somewhat distinct from each other according to their functions?

P: Well, generally they were kept distinct. He would have someone in each organization that was in charge of the operation, although it was natural that with as many activities as that, under one head, that we did overlap, or rather we were able, sometimes when one group was behind, to be able to call on the other to help out especially with correspondence. We had worlds of correspondence at that time and the regular office staff wasn't capable of handling it all and we called on the other groups for help to bail us out.

F: Did the several staffs get in each other's way? Were there ever any tensions between them or did they pretty well appreciate the fact that the others existed?

P: Well, I don't recall any friction that ever arose between us. Everybody knew that he or she was there to do a job and it was all for the aid and the help of the Senator. He kept in close touch with all of us, and had a remarkable facility for organizing such an activity.

F: Did he do a good bit of his own hiring, or did he leave that to people like you?

P: Well, the regular office staff--just secretaries and typists and stenographers--were generally selected by the head of the office, but always with the approval of Mr. Johnson.

F: He always met them before they were formally approved?

P: That's right.

F: What did people--what were people like Walter Jenkins and John Connally doing in the office at this time?

P: Well, Walter Jenkins, of course, had been with the Senator for years and was his very close assistant. He was, as I remember, put in charge of the Policy Committee. The Senator was the head of the Policy Committee and there was a staff for that activity. As I remember, Walter took that, but he was still available to assist in the regular congressional office at any time and did so.

F: What was John Connally's particular range?

P: I don't believe John was in the office at the time I was. I remember John being there, but I was still with Senator Connally then. I don't believe I had gone with Mr. Johnson then.

F: So you two didn't overlap?

P: No.

F: Mr. Johnson had a reputation for working his staff very hard. Did he compensate for this by some other attentions or--?

P: Well, he had the facility for developing loyalty among his associates and his employees to the point that they never complained about extra hours that we had to put in when the occasion demanded it or required it. But while he was very demanding that the work come first, he was always interested in the welfare of each individual in times of sickness or stress and was anxious to help out if he could and did.

F: Can you cite some specific instances of this?

In 1960, Mr. Perry, there was a boom for Senator Johnson to get the Democratic nomination, and the frontrunner seemed to be Senator Ken-

nedy at that time. Was there much talk around Senator Johnson's office about the possibility of his getting the nomination?

P: Oh, of course, among the members we were intensely interested in the prospects of it, and I can well recall the elation that we all had when Mr. Johnson had finally decided to run and made his announcement. I was there at the time, and I remember how exciting it seemed to me, historic; but I didn't go to the convention. My job was here at the office in the meantime.

F: Was there a feeling among the staff that he had a real chance for the nomination?

P: Well, I believe we were so prejudiced, each one of us, in his behalf, that we couldn't make a very objective statement on that. We wanted to analyze every situation we could as being favorable to him.

F: Up to the point that it was announced that he would be a candidate, had there been any activity outside the office towards trying to persuade delegates and so on?

P: The activity wasn't on the part of the office staff, necessarily. By that time there were people who were taking an active hand outside of the office, and his friends were going to various states and attending conventions and promoting Mr. Johnson wherever they could. Sort of advance men, as we called them.

F: When did you first learn that he had been offered and had accepted the vice presidential nomination by Mr. Kennedy?

P: It was, of course, speculated in the newspapers the next morning that Mr. Kennedy was going to offer the vice presidency to Mr. Johnson, but we didn't, at least I didn't think, that he would take it in view of the

fact that he had so strongly indicated that he was running for president and not necessarily for vice president. Of course, I was very much surprised when it turned out that he had been offered the vice presidency by Mr. Kennedy and that he accepted.

F: Was it the general thinking of the office force that if offered he might not accept?

P: Well, there was a newspaper report to that effect. And being this far removed from it, I had nothing to go on except newspaper speculation.

F: Senator Johnson never had indicated anything one way or another to the staff?

P: Not that I was aware of. He may have discussed it individually with one or two of them.

F: But not generally?

P: Not generally.

F: What activities did you have then during the campaign of 1960? Did your office get involved, or did you stay back and run a senator's office?

P: The Senator's office was run just the same as it was before, but in addition to that, by working nights and Sundays and at all extra times--we were all just snowed under in the detail that goes into the letters that are to be written by the hundreds, and that was where our activity was during the campaign mostly.

F: Whom did you send these letters to? Were they replies to letters that had come in, or were they solicitations, or what was the general run?

P: Well, they were both. We had long lists of names of delegates and political activists in other parts of the country, and we naturally tried to contact them and influence them as much as possible. And so we

sent out thousands of letters, which had to be formulated and written and signed, and it was an overwhelming task of detail.

F: Did the President insist on approving these letters individually, or did you have somewhat of a free hand to send them out in his name?

P: No, we didn't attempt, on our own, to compose such letters. They were composed by Mr. Johnson primarily and then we furnished these lists. Our work was largely the detail of getting out this mountain of correspondence that was necessary to reach as many of these influential politicians as possible.

F: When did you close down your Senate office and move over here? Right after the election or did you wait until the new Congress convened?

P: You mean after he was--

F: After he was elected vice president. Of course he was elected senator at the same time, but he resigned from that. He was elected in November and then he became vice president in January. I was wondering if you started shutting down the Senate office right away or if you kept it right up until the time you moved here, or what you did.

P: Well, when he became vice president, there weren't too many extra duties placed on the office. We still carried on mostly the correspondence he had had previously as senator because constituents felt that now that he was vice president he was more in a position to be helpful to them than when he was just a senator. No, as I remember, the office work was increased, but it didn't change very much in its character in that we still had the routine requests for pensions and visas and that sort of thing.

F: When he moved over here, did he move into the same suite that Vice President Humphrey has now?

P: The fact of the matter is that I wasn't here at the time of his succeeding to the presidency. I was on a trip and was on a ship.

F: So you weren't involved in the move?

P: I wasn't involved in the move and have no knowledge of it except what I was told about how they transferred down here. It wasn't until I got back from this trip--I canceled the trip when the news broke and got turned around and came back. So I wasn't here until a couple of weeks or more after the staff took over.

F: Where were you on the ship when you got the news about Mr. Kennedy's assassination?

P: We were in Palermo, Sicily, and I had gone off the ship that day to make a sight-seeing trip around the city. When I came back to the ship that afternoon--we were going to sail that evening--I was told the news of the President's assassination and the fact that Mr. Johnson was also injured, which disturbed me considerably. The first reports had it Mr. Johnson had also been struck, but this wasn't true.

F: How long after the assassination was this actually? I'm trying to think of the time lag there between Sicily and Texas.

P: Well, when I got the news, it was along about six or seven o'clock at night, and I remember they came in and announced it in the dining room.

F: On the ship, you mean?

P: On the ship.

F: Bet you didn't finish that meal.

P: I certainly didn't. I'll never know how everybody was struck by the news. Most of us just sat there and gazed into space and just ceased to eat the meal.

F: I've often wondered just how many tons of food were wasted that day because, you know, both on the East Coast and in the Central Time Zone, it came during the lunch period. Well, I didn't eat any lunch that day. All over the country it must have been somewhat the same thing.

Then, did you cut your trip short?

P: I at once sent a message to the office telling where I was and that I was canceling out the balance of my trip and as soon as I could arrange some transportation I would return to Washington. Some way that message must have fallen into the hands of the press, because the next morning when I got to Naples I was awakened about six-thirty by a telephone call from the local consulate telling me that there was a group of newspapermen awaiting my arrival and that they wanted to interview me about the purpose of my trip and why I was over there at that time. To my astonishment, when my wife and I stepped out of the stateroom, the whole corridor of the ship was filled with newspapermen and photographers. They wanted to interview me about my connection with the new President and what my purpose was of being over there. I was a little flabbergasted at the fact that they knew about it--rather knew about my being there. I don't know how to account for the news getting to them.

F: Did they tend to disbelieve that this was just a private tour?

P: The newspapermen took the position that I must have been over there on some mission of some kind, and I explained my wife and I had made this trip once or twice before, and it was simply a vacation trip. I don't believe I was ever able to convince them otherwise, but that was actually the case. And they began asking me questions about policies of the President and what his views were going to be and so forth, all of

which I had no basis for making any statement whatever. Finally, I just fell back on the statement that the President had worked closely with President Kennedy and that many of the policies, or all of the policies of the administration had, in one way or another, been considered by both the President and the Vice President, and that he was behind those policies and it probably could be assumed that he wouldn't change those policies particularly, but would carry them forward with modifications, if necessary.

F: Did you fly home from Naples?

P: No, I didn't fly home. I offered to fly and sent a message to that effect. I guess it got lost in the shuffle, because I never had any response to it. But the Consulate notified me that they would be glad to arrange a flight for us if necessary. But I declined to let them do it. When we got to Genoa, the same thing was repeated about the newspapermen coming aboard and wanting to interview me. At each one of these points the local townspeople had arranged memorial services for President Kennedy.

F: Or prayers for the future President?

P: Well, they were both; but primarily they were memorial services for President Kennedy. He was very popular in Italy, and there was a tremendous turnout for the ceremonies held in the cathedral. The consulate arranged to send a car down to the dock for me and my wife, and we attended. When we got to the cathedral, there were just literally hundreds who couldn't get in who were just standing outside. The consul told me that they had been at the consulate during the morning and had left flowers just banked all around the consulate, as a memorial. The

same thing happened at Genoa. The cathedral was draped in black, and many of the stores and business houses had closed down for the day and had black draped over their doors. I had people come up to me, hand me a little bouquet of flowers and ask that I take it to Mrs. Kennedy.

F: They were sincere in this--thought you could kind of represent them as a go-between?

P: That's right. It was quite a moving experience for us.

F: Changed the tone of the trip for you, didn't it?

P: Yes. We finally arranged passage on a returning ship. So, by that time, the staff of Mr. Johnson had been installed here at the White House. I wasn't here for that.

F: Did the staff move in without much lost motion, or did you find confusion when you did get back? Had things settled down pretty quickly?

P: Things settled down very quickly. I was given an office here in the Executive Office Building, and there was that stack of mail and telegrams for my handling just the same as when I left, but it was a new angle, of course, that I had never experienced before. It was pretty exciting and moving.

F: Have you handled a certain type of correspondence, or general, or what?

P: Well, a senator's office is just a big public relations office for the whole state. The constituents call on him for every conceivable service, and they mostly had to do with claims and desires of the individual for some kind of assistance. My job had been largely to contact these departments, present the claims, and urge them on their merits. And that still goes on in the White House the same as it did in the Vice President's office, except that we have a constituency of the whole

country, and they feel you have the ultimate power in these matters, and that the President, if he wants to, can do anything within reason to bring about fulfillment of their desire.

F: To many of them he is their personal representative in Washington.

P: Yes, with more power than he ever had before.

F: You must have a fairly wide knowledge, then, of government here in Washington and whom to contact.

P: Well, I've certainly been exposed to it for fifty years, lacking five months. My job has been largely handling the requests that are made of a senator or the President with respect to all manner of claims and benefits to which the individuals have the notion that they are entitled.

F: Many people, and not necessarily his friends, have said that President Johnson has the most detailed and intimate knowledge of the government of any president within their memory. Where did he get this knowledge? Did he study? Was it just from observation?

P: Well, he's constantly at it, and he had never dissipated any of his energies on outside activities that I've seen. He had such a one-track mind on achieving success in politics that he was bound in time to succeed.

F: When did you first begin to suspect that this man might have presidential potentialities? Does it go as far back as his being a congressman?

P: Well, I have nothing in mind that I could point to, except that anyone that is as active and as successful in his operations as the Senator was, and the Congressman, when he was congressman, is bound to be recognized by his associates and others. It just grew. But I can't point to

any one thing as indicating my thought that he was going to become a candidate for the presidency.

F: You, of course, have heard all these tales of the Johnson treatment that he used to give people in the Senate particularly, Congress a little less so. As a member of the staff, did you see evidences of this? Is this legitimate, or is this something that his associates and the press have invented?

P: As far as the staff is concerned, it wasn't a question of persuading them to do it. If he wanted it done, that was our duty to see that it was done. We never did argue with him about it, at least I never did. He is very persuasive in dealing with opposite viewpoints.

F: You first knew him and, to a certain extent, had the opportunity of instructing him when he came up here as a callow youth. How do you think he has changed over these nearly forty years? What evidence of growth, for instance, have you seen? Has he gotten rid of any bad habits or bad tactics through these years?

P: Well, I hardly know how to undertake an answer to that. He has naturally changed, as anybody would over that period of years and being exposed to the opportunities he has had. Of course, my work has continued as it was in its own separate sphere, and I don't know how to say that he has changed except that the change was normal, having had the experiences and growth that he has had. But I don't know quite how to answer how his habits have been changed. I do know that when he had his heart attack the first thing the doctor told him was that he would have to stop smoking. He was a chain smoker at that time and so from that day to this I don't think he has ever smoked--if that be a bad habit.

F: Well, I was thinking really--that's fine--but I was thinking really more of--you remember the anecdote of Senator [Alvin] Wirtz [of Texas] telling him when he was fairly new in the business as a congressman that you can tell a man to go to hell but you can't make him go, and this is supposed to have had an influence on the Congressman so that he never, from that time forward, sort of--he wasn't as abrupt with people as he had been previously.

P: Well, that may be true. I have never had any incident where he was abrupt with me in my work or my association in the office. He's always been wonderful to me, and I think one of the greatest experiences of my life has been in association with him. But certainly he has mellowed--maybe would be the word--due to time and experiences he has had.

F: When he had the heart attack, you were with him at that time; that is, you were with the office?

P: That's right.

F: What changes did that make in the running of the office?

P: Well, immediately there was a deluge of phone messages, telegrams, and letters and so forth. All of these had to be handled, just acknowledged, and, of course, they brought about that work on the part of the office and everybody was anxious to help. I remember my wife and I came down to the office, I believe it was on a Sunday after the heart attack, and just answered the telephone all day long. There were phone calls coming all day, and we just took those calls and tried to explain to the people what had happened and what was being done.

F: Did you keep a log of callers to show him who had called?

P: Yes. I seem to remember that there was a log of these calls, and Mrs. Johnson was usually taking messages out to him after the doctor told him

it was all right to do so. And he kept advised of things in which he would be interested respecting the office and its activity.

F: Before he was released by the hospital, did he sort of set up an office force out there at the hospital?

P: I don't remember that. I think Mr. Jenkins went out to see him regularly and would take mail after he was up and able to take a part in handling the mail. Some of it was brought to him, and he indicated what he wanted done with it.

F: Do you think the heart attack gave him a patience he hadn't had before?

P: Well, I would think so, but I can't be specific on that. I've never had a heart attack, but I've had some illnesses in my time, and I think each one of them has a tendency to teach me patience. I'm sure Mr. Johnson has become a more patient man possibly than he ever would have otherwise.

F: During the period of the heart attack, did Mrs. Johnson--was she active in the office, or was she mainly just courier duty?

P: At first, she was there at the hospital, but later she was keeping in touch with the office very closely, and if I'm not mistaken, she came down and worked in the office some.

End of Tape 1 of 1 and Interview I

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Arthur C. Perry

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