

INTERVIEW IV

DATE: June 10, 1982

INTERVIEWEE: MARY RATHER

INTERVIEWER: MICHAEL L. GILLETTE

PLACE: Miss Rather's residence, Gonzales, Texas

Tape 1 of 1

R: After the 1941 campaign for the Senate, it had been my plan to remain in Austin and continue to work for Senator [Alvin] Wirtz as I had in the past. But one evening in the fall when Senator Wirtz was on a trip to Washington, Mr. Johnson asked him if he could borrow me, I guess, that after having run for statewide office he was receiving about three hundred letters a day and his staff couldn't get them all answered. So that evening I received a telephone call. I was at a party, and they traced me from my aunt and uncle's house to the party. Senator Wirtz was in Washington on business and he and Mr. Johnson were together. They called me and asked me if I would like to, or if I would mind coming up there and helping out in Mr. Johnson's office for a short period. Senator Wirtz said that it was all right with him because he wanted to take a vacation, take his wife and go on a trip. I believe I remember they went to South America. I was supposed to have a vacation, but I didn't get it. I went to work in Washington. We stayed there through Christmas; I don't remember coming back to Austin. And of course, December 7 came with the bombing of Pearl Harbor.

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G: We did discuss that aspect last time.

R: I think so. Yes, that's what I was sitting here thinking. Anyway, the result was that I stayed in Washington a good many years.

G: Now let me ask you about a series of events after Mr. Johnson went on active duty in the navy but before he went to the South Pacific. You know, he went out on the West Coast and did some work there for the Manpower or Navy Department. I think he was looking at NYA [National Youth Administration] projects, as well, and things of this nature. Do you recall anything about his work on the West Coast?

R: Not much, because I was so new in the office for one thing. I had enough to learn about how to do his office work representing the Tenth District. His committee work, his Naval Affairs Committee work, was something that I hardly knew anything about. The Naval Affairs Committee had its own staff. I only know that he did go to the West Coast, that Lady Bird either went with him or joined him out there but didn't stay very long and returned to Washington, that I believe Mr. [Jesse] Kellam was out there in some capacity in the navy. It's true that they did go to NYA offices and places where NYA work was being done. I don't mean office work but other projects that the NYA did. And he went to some other kind of naval installations out there on the Pacific Coast clear up, I think, to Washington or Oregon. But I don't remember any details. For a time when he was out there, John Connally was with him. I can't tell you any more about it, though.

G: My impression is that after a while he grew restless in this capacity and wanted something else and there were all sorts of alternative forms of work being discussed, and one was that he'd go to work with Harry Hopkins. Do you remember that?

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R: I don't remember that. I remember he wanted to get where things were going on, the war was going on. I don't remember any details, though, I just know he went. Well, I know this much, that Senator [Warren] Magnuson was also in the naval reserve and was also on the Naval Affairs Committee. And he was a young man like Mr. Johnson and wanted to see some action, also. Someone who knows more about it than I do or remembers it better than I could tell you more, and I may even be incorrect in what I say, but I believe that President Roosevelt talked to the young men, the young Congressmen, Johnson and Magnuson, and then I guess asked the navy to send them somewhere. I think [James V.] Forrestal was the secretary of the navy and [John E.] Gingrich, who was perhaps a captain then and later on, before it was all over, was an admiral, was his aide, and Commander [Richard] Byrd was there at the Navy Department. We all knew him. He was in charge of the Bureau of Naval Personnel.

G: Well, do you recall ever hearing that some other options maybe that he would go to work with Lowell Mellett?

R: No.

G: Or actually working for [James] Forrestal, be assigned to Forrestal?

R: Well, that's kind of vague in my mind, maybe with Forrestal, but I don't know that there was anything to it or that he wanted to do it.

G: Do you know if he did request duty at Pearl Harbor?

R: No, I don't. I just know he wanted to . . . And that's where the action was. He wanted to see some of the action, and I suppose he went on a fact-finding trip either for the President or the navy or the Naval Affairs Committee and to bring back whatever

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comments or criticisms of whatever things he noticed.

G: Did he talk to you about that trip after he came back or did you ever hear him reminisce about it?

R: I don't remember hearing him say anything that would be of importance. He might tell you something funny that happened or something light, but he didn't ever in my presence say anything about any important details about what the navy was doing or not doing.

G: Was he discouraged by the situation there, do you think? What was his reaction?

R: I think he thought that everything wasn't being done that could be done, that they needed more help from here in the way of supplies, which could cover anything, you know, ships, airplanes, ammunition. But that was so long ago and I was so new in the office that it was all . . . After all I had worked for a lawyer; I didn't know much about armies or navies or anything like that, wars.

G: Did he ever talk about his meeting with [Douglas] MacArthur? Anything else on that trip to Australia? I know there were some home movies of it.

R: Yes, yes, you're right. He took the camera, I guess he took Lady Bird's camera or got another one. She was into photography in those days and she took still pictures and then she got a movie camera. We even made a little movie of our own and we all dressed up in costumes, and she was the leading lady. I was her mother in it, or her grandmother. I remember I had on spectacles and I had powder in my hair so I'd look like I was white-haired. He didn't take her camera because we did that while he was gone now that I remember.

G: Oh, really?

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- R: Yes, because I remember where we lived and who came and who participated.
- G: What was the purpose of that?
- R: Just for fun and to have something to do. And, you know, she got interested in photography. And I've seen that movie and I'm sure she still has it. So he took another camera; I guess he bought one and took it. I can remember a few pictures, but I imagine they're in the Library files.
- G: I have one more question about hers. She had, I understand, at the University [of Texas] been sort of interested in drama and had gone to plays. Do you think that this was part of her interest in drama that led to--?
- R: It might have been. And she did love to read, and she was a real learned person. And by reading, I mean, I'm sure she read plays as well as novels and history and everything else. Now this is simply a guess on my part, but living out in the small little town near Marshall, she was close to Shreveport, Louisiana, and she wasn't too far from Dallas, and those were the places she shopped for clothes and things or maybe things for her daddy's house. One time I think she sort of did the house over. She's always been kind of what you'd call a cultured person and you'll have to ask her, but I wouldn't be surprised if she didn't go to plays and musicals and theatricals perhaps in Shreveport or sometimes in Dallas. I'm just guessing, though. But to me, knowing her as I do, it sounds typical.
- G: Any other memories of that play, or producing that film?
- R: No, it was something kind of on the order of--it was very melodramatic.
- G: It was like a twenties or early silent movie, wasn't it?
- R: Yes. Or did somebody record our voices? I do believe they did. But it was kind of on

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the order of a Little Eva play or something like that--just get out of the snowstorm or having troubles. But Lady Bird wanted to marry in the play, she wanted to marry this young man; my recollection is her family didn't want her to, or she was too young or something. And he was a villain. Have you ever seen it?

G: I have. It's been a good while, though.

R: Well, it's been a hundred years since I saw it. (Laughter)

G: How long did it take you to produce it?

R: We did it one evening, one night after--I've forgotten whether Ida Nell Connally was in the production as an actress or whether she was the producer or the director of the play. Somebody. I believe it was--there was a young man whose name was Brumbelow [?], I've forgotten his first name right this minute, a lawyer down at one of the departments, maybe it's the Justice Department. I believe he was the villain. He had a mustache and he would twirl the ends up. But, you know, it wasn't long before all of those young men were gone, too, in the service. We must have made it, I'm sure we made it, at the Woodley Park Tower where Lady Bird was staying at that time while Mr. Johnson was gone. Well, they'd both been living there, and then he left. And I was staying out there with her.

G: Do you recall how the idea came about to--?

R: I think she thought it up. I didn't. Never would have thought about it. I wouldn't have known how to undertake it.

G: Who did the camera work? Do you know?

R: I don't remember. She might remember. Ida Nell might remember. You see, Ida Nell

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was in the little theatre [Curtain Club] and everything at the University of Texas when [she was] Ida Nell Brill, so she was interested in dramatics. And John had been sent off, so I don't know. I just put on the long dress and the high-necked collar blouse and the spectacles and put powder in my hair and acted the part of the mother. I remember shaking my finger at Lady Bird, I think, in this little movie we made and I guess I told her that the young man she wanted to marry was not good.

G: Now, let me ask you about the films that he made overseas. Do you recall seeing these when he came back or at some point?

R: Yes, at least once, but not any more. I just think, though, that I happened to be at the house one time when he was showing them. I don't remember anything much about it. He thought Australia looked like West Texas. I remember him saying that, and I think that's when he said it, when he was showing the movie.

G: Was he disappointed in the way the films came out, do you know?

R: I don't remember. Lady Bird would remember all that a lot better than I.

G: Now, before he went, he drew up a handwritten will, which you witnessed.

R: I must not have read it, though, because I don't remember what it said.

G: Really? Well, it left everything to Mrs. Johnson.

R: Yes. I would assume that's what it did. At that point, they had not had any children.

Lynda hadn't been born. I guess I did, but I'd forgotten it. Who else witnessed it?

G: I don't know. All I have is that it was witnessed by you. I assume that someone else did.

R: I thought maybe two people did. Yes. I guess I remember that I did that.

I also remember, although this was a number of years later, goodness, maybe ten

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years later, that he and Lady Bird--I don't know what year it was--decided to establish an LBJ Foundation. I suppose that's what it was called. I probably typed it, but I don't remember what it said except that to start it off, he and she each, I believe, put in one hundred dollars or maybe two hundred apiece or something, and I put in twenty-five dollars, and I believe Walter Jenkins was the other person and he put in twenty-five dollars. I'm not even sure it was called the LBJ Foundation. It probably wasn't. It might have been called the Johnson Foundation or it might have been called something else. But I'm sure they had their own ideas about what they hoped it would be someday. I know it was later changed and I don't know where that one is and maybe it was destroyed when another one was formed.

G: This is the family foundation, and I think they still have it.

R: Do they? Well, maybe that's what it was.

G: I don't know technically what the name of it is, but--

R: Somehow I thought it was what later became the LBJ Foundation, but I guess not.

G: It may be.

R: I may be wrong.

G: When did he found the little one, though, that you're talking about? Was it maybe in the forties or the fifties? Was it before he became vice president?

R: Oh, yes, yes. It was out at the LBJ Ranch, so they had already bought that house. When did they buy that?

G: They moved in in 1952, I guess.

R: It seems to me that it happened out there.

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G: Was it after the heart attack?

R: Well, it must have been, or the year before. I think that we witnessed it, too. That he and Bird signed it, and Walter and I witnessed it. I think it was Walter. I'm almost certain we did it in the living room at the LBJ Ranch, and it must have been in the early, early fifties.

G: Why did he do that? Why did he set it up?

R: I don't know, because I'm mixed up now. You've called it the family foundation. I don't know what foundation it was. I remember in those days, though, he never dreamed of the LBJ Library, you know, in Austin, or that he would be president or anything like that. He wanted to leave something, though, and he talked about acquiring when he could the property on the edge of Johnson City where his ancestors started the cattle business and the old rock fort there. What he said was that he would like to buy some acreage around that also and have a park for Johnson City, a park for children to play in, a park that was pretty, that people would enjoy being in it and have a building which I guess would have been the old rock building that's still there [which] would be a library for the city of Johnson City. And I think he wanted it to be a storeplace for his own congressional papers, I'm pretty sure he did. I know he did. But what I think also is that perhaps it would be a library with current books and things like that for the people of Johnson City. He wanted to leave something to Johnson City and then he wanted a place to store his congressional papers, and that's as far as his mind had ever gone at that time. And somehow I kind of connect that idea with this paper that I was talking about, this little foundation that was started with two hundred and fifty dollars. Of course; [it was] added to, I'm sure, through the years until--well, I don't know what happened to it.

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G: Back to 1942. In May you had an emergency appendectomy. Do you remember that?
You were out for a while.

R: Yes, it wasn't an appendectomy, though. That's what the doctor thought it was, but he wasn't sure. Anyway, I did. I was living at the Woodley Park Tower with Lady Bird. We had been across the street for dinner with the Ewing Thomasons, and I didn't feel very good and excused myself and went back to Bird's apartment. Anyway, I got worse and worse, and we couldn't get a doctor because doctors during the war were hard to get. Finally one of them came at midnight and I was operated on the next morning real [early], at six o'clock. I think I was in the hospital about two weeks or ten days. Then when I could, I went back and stayed with Lady Bird a week or something and then I went on the train home to my mother and daddy. My recollection of that is that I did not go back to Washington at all until the fall. What year was that?

G: 1942.

R: I believe that that year Mr. Johnson came to Texas in September, but I don't think he had an office. I don't think anyone else came with him except that he asked me if I could come up from where I was with my parents; instead of with my parents could I come and be there for a few days. He wasn't going to be there but a week or something like that. It was the time of the Texas State Democratic Convention, and it was being held in Austin that year. And I believe he went up there to it one day--well, it didn't usually last but one day.

G: Yes.

R: Then I went back home and he went back to Washington. I guess sometime after that I

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either went to Washington or he brought half of his office force to Austin, and I went to Austin and I went back on the payroll and started working again. I'm just guessing though. I don't remember for sure. 1942. All those years run together.

I think Mayor [Tom] Miller and Maury Maverick, or Mayor Miller and somebody had a fight at that convention. Well, it must have been Mayor Miller and somebody else, not Maury.

G: Did you ever hear about LBJ's meeting with FDR when he returned from Australia?

R: I didn't hear any details. I know he went to report.

G: There's some indication that he considered declining accepting the Silver Star. In the files I think I've seen a draft of a document in which he declined it. Do you remember that or do you--?

R: Well, I never would have thought of it, but now that you mention it, it seems to me that he did have some reservation that he didn't do enough to earn it, and he may have made some motion towards giving it back. But he must have changed his mind or talked himself out of it or something because he wore it very proudly all of his life. After all, he was in territory where there was fighting everywhere, where they didn't have adequate ammunition or didn't have good planes. He was supposed to get on one plane and somebody else got his seat and he went and got on another plane. Well, the one he was supposed to have gotten on crashed, and he could just as well have been on that. Not that he fired a machine gun, but he was in the thick of gunfire, of whatever you call it, from other planes to the one he was on. He exhausted himself, too, because that's the way he always did all of his life. And not that you deserve a medal for it, but he was sick and on

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the flight back home--I've forgotten where--they had to let him off on some island and he was in the hospital. And he had a hard time. He always exhausted himself whatever he did. And I think if MacArthur wanted to give him the medal, if in his judgment he deserved it, why, it was all right.

G: Do you know anything about Sam Rayburn's effort to get the congressmen home who were in uniform?

R: Well, logically it would be Mr. Rayburn who would take the lead to do that. I just remember talk, though, that members of Congress were needed in Washington and either they ought to come back or they ought to resign and get in the service. Then the only thing else I remember is that President Roosevelt asked them to come back after six months. And he had sent at least Magnuson and Johnson--I don't know about other people--on fact-finding errands for him.

G: Did he consider resigning and staying in the service, do you think?

R: I don't think so. Have you ever heard that he did?

G: No. I just wondered.

R: I don't remember it.

G: Now while he was away, the decision had to be made whether he would file for the House or for the Senate. Do you recall that?

R: Yes, I recall it somewhat.

G: Tell me as much as you remember about that episode.

R: I just remember it was considered and that Senator Wirtz was maybe suggesting or telling him, "You ought to make up your mind to do one or the other." And he didn't do it, and

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I'm sure that if he hoped someday to go to the Senate, he thought maybe this was too soon.

G: Was his reason for waiting perhaps hoping that maybe there would be a draft, that he would be sort of drafted to run for the Senate if no other suitable candidate emerged?

R: I don't remember that. I just remember in 1941 when he lost the campaign for the Senate by, what, eighty-seven votes, he went back to Washington very quickly in just a matter of a day or two, or two or three days at the most.

G: It was thirteen-hundred and eleven votes.

R: That's right. Eighty-seven votes was in 1948. Thirteen-hundred and eleven. And he went back to Washington very shortly after the votes were counted and certified and I remember his saying that he'd fight again another day. But I don't think he thought real strongly about running. It was suggested, of course, and talked about and considered somewhat, but I think he himself was rather reluctant to run for the Senate again in 1942 and that he would maybe, depending on circumstances, try it again some other time. Which he did.

G: Had he and Jimmie Allred at all worked out an arrangement whereby let's say LBJ would run in 1941 and Allred would run in 1942 the next time if--?

R: Not that I remember, but you know, actually they could have talked about it without my knowing. But I don't know that they did. But, you see, there were a good many people getting into that 1942 campaign. And several of them, perhaps four of them, were well-known names.

G: [Dan] Moody, I guess.

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R: And I think Mr. Johnson just thought he'd stay out of it, which was a good idea.

Now, let's see. Price Daniel was running, wasn't he? In 1942?

G: I don't think he was running that early but Dan Moody was running, and Jimmie Allred was running, and W. Lee O'Daniel, so that's three former governors right there.

R: Oh, that's right. That's right. Yes, I think Price ran for [Tom] Connally's seat.

G: In 1952.

R: Oh, yes, that was ten years later.

G: Now there's an indication that Charles Marsh wanted him to run for the Senate in 1942.

R: I'm sure he did. He would be the one that would be pressing him the hardest.

G: Do you remember that at all?

R: Well, I remember it now that you've reminded me of it.

G: And that John Connally had the petition or the filing papers and one thing and another?

R: Well, he might have been carrying them around in case Mr. Johnson decided at some unexpected moment to sign it.

But you know he was very astute as far as his political senses were concerned, and I'm just sure that he listened, no doubt, to anything Charlie Marsh had to say or other people--not just Mr. Marsh. But Mr. Johnson was a cautious man, also, and I think he just thought it wasn't the time, to let the others try for the seat and he might do it at a later date. I don't think Senator Wirtz thought real strongly that Mr. Johnson should run again so soon, especially with all those people in the race.

G: Well, the story has been told that Marsh tried to pressure John Connally into filing LBJ's name for the Senate.

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R: He might have. I mean, he would have done it.

G: But you don't recall the details?

R: I don't remember. John would remember, I'm sure. But Mr. Marsh, he never gave up. And he would try anything. His head was so full of ideas.

G: Oh, I was going to ask you one other thing about his experience there. How did that trip overseas affect him? Did it change him any? Did it affect his attitude toward the war? Or was there any visible impact on him?

R: I'm sure that it made him, of course, all the more determined after having seen what was happening over there that we must win the war and we must find ways to win it, and we must get the ammunition to them. That was part of his work, you know, for the committee. He had various subcommittees, and one was manpower, and one was--I don't remember the name of it, but it was supplies, arms and ammunition, and getting it there. I'm sure he was trying to overcome what he had seen and what was lacking and what was needed. That's about all I know.

G: Later that year after he returned he flew to Dutch Harbor, Alaska, with Warren Magnuson on an assignment. Do you recall that?

R: No. Now that you say it, I think I've seen a picture or two that was taken when they were there, but I really didn't know much about the Naval Affairs Committee. We had so much to do taking care of the district and the constituents.

G: Now a related question. He evidently anticipated a trip to London on some assignment in November of that year.

R: Did he go?

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G: I don't think he went, but there were newspaper stories that speculated that he was going to be sent, and there's indicated that he expected to go.

R: He never was much of a person to take trips. I don't know whether you know that, but lots of members of Congress would fly off places. He didn't do it very much. He went to Europe once only that I remember and on some mission for the government or the committee or the Congress or something. I don't remember what it was. He thought that he needed a little bit of a vacation as well. Now I don't remember whether it was that year, and I don't know what he went over there about, but he asked Bird to go with him, and he asked Congressman and Mrs. [Homer] Thornberry to go with him, and he said as soon as he got through with his work, why, they would all have a little vacation. And they stayed a little longer. That was in the fall of the year. The only reason I remember it is because--but I don't remember what year.

G: It may have been that NATO conference in the fifties, the mid-fifties.

R: Well, that's way ahead then, isn't it? We'll just leave this till later. Anyway, I didn't have anything else to tell.

G: No, no, go ahead. Tell me the [story].

R: I didn't have anything else to tell except that they were having a good time for two or three days and I think they must have been in Paris by then. Whether his meeting was in Paris or somewhere else, I don't know. But I remember it was the fall, because I cut a picture out of the newspaper of a great big buck with about fourteen horns. You see that picture nearly every fall when the deer season starts. You'll see that same picture in the paper. I cut it out and in a letter to him--when he was away, we wrote him, somebody or

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maybe more than one person, would write him a letter every day to tell him everything you knew that had happened in the office that he would want to hear about, not just the minor routine things, but anything of interest and importance to him. I put a little note on this picture of the deer and I said, "Here's a friend who's anxious to know when you'll be coming home." And I was just joking. Homer Thornberry told me after they got back, "If you hadn't sent that picture, that deer would still be there." He saw it and he said, "We're going home tomorrow." (Laughter)

But that was just kind of a joke, because he really didn't, I don't think he really liked to kill a deer. He did like to go deer hunting, to take friends who had never been, but he didn't like to kill a deer. And I have seen him through the years go deer hunting with people and never fire a shot. He'd tell somebody else, "There's a buck over there. Shoot it! Shoot it!" But he wouldn't fire.

G: He did go to Germany at the close of the war, I understand, in May of 1945 with Edward Hebert, and Don Cook went with them.

R: I guess so.

G: Do you remember this?

R: That was Naval Affairs Subcommittee work, and I don't remember what he went for. If I thought real hard, I might could remember a word or two, but I don't know.

G: He saw a lot of the bombing damage in Germany.

R: Yes, he did, and the atrocities that were committed, but I don't remember what they went for.

G: Another activity for that year was that he spoke at the scrapping of the Battleship *Oregon*,

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went out there to Portland, I guess, and spoke there. Do you remember that?

R: No.

[End of Tape 1 of 1 and Interview IV]

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