

INTERVIEW I

DATE: July 8, 1969

INTERVIEWEE: CECIL REDFORD

INTERVIEWER: David McComb

PLACE: Mr. Redford's law office, Petroleum Tower, Corpus Christi, Texas

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M: Well, first of all, I would like to know a little about you and your background; where were you born and when?

R: I was born in San Antonio, Texas, on January 31, 1907. My father died in 1910, and in 1912, my mother moved her three sons, of which I was the middle in age, to Johnson City. This was probably in March of 1912, and later in the year she was appointed postmaster at Johnson City and was postmaster there until she retired in the year 1943.

M: You got most of your schooling then, your elementary school and high school education, there in Johnson City?

R: There was a five-teacher school in Johnson City with two teachers in the high school and three in the elementary schools. Of course, there were eleven grades only in those years. I finished there in May of 1923. During the last few years, in order to make more time for teaching classes, the teachers combined the tenth and eleventh grade and the ninth and tenth on different subjects. In this way, I had many classes with Lyndon Johnson in high school during the last two of three years I was in high school. He attended, as I recall,

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grade school and high school a part of the time at Johnson City, and part of the time he attended school at Stonewall during certain years that his father moved the family to the farm in Stonewall.

M: When did you first meet him? Do you recall?

R: I couldn't recall exactly, but I would assume that he lived there in 1912-1913. The first memory I have would be in 1914.

M: What memory is that?

R: In 1914, Tom Ball ran against Jim Ferguson for governor of Texas. Ferguson was an anti-prohibitionist and Ball was a prohibitionist.

M: This is Tom Ball of Houston?

R: I don't remember where he was from. Lyndon's father was for Ferguson, and my mother, being a prohibitionist, even though she couldn't vote, was for Tom Ball. So he and I, as I recall, used to argue about that election. Although it seems strange that kids six and seven years old would be arguing about elections, we were.

M: Was politics an exciting subject in a town like that in those days? Was it widely discussed?

R: Oh, yes, local politics and I'm sure state politics, also. Lyndon's father always took an active part in all politics, whether it was local or state, inasmuch as he had served in the legislature in the early nineteen hundreds and was again serving in the legislature in the early twenties.

M: Did Lyndon Johnson try to support the position of Pa Ferguson then?

R: That's all the memory I have about it, but I know that his father was always a supporter of Jim Ferguson. And every supporter of Jim Ferguson, the adults, were die-hard

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supporters. They were avid readers of the *Ferguson Forum*, which came out once a week. I do know that when Ferguson was impeached by the Senate in 1917, Lyndon's uncle by marriage, Clarence Martin, who was then, I believe, practicing in San Antonio, was one of his defense counsels. Then in 1924 or 1925, through his contacts with Ferguson, Mr. Johnson was appointed by the highway commissioner to have supervision of the upkeep of the roads in Blanco County. In those days, there was a political appointee for each county to have charge of the upkeep of the highways in those counties, and Mr. Johnson had that for a couple of years probably.

M: What kind of work did that entail in keeping up highways? Were the roads dirt or gravel?

R: In those days, we didn't have any paved roads in Blanco County. It was a question of putting some hard surfacing on it, such as caliche or adobe or something like that, and grading it down and then hoping that the traffic packed it.

M: And traffic in those days was what, mainly horse and wagon, or automobiles?

R: Oh, no. Now we're talking about the twenties. It was automobiles then.

M: So by that time, there was plenty of automobile and truck traffic?

R: Oh, sure.

M: So that upkeep of roads might be a fairly difficult job.

R: Well, it took a little know-how. It was during this period of time, fall of 1925 to sometime in 1926, that Lyndon worked for his father on the highway in Blanco County. At that time, I was teaching school at a one-teacher school called Miller Creek School six miles from Johnson City.

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M: You'd mentioned that you'd graduated and gone to TCU [Texas Christian University], is that right?

R: That's right.

M: And then you came back to teach in that school?

R: That's right.

M: While Lyndon Johnson was working on the roads. Then you used to pick him up in your automobile, or what?

R: For a period of time, they were working out of a caliche pit close to the school, and when I'd close my school at four, I'd drive by in my T-model Ford and wait 'til five o'clock and bring him in so he wouldn't have to ride in on the truck. When I was teaching at this school, we had a boy who was named Leslie who was in the third grade. There was another boy, an older brother, named Oscar, who was in the fourth grade. I won't use their last names. Now Oscar had never been out of Blanco County, but he had been to two other little towns in Blanco County. And I remember Leslie said in school, "Oscar has been two wheres, and I ain't never been nowhere." I told Lyndon that story, and many, many years later I read in *Time* magazine where Lyndon was telling that as one of the stories from his school. And it came from me, from my school.

M: You mentioned earlier that when you were in high school and went to school with Lyndon Johnson, you had some classes with him, since the several grades were merged together. Do you remember anything about what kind of student he was?

R: Lyndon was a good student. As I recall, he didn't make all As in school. He had the ability to do it, and if he had worked as hard when he was in school as he did in adult life, I'm sure he'd have made all A+s. But he didn't work quite as hard then as he could have.

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M: Did he enjoy debating with people about various subjects?

R: He enjoyed arguing about anything. I don't mean that disrespectfully at all; I mean that he would take sides on anything and make good arguments in support of it. As for instance, as I mentioned, we studied the--I don't remember if I mentioned on this record or not--but in 1920, the class in American history studied the presidential campaign and studied the League of Nations. I remember he and I had very vociferous arguments with some of his cousins, wherein we were arguing for the League of Nations, and they were opposed to it. As far as politics is concerned, I do recall his interests in politics. In 1920, Harry Hertzberg, a Democrat from San Antonio, was running for Congress--Blanco County and Bexar County were then in the same Congressional District--against Harry Wurzbach, who was a Republican. Lyndon's father was actively working in Blanco County for Hertzberg, and Lyndon had placards with Hertzberg's picture on them tacked on each side of his desk in school at times during that fall. Incidentally, Wurzbach was elected.

M: Then at your graduation, I believe you mentioned that Lyndon Johnson's mother wrote a graduation play or scenario for the ceremonies, is that correct?

R: Yes. I wished I had retained a copy of it. Lyndon's mother was not only a wonderful, lovely, attractive woman, but she was very talented. There were two in my graduation class, a girl by the name of Annie Rae Ottmers, O-T-T-M-E-R-S, and me. Mrs. Johnson wrote, I don't know what you would call it, but anyway it was titled, "The Court of Achievements." I was the king of the Court of Achievements, and Annie Rae was the queen. This was our graduation program, and they had princes and oh, I don't remember.

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I do know that different of the classmates would come in and give the king and queen the gift of friendship or the gift of success, and so forth. Anyway, to me then, as a boy, I thought it was absolutely wonderful. And I think that if I had it now, I'd still think the same thing.

M: You mentioned Mrs. Johnson as being a talented woman. Would you say that she was one of the strongest influences in his early life?

R: I'm sure all mothers are, and I wouldn't say that she was any more of an influence on his life than my mother was on my life. But unquestionably, she was a strong influence on his life.

M: The reason I mention this is that a number of writers who have written about Lyndon Johnson have mentioned that he is sort of like an old time populist with a great deal of concern for the welfare of the people. And they like to say that this comes out of his background in Johnson City.

R: Well, of course, Johnson City wasn't a poor town. It was like all the other small towns in those days. I think this business of Lyndon being a poor boy has been overplayed. He worked, but he didn't work because he had to. My brothers and I worked on farms because we had to to buy our clothes. Lyndon worked to get spending money, I think, and also because he liked to work, but it definitely wasn't a necessity. His father was not any rich man; he wasn't even a well-to-do man, but he was the average person in a small town in those days.

Lyndon was always interested in people. I've had people, friends of mine who were critical of him, think that this business he has of always wanting to shake hands with people was an act. I don't think it was. I remember when I'd come home from

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college, say I'd run onto Mrs. Cammack--I mentioned her name, she's still living, about ninety unless she's died recently--on the street. Well, I'd walk up and shake hands with her and say, "How do you do, Mrs. Cammack?"

If Lyndon came up--he didn't have anything to gain then; he wasn't running for anything and probably never thought he ever would run for anything--to Mrs. Cammack the same afternoon on the street downtown, he'd throw his arms around her and kiss her. And that was the difference. So this effervescence he has exhibited through the years of shaking hands with people and liking people isn't put on at all. He had it as a boy.

M: Did he often come to visit your mother when he came back to town?

R: Oh, yes. Oh, in her later years, when he got to be Senator, he didn't have time, but he always came to visit her when he was a congressman. I could show you a letter I wrote him about that one time. If I can find it I will later.

M: Good. Did the older people in town, such as your mother, seem to like Lyndon Johnson?

R: Yes. Everybody liked him.

M: He was a friendly person?

R: As a boy, he was friendly; he was generous. In those days most of us boys didn't have much money to spend on candy or anything like that, maybe a nickel or dime a week.

Whatever Lyndon bought he always shared with his friends, and that's a time when little boys are selfish sometimes. But he was very unselfish.

M: What did you do to entertain yourself in Johnson City? Did you play baseball or swim?

R: We played basketball, we played baseball some, [we'd] go down to the river and go swimming. That was about it, or shoot marbles or whatever came up.

M: Did you have a favorite swimming hole anyplace?

R: There were two or three. We used first one and then the other, depending on which one got sanded up by the rains.

M: This was in the Pedernales River?

R: Yes.

M: I assume those were the good old days when boys didn't bother with swimming suits?

R: We didn't own one.

M: So you just keep an eye out.

R: Went in the raw.

M: Did you go horseback riding, that sort of thing?

R: Well, I didn't have any horse. I was always glad when some of my friends who did have one would ask me to ride. Lyndon didn't have one, either, when he was down at Johnson City, but he had an uncle who had a ranch there. I don't know [if] I've been out on it, and spent some time now and then, I'm sure Lyndon did also, where there were plenty of horses.

M: Do you remember if Lyndon Johnson got into any of the organized sports, like basketball, for your high school or anything like that?

R: It was just a little old school, and practically everybody did. He played basketball. There used to be a town baseball team; I think he was first baseman on it. He took an interest in sports always. And before I forget it, I might mention that through the years he has impressed me as being always serious about everything, but as a boy he had a keen sense of humor. [He was] the type that would like to play jokes on other people.

M: Do you remember any of the jokes he played on others?

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R: I remember one time he and I were in school, passing the basketball back and forth to each other in our seats while the teacher had her back to the wall. After a spirit of confidence had been created between us, it was my time to throw it to him. He turned around started studying, and it hit him on the back of the head and bounced on the floor. Then they told the teacher who threw the ball. That's just an example. I mean, there wasn't anything vicious about it, but it showed he had a good sense of humor.

M: There's a strange thing about Lyndon Johnson. Apparently, in his youth, when you knew him going to high school and so forth, he wasn't too serious about getting good grades or working hard. But then when he went off to San Marcos. . . .

R: He found himself.

M: Why did this change come?

R: I don't know.

M: How did it come about?

R: I wasn't at San Marcos; I wouldn't know. He had potentialities for leadership, and in a little country town like that, in a little school like that, there wasn't anything to lead. I'm sure his enthusiasm was fired by the chance to be in a larger place and around more people, and he quickly became a leader.

M: So he just got into an atmosphere that allowed this potential to come out, you think?

R: That would be my supposition. As I say, I wasn't there. I was in the University of Texas.

M: There is some thought that perhaps while he was working in the roads that this was an influence that he might be cut out for better things.

R: Well, I'm sure of that. I'm sure he decided that he didn't want to spend the rest of his life driving a truck or running a big shovel with a team of mules attached to it.

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M: Then you went on to college, and so did Lyndon Johnson. How much did you see him after that? Did you just see him during vacations?

R: Oh, while I was in the University, I saw him during vacations, during Christmas time. While I was in law school, I wouldn't see him particularly, because I went to school in the summertime, also; whether he did or not, I don't recall. The next time I recall seeing him, when I was practicing law in San Antonio, was after he was secretary for Congressman [Richard] Kleberg, and at that time Kleberg's congressional district ran all the way from Kingsville to, and including, San Antonio. Lyndon was up there campaigning, and I visited with him several times then.

M: Had he changed much between that point in time and when you knew him in his youth?

R: Well, it had just been a few years; this was in the earlier thirties. [He] couldn't have.

M: There's a story you might be able to verify. They say that Johnson in his young days used to play poker out in the woods with some of his friends. They'd play poker on a blanket and keep an eye out for the county sheriff, since gambling was illegal, and when the sheriff came along, they'd just pick up the blanket.

R: I don't know about that, but I know one time when we were home for Christmas, he and I and about two or three others played a little nickel poker in a culvert.

M: In a culvert?

R: Under the road. I'd forgotten about it, but I remember it now.

M: Did you help Lyndon in any of his campaigns?

R: When he ran for the Senate in 1941, I was employed as an attorney working for the receiver of an insurance company, and the receiver was the campaign manager for Gerald Mann, who was also running for the Senate against Lyndon. So there's nothing I could

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actively do, but with the knowledge of my employer, I did vote for Lyndon and contributed a third of a month's salary to his campaign.

M: Did he seem to appreciate that?

R: I don't know whether he ever knew about it or not.

M: That was a third of a month's salary?

R: It wasn't a great deal in those days.

M: Did you get involved in any of the rest of his campaigns?

R: When he ran in 1948, I was, after having gotten out of the Army, an employee of the firm here in Corpus Christi, and all but one of my employers were for [Coke] Stevenson. But I voted for Lyndon and helped out in a small way, and heard him speak down here if he spoke here. Then I did make a trip to San Antonio to hear him speak in front of the Alamo in 1948.

M: Was he a good speaker, do you remember? Were you impressed by his speech?

R: I was impressed because I liked him. He wasn't exactly an orator, but he was a forceful speaker. He impressed me because I was for him.

M: Have you had occasion to speak with him every now and then when he came through town, or you were in Washington?

R: Oh, I saw him in Washington when he was in Congress and I was in the army in 1945. He's made addresses here to organizations such as the annual meeting of the Junior Chamber of Commerce once, I recall. In those days, I always visited with him briefly in his hotel suite while he was here. I saw him several times when he was here in 1960 when he was attempting to get nominated for president. Then in 1958, when my mother

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died, he was a pallbearer at my mother's funeral at my request. But my contacts with him since college days have been very few.

M: Did you ever help campaign for him in the Corpus [Christi] area? You mentioned you contacted some people.

R: I worked for him in 1960 and did all I could.

M: What kind of work did you do?

R: I just worked with the organization. I wasn't one of the leaders. I was just one of the workers.

M: You would contact people and ask them to vote for Mr. Johnson?

R: I don't remember. I do know I contributed to his campaign when he was seeking the nomination, and then I contributed to the campaign during the general election when he was nominated for vice president.

M: Did you have anything to do with Lyndon Johnson's wedding to Mrs. Johnson, Lady Bird?

R: No.

M: You didn't?

R: I don't know where he was living then, but I was living in San Antonio and probably hadn't seen him in several years.

M: Well, this exhausts the questions I had for you. Is there anything you would like to add or any statement you wish to make?

R: After you and I have visited for a few minutes, I recall an incident that I intended to mention earlier, but overlooked. Sometime while Lyndon Johnson and I were in grade school, there was an assembly in the small auditorium of probably a hundred and forty or

a hundred and fifty students. We were addressed by, as I recall, Mr. Cone Johnson, who was commissioner of agriculture. He told a story about a boy and a girl sitting on a bench in a park. The boy mentioned that he wished he were a centipede, and the girl wanted to know why. He said so that he would have a thousand arms with which to hug her. And she then said, "Why don't you use the ones that you have?"

Then with that background story the speaker made the usual talk to young people exhorting them to use the opportunities that they had. And I distinctly remember that, at some time in his talk, he stated, and many speakers said that in those days, that if you used the opportunities that you had, "Who knows, perhaps someday one of you will be president." Lyndon was one of those present, and I'm sure that that was the last thing that would have entered his mind at that time. But that is a true story, and I doubt very seriously if he remembers it.

M: Thank you.

[End of Tape 1 of 1 and Interview I]

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