

### INTERVIEW III

DATE: October 17, 1969

INTERVIEWEE: JUANITA ROBERTS (with a segment by Mrs. Katherine Duggan,  
Colonel Roberts' mother)

INTERVIEWER: JOE B. FRANTZ

PLACE: Colonel Roberts' apartment, Washington, D.C.

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F: Juanita, let's pick it up where we left off which is the beginning of Mr. Johnson's presidency. We had brought you over then to his offices following the news of the assassination. Did you take part at all in the reception of Mr. Johnson when he came in? Where did he go when he came in, did he get in any immediate contact with you?

R: No. He landed at Andrews [Air Force Base], and there was a helicopter there for him that brought him to the White House. I had gone directly from the office here that I had worked in in the Capitol to the office that was set aside for him as vice president in the Executive Office Building.

When I heard the plane had touched down, then I left the Capitol office and drove to the White House, and we met in the elevator going up to the second floor office, 274. McGeorge Bundy, Walter Jenkins were with him.

F: You had a regular White House pass or EOB pass or something like that? You had no difficulty in getting in?

R: In those days, that's right. And we met in the EOB elevator going up that night.

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F: What was the scene like there in the EOB?

R: Well, I didn't get there ahead of time.

F: Were there a lot of people in the halls, or were people there that night? Was it pretty full?

R: Yes. I don't know what was going on outside that suite. There wasn't a crowd; there were no curiosity onlookers. The security was very tight of course. And when we got to the elevator and came face to face, we just sort of at the same time reached out and shook hands with a sort of reassuring pat. There was not talking in the elevator that I remember. Of course it was only from ground to second.

When we got into the office, he turned to go into the room that was his, and stopped at the door and turned around and said, "Walter, let's have Marie [Fehmer] take the phone calls; Juanita can take care of the people who are coming, make my appointments. You and Bill come on in here." And then he and Bill Moyers went-- I guess Bill Moyers was with him.

F: Yes, Bill had, you know, slipped a note in there at the Dallas airport.

R: Yes, and had joined the plane and had come back. Bill must then have been on the helicopter and come back with them.

He took Mac Bundy in with him. He wanted very much to have a cabinet meeting, but of course the cabinet was divided; part of it was out of the county, so he had to defer that. He wanted to talk to all the living presidents, and he did. One of the first

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things he did, though, when he got into the office was call for some presidential stationery, and Walter went out, I believe--somebody went out--to one of the offices that had been functioning there for President Kennedy to see if they had any of the green azure paper.

F: That's what that shade is. I've always just called it green.

R: Azure is what they call it. We of course didn't know what he wanted it for, but when it was taken in to him he sat alone and he wrote one note to little John-John and another note to Caroline. He wanted to let them know how much he thought about their father, and also how brave and wonderful he felt their mother was.

After he had written the letters and addressed the envelopes, he asked--of course there was no carbon or any other kind--he asked that I get them over for delivery. And I took the liberty of stopping to give instructions that they be xeroxed, so that he would have a copy for his files. That was done, and the letters were carried over to the West Wing then to the usher for delivery to Mrs. Kennedy.

The congressional leadership came in that night, I believe.

F: In a case like that, are they sort of sent for, or do they just come voluntarily?

R: No. The President let it be known that he would like to see them in a group, and so they were called and a time was set for them. Of course they had to be cleared at the gate before they could come in.

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It was a very solemn time, but there was no lost motion; it wasn't necessary for us to talk. He would say, "I want such and such," and we set about to get it and get it done. We had all worked with him a good while and knew his ways. And we had always known that when there was a very difficult problem, this would be the time when you would work fastest and with less conversation. Everything went smooth.

I remember Mac Kilduff coming in and out, in and out; apparently he was bringing things from the ticker. I didn't know him; he didn't know me. He would seek out one of the men that he had known. McGeorge Bundy was in and out, and the President was giving most of the instruction of what he would like done to McGeorge Bundy, and this was reasonable.

F: Did he know McGeorge Bundy fairly well at that time?

R: He knew him because Mr. Johnson was at the White House frequently and of course was a member of the National Security Council.

F: So there wasn't a great deal of break-in in the relations between the two men?

R: No. And Mr. Bundy of course is a real professional. For a person who didn't know either one of the men, they could easily have assumed that they had known each other and worked with each other forever.

I remember other people of the Kennedy staff, or the Kennedy appointees, people like Walter Heller and Kermit Gordon; it's hard to remember. If I could refresh my memory with the diary, because fortunately the writing into the diary was already a habit with us,

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so it was not something we had to make a conscious effort to do. Of course, all the appointments, all the phone calls, all the things going, are recorded in the diary.

F: Well, that sort of thing we can dig out, you know, with no problem. I'm more interested in impressions of that time. When did you go to bed?

R: I don't remember.

F: Was it real late?

R: It seems to me that it was about eleven o'clock when I got home. But there were six young men--six nineteen-year-old boys in Washington from Tampa, Florida--that Mother and I had learned to know earlier in the year through her great-niece. These young men were on a program of study with the FBI. The FBI has a program where they bring high schoolers [to Washington] after graduation, before college. As these young men heard the news that afternoon and were released from their jobs, each of them went to my house. So when I got home that night, Mother had six young men keeping her company. And we talked a little while after I got home. It must have been midnight or later by the time we got through talking and were ready to go to bed.

F: How did that weekend go?

R: We worked in the EOB office again Saturday, Sunday, and Monday. They were days filled with people, filled with telephone calls. And of course Mr. Johnson was having to leave the--

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F: Who did the sorting to see--I mean, you couldn't take in a note from everybody that wanted to see him; he'd have spent all of his time reading notes.

R: No. These were primarily people he needed and wanted to see and that he would instruct to set up the appointment. Of course, Marie on the phone and I at my desk, Walter Jenkins, Mildred Stegall, anybody of the staff who was known by people--Cliff Carter. Cliff was getting inundated with telephone calls. And each of us, according to the request from people we got, would make a judgment. I really don't remember how we collected or took--as the President would move from place to place, if he'd pass our desk and we had something we thought he should see, we'd give it to him. And sometimes he would buzz out and say, "What have you got?" and we'd tell him. He was having to leave, of course, to go to those things that were expected of him according to the plans that Mrs. Kennedy was making.

I believe it was Saturday that the White House staff and the press were invited to pay last respects in the East Room, and President Johnson was asked if he wanted--and he did. He and Mrs. Johnson paid their respects there. He saw the cabinet on Saturday. And he was busy going to--well, the State Department reception for the foreign dignitaries was later.

F: That was on the Monday after the funeral.

R: That was on Monday after the funeral.

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F: He made no attempt to try to meet any of the principal heads of state that came in prior to the funeral or to meet them as they left or anything?

R: No. He was working as rapidly as he possibly could with the leadership, with congressional leadership, the leadership meaning the Kennedy appointees, both White House staff and executive department people, the leadership of labor, the Negro leadership, farm leadership--the leadership in general. He was making--

F: Did he have much time with Bobby Kennedy, or was Bobby too busy with Jackie arranging for the funeral?

R: I don't recall that the Attorney General was anywhere around us. I think he was with the family in the Mansion. He may possibly have been in the West Wing in the President's office or some of the other offices, but we were not in the Mansion; we were not in the West Wing. We didn't use the mess facilities; we didn't go to the West Wing. We knew that those people needed all the time they could have, and we didn't go in that direction. I don't recall that he was in our office, don't remember seeing him, don't remember it at all.

We worked on Sunday. That was the day, I believe, yes, that President Kennedy's casket was moved to the Rotunda of the Capitol for him to lie in state there.

On that afternoon, Sunday afternoon, I did make a trip up to our office in the Capitol, and marked items for packing to come down to the White House. I marked a couch and the desk and the personal

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items, and things that I knew would make him feel more comfortable the sooner we could get them. That was a difficult trip to make; the crowds were so great and trying to get into the Capitol Building was a difficult thing.

We didn't work so very late on Saturday; everybody was exhausted.

F: Emotionally drained, among other things.

R: Yes. Monday the staff was still in the Executive Office Building. We watched as many of the ceremonies as we could on television, and if someone happened to look out the window and saw that there was activity they would--if he were not in the office--call out and others of us would try to see something of it.

F: You had that walk up the street to the church. Did that cause any undue concern for his sake?

R: I think everybody was concerned about that problem: Mrs. Kennedy, the Secret Service, and everybody. But it was what the President and Mrs. Johnson wanted to do, and I'm glad he was able to do it.

Monday night, it was about ten o'clock I think, we closed up the Executive Office, and I went over to the West Wing for the first time to the Oval Office to try to get it ready for Mr. Johnson's appointments first thing Tuesday morning, because he was going to use the Oval Office for the first time the day after the funeral. And Mrs. Lucy Ferguson, who was a careerist there at the White House-- head of the gift unit and assists the secretary to the President, has beginning with President Eisenhower--had done most of the clearing of the personal items of President Kennedy for the family.



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F: What's the gift unit?

R: That's the unit that--you know, people are so generous and they just shower things on the President and members of his family, crocheted doilies by little old ladies in a nursing home, or people who just like to do things like that, and other arts and crafts items. Children make a lot of things and send them; whittled walking canes, all kinds of art work, all kinds of things.

F: Food.

R: Food, books, Bibles. People want to be sure that a Bible perhaps in another language, or maybe the sender would be the last member of a family and he wanted the Bible to be where he knew it would be taken care of--just all kinds of things.

But Lucy had done most of that work to be helpful.

F: There's not much in the Oval Room in an official sense, is there? I mean, there's just those sort of knickknacks, mementos usually?

R: That's right.

F: So you don't move papers out, or anything like that?

R: Mrs. [Evelyn] Lincoln had taken care of the papers.

F: Of course, I realize in what became your office--

R: Had files and that kind of thing, but you see when they left to go to Texas, Mrs. Lincoln had cleaned the Oval Office up, knickknacks, papers, and things on the desk, because Mrs. Kennedy was going to surprise him by having a new carpet and new drapes in the office. They had just finished the laying of the new rug and hanging the new drapes on noon on Friday at the time of his death. The rug

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was very plain, sort of velour, velvet finish--no sculpting, no design in it of any kind, just a great oval in scarlet red. The drapes were off-white with a deep maroon border--a sort of open-work border, not a Greek key, but that kind of thing. They were very handsome together, the deep wine and the scarlet red. The only other things in the office then were the paintings, the books in the shelves, and two couches in front of the fireplace--sort of modified kidney-shaped couches--a coffee table. There were two lamp tables and the desk that he used. These had been moved back in, but no chairs. Of course, there were no books or paintings when we went in; it was completely bare, just the couches, the coffee table and the desk.

I brought in those things that we had marked on Sunday. They had been put on a truck, and the truck was standing by. I brought those things in. And we got books out of the library there at the White House library to fill in the shelves so it wouldn't be too bare. No way we could hang paintings that night. But I arranged with the White House florist to have flowers for the next day. There were no glass curtains, no shades; I got the seamstress to come in and make glass covers. We worked until--well, I left there about two o'clock in the morning.

That brings to mind another story that I would prefer Mother to tell.

(Interruption)

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F: This is Mrs. Katherine Duggan.

D: On Monday night, November 25, 1963, I went to bed at eleven o'clock. I awoke at twelve and found that Juanita had not gotten home. The Johnson staff members were moving into the White House offices. Juanita had given me a telephone number to call if I wanted to get in touch with her, but as it was the first time I was to call the White House number, I was somewhat overawed by the idea. However, I did finally dial 456-1414 and a cheerful voice said, "White House." I got a long breath and plunged in. I asked her if she could get Juanita Roberts on the phone for me. She asked me who she was, and where she was. I told her she was Mr. Johnson's secretary, and that she was probably in his office. She made some inquiries and told me she could not find anyone who knew who or where she was. I thanked her and hung up.

I walked the floor and drank coffee for an hour and called the number again. This time I told the operator why I was so alarmed; that my daughter was sick with a very bad cold and that she had never failed before to call me if she were going to be late getting home; that we lived miles from the White House and that she was driving alone. The operator said she would let me talk to one of the Secret Service men. I am not sure, but I think his name was Taylor. He listened attentively while I told him what my problem was. He asked me if she ever had been out late before without calling me, and I told him, "No, never." I told him my greatest concern was because she was sick and driving the distance alone. He suggested that I

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call the Metropolitan Police and report it to the Missing Persons Bureau. I said, "Oh, I can't do that." Then he told me to call everyone I could think of who might be able to give me some information about her, and that he would make some calls. A little later he called and said he had not been able to trace her, and said he strongly urged me to report it to the police. I told him I would rather wait a little longer. He was patient and kind and asked me to call him if I heard from her, and that he would call me if he located her.

Soon after that Juanita called me and said the Secret Service had told her I was trying to get in touch with her, and told her to call me. She said she was all right and that she and Sunny Price, an interior designer, were going through the storerooms looking for furniture for Mr. Johnson's office, and that she would be home as soon as she finished.

I called Mr. Taylor and told him I had heard from her and that she was all right. I thanked him and apologized for the trouble I had given him and told him that Juanita would probably want to spank me when she got home. He laughed and said he thought I ought to spank her, and I agreed. He assured me that he was glad to be helpful, and that I was to call him any time I felt the need.

Juanita had taken that very bad cold while she was in Europe with Mr. Johnson and party. They had brought tulips and other bulbs home from Holland. Juanita had planted them at The Elms, but didn't have the pleasure of seeing them in bloom because of the tragic

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event of November 22 which occurred in a few days, resulting in the Johnson removal to the White House.

A little more than five years have passed since then, and they have been wonderful, rewarding years. Everyone I have ever come in contact with who were connected in any way with the White House and Mr. Johnson's administration have given me the comforting feeling that Juanita was indeed working among friends and I counted them my friends, too. If it's true that they also serve who only stand and wait, I am grateful for having had that privilege.

F: Thank you, Mrs. Duggan. That's very nice. I am glad to have it from you.

R: Sunny Price had helped in decorating the Senate Majority Leader's office, and when I found out Monday night that I had that task to do after work and before the beginning of the next day, I thought I wasn't up to it and I just had to have some help. I didn't know what I was going to run into, and she was just marvelous. I don't know what I would have done without her. And Mr. [J. B.] West, the usher, Mr. [William] Hopkins, the ushers in the West Lobby, Sam Mitchell--

F: All the regular day-to-day, permanent White House people just pitched right in.

R: Stayed right on. Most of these people had not even gone home from the time they came to work Friday morning; they had not left to go home. And they stayed right there with me until--it was almost two o'clock when we got away.

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F: What did you do, go up there on the third floor, or where do they stay?

R: They were working.

F: They just worked straight through?

R: You see, in taking care of Mrs. Kennedy's wishes for the platform and the drapes over it, for the coffin--those, I was told, were the same that had been used for President Lincoln in the East Room. They had to locate them; they had to get them. They just worked. They'd get a nap of an hour or get some food. But they were about ready to drop, but they were as gracious as they could be, absolutely wonderful people. You see, we hadn't worked [with them]. I'd worked in the Capitol, and we hadn't gotten acquainted with these people by name.

F: That's a lost feeling where you don't know whom to contact, or where things are.

R: Yes. And the number I had given Mother to call, you see, was the Vice President's office that we had been using. When the operator would ring there, there was no answer. You know, from having been at the White House, that they get all kinds of calls and sometimes they are just people who have a fantasy or something.

F: Or some drunk who's winning a bet.

R: Yes. But I felt awfully bad after this little incident happened because--and I am sure that I was just so concerned with this task--and then I did realize, but I thought, "It's so late now Mama's

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asleep, and I won't bother her." But she sure did a lot of waiting in those five years.

F: It wasn't the last time you were late?

R: No, but I have tried to let her know why because it's easier to wait if you know.

F: Then you had a problem. On Tuesday the President had moved into the Oval Office. You've got one staff leftover in a sense; he has got his own, as any man would have, [that he's] bringing in. How did you keep from getting in each other's way?

R: Those of us who had worked with him very closely he wanted to go right into the West Wing with him. Walter and Mildred were in the office that had been Sherman Adams' in Eisenhower's time.

F: This is Mildred Stegall.

R: Mildred Stegall. And I believe it was Ralph Dungan's at that time. But Mr. Dungan, knowing that the President would want some personal staff close, had just on his own moved upstairs. That office, you know, was down the hall from the President's office. Then the office of the secretary to the President was between the Oval Office and the Cabinet Room. Evelyn Lincoln had moved out to the Executive Office Building, so Bill Moyers and Marie Fehmer and I went into that office. We were the only five people of President Johnson's staff to come into the West Wing. The balance of the staff stayed in the 274 office in the EOB.

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President Johnson had asked, as you know, the Kennedy staff to stay on. Kenny O'Donnell was in the appointment secretary's office. He was not there a great deal in the first two weeks, if I remember right.

F: Seeing to leftover Kennedy affairs?

R: Yes. And some of the others were helping. But Larry O'Brien was there to my memory most of the time. Pierre Salinger and Andrew Hatcher and Mac Kilduff continued in the press office; President Johnson didn't bring any of his people into the press office. But of course George Reedy was in the hospital at that time with a weight reduction program, and the President would talk with George on the phone nearly every day. But the press office that had served President Kennedy continued to serve President Johnson. Bill Moyers and I took over pretty much the appointment work that was of the personal type. The mail that was processed for producing appointments was handled by Ken O'Donnell's staff and then would be given to Walter and to us. Mr. [Ted] Reardon continued to function as cabinet secretary; Mr. Dungan continued in his normal assignments. [Myer] Feldman and Lee White continued as counsel to the President doing their normal functions, and Mr. Bundy of course was a man of towering strength for the President.

There were other special assistants but not so closely associated with day-to-day things, people like the science adviser and special assistant on food. People who officed in the EOB for specialized tasks rather than daily operational tasks stayed on at their



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jobs, but we didn't see so much of them in those early days. President Johnson saw them all as soon as he could and again expressed his wish for them to stay on.

F: Did Mrs. Kennedy ever come around?

R: Yes. My memory--her first time in was on Wednesday, I think, after the funeral.

F: The carpeting and the drapes must have--

R: She wanted to see those to see how they looked. These were a great shock to President Johnson, and not a happy shock.

F: So he hadn't seen the office like that either, had he?

R: No. He had been going to the White House beginning in President Roosevelt's time, and he had never seen anything in that office except blue or green. And the floor covered in scarlet red was a great shock to him and not a pleasant one.

Mrs. Kennedy came over. The President met her and brought her into my room and introduced those of us who were there. She had complete control. She showed signs, of course, of having done a lot of crying; her mouth still had that slackness you sort of associate with shock or emotional problems. Then she went on into the Oval Office with the President, so I didn't get to see her see these things, nor did I hear the conversation.

But we would see her with her sister and the children, the dogs. They'd play sometimes with a big ball in the Rose Garden; but that was the only time that I came face to face or to a talking situation with her.

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F: Did the President show any impatience at all at Mrs. Kennedy's sort of--at least deliberateness in leaving the White House? They were there for some time, I know.

R: She was there for two weeks. But both the President and Mrs. Johnson had assured her that they wanted her to take all of the time [she needed].

F: They had no impatience?

R: None. Absolutely none. They had assured her that she was to take all the time she needed; that there was no reason, there was no need, as they expressed it, for them to get in. Now, I brought in a refrigerator and put it in a very small closet close to the Oval Office, and had got a hot plate. The President would have breakfast appointments, and they would be served by the navy mess people, and they'd use that little closet with those facilities for their pantry. We even had a luncheon of the Governor's Executive Committee in the Cabinet Room. We dressed the tables and set out the place cards, and just used the Cabinet Room table.

The President would walk a part of the way some mornings for exercise from The Elms with the cars and the Secret Service following along behind. He'd walk a few blocks and then come on to the office. He gave no evidence at all, and I'm sure he felt no impatience or inconvenience for not moving in.

Mrs. Kennedy wrote a very lengthy letter to the Johnsons about her work on restoration of the White House, and her hopes of what they might continue. Every evidence in the written word from

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Mrs. Kennedy that I saw, or every evidence that I could see, there were only the most cordial, the warmest relationship between Mrs. Kennedy and President and Mrs. Johnson.

F: Now, then, one of the first things you had to face, of course, was an upcoming election, one of the first major things. Of course, you had the State of the Union Message and all that went on in between.

R: And the message to the Congress prior to the State of the Union [Message].

F: Did everybody pitch in and work on that?

R: Yes. You know, he likes to glean ideas from people, and he likes to try out his ideas on people. He put in a great many hours on that speech. That was one of the speeches that he worked very closely with Ted Sorensen, who had worked in a similar way with President Kennedy. President Johnson of course used his own people as well, but Mr. Sorensen did make contributions and worked with the President on it.

And that was a very emotional evening.

F: Did you go?

R: No, I didn't go up. I stayed in the office; I listened to it on television.

F: Had President Kennedy had the television sets in the Oval Room?

R: One.

F: Mr. Johnson had the other two installed?

R: That's right, but some time later.

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F: A good bit later?

R: Oh, a good bit later.

F: Were the tickers there?

R: No, not until later, some time up in the next year, but I don't remember exactly when. Willie Day Taylor had for years clipped the tickers and marked the tickers for President Johnson, and we just continued this and had the two different wire services--a clipboard for each. She just continued it as she always had. And even after he had his tickers, this was continued and they would stay on a cabinet in my office. But he did use the tickers. He enjoyed them, they served him well and they kept other people on their toes, too.

F: Everybody stayed up on what was going on, too.

Now, then, you've moved in over there. How was the work more or less divided within your particular office? I presume you handled all of the personal relationships there. Did you have Marie in there with you?

R: Yes. Bill Moyers, Marie and I were in that room. Bill brought his secretary in, but--

F: It was kind of crowded, wasn't it?

R: Yes, it was.

F: It never seemed to me to be adequate space for the size of the operation that went on.

R: I know. Bill moved in with his secretary down the hall after a few days, and he really began being then within--well, from the beginning we handled the most important appointments. And Bill then

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began functioning as the appointments secretary even after Ken O'Donnell came back.

F: Did anyone ever lay out a kind of plan or organization, or did these things just grow?

R: Well, President Johnson did. The White House was already set up and functioning with the Congressional Liaison Office, and the other specialized offices--the counsel, and what have you. And we continued as we had always done.

The opening of the mail was always done away from us, and the things that were to be sent in to him without being opened flowed right on through just as they always had. Walter of course was able to handle a great deal of the bulk of the routine that had been selected out as possibly for the President; Walter would handle a good deal of that. What was to go then to the President he would send in to me. This is the way we had functioned in the vice presidency and we just kept that up. And with Bill taking on the responsibilities of the appointments office, there was no period where we floundered about, "What am I to do?" We just did as we had been doing.

Of course we had the appointment books for the Vice President that I had been doing in the Vice President's office. These were either kept or cancelled, depending on who they were and why.

F: You had to check them all out?

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- R: Yes, had to go through the book ahead on the calendar and find out what the President's wishes were about--some of them were obvious that they'd just be cancelled.
- F: Did the President as a general rule give you quick, decisive answers, or does he in many answers kind of equivocate and wait and delay or, "Let me think about that, I'll tell you later"?
- R: No. I would say that about 80 per cent of what you present to him you get an immediate answer.
- F: So that as a secretary generally you know where things are?
- R: Yes. Sometimes he'd say, "Well, I want to think about that." And he had a certain place on his desk we'd put it, and as long as it stayed on that part of the desk, you knew he was still thinking about it.
- F: Is he pretty good himself at shuffling papers, getting things out of the way, keeping [up]?
- R: Yes, he was. I'd try to give things to him in groups because he could go through things so fast; he's just really a very, very rapid reader. And I could take in eighty or ninety items and be back out in twenty or thirty minutes.
- F: Did you have kind of a Sears and Roebuck rule--you know, an order comes in today, we mail it tonight sort of thing?
- R: Yes. His general rule was anything received today is handled today. Of course some things you had to wait on for answers, but he didn't like a buildup of backlog.

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And we had worked out our little systems where we could help him by gisting and putting something like, "Dr. Frantz hopes you can speak at The University of Texas in November." Then we'd say, "Your day is free," or "Your calendar is free that day, the day before, the day after," or give him some clues to help make the decision easier, and he wouldn't have to ask questions about it.

Eventually we worked out a scheme where we would put the yes, no, and other things so he could check them, if he were going to work alone and not work with somebody, and that worked very well. It was more work for us, but it saved him a lot of time by putting cover items on.

F: As far as you know, in this system of the mail getting further down the line the more important it was, did you ever just flat commit a gaffe somewhere of someone who, say, back at Whitney Shoemaker's level got overlooked who should have come to the attention of the President?

R: Oh, yes, this happened.

F: I would think the percentage would be with you to make a few of those.

R: Oh, sure, this happened. And it happened down in the transition [from Washington to Texas in 1969]. When this kind of thing would happen, it was just unbelievable that it could have happened to this person or in this thing. Oh, yes, we were all human and we--

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F: Do you recall any specific instances?

R: I don't recall on those. There's not any that just stands out as a great big one. But, oh, yes, we did--

F: They came up often enough?

R: Oh, yes.

F: Did the President understand the possibilities of error within the system, or did he get pretty perturbed on this?

R: Oh, yes--

F: I mean, to me it has always been miraculous in the sense that just out of sheer volume that things get done.

R: So much volume got out, yes. Oh, and we'd make mistakes like he'd dictate a letter, or a group of letters, and maybe he'd say, "Dear Joe," when you're writing Mrs. Duggan. And if he'd catch you in this, he'd use it to tease you.

F: He liked to--is he something of a proofreader of his mail?

R: Oh, yes.

F: Oh, yes, he was. He had been one, you know. And he had very definite ideas not only about the composition of the mail, but the placement of it on the paper--very particular about those things.

F: He wanted a proper-looking letter.



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R: Yes, indeed. As he said, he wanted it framed with margins. And he would fluctuate. He'd get into a period when he would want very short letters, but warm and friendly--

F: That's a great phrase.

R: One time he said, "Now, let me see you compose a letter to this, and let me see what you can come up with. Make it short, but make it warm and friendly." And I had three paragraphs containing thirteen words. I think that was my best effort.

F: You have to work hard to be warm in that short a time.

R: That's right.

F: Did you develop any office schisms between, say, Kennedy people and the people that the President brought in, or were some of these disenchantments just an individual thing? I mean, there wasn't really a line-up, this side against the other, ever?

R: No, not as far as I know. I learned to know some of the Kennedy staff people quickly and became very fond of them and enjoyed working with them; some I never did get to know. I cannot say that I ever got to know Kenny O'Donnell. I don't believe he would recognize me today.

F: Just wasn't around, or he just moved in his own world?

R: He just--his body was there, but he was not.

F: Do you think that in a sense, at least at that time, a part of him had been buried with Kennedy?

R: That was my impression. I was uncomfortable in his presence not because he ever said anything to make me so, but I was just

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uncomfortable in his presence. Dave Powers, on the other hand, I enjoyed eating with at the round table; he functioned very well, I enjoyed him. There was no question but that his heart and love were with the Kennedys, but you know he would go every day to spend some time with John-John. Then he'd tell us about it just as if we were all one working family, which we tried to be.

I didn't get to know Ted Sorensen; but he didn't stay very long. But he, too, was more reserved, perhaps aloof, but I just personally didn't--we had a little conversation because it was necessary, but it wasn't anything beyond what was necessary, and he wasn't there very long.

F: How about Arthur Schlesinger, Jr.?

R: I don't think I ever spoke with him.

F: Richard Goodwin? He stayed longer.

R: Well, he was not there when we went there; he had been moved out of the White House a good while before to the State Department, and then had moved out of there to the Peace Corps. It was some time after we got to the White House before he came in. Bill Moyers brought him in. Bill brought him over a while, I think, helping Bill, before anybody else much knew he was around.

Yes, I got to know him. He was not a person that I ever learned to like; I respected his ability in writing.

F: Did the President work with him fairly well, or did he mainly just submit ideas and draft suggestions?

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R: No, there were periods of time when they would work closely together.

I think he had known enough about Richard Goodwin's association with President Kennedy, and I think there were periods of time when President Johnson was not sure it was best to have him there. Then I think there were periods of time when he so liked Goodwin's product that he would forget that and work well with him.

F: He has told me that Goodwin never missed a deadline, that the work was always--

R: And he did quality work.

F: Always good, and right when he needed it.

R: A very bright man, but he was not a person that I learned to like.

[End of Tape 1 of 1 and Interview III]

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In accordance with the provisions of Chapter 21 of Title 44, United States Code, and subject to the terms and conditions hereinafter set forth, we, the co-executors (for the estate of Juanita Roberts), do hereby give, donate and convey to the United States of America all my rights, title and interest in the tape recordings and transcripts of personal interviews conducted on August 29 and October 17, 1969 and April 6, 1983 in Washington, D.C., and prepared for deposit in the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library.

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