

#### INTERVIEW IV

DATE: April 6, 1983  
INTERVIEWEE: JUANITA ROBERTS  
INTERVIEWER: Michael L. Gillette  
PLACE: Mrs. Roberts' home, Washington, D.C.

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G: Okay, Mrs. Roberts, I want you to start with the March 31, [1968] speech. Just tell what you remember about that occasion, where you were. It was a Sunday, as you say.

R: Yes. I had gone to work for some reason, I don't remember why now. And other people came wandering in that day to either get caught up or do something. Mary Rather came in to write some letters. Marie Fehmer was there to do some pick-up work.

Toward midday, I think it was--oh, that was the Z day that Lynda Bird arrived home, and she arrived home quite early from having come all the way from California. Naturally the child was very upset because Chuck was on the way to Vietnam. And like any mother, father and daughter, there was sadness, efforts at expressing hopefulness and that kind of thing. But in those days Lynda had a very volatile personality, and like many of us one and two-child families, we spoke to our parents in ways we wish we hadn't. But Lynda could thrash out with things, and I think that her parents were pretty well bowed down with all the weight of that serious--and it was serious that your husband was on the way to Vietnam.

G: What did she say? What did Lynda Bird [say]?

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R: I wasn't present to hear it, and all I would have heard would have been how many times--hearsay I don't know--but I know Lynda, and I knew that she could say harsh things. But at any rate, that apparently was the background of the early morning.

This was an announced speech, had been under preparation for some time, manners and ways of the bombing cessation. Now, that day it didn't occur to me that he would include the "I won't run" portion of the speech, and I hadn't heard too much about it. I had heard that he was considering not running, and back in 1964 on the one day that the Mississippi delegation was giving him so much problem, he talked about, "Well, the best way to solve it is just to step aside." But I didn't give too much thought about that would be a means of stopping the bombing.

G: Did you have any evidence that he wasn't going to run again?

R: No, not at that time, I did not. You know how Mr. Johnson would frequently say, "Oh, I'm going to do so-and-so." He had no more intention of it than you or me, but it was a manner of speech. We all employ some of those things.

After lunch my phone rang, and I'll declare I can't remember who it was, but it was somebody in the house, as we called the Mansion, asking if there was somebody there in the office who could come over and type a copy of a statement to be added to the speech. I said yes, and I looked up and I repeated it to both Mary Rather and Marie Fehmer, and I said, "Would one of you want to go?" and Marie went. So she didn't come back, she was gone the rest of the day. No, she came

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back. She came back to proofread some things she had written, and that was it. It was the message that [Horace] Busby drafted. And Busby has told his story on it.

Later, a year or two later, I was up in General [William] Westmoreland's office in the Pentagon because the President had sent me a draft of that portion of his book [The Vantage Point] that he wanted General Westmoreland to take a good, serious editing look at. The General had done it, and he called and asked me to come up, and he went over the penciled changes with me. I asked him if the President had ever talked to him prior to that date about not running again. And he said, yes, President Johnson had very seriously discussed it with him from the background of would the men think he was quitting and running out, that he was in a position to quit and get out and they were not. How would the men feel about that? I had never heard anybody else say anything like that. But General Westmoreland told me that on a visit home the President had that discussion with him, and that the President had promised him if ever he seriously considered it, he would tip him off so that he would know what was coming, and that the President had sometime during that immediate period. But I still think it was after Lynda got home that he said "this might be the time," such and such, "this might be the time. And I'll get in touch with you ahead of time to let you know." But you know, they were checking Z speech points back and forth all the while, period, comma, every word, expression, to make it as perfect as possible. But that part of it was to have been kept just for the two men.

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Marie went on back to the House with the proofread addition to the speech.

G: Did she tell you what was in it, the contents?

R: Well, I was in on the proofreading, so I knew the contents.

G: That's how you learned of it.

R: I knew the contents. So Mary and I finished up what we were doing, and we went on home. There wasn't any need to check back with the man to say we were going, because he hadn't known we were there. It wasn't that kind of a day. And there were meetings all over the West Wing. Marvin Watson was having a meeting of the politicos, planning the campaign. That was almost proof positive there wasn't going to be any ducking out. There was a meeting--Jim Rowe was present I think--up in what had been Walter's [Jenkins] office, the big room up front. There were meetings all over the place.

I came on home. I was tired. I changed for night, bed, and I had a sofa in the living room that I could unload the pillows and get real comfortable. Well, I did that and Mother and I settled down to watch the speech. And lo and behold, he came to the opening of that portion and I raised up off that couch and I started shouting, "No! Don't! Stop! You still have time, please stop, don't go any further!" Mother thought I had lost my mind.

Without any more ado, I got up and started dressing, called a car and went back to the White House. And the phones were pandemonium. People were coming. He looked so happy. He looked so relieved and so happy. And he was happy with his decision because he had been a long

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time coming to it and he had tried everything he knew with Ho Chi Minh. Ho Chi Minh bought nothing. I do honestly think that he believed if he took himself out of the picture, Ho Chi Minh might be willing to negotiate with a fresh party.

G: What did he say that night? Did he talk to you about that?

R: Well, he was talking--there were so many people coming and going and coming and going. As far as just having a serious conversation of the whys and the wherefores and the pros and the cons, no, that never occurred. That wasn't his manner. He would sometimes get on an analytical soapbox and go, but an interruption would get him off track.

G: What was Mrs. Johnson's reaction to the speech?

R: My recollection is that she was smiling, a little teary-eyed and very much relieved. I think that there was family drama behind that whole thing and that whole day that if ever we know it, it will be down the road a while. But I just think that they were a loving, close family and that this was a great part of it, a great part of it. It was so unplanned. You know, it was not on the teleprompter. There were people they would have wanted there who were not there, which is another proof positive that it was a spur of the moment thing, in my opinion.

G: They did have a list of people to call I understand during the speech.

R: Well, yes, to make sure that they were listening. But you see, that was done at supper. The Krims were in; the Krims were there. Busby was there, and Busby had been with them through the years. And Marie stayed on as secretary for Busby. Marie had knowledge of people the

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President was seeing every day all day. So they had two good people to help them build such a list. Lynda and Luci were there.

G: What were their reactions to the speech?

R: You know, I don't recall. People were going all over the place. And everybody was crying. Everybody was crying. I think some were crying out of joy of, well, "they don't have to go through much more of this," and some people were crying because "this is the end of my career in the President's ear." It was just depending on who they were.

G: How could you tell the difference?

R: (Laughter) Oh, my.

G: Now, is there anything else about March 31 that you remember that was significant?

R: I don't think so. See, as it was happening, you weren't even thinking that it was a day of significance, because you thought, well, this will be like that day in 1964, we'll go build up to the peak and then toss it over the side and won't do anything with it. Didn't work that way.

General Westmoreland said that he missed hearing the President's speech because of the mechanics of getting the call through. Somebody had to tell him what it was all about.

G: Now shortly after that, Martin Luther King was assassinated, a period of three or four days.

R: Yes.

G: Well, I guess even before that he met with Robert Kennedy at the White House.

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R: Yes.

G: Do you know anything about that meeting?

R: Bobby didn't come through my office, nor did Ted Sorensen, who accompanied him. I was very prejudiced. Mr. Johnson did not have him in the Oval Office. Mr. Johnson came out of the Oval Office, crossed my room, went into the Cabinet Room, and they sat around the cabinet table, Ted Sorensen and Bobby Kennedy. Bobby and Mr. Johnson were across from each other, Bobby in the V.P.'s chair. I was prejudiced, am still prejudiced, and I can remember thinking what a little pip-squeak he looked. It was unfortunate he was so much smaller physically than Mr. Johnson. Mr. Johnson towered over him. I was in and out of the room, taking notes and stuff and things. But you know, you learned in that situation to tune out, and of course conversations would stop while the President would read his notes.

G: You mean notes that would be brought in from the outside?

R: Yes. Something I would take in that I figured I couldn't wait until that meeting was over. Not many interruptions. But I do remember when the meeting was over, Mr. Johnson went on back in the Oval Room and I turned to my back, my windows. My windows were doors, and they opened onto the terrace that stepped down into the Rose Garden. And Ted Sorensen and Bobby Kennedy walked across the Rose Garden until they disappeared behind the hedge. And I stood there and watched them until they disappeared. I was hoping to myself "that will be the end of that," but it wasn't.

G: Why do you think they met in the Cabinet Room?

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(Interruption)

R: Let's go to something that is speculative on my part about recording. Bobby Kennedy was well aware of John Kennedy's recording capabilities, which were pathetically amateurish. One button on his phone, one button on a phone on Evelyn Lincoln's desk, and a dictaphone machine. The President could punch the button, the light would turn red, and it would record. Evelyn didn't have to be on the phone or anything.

Now when Bobby Kennedy came to see Mr. Johnson about running with him for V.P. in 1964, in the meantime Mr. Johnson's phones had changed drastically. We had a forty-two button call director. Some of them were just direct lines, but one of them was a voice phone, and we would set it up every day so that Mr. Johnson wouldn't have to lift the receiver to place or receive calls. When that thing was on, there was a red button that glowed, but had nothing to do with recording. To use the same kind of simple recording device President Kennedy had, which was the dictaphone belt, Mr. Johnson would buzz. We'd open the door and look at him, and he'd twist his finger in a circle, twirl his finger. He wanted us to turn on the machine. Well, Bobby saw that red light and he was convinced, convinced that his conversation was being recorded. I think he convinced many other people, too.

But as to the Cabinet Room meeting, I was in and out of the room, but I saw no instrument and I don't know, from personal knowledge, what there could be in that way.

G: What was his mood? What was the President's mood after that meeting with Robert Kennedy, do you recall?



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R: Now we're back to--?

G: 1968.

R: --1968. Any kind of personal disagreement was a drag on him, and it showed in his contacts with other people. I never saw him gloat about winning a debate, an argument, or a point. I think their relationship was a burden to him, made him very unhappy. He didn't like the man, knew the man didn't like him. That's not easy for anybody to carry. But I don't remember discussing about it that day.

G: Was there any talk of moving the Democratic convention from Chicago? You had all sorts of hints that there would be protests during this period.

R: Yes. Not in my direction. I don't remember overhearing any. I could have heard plenty and just not paid attention.

G: Now Vice President Humphrey announced for president about a month after LBJ's March 31 speech.

R: Yes. Mr. Johnson wanted him to and he was getting impatient that he was dragging his feet.

G: Why did Humphrey drag his feet, do you know?

R: I think just being Humphrey. You know, he was a quick-minded man, he was quick to think on his feet, quick with a quip. But that was a pretty big step, and I think it was just being natural Mr. Humphrey. I don't know whether she was adding to that or not.

G: Now, you had a situation where various cabinet officers were aligning themselves behind one candidate or another. [Robert] McNamara did some television commercials for Robert Kennedy. [Orville] Freeman,

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[Willard] Wirtz and [Wilbur] Cohen came out for Humphrey. Did this displease the President, the fact that his administration was getting involved in Democratic politics?

R: I'm sure that each one as it occurred did at the moment, because you remember he said, and I think he tried desperately, that he would not devote an hour. And if he had been willing to devote an hour to politics, he wouldn't have bowed out.

G: What did he do to help Humphrey in that spring campaign?

R: I don't know. I know that he leaned over backwards to be fair to Nixon and Wallace and not to give Humphrey advantages because of being vice president, simply because he himself had pledged he would not devote an hour. But when there was national security information that had to be passed, he would have conference calls set up so that all of the candidates would be together at one time in one place and would hear from him one message. And he never talked to any one of them singly.

But then I remember one time, as one of those conference calls was going on, Mr. Wallace said to him, "Mr. President, what can we do to help you?" and that deeply impressed LBJ.

G: How did he respond?

R: I don't remember. I don't remember the exact words, but it impressed him that the man thought of him. Mr. Johnson thought that he was outstanding in other ways. When LBJ was writing his book and he came to Wallace, he wanted to bring that up and say that he thought--and he used the expression "a small man" so and so and so and so. And when

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Mr. Johnson asked me to read his book I said, "Can we find another word for small? Because I know what you think about him. You mean in stature he's little, but he's not small-minded?" "Oh, no, he's not small-minded."

G: Humphrey seems to have tried to put some distance between himself and the administration policy in Vietnam.

R: And that was outside influence and, you see, that was something that Mr. Humphrey was subject to. He could go this way and then the next person he met he could go this way. Because he apparently did not have that sense of deep security, and he'd been thrust into this so suddenly. And he knew the President's absolute, adamant attitude and people were telling him, "If you go along with that you're going to lose." He must have been in a terrible spot.

G: He delivered a speech in Salt Lake City that--

R: That just split him and Mr. Johnson miles apart.

G: Do you recall any of the details of the President's reaction to that? Did he know about the speech in advance, for example?

R: I don't know whether he did, but he I think credited it to George Ball. Yet he had respect for George Ball. But, see, George Ball didn't vacillate. There's a big difference.

G: As long as we're on the subject of Ball, why do you think he named Ball to replace [Arthur] Goldberg at the U.N.?

R: Did he?

G: Yes.

R: George Ball was our U.N. rep?

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G: After Arthur Goldberg.

R: I didn't remember that. Well, again, you see people tried to make it that you had to think like LBJ to get along with LBJ. Nothing could have been further from the truth. But he wanted you to be honest in what you said you thought; he didn't want you to be rigid, he wanted you to be a flexible person, but he wanted you to be steadfast. If those things don't contradict, and I think you know what I mean. And I think he had a deep respect for George Ball because he could tell you almost before an utterance what George Ball was going to say. That was Mr. Johnson's great skill in the Senate. He knew how to reason that people would think. And he knew that if they thought that, you could depend on them to think it. You know, old Harry Byrd and he were miles apart in thinking. But he had deep respect for Senator Byrd. He sure knew how he was going to think.

G: Anything else on Humphrey and the Salt Lake City speech? Do you recall any meetings they might have had or discussions?

R: No. But I know Mr. Johnson on more than one occasion touched on ridiculing that operation. He really thought that that defeated Hubert Humphrey.

G: Nixon on the other hand seems to have defended the administration position on Vietnam somewhat more. But on the other hand, there's evidence that he was trying to influence the South Vietnamese to not make a deal too hastily with the current administration. He, if he got elected, would be able to strike a better deal. Do you know anything about that?

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R: Does the expression "the little flower" mean anything to you?

G: No.

R: Well, I don't know what security clearance you have or what access. If you went back to [Walt] Rostow and asked for it, it might get you and me both in deep kemche [?]. That would answer your question. So what can you do about it?

G: Okay. Well, maybe we can go back to this.

(Interruption)

We haven't talked about Martin Luther King's assassination. Let me ask you what you remember about that and the Washington riots. The President was scheduled to fly to Honolulu, I think.

R: Right. And we had gone up to the U.N. that afternoon and had come in from the United Nations. I think we got the word of that assassination after getting inside of the White House, and the planes with people to accompany him were already loaded at Andrews. I was not going. Marie Fehmer went on that trip, and I came back in from the United Nations with him and stayed in the Oval Office until that Honolulu trip was cancelled. Who was that fellow that they thought was responsible and they were looking for him all over town?

Carmichael?

G: Stokely Carmichael.

R: Stokely Carmichael? Is he the one they thought was loose here in D.C.?

G: Or Rap Brown, one of the two.

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R: And they were making desperate efforts to find whichever man--I'm sorry I'm not better acquainted with their histories.

It was a fearsome night, and the skies in Washington were red. When the trip was cancelled, I was alone in the outer office so I wasn't going back and forth into the Oval Office. When I came home, you know all the glass that's around here on these lobbies, instead of a driver only, we had a driver and you might call him a shotgun rider. There were two men per car, staff car, taking people wherever they had to go. There were security people with guns on all of the buildings around the White House. Driving just that short distance from the White House here, but then coming into this glass lobbied place, everything had to be locked, unlocked. It was a heavy-hearted night, a fearsome night.

G: Do you recall how LBJ learned of King's assassination?

R: No. I don't remember through which door, who came. I don't know whether it was the press, Secret Service, security. It could have been any one of them.

G: Did he reminisce about King during this period? Did he talk about [him]?

R: No. He and Mr. King were not--I didn't get a sense of a close relationship between them. You know, he came to love so many of those people, like--

G: Whitney Young?

R: Yes. He had a great fondness for Whitney Young, respect for him. Who was NAACP?

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G: Roy Wilkins?

R: Roy Wilkins. Such gentleness.

G: Now, why did he postpone going to Honolulu? Was it because of this crisis?

R: There was too much unknown here. That would have been putting too much distance--there was too much unknown.

G: Did the President consider going to the King funeral?

R: I don't recall any conversation on it. You see, that was Kennedy territory, and Bobby was killed, what, a few days later.

G: No, it was several--well, it was in June.

R: June 6.

G: And this was April, so a couple of months.

R: Oh, yes. Well, Mr. Johnson was a sensitive man, very sensitive in so many ways. The King family, those were the Kennedy friends. He would think that people would think that he was trying to shove Bobby out, especially since Bobby was ambitious for the presidency.

G: Do you think there was at all a security angle to his not going?

R: No. No, I don't. I think that if he thought that he could have been helpful being there, that he would have been there. But can't you hear the tongues wag in your imagination that he went because Bobby wanted to be president, and he was trying to angle himself in.

G: Now, he traveled quite a bit during that month of April, went to Chicago to address the broadcasters convention, met with Mayor [Richard] Daley. Do you remember that at all?

R: No, I didn't go.

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G: The ordination of I guess it was Archbishop [Terence] Cooke in New York.

R: No. You know, if I saw a piece of paper or if I saw a picture or something of the kind, it might spark a thought, but no, I don't remember.

G: May.

R: Yes.

G: It was in May that the President announced that there had been an agreement with North Vietnam to meet in Paris for peace talks. Do you remember that at all?

R: I know he could be so easily elated in anything promising. He would just hit the road for the mountaintop.

G: Really? His popularity seems to have gone up in the polls during this period.

R: Oh, yes. Yes. I think he could have been so easily re-elected. That's my opinion.

G: During this period there were a lot of people who seemed to have urged him to reconsider.

R: Yes. In correspondence, telephone calls, in person.

G: Do you remember who some of the people were?

R: Oh, no. I would say it was a cross-section of America.

G: Really? Did he himself ever think about possibly running again?

R: No. There were times when I think he would be cross because he had announced that decision and perhaps wished he hadn't. However, I



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don't think he ever once gave one-half a second to reconsidering it because that would have destroyed any credibility he would have had.

G: Do you recall any particular occasion when he expressed anger that he had withdrawn as he had, burned his bridges?

R: No. No.

G: Now, of course LBJ was pushing hard during this period for the 10 per cent surtax that he really felt was needed to control inflation. Do you have any insights or recollections of his efforts here, the people he met with?

R: It's not the kind of thing I worked with. Like I said, if I had the night reading list or if I had the night reading back-up envelope or something of the kind, I might be able to tell you something additional that I heard him say that maybe I hadn't taken time to write down as extra. But not working with those things and not being real conversive with details of them, it's just not something I would remember. Now you tell me, isn't this the area that Wilbur Mills was giving him such a fit about?

G: Yes.

R: It was not LBJ's wish; it was Wilbur Mills' absolute refusal to do what was needed.

G: Do you recall any of his meetings with Mills?

R: No. No. Have you ever talked with Mills?

G: No.

R: Somebody ought to, because maybe since he got religion on the drinking and the rest of it, maybe he'd come clean on this. Because as I

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understand it, we were ready long, long, long, long ahead of the danger period. There was no reluctance to bite the bullet when it was needed. It was that Mills wouldn't let the bullet come in view to bite.

G: The Poor People's Campaign began in mid-May. At the same time, there was a CBS special called "Hunger in America." Do you recall the President's reaction to Resurrection City, his attitude toward it?

R: Not really as a project. Not really.

This is reminding me, have you noticed there is never a time when there isn't more than one crisis? When a new crisis would come, we'd type a new crisis card, and I kept by the telephone--I'd give anything if I'd kept a set of them myself, but I didn't--how the crises had piled up. Have you ever seen those cards?

G: No. Are they index cards, is that what they are?

R: Yes, they're about the size of it, yes, they're the size of an index card. And I know they're in Diary Back-up somewhere. I called them crisis cards, but they--you've got it here in these things, April, May and June, and the overlaps are dramatic.

G: And all the while you had Vietnam also.

R: Yes. Like I don't remember what was already on the book when the Dominican Republic came up, but there it reared its head, and before it was wound up there was something else.

G: Now in June he met with Earl Warren, who indicated that he wanted to step down as chief justice. And the President named Abe Fortas, as you know, to succeed him. Do you have any insights into that whole

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event, his meeting with Warren, Warren's resignation, and his appointment of Abe Fortas?

R: No. No. Have you talked to Mrs. Fortas about it?

G: No. How did you learn that Warren was resigning, do you remember?

R: I don't. And of course I was very, very, very fond of Mr. Fortas.

G: Do you think that the President considered anyone else besides Abe Fortas?

R: I would doubt it, because of his confidence and fondness for Abe Fortas. Now if he did, I would think Clark Clifford, maybe Jim Rowe would know.

G: How was Fortas unique to him? Why do you think he singled out Fortas for this appointment?

R: I don't know. I don't know. But it's entirely possible that because Fortas was so brilliant and he was such a quiet, gentle man and he had achieved so much and yet Mr. Fortas had come up in this house as a Jewish fellow, had to make it on his own, and Mr. Johnson was really an underdog man. You know? So it could be that all of that entered into it.

Now have you had evidence of a great bond between Tom Corcoran and LBJ?

G: Well, of course I know they were friends for a long time.

R: Yes.

G: But is there something--?

R: There has always been that talk that they were such good friends. But it has seemed to me that Mr. Johnson was closer to Jim Rowe, and I

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just wondered if in your work you had come upon a stronger bond between Tom and Jim.

G: There's a bond between the President and Fortas that's very evident from the files.

R: Yes. And, see, Fortas and Clifford were very close.

G: They were used together a lot I gather.

R: Yes. And Mr. Johnson was very fond of Clifford, deep respect for him. Now, toward the end he got a little peeved with him because of that Vietnam thing. There again was a misunderstanding.

G: Fortas had been reluctant to go on the Court to begin with.

R: Right.

G: Do you know anything about that?

R: No. Maybe he knew that he had some things in his background that he wouldn't want to come out without its being in his total control. I know that--I don't know who could tell you anything about it, because the Senator's dead and I don't know who else is there, and I don't know enough to bring it up, but there was a man in Georgia that Senator Dick Russell wanted--

G: Alexander Lawrence.

R: --named to a judgeship. It dragged. Why it dragged, I don't know. But it dragged it to the point that Senator Russell, not being well-- he was getting close to the time that he died; he had emphysema and that's dreadfully hard to live with--Senator Russell became angry about it.

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We had a scheme to get me retired on a combined service and I could go to Texas when everybody went. I suggested to Mr. Johnson that we explore the thought with Margaret Chase Smith, because she was such a strong woman on keeping everything just right personnel-wise in the military services. She's the one who denied Jimmy Stewart his PG. So Mr. Johnson liked the idea. He called up General Lewis, who was Mrs. Smith's AA, Bill Lewis, and said, "Bill, come see me. I've got something I want to talk to you about." So he talked to Bill Lewis about would Senator Smith introduce a private bill that would combine my Senate and military service together. One government, why not? Let us count it all together, and then I could retire on twenty years satisfactory service, and go on down with him and work in the Library. So he said, "I have just one request, but I know Maggie will do it anyway. Be sure that it's okay with Senator Russell."

So Bill Smith called back and he said, "Tell the President that Senator Smith will be delighted to introduce the private bill, and that she has already discussed it with Senator Russell and he says he doesn't like it, it sets a precedent, but he thinks mighty highly of Miss Juanita and he'll go along with it. He will not object in committee nor on the floor. And she's also checked it out with Senator [John] Stennis, who says whatever the Commander in Chief wants, he'll go. And she checked it out with Strom Thurmond, the senior Republican, and he said, 'If the President hadn't recommended it himself I would have recommended it myself.'"

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So we were going to go. And the President was down at the Ranch. The phone rang. It was Bill Lewis, and Bill Lewis said, "I've got some information from Senator Russell that Senator Smith thinks we better check it out with the President before she moves any further. And Senator Russell said, "Senator Smith can tell the President that I said that if she introduces the bill on Mrs. Roberts, I will oppose it in committee and I will oppose it on the floor, because that judgeship hadn't come through." So Mr. Johnson was quiet. I thought maybe we'd been disconnected. And he said, "Well, honey, I am truly sorry," but he said, "Tell Bill to tell her in no way would I want to do anything that would hurt that old man, because I love him. And this is a result of his sickness. So we will just forget it for now."

G: Do you know whether the foot dragging on the judgeship was coming from the White House or from Ramsey Clark?

R: I have no idea.

G: You know, there are a lot of indications that LBJ would call in Ramsey Clark and ask him about it.

R: Yes. Now, Ramsey was one who just did what Ramsey wanted, regardless of the President's instruction. Haven't you found some of that?

R: He did have a meeting with Russell, didn't he, later on in this?

R: I don't know.

G: Do you know what Russell's position on Abe Fortas was initially?

R: No. I don't. But I do know that in the deep, deep old South there were those prejudices that some may have lingered in him about Jewish people.

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G: Ed Weisl was a good friend of Russell's, and I understand that Weisl went to Russell and talked to him about the Fortas nomination. Do you know anything about that?

R: No.

G: Do you know anything about the letter that Russell wrote to LBJ that LBJ sent back to Russell?

R: No. Wouldn't accept it?

G: Yes. You don't remember that letter?

R: No. I didn't see it.

G: Now, [Everett] Dirksen was another one that was very important for the Fortas thing.

R: Yes.

G: Do you recall his efforts to keep Dirksen on board?

R: No. I'm sorry.

G: That's all right. Anything else on the Fortas nomination?

R: No.

G: Do you think LBJ sensed that it was going to be lost when it dragged on as long as it did?

R: I think so. I think so.

G: Did he ever consider withdrawing it and appointing someone else who would be more acceptable to the Congress?

R: I don't know.

G: Okay. Now, let me ask you about Robert Kennedy's assassination and any memories you have of the White House during that. It was in California, of course, in early June.

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R: Yes. June 6.

G: What do you remember about that?

R: Coming on top of everything else and the fervor with which young people followed his campaign gave me a sense of fearfulness of what could come out of it. It was something that could grow and grow and grow. As I mentioned, I was not an admirer and I couldn't understand the fervor with which these people reacted toward him, but I recognized it was there. People lost their reason. Sirhan Sirhan had lost his reason, hadn't he, and it wasn't fervor for the man.

G: How did you learn of the assassination, do you know?

R: I don't recall that either. You know, there were so many ways for information to come. It would burst in through the doors, ticker tapes, so many people had ticker tapes, and maybe somebody read it before somebody else. Mr. Johnson had his own ticker tapes. The telephones would erupt. Security people would come in. And sometimes it would just seem like it would all happen at once. It was like at the fireworks where one goes off and then it's just a shower of others within it. But the first inkling, I don't remember.

G: Do you recall his reaction to it?

R: No.

G: I know he sent a plane for the--

R: --the family. Again, there's that compassion. He wanted--you remember the stories of when Jack died. He talked to [Kennedy's] mama and papa, best he could to papa, but to mama. First thing he did when he got in the door in the White House was to ask for presidential



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letterhead and sat down and wrote in longhand the letters to little John John and Caroline.

G: Which you xeroxed, I understand, so we'd have a copy.

R: Yes. I have a letter he wrote me, all handwritten. Even the envelope is addressed. And, you know, I very nearly didn't get it. They're just so few and far between. But Yolanda [Boozer] told me--he sent it to me. I was in Walter Reed [Hospital], and Yolanda told me. She xeroxed it. But I'm going to xerox it and send another copy.

G: Good. Now during this period he was also trying to improve relations with the Soviet Union. He'd had the nonproliferation agreement. He had arranged a summit. He was planning to go to the Soviet Union and then the Czechoslovakian invasion came. Do you remember this chain of events?

R: They're too substantive to--no. Without memory jogs, no, I don't.

G: Do you remember his reaction to the Czechoslovakian invasion?

R: No.

G: He must have really been disappointed.

R: Yes. Would have had to have been.

G: Did he ever consider going to the Chicago convention?

R: Oh, I don't think so. That again would have violated his pledge of "I will not devote one hour to politics." And when he made that pledge, he made it to keep.

G: Now there were efforts to have a birthday party for him there.

R: Yes, but, you see, that he wouldn't allow. Now why they couldn't understand that he meant what he said, I don't know.

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- G: Where were you during this period of August? Were you in the White House or did you go to the Ranch? Remember, he spent a long vacation period at the [Ranch].
- R: I was in the White House area more than in [Texas]. Yes. I'd have to look to see if I went to the Ranch at all. He used to say he'd leave Walter and me there to keep the store.
- G: Was he shocked at the rioting at the convention?
- R: I believe he would have been. Even though I say he was a sensitive man, and I do believe he was, he was not a fisticuffs man. You don't recall him growing up fighting. I think he thought you could work things out with your head better than with violence.
- G: There were accusations that he was actually controlling the convention behind the scenes.
- R: Of course there would be. That's the [Robert] Caro mentality who would not accept him as an honorable man who said he was not going to give any time to politics. That would be so inconsistent with his not talking with Hubert Humphrey, his own vice president, in private ever in that period of time, giving him any material for political use, always the other candidates were present. Now when Humphrey had to come to a National Security Council meeting, okay, that was business as usual. But I'd have to check the record to be sure that he came to cabinet and security council. Because we would set these others up, and they would all get it at one and the same time. So why would he then slip in the back door to run the convention?

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G: Well, the most logical explanation would be that he wanted to ensure that his policies were defended in the platform of the party, say the Vietnam plank was not one that would repudiate the administration, and that he worked through Marvin Watson in doing this.

R: But if his contention was that he had failed with Ho Chi Minh and that perhaps a new, new entity could succeed with Ho Chi Minh, it wouldn't be consistent.

G: So you didn't see any evidence that he did?

R: I did not, no.

G: Anything on his relationship with Eugene McCarthy during that campaign period?

R: Of 1968?

G: Yes.

R: I don't know of any, but I think he kind of lost all the respect he had for Eugene McCarthy in 1964.

G: Really?

R: I believe so. He considered him an extremely lazy guy.

G: Anything else on this period that we haven't talked about?

R: No. I'm glad you all find evidences of my effort to be helpful in the stuff you've got, because I feel like I can't add anything now.

G: Well, you have, and let me ask you to add one more thing and that's something you discussed before we turned on the tape, the development of the night reading.

R: Oh, yes.

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G: You indicated that this was something that was developed while he was vice president.

R: Yes. Do you want me to tell you how night reading got to be?

G: Yes, please.

R: Well, frequently you would need answers to questions in order to do tomorrow's business on time tomorrow, and he wouldn't be there or he was going to be in meetings or presiding in the Senate, so you wouldn't get answers before he left. So the night reading was in part things you needed information on to get business started off promptly in the morning and conducted through the day promptly. Then because Mrs. Johnson didn't have a place there in the Capitol and they did enjoy sharing things from constituents and information, [it included] things he could share with her, lovely thank you notes or just anything that was of a personal nature they could share together. And then three, he didn't always sleep well, so [it included] things that he might read in the night if he waked up at one of those sleepless times. And in that regard you'd try to balance it out, give him something that was hard going and maybe another something that was just a nice to have read but didn't really have to read it. In the beginning we called it pillow reading, and we'd give it to Eugene Williams, who lived at the house and did work at the house, but also worked at the Senate. And Gene would take it in and bring it back. Or else he'd put it with Norman [Edwards], the chauffeur, to bring in. It was great. It worked like a charm.

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G: Were these various categories prioritized so that the memos that were urgent that needed action before tomorrow, were they placed on top?

R: Yes. I'd have three folders in a brown envelope. And he learned, too, that here they were. They were catalogued. I'd have on the outside, "to share with Mrs. Johnson," and "nice to know" or "need to read someday" or "need for business tomorrow." So he could pull out the [one he wanted]. And maybe he'd just use one, put the others back. Maybe he'd leave the share with Mrs. Johnson at home a day or two. It got to be a status symbol. Anybody who had access to night reading felt they had arrived, and sometimes he would help them to get that attitude, and it could make it awfully hard to get business done, because people wanted to have their hands on the night reading, and I considered it confidential to the President from whomever it came.

G: Did you have to limit how much he received in night reading in order for him to get through it?

R: Well, I would try to. I had another expression that I used all the time. When the piece of paper would come in I'd look at it and I'd say to myself, "Do I walk with it, run, or wait a minute?" And I had different places in the office--if I didn't want him to see something, I could put it behind me somewhere and he'd go like a beeline to find it. So I learned soon that I could put things there to entice him to them that I wouldn't get an answer as quickly [otherwise]. Because he was terribly curious. But the walk with it, run or wait a minute, the night reading would come in the wait a minutes, because I wouldn't really have to have it before morning. But that was a gamble, because

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you didn't know what might happen, he might not even get to night reading. And the run categories [were] what would make me interrupt a cabinet meeting or a National Security Council [meeting] or what have you.

G: Did you have guidelines from him on how soon he wanted a piece of information, or did you just have to learn it by trial and error?

R: Intuition. Intuition. Sometimes it was the wrong intuit. Sometimes you made mistakes, but you learned.

G: Now you indicated that the night reading contents would be filed in the regular subject files.

R: Yes.

G: But there was an inventory.

R: In order to keep up with where what was and get it back if you had to have it in a hurry, and also to give you some little cue to remembering what he wanted done, we inventoried and would leave space for putting his reaction to it: yes, no, see me, call me, not now--just all manner of little responses, and you'd have to word your line of what you had to fit a short answer like that, and you would still have memory enough to be able to pass on the messages. I'm sure some of them worked even these years later.

G: How did the night reading get back to the office?

R: Various and sundry ways. Either one of the valets, Paul Glynn or the other young man, or an usher, and if I were in very great need and it was slow, I might call over and say, "Mr. President, could I have the night reading? Are you through with it?" Or I could just tell him,

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point out, "Mr. President, so-and-so is asking if we know yet what your wishes are for such-and-such?" and he'd say, "Well, I'll send the night reading over," or he'd say, "Well, wait a minute, let's--" and he'd look it up and talk about it. Just all manner of ways.

G: Was there any precedent for night reading before that? Did you get the idea from some other person who had done it?

R: No.

G: Whose idea was it, I should say?

R: I think it was one of those that came from old mother necessity.

G: Did you ever have a problem with night reading getting misplaced?

R: No, weren't we fortunate? And we never lost a signed bill.

G: Amazing.

R: It really was. Because sometimes those things can get up to the wire. You would have had a dreadful time reproducing them in time to get them signed and up on time or they would have become law in spite of you.

[End of Tape 1 of 1 and Interview IV]

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