INTERVIEW I

INTERVIEWEE: ELIZABETH ROWE (Mrs. James Rowe) (Tape 1 of 1)

INTERVIEWER: MICHAEL L. GILLETTE

PLACE: Mrs. Rowe's home in Washington, D.C.

June 6, 1975

MG: Mrs. Rowe, let's start briefly with your background and where you were born. You say you are a Washingtonian.

R: Yes, I feel I am a Washingtonian. I was born in Maryland, but I lived there only three months and came back, so all my memories are of this city. My mother and her family were long-time Washingtonians, so I consider myself a real native. I am very fond of the city and was delighted that both Johnsons were so fond of it.

G: How did you first become interested or active in politics?

R: When I finished college, after several not very enjoyable jobs I went to work for the United Mine Workers. To go further back, I grew up in the city of Washington in a Republican time. My family were Democrats living in Washington, although my family were not political. The gossip of the town is political. My knowledge of politics was the knowledge that Washingtonians have from the daily papers and from the talk of the town. When I went to college I went to Bryn Mawr, and there were only a handful of Democrats--this was before the Roosevelt era--and they were for the large part Republican. And then there was quite a vocal group of socialists

in the campaign of 1932, and there was only a handful of Democrats. Bryn Mawr was on the Mainline outside of Philadelphia, which was as conservative and as Republican as any section of the country. We had meetings in the '32 campaign with a handful of local Democrats and another handful from the college. So having grown up in a Republican Washington and gone to a college where a majority of undergraduates were Republican--not the faculty but the students, it has been a change of pace to have the Democrats in the majority.

But to get back to what I was telling you about refining my interest in politics. I went to work for the United Mine Workers in 1935, after I was out of college several years. It was during the time of the early New Deal when labor was encouraged, when there was new legislation that allowed for organization. John L. Lewis, who is one of my great admirations, took advantage of the climate of the time and started to organize the unorganized in the mass production industries. The AF of L at that time was exclusively made up of craft unions. I don't want to give you a long lecture on labor organization, but the craft unions were the skilled unions that were organized by the craft rather than by the industry. John L. tried to get the AF of L to move into the automobile industry, the steel industry, other industries, and organize them totally as the mine workers were. You were a member of the Mine Workers Union whether you were a check weightman or a miner or what your

job was in and around the mines. He got nowhere, so that's when the CIO was born. That's when I worked at the United Mine Workers, and it was a very exciting time. John L. Lewis, with the Amalgamated Clothing Workers, the International Ladies' Garment Workers, the printers, and other unions that were industry organized and had enlightened leadership, or what I consider enlightened leadership, got together and started the CIO. The political climate was right. [In] the 1936 campaign when I was working for the United Mine Workers, I helped by writing speeches. I worked on the United Mine Workers Journal. I did the women's page, and I was the editor's secretary, and I helped write the speeches. We were also what would now be called the public relations office or the press office. It was a tremendously exciting time, and the Roosevelt victory in '36 was of great satisfaction in the Mine Workers office. My political activity then was confined to writing speeches for some people to give in the different mining communities in support of Roosevelt. Of course after '36, John L. Lewis and the President had an increasing number of fallings out, and by 1940 John L. was supporting Wilke. But in '36 it was all very friendly.

I worked at the Mine Workers until '37, when I got married, and no married women were allowed to work at the United Mine Workers. In this International Woman's Year and the interest in Equal Rights and the forward-looking views of the Mine Workers on industrial

organization, on organizing the black members, which the AF of L did not do. [But then] there was a great feeling about women not being in the home. Up until the headquarters of the Mine Workers had moved here in '35, there were very few employees in the office who were women. They were almost all men, either retired miners or children of miners. If you got married on the staff, you were tossed out.

G: I suppose your political interests increased after you were married, since your husband was by then working for President Roosevelt.

R: No, he wasn't. No, he was working for the New Deal. He had come down to be Justice Holmes's last law clerk. Then he had a variety of New Deal jobs, and when I married him he was working for the Securities and Exchange Commission. Soon after we were married, he went to the White House as an assistant to Jimmy Roosevelt, who was one of his father's secretaries. That was only a few months after we were married.

G: Do you recall the first time you met Lyndon Johnson?

R: I certainly should, but I don't. Since you called me I have been racking my brains. [I should remember] anyone who makes such an impact on any gathering that he is in and did on me at every gathering I saw him. I still can't remember when I first met him.

G: What sort of an impact did he make in those early years?

R: Oh well, he was always more fun to be with than anybody else, and

he heightened the experience of everybody around him, because he was such a vital person. I always think of him moving fast through a room or telling marvelous stories. We saw the Johnsons quite a bit after he came to Congress. We were good friends, and he was a particularly good friend of my husband's. He could make me laugh more than almost anybody I have ever known. But [of] all those early days before the war, I can't think of any specific conversation or anything, except I always looked forward to seeing them, I always knew he was going to be great company. But I can't think of any particular pre-war incident; it may come to me sometime.

G: Could he relax at these parties, or was he always concentrating on his work?

R: He had a different way of relaxing from most people. He was relaxed in the way he talked, and he didn't talk about just what was at hand. Also I have seen him sit in that chair and go sound asleep when the conversation got away from him. I'm sure other people have told you that. When he wasn't talking, he could take a little catnap, but usually he was the center of a lively conversation, or telling stories.

G: These parties were often New Deal parties, weren't they?

R: Oh, yes.

G: People in the Interior Department or RFC?

R: Well, all varieties, I mean from all parts of the government.

G: Would you say he was closer to the executive branch of the government

than most congressmen were, that his friends were more people [in the executive branch]?

R: He may have had more friends. I didn't know any other congressman so well. But he was very interested in the New Deal's programs, and he wanted to have everything for his constituents that he could. But then I think he was sincerely interested in the things that were happening and liked to talk to the people that were a part of making them happen. He had a variety of friends, not just exclusively members of Congress.

G: Johnson was regarded, I think, pretty much as a young turk, a liberal in those days, a New Dealer. I suppose you also knew Maury Maverick.

R: Oh, indeed I knew Maury Maverick, but if I start talking about him we'll still be here by tea time.

G: How were they different philosophically, would you say, in those days?

R: Maury was almost another generation in age. He was more extravagant in the way he talked than Johnson. He was a very dramatic fellow, and he drank quite a lot. But that sort of heightened the way he talked. I thought he was an absolutely glorious man, but he seemed much older, and was, of course, than Johnson. I don't remember ever hearing them have a political disagreement, but they may well have had later on. But I wasn't a witness.

G: Do you think Johnson as a congressman was more pragmatic than Maverick?

R: Oh, yes. I'll tell you a lovely story if we can skip chronology a little bit. When my husband went off in the Navy, I was working for the International Labor Office, which is a specialized agency of the U. N. now, but it was the last remaining organization of the old League of Nations. My office was on Jackson Place overlooking Lafayette Square, and the CIO was right down the street. I guess it would have been the '44 campaign, when Lyndon Johnson was running for Congress. He called me up one day and he said, "Elizabeth, do you know anybody well in the Labor movement? Do you know those people down the street?" I said, "I know them pretty well." He said, "Well, do you suppose you could get them to come out against me?" I said, "What do you mean?" He said, "I'll tell you what happened. A little while ago I came home one night and I said to Bird, 'I'm tired of voting the way I think I should vote to stay in the Congress and not voting the way I really feel when an issue comes up.' She said, 'Just vote the way your conscience tells you and forget about being pragmatic and surviving.'" So he said, "The next vote that came up was a vote for the Dies Committee," You know the Dies Committee, the Red-chasing committee. "It was a vote for the appropriation. I voted against it," he said, "and do you know what's happening to me? The New Republic's got out a special supplement supporting me in my district in Texas, and I need something to balance it out. Do you think your friends at the CIO

would come out against me?" I think that's a marvelous story.

G: Was he serious, really?

R: How can you tell? Certainly he was serious. He wanted some noise on the other side.

G: Did you talk to the people?

R: I talked to a few people. I don't know what happened. They didn't come out against him, but isn't that a good story?

G: That is a marvelous story. I've never heard that before.

R: I told you I had at least one. Anyway, he got elected, but as far as I know, the CIO never took any formal action against him.

G: When did your husband become an advisor in terms of someone who would offer Lyndon Johnson advice and someone he sought advice from?

R: You will have to ask Jim. Certainly soon after he came to Washington, through Roosevelt they got together. Whether Roosevelt said, "I've got a fine young congressman coming up from Texas," I don't know. But they were about the same age--Johnson was a year older than Jim--and President Roosevelt liked younger people around. It was through him they got together, but how . . .

G: I know he helped in that 1941 race for the Senate against "Pappy" O'Daniel. Do you recall any stories related to that campaign?

R: I heard the stories which other people have and which you must have heard about going to sleep elected and waking up not elected. And then of course I saw the films that the Johnsons had. But I don't

have any stories. Jim might have.

G: Yes, he did. Could you see a move to the right, say in the mid-Forties, on [Johnson's] part? President Roosevelt died in April, 1945, and it seemed that maybe LBJ was too liberal for a statewide office. Texas was going to the right. Did he change any in your opinion then?

R: My memory of his changing was in the other direction on civil rights. I don't remember specifically his backing off from any social programs that he had always supported in the New Deal days. I was aware of his changing attitude on civil rights, because I think originally he felt that if the South were left alone the black-white problems could be worked out better than if there was Federal interference. I think he changed his mind on that. So I don't have a feeling of his deserting the liberal cause at all. I had great admiration for what he achieved, and I think that in some cases you have to trim a bit in order to get something. He did a tremendous job as Majority Leader when he did get to the Senate.

G: In the earlier years, he seems to have had a number of mentors and political sponsors. I guess one was Sam Rayburn and another was Alvin Wirtz. Did you know Senator Wirtz?

R: Oh yes, I just loved him. He was always the liberal, the sort of captive liberal. I can remember fussing at Congressman Johnson and saying, "Why aren't you more liberal on this?" But it's lost in the mist of time; I don't remember what it was about. In retrospect

I can't remember. But Senator Wirtz was always pushing him in one direction, and Sam Rayburn essentially was more pragmatic.

G: What was Wirtz like?

R: He had a very understated way, no bombast, no tablethumping, great humor, and almost at one removed from the battle so that you felt that his advice was a disinterested kind of advice. At least that's the way he impressed me.

G: Was he held in high regard by the New Dealers? I know he became Undersecretary of the Interior.

R: Well, I can't speak for everybody. I don't think that so many people knew him. Lots of people must have known him, but he didn't make a splash of himself at all around town.

G: How much did Congressman Johnson rely on him, could you tell that?

R: I wouldn't know. Jim would know much better, and I think Jim always felt whenever Congressman Johnson listened to Wirtz it was good advice. Not that Jim didn't have the highest regard for Sam Rayburn, too, because he did. And I don't think they were necessarily apart on everything. But Senator Wirtz, I think, was a kind of walking conscience.

G: I have really two images of Wirtz that I have picked up. One is the old populist liberal, and the other is a more old-fashioned lawyer who represented oil and gas interests and who was not as liberal as LBJ during this period.

R: What he represented was one thing. What he thought and said politically

was quite another. You don't have to be wedded to your clients in everything you do. I wasn't there when he was giving advice or seeing whether it was taken. My feeling would be that he was always on the side of the angels. But Jim, again, would know much better about that than I.

G: It's been indicated that Johnson was very close to a lot of the people in the New Deal, in the administration. Many of them got enormous turkeys every year for Christmas, and I'm sure you did.

R: Oh, yes. I thought it had been crossed with a beef. I had never seen such a big turkey. I didn't have anything big enough to cook it in.

(Break in recording)

G: Is there anything else during the time when he was a Lieutenant Commander in the Navy and Mrs. Johnson was working in the office?

R: Well, I can remember Him working with Bird while the President was in the Pacific, and I can remember him in his naval uniform. I have a marvelous memory of his helping my husband get a naval commission. My husband was very nearsighted, and he was desperate to get in the Navy. He even went to an eye doctor who made him squeeze his eyeballs and eat carrots--I mean, squeeze them not with his fingers but with his own muscles, and standing at one end of the bedroom and squinting down at the other end to see if he could lengthen his vision. He just couldn't get his eyes up to be acceptable. But Lyndon Johnson was then on the Naval Affairs Committee, and he

arranged for Jim to come to his house to meet a young lieutenant who was recruiting in the Navy Department. He warned me ahead of time as did my husband that they didn't want any of my liberal views at this gathering. I can remember driving out to their house and Jim saying, "Don't you say a word. This fellow is looking me over and maybe he'll give me a waiver for my eyes." He was desperate to get into the Navy.

So we went out, and there were a number of people around, including the important lieutenant, who was the recruiter. I said how do you do to him and then sat in the corner and didn't say a word. Finally the young recruiter said to me, "Libby, why don't you speak to me?" He was an old friend of my youth, and I had been so brainwashed by Johnson and my husband that I wasn't to say anything that I sat quietly by. But he did get in the Navy with a waiver.

Talking about going to the house reminds me of a personal story. Bird was in Texas, and Lyndon Johnson had just bought their house on 31st Street. He was very pleased with it. There was an auction or sale of old Victorian furniture, and he bought a lot of it without the benefit of his wife. And he wanted us to see it. We went over, and it was furniture made for a great big house. Some of it was absolutely marvelous, but it was really overpowering for the size of the house that they had bought, which was a very nice house, but

these were just tremendous, big pieces of furniture. I'll always remember his joy in these great big pieces of furniture that he had bought on his own, and then he called us up so we could come and admire them because Bird wasn't there.

G: Did he get rid of it after she [saw it], I wonder?

R: No, most of it stayed there, I think, but it was moved around a bit. I don't know whether it moved on with them everywhere or not. When we first saw it in the house, [the house] really didn't seem quite big enough for the size of these great big pieces he had bought. Now let me think of another memory of about that time.

Before we were in the war and there was rationing, you may have heard this story about the coffee coupons. My husband was a great coffee drinker and Lyndon Johnson was a great coffee drinker. [Johnson] ran out of his own coupons, he ran through all the coupons that he could get from the office. Zephyr, the cook, who was up here--Bird again was down in Texas--called Nellie Connally at the office and said, "I just don't have any coffee for Mr. Johnson's breakfast tomorrow. I haven't any more coupons. What am I going to do?" And Nellie Connally said, "You are just going to tell him that he is like everybody else." Zephyr said, "I know he is like everybody else, but I ain't going to be the one to tell him." That's the story that I think Drew Pearson had, and it got mixed up with red coupons. But actually it was coffee.

G: It was coffee. I heard it was meat.

R: No, it wasn't. Jim tells the story that it was meat, but the story was told to me and it was coffee.

G: Was he like everyone else?

R: No, he wasn't like everybody else as far as coupons were concerned.

G: But as far as just the way he conducted himself.

R: He was that old cliche, larger than life. He really was, and he heightened the atmosphere around him so that he heightened the experience of the people with whom he was talking. He had an extra vitality. I guess it was essentially vitality that heightens people.

G: I hear that he was always a very tactile person, and he would grab you on the arm or put his arm around you.

R: Yes, that was one thing. But there was the feeling that you were sitting with a dynamo more than the touching. He was at concert pitch all the time.

One time during the war, we went to an Army-Navy game. Jim was off in the Pacific and Bird was in Texas. We went with the Tom Clarks. We drove over to Baltimore and we were up in the stands, and it started to snow. You couldn't see anything, none of the game at all. He had a small flask which he shared not only with us but with all the frozen people around. And then we had a party up in the stands. There must have ten or fifteen people who we didn't know at all, but he was such fun and calling plays that we couldn't see on the field

at all. It was such a gaiety. I always wondered when he was President whether any of the people who were part of this impromptu group would realize that this was the man that had given them such pleasure at a sort of disastrous time.

G: Did he meet people easily?

R: Oh yes, very. He really looked you in the eye, and there was a very direct relationship established with everybody he met. It didn't seem to drain him; it seemed to add to him. Many people who have to go shaking hands, even many politicians, are drained by constant contact. He seemed to thrive on it.

G: That's fascinating.

R: Other people must have said the same thing.

G: To a point, but I have also gotten the impression in interviews that he wasn't all that happy on the campaign trail. He was always frustrated about this or that, he let things bother him that probably wouldn't have bothered him had he not been out on the campaign [trail].

R: Well, that's probably true. I was never on the campaign trail with him except once, and again this is a marvelous story.

In the 1960 campaign when he was running for Vice President, he started his campaigning in Boston. We were down at Cape Cod and he was coming into the Boston Airport, so we went over to meet him, by invitation. The plane came in, and lined up at the Boston Airport were a dozen and more little dumpy women, all with great big cowboy

hats on. They were all the Italian population of Boston, all good Democrats, and all absolutely overpowered by these great big hats. He came down, twice the size of any of them--I can see him coming down. Then we got in a series of limousines to drive through downtown Boston at lunch hour. I was in the car immediately behind his and was the first woman. I was dressed up with white gloves on, and lots of people thought that I was Lady Bird just because I was there, so I had a marvelous time waving. But he was in the first car, throwing out green passes to the Senate gallery. He wanted to leave something behind.

Then we got over to the Copley Plaza. There was a policeman directing traffic on a horse, and he just said to the policeman, "If you will get off that horse, I'll get on." So he got on the horse and pranced around in the square a little while. This was the starting of "from Boston to Austin." But I never was a part of the campaign organization. I worked in the 1960 campaign, but not for President Johnson. I worked for Jackie in the National Committee. He had such high expectations of himself, and he had the same of other people. If things didn't go right, I'm sure he didn't like it a bit. But I can't tell you firsthand any [campaign stories].

G: Did he ever seek advice from you or aid from you in these early years other than just to try to get the CIO to come out against him?

R: No. After he was in the White House, he asked me to put together

names of women that might be appointed, but that's the only kind of advice [I gave him].

G: He was elected to the Senate in 1948. Did he seem to grow in that office?

R: Oh yes, I think it suited him just beautifully. He was born to be a Majority Leader of the Senate, I think. How long was it between his election and his [becoming Leader]?

G: Well, he became the Democratic Leader in 1953, I think, and then the Majority Leader in '55.

Did you see much of the Johnsons socially while he was in the Senate?

R: Yes, we saw them fairly often. We went there to parties and they came here. One of the things that endeared the Johnsons to me was during the war when my husband was away, and then he went to Nuremberg for a year and a half after the war. There were lots of women without husbands around during the war. The Johnsons always included me in their parties, made a special point of it. Lyndon Johnson came by to put an eye on my little girl when Jim was off in the Navy, and he was absolutely wonderful with this little girl who is somewhat older than his [this was] before he had children. The house that my mother and little girl and I were living in was sold, and we had to buy a house in the middle of the war. He wanted to be sure of the financing, that we could afford to do it. He would

lend me money to do it, he was that kind of a friend.

G: What did he look for in return.

R: Just friendship. He had great respect for Jim's judgment. I think he enjoyed our company as we enjoyed theirs. I don't think he was looking for anything special. I was dismayed to learn from Horace Busby that Buzz didn't think that Johnson ever felt that Jim and I loved him enough. I certainly thought we did . . . we did. But he did like to get my husband's judgment on things. We did have fun; we had good times together.

G: Did his relationship with the press change much through the years, do you think? I'm not talking about really during the presidential years. But during the early years he seems to have been very close to a large number of influential newsmen. Did you ever observe [these relationships]?

R: He was on friendly terms with newspapermen. It was just after he got to the White House, I think, that he really had a feeling of being beleaguered and not being given a fair shake. But he had a great ease and no feeling of being run down by the press. Of course his great friend Bill White was a great friend of ours, but that was a long-time personal friendship more than a press-public official friendship.

G: I have heard that he was happiest in the role of Majority Leader, that those were the happiest years of his life.

R: I wouldn't be surprised, although I think at the first, before things went so sour with the war, he was really enjoying being President

It was like Aladdinand his wonderful lamp, you know: rub the lamp and there was Air Force One. I think he had great pleasure then. But the functioning: he was just a great Majority Leader, and it must have given him tremendous pleasure to accomplish what he did, and it suited his style.

G: Did you have occasion to observe him much in the Senate, not on the floor but just in terms of his functioning as Majority Leader?

R: Some, because when we would see him in the evening, he would talk about what had happened during the day and the votes here and the votes there. And I saw him some from the gallery, but I never was on the staff or that sort of thing. I can't think of any single incident. It will probably come back to me.

G: Was he then committed to sort of reaching the most workable compromise, do you think, in terms of each legislative issue? What was his formula as Majority Leader? Was it promoting what he himself believed in in a particular bill, or was it playing off one issue against another?

R: I think he wanted to accomplish as much as he possibly could, and it was his judgment about how much he could accomplish. But the goals were always there: the education field in which he was particularly interested. He may have given less than in some other areas. [Regarding] his record as Majority Leader on the civil rights legislation, I don't think anybody could have done it so well.

G: One person told me that there was no stage in the legislative process of a bill that he couldn't change it or improve it or defeat it or anything, that he had an amazing ability to use all of these gimmicks and rules and procedures.

R: Well, I hadn't thought of it in the way of changing it or improving it or diminishing it. He certainly was on top of every legislative step, just listening to him talk.

G: Do you recall him talking about an achievement in this respect that he was particularly proud of?

R: He was very pleased with the end of Joe McCarthy, which I thought perhaps could have been speeded up. But he said that the way it was done was just right. I can remember his saying to me, "Now I was right. We have done it and we have done it the right way. We've got the votes, and this is the way it should have been done." I can remember his pleasure on voting rights, other civil rights. I can remember his great pleasure . . . I can't remember what education bill, but [I remember] his joy that this bill had passed and become law. But I can't remember the details of it at all.

G: Maybe that was that 1958 National Education Defense [Act].

R: I think that's it. I think that's the one.

G: Do you recall his role in the McCarthy censure, selecting the committee?

R: Well, he did have a hand in that, didn't he? That's my memory.

G: Yes. But this was what he saw as his strategy, didn't he?

R: As a strategy to accomplish the demise of McCarthy.

G: And on the civil rights legislation in 1957, some people charged that it was half a loaf and that he had sold them out somehow or sidetracked [the issue].

R: Well, I just disagree with them. I think he got as much as he could, but that's my opinion.

G: When do you think he changed his mind on civil rights?

R: I think it was gradual over the years.

G: Do you think that this had anything to do with possibly a desire to run for a national office, or do you think it was just a philosophical [change]?

R: I think it was a genuine philosophical change.

G: When did you suspect that he might want to run for the presidency?

R: In 1960 he said he wasn't running, and he told that to my husband who went off working for Humphrey. I went to a party at the Johnsons and Jim wasn't there because he was off in the primaries with Humphrey. I can remember Johnson saying to me, "Jim doesn't really take Hubert seriously, does he?" And then I thought well, "Maybe he shouldn't have taken you so seriously when you said you weren't going to run."

G: Had he already decided to run?

R: He was very back and forth on it, I think. When he was saying, "Where's Jim?", I said, "He's off with Humphrey." He said, "Oh, he couldn't take him seriously."

G: Your husband kept that commitment with Humphrey, didn't he?

R: Yes. And then of course Humphrey was defeated in the primaries by [John] Kennedy. And then you know the story of Jim [Rowe] and Johnson and Phil Graham and all the people at Los Angeles. I was not there, and I haven't anything to add to that.

G: What else do you recall on Johnson as a senator? I don't mean to have you answer just specific questions. I am trying to think of things that might remind you.

R: Let me see what my notes to myself say here. I can't think of anything else right now.

G: Who do you think was his mentor when he was in the Senate? He had Rayburn and Wirtz in the House.

R: My guess would be that [Sen. Richard] Russell was the man that he had the greatest respect for. Not that he followed his advice, because on civil rights they broke apart. But I think that he had more respect for Russell than for any other member of the Senate.

G: Was that deserved?

R: Well, I disagreed with Russell on many things politically, but everybody that has had anything to do with him said that he knew the Senate, he was a first-rate man. His political philosophy might be different

from the person talking about him, but I think he had the respect of the people, even those who disagreed with him.

G: Let's talk about some of the people around Johnson and if there is anything here that reminds you of anecdotes or incidents that you recall. I suppose Walter Jenkins was the closest during those years.

R: Yes. He was and is a lovely person, and I guess he just exhausted himself. He didn't have the vitality the boss had. I think that was one of the great troubles. The tempo [at] which Johnson always worked pushed anyone of normal vitality beyond their limit.

G: What was the extent of Jenkins' position, do you know? Did he give, say, Majority Leader Johnson much advice on issues?

R: I would be the wrong person to ask. I certainly don't know.

G: What about Bobby Baker?

R: Well of course, I always thought he was terrible. I couldn't stand him. Harry McPherson called him a Snopes, and that's the best description I can think of him. He just was not my cup of tea at all. Now I know Johnson relied on him because he was very bright, active, and a good head counter in the Senate, and that sort of thing. But to me he was just poison. I couldn't stand him.

G: It seems to me that Baker might have affected this image, that he tried to cultivate the image of being devious.

R: Oh, I'm sure he did. He arrogated to himself [that] he was Johnson's right hand, or he would tell Johnson he would straighten Johnson out.

I don't think he ever straightened Johnson out on anything. He was a real con artist. He was so different from Walter Jenkins, who is a lovely fellow. If Walter Jenkins ever gave Johnson advice, Walter would be the last one to tell you about it. But Bobby Baker would say, "Now I've straightened him out on that." Well I didn't see him very often, thank goodness.

G: Did you know George Reedy very well?

R: I know him. Well, he's all right.

G: How about Mrs. Johnson? How important was she to his career?

R: Oh, she's the most important of all. He really did rely on her judgment. And she is the most disciplined person I have ever seen, I think. To live with a whirlwind as she did she just deliberately disciplined herself so that she could survive. She is a woman of great strength and intelligence. Oh, she is a marvelous woman.

G: I have heard that one time he expressed the feeling, and he may have done this many other times, that one of the reasons that he wanted to seek national office, the presidency, was so that Mrs. Johnson would receive the recognition that she deserved.

R: Poppycock. That's a bunch of poppycock. He wanted to be President because he wanted to be President.

G: That doesn't sound like something he would say, though?

R: Oh yes, I think he might well have said it, but I don't think it's true. Who knows, he may have believed it for a minute, but . . .

G: What did Mrs. Johnson do for him, though in his political life?

R: To have a wife who was as intelligent as she, with as good judgment, someone that he could always count on, complete loyalty, good judgment and intelligence on anything that came up, is marvelous. For instance, he moved so fast he didn't read a book. He would say, "Bird, you read it and then tell me what's in it." Now this is not the legislation, which he always read. But outside things he did rely on her.

G: I have heard that she would also repair relationships that he had [damaged].

R: Oh yes, she did. She did with him, my husband, and Johnson, which is not my story. You'll have to ask Jim about it.

G: We didn't have much on that in the tape [made earlier with Jim Rowe]. I think it was over campaign strategies, wasn't it?

R: It was a critical letter that Jim wrote to Johnson about his treatment of his staff, I believe. But I was not a part of it, and it's something that you had better ask Jim about because I don't know. But it was a very sad break in our relationship for almost three years.

G: When he went into the White House, I think, Jim Rowe was one of the first people he called?

R: That's right, after not seeing each other after a long-time friendship.

G: Now in 1955 you went on a Washington, D.C. committee, didn't you?

R: No, that was 1961. I was appointed to the National Capital Planning Committee by Kennedy.

G: Right, but before that you were a member of the D.C. Auditorium Committee.

R: Oh yes, and of course that was Johnson who put me on it. We have talked for an hour and a half. My being on the Planning Commission and D.C. Auditorium Commission and that later part is another sort of long story. Maybe we could catch up another time, would that be all right with you?

G: Sure.

R: The time that he put me on the D.C. Auditorium Commission was a great compliment.

G: The Planning Commission and the . . .

R: You see, he offered me the district commissionership twice, which was great. It was a marvelous compliment and very hard to withstand. I would love to talk about that, but I'm sort of running out of voice, I guess.

End of Tape 1 of 1 and Interview I)

GENERAL SERVICES ADMINISTRATION
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Gift of Personal Statement

By ELIZABETH ROWE

to the

Lyndon Baines Johnson Library

In accordance with Section 507 of the Federal Property and Administrative Services Act of 1949, as amended (44 U.S.C. 397) and regulations issued thereunder (41 CFR 101-10), I, Elizabeth Rowe, hereinafter referred to as the donor, hereby give, donate, and convey to the United States of America for deposit in the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library, and for administration therein by the authorities thereof, tapes and transcripts of a personal statement approved by me and prepared for the purpose of deposit in the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library. The gift of this material is made subject to the following terms and conditions:

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Signed Elizabeth Rowe

Date March 18, 1976

Accepted Harry J. Middleton
Director, Lyndon Baines Johnson Library for Archivist of the United States

Date March 31, 1976