

## INTERVIEW I

DATE: March 2, 1968  
INTERVIEWEES: POLK AND NELL SHELTON  
INTERVIEWER: PAUL BOLTON  
PLACE: Home of the Sheltons, Bluff Springs, Texas

Tape 1 of 1

PB: We're at Bluff Springs, the small community near Austin, Texas, in the home of Polk Shelton. Mr. Shelton was one of the candidates in the first race which Mr. Johnson ever ran for public office for Congress from the Tenth Congressional District in Texas. First of all, Mr. Shelton, I think we should have something about your background.

PS: I was born in Austin, October 3, 1900. My father was John E. Shelton, Sr., who was born in Bexar County, and my mother was Mrs. Willie Adella Greer, who was born at the Johnson Institute in Hays County.

PB: You say the Johnson Institute. Was that a family name?

PS: Oh, yes, the people who owned the Institute were the Johnsons.

PB: Are they related to Lyndon Johnson's people?

PS: No. I don't think so. I think that the Johnsons that I'm related to are English, pure English. They all came from England.

PB: I didn't mean to interrupt you. Go ahead with your story.

PS: My father had been in politics in Travis County from the time I was born until the time of his death. He served as county school superintendent, county attorney and district attorney, and many years was the Democratic chairman of Travis County.

PB: You were a lawyer, were you not?

PS: That's right.

PB: You went to school at Southwest Texas?

- PS: I went to school at Southwest Texas, University of Texas, and the Cumberland University in Tennessee.
- PB: That's where you got your degree, at Cumberland?
- PS: I received my law degree at Cumberland.
- PB: I seem to recall that Jimmy Allred got his law degree at Cumberland.
- PS: That's correct.
- PB: And a lot of other pretty good men.
- PS: Also in the city of Lebanon where Sam Houston owned his first law office.
- PB: Is that so?
- PS: The Lebanon Law School.
- PB: Now, tell me, Mr. Shelton, how did you happen to run in this race for Congress in 1937 when Congressman Buchanan died?
- PS: Well, at that time it was a question about whether the President of the United States and Mr. Roosevelt would place more people on the Supreme Court in order to have the Court sustain certain laws that had been enacted by Congress. And it was known at that time as the packing of the Supreme Court. I was opposed to it, being a lawyer, and I decided that I would make the race on that and also against the sit-down strikes that we were having at that time in the industries of our country.
- PB: What was a sit-down strike? I've forgotten.
- PS: Well, that means that organized labor moved in to any industry and just takes it over without any authority and just stays there and lives on it until you agree to compromise with them or accept their terms.
- PB: Okay. Now you got into this race for the seat vacated by Congressman Buchanan and you recall who else was in that race?
- PS: There was Mr. C. N. Avery, Mr. Houghton Brownlee.
- PB: He was a state senator, wasn't he?

- PS: He was. That's correct. He was. And Mr. Merton Harris, Mr. Sam Stone, who was county judge and still county judge in Williamson County, and Mr. Ross, and Mr. Smith.
- PB: Ross. Now he was the Townsendite candidate?
- PS: Smith was a Republican, and who Mr. Ross was, I'm not familiar with.
- PB: Now, in a campaign like this, how do you go about meeting the people, rather how did you go about meeting the people back in those days?
- PS: Only way to meet the poeple is to go out where the people are and meet them. Go in the streets and in the stores and shake their hands and ask them to vote for you.
- PB: Did you tell them you were against the Supreme Court bill?
- PS: I always did. That's one thing I did every time I could speak and I had literature with me that announced my platform and my thoughts.
- PB: What else was in your platform?
- PS: Well, there was a lot of things in the platform, but the main two, I think, were packing the Supreme Court, and the organized labor taking over industry. Sit-in strikes we called them at that time, by John L. Lewis.
- PB: John L. Lewis, let's see, he was the coal miner.
- PS: Well, at that time he wasn't exactly a coal miner. At that time he was running one of the organized labors and sit-in in one of the big industries, I think in Pittsburgh.
- PB: Well, now, you say that you went from store to store shaking hands with the the people. Did you also have meetings back in those days, rallies?
- PS: Oh, yes. We had rallies both in . . . I know we had a big rally in Brenham. We had the high school band down there that night. And I made a speech to the people in Brenham. And we had speaking over in Burleson County. And we had a speaking also in Lee County, and in Lockhart. I was introduced in Lockhart by Mr. Tom Gamble, who at that time was county

attorney at Lockhart. And at that time my father's first cousin, Mr. Ellison sheriff at Lockhart.

PB: There are a lot of Sheltons in this area, aren't there?

PS: Good many.

PB: Good many, yes sir. I meant to mention that a little earlier. I've heard some stories about how the Sheltons fought the Klan back in those days. Can you tell us something about that?

PS: My father used to go down and sit by the Klan door where they went up to hold the meeting, and he was familiar, and so were the biggest part of us at that time, to the people who lived in Travis County. He would take the names of all the people who went inside the Klan hall. Then we would take those names and take them to a printer and have them printed and pay to have the names distributed of the Klansmen who belonged to the members of the Ku Klux Klan in Austin, Texas.

PB: And you distributed those all over town?

PS: Yes sir.

PB: Have you saved any of those handbills [listing the Ku Klux Klansmen] in the family?

PS: I did not, no sir.

PB: Mrs. Shelton, Mrs. Nell Shelton has just come into the room, Mr. Shelton's wife. I understand that you campaigned almost as hard as Polk did back in those days.

NS: Well, we certainly did. Not only in Polk's campaign, but other people that we were interested in. There was hardly a year went by that we didn't work for somebody in some campaign because we were interested in politics. I remember so well some of the big rallies that we had. I'm sorry that we don't have these anymore because to me it was just a great joy to meet

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the different candidates and hear them speak. And very often we would have it where all the candidates for all the offices would speak. Sometimes it lasted hours and hours, but we never seemed to mind this because it was interesting to meet the candidates face to face and to hear them speak extemporaneously, you know, as it were.

PB: Where would these rallies be held?

NS: Well, at the big parks, usually. The one in front of the courthouse, which is, what park is that?

PB: Wooldridge.

NS: Wooldridge Park used to be one of the biggest ones. Usually it was the last big rally they'd have before the voting day. You had a last chance, usually, to look your candidate over and hear him speak in comparison to the other ones running against him in the same race.

PB: Now during the campaign for Congress, Mr. Shelton, what was the most unusual thing that happened to you?

PS: I was in Brenham one night, made a speech down there, and a man came to my room at the hotel and told me that he could have Elliott Roosevelt endorse me if I was willing to pay \$5000. I told him that I wouldn't give \$5000 to any endorsement and I didn't have the money to start with, and that no Roosevelt would endorse me because of my feeling toward the Supreme Court which is set out in my platform. The last time I saw him was when I told him that I wasn't interested.

PB: Was this a reputable person?

PS: I never saw him before and I haven't seen him since. I couldn't vouch for his veracity or anything else.

PB: Do you think he took the same offer to the other candidates?

PS: I've been advised that he approached one other candidate who was running for Congress.

PB: In the race for Congress you say you did most of your campaigning by speaking. Did you use any radio at all?

PS: Oh yes. I used radio, both in Austin and in other cities that had them available at that time. There weren't too many radios working in those days.

PB: Of course there wasn't any television at all.

PS: None at all.

PB: You like to speak by radio?

PS: No I don't because when you speak on the radio, you've got to use written material and it must be censored before you speak.

PB: Well it was in those days. Nowadays--this is an aside--but nowadays I don't think you're even permitted to change a word a candidate says.

PS: I think that's probably true. I know I made a lot of speeches on the radio, though, way back yonder where we could speak what we thought.

PB: In this race did the candidates jump on each other very much?

PS: No sir, I don't think so. We were running on principles and nothing else because I knew the men who were in the campaign. All of them were my personal friends, and you can't talk about a friend.

PB: You mean every one of them was a friend of yours?

PS: Every one of them.

PB: Did you know Mr. Johnson before you [ran]?

PS: I didn't know him before we ran, but I had no complaint. He was running as a candidate supporting Mr. Roosevelt, and I was running as a candidate that was not supporting him because of his view on the Supreme Court.

PB: I understand that both you and Mrs. Shelton have become good friends of Mr. and Mrs. Johnson since that time. How did this friendship develop?

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When did it develop?

PS: Well, I never had any enmity towards him. I just wasn't acquainted with him until after the campaign. After it was over, my wife and I and my daughter and mother decided we'd drive to New York to see the World's Fair and on the way up Judge Robinson had retired from the bench and was living in Washington. He was a good friend of ours and we decided to go by and see him and while there, told my wife we'd go down and see Bob Poage who a congressman from Waco who was a good friend of mine; and also go by and see Mr. Johnson. We went by and saw Mr. Johnson, had lunch with him at the office restaurant in the Capitol. From that time on we just got a little closer and a little closer and still good friends.

PB: Well, I understand that you've visited him out at the Ranch and he's visited you out here. What do you call this, a farm or a ranch?

NS: It's a farm, I guess you would call it. A lot of people call it a ranch. It's really just a farm.

PB: I see you have some black cattle out there.

NS: Black Angus.

PB: But you all visit back and forth now. There's no animosities left from that campaign?

PS: None whatever. I know that when I was ill that I came to an oxygen tent one night up at the Veterans Hospital at Temple and I looked up there and I saw the most gorgeous flowers you ever saw. Finally the nurse told me that they were sent to me by the President and his wife. It was the most gracious gift that I ever received.

PB: That was just in the past three years? What was it?

PS: About four years ago.

PB: Now, Mr. Shelton. Back to that campaign for a bit. Who were some of the people who supported you in that campaign?

PS: Judge Harry Dolen, who was district judge at that time in Georgetown.

PB: That's in Williamson County?

PS: Williamson County. And Judge Hart, James H. Hart, who has been a longtime friend of the family and a friend of ours. Judge Calvin Hughes, who lived out in this precinct, supported me. And the Johnson boys up at the Trading Post, and a number of people--I hate to try to single them out--that supported me, that felt like I did, and also personal friends of mine. Henry Brooks, who had been the former district attorney of Travis County supported me and did all he could for me.

PB: I understand that a man of our age who is now in Corpus Christi, named Vann Kennedy, was also one of your [supporters].

PS: That's right, Kennedy was a supporter of mine, and so was Mr. Paul Wakefield. He supported me. Elbert Hooper was my campaign manager.

PB: Now stop there a moment. That is a familiar name. He's the gentleman known as Doc Hooper?

PS: That's right. The former assistant attorney general of Texas and a good friend of mine.

PB: His law partner?

PS: His law partner. Everett Looney also supported me, too.

PB: Everett was one of your supporters, huh?

PS: Oh yes. He went down to San Marcos with me. Of course I don't know if Everett would like for the President to know it now, but it's a fact that he was for me.

PB: I imagine that he didn't even know the President then.

PS: I don't think he did. We were officing together at that time.



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PB: It seems to me that one of the talents the President has is to make friends with those who have been on the other side of the fence politically and political, you might say, enemies. Do you think that's correct?

PS: I think he has that knack and I think he can make friends with anybody who is not a person that doesn't want to make a friend to him. I made a friend out of him. I ran against him. I didn't hold it against him or anybody else who voted for him. I have some of my best friends today who voted for Mr. Johnson in that campaign because they were for Mr. Roosevelt. I can't fall out with people about their political, nor their religious beliefs.

PB: Have you changed your political [views]?

PS: I never have. I was born a conservative, an anti-Prohibitionist, and an anti-Ku Klux.

PB: Some of that sounds kind of liberal.

PS: Well, I . . .

PB: It depends on how you define things, doesn't it?

PS: I can't define what a liberal is because I've never been one, I don't guess. I may be a liberal on the other end of the stick.

PB: Nevertheless, you have supported Mr. Johnson in his subsequent races, have you not?

PS: Oh I've supported him in every campaign he's run in.

PB: Except the first one?

PS: Except the first one.

PB: Well, that brings us down to another interesting aspect: the 1948 race for the United States Senate. Were you involved in that campaign?

PS: Oh yes. I supported Mr. Johnson, in both the campaign that he was defeated in and the one he was successful in. He was defeated, I

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think, by Mr. O'Daniel when Mr. Sheppard died, and then he was successful in the next campaign when he ran against Mr. Stevenson.

PB: Yes. That was in 1948.

PS: Yes sir.

PB: After that campaign there was a considerable flurry of excitement about the closeness of the vote and about the vote in the lower part of the state down near the Lower Rio Grande Valley. I understand that you had a part in some of the legal work down there.

PS: I went down to Duval and Zapata Counties to represent certain people down there who had been involved in a lawsuit as a result that was filed by Mr. Stevenson before a federal court in Dallas and had appointed Mr. Smith and Mr. McBride--something like that. What was his name?

PB: I can't help you.

PS: Anyway, they went down there to have a hearing to determine as to whether or not in Jim Wells, Duval and Zapata Counties, whether there had been any illegal votes that had been cast. I went down there to represent some of the members of various Democratic committees of those counties. Now I went down to represent them, both in Duval and Zapata Counties, assisted Judge Raymond in representing them.

PB: Judge Raymond was a district judge.

PS: He was the county judge of Laredo at that time.

PB: I don't believe I recall him either. Now what finally happened in this lawsuit?

PS: Well, we went into Duval County and the members of the Democratic Party had left the county and they decided to postpone it until we got through with Zapata County. Judge Bravo was the county judge in Zapata County and I went down there with Judge Raymond and Judge Bravo and we started a

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hearing down there and went on for about five or six hours to try to determine whether or not if there were any illegal votes, any illegal maneuvering in that county. After about the hours I've mentioned, we received, the man who was holding the hearing under the authority of Judge Whitfield Davidson, received a long distance telephone call from Washington telling him that he had been enjoined from any further proceedings. As a result of that, all the proceedings in that part of the state were stopped, and so far as any hearing in the future on any contest, I know nothing of.

PB: In going back to your friendship with the President, I understand, maybe Mrs. Shelton, you can tell us about this that Mr. Johnson was asked and did help your son-in-law in a situation in respect of getting from the Army Reserves into the regular Army.

NS: Well, one of the things that I do want to say, it's often been said of the President that he never forgets a friend, and I think that this is absolutely true. Because our son-in-law did want to go from the Reserve into the regular service and Lyndon, I'm sure, just did everything he could to make this possible, which, of course, he did. And he did go into the regular service. This is something that we will always remember him for because this just points up what I said before, that he does not only do things for people, but if he is your friend, you feel like you can always go to him and ask him anything you want to ask him if you want to ask a favor. We've never, thank goodness, had to ask him too many favors, but this was one of the things that I'll never forget. I do think that the two of them, their thoughtfulness in so many things, like Polk mentioned earlier, the fact that he sent flowers to him when he was in the hospital. I know he's a busy person. He also sent him a telegram and I talked to Lady Bird by telephone, and she wrote me a letter, which I appreciated very much.

during the time when Polk was so ill, saying that she was enjoying some of the Texas sunshine and she just wanted me to know that she was thinking of him. I did appreciate this so much because to take this time out of his busy life, it was something I will always remember and appreciate.

PB: Polk, I believe it's true that in that connection you all are good friends now, you and the Johnsons. I believe it's true that he's also made friends out of those other men who ran for the Congress at that time.

PS: I'm sure that he has, those that are still living. There's some of them that felt like that maybe they should have won and maybe he shouldn't have, but I don't think that--at least he's tried to, and if you try to make a friend out of a man, and you don't make one, you've succeeded just as well anyway.

PB: Well, let's take them up in something of an order.

PS: I'm sure Sam Stone is a good friend of his and I am. Merton Harris is dead; Houghton Brownlee is dead; Avery is dead; and of course, Mr. Smith, he's a Republican, so he's still on his side and we're on our side. I don't know of anybody else in the race at that time that's not a friend of his. They can't help but be a friend of Johnson if they know him. He's a good man. He tries to do what he can. Of course, he's got a lot of difficulties right now and it's unfortunate, but those things happen.

PB: I thought of something else that I needed to get your views on. I talked recently with Mr. Ray E. Lee, who was one of the campaign workers for Mr. Johnson, and he talked about several things that happened that I need your reaction to in that campaign. One of them was the completion of the dams on the Colorado River. Did you take the position . . .

PS: Yes sir. I was for all those things, the same as Mr. Johnson was. I think

everybody was for that that was running in the race. There had been no question about the completion of those dams and the electrification of the people who lived in the vicinity as a result of the dams. I think all of them were for it.

PB: Another thing that we talked about was at least one public opinion poll that the newspaper took back in those days. Do you remember that poll at all?

PS: No sir.

PB: It didn't effect you any, then?

PS: No sir.

PB: Both of you have known the Johnsons now for nearly thirty years. I would like to know how you sum up Mr. Johnson, Polk.

PS: Well, I think he's a good man, a sincere man, and an honest man. I think he's got, probably, some people that's working for him that haven't been a credit to him or a credit to the administration, but you can't lay that on the man who is running the head of a government as large and as big as ours. I think he's made as good a president as anybody could under the circumstances under which he's accepted and tried to deliver. As far as I'm personally concerned, I guess if a man could love a man, I could love him. But I admire him and his wife and his family, and I know that they have a lot of disappointments with the people, the way they're acting at the present time. I think it will all come out in the wash up.

PB: Nell, do you have anything to add to that?

NS: Well, one thing that's interesting to me--I've made several trips in the last few years to Europe and I think it's pretty well known that the people in Europe love Kennedy, and they're very curious about our President, and they've asked me many things about him and they're always surprised, I think,

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to find out when I tell them that they are people who love their neighbors. They are not . . . he's not generally known as a sophisticated type man. He may be in some circles, but to us he's like a good friend. The people there, I think, are surprised to find out that he could sit down and discuss with you the price of feed and cattle and this kind of thing. This is really, truly, . . . I mean he really enjoys the life that he has on the Ranch. And they are always surprised to find that he's such a wonderful kind of person. I admire them both very much. In fact, I just love him and Lady Bird.

[End of Tape 1 of 1 and Interview I]

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