

## INTERVIEW II

DATE: April 14, 1989  
INTERVIEWEE: ADRIAN SPEARS  
INTERVIEWER: Michael Gillette  
PLACE: Judge Spears' residence, San Antonio, Texas

### Tape 1 of 1, Side 1

G: Judge, I wanted to begin by asking you to discuss the Texas political situation in 1956 when Lyndon Johnson challenged Allan Shivers for control of the state Democratic Party and chairmanship of it.

S: Okay. What do you want to know?

G: Well, just simply how the battle took shape from your point of view. You were down here in San Antonio at the time.

S: That's right. We had a real dogfight because Shivers was pretty popular and particularly in the section of town of San Antonio that I live in. This is a very conservative area and people voted that way. In all my time that I have lived in San Antonio, I have never carried the North Side for anybody until 1956. This fight meant so much to so many people--I mean, there's a personal thing--that we were able to get out the largest representation that we had ever had in our precincts in the North Side, and at that time I think that I was living in--well, I lived in two or three sections of the North Side, but I think it was maybe Alamo Heights, around in that area. We just worked like the devil to win that, and I wanted to win

Spears -- II -- 2

it so badly that I worked day and night to get people out and get them interested. I remember very vividly lining up the pro-Johnson people when we were voting. We were at the precincts, I think, voting and I lined up mine and the other side lined up theirs and we went down the line. I don't know; there were several hundred people there and that was something unusual for a San Antonio precinct. But we had a lot of people and we counted it three times, and every time we won by one vote. The whole precinct--the first and only time I've ever been able to carry any of the North Side precincts.

G: You said this race meant so much to a lot of people from a personal standpoint. Why was that?

S: Well, because a lot of people were absolutely disgusted with Shivers. People who had been friends of his and all like that, and who had sworn by him, just didn't like the way he was acting, and not only that, but by that time Johnson had become quite someone to contend with and he had a lot of friends. The reason I said "personal" is because the people around here that voted were voting on personalities, I think, more than anything else. And we won it, you know; the Johnson people won it hands down, but I was just singling out one precinct and telling you what we had experienced, an experience we had that we never had had before.

G: Was Johnson initially reluctant to take on Shivers, do you think?

S: I don't think he was reluctant. Of course, I can't tell you what was in his mind, but I never did have any feeling that he was reluctant. He was taking on a popular governor. I think Shivers was still governor, wasn't he? And that was something for him to take on, but he did it and was successful doing it. Well, that's okay.

G: What were you going to say?

Spears -- II -- 3

S: I was going to ask you, that tape that I gave you--it was a speech of some kind that Johnson made--did you ever get it?

G: (Inaudible) What in particular had Shivers done to alienate Democrats?

S: You know, I would have to get my time frames clearly in mind as to--of course this was 1956 and now this is a long time after that. Was it at a time when Shivers was still a Democratic governor but was acting more like a Republican?

G: Well, he did support Eisenhower.

S: Well, I know, I mean, but had he started to do that at this particular time? Well, okay.

G: 1952.

S: Yes. Well, I told you what happened in 1952 between me and Shivers, didn't I?

G: No.

S: Well, at that time I was on the executive committee and Shivers had asked me on several occasions to set up local conventions and I had done it. I had also set up at least one state convention in San Antonio at Shivers' request. The reason I did was that Shivers and my brother, who were both in the [Texas] senate at the same time, knew each other and I felt that Shivers would be a friend and that you could count on him and all like that. So I helped him, and I kept telling him that people said that he had the attitude of a Republican rather than a Democrat and, in my mind, I thought that I could handle that and I could go along with it as long as he didn't try to bolt the party. And I asked him one time, here in San Antonio when he came at a meeting, I asked him about that. I said, "People around here think you talk more like a Republican than a Democrat." And John Van Cronkhite--I believe I told you about this-- John Van Cronkhite said--I said, "Are you going to vote the Democratic Party, Allan? You have a right to say what you please, but the question as to

Spears -- II -- 4

whether you're going to vote the party is an entirely different matter." John Van Cronkhite said, "Listen, Allan Shivers' whole family have been Democrats and I can see his daddy turning over in his grave if he did anything to hurt the Democratic Party or to bolt the Democratic Party. Hell no, he's not going to do that." And Shivers was sitting there and he said, "He's not going to bolt the party. I'll bet anything. I'll bet he's not going to do that and if he does I'll jump out of this window." We were on the tenth floor of the Gunter Hotel. (Laughter) And later when he did bolt the party, I wrote John Van Cronkhite and told him that I was ready to lease the top floor of the Gunter Hotel any time he was ready to jump, but I never had an answer to it.

Anyway, that's when, as far as I was concerned, I left the executive committee, because I didn't feel like going out on a battlefield with a bunch of guys around that I knew were going to double-cross me.

So now, getting back to 1956. You have to give me something to kind of help me with the time.

G: There was a meeting of LBJ's key supporters at the LBJ Ranch.

S: I'm sure I was there.

G: I think you were. In April.

S: Johnson reacted to that.

G: To the suggestion--

S: To the suggestion that--well, he was very adamant in stating--he would point to his black cook, whoever was working for him, and told how close she was to the family and how he felt about it, so I never thought that this was a come-on by Johnson. I thought it was a very sincere feeling that he had about the racial situation.

Spears -- II -- 5

G: But did Shivers make segregation an issue?

S: I don't recall that he did.

G: Okay. Anything else on that meeting at the Ranch that you recall?

S: Not the specific meeting, no.

(Interruption)

S: We went to a state convention after this took place, and we had won; the Johnson forces had won and we were very proud of ourselves. When we got to--I believe it was Fort Worth, we had a session where everybody sat around the room and were asked to respond in whatever way they felt to whatever was going to be presented. Well, as I recall it, John Connally was sitting to the left of Johnson. I was sitting on his right, and so we were at opposite ends of the totem pole. And Connally started with one of his speeches and told how he felt that it would be a sad mistake for us to take the position that we had to get rid of the executive committeemen because of what had happened, and he argued that we should show compassion and that we should treat them better than they treated us, and I couldn't believe my ears.

And so after I'd heard that, and there were about thirty people in the room, Johnson called upon each one in turn, around the room. Now remember, I would be the last one. He said, "I want you to tell me, now, whether you agree with John or whether you don't." Well, it went around the room and everyone, in time, just got in order like marching orders: "Yes, I guess we ought to do that. I guess we ought to do it." It went to all of them and it got to me and I said, "It's the worst thing I ever heard of. Imagine, we go out here and work like hell to win a battle and you throw it away in this room. That's ridiculous. The people that voted for Johnson voted for a man that was going to kick the rascals out. That's what I

Spears -- II -- 6

thought we were going to do. This is just so ridiculous, so absolutely ridiculous." Well, the meeting broke up. I had at least ten or fifteen of those people who came to me and said, "I wish I'd had the guts to do that." And I said, "Well, it doesn't take guts. By gosh, it just takes honesty. You did what you did to kick them out and to have a new start and then you want to leave them in. That's the worst thing I ever saw."

Well, my recollection of that is that when the convention got started and the word got around that that was what the group, what we had decided, why then the people who really went out and worked on the thing got upset, as you can well imagine they would be. Probably as much as I was; I doubt it, but probably as much. But the net result was that whoever was on the stage presiding over the convention at that time walked to the side of the stage, and one of these people from Houston jumped up and took over the convention.

G: One of the labor/liberal--?

S: Yes. Took over the convention. And where Mrs.--

G: Frazier Randolph?

S: No. No. Mrs. [Beryl] Bentsen was put up for national committeewoman and we all had it nailed down; that's the way it was going to be. Well, when these people heard all that I've just told you, they jumped on, took the convention over and elected this lady from Houston who had a bag of money.

G: Frankie Randolph?

S: Was that her name? Yes. Okay. I never did know her but I knew her name, of course.

And needless to say, the convention went asunder as far as the Johnson people were concerned. Now I don't know that this is true, but I heard somebody say that Lyndon Johnson told someone in their presence that he wished to hell he'd listened to me.

Spears -- II -- 7

- G: To what extent was that victory over Shivers the result of the labor/ liberal forces, particularly labor, getting out their people?
- S: Well, I think it was pretty obvious that labor deserved a hell of a lot for doing what they did, because they did get out and work and worked very hard for it. They were trying to put the thing back on an even keel. Here's a guy who was running around called himself a Democrat, doing everything that Republicans wanted him to do. And as an aside, I just got the impression at that time that John Connally was in there for what he could get out of it, and I haven't changed that position in the last whatever number of years it's been since 1956. It wasn't long before he went in, sold himself out to old Nixon and thought Nixon was going to make him vice president. I won't get on Connally, I'll tell you. I would, but I don't think I want to do it publicly.
- G: Was there a legal problem with replacing the state executive committee at that convention or could Johnson have legally done it if he wanted to?
- S: Certainly he could have done it. Hell, the convention is the master of all its surveys. The convention is the final authority. The convention could have done it and did do it. I guess that's the one that Shivers controlled, didn't he?
- G: No, LBJ was--  
(Interruption)
- S: --that time had told Allan Shivers in a meeting they had in Illinois what his attitude was about the Tidelands. He'd done that months before when Shivers went up to beg him, I guess, and then they came back and like Stevenson had just done it. He and Price Daniel both did it, and I thought it was hypocrisy of the worst kind and just outright misrepresentation. If you can think of any other mean words, I'll give you those.

Spears -- II -- 8

G: Now in your correspondence you wrote to the state headquarters, to Warren Woodward there at [Adlai] Stevenson-[Estes] Kefauver headquarters, how difficult you thought it was going to be to do well in Bexar County against Eisenhower. Any additional recollections of that?

S: Well, yes. I don't have any vivid recollections of that, but the thing that I believe would most probably have come to my mind was the fact that this was a military city; he had been stationed here. He and his wife had either just gotten married here or lived here, and I felt that the influence that the military would have would make it very hard to do anything with him. And I would have said the same thing today, because he was a popular man just like [Ronald] Reagan was popular. Neither one did anything but they were both popular. That's like Will Rogers once said about Calvin Coolidge. I remember on some little vignette that he--well, I know it was out when he was standing with Coolidge and two or three other people. He said, "You know, old Cal here, he ain't done nothing. But that's just what we wanted done." Do you remember that? Okay. Well, that's the same sort of situation that I think we were in at that time. Eisenhower didn't do anything, but I guess that's what the people wanted. Reagan didn't do a damned thing either, and I guess that's what the people wanted, because they--

(Interruption)

G: How did 1956 and the political events that you described affect Lyndon Johnson's relationship with organized labor in the state?

S: I think he was hurt by what he did at that convention. And I've heard people discuss it in that light, that--

G: Was labor bitter about this?



Spears -- II -- 9

S: Hell, yes. You used a name there that I haven't heard in a long time. What was the lady's name? I never will forget Kathleen Voight when we came down out of that meeting, see, and she was standing there doing this, "Oh, gee, now let's count the boys. One, two, three, four." Just like that. And she said, "Aren't you proud? Aren't you proud? Aren't you proud?" Things like that. Well, I was one of the boys, but I wasn't very proud of it, I'll tell you. Not that--I mean, I want to put myself straight. I've never had any attachment as far as labor or anything else is concerned. My attitude has always been that Democrats are Democrats, and of course you want to try to get various factions to work with you, but I never tried to consider one above the other or anything like that.

G: Do you think it was simply a matter of showing compassion, or do you think it was a matter of trying to maintain a balance between the various factions so that the Johnson forces would have the numerical majority, or at least plurality?

S: In what context are you talking about?

G: In terms of replacing the Shivers people.

S: On the committee? Are you still on that? Okay. Well, I tell you, I never did have a very satisfactory explanation of it. I just felt that this was just another damned situation that John Connally had screwed up. That wasn't the first one; that wasn't the first one.

G: When was the first one?

S: Well, I don't know when the first one was, but there'd been several more up before that. He'd give these--but I'll say this for him, he had Lyndon Johnson right in the palm of his hand. Either that or he was just doing what Johnson told him to do and I don't know which one to believe, but I would rather believe that Johnson didn't tell him to do these things.

Spears -- II -- 10

But let's hand it to him; he was a very popular person, Connally was. He was popular as governor. His looks and all of that is good for him and he can talk; he can speak.

(Interruption)

S: What were we talking about?

G: John Connally.

S: Okay. I say John Connally was a very--guy with a lot of macho deal, you know, and he knew a lot of people and all like that; and he was persuasive to some people. He was always trying to find some "out" situation; always talking against the mainstream, trying to steer people, which he did pretty well, steer people in another direction. Now maybe I'm too hard on him.

G: Was it a matter of him being more conservative than Lyndon Johnson or LBJ supporters?

S: Well, take your thing off [and] I'll tell you.

End of Tape 1 of 1 and Interview II

NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND RECORDS ADMINISTRATION

LYNDON BAINES JOHNSON LIBRARY

Legal Agreement Pertaining to the Oral History Interview of

ADRIAN A. SPEARS

In accordance with the provisions of Chapter 21 of Title 44, United States Code, and subject to the terms and conditions hereinafter set forth, we, Carolyn Spears Harris, James A. Spears, Monroe Spears, Sara E. Spears, and Thomas W. Spears, do hereby give, donate and convey to the United States of America all our rights, title, and interest in the tape recording and transcript of the personal interview conducted with our father, Adrian A. Spears, on April 14, 1989, in San Antonio, Texas, and prepared for deposit in the Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library.

This assignment is subject to the following terms and conditions:

- (1) The transcript shall be available for use by researchers as soon as it has been deposited in the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library.
- (2) The tape recording may be made available to those researchers who have access to the transcript.
- (3) We hereby assign to the United States Government all copyright we may have in the interview transcript and tape.
- (4) Copies of the transcript and the tape recording may be provided by the Library to researchers upon request.
- (5) Copies of the transcript and tape recording may be deposited in or loaned to institutions other than the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library.

<u>Carolyn Spears Harris</u> Carolyn Spears Harris	<u>November 22, 2007</u> Date
<u>James A. Spears</u> James A. Spears	<u>December 17, 2007</u> Date
<u>Monroe Spears</u> Monroe Spears	<u>November 22, 2007</u> Date
<u>Sara E. Spears</u> Sara E. Spears	<u>November 7, 2007</u> Date
<u>Thomas W. Spears</u> Thomas W. Spears	<u>November 22, 2007</u> Date
<u>Adrian Fowcett</u> Assistant Archivist for Presidential Libraries	<u>1-24-2008</u> Date