INTERVIEW I

DATE: April 21, l987

INTERVIEWEE: FRANK STANTON

INTERVIEWER: Michael L. Gillette

PLACE: Dr. Stanton's office, New York City

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G: Dr. Stanton, let's begin by asking you to recount your earliest association with the Johnson family and, if you can recall, the circumstances under which you first met them.

S: I can recall very clearly, the first time I met the Congressman was pre-World War II. In those days I was director of research at CBS, and any affiliation which was made with a station any place in the country had to be processed by my group to make sure that it added circulation and served an area we weren't already serving, either weren't serving it at all or perhaps weren't serving it adequately.

In those days I had a very small office with a glass partition that went up about five feet and was a little bank screen affair. And one afternoon shortly after lunch, a head appeared above that screen and looked over and said was I Dr. Stanton. I said yes. In this Texas accent I didn't recognize who he was, but I knew he was certainly not from Manhattan. I opened the little door and he came in and he introduced himself and asked me about didn't we need a station in Austin. Well, in those days we had a station affiliated with us, I guess it was KTSA, if that's the call letter, in San Antonio, and there

was one in Dallas which I recall as being KRLD. You know that geography better than I, but a fifty-kilowatt station in each of those markets just barely touches the outer limits of the Austin area. So I said, yes, I thought we could use a station in Austin, but it would depend upon just what the rate was going to be and so forth.

Well, I thought he was going to give me a bear hug that was going to end my life. He wanted me to talk to some of the people in station relations about it who weren't very happy about the fact that I had exposed the company's hand by saying we could use a station there. The man who was in charge of affiliations was most unkind to me after the meeting was over because he said that should have been handled by his department, and I said, "Okay, but I was just simply giving an answer to a question about coverage." And to make a long story short, we made the affiliation. And in a way, I guess Lyndon at that time thought this was the guy that made it possible. All I was doing was reporting the facts of the situation.

But he asked me a lot of intelligent questions about stations and so forth, and that's where it began. Then, from time to time when he had questions about broadcasting he would give me a call, and I made trips down to Washington to see him and ultimately met Lady Bird, and then [we] picked up again, of course, after the war years. Throughout that period, there were numerous telephone calls at strange hours of the day and night, never reluctant to call, and I felt he was never frivolous in his questions, but I don't recall much more beyond until he got into the Senate, and then he was my entree to, or he was the one who introduced me to Warren Magnuson, who was then ranking member on the Commerce Committee. That's roughly where it began and how it developed.

G: During those early years, did he seem knowledgeable about the radio business?

S: Oh, surprisingly so. I know a couple of times, perhaps a little later than what we're talking about, but he would ask me to come down on a Sunday morning and go out to the house. He'd spread out the financial papers on the carpet and we'd get down on our hands and knees and look at them, and Bird was sitting on the sofa and looking over her half-glasses and making comments, but the guy that was calling the shots, as far as I was concerned, was the President--not the President then, but later became [president]. I know he would call and say he wanted a piece, he noticed that an advertiser's program was appearing on one of the other stations in the area and Austin didn't have it, and, "My friend," you know, "are you my friend or not?" and so forth, and would I see what could be done for him? And I quite frankly went out of my way to help him.

It was an interesting relationship and one that I felt very comfortable with.

G: The question of affiliation with CBS was so important to the success of that station. After he got the technical answer from you, then what else did he have to do to get the affiliation?

S: Well, he had to sit down and negotiate a contract. He went back to what we called in those days the station relations department, and the man who ran that had a rule-of-thumb formula for the base rate that we would pay.

G: Was it a population--?

S: Yes, it was based on circulation. And in those days Austin wasn't that big, so by coming on the network he wasn't taking any business away from anybody and indeed the network was a better network for having had that station in Austin. But we could have lived without it a damn sight better than he could have lived without the affiliation. It probably gave him three things: he got circulation that gave him an opportunity to sell local spots;

he got income from the network, and I guess in those days there was a certain rub-off of being a network-affiliated station [rather than] as being just a run-of-the-mine independent station. It probably meant more to him in those days than it does today, but nevertheless there were multiple advantages to Lady Bird and to Lyndon to have that affiliation.

G: As you look back on that station in Austin, in comparison with--

S: What was it, KTBS?

G: KTBC. In comparison with the vast number of affiliates that you had around the country, was there anything unique about that particular station, aside from the fact--

S: Yes.

G: --that a member of Congress was--

S: Lyndon B. Johnson. (Laughter)

No, I can't recall anything that--the manager of the station, and I'm embarrassed that I can't think of his name right now--

G: Jesse Kellam.

S: Jesse, yes. A fine man to work with, never was unreasonable in his demands on us, and I hope we weren't on him. Some affiliates were difficult, but Jesse was the salt of the earth as far as I was concerned. Any time he called me to ask for something, I was only too glad to help him, and I didn't feel that way about everybody on the network. But there were over three hundred of them to worry about, perhaps not that many at that time, but that wasn't the most important station on the network, there's no question about that. The market wasn't that important. The station was important because of the friendships and ultimately, of course, because of the position that Lyndon had in the national scene. But

that's where it all began.

G: Someone suggested that buying a radio station in the early forties was overall a very good investment, because so many of them made money in the ensuing years. Would that be your interpretation?

S: Oh yes, no question about it. Sure. After the Democrats took the Senate, what, in the first by election in Eisenhower's period?

G: Yes.

S: The morning after the election, Lyndon called me and he said, "My friend, I'm going to buy some more stations, and I want you to tell me which ones to buy." And before I could start talking, he started talking, and he had a whole list of ideas. I think at that time he did acquire pieces of some other stations. I don't think he bought any one 100 per cent, but I think he bought pieces of stations, and indeed, I thought that he should have filled out his full complement under the FCC regulations, because it would have been, as things turned out, one fabulous investment, from the family's point of view. But even in the period of his lifetime, those properties appreciated tremendously.

G: Why was this? Why were radio stations such a good investment during that time?

S: Because they were such an effective means of advertising, and because in that period you hadn't reached the full growth of the market, and because the effectiveness of radio advertising was just coming into its own. It was probably the most effective means of advertising for many products and at the same time the cheapest in terms of circulation. And as that finally permeated the advertising agencies on Madison Avenue, they went deeper and deeper, and it didn't cost any more to handle twenty advertisers than it did to handle one. Well, perhaps marginally a little bit more, but from the station's point of

view, they were on the air anyway; they had to buy the electricity; they had to amortize the transmitter; they had to pay the announcers. So another announcement was--that money went right to the bottom line. So these stations became very profitable. I think probably, although one would have to go back and look at the figures, but I would guess that in the period we're talking about, 35 to 45 per cent of every sales dollar went right into the profits, and that's something you can't say for many businesses.

G: How would you describe Mrs. Johnson's role in the early years?

S: Interested, knowledgeable, not aggressive. She was an interested partner, but the thrust of the association came from Lyndon. I think perhaps she had more--well, I know she had more to do with Jesse than she had to do with me, but I think perhaps her role was more clearly defined in her dealings with Jesse than I saw it in her dealings with me when Lyndon was present. He took over.

G: Did she seem knowledgeable of the business?

S: I thought so, yes.

G: Let me ask you to characterize his association with it.

S: Well, there are a lot of nuts and bolts that he didn't know anything about, but when he looked at the P&L statement and the balance statement, he knew exactly what was happening, and in a sense, was not an absentee owner, but an investor more than an operator. But he was a fast student, and he understood exactly what you were saying to him. You didn't have to explain things to him.

G: Was he helpful in selling ads for the station, do you know?

S: Never, to my knowledge. But he must have been locally, but never impacted anything that I did, because we were selling things on a national basis only, and--oh, I think

occasionally some advertisers would not take any stations in Texas, for example, or maybe no stations in the whole Southwest, and he would get on the phone and talk to the client. But that was the unusual thing, not the usual thing.

G: I guess, beginning in 1944 with the first campaign that he had after the purchase of the station and continuing through twenty years, until he ran for president, he still was [involved].

S: When did he acquire the station?

G: 1942-1943, in that time.

S: Was it that [late]? I thought it was before World War II.

G: No, it was right in that period; I think December of 1942, January of 1943.

S: Well, certainly before he went off to war.

G: I think it was after he came back from that.

S: Really? Well, then, you've got the figures.

G: I think the FCC approved the purchase in January 1943, let's say.

But throughout all of this twenty-year period, there were charges that it was the fact that he was first a member of Congress, and then a member of the Senate, that enabled him to prosper, that enabled that station to do well.

S: The Austin station?

G: Yes.

S: Not true.

G: Let me ask you to elaborate on that for a minute.

S: Well, forget the radio situation, because that was peanuts by comparison with what happened in television. Under the FCC allocation of channels that could be applied for,

the big markets, New York for example, had seven slots, or seven channels in VHF. Austin, I believe, had one. And to the best of my recollection, nobody applied for that VHF station in Austin except the Johnsons. The charge that he was able to get that station through the FCC is just absolutely wrong, in my opinion, because I remember at the time he was the only one who stepped up to the opportunity and applied for it. And in those days, if you hadn't robbed a bank in your junior high school years, and nobody else applied, and you had the wherewithal to build a transmitter and to go on the air, the FCC sent you a license. And he did that. I don't think his application was contested. Now, if there was anything to the charge that he had forced that through, where were all the other people who wanted the same channel? They never showed their hand. So I just think that the charge that he used his influence was sheer nonsense.

G: I think one of the arguments that the critics made was that Austin continued to have only one television station.

S: Because of him?

G: Yes.

S: I don't believe it at all, because once the FCC made that allocation, that was sort of a sacred rule and order, and there were plenty of markets that wanted more stations; Chicago was one. I think Chicago had only four stations allocated to it. The three networks got stations and--no, the three networks didn't, but there were three allocated to what later became network stations, and the other one went to the *Tribune*. Now, there were a lot of people in Chicago that--the Zenith Radio Corporation wanted the station in the worst way. Yes, the allocations were made by the FCC, and for many, many years that was the sacred matrix that the applications had to be fitted into. Austin had one. San

Antonio and Dallas had several, so you couldn't repeat that in Austin or there'd have been interference. So on the television side, as far as Austin was concerned, I never saw any signs that he did anything that was in the least bit questionable.

G: Was his relationship with the FCC different from that of other owners of stations, do you think?

S: Oh, it had to be because of his position. Anybody who came from the Hill had a certain aura that the average Joe wouldn't have. But I never saw him, to my knowledge, abuse it, and I think if he had abused it, the gossip around the FCC would have leaked out, and you'd have heard about it. No, I think he was clean.

G: Do you recall the episode when Eugene Cox attacked the FCC and Larry [James Lawrence] Fly during the 1940s and LBJ apparently did quietly help tone down Cox's charge. Do you remember that?

S: No, I don't remember that. I remember Larry Fly very clearly, but Larry Fly was in the commission's chair before the war, wasn't he?

G: I think he continued for a time.

S: May be.

G: Was the commission at that time inclined to reflect the views of President Roosevelt, do you think?

S: More so than some other administrations, but I think the current FCC is very reflective of President Reagan's views. Harry Truman certainly bore down on the Commission. I don't know that Nixon did. I don't think Ike ever did, to the best of my knowledge. I was very close to Washington in the period of the latter years of Roosevelt certainly all the way up through the Nixon Administration, and I would say that the two that stand out as

having had a little heavy hand on FCC were Roosevelt and Truman. And Truman only in limited areas, but I know firsthand that he got into the Kansas City assignment of a radio frequency, because I was sitting in the chairman's office when he was summoned to the White House to see the President about an allocation or an assignment to a man by the name of Tom Evans, I think a big chain drugstore operator in the Kansas City area. Truman backed off, but the fact that he expressed interest and then backed off, it's awfully hard for the Commission to erase that.

G: Yes. Would the Roosevelt Administration be inclined to award licenses to people who were friendly to the New Deal rather than--?

S: Well, I wasn't close enough to that to really give you a firsthand answer. I would have to say that, sitting some little distance away from the seat of power at that time, that was the impression that I had, and certainly people whom I worked for reflected that attitude. I think there were some grants in power and some frequency changes, shifts that were made, that certainly weren't--they were all done aboveboard, but I mean, I think it was well known that they had support from staff at the White House.

G: Let me ask you to go back to the early years of the television station for a minute. Was it a difficult choice, do you think, for the Johnsons to make, to decide to file a VHF application instead of a UHF?

S: Well, they'd have been out of their minds to file a UHF.

G: Really?

S: Yes.

G: But was it clear when they did file the VHF that that was the way to go?

S: Oh, yes.

G: Was it?

S: Yes. You would have had to be in a pure UHF market to have had the courage to apply for a UHF in competition with a VHF in that particular market. That flat terrain, everything argued in favor of the VHF as against the U. And I had two Us that I--under the FCC regulations in those days, a single owner or a single corporation was permitted to have five Vs and two Us. The networks and most multiple owners were very reluctant to go beyond the five Vs. NBC and ABC had five, and we had five, and we were all chided by FCC commissioners, either privately or I think sometimes even in public appearances, about the fact that the fat cats were staying with the Vs and not doing anything to help the Us. Not entirely true of the networks, because we did affiliate with them where we had no other choice. But I thought that the U was something that we ought as a company to acquire because I thought that someday they would be very valuable, and we had a program schedule to give them, so I thought maybe we could force the market to equip itself with UHF sets. This was before it was mandatory to have UHF in the receiver.

So I, pretty much alone in my company, acquired a U in Milwaukee and a U in Hartford, Connecticut, both places where we did not have VHF affiliates and [both] good-sized markets. I figured that someday those markets would be very valuable. And we couldn't make it work. The U in Milwaukee was very substandard in terms of its signal, and it wasn't because it was a bad channel, and it wasn't because we didn't put a lot of money into the engineering. People just didn't want to bother with all the fine tuning that you had to do with a U. I don't know, I never tried to figure out the economics of it and whether it would have paid or not, but I would guess that we made a

mistake in not keeping those two Us, because with cable there's no difference between a U and a V. But I didn't have that kind of vision, and I don't know of anyone who did have at that time. So we sold the U in Milwaukee, and we sold the U in Hartford and were glad to get back to an affiliate relationship in both cases.

But to go back to your question, that was not a difficult [decision]. No, I think the tough question was the cost of carrying the money that you had to borrow to build studios and a transmitter and the operating costs of keeping the station on the air when it wasn't carrying its own schedule. But they had the radio station to plow those profits over into the television. But nobody else wanted to make that jump. There were other radio stations in Austin; I've forgotten now how many. But I think there was at least one other there that could have applied for it and, my recollection is, did not apply. Do you have contrary--?

G: No, I think you're right.

Lyndon Johnson seems to have been fascinated by gadgets. Did this spill over into this interest in television and radio?

S: Well, I don't know, but when I told him once I would build him a unit that had three television sets in it so he could watch everything and kick the sound up on any one of the three, I barely got the words out of my mouth until he said he wanted one.

G: Did you have one yourself at that time?

S: Oh, yes, sure.

G: Did you? Had he seen it, or did you just describe it?

S: No, I don't think he ever saw it, but I think I told him about it. No, I started having a two-way set in the 1948 convention, because that was in Philadelphia, and there were only

two networks covering that, and I wanted to see what NBC was doing as against what we were doing. I drove some of my colleagues crazy, because they didn't know that I was watching simultaneously on two receivers. I don't know why it didn't occur to them that I was doing that, but I had a direct line to the control room, and I'd say, "Gee, I see NBC has got an interview with Senator So-and-so on the floor. What the hell are you doing about it?" And it drove them a little bit nuts. So that as soon as ABC came on, I got a three-way, and then I finally stopped at four.

But I had one put together for him. I guess the first one that I did for him was in the Oval Office, but I'm not sure. I have pictures of the first one I had built for him. I took it down myself, or went down with it when it was delivered and installed. And he was able to watch the evening news on all three networks, sitting right there at his desk. I don't think I was aware of any other gadgetry interest, but one got the sense that he was a guy that would enjoy advanced electronic gear and so forth. But I don't remember anything else that I gave him.

G: Well, back in the 1950s, you arranged for him to have a tour of the Television City installation out in California--

S: Yes.

G: --and he seems to have been very impressed with that. Do you remember that?

S: Oh, yes. (Laughter) I guess you would say he was a sucker for electronic gadgets. But I never gave him or saw him use a hand-held--well, I guess they weren't even around much, the hand-held computer, at that time. But if they had been, he would have had one, because I know he gave me one of the early felt-tipped pens. I don't know how he had gotten it, but that was long before they were in distribution. Or at least they weren't in

distribution in any place that I was. And he gave me something else once: a ballpoint pen which I think came along early, a special pen that had his name on it and so forth. But I don't recall, I--

G: How about color television? Did he recognize the potential of that early?

S: I don't recall ever talking with him about that. I know I sat with him, or was in the same group with him, one night when we saw the Telstar, when AT&T demonstrated its first satellite, and he was very quick to see what that meant and so forth.

G: What did he say, do you recall?

S: Oh, he was as extravagant as he could be in saying what this was going to do to the world, and so forth. I don't recall the words, but that was the sense of it, [the] obvious thing to say. But he wasn't reticent about it; Jack was the same way. But that was before COMSAT [Communications Satellite Corporation] was organized. I was offered the job of running COMSAT by Jack Kennedy, and I know that Lyndon was a little annoyed with me because I didn't drop what I was doing and come down and do it. But I was always much more interested in what was being transmitted than operating the telephone lines, if you will, and the satellite I just saw as being an extension of the coaxial cable.

G: You visited him at the Ranch in 1955 after his heart attack, I believe; in late 1955, you and your wife went down there.

S: Yes, I thought we went down to--didn't he go back immediately from the hospital to George Brown's place in Virginia, or was he at George Brown's place when he had the--

G: When he had the heart attack.

S: That's right. I guess--oh, I know. I think we had been down with the Browns before Lyndon and Lady Bird came, because I was up in Canada when he had the heart attack,

and I don't recall how soon we saw him after the heart attack, but I know we were down there I guess several times.

G: Tell me what he was like during this period. That was 1955; he was majority leader.

S: Well, I don't think that he was a lot different then than he was when he was in the Oval Office. If anything, I think he was more at peace with himself at that period and certainly was easier to be with at that period because there just weren't the pressures on him that he had at the White House. And he was, I thought, much more in control of things then than he was later. He knew he had the votes or he didn't have the votes, and I thought he was uncomfortable a large part of the time that he was in the White House, or at least that's my impression of it. But as far as how was he to be around in those days as against later, I don't think I'd make a--

G: Well, tell me what he was like throughout, as if you were describing him to someone who had never been around him.

S: I think the things that stand out in my memory would be his dominance in any group in terms of the conversation; a very inquisitive individual, inquisitive in the sense that he wasn't the least bit reticent about asking information about things he didn't know. Some people in his position, I think, would like to fake it and let you believe they knew everything. I never felt that he played that kind of a game.

He was a little extravagant, I thought, in some of the things he said about individuals, either good or bad. There was an awful lot of black and an awful lot of white, and some of the shadings weren't as evident with him as they would be with some other people.

G: Do you think he really believed these, or was this a tendency to exaggerate?

S: Oh, I think he knew when he was overstating it, sure. I never thought he kidded himself until later. I thought that sometimes he--and this is not when I first knew him, this was in the later years--got carried away sometimes and didn't know when he was on the center of the issue. What I'm really trying to say, I guess, [is] I don't think he knew when he had gone overboard too far one way or the other. I found that in the later years he was much more extravagant in his declarations than he was in the early period. That's my clear recollection; maybe my age is bending my lenses a little bit. But he was demanding, fascinating, great storyteller--

G: When you say demanding, what do you mean? How would you--?

S: Well, he had asked me to come down to give him a hand, and I frankly didn't think that I was equipped to do what he thought I could do. He was a little petulant about that, but made, I thought, pretty heavy demands on me, made me feel like I had let him down. In fact, that demanding quality, I think, in a way, kept me from doing it. He could be pretty rough. I don't mean in terms of his vocabulary; I simply mean if he wanted you, and you were resisting it, he could really push pretty hard.

G: What did he want you to do? Was this while he was president or before he became--?

S: While he was president. No, he had me come down a couple of times and wanted me to take jobs and so forth. And I said I'd help him as much as it was possible to help him from the outside, but I just, in effect, didn't want to get that close.

(Interruption)

G: You were talking about the fact that he was demanding and--

S: Yes, he could twist your arm pretty effectively, and I thought I was pretty good when I was able to deflect his demands. But it got down to the short strokes with my wife, who

said, "You can go to Washington, but I'll stay here." She wasn't about to go. Lady Bird had picked out a house and had the thing all arranged so that we'd move and so forth, and my wife said, "Fine, if you want to go, but I'm not going to go." And I think it would have been the end of a long marriage, so I wasn't that foolish.

G: What did he want you to do?

S: A variety of jobs. I think he had me ticketed for a couple of cabinet posts, not HEW [Department of Health, Education, and Welfare]. Yes, I guess it was HEW in those days. He wanted me to go in under [Dean] Rusk at State; he talked glibly one day about doing Commerce, and he wanted me to come down and run USIA [United States Information Agency]. Then he had me down at the Ranch one weekend along with Tom Watson and Don Cook, and he wanted Cook to take Treasury and Watson to take Commerce and I've forgotten precisely what he wanted me to take, because he was all over the lot. But he was putting a new team together; this was right after the election. And we all turned him down. Watson couldn't do it, and Cook didn't want to do it at that time, and he was a little imprecise about what he wanted me to do. But he made these wide-open declaratory statements where, "You tell me what you want to do," and that kind of thing. No, there were a number of times when he pressed me to come down.

G: My impression is that one of the big mistakes he felt like he had made, in retrospect, was not getting his own team in.

S: Oh, I'd say that was almost fundamental to the problems he had, because when I went into the White House after he was president, and you saw the Kennedy staff and the Johnson staff, it was like having two platoons on the field at the same time, and you knew that there was friction, and that the Kennedy people weren't all that enamored of Lyndon.

I had said to him that I thought the thing to do was to clean house immediately. And he took great exception to that because he said that he wasn't going to treat the Kennedy people the way they had treated him. And he just wasn't that sure of himself. That's why I said earlier that when he was majority leader he knew what he had.

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S: When he was in the White House he was walking in the shadow of the Kennedys and felt very unsure of himself. Oh, there's just no question about the fact that he should have changed a lot of those positions quickly. I saw that happen when Truman took over from Roosevelt, because Truman had had me down the morning after he took the office to help prepare his first two addresses to Congress. So I sat in the Cabinet Room for two days, working on script. And he'd come in and out and talk about the appointments he had--

(Interruption)

G: You were going to say he got rid of--

S: He was quick to have the cabinet people come in and see him and thank them, and that was the end of it. I remember particularly when his secretary came in and told him that Secretary [Henry] Morgenthau was waiting to see him. And the President said, "Just a minute, I'll be back." And he went out of the Cabinet Room into the Oval Office, and I promise you, it seemed to me that he wasn't gone long enough to even say hello to Morgenthau, and he came back in again. And I had the impertinence to say, "What happened?" Meaning, wasn't he really there? And Truman said, "I just asked for his resignation, and he gave it to me." Well, he cut the puppy's tail off, smack, right away; didn't wait and go through a lot of the delays.

Lyndon didn't do that. He tried to get along with the [Robert] McNamaras and so

forth, and some he did better with than others. I didn't think that they ever accepted him the way that they accepted Jack Kennedy. And I can understand that, but that certainly held one hand behind him, no question about it.

Then, of course, every time I would talk that way to him, he'd say, "Well, goddamn it, come on down here." And so you'd back off because I just didn't want to get that close to him. I thought I could live better with him in the job I had in New York than I could being outside of his office.

G: He had a reputation for being very effective and persuasive in small groups.

S: Oh, fantastic. The first time that the Business Council met in Washington, which it used to do in those days on a monthly basis, or almost on a monthly basis, I got Walter Jenkins--

(Interruption)

The Business Council used to meet in Washington on a monthly basis in those days, and the first time it met after the assassination, I called Walter, or maybe I called the President, and said, "I think it would be a nice thing if you had the Council come over and have drinks with you." "Well, who the hell's the Council?" I told him, and he said, "Sure, we'll get them over. Talk to Walter and set it up." Well, we had the Council come over, and the idea was that they'd just come in and shake hands and have a drink and so forth. Well, he took them into the Cabinet Room and we sat there, my recollection is, over an hour while he talked about the problems as he saw them. And somebody asked about something having to do with agriculture, and he said, "Well, get Orville Freeman over here!" And Orville came in, and the room was [full]; you know, there must have been sixty people in there, standing, sitting, and Orville was stunned, I guess, or surprised

when he opened the door and saw all those people in there. And he [Johnson] said, "Don't sit over there, Orville. Come on over here. We want to talk to you." And that's the way, you know--and gee, the business community just thought, boy, this is something they'd never seen before. Obviously, it was something they'd never seen before.

I remember one night he had us over after a Council meeting. This was a very--I don't know whether you know anything about the Council, but it's a group of about, in those days, sixty chief executives, tops of all the--oh, if you take the Fortune Five Hundred, I would guess the first sixty companies listed are members. So if he had that group with him, he had a hell of power base. I know I sent over to the Ambassador Hotel to him the little book of the membership, because he was asking about giving him some suggestions about appointments. And I said, "Well, there are some damn good guys on this list." And he looked at it and he said, "Jesus! Who is this group?" and so forth. Well, that was the Council.

One night after one of the dinner meetings, I think he said, "Come on over and have drinks." And I think he had us there until eleven-thirty at night sitting in the East Room on the floor, chairs; they were draped all over the place. And he could have sold them anything. But when he got into his news conferences, he got behind that damn lectern and he froze up. He wasn't anything like the guy he was--I don't know what your experiences were with him, but he was never on television the guy that he was on a face-to-face thing.

Except once. One day--and he used to ask me to watch him and call him afterward and tell him what I thought. I don't know that I ever persuaded him of anything, but at any rate I tried to call him after the news conference was over or a

television talk was over and tell him what I thought was right and wrong, not so much about what he said, but the presentation. One day I was watching it, and he came out and put one of his lavaliere mikes on, and he got out and he talked to the press like he was an old come-to-Jesus evangelist. And he did one hell of a job. I called him afterward and said, "Boy, that was terrific!" And he said, "Well, you know who got me to do that?" I said, "No." And he said, "Well, your friend, John Pastore. John Pastore came down here the other day, and he said, 'If I was as tall as you are and I was president of the United States, I wouldn't stand behind that lectern. I'd get out and talk to the press the way you talked to us on the Hill when you were majority leader.'" And Lyndon did it, but he never would do it again.

G: Why didn't he do it again?

S: I don't know why he did it then. I had asked Lady Bird--when he first went into the presidency, I had tried to put cameras into the Cabinet Room and let us tape non-secure meetings, so that nothing was going to be taped that was important, let him get used to being in front of the camera. He never would allow it, never would allow it. And when he got in front of that camera, he was a different guy than he was when you and I knew him. And everybody, my friends in the business world all said to me, "Talk to him. Get him to talk to the public the way he talks to us when he has a private meeting." Never would do it.

I will always think that if he could have gotten the nomination, he would have been elected. There wasn't any question about it. When he backed out in Chicago, I thought that was unnecessary; I thought he could have carried the--he would have had a tough fight to get the nomination, but if he'd have been nominated, he'd have wiped up

the election, as far as I'm concerned.

But, at any rate, that's the only time he came out from behind the lectern and really--that is, I'm talking now about television. But in individual meetings, he could charm the birds right out of the trees. And if he couldn't do it with logic, he did it with stories, and if he couldn't do it with a low voice, he raised his voice, and if he couldn't do it without grabbing you, he'd twist your arm off. But he was persuasive.

G: Do you think that he adopted a much more subdued style on television because he thought it was more presidential or--?

S: Oh, I suspect so, and I also think because he wasn't sure enough of himself. Lady Bird said to me one Sunday morning--I never will forget it. We were up in the private quarters, and she said--"You've got to help Lyndon. He needs help." She was talking about helping him get people to come down and work with him. And I said, "Lady Bird, he's the president of the United States. All he has to do is to call people up, and they'll come." "Oh, no," she said. "You're from the East, and he's from the West, and he isn't comfortable with the people from the East."

Well, I wasn't an easterner; I was born in Michigan and grew up in Ohio. While it isn't quite as far west as Texas, it's a hell of a lot different than going to Yale or Harvard. But he was very much aware of the fact that Jack Kennedy called on the Harvard crowd and so forth, and he didn't have those contacts. True, he didn't have the contacts, he didn't know the people, but neither did Jack Kennedy. Because the first time Jack Kennedy had me down to Georgetown after he was elected and wanted to talk about some things, he asked me if I knew Robert Lovett. And I said, oh, yes, I did, and he was very surprised that I knew Bob Lovett. Well, hell, Bob Lovett had been undersecretary of

state, he'd been secretary of defense, he'd been in and out of the government his entire lifetime. And Jack Kennedy said he didn't even know him. So he wasn't all that well plugged in, either. But Lyndon thought he was.

G: During the [Joseph] McCarthy era, was LBJ helpful to CBS at all in--?

S: I'm neutral; I can't remember a thing about it one way or the other on that.

G: Anything else on him as majority leader that you recall?

S: (Laughter) Yes, a lot of things, but--I was having some trouble with Stu Symington. And Stu was very up front about it; Stu was opposed to an application that we had made in St. Louis for a television station. And Stu called me one day and said, "I'm opposed to you getting that license, and I just want to tell you about it." I think that's the way he put it. And he said, "I'm going to go on the floor of the Senate and say that you shouldn't have it," or something like that.

Well, when he said that, that sort of shook me up. So I called Lyndon and said could I come down and see him. I told him what I was up against, and he said, "You go around and see some other people, and I want you back here in a little while." And we met down in the basement, a private room he had down there. By that time he apparently had gone to work for me, and [he] said, "I don't think you're going to have to worry about Stu anymore." Well, I obviously was bug-eyed. I wanted to know, you know--"Well," he said, "all I did was I just took the watermelon and I just dropped it on the floor and the seeds went every place. I said, 'Stu, what have you got against my friend, Frank Stanton? Why are you doing this to him?'" Stu told him why he was doing it, because he had local pressure that made it necessary for him to do it. And I must say Symington didn't do it behind my back. As I say, he was up front and told me he was going to punch me in the

nose, and so I did what I could do to deflect it. So Johnson was majority leader at that time, and Symington--who was Symington so close to in those days? Senator from--tall guy from Florida, can't remember his name now.

G: George Smathers?

S: Yes, George Smathers and Stu were very close. And Lyndon said, "I didn't go to Stu. I went to his friend, Smathers." And Smathers clammed up and didn't want to talk, and then that's when he got Stu and dropped the watermelon and spilled it all over the floor. And as it turned out, Stu was doing it for Smathers, who, in turn, was doing it for a St. Louis crowd that wanted the channel.

Well, you say, did I have relations with him? Sure, I had all kinds of relations with him in those days, and he knew that he could ask me to do anything that I could do to be helpful to him. He sent me out to Vietnam. That was obviously when he was president. But, no, I think--then I got his memoirs for my company when he published his book; I got that. Never made a nickel on it; in fact, it was a money loser. And we got broadcast rights to some interviews that we did with him. I don't think he did me any favor in terms of giving it to me for less money than he could have gotten from somebody else, but nevertheless we got it, and NBC didn't get it, so--

G: You were a close observer in the 1956 campaign and the convention, I understand, and also in 1960. Is that right, weren't you--?

S: Oh, yes, sure.

G: Any recollection of Lyndon Johnson at the 1956 convention, for example?

S: Not clear about 1956, but certainly clear about 1960. 1956, I guess, was that when [Paul] Butler was chairman of the party, Chicago convention?

G: LBJ was a favorite son and was supporting, I guess, Kennedy for vice president over [Estes] Kefauver.

S: I don't have too clear a recollection about him in that campaign. My recollections in that campaign all flow to the problems I was having with Butler. But in the 1960 campaign, I was in and out of his life many times on that.

I know that the night that Kennedy was going to be nominated, the Kennedys had effectively frozen Lady Bird out of a decent seat, and I ran into her and asked her what was going on and she said, "It's all over." I asked her where she was going to be seated and she said that they had given her a seat but it was a very bad seat in the hall. Obviously the network had whatever it wanted, and so, I said, "Come sit with me." And I took her up into the place where we were and took care of her. It was a very shocking treatment. In fact, I left that night and came back to New York fully persuaded that Johnson would not take the vice presidential nomination. She talked with me a little bit about that. Maggie--or Magnuson--was, I think, preparing a nomination for Stu Symington, if I'm not mistaken, and asked me to write a nominating speech that he could use for Stu and said that he needed it by a certain time. And I came back to New York in large measure because I couldn't do that in Chicago. I was going to help him on that when we got back to New York the next morning. Then when I got up the next morning, Sam Rayburn had already had his talk with Lyndon and it was set the other way, and that was that. So, yes, in 1960 I was much closer to it than I was in 1956.

G: Why do you think he ran in 1960 at all? Do you think he really thought he had a chance to win the nomination?

S: The nomination for president? Oh, absolutely. I remember one night having dinner with

him in a little restaurant here, Lady Bird and Lyndon, on a Sunday night. He was as gung ho then--this was early in the spring of the year of the nomination, yes.

End of Tape 1 of 1 and Interview I

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