INTERVIEW III

DATE: November 3, 1971

INTERVIEWEE: JAMES SYMINGTON

INTERVIEWER: JOE B. FRANTZ

PLACE: Congressman Symington's office in Washington, D. C.

Tape 1 of 1

F: Jim, when you became chief of protocol, I note from your book that you said it caught you by surprise.

S: Yes.

F: Now, I have picked up from somebody entirely divorced from you the suggestion that your appointment to protocol chief may have been at least party motivated by President Johnson's desire to extend the olive branch to your father.

S: Yes. [with the tone of a question]

F: Is there anything to comment on there, either deny, affirm or explicate?

S: Well, I really don't know everything that went on in the President's mind when he selected me for that job, and I can't gainsay that might have been some element of hope in it that it would be an indication to my father that he wanted to restore their earlier friendship. Actually, I think most of the restoration had been done after the sadness of the assassination and Johnson's ascendence to the presidency. At that point, of course, he was no longer majority leader and wasn't in the same position to--if he ever did--frustrate that natural ambitions of the senior senator from Missouri. But I

think that those wounds were pretty well healed.

F: You think that someone's overreaching in this statement?

S: I would think. You know, I think it's possible for President Johnson to have thought of all the angles that are incident to an appointment, and clearly he knew Stuart Symington a great deal better than Jim. I think that he would have also, on the other hand, wanted to reassure himself, from other aspects of my prior performance, that this would not be a disastrous appointment and that it would be one which I would carry out with a full measure of loyalty and effectiveness. And if he'd ever thought, for example, that my mind had been poisoned in this regard, I doubt if he would have made that appointment.

So I'm thinking that, if he had this feeling at all, it was just a lingering, peripheral thought, not the central thought, because it wouldn't have been an important enough objective to spend that job on.

That's a kind of tricky job with a great deal of public exposure, and one where a certain measure of sensitivity to people and events is required.

F: We'll grant that you have the necessary social attributes and that you knew the Washington scene fairly well, by background, but at the same time your own professional background had not been in this direction. You had worked on much more bread-and-butter concerns. Why you?

S: I think this: in the years we spent prior to Protocol. . .

Just remember what they were: two years in London in the State Department in a job not so different really, special assistant to Ambassador Whitney, where I was helping him get through his day, you might say; coming back and campaigning for the ticket, yes; and then going in as Food for Peace deputy director, which involved trips abroad, working with diplomats, foreign ministers, agricultural ministers and poeple from all walks of life. I think President Johnson really thought of his projection into the diplomatic world as that of a man of many dimensions and not just a state leader. Perhaps he knew a little about the things I was doing in those days, because back here in Washington I helped the International Visitors' Program, and worked with foreign students during Angier Biddle Duke's tenure as chief of protocol under Kennedy. I gave programs in the State Department, folk music for diplomats and students from other countries. I'd hit the papers with that sort of thing on many occasions. So I think that he knew that this wasn't. . .

F: That you had [several words inaudible] somewhere.

S: Yes, that I wasn't putting my toe in for the first time. Somewhere --I didn't mention this earlier, but at some point prior to, perhaps after, the appointment of [Lloyd] Hand, who followed Duke before my appointment, I learned from some source that the Dukes

had recommended us. And I say us advisedly, my wife and myself, to succeed them, namely Robin and Angie, because it is a bit of a team job. We had gotten to know them quite well, and it may be that someone even sounded me out on it. I don't recall if they did that; I don't think so.

But in any event, we did learn, indirectly, that our names had been mentioned earlier. That had totally escaped my mind when the call came from the President--I was in New York at this judges conference--that [Lloyd] Hand had left and would I take his place. That was a surprise. It was more of a sudden surprise than it was an enduring surprise, because after I began to reflect, it occurred to me that the President may have had my name before him on another occasion, and that perhaps he had run through some names, and for one reason or another, taken mine.

Now an element of that reason could have been his desire to get back together with Dad again to a greater extent, although, goodness sakes, he saw him frequently. What was there left to do or say? So I would discount that as any major influence on his decision.

F: Did your predecessor give you any advice?

S: Well, my immediate predecessor took off so fast that I never got to see him. He was gone. Lloyd.

F: You all didn't get in that case of your moving in while he's moving out? He was gone.

S: No, indeed. He was gone, and there was a very low state of morale in the office, because he had apparently not found time even to tell

them that he was leaving. The circumstances of his departure are something that only he, or Bill Moyers, or the President, or somebody could delineate for you. All I know is when I took the oath of office and went downstairs, my people were in a state of shock, my new people; they didn't know me. I got them all together, some forty, and said, "Look, you folks obviously must have been doing a good job, because it's only the bad ones you read about, and I haven't read anything bad. So why should we worry about our tenure or job? I expect you to continue to do the work that you're doing and helping me do my job." And within a few days I think the morale was back where it belonged. We got along great. We made very few changes in my time.

I was blessed with a deputy, a black, Chester Carter, whom you may have heard of or read of, who was a consummate logistics expert and great with people. Sam King, who was the head of Visits Section, was a fine man, got along well with the White House and the troops. So really it was a learning experience for me, but more of the same for them.

F: Do you have a sort of a rightfielder's position in this vis-a-vis the State Department and its operational function? I'm thinking about, you know, the old thing that the rightfielder ought to pay his way into the ballpark because he's not operating with the remainder of the team, just the bat?

S: Well, I can see where the careerists in the Department with substantive responsibilities have a right to be hopeful that the chief

of protocol, with whom they must deal from time to time when their area is involved in a visit, is a fellow that can handle himself properly. Now I don't think, on the other hand, that they are all that sure that it's a career man that must have that job, because you can be a career State Department officer and mishandle certain jobs that require exposure to the press, exposure to the people. A lot of foreign service work is not public work and doesn't necessarily produce people that do such work well. I think that they cross their fingers, no matter who gets that job, in hopes that. . .

F: It's not something that the ordinary career foreign service man aspires to?

S: That depends. It's not generally considered a substantive job. But it is the sort of job that a career man might like to have either in mid-career or just prior to his retirement. It could broaden his own experience and enhance his value to the department. I think that it is a tough job for a young man, as I was, with young children, because you're never home. Never. Traveling a lot.

I felt there were dimensions to the job, potential dimensions, which were challenging and creative and exciting to me. For example, I didn't think of it simply as a place to sit and wait to plan a visit and see that it went right. I wanted to get out in the diplomatic community. I called on most of the ambassadors. I couldn't get through them all, but [I tried to] get to know them, handle their problems with the police, with the real estate people,

with the school system, and in a way, provide and act the part of their advocate. Also [I tried] to broaden the dimensions of the work by accepting the fact that it's an attempt to meet people and help people meet and that it's not just between a king and a president. It's between people, their representatives, let's say, between Congress and the diplomatic corps. There's very little contact even yet, now, but it takes a long time to develop ways for people to get to know each other.

I brought the five youngest Republicans and the five youngest Democrats and put them in the State Department eighth floor auditorium. There were about a thousand young diplomats from all over the world. I gave each of the Congressmen two minutes to talk, not too seriously [and to] explain how he got there, what he thought. Then we mixed, and out of that grew friendships. Tomorrow's chairmen of committees might as well know tomorrow's foreign ministers, so that the distrust that I'm afraid exists today between what you might call the striped pants set--(A buzzer sounds)

That's all right, there'll be two bells in a second and then they'll stop ringing. I'll go and vote and come back when that happens.

So I think I did extend the reach of the job in my time. Every man plants a little bit of himself on his work. I don't think I created precedents that have to be lived up to by successors. For example, I think Mosbacher is doing a great job with his style and

his way. We felt we made friends with the [diplomatic] corps. When I left, two things happened. As far as the U.S. people I worked with were concerned, somewhat spontaneously, they gave me an honor guard farewell. I knew all those fellows well. But it was a complete surprise,and I was pleased. The diplomatic corps also gave me a reception at the end, and I have a book with the names of every ambassador in in it and letters from them, which I could show you. I don't have it here, but they are lovely letters. So I know that we were able to make these people feel that they had a friend. You know it was important to them. They don't get to see the president that often, and who else do they talk to sometimes, the desk officer? Well, maybe if the guy is really doing his job well, they'll talk to the desk officer; but the desk officer doesn't have access to the president, does he, or to the secretary of state, automatically? So I was that other fellow they could bounce ideas off of. And I think I've given some examples in my book of times when they did this.

F: Did you feel that your relationship was more with the President or with the Secretary of State?

S: I think that it was about fifty-fifty, really, more with the President, I would say, because the Secretary of State gave me a pretty free hand. I felt close to Dean Rusk, very fond of him. I suppose I had more of a spiritual affinity with him than I did with the President, who was a more difficult man to rap with, you might say.

I was just thinking a few minutes ago: what is that quality in the President that renders him a man difficult to criticize to his face? Why is that? Is there a measure of fear; or is it that plus fear of his reactions; or is it the fear that you are wounding a sensitive person, besides, in doing it? Are you awed, or are you afraid you'll hurt? That quality in the President is what makes him a constant enigma for his associates to deal with. Never mind the historians of the future, who are going to get it all screwed up, I'm convinced.

F: Psychologists will have their field day.

S: They will have a field day. But I loved being with the Secretary of State. I was always comfortable in his presence. I can't say that, of course, about the President, because, when he was in a good mood, it was great, and when he was in a bad mood, it was rough. But Rusk, no matter what was happening in the world, was a steady temperament and always gracious and tolerant of error--a great guy to work with.

F: I think Rusk comes close to being sweet, and the world doesn't have many sweet men.

S: That's right, I quite agree.

F: Sweet without being soft.

S: So maybe, with the way you put the question, I gave a misleading answer. But I really felt more of a pull from the President, because my antennas were always pointed that way: please him! Please him! Rusk I kind of felt that I could please without trying,

because I felt that he really had some trust in what I was trying to do and some respect for my intelligence, you might say. Whereas the President, I think, was never sure about anyone. I just don't think that there was anyone that he was completely confident of.

F: Did you have fair leeway on what level of person you put with your visitors? How do you reconcile this? Now heads of state is understandable, but when you've got somebody who is down the ladder a little bit coming in, do you decide whom they see, or do you try to . . .?

S: Well, not so much, because that's sort of worked out by agreement with his ambassador, input from our ambassador over in the other capitol [and] pressures from groups that I know that the President would want to honor, business or labor or what. [Of course, there were] dinners at the White House where that guest list was made by the President himself, and nobody else. He would ask for suggestions, and we would suggest the same broad spectrum of types that we knew that the President would draw from, but we didn't--

F: Well, you didn't tailor it to what you thought the President wanted. You tailored it to the kinds of people who ought to be at that sort of thing.

S: We did try to do that, sure; and I think President Johnson wanted variety, too. He wasn't a difficult fellow to deal with that way.

F: Was working with Bess Abell much of a problem?

S: I wouldn't say so. No.

F: You all didn't get in each other's way?

S: Not at all, really. Very, very little. The tiny little details of timing of arrival at the house and who goes upstairs, occasionally there would be a little flap about that, but it was never a fundamental thing. It was always a question of timing.

F: What about entertainment?

S: They planned the entertainment, and I had nothing to do with that. I think that, really, that's only proper, because the chief of protocol is not a Sol Hurok, an entrepreneur, and the President wants the stamp of his own personality on his entertainment, or at least, the personality of his choice. So that dealing directly with Mrs. Johnson and the President, Bess could come up. They had some great evenings, you know, great evenings. Booking the entertainment for the White House is definitely a White House function.

We met before every State visit, in what they call the Situation Room of the White House, a month before the visit if we had that much time, and rapped together with Walt Rostow, as chairman, [the] desk officer, [the] country director, and maybe [the] assistant secretary of state for that area; maybe Defense if it was relevant, and [it] usually was. There we would talk about the whole visit: what were the hopes and aspirations of the U.S., of the visitor; and at one point there might be some informal discussion of what he'd like to see when he gets here. And someone might mention--

it might have been me or it might have been the desk officer--the King is very interested in American dance. So it might have come from us that way. Then Bess says, "Well, I know just the thing," and we'd then get a dance troop.

F: Suppose they danced in the flesh?

S: In flesh? Well, in my time, we were never called upon to provide that kind of entertainment. I had heard raucous stories about prior administrations having to satisfy the lusts of potentates.

F: Do you know how much is folklore and how much is true?

S: I really don't. I didn't pursue it with the Secret Service; they probably know a lot, if that sort of thing went on, and the departmental security people. I really couldn't be bothered. If anyone had ever asked me, "I'd like twenty girls tonight," you know, that would have put me a little on the spot, wouldn't it? I might have said, "Well, girls are out of season."

F: Right. What did you do for security? Does it vary from one to the other? I know that some are hotter than others. I was very idly, myself, during your regime, walking down Pennsylvania Avenue, and I really hadn't paid much attention to things in front of the White House, when the Shah of Iran came out of his limousine and went over into the White House grounds. They just came out of the sidewalk, I don't know how many people saying, "Down with the Shah! Death to the Shah!" I often thought . . .

S: I mentioned that in the book.

F: I bought the [Washington] Post the next morning to see if my picture

were in it, because I thought, "That's all I need at this stage."

S: Then you know how insecure we were on that occasion, because that could have been something harder than leaflets they were tossing and that could have wiped us out. I really think that we've reached a point where the reach of confidence in the presumed lawful conduct of people in this country, visitors and citizens, intersects with the danger that such misplaced confidence can raise. I think that it augurs in favor of slightly more controlled movements and protected movements. We harbor within our shores not only malcontents whose ancestors were fighting in the Revolution, and feel that the whole thing has gone cockeyed and that it's all due to Kennedy or something like that, [but also] people who just got off the boat yesterday as a student and discovered that the ruler of their country is going to be within a shot of them in another twenty-four hours. And they can't wait to fire that shot and spend their whole life on this glorious act.

F: You noticed Tito's statement, I think in this morning's paper, that the immigrants here should leave their factionalism at home.

S: Yes, well, nice thought. Try it sometime; tell it to the Irish; tell it to the Slav; tell it to the Jew. For crying out loud, fifty percent of all the pressure I get for foreign policy stands is from the Jewish constituency--more jets for Israel and so on. That being so, the question is: what to do? As I mentioned in the book I always deferred not just to the requirements, but even the most subtle suggestions of security, because I've always felt that with good

humor and personal contact you could get over the frustrations that security imposes. But you sure can't get over a shot in the dark and the guy jumping on you.

We were so lucky with Kosygin in Canada. I had Kosygin in Canada, but he hadn't planned . . . It was such a quickly arranged visit, that all he got when he got there was spontaneous cheers and joy and smiles of the average American with no axe to grind who thought, "Gee, great, a chance to show the Russians that we can be friendly." We had a great time at Niagara Falls and we saw the plant and we had lunch; and everybody had a grand time and came home. If that thing had been scheduled a month ahead, we could have had trouble. No question about it in crowds like that. And it couldn't have been nearly as informal.

I think if the ruler is going to move about his own people in bad times or another people in bad times, the best way to do it is without forewarning. When Johnson traveled through the streets of Korea or Australia--of course, there were not too many people in Australia that were disaffected with his policies, but there were some, there were kids that lined up-- but he would stop any old time, and the cops didn't know that he was going to stop. His own security didn't know that he was going to stop. Therefore, how in the devil could a potential assassin know that he was going to stop? So he could walk out into those crowds. I think de Gualle played the game a little bit that way, too, which is really in safety.

The Blair House is right across the street from the White

House; it is very exposed. They don't block off the street when you get in the limousine; they hold people at bay while you climb down the stairs and into the limousine, so that they don't actually cross in front of you. They don't clear the other side of the street; so there's always the chance, and a fairly good chance, that a determined assassin can achieve his object, the way we do things now. It might be that we ought to consider another more secure place, at a greater distance, either near Mt. Vernon, where we could put up a lovely place, historic as well, or even take something like Firenze House and turn it into a presidential guest house. So that you get in your limousine, fully protected, and then it moves. It moves; it's protected, and you go into the White House.

F: You don't even have a porte-cochere here. He's got to come down to the sidewalk.

S: Sure.

F: I've been surprised, really, with the Blair House. Now the White House is set back, and I've got to use a rifle shot, but I could throw a rock through Blair House upstairs anytime I wanted to just out of sheer . . .

S: You could walk by Blair House and throw a hand grenade into the upstairs . . . The windows are sort of barred, and I think there's some bullet-proof glass or something. I don't know. You might not get it in, but you might.

F: But I don't know that. I'm just an ordinary citizen, and I just see it sitting there, rather stark, against the sidewalk.

S: You could certainly toss one in the lobby, through the front door when it's open, and you're likely to take out of the play two or three Cabinet officers and maybe "the man," especially if you see two or three people that you know are just preceding him. It could be Serajevo all over, any day of the week.

F: Do your foreign visitors worry about the security here?

S: No, they don't worry about it. They think that nothing can happen like that in a great civilized democracy like the United States. Even the ones that rail against us as a neurotic and feverish imperialistic people or government, actually feel quite safe here. Maybe that's the best measure of what they think of us, but they could be surprised.

F: As another aspect of the security problem: what can James Symington do, what did he do, as chief of protocol, to protect against crime against embassy people and property, which is a Washington problem.

S: You bet. Well, this was one of my first considerations. It was before my time as protocol chief that the Italian embassy was invaded by two thugs who shot and nearly killed the butler, wounded a footman, and were apprehended. [Sergio] Fenoaltea was the Ambassador at the time, and he came white-faced to see Katzenbach, who was then attorney general. I was his assistant at the Justice Department. He said that, "We want these men dealt with." And Katzenbach said, "Yes. They will be tried, but your men will have to be witnesses." "I will not subject them to such infamy. You'll

have some smart American lawyer make a fool out of my poor, bumbling peasant butler, and get these people aquitted, and have this obloquy attached to the honesty and integrity of the man who has already been half-killed. No, no." He said, "There must be another way to approach this. What are you going to do about it?"

Well, you know, that was a long time before Protocol for me, and I thought, "Holy smokes! We ought to be providing more protection for these embassies." So when I got the job, it wasn't long before three or four incidents occurred. The Yugoslav Embassy was bombed; the Russian embassy was bombed. The Kuwait ambassador [incident] was really just before I got in, but it was so vivid. I never forgot it. He was held up in his own bedroom with his wife, who was quite an attractive woman. Fortunately all they wanted was jewels. There were muggings. The Polish children were beaten up on the way to school, and I spent time with the head of the school here in Washington--a famous man who [has] since quit--saying, "Why can't these kids go to another school?" They wouldn't make exceptions for diplomatic children, because it wasn't egalitarian so to do.

F: I would have thought they would have had free choice of anywhere.

S: Nope. If they were going to our public school, they had to go to the neighborhood school, and, of course, around 16th street--that's the neighborhood school--they got clobbered. And here we're trying to do business with these countrymen, and I pled with this man that this was the wrong view to take. I didn't want to take my problems

to the public, you see. Well, things got in the papers if I did things in the right way. But I was never able to change that policy, nor, in my time, was I able to get beefed-up police.

F: Did you go to the President with it?

S: I did not go to the President. You're right I talked about these things with the Secretary of State, and I talked about them with presidential assistants. It didn't seem to me that I could be any more of an advocate than the attorney general, or people, or the secretary of state himself, who was more conscious than I was of the likely consequences of a murder of an ambassador or the rape of his wife. President Johnson had no reason to think that my judgment deserved any greater weight than theirs, and I was convinced that every time he read about one of these things in the paper that there was chatter in the White House at the highest level on it.

However, I fought myself in not taking it up with him, only because in retrospect it's perhaps easier to judge yourself than at the time. At the time, I thought that the claims on the President's time were good and sufficient. Somebody was telling him, talking to him. And the President did not invite this kind of initiative from me. "Why don't you tell it to Marvin [Watson]? Why don't you talk to Dean Rusk. See what he thinks," would have been a quite likely response, and inasmuch as I'm trying to make life easier for him, it wasn't always possible to make it easier for him and for the diplomatic corps together, and if I had to choose, I always took him. But I did write a memorandum to Katzenbach, who was then

under secretary of state--he came over from Justice--urging that inasmuch as we have a national obligation to preserve inviolate the persons and property of the diplomatic corps; two, inasmuch as the Washington police were not equipped to do it and staffed to do it;three, therefore these should be additional forces available to protect embassies, either by increasing the size of the Washington police force and assigning the task, or creating a separate federal force for the purpose.

F: Does all this protection come out of the Washington police budget?

S: Well, it did then, and they couldn't even hire guys at one of the highest patrolman rates, because no one wanted to be a cop in Washington. They couldn't fill their quota; they were a couple hundred short as it was.

F: Some neighborhoods were not exactly the safest.

S: I'm proud to say, and happy to say, that one of the first things Nixon did was to accept the implications of my memorandum and appoint an executive security force for the protection of embassies. There have been far fewer incidents of purse-snatching, and mugging, and bumping, and pushing since then. These guys--they patrol in twos and you can see them any day and night walking along; they're very visible. They've got rather fancy uniforms, not quite as fancy as the ones President Nixon had planned for his own White House force (laughter), but they look pretty serious, these fellows, as they walk along. I think they must be chosen for their stature, their bearing, and their seriousness of intent.

F: They're meant to look impressive?

S: Yep, they do. And there's also a squad car group that cruises, and foot men. I don't know how many are on it; must be a hundred at least, because they were always around and it's a twenty-four hour job.

F: Did the country from whom the leader came . . . did your ambassador there provide you with the sort of information that you needed, as to sort of personal idiosyncrasies: he can't stand windows up; he can't stand beef.

S: Yes, we had all that; we never made a mistake on those lines. King Faisal had to have his own cook prepare his own food, because he had a stomach condition, I think, that required very soft and bland food. And we arranged for that man to go to the White House the night of the dinner, and to prepare the special thing for him right there, and serve it to him. If there were any other motivations for that in terms of the safety of eating the food, we didn't hear of them. I doubt if there were, because I know that King Faisal had had other dinners in the New York area and in the Washington area without special preparation, if he could get the right food.

F: Did anyone bring a taster?

S: Nobody brought a taster that I know of, per se. It could be that one of the King's staff would try things out.

F: Was Blair House your responsibility?

S: Yes. It's the President's guest house.

F: Including the staff?

S: Yes. Let's see now. Really, I did not hire and fire staff. There were no staff changes in Blair House in my day. I sort of supervised them, at least when they were dealing with foreign visitors.

F: Do you have a fixed budget, or do you just do what the occasion demands?

S: We did not really have a fixed budget. There were sums allocated to the Office of Protocol for staff that was rather fixed. If you wanted a new position, you had to argue for it at the administrative level. But as far as what it took to conduct a visit, that was out of a kind of presidential slush fund. We only carried out the President's wishes. We didn't think of beautiful new expensive things on our own.

F: What I was thinking, you know, anyone working on a budget comes to that point where we'd like to have a party and we can't afford one this month. We've used it up.

S: Yes, we were in that position.

F: What do you do in that position? Just borrow against the future?

S: If necessary, go to the secretary of state.

F: Because these people want to come . . .

S: There were many people who wanted to give parties and charge it to the Protocol budget, but what we would do is--like the secretary of commerce would want to give a party in the State Department for foreign economic advisers, or something--we'd

say, "You pay for it. We give it." And that's the way we did those things.

F: Somebody come from country "X," and there are a number of people for sentimental or business reasons would like to meet with him, particularly former nationals of that country. He must get an unremitting pressure for people to be added to the local embassy parties and so forth. Was that part of your problem, to say no?

S: We didn't have to say no except for the White House's and State Department's entertainment. We didn't get into the question of who the embassies would have. People might ask us to forward their interest. If someone did that, I would say, "Sure," and drop a line or make a phone call. I never got a request that I couldn't handle like that. I didn't get that many.

F: Is there any different between receiving the heads of state from the so-called free nations and the iron-curtain nations?

S: Very little difference. They all wanted pretty much the same variety of contact and entertainment.

F: You almost have a formula, don't you?

S: Oh, yes. The formula, as far as that goes, was precisely the same. There were three or four forms of visit. A state visit is a visit by head of state as head of state. He or she gets three days in Washington and six in the country. You've got to leave after the third day--boom. You know Ben Franklin's rule about fish and guests. The only difference between a state

visit and an official visit, so-called--which was the visit of the head of government as distinct from the head of state, or head of state coming as head of government like the President could do in either capacity-- was that at the outset there was a parade for state visitor. Other than that, the same thing: two meetings with the President; dinner with the President; return reception the next day, the President would attend; and the various other things that they wanted to do: Arlington Cemetery; call on the speaker of the house, majority leader of the Senate, Foreign Relations Committee; receive McNamara, Humphrey, Rusk in Blair House; and then have the wife to go on a series of things that she indicated that she wanted to do--hospitals and schools.

The state visit and the official visit were distinguished, really, only by the parade which was given the state visitor following his arrival and exchange of remarks on the White House lawn. He got a parade, which was a very short parade and was finally discontinued in my time, because nobody would fall out for the parade. It would be simply embarrassing to be moving along in the bubble-top with Johnson glumly looking out on a empty street and a rather puzzled King waiting for plaudits and not getting them. After two or three of these, we quit. I think we took Faisal on such a parade that was absolutely empty. We had a Burmese, Ne Win, on a parade, I believe. I forget. We had two or three parades, perhaps we had Haile Selassie [Emperor of Ethiopia] on one. You know, just an occasional bootblack or

newsboy peering curiously into the limousine, people going to work and looking over their shoulder and shrugging, going on. Washington, I guess, is a little jaded as far as receiving foreign visitors.

F: When you have a hundred of them, that kind of cuts down their novelty.

S: We tried to get the schools to let out and bring the kids down in buses to stand with little flags. Well, the schools wouldn't do it. Maybe they're smart. So we couldn't get any cooperation from the schools or the institutions with people. Maybe we could have emptied the prisons if we tried. But we just couldn't get a crowd. The President really thought it was my job to get a crowd. And I'll never forget. He would say, "Where are all the people, goddarn it? What have you been doing to get this crowd out?" Because if you're working your tail off to get just the visitor in straight and take care of him . . . it's not like going to Tulsa or Portland and having your bag man go ahead because that would not be a very decorous way to get a crowd for a state visit.

Of course, he [Johnson] would go to places like Mexico City where the people came out by the--well, there were two million,there were two million people. And it took us three hours to conduct a thirty minute drive, and he was so happy, and people came into the car, and [President] Diaz Ordaz [was] shaking hands, and "amigo!" And so forth.

And he comes back to Washington and says, "Why can't we do that here? I want something like that Mexico City business!" Again, going back to something that I mentioned earlier, how do you explain to a man that's made that way, with that chemistry, that this isn't possible here? Because you get the impression that he lives in a world of understanding that all things are possible, if you simply put your mind to it. And to say something isn't possible is to simply eliminate any confidence he has in you, whatsoever, as to your judgment or your ability to make sound decisions. So, you don't quite want to be put in that outcast category, so you sort of keep your peace in the hopes that it will dawn on him without you saying anything. And you haven't put yourself in the position of having countermanded his decree. With a little common sense, it'll come to him eventually.

And so it did. He finally said, "Let's just scrap this thing,this parade business." So as of now, at least the way we left it, there is no difference between those two forms of a visit.

Then you have the informal visit, which is the third type of visit, which is usually lunch instead of dinner and a one-day visit in Washington, not a three-day. Then there's the unofficial visit which hasn't even been planned that you see the President.but you come to get your teeth fixed or something, and he decides he can do anything he wants. Have you to dinner. He can always change the format. You live a little bit in dread of the times that he does it, for

fear that some ambassador will catch it and say, "Hey, you did this for so-and-so, and now I want it for my man." You've set a new precedent.

The President was pretty good about it. He didn't [often]. A few times he bowed to his own inclinations and had people to dinner when he should have just had them to lunch. Like when he stayed to dinner with Mrs. Gandhi when he was simply supposed to return to a reception and Humphrey was the honored dinner guest that night. She was, as you know, the official visitor, and she had come to dinner with the President. Big success. Next he goes to a return reception, and in the middle of the reception he says, well, I don't know how this happened, but either she said, or he said, "Why don't you--or I--stay to dinner?" Because the next thing I knew, I was being told that there was another place for dinner, and I'd already been planning to stay for the dinner with Vice President Humphrey, because the chief of protocol serves him too. Well, they had to move Hubert a few places down; they put the President right next to Mrs. Gandhi. And they had a marvelous time, stayed up until midnight, and that was a hell of a precedent.

Well, when they asked me about it the next day, I took the coward's way out and said, "When has there ever been a woman head of government here? That is the exception to the rule on staying for dinner." Hopefully, people will forget I said that, and next time--

F: Hopefully, Golda Meir won't come. (Laughter)

S: Yes, that's right, and, of course, Johnson will be out, and they can blame it on the Democrats because they got it all screwed up.

He was an instinctual man, and I think that this was good for us because . . .

F: Did you sit in on the conversations when he received them in the Oval Office?

S: Occasionally, yes, I was there.

F: Were they fairly easy going?

S: Oh, yes, he was good at that.

F: What do you do when you have interpreters?

S: Well, that was boring and frustrating for the President.

F: I would think so, to have to listen to something once when he didn't understand it and have to listen to it for a second time.

S: But, of course, he had to deal with it that way, and he did. He would sort of crunch himself up.

F: Did he ask questions, or did he talk like he sometimes does?

S: He did both. The only time that I ever saw him, not at a lost for words, but unable to get a word in edgewise, was when Haile Selassie came and he spoke through an interpreter in Amaric. He brought out this huge scroll and read from page one, top, to page ten, bottom, legal-sized and single-spaced, and when it was over the President just nodded, and got up, and shook hands. And I took him out of there. (Laughter)

F: I would have liked to have had a movie of his face during that period.

S: That was it. He could have kept him longer, but he thought to himself, "To hell with this! Because, if I ask anything, he's likely to bring out another scroll!" (Laughter)

There was also a time when the head of Lesotho, I think it was, an African, tiny country. The President of this little country couldn't talk. He saw so awed by being with the President, he couldn't get a word out.

F: He just lost his voice?

S: I mentioned this in the book, but I didn't say who it was. The President kept getting closer, and looking down his throat, and I finally said, "What the President's trying to tell you, sir, is that he's enjoying his stay here in Washington." "Oh, is that right? Well, it's nice to have him." And this guy was going, "A-a-a-a . . ." Like that. It was really pathetic, but we finally got him out.

But one thing on informality as a key to this country and a welcome change to ritual: that was the visit of [Levi] Eshkol [Israel Premier] to the Ranch, because the President happened to be at the Ranch. If the purpose of visits is candid conversation in a relaxed atmosphere, then it's not always well served by the folderol that we have to go through here. It's great for a guy to see our capital, and wonderful that he gets that kind of attention and the silver trumpets, the honor guard, but maybe they always

ought to go up to Camp David, or slip into the woods and take a boat ride together and share ideas. The President took people on the boat, but it was always with fifty retainers of his and the other guy. And they were just bumping heads all of the time, and watching some silly film about Texas or something, and therefore not really using that gentle time to converse. But out on the Ranch when he had Eshkol, gee, they just walked around, looked at the sunset, sat down on rocks, and talked.

F: Like two heads of corporations.

S: Right.

F: In the same business.

S: Sure, and this to me was one of the most effective formats that I could think of, for Johnson's style. He was his own man on the Ranch. He was confident, you know, like Anteus with both feel planted in his own soil.

F: Well, was anyone offended by his informality when it did surface, or did it come across?

S: I think some ambassadors may have been at certain times, but not heads of state. I think he always handled himself with his state visitors in a very diplomatic way. He could be rough; he could be coarse in a humorous vein. But generally speaking, he was pretty guarded, self-disciplined, at those moments, which has another side to it, and that is, of course, that it was a little unreal.

F: It showed you another facet, too, didn't it? (Laughter)

S: Yes, that's right.

F: I don't recall, were you chief of protocol when they had the ambassadors down to the HemisFair?

S: You bet. That was good, too. I meant to mention that.

F: Well, you know there was some flap about the hats.

S: Very well remember it. I forget who the ambassador was. Lyndon wanted to give the fellows hats, and they wanted those hats! We had about forty or fifty Latin ambassadors and their wives. And all the symbolism that one might attach to the President's try to put his cap on everybody was a lot of nonsense. It's a Texas symbol; it's the heart of the hospitality of the West: the ten gallon hat; everybody knows it. Many people own them and don't wear them, but they're proud to have them and remember the moment when they got them. It was a great idea--the hats--it was his idea. Well, how did it get out? I forget. It may be that-- I mean we were very circumspect in my office.

F: May have been the firm leaked it.

S: It might be, but some ambassador then, at an unguarded moment with a gossip columnist, said that he thought that it was in bad taste and, "We don't consider ourselves under the Texas banner," or the Texas hat, or whatever it is. He would not consider it an honor to receive the hat. Well, you wouldn't have to be Lyndon Johnson to hit the ceiling, but if you happened to be Lyndon Johnson, you went up through three stories. No hats! Boom! And poor Stetson, they could have retired for at least a month on that

sale. And they ended up with little red scarves, you remember that, which is hardly what anyone had in mind. It would have been much more fun to have all those hats, to see these guys waddling around in a ten-gallon hat.

As it was, it was a great [occasion]. You were there. The entertainment was real down home music and dancing.

F: Incidently, I recommended part of the entertainment, so I was interested in it.

S: Oh, it was just grand.

F: But, for my taste, the thing went over. And most of the things that I attended, which aren't legion, out at the Ranch in something like that, it seemed to me that the spirit came across. I'd read, picking at it later.

S: It was really one of the best.

F: I wondered if the people who were actually the guests didn't enjoy it?

S: Oh, they did. It really was a high point. I heard a lot of talk about it, favorable, really warm, for a long, long time, and still do. Any fellow who was down there on that and I'll see him at a reception: "Boy, wasn't that fun down there on the Ranch!" It was a great idea, not just a good idea.

F: When you have someone come from Upper Volta or Togoland or somewhere, you may control this through your guest list, but how do you prevent an otherwise well-meaning "frau" who's present that's striking up a conversation and saying all the wrong things like, "Togo is in what part of Canada," that sort of thing.

S: Well, you listen. Even if you're doing something else, you keep an ear cocked to the casual [conversations].

F: You don't really get too far away from him yourself,do you?

S: No, because the minute you hear something like that there's a million and one things to do. "Excuse me, Mr. President, I must meet so-and-so." Or, "Mr. President, the President hopes you won't forget to go down and look at the Lincoln Room." The people are being interrupted all the time; so that they don't take offense at being interrupted, if you convince them that it's the way you would have interrupted anyone. And since they don't know they're making such a gaffe, they don't know they're being corrected, or they don't know that conversation is being made for something they're doing. So they sort of smile eerily as you'd walk off with your man. Or, you bring up another person, as I said, to meet him. Or, you can pick up the thread of that question, and you can correct the person while you're doing it.

I'll never forget back in England in 1959 when I was with Ambassador Whitney, we were in Manchester, and the Mayor of Manchester, just before this dinner for Whitney, said, "Mr. Wynant, we're very glad you're here." Wynant was dead, and he had been succeeded by a number of ambassadors before Whitney, and Whitney was talking with someone else. And then I saw the Lord Mayor move up closer to say something again. So I went to the Lord Mayor as if I hadn't heard anything and said, "Lord Mayor, there's something I must tell you before the evening gets any older. Ambassador Whitney is really pleased to be with you this evening and to have received your invitation." So he looked at me. You could see the sort

of shade going up and down behind his eyeball. Later, when he gave the toast at the dinner, he toasted the President; he toasted Whitney; and he says, "I wish to reserve a final note of commendation, and I lift my glass to Ambassador Whitney's young aide here who I am sure will have a diplomatic career." He was speaking to nearly thousand people, and no one knew why he was doing that. (Laughter)

F: Everybody wondered, "Why him?"

S: One of the English guests came up and said, "What did you do wrong, kiddo?" They all thought that he was trying to make me feel better about a gaffe that I'd pulled. But that's another [story].

You just can come in. There are a million ways.

F: How did you use your wife? You mentioned earlier that it was a team, and I'm sure it was.

S: I hesitate to say I used her, because she really plunged into the most natural aspects of the distaff side of the job. She got to know ambassadors' wives. She would help them.

F: Did she have a kind of little luncheon circuit of her own?

S: She had a luncheon circuit, and she helped Mrs. Johnson set up luncheons. Mrs. Johnson was great about seeing all the ambassadors' wives, and Sylvia worked with Bess Abell to set up those luncheons and always went and helped to keep the conversation going.

F: Did Sylvia get around? Now she'd know the obvious ones, but I mean, did she get around enough that she could pretty well know the

wife of the minister of Togoland?

S: Yes, she was terrific at it. We started out, of course, cold. We knew perhaps a tenth of the diplomatic corps through other social contacts. We got out these little books; we studied them, and we got to know the people by sight. Then, a state visit would really help you get to know an ambassador, because he's leaning on you every minute; and his wife is also necessitous. Sylvia worked in that way. She even went and helped some of the new diplomats' wives get their hair done, if they spoke French, didn't know where to go, get their teeth fixed, find a dentist. All these things, she did before I even went into Protocol, because she got interested in the plight of the newly arrived foreign family.

Well, on the state visits and, you know, the regular visits, she was a right arm for Mrs. Johnson in helping her in every way.

F: In line with that previous: did the opposite happen ? That since she helped you, and you, and you get straightened out on your arrival here, that she was kind of handed along to other people, and they'd say, "If you have any problems get in touch with . . ." So that she got kind of unsolicited requests?

S: I think people were pretty fair about that. The State Department wives are a great group altogether, and there are times when you might get called. Let's say you're a foreign diplomat; you call the desk officer's wife, if you're the wife. It's who you know and who you feel comfortable with. Sylvia got a lot of

requests for that. One thing, she was very defensive of the diplomatic wives in fighting off requests for getting them to sponsor events. People would always come to Sylvia and say, "Can you get Mrs. Shimoda of Japan, Mrs. Schnyder of Switzerland, Mrs. Alphand? Would you approach her on behalf of the Tootsy-Wootsy Children's Shoe Fair?" And she'd say, "No, I won't. Here's the address, and if you wish to, approach yourself. . . . Because she felt that she should use her energy to remove pressure and burden from these people, not to add to it. Now there were exceptions, of course, to that; I don't know, if it were the National Symphony or aid to the United Fund or the blind or something that really deserved this kind of attention. You can't have these rigid rules, and she might have at times said, "Yes, I will." She'd have only done it when she thought that such participation would be welcomed by the lady in question and not considered another burden of an already tough schedule.

F: Now you did some advancing for the President on his Asian trip I'm thinking particularly. Anything you haven't said on that that ought to be said?

S: Advancing?

F: Yes.

S: Well, just that there's many a slip 'twixt the advance and the final trip. You think you've got things laid on, either logistically or movement-wise, and who's going to be at the foot of the ramp, and which door do you exit from off the plane, and you can be

wrong all the way down the line, because you know, take the Asian trip. We advanced that trip in six days, 30,000 miles, and we went back home, and for one day we got on the phone and talked with the guys that we left at each point.

F: You must have had a problem, though, of sorting it out in your own mind after that kind of whirlwind.

S: Oh, boy! Sleeping on the plane, and you never spend the night anywhere. Well, we had a great time; we played poker, and got stoned a few times, but not much, because you had to be wakeful and sharp most of the time.

Then you'd get on the phone. You'd say, "You got it laid on?" "Yeah, yeah." "Well, where does he come in?" "He comes in here." "Front gate, rear gate?""Yeah,front." Who's going to be at the foot of the ramp?" "Well, it will be the Prime Minister, and the Foreign Minister, [and] Ministers of Agriculture, Commerce and Labor." "Okay, and then what?" "Then he's going to walk down the line and shake dignitaries' [hands] and go to the limousine to be driven directly to the President's palace." "Okay. fine."

Well, you get there, you get out of the rear instead of the front. You know, you've got to turn the President around to get him to go. There's nobody at the foot of the ramp, maybe there's one protocol officer. The other people are waiting at a dais further on down the line. You've just briefed the President that he is about to be met by this guy. You can't look out of the plane, because you've got to pull the shades down for security

reasons when you land. So that everything is a surprise when you open the door.

When we went to Mexico City, of course, he had decided to go to Mexico City in an eight hour period. It was Mrs. Johnson who was supposed to go; he went instead. I had no time to prepare for that. He got out of the plane, and the Mexican chief of protocol was in a state of shock, standing on the ramp unable to tell us what to do, because even he didn't know at that point. Somewhere in the distance a band was playing, so I decided --

F: He feels some of them will show up.

S: Yes. So I got the President by the arm and took him, and we sort of sauntered across this endless tarmac to the bleachers. There was the Mexican President, and so forth. We all got together somehow, and did it. He was in a good mood, enjoying himself, and, of course, that was the beginning of that incredible welcome that he got in Mexico City which he contrasted with everything we did.

F: Was that whipped up?

S: Well, you can't whip it up. I'm sure that announcements were made that the Presidente de los Estados Unidos was here. Johnson was quite popular in Mexico; he had made many, many statements about his fondness for the Mexican people, and being a Texan and all, he was conscious of the antagonism that could exist if he didn't play it right. Being the consummate politician he was, on many occasions, he made it very clear that he really respected the Spanish-American heritage

and that part of Texas, and so forth. So they knew that, and they welcomed him, I think, very genuinely.

F: He speaks a functional Spanish that is good for posthole diggers, and vaqueros, and so forth. Did he ever ask you for phrases that he might use, or did he assay any himself, or did he keep--

S: He was very chary of that. No, he never did ask me, and he didn't reach out too far.

F: He'd rather be on secure ground .

S: Secure ground --amigos, grande, and words like that. But I think that he restricted himself to those things; he didn't want to get too far off base. Mrs. Johnson studied Spanish very hard and made the speech at the dedication of the De Weldon statue of Lincoln down there, and the President was furious because helicopters were hovering overhead and screwing up the loud speakers. Nobody could hear. And you wonder what other demands would he make on the Chief of Protocol? He said to me, "Get that damn thing out of there!"

F: What did you do? Shoot it down?

S: So I looked up at the helicopters and thought, "Get out of there!" I went over to a Mexican general standing there, you know, and I said, "El Presidente no quiere," or something, and the guy just shrugged. And then Jack Valenti came back and said, "That thing is still up there. What are you doing about it?" Those were the moments when I wished that I could take another job.

F: You needed a rope trick.

S: Yes, that's right.

F: Just climb right on up.

S: It finally went away for some reason. Thank goodness.

F: Through no fault of yours?

S: No fault, no.

F: I trust you took some credit for it?

S: I took a lot. I went over, and tapped Valenti and said, "Look at that, boy!"

F: On the Salvadoranean trip? There was that seeming last-minute decision to take all the presidents home.

S: On which trip is this?

F: The one to El Salvadore. Were you along on that?

S: No. When did he go to El Salvadore?

F: That summer of 1968. Had you departed?

S: Yes, I'd left, because I was running for Congress that summer.

F: That's right. You didn't get involved in that.

S: Was he going to invite them all back to the states and to Texas?

F: No, this is an [example],to make a short story out of it, of the kind of confusion that he can bring on with his changes of [plans].

S: It doesn't surprise me.

F: When he got ready to leave, he decided that a nice thing to do would be to make every Central American capital on our part, drop off each President.

S: Oh, take them all home. I see.

F: That way they could see Air Force One. And they could be seen, you know, and so on. Well, that's fine except that nobody set up security, one. And two, George Christian had to figure out how to get the press there ahead each time so that they could photograph and record the proceedings and get them on to the next place. It was a real headache of non-planning, you might say.

S: He could have had a photo pool get out of the plane each time and snap the pictures and get back in again. [That] would have been my solution to that.

F: Yes.

S: But those are the things . . . I mean, boy, when he got an idea. Did he do it?

F: Yes, he did it.

S: He did it! Wow!

F: Over George's objections, I might add; he said it wasn't practical.

S: I'm sure. (Laughter)

F: I think maybe the Secret Service objected, but the presidents enjoyed it.

Did he change the script on you much on that Asian trip?

S: I'll tell you the thing about the Asian trip that I think that reflected his personality to some extent, and what he wants out of history, which I felt to be at best cumbersome, and at worst a little insensitive to the moment. I was in charge of the gift-giving of the President to the heads of state, and anyone else really

except the Secret Service long since has learned to carry little trinkets around in case he just wants to give something to an elevator boy or a man on the street. You never want to be short when he says, "Hey, give me one of the lighters or give me one of the trays," or something.

F: Cufflinks.

S: Watches, the Acutron watches were very expensive, but he loved to give those away. You can't fault a man for wanting to give mementos and gestures of his friendship. But what he wanted to take with him was, I don't remember the exact figure, something like two hundred busts of himself. Some of them were white marblish in appearance and the others were bronze-looking, dark. It is, I think, unusual for a man to want to give a bust of himself in his lifetime, although it's difficult for him to give it any other time. To give a bust of yourself, I think, is an extraordinary gesture, even just one. But to make a mass production gesture really boggles the mind. And we were required to have these busts either on Air Force One or Air Force Two. We never had enough of them, because he gave a lot away. I finally burst out laughing one time when we got to Manila for the Manila Conference. He wanted busts and other gifts to go to all the Heads of State, and all of it done in one evening. I got a big cart and spent about an hour trundling through the hotel with these boxes of gifts, knocking on all the doors, getting rather curious looks, and explaining that I was chief of protocol with my little cart. It

was the most efficient way I could think of doing it.

F: Kind of like a stewardess with the drinks. (Laughter)

S: And leaving these things. So that today there are heads of state all over Asia who are trying to decide what to do with the President's bust. But not just heads of state, because that would have only been a dozen or less. As I say, we had hundreds of them; so many, many people, cabinet ministers and all kinds of functionaries received one. And, "I don't want a white one. I want the bronze one." "I don't want the bronze one. I want the white one." And you never had the one he wanted and you had to go back and get it. And, "Dammit! Can't anything be done right?" The arrangement of the rooms in the hotel in Manila was quite unsatisfactory.

F: You mean his room or the other people's rooms?

S: "I don't want you here. I want you here, and I want you there." I'm just beginning to remember some of the aggravating moments where none of us could figure out how to please him and where he would be steaming like a maddened buffalo over issues that we didn't think were worthy of his consideration. He could have just said to somebody, "This whole thing is a mess, but now I'm going to go and solve the problems of Vietnam." Instead of that, he really dug into the whole messy thing and tried, by a series of arrangements and edicts, to bring order out of what he deemed to be chaos in the arrangement of rooms, and people, and who's doing what, and where are the gifts.

There was a time that I really let him down. I realize it. I mentioned it in the book. There were two Mexican visits, remember. Well, it was in the hastily planned visit. One thing that we learned was that there would be no gift giving at the dinner, the first dinner with President Diaz Ordaz. Now I was chief of protocol, but I was advised by my counterpart that I would not be seated at this dinner, nor permitted to enter the room, because it was very small, he wasn't himself going; it was only the two Presidents,and he always got Jack Valenti with him because that's the guy he really wanted with him, when all else failed. I didn't have a position like Jack, and wouldn't in a hundred years, so Jack was with him. Well, what do you suppose happens? I go back to my hotel because I'm told that I'm released. You don't just sort of sit outside of a dining room, I mean I didn't quite look at my job in that fashion; perhaps I should have at that time. The phone rang, and it was Valenti saying, "God! You are in trouble, boy!" And I said, "Well, it's happened before. What is it this time?" And he said, "The President got a gift from Diaz Ordaz amd he said, 'Where is Symington? Get him!' And I'm getting you. A gift!" I said, "Well, it would take me too long to get there now. Maybe the Secret Service has something on them." They checked and they didn't. He needed something. I mean this was a bad moment; he wanted to return a gift; he couldn't do it. And I felt like I had been stabbed by the chief of protocol of Mexico and the Mexican

President. And yet in retrospect, I thought, "How could you trust a Mexican not to be generous? Simply because he tells you he isn't going to give a gift doesn't mean he isn't going to give him a gift. What a fool I was to take him at his word!"

F: At least have something in your hip pocket.

S: At least have something in your hip pocket, or see that Valenti has something in his hip pocket. The fact of the matter is that Valenti should have had something in his hip pocket. He knew the Presidenta devil of a lot better than I did, and he had seen situations like this before,I'm sure. But he was naturally comforted by the thought that I was responsible. And he and I are great friends, always have been, but at moments like that friend, you are not. (Laughter)

F: It's every man his own survivor.

S: That's right. So I always made sure from that moment on that the Secret Service had a pocket full, a variety of valuable and pleasant gifts.

F: Did you ever run out and have to send back?

S: Sure, this happened all the time. For example, you'd go to a reception at one of these Asian . . . at Manila in the hotel. He would go to Park, the Korean President's rooms, and there would be a number of Koreans standing around that none of us had ever seen before. They'd all get a gift, because the President hated to see someone standing there that he hadn't given a gift to. It was just kind of an embarrassing lack.So he would say, "Get me some

of them things." And I'd get him anything we could find. And the thing is I had no staff. That is to say, I couldn't send flunkies to do things on a trip. I had to go myself, which meant I had to fight my way through traffic. I was often--in Korea, I was running through the streets of Seoul because I couldn't get back in my limousine in time when he left the podium. My service in that job, as I think back, was a series of desperate last-ditch attempts to get aboard. And here I'm supposed to be the cool cat, running the whole thing. (Laughter)

F: You'd have to every now and then remind yourself that this is all part of something great.

S: That's right. And then people would say . . . They'd meet me at a party when I'd finally pull myself together, and they'd say, "Gee. What a grand job."

F: And, "All you do is party."

S: That's right. All you do is party and ordain and maintain.

F: How did you discipline yourself, when you're on a real entertainment treadmill, to keep from eating too much and bloating out of shape and drinking too much and not being able to remember whose party you're at?

S: The first rule was easy to make; no drinks before dinner, only ginger ale and anything that looked like a drink. I didn't want to make people nervous. The last thing people want to think is that you're sober or attempting to stay sober. That's very bad form; so you drink soda water, or ginger ale.

F: Something that looks like gin.

S: Right, so everybody relaxes. Then you go to dinner, and you have a glass of wine. Why not? After dinner, maybe a drink, and that's it. Eat little. Take little, and eat less. Actually, I was on the go so much that I burned up my meals pretty fast. I played tennis in the mornings, two mornings a week, and on the weekends. So I stayed in shape. You've got to stay in shape.

F: You must have occasionally though, when you went to one of these Arab tent feasts, felt like letting go.

S: Well, here's what happened. I would get in the Arab tent and a happy Arab would present me with, usually, a paper plate--because these were all sitting-around-type things--absolutely filled with interesting pottage of some kind. I would dig in, and smile, and eat a couple of mouthfuls. Thus reassured, he would turn his back and go and inflict the same thing on someone else. At which point, I would look around, park the thing by a potted palm, get up, and leave it-- no one knows whose it was -- and start up a conversation somewhere else, and maybe get a smaller plate. The waiters would go around and pick up all the empties and the unused and the abandoneds.

F: Then you could look forward to saying, "Thank you, I've eaten."

S: That's right. Eventually, when enough time has passed, you can say, "Gee, I just can't go back to that board. It's so good, but I've had my fill." You had to do that.

F: Going back to your aid in advancing, you hit in six days, 30,000 miles. Did you go according to a plan, or did you cover every

place that he could conceivably want to go, even though it wasn't on the itinerary?

S: We went according to a plan.

F: What would you have done if he had suddenly decided he wanted to go to Yap?

S: We'd have gone to Yap, with people hanging on to the landing gear and trailing from the wings.

Before we went, the President himself outlined his itinerary. For Australia, he wanted to hit two cities, Melbourne and Sidney. He wanted to go to Wellington, New Zealand; Bangkok, Thailand; Seoul, Korea; Manila, for the conference itself; Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. And [he] was willing, therefore, to make little forays out of these areas, within the time-constraints of his visit, to agricultural stations or hospitals or troop emplacements or whatever. He then left it to us to figure out what they would be. So we would pull into a place, be met on the advancing and taken immediately to the conference room and sit down and attempt to dialogue, in our state of mind, with the guys who wanted him to do this, do that, talk here, talk there, present a statue here and [we would] protect the President's time as much as possible so that he doesn't overtire himself, and fight off home hospitality, which he didn't want, get into hotels, which he did want, and go on to the next place. We'd leave a guy behind each place to firm up our view of the matter.

F: You would rely on the local embassy man?

S: We'd rely on the embassy to help us, but we left our own White House man behind. We had all kinds of different guys that could perform that function, close friends of the President, I forget

guys like Jake Jacobsen, sort of non-official members of his staff.

[He would] leave them behind so that when we got on the phone, we would relate to that guy, but not the ambassador. He didn't trust ambassadors too much. He figured that they'd be playing into the hands of the status quo, and he wanted his own style on this thing. So we would let this guy, give him all the power to negotiate. This infuriated some of the ambassadors. You can imagine it would--a fellow like Martin in Bangkok, who thought that he was "perfectly capable of arranging for the President's visit, thank you . . . You know, I've been in this work a long time . . ." But no he'd be by-passed by somebody who would say, "Ambassador, here is what we're going to do." So, there was a lot of ill-feeling we left all along the way, and I'm not sure that we gained anything doing it, because I think the embassies probably could have set the thing up all right. After all, they wanted an A+ for their work, and they know that the President is going to judge them. And what does Joe Stokes know, from Duluth, about what to do in Bangkok. But the President always wanted to have his man, as if it were possible to understand in twenty-four hours the culture, the climate, the situation, and yet, he felt more comfortable having someone like that do it than having the pro do it that's in the embassy. His view of the State Department was jaundiced. The career officer, I think, was distrusted by him for-- I don't know, maybe it's a kind of a sense of a class distinction or a sense of "what do they know, these high-pants from the East and the colleges."

F: I think that is a frequent congressional attitude, too.

S: Yes.

F: I mean, you hear them sound off on those State Department people as if they're not quite human beings.

S: Exactly. Well, I mentioned this in the book, that that bridge needs to be built. But one time, I think, it was in the wedding of Luci, and presents were coming in from around the world, he didn't want presents from heads of state to go to Luci. But how are you going to tell an ambassador who says, "You know, my sovereign wants to give a gift"? So what I did . . . I would try to be delicate. I sent out a little notice to the Dean of [the] Diplomatic Corps that, "should the question be asked . . ."

F: Is this Sacasa?

S: Yes . . . "that, should inquiries be lodged with you, I wish to convey the President's very sincere gratitude for the interest of your various sovereigns in his daughter's wedding, but the first family does not expect to receive gifts from foreign governments or foreign leaders." That's as close as I could put it to what he said: "I don't want any gifts, and that's that!" [Guillermo] Sevilla Sacasa [Ambassador from Nicaragua], I think, dealt with the matter in the appropriate way. I think he got out some kind of a little notice along the same lines. Well, that's as far as that thought went, because when the Lion of Judah decided to send some silver or something, his ambassador wasn't going to say, "Forget it."

And I had long since read of the effort of the consul in North Africa under Jefferson's term who refused the pair of horses that the Sultan gave him. And the Sultan's Viceroy said, "Well, that will just mean two things. Number one, there will be no further relations between our two countries. And second, less important to you, but quite important to me, I will lose my head." So the guy says, "Well, wait a minute. I'll write the President." A few months later the boat comes back with a return letter. "Okay, you can keep the horses." And [he] brought them back, and they grazed in Monticello for a few years.

The gift giving is a very important part of foreign relations because it is the expression of yourself.

F: You've got hundreds of years of tradition of it that you don't know how to break, among other things.

S: Yes. So along comes a gift, and, of course, a lot of gifts came in, and, under the law, only the President, I think, and his wife are exempt from duties. Well, the gift of the Lion of Judah arrived--a lovely pendant of some kind--I think it's intrinsic value was probably a thousand or twelve hundred dollars or something like that and we were asked in our office if they should exact customs. And I thought, "Exact customs for the king's gift? Come on! Forget it." So I said, "Just let it in, no customs." So in it came. Somebody ratted. Because it was in the paper: Lion of Judah's Gift Custom Free Arrives. The President called me up, and he said, "Did you see that?" And I said, "Yes sir." "Well, what do you think of that?" He said, "This

is awful. Who told those people?" And I said, "I have no idea." He said, "Your people told them." I said, "No, I can't imagine anyone would do that in the State Department." He said, "You can't imagine it? You can't imagine that? Well, you don't have much imagination! Let me tell you! They'll do it in a minute. And that was the extent of his comments in the department.

[End of Tape 1 of 1 and Interview III]

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acting James E. O'Neill
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