

INTERVIEW I

DATE: July 23, 1971
INTERVIEWEE: Mrs. T. J. TAYLOR, JR.
INTERVIEWER: DAVID McCOMB
PLACE: Mrs. Taylor's home in Jefferson, Texas

Tape 1 of 1

M: This is an interview with Mrs. T. J. Taylor in Jefferson, Texas.
T: Mrs. T. J. Taylor, Jr.
M: Mrs. T. J. Taylor, Jr. (Interruption) I mentioned the family background and asked you to straighten out which Taylor is which, as to which is T. J. Taylor, Sr., and Jr., and the Third.
T: I am the widow of Thomas Jefferson Taylor, Jr.
M: Mrs. Johnson's father, then, was Thomas Jefferson Taylor, Sr.
T: That's right.
M: And then who is Thomas Jefferson Taylor, the Third?
T: Tommy Taylor is my husband's son by his first marriage.
M: Oh, yes. Does Tommy Taylor have children also, and if so, who are they?
T: You mean the Third?
M: The Third, yes.
T: He has two daughters.
M: Two daughters. And what are their names?
T: Sally Christine.
M: Sally Christine. Who is Nancy?
T: That's the second daughter.

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M: That's the second daughter. I see. Sally Christine is the oldest daughter?

T: Yes.

M: And Nancy's the youngest daughter?

T: They are my grandchildren.

T: Well, I hate that word step-grandchildren.

M: Yes. That's kind of awkward.

T: You see, I am Tommy Taylor's second wife.

M: Yes, yes. Did you have children?

T: Yes, I have one daughter, Susan Grey Taylor.

M: She's the one that goes to the University of Dallas?

T: Yes. And married.

M: Okay. I think that maybe straightens it out. Tell me, for the sake of information, when did you get married? What was the year?

T: Tommy Taylor and I married--Lord, was it 1940 or 1941? [September 1941] Susan just had her twenty-ninth birthday on the thirteenth.

M: It was in the early 1940s?

T: Susan, I believe, was twenty-nine in July, and this is. . . . Was I married in 1940? 1941?

M: Yes, ma'am.

T: I'd been married ten months, to the day, when she was born. So Is this on tape now? (Laughter)

M: Yes. But you'll have a chance to edit it if you want to.

T: No. What I mean, it is perfectly legal. (Laughs) Tommy Taylor and I had one daughter.

M: Did he have the one son by the first marriage?

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T: By his first marriage.

M: I see.

T: And he's the Third. [He] has the two daughters, Sally and Nancy.

M: Right. When did you first meet the Johnsons, Lyndon Johnson and Lady Bird?

T: Well, do you want to know the Johnsons, or do you want to know when I first met Lady Bird?

M: When did you first meet Lady Bird?

T: Lady Bird went to school here, and in all probability I was a senior when she was a freshman. She and her aunt had an apartment at Miss Bernice Emmert's, close to the school. I think I was a senior when Lady Bird was a freshman, and I knew her.

M: You were raised in Jefferson? This is your home?

T: Oh, yes. I've never lived anywhere else.

M: Do you think you met Lady Bird, then, in high school?

T: When she came here. I can't remember whether I knew No, I'm sure that was the first time I really saw her. But as I say, I'm pretty sure I was a senior when she was a freshman. So we were not, you know--

M: Yes.

T: We didn't run in the same crowd, if you know what I mean.

M: Yes. When did you meet her again?

T: Well

M: Was this when you married?

T: No, it was before I married. You see, they married many years before. Tommy Taylor and I went together two and a half years before we married.

M: Yes.

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T: But she would visit here. And then I remember once going to the University of Texas and seeing her I saw her again through mutual friends of the Benefields here. Mrs. Benefield's sister was Mrs. Kuehne. I believe she spelled it K-U-E-H-N-E. [He] was a very well known architect, and she was Mrs. Benefield's sister. I was down at the University for a party, and I saw her. And then when Tommy Taylor and I started dating I saw her quite often when they would come through. We'd go down to the Brick House, and they would either be coming from Washington or going back to Washington. Now, when I first knew Lyndon he was secretary to [Congressman Richard] Kleberg. That's when I first knew him.

M: You--met him, then, as Lady Bird's husband.

T: Oh, yes.

M: For the first time.

T: Oh, they married years before we did. When did they marry? I've forgotten.

M: Well, about 1936.

T: Yes. They married six or seven years before Tommy Taylor and I did.

M: Yes. What were Lyndon Johnson and Lady Bird like in those days? Were they full of energy, enthusiasm, or what?

T: The most delightful people you have ever known in your life.

M: And what makes somebody like that delightful? What do you mean by that? Were they just pleasant, or what?

T: They were pleasant, and they wanted to make the visit pleasant. He was interested, of course, in where Lady Bird was born and reared in Karnack. [She] went to school in Marshall, except for the one year over

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here, before she went to St. Mary's--you know all of that--in Dallas, the Episcopal school. We would just get together at the Brick House, and we would just have the best dinners and luncheons, and go to the lake, and eat fish, and fish. During those days after he became congressman he would just stay for a short time, and she'd linger on several days. She loved to fish and go out on the lake. She loves nature, always has.

M: You mean this love of the out of doors and love of beauty is nothing new with her?

T: Oh, no, no. She just loved it. And Caddo, if you've ever been there, ever seen it, was perfectly beautiful and still is. Of course, she was born practically on the shores of it, you see, there at Karnack.

M: Did you ever have a chance to meet her daddy, T. J. Taylor, Sr.?

T: He was my father-in-law! Certainly!

M: What kind of man was he?

T: I don't have words to express it. One like you'll never see again in your life, and the breed has passed.

M: Really?

T: He was typically an old-fashioned southern gentleman with an eye for making money and amassing land. [He was] the kindest hearted, dearest soul you ever saw in your life. He was the father of three children: Tommy Taylor, my husband; A. J. Taylor, Tony, in Santa Fe; and Lady Bird was the baby.

M: From what I've read about their childhood, the boys, Tony Taylor and Tommy Taylor, were sent off to a school at a pretty early age.

T: Quite right.

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M: I believe Tony went as far as New Mexico to school.

T: Their mother sent them east to--so help me, now--but it was a school founded by Albert Hubbard. Tommy Taylor stayed four years in that school. And of course, he went down and was on the *Titanic*, wasn't it, that Albert Hubbard that went down on?

M: I don't know, but you may be right.

T: Wasn't the *Titanic* the one the iceberg hit?

M: Yes. He was on it?

T: Well now, don't quote me; I'm not sure. But he, I think, was on [it]. You know Albert Hubbard, the "message to Garcia" man. He founded this school right in Poughkeepsie, New York. Tommy Taylor stayed the whole four years, but Tony went west to Los Alamos, which is now an atomic bomb plant. This was a boys' school.

M: Why did they go so far?

T: Tony wanted to go west, and Tommy Taylor liked the East and he stayed four years. Then, after Mr. Hubbard died Mr. Raymond Wright took the school over. Tommy Taylor stayed there four years. You see, the school is no longer in existence.

M: Is that high school that he went to?

T: Yes. Prep school.

M: Prep school.

T: Right.

M: Why didn't they go to school somewhere in Texas, closer to home? Did their mother want them to go, or their father?

T: Tommy Taylor's mother was a woman born many, many years before her time. She was an inveterate reader, loved music, loved opera, loved everything

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beautiful, and living there she wanted her boys to have the best education possible and she thought that was the way to do it, instead of sending them to a country school. You're so young you don't remember how country schools used to be at their age. See, Tommy Taylor was born in 1901; he was two and a half or three years older than Tony. They were both big boys, you see, when their little sister was born.

M: But Lady Bird did not go so far to school, did she?

T: No, no.

M: She also went away to school, but not so far.

T: No. Her mother died, and then she lived with her Aunt Effie, who was her mother's sister, part of the time, as I recall. I was not in the family then, but I think they spent a good deal of time in Karnack. She went to school in Marshall, and then she went to school here. Then she went to St. Mary's. Now I hope I'm telling this right; this is as well as I can [remember]. But she and Aunt Effie moved to Dallas, St. Mary's, an Episcopal school which is now defunct and has been for several years. Then I just lost track of her, except that one meeting in Austin, until Tommy Taylor and I started going together.

M: Is the story that everybody tells about Lady Bird's name true? That when she was a baby somebody said, "She's as pretty as a lady bird," and that's where she got the nickname Lady Bird?

T: I think, in essence, that is true. But there was a man by the name of Mr. Good Coleman. Good Coleman is all I know. When he first saw her he said, "She looks just like a little lady bird. She's so pretty." I hope I am telling the right story on that because that's the way I heard it. Mr. Good Coleman was with her father a lot, and as a matter of fact

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he was very close to my mother and father. But the first time Mr. Good saw her he took one look and he said, "She is just as pretty as a little lady bird." Now I hope I'm right on that. That's the way I've always heard the story.

M: Do you suppose that's a nickname she really liked? Do you think she liked to be called Lady Bird? Or did that ever come up?

T: Now listen, I have no idea.

M: Rather curious nickname.

T: If you've ever been around East Texas and all the characters And I'm not at all sure I'm right on that. It may have been her nurse who said she looked just like [a lady bird]. I've heard two conflicting stories on that. Her nurse said, "She looks just like a [lady bird]"-- or Mr. Good Coleman. But I know in this part of the country, and throughout the South as far as that's concerned, they're great on nicknames and always have been. For instance, when I was a child I was named Miss Sooky Suds, and I've gone by Sooky all my life. Now everybody's dead; there's not half a dozen people left who call me Sooky, you know, anymore. But Lady Bird must have liked it. I mean because I don't think that she would have kept it with LBJ and her children's names. I mean I don't know, I have never discussed it with her.

M: Yes. It never came up.

T: As far as I'm concerned, I think it's a Well, I just think of her as Lady Bird. It suits her more than Claudia Alta, to me.

M: What was life like at the Brick House? Was it a pleasant place to live? Was there a lot of activity going on?

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T: Oh, it was just wonderful. I married in the Brick House.

M: Oh, you did?

T: Of course she was a very small child when her mother died. But it was just a place where the table was always spread and there was always room for one to twelve people more, you know.

M: It was a house where people were welcome to come.

T: Oh, very welcome.

M: Then you met Lady Bird and Mr. Johnson when you started dating Tommy Taylor.

T: Of course, I'd known Lady Bird.

M: Yes. You'd known her before.

T: Not intimately or well, but I'd known her.

M: Yes. Then you married in the early 1940s. Did you see the Johnsons when they would come through after that?

T: Oh. . . .

M: They'd stop, and you'd have dinner with them?

T: Oh, yes.

M: And Lady Bird would stay for a while, and it was the same pattern of life.

T: Oh, yes. They were very close.

M: Did you ever have an occasion or an opportunity to go on any of the campaign trips?

T: No.

M: You never went with Lady Bird?

T: No.

M: Did your husband, Tommy Taylor?

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- T: Tommy Taylor was very active here in Marion County during elections.
- M: So he would campaign locally?
- T: Here in Marion County.
- M: Did he campaign for Senator Johnson when he was running for election and things like that?
- T: I wouldn't say he would exactly campaign. but he would throw any influence he had and during Tommy Taylor's lifetime Lyndon Johnson always carried Marion County. Now, I wouldn't say how much, but Marion and Harrison County. What influence he had, he used it. And he carried Marion County. Of course, Marion County is one of the smallest counties in Texas.
- M: Do you remember if your husband made speeches, or did he go around and meet people, or did he just talk to people on the street?
- T: No, I don't ever remember. Oh, it's just been so long ago. When they would have meetings in this part of the country he would go to them. I never did go to one with him , so whether he ever made a speech or not, I don't know.
- M: Yes.
- T: But he showed his support by being there, and if he was called upon to say something, I'm sure he did it.
- M: Yes. Did you ever have an occasion to visit the Johnsons at the LBJ Ranch?
- T: On, many, many times. As a matter of fact, we used to go every New Year's.
- M: Oh, it was a family gathering there at New Year's time? I assume that Tony Taylor came from Santa Fe then?

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T: Oh, yes, and Mr. Boss and his wife. For years and years we did that.

M: Yes. What were those occasions like?

T: Very, very happy ones.

M: Did you sing songs, or did you have Christmas presents or what did you do?

T: No, this was New Year's. I don't remember any singing, but we would show movies of our children and we would ride over the Ranch to see the deer and then we would go fishing. Oh, it was just beautiful, just the normal things that anybody would do.

M: Did all the smaller children come, the grandchildren and so forth?

T: There weren't any grandchildren.

M: In those early days

T: Later on, after my husband died, [there were], but I mean at the beginning. I had a child and of course she is Let's see, how old is Lynda Bird? Susan is three or four years older than Lynda Bird. And then they were still in Congress. I'm Lynda Bird's godmother, and his deceased sister, Josefa, is her other godmother. Let's see, who was the godfather? He was off at war during that time. Oh, I just love the children. They used to come every summer, and then we used to go up there to visit numerous times.

M: When you were named godmother for Lynda, was there a christening ceremony?

T: A baptism.

M: A baptism?

T: In the Episcopal church.

M: Did you go to the baptism?

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T: I certainly did.

M: And was Lyndon Johnson there, too?

T: He certainly was.

M: Where was that? Was it in Austin or Washington?

T: St. David's, I believe, was the name of the church.

M: In Austin?

T: And they were living in an apartment.

M: Yes. Then you visited the Ranch many times. Did you ever visit them in the White House?

T: Yes.

M: When was that, do you recall?

T: Well now, you just got me there. My sister, who is now deceased, and her husband were in the Army, and they were stationed in the Virginia area. Of course his work was in Washington. They lived in Arlington. And then I was there many times when he was vice president living at The Elms, and my daughter was going to school there. After they came, I'd go visit my sister, and there was never a time that Lady Bird didn't ask me over two or three times. I'd go up--by that time my husband had died--and I would visit my sister in Virginia and one in New York out on Long Island. I wish you could get some more information about them, because she's visited them, too.

(Interruption)

M: One other question: Has it made any great change in your life, being a friend of the President of the United States?

T: No.

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M: Your life in Jefferson has been much the same as it probably would have been anyway?

T: Yes.

M: Other than maybe some enjoyable moments in the White House, or something like that?

T: They certainly shared The Elms and the White House every time I was up in the East.

M: Something else you might have a comment on: I've been impressed that the Johnsons, throughout their political life, were very thoughtful of other people; such as, they'd be certain that people had autographed pictures of them and things like that.

T: They're the most thoughtful people, and Lady Bird has been so good. Of course [there is] the fact that she was related, but she has sent me the most beautiful clothes, you know, since she doesn't need them any more.
(Interruption)

When Lynda Bird was married, before Luci had her second baby; there's just the first baby. The Robbs didn't have a baby. That was Christmas, 1967, you see.

M: May I read the inscription?

T: You certainly may.

M: Mrs. Taylor has just shown me a picture of the Johnson family with Luci and her husband, Mrs. Johnson, President Johnson with baby Lyn on his lap, and Lynda and her husband sitting on chairs in one of the garden areas of the White House, isn't it?

T: No, no, no, no. That's at the Ranch.

M: This is at the Ranch.

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T: Look and read. Let's see.

M: The inscription says, "For Sarah, With Our Affection and Wishes for a Joyous Christmas." Signed Lady Bird and Lyndon Johnson, and it's dated December 1967.

T: Well, no. See, I thought that was at the Ranch.

M: I was just looking at the windows behind them. It's a beautiful color picture.

(Interruption)

I've pretty well exhausted the questions I have for you. Is there anything you'd like to say in conclusion about the Johnsons, or in any connection?

T: No, nothing.

M: Very good.

[End of Tape 1 of 1 and Interview I]

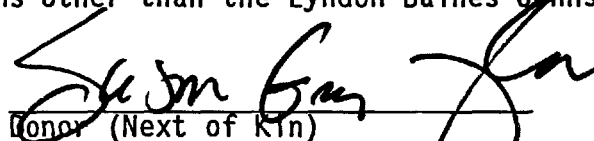
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