

INTERVIEW I

DATE: June 2, 1987

INTERVIEWEE: WINSTON TAYLOR

INTERVIEWER: Michael Gillette

PLACE: Mr. Taylor's office, Marshall, Texas

Tape 1 of 1, Side 1

G: Okay, Mr. Taylor. Let's start with a little bit of family background. Tell me, if you will, about your father, W. B. [Walter Bates] Taylor.

T: My father was five years older than Lady Bird's father. They were both born in Alabama.

G: Yes. Which one came first?

T: T. J. came [inaudible] first though. My father owned a [inaudible] gin in Birmingham, Alabama. He sold out and came to Texas because all the farmers had done so well and to Karnack.

G: Did you know why T. J. [Thomas Jefferson] Taylor came to Karnack rather than--?

T: He was just a young man looking for a place to settle.

G: Yes.

T: Actually, Karnack was a place on the Missouri, Kansas, and Texas railroad, and the railroad was envisioning a town there, so he was hoping to be one of the first settlers, and

Taylor -- I -- 2

that's the reason he came to Texas. [Inaudible] I think he was about twenty years of age when he came.

G: And your father felt that he was doing well, and so he came also?

T: Yes. He sold out in Alabama and came to Texas, too. And later on, it turned out that they were partners in a lot of cases. They had land and a [inaudible] gin.

G: What business was your father in? In the ginning?

T: He liked it. He liked cotton ginning.

G: And did he live in--what--?

T: He lived in a little place called Laws, Texas, about twelve miles east of Lee, Texas.

G: Did your father share with you any experiences of growing up in Alabama and what their family was like?

T: Some. As much as he could, yes. Didn't talk too much, but he did share some. I was actually born in Alabama myself.

G: Were you?

T: I came to Texas when I was three years old.

G: Now their father, T. J. Taylor's and W. B. Taylor's father, had died; is that right?

T: Yes, he died the month T.J. was born.

G: And then their mother remarried--?

T: Yes, she remarried. She married a man named Bishop.

G: Can you recall anything about their growing up that is significant?

T: A little bit.

Taylor -- I -- 3

G: Tell me what you remember.

T: Their mother must have been a remarkable woman. She had five children by Taylor--my father and T. J.'s father. His name, of course, was Taylor, and when he died before T. J. was born--and then she married again, and there was five Taylor children. She married a man named Ben and had ten children by him. She was a most remarkable woman. She had four [?] marriages and no divorces.

G: She stayed in Alabama, is that right?

T: Yes, stayed in Alabama.

G: Let me ask you about Mrs. Johnson's mother, Minnie Lee Patillo.

T: They were from the same general area in Alabama. Her name was Patillo, and she married my Uncle T. J. and came to Texas with him.

G: What was she like?

T: She was a very unusual woman. She liked to read, and she had a house full of books.

G: Was she active in the community?

T: Yes. Of course, I was just a child. I don't know too much about her. I think she entered into politics.

G: What kind of politics would she--

T: Local politics.

G: Local politics. Any particular memories of her political--?

T: No, not much. You see, I was about ten years old when she died.

G: So you were five or six years old--?

Taylor -- I -- 4

T: I was three years older than Lady Bird.

G: Okay. What did she look like?

T: I don't really remember. I think she was a blond woman. She liked to wear veils.

G: Was her health good, or was it--?

T: I think she had some problems with her health because she would go up north to the health place.

G: To the Kellogg--?

T: Yes.

G: She liked opera, I understand, and classical music.

T: Yes.

G: What can you tell me about that?

T: I can't tell you anything except I kind of grew up in a family--in her home, a little while before she was dead, but most of the time after she died. Uncle Tom was a widower, and I lived with him.

G: Was Minnie Lee Patillo involved at all with her husband's business, too, with the store, or did she--?

T: No, she was a housewife.

G: Just a housewife.

T: Yes.

G: And the two older boys were Tony--Tommy and--?

T: They went off to school.

Taylor -- I -- 5

G: They were both older than you?

T: Yes.

G: Can you tell me anything else about her, what she was like?

T: Minnie Patillo?

G: Yes.

T: Not very much. Remember--I was about ten years old when she died. As I say, all I know is she had a house full of books.

G: Okay. Let's talk a little more about T. J. Taylor. He--

T: He was a remarkable man. He was a good businessman.

G: Why was he a good businessman?

T: Because he works hard. He works hard at it.

G: He opened a store, and--

T: Yes, in Karnack.

G: I gather he was involved in the fishing industry, too, that he would sell fish.

T: Yes. He didn't fish himself. He would advance people that wanted to fish, fishermen, and then he'd sell their catches. He'd sell them fish [inaudible] New York [inaudible]--

G: He owned a lot of land, I gather.

T: Yes. Each time he'd get a little bit ahead, he'd buy more land.

G: Is that right?

T: Yes.

G: And what--how would he cultivate this land? Would he hire--?

Taylor -- I -- 6

T: Tenant farmers.

G: --tenants? And let me ask you to describe this kind of agriculture. Was it primarily cotton, or did they raise--?

T: Cotton. Cotton was the money crop. It was very common; T.J. did and my father--for market [inaudible], and they had tenant farmers.

G: Did they raise other crops besides cotton, or was it--?

T: They did, but they didn't amount to much. Grew corn; cotton and corn.

G: Now--

T: This was right before automobiles, just about.

G: The store was a general merchandise store?

T: Yes.

G: Let me ask you to describe it.

T: It was just a big, big stone building, two-story. It had a sign on it, "Dealer in Everything," and he tried to live up to that. He wasn't afraid to tackle anything.

G: Did he have a number of employees working for him, or did he tend the store himself?

T: He had employees. No, he had mighty near everything done except he supervised everything.

G: So he usually spent a great deal of time at the store himself?

T: Yes. He opened up early in the morning.

G: And they lived at the brick house in--

T: Yes.

Taylor -- I -- 7

G: Would you tell me what it was like there when you were young?

T: It was just a large brick home. It was built before the Civil War. Have you seen it?

G: Yes. Did you go there for dinners and family occasions?

T: I used to live there. I lived there when he was a widower. I went to school when he was married.

G: How many years did you live there?

T: I don't know, off and on. All my growing--all my formative years.

G: Was he a stern disciplinarian?

T: Not at all. He was a very nice man, very gentle.

G: Was he a good teacher? Did he influence you?

T: He influenced me a whole lot. More by example than by word of mouth.

G: Can you give me an example of things he might have taught you by example?

T: Well, I don't know. He just went and tended his job and you tried to copy. He would just tell you what to do, and you did it. Remember, I wasn't but about eight or ten years old.

G: What was his relationship like with the people who worked for him, the tenant farmers?

T: It was good. They looked on him like a benevolent man. He was "boss" to them; he was called "Cap Taylor."

G: What was Mrs. Johnson like when she was young?

T: She was just an average girl growing up, but she was very smart. I remember how when I was little I was trying to teach her how to read before she went to school. She ended up pretending to read to me.

Taylor -- I -- 8

G: Was she shy?

T: I don't think so. No, I don't think so.

G: She went to the Fern School?

T: Yes. I did, too.

G: Will you tell me about the Fern School?

T: It was just a one-room schoolhouse. We had all the grades, all the way from first grade to high school.

G: And anything else that you remember about that experience?

T: Not very much. I was a pre-teenager. I lived there a little bit when I was in high school, too.

G: What do you remember about Mrs. Johnson's mother's death?

T: Not anything. I just remember when she was living there at the brick house. I was just a kid; I think Lady Bird was five years old. That would make me about eight years old when she died.

G: She fell on the steps, is that right?

T: I really don't know.

G: Was--and then Captain Taylor was a widower for a long--

T: Yes.

G: --time and then remarried thereafter. What else can you tell me about him? He was a large man, is that right, physically?

Taylor -- I -- 9

T: Yes. He was about six-foot-two or -three inches tall. He weighed about two hundred pounds.

G: And you say he was a good businessman.

T: He was very good; he had a very good mind.

G: Did he influence his daughter, do you think? Did she learn from him?

T: No. Because he needed some help, Lady Bird had an aunt that took over rearing Lady Bird. Miss Effie. Miss Effie was a big help.

G: And she came and stayed?

T: Yes. She stayed in the house, too.

G: What was she like?

T: All I know is she was a grown woman. She was an old maid and was very devoted to Lady Bird.

G: I am wondering where you think Mrs. Johnson may have gotten her love of nature, of wild flowers, of natural beauty that you find in the country.

T: Just growing up in the country.

G: You think? Was she not unique in that respect? Did other people who grew up in the country have the same appreciation that she did?

T: I think she developed it through the years. No, I don't think she was unique.

G: But you think she had it when she was young?

T: She developed it growing up.

G: After the Fern School, she went to school in--?

Taylor -- I -- 10

T: In Jefferson, two years of high school there, two years of high school in Marshall.

G: Why did she go to Jefferson, do you know, and then Marshall?

T: They didn't have very good schools. [Inaudible].

G: I see.

T: It was more convenient.

G: Did you also go to Jefferson and Marshall?

T: No. I went to military school.

G: I see. Where did you go?

T: I went to Gulfport Military Academy.

G: Yes. Where was that?

T: Gulfport, Mississippi.

G: Okay. Now the boys also went away to school, didn't they?

T: Yes.

G: Was this something that your father thought was important, your--?

T: No. We just lived so far back in the country we didn't have any schools.

G: I see.

T: See, it was necessary to send us off.

G: And then you also were at The University of Texas when Mrs. Johnson was there?

T: Yes.

G: Let me ask you to tell me about that experience.

Taylor -- I -- 11

T: Well, I went there [inaudible] because [inaudible], but I didn't stay there two years. I got DAVA [?] degrees from the university in 1931.

G: And she was there in 1930 and 1931, is that right?

T: No. Let me see. I guess so.

G: What was she like as a student?

G: A very good student.

G: Was she? Was she active in student--

T: Yes.

G: --affairs there at the university?

T: Yes. She was a very good student.

G: Did you see much of her socially?

T: Yes. Yes. I did as much as I could for her. I invited her over to the Senator house.

G: Did you ever get an indication of what she wanted to do when she finished school? Did she talk to you about that?

T: She had two degrees. She had one in--a BA degree, Bachelor of Journalism. She was a journalist, too. She was always interested in politics a little bit.

G: Yes. Was she active at all in student politics there?

T: No. I don't think so. She was more interested in state politics.

[Voice in background]: I want to show you.

G: Anything else on Mrs. Johnson when she was at the university?

T: What?

Taylor -- I -- 12

G: Do you remember anything else about Mrs. Johnson when she was at the--

T: Not too much except I tried to be as much help to her as I could.

[Voice in background]: Have you seen this?

G: Yes.

T: What's that, [inaudible]?

[Voice in background]: This is of Lady Bird. He's seen it.

T: Yes.

[Voice in background]: I think that's about all that I've got in here. Of course, that's the Ranch, and you've seen all these others.

T: For some reason or other, I got in law school when she was going to school.

G: When did you first meet Lyndon Johnson? Do you recall?

T: The year they married.

G: Before they married or after?

T: Before they married. He was dating Lady Bird there at the university. She was at the university.

G: What was he like?

T: He was a very personable man, very out-going.

G: Did he get along well with the family?

T: Yes, very well. Very, very well.

G: Did you see him as politically ambitious?

T: Yes, he'd been in politics ever since I've known him.

Taylor -- I -- 13

G: Yes.

T: I believe at the time he was working with Kleberg.

G: He was secretary to Kleberg.

T: Yes.

G: Did you think that he had a promising political future?

T: Yes, I did.

G: Why did you think that? What was it about him that made you think that?

T: Well, he had a very--desire to be somebody. I helped as much as I could when he first run for Congress from the Austin district.

G: How did you help?

T: I just helped as much as I could there with some people I knew there in Austin.

G: Did you help him raise money, or did you--?

T: Not until later. Not until the time he started running for the Senate.

G: Yes.

T: I'm not very much of a politician.

G: And T. J. Taylor was supposed to have contributed money when he ran in--

T: Yes, he helped him.

G: --the first time.

T: He helped him anytime he asked for it.

G: What did T. J. Taylor think of his son-in-law's political career? Did he think it was good? Did he--

Taylor -- I -- 14

T: Yes, it was good.

G: --think he should go into business instead, or--?

T: No. No. He didn't try to tell him anything. He just tried to help him.

G: Now, he ran for the Senate first in 1941.

T: That's right.

G: Did you--? Against W. Lee O'Daniel.

T: I did as much as [inaudible] I could. [Inaudible].

G: How did he fare in this area against O'Daniel?

T: It was nip and tuck, but he was always ahead.

G: Did--was he popular in Harrison County?

T: Yes. Yes, he was. Yes, he was popular.

G: Of course, he lost that election. He didn't win.

T: Yes.

G: What did you do for him here in Harrison County in 1941?

T: I don't remember. Like I say, I'm not a politician. I just worked with those people who were politicians the best I could. Helped in any way I could.

G: Who were his principle political aids here? Advisers? Operatives in Harrison County?

T: I guess I was and Dar [?] Sullivan. Do you know Dar Sullivan and Powell?

G: Hugh Powell?

T: Yes. Hugh Powell.

G: How about McLeroy [?], Cameron McLeroy?

Taylor -- I -- 15

T: He was a big help. Cameron McLeroy. He was a good politician.

G: Then did you help him in 1948?

T: Yes. I helped him.

G: Can you describe that?

T: We had a mailing list. We mailed it out [inaudible]. Everybody had a vote.

G: Did he come here and speak?

T: Yes, he did.

G: Anything else on the 1948 race?

T: No, but it was mighty close. [Inaudible].

G: It was a contested election.

T: I went to Fort Worth.

G: Did you go to the--?

T: Yes, I did.

G: Tell me what you remember of that experience.

T: I don't remember much. I just did what I could.

G: Yes. What did you do?

T: We'd go to meetings.

G: Were you a delegate, or did you--were you just interested?

T: No, but I went with the delegates.

G: Do you remember Judge Davidson's hearing? Did you go to that?

T: I guess I did. I've forgotten. Judge Davidson always [inaudible].

Taylor -- I -- 16

G: Excuse me?

T: You're talking about Winfield Davidson?

G: Yes. Did you go to that hearing?

T: I think so.

G: Any recollections of that?

T: Not really. I've forgotten.

G: Now Lyndon Johnson had a heart attack in 1955, and you visited the Ranch thereafter.

T: That's right.

G: Can you describe that visit?

T: Not really. Not really. [Inaudible]. That's why I went to the Ranch. Everybody did the best to have him cured.

G: Was he a difficult patient?

T: I don't think so.

G: You think he was cooperative?

T: Yes.

G: You knew him before the heart attack and after the heart attack. How did the heart attack affect him? How did it change him?

T: I can't see it changed him at all.

G: Really? Didn't slow him down any?

T: No.

G: You had sort of a family reunion there at the Ranch?

Taylor -- I -- 17

T: Yes. We were just there as guests of he and Lady Bird.

G: Anything else you remember about that occasion?

T: Not particularly. We didn't stay very long, just overnight.

G: LBJ ran for president in 1960. Do you recall that?

T: A little bit. [Inaudible] California. Los Angeles, I believe.

G: Did you go out there?

T: No, I didn't go. I wish I had.

G: And Kennedy won the nomination, and he went on the ticket as vice president. Anything about the campaign that--you worked for the ticket, I know, and--

T: Not very much. I was very much surprised that he accepted being vice president.

G: Did he ever talk to you about that position?

T: No. No.

G: Why do you think--?

T: I think it was a wise decision on his part.

G: Anything else on that period before he became president?

T: Not particularly.

G: Did you go to Washington while he was vice president?

T: I went one time while he was president.

G: Tell me about that.

T: I didn't go while he was vice president.

G: Tell me about your experience in Washington.

Taylor -- I -- 18

T: I was too busy here at home. I just spent the night there was all. I spent the night at the White House. I was in [inaudible] time, but I didn't take advantage of but one trip. One trip.

G: Now, let's see. T. J. Taylor died during 1960, didn't he, during the campaign?

T: That's right.

G: During--and Mrs. Johnson would come and spend some time with him before he died?

T: Oh, yes. Yes.

G: What do you remember about that?

T: I don't remember anything about a special time. All I remember--

G: Excuse me?

T: Special.

G: Did you see President Johnson any in retirement after he left the White House?

T: Yes.

G: Well, tell me--can you describe the--?

T: He seemed to be enjoying himself going to football games.

G: Did you go with him?

T: No, I'd just see him there.

G: How, aside from the obvious differences, would you contrast Lyndon Johnson and Lady Bird Johnson? How were they different in terms of their personalities?

T: I think they were very suited to each other.

G: Why do you think that?

Taylor -- I -- 19

T: They just worked together real well.

G: They came from different parts of the state.

T: Yes, different parts, but they went to school in the same area. She went to Austin and he at San Marcos.

G: Did they tend to think alike?

T: I think so.

G: Did she strike you as being more conservative than he was?

T: Yes. She was more conservative.

G: Was he, would you say, more impulsive?

T: In a way. Yes, he could be more impulsive. I think he maybe had more ambition than she had. But I don't know that for certain.

G: Anything else on their differences?

T: They were more alike than they were different.

G: Really? How else were they alike?

T: They worked together well as a team.

G: Did he rely on her judgment? Did he rely on her advice?

T: I'm sure he did. He had a great deal of respect for her judgment.

G: Okay.

T: But he was a hard worker. He had a lot of nervous energy.

G: Did you feel that he expected too much from her or expected--?

T: Not at all.

Taylor -- I -- 20

G: What else do you remember about their relationship?

T: I didn't see them except for on occasion. They seemed like an ideal couple to me.

G: Okay. Mrs. Johnson used to say that her husband "stretched" her, that he enabled her to grow and do things that she didn't think she could do.

T: Yes.

G: Did you see this in--this sort of a change in her over the years, or--

T: She became a public figure through the years, but she had a pretty good background herself. She had two degrees.

G: But she does seem to have had a reserve about doing--appearing in public, or--

T: Yes.

G: --speaking in public.

T: I think he met the public maybe better than she did, but she came across to the public pretty good herself.

G: Yes. Anything else on her growth as a public figure?

T: Well, she always was able to carry out any of the [inaudible]. Through the years, she gradually grew in stature. I say they worked together as a team mighty well.

G: Anything else?

T: Not particularly.

G: Okay.

End of Tape 1 of 1 and Interview I

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