

INTERVIEW I

DATE: June 2, 1978
INTERVIEWEE: EMMA BOEHRINGER TOOLEY
INTERVIEWER: MICHAEL L. GILLETTE
PLACE: Mrs. Tooley's residence, Houston, Texas

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G: You knew Captain [T. J.] Taylor?

T: I did.

G: What did you think about him?

T: Well, I think he was a great and wonderful man. He was a very stern disciplinarian, but always gentle and loving and understanding as far as Lady Bird was concerned. There wasn't anything in his store that we couldn't have; no matter how many friends came to the store at lunchtime there was always plenty of cheese and crackers and cold drinks and candy. We loved to go horseback riding and Mr. Taylor saw to it that his best horses were saddled and ready for us to ride.

It was a great day when Lady Bird would invite me to come and spend the weekend with her. Her home was beautiful but rather mysterious. Many stories tell about the ghost in the house and I used to tremble from fright imagining that I heard all kinds of weird noises. Mr. Taylor always retired when the sun went down for he had to get up at the dawning of the day. When Lady Bird and I had gone out to a show in the evening and had come back late we would take off our shoes and try climbing the stairs without disturbing

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her father. But no matter how carefully we climbed those stairs Mr. Taylor would call out to us making sure that we were safe.

G: He called her Claudia I assume?

T: Yes.

G: What did he look like? He was a large man.

T: Very, very handsome. Tall, dark hair, dark eyes. Lady Bird looks a great deal like him. A very commanding figure I would say. He had the general store, the country store, and everybody looked up to him and respected him. He took care of all of the people down in Karnack, I mean the colored people, you know. They depended on him for their livelihood.

As far as our family was concerned he was always so very generous and nice to us, because it was from his store that we bought our groceries. In that day and time people didn't buy just a little one-pound can of coffee or a pound of lard. We'd buy the lard in five-gallon cans, Mrs. Tucker's. Then the great sacks of corn meal and sugar and flour. But I remember how generous he was with us. My mother was a widow with six children and I'm sure she charged all of those groceries, but at the end of the month we would pay for it. But he was always kind and generous to us, helped a lot of people.

Then in the church, I know that he was very active in the church. When I taught school down in Karnack in later years he gave this lovely organ to the Methodist church. So he was generous and kind and helpful to other people.

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G: He asked Aunt Effie [Pattillo] to come down and help raise Mrs. Johnson.

T: Well, I don't remember really Bird's mother except I can remember seeing her once or twice, always beautifully dressed with her hat with veils on it. But then when after her death Aunt Effie came, Aunt Effie was the same type of person as Mrs. Taylor, frail and lovely, kind of an ethereal being. But she loved Lady Bird and took the best of care of her. And Bird never lacked for love in her home because her father adored her and Aunt Effie was so wonderful. One of the things I always admired about Aunt Effie was that she taught Lady Bird all of the graces that a young southern lady needs. I believe that next to a mother's love, her love was the greatest for her.

After we graduated from Marshall High and Lady Bird went to St. Mary's Episcopal School in Dallas, Aunt Effie was there with her a lot. I don't know whether she lived in an apartment or not. But we used to go to visit Bird when she was going to St. Mary's and Aunt Effie was always up there with her. So Bird loved her.

G: I gather that Aunt Effie was not a very authoritative person, that she wasn't very outspoken or wasn't very good at supervising younger people in terms of telling them what to do.

T: Well, I think she left most of the disciplining to Mr. Taylor since she was living in his home. We always respected her, but of course we trembled when Mr. Taylor came. He was never unkind, but I mean he was just that type of person.

G: I'm wondering how much influence Aunt Effie had on Mrs. Johnson's love of nature and natural beauty, flowers, things like that.

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T: I'm sure a great deal because they lived, you know, in this beautiful old home surrounded by fields and then by forests, too. I'm sure that Aunt Effie taught her to love and appreciate all the lovely things of nature.

G: Was this something that was general in that area? Did everybody seem to have this sort of interest that Mrs. Johnson had, or was this something--?

T: No, we all loved the stars and the moon and all of the beautiful flowers. Our mother used to say, well, we never saw a flower but what we stopped and loved it and thanked the Lord for it. So we just loved all of the beautiful things in that area, the tall pine trees and all of the birds and flowers. You know, that's where the dogwood grows so beautifully. But in that center of Karnack today, there's a little plot of ground with a little marker. I think it was put there, I don't know whether by Bird or in her honor, but with some little flowers planted around it. I thought, how wonderful that they're trying to beautify Karnack, because Karnack is not as charming as it was when we lived there. I don't know why the people haven't cared for it.

But Mr. Taylor was the cause of them bringing this ordinance plant there to Karnack. And everybody in Karnack has a job and that speaks well for Mr. Taylor, because he brought that industry there, and it's still there and doing beautifully now. So people there are not as needy as they are in some other area. I think that's to his credit that he brought that industry there, to give everybody a job.

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G: Is there anything else about him or Aunt Effie that you feel is important?

T: I don't believe I remember, because it's been so long ago.

G: Do you recall when you first met or got to know Mrs. Johnson?

T: Well, as I said the other night in my talk, I was older than she, and we lived at least six miles away, but in that day and time there was no means of transportation. We didn't see each other, because how would you get from six miles? In that day it might as well have been a hundred. But she went, not to the Karnack school with us, but later on she went to Jefferson and went to school.

The first time I remember seeing her in our school days was she came into Marshall High School one day and came into the classroom where I was. She was just a young girl, much younger than the rest of us in the class, but I was drawn to her and loved her because she was from Karnack and I knew who she was. So she and I became real good friends there when we were in high school together. That's when she drove back and forth to Karnack. My family had moved to Marshall so we could go to school. Then Lady Bird and Aunt Effie had gone back to Karnack and Mr. Taylor had bought this car and so she drove back and forth from Marshall.

But we had happy times.

G: What was she like then?

T: Well, to me just darling and lovely. I always loved her. A little shy sometimes and real smart. She was very smart. And she worked on The Parrot staff, that was our school paper. She could write

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beautifully and her choice of words was exceptional. We were always so excited when she would have one of her articles printed. Then another thing that I admired about her was that she was so adventurous. That's when Richard Halliburton was writing his wonderful book, The Royal Road to Romance [published 1925], and she was always wanting to travel that royal road to romance. And now I think it's so wonderful that she has had an opportunity to travel that road all the way around the world.

G: Do you think the fact that she was several years younger than the other people in the class had much effect on her in high school?

T: I just don't know. Now I was older than she and of course my sisters in our home were older than she, but she enjoyed being in our home. It was a taste of family life with girls, like sisters to her. So I really never thought of her as being much younger than I.

G: What did you do when she would stay with you?

T: Oh, we would go to the theater, and that was great in that day. And then we would go on picnics. I had three brothers and they all had a lot of boy friends and of course we never lacked for boy friends to take us to the show or take us on weiner roasts or take us swimming, go out to Sue Belle Lake [?] and other area lakes there near Marshall and swim. Then of course the happiest times of our life were when we'd go to Caddo Lake. I think that she loves it as much as I do. Now I was born on an island in the middle of Caddo Lake, Taylor Island. Isn't that interesting? Not named after her family, but I was born on that island. But anyway, it has a very special

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place in my life and I'm sure it does in hers.

On the weekends we'd go to house parties and Mrs. Powell, Dorris Powell, and her husband would chaperone us. We would go down to Caddo Lake and have the best time swimming out in that wonderful water. I remember one day, as we were swimming, someone called and said, "Oh, there's an alligator out there and I'm sure that he's going to get Emma and Lady Bird." An old friend was standing by and he said, "Oh, no. The alligator is not going to get Emma and Lady Bird because he's going to say, 'Well, I've known those children since they were born.'" So it was dangerous really but perhaps we didn't know any better, but we swam with alligators and loved it. Then of course those wonderful boat rides. Parts of Caddo look like Cypress Gardens down in Florida, and all of those wonderful boat rides that we'd go on. So that was fun.

Then of course one of the highlights in our lives was going to Shreveport. We'd go in Bird's car, her Studebaker Commander, and we would dine at the Washington-Youree Hotel and then we'd go to that beautiful Strand Theater. That was just like going to Europe for a while.

G: One of the places that I have in my notes is the old Haggerty Place which I guess was just the foundation of an old, old home that was there. Did you ever go there?

T: Yes, and it's still there. Not very long ago we went over there. Someone was going to lease it to hunt deer, and the Haggerty place is still there, leased out to somebody. One of the old cemeteries

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in that area is still at the Haggerty place, and it is near that Taylor home.

Then another thing that Mr. Taylor did was give this land for the Andrews Cemetery. It's a cemetery across the road from that beautiful old home. Most of the people in Karnack who pass away are buried in that beautiful place. But it's just out in a field. We went to an uncle's funeral service there, and as we were standing there by his grave the cows and the horses came and there was a barbed wire fence around this cemetery. I just said to someone, "Just look, the cows and the horses are sad that Uncle Charlie's died," because they were bowing their heads across the barbed wire fence. But it's just a sweet old peaceful cemetery there. And that was another lovely thing I think that Mr. Taylor did, was to give that land for that cemetery.

G: There was a Mrs. Fox, Mildred Fox, there, too. Did you ever know her?

T: Yes, and her beautiful home. See, the Taylor house and the Haggerty house and the Fox house, they were just beautiful old homes. That home now is occupied by some of the descendants of the Fox's. It's a wonderful place now, a real working ranch. The young couple that live there with their children now, they have restored the house, fixed it all up. It's still there.

G: Well, I've got the names of some more of Mrs. Johnson's friends and your friends during this period, of course. Clayton Fields and Jack Staples.

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T: Yes. Now, Jack Staples was at the reunion.

G: Yes, I talked to him.

T: Did you get information from him?

G: Yes.

T: But Clayton Fields is deceased.

G: Nell Coggin [?], is that how you pronounce that?

T: I don't know.

G: Anything about any of these or other people, Helen Bird, that you remember that, say, brings back the memory of a particular occasion when you were together with Mrs. Johnson or anything there that brings it back.

T: Well, Helen Bird's father was rector at the Episcopal church in Marshall, and of course we admired him very much. He preached our baccalaureate sermon. But Helen had a nature akin to that of Lady Bird's, you know, adventuresome and full of fun. She would be with us a lot of times there at the Taylor household. So we just had a real good time together.

G: What about your teachers at Marshall High? Were there any that Mrs. Johnson particularly liked?

T: Well, that Mrs. Willis that came to our reunion, there never has been anybody any cuter than she. The day that the Principal of the high school called us in to tell us about our grades and the ones that were chosen as valedictorian and salutatorian, Mrs. Willis was the teacher that was going to help us with our talks. No one in the world was ever more surprised than I when they told me that

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I had won first honors, that I was going to be valedictorian. I shall never forget what Lady Bird said to me, "Oh, I'm so glad that you won the first honor so now I won't have to make a speech." I thought that was just darling. So that showed she was just a little bit shy even then about people. But that was all right. She had other things, you know. She could do other things besides make a speech. But that was a wonderful moment for us. And of course our graduation exercise was great. They didn't know what caps and gowns were in that day and we all had beautiful evening gowns to wear.

G: Can you recall any courses that Mrs. Johnson particularly liked or that she did well in at Marshall High?

T: I cannot. I'm sure she was in my English class that Mrs. Willis taught; she was our teacher, our English teacher.

G: Do you recall any courses that gave her trouble or that she found difficult?

T: No. I don't remember. Because if you saw in this school paper, did you see what her grades were? It was just wonderful. She got a very high rating. She was just brilliant back in that day and time.

G: How about any other extracurricular activities? You said she worked on the paper, on The Parrot. Did she have any other activities that she was involved with, sports or--

T: Now you see, I can't remember that. I can't remember whether she did or not. I didn't take part in their physical education things but I don't remember whether she did or not.

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- G: You mentioned Helen Bird's father, the minister, and I'm wondering if he was responsible in part for her going to St. Mary's in Dallas.
- T: I feel sure that he was.
- G: Do you recall how that decision came about for her to go there?
- T: No, I don't know why, because her family were members of the Methodist church. But it was a girls' school and perhaps Aunt Effie thought that she'd be safer there in a girls' school. But of course after she left St. Mary's she went to the University of Texas. That's where she and my sister, Eugenia, became friends again. We'd known each other as children but then my sister hadn't been with her in years.
- G: She was closer to you than she was to Eugenia?
- T: Well, she was nearer my age.
- G: Yes.
- T: But then after she went to Austin and to school there and my sister Eugenia worked for the Railroad Commission in Austin, they became very dear friends and it was she that introduced Lady Bird to Lyndon.
- G: Did you ever see her while she was at St. Mary's?
- T: Yes. Mrs. Powell and I used to ride the train from Marshall to Dallas to spend the weekend with her and we'd have the best time. She had her car there and we'd go out to I think it's White Rock Lake in Dallas and have picnics. We'd go to the theater and just have a wonderful time.
- G: Did she seem to enjoy it in Dallas?
- T: I believe she did.

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- G: Did that change her at all? Here she was really away from home for the first time.
- T: But Aunt Effie was there in the background. I can't remember whether Aunt Effie had an apartment or where she stayed while she was there but she was there keeping an eye on Lady Bird.
- G: How about intellectually? Do you think that was an intellectual turning point for Mrs. Johnson, the fact that she was going to a private girls' school as opposed to a public high school?
- T: Well, I think it was good for her perhaps before going into a great school like the University of Texas. Back in that day and time I went to a junior college. It seemed that parents wanted their children to go to a junior college or a girls' school in between their high school and their university. I went to the College of Marshall and Lady Bird went to St. Mary's. Then I went to the University of Texas and then she went. But I just went in the summer because I taught school and I'd just go in the summer.
- G: So you were not there when she was there.
- T: I was not there when she was there. Because she went the full term but I'd just go in the summer.
- G: Well, I gather that her father really didn't go along at first with the idea of her transferring to the University of Texas.
- T: Well, I just didn't know about that.
- G: Do you have something else--
- T: Well, this was about how she loved to be with us in our family, with our family. She came from a home that had wealth but it never had

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any effect on her. Our father was dead and we were considered poor, but that didn't make any difference to us because we didn't know what money was. We'd always say, well, we had things that money couldn't buy. And our mother's philosophy was you don't need much in your pocket if you have much in your heart. But now Bird came from this home with money, but it really never did affect her. I mean, you would have never known that her father and her family were people of wealth. Because she was always that same sweet and humble and kind and generous person.

At our reunion I thought this was just wonderful. I think everybody was impressed with her, with Lady Bird. Many of them hadn't seen her in fifty years. But they came to me and they would say, "Well, she's that same sweet, friendly, shy person she was when she was a teenager." As I sat by her and had a part in that reunion I thought, well, how thankful I am that I've had the privilege of knowing her and my life has been blessed and enriched by such a friend as she.

G: Did you see her when she was at the University of Texas? Would you visit with her at all then?

T: No, our lives kind of parted then because I taught school during the school months and then I would go to the University of Texas in the summer, and she would already be gone. So I didn't have much contact with her then.

G: Well, of course the general story of how she met Lyndon Johnson has been told, but I'm just wondering if you know any more of the details

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about that from your sister, Gene. Number one, had LBJ been dating Gene before?

T: Well, the way Genie met Lyndon was through his father. Mr. Terrell, Mr. C. V. Terrell, was railroad commissioner and Genie was his secretary. I think during an election one time Mr. Johnson, Lyndon's father, was his campaign manager. And Lyndon, of course, would be in and out of Austin. Genie and Lady Bird would get together because, see, they'd been born in Karnack and they had such a good time together, so one day Genie just invited Lyndon to come, and she introduced him to Lady Bird. That's when the romance began.

G: But you didn't see them again during this?

T: No, I guess that Alton and I had already married and I had my own life. Then I didn't see her any more for years until it was in 1957 that she came and we had this luncheon down on Caddo Lake together. Then I hadn't seen her from 1957 until the other day.

G: Is that right?

T: Isn't that something? But she and I both were surprised that we would say, well, we just don't know, we don't remember some of these people. It was kind of sad. I thought well, of course they'd remember Lady Bird because of her position. But fifty years is a long time and you forget.

G: Sure. Anyone else that you feel that I ought to talk to, say, particularly that would know anything about her mother or her father?

T: If you'd let me call my sister and just talk to her over the phone, because Marie's older, she's six years older than I, and she might

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- remember something about Mrs. Taylor. Do you have time for me to call?
- G: Sure. Is there anything else that you feel like we ought to add?
- T: Well, I just don't know. I think I've given you everything that I had written down. Yes. I think I have given you all that I have.
- G: Did you ever get an impression back then when you were, let's say, in Marshall together or when she was at St. Mary's in Dallas what avenues she might pursue as a career?
- T: Well, of course her one thought then as most of us, all she wanted to do was to travel all over the world. I thought perhaps--she could just write the most beautiful themes and beautiful stories. I had thought at one time perhaps she'd choose journalism as her major but I don't know what her major really was down in Austin, whether she ever--
- G: She got a degree in journalism.
- T: Oh, did she? But now see, she's written her wonderful book, [A White House Diary], so perhaps she was thinking about it even back in her high school days. But she was very smart, and we admired her, because we were all older than she. She was just fifteen and most of us were seventeen and eighteen when we were graduating from high school. So, everybody admired her.
- G: I think that perhaps I heard somewhere that your brother Karl one of her first dates.
- T: Well, we used to go together, my friend and I and Karl and Lady Bird, when we'd go to the theater and when we would go to dinner. So they

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liked each other. That little romance I think lasted until she went away to school and then he didn't ever see her anymore. But it was nice to have her around, because we enjoyed her. She brought so much joy to our family, so I've always loved her and appreciated her.

G: Is there anything else here that. . .?

T: I just can't think. I didn't write down enough, did I? But I feel that my sister, Marie, since she was older than I would remember something about Mrs. Taylor. Some of the circumstances of her death I never did know, but she was very sickly, frail and all that. I guess the rigors of living the country life down in Karnack was a little bit too difficult for her. But her [Mrs. Johnson's] brothers now, of course, they were older than I and I don't know anything about them. I know that Tommy, the oldest brother, and Lady Bird just looked so much alike. He looked just like the father, and he was a very fine man.

G: He was in the wholesale grocery business.

T: Yes, over in Jefferson. But now Tony lives in Santa Fe and I don't know him at all. But I did know Tommy.

G: Well, I sure do thank you for the memories you've--

T: I wish I had known more to say. But I think what--

G: If you think of anything else we can just add it to it. No problem.

T: I believe I'm going to call Marie now and let her tell you something about it.

[End of Tape 1 of 1 and Interview I]

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