INTERVIEW II

DATE: February 1, 1976

INTERVIEWEE: BOB WALDRON

INTERVIEWER: MICHAEL L. GILLETTE

PLACE: Mr. Waldron's residence, Washington, D.C.

Tape 1 of 2

G: Would you like to start with some of those observations about his Senate years, the majority leadership period, and the persuasiveness that he was able to marshal in the task of getting bills passed?

W: Again, as I have explained to you before, not being on the Majority Leader's staff, but merely being around and with him socially and travelling with him, you were always aware, though, of the persuasiveness of this man, not only with the Senate, but with anybody where he wanted to make a point or wanted you to do something. Because he used that personal contact and that personal persuasiveness which he was so excellent at doing, as history has already recorded. I believe President Eisenhower made the statement that without Lyndon he never would have gotten any of his program through. The President was a statesman as well as a partisan, but he appealed to the members of the Senate on a strict--you know, when it got down to really being a close-knit vote and he knew that he had to make those appeals, then he went to the man himself, pled with him on what he thought would get his support. And certainly he made promises, which is part of our system. If the President ever made a threat on

anyone, I'm not aware of it. But power and the pressure that he held would certainly be persuasive.

But I've always been impressed by the fact that he would pick up the phone and call a senator and talk to the man himself, and then when the vote had carried, pick up the phone again and thank the member. That phone would ring and no secretary was an intervener. It was, "This is Lyndon and I appreciate your vote today." Also when a man voted against him, he would still call. He said to me one time, just in visiting, that you want to find out exactly why, and then start doing your groundwork for the next time.

But I think this was so true. I've heard men who were asked to--I think he even did Mr. [Mike] Mansfield this way in convincing him to take majority leader. As I understand it, Mr. Mansfield did not want that job and the President just appealed that, "You've got to serve your country." How often, because of his influence he would literally just say, "You can't refuse it. Your country needs you." And certainly on a number of appointments or commissions, when it would be a financial loss to people, he would convince them that they owed it to their country to serve.

Also, he gave gratitude for service, personally and on record. When he'd go back and start talking about men early in history, their service to their country and the devoted work and unselfish attitude and all, I think all of us, whether you just donated a little time or a lot, were aware that he was grateful for whatever help he got. But I was astounded at how he could cajole and pressure and, again, that personal appeal

of putting his hands on you. He'd buttonhole a senator right on the floor or in the hallway, and just almost not let him go until he had agreed. And of course, again, he never went on that floor without basically knowing where he stood. Very seldom was he ever caught off guard.

G: Can you recall an instance in which he was?

W: Not with any particular senator, because I would not have been privileged to be present. I have heard him on the phone. You know, [I've] been in the room when he picked up the phone and called a senator and pled a case, but namewise, I can't.

G: I really was thinking of a particular legislative issue where he got to the floor and felt that he didn't have as many votes as he had anticipated.

W: That would be very few and far between that that would have ever happened.

G: How did the other senators react to him?

W: I have a strong feeling that they reacted very well to him, because they knew where he stood. And when he made a commitment, he stood by it. I've often heard that members of the Republican side, through my years here, say that Mr. Rayburn and Mr. Johnson were two of a kind, that once they gave you a commitment, they stood by their word. So at least you knew that he wasn't going to turn or change his mind on you. But I think they reacted very well.

One of the cute stories about the White House years is that a senator attacked the President very strongly on the floor of the Senate the day of a state dinner, and that night he was on the guest list. Of course,

it was a great press coverage that after that vicious attack, here the man was at a state dinner. And as they were leaving the White House, the man's wife turned to her husband and said, "The President danced with me three times tonight. Isn't that amazing?" And the senator said, "Well, had I not attacked him, he wouldn't have danced with you at all." There was a knowledge.

But I think this is true of all these men. They all have to give and take. I just think, to have been elected majority leader as young as he was and in as short a period and to have maintained that position so long, that he had their respect. He was such a hard-working man that he had them all kind of on their toes.

G: Did he seem to enjoy the majority leadership more than the vice presidential years?

W: Oh, I think very vividly. I think you asked me a question similar on that before. Because he held the power and was the great power on the legislative field at getting things done, whereas being vice president he was presiding over the Senate and helping with the White House program, but it's certainly not as exciting and you don't have the personal influence that you hold as majority leader. I don't think you do. And I think, again, he loved that day-to-day battle, thoroughly enjoyed it.

One of the memories that I hold was the period when the AMA fought so vividly and so long against Medicare of any kind. Well, the President's mother had been sick for so long, and of course he fortunately was able to take care of her. Judge [Homer] Thornberry had gone through a very long experience with his mother. I just happened to be in the Vice

Presidential office when the AMA had fought and screamed and carried on that they would never accept any kind of Medicare, medical aid bill. And they came in to argue with him and I just so remember him saying to these men that, "We are going to pass some kind of bill, so you get busy and decide what is acceptable to you." But he made it perfectly clear that he wasn't going to be cowed by the strength of the AMA. Of course, it did pass and they've all benefited and you never hear any more about it. But, God, during that period he went through holy hell with the doctors on the thing. That was just another one where it reached the point of not cajoling or pleading. He made a perfectly clear statement that he was going to see that a bill went through and they could just get ready to accept it [or] at least now work with him on what is acceptable.

I think this is true in so many of the pressure groups. The President was a great listener to their needs and wanted the input of any kind of information that would help him make a decision, and I've heard him discuss it. But it came down to what he thought was best for the country. And of course he was so aware of people who needed help because of his background. He was determined to get through legislation that could help an average family.

One of the most moving experiences to me was on the trip around the world in 1961, where we were in Pakistan and were going into this village. These people were waiting to see him, and this woman was standing by the road with a child in her arm and holding a child's hand. And in the most tender manner, he turned and just looked at me and he said, "Do you see that lady standing there?" I said, "Yes." He said, "Well,

that woman wants for that little boy and the child she's holding, exactly what Mrs. Waldron wanted for you and what my mother wanted for me: it's just a better life than any of us know." And he said this in the most wonderful, tender manner. I think he was extremely aware of the needs of the public the world over that had not had equal opportunities. And certainly education was one of his greatest drives, anything to better your life.

I remember extremely strongly one night when we were talking about poverty programs, and he said, "You know, it's awfully hard to argue with a man who has a sick baby at home." And I've heard him use that in a speech. That if the child is ill and is hungry, the man's first duty is survival and feeding that child or taking care of it, you know, robbery or whatever it takes to do it. Again, he would say these things in such a pleading manner. If the world could just understand that we first had to give everybody a chance to at least live a little better and eat. Often in speeches his statements would just be so convincing. It would be almost like a minister pleading for the conversion of a sinner in the crowd.

G: On the civil rights legislation of 1957 and 1960, he had pressure from both the right and the left: the pro-civil rights forces wanting a stronger bill and the opposition forces wanting nothing at all or a more limited measure. Do you recall him working in this situation?

W: Yes, because that was just such a drive for him. Again, I was not privileged to be in on the arguments and thelegislative part in preparation for it except just hearing him on the weekends discuss the importance of

getting a civil rights bill through, that we had to wake up to the fact that it was coming and the idea was to get as fair a bill through, to get something started before we had trouble in the country. But, again, I think he was so sincere, whether it was a mother in Pakistan or a Negro mother standing on the street in Washington. He saw this, that they were entitled to a better way of life and he wanted to see if he could help provide it.

G: Did he ever relate this to the blacks that he knew in his own [life]?

W: Oh, gosh, yes. And certainly to black leaders. Some of them were wise. I think Roy Wilkins, who just retired, was a man who, again, like Mr. Johnson, had the wisdom of knowing there had to be a great compromise on both sides. And the Negro leaders helped work out a program. But I think he pled with them just like he would have with anybody. And it took a tremendous amount of courage at that period to make that stand when he did. Since then, it was a great reward to hear average Negro people acknowledge. I know the lady who worked for me and kept house for me came to me one day and said that her minister had gone in the pulpit on Sunday morning before the 1960 election and said, "Tomorrow you have a chance to vote for the man who's made the first step truly for you, and there's no doubt that if you have any conscience at all that you're going to vote for him." I think the average Negro across the country realized what he had done for them and were grateful. You know, the minority, the rabble-rouser, of any group is not the average man, the working man, who was grateful. You know, whether it was a health program, or civil rights, or education, or whatever it was, the press loves to play up the

unusual case. But how many times have we seen it, that you would have five thousand people appear at a rally in support of a candidate, whether it was Mr. Johnson or someone else, and the press will only cover the hundred over in the corner that raised hell. So you never know, or history never really knew, how much support, except just in the ballot box, that the man ever had, regardless of who the president is.

G: I was wondering if he ever related some of his motivation for civil rights in terms of, say, Gene and Helen Williams or Zephyr Wright--if he ever used them as examples.

W: No. I never did hear him use his staff as an example.

G: Or the discrimination that they might have encountered as something that offended him.

W: Well, let me just say that he never used the immediate staff as an example, but he was aware of it. I know certainly about people travelling that he would use that as an example, that a man couldn't come in a cafe or go to the bathroom or have any, what we call "common privileges" that we all take for granted across the nation. The President was aware of that and used those as examples. But I never did hear him use the immediate staff [as an example].

G: Any other legislation that particularly reflects his commitment?

W: Well, again, the space legislation was certainly one of his great drives. He felt that it was a step that we should take out of exploration as well as defense. You know, any legislative bill that got through seemed to please him extremely. I think when he signed bills, if you take his statements at the time he signed the bill, kind of summarize his commitment

and the pleasure of seeing it go through. It would be much more so than any of us could ever tell.

G: Let's move to the 1960 campaign and your observations about him pressing the flesh, what this meant to him, if he derived strength from it.

W: I think it was interesting to have been asked to begin traveling with him when he first started feeling out the nation on running. You know, he had made a commitment to himself and to his advisers that he would run for the office and he then, just like the candidates that you see today, accepted speaking engagements and started going around the country, testing the water. I had never been with him in a campaign for office in Texas. I had never campaigned with him, so it was a new experience to see how much he enjoyed it. He just had to reach the people, you know. The Secret Service had one of the greatest burdens in history, probably more so than any president, in protecting him, because he absolutely had to touch the people. He wanted to be right with them and look them in the eye and put his hand on their shoulder and argue with them or hear them compliment him, whatever it was. It didn't matter whether it was in this country or abroad. No matter where he went, he had to get out of the car and go among the people. I just think he felt that "if they could just know me as a human being." As I said the other night to you, I think he, all of his career, wanted people to truly know him and understand him. And if you did, it made it so much easier to understand what his whole feel was. A lot of people never gave him that privilege of doing it. But he wanted to know. He would ask specific questions of, "What are your local problems?" and "Is the federal government helping?"

And he would really, if he had time, want to spend some time with some of these people and find out what they were thinking.

G: Did people along the way ever argue with him or register some sort of [protest]?

W: They would try. I'm sure there were moments, certainly on the campaign, where he had time to be with them. But in a campaign where you're moving so rapidly, it's not that you wouldn't have, time didn't permit, nor would the people organizing it. It's just an easy way to keep you moving along so you don't really get in an argument.

G: I suppose a successful speaking engagement could change his whole day.

W: Oh, my, no question! And a bad one could also change it. You know, he would build this marvelous momentum when we would go. I thought the trip through Pennsylvania was an example. We started out in a very depressed part of Pennsylvania, the western part. And it was obvious--and I wish I had the diary to tell you towns--but one of our first stops was this small town in the hills of Pennsylvania, a coal-mining area. As we understood it, the only real functioning industry was the needle factory and most of the wives [worked there]. It employed mostly women. You saw men on the streets doing the shopping and all. And as that day moved on, he really worked trying to get these people to understand that he was concerned, that it wasn't just that, "I'm the candidate, and I'm hitting the ground running, and I merely want to say that I will do it." I had a very strong feeling that day that he wanted these people to truly believe that a new administration could help them and that they could go back to work and that their kids could go to school. You know, he just pled.

And certainly in a farming area, where he had a background of knowledge of farming problems, he would appeal, just almost in a pleading way to these people that, "You've got to trust us to help you."

As the day progressed, as I said, on that occasion his momentum built up although it was very tiring and we ran about two hours late everywhere. But if there was a great response and a good crowd and all, well, then he was just bubbling over. But if it wasn't, it could be the reverse situation at times, because he could get very angry about the way the campaign was going. Again, I've said this all along and I think that he would have admitted it, too, when the schedule is set up and they have said, "Yes, I will go there," then nobody but the candidate can really blame. But if he got angry or didn't like where we were, well, then he blamed it on the advance men or the national committee for scheduling him there, and would just give everybody hell for even having been there. I think it was in Missouri when he just said he wasn't going to an engagement. He just told people he wasn't going to show up. Well, he did and made a marvelous speech. But the crowd was, I think, one thing that made him outraged. The crowd was very small, and it was a place that, really at first, he had thought he didn't have to go. But these lists were submitted and he accepted them. But there were times when he really didn't agree that that was true.

G: Did his staffers on these campaign trips ever book him for things against his will?

W: I don't think so. I don't think you could ever have done it. But, again, he had made a commitment to his people on his lists and he filled them,

although at times he said he wasn't going to. I just remember the night in Missouri, gosh, he just said, "I'm not going to the hall. Just tell them I'm not coming." Of course, he did.

G: Who talked him into going?

W: I don't know. I don't know that anyone really talked him into [it]. He just kept prolonging it and raising hell and giving everybody a hard time, and then of course he showed up.

G: How did you respond in these situations?

W: You just stayed quiet. Or I did, because I was not a permanent staff member and I was, as I've explained, merely along as his secretary to do what he wanted me to do, and so I would just keep perfectly quiet and stay out of the way, because it wasn't any of my business. Of course, I didn't like campaigning anyway, so I was perfectly happy if we skipped one of them. You know, you'd have been so glad to have been able to sit down and eat dinner and not eat a hamburger on the road.

G: Yes. On these occasions did his staff members try to hide from him, more or less?

W: Oh, no.

G: They took their medicine?

W: They just took the rap. Again, once you had worked with him and understood him, as I've said, you just let it get over with, and you just stood there and took it. You didn't like it, no one else did, but you had a job to do, and he was doing his job.

G: You didn't argue with him, though?

W: Never. I never did. Now some of the other staff members might have, but I sure never did.

G: It was, I presume, inadvisable.

W: If I felt that I had nothing to do with what he was talking about, I might try to defend myself, which didn't work. (Laughter) It was just that self-survival that you would say, "Well, that's not my problem." And, as I mentioned before, though, he always made up for it.

But, you know, I think he really wished that he could have known every American person. I just can't imagine a man that campaigned more vigorously and truly wanted to know what people thought. As you have found in your research, I don't know of any president who wrote more letters. God! He was incredible. When people write in, they got a reply.

G: I guess the rule of handling his correspondence was one of the number one rules that he had.

W: From the time he ran for Congress they tried to answer daily or at least acknowledge the letter. Judge Thornberry followed that same rule.

G: Did he?

W: In my years with him we went by the same code of ethics that you could answer that constituent letter, and if you couldn't give them the answer, you said, "We acknowledge the letter," and said we were working on it.

G: He had a hard act to follow, didn't he?

W: Yes. But what made our work easy was that Mr. Johnson had set up such a rigid office routine and the Tenth District was used to it. While it was, as you say, a hard act to follow, we knew how to go about it, and

Walter Jenkins was the greatest help for all of us, because he had done that so much for the Tenth District that it was just a godsend to us. On almost any major problem, if you needed help you could just pick up the phone and call Walter or Mildred Stegall or Mildred's husband. Some of the older ones that had been with him through those years would give you [the answer]. Willie Day Taylor, for example, could just almost tell you what to do. My work was cut in half because of their staff. I just never did have to search all this stuff out.

G: Was it often the case that other congressmen or senators would rely on him for stepping up their own procedures or advice along these lines?

W: Oh, I think so, because he had been successful. Also, I think Senate and House members certainly relied on the President when he was majority leader and vice president and president for advice and support and certainly to make them look good in their own districts, which is, you know, part of a fact of life.

G: Let me ask you a few questions about the man rather than the public life. You've mentioned earlier before we were taping that attending church was very much a part of his life, and it was not simply putting in an appearance.

W: Now, whether he went a lot as a young man I don't know, but during my years of being privileged to be with him, I always felt that he enjoyed going to church, and whether he agreed with the minister or not, he at least listened, because he would discuss the sermon later. But I think that he had, again, whether you want to call it a sense of relaxation, or a sense of belonging, whatever you want to name it, that here was a

chance that he could sit quietly for a while and enjoy the music, because I think he thoroughly enjoyed singing in church, not that he sang that much. I just think he enjoyed hearing [it]. I remember in Johnson City one time we all went to the little Christian church. I was reared as a Southern Baptist and read the Bible and I know every hymn by heart. I was just singing up a storm, and all of a sudden I saw him grinning and he leaned over and kidded me about knowing all these hymns. But when he was at church he was an intent listener, and I do know that there was a lot of times when I just thought, "My God, with this sermon going on how can you even sit through it," because I didn't agree with the minister either. But at least it gave him a part of, I think, probably background and feeling of belonging to a society outside of the political world. I know it was interesting that after he became president he even attended much more.

When the President died I was privileged to be sent to Dr. [Herbert] Elliston in helping--I believe that's the minister of the Christian Church where the funeral was held. I'll have to check the name, but I believe that's his name. But he was saying that the President had often conferred and talked and visited with him, which I did not know that he had. And in your interviews, if no one has interviewed him, I think he is one of the [ones you should], because that was one of the ministers in those latter years that did spend time with the President and, obviously, the President admired him greatly. It's certainly a facet that I think only a minister that had spent any time with him would know.

G: Did he have pretty well-defined beliefs?

W: I think the President's beliefs were general, that we all owed certain things to each other to make society comfortable and that there were moral standards that it was part of the church's burden to uphold. I never did hear the President discuss religion particularly with a strong belief one way or the other about any facet of it, and as I say, whether this just comes from background or not. Because, gosh, whether we were at Middleburg or down at the Ranch or Austin, so much of the time he would get up, and we would go to church. Now if there were visitors, he would want to take them and show them around, but a lot of times it was just us. We'd go. And certainly at Middleburg when we were down there just on weekends, there was no reason per se that you would attend church among a strange congregation. He would just get up and go.

G: He would go to a nearby church?

W: We would generally go to the Episcopal church there.

G: On a more worldly plane, he had a fascination with gadgets, I understand.

W: Oh, yes. This was really intriguing to me, this great fascination with all kinds of gadgets and particularly small things, things that he could have on the desk or back of him on the shelves. He was just intrigued by every kind of small gadget, not that the interest lasted that long. But I will say that it was certainly a blessing for people who were looking for small items to give the President, because he always enjoyed the fascination of them. Because he was so generous with you that no matter how small the token, you always kind of wanted to give him something in

return. I just used to be astounded at his attitude or his fascination about some of the weirdest things that people would bring in.

G: Can you recall?

W: No, when you brought that up I was just trying to think of some of the things that you'd find on his desk. But what is just one of the funniest things is that here is a man who is President of the United States and--Juanita [Roberts] and I have laughed about this so much--he had a real hang-up on the toilet paper holder, how awkward the place it had been put. We'd get a fifteen-minute lecture on [how] the guy who installed the toilet paper holder in the john was the torture expert. He would just go into this whole elaborate discussion that you just had to be a contortionist. These are the kinds of things that would just break you up. You'd think the whole world was at your fingers, and then all of a sudden he would take off on one of these subjects. And the pepper mills, there just had to be a pepper mill on the table. My gosh, I have no idea how many pepper mills he'd gotten. I remember Judge and Mrs. Thornberry, one of their gifts was a large [pepper mill], because he would say, "There never was one big enough." There never was a salt shaker big enough, you know.

But I think, again, this is what made him so human, that he did notice details. No one ever knew how much detail he noticed. He observed so much that he just observed and never said anything [about], but if he did say it, you were astounded that he remembered as much detail, about what you had on, say. And, of course, no one appreciated attractive people more than the President did. He dressed well and always

appreciated [others who did]. And certainly, the women that surrounded him, he was extremely generous in wanting them to look as attractive as they could. I always thought it was so interesting when he would take a group to Eddie Senz in New York and pay the bill for all of them to have make-up treatment, and learn how to do make-up. Of course he would remind them that he had spent this money, you know, and therefore to make your face up and look good. He was very generous in giving beautiful clothes, because he did want the people around him to be as attractive as they could and he prided himself [on it]. But I always thought it was so dear, and certainly the women--I know when Mrs. Kellam was living, I think she went one time, and Mary Margaret [Valenti] and Mrs. Thornberry and different ones. Eddie Senz would brief them all--and certainly Mrs. Johnson--on how to do make-up and how to make themselves look lovely and then, of course, buy all the cosmetics that Senz had to do this. If you had time to go through the years, there were a lot of these little things that no one ever knew that he did. Now, the press did pick up the fact that he was very generous on buying sprees with the women here.

G: He seems to have had a fascination, too, with transportation vehicles: cars, boats, helicopters.

W: That is very true, but my memory was that it got him where he wanted to go quickly, because he never could stand to waste a minute. There was something to do all the time. And even if [you] were just going from the LBJ Ranch to Judge [A. W.] Moursund's ranch, the idea was to get there as quickly as you could. Or if you were just going over to the Scharnhorst, well, get there. You know, all the stories about him driving

so rapidly around the Ranch. But he loved running the motorboat on the lake. Once we'd start he would pilot the whole time.

G: Was he able to really enjoy leisure or was he restive?

W: I always felt that the President was restive even at leisure moments because his mind worked constantly, even while he was at leisure. As much as we joked and talked on weekends when I would be privileged to be with him or down at the Ranch, being majority leader and vice president and president, there was always a problem to handle. So a part of it would be feeling out those around him. Whether it was a problem at the Ranch [or whatever], he just always seemed to be doing something. And it wasn't the typical man. His few times to play golf or to swim, even when he was in the swimming pool he would be generally talking to someone. This was very true at The Elms when he had the pool put in there and then at the Ranch. This was a form of relaxation, because his body could relax. But why I was so privileged in those years is that rather than just go and relax alone, he surrounded himself with friends and took us with him. You know, even when he used to go to Mexico, he always took a group. So his relaxation was with his family and friends. But he was always talking about something, or discussing, or stating what he thought about things, or summarizing the week. But I never did see him just, quote, "relax" like the average person does. That wasn't his type of relaxation.

G: Anything else on this score?

W: No, I really can't think of anything to pinpoint. You know, what I had said earlier, though, about him wanting to share. This always was very

dear to me, that he shared with his older friends who had helped him or knew him early in life. I know in the 1960 campaign we arrived in Sacramento, California and he had his first schoolteacher who lived there to come and spend the day with us. Then I believe he also had her when he signed the education bill, if I'm not mistaken. I'm not sure about that.

G: I think her name was Kate [Deadrich] Loney.

W: Yes, that's right. Then of course he had her to the White House. But, you know, through all these years, whether it was in a campaign or at the White House or around the Capitol, you kept meeting people that had had some influence or some contact in his early life, and he never forgot them. And he made an effort, a great effort, to track them down and to invite them or to see that they got to share part of the glory that had come to him.

G: He, I guess, moved into The Elms about 1961 or 1962?

W: 1961. Now if my memory serves me right, we were on the trip around the world, and as I recall we were in the Philippines when he was on the phone talking to Walter [Jenkins], and whether they made the commitment to purchase The Elms or not, it was part of the discussion. I just happened to be in the bedroom when they were talking. I think they moved into The Elms the end of that year. I'm not exactly sure when it was, but certainly right around [then]. I think it was in 1961. Then I think he had the pool built.

I think he and Mrs. Johnson enjoyed the house very much, because the house on 32nd was a small house and I could see even in the Senate years the crowd continued to grow.

Gosh, I never ceased to amaze at how Mrs. Johnson and Zephyr [Wright] could handle the people he invited to dinner. You would start out with six and you would end up with twenty-six. One night at The Elms I was invited to dinner, and I got there, and as I recall there were going to be only eight of us, and by the time we went to the table there was something like twenty-one! He just kept getting on the phone. I never will forget--and I've mentioned this to Mrs. Johnson--that Zephyr had been through this so many times that she was prepared. There were frozen casseroles, and she had a way of changing things and adding [to them]. Mrs. Johnson would keep going to the kitchen and saying, "Well, now, instead of eight there are going to be eighteen." And there never was any flap. I'm sure Zephyr could have hit him up the side of the head at times for doing this, but she always rallied to the cause in a very quiet way, and Mrs. Johnson never let it bother her.

But the amount of preparation in that household, certainly at The Elms with that large kitchen and facilities, was the most incredible thing to me, that they could just constantly change menus and switch around. You know, the table would be set and we were all going to be served, and then all of a sudden we'd be at a buffet. But they could just handle it, and I think they thoroughly enjoyed that house because they certainly entertained a lot, and as I mentioned to you before, I was privileged to go to dinner fourteen nights in a row. I'm sure Mrs.

Johnson just thought it would be heaven not to have me sitting at the table one night. But as I've said, on every occasion he enjoyed having friends around, and when you were privileged to be a friend, he would have been happy for you to be around all the time.

G: He didn't realize perhaps that his friends had separate identities, that they had separate lives.

W: Well, you know, as I've mentioned before, there were times when he just couldn't understand why you weren't happy to just spend the day with him or the evening with him, or why you would want to do something else. "We're having a good time." Also, it was a real tearing thing for you to be invited when you had a prior commitment, because you realized what a privilege it was to be with him and Mrs. Johnson through all the years. So it did cause a moment of hesitation when you had to say no.

G: It wasn't easy to say no to him.

W: It wasn't easy to say no to the President because if he wanted you to go, he'd made the decision he wanted your company, and then I won't say that he was really hurt, but he acted hurt that you had refused.

G: Was he persistent, too?

W: Oh, yes. Very muchly so. I don't know whether I have said this or not, but some friends were giving a dinner in my honor, and the President wanted me to come to dinner. I told him that I couldn't, that these people were giving this dinner, and they'd let me pick the date and pick the guest list, and he said, "Oh, just tell him you'll come next Saturday." You know, anyone else would have just said, "Well, if you can't come,

forget it." But he could be very persistent about an invitation, and you were just so stunned that he would even care, that he would even want you that badly to come.

As you know, the children who were named for him, he generally gave them a calf from the farm and then we ran into one little boy that had built quite a herd from that.

G: Really?

W: I've always wondered how many of these kids ever knew him. Certainly the staff members' children that were named for him knew him. But I've always thought, gosh, the kind of strange mark in history, that you were named for a man who became president who gave you a living gift that could help you later in life, and I've always been curious to know how many of these children there are and did they ever know him.

But as I've mentioned and I'll repeat again, he was so pleased when you said thank you. I've never known anyone that seemed to appreciate [it more], whether it was a note or [whatever]. You didn't have to give the President a gift. He always seemed to appreciate anything and expressed it, but he just seemed to be so grateful to anyone who said thank you in any form to him, because he did for so many people who didn't say thank you. I just think that, whether it's through oral history, or people being interviewed, or written history, it's going to prove how truly sensitive this man was to people's feelings. A lot of times we didn't think he was, but he certainly rallied when he felt that you needed him.

G: He was, I've heard, a great practical joker, too.

W: That was, I understand, more so early in his [life]. Bill White, the columnist, told the story about their early life, when Mr. Kellam, when they were all young. But later on, practical jokes, I could not name one specifically that he pulled. But as I've mentioned, he loved to tell tales, you know, make up a story and exaggerate it and joke and kid. Gosh, I just think of the girls and what they went through about their dates. He would start kidding one of the girls. When Mary Margaret [Wiley Valenti] was first dating, or whether it was Marie [Fehmer] or somebody else, he went into great elaboration about the date, and kidding them about it and where they were going and what they were doing. But, as I've mentioned, I think he really felt such a fatherly attitude toward everybody on the staff. It was unbelievable how much attention he paid to what you were doing, and you know if he didn't feel that way he never would have kidded you about some of the things. But I don't suppose that any of us ever had a problem and we went to him that he didn't help solve it and stand by you when you needed him.

The tremendous regret--not for us, for history--is that the years of retirement were not years where he had listeners nearby that truly understood, so that he didn't have to brief you on what he was going to say, that he could just start talking. In other words, I've always felt that had he retired and stayed here where he could have been around people that had been a part of it, or, say, that if he had been at the Library more when people were coming that would talk and discuss, because just in my own experience in visiting with him, when he would start talking, it was

just the most unbelievable relevation of his entire summary of life and politics. I don't know whether I mentioned to you we were riding horseback one day, and he gave me a marvelous dissertation on why he thought the various governors of Texas were good or bad, and the detailed knowledge he had on them [was amazing]. One of the most stunning things he told me [was] that Huey Long was way ahead of his time, that Huey Long was proven to be a very good governor and intelligent man in spite of his poor education, but that he was way ahead of his time.

G: I believe he used to go as a page or as an employee of Congressman [Richard] Kleberg and listen to Huey Long's speeches from the galleries.

W: It was when he would have been secretary.

I wish I could tell you who would know, but he helped organize--they might have been organized, but he really put it on the map. We had clubs on the Hill. I don't know whether they even exist any more, but they were very strong in those early years, [clubs] of the donkeys and the elephants. We were called the Burros Club. He became president of that club--and ran for it and worked in that just like he did running for president of the country. It was an influential group, because it was made up of Democratic male assistants. But he was just as strong in that election as he was in his own elections later in life, and the men who worked with him during that period had great memories of it.

G: Do you think he saw himself the way that those around him saw him? His own self-concept as a person in public life, was he happy with [it]?

W: Oh, I just can't think of anyone that was happier in public life than this man, because I think he was doing what he wanted to do. But I think

more than that, he was doing what he thought he should do, that he did have something to offer the country and could be of help and I think he thoroughly enjoyed public life. And I hope that he felt--and I really believe he did, because he was so pleased with the results of his work on education and labor and health and things like this--that he did make a contribution to the nation that the people approved and appreciated. I think certainly he was frustrated that he did not get to accomplish all, and the Vietnam War was a tragedy that if it hadn't happened, he certainly would have been in the White House another term.

G: Do you think he felt in retrospect that he would have done things differently in Vietnam?

W: That I can't answer, because what I've always said to anyone answering about the President's position on anything dealing with the military, you aren't privileged to know, as we're finding out, what the basis of the decisions were, because it was privileged material. It didn't matter how close you were, the President and certain leaders were the only ones who knew what the information was. So whether he would have done things differently I don't know. Certainly in retrospect when history was put down I think he would have, and maybe he would not have listened as intently as some to his advisers on that program. But I think when we start to ever say, on military matters or State Department matters, we're never privileged to know what the man himself knew, because most of it was classified material. I do know that even I felt at times and the public [felt that], "Why would a president, whether it was Mr. Johnson or Kennedy

or Mr. Nixon, do that," and then you just stopped and thought, "Well, if you knew really what they knew you might have done the same thing."

G: I was just wondering if in retirement he expressed any regrets as to the decisions he made there.

W: Not to me, because I was not privileged to be with him that much. The week that I spent--I think it was the year before President Johnson died, in the spring I believe--was just such a delightful week. That's when he asked me to come and we worked on--he was having a room added to the [Dale] Malechek house at the Ranch for them. It was fun, because he was involved in the construction and picking out everything to go in it, and it was just a glorious week for me because every waking moment almost he spent in just telling stories, some about legislation and some about, as I've mentioned, giving me a run-down on Texas governors. It was all a very pleasant week and, no, I don't remember one strained moment in that period.

G: I believe you had another anecdote concerning that week where you were on horseback.

W: Oh, we were riding and that morning he'd gotten up and said that he was so irritated that the Secret Service were always reminding him that he was going to get killed. He said, "You know, everything I do I'm reminded I may have a problem." It was just something that obviously set him off. We were riding along the Pedernales in front of the Ranch and the cars [were there] which stopped every day over on the road, to look. He said, "Well, just for example, look over there." There were five or ten cars sitting over there. "Any one of them could have a rifle and could

just pick me off right now. You know I just can't live this way, with being afraid." And I was riding on the outside between him and these cars, so I just said, "Well, in view of what you've said, Mr. President, I think I'll rein in and come on the inside." And I'm not sure he thought it was as funny as I did.

But he really could just be so funny on personal things. I was visiting with Mrs. Johnson one time, and she and I were walking and something reminded us both of one of his funny talks, kidding us. We both just automatically laughed about it and I said, "If you-know-who was here, we'd both hear about this." And there have been other times when she herself would, in such a kind, sweet way, bring up the subject of something that would remind her of a joke that he would tell or something funny that he said, and certainly if it were a story on one of us that he loved telling.

G: Can you recall the story that you were making reference to in the particular case you were just talking about?

W: No, it was just something [where] she and I were walking along and talking about him and she made this statement, and it was just automatic that it was the point that we both knew. I really regret that I can't pinpoint some of the things.

G: Do you recall the first time that you had contact with him after he became president, after the assassination?

W: Oh, yes, very definitely. Judge Thornberry was living with me then. Mrs. Thornberry and the children had already moved to El Paso for him to go on the court, and the Judge had moved in with me. I watched the

plane land and [saw] them get off the plane, and the President make his statement. The next morning, as I recall, at seven, the phone rang and it was Mr. Johnson, the President of the United States, and if you don't think that'll send goose pimples up your back, that here is your first time that you've had a phone call from a president. Then the first time to be with him was on Sunday. He and Mrs. Johnson and Judge Thornberry asked me to go to church with them at St. Marks. So that was my first time to be in his presence as president.

G: But that was what he'd called about?

W: No, he'd called Judge Thornberry up to talk, because they were in the preparations of the transition and the funeral then. But we did attend church with President and Mrs. Johnson, and as we were leaving the church is when the Secret Service walked up and told him that [Jack] Ruby had shot [Lee Harvey] Oswald. And that was just, again, another stunning blow. He reacted.

G: What was [his reaction]?

W: Total surprise and a frown on his face, you know, that "Is this building a story of some conspiracy?" Whatever his thought was, I'm certainly not privileged [to know], but you could tell that it disturbed him greatly. We went from the church to the cemetary, to President Kennedy's grave--this was on a Sunday--and then we went back to the Mansion in the president's office and stayed for a while. And that was my first [meeting with him as president].

G: Did he discuss that in the car, the Oswald-Ruby [shooting]?

W: Yes, you know, "my goodness, what brought it on?"

Tape 2 of 2

G: He was briefed back at the White House, back at the Mansion?

W: Oh, I assume that that's when they briefed him.

G: You left, though, I take it.

W: I stayed just for a while. I remember he ordered some soup over to the Oval Office and then we left. But I'm sure even in that interim period he was immediately briefed on what the circumstances were, or as we were leaving church and going to the car I'm sure that immediately the Secret Service gave him a quick run-down as to what [had happened]. I remember as we stepped outside the church is when he was told of this.

G: Did you see much of him in those early days as he was moving into the White House?

W: I was asked by President Johnson and Juanita Roberts to come immediately on Monday when they set up their offices and work for two weeks in the office, merely as a help to Juanita and to help him when he needed it. [As] I've just said to anyone that ever asked, no one has any conception of the strain this man was put under during that immediate transition because, one, he was receiving all the heads of state who had come to the funeral, plus, it seemed to me every time the phone rang it was some crisis. You could almost spend the day cataloging crises. Again, what I never understood is how this man's mind could keep so much going and be so accurate on each instance. You know, the buzzer would buzz, and the phones would ring, and there just wasn't time to catch your breath during

that two-week period because none of us knew about the office. The great blessing which Mr. Nixon's staff had was that Mr. Johnson gave instructions to his staff that at least one of them was to call the person on Mr. Nixon's staff who was taking the job from his staff member and to spend some time and brief them. Mrs. [Evelyn] Lincoln just had to turn over to Juanita things, whereas Rosemary Woods had time with Juanita on being briefed about the subject. We couldn't even find the stationery! It was just so quick, no one had time to find anything, and all of a sudden, here we were, a new group. When I say "we," I just happened to be privileged to be there. Mr. Johnson made a great effort at the end of his time that his staff prepare the incoming staff to the routine, which was certainly the first time in history that had ever been done.

G: Did you sense a resentment among some of the Kennedy aides who remained in the White House?

W: I won't say resentment, because their jobs were saved by this kind and sympathetic man who gave them a chance to stay on. They had lost their leader in a very instantaneous, tragic manner, and Mr. Johnson felt very badly about it. He gave so many of them the privilege to stay. I don't think it was a resentment openly, I just think a lot of them showed their resentment later on in things that were said and articles written and statements to the press. They certainly were not. . . .

G: Was there a time after he had been in office a few months when he began to relax a bit and feel comfortable in the office?

W: Oh, I think that once the tragedy of the assassination was over, and we settled down again, that once the President got in stride the tremendous

responsibilities and duties and worked out a schedule, then he settled down and enjoyed the office very much. And he thoroughly, as we all know, enjoyed entertaining. If there was a friend that could afford to come or that he could afford to get up here from anywhere, he wanted all of us to share in that experience, whether it was at a dinner or just being at the White House at receptions. He was so marvelous about, if there was a picture taken with anybody, of having a copy made, and he would autograph it and send it, which is certainly a memorable treasure for anyone.

But he thoroughly enjoyed the social functions at the White House because he saw you enjoy them, or the people there enjoy them. And, as I said, he loved to dance. Back in the Senate majority leader days he used to take us about once a month to the Shoreham. There was a pretty small room there. We could go for dinner and dancing. And I even had a group to my home and he came. Then when President Kennedy and Vice President Johnson were elected a group formed a dance club called the Potomac Marching Society so that they could all get together and dance, those who liked to dance, and the press were not allowed to join. I was privileged to be asked and it was great fun, because he and Mrs. Johnson would come. You'd just have dinner and dancing among friends and we'd do the Paul Jones and, gosh, I don't think he sat out a dance.

G: Where were the dances held?

W: They were held at the Women's Democratic Club. It was just a great family and it kept up. It's still going. Now, I did not join last year because I was going to be out of town two of the

dances. Even Vice President Humphrey joined, they were members. Gosh we just had an incredibly good time. But again, you were among friends and you could have a drink and dance and laugh and giggle and it wouldn't all be written up. He just seemed to be so delighted when he had time at the White House to show people around.

G: Can you recall him giving you a tour of the White House?

W: Just walking with him, you know, during the first few weeks, going in the Cabinet Room, for instance and walking around the halls some. It was very exciting. He did not give me a tour per se at all. But I think he thoroughly enjoyed the House itself, the privileges that it offered him. But again, as I said, the enjoyment was knowing he was sharing it with everybody, because, gosh, I don't know that anyone has entertained any more people at the White House than he and Mrs. Johnson did. I think the statistics show that's true, but I'm not sure.

G: Anything else on your mind?

W: No, other than I can never talk about President Johnson without talking or wanting to almost say equally as much about Mrs. Johnson, although I was not with her privately as much. But the devotion between the two [of them] and how much he did rely on her for advice and would listen--and he would lecture Mrs. Johnson just like he did a staff member if he were irritated by something said or done that didn't please him. But I think he truly appreciated her advice as being well thought out, and if she disagreed with him that she would say so. But it was a delight through my years to watch the relationship, to observe it and be privileged to

hear the two of them discuss things, whether it was a problem with Luci and Lynda, or the house or a political situation or a person.

I was so pleased to have been along during the majority leader [years] when Bobby Baker was the secretary to the Senate and was so active. He was such an incredibly hard-working man--just like Mr. Johnson--that I think, again, that's why those two got along. He was always available; he did his homework; he counted his votes and was right there at all times. I think Mr. Johnson appreciated the effort that Bobby put in, and I'm just deeply regretful for the situation that happened in regard to Bobby, because I think the President still considered him a very good friend. And I felt so pleased to know that Mr. Johnson invited Bobby and Dorothy to the Ranch after he came out of prison. It was very touching, because I went out to have dinner with Bobby after that, and he told me what it meant to him to go. It was great fun during the first months after Bobby came home to hear him tell jovial accountings of the President, and the things that they'd done and the people involved, and when he'd get mad and so forth. But Bobby gave such a delightful viewpoint on this human being, and I'm very anxious--he has supposedly sold rights to a book--to read the book to see what his accountings are of that period of history, because this young man certainly had a tremendous amount of power.

[End of Tape 2 of 2 and Interview II]

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