INTERVIEW I

DATE: March 14, 1975

INTERVIEWEE: JOHN WILDENTHAL

INTERVIEWER: MICHAEL L. GILLETTE

PLACE: Mr. Wildenthal's office, Houston, Texas

Tape 1 of 1

G: Mr. Wildenthal, why don't we begin by tracing your background very briefly and telling how you went to work for Lyndon Johnson. You are from Cotulla, you said.

W: Yes. I was born in Cotulla, Texas, November 10, 1922. I was attending the University of Texas Law School in Austin and working downtown with the law firm of Powell, Wirtz, and Rauhut. John Connally came back as a member of the firm during my senior year in law school. When I finished in August, had my license in July, I let it be known I was considering moving to Houston, so Connally said, "Well, if you're not going to stay here and work for the firm, why don't you go to Washington to work for Senator Johnson?" After an interview with the Senator when he was back in Austin, I did on October 15, 1950, go to Washington in a Wesley West [plane]. It picked up the Senator, several staff members who were in Austin; then stopped in Dallas or Fort Worth, picked up Walter [Jenkins]. The West plane was carrying an employee of his over to Johns Hopkins for medical attention and took the Senator's party on the way.

G: Did you have any contact with Lyndon Johnson before you went to work for him, while you were in that law firm?

W: No, I had not met him personally until the interview, as I recall. He had lived in Cotulla when I was about six years old. My aunt had taught school with him. My uncle at San Marcos at the state teachers college had been a friend ever since college days. I just don't recall, though, that I had ever had occasion to lay eyes on him, except possibly in public appearances he made as congressman while I was on the campus at the University of Texas. I believe I did see him once or twice, but I had made no effort to get acquainted with him.

G: What about Senator Wirtz? He was still alive then.

W: Yes, indeed. Yes, indeed. John Connally came back to work with Senator Wirtz, primarily, of the three partners of Powell, Wirtz, and Rauhut. Senator Wirtz brought him back. Senator Wirtz, of course, had been under secretary of interior, or some sub-cabinet post, and instrumental in getting the [Lower] Colorado River Authority established, handling that legislation.

G: What was he like as a person?

W: A very cheerful, ideal type of state senator who's going to be willing to meet people and talk to people regularly, but one who worked fast, got it done. [He had a] ready smile. I remember going out to his house and admiring the beautiful home that he had. His face lit up, and he said how much he had enjoyed it. He seemed to be not just proud of his possessions, but enjoying life, enjoying a home and enjoying his work.

G: Was he a good lawyer, do you think?

W: Yes. All of those three law partners were outstanding lawyers. I would guess that Senator Wirtz was more of a politician than the others,

although Judge Powell had been on the [Texas] Supreme Court, and that takes a little bit of political sense to be able to be a Supreme Court justice. In comparison, I would characterize him [Wirtz] as more public policy-oriented rather than plodding in a law practice. He was interested in what was going on in the world and what impact he could have on it.

G: Did you know anything about his friendship with LBJ then?

W: Well, I had just picked up I don't know how much at the time. I found out at the law firm that Senator Wirtz was one of the strong people in carrying the ball on the congressional campaigns of Lyndon Johnson, and I suppose something of a mentor. As a congressman he [Johnson] had other bases of support, I know, but I don't think any stronger than Senator Wirtz over the entire congressional [district]. But that would be hearsay by the time I got there because he was already in the Senate.

G: Can you describe your first meeting with Lyndon Johnson?

W: Yes. He asked me how many letters I could write a day, and if I thought I could write as many as twenty letters a day in handling his mail. I was employed as a secretary, briefing clerk and so forth at the law firm, was a competent typist, could take dictation but almost never did. He said that the job would be just principally answering his mail for him and submitting letters to see if he approved of them, and he would sign them, which is what I had been doing at the law firm. They would just say, "You answer this."

G: Was this interview in Washington?

W: No, this was an interview in Austin, back there in the Powell, Wirtz, and Rauhut offices, very brief, like ten minutes.

G: Did you get the feeling that they were looking for someone, they had a position they wanted to fill?

W: Well, it was a constant manpower requirement to keep Lyndon Johnson's staff filled with competent people. He knew my family, and he didn't have to take a whole lot of time checking because my father had been chief deputy sheriff when he was there teaching school in Cotulla twenty-one or twenty-two years earlier.

G: Did he make any observations?

W: Oh, he mentioned my family and that he knew I had to be good folks to be a member of the Wildenthal clan, or however he expressed it.

G: What were your first impressions of him, can you recall?

W: My first impression was that of a rather shrewd, calculating type of personality, which I emulated and admired. I since personally have attempted to be a little more spontaneous and a little less of the calculating type in my own life. The wheels were turning in his brain at all times, and anybody who didn't think so was being misled.

G: What happened after you went to work for him?

W: We got off the plane in Washington. John Connally also recruited Edward A. Cazares, C-A-Z-A-R-E-S, who is now first assistant city attorney of Houston. Ed and I had not met before. Ed had graduated with a business administration degree. The two of us went to work on the same kind of staff assignment, although we did different things. Johnson told us he wanted us to live in the basement of the Dodge Hotel, which is where he

lived when he was working for Congressman Kleberg, and that a room was not available at that moment but would be during the week and we should stay at his house. Lady Bird was gone, and he would bring us to work each morning with him until he could get us established in a basement room at the Dodge. We did, and we spent two or three nights out there and rode to town with him. He was going over the newspaper. He told me, "Now, John, if you want to amount to something up here you will read the New York Times, the Congressional Record, and the Washington Post every day."

G: Did he do that?

W: I think he fairly well did, or had them read for him. He had Ed and me at the Dodge so that we could be available. He hated to have his office closed day or night. He liked to have somebody there manning the telephones in case something happened, and at the slightest excuse would hold people there late or have them back on Saturdays and Sundays. In those days Western Union was working well, and you would get telegrams delivered [at] all hours. He wanted them picked up instantly and conveyed to him. We had the assignment on several occasions of monitoring Drew Pearson when Johnson himself could not hear the Pearson broadcast at six something or seven something [o'clock], Sunday evening. We were to take notes on anything that had to do with Washington politics. Pearson had a tremendous following of people who were interested in Washington politics, and his exposés were substantial and were causing congressmen to be indicted and affecting the fate of politics. So Johnson kept up

with everything in great detail that might bear on the course of public affairs in Washington.

G: Did he feel that Pearson's broadcasts were pretty accurate?

W: I don't think that he ever expressed himself on this. How I would guess [is] when somebody had just deliberately done something sloppy or made a dumb mistake or a vicious mistake, he would express himself over that kind of thing. The degree of reliability didn't much matter because Pearson was a newsmaker himself. It was important because Pearson said it, regardless of whether he had gotten his facts straight.

G: Was LBJ a source of information himself for Drew Pearson?

W: I doubt it. I had no indication.

G: You don't remember him giving Pearson information?

W: Not through any way that I found out. I was very much interested to learn the press release methods that were in use in Washington at the time, and I suppose still are, where copies of speeches would be delivered much in advance with the extracts already predigested into a news story form with the things lifted out so that the lazy ones wouldn't have to bother to write up a new story. They also had some hope that it would influence the hard-working ones to pay attention to the points that the newsmaker wanted to feature. I think that he did try to work with individual members of the press and win their individual friendship from time to time and tried to promote himself, but I am not aware that he ever trusted Drew Pearson with any kind of personal attention. I would guess that he would have been afraid that Pearson might have taken something out of context and used it in a way that might have embarrassed the

Senator. I would imagine he probably would have avoided contact, the more I think about it.

G: What else do you recall about those first days that you spent there working for him?

W: The whole time that I worked there, he treated me like a constituent rather than like an employee. There were too many Wildenthals that were too active politically, I guess, for him ever to feel really comfortable with me. I think he felt that if he offended me I might get in a huff and go home and cost him some votes. I think later that he felt more comfortable with me after I was back in Texas, although I saw very little of him during his subsequent career. There remained a very high regard and a mutual one. He would call on me on a few occasions, politically. He would let off steam with people he could trust, friends and employees, that he wouldn't let off in public. He was always conscious of his image, and behind closed doors, when it just got where he couldn't stand it, he would just cuss a blue streak and lay into whoever.

He never laid into the bearer of bad news. I didn't see that trait at all. He just didn't have much patience with people doing dumb things, particularly if they were working for him. So his smartest and his best talent, like Walter Jenkins and later George Reedy--George went to work for him in 1951--he would just treat like an old shoe and abuse them in the eyes of a stranger looking on. An outsider would not understand why anybody would put up with the way that he would berate one or another of them over things that had gone wrong, sometimes through no control of theirs, perhaps. But they understood it. I felt that they always did,

and that he needed the outlet and that that was the proper place for the outlet, with friends and people that he had confidence in.

On policy matters, I was assigned to handle the correspondence that came in on the excess profits tax at one point. I did a one-page memo to the Senator suggesting that he consider changing his position on the excess profits tax, that it was such an expensive and useless thing because the base period following World War II would have been a period where companies that were going to tool up and really try to put a great product in the field would be spending some development money and not be making as much profit as those who were cashing in on the postwar boom and getting to the market the cheapest, the quickest, the shoddiest thing, and making the quickest profit. The bad guys that were just profiteering on the short range would have the highest profit records. The burden of the tax was such that it would handicap new enterprise. It would handicap those who were conscientious and new enterprises that were going to supply the new needs of the Korean War period. I felt that organized labor might have been for it, perhaps not consciously but as an incidental by-product that the companies they had already unionized would have a good profit base and would be protected, and the new companies that they might not have already organized would be handicapped with the burden of paying excess profits taxes.

Anyhow, I just put a one-page memo in on his desk. There were a couple of other points I made, as I recall, I don't know which. But either late that night or the next day, he said, "John, I read your memo. I agree with what you said, but coming out against the excess

profits tax would be like coming out for gangsters." He firmed up in my mind an opinion of his being an intensely practical, goal-oriented type person who was very much interested in principles and consistency but not where it was a waste of time, where there would be no fruits, either immediate or long range. He was not just the results-oriented guy who pays no attention to principle, is criticized for sacrificing long-range purposes and honorableness in order to achieve short-range goals.

But I felt that he recognized the necessity of dealing in complete honesty with the public and with individual senators. Had he not been completely honest, he would never have achieved through the fifties all the unanimous or near-unanimous votes on controversial issues that he got out of the senators. Every senator understood him, and he understood them. Later, in the sixties, I felt the communications difficulties that he had and the so-called credibility gap was based on the level of communication at which he communicated. It was intensely practical, results-oriented. People began to feel that he would just say whatever was necessary for the results he wanted at the moment. I think historians will see the consistency that ran through and the very carefulness of not making the kind of sacrifice that ordinarily goes with a credibility gap. I think the credibility gap was the fate of changing times.

(Interruption)

G: Do you recall any incident where he did something that was politically unwise in order to advance something that he believed in as a matter of principle?

W: Yes. Oh, I don't think that it was politically unwise. I think it's a question of choices. He let me answer all his mail when he was advocating universal military training. He was for U.M.T. because of the experience of the youth who were involved in World War II. A lot of kids who never had a chance to do anything but some kind of hopeless manual labor were taken out and were given a chance to see the world elsewhere in the United States, were given an education. What going to college does for most people who get to go to college is mainly the experience of learning to be on their own and learning to get out from under the family and set a life of your own. He saw that a healthy military training kind of thing like the Swiss have would have tremendous educational by-products, and people would get their teeth fixed and get little medical problems solved and would get an independence. So he really fought for it for lots of reasons.

He let me write up to one-page letters with very little margins answering on the merits. Occasionally that would make people angry, but occasionally they would say, "I'm so thankful not to get one of your 'thank you for your views' letters. I disagree with you, but I respect you for telling me what you believe and why you believe in universal military training." He had preachers, particularly Baptist ministers, and he had a lot of pacifist-oriented types that gave him a considerable amount of mail on that. He just told them foursquare where he stood.

I saw him pop off one time. It was just a very rare kind of thing, some piece of hate mail that he got from somebody up in North Texas. For a while I guess I could have remembered the name of the town. He knew of

this fellow or knew something about him. I don't suppose they had ever met. Maybe they had met. But this guy wrote him a particularly insulting piece of mail. The only time I was aware that he ever did such a thing was to write back a letter which I trust is still in the files. I don't know of anything that was ever thrown away deliberately. I don't know of anything ever thrown away, period, accidentally or deliberately. He wrote back to the effect that, "Your letter does not deserve a reply, but you deserve a punch in the nose, which I am prepared to deliver you the next time we meet." (Laughter) I think that letter was mailed.

As far as unpolitic things are concerned, there was very little of letting down the guard with people that he didn't feel like merited the confidence of letting down the guard with them. That doesn't mean that he deliberately misled people, but he recognized the limitations of his ability to educate everybody in the world. So he would communicate with people in complete honesty on the point that he was communicating with them about, and finesse on the rest of the subjects. I believe it was a question of candor, if you define candor to mean going ahead and saying a bunch of things that are not in point on the discussion but that somebody might be forming some impressions about, and therefore you go out of your way to correct the misapprehensions or misimpressions they might have about your views. He did not go out of his way to educate people unless he cared about them personally, and then he would go the extra mile. But in dealing with people, he would answer their questions, and everyone came away being surprised at how frank he was with them. That was my impression--you know, these everybody generalizations. I was around

there for sixteen months and saw people continually afterward that dealt with him. He communicated at a different level.

I'll skip ahead to when I went to work for Will Wilson as assistant attorney general while Will was [attorney general] in 1959, 1960, and 1961. Will and Jim Ludlum had stopped by to see the Senator earlier in 1959. The presidential boomlet was already on its way. I have never told Will this yet, and I intend to tell him some day. I still see Will and still do some work with him once in a while. Johnson started off with Will and Jim Ludlum both about how unqualified he was. He told them he had had the heart attack, and he was from the South, and the burdens of the office were probably such that he couldn't live up to them. I could see what in common parlance would be called fishing for compliments. He's not sure that Will really feels that he should be president, and he's putting his negative foot out there. In substance I don't know what Will and Jim said, but they came home mistakenly convinced that he did not want the office and was not a candidate and did not consider himself qualified.

I felt at the time that he really needed to be reassured by people. This was not just a put-on like fishing for compliments. Anybody with the kind of ego that he displayed, with the LBJ initials all over everything, of course is a guy who considers himself starting against tremendous handicaps, who is painfully aware of these handicaps, who wants to achieve greatness, and who needs to be reassured and supported sympathetically but wants it honest. He didn't want to start off a discussion with anybody saying, "Don't you think I would make a good president?" and coaxing them into saying it. If anybody felt that he would make a good

president, he wanted to be sure that they were saying it from conviction and not from his having fished a compliment out of them by positive fishing rather than by this negative fishing. I guess you could say that he wasn't candid with Will and Jim Ludlum about his ambition, because they came away impressed that he didn't have it. But I felt that it wasn't a question of candidness about his ambition, but that he was really dealing with self-doubt.

G: Do you think the principal doubt involved the fact that he was a southerner, or possibly his health?

W: It's hard to say with anybody who grapples with life the way he did. It's just like a worrier. He was not a worrier. But if you have somebody who has learned to worry and whose state of health is such that they give themselves to worry and strain, they are going to find something to worry about, and it's going to be reasonably logical. Sometimes you have to pay attention to the worriers, because in their acute sensitivity over wanting to worry they may have found something really worth worrying about. But whether or not there is something worth worrying about, they are going to worry.

Anybody that is driven with that kind of ego, I'm proud of him and very grateful for him, because he also had with his self-doubts the determination to go all the way and do everything he could to make a mark for humanity in the world. He saw this from the beginning, was considered by a lot of people in Cotulla as an upstart, a young, egotistically know-it-all kind, very unpleasant, a bore to be around. That was the impression of a substantial number [of people]. But he was just determined to be

president of the United States and to do his part to save the world, do as much toward saving the world as Franklin Roosevelt had done toward saving this country and saving civilization.

G: Do you think this was the case as early as 1950, 1951?

W: I think it was the case as early as 1928.

G: What did he do during the early fifties while you were there that led you to believe that he had presidential ambitions?

W: Where else do you go with intensive ambition when you are devoting twenty-four hours a day to public policy? As an American, where else do you go? I don't guess he ever went to a movie. He may have, but he did go to some baseball games. He never went to a baseball game but what it had a political purpose; politics was the talk, and the people he was with had something to do with politics. Not that he didn't relax and enjoy those people to a great extent. But I've worked with other goal-oriented people, and they are hard to work with. I am not a goal-oriented person. I am learning to be here in my second fifty years on the planet. I am relationship-oriented, but I have great respect for goal-oriented people. I have distaste for a few, but most of them I genuinely admire and don't want to make some of the mistakes that I see them making. For example, I wouldn't stay and work with him because I could see the way he drove himself. He never required of his employees as much devotion to a job as he gave himself, but I didn't even want to give 80 per cent, because I wanted to give more personal attention to my children, my family.

I can go around the clock for weeks on end when I have a political campaign or I have a law client, but I could see that staying with him

would be going around the clock fifty-two weeks a year and leaving your phone number where you could be reached when you were on vacation. I think the government and business enterprises and particular programs and activities that human beings are fed by need that kind of goal-oriented devotion. I expect to find some goals and devote that kind of thing myself, but I did not want to latch on to him and devote the rest of my life to his goals at that level of devotion, like Walter and some of the others did.

G: When he would go to a baseball game and it would have a political significance to the people he would go with, who did he generally go to these types of affairs with?

W: Oh, I wasn't around that much, for a while I guess George and Herman Brown, probably George Brown of the two. I don't know. There are others that would know a lot more about who his cronies were from time to time.

G: How about other senators? Who were his close friends among the other senators?

W: Ed Cazares would probably know more about that than I would. He had special relationships, very firm relationships, with every senator, but whether those relationships included just palling around or going to a baseball game--when I say go to a baseball game, how many did he ever go to, five in his life, maybe, fifteen? I don't know.

G: Did you see any firsthand of his relationship with Senator Russell?

W: Yes, because I moved over on to the Armed Forces Committee staff after a few months on his office staff. I was attorney for the Senate Preparedness Subcommittee. I feel that he checked out everything. One of the first

people he would check with would be Senator Russell. Probably the very first would be Sam Rayburn, I felt like. Chronologically I don't know that I was that close to the inner office. I was for some months in the next office, right across the desk from Walter, when Warren Woodward was there and Mary Rather was sort of the appointments secretary. For a while Dorothy Nichols was. Of course, Dorothy and Mary Rather and Walter and Warren Woodward would know, Warren Woodward particularly and later Jake Jacobsen in the White House years. There are others that would have observed that kind of thing and would know more. I wasn't around him at all during the vice presidential or presidential years. I saw him and had brief conversations at civic events. I took Will Wilson out to see him one time in 1959 when Will wanted to visit with him and did not want his own car recognized out there.

G: Was this at the Ranch?

W: At the Ranch. So I drove Will out there and back in my little old 1955 Chevrolet. The three of us visited a few minutes, and then I excused myself and let him and Will talk at length.

Oh, let me insert: one politically significant understanding of him emerged from that brief conversation, and this was the fact that he dealt with the sudden emergence of W. Lee O'Daniel into politics. I don't know how the subject came up, but the point he made was that W. Lee O'Daniel had won his way into the hearts of the people of Texas through selling flour over radio at the prime noon-time, when everybody religiously would go in from store and office and out of the field at straight-up twelve to eat. The Texas state network had become the vehicle

through which W. Lee O'Daniel had become a political personality as a result of holding the Bible in one hand and the Constitution of the United States in the other hand in order to sell flour. The same image that he projected there of the Constitution and the Bible was easily translatable into political currency of confidence in the voting booth.

He didn't say this, but it was very plain to me that that was why he risked his wife's and his, mostly his wife's, money that had been nurtured from the inheritance that she got. He put it in a TV station at a time TV was not the best investment because he could see that television might some day be the political vehicle, and [he wanted] to have the principal television station protected from that kind of political abuse by an opponent.

G: Is this something he said?

W: All right. What he said was, yes, he mentioned that television might yet be politically that potent, but he did not tie it in with [O'Daniel]. I just made the surmise. I knew all along the reason he owned the television station. He was careful not to abuse it, and complained bitterly because he could get better coverage off everybody else's station than he could off his own ten o'clock newscast. I heard him complain about that, and I heard some of the KTBC people who were complaining that he had complained about it. By owning it, he could keep the thing from being used by some other politician to undermine him while he was off in Washington tending to the public's business, somebody else coming in and getting to be a political personality and zapping him in the next election.

G: Can you describe your own work on the Preparedness [Sub]committee?

W: Yes. As far as the committee was concerned, I would see people that came in about the Korean War things. I was in the naval reserve and had gone to Washington with the thought I was going to be called back in the navy as a lieutenant jg. It turned out I never was. Whenever complaints would come in, I would see some of the people and screen whether it went to staff. I did the editing and printing of committee reports, had to rush them over to the Government Printing Office, work the galley proofs and try to get it all done and out within hours to the newspeople, plus clearing it with other senators before the committee report was released to be sure that all of them that were supposed to approve did approve. Then I wrote a lot of the mail that he got that related to Korean War and military subjects. I would just sit and dictate answers to his mail by the hour.

G: Was he pretty pleased with the way you answered his mail?

W: Well, there were several things that made me believe he was pleased. One thing, when he got personal notes from senior senators over his election as such a youthful, unprecedented honor that he was bestowed, I guess it was, promotion to Democratic leader that occurred in 1951--

G: I think that was assistant leader.

W: He was elected assistant? Yes, that's right. It was just two years. He was assistant leader in 1951, picked out as a junior senator to be the assistant Democratic leader. He had all those letters assigned to me to answer when he wanted a letter tailored with good taste and sensitivity, which all of them had, but which others wouldn't waste as much time on as I would. I would slack on my quota for the day by dawdling over one of

his letters until I would get the right inspiration. I wasn't as much of a volume producer sometimes, but he appreciated sometimes the extra time I took. Then also he let me have a free hand on these universal military training letters, which is one of the few times that he would answer adverse mail by not just thanking them for their views.

Then he offered me--and this made me upset with him--oh, I don't know, a 30, 40, 50 per cent pay increase to stay after I had resigned to come back to Cotulla. I knew at the time that he was using his salary. He said, "If my wife didn't have money I couldn't hold this office. I am using my salary to supplement my allowance for staff help." So I know he was trying to make every penny stretch as much as he could, and he had given me three or four little old penny-ante raises. Of course, in those days lawyers were expected to go to work almost free anywhere out of law school. But I thought if I was worth that much turning in my resignation, I was worth that much the day before my resignation. I was resentful a bit, but I never let the resentment do anything more than eat holes in me. I never did say anything to him about it.

G: Did he employ a larger staff than most of the other senators?

W: Oh yes, quite much larger. Then when we got this deluge of mail on the firing of Douglas MacArthur, he was one of the few that put his staff on a twenty-four-hour basis, with shifts going night and day running robotypers and addressing envelopes. For the petitions, we sent out printed mail. For the individually-written letters, we sent out robotyper, individually-typed. In a little over two weeks we answered around 25,000 letters, less than 1,000 individually dictated, on the firing.

G: Do you recall his views on the firing of Douglas MacArthur?

W: He was generally supportive of President Truman. If I had been that close to him, I would probably have gotten some expletives one way or another as to either whether Truman handled it well or as to whether Douglas MacArthur was that much of an obstacle that he had to be dealt with that way. I never got any indication that he would have had Truman do anything other, because Truman had to be in control. Douglas MacArthur was more hawkish, and Lyndon Johnson was not at the time. I'm sure he felt that Truman wouldn't have done it if Truman had been able to solve his problems without doing it.

G: I guess he realized, though, that there was a good bit of popular support for MacArthur.

W: Yes. I would be interested now in going back and seeing what we did say on those [letters]. I was very well satisfied with the letters that went out at the time, and I don't recall that they said a whole lot. We all had a high regard for Douglas MacArthur, and we turned off everything in the office, shut down the robotypers and the whole thing to hear MacArthur's address to the joint session after he made his triumphal return from his firing. I was with the rest of them with tears running down my cheeks by the time the man got through. We all felt that way about him, but I wasn't aware of anybody much in our staff that felt that the Senator should not be supporting Truman. Now there was a difference of opinion after I left about supporting Adlai Stevenson. It is my impression, and I don't have this firsthand but I had it repeatedly secondhand, that John Connally was very strongly disappointed that Johnson did as much for Stevenson as he did in the 1952 election.

G: Johnson had met Douglas MacArthur, had he not, in 1942 when he had gone to Australia?

W: That's right. That's right.

G: Did he ever talk to you about that?

W: No, no.

G: Can you recall any instances involving LBJ and other senators on that Armed Services Committee, say Senator Russell? I think Senator Bridges was on there also.

W: No, I really didn't work that personally close to him. I was back there on committee reports and the mail. I would not have been around, nor would hardly any of the staff, but there are other members of the staff, like Dorothy Nichols, Mary Rather, Walter Jenkins and possibly Warren Woodward, in those particular years who might have been around while the other senators were present.

G: I guess Glynn Stegall was there then.

W: Glynn was there. Glynn was in the mail-answering operation with me, as was his wife, Mildred. Of course, Mildred came to finally be in charge of the security at the White House in terms of screening the staff members. We had a security problem in 1951. The FBI told us that a secretary--oh, what's his name, that was Civil Defense? I just visited him a few years ago. He started out here at Sam Houston High School, was on the debating team and went to work for LBJ.

G: Gene Latimer?

W: Gene Latimer, of course. I'm so terrible with names. It was such a struggle to remember his name, now what was I going to say?

G: Security problems.

W: Oh, yes. Gene had hired a lady who was multilingual from Eastern Europe and who had an interpreting and reporting service that would report and record conferences in a variety of languages. Why this lady was willing to go to work on the LBJ staff was something of a mystery to me. But a couple of days later, the FBI sent word that she had some doubtful connections or something bad in the background, we never did know what, but that Gene should get rid of her. I think we had to give her two-weeks notice, and I was assigned to ride herd on that situation and to review her mail before it went in to the Johnson office. She was very opinionated. I don't think she was that much of a spy as she was of a hard-headed, opinionated woman.

G: Did LBJ tolerate differences of opinion?

W: He didn't mind your having a difference of opinion, but you had to protect his image and express your difference of opinion in-house. He dismissed a committee staff member who had taken the morning off to go out and testify on a zoning hearing. Johnson didn't care anything about zoning, but Johnson did care a whole lot about the man's sense of values. I don't know how his performance had been otherwise, and that may have been just the last straw of a whole haystack. But I got the impression that seeing that the policies were carried out and that things were done on your assignment was a lot more important than your ever attending a civic meeting of any kind, or a zoning hearing, or anything else.

When I was on the State Democratic Executive Committee I had a brief encounter in San Angelo at a committee meeting with then-still-Senator

Johnson. He had in tow a Look magazine correspondent, I believe, who was doing an article on him. He asked me if I could find the pictures which were since published all over, of his having taught with the Mexican-American school there at Cotulla. I believe I did and was able to furnish copies. I got them from some of his classmates that were very proud. There is quite a story there. One of them appeared on a TV show, and Johnson called the show that night from the White House. This was--let's see, I call the whole roll of friends down there--Daniel C. Garcia at Cotulla, a retailer. Dan was one of the pupils in Johnson's class when he taught at Cotulla.

G: I have heard that one of the pupils there he took back to Johnson City with him one summer to spend the summer on the ranch there, and the guy became a successful retailer in San Antonio. I don't know, maybe it's the same [man].

W: Now, this may be somebody else. I have heard about that, but I don't know the details, don't know who it was.

G: I think he said it was Juan Gonzales. Would that be right?

W: Could be, could be. Oh. There were some visits to the Ranch in later years, but you are talking about when he was teaching and when he went back to school. All right. That could have been. I just don't know. I don't know about that occasion. Those kids had the highest regard for him because he could empathize with them, and he saw discrimination and was not that comfortable with it. Although he was the kind of guy that wasn't going to go out on the streetcorner and make useless stump speeches about it, when he got in the position that he could do something about it

he was going to do something about it. But in the meantime it would come as a great surprise to a lot of people that he really was concerned.

G: Did you see much evidence of his relationships with black constituents in Texas then?

W: None. I saw nothing of that because I never worked the political conventions with him where that would have been. As far as racially concerned, I was racially concerned at the time, so nothing that I saw particularly offended me. I went to interracial conferences and things before and after I worked with him. The issue just didn't surface of discrimination, Mexican-American, black, or what.

I was going to make something more of a point, though, on the Look magazine article because he wanted his relationship and his concern for the Mexican-Americans in the clutches of poverty there in Cotulla to be highlighted in this story. In his words to me he said, "Now you see that he gets that material and the pictures if you can get the pictures." He related it to political power. The import that I received very plainly from the words, and I am not good at remembering exact verbiage, was that political power is related always to attention to the very poorest. He didn't say it's in the hands of the poor people. Why can't I remember the exact words? I never do remember exact words. But I thought at the time that if he had been overheard that his statement could have been viewed as somewhat callous and sort of power hungry. But he related the power toward his personal fulfillment. His image that came through to me over lots of little random things that I picked up was that he had to justify power and he had to earn power and the place of power by being attentive,

sort of the twenty-fifth chapter of Matthew thing in political language. If you weren't attentive to the poorest of the poor, you would find yourself cut off from power.

G: What other recollections do you have about him as an employer, what you witnessed there?

W: He would dash in and out of the office, would maintain, of course, a heavy schedule. He would have a staff man along. I never traveled with him, but he would have a staff man along on the trips, or one of the ladies, who would keep a battery of three or four telephones going trying to get people on the phone. He would bounce from one to another as they were able to reach people. He just made the maximum use of every second. He would pop out of the inner office. One time he made some wisecrack about some mistake that had been made, and I was the only one in the office that laughed. I had only been there about a week. One of the guys with a master's degree who was a file clerk picking up an extra job--almost nobody worked as a file clerk or anything else without graduate degrees, June Welch it was, who is up in Dallas--turned to me after [Senator Johnson] popped on through the other door. I was still chuckling out loud at what he had said, and I was the only one. He said, "Don't you think he meant what he said?" And I said, "Yes, and that's part of what's funny about it."

G: Do you remember what he was talking about?

W: It was some goofy thing, that they had mailed out a letter with an error in it, the kind of thing that irritated him. He never let a letter go out with a comma blunder or any conspicuous erasure. Everything had to

go out letter perfect. He would come in on a Saturday afternoon about four o'clock, a beautiful October Saturday with bright sunshine and brisk, cool air, and say, "Gee, isn't this such a beautiful day. Let's take the rest of the day off." Well, it would take us an hour to wind down everything, get our desks cleared, and we'd leave at five. But then nobody had to come back Sunday, except Ed or I would go over and check for telegrams put under the door and call him to see what mail and telegrams or special deliveries might have come.

G: Did he ever call you at home and ask you to do something?

W: Oh, yes. He would call at the Dodge Hotel and leave word for us to go over. He was never that comfortable with me, nor I with him, that I had as much personal relationships to answer some of these questions about who he cronied with and so forth. The morning mail was reviewed every morning. Say there would be 185 or 315 letters. They would be counted, and those from family and key friends would be picked out and read to him, or excerpts read, and he would be told what they were about. Then they would say--the mail followed columnists who were exciting the public--"There are 18 letters on government economy, there are 23 letters on this, there are 5 letters on"--something else, and the whole mail would be reviewed. Then answers to everything would be ready by close of business that day.

He would come in and he would flip through, and he might read and sign every one of them and look at every one. He would never say what was wrong. If he didn't like something or saw a comma error or just didn't like what you said, there would be a line down it so it wouldn't accidentally get mailed out. Then you had to figure [it] out. You might call

upstairs and consult with Walter or Woody: "What do you suppose he didn't like about this letter?" He almost never would say, because we were supposed to be smart enough to figure [it] out. Gene Latimer had that duty for the longest time that I was in his office. Gene would be sick or gone, and I would call and read the morning mail to him for a couple of weeks. He felt like I was not at ease with him, and I was not that much at ease with him, I expect. I'm sure he sensed it, because he was so acutely aware of what was going on in other people's minds.

G: Did he have a way of putting you at ease more?

W: Either you talked his language or you didn't. Now I understood his language, but as I say, I am not goal-oriented. I am not a purposeful type. I like to stop and consider what the human relationships [are] and the theoretical analysis. He had no time for theoretical analysis unless it had some particular purpose in view that you are doing a theoretical analysis for.

G: What about LBJ as a raconteur? I hear he was great at telling stories and describing things in graphic terms.

W: Yes, yes.

G: You must have some recollections of that.

W: I doubt that I do, because those would be on social occasions for the most part. They would be political, but--

G: Oh, I see. He didn't use that in the office?

W: No, he wouldn't take time in the office. Oh, he might, but they were very succinct, very short points that he made in the office.

G: Did the young staffers that came, say, from the University of Texas Law School, places like that, respect Lyndon Johnson, or did they think of him as somewhat old hat?

W: I would be aware there only of the early fifties. Now, I was in and out of his office through the late fifties. I was in and out of the White House two or three times, and when he was vice president I was in Washington a few times. The fact of the matter is, somebody said just before he was vice president, "John, you have been to Washington two or three times, and you haven't called on the Senator." I said, "Well, I haven't had anything to tell him, and he knows that whenever I can help him on something I usually write him." I had considerable correspondence with him and always got good, satisfactory replies. If anything required his personal attention, like keeping this airport open at Cotulla, I engineered a lobbying campaign for the Cotulla town while I was practicing law down there to keep the thing open, and he had it written into an appropriations bill. So I had what was a very satisfying relationship with him, but not that personal. So the anecdotes that I have are anecdotes that have come out of the magazines and newspapers I have read. Everything that I see that is about LBJ I pick it up and read it. But I would be surprised if I have any story to add to the stock of stories that has already been recorded.

G: Do you recall any incidents related to the Taft-Hartley Act and his position on that? Did he oppose that?

W: No incidents. We were still getting mail on it and on the right-to-work issue.

G: What else do you remember about those years that you want to add to the tape?

W: I will add a personal note. This is for the family. It meant a whole lot to me. I was very proud and appreciative of Mrs. Johnson expressing herself. I went through a reception line down here--I don't know what the occasion was--where he and she were here. My first baby had been born in December, 1961, and this would be January. What was going on in January, 1962? Let's see, he was vice president, and there would be primaries and a congressional campaign that year. Anyway, he was in Houston for something. I told Mrs. Johnson that we had had a boy born. "Oh, what's his name?" I said we had named him John Mark. "Oh, you should have named him for Lyndon, and he would have given the boy a heifer calf."

He had a warmth of relationship with his employees. I think all of his employees knew, even the temporary ones--if they didn't know they should have known--that he wasn't going to pay them a dime more than he had to to hold them, but if anything happened that they got into a bad sickness and didn't have the insurance, didn't have what it would take to cover it, he would work it out somehow. Goal-oriented people who are bargainers, traders, which he was or I saw him to be at least, feel a loyalty to people, but not a loyalty to fulfill <u>their</u> [the other person's] purposes. These goal-oriented people have a high regard for the goals they select, and everybody ought to be working on their goals. If somebody did get in trouble, he would help them out and he would go out of his way to, but in the meantime he would not encourage that much individuality.

Now, Walter went home, and Walter ran for congressman from Wichita Falls. I don't know how much support LBJ gave him, but I think a [candidate] having that close a relationship with an individual senator starts out as a liability. I think Johnson had the same opinion of it, and Johnson would have kept his hands pretty well clean of it. I was tagged when I ran for Congress as an LBJ man, which was not a vintage year--1966--for LBJ people because the reaction against the Vietnam War was beginning to set in and I was a hawk right through to the last days. In fact, that's about the only thing that Nixon ever did that I approved of. Well, his foreign policy I supported. I can see what was wrong with it from vantage point, but I am honest enough to say--I can see some of the things wrong with it--I can't say that I would have done differently had we known then what we know now.

But his [Johnson's] relationship with his staff was one that those that understood accepted him as a very demanding, low-pay, high-yield kind of employer and appreciated what he was wanting to get accomplished. That's the way I saw it. I'm learning the hard way. I have published some good things around that are beautiful ideas, but I have not yet been willing to go out and campaign for them. My ideas lie around, and nobody pays any attention to them because I don't have a program. I am not out pushing them. So I have even more respect for LBJ than I did then, and I did all along respect the necessity of his ambition to be president. If you want bills passed the "best/right" way, you do it yourself. If you leave it to others, it won't get done--or at least not the best

way. You've got to be president to get things done. You can't separate issues from live bodies of people.

I think there was an inclination of a lot of people when they would get impatient with him, even those who loved him, to perhaps feel that he was selling himself instead of any ideals. But I was willing to back him clear through to the end, and would still be for him as long as he could physically do the job, because I thought that his perception of what the country needed was as good as we could ask. I could have done better, and planned to, by the way. My wife would have died, but had he been elected to a second term, and knowing that he could not get me involved in a political campaign then for re-election, I would have volunteered to go to Washington and chain myself to a typewriter in the White House dungeon and help him the last three or four years.

I could see things that were going wrong with the domestic policy that I could have communicated with him on and that he would have been ready to receive. Just like Roosevelt's New Deal, the things they tried the first term all got thrown out and changed and the second term were reworked. A lot of the bills that we live with that did all the good were passed in 1937, not during that famous Hundred Days. The Hundred Days was a great effort but didn't come up with many good solutions, not nearly as many as came out of 1937 legislation. I would have liked to have been in on that, where you go in on his second term and point out what's wrong with the poverty program and the social programs and reorient them for a second round at it.

G: That's fascinating. If you think of anything else, you can always embellish them later on, any insights. I've jotted down the names you have given me. If you can think of anyone else that we ought to see [let us know].

W: I would think you have probably got most of those names already on your project.

G: Well, we've got a lot, but we haven't seen them all.

[End of Tape 1 of 1 and Interview I]

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