INTERVIEW I

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INTERVIEWEE: MARIE WILSON

INTERVIEWER: MICHAEL L. GILLETTE

PLACE: LBJ Library, Austin, Texas

Tape 1 of 1

G: Let's start out, Mrs. Wilson, briefly with your background, where you're from and how you ended up in Washington.

W: All right. I'm from New York. I left New York and went to Texas at the end of 1951. I worked at Lackland Air Force Base and met Glen Wilson there. I married Glen Wilson in June of 1953. Okay, that gets me to Austin. I went to work for Max Brooks: Kuehne, Brooks, and Barr Architects and Engineers. I went there for a job as a temporary receptionist. I couldn't find much else in a hurry. I'd been an insurance broker in New York, but I was told all over Texas, "We don't hire women for that sort of work." And that's true. It was true, and to some extent it still is true. I took this job just to have something to eat. Mr. Brooks hired me for one week, and after one week he asked me to stay on.

After a few months, a lady named Mrs. Johnson called the office. I was terribly impressed. I said, "Kuehne, Brooks, and Barr," and she said, "This is Lady Bird Johnson. I wonder if Max Brooks is there." I said, "La--La--Lady Bird Johnson?"--I couldn't believe it!--"Mrs. Lyndon Johnson?" "Yes." I said, "Just a moment," and I

didn't even push the hold button, I was so scared of losing that call. It was the first time I ever talked to a senator's wife. So I literally left the phone on the desk and went running down the hall to get Max Brooks on the phone. She was calling about ranch plans.

Then I met her [after] a few more things on the phone. She got to know me on the phone and I got to know her. She asked me to sit in on a session of talking about the remodeling of the Ranch. I was very flattered. I didn't get to know her real well: I was kind of an arm of Max Brooks. And I could always find the plans. Nobody else could ever find them. I'd keep saying, "Here's the LBJ Ranch," and I'd put great big stickers on: "LBJ Ranch." Why nobody else could find the plans, I don't know. They were always in there, but they couldn't find them. So I got stuck with kind of the job of honcho-ing the LBJ Ranch plans. It was kind of nice; I liked it. That's how I met her.

G: Do you have any particular recollections of that project?

W: Yes. It was to do with the building of the pool and the facilities in connection with the pool: the bathhouse, the cabana. I believe there was a balcony, as I recall, [that] was being built at the same time. They were in the initial stages.

G: Did Max Brooks design this himself?

W: Yes. He personally handled everything for the Johnsons himself. Oh, he may have asked some staff member to do some drafting work, but he really did the stuff himself for the Johnsons.

I worked there about a year and three months or so. My husband, who had been with the University [of Texas] and left them before we were married, was trying to be an individual entrepreneur, building a game: Texas Educational Devices Company. It wasn't a great success, and it was apparent that it wasn't going to be a great success. You have a lot of competition in the field of games, and if you don't know what you're doing, you're in trouble. There's not too much demand around here for psychologists; [there] wasn't at that time in small cities, so we went to New York. He was exploring the then-newly burgeoning field of management consulting. We went to New York and talked to a few people. Glen said, "Well, I'm going to have to get a job outside Austin. I cannot get anything inside of Austin, and we cannot continue to live on your salary. We're running out of my savings," and so forth. He wasn't making any money in his gameboard project, so he said, "You had better tell Mr. Brooks."

So I went to Mr. Brooks and I told him, "I am going to have to think about perhaps leaving Austin, because Glen needs a job and he can't get one here that's suitable." Max Brooks said he didn't want that to happen. He said he would talk to Lyndon Johnson. He said, "Glen has a lot of ideas." I said, "Yes, he does." He said, "He's an idea person, and Lyndon needs idea men, really needs them. Maybe he can work here for the television station." So he said he would arrange someone for Glen to see, something about working for then-KTBC.

I told Glen about it. Glen didn't think much of it. He thought: "Max Brooks is just trying to keep a good hand because they're hard to

find." Weeks went by and nothing happened. All of a sudden, Walter Jenkins called Glen and asked to see him. He couldn't get him at work, and he called me at the office--I think it was Willie Day [Taylor] placing the call, I don't remember--looking for Glen Wilson.

It just happened that he was at the local stock exchange. We had a little stock--we were trying to keep from losing everything--and Glen happened to be there; Merrill, Lynch, I guess it was. So they paged him at Merrill, Lynch. I can see how dramatic that must have been: "Senator Lyndon Johnson calling Glen Wilson." Here we are poverty-stricken.

Glen finally did get to meet Walter. The fragments of that interview are so. . . . Well, Glen has a total recall on the thing. Yes, really, it's best to talk to him about it. Except that one of the things that did impress both of us about that--it impressed me--was Walter said, "I don't know what Lyndon Johnson wants to hire a psychologist for." Of course we are thinking that Max Brooks has proposed Glen to work for KTBC-TV. We don't know what Walter is thinking about at all, and who in the hell is Walter Jenkins, anyway? But Glen feels we're just doing this to satisfy Max Brooks, who is a nice guy and my boss. You know, why not? We'll go through these motions for his sake to show that we've made an honest effort to let me stay working for him.

Well, that just sort of faded away. Nothing happened after Glen's interview with Walter. I know Glen's put this all on tape, and I know

it's kind of long, so there's no sense my going through it all over again.

Then some more weeks went by. All of a sudden, I got a call and was asked whether I could go see Walter Jenkins. Now, I'm at the then-Kuehne, Brooks, and Barr office, Max Brooks' office. So I made arrangements to see Walter Jenkins. I, of course, advised Mr. Brooks of all of this. All of the time, mind you, we're thinking of KTBC. I thought, "What am I being interviewed for?" except that I had been through this management consulting routine up in New York where they interviewed wives at the same time to make sure that the wives comported with the correct corporate image. That was fashionable in the mid-fifties.

So I went up to see Walter. I went in and was introduced, and he said, "Max Brooks says that you're the best secretary in the United States of America." I said, "Well, that's very kind of him." Mind you, I didn't know I was being really interviewed for a job. I didn't really have the whole picture. Then he sort of brought out: "Can you write letters?" I said, "Yes, I write letters all the time." "Can you write friendly letters, warm letters?" "Yes." By this time the picture became clear. He was talking about Washington, talking about working for Johnson. There was something in there, I can't recall, but somewhere along the line, the picture became clear that he was talking about working for Lyndon Johnson and writing warm letters, folksy letters. I said, "I can write them any way you want them."

Walter then asked me whether I smoked, and I said yes. He asked me whether I smoked heavily, and at that time I said I was trying to cut down, something like that, but I would say I smoked more than a pack a day. He said, "Well, do you drink?" I said, "Only socially, and not very much. Only at parties, really." I don't think at that time I had had more than one drink at lunch a year. Really it was only Saturday-night highballs or beer or something. I thought, "What's all this smoking-drinking? What else is going to come up?"

It was about at that point when, all of a sudden, Walter--I'm facing him and Walter's facing the door--leaped up to his feet as though something had just gone whack on his bottom, just sprang to his feet. I couldn't imagine what had happened to him, like a dinosaur had come up and bit him in the behind. I looked about and here was this huge figure stalking in, and it was, of course, LBJ in great boots and a great hat. He was in his ranch clothes. He looked so enormous to me. That was the first time I ever saw Lyndon Johnson. He had been on the cover of Time, and I had talked to his wife, and I knew everything about his home on the Ranch, but I had never seen this person in person. He did impress me. He just came across with all the vitality, just living energy, great force.

G: What did he say?

W: Well, I was young, and I guess I was kind of a pretty girl. This business about Johnson being a lady chaser: he never chased me, and I don't know anything about it. He was very protective of me, so I don't know. I don't know whether people just have pipe dreams. I

think a lot of little girls like to think they've been made over. But everybody likes pretty girls. Even girls like pretty girls.

I stood up then, when I saw it was the Senator, and I recognized my place. Obviously this is somebody you stand up for, even if you're a lady--a significant authority figure. So I stood up, and he marched on through the room. There were people hopping up at desks and fluttering papers, all nervous. He did this all the time; he made people nervous when he walked into the room--staff--frightened them, lots of them. He came on in, and Walter then, in a flurry of paper and people standing up and hopping around, introduced us, presented me to the Senator, who held out his great big hand which enveloped mine completely. My hand just disappeared, and it's not that little.

He said, "Good to see you. You and Walter been talking?" I said, "Yes, sir." He said, "Well, are you ready to leave?" I said, "Well, I don't think Mr. Jenkins is quite finished. I don't know." I thought, "Am I supposed to just go because Johnson is here, and he has something to talk to Jenkins about and I'm in the way? What does this mean, 'Are you ready to leave?'" He was friendly about it, though, and had that funny crinkle around his eyes. I was just flabbergasted. He said, "No, honey, I mean leave for Washington, because I need you up there by January 3; that's when the Congress starts." I said, "Well, we hadn't talked about anything like that," and suddenly I said the word salary. He said, "Well, Walter will take care of that. Okay, you go on and talk to her about salary, and I'll see y'all later. I'll see you in Washington, now." He pointed his finger

at me and looked down his big nose, and off he went to wherever he went to. And there we were.

I don't remember exactly what Walter said to me then. He said that he would take it up with Glen and me. But anyway, we finally received an offer of five thousand a year for Glen and four thousand for me, which was, considering that Glen was a Ph.D., a pretty low salary for him. But we talked it over. Glen at the same time was negotiating with Rand Corporation in Santa Monica where his salary would have been something like seven thousand, but there was nothing in it for me. Well, we just weighed the whole thing, and since we were young and adventurous, we said, "Why not go to Washington for a couple of years? What can we lose? We're young. Come on, let's do it. It's no big deal. At least we'll eat." So we accepted it at that.

What else? Where do I go from here?

G: Let me ask you one thing that's kind of curious. When do you think the decision was made to hire? Do you think Walter Jenkins made the decision?

W: No, I think Lyndon Johnson made it the minute he looked at me, and since he had talked to Max Brooks, and Max Brooks had said I was good and that Glen was good, he decided he would hire us. I'm sure that Lyndon Johnson made that decision.

G: Perhaps the question then: "Are you ready to leave?" was the signal that he wanted [to hire you].

W: "Are you ready to leave for Washington?" That's what it was. The question was, "Are you ready to leave for Washington? Are you packed to go?" That's what he really meant.

G: Perhaps by doing so or saying that he was indicating to Walter that he had just hired you.

W: Yes! He overrode whatever Walter was going to do. Walter was in the midst of questioning me all about this odd stuff about smoking and drinking, and what else we were going to get into, as I said, I don't know. Then Johnson just came in at that point and said, "Are you ready to leave?" Whatever wind was in Walter's sails was taken out.

G: So many of your colleagues on the staff recounted similar experiences of being swept off their feet in the hiring. Did you see this happen at other times? Was it something that was a systematic thing with him, or did it just turn out that way? Do you think he planned these things?

W: No. Planned to shock people?

G: Well, yes. For example, did he time it so you would be sitting there talking to Walter, and he would come in after a certain time?

W: That would seem to me to be a very remote possibility. I just don't see it as a likelihood. It never entered my mind. Never. I would think I was kind of conceited to think that the upcoming Majority Leader of the United States Senate would sit around plotting about hiring a couple of staff members to such an extent that he would enter and. . . . I don't think so. I think he had favorable enough

reports from his trusted friend Max Brooks, and from Commodore Perry, old Mr. Perry.

G: E. H. Perry, yes.

W: He knew me, because his office was right down the hall from Max's office, and I used to see him all the time and help him out. Brooks and Perry had business interests together.

G: Perry died shortly after that, didn't he?

W: Yes. I don't remember exactly when.

G: Within a year or two.

W: Yes, within a year or two. But after I told Perry about this, incidentally, he said. . . . I went to him; I asked for an appointment and so forth, where ordinarily I would have just gone in and talked to him. But I felt this was important enough for me to ask for an appointment to see him. I told him about the whole business, about how Glen had to get a job, and it looked like here was this thing opening, and what did he think? He asked me what did I think. I said, "Well, I thought and Glen thought that we ought to just take a flyer on it. Since we're young, we could afford to lose a couple of years. It wouldn't make any difference."

Old Mr. Perry said, "Do you know how hard he makes people work?" I said, "Well, I'm no stranger to hard work." He said he knew that, and he knew I was a hard worker, but he said, "You can't believe this; you really can't. You'll find out, and I really don't think you're going to like it, because the hours are terrible. Lyndon is a slave driver. Why don't you talk to Mary Fish [Haselton]?" Well, Mary

Fish works out to be Sam Houston [Johnson's] ex[-wife]. Mary Fish, Mary Snish, I didn't know who that was. And old Mr. Perry was kind of being vague and dropping names and you never heard of them, and so I just kind of put that aside. "But Mary Fish," he said, "she'll tell you. I don't know what her name is now." Apparently she married somebody else between. I since, of course, have met Mary and I know who she is. I said, "I didn't want to go to Mr. Brooks and tell him about this. I just feel badly about leaving him, but it looks like an opportunity for us." He said, "Well, you had better tell Max as soon as you can." I said, "Yes, I will."

So I discussed it more with Glen, and Mary Fish and the whole business, whatever that was. I never did get hold of any Mary Fish. We just decided we'd just go. We left poor Max, rented a U-Haul, piled full of things, and went up to Washington in the rain. It hadn't rained for years; it rained fifty-four hours, all the way up.

G: I was going to ask you, while you were talking about Commodore Perry, if you got any other insights into the relationship between Mr. Perry and Lyndon Johnson.

W: No, as I said, Mr. Perry said he liked Lyndon; he supported Lyndon now, but Lyndon--and you hear this over and over again: he was a fine man, a good man, a great man, but nobody you want to work for. Since Mr. Perry first said that--he was the first person who ever said it to me--it's been said a hundred times, a thousand times by different people, including me, since I have quit him twice, saying the same

thing: "He's a fine man, a wonderful man. I respect him; I love him; I would do anything for him except work for him."

G: You mentioned also about how he would make the staff nervous, simply his entering the room.

W: That's right. Some of the staff, not <u>everybody</u> went to pieces.

G: Who seemed to be the most relaxed around him, the most at least with him?

W: Of the people I knew? Really at ease with him? It certainly wasn't Walter. Mary Rather, his secretary from a long time back, was probably the one who was least likely to start running around in little tight circles and going out of her mind. Also Mildred Stegall. Mildred was a little oasis of placidity in a sea of insane nonsense. She stayed placid, whereas her husband Glynn, the late Glynn Stegall, was very nervous.

But Walter was probably the most nervous person I ever saw. What was it we used to [do]? Gee whiz, I can't remember now. There was a buzzer that wasn't on the telephone. I think it was the buzzer for the Floor, for the vote or something. You know, they'd buzz to indicate that a senator was to go for roll call or adjournment. It would buzz for adjournment or buzz for convening, or whatever. It would go BZZZ--it was a loud noise! It wasn't like the telephone buzz; we had the old buzzer system then. We didn't have the call directors, or any of those things. But Walter would answer the damn telephone when the buzzer for the Senate would go off: "Yessir! Yessir! Yessir!" And of course there wasn't anybody there. It was

the lousy Senate calling quorum; that's all that was. He was probably the most nervous person.

Booth Mooney was one of the most relaxed people, although I think one of the reasons he was one of the most relaxed was because he kept out of his presence, wasn't frequently around him. I was more relaxed than my husband. Glen would tend to think, "What's he doing? What's he here for? What's he going to load on us?" But I wouldn't do that.

G: What about George Reedy?

W: Poor George. George was superficially calm but internally quite worked up, as you can see if you look at photographs of him from the time he started. Just within a few years he went white and gained lots of weight. George was under terrible tension all the time. He would write something, and Mr. Johnson would have three other people writing the same thing. And yet, he would hold George responsible for it. Often, speeches came out to be a horse built by a committee--a camel. George was quite nervous. Really, most people were tense. Most people were.

G: Why was this? Was it because of the standard he exacted of his staff?

W: The standard, and the quality, and quantity of work he demanded of himself, he demanded of the staff. Nobody could ever match it. We could never, each individually, be him. We could never match him, and yet there was a general feeling that each and every one of us was expected to be able to do that. It was frustrating because you can't be another person. The first thing you have to recognize is you can't,

but I don't think that everybody was willing to recognize that. You had to discount a lot that a person like this says: "Damn, I want you to get out a hundred letters tomorrow!" Well, I might have only twenty letters that I can do fast, and I might have ten letters that I'm going to have to allow a lot of time on. Numbers of letters don't mean anything. If you're just transmitting something, say: "Dear Friend, here's your report. I hope I've been helpful to you. Sincerely," that's one kind of thing. If you're sitting down, as I did, and explaining an omnibus immigration bill that goes on for two days, I'm sorry, there's no way I can write a hundred letters like that.

G: You handled legislative mail?

W: The first go-around.

G: How was he able to do so much himself and yet at the same time keep up with what everyone else was doing? You mentioned before we turned on the tape about finding the letter from Jack Hight's mother in his desk.

W: The man never rested. He never rested. He went around after hours and looked in people's desks. He didn't go home. That incident was before we came there. When we came there in 1955, he moved from the quarters in the Old Senate Office Building, Room 231. In early 1955 when he became majority leader, he moved to G-14 in the Capitol. Walter Jenkins then assumed his desk in the Senator's office, and Mr. Johnson was over at the Capitol. Just before that, though, he had

been over in the Senate Office Building--Mr. Johnson himself--and during that period is when he went looking around people's desks.

G: You arrived in January, 1955?

W: January. We reported to work January 3, 1955.

G: I believe you said that you had to move in after your first day of work.

W: We couldn't move in at the time. We had to report to work before we had a chance to move in.

G: Do you have any impressions of that first day at work?

W: Yes. First of all, we got there at something like eight o'clock. We weren't told when, what time the office hours were, or anything like that. We arrived at eight-thirty, eight o'clock or something. Mary Margaret [Wiley] was the first to get there. Finally at nine o'clock she came in, and she led us to Mr. [Arthur] Perry and told us Mr. Perry would give us our assignments. Well, he sat me down at a typewriter and asked whether I could take letters. He said he didn't expect us; didn't know what to do with us; we'd have to ask Walter Jenkins. It was all very frenzied, but he said, "Well, as long as you can take dictation and type, I know what to do with you." So he started dictating to me, and I just took dictation and typed the letters. I asked somebody what copies to make--Mildred Stegall, I think it was. There was another young woman there, but I don't remember who that was. Anyway, I just proceeded to follow the example and did it, what was necessary. It seemed to me it was very simple-minded, very simple work to me. I couldn't see what all this fuss

was about, about letter-writing, if this was what it amounted to. After about two weeks I just ceased taking dictation and wrote letters myself. I just told Mr. Perry he didn't have to bother dictating, that I would just write them. You'd get the picture pretty fast.

Glen was assigned--I don't remember exactly how it happened, but I guess he was introduced to Jack Hight, and Jack Hight put him to answering military and defense-related mail. And there we were and there we sat. Mr. Johnson was in the Mayo Clinic with a kidney operation. He came back from that . . . the timing is all out on this in my mind.

G: That was early 1955, I think.

W: Yes, January. He came back from that. We never knew what time to go home. Nobody ever wanted to go home, because the Senator might call, something might happen. There was no end to the day; that was probably the worst part of it. We just sat there, waiting for somebody else to leave first. After a while, we just started to leave anyway, despite all these people hanging around waiting for whatever.

One time, though, Juanita [Roberts] was leaving at six o'clock. Mr. Johnson then was back from the hospital, and he walked into the room, saw Juanita with her hat on, and said, "What have you got your hat on for? Is this half a day?" Juanita said no, she was going to have dinner with her parents, or some such, and made an apology for leaving at six o'clock. That's about where we can go with that one, except that that went on forever.

G: How late did you stay as a rule or as an average?

W: Well, once he got back it started, and it got later and later for me, because I became involved in answering legislative mail. It would be now seven, and then sometimes seven-thirty, eight. It didn't matter. I figured out that over a period of a year and a half, I averaged a 54-hour week. That's what the average was, and that's a long time.

G: Was there any key to leaving? For example, if Walter Jenkins would leave then the rest of you could leave, or if you knew he had gone home for the day?

W: Most of the time we didn't know. We just didn't know. Especially over in the Senate Office Building, we had no clues. Over in the Capitol, the Democratic Policy Committee staff sometimes would know when he had left, but they never told us. There was little communication. The people that worked in the Senate Office Building referred to those who worked in the Democratic Policy Committee as "those who sat on Mount Olympus," "the gods," and "drank of nectar," and so forth.

G: Why was that?

W: It was just jealousy. In fact, when I went back to work there, after I quit in 1956 and went back in late 1958 or early 1959, when I called over to what we called the Texas office, I'd get kidded. "Oh, well, there you are over on Mount Olympus. How is it being over there? How rarified is the air? Do you ever get dizzy from the heights?" That sort of thing.

G: What other advantages were there, other than the fact that you could leave earlier?

W: There was more space, and you were in the Capitol, and it was prettier. It wasn't crowded. It wasn't as insanely busy, because the terrible busyness of being crowded added on to just being busy. You just didn't deal with plain Texas constituents writing and saying, "Support the Bricker Amendment," and "Impeach Earl Warren," day after day. You did get to work on more important things, national-level things, rather than constituent mail and that sort of stuff.

G: The first time around when you were working in 1955-56, were you responsible to, say, Walter Jenkins or someone? Was there a sort of hierarchy on the staff? Who did you report to?

W: One, to Arthur Perry, and then right immediately above him would be Walter. It was really Walter, except for those times when Booth was there one time, and Jack Hight would be there if Walter and Arthur Perry were out at the same time. But Walter was ultimately the one. I remember asking him for some assistance in doing my work, since I had virtually taken the legislative mail away from Arthur Perry. I didn't want to be sitting there having these letters dictated to me, or hearing him drone on into a machine, one of these damn things. You'd get a form letter response. And I didn't want to have to call every day about the status of a bill, the same committee over and over again. I developed a system for following the course of a particular bill that we had had a lot of correspondence about.

G: How did you do this?

W: You would see the mail come in, and you could sort it. "Okay, here's a bunch that's in favor of increasing the minimum wage. Here's a bunch against Hell's Canyon," whatever. There were more obscure bills. Railroad retirement, for example, we'd get a lot of mail on. You could categorize them. Then Arthur Perry would call up the committee in charge of the bill. Say it was minimum wage; that was probably under the Senate Finance Committee at that time. He would ask them what the status of the bill was. They would say it was pending before the committee. Then he would write a letter saying, "It's pending before the committee. Whenever it goes to the floor, I'll be glad to keep your views in mind." But to do that every day was a little simple-minded to me, to call the committee every day about the same damn bill. It seemed to me you could find out what happened to it because it came out in the Congressional Record every single day. Minimum wage came out in the newspaper. That was even sillier when it came out--something big. But when it came to some of these obscure things, you could look it up in the Record every single day.

So I started keeping a record by bill number and title of bill, by committee. I started off with little three by five cards. Pretty soon it got to be this big, and the cards got to be five by eights. But I had an incredible cross index by number and by committee. People from all over the Hill found out that Johnson's office had this record, and they began calling us to find out the status of bills rather than the committees.

After I developed this thing, I went to Pauline Moore, who was chief clerk of the Democratic Policy Committee and to Gerry Siegel, who was chief counsel, and I suggested that this kind of information could be put on a computer. This was in 1955, and I'm a smart ass in my twenties. I got nowhere. I got blank looks. I got, "What do you mean, on a computer? What would anybody do that for? What are you talking about?" I got absolutely nowhere. In fact, Pauline said, "What are you trying to do, put us all out of a job?" I thought, "When there is so much work to do, the thing to do is reduce all this human effort that we're putting into this." And [it was] repetitive; people all over the Hill [were] asking the same information.

Now, of course, they do this. The Library of Congress has the whole thing, and you dial in: HR 7891, or whatever it is you want to know about. But then it was just incomprehensible. Twenty years ago they just could not conceive of it. It's absolutely essential. I don't know what they would do. We could not keep on operating that way. But we did, and I strove to keep it up. I just got worn out with it. When you get to the second session of a Congress, by that time you've got too many bills. You just cannot keep track. One human being can't do it, because that's all you do. You can't do that and answer the mail at the same time.

G: Did you ever get a feeling of his mind for legislation, whether he was able to keep track of all of these various bills or not?

W: He couldn't keep track of the minor ones, nobody could, but he wanted them kept track of. On the big ones he was ahead of everybody and the only reason for keeping track of those in the office was because he would never communicate to you what he wanted done. So, I would find out from reading the Congressional Record that he was in favor of liberalizing Social Security--in the Record it would say that--and I would write a letter saying, "I am glad you wrote me in support of liberalizing Social Security. I agree with you completely, and I intend to support the bill. Let me hear from you again and soon. Sincerely." I would send that letter in to Walter, and Walter would come out and say, "What made you say that? Why did you say that?" I would reply: "Here it is, right here. He said it on the floor yesterday, himself, that he was going to support the bill." "Oh, I didn't know that," Walter would say.

But that's the only way you would know. There was no communication. Nobody ever told anybody anything, and I think that's part of the resentment against the Policy Committee because most of the time you found out there. You were writing the floor speeches, so you would find out over there at the Policy Committee, whereas the people back in the Texas office were answering these thousands of letters that were coming in from Texans and weren't able to give these concrete answers. Well, they could if they had read the Record or if there were communication, but there wasn't any communication on substantive issues. None. The only communication was: "Has he left yet," as you suspected. That sort of thing, "Can we go home now?"

G: Did he ever see mail counts of the number of people for or against?

W: Oh, sure. Oh, yes, we lied all the time about those, though. I did.

G: How so?

W: We had letter counts. It was production letter counts, those miserable things.

G: Here's one here, I think.

W: Oh, is it? What year was that? [Looking over a document] Incoming? What in the world? That's not many.

G: This may have been an older one, before he became leader.

W: That's nothing!

G: Let's see. Incoming: 103 on Monday. Maybe this was for one person.

W: Yes, more than that.

G: How many letters would the entire staff answer on a day? Of course, I realize that the mail on Monday was going to be heavier than it was on other days.

W: The mail on Monday in Washington was not as heavy.

G: Oh, it wasn't?

W: No, the backup at the post office didn't deposit the Monday mail on Monday. People sit down on the weekend and write letters to their congressmen, and that stuff gets dumped on you on Tuesday or Wednesday. The Monday mail wasn't really quite as bad as, well, maybe the Monday afternoon or the Tuesday.

You see, what's hard is that some people just could write in for copies of bills. Well, it was counted as a letter when all you had to do was write out an envelope. So the person who was typing out

envelopes and sending out bills was getting credited with having written a letter, because it was a piece of correspondence that was answered, and it was a piece of outgoing mail. So it was a hundred plus for that person. I would say the Texas office probably answered three hundred and fifty letters a day, but that includes all these garbagey things like requests for copies of pamphlets and things. I would say that.

G: Was Sam Houston in the office then?

W: No. He was only in the office when Mr. Johnson was in the hospital with a heart attack. He came in there for a while, and that's when we fooled around with the Botanical Gardens, when Johnson came in and said it looked like a jungle and to get rid of the plants. Mary Margaret having called the Botanical Gardens to remove the plants, Sam Houston then had me call the Botanical Gardens, and he got on the phone and told them he was Lyndon Johnson and why didn't he have any plants--carefully timed so that the man exiting with the plants would just narrowly scrape by the guy coming in with the new ones. (Laughter) I'm pretty sure that Sam has it in his book, but it was an imitation by Sam of Lyndon.

G: Did the new set of plants actually arrive in the office?

W: Yes, but they weren't as great in number. There really had been an excess of plants. Snake plants, you know, for example, will take over. They just grow like crazy, and there were too many. As far as I recall, they arrived, but there weren't very many. A net reduction.

G: You and your husband are close to the President's brother. How would you characterize their relationship?

W: You're dealing with two of the most complicated people you could ever meet, very complicated. I would say that there was a sibling rivalry at all times on the order of: "Mother always loved you best." "No, Mother always loved you best." The Smothers Brothers, really. A little silly. But their minds worked very much alike, they really did.

G: Sam Houston seems to have been considerably closer to his father than LBJ was. Is that your impression?

W: I have no idea. I really don't know that. Somebody who has known the family longer would have to answer that. As I said, it just looked to me like a lot of sibling rivalry about who loved who most. My view was that the two of them were a great deal alike as far as the way they approached political matters.

G: Can you elaborate?

W: Gosh. No, I can't think of anything right offhand. I wish I could think of an example of how to con somebody into voting a certain way. I'm going to have to think about that one. I'll have to give that one some thought. Let me make notes on that when I talk to Sam some time.

G: Sam Houston seems to be a much more even-tempered man.

W: Yes. All right, he has a sense of the ridiculous. One thing that Mr. Johnson did not have, nor to my knowledge do any dedicated people have, is a sense of the ridiculous. I have one that is absolutely

hopeless. I find I get to a certain point where everything becomes ridiculous. Consequently, I can get along with Sam forever and ever, but I could not work in a close relationship with Lyndon, because he just had no sense of the ridiculous.

G: And yet he was superb, evidently, at exaggeration and hyperbole--

W: Oh, as a raconteur.

G: --but he would do it with a straight face, or something.

W: But he didn't see it in himself. He could make fun of Dick Nixon saying, "You won't have old Dick Nixon to kick around any more," and do a perfect imitation of him doing that, but he didn't think that it was ridiculous when he, LBJ, stood in front of a staff meeting and said, "What I need is a good, aggressive Jew on my staff," with Gerry Siegel sitting right in front of him. You see, he didn't have a sense of the ridiculous, as opposed to a sense of humor. There is a kind of subtle difference, but it's a difference. He had a sense of humor, and of course making fun of people and imitating anybody, imitating Bobby Baker. He used to imitate Bobby, sure. He'd imitate Arthur Perry. I don't remember his imitating Walter--there wasn't much about Walter to imitate--but he would imitate people all the time.

G: How about [Senator Everett] Dirksen? Did you ever hear [LBJ] do him?

W: Yes. It wasn't so much the talk of Dirksen; it was the mannerisms. He was very good at mannerisms. But that was the big difference between the two, Sam and Lyndon: Sam's sense of the ridiculous. He could see

pomposity and see through it. Johnson could see through other people's pomposity but not his own, which was there; there's no question about it.

G: Some writer referred to Sam Houston as "a Johnson without an ego."

W: That's kind of nice, regrettably. . . . Without an ego? Well, obviously he has an ego. I think that's a little too kind. That sounds like somebody who really is crazy about Sam. I like Sam. I'm Sam's good friend, but I think that's pushing it a little.

G: In trying to sort out how much of a contribution Sam made to his brother's success along the way, what light can you shed on that? How important was Sam Houston's advice to his brother? For example, when he would write a memo or something, was it regarded as something out of left field that would be taken lightly, or do you think Sam Houston really helped devise strategy?

W: In the Senate years--now, I can't talk of the White House years. I would say in the Senate years that, yes, I think that Sam would help devise strategy and that mostly, though, it would not be done by memo. I think that memo-writing business started after he [LBJ] got into the White House. Most of the time it was just by--they would talk. Nobody knows what went on, and their communications were instant, very, very quick. Each one could anticipate what the other one was going to say. It was fast communication between the two.

G: You got the feeling that they were quite close, then?

W: The feeling that they understood each other. Lyndon was a very fast study, and so was Sam before he got so sick and had all his drugs and

whatnot. They were both very quick minds. As you know, Sam's a little slower now, but he was always very quick. I would say during the Senate years that, indeed, there was instant and fast rapport.

G: Was his advice largely along a political line?

W: Yes.

G: Do you think it related more to Texas politics than national?

W: Yes. I think it would mostly be Texas, but then it would be also national, too, but that would be secondary. After all, Johnson had to keep his office in Texas in order to become a national politician.

I'm trying to think of an example of something that Sam would talk to him about, what to do about. I just can't think of any. That's one thing I'm going to have to think about. I'll ask Glen, too. Glen might even be able to think of something more than I did, since you're aiming in this direction, and we hadn't thought in this direction.

G: Do you remember anything else that spring before [LBJ's] heart attack? I think you were talking earlier about the Senator flying Hubert Humphrey back, making him land. Do you remember that firsthand?

W: It was the 1955 Housing Act, public housing. It was late in the day, and Johnson needed a vote. Now that I see "rejection of Capehart Amendment," it was to reject an amendment in order to get a decent bill. Hubert Humphrey was out of town, and he needed Hubert's vote. He was calling all around, and all I can remember is that Hubert was circling Washington National Airport and that Johnson personally

got on the phone to the air traffic people. I was told this, now. Juanita or Dorothy Nichols might be able to confirm this; they were the two people that were close with him, working in Room G-14.

He actually, personally, got on the phone, I understand, and ordered the National Airport traffic controllers to clear that plane for landing because Hubert Humphrey's vote was needed on the floor. I don't remember whether he had some kind of police escort arranged, but I know that he got him there, and he did it himself. The staff would get up against some tough guy who would say, "No, you can't make a plane land." What would you do? Just like I would do. "There is no way. You can't do that. You can't order a plane to land." Johnson would say, "What do you mean, I can't order a plane to land. This is the United States Senate!" That sort of thing. He wouldn't put up with that sort of thing. If you said, "Mr. Johnson, I can't get that ready. That just can't be done. It isn't possible." [He'd say], "Do you expect me to do that myself? I'll do it. I'll do it myself. I'll type it myself. I'll run it off on a mimeograph myself." He threatened to do things like that, and the hell of it was that you got the feeling that maybe he could, because he did so many things. But he wouldn't put up with little penny-ante bureaucrats at all. He'd get on the phone and just insist that it be done his way. And it was done. The marvelous thing is that he was victorious when he did that.

G: You get the impression on the one hand of someone who was a driven man--

W: Oh, yes, and a driving [man].

G: --and who really drove his staff as well. And yet on the other hand, he seems to have been charming and gracious--

W: And affectionate.

G: --and affectionate, and as you say, protective. Did these moods change rapidly?

W: Yes. He would fire Bobby Baker about every two weeks. "Bobby, damn it, you're fired! I don't want to see you again." And then a half hour later: "Get me Bobby on the phone." Yes, they changed rapidly. He could cuss a person out and a half hour later just say, "I owe my life to you," that sort of thing, quite up and down. You couldn't call him a manic-depressive because it was too fast to catch up with anything. He was just emotional. He was quite emotional, and he let it all hang out when with the staff. But then, when he was operating on the floor of the Senate he didn't. Then he was all under control. Everything was under control. So I think that's why he took it out on the rest of us.

G: It was something that he very definitely could control, then--his temper.

W: Yes, he could, but he had to let it go sometimes. I think that's what he did. That was my young opinion at the time, and I think it remains that way. If a person stays bottled up, they've got to let go somehow, some way, and that was it. He just took it out on the people who were closest to him. The people who got the worst treatment

were the people who were the most dedicated, the closest, like Walter, like George. They really got it all the time.

The Federal Airport Act, which I was trying to recall, that was kind of unusual. I was following legislation. I decided that I was really very tricky, really very smart. I decided. I called up one time on the Federal Airport Act. We had a lot of mail coming in from the little airports in Texas. They all wanted some of that money, and this was the first time. Because I had seen that Johnson had said he was in favor of it, I had been saying that we were in favor of it. What I had decided to do was have a form letter written up to send to people that it had passed. I had it all composed and ready to go on the Robotyper as soon as I knew it had passed. I had a phone call in to the page. I knew when it was reported out of committee and whatnot, and then the damn thing passed.

The page called me, and I said, "It can't. It can't have passed. It hasn't rested on the calendar for twenty-four hours, and it has to lay over for twenty-four hours." "It's passed," he said, "It just passed. Mr. Johnson just passed it." "That's silly. You've got something wrong. You've got the [Senate calendar] number wrong." I checked it out with Walter, and Walter said, "I don't know. Does it have to lay over on the calendar?" I said, "Of course it does," looking at my Senate rules, being terribly, terribly smart. And who in the hell walked in but Lyndon Johnson.

I said, "Mr. Johnson, now, the Federal Airport Act didn't pass." He said, "Yes it did." I said, "It didn't lay over on the calendar

for twenty-four hours." He said, "What makes you think it has to? Where'd you read that?" He just called it up out of order! They just passed the damn thing. The report hadn't been printed, nothing. Nobody knew it was on the calendar. There was somebody who was going to give him trouble on it. Now who, I don't know, but he just figured that that person wasn't around. He looked around the floor and he wasn't there, so they passed it. I guess he moved to reconsider, moved to table the reconsideration motion, and that was it.

I felt so stupid. There I was challenging the Majority Leader because I had gained all this new-found knowledge, just that little bit of knowledge that makes a fool of you. That's the tail end of my big story about following the legislation and really getting the end putdown from the Majority Leader himself. What made me think that he had to follow those rules when I learned about those rules? And he did this all with a terrible smirk, knowing full well that I was absolutely right according to the rule book, and he had just tricked everybody.

G: That's fascinating. Did you ever see any other occasions where he was able to move things along more quickly than [usual]?

W: Yes. Also one of my assignments was tracking Texas legislation, all legislation introduced by any Texas congressman, with the exception of Bruce Alger of Dallas, who was a Republican. But I was to track all the Texas legislation.

Sam Rayburn introduced a bill. Now, the Speaker never introduced a bill, just never did. Mr. Johnson rarely introduced a bill, as you

probably know, after he got in the Senate; after he got in the leadership, anyway. Mr. Rayburn introduced a bill to build a veteran's hospital in Bonham, I think it is; it's his little home town. The minute he did, of course [Olin] Tiger Teague, I believe, was the chairman of the Veterans' [Affairs] Committee in the House--and of course Rayburn and Johnson had told me to follow up on those things--so the minute it was introduced, Tiger Teague's people told me that it had been reported out and passed and was over in the Senate in twenty-four hours. Johnson had it out . . . the whole thing didn't take more than two days before it went to the President.

And whenever a little old immigration bill arose--Jim Wright, for example, would introduce a bill to help somebody get a Korean orphan and needed an immigration bill. They've changed the Immigration Act [now] so we don't need as many bills, but we still need them. Okay, that bill would pass the House. The minute that bill passed the House, I wrote a letter to the chairman of the Judiciary Committee--I guess it was [James] Eastland then--and said, "Dear Mr. Chairman, I understand bill so-and-so on behalf of so-and-so has just passed the House. I urge that your committee take as early action as possible, and I will see that it is scheduled for immediate floor action. Sincerely," and get it signed. We would hand-carry it over to the chairman of the committee, and it would be recorded that Lyndon Johnson had the letter in on that chairman's desk on the day the bill passed the House. Those things moved out as fast as they could.

G: So the Texas congressmen really got good treatment.

W: They got good attention. Yes, they did for the time I was there, anyway, I can tell you that.

G: I suppose that there were some other senators who got special treatment, too, like Richard Russell or Carl Hayden or someone with a good deal of power or seniority.

W: They probably did, but that would not have gone across my desk. That would have gone on at a higher level. I was dealing with the Texas delegation; that would be Senator Price Daniel or Ralph Yarborough--[I] wasn't sure what time they were there--or the members of the House delegation. We would see to our friends. We didn't see to our enemies, though. Although, I must say that I followed all the stuff even that Alger introduced, because I felt that they were Texans, and in the end they would turn to Mr. Johnson, and so I had better keep on top of them. And I would report things. I would send a memo through Walter on it and figure, "Well, I did my duty if he wants to do anything."

G: Along this same line of his being able to make the rules flexible to get legislation through or something, do you recall any instances where he was able to get the best of the Republicans who, after you were there, were in the minority but by a very narrow margin? His majority, I guess, was only one vote.

W: For part of the time, yes.

G: Do you recall how he was able to mold the majority or to keep some Republicans from voting with their party on occasion--Senator [William] Langer, for example?

W: Or some Democrats from voting conservative.

G: Or some Democrats.

W: No, off-hand I can't.

G: There must have been some legislative victories that he was proud of that you witnessed.

W: I can think of the [incident in] 1958. That was in 1958, and I wasn't even working there, but I was involved because Glen was still working there. That was a bill that would have abolished the Supreme Court.

G: Oh, yes, the Jenner amendments and HR 3.

W: It was just HR 3. That August 23 vote on that was a one-vote victory by Johnson to recommit the bill. Somebody ought to check on the Drew Pearson column. Drew Pearson wrote that up, but it's the August 23, 1958, Congressional Record that shows the vote: 41 to 40, something like that.

The thing was that Johnson did not trust Richard Nixon to break the tie. He felt that if Richard Nixon were allowed to break the tie, he would abolish the Supreme Court. Mr. Johnson did not trust Mr. Nixon. That was made clear to all of us a long time [ago]. According to Drew Pearson--I can't remember; Harry McPherson probably knows about this--[LBJ] persuaded somebody not to appear and somebody else to change his vote. It is alleged, it is purported, that he caused Bobby Baker to lock Senator [Robert] Kerr of Oklahoma in the men's room, so he couldn't get to the floor to vote. I can't testify to that, but it was kind of a joke. It was the sort of thing that went around a lot. I wasn't working there at the time. I don't remember all those important victories.

G: You said that it was made clear that LBJ didn't trust Richard Nixon.

W: That's right.

G: How so? Can you remember the terms that it was explained to you in, or when you became aware of it?

W: I think it was Mr. Perry, when I was first over there, who said, "Senator Johnson will never allow Vice President Nixon to break a tie. Mark my words, Mrs. Wilson, he will never allow it," that sort of thing. Mr. Perry was a very gentle fellow. He didn't say things very strongly. I'm making that stronger. It would be: "I think you will come to know this," or something. And he always addressed me as Mrs. Wilson, that sort of proper old gent. "You will come to know this, and you can believe that Mr. Johnson will never allow Mr. Nixon to break a tie." I don't know. It was this feeling that he didn't like him, that's all. And yet, there was always the old-club friendliness, the surface business. It didn't have anything to do with what was in his heart or what he really felt toward somebody.

Joe McCarthy--one of the fascinating things--there was a guy he didn't like. Oh, what were those crazy issues: Quemoy and Matsu? I can't even remember what they were. But there was a resolution early on in 1955. McCarthy had been censured. We weren't there then, at the time of the censure. All we know is what you've heard, the same things.

One time McCarthy had the floor, and it was something that would have tied Eisenhower's hands in dealing with foreign governments.

McCarthy wanted to tie Eisenhower's hands, and Johnson didn't want McCarthy and the conservatives to get away with this. McCarthy had the floor and he was haranguing. He bent down. He did not sit down; he just leaned over, but he leaned too heavily. You know, maybe he let one cheek down for a minute to reach a piece of paper. That was enough. Johnson moved to continue with some other thing, recognized somebody else, moved somebody else to get recognition. And there was McCarthy, all flustered, saying, "I have the floor! I have the floor!" "I believe the Senator from Wisconsin took his seat and lost the floor," Johnson said. And that was it. He did, and Johnson licked him and stopped whatever this awful thing was McCarthy was trying to do simply by--you wouldn't even think he was looking at him! He seemed to be looking off this way, but those beady brown eyes were seeing that McCarthy was just kind of leaning just a little too heavily. He had taken his seat, in Mr. Johnson's estimation, and that was it.

That was kind of nice. We happened to witness that one. We weren't allowed to watch the floor. That was a no-no. He didn't want to see staff in the gallery, because if you were in the gallery, you weren't working. You could sneak over there once in a while on a lunch hour or something, take an early lunch and sneak over, but he didn't approve of that at all. When I got to work for the Democratic Policy Committee and was no longer in the Senate Office Building, then I had occasion to see him more frequently, because I was always trying to find out where the hell he was. Somebody was always looking for

him, and I was always trying to track him, and the easiest thing to do was walk across the hall and look.

G: Where was he usually, in the cloakroom? Did he spend a lot of the day in the cloakroom?

W: No. Oh no, he spent most of his time in his own office, which was right off the--

G: The majority leader's office.

W: Yes. And on the floor. He held a press conference every day at quarter to twelve--the Senate convened at noon--and we had to have the Senate Calendar in order. That was in 1959-60, when I worked for the Democratic Policy Committee. The Senate Calendar was published every day, and you had to annotate it: "Dirksen says hold on this." "Clair Engle says okay from Calendar Committee." [I put] notes by these things. I had to produce them. The printed ones, without notations, would be delivered any place around ten-thirty or something like that. Then I would have to carry over the previous notes, put new notes by the new items, and distribute them to Johnson, to Dirksen, to Bobby Baker, to Mark Trice--Dirksen's man--to Gerry Siegel and Harry McPherson so they would all have copies.

They all got the same thing. It was all inside, but it would say what senators wanted a hold on what. I got this information from various sources. Gerry Siegel would tell me things; Harry would tell me things; Bobby would tell me things, different people: "Put this note by that," and that's what I would put down. "This is cleared

for unanimous consent," or whatever. That was kind of a pressure job. He had to have that before his eleven-forty-five press briefing preconvening every day. Sometimes it was a bit of a sweat, because the printers didn't get it to me till eleven-thirty. He would be calling for it, and what could you do? You didn't have it. And we didn't have Xerox machines; we didn't have anything handy like that. There were no extra copies of things like that floating around. You just had to wait until the one came in from the printer, or you were out of luck. There was no other way. It kind of gave me the wim-wams once in a while, but it really wasn't anybody's fault.

I see it says, "Eliminate poll tax by constitutional amendment under the Eighty-fourth Congress." I remember telling Mike Janeway, during his writing of his thesis ["Lyndon Johnson and the Rise of Conservatism in Texas"], that Mr. Johnson had written either a newsletter or had cut a tape and made a radio report supporting a constitutional amendment abolishing a poll tax. Mike Janeway said in 1959 or 1960, whenever he did his thesis, that he had searched everywhere and could find no record of this. I said to Mike, "I know it exists. I know I've seen it." And Mike said at that time that somebody else had said that, too, but nobody was able to find this thing. However, he <u>did</u> say it. All I can say is I remember he came out strongly against the poll tax in either 1955 or 1956. It had to be between January 3, 1955 and May 30 of 1956. He made some statement somewhere against the poll tax.

G: I'll look for that. Are you ready to take a break?

W: I'm really ready, yes.

[End of Tape 1 of 1 and Interview I]

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