

INTERVIEW II

DATE: April 24, 1987

INTERVIEWEE: ANITA WINTERS, with occasional comments by Melvin Winters

INTERVIEWER: Ted Gittinger

PLACE: Anita Winters' residence, Johnson City, Texas

Tape 1 of 1, Side 1

G: I wanted to ask a question about the press coming in to LBJ's home country to do stories and do research and so on. I've heard that they created a certain amount of resentment sometimes. Did you have any experience with the press?

W: No.

G: Okay. Do you know if LBJ and his brother, Sam Houston, ever got reconciled after Sam Houston's book came out?

W: I really don't think so. I don't remember. I know that Lyndon resented it, of course, but I don't think they were just really mad at one another. But he didn't have as much to do with him, I don't think, as he did before.

G: Did you ever see him out at the Ranch after that book came out?

W: No.

G: I've got a number of notes about Christmas parties, especially after he came back from the White House including one that was in the hangar and went on until pretty near three o'clock in the morning. Were you at that one?

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W: No, we weren't at that one. No, we weren't.

G: Did you ever see him play Santa Claus at a Christmas party?

W: No.

MW: Yes.

G: You did?

MW: We've got a picture of that somewhere.

W: Well, we may have [but] I never did see him.

G: Okay. Did either of you--

W: Oh, you mean did he dress up like Santa Claus?

G: Yes.

W: I never did see that but, of course, he was always giving gifts and things like that as a Santa Claus.

G: Would he come to your house to deliver the gifts or would he--

W: Oh, yes.

G: I see. On Christmas Day?

W: Yes.

G: I see.

W: And at birthday's he would come. I know he's been to the house several times when we'd have birthdays, and he'd bring gifts to us.

G: You worked on the boyhood home, is that right? Did you ever do any of that volunteer work over there?

W: Yes.

G: Who did you work with over there?

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W: I worked with Jesse Hunter and, gosh, I don't remember who else was there. But I know Jesse was one of them.

G: Yolanda [Boozer?] worked over there some, I guess.

W: Yes, she was there.

G: Did he take a lot of interest in that?

W: Yes, he did. Yes, he did.

G: Would he visit often?

W: Well, yes. I guess two or three times a week he'd be there, and, of course, Lady Bird came oftener than that.

G: What did they take a special interest in?

W: Well, just I guess how the furniture looked and what was put in and what wasn't put in.

G: Were you there after it was opened?

W: Yes, I worked in it as a hostess for a time or two--

G: Selling books?

W: --several times.

G: Did you sell books over there as well?

W: No, at that time they hadn't started selling anything.

G: I see.

W: That came later, and I didn't work there anymore.

MW: I remember that y'all worked in pairs up there and the women did all that volunteer--

W: Yes, it was all volunteer. And we had certain times that we--certain days of the week that we'd go. Of course, we staggered it. I wouldn't go every day in the week. Maybe I'd go on Thursday or maybe I'd go on Mondays or however we'd--

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G: Who recruited all the ladies to work over there? How did that work? How did that happen?

W: I think Mrs. Johnson started it and then there was a woman from Stonewall, Mrs. Weinheimer I believe it was. She came and kept it going.

G: Was that Betty Weinheimer?

W: I think, yes. Betty Weinheimer. And then, I can't think of her name anymore--Jesse Hunter was one, too, that saw to help that was there, and the days we came and things like that.

G: Did you ever hear LBJ talk about Justice [Abe] Fortas' resignation, that case?

W: No.

G: Do you, Mr. Winters, ever recall when Abe Fortas resigned from the Supreme Court? Never heard him talk about that?

MW: No.

G: I have a note here that you witnessed a will for the Johnsons in 1969, but that apparently wasn't the final will because there was a later one. Why was he putting his will together in 1969, do you think?

MW: I don't know.

G: Do you remember anything unusual about that will itself?

MW: No. Everything went to his two girls.

G: Everything went to the two girls. Okay.

In March of 1970, LBJ spent about a week at Brook Army [Hospital]. He'd gotten ill. Did y'all visit him at that time? Do you remember that incident?

W: I remember it but we never visited him. But I remember--

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G: Did he talk about it?

W: Yes, I think he did. I thought he thought he had gallstones. Then later on, he did have them.

MW: [Inaudible]

G: Of course, then in 1972 was when he had the second heart attack, in April. What do you remember about that incident? He was in Virginia, but he did come back.

W: We were just real worried about it and everything. I don't ever remember him coming while he was still ill here. I know he talked about it quite a bit. It worried him.

G: Did he?

MW: [Inaudible] George Herman Brown. [Inaudible]

W: I think--

G: This was one--I think you're thinking about the first one in 1955. This one was in Charlottesville, Virginia. He was visiting the Robbs, I think.

W: Yes.

G: What did he say about that? You say he was worried.

W: Well, of course, he just--you know when you have a heart attack, I guess it just worried him in that capacity that he just knew that he had to be more careful and everything, and he was just concerned about it.

G: Did he modify his habits after that second heart attack?

W: Well, to a certain extent he did.

G: What did he do?

W: He did more exercise, more walking, and he just seemed like he was more easygoing.

G: Of course, he started smoking again somewhere in this period.

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- W: Well, I know that he did, but I don't think he ever really smoked very much.
- G: I've seen a picture of him with a little cigar, but I always thought he smoked cigarettes.
- W: It was cigarettes. I guess maybe the cigar was given to him for something, and he just--
- MW: He didn't smoke many cigars, very seldom.
- W: I never did see him smoke a cigar.
- G: Did he watch his diet better?
- W: Yes, he did. He watched it.
- G: Was he in a lot of discomfort during this time?
- W: Well, he didn't act like it to me. He was just more careful, but I don't think it was really bothering him to any extent.
- G: Yes. At some point, he had an oxygen tent put into his bedroom. Do you remember that?
- W: I remember that oxygen tent being there, but I don't know whether he really needed it or he thought maybe he would need it.
- G: He never spoke about using it?
- W: No.
- G: I see. I think he took nitroglycerine pills from time to time.
- W: I'm sure he did. He took--
- G: Did you ever see him do that?
- W: No.
- G: What do you remember of that last Christmas? That would have been the Christmas of 1972. Is there anything special that you recall about that one?
- W: No, not that I recall. Not anything--of course, all of them were special.

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G: When was the last time you saw him?

W: Gosh. I guess it was the day or two before he died, before he had his fatal heart attack. I think it was, because I think he came--he did; he came by the house, and he was riding around. He came by the house. It was the first of the week or maybe on a Sunday. I don't remember. I know he came by, and I think Dale Malechek was driving him. They came by; they didn't stay very long. He just wanted to ride around, he said, and he thought maybe he'd come by and talk to us.

G: Did he give up driving at some point?

W: No, I think at that time he just wanted to look and have Dale drive him. I don't remember him ever, you know, just stop.

G: You think it was just a couple of days before he died.

MW: He was here.

W: It was two or three days before he had--

MW: [Inaudible]

W: --had the heart attack. Because I remember at that time "Well, gee, he seemed so happy and so healthy and everything," and then this happened so sudden.

MW: [Inaudible] helicopter [inaudible)].

G: Did you go to [Dolph] Briscoe's inauguration that January? Don't recall doing that? I know LBJ went. It was January 16 and I just thought y'all might have gone, too.

W: I believe that was the one I went to. You didn't go. You weren't here. I went with the Bairds and Cynthia Cross. We went down there.

G: Did you see LBJ there?

W: I just spoke to him for a couple of minutes.

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G: Was he in good spirits?

W: He seemed to be.

G: There is a picture in the Library of him and Mrs. Johnson sometime about this time, planting redbud trees along Ranch Road 1. We haven't been able to put a date on it. I wondered if you recalled anything about that.

W: No, I sure don't. I remember them planting them, but I couldn't put the date on it.

MW: I know one thing that happened.

G: What's that?

MW: He made a contract from Johnson City out to the county line out there. I got the contract. The reason I got it--Lady Bird had been out there with the Highway Department and just a bunch of trees. We had to save so many trees, and you couldn't score up a tree, and all that kind of stuff. Scared them all off and I got the job.

(Laughter)

G: Did he ever say why he didn't go on and have some kind of operation to try to cure his heart trouble?

W: No.

G: You mean he knew--

W: Not that I heard him say; he could have, but I never heard him mention anything about it. I really think that he just thought it wasn't happening to him and he was going to just go away.

G: Do you ever go to the Gay Nineties Club in Fredericksburg with him?

W: No.

G: I've heard that he used to go there from time to time.

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Did you go to the Library dedication when they dedicated the Library the year before?

MW: Yes.

W: Yes, we went.

G: Do you remember anything in particular about that?

W: No, I remember it was kind of a misty, messy day. But that's all.

G: Do you remember the water overflowing in the fountain and making a mess?

W: Yes, I remember that.

G: Did you see any of the demonstrators or hear any of the demonstrators that were around?

MW: I didn't see any.

W: I didn't see any.

MW: (Inaudible)

W: If they did, they were somewhere other than where we were.

G: Out of sight.

W: Out of sight.

G: I see. The reason I asked about the operation was he knew people like Dr. [Michael] DeBakey and Dr. [Denton] Cooley and doctors who were pioneering heart surgery, and I was just wondering why he didn't take advantage of that.

W: I just wouldn't know other than he just didn't think he was as bad as he was.

G: Yet, you who said he was always afraid something was going to happen to him. Didn't he say very frequently that the men in his family didn't live long and so on?

W: Yes.

MW: Always.

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W: He was always talking about the men not living very long.

G: Did he ever act afraid?

W: Not to me he didn't.

MW: I think he was prepared to accept it anytime it come.

G: There are stories that he was putting his affairs in order in the fall of 1972.

W: Well, he was doing that.

G: Was he? Did he say this was because he thought something was going to happen?

MW: [Inaudible]

W: He just wanted to get it all together. Of course, that may have been in the back of his mind, but I never heard him say that he was afraid.

G: He didn't have any premonitions of anything happening?

W: No.

MW: He'd fuss at me all the time to be sure that [inaudible]. He fussed at all his friends, [inaudible]

G: Do you recall when you learned he had had his fatal heart attack? How you got that news?

MW: Television.

W: Were we here? We were here at the house or were we at that lake?

MW: Somebody announced it on television.

W: Yes, I know but I don't know whether--I think we were here at the house and we heard it. Of course, it just shocked us to death.

MW: [Inaudible]

W: It just numbed Johnson City. Johnson City was just at a standstill almost.

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MW: [Inaudible]

W: What, Walter Cronkite?

MW: Walter Cronkite.

W: He was the one that we heard announce it.

G: You say that Johnson City was numbed.

W: Well, it was just so grief stricken, I guess you'd call it. It just seemed like everything stopped. Of course, that was all that everyone around here would talk about--of course, everywhere else as far as that goes. It seemed like it really hit the people in Johnson City.

G: What did y'all do when you heard the news?

W: Well, I cried. (Laughter) Well, there wasn't anything really we could do, but we wanted to do something, but we were just to where we couldn't do anything.

G: What are your recollections of the funeral?

W: Well, it was a very nice funeral. There was--what movie star was that, Melvin, that sang?

MW: [Inaudible]

W: I didn't think I'd ever forget what she sang.

MW: [Inaudible]

W: I can just see her but I cannot think of her name to save myself. But she sang a song at his funeral. In fact, she said at the time that he had requested if anything happened to him he wanted her to sing this song.

G: Anita Bryant, was it?

W: Anita Bryant.

G: Did you talk to Mrs. Johnson and the daughters?

W: Oh, yes.

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G: How were they taking it?

W: Well, they seemed like they were just more or less stunned. It just hadn't quite gotten to them yet. Later on, Mrs. Johnson grieved quite a bit. She couldn't talk to you or anything. Of course, the girls were younger. Of course, they missed him and everything, but they didn't seem to take it like she did.

G: Well, that's perhaps understandable.

W: Well, yes, for children.

MW: Luci took it worse.

W: Well, yes, Luci.

G: Did he ever say that he wanted to be buried down in that family cemetery?

W: That was it. He definitely wanted to be buried there by his mother and father. That was the Johnson cemetery. That's exactly where he wanted to be buried.

G: He used to take people down there a lot.

W: Oh, yes. We'd go to the house and a lot of times we'd ride down there or we'd walk down there you know. That was one thing that had to be kept in top shape.

G: Why do you suppose he was so preoccupied with that cemetery? It comes up often.

W: I just don't know. I guess he knew that's where he'd go when he just--he just wanted it--

G: What's your favorite memory of Lyndon Johnson?

W: Oh, my goodness. I have so many.

G: Well, why don't you just pick a couple at random.

W: Well, I guess one time I remember he and Hubert Humphrey came to the house. I had a bunch of quail and chukars and different kinds of wild birds. They came in, and he was talking about me fooling with birds.

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MW: She had a big room of all kinds of birds. [Inaudible] She raised quail, she raised--

W: Pheasants.

MW: Pheasant. It took a couple of us working all the time to keep those birds.

W: Anyway, they went down and looked at the birds and when they came back, well, Lyndon said, "I never knew that Anita had it in her," he said, "to fool with something like that. But there is something I will say. So long as she is fooling with something like that, she is staying out of trouble." (Laughter)

MW: (Inaudible)

W: Then another time--

G: You mentioned that he came with Hubert Humphrey. What kind relationship did they have?

W: They had a nice relationship.

G: Did LBJ ever play pranks on him that you saw?

W: Not that I saw, but I wouldn't put it past him. (Laughter)

G: Let me phrase the question another way. What is the thing you remember best about LBJ as a young man?

W: Well, he just loved life. Any way, he just enjoyed it. He was always trying to do something for someone who needed it or something. The old people around here, you know, he's helpful to them.

G: I see you're wearing a kind of a familiar looking watch. That wouldn't be a LBJ watch?

W: No. The watch I have that he gave me I have it in there in a box.

G: Okay.

MW: That's the last watch he ever gave me.

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G: Oh, you're wearing that one--we talked about that before.

MW: I don't remember. I gave him [inaudible].

G: Can you remember what the last thing you heard him say was?

W: No.

G: That would have been the day he came by with Dale Malechek, I suppose.

W: The only thing--when he walked out the door, I remember he said, "We'll all get together by the weekend." So that must have been before the weekend that he had the heart attack or somewhere along in there. That's about it. He was always wanting to come to fish frys. He just thought our fish fiys were really something.

MW: [Inaudible] A whole bunch of people. [Inaudible]

G: Of course, I'm not sure he was supposed to eat fried fish, was he?

W: If he wasn't, he sure ate a lot of them.

MW: [Inaudible] I gave him one of those. He was real proud of his.

G: Would Mrs. Johnson fuss at him when he would eat things he wasn't supposed to be eating?

W: No, she really wouldn't fuss. She would just always say "Now, darling, you know you shouldn't be eating that." But that was it.

G: Would he stop or not?

W: No. But it wasn't that she didn't try to take care of him in that respect.

G: I've heard he had a sweet tooth.

W: Yes, he did. He'd eat almost anything that was sweet.

G: Ice cream?

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W: Ice cream. He loved ice cream. I know there was one morning they were at the house and he came down for breakfast, and I had cantaloupe and scrambled eggs and bacon. He ate the cantaloupe, but he wouldn't eat any of the other stuff. He said, "Well, the cantaloupe isn't fattening."

MW: He liked to eat.

W: He loved cantaloupe.

MW: [Inaudible] gumdrops or something?

W: Jellybeans.

MW: Jellybeans was what he liked.

G: Jellybeans.

W: Yes.

G: Oh, I thought Reagan was the president that liked jellybeans.

W: Yes, but he loved jellybeans.

MW: He'd tell a story about him and Max [inaudible] jellybeans, wouldn't give him any.

W: That was when they were going to school. Max would come to school, buy a little bag of jellybeans--of course, he couldn't afford too many either. Lyndon would follow him around and beg him out of jelly--and Max would give him one. He'd say, "I'll lose that in my tooth. Give me one more." So he'd give him another one, you know, and finally he and Max would have the bag of jellybeans eaten one by one.

G: I've heard he was partial to Dairy Queen ice cream.

W: I don't know.

MW: He liked ice cream.

W: He liked ice cream.

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- G: What other foods did he liked? Mr. Winters said he'd eat pretty near anything.
- W: He did. When he was at our house, he'd eat everything we had. He wasn't picky with his food at all. He liked it all. Some courses he liked better than others, but I don't remember ever putting anything on the table that he didn't like.
- MW: [Inaudible]
- W: I don't remember.
- G: You say this was his cook or your cook?
- W: Our cook.
- MW: [Inaudible] somewhere in East Texas (inaudible).
- W: Rusk.
- MW: [Inaudible]
- W: Oh, yes, they did everything he wanted them to.
- G: I've heard after breakfast they'd have to hide any leftovers because he'd raid the kitchen.
- W: (Laughter) There was a pudding--I'm trying to think of what that is.
- G: It wasn't tapioca, was it?
- W: No. It was an egg pudding that they would fix. It was delicious. Every time he could, he'd get them to fix this. It was kind of like a vanilla pudding, only it didn't have the vanilla wafers or anything in it. It was just a thin pudding.
- G: Sort of a custard.
- W: Custard, yes. Every time we went up there, it seemed like he'd have his custard. He liked that vanilla custard.
- G: Did you ever know any of the doctors that were looking after him back here?
- W: No, I didn't.

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G: How about Tom Mills? Wasn't he the fellow who used to give him his massages?

W: Yes.

G: The Navy corpsman.

W: Yes, Tom Mills. They moved from here and went to New Braunfels.

G: Oh, they did?

W: Yes.

G: I knew they had been out here.

W: Then no, I'm thinking wrong. Tom Mills is still here. They live here.

G: You might be thinking of Clarence Knetsch.

W: That's right. No, they live here, the Mills do. That's Miss Mills, you know, that took care of Dr.--

G: Clarence Knetsch had a tragedy in his family. Do you remember that? His daughter?

W: The horse?

G: Yes.

W: Yes. Then they moved--that's the one I was thinking about--to New Braunfels, and they had a flood down there, and he went over their fence to help someone, and he got washed away; he got drowned.

G: Yes, I had heard that. I remember coming across a mention of a funeral for Roy Weinheimer's son. Do you remember that? He was killed in an automobile accident.

W: No, I don't. I remember when he was killed, but we didn't go or anything.

G: Okay. I'll ask you a question I ask a lot of people. Why did it take the people in Gillespie County so long to become LBJ supporters? Was it strictly because they were traditionally Republican or was it something that they didn't like about LBJ?

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W: No, I think they just couldn't make themselves come over to the Democrats. I think they were so--those people up there, and some of them, still are--just died-hard in the wool Republicans and Dutchmen, and you can't make them change their mind.

MW: [Inaudible] Blanco County.

G: That must have been kind of an embarrassment for him that he couldn't carry a county in his own district.

MW: He got it all every time because [inaudible].

W: Yes. That was some of the real oldies up there.

G: Were there people who disliked him on a personal basis?

W: I don't think so. I don't think they really disliked him at all.

G: Now, they did have some trouble when they were acquiring the land around the Ranch for the park, didn't they? Weren't there some controversies there?

W: Well, Melvin will--

MW: [Inaudible]

W: I think there again they just thought well, maybe he was trying to buy up everything, and they just didn't want to let him have it right straight. They want more or less to--

MW: [Inaudible] Finally, he gave in to folks [inaudible].

G: Was it a question of money, or were they just attached to the land or what?

MW: No, they were just attached to the land. [Inaudible]

W: Well, they had been there for years, and it was their home.

MW: And you're talking about the park, I think.

G: That's right.

MW: They had just been there for so many years, and they [inaudible].

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G: How about--what was his name--[Earl] Sweeney?

MW: I don't know about Sweeney. He never did give up, I don't think. As far as I remember--[inaudible].

G: Wasn't it Eugene Lindig that was one of his neighbors?

W: There was a Lindig I think. Yes.

G: Raised hogs?

W: Yes. Well, I don't know where they lived, but I don't think they were--see, that's Rosalie's daddy. I don't think that they--

G: She was born out there.

W: But I don't believe they were even on their side of the--

MW: It seems like [inaudible].

W: They're on down closer down in to Stonewall.

MW: Seems like I was on a trip to Washington and took Rosalie along.

W: No, no. We talked about it, but we didn't.

MW: She didn't go?

W: No. No, because I know we all went to the beauty shop there down at the hotel you know--because she didn't go.

MW: She did make one trip there I know because she was--

W: She may have with somebody else. I don't know.

G: What is your fondest memory of LBJ?

W: Just knowing him.

G: Tell me about his sense of humor. People said he had one, but it wasn't always the same as everybody else's.

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W: I don't know. I thought his sense of humor was just like everybody else's. He liked to tease, but I think he had a real good sense of humor.

G: Could he take a joke?

W: Not too good. (Laughter) You've heard of people liking to play jokes on people, but it seemed like it kind of hacked him or something. He didn't care too much about it. As long as he could get one on you, it thrilled him.

G: Let me pause here for a second.

End of Tape 1 of 1 and Interview II

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