

INTERVIEW IV

DATE: March 12, 1987

INTERVIEWEE: MELVIN C. WINTERS

INTERVIEWER: Ted Gittinger

PLACE: Mr. Winters' office, Johnson City, Texas

Tape 1 of 1, Side 1

G: The only note I have from 1954 is--that was the year LBJ ran against Dudley Dougherty for his second term in the Senate. Do you recall anything about that campaign in particular?

W: No.

G: Was that any different from any of the others?

W: No.

G: That was also the year that Senator Joe McCarthy was censured by the Senate for his actions. Do you remember how LBJ felt about Senator McCarthy, Joe McCarthy?

W: Not a whole lot, no.

G: I have a note that Clint Murchison and Hugh Roy Cullen supported McCarthy but that LBJ--

W: Didn't.

G: --didn't.

W: I remember that.

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G: But that he was discreet about it. Do you ever remember him making any comments about McCarthy?

W: He didn't like him.

G: He didn't like him?

W: Not a whole lot. I don't know.

G: In 1955 Sam Houston married Mary Fish in Veracruz. Do you remember anything of that?

W: No, I just remember hearing that she got married.

G: Yes. In February LBJ was back here recuperating from another kidney stone operation and had to wear a back brace, I understand. Do you remember that?

W: Yes.

G: What was the purpose of the brace?

W: He just needed it. That's all I know. I don't know any details.

G: Did he complain about having to wear it?

W: Yes, sure did. (Laughter) I can remember that [inaudible].

G: What did he say?

W: Well, he hoped he didn't have to keep it on very much longer or something like that. That's about all the conversation [inaudible].

G: Some people said he wasn't a very good patient when he was sick. Can you comment on that?

W: I don't think he was.

G: Why? Was he restless?

W: Restless, that's right.

G: Give the doctors trouble?

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W: Well, he wouldn't give them trouble but he just didn't like to--he didn't like to be tied down.

G: Yes. Of course, his mother was still alive then. Did she tend to him any that you recall?

W: I don't think so, no.

G: Here is a note--in May, the Senate passed a five-year highway construction bill worth eighteen billion dollars. Do you remember that incident?

W: Yes.

G: That was, of course, relevant to your business.

W: Right. It sure was.

G: Eisenhower had proposed a thirty year, 3 per cent bond to finance this, but they decided to finance it by appropriation instead. Do you recall any of the background to that?

W: No, I sure don't.

G: The Democratic National Committee didn't like that bill. They preferred a bill being offered by Senator Gore. Do you recall what your preference was or did you have one?

W: Well, Eisenhower is the father of our interstate program that really amounted to something in Texas. In other words, he took this attitude if you drop bombs on a city, they've got to be able to get out and get out quick and evacuate every city. He worked to that end and done that all over Texas from Houston and Austin and Dallas, everywhere. That was his program. He did lots of construction during that period.

G: Well, was the controversy over how the act would be funded rather than the act itself? Is that your memory?

W: I don't know very many details. I sure don't.

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G: Okay. You remember when Paul Butler came to Texas that year to make a tour? He was a prominent liberal Democrat, and there was some controversy in the Democratic Party already, and apparently this stirred up some more controversy. I was wondering if you recalled anything of that.

W: No, I don't.

G: In June, Miriam Ferguson had her eightieth birthday party at the Driskill Hotel. Did you go to that?

W: No.

G: Also in that month, I think, is when they learned that LBJ's cousin Margaret's husband had cancer and was dying. Do you recall that?

W: Yes, I remember.

G: She had a tragic life as I recall. What was the problem there? Did you know anything about that?

W: Well, they had one child, one girl, and he was a rancher down at Cotulla, Texas, as I remember. I know he had a lot of sickness; I remember all that. And Mary Margaret--no, it wasn't Mary Margaret. I believe her name was Margaret.

G: Her name was Margaret, that's right. Some people say he was very close to her.

W: He was. He was very close to her.

G: Did he talk about her?

W: Yes. She was very close to LBJ. Sure was.

G: Do you remember any of the details of her death? The circumstances, how she died?

W: I remember--now, I know she was sick for a while.

G: She was sick for a while?

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W: Yes.

G: I see. Then on the second of July was when LBJ had his first heart attack, in 1955, at George Brown's home out in Virginia, I think. You think he was considering running for president in 1956 if he hadn't had that heart attack?

W: I don't know.

G: He never said anything about that?

W: I don't know any details on that at all.

G: Okay.

W: [Inaudible] to run, I remember that. But I don't remember anything like that.

G: Okay. Of course, he did quit cigarettes after that heart attack.

W: Quit smoking. He sure did.

G: Did that bother him? Did he have a hard time with that?

W: He sure did.

G: He liked cigarettes.

W: Yes, he did.

G: Did he ever sneak a puff from time to time or borrow a cigarette from you?

W: He borrowed one once in a while.

G: He would?

W: But he'd take a few puffs and throw it away.

G: Did Mrs. Johnson ever see him doing that?

W: I don't recall that she ever did. No.

G: Okay.

W: I don't believe she did.

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G: When did you first see him after that heart attack? Do you remember?

W: After he came back here. Well, after he came back here and got to where he could walk, he'd want somebody--he'd want company to come up there every night, and he'd walk every night. He'd call my wife and I and want us to come up there, and call A.W. [Moursund] and his wife. He had to have a bunch of people to walk with him. You start up there at the old Ranch house and walk all the way down to visit Mrs.--one of his aunt's house, and then turn around and go back. He did a lot of walking. But he always wanted company on the walk.

G: Was he a fast walker then, even then?

W: No, he didn't walk very fast at that time.

G: Yes.

W: It would take an hour or better to make that run.

G: How far was that, do you reckon?

W: Over half a mile, I'm sure.

G: One way?

W: One way.

G: I see. They had a quiet birthday celebration that year, and I have down that you and your wife and Judge and Mrs. Moursund and the Thornberrys were the only ones there. Do you recall anything of that birthday party?

W: Well, I've got a picture around somewhere I think. [Inaudible]

G: How good was he on staying on a diet after that heart attack?

W: I think he tried to live with it. I think he tried to stay on it. Very good. Very good.

G: Did he have much trouble passing that Dairy Queen after that?

W: Yes. (Laughter) Always.

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G: Always.

W: Always had trouble.

G: It was in September that they first started talking about building a swimming pool on the Ranch. Did you have anything to do with that?

W: No. I knew all about it. I remember Marcus [?] Burg built it for them.

G: I have a note that Jack McNary [?] was talking to them. Does that name ring any bells?

W: Maybe it was him. I don't remember. He [Johnson] got a contractor to go in there and build the pool.

G: Was that a tough job? Did they have to dynamite?

W: No. The excavation worked out all right.

G: In 1956 the split in the Democratic Party really heated up between Governor Shivers and LBJ. I have a note here that in June LBJ publicly charged Shivers with plotting to wreck the Democratic Party, to split the Democratic Party.

W: They didn't get along for a long time there. But they finally became very close friends. I remember all that.

G: Do you remember how that happened? Who made the move and what kind of an agreement they finally reached?

W: No, I don't. But they got along there at the last. They got along real good.

G: LBJ said in June, too, that he was getting threatening and insulting phone calls, apparently on the race issue. Did he ever say anything to you about that?

W: No, but he done every thing he could for the colored people all the way through. He always did that.

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G: This is the time, too, the summer of 1956 when the presidential primaries are going on, and Adlai Stevenson was winning the lion's share of the primaries. Did LBJ talk about Stevenson? What was his opinion of Adlai Stevenson?

W: I think it was all right, far as I know.

G: He never said anything derogatory about him?

W: No, not that I know of. Not that I remember. I don't think he did.

G: Did you go to the state convention that year? It was in Dallas.

W: I don't believe I did. I don't think so.

G: I have a note that Byron Skelton and Frankie Randolph were named the national committee man and committee woman.

W: I don't remember that.

G: Averell Harriman entered the race in June. Did LBJ make any comment about that?

W: No, that I recall at all.

G: What was LBJ's relationship with organized labor that you recall?

W: Taft-Harley Bill entered into that somewhere or another.

G: Yes. He voted for Taft-Harley.

W: I believe that's right.

G: The reason I ask is in June the *Dallas Morning News* said that LBJ and organized labor had made their peace and that organized labor was now going to support him. I wondered if you had any insights on that.

W: No. I don't remember.

G: What did organized labor in Texas feel about Shivers?

W: I don't ever remember that being a big issue, myself. I don't remember.

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G: Okay. LBJ was trying to heal the rift in the Texas party about this time, and I believe that his movement was called the Moderation Movement. Does that ring any bells? He was trying to make peace between the liberal forces under Yarborough and the Shivers forces under the governor, I gather.

W: Yes. I remember discussing it several times.

G: Do you have any idea how he managed to do that?

W: No. He was good at getting two people together or two sides together on lots of things. He was a mediator--well, I don't know what you'd call him.

G: Was he saying "Come let us reason together" even back then?

W: Right. Something like that. Yes, sir, he sure did.

G: When they went to the national convention in Chicago that year there is some indication that [Averell] Harriman and Stevenson both went to LBJ and offered him the vice presidential nomination if he would support them. Did he ever say anything to you about that?

W: He didn't accept it.

G: No, he didn't accept it.

W: No, that's about all I remember. He didn't accept it.

G: Okay. LBJ was nominated as a favorite son in 1956. I think John Connally made the nominating speech, and apparently LBJ's sisters were at the convention because I have a note that they joined the demonstration. Do you remember anything on that score?

W: No.

G: Were you at home during the convention?

W: I probably was. I didn't go. I was at home.

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G: They came back from the convention. They came to the Ranch in the middle of August.

Do you remember anything of his visit during that time right after the convention? They nominated Stevenson and Kennedy for vice president.

Okay. Also in that month Price Daniel ran against Yarborough for the Senate, and it was a very close race. I think Daniel won by thirty-five hundred votes.

W: Pretty close, I remember that.

G: Did LBJ throw his support to Daniel?

W: Yes, he sure did. He never did like Yarborouogh.

G: Do you think that was a personal thing, or political?

W: I always thought political, but I don't know. Maybe personal.

G: Of course, LBJ was so good at mending political fences you wonder why he never mended that one.

W: I don't know.

G: But he never did.

W: Not to my knowledge.

G: Did you go to the state convention then, in September? It was in Fort Worth. That was 1956.

W: No.

G: There was a big fight between which delegations were going to be seated. The liberal loyalists sent rival delegations from a lot of counties. I was wondering if you had seen that. Kathleen Voight was leading the liberal loyalists. Did you know her?

W: Just knew of her. I don't know her personally.

G: Did LBJ ever talk about her?

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W: Well, he didn't like her, I don't think.

G: Did he say why?

W: No. If he did, I don't remember.

G: LBJ was the chairman of the Blanco County delegation that year. Do you recall that?

W: Yes.

G: And Rayburn chaired the Fannin County delegation. That's pretty high-powered county chairmen.

W: It sure was. Real high.

G: In October LBJ brought Kennedy down to tour the state. Of course Kennedy was the vice presidential nominee. Did you meet Kennedy at that time?

W: Yes, I sure did.

G: What was your impression?

W: Well, I thought he was just a young, very energetic man. That's about all.

G: Well, he would have been quite young then.

W: He was real young.

G: About thirty-seven, thirty-eight.

W: [Inaudible]

G: Did he impress you with his. . . .

W: Yes, he sure did. Impressed Lyndon a whole lot, too.

G: Did LBJ talk about Kennedy, about his thoughts?

W: Yes, he was for Kennedy.

G: He liked Kennedy?

W: Yes, he sure was. Sure did like him.

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G: A lot of the conservative Democrats seem not to have contributed in their normal pattern in 1956 because they didn't like Stevenson. Do you remember anything of that? What were feelings toward Stevenson?

W: Well, I didn't--was against him of course. I didn't like him.

G: What was it about him?

W: Oh, I don't know. Let's see, was that after he had run in the senatorial race?

G: Was it what?

W: See he had run against Lyndon once--Stevenson did. Lyndon ran against him.

G: This is in 1956. At the convention they were rivals, yes. Then again in 1960, I guess, but not so much.

W: I don't think they were in 1960.

G: I was just wondering what the feeling of Texas Democrats was about Stevenson. Apparently he wasn't too popular.

W: I don't think so.

G: Do you think that was political or personal?

W: I don't know.

G: Of course, Eisenhower won in a landslide again that year, and that kind of sent Stevenson and [Estes] Kefauver over to the rear ranks in the Democratic Party, it seems to me, and LBJ and Kennedy were seen as the new leaders of the party. Was that your impression?

W: Yes, it sure was.

G: Did LBJ comment about that to you? Did he see himself as a leader of the party after that?

W: He thought he was. Anyway, he was proud of it.

G: Price Daniel was announced as resigning his Senate seat at that time. Why did he do that?

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W: I don't know. I don't know.

G: The rumor was that Shivers was going to name Coke Stevenson to replace him. Do you recall that?

W: No. I probably knew about [it], but I don't know any of the details.

G: Do you have any recollections of Christmas of that year? I don't have any notes on Christmas of 1956.

W: I don't know. [Inaudible].

G: The Senate was almost split fifty-fifty Democrats and Republicans that year. In 1957, LBJ was elected majority leader because of one very conservative Democrat, Senator [Frank] Lausche, voted for him for majority leader. Did he ever mention that election?

W: No.

G: Okay. Shivers, in fact, appointed William Blakely to succeed Price Daniel.

W: Right.

G: Did you know Blakely?

W: No. I just knew of him. I never had any dealings with Blakely though.

G: Apparently, it wasn't clear what party he was going to vote with. He was a conservative, but it wasn't clear if he was a Republican or a Democrat. It turned out he didn't go Democrat.

They had to have a special election then for the Senate and Yarborough, Martin Dies, and Thad Hutchinson ran one against the other. Yarborough won that election. Did LBJ comment about Yarborough winning?

W: He wasn't pleased.

G: He wasn't pleased.

W: (Laughter) He wasn't pleased at all.

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G: We're in 1957 now, and in April Sam Houston broke his leg in Washington. Did you know any of the details of that? How he did that?

W: No. I sure don't.

G: Did you know Woodrow Bean?

W: No. I don't believe I did.

G: In that year, of course, there was a record number of insurance companies that failed in Texas, including some that were headed by some prominent people. Coke Stevenson's company failed, and Ben Jack Cage's company failed.

W: I knew a whole lot about Ben Jack Cage.

G: You did? Tell me about Ben Jack Cage.

W: Well, see he is a first cousin to the Cage family that I have been associated with all my life, still associated with. Ben Jack was a promoter, and he tried to promote everybody, including his uncle, to everybody else. He finally ended up down in Brazil. I'm sure you've heard all that stuff.

G: Right.

W: I don't know. He was head of a big insurance company, a hell of a big one, and he had all the Cage Brothers' business. I remember Mr. Tom Cage when he had to do otherwise, get loose from him. He was pretty well teed off at him.

G: Why did they split?

W: Why did who split?

G: I think what you're saying is that Ben Jack Cage lost the Cage Brothers business, is that right?

W: Right.

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G: Why was that?

W: It was over this [inaudible] deal. I don't remember what the whole story was, but they ceased doing business with them. I know that all of the members of Cage Brothers wanted to take it away from him. Mr. Tom Cage, he tried to keep him as long as he could, but got to where he couldn't do business with him.

G: Were his premiums too high or was it something else?

W: No, it was something else. [Inaudible] of everybody.

G: They had some quarrel with his business operation?

W: I don't know. I don't know. It's been so long--family affair. It lasted a long time.

G: Did you know Ben Jack Cage personally?

W: I just knew him when I saw him. I've never had any dealings personally with him.

G: Did LBJ have any connection with any of these companies that you know of?

W: Not that I know of, no.

G: Is there anything else on Ben Jack Cage? Is he still in Brazil or did he stay there?

W: Seems to me like he died, but I'm not positive of that.

G: I'm not sure because I haven't followed that.

W: I don't remember. It seems like he died, but he may still be in Brazil for all I know.

G: Okay. I have a note that in May General LeMay of the air force and General McConnell, also of the air force, spent the night at the Ranch. Did you meet them then?

W: Yes.

G: You did? What were your impressions of that?

W: I just met them. That's all.

G: Were you out for dinner with them or something of that sort?

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W: No. He called a bunch of us up there and went up there, and we met them.

G: What was LBJ's relationship to Arthur Godfrey?

W: I don't really know how that started. Lyndon called me one day and asked me to come to the Ranch. Arthur Godfrey was flying his own plane in there, which he did. I met Arthur Godfrey, and he stayed a night and the next day, I believe, before he left I believe. Lyndon and I took him to the airport. He had to land at Fredericksburg. Lyndon and I took him over there when he took off when he went for home. Arthur Godfrey made a record of his trip and me and my wife and family and sent it to us.

G: You've got a copy.

W: I've got a copy of the whole thing on a record.

G: I'll be darned. Is it an old 78?

W: Yes.

G: I see. Is LBJ on the record?

W: I haven't played it in so long.

G: I'd like to hear it sometime.

W: Well, I've got the record [inaudible]. It seems like we took Arthur Godfrey dove hunting. Ended up taking him dove hunting.

G: On the Ranch?

W: Yes, and he mentioned that in this record—going dove hunting.

G: Did you go dove hunting with him?

W: Oh yes, Lyndon and I was with him. We took him dove hunting.

G: How was his method of dove hunting? Tell me how you would do that?

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W: You'd got to a [stock] tank, primarily, and catch them coming in and coming out, or just ride around and shoot them out of a tree, which is not very sportsmanlike.

G: What kind of a gun was he using in those days?

W: Lyndon?

G: Yes.

W: I think a 12 gauge shotgun, I think.

G: Was it a pump or. . .

W: Probably was.

G: That was also the summer when the Congress passed the Civil Rights Act of 1957. That was pretty controversial at that time. Did he talk to you about that?

W: Oh, I knew all about it, but I don't know if I can remember it in detail.

G: Then in September they had the crisis in Little Rock, when Governor [Orval] Faubus blocked the integration of the schools down there, and they had to send in the National Guard and so on. Did LBJ comment on all of that to you?

Okay. I have a note that this may be the first time that LBJ met Jack Valenti. That he met him in Houston at a coffee for young businessmen.

W: Sounds about right.

G: Really? Do you remember when you first met Jack Valenti?

W: Lady Bird--after he went to work for him, I know. Got a long story on him.

G: What's that?

W: It's a pretty long story on him.

G: Well, tell me that.

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W: He married Lyndon's secretary, Mary Margaret. He's out in California now, head of the [Motion Picture Association], a big deal out there. When Kennedy was assassinated, Lyndon's story was that he was on that flight with Lyndon to Washington, and stayed with him up there for a long time.

G: Is there anything more about Valenti? You said, of course, there was a long story about him and you rather smiled. You care to comment further?

W: I don't know. I'd rather not. It's personal. I know about the thing.

G: Okay.

W: [Inaudible] but I don't know. I wouldn't want it to go public.

G: That's fine.

W: I'd tell you off the record what it was, but I don't want no damn hereafter.

G: In October of that year the Russians launched Sputnik. Do you remember LBJ talking about that? He was always interested in space, I know.

W: He thought it was quite an accomplishment and all that. I think he [inaudible].

G: Did that worry him?

W: Yes, it did worry him. It worried him a whole lot.

G: Did he ever say what he intended to do about it?

W: No, but he knew he had to do something. He inherited the Vietnam War and all the people who knew him thought that he ought to just drop a bomb on Hanoi and get the damn thing over with. He was talking to me about it, and I said, "Hell, I think that's what you ought to do. Drop that damn bomb." He said, "Well, you're just as wrong as you can be. I know things that you don't know." I said, "Well, that's just fine." He said, "If I drop a bomb on Hanoi the Russians will drop one on Washington, D.C. the next day." And he firmly

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believed that. That's the reason he didn't do it--told me. And I guess he was right. I don't know. But I thought they ought to get the damn [inaudible] like everybody else.

G: Did you go to the dedication of the Rayburn Library? They had that up in Bonham.

W: Yes. Yes, I sure did.

G: What kind of an affair was that? Can you tell me about that?

W: It was pretty big. There was lots of people there. There sure was.

G: Pretty nice, was it?

W: Yes. Lyndon and I both went.

G: How'd you go?

W: The car, wasn't it? I think that's the way we went.

G: Then in late October, I have a note that LBJ was hunting in South Texas and then flew to Monterrey, Mexico. Were you on that trip?

W: No, sure wasn't.

G: Then in December LBJ addressed a service club luncheon in Waxahachie. Were you in Waxahachie then?

W: Yes, I went with him.

G: Do you remember that talk?

W: Yes, sure do.

G: What club was that?

W: Oh, I forgot. See, I had a road job at Waxahachie at the same time. I had a contract there building the bypass for Waxahachie, and helped build and maintain the field office there, and knew lots of people. I went to that meeting.

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G: I wondered when I saw Waxahachie. Did you have anything to do with him coming to there and giving--

W: No, no, no. He had told me he'd had an invitation. I said, "Well, you've got lots of supporters up there. Then he decided to go.

G: He went on to Dallas from there. Did you go with him on that?

W: No, I didn't go to Dallas.

G: On the 20th of December I have a note--Jim West's funeral was in Houston. Do you recall anything of that? Did you go to that funeral?

W: No.

G: On Christmas day, here's a note, he visited Melvin Winters to deliver Christmas presents.

W: On when?

G: Christmas Day of 1957.

W: He probably did.

G: He liked to play Santa Claus, did he?

W: He sure did.

G: You don't remember what he gave you that year do you?

W: In 1957?

G: Yes.

W: No. My wife might, but I don't remember.

G: Then he went off hunting at the West Ranch the next couple of days. Were you on that one do you remember?

W: Seems like I was up there one day with he and Wesley. I think I was up there one--I don't know if it was that day or the next day.

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Wesley West was--he and I were always friends over the years, just like Lyndon and

I were.

G: Moving into 1958, I have a note that LBJ was irritated because Eleanor Roosevelt was criticizing his leadership. Did he ever mention Eleanor Roosevelt?

W: He didn't like her. Never did like her.

G: He didn't like her? Why not?

W: I don't know. I don't know any of the details. She wasn't up very high on his list.

G: Here's a note that there is some controversy over the anti-billboard law that was being debated in the Congress. Did you know anything about that?

W: No.

G: I have a note that LBJ and Senator [Robert] Kerr were at odds over the billboard law.

W: [Inaudible]

G: LBJ took a long vacation here in the Hill Country that summer for almost a month between June and July, and there was speculation that he was thinking of giving up the Senate leadership. Did he ever mention that to you?

W: No, not particularly. I don't know why he would want to give it up. If he ever talked to me about giving it up, I don't remember.

G: This was just press speculation so there may be nothing to it.

W: Might have been the press.

G: Do you remember anything of that vacation that summer? He seems to have been gone an awful long time.

W: 19--

G: 1958. Wait a minute, I'm wrong. That's 195--yes, it is 1958.

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W: I don't know.

G: He started meeting with labor leaders an awful lot that year. Do you know what was going on there?

W: Yes, he was trying to get this [inaudible].

G: Building some bridges?

W: [Inaudible]

G: Okay. Here's a note from December that J. Frank Dobie was hunting at the Ranch with Walker Stone, and R. W. Howard and Jack Howard. Do you remember that?

W: I remember them being up there, that's all.

G: Did you meet J. Frank Dobie?

W: I met him. I met him before that. He had been to the Ranch before that, as I recall.

G: What did LBJ think of J. Frank Dobie?

W: He admired him for his writing and all that kind of thing.

G: What did you think of him?

W: Well, I just didn't know much about him to think much about him.

G: What was he like in person?

W: J. Frank Dobie? Just like everybody else. He wasn't no power [inaudible]. He was just down to earth in everything he talked about, seemed to me.

G: In 1959 one of the big events is that [Fidel] Castro takes power in Cuba in January.

W: Right.

G: Did you lose anything in that takeover? Did you have any work down there?

W: No, I didn't have any work down there at all.

G: You didn't have any land or equipment, anything involved?

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W: No. Nothing in Cuba. Never did have anything down there.

G: Here's a note in February that LBJ hosted a party for Texas Rural Electrification Association officers in Washington for the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association Convention.

W: When was that?

G: This was 1959, February of 1959.

W: I think we went to that.

G: Did you go to that? Do you recall anything of that convention?

W: No.

G: Here's a note that LBJ addressed the officers at the convention and criticized Eisenhower's attempts to increase their interest rates. Do you remember what that was about?

W: No.

G: On the 18th of February, Eisenhower came through Austin on his way to meet [Adolfo] López Mateos in Mexico, and LBJ was with him. Did you go to Austin?

W: No.

G: And then LBJ was at the Ranch until late that month. Did you meet Eisenhower at that time?

W: Yes, I sure did.

G: Was that your first meeting with him?

W: That was the first and only one.

G: It's about this time that Senator [William] Proxmire begins to criticize LBJ in the Senate and, of course, Proxmire was a Democrat. Did LBJ talk about Proxmire?

W: I don't remember his [inaudible].

Winters -- IV -- 24

G: Here's another highway bill that was passed in September of 1959. It raised the gasoline tax from three to four cents, and LBJ got that bill through, apparently, because Senator [Wayne] Morse criticized him for using steamroller tactics to get it through. Do you remember anything of that bill or what that was about?

W: No.

G: In September Jimmy Allred died and LBJ went to the funeral. Did you go to that?

W: No, didn't go.

G: This is a bad year because in the next month Sid Richardson died.

W: Right.

G: And the funeral was in Fort Worth. Did you go to that one?

W: No.

G: In October apparently LBJ has leased an airplane. That's the first mention that I have found of him leasing an airplane. Do you--

W: When?

G: This is October of 1959. He's looking at land to build an airstrip. Were you with him on that?

W: No, I remember calling it the *Lucy B*. That's the first plane he leased. It crashed down and killed both pilots, the *Lucy B*.

G: Oh, yes.

W: [Inaudible]

G: Right.

Winters -- IV -- 25

W: The two pilots were going away to the Ranch in foggy weather, and they hit a hill up there. I went with Lyndon up to--we searched for nearly all day trying to find the plane. Finally found it.

G: Yes.

W: I went with him, and I remember going through the wreckage and looking through it, and both pilots were dead.

G: Do you remember the details of what you found when you got there?

W: Well, the pilots were out but the seats were still strapped to them.

G: Were they killed by the impact, do you think?

W: Yes.

G: What did they hit? Did they hit one of the hills out here?

W: They crashed into one of those high hills. They took down a lot of timber before they were stopped.

G: How did LBJ react to that?

W: Well, pretty tragic. He was really upset over the deaths of the pilots.

G: Right. Do you know why they chose to fly in such bad weather?

W: Yes, I do. Lyndon, A.W. and I, as well as I remember, was coming back from up there from visiting Wesley West, and it was bad weather and the pilots were calling to Lyndon whether to bring the plane or not bring it. I made the remark--because I had a plane at that time myself--I made the remark, "I'd tell them to stay at home." But anyway, he told them to use their own judgment or something and come on if they wanted to. And they did, and that's when they got killed.

G: You were present when he was talking to them on the phone?

Winters -- IV -- 26

W: Yes. A. W. was with us, too.

G: Where was he? Was he talking from the Ranch then?

W: No, he was in the car on the telephone radio.

G: Oh, you had a car telephone.

W: Had a car telephone.

G: I see. And they were calling from Austin?

W: Yes.

G: And he told them to use their own judgment.

W: Yes, I remember that. A. W. Moursund was with us. It was the three of us.

Tape 1 of 1, Side 2

G: On the fourth of October they had a flood. This is in 1959. I have a note that LBJ and Joe Mashman were flying a helicopter around picking people off their rooftops and things. Do you remember that flood?

W: I remember that one very well. Couldn't anybody get to the Ranch. Lady Bird was at the Ranch. Nobody could get in or out. I'm trying to think who went with me. . . . Anyway, we went the back route, went way around the country and come in and got her and took her. Where did we take her? First, I believe out to Round Mountain at Moursund's house. We got Lady Bird out, anyway. Lyndon. . . .

[Interruption]

G: I have a note that during one of these rescue operations LBJ was bitten by a dog that they were trying to rescue. Do you remember that?

W: No.

G: They pulled a dog up and he bit him.

Winters -- IV -- 27

W: [Inaudible]

G: In October Sam Rayburn announced that there was going to be an LBJ for President drive.

This is in October of 1959.

W: That's when Kennedy was elected.

G: That's right. That's the 1960 election around the corner coming up. When they asked LBJ about it, he was noncommittal. He didn't commit himself one way or the other.

W: Right.

G: When did you know that he was going to make the run?

W: Well, that's kind of a long story.

G: Well, let's have it.

W: He was at our house the night before he was supposed to go to California the next morning. We had a bunch of people there, a bunch of his friends. I don't know, there must have been fifteen, twenty couples. After the dinner somebody said, "Lyndon, if you don't get the presidency will you accept the vice presidency?" He jumped up and hit that table and said, "No, hell no, I'll never accept the vice presidency." That's the way he left it. The next day, he did accept it.

G: Did he ever talk to you about--

W: Hell, yes.

G: What did he tell you?

W: He said that Sam Rayburn talked him into it.

G: Okay.

W: Blamed it all on Sam Rayburn, well as I remember.

G: Wasn't his fault at all.

Winters -- IV -- 28

W: Wasn't his at all, but Sam Rayburn talked him into it. But he did make that statement that night.

G: When do you think--let me back this up a minute here. In 1959, late 1959, they started this. LBJ for President clubs began to come up all around the country, but LBJ never admitted that he was really a candidate.

W: Right.

G: When did you know that he was a candidate?

W: We knew it that night before he left.

G: Oh, but surely you knew it before then.

W: Well, I guess we did. I don't know. Of course we knew it before then.

G: Was he of two minds about running, do you think? Some people say he didn't think that anybody from this part of the country could be elected president.

W: Well, he did kind of think that.

G: What was wrong with us? Why couldn't we have a president?

W: I don't know. But he had his doubts as to whether anybody from Texas would ever be elected.

G: Yes. Here's a big meeting at the Ranch in October. López Mateos came to the Ranch, and Truman and Rayburn and Bob Anderson were all there at that time. Do you remember anything of that meeting?

W: The president of Mexico. [inaudible]

G: What was that about, do you remember?

W: Well, I don't remember the details on it now. Just we had a special roping and riding and horse-breaking all at the time. It was kind of a built-in rodeo for him.

Winters -- IV -- 29

G: Did they have a barbecue?

W: Yes, it was all barbecue.

G: Who used to furnish the beer for those barbecues?

W: An outfit out of Fredericksburg.

G: Out of Fredericksburg?

W: Yes.

G: Did he have a brand that he was partial to?

W: I don't know. They just sent a truck out there with the beer; keg beer and bottled beer, anything you wanted.

G: Of course, he was friendly with at least two brewers, I think, with Augie [August] Busch--

W: Augie Busch was one of them. That's Lone Star, wasn't it? Budweiser. Augie Busch was in. . . .

G: St. Louis.

W: St. Louis. Hell, no, they were big friends.

G: Of course, he did get Lone Star sometimes out of San Antonio, didn't he?

W: Yes, he got it down in San Antonio.

G: What did he drink?

W: Anything he wanted.

G: He'd drink either one?

W: It didn't make any difference. During his inaugural at Washington, his [my?] second or third cousin, this lawyer in Austin, Clark Thomason Winters, wasn't it?

G: Is that Sam Winters?

W: Sam Winters.

Winters -- IV -- 30

G: Right.

W: We were supposed be seated with Lyndon and his delegation and we were a little late getting there, and Secret Service said, "Wait a minute something's wrong." See, Winters is already up there. So we went up and brought Sam and his wife down, and Secret Service knew we belonged up there. He never did get over that.

G: Did he think you were behind that?

W: Well, he knew damn well we got his seat. Anyway, we were seated next to this Busch. He and his wife [inaudible] head of the brewery at that time.

G: Right.

W: He gave Lyndon a bunch of exotic animals. We got to talking about it. He knew me because I was accepting the animals and distributing them around to these various places here when I came in. He said, "How would you like to have some?" I said, "Well, [inaudible] I'd like to have them, but I don't think I could afford them." He said, "Oh no, I'll send you a couple of trailer loads." In a few weeks, up rolled two big trailer trucks loaded with exotic animals--I stocked the whole ranch out here.

G: What kind of animals?

W: Oh, hell, they was every damn thing. There was axis deer, and damn I don't remember what all kinds of deer out there. We had red deer. We had axis deer. We had fallow deer. Japanese deer. We went through every damn thing you could think of. I stocked the whole damn--

G: How did they work out?

W: Worked out real fine.

G: Have they?

Winters -- IV -- 31

W: Since, we've scattered them around and stocked a bunch of other ranches around here.

[Inaudible] Buda got most of them.

G: Do you remember what kinds LBJ got? You said that you received--

W: He got everything. He got everything, and I got pretty well everything he got. He got a whole damn bunch of them.

G: He said you had the receiving of those--

W: He'd call me and tell me to meet the truck at the Ranch at a certain time and show them where to put them.

G: Right. Did you have to prepare the fences and so forth?

W: We already had the deer-proof fences and everything ready for them before they got there.

G: Did you have the building of that?

W: I did build.

G: I see.

W: Fences and all the road work.

G: How much trouble is it to make a deer-proof fence?

W: It's got to be about eight, nine foot high, something they can't jump over.

G: Right. That's an expensive fence to build.

W: Very expensive.

G: Do you recall him having any black buck?

W: Yes. Black buck [inaudible], had lots of them.

G: Did you participate or see any of the roundup of any of those animals? I know that he rounded a bunch of them up for the King Ranch at one time, I believe.

W: No. I don't. . . . I was only working up there for him. Maybe Dale might [inaudible].

Winters -- IV -- 32

- G: Right. Mrs. Johnson's brother, Tommy, died in October of that month. Do you recall that?
- W: Yes. Sure do. We went to the funeral over at--hell, I can't think of that. I can't think of that goddamn little place out there.
- G: Out by Marshall, you mean?
- W: Close to Marshall. He was buried at--
- G: Karnack?
- W: Karnack, yes.
- G: Right. Was she very close to that brother?
- W: Oh, you bet. Sure. We met her mother and father and brother and the family while he was senator, and went by there on our way to--where the hell did we go? It was Alabama, that's where we were going. Went by on our way to Alabama. That picture up there was taken in Alabama.
- G: You have a picture on the wall up there of that trip.
- W: He was senator at the time. The four of us [inaudible].
- G: Her brother would have been a relatively young man at this time, wouldn't he?
- W: It seemed like he was in his forties. [Inaudible]
- G: I have a note that the Johnsons celebrated their twenty-fifth anniversary in this year at the Dillman Street home in Austin, and then they went to El Mat afterwards. Did you go to that?
- W: No. I don't think we did. I don't believe we did.
- G: Jerry Holleman was with LBJ a good deal this year. Jerry Holleman, I think, was a leader in the AFL-CIO in Texas at that time. Did you have any dealings with him at that time?
- W: No.

Winters -- IV -- 33

G: It was in November that LBJ picked up Bobby Kennedy at College Station and flew him to the Ranch. Were you aware of that visit?

W: Yes, I met him.

G: You met him at the Ranch? Did you go hunting with him at that time?

W: Yes, seems like we did go hunting. Up to the West Ranch, I believe.

G: My note doesn't say that because apparently they stayed at the Ranch overnight and then he took him to the airport in Austin the next day. But they did go hunting that morning.

W: I think we went to the West Ranch [inaudible].

G: I was wondering if that was the scene that was portrayed on TV where Bobby Kennedy cut himself with the scope.

W: Same trip. Seems like A. W. and I both were there.

G: Do you remember that incident of Bobby Kennedy getting cut by the telescope when he fired at the deer?

W: Yes.

G: That did happen?

W: That did happen. It wasn't bad, but it did happen.

G: Was that because he was unfamiliar with that rifle?

W: No, I don't know. He was holding it too close to his eye.

G: Did he get ribbed for that?

W: He sure did.

G: How did he take it?

W: All right.

Winters -- IV -- 34

G: All right? You couldn't tell--could you detect any ill feelings between Bobby Kennedy and LBJ at that time?

W: None whatsoever.

G: Do you know what Kennedy was there for, what the purpose of that trip was?

W: No, sure don't.

G: Okay, I think I understand why you relate this to the West Ranch, because the day after Kennedy left, you and the Moursunds and the Kellams all went to Eagle Pass to go quail hunting, according to my note. Does that ring a bell with you?

W: Went where?

G: To Eagle Pass.

W: We went to Jim West's Ranch down there. That's where we went.

G: Okay. That's why your association with that.

W: We went to the West Ranch down there. That's where we went.

G: Okay. Hubert Humphrey came to the Ranch that December. Did you meet him then?

W: Sure did.

G: Was that the first time you met him?

W: First and only time.

G: What were your impressions of Hubert Humphrey?

W: I don't know.

G: What did LBJ think of Hubert Humphrey?

W: Well, I think he thought a whole lot of him. I may be wrong, but I never recall him ever talking against the man.

G: Some say he was fond of playing jokes on Humphrey. Did you ever see that happen?

Winters -- IV -- 35

W: No.

G: On the fourteenth of December, LBJ addressed the Association of General Contractors in Austin. Were you at that one?

W: Yes, sure was.

G: Do you recall anything from that?

W: We got a bunch of pictures somewhere of that.

G: I was wondering if maybe you were the one who got him that invitation?

W: I was.

G: You were?

W: [Inaudible]

G: Well, it could be. We'll look at them after a while.

Here's a mention of Mrs. Johnson's birthday at the Ranch, but I'm not sure if you were there. Do you call that particular birthday? This is 1959.

W: Sure don't.

G: Right before Christmas the LBJ for President office opened in Austin. My note says Larry Blackmon was executive director, with Jake Jacobsen, and Byron Skelton was the chairman of the executive committee. Were you active in that campaign at all?

W: No.

G: Okay.

W: Not to my knowledge. I might have been. I don't remember.

G: Okay. Let's move in to 1960. LBJ was at the Ranch, hadn't gone back yet.

(Interruption)

Winters -- IV -- 36

I have a note here in January of 1960 that LBJ was interviewing Henry Blackburn for the job of ranch foreman. Did you know Henry Blackburn?

W: Did he ever work up there?

G: I don't know.

W: I don't think he did.

G: That name's not familiar to you?

W: No, it's sure not.

G: About this time I have a note regarding H. L. Hunt. What do you know about the relationship of H. L. Hunt and LBJ?

W: I don't [inaudible].

G: You don't know if he was a backer of LBJ's or not?

W: H. L. Hunt. That rings a bell, but--where is he from?

G: He is the big millionaire out of Dallas. He and his brothers.

W: I know who you are talking about now. No.

G: Here is a note in April that the Johnsons and yourself and Hugh Sidey had dinner at your lake house in Austin before coming back to the Ranch that evening. Do you remember that event?

W: Our lake house, what?

G: In Austin. You had a lake house on Lake Travis, is that right?

W: Granite Shoals.

G: Granite Shoals, I see. Do you recall that event with Hugh Sidey being present? Was that just an ordinary dinner?

W: There are some pictures in there of Lyndon and me on that boat, his boat. Somewhere.

Winters -- IV -- 37

(Interruption)

G: In April, I have a note that you and the Johnsons and Tom MacAvoy [?], Jane Shoal, all drove to Austin for Lucy's confirmation in St. David's Church in Austin. Do you remember that, Lucy's confirmation?

W: The church?

G: Yes, St. David's Church.

W: All I remember about that [inaudible].

G: Let's see. Then you didn't have a lake house on Lake Travis then?

W: No. It was on Granite Shoals. He had one up there, too. He leased it for nine years.

G: Let's see. In May--

(Interruption)

In May, LBJ was at the Ranch with a large number of people when [Nikita] Krushchev announced that they had that U2 pilot, Gary Powers, in custody. Do you recall that U2 incident when they shot that down? Were you at that party at the Ranch when that announcement was made?

W: No, I don't think.

G: I was wondering what LBJ's reaction might have been.

W: I don't remember. I don't think I was there.

G: The official note says that LBJ announced his candidacy for president in 1960 on the fifth of July, day after the fourth of July. Was he here at the Ranch, do you know? Do you recall that announcement?

W: No, I sure don't.

Winters -- IV -- 38

G: On the sixteenth he came back from the convention of course, from having accepted the vice presidential nomination. What was his mood? What was he like?

W: They came back from the convention when he was elected vice president?

G: Well, before the election. Right after he came back from Los Angeles, he came back to the Ranch. He had just accepted the nomination. He had told you that he'd been talked into it by Sam Rayburn.

W: Sam Rayburn.

G: Was he happy with this or sad--what was his mood?

W: I don't know that he was happy with it or not. He wanted to be president very bad. I know that it was a let-down for him, but that's the reason he didn't want to accept the vice presidency. But Sam Rayburn [inaudible].

G: Some people are curious as to why he would give up the Senate majority leadership to be vice president. Do you have any idea?

W: No, I sure don't.

G: They went to Acapulco for a few days after that. Were you along on that trip?

W: No. He and Lady Bird?

G: Yes. And I have a note that everybody but him was sick on that trip.

In August he had a barbecue for his district and county men at the Ranch and had a big meeting with Governor [Price] Daniel and Jake Pickle, with you, Bill Allen, and Jimmy Dillinger. Do you remember that one? What was that about?

W: I do. Jimmy Dillinger was a contractor.

G: I see.

Winters -- IV -- 39

- W: Jimmy Dillinger was with Brown and Root, and I was with Chase Brothers and we [inaudible]. Brown and Root and Chase Brothers.
- G: Was this friendly competition or unfriendly?
- W: No, it was friendly competition. Employees of Brown and Root--got his own bank over in Marble Falls now. He's doing very well [inaudible] after old times, how we used to fight each other over these contracts.
- G: Who was this now?
- W: Howard Counts.
- G: How do you spell that?
- W: C-O-U-N-T-S. Howard Counts. He was with Brown and Root, and I was with Chase Brothers. We used to battle over contracts, bid against each other. But it was all friendly.
- G: From this meeting apparently you went to a big rally in Blanco County, *the* Blanco County Rally I guess it was. Was LBJ talking about campaign strategy or how he wanted you to proceed during the campaign? Do you recall what was discussed at this meeting?
- W: I don't remember when it was--Blanco, wasn't it?
- G: Yes.
- W: Was that at Blanco, that they did that?
- G: Right.
- W: [Inaudible] was there, but I don't remember.
- G: Did you know Amon Carter?
- W: Just met him one time.
- G: I have a note that LBJ was going after his support at this time. Did he talk to you about that?

Winters -- IV -- 40

W: The reason I remember it, he got it. I think he did as far as I remember. Amon Carter was a pretty big figure.

G: Yes. Did LBJ comment, in your hearing, about the Kennedy-Nixon debates that were being televised that fall? You remember that was a really big deal, that the two presidential candidates were going to debate one another on TV. Did he say anything about that to you?

W: No, not that I remember.

G: About this time Mrs. Johnson's father became very ill in East Texas, and died in October of that year. She was pretty close to her father, wasn't she?

W: Real close.

G: Did she take it badly?

W: Sure did. Real bad. Sure did.

G: Here is a note that LBJ tried contact lenses in November of that year. Do you remember that?

W: He didn't like them at all. Not at all.

G: What was wrong?

W: I don't know, but he just didn't like them.

G: He was sensitive about being seen with glasses on, wasn't he?

W: Sure was.

G: Didn't like to have his picture taken with his glasses on.

W: He always tried to take them off.

G: Would he fuss at the photographers?

W: Yes.

Winters -- IV -- 41

G: In November of that year there was a very unpleasant incident at the Adolphus Hotel in Dallas, when he and Mrs. Johnson were mistreated by a crowd out in front of the hotel. Do you recall that?

W: I know it happened.

G: Did he ever talk about that?

W: No. I don't remember any special details.

G: Then on the eighth, election day 1960, LBJ watched the returns at the Driskill Hotel. Do you remember where you were?

W: When he was elected vice president?

G: Yes. He was at the Driskill. He came home to watch the returns--

W: We were there.

G: Do you remember any details of that day? What was his mood?

W: It wasn't good, I remember that.

G: Was the election too close to suit him?

W: Too close, I guess.

G: Do you recall when everyone finally realized that they had won?

W: Seems to me like it was way late; [we'd] been up all night. (Laughter)

G: On the sixteenth, Kennedy came to the Ranch about six o'clock in the evening. I have a note that he was met by a bunch of people from Stonewall who gave him a hat. Were you present at that one?

W: I don't recall.

G: This was the first time I think LBJ took JFK deer hunting. I think we talked about that hunting trip. Were you along on that one?

Winters -- IV -- 42

W: I don't remember now. Did I say something about it before?

G: I'm not sure.

W: I don't believe I was along.

G: Augie Busch came to the Ranch that December, and LBJ took him hunting at the West Ranch. I believe A. W. Moursund was along, and I don't know if you were or not.

W: I don't remember.

G: There is some indication this month that LBJ was thinking of selling his radio station. Did he ever mention that to you?

W: Yes.

G: Was he really thinking of selling it?

W: What year was that?

G: This was 1960, right after the election.

W: I don't know, but there was some talk about it.

G: I don't know why he would want to sell it, unless he thought it was a conflict of interest in some way.

W: May have been.

G: He wound up putting that all into a trust, didn't he?

W: Right.

G: What was your role in that blind trust that he put everything into?

W: That was when he was president?

G: When he was vice president.

W: When he was vice president. I don't know. I was involved [inaudible] foundation and the trust [inaudible].

Winters -- IV -- 43

G: Who had the final say-so in making decisions on items regarding the trust?

W: He did, or Lady Bird, one of the two. I never made any decision on that foundation or anything else without their consent. They told me to, but I never did do it. Never did. I'd give out millions of dollars out of that Johnson Foundation.

G: So that blind trust wasn't all that blind?

W: It wasn't all that blind; it sure wasn't. I never done anything that they didn't approve, but I also made a point to find out if it was favorable. Churches come in here and want forty or fifty thousand dollars, and I just stall them off until I could find out how they felt about it. I wouldn't turn loose the money without them knowing.

G: But what all was involved in the trust? The Foundation obviously was in the trust, and the radio station, and I guess the TV station. What about the Ranch operation?

W: It never was in the trust.

G: That remained under his personal supervision?

W: [Inaudible].

G: He had banking interests, too, at this time, didn't he? Here and in Llano and so on.

W: He had one here and at Marble Falls. And I know [inaudible] hardware store was.

G: That's something I don't know much about, was that hardware store. How big a hardware operation was that?

W: At one time, I had started off and bought a hardware store here, and then the people out in Blanco got after it, and I built a new one in Burnet. I had one in Fredericksburg. I was pretty well all over the country.

G: He was in on the one at Marble Falls?

W: He wanted part of the one at Marble Falls.

Winters -- IV -- 44

G: Why was he so interested in that? Was it a money-making--

W: Just investment. It made money and we sold it at a big profit. I finally sold most of them out to the people who were working for me a long time, give them [inaudible] to pay for it. Every one of them paid out in less than seven years' time. [Inaudible].

G: They were pretty good stores, then.

W: One of them down here is still in business. He's older than I am.

G: Was LBJ a patron of his own store then, for the Ranch?

W: Oh yes, he was that.

G: Did he buy his equipment through that store, his ranching equipment?

W: Yes.

G: Just one or two more general questions. He always had a good many automobiles and trucks that he used at the Ranch. Did he tend to buy or to lease, or what kind of arrangement did he usually have for those automobiles?

W: As far as I know, he bought them. I didn't have any part of that. Lincoln Continentals [inaudible].

G: He always had a preference for Lincolns, didn't he?

W: Sure did. Fussed at me over driving a Cadillac.

G: Why did he fuss at you?

W: He just never did like Cadillacs. Of course [inaudible].

G: There were stories about him being kind of a fast and somewhat reckless driver.

W: He was a fast driver but he was not a reckless driver. He was a hell of a good driver, in my estimation. I always felt comfortable with him.

G: Did you ever go with him in that little car that he would drive into the water?

Winters -- IV -- 45

W: I sure did.

G: Did he pull that trick on you?

W: Yes, he pulled that damn trick on me up there at the lake one time.

G: How did you react?

W: Oh, God dang, I swear. You'd scream and holler, "Don't do it!" and he'd just drive right off in it. He got a big kick out of that.

G: Did anybody jump out of that car when they were getting ready to do that?

W: Not that I know of. No, he just drove down there pretty dadgum fast and I said, "Lyndon, don't do that." We drove right off in it. Of course, we were soaked. He got a lot of fun out of that.

G: Was he a practical jokester that way?

W: Yes, to a certain extent he sure was. He liked that.

G: What kind of sense of humor did he have? Some people say he got his biggest kicks out of teasing people.

W: Oh, yes, he did. He really liked pulling something on someone.

End of Tape 1 of 1 and Interview IV

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MELVIN C. WINTERS

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- (5) Copies of the transcripts and tape recordings may be deposited in or loaned to institutions other than the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library.

<u>Anita Winters</u>	<u>3-22-04</u>
Donor	Date
<u>John W. Carl</u>	<u>4-8-04</u>
Archivist of the United States	Date