

INTERVIEW I

DATE: February 22, 1970
INTERVIEWEE: MRS. ALVIN WIRTZ
INTERVIEWER: DAVID McCOMB
PLACE: Mrs. Wirtz's apartment, Rochester, Minnesota

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M: First of all, Mrs. Wirtz, I'd like to know, do you remember when you first met Lyndon Johnson?

W: No, but we knew his father first.

M: Oh, you did know his father first?

W: My husband was in the Texas Senate and Lyndon Johnson's father was in the House of Representatives.

M: That's Sam Johnson. So Sam Johnson knew your husband.

W: Yes.

M: I see.

W: And I don't remember when I got to know Lyndon, but I presume that somewhere along that time my husband did. He was a young man.

M: Lyndon was a young man when you first met him.

W: He was tall and slender.

M: Tall and slender.

W: Nice looking.

M: You think he was handsome?

W: Yes. I don't think I met him until our Senate days were over.

M: After your husband retired from the Senate?

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W: So then he started to come into my home in Austin and from then on we saw quite a bit of him. He and my husband became close friends. He was sort of a protégé of my husband's.

M: That's what I understand.

W: I guess you'd say [that]. Alvin took a big interest in lots of young men.

M: Oh, he did?

W: Homer Thornberry and John Connally and Welly Hopkins and just a lot of young men. He was interested in their future welfare, but especially Lyndon.

M: Did your husband seem to think that Lyndon Johnson would be a good politician?

W: Oh, yes.

M: So your husband had faith in his future?

W: Yes. Alvin was always very interested in politics. He didn't want to be in office himself. Oh, he loved the Texas Senate, but he didn't want to do anything else. But he liked, you know, young men that he thought would be capable. He liked to interest himself in those.

M: Did Lyndon Johnson seek his help then when he first ran in 1937?

W: Yes.

M: Was your husband the campaign manager?

W: No, he was not his campaign manager, more his advisor.

M: Gave him advice on what to do and what to say?

W: Of course, he helped in the campaign, but he didn't want to become

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campaign manager.

M: He didn't want to become a campaign manager?

W: No, not in name.

M: So he was just then more of an advisor than anything else. Did he advise on national politics as well as state politics?

W: Oh, yes.

M: And your husband also was a lawyer, was he not?

W: Yes.

M: So he helped Lyndon Johnson in legal matters too then?

W: Yes. Well, we knew him before he went to San Marcos to school.

M: Before he went to San Marcos.

W: I was trying to think. He was Youth Administrator before he was Kleberg's secretary?

M: As I recall he was National Youth Administrator afterwards. He went to Washington in the early thirties as Kleberg's secretary, and about the mid-thirties he became the NYA Director.

W: I see. Of course, I don't particularly know anything to tell, but he was with us for a while in my home.

M: You knew him then when he was NYA Director?

W: Oh, yes.

M: All through that time?

W: Yes, and before he was Kleberg's secretary.

M: Before then, through Sam Johnson. I see. Do you remember when Lyndon Johnson got married? Did you meet the bride?

W: Well, not until after they were married.

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- M: Not until after they were married.
- W: Well, that was when he was Youth Administrator, and he brought her to Austin to live. That was in '35.
- M: About that point in time, 1935.
- W: My daughter was in the University, a sophomore, and so she especially was with them.
- M: She was about their age then?
- W: Well no, she's a good bit younger. See, Lyndon was up working, and Bird had gotten two degrees at the University when they married.
- M: Oh, I see.
- W: But anyway, they were close friends. Of course, I was a whole lot older, but we were together quite a bit. Lady Bird had lunch with me yesterday.
- M: Oh she did? Here in Rochester?
- W: Yes. I have . . . We call them the Saturday Girls, but we met on Friday, day before yesterday. So she called me and wanted me to come to town and have lunch with her, but I had these four girls. Of course they were thrilled to death. Bird came out and had lunch with us.
- M: Oh, that's nice.
- W: So now all my friends wish that they had been here.
- M: The Johnsons were here for a physical checkup, were they not?
- W: No, for this meeting.
- M: They had a meeting here?
- W: He's on this, what do you call it, this Rochester board.

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M: I see.

W: Board of trustees, some board. This is the first time she's come with him since he's been coming to these meetings.

M: Does he usually contact you when he comes into Rochester?

W: Oh, yes.

M: Call you?

W: I usually go out to my daughter's and see him out there, have dinner with him out there.

M: I see. Do you remember anything about that first campaign that Lyndon Johnson had in 1937?

W: Was that for the House?

M: He ran for the House, that's right, the House of Representatives of the United States.

W: I don't know that I remember any of the details.

M: Then he ran again for the Senate in '41, 1941; he lost that.

W: Yes.

M: That was against Pappy O'Daniel, and Pappy O'Daniel beat him. Do you recall anything about that campaign?

W: Of course I don't know if it's true or not, but we felt like Pappy O'Daniel, maybe you better strike this out, that Pappy O'Daniel stole that election.

M: Yes, that was pretty close.

W: So when the second one came up--

M: This was in '48?

W: --against Coke Stevenson, they felt like the same thing had happened.

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So they really fought that. For about a week Lyndon thought he was elected. I know one night I was having a dinner party, and in the middle of the dinner party he called Alvin to come down quick. They'd found out that Stevenson had won. So that's when they had the big trial.

M: Your husband helped lead the lawyers in that fight, didn't he?

W: Yes.

M: In Texas. Did he go to Washington at all in that legal battle?

W: Oh, yes. It was contested and went before the Supreme Court. I remember one phase of it. Dan Moody was Coke Stevenson's lawyer. So he said that some town in the Valley where all the votes went for Lyndon just couldn't be right, there had to be fraud. And I remember my husband told the Judge that Governor Moody evidently had forgotten that when he ran for governor he got every vote in that town, just as Lyndon had gotten them.

M: Lyndon won that one in '48.

W: Yes, but it was a struggle. He won by forty-eight votes.

M: Yes, by forty-eight votes. Then he got to the Senate and served in the Senate a good while. As I recall he was in the Senate at the time your husband died.

W: Yes.

M: Now after that did you have much contact with Lyndon Johnson?

W: Listen, we had contact with him his whole life. When my husband died at this football game--

M: That was the Rice-Texas football game.

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W: --and somebody saw Lyndon before he knew it and said to him, I mean said to Lyndon, "Well, Lyndon, you've lost your best friend." That was the way he was told. We were very close all my husband's [life], I mean, from the time we knew him.

M: Did he come to see you immediately after that?

W: Yes. He came straight to our house.

M: In the years that followed did he often see you?

W: Oh, yes.

M: When he was in town, in Austin or Rochester, he'd look you up?

W: Yes, very considerate and thoughtful.

M: Doesn't it seem strange to you that a man as busy as that would have the time to look up old friends?

W: Oh, but he did. Yes, you're right, it does seem strange.

M: But he nonetheless did that? Well, he must have had a great affection for you then to do that.

W: He certainly did for my husband. They talked on the telephone almost daily.

M: They did? You mean when Lyndon Johnson was in Washington?

W: Lyndon would call Alvin almost every day.

M: Almost every day?

W: Yes. Lyndon said to me once, and people had criticized him, thought that Alvin called him to tell him what to do, he said, "As a matter of fact, I call him and ask his advice."

M: I see. Do you remember any particular events when he called him for advice? Anything in particular?

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- W: No. See, I saw him practically every day when he was in Austin. He was in my home so much, it's hard to pick out. I really just don't remember any incidents.
- M: Did you ever have a chance to campaign for him? Did you ever call up names or anything?
- W: Oh, yes, sure. I did call over the telephone, but I can't campaign.
- M: But you didn't go out and make a speech?
- W: No, I can't do that.
- M: Did you go to his campaign headquarters to do this, or did you do this from your own home?
- W: No, I never did work in the headquarters.
- M: You never worked in the headquarters. But you would talk to your friends and that sort of thing?
- W: Oh, yes.
- M: Did he seem to appreciate that?
- W: Yes, he did.
- M: Well, that pretty well exhausts the questions I had for you. Is there anything that you'd like to say about Lyndon Johnson?
- W: Of course I think he's a very fine man.
- M: A very fine man.
- W: And we love him right or wrong.
- M: Right or wrong.
- W: Not that I can pick out any wrong, but . . .
- M: But he's been a long, good friend of yours.
- W: Yes.

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M: Well, I thank you for your time and for talking to me about this.

W: I don't care anything about seeing this thing. You can just fix it up and destroy the recording.

M: All right. Thank you very much.

[End of Tape 1 of 1 and Interview I]

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