

INTERVIEW III

DATE: May 4, 1982
INTERVIEWEES: VIRGINIA and WILTON WOODS
INTERVIEWER: MICHAEL L. GILLETTE
PLACE: The Woods' residence, Seguin, Texas

Tape 1 of 1

G: Well, let's start today with Professor [H. M.] Greene.

VW: I had a government class under Professor Greene at seven o'clock in the morning, and he required reading of the morning newspaper before you could go into his class. If he called on you, you had to name the topic, then he would call on someone else and ask how that was affecting America or how it would eventually affect America, whether it would be economics or whatever. Then after different members of the class would have discussed it, he would inject his own ideas.

G: So he really encouraged discussion?

VW: Oh, yes. A lot of the pupils complained that they weren't getting information about government that they thought they should know because so much was about what was actually happening at that particular time.

G: Besides the newspapers, did he require or urge you to read other periodicals?

VW: Occasionally he would ask a question about a magazine, or he would come in and he would say there was a certain item in some magazine

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this week that dealt with government and [tell us] what was it all about, or who was the key person in it, or which area of government was it about.

G: Do you think he was more interested in state politics or national politics?

VW: Oh, I think he was more interested in people and how government affected them [at] whatever level.

G: But in his references, the things that he talked about, the questions, were these more likely to be references to state political figures or people in Texas history or people in national [politics]?

VW: At that particular time it was more national.

G: How do you think he influenced Lyndon Johnson?

VW: Oh, of course--

W: Well, Lyndon at that time was seeking information from any and all professors and he talked to them at length after hours about everything, but of course anything political. And there were so few [like him]. Apparently of the seven hundred students at San Marcos, he was probably the only one doing that. The rest of them were interested in playing poker and a hundred other things, but not interested in politics or how people got elected. But Lyndon was. Now, Professor Greene was pretty philosophical in all his opinions about politics. He wasn't bitter against Republicans but he was definitely against them. What else?

VW: He really felt like the little man needed to be looked after. And he was always talking about how this was going to affect the person

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who couldn't defend himself. He was very concerned about that.

G: Was he against the large corporations?

VW: Well, he was against them if he felt like they were getting more out of it than they should. Yes, to that extent. If he felt that government was favoring them over a small businessman, very definitely he would have been opposed to that.

G: Did he ever have problems from the administration or from local people or anyone who objected to his talking controversial subjects in class?

W: I don't think so.

VW: I don't think he did. He may have. Everyone considered him a rather colorful character, and I think most people just didn't worry about the actions that he took.

G: What did he look like?

VW: Well, he was not a large man. What did he look like, Wilton? When I had him for instructor he was already gray-headed and [had] very sharp, sparkling eyes and a little twist to his mouth when he thought he had you in a corner on a question. As I said, he was a small man. He was rather swarthy, wasn't he, Wilton?

W: He was. He wasn't ever flashily dressed, never. He seemed to kind of lean towards old clothes.

VW: Old clothes. Khakis, yes.

There were a lot of comments about his performance in the classroom. He had none of that when I was there, so whether that

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act was cleaned up, or whether that was something that kids had just said about him because he lent himself to it or--

G: You mean chewing tobacco and--?

VW: Yes.

G: He didn't do that?

VW: I just didn't see that, no. After, if you had said something in class that picqued his interest, he would follow you to the door and he'd say, "Now, let's continue."

G: Did everyone call him Prof. Greene or what?

VW: Yes, everyone did. Or just Prof. Even to those that weren't in his class he was just Prof. And he was so relaxed with all the students.

W: Yes, and much closer to them. Most of the professors were kind of dignified and high-hat, but not Prof. Greene. He knew all the local problems and peculiarities of every student he had.

VW: When groups would form on the Quadrangle, standing around just talking, he would stop by and see what the conversation was about and add his to it.

G: I hear he lived in a very modest fashion with farm animals around.

VW: Yes.

G: Did you ever go over to his house?

VW: I saw it quite often. Wilton, did you go?

W: No, not actually go in it. It was a real small, frame board house, and I don't know how they raised so many kids in such a small house, but they did. Then later on he got enough money to build

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this retreat up in the mountains at Devil's Backbone. He bought one of those mountains, and it had a valley and he built a little house way down in the bottom of that valley. For weekends and holidays in his later years, he liked to get away from it all.

VW: But even in town, his house was like a nature retreat. It had every type of growing plant around it, and it just looked like it had been left to grow natural so that it would be a nature habitat.

G: Anything else on Professor Greene that we can talk about?

VW: I can't think of anything.

W: He's a hard man to actually describe, don't you think?

VW: Yes. But if he really liked a student, he would constantly ask them, probing, making them think deeper about the subject.

G: Let me ask you more about the Harris-Blair group. You mentioned that last time as a debating organization, but can you recall their social events or--?

W: No, I can't, because I wasn't a member and it was such a small club. I'm sorry I can't help.

G: Was it considered a prestigious organization, do you know?

W: Was it?

VW: It was when I was in school.

G: Now, I have a few questions about LBJ in Cotulla. We talked about that a little bit last time, I think. Do you know how he got the job in Cotulla? Who got him the job?

W: No.

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G: I've heard that it was a Mr. [W. T.] Donaho who offered him [the job], another indication is perhaps by the teachers' placing bureau at the college. Do you have any recollection of that at all?

W: No, but that sounds more logical.

G: Did you ever visit LBJ in Cotulla when he was down there?

W: No.

G: Did he come back to San Marcos on weekends or things like that occasionally? Would you see him?

W: Yes.

G: What would he talk about? Did he describe his life there in Cotulla?

W: Well, to me he talked about the poverty of the Mexican student. He liked them as students and definitely wanted to help them any way he could, but he knew it was an uphill pull to do anything for them. But you know how he was, he was willing to tackle anything. But we didn't talk a big lot about it because I never had been down there and we had little common ground, very little.

G: Do you think this was an experience that he took with him that affected his attitudes later on about poverty?

W: No, I think he got it down there, because these stories you hear about the poverty of the Hill Country, none of them are exaggerated. Those people up there were poor. And of course they were proud and it was a different type of poverty from the Latins at Cotulla. They probably actually had very few respectable clothes and very few automobiles if any, probably not any. I don't imagine he had

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a student whose folks had a car. But the Hill Country people were living on a nonproductive land [so] that they were equally as poor but in a different way. They did manage to dress well enough to go to Sunday school and church and places like that where. . . . But it seemed like in that day and time money was more of a luxury than a necessity, and they got along pretty well without money. Of course, I guess they had to.

G: Did he ever talk about his efforts to improve the children's health or their extracurricular activities or anything, all of the different things that he did?

W: No.

G: I have a note here that says he roomed with a high school coach when he was down there. Do you remember that? Do you have any recollection?

W: No, but there ought to be a lot of people that know more about that than I do, because I plead guilty. I don't know much about it.

G: There's one other thing on Cotulla. LBJ was elected or selected as editor of the summer College Star while he was teaching down there at Cotulla. How did he get elected in his absence, do you recall?

W: Well, that's just one of those periods when he was coming back and spending a lot of time on the campus or all the time he had.

VW: I think it was probably because Mexican schools had short terms, and he probably came back to the campus. You could come back and

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take six weeks of school in the spring before you started the summer term.

G: I see.

VW: And especially if you were teaching in a Mexican school. It was a short school term.

G: But he wasn't there much to campaign. I mean he couldn't have been during the week. Did you all campaign for him while he was gone?

W: In what way?

G: Did you campaign for his election as [editor], or help him get [elected]?

W: To the Star?

G: Yes.

W: I don't know. That might have been a White Star project, but. . . .

G: Did LBJ ever teach, say, history and civics at the training school at San Marcos?

W: No.

G: You don't have any recollection of that?

VW: Did he do student teaching?

W: Well, that's a possibility. I forgot about that. The so-called subcollege where the kids from little schools, just like he came from up in the Hill Country, the college didn't recognize them unless they took some more schooling. I think they did have--which I didn't attend--courses that prepare you to be a teacher. Of course, at that time it was more of a teachers' college than it is now. Everything was beamed toward making teachers out of the kids.

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G: Now, I have a note that in April of 1930, you were initiated into the Press Club. Can you tell me about the Press Club more? Do you recall what it was like, how often it met, what it did, what the purpose of it was?

W: That Press Club at San Marcos?

G: Yes. Was it made up of people that wanted to go into journalism, do you think?

W: Probably. Because Lyndon persuaded Doc [Tom] Nichols to teach a journalism class, which it didn't have up until that time. And Doc Nichols, according to that book he wrote out there, told Lyndon the only way he could get a class was to get half a dozen people or more to sign up to take the course. And I think he'd list me as probably the first one after Lyndon signed up.

G: Before we turned on the recorder, you were telling the story that Raymond Dwiggins told you of LBJ's mother talking with him at the outset of their experience rooming together. Can you recall that story?

W: Raymond--of course this is immaterial--but for the past fifteen years I've gone fishing in Mexico with him. He had a real large camp way, way down in Mexico. We went fishing down there, a small group of us.

Raymond told this story at least once or more. About the first time he'd mentioned something about he was LBJ's first roommate, I said, "Well, Raymond, Barton Gill claims that honor in San Marcos." And Raymond said, "Well, no big deal. But I

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think I am. Lyndon moved every few weeks. Most of us did and I've heard that quite a few people have claimed to be his first roommate." But he said, "I distinctly recall Mrs. Johnson the Sunday afternoon prior to school starting on Monday. When I got to San Marcos with my things, I went to the room that had been assigned to me, and there standing in the doorway was a well-dressed, middle-aged woman. She introduced herself as Rebekah Johnson and said, 'I'm Lyndon's mother. I understand he's going to room with you.'" Raymond said, "Yes, I've heard that, too." And he said that Mrs. Johnson said, "Well, I sure want you to take care of him, because he's just a country boy." And Raymond, of course his folks lived on a farm near Wharton, and he said he laughed and said, "Well, I'm just a country boy, too, but I'll sure help you take care of him." And said something to the effect, "We don't look for any problems," or something like that. He asked her where Lyndon was, and she said, "Oh, he's out looking at the campus."

But when you're in El Paso, I hope you get Raymond to repeat that. He's getting older, and it might be that you want to let him think a little and maybe repeat it twice, but that's what he told me.

G: Do you have any recollection of LBJ selling the Real Silk socks?

W: Of Lyndon selling them?

G: Yes.

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W: I think he did, but not for long, and it wasn't much of a career for him. The only thing that--it was either Babe [Mylton] Kennedy or Jack Lane or maybe one of the Puls that stayed there at the Gates' house. They decided one Sunday afternoon they'd like to go to Mexico for two or three days, Nuevo Laredo, but counting up their money, they just didn't have enough funds. Lyndon said, "Well, I think I can sell enough socks to where we can make the trip." Whoever told me about it said that Lyndon went right away Sunday afternoon and got these socks and picked out a selective group of professors that he knew might have a little money and he sold enough socks to make the trip. And before dark they were on their way. But what they did and how long they stayed, I don't know.

G: Any other jobs that he had? You mentioned working in Dr. [C. E.] Evans' office. Did he ever work with the San Marcos newspaper?

W: Not that I know of.

G: I've heard from several sources that LBJ borrowed money to put himself through school. Ben Crider loaned him some money and I think one of the fraternal organizations did and one thing and another. Do you have any recollection of his borrowing money to continue in school?

W: I think that story, which has been widely circulated for several years, is correct about him borrowing a hundred and twenty-five dollars from Percy Brigham, a banker at Blanco, Texas.

G: I've seen some letters on that, I think. Did he ever talk about that? Or how did you--?

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W: No, I read it somewhere. I don't remember hearing him mention about it. I don't know whether his mother or his daddy or maybe he held it over to one of these teaching jobs before he paid it, but they didn't press him for payment. Yet knowing Percy Brigham, I'm sure he didn't make a gift of it, because he wanted his money.

One thing--if you don't want this recorded, you can mark it off, can't you?

G: Yes.

W: Percy Brigham, when Lyndon was elected, was a little bit like Ed Clark; he showed up as one of the campaign workers. He was a whole lot more sincere than Clark, and he wouldn't lie like Ed did. He did say about a year or two before his death, and he hasn't been dead too many years, that the--what was Lyndon's mother's folks' name?

G: Baines?

W: Yes. Some Austin American reporter went up to Blanco and took notes on them and wrote stories about Lyndon's early days. One thing he said was that Percy Brigham told him that Lyndon's mother was a Baines and said, "That's where he got his brains." And said that the Baineses were real smart people, and implied that the Johnsons weren't, which I think by comparison, that Percy Brigham probably was correct, because. . . . Anyway, that was on the front page or a prominent story in the Austin paper about "Blanco County banker says that Lyndon Johnson got his brains from his mother's folks."

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G: Where did he study when he was at San Marcos when he was going to school? Did he study in the library? Did he study back at his garage apartment? Or did he have another place where he studied?

W: I don't think he went to the library. He was a real rapid reader. For his time, he could probably read much faster than most kids.

G: Even when he was in college he was a real fast reader?

W: Yes. He probably did what studying he did on a hurry-up basis at the garage [apartment] or. . . . It was a catch-as-catch-can thing. I don't think he had any specified hours where he sat down and studied. However, Rebekah, wasn't she a teacher at one time, his mother? Anyway, she tried to require all her kids to study and learn things, but she realized that Lyndon was the type that would probably learn more talking to these professors. He was real good at pumping them for information, and they were real good in giving it to him, because it was so rare for a student to come to them and say, "How about this or that?" I know I asked Dr. [M. L.] Arnold about this. In 1840 or 1830 they tried to take colored people back to Africa, and I asked him about how many ex-slaves were involved. He'd say, "Well, probably thirty or forty thousand." I was interested in that because my great-grandfather was one that helped out in that, and went to Africa.

G: Is that right?

W: But anyway, it was that kind of information if Lyndon wanted it, he got it direct from professors. They all liked him, and they listened to what he had to say and he listened to what they had

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to say. Consequently he got more out of school than a lot of youngsters, including--

G: Including who?

W: Me. (Laughter)

G: You wrote editorials for the Star.

W: Yes.

G: Did he edit them? Did LBJ edit them for you?

W: Well, probably real rapidly, but--

G: Did you think of him as a good editor?

W: Oh, I don't think that was something I thought about except that I never remember criticizing him for sloughing off and asking somebody else to do some work, like he asked me quite frequently, which I was willing to do.

G: Anything else about his years at San Marcos that we haven't talked about?

W: He was so close to the faculty that it was bound to have made an indelible impression on him that he never got over, because as long as he lived, San Marcos was his favorite school of learning. And of course, that's something that's widely known.

G: Other faculty members besides Professor Greene?

W: Yes.

G: Who else was he close to?

W: Well, Dr. Arnold was head of the history department, and Dr. M. L. Arnold, and Spurgeon [C. S.] Smith was--

VW: Science.

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W: --a biology teacher. I don't know about his relation with Miss Murphy. She was history, wasn't she?

VW: Yes, I think so.

G: What was her first name?

W: What was her first name?

VW: I don't remember. She was just Miss Murphy.

G: Was it Retta Murphy or--?

W: She's in a rest home now, isn't she?

VW: I think she just died.

G: Did she? How about you, Mrs. Woods? Can you think of anything on his activities at San Marcos?

VW: Not as a student. It would all be hearsay.

G: I'm asking how LBJ got the job as secretary for Congressman [Richard] Kleberg?

W: At that time Welly Hopkins was state senator and I was sergeant-at-arms in the senate appointed by him. Welly confided to me in what he was doing and why, but he set out from the first to get that job for Lyndon. Now, you talked to him; I'm surprised he didn't bring that out.

G: Why was he doing it? Why did he want to help [LBJ]?

W: Personal friendship. They liked each other. They went to Monterrey together and rode the donkey and went through the brewery and one of them signed as Dan Moody and the other one as--

G: James V. Allred?

W: Yes. (Laughter)

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G: Well, let me ask you this. Do you think it may have been in part because Sam Johnson, Sam Ealy Johnson, was close to Welly Hopkins or a friend of Dick Kleberg's or anything like that? Did Lyndon's father have a role in helping him get that?

W: I personally don't think he did.

VW: I thought you said that Lyndon worked in Welly's campaign.

W: Oh, yes, well, when Welly Hopkins first ran for state senate, he was a real small person and had a big voice, so, man, when he got on that stand, people listened. He lived at Gonzales, and a fellow named Gamble, Tom Gamble, lived at Lockhart, and he was an attorney but well known. He was a prohibitionist, Gamble was.

G-A-M-B-L-E or B-E-L. [Gambrell].

VW: B-L-E.

W: And Welly Hopkins wasn't. Well, Senator [Alvin] Wirtz was senator from Seguin, Texas. The district consisted of Gonzales, Guadalupe, Hays and Caldwell Counties. Well, Hays and Caldwell and probably most of Gonzales were bone dry. But Welly defeated a dry candidate, and he made no bones about being wet. But he was that type of persuasive speaker that he could influence people. Even the dries voted for him, because they liked his sincerity.

G: How did he get the job with Kleberg? Do you know?

W: Well, when he was elected senator, you know how a state senator is, and it was more so in those days. He had a lot of influence with the lobbyists. And at Corpus Christi, there was a lobbyist that had a lot of friend influence with Kleberg. His name was Roy Miller.

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So Welly put the squeeze on Roy Miller, and Roy came through, and Welly also wrote a letter to, I think one of the letters is--

G: We have the letters.

W: But that's how he got it, was his senatorial connections. He told about how he had observed Lyndon, his activities, and he was sure he'd be an ideal secretary. That's the way he got the job. Now Senator Wirtz was close to Welly Hopkins. Real, real close. Now, he joined in on that pulling for Lyndon.

G: Is that right? Did he? What did he do?

W: Well, he just did like Welly. He was retiring from the state senate, and Welly was coming in. But Senator Wirtz was strong for Lyndon, mainly on account of Welly Hopkins. I think I mentioned the other day that Wirtz was really a reluctant campaigner for anything in those days, because there was considerable sentiment in favor of a government employee refraining from indulging in politics. Well, of course Senator Wirtz was LCRA, but that was considered by the average person as government, because it was built with government money and it was one of the first large products where the money came straight from Washington.

You asked a question while ago, getting off the point a little bit here. In those days, Washington was way off. You couldn't pick up a paper and read about what was happening in Washington, because communication was such that [it] would take a long time to get information. And Sam Fore about that time was getting well-acquainted with Lyndon through Hopkins and Wirtz and he

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put in his word with Kleberg. And Kleberg was strictly a playboy congressman. He didn't care. All he wanted to do was go play golf and live at the Mayflower, is that that expensive hotel? He would be more interested in pleasing Roy Miller and Sam Fore and Senator Wirtz and Welly Hopkins than he would in pleasing some little old weak farm bureau or something like that. He could care less about them.

VW: They were weak then.

(Interruption)

G: Let's talk about LBJ going to work for Kleberg. You mentioned that you drove his car to Corpus, is that right?

(Interruption)

W: In the early days of Lyndon being in Washington and throughout his life, he always flew from Washington to Texas, if possible, and one reason was to save time. He would come home for Christmas and he had a roadster, a one-seated Ford. And for some reason he usually drove it down here because they wanted to stop in East Texas at her folks. Anyway, they drove down here in the car, but they always went back by air. I drove their car down to Corpus Christi, and usually left here at midnight just to get there in time to load it on the boat the next morning, and stopped off in Seguin, went to a mistletoe dance one night. It was usually foggy and really a pretty tough trip, but wasn't much traffic and eased along down the road. I've thought of it many a time, the fare for shipping that car to Washington, and paid cash, got no receipt or anything, twenty-five

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dollars. Then I would ride the bus back and sleep most of the way, of course.

But what we'd really started on there is something I know a little about, because I've forgotten it and it didn't impress me much at the time. That was that Young Democratic meeting. It consisted of young government employees. I was working for the Railroad Commission, and Roger Moore had just been elected mayor here in Seguin. He was a real active Democrat and the county attorneys and younger Democrats--well, it was called Young Democrats--they were the ones that were there. Now, if I remember--I've forgotten for sure about the purpose of. . . . I've wondered lots of time--of course at that time, the man that committed suicide and was accused of furnishing the votes in Lyndon's close election. What was his name?

VW: Duval?

W: Yes, Duke of Duval. What was his first [name]?

G: [George] Parr.

W: Parr. Yes. I don't know whether that was to try to contain his growing influence or what. You might--

G: Well, I had the impression from reading a newspaper column about it that Henry Kyle and some of the more conservative people were trying to take it over or had taken it over, the Young Democrats, and that Lyndon came down and you all wrested control from him. Is that right? Does that ring a bell?

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W: Could be, but it covered quite a bit of territory. I'm pretty sure this article said the meeting was held at Beeville.

G: I think you're right, yes.

W: Some people thought later that it was at Corpus Christi, but I remember it was at Beeville. We had some real fancy letterheads printed. The show amounted to more than the substance. We really didn't accomplish much and didn't try particularly.

G: Do you recall how you were able to get control of the organization? Was it just turning out more people, or was it--?

W: Yes, down there it was. It was a district meeting, and there was just more of us there. You know, always Lyndon's idea is you can't be a hero without being elected and can't get elected without getting there first with the mostest. (Laughter) That's about all I recall about it. They just had that one meeting.

[End of Tape 1 of 1 and Interview III]

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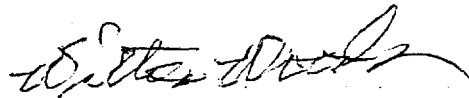
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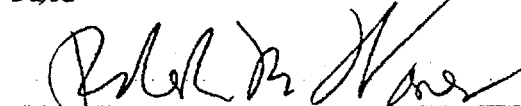
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