

INTERVIEW VI

DATE: April 21, 1983

INTERVIEWEE: VIRGINIA AND WILTON WOODS

INTERVIEWER: Michael L. Gillette

PLACE: The Woods' residence, Seguin, Texas

Tape 1 of 1

G: Let's start with the 1948 campaign today and your role in the campaign. Do you recall what you did in the 1948 campaign when LBJ ran against Coke Stevenson for the Senate?

WW: That's when we had all the typists up in the mezzanine floor of the Stephen F. Austin [Hotel].

VW: That was 1948? Was that 1948? 1948, Wilton, is when you had already moved to Seguin--

WW: Oh.

VW: --and you were contracting business. Lyndon called you and you couldn't go to work in his campaign, because you couldn't leave your business. So you worked here. Now tell what you did here.

WW: Here it was a matter of person-to-person contact--takes a while to contact all her relatives--just to ask people to vote for him and maybe give them a bumper sticker and that kind of thing. That's actually all I did in 1948.

VW: Well, he really did more than that. He organized a committee that worked for Lyndon,

Woods -- VI -- 2

and Mr. Donegan was the one who told him the people that he should contact at each of the precinct levels--Mr. Henry Donegan, who was president of the bank. And then he organized and worked with a local committee. I know that Tom Gibbs was on that committee. I do not know, I do not remember for sure, probably Otha Grisham [*Seguin Enterprise* publisher]. They worked here in this particular county and then they would meet with other people. I know they went to Corpus and to Beeville and would organize groups in the different areas. And they worked together on the Floresville--they worked together on a bigger program. They organized by precincts so that there would be someone in each precinct that was going in to see that Lyndon would be elected.

WW: That's fine so far.

VW: Okay. You want to add to it?

WW: Answer what?

VW: Add to it. So you want to say any more?

WW: Well, is that the year she had her wreck?

VW: Yes.

WW: You want to mention all that? All I know, let me finish my part of the wreck. I'm [?] coming from Austin this side of the first little town, Geronimo. It was muddy and slick, about like today; I'm assuming that slick. On a muddy road it would be, anywhere. Marietta Brooks was driving and [for] some reason or other she lost control and they rolled over in a ditch a time or two [see Brooks' account of the accident in her oral history interview]. Lady Bird--well, I've heard about it and somebody said that Marietta was down at Dr. Williams' office--she's not still living, is she?

G: Yes.

Woods -- VI -- 3

WW: Marietta Brooks, yes, she will remember this, that she went down there and Dr. Williams talked to me. I don't know how much he said that was in her presence, but he said, "I really don't think she's seriously hurt enough to be hospitalized, but I think for my safety and your safety, we'll just send her for an overnight stay at the hospital and if she's okay in the morning, well, we'll release her." I don't know how she got from the doctor's office to the hospital, whether there was an ambulance or whether somebody took her in a car.

VW: I don't know. I think that they were coming here for a tea. Mrs. Henry Donegan and Mrs. Roger MyCue [Arleene], Mrs. Tom Crump and I had planned a tea for her, and we had invited about two hundred ladies to come that afternoon.

G: Let me ask you what the genesis of this tea was. Did the campaign ask you to do it, or was it your idea? Whose idea was it to have this tea?

VW: Oh, I just really don't remember now.

WW: I think as a rule we did these things--if it was important enough, we'd let them know that we were going to do it, and if it wasn't, we just went ahead and--

VW: Well, of course we had to contact them and let them know that we wanted to do it and then they would set the time and the date, if they wanted to do it. So that was the way it was, and I think that's probably what we did, that we offered to do it and then they set it up that way.

G: And what was the basis of your invitation, let's say? What kind of people did you try--?

VW: I hadn't lived in Seguin very long then, so the people that I invited were relatives and Girl Scout leaders and PTA members, the people that I had met in that particular [capacity], Sunday school teachers and that way. Mrs. Henry Donegan was a very active club woman and so she invited the club women from Seguin. Mrs. MyCue is a long-time

Woods -- VI -- 4

resident of Seguin and her family, the Koepsels and Blumbergs, are a very large relationship. So she invited her relatives. She is also a native of Seguin, so she invited her classmates and her friends in that particular way.

Now, Mrs. Tom Crump is also a native of Seguin [Virginia Woods later noted that Mr. Crump did business with Wilton Woods, and Mrs. Crump was related to Mrs. Weinert.], but when we had the party fairly well organized and she was working on her guest list, about the first one that she asked was her aunt and her aunt said, "Well, have you contacted Mrs. [Hilda] Weinert to get her approval for this?" and Mrs. Crump said, "No." Her aunt said, "Don't do it then." So Mrs. Crump called us and withdrew from the list of hostesses. So then the other three of us got together and we said, well, maybe we better find out exactly how Mrs. Weinert feels about this, so we will know what we are facing. Neither of the others wanted to go, and since I was the newcomer in town, I was the one who contacted Mrs. Weinert. I went personally and I said, "Mrs. Weinert, we want to invite you to a tea that we are having to introduce Lady Bird Johnson to the women of Seguin." And she said, "Well, I know Lady Bird, but I am for Coke Stevenson and I will have nothing to do with the tea." So I said, "Well, I appreciate that very much, your telling me how you feel about it. But we are going to have the tea for Mrs. Johnson."

Then several people that we had asked called and said that they would not come to the tea because it was a political tea and they did not think that we should presume upon their social lights [lives?] by asking someone to a political tea. So we knew then that there was some work behind the scenes. But one woman was a little more honest and she called and she said, "My father has been notified that the Weinerts are putting out

Woods -- VI -- 5

the word that there will be no more short-term loans unless their candidate Stevenson is elected. Therefore I can't come to your tea."

G: The Weinerts owned the bank?

VW: The bank, yes, they were the bank. [They] have been very good to the local farmers in maintaining them on a short-term basis.

So we went ahead with our preparations for the tea. Just as I was dressing for the tea, the maid, Ruth Wright, came running into the room and she said, "Oh, Mrs. Woods, something horrible has happened. They've just telephoned and said Lady Bird Johnson was in a wreck. I thought you better know right away." So Wilton went then to find out what he could about it, and Lady Bird Johnson came on to the house. I had been told by Irma Bell, who was Irma Ewald at that time, that she was the one who came along and picked Lady Bird up and brought her to my house. Lady Bird's clothes were all splashed with mud, but she had an extra dress that she had bought to wear to the program that night in San Antonio, so she changed immediately to that. And as the ladies came, she was poised and gracious, her usual charming self. You would just never dream that she had had the traumatic experience of turning over in the wreck. So that she really made a very favorable impression upon the people who came.

G: Did she give a speech?

VW: No, she did not. She talked to each one personally. You know how she has this gracious way of finding out the things that people are interested in. She was just her natural self. No, she did not give a speech, but she did talk to each one personally who came. And it was, under the circumstances, a very nice gathering.

Then when it was over and Lady Bird was rushing to keep her appointment in San

Woods -- VI -- 6

Antonio, here came Mrs. Weinert up the walk and stopped her. She said, "Oh, Lady Bird, I am so sorry I had this previous commitment and I couldn't come to the tea to be with you, but I just want you to know that I love you and I'm doing everything I can for you and Lyndon." After that, Lyndon and Lady Bird were always very gracious to Mrs. Weinert and I never knew whether they realized, but Wilton and I, we got the brunt of that dislike. They moved on. Lady Bird and Lyndon were in a position to forgive and forget if they had known, by that time.

G: Do you think they did know?

VW: I don't know. I never told them.

G: Did Mrs. Johnson talk about the accident, how it happened?

VW: Yes, she did, she talked to the ladies here and it seemed that they just hit a slick spot where the mud had crossed the road and Marietta simply did not know how to control a car on a slippery road. Whether she put the brakes on and caused it to flip [inaudible].

G: Did she tell LBJ about the accident, do you know?

VW: No, she did not. It was my--well, Wilton and Janice, then, because Lady Bird's car was still in the garage, Wilton and Janice--and Janice can tell you more about this because she was an impressionable little ten- or twelve-year-old--took Lady Bird to San Antonio to make her radio speech. And because of Mrs. Weinert, they were late and had to travel at an excessive speed to get to that program on time. She delivered her speech on the radio like she had here with all this poise, and then I think Lyndon found out after the radio speech. As far as Wilton knows, Lady Bird did not see him until after she had made her speech.

G: It's been suggested in print that one of her thoughts after the wreck was that she should

Woods -- VI -- 7

have voted absentee.

VW: (Laughter)

G: Did she ever express that to you?

VW: No, she didn't.

G: It was her car that they were in?

VW: Well, I do not know that, but anyhow from how they would get from here to there, Wilton took her.

G: What do you remember about that trip down there to San Antonio after the wreck here?

WW: I remember high speed. About the time she left here, it was almost time for her to go on the air, radio, in San Antonio. And she had to almost fly one way or another to make it. So Janice, a kid that age, she wanted to go, and we didn't have time to say no. She went along and we just had to drive much faster than I like to drive. But it was a new Mercury and no problems, sailed right on.

G: Was she rehearsing her speech at all, or reading over it, or getting ready for the talk during the trip down there?

WW: When we got to the edge of San Antonio, none of us had a watch or a clock and she was busy looking for clocks--they used to have them in service stations, you know. And that's all I remember about the time.

G: Was it easier to promote the Johnson candidacy after the tea?

WW: Oh, I don't--

VW: Yes, I think so. The women who left here left with a very nice feeling about her. Yes, it was. Of course, Coke Stevenson was well known in this area and he'd been law partners with one of the men here in Seguin. So he was well known, and Lyndon was a relative

Woods -- VI -- 8

newcomer to this particular area. But that did put his name in front of the people and actually I guess the wreck did, too. But certainly the way that she controlled the situation was very favorable.

G: Is there anything else on that episode that you remember?

VW: I think it was very interesting to know that Ruth Wright, who was my maid, was an influence among the black people in this town, very highly respected. And she was so impressed with Lady Bird that the black folks went all the way for Lyndon.

G: Now, in 1956 when LBJ challenged [Allan] Shivers for control of the Texas delegation, I understand you worked in that campaign as well.

WW: Yes, that was an entirely different type campaign. It turned out to be more of a whirlwind type, hurry. Shivers was determined to win it, I've forgotten what--

VW: All right, it was the conservatives against--and I think Lyndon was branded as the liberal in that particular one. Really, he was more of a middle-of-the-roader, because of his followers.

WW: We had about the same little group or organization that we'd used previously.

VW: And added Otha Grisham to that list.

WW: Yes.

VW: For sure.

G: Did LBJ come to Seguin during that period?

VW: Yes, I think he came twice.

WW: I've forgotten. That's close enough [inaudible].

VW: I think so. But the committee worked then, and again this time they wanted Lyndon to be the favorite son. So very quietly they went out into each precinct and they got one person

Woods -- VI -- 9

from each precinct to move at the precinct meeting to endorse one person and then be ready to go for a unit vote at the county convention. Well, in this county it's very difficult to get anyone to turn up at a precinct meeting anyhow, and so that one could naturally say, "Well, we're going to be a unit," and came to the county convention. Well, at the county convention then one of Wilton's committee moved to have Mrs. Weinert's man, Edgar Engelke, to be the chairman, and that of course pleased them, to elect new--when they finally saw what was going to happen, there he was in a position [where] he couldn't control a vote. But then after they had him elected to that position, they immediately moved for a unit vote for Lyndon Johnson as favorite son, and had enough votes that they carried the county. Well, before the meeting was over then, Mrs. Weinert got up and she was so angry. She came down the aisle and she shook her finger in Wilton's face and she said, "I'll never forgive you as long as I live." Because she had promised that this particular vote would go to Shivers.

WW: This was her county, you see.

VW: She had always delivered.

WW: From her viewpoint, she owned it lock, stock, and barrel. Had all the wealth and the people that she didn't actually control immediately, why they were scared to do anything anyway.

VW: And she had a swap-out relationship with Albert Siegert [?], who was chairman of the Republican Party. If one needed a favor, they got it, you know, from the other. So whichever party was in power, they had control. But this was really an upset to her, totally unexpected, and she never did forgive him, never.

G: Do you think it was a result of a numerical superiority at this convention or was it a result

Woods -- VI -- 10

of a parliamentary tactic?

VW: Oh, it was the result of a parliamentary tactic.

G: You think she had more votes than you did actually?

VW: Yes, she would have had if it had not been the unit vote. She would have had more votes than we had. But by having it coming in from the precincts that there would be the unit vote, it was a unit vote and--

G: But apparently you organized the precincts better than she did, is that right?

VW: Yes, she had accepted the fact that it would always come in the way she wanted it.

G: I see.

WW: You know, the young attorney, I guess it was Joe Dibrell, Kellis Dibrell's younger brother, he was a Democrat in those days and supported--the boy here, Joe Dibrell, he supported the ticket. Anyway, at that meeting she was telling about, after they elected the delegates, well . . .

VW: The next day? You're talking about the next day, when Edgar Engelke told Joe--is that what you're going to tell him?

WW: No, I was going to tell him that Joe Dibrell was just dying to be a delegate to the state convention, but he was scared to ask for it or even act like he wanted it. He was afraid she'd cut his head off, in more ways than one. What she mentioned there is next morning--Mrs. Weinert daily went down to see her secretary, Edgar Engelke, who had worked for them for years, and they said a lot of mean things to her back, but they were scared not to be loyal, afraid she'd find it out. But anyway, Mrs. Weinert came in and said, "Edgar, how could such an impossible thing happen? How could something that is so embarrassing that my own county went against Mr. Shivers [happen]?" (Laughter)

Woods -- VI -- 11

And old Edgar, casting around for an answer, he said, "That's that Wilton Woods again."

(Laughter)

G: Anything else on 1956 that you can--?

VW: I don't think so, I don't remember any.

G: Was segregation at all an issue in that campaign here?

VW: Not in this campaign.

On the 1948 chronology, Truman's campaign stop in San Marcos, we attended that. I think that Lyndon let us know that they were coming through and so we went to San Marcos about five o'clock in the morning. Truman spoke. If I remember correctly, Lyndon introduced him. And shook hands, but otherwise that's--

G: Was there a good crowd?

VW: I would say about a hundred, possibly more, which is really good for five o'clock in the morning.

G: How did LBJ look?

VW: Do you remember, Wilton, how LBJ looked on that Truman--?

WW: Just normal; I think he was okay.

VW: He probably looked tired, I just don't remember.

WW: Oh, he was always tired.

G: I need to ask you about the 1960 campaign and what your role was in that campaign.

WW: We had a campaign office located on the square facing the courthouse. You know, all these towns are about the same. We had a real prominent place to display Kennedy-Johnson signs, and that caused a lot of comment around town and that caused a lot of Republican stirring around, trying to do something of equal quality. But anyway,

Woods -- VI -- 12

that lasted throughout the campaign and, well, I've forgotten what the returns were, but this has always been such a rock-ribbed Republican county that it's hard to tell what caused the wind to blow this way or that way.

VW: Organized in that year, you had a women's auxiliary organized also, and you organized a Young Democrats Club. And the headquarters were manned from eight in the morning until eleven at night, so that anyone who was interested could come in and get information or tickets or whatever.

G: This was volunteer labor?

VW: All volunteer.

End of Tape 1 of 1 and Interview VI

NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND RECORDS ADMINISTRATION

LYNDON BAINES JOHNSON LIBRARY

Legal Agreement Pertaining to the Oral History Interview of

VIRGINIA AND WILTON WOODS

In accordance with the provisions of Chapter 21 of Title 44, United States Code, and subject to the terms and conditions hereinafter set forth, I, Virginia Woods, of Seguin, Texas, do hereby give, donate, and convey to the United States of America all my rights, title, and interest in the tape recording and transcript of the personal interview conducted with my husband, Wilton Woods, and me, on April 21, 1983, in Seguin, Texas, and prepared for deposit in the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library.

This assignment is subject to the following terms and conditions:

- (1) The transcript shall be available for use by researchers as soon as it has been deposited in the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library.
- (2) The tape recording may be made available to those researchers who have access to the transcript.
- (3) I hereby assign to the United States Government all copyright I may have in the interview transcript and tape.
- (4) Copies of the transcript and the tape recording may be provided by the Library to researchers upon request.
- (5) Copies of the transcript and tape recording may be deposited in or loaned to institutions other than the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library.

Virginia B Woods
Donor

Oct. 10 2007
Date

Dr. Javetta
Assistant Archivist for Presidential Libraries

12-18-2007
Date