INTERVIEW I

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INTERVIEWEE: ZEPHYR WRIGHT

INTERVIEWER: MICHAEL L. GILLETTE

PLACE: Mrs. Wright's home in Washington, D.C.

Tape 1 of 2

G: Let's talk about your background first. You were born in Marshall, is that right?

W: Yes.

G: And you say that your mother and father separated when you were very young.

W: Yes, when I was four months old. I was raised by my grandparents, my mother's father and mother.

G: What were their names?

W: My grandparents?

G: Yes.

W: Maria and Tom McKenzie.

G: What did he do for a living?

W: He was a farmer. He had a farm. It was quite comical, because I wanted to work in the fields picking cotton and things like that, but I was afraid of worms, so I didn't do very much of that. I lived with them until I guess I must have been eleven years old, and then I went to live with my mother.

G: Did she also live in Marshall?

W: Well, part of the time. Most of the last part of her life she lived in Marshall. She remarried and lived in Louisiana for a part of that time. Really, I didn't know too much about our mother for the first eight or nine years.

G: You essentially, though, grew up in Marshall most of the time.

W: Yes.

G: You went to school there, to Wiley College, I think.

W: Yes.

G: Tell us about your experiences at Wiley. What was Wiley College like?

W: Wiley College was a very nice school, and I liked it very much. I went to high school just right across the street from Wiley. I didn't live on campus; I lived at home. That's what made it so good, because we really didn't have money to go to school, but everybody was really helping me. But I think I liked Wiley better than I did Bishop, although I'm a Baptist and Wiley is a Methodist school. Because I thought they had more to offer than Bishop did.

G: Were you influenced greatly by any of your professors there at Wiley?

W: It's amazing that you asked that, because the one person that really helped me most was Dr. Tolson, because he would help me in the evenings. It doesn't seem like it now, the way that I'm talking, but I used to like speaking. He helped me with the diction and things like that, and he was very, very good. And the other person was Dr. Dogan, because he seemed so interested in me.

G: What was Melvin Tolson like as a teacher?

W: Very good. He was just very good. But he was very strict also, and he liked you to be able to answer questions. College to me was so different, because it seemed that you were on your own most of the time. He would talk to you, and then he expected you the next day--whatever he talked about--to be able to come back with the same thing and do it exactly as he did it. But it was very difficult for you to do that. If you noticed him when he was talking, you would get the idea that there was no better. He was very good.

G: Did he ever inject his ideas about civil rights into his classes?

W: No, not very much. That was so long ago, really. It wasn't like it is now. It was later on. But most of the teachers did, you know, talk about it a little bit, but not too much.

G: Wiley was really the center of civil rights activity as far as the intelligentsia was concerned. James Leonard Farmer was there, I think, James Farmer's father. Did you know him?

W: No. At that time I didn't know him.

G: Did it appear that way to you at the time? Did you come out of this experience with a more sensitive attitude about these things?

W: I did. Yes, I did. I did. I really did. That was one of the things that I realized later on in life, that this was the first beginning of my realizing what segregation was all about. Because I had come up with the idea that this is the way life was going to be and there was nothing I could do about it. But after I went to school there, then I began to learn that things were changing and things

would change. It really gave me a different outlook on life altogether.

G: The year that you were there was really the turning point, I think.

W: It was, yes.

G: Tell us how you became acquainted with Mrs. Johnson and how you got the job.

W: Well, I had known about Mrs. Johnson, I guess, practically all my life, because my aunt had worked for her father. But at the time Mrs. Johnson didn't know me, nor I her, but I had seen her. When I went to Wiley that September I talked with Dr. Dogan about working, and it was just a coincidence that Mrs. Johnson also went to Wiley and talked to Dr. Dogan about someone to work for her. He had told me that he thought I could help him in many ways, with even cooking and probably something in the office, or just work around there in order for me to go to school. Then after Mrs. Johnson had talked to him, he asked me how would I like to go to Washington. I was quite elated when he spoke of going to Washington, because I knew I'd never have an opportunity to go anywhere. You know, I just thought in terms of always being in Marshall. After I talked with Mrs. Johnson, that was it.

G: How did you meet her? She came out to the college, and you met her there?

W: No, I didn't. She asked Dr. Dogan to recommend someone, so he called me and talked with me, and then he called her and talked with her about me. She in turn called me. So I told her where I lived, and

she said she would come out and talk with me. And she did. We made an appointment to meet. She really didn't know how to get out there, because she wasn't accustomed to that part of town. I had to give her a little landmark where she could meet me. I talked with her, and it just wasn't a long, drawn-out thing. We just talked, and in about fifteen or twenty minutes she had hired me.

G: Did she ask questions about your--

W: Yes, of course.

G: What type of questions did she ask?

W: She asked me about housekeeping and cooking and what kind of work I could do. Of course, I told her that having gone to school for this type of thing I thought that I could do the type of work that she wanted. Really, most of the work around Marshall was domestic. There were not too many jobs unless you were a teacher or something like that that you could even do there. People came there to go to school, and when they were through with school they wanted to go on someplace else. So I knew that the type of work she wanted I really could do. Because that's the only thing that I knew, going to school and maybe once in a while helping somebody out with their dinner or a party or something. There just really wasn't anything to it.

G: Let's talk about the trip back to Washington. You rode back in the car with Mrs. Johnson. Who else was there?

W: I can't think of the name of the young lady that she had hired to work in the office, but the other person was John Hickey, who did most of the driving. Mrs. Johnson did some of the driving, and so

did the other young lady. As I said earlier, we did get lost. But that first day I guess I was just so happy and elated that I was leaving Marshall, gosh, and thought I was coming to Washington. I was just excited. It was a very enjoyable trip, and we didn't have too much trouble in finding places to stay. That was utmost in my mind about the traveling by car, because I was afraid of not having any place to stay that was nice. One thing I must say about Mrs. Johnson, she was very nice about finding nice places to stay. And if we couldn't stay there, she didn't stay there.

G: How would this work? Would you go up to a hotel, and if they would say, "I'm sorry, whites only"--?

W: Yes. One time I know we stopped at a place, and Mrs. Johnson asked them about a place to stay. The woman said, "Yes, we have a place for you." She said, "Well, I have these other two people." She said, "No. We work 'em but we don't sleep 'em." And Mrs. Johnson said, "That's a nasty way to be," and she drove away.

G: Where was that, do you remember?

W: I believe that was in Memphis, Tennessee. I'm almost sure that's where it was. Of course, she went on to another place and got a place to stay, and she got a place for us. But I think that's the only place that we really had difficulty in staying. Mrs. Johnson always tried to find someplace nice to eat and someplace nice to sleep, and we never had too much trouble, although at that time most of the places that we stopped didn't want colored people to come in and eat in the same place. They wanted you to come into the kitchen.

Either they would let you come in, or they would bring the food out to the car. But there were very few places that we stopped that were that way. You know yourself how difficult it was during those years for colored people to go into a white restaurant and sit down and eat. That was just almost an impossibility, and of course we didn't even try it. We hadn't gotten to that point where we--well, I was just not that type, anyway. I felt that if I wasn't wanted, I wouldn't go. I felt happier not going.

G: Do you think that this firsthand exposure to discrimination helped shape Mrs. Johnson's and President Johnson's opinions on civil rights?

W: I do, because I wouldn't go to Texas for ten years; I just wouldn't go. And he said to me one day, "Well, now you can go. It's very different now. You can go any place you want to go; you can stop any place you want to stop." And I know that from the things that I had told him earlier about our trips from Texas, he remembered it. He told me, "Things are different now, so you can start going back to Texas with us." And I did.

G: As long as we're on the subject, while you were working for the Johnsons did you ever take problems of discrimination to their attention, such as, say, taking Luci and Lynda to a movie and not being able to go in, or some problem that affected you that also in turn affected them? In addition to these rides up, were there any other instances where discrimination against you touched their lives, was visible to them?

W: No, I can't remember anything like that occurring. Nothing comes to mind now that happened like that. The only thing that I can remember is when Glen Echo didn't allow colored people in there. They had a lot of trouble out there. We used to have to take Lynda and Luci out there so they could go on the rides and play, and they didn't want to let colored people in. But we knew that to begin with, so I didn't consider that anything that really would affect the Johnsons.

G: As President Johnson championed various forms of civil rights legislation, did he ever talk to you about this? Can you recall what he would say on things like, say, the Voting Rights Act?

W: Oh, yes. I can't remember exactly the first civil rights [legislation] that he got through, but he came home and he was so happy. He asked me did I notice what he had done. I said, "What do you mean?" He said, "You mean to tell me you didn't notice the civil rights bill that was passed?" I said, "No, I didn't." Then he went and got the paper and he showed it to me, and he seemed very disappointed that I hadn't noticed what he had done for this civil rights bill. I think that's the first one he got through Congress.

G: That was in 1957, when he was still senator?

W: Yes, he was still senator.

G: Did he tell you how he got it through?

W: I just don't recall. I know he did, because he always would go through everything and talk about it. I really don't remember his saying how he got it through, but I know it was kind of hard to do. I do remember more about the things in the White House, because really

I think I noticed more things then than I did beforehand.

G: What do you remember about his remarks concerning civil rights legislation during the presidency?

W: He said, "You know, the thing that I'm trying to do most on [is] civil rights, and they [the blacks] are the people who are really hurting me. I can't see how they can't see what I'm trying to do for them. But they are really the ones that are giving me down the country, and they are against me more than anybody." He asked me, "Why do you think they do that?" And I said, "I don't know. Because I see that you're doing more, and I think that most of the people see that you are doing more for our race than anyone that has ever been president.

One day he came home, and he said, "Oh, do you see that I have appointed the first Negro to the Supreme Court?" I said, "Oh! Has it gone through?" And he said, "Well, no, but I'm sure it will. I've appointed him." That's when he had appointed Marshall to the Supreme Court.

G: What else did he say about Marshall's appointment? Did he think Marshall was a good selection?

W: He did. He thought he was very good. He asked me if I knew him, and I said, "No, not personally." He said, "I'd like you to meet him, because I think he's one of the great Negro men of our time."

G: Did you ever meet him?

W: Yes. Thurgood Marshall? Yes.

G: As long as we're on the subject, do you want to talk about the occasion?

W: Really, the first time I can remember having any conversation with him was when, I believe, Lynda got married, and he was at the wedding, at the reception, really. I had a long conversation with him. It was really the first time that I ever had a long conversation with him, and I enjoyed talking with him because he just seemed so brilliant. To me he was somebody you could look up to. He was just very down to earth, a good person to talk to. And also Weaver.

G: Robert Weaver?

W: Robert Weaver, Housing.

G: Did LBJ have anything to say when he appointed Robert Weaver?

W: No, not to me he didn't, but he made quite a few comments about him. He thought that Weaver was a very nice person and a well-deserving person of the job that he had, but he didn't talk about him too much. I noticed that Weaver always got these invitations to everything, and I knew that he was well thought of by the Johnsons.

G: I've always heard that Whitney Young was President Johnson's favorite Negro leader. Is this the case?

W: I can't really say that he was. I didn't notice that too much. He might have been, but I noticed that Wilkins was always around. I had the impression that maybe Wilkins was one of the favorites also. I just didn't notice his saying too much about it.

G: Okay. Is there anything else about Lyndon Johnson and civil rights that you think we ought to put on the record?

W: I just can't think of anything.

G: What about their own attitudes toward race? Were they easy to work with?

W: Well now, you know they had to be easy to work with, because how do you think I worked for them for twenty-seven years if they hadn't been easy to work with? I think they were the best, really. A lot of people have told me when I would speak out for Johnson, "You are prejudiced where Johnson is concerned because you work for him." And I said, "No. In talking with him I know he is for all of the Negro people, and he has done more for them than anyone else." I have been in cabs, and I've just had to hold my temper. I guess because he was a southerner they didn't believe in him. I knew what kind of man he was. Really, I just never could understand why other people couldn't see it like I did, but I guess because I was so closely connected with them I could see and understand how they felt about the civil rights thing.

I think I noticed it more during that time when Martin Luther King had that march on Washington. I didn't go, of course, because I think working for the Johnsons I didn't associate myself with any of these things that were going on. I kept it on TV, and President Johnson would come in and say, "Did you see or hear what went on today?" And I said, "Yes." Then we'd sit down, and we'd talk about it. He just seemed happy about what was going on. He said, "Well, this is a step forward for you people." He liked Martin Luther King very much, and he respected him highly.

G: Did he?

W: Yes, he did.

G: What did he say about him, do you remember?

W: He said he was a brilliant man and that what he was doing he was doing in the right way, because the nonviolent way was the way of doing things. He didn't believe in all this violence that was going on where civil rights was concerned. He thought that Martin Luther King was really doing a wonderful job.

G: Did he ever say anything about Selma.

W: Selma, Alabama?

G: Yes.

W: I don't remember him saying anything about Selma, because we were all so upset about Selma, Alabama, and this property that Mrs. Johnson had. I don't think that the newspapers or what have you should have made a big issue out of it, but they did--about this property. I guess that's what you're speaking of.

G: Well, no, just the march in Selma in 1965 and the having to send federal marshalls to protect the demonstrators, and the state and local police sort of attacking.

W: He didn't like that sort of thing. I mean, he didn't have anything against the march, as far as I could see. Now, I'm just giving my opinion. He didn't have anything against the march at all, but he didn't like the violence that happened. Because he seemed to believe that you could protest in any way that you would like to protest as long as there was no violence. He was against brutality in any form, as far as I could see. He didn't like that part of it.

G: Were you ever the messenger or the person who conveyed feelings or attitudes to him? Let's say if there were other Negroes in Washington who wanted you to tell him something or to thank him for this or to make him aware of a civil rights problem or something, did you ever do this? Can you recall a specific occasion?

W: Yes, there were quite a few times. Sometimes I didn't even relate things to him or say anything to him about things that people said, because I just felt that with the problems of the whole country, a lot of things that people said and wanted me to tell him I just didn't tell him. I knew myself that he was doing the best that he could to help our people. But there were times when I would go to grocery stores to buy groceries, and I had to change from time to time, go to different stores, because when people realized who I was they would converge on me and say, "Tell President Johnson to go down on prices," "Tell President Johnson he should do something about how we are living." and things like that. Of course, I would never tell him.

G: Did you ever have any pleasant messages to convey to him?

W: Yes, and he would be very happy about it. I guess maybe it was mostly my associates and my friends who would tell me that they thought he was doing a good job, and he's one of the best presidents we've ever had, and that he had done more for us than any other president. He would just beam when I would tell him. I just can't remember the exact words of things that people would tell me to tell him, but there were quite a few times that I talked with him.

Now there were times when I would talk with him about salaries, because I guess I was more conscious about salaries than anyone else. I do think with my talk with him about salaries for the Negro I talked to him about myself, really, and in talking with him about my salary made him conscious of what the other Negro people were going through. I know I went to him one time about salary and told him how much I was making, and he was a very funny type person. You would think that he wasn't paying you any attention. He'd probably have a paper, reading it or something, while you were talking to him. I told him that it was so funny that we had a chef, and he wouldn't eat his cooking. I said, "I have to teach him what you like. I feel that if I'm capable of teaching, I'm capable of getting his salary. Yet he makes twice as much money as I do." He asked me, "Don't you and your husband together make enough money to live on?" I said, "My husband and I don't make as much as that one person. I do feel that I should get more money." And he saw to it that I got it.

G: Did he tell you then that he would give you a raise?

W: He said he would see about it. He didn't commit himself at that time at all, but he did see that I got a salary increase. Not only me, but my husband also.

G: Was he an easy man for you to approach?

W: He was. Everybody would put me up to talk to him, because I could talk to him at any time. I think the reason that I could talk to him so easily was, if he asked you a question you must answer him immediately, and you must be exact about what you are talking about and

and know what you are talking about. If you don't know, say, "No," I don't know." But if you are going to talk with him you must, when he asks you a question, just answer it. There have been times, though, he got me on the spot, and I didn't know what to say. He would look at me and he'd say, "You don't mean you're speechless?"

For instance, one day he was at lunch, and he was talking about food. That was a time that this man was writing this book on, "A Day in the Life of President Johnson." He was talking to me, and I didn't say anything. He looked up at me and he said, "You mean you're speechless?" And I said to him, "Mr. President, a person who works for you as long as I have has to love you, because there is no other way they could work for you. Because you're killing yourself and everybody else, too, with these long hours and things." He just looked at me and smiled, and he didn't say a word. But, as I was saying before, if you talk to him, you don't hesitate. You just talk.

Now, he could talk to you this minute, and he would just kind of cuss you out. He really didn't cuss you out, but he would give you down the country or something. And the next minute he was putting his arms around you and was hugging you and telling you how much he loved you. But you had to be straight with him. You see, I guess I was always so outspoken until if he talked to me, whatever he would say to me, I would say right back to him. He liked that, I think, better than cowering and bowing--he didn't care for that.

G: I hear that he was really very, very devoted to his employees, and

one of the hardest things for him to do was to fire someone that worked for him.

W: That's true. That's really true. You would go on working year after year, but he would never fire you. I remember one time I quit--not because of anything that happened, I was just tired.

G: When was this, do you remember?

W: I believe it was about 1946. I went to California. I was supposed to go out there to live and I didn't like it, and I came back to Washington. Well, he looked until he found me. They were in Texas, and when he found me he called me and told me to come back. I went back. The same day I went back, the next day they came back to Washington. I don't know why he wanted me to come down there.

G: You were in California when he found you?

W: No, I had gone to California, and then I didn't like it and I came back to Washington.

G: And they found you here? I see.

W: Yes. But they had followed me from Texas to California and then back here until they found me.

But I must say that working for the Johnsons was a great experience, and it's something that I wouldn't have missed for the world. Although there were times, you know, the hours were long and all that. But they were very good people.

G: I've always gotten the impression from people who worked for President Johnson that he would bring the best out in you. He would make you a more efficient, sharper, more energetic person.

W: That's true.

G: How long do you feel it took you to develop the characteristics that were necessary to work for him after you began? Was it something you adapted to right away, or did you gradually become more and more efficient?

W: I think it is a gradual thing, because you have to get to know him. He was the type of person that, to me, you didn't get to know too easily to begin with. It just seemed that you weren't going to ever get close to him. But gradually you began to understand that this was just a way that he was, and if you were going to work there you had to get used to it. Then once you had become accustomed to his way, then you paid no attention to what he said or did. Although you know that if you work for a person you are going to have to do the things that they want you to do. Once you knew him, it was just an easy thing. You just felt a part of them. In fact, I have said several times that he seemed more like a brother to me than anything else, because once I got to know him he was just that way.

G: We were talking about people asking you to convey messages to him. Let's look at the other side of it. Did he ever ask you to find out what people thought about this, or did he ever use you as a sounding post for what people were thinking?

W: No, he didn't.

G: You know, some people have expressed the view that he was isolated from what Americans were thinking. How would you respond to that?

W: I think he possibly would ask people what other people thought of him, but he never did to me. I can't think of the man's name now. I think he made some threats against Mrs. Johnson. I don't know they were really threats, but something that he had said about Mrs. Johnson, and the President asked me if I knew the man. He was one of these people who really--I wish I could think of his name, but I can't. But he told me to tell him that he should keep his mouth shut, or he was going to get in trouble.

G: Was this during the presidency?

W: Yes.

G: Did you tell him that?

W: No. I didn't ever see the man. I just can't remember when it was. My memory is not as good as it used to be, and probably if I wasn't even trying to think about it now, I would know him. I really can't think of it. You know how people try to get at the president through someone else.

G: Yes. Let's get back on the road to Washington here. You're driving back, and you get back the same day that President Johnson returns from Australia. I think he was a lieutenant commander in the Navy.

W: Yes, he was.

G: Can you describe your initial employment here the first day or first night, how you met LBJ, and the first meal you cooked?

W: The first night that I met him it was in the middle of the night, and everybody was so tired and worn out. I can't even describe that night very much. The next day I did meet him, and it was very nice.

He was a very nice person. I think I've gone over this tape so much about those first few months. If I could just get away from it.

G: You were talking, I think, on the other tape [a cassette belonging to Mrs. Wright] about fixing the first meal, and Mrs. Johnson indicating that in fixing dinner that you should surprise them and just fix whatever you wanted.

W: I did. I thought she would come in after the meal and tell me what she thought of it, and she didn't. After telling me to go ahead and prepare it the way that I thought it should be done, afterward she didn't say anything to me. Of course, you know, I kind of felt badly about that. It was late, as usual. This was one of the things about the job: he was always late unless he was having guests, because he just took his job to heart, I guess you would say. He was just busy all the time. I mean, he was a politician from his heart. He just was a great politician. He was just always late for meals, and you would always have to hold meals for him. That's one of the reasons why I thought maybe they didn't like that meal. When I was leaving, after she hadn't said anything about it," I thought, "Well, maybe tomorrow she'll say something." But as I was leaving, he was the one that called me back and told me that that was a fantastic meal, one of the best he'd ever had.

So the next day they were having company for dinner. You know, just beginning a job, this was a little difficult for me to have company, say, for four nights in a row.

G: Who were they, do you remember?

W: No. I can't remember who they were. One thing about them, they always liked to have people around them that were their friends. They didn't have to be congressmen or senators. They loved people, and they would have people like the Worleys or the Connallys or the Carpenters, or somebody like that for dinner. I think they enjoyed these people very much. Now they did entertain the congressmen and the senators and people like that. I remember Speaker Rayburn--oh, I admired that man next to Mr. Johnson, because to me he was a great man. He always had time to talk to you, always. I don't care when he came to the Johnsons, he would always find time to come in and say something to me.

G: What would he say, for example?

W: Oh, how was I doing. I remember one time John Glasco, who worked there, was getting married, and he [Rayburn] came in and he said to me, "I understand that John is getting married." I said, "Yes, he is." He said, "Do that hurt you in any way?" I said, "No, indeed!" Just little funny little things, you know, because he knew that it didn't affect me in any way. He was just trying to make a joke out of it, that he was getting married and at that time I was not married. "Well, when are you going to get married? Do that hurt you that he's getting married?" And I said, "No." Sometimes he would come in and say, "You know I couldn't come out here without coming in and saying hello to you and seeing how you were doing." I would say, "Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm doing fine!" There were times when the only thing he would do was come in and shake my hand and say, "Hi. See you later."

He would tell me, "I always enjoy coming here, eating your meals," or something like that.

G: What were Lyndon Johnson and Sam Rayburn like together?

W: Brother, there was the most admirable thing I know of. It was just amazing how close they were, almost like father and son. Both Mr. Johnson and Mrs. Johnson just admired him so much. I know that Mr. Rayburn admired them, too, because it just seemed like he would tell Mr. Johnson what he thought was the best thing for him to do and all. I remember the time when Mr. Johnson ran for president, and Mr. Kennedy asked him to be his vice [president]. Nobody wanted him to accept that job because he had always been a leader, and he had never taken second place. As far as I can remember, now I may be a little off on this, I do think Mr. Rayburn was the cause of him taking the job.

G: I've heard that, that Jack Kennedy talked to Speaker Rayburn. Were you present when any of this was going on?

W: No. I was here, and this was in California.

G: This wasn't something, then, that you saw firsthand or that you had firsthand knowledge of?

W: No.

G: Was it generally a situation of their working out strategy together? Did they do that much?

W: Yes.

G: Who dominated? Was it pretty much give and take?

W: I think it was pretty much give and take. If there was any domination, I think Mr. Rayburn was the one that Mr. Johnson would really listen to.

G: Do you think he might have done more of the talking? I mean, he always seemed to me to be quieter than LBJ.

W: In a way he was. But that's the amazing part about it, that Mr. Johnson would listen to him when he wouldn't listen to anybody else. In talking, now, Mr. Johnson could outtalk Mr. Rayburn, but in the end he would listen to what Mr. Rayburn had said.

G: Are there any particular recollections here that you can remember that are vivid of them together?

W: They were together so much. I can't recall any special event.

G: Did they ever have a birthday party for Sam Rayburn?

W: Yes, they did. You know, they had so many things, and so many things went on it's very difficult for me to separate them. There was just so much going on.

G: I think Sam Rayburn has often been considered one of LBJ's early mentors. There was another man, I think, who was also considered very important.

W: Franklin D. Roosevelt.

G: Yes.

W: Yes.

G: Do you remember anything about their relationship?

W: Not too much about their relationship. That was the earlier part of the time that I started to work there, but it seemed that Mr.

Roosevelt was one of the people that LBJ listened to and admired a lot. Really, I think Mr. Roosevelt--in my way of thinking, LBJ was more like him than anybody else I know. He had the ways of getting things across to you like Roosevelt did.

G: Do you recall President Johnson's reaction to FDR's death in 1945?

W: It was such a shock to him. To me, it was kind of like losing a father. There were two deaths, Roosevelt and Rayburn, that I distinctly remember how hard he took it, this very, very sad time for him. Because I think that those were the two people in politics that shaped and helped his life more than anybody else.

G: At this point, let me turn the tape recorder off.

[Tape 2 of 2]

G: You were talking about the shock of Franklin Roosevelt's death and how hard it was for LBJ at this point. Do you recall anything specific? He did go to the funeral, I guess.

W: Yes, he did.

G: Did he say anything to you about what it meant to him?

W: I can't recall his saying anything about what it meant to him at this point. It's been so long ago.

G: I suppose at the time of the death he was at the Capitol, and he heard about it then.

W: Yes.

G: Did he come home, do you know?

W: No, I can't remember his coming home.

G: Let me ask you about another influence on him, Senator Alvin Wirtz, from Texas. Did you ever know him or have any contact with him?

W: Yes. I knew him quite well. In fact, I think his daughter married--

G: Dr. Cain.

W: --Dr. Cain, Mayo Clinic. Yes, he did have quite an influence on him, and they were together quite a bit before his death. I can't recall now too much about it, but I remember they used to visit, especially in Texas, and here. Gosh, I had even forgotten Senator Wirtz.

G: Did he look up to Senator Wirtz and treat him with considerable deference?

W: He did, yes.

G: What was Senator Wirtz' attitude toward LBJ?

W: It seemed that he liked him and considered him a good friend and, I guess you'd call it, a good politician.

G: In what ways did Senator Wirtz advise Lyndon Johnson, do you remember?

W: No. I don't remember anything about how he advised him or anything.

G: I suppose Lyndon Johnson used the telephone a great deal in his relations with other people?

W: Yes, he stayed on the phone.

G: Are there any incidents here that you recall of his use of the telephone? Overuse, perhaps?

W: Yes. He stayed on the phone most of the time, and I remember a time that I thought I was doing a favor. I can't recall now who it was that called, and I didn't know that he had been trying to get this

person on the phone all day. This person called, and I told him he was at dinner. But that was one of the mistakes that I made in not putting him through to Mr. Johnson, because that's one of the times that I really caught it. (Laughter) He asked me who did I think I was not to put the call through, but I thought I was doing him a favor letting him have dinner in peace because he had company. But it was the wrong thing.

G: How did you know, in retrospect, when to interrupt him and when not to?

W: I didn't. Well, it was according to who was calling. Now if I knew who was calling, I would just have to go to him and tell him who was calling. But this is just one of the times that I really made a boo-boo.

G: Who was it, do you know?

W: I can't recall who it was, but it was somebody that he really wanted to talk to and needed to talk to.

G: I understand that he would place calls at odd hours of the night and just wake people up.

W: He would do that. You'd never know when he was going to make a call to someone in the middle of the night. But I think people got accustomed to it, and they didn't pay it any attention.

G: Did he ever call you in the middle of the night?

W: No, because I was there so late it wasn't necessary.

G: Would he talk frequently to his friends and associates in Texas, or would most of the calls be to other members of Congress?

W: Well now, I can't truthfully say. I know he would talk to his friends in Texas and possibly sometimes to [members of] Congress. He had so many friends in Congress that I wouldn't say that he talked to any one of those people more than he did to the others. But I do know it's amazing that he could stay up late at night talking on the phone as much as he did, trying to get information on what was going on.

G: He was also an early riser, I understand.

W: Yes.

G: When did he get up?

W: There were times--I can't say that he would get up--he would be awake and on the phone sometimes five-thirty or six o'clock in the morning. Some of that time he would be in bed, but he would be awake. So I would say he was up anyway, as long as he was on the phone and busy trying to get things straightened out.

G: One of the stories I've heard was that he would intentionally set the alarm in the middle of the night and wake up and call somebody to impress upon them how important it was to him, the fact that it was bothering him in the middle of the night.

W: Yes.

G: He actually did this?

W: Yes. Sometimes you would think that he was in bed, because I know there have been times we'd have late dinner and I would stand around and talk afterwards. Everything was dark on that side and you'd think they were gone to bed, and he'd pop in and say, "What are you doing here? I thought you stopped this a long time ago." And I said,

"What?" "Standing around talking to the boys." He said, "What are you doing, standing back here drinking up all my liquor?" And I said, "I don't even drink the stuff." You know, you could just be teasing.

Then I do remember one time he popped in and was talking, and he said, "What about breakfast in the morning?" None of us knew anything about the breakfast he was having the next morning, and he had a whole bunch of people coming in for breakfast the next morning. That's one of the times that the ushers made a boo-boo. So he got on the phone and tried to call them to find out why we didn't know anything about the breakfast he was having.

G: This was during the White House?

W: Yes. We always had to know at least a little bit in advance that he was having breakfast at seven-thirty or eight o'clock in the morning for a whole bunch of people, and this is one time we didn't know it. Nobody had told us anything about it, and of course that upset him tremendously. But all in all he didn't get upset too much about things. I considered them small things, and I guess he did, too. Most of the time they would let you know what was happening. Now there have been times that he'd get on the phone himself and call me and ask me how long would it take me to get something ready for the whole Cabinet. And sometimes he would walk in with them, and you didn't even knew he was coming. It was just amazing.

G: You were prepared, I suppose, for these emergencies.

W: Yes, I had to be. I've seen times that I have fixed a meal in ten minutes for twenty-five or thirty people.

G: Is that right?

W: Yes. But it was just a way of stalling, really. I would tell, say, the butler, "Well, just serve some sherry." By that time we'd have our shrimp cocktail or something ready for them and shove that in front of them. Then if we had something like filet, we'd take the filet real quick and cut it and cut it again and make butterfly steaks. I would just open it up, you see, and that would take just about a minute to cook. By the time they got the cocktail off, we'd have that going, you know, just in a matter of minutes. He would come in and say to me, "You know, I know exactly when you're here and when you're not." I would look at him, and he said, "Just nothing goes right [when you're not here]."

I remember the time he went to Glassboro, when he had that meeting with Kosygin and he got sick. Now I didn't know he'd gotten sick. He came back--I was usually off on Mondays--and it just so happened they had a seafood salad for him. I fixed a seafood salad. They took it in to him, and he said, "Oh, my God, not again! I just got sick off of this stuff." So he just took a little of it, and he said, "Wait a minute. Bring it back. What is Mrs. Wright doing here today? Tell her I said come here." So I went in, and he said, "What do you do to these salads that you can't teach the others to do?" I said, "I don't know." He said, "You'll have to teach them how to fix this. I almost didn't eat it because I just got sick off of it." I said, "I'm sorry, Mr. President, I didn't know that you had had it. I didn't know what you had when you were away." He said, "Yes, I

was terribly ill."

He told me to teach them how to fix that seafood salad, because he loved shrimp and crab meat. Of course, there was a secret in doing it, because I made my own mayonnaise with mineral oil that had no food value at all. Then when I mixed it I would put lemon juice in it to cut it, where they would use just regular mayonnaise. He couldn't stand it because it was so thick it would just make him sick. I tried to tell them that, but they didn't want to take the time to make the mayonnaise.

G: He liked seafood. What else did he like? What was his favorite meal? Let me put it this way: if you were going to serve him one meal, and you wanted to serve him everything he liked, what would you put on the table?

W: Everything he liked?

G: Well--

W: There were so many things. I could tell you better what he didn't like than I could what he liked, because he liked food. Seafood was one of his favorites. Now he would love fried catfish and hush-puppies. That was one of his favorite meals. The other was Mexican food.

G: Did he get good Mexican food in Washington?

W: I made it.

G: You made it? I see. Where did you learn that? In Texas?

W: Well, not really. I just started fixing it. He said he wanted a Mexican dinner, and I fixed the chili and the enchiladas, guacamole

salad, and he loved pinto beans. It seemed like an easy meal, but it was one of the hardest ones you could fix. We'd fry tortillas for the bread. We just got used to fixing it.

G: Did Mrs. Johnson try to restrain him to the point of leading a normal life in terms of the length of time and the amount of things he tried to do? He was just generally working at a rapid pace all of the time. Did she ever try to get him to slow down and relax?

W: She did.

G: How successful was she?

W: Sometimes she was successful, but not very often. He just had that drive. It seemed like, "I must do this." It's just like every day he felt like this was something that he had to do. He couldn't wait until tomorrow. He just had to keep pushing.

G: Why do you think he was this way?

W: I don't know, and he pushed everybody else that way. He didn't make anybody else do anything that he wouldn't do. He would push everybody, but he was pushing himself more than he was anybody else.

G: When he was up here in Washington, did he have ways of relaxing? Would he go to a football game?

W: Yes.

G: What did he like to do for relaxation?

W: There were times he would play golf. He loved to go to the racetrack. There were times when I would be so glad when he said he was going to the races, and then they'd have dinner there and everything. Sometimes he would go to ball games but not too often. He loved swimming,

and that swimming pool was one of the greatest things, I think. Especially at The Elms they had that swimming pool, and at the Ranch, too. He loved to sit around and eat and entertain friends and sometimes just the family. He loved to swim; he loved swimming pools.

G: I guess he would swim every day, wouldn't he?

W: Yes. He even used that one at the White House. I understand they don't have it any more, but he really enjoyed that swimming pool there, too.

G: How would Mrs. Johnson try to get him to slow down? What would she use? Would she try to get him to go to a movie or go on a vacation, let's say?

W: Vacations, I think, were just something that you could say were taboo as far as he was concerned. She would try to get him to slow down, maybe go to a movie or something like that. But he would stay in that office, and there wasn't very much she could do about it. She would call him and talk to him and ask him to come home and eat and go to bed early and relax, but most of the time he wouldn't do it.

G: Of all the people he associated with in the Congress and in the White House and in Texas, who do you think he was most relaxed around or most comfortable around in terms of the way he talked to them, the information? Whom did he talk the freest with? [Who] seemed to be closest to him in terms of how much of himself he would . . . .

W: Betray?

G: Yes.

W: That's a hard question. I can't truthfully say.

G: Let me give you an example. Would he talk more freely to someone like Judge Moursund than someone like Richard Russell, for example?

W: Oh, yes. Well, he was very fond of Richard Russell.

G: But they were, I guess, different kinds of friends, weren't they?

W: Yes. Now Mr. Moursund, and there was another person, Mr. Winters--I don't know if you even knew him or not--

G: I knew who it was, yes.

W: --that he seemed to enjoy talking to and talked freely with. That Ranch was a place that he just loved, and people that he had around him when he was at the Ranch were the people that he just seemed to be more comfortable with. He was more himself and happy and gay. To me, you could see the change in him when he came back to Washington. Whenever he could he would get away and go to the Ranch, and it just seemed like his moods would change.

G: I was going to ask you some more about Richard Russell, I suppose epitomizing the very powerful southerner who had been very close to Lyndon Johnson during the Senate years and with whom he had been identified, gradually growing apart from [him] in terms of his policies. Did you ever see this happen, to the effect that that they were taking separate roads, more or less, in terms of civil rights or things of this nature?

W: To begin with, to me they practically had the same way of thinking, but I took for granted that it was because of their constituents. Now I felt this way about Mr. Johnson, that a lot of the things that he did were because of his constituents. But once he had the power to

do the things that he had always wanted to do, then he changed, because he was able to do these things that he couldn't do before because of his constituents. He had to go along with them in order to be sent back year after year.

G: So you think that Senator Russell possibly did not necessarily believe a lot of the things that he supported, but did it because he had to?

W: Yes.

G: What were your own impressions of him?

W: Senator Russell?

G: Yes.

W: I don't like to say too much about people like Senator Russell, because he was at the Johnsons quite a bit. To me, when he was there, naturally he portrayed a different way of life than he did in Congress, because he was a very nice person. But when I read about and heard about the things he was doing and saying in Congress, then I got a different feeling about him. Just seeing him and being around him you didn't get this.

G: Was it hard for you to function in this dichotomy, where you knew someone on a personal basis and as a friend of your boss that you had a very high regard for and everything on the one hand, yet knowing that the views that he was advancing were really anathema to the American Negro? How did you work in this situation?

W: I didn't think in that way, because I felt, "Here I am; I'm working for Lyndon B. Johnson. These are his friends. I must accept them

the way they are because he accepts them. There is nothing else I can do about it."

G: You don't think you were ever cooler toward Senator Russell?

W: No. No. I think because I was a southerner myself and came up in this atmosphere I accepted it more than anyone else would have.

G: That's an interesting point, I think.

One of the things that you mentioned while we were changing the reels was turning off the lights in the White House.

W: Yes, because from the time I started to work for him this is something the country or the world did not know about. This was one of his things that he had when he was young, turning off lights. That was one of the first things that we had words about, and this was one of the first times, too, that I learned that you had to talk up to him.

G: Do you want to recall that incident?

W: Well, he came home late, about eleven-thirty, for dinner. I had gone downstairs, and I was lying on the bed. He called me to give him his dinner so I went upstairs, and I just forgot to turn off the lights. He told me that if I didn't learn to turn off the lights when they weren't in use, he was going to take it out of my pay. I told him, "Well you just do that, because I have always lived at home where I had to pay my own light bill. Nobody ever told me anything about turning off the lights. But if you would come home on time you wouldn't have to worry about me turning off the lights, because they wouldn't be on if you'd get here on time." Of course after that he didn't say any more to me. I just normally would turn off the lights.

One of the things that I did automatically was turn off the lights. Now that went on all through these years about the lights. We always knew to turn the lights off when they weren't in use.

Then when we went to the White House, of course, that was another thing he started that people really didn't realize had been going on all these years. So he made a point of everybody turning off the lights, and he'd go around turning off lights! Then I put up little signs telling everybody to please turn off the lights. He told me one day, "Everybody's making fun of me and talking about me because the White House is dark, but one of these days it probably will be dark. Not because I will be here turning off the lights--this will probably be after I am gone--but the lights will be off because there will be a shortage. If they think they are having it bad now they will have it worse, because there will be a depression. It's going to be worse than it was in the thirties." I notice every day now that those things that he said are really coming true.

G: In this connection I think he was ahead of his time. Wouldn't you say so?

W: That he was ahead of his time?

G: Yes, as far as projecting what would happen with the energy shortage and all this.

W: Yes. I often wondered how he could tell that this was going to happen, because during those times everything to me was good. Salaries were good and people were working; there weren't so many people that didn't have jobs and things; and everything seemed so good. How could

he tell that this was going to happen? I've often wondered about that.

G: As long as you're reminiscing, another story I've heard that maybe you can tell at this point involved having some people over for dinner back during the war when they had ration stamps.

W: That has been told so many times! (Laughter) That's true. But it has been told in so many different ways.

G: Tell it in the way that you remember it, and maybe we can get an authentic version here.

W: Mrs. Johnson was away. I think she was in Texas or Alabama; I'm not sure [which] one. He wanted to have some people over, and he wanted to have steak. So I told him that, "We just don't have the stamps." You know we had stamps at that time. He said, "Well, we'll just have to get some." So I called up Mrs. Connally and asked her if she had any stamps that I could get some meat for some guests. She said, "I don't have any, and if I did I wouldn't let him have them. He's got to remember there's a war on, too, and that he's just like everybody else. He has to do without." And I said, "Yes! You know it, and I know it, but I'm not going to be the one to tell him!"

In later years, he made quite a joke out of it. He would tell everybody because of a time that he had gone to Texas and he came back and he had gained a lot of weight. At each meal I used to write him a letter that he called his love letters, and I would count calories and carbohydrates and proteins and grams of fat and let him know how much he was having at each meal. So this particular day I wrote him

a note and told him that he had been my boss for a number of years and he always wanted to lose weight, yet he would do nothing about it. Now I was going to be his boss for a change. [He should] eat what I put in front of him, don't complain, and don't ask for any more. Then he would go around telling this story about what happened about the stamps, and he would say, "After twenty-seven years, now she tells me. She couldn't tell me then, but now she tells me!" That was quite comical, because I had said that he was no different from everybody else. But I was not going to tell him, because he didn't realize that he was like everybody else. It's just been told so many different ways until--

G: After you more or less put him on this diet, did he stay by it pretty much?

W: You know, he did pretty good for a while. The only mistake that was made in preparing food for him was once we tried preparing different food for guests, and he would have something else. That didn't work because what he would do [was] eat what was on his plate, and then he would turn around and eat what the other guests were eating. So we had to start devising ways of planning and preparing food that everybody could eat. That's one of the things that I really would like to do is do this cookbook--not the first one, if I ever get the first one written and see how it turns out--showing how a menu or a recipe can be made into a diet recipe. Because this is what I had to do, use skim milk and Sucaryl and stuff like that to make it where he could eat it and everybody else could eat it, too, and it would taste good.

G: Was there much difference in the taste between one of these diet meals and--

W: Not very much, no.

G: Do you think he enjoyed them just as much?

W: I know he did. But there were some things that we had to stop preparing at all, because he would eat them. There were so many things, though, that he really couldn't tell the difference in the taste. You'd be surprised, things like lemon chiffon pie. I wouldn't make a crust. I'd take it and use Sucaryl and skim milk or something like that. In fact, you could not tell the difference, but you would not have a crust. You'd make it in a mold. It would be very good, but you just had to learn. Now, he loved coconut custard, but when I prepared it I prepared it in a casserole. He just loved desserts. That was one of his favorite desserts. He loved desserts. But I didn't use butter or margarine or anything in these desserts, and you couldn't tell it wasn't in there.

G: I suppose that when he was having dinner was one of his favorite times for telling stories, and that he was a great storyteller and raconteur.

W: Oh, yes. Right.

G: Do you remember any of them that were your particular favorites?

W: No, I don't.

G: I've heard that he was a great mimic.

W: He was.

G: Do you remember any particular examples of his depicting other dialects or accents?

W: No. I have heard them, but since I really can't remember exactly I would rather not say. I wouldn't want to say something that I'm not sure of.

G: I've heard he would on occasion, for example, affect a Hill Country German accent and talk like the Germans would in the Texas Hill Country. Is this so?

W: Yes.

G: What else about the man that you remember, just his day-to-day life style?

W: Naturally I didn't pay too much attention. I guess after so long it just became a part of me not to even notice. To me, he was not a president; he was just another person. I remember when he first became president he was in the West Hall, and I walked out and I said to him, "I certainly would like to shake the hand of the President." He just laughed, because we had been close for so many years until to me he was not a president. He was just the same person that I had worked for. But then, you know, it actually changes later on. When you are around other people and they are saying Mr. President this and Mr. President that, then it becomes a part of you to do the same thing. So it seemed that it did change your way of feeling toward him. I don't think that he changed. But it was just that he had so many things on his mind, so many problems of the whole country, until naturally he had to change.

G: Which years were his happiest years that you worked for him?

W: I can't say, because he just seemed happy most of the time. But I do think that his happiest years were the years before he went to the White House.

G: Was he, say, more consistently a more jovial person then?

W: Yes.

G: What differences were there in him before his heart attack and after his heart attack?

W: You mean in 1955?

G: Yes.

W: There wasn't such a great difference. At first, he would take it easy and think about himself, but that didn't last long.

G: He didn't age or slow down much as a result?

W: No, he didn't. Not at that time. But it's amazing, quite amazing after he went to the White House how he aged. You could just see it. I think it was just so many problems and the way the country treated him. You could see him age.

G: Do you think he enjoyed being president, or do you think he felt it was a strain?

W: I know it was a strain, but I really think he enjoyed being president. And I don't think that he really intended to stay. I think when he went in he intended to stay that one year and leave.

G: Do you really?

W: Oh, yes. Because he said that to me: "We'll go in one year, and then we'll leave."

G: Did he plan to retire to Texas, do you think?

W: Now I don't know what his plans were, really. I never thought in terms of what his plans would be. But that's one thing that he did say, "We're going in here for one year, and then we're going to leave."

Then it was quite surprising, I thought, when they had the convention in Atlantic City. I can't say that he wasn't supposed to because I don't really know that, but we didn't think that he was going to Atlantic City. Mrs. Johnson and the girls had already gone on up to Atlantic City. That evening, of course, I saw Mr. Humphrey when he came in, and he and the President had a conference. Then he came out and announced that he was going to Atlantic City, and I said, "Oh, my Lord, that means he's not going to run. He's going up there and he's not going to accept the nomination." Because he had said that he wasn't going to run any more. Then when he went to Atlantic City he accepted it, and I guess I was one of the happiest people in the world to know that he was going to go on, because I thought that he was the best president we could have. I knew what he was going to do. I've had so many of my friends to tell me he's one of the best presidents that we have ever had and that he's done more for our people than any president we've ever had. I said, "Well, I wish you could have told him that when he was living, because I think he would have liked to have known how you felt." But most of the people didn't let him know then or didn't come out for him, and naturally that hurt him.

G: He, I think, was perhaps more sensitive than many other politicians.

W: He was very sensitive.

G: I've often heard that one of his best companions during the White House years was a little mongrel dog, Yuki.

W: Yuki, yes, that's true. Yuki used to sing--what we called singing. The President would start him off, and he would just make these weird noises like he was singing. This is one of the dogs that Luci picked up on the highway. She brought him back, and the President took the dog over. He was very fond of that dog.

G: I think Luci mentioned once that he was originally very obstinate and hard to get along with and just wouldn't mind and everything. Then they took him to the vet and had him operated on, and he became a much better dog. Do you remember that?

W: Yes. He was very fond of animals, the President was, very fond of animals. But I remember a time when we were going to Texas. They were going by plane, and we were going by car. They had this beagle that he was very, very fond of, and he wanted us to take the dog by car. You remember Gene Williams. Gene and I were the ones that were traveling, and we didn't want to take the dog. He couldn't understand why we didn't want to take the dog, so we told him that it was hard enough for us to find a place to stay and get across the country, let alone taking a dog. We just couldn't afford to take that dog. So we didn't have to take him.

G: What about Lyndon Johnson as a campaigner? Did you ever go with him on any of his campaign speeches?

W: No, I didn't. Helen did quite a bit of traveling with him, but I didn't go on any of those campaign trips.

G: You stayed at the White House pretty much during those . . .

W: Wherever.

G: Wherever they happened to be?

W: Yes.

G: I've heard the home that they really loved was The Elms.

W: That's true. They really loved that and enjoyed it so much. Yes.

G: I went by there the last time I was in town, and it's just beautiful. It's huge.

W: Oh, I haven't been by there since they moved out of it. Because they had cleared away a lot of the trees and things, and they were getting ready to make a park out there when he became president. They had bought a lot of bulbs in some foreign country and brought them back, and they were putting it out. Gene Williams and Sam, my husband, were cleaning it off and fixing it. I haven't been by there. I just wondered several times how it looked, but I don't know why I've never wanted to go by there.

G: What about Mrs. Johnson in her role as first lady? Do you think she successfully complemented his presidency?

W: Yes, I do. Yes, I do.

G: What qualities made her a good first lady?

W: She was just a good first lady. I think all during the years she had entertained and taken people around, and she had been accustomed to all of these things. Once she became first lady she just fell into

place and was very good. It's kind of hard for me to say what made her a good first lady, because she had so many good qualities. She was the type of person who accepted people, and she was very gracious. She still is. Looking back over it now, it's kind of hard for me to say what made her a good first lady. She talked with the President all the time, and he really listened to her about a lot of things. It's kind of hard for me to explain, but he took what she said. She was a journalist, and she knew a lot of things. She helped him a lot. I think he listened to her more than he did to anybody else.

G: Do you really?

W: Yes, I really do.

G: Can you recall any examples where she really contributed the important, persuasive counsel for him?

W: No, I can't.

G: Would she just do it at the dinner table, or something? Is that when?

W: No, not really. That's one of the reasons why I can't say too much about it, because I think it was in the mornings. They would have breakfast together in his bedroom, and this is really when I think they had more of their discussions about different things. It was very seldom that she had lunch with him, because he always had somebody with him. And it was very seldom that that they were alone at dinner time. This was the time of day, in the mornings, when they would have time to discuss things, and I know this is the time when he really did listen to her. I know she had a great bearing on things that happened and things that he did and the way he did things. I can recall the

times before he became president, and I know that she really did have a great bearing on things that he did. One thing that I really admired about him [was that] he really did listen to her about a lot of things. Now of course there were times when he didn't. You know, everybody has a way of doing things and a way of thinking things out. People can give you their opinion and you can or cannot follow them. One thing I must say about him is he really did listen to her quite a bit.

G: Is there anything else that you think of now that might be appropriate? What about leaving the White House? Was it difficult to do?

W: No, I don't think so. I really don't. I can remember the night that he made his speech, saying to the nation that he would not accept the nomination. I don't know. I was home, and it just did something to me. I think I just cried, because I had never seen him give up before on anything. He had always been such a fighter. It just hurt me to my heart to hear him say that, because I felt that once he left the White House he would not be in politics any more. And I knew this was one of the things he liked most. This was his whole life. It really was difficult. And then those last days--to me they were very sad.

G: Do you remember anything in particular about the last days?

W: I know he came in and said to me, "Well, at last we are going home." He said, "Are you going with us?" I said no, that I would be staying here. He said, "It won't be the same without you." And I said, "Well, I guess I thought that you would always be here." To me it was just like losing a family, but it was what he wanted to do. I didn't know

at the time, but I thought of it since. He said that it was because he could not hold the country together, but I do think it was because of his health.

G: Do you really?

W: I think that. Nobody said that to me. And then it could be that he thought he could not hold the country together and it was best for him to leave, but I think it was because his health was failing. Then, too, it may have been that after he went home that his mind and his heart and his soul were still here in Washington. That's one of the things that I really want, that last speech that he made for civil rights. I'm going to write and ask them for it.

G: I'll get you a copy of it.

W: I really would like to have that.

G: Would you like to have an audio tape for that machine or would you like a printed text?

W: I would like the printed text. I would like both, but I couldn't ask for both.

G: Okay. I could send you both.

W: I really would like to have that, because that is one thing that stands out above all else. Because I watched it, and I saw his picture. I saw him when he took that pill, put it under his tongue, and I could see the weakness in him. It hurt me to my heart to know. But I didn't know he was as sick as he was.

G: Did you have much contact with him in the post-presidential years?

W: Yes. Whenever he came to Washington he'd always call me. I remember the first Christmas he came and he asked me how I was doing, and I told him fine, that I was getting along fine. He said, "I want to make sure that you have a good Christmas now, because I'm going to leave something with Lynda for you." And he did. He was just that way. He would ask me, "How are you doing with your house? Are you getting along okay with your house?" And I said, "Yes, I'm doing fine." I mean if I wasn't I wouldn't have told him, because I felt that those years were over. I just felt like if I didn't prepare for those years I didn't feel that he should. But until the end he thought of me.

G: That's remarkable.

W: To me he was just the best. He was just the greatest.

G: I certainly do thank you for taking the time to go through these years with such marvelous recollections.

[End of Tape 2 of 2 and Interview I]

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