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HORACE BUSBY ORAL HISTORY, INTERVIEW I

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HORACE W. BUSBY

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This assignment is subject to the following terms and conditions:

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Signed by Horace W. Busby, Jr., on May 7, 1999.

Accepted by John W. Carlin, Archivist of the United States, June 4, 1999.

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ACCESSION NUMBER 99-04

INTERVIEW I

DATE: April 23, 1981

INTERVIEWEE: HORACE BUSBY

INTERVIEWER: MICHAEL L. GILLETTE

PLACE: Mr. Busby's office, Washington, D. C.

Tape 1 of 1

B: I arrived in Washington on the afternoon of March 16 [1948] and met with the Congressman [Johnson] for the first time about seven o'clock that night. When I was at the Kennedy Library on that panel I started off that way, saying that I remember the date very specifically because it was the eve of St. Patrick's Day. Coming from Texas I had held a lifelong impression that the Irish were ruddy-faced tenors who came through singing on the vaudeville circuit, and it was not until the next morning when I went to the Capitol to be put on the payroll and was met by these battalions of people wearing green that I came to appreciate that the Irish were one of the great sub-forces in American politics.

But I went over to the--I don't remember what the office is called, I think the disbursing office of the House, with Congressman Johnson to be sworn in as an employee of Congress and be put on the payroll. All the men standing around the room watching this occur were wearing green.

G: How did you get your job? Do you recall?

B: Yes. Let me interject, I don't want to get off onto my first meetings with him and some of those things, but this one is interesting as to how [I was hired], not all the details that were involved with it.

I was working in the press room at the State Capitol in Austin. I was a second-man in a two-man bureau there for the International News Service, which is today the I in UPI, and had started the job the previous year in 1947, at the beginning of the year as a matter of fact, to cover the legislature and continued on covering the Governor's Office. My bureau chief, who was Bill Carter--he was from New York--did not know much about Texas politics. He had been sent down to take over and spruce up the bureau and so he let me write a weekly piece about Texas politics.

Early in January of 1948 Paul Bolton, who was almost the dean of Austin newsmen, but was not at the Capitol, [sought me out]. He had become a commentator on KTBC, and was also a member of the school board, other things like this. I had formed a friendship with him several years earlier when I was the editor of the *Daily Texan*, and at the end of my editorship he had called me down to KTBC and had offered me a job in the news room there. The year I was editor, and then the year before when I was the principal writer of such things, were the years of the University's great tumult about Homer Rainey and the demonstrations. Because I had the positions that I did with the paper I was quite prominent in that period, and Bolton called me to KTBC and offered me this job, which was a news job and basically the number-two man there behind him. I did not [accept]. I had worked in radio and radio news in Fort Worth when I finished high school. I was not too hot on that, but after thinking about it I went back to him and told him that I just did

not want to work for a politician and that while I understood that they said that Lyndon Johnson did not own the station, I thought otherwise. And so that's the last time Bolton had spoken to me. (Laughter)

So he appeared in the news room. I was in the second news room on the hill over by the state library--I mean, it wasn't the Hill; this is Austin in the Capitol. He came in one afternoon and said could I come out in the hall, he had something to talk to me about. Since I was writing politics and was getting in the papers with it really--we were in intense competition with AP and UP and my political stuff was doing pretty well in that competition--I assumed that he wanted to leak something to me most likely about Congressman Johnson. So I went out in the hallway thinking that was the subject of the conversation. He said, referring back to the conversation in 1946 that I just related, "You don't think that I'm here because I want to be here," which was acknowledgment of his irritation with me for turning down that job on that basis before. So in effect he said that Lyndon--I don't have notes here, but he stated it in some sort of a negative, "You wouldn't want to go to Washington and work with Lyndon, would you?" He told me the pay, which was three hundred dollars a month, which was a good bit less than I was making then from my job and from free-lancing, and several other things like this. I was grinning I suppose before he finished, because there was no way in the world I was going to work for Lyndon Johnson. Then he got irritated with me and said again, "Now I wouldn't be here if I didn't think this was good for you."

He just didn't let me say no at that particular time. I started debating about it a little bit myself, because I had just rather brashly applied through INS to come to the

Washington bureau. At that time--of course, the pre-war attitudes about seniority and all like this had not yet collapsed on post-war, although they were in the process. The managing editor of INS wrote back to my bureau chief and said to tell Busby he has got to wait in line a while. So I continued to debate about this. Well, I didn't really debate about it. I was going to be negative, and then several things happened. The other people in the news room--of course, I was by far the youngest. At that precise time I was twenty-three years old and most of them were much my senior. So word got around the Capitol that Lyndon Johnson had offered me this job and it didn't look like I was going to go.

The first thing that occurred was that the Lieutenant Governor, who was Allan Shivers, and whom I had known some while I was in the University, thought very highly of as I have ever since. This is a gratuitous side comment, but he was the smartest politician I've met, ever been associated with. He called me in to the Lieutenant Governor's apartment behind the State Senate one day and said, "I hear that you have this job offer." I said, "Yes, I do, but I don't think I'm going to go in the job." He said some expletive and he said, "Oh, get on up there. It's too good an opportunity to pass by. You'll learn more from Lyndon in a year than you'd learn from all of us around here in ten years. He'll work your tail off, but I think you'd be making a foolish mistake not to go for no better reason than you just didn't want to go."

So that impressed me a bit. This sequence that I'm relating impressed me with the assessment of Johnson by the cream of the crop in Texas politics as opposed to the legislative assessment of him, which was low and spitting at him all the time and putting him down. People got up in the legislature in 1947 several times and made personal

privilege speeches about Johnson and that he had deserted Texas. He was a controversial figure, and of course all of his career, I might point out, up until the presidency, he was nearly always in a contest, a head-to-head real arm-wrestling contest with the State Capitol in Austin. He did not have any love for the states or for that specific State Capitol. State government was the enemy in the thirties. You were trying to centralize government, and it was something that he carried on for years.

But anyway, even more impressive than Shivers, whom I knew on friendly terms, Governor Beauford Jester called me in. I, of course, had been a strong supporter of Dr. Homer Rainey for governor against Jester, and in the eyes of the Jester people had helped build up Rainey when I was editor of the *Daily Texan*, which I don't think was necessarily true. But I was very much from the other side of the forest as far as that group was concerned. Jester was an enormously nice man, a courtly man, and I had come, even in the short time that he had been governor, to see him very differently than when I had been a student.

He had called me in once before. This is again digression, but he'd called me in the previous fall because he was greatly devoted to the University of Texas, at which he had been a chairman of the Board of Regents and all like this. So he had gone to a football game and the PA announcer introduced the new Governor to the football crowd, and the student section booed. This set off all kinds of alarms. Politicians, as I learned then, are forever occupied with "what do the young people want." So I had been called in to Jester's presence from the news room several times the previous year to help them understand what the young people wanted and why this booing would occur.



But I hadn't had any other close association with him. One or two stories I had written, his press secretary and executive assistant thought I was shooting at him. I expected some kind of a negative reception. But when I went in we were alone, and he stood and welcomed me into his office and he said, "I understand that Lyndon has offered you a job. Now, I want to tell you before we say anything else that one of the great losses, one of the great problems of the southern states"--and he, unlike Johnson, would think of Texas as a southern state instead of a southwestern or western state--"is the loss of our best young people. Our best ones graduate and go East and they don't come home." Of course [Wilbur Joseph] Cash or some several southern writers have quantified that, that there were fifteen million southerners went North in the first three or four decades of the century, oftentimes fitting pretty much to Jester's description, that they were the best law school graduates or whatever. I think that's where the Sunbelt came from, that we were all acting as double agents, come up and take over businesses and send them back to the Sunbelt.

But anyway, he said, "I want you to promise"--this is Governor Jester speaking--"that whatever the outcome, should you decide to go, that you will stay no longer than five years and that you will come back and you will not spend your life in the East." Or rather, I think he was saying North. So with that introduction he said, "You are going to go, aren't you?" I said, "Well, Governor, no. I haven't made up my mind. I don't know whether I want to do this or not." He said, "Horace, a young man your age could not have a higher compliment than to be asked to serve on Lyndon's staff." I'll come back to that in a minute. He said, "I certainly think you should go. I think you should be very

proud to have been asked. Who knows, who knows?"--threw out his hands in a "who knows" gesture--"Who knows where Lyndon may end up? Someday he may be president of these United States."

That attitude, and Shivers had some of it, too, was an attitude around the State Capitol about Johnson, that you couldn't explain him. He voted against Texas things. He survived. He voted against oil, he voted against the employers, he voted against all the sacred cows, and yet he couldn't be defeated in his district. He did not behave like a politician. I didn't understand all this at this point. Every other politician was very obsequious to his constituencies and particularly to the press. Johnson was the only major politician with any kind of an Austin connection who never sent any goody up to the press room. All the rest of them sent hams and sausages and whiskey, and you lived high off the politicians. Johnson didn't have anything to do with them.

So I was impressed, and I went back again to my [job]. I got a letter from Johnson, which I do not have with me, and he was a bit exasperated because I was taking so long, and he said--no, there was another occurrence. Paul Bolton then moved in and invited me to lunch at the Stephen F. Austin Hotel with John Connally. Now when Jester was talking about the compliment of being asked to join Johnson's staff, that I later learned referred principally to what had happened when Johnson got John Connally. I mean, Connally was a true coup to have as a staff person because when he was in the University and was running for student body president, it was an article of faith with many of the people out there, his contemporaries and faculty people, too, that John was going to be governor or senator. I don't know that I ever heard anybody say president. But this

was inevitable. And in turn, because of John, not because of Johnson, Johnson continued to have this kind of staffing: Pickle, a fellow named Goldberg, from Dallas.

G: Irving Goldberg.

B: Yes, Irving Goldberg. These people were John's friends in the University. They came to work for Johnson, and Jake Pickle has told me this specifically himself, they came to work on Johnson's staff, but they didn't come to work for Johnson. They came to work for John. Which of course is the same principle as a faculty, that you get a strong professor and good people try to gravitate to him. So I met the fabled John Connally, whom I had been hearing about all the time I was in the University, but he was off in the navy. I had never actually met him; I had seen him. He was unfairly handsome and all this sort of stuff and this tremendous personality.

It was interesting. I was sitting at a table in the dining room. Of course, you know, in those days that coffee shop--it wasn't a dining room--was the center of Austin. No drinks, no beer, no whiskey being served, crowded to the gills. I saw John come in the door to join us, and it was fifteen minutes before he made it over to where we were because everybody in the room seemed to want to get up and go talk to John. It's always been that way, this lavish personality that he had then and still has, to some extent. In fact, at one point they were just lined up just to shake hands and say hello to John. He had had no position or anything in the community.

He came over and sat down with us and was very cordial, in no way solicitous or obsequious, which I liked. He wasn't trying to sell me something. There was an interesting tone developed. When we finally got down to the serious part, John figured it

out that I didn't wish to enter the company of an ordinary politician. I told him, I said--see, we might not realize it today, but the idea of staff for political people was a very dimly developed idea in 1948. The first White House staff had not been created until 1939 by an act of Congress. At the state level the only staff was around the handful of elected executives, and what it was, it usually was a family retainer--maybe a press man, but that was rare--a family retainer, somebody that couldn't make it in life unless they were on that kind of a job. They weren't expected to be, weren't taken to be intelligent people with initiative of their own. It was almost the opposite, at least in my view. Now that didn't mean that governors and all didn't draw on some smart people, but they were not staff people. They'd be company people or professors or something like that who would handle some project or design some legislative program or something of that sort.

John I could tell was different, enormously different, from what I had ever seen a political staff person be. I mean, this was an accomplished, well-turned-out, tremendously intelligent, articulate guy. He just was completely unlike anything I had seen, and that was being imprinted on me from the beginning of the conversation. Then I began asking some questions and John picked up pretty much on what I was just saying, that that was my reservation. And he told me, "The Congressman is regarded on the Hill, has been regarded almost from the beginning of his career, as having nearly always one of the two or three best staffs in Congress. You don't lose any respect on the House side of Capitol Hill working for Lyndon Johnson, because people just assume that you're good."

I would raise for you at that point one thing I know nothing about, but I gathered that when Johnson came to Congress in 1937-38 that he had a very poor staff. One or

two of them turned out to be alcoholics. Whatever they were, he didn't like them. He never spoke about them in the later years. He had set out to correct this situation and that's how he came into Connally. And also, I would make another point that some of us as late as Johnson's presidency were quite smug about, that the people that were closest to him, that worked best for him through the years, he never hired and he didn't hire. See, he didn't hire me. He didn't hire Connally. He didn't hire Pickle. He didn't hire Jenkins.

Walter Jenkins, who was invaluable to Johnson's career, came because of John Connally. He had worked in John Connally's campaign for student body president. He got out of business administration school--this is Walter Jenkins--I think at the age of sixteen, or maybe he had just turned seventeen. He could not get into law school, because they had a minimum age requirement, and that is what he had expected to do. So instead he came to Washington. He followed John to Washington. He did not join the office staff; he was a policeman at the Supreme Court or something like that. But he worked in the office after hours.

Anyway, I asked John about Congressman Johnson and his future because what I had been told to that point by Bolton was that Lyndon was saying that he was not going to stay in politics, he was not going to run again for the House, which of course in fact he did not. As Paul had told me the story, he said to me, "When you are around forty you will understand what he is going through, that he is thirty-nine years old, he'll be forty in August. He's deeply disturbed by that and he thinks that life is passing him by and that he ought to get out of politics and get into something worthwhile where he could use his talents."

Connally didn't buy that at all. He did not think there was any chance Johnson would get out of politics. Connally had set up [an agreement] in 1946 when Rainey and Jester and four or five other prominent state officials were running for governor--they were actually running for the Democratic nomination, but that was the only race--before any of them announced. I guess he did this work in 1945 right after he had returned from the war. He went to Jester, he went to Rainey--he in this instance being Connally-- he went to Grover Sellers, who was the attorney general and who also was potentially a candidate, he went to one other person. He got agreement from all of them that if Lyndon would run for governor they would not seek the office.

See, on the eve of World War II he had made this race for Senate and in all but the history books he won it; it was stolen from him afterwards. John very much wanted him to run for governor and use that as a base to build on for other things. When he got all this worked out and presented it to the Congressman, the Congressman said he had absolutely no interest in the ticky little things that governors did. He wasn't interested in pardons, he wasn't interested in highway contract-letting, he wasn't interested in textbook contracts, he wasn't interested in tax bills in the legislature. [He said] that they were all primitive and too conservative for him around there, that the future lay in what people did in Washington. As a result there was a flare-up, which was a frequent occurrence between Johnson and Connally, and I think that they went through the traditional six-month period of not speaking about that.

Anyway, I was questioning around about the future of this venture of coming to Washington with Johnson. I was pretty well decided that I would come, because I had

gotten it into my head that maybe if I did come to Washington with him that even though he didn't run for reelection that somehow or other through him that I might get to attend the national convention in Philadelphia. That had been something I had been wanting to do since I was an eight-year-old in 1932 and listened to the convention in Chicago. Paul Bolton had also given me assurance that if Johnson didn't run, if he went out of Congress at the end of the year that he, Johnson, would use his good offices to try to get me hired as a reporter on some paper here or in New York. That had all been done.

John said of the Congressman though--made a very solemn assessment of him for me--he said that "He has an extraordinary or great amount of talent, far more than you will find in most men in politics." He said, "Under the right circumstances he could go quite far. He does, however, tend to be his own worst enemy," and something to the effect that "If he doesn't go far, it will be because of himself." I had no understanding of the import of that description.

G: He didn't elaborate on what he meant by that?

B: No, he didn't elaborate, but I was impressed myself with Connally's obvious objectivity and the seriousness with which he answered my question. Because this was unlike the typical political staff people I had dealt with in the news room or had seen--I had been seeing them all my life--who could only say that their guy, whomever he might be, whether he was a county commissioner or governor, could walk on water and turn granite into candy. That's the way they all talked, and John wasn't talking that way and Bolton wasn't talking that way. So I decided this was a little different milieu than I had expected

and I could begin to see what Shivers and Jester were saying about the man. He was different, but that you were not putting an albatross around your neck.

G: Did you ever learn if Johnson had talked to Shivers and Jester in advance and asked them to [speak to you]?

B: Well, he hadn't talked to anyone. No, no, he hadn't talked to anyone. See, people today, young people today especially I think find it very hard to believe that neither then nor later did I ever--I've never submitted a resume for employment. But there was no checking on me at all. You just didn't do that.

G: I mean asking Jester to talk to you.

B: No, no, no. No, he wouldn't have thought of that, and he wouldn't have anything to do with this. This was all being done by John and Paul. They didn't check any references. I had assumed more or less on the basis of my experience that if you got a job with a politician it was because of your family or you had to be tied in some way. My family was off up in Fort Worth and didn't know anything [about it]. There was no inquiry like that at all. Johnson had written me a letter, or two letters actually, when I was editor of the *Texan* complimenting me on my editorials. I had answered neither of them because I thought he was a politician trying to butter me up.

G: Compromise your objectivity.

B: Oh, yes. I was very indignant in a good, college journalist sort of way, even though the letters were very nice, and they were the only letters I got from any public official anywhere.



G: When did you learn what your job would consist of? Did Connally outline why they wanted you?

B: No. No, Connally didn't know. Well, he knew, but . . . . To tell that, what my job was supposed to be, gets into some areas that I didn't know whether I wanted to get into or not, but let me explain it this way. In the late fall, sometime late in the year in 1947 the Congress--that was a Republican Congress. In other words, when I came to Washington, Congress was Republican, and while I was here it changed back to Democrat and changed back to Republican again. And then it's gone thirty years without change.

G: This was the 80th Congress, the Do-Nothing [Congress].

B: Which was one of the best Congresses in history.

But anyway, Lyndon Johnson could win any contest in the country that was ever held since the beginning of the Republic for feeling sorry for himself, which was one of the crosses you had to bear if you were a close associate of his. He was seeking something from people by that. I never quite settled on what it was that he sought by that kind of self-pity, but he sought it.

G: Was it genuine self-pity or was he just trying to make you feel sorry?

B: Most of the time he was fishing for something. I said in one of my book reviews about Doris Kearns' book [*Lyndon Johnson and the American Dream*] that he always felt that the ineffective people got more sympathy and were treated better, but his problem was always success. He was always a huge success and everybody was resisting him. That's why he tried to depict his childhood as so barren and miserable, when in fact it wasn't. I've learned more about his childhood since he died than I ever knew from him, because

his depiction of it was just grim: not enough food on the table. I knew that wasn't true. But no clothes, no shoes. Well, Rebekah Johnson, in fact, in the social structure in Johnson City they were so far above everybody else that his problem was just that. It was not that he was down at the bottom. Poverty, he never had any idea what poverty was because he never was poor. Not rich, but not poor.

G: You were filling a need here, is that it?

B: No, it works back to that. Let me go back. When he turned down Connally on running for governor, I think that at root what he really wanted to do was to run that one more time for Congress in 1946 because he knew that all of his accumulated enemies--and enemies were less people than groups, oil and all like this--that there was nothing they wouldn't do to beat him. He just wanted to take them on. He just wanted to show them. So he had chosen to make the race in the Tenth District in 1946, and true enough, the establishment--and he hated the Austin establishment, old family, rich people.

One of the fellows, Bill Drake who was once mayor of Austin, the richest young son of a rich family in Austin--they owned the Calcasieu Lumber Company, which represented family holdings in timber back in Louisiana. He was mayor of Austin in the fifties. But Bill Deason has told me about the day that Billy Drake came into the Congressman's office, this is in the late thirties. Drake was something, of course, that you had not heard many of in Austin. He was a Republican, said he was. But he had called on the Congressman in the Federal Building, Federal Courthouse, as apparently he had done frequently, and started in on what Roosevelt was doing that was messing up the country. The line in those days which we would have very little recollection of today was that the

welfare side of the New Deal was corrupting the American character and all, which it may well have, I don't know. He ran on and on, typical rich-boy Republican talk. And this is causing all these Johnson vibrations to begin to tremble. The result was that he stood up and went around the desk and told Bill Drake that he, Drake, was leaving. Drake was by then shouting at him, crusading against this iniquity in Washington. So Johnson picked him up by the back of his trousers, by his belt and by his coat collar. Drake was a short man, shorter than I am, and Johnson of course was tall. As people in the office said, he went striding out with great dignity carrying Bill Drake, who was shouting and screaming, like he was carrying a satchel, and carried him out to the street in the courthouse and plopped him down on the sidewalk.

Johnson had awfully strong class feelings. They were not of someone from the under class feeling strongly against the upper class; it was the fact that Johnson [felt]--this is my interpretation of it, and this applied when he was president--that there were an awful lot of people from the upper classes elsewhere who did not understand he was from the upper class in Johnson City. I mean, it was aristocrat against aristocrat.

But anyway, back to the connection that brought me in there. He had made this big race and he had won it by 73 [per cent]--look up sometimes the percentage by which he won in 1946, because it was quite crucial. He wanted to win by 75 per cent. As I recall, he missed it by 2.3 per cent, and this caused the greatest break ever between him and his campaign manager John Connally. He was absurd about that two point difference. So he went on something of a rampage all during the fall. All these staff people of his, all his boys, had come back. None of them had done him the honor of returning to work on

his staff. They all somehow or other wanted to go out and make money, and he just found this unthinkable.

Now, Walter Jenkins had come back, and this is of course the subject of three hours separately. But in a very curious way Johnson always had great difficulty seeing Walter. In other words, Walter was one of his boys and had gone off in the army and became a major and all like this, and was back and was working like a dog trying to win the Congressman's approval and he just didn't count. He knew he had a very able assistant, almost a genius assistant, but that still wasn't good enough. Well, what he really wanted was another John Connally.

This is something that he never ceased to want, even as late as 1958--I think it was 1958--he hired Lloyd Hand. Lloyd Hand-- this was when Johnson was senator--was a student body president at the University and was personable, met people well. Lloyd has told me--and I knew it without him telling me--he's told me since the President's death with sort of a note of bafflement and awe in his voice, "You know, Buzz, when he was interviewing me he told me, 'Now you know how to meet people. I can tell.'" And Lloyd said, "Meet them, what do you mean?" He said, "Well, like at parties, at cocktail parties and receptions and things. See, I'll tell you what I want you to do. I want you always to go with me to these parties and functions and always go about two steps in front of me. It's just better if I've got somebody doing that." And that's really the way he was. There was a streak--and people will think, anybody that ever reads or hears this will think I'm out of my mind--there was an enormous streak of shyness in him. He was always so afraid that in a graceful social setting that he wouldn't be mannered properly. Now he took over

any party he went to, which is also one reason he took it over, because if he didn't take it over it might bite him, in manners. But this is what he wanted.

So he came home, told them he didn't think he was going to run. They had got sick of that. He had a meeting--I don't know who all was there, I don't even know which month it occurred, but there was a number of them that he brought in, Bob Phinney and Jesse Kellam, maybe Pickle and some others. I doubt that any of them would remember it, but I remember it because of what I was told about it, which ultimately came to involve me. Well, he wasn't going to run. The accepted way that Connally taught and that I myself came to follow in later years, whenever he pulled something like that on you, the thing to do was to agree with him: "Oh, yes. I don't think you ought to run." Because that's when he would turn around and say, "Now wait a minute."

And so they did that. Somebody spoke up who believed him, that he wasn't going to run, and said, "Oh, good. We've got to get the campaign started for John." And so a great sour look comes over Lyndon Johnson's face. "Now just a minute here. Wait a minute. I don't know so much about that." But the other guys really wanted to run John, they'd much rather have John as congressman than to have Lyndon Johnson as congressman.

G: Why was this?

B: Because he was their contemporary, their friend, and infinitely more approachable and less difficult and more fun. Johnson, I don't care if you just had a remote relationship with him, he kept you on your toes all the time. He really did. But anyway, he--

G: This is leading up to 1948? This was--

B: Yes, we're working at 1947. After his thirty-ninth birthday, that's when he began to really need lots of tender loving care and he wasn't getting any, that was his problem. People did not understand what a monumental and personal thing it was for him to become forty. For other people, maybe it wasn't so much, but for him--he had a rule as a matter of fact, which greatly worried Paul Bolton. Bolton in his association always felt that he was on borrowed time, but Johnson had a rule, didn't want anybody past forty around him. This was all through his career, and then when he was president he still preferred to have people under thirty, at least under thirty-five, on his staff rather than anybody older.

So he came in and John told him--so I was told, I was, of course, not party to this--but he said, "Well, don't run if you don't want to. I'm not telling you to." He said this in front of the group. But he said, "I think you're turning your back on the man that made you what you are, and you're turning your back on things that I know you believe in." "You're turning your back on Roosevelt," is what he meant. "You're abandoning him." See, all this was still very much under the influence of the fact that Roosevelt was gone and Truman was in no way considered an adequate replacement. He said, "I think you're also abandoning Texas to a direction that lots of us don't want it to go," and perhaps isolationist and all like that.

It had an effect. Johnson could not disregard that particular kind of counsel. So he said, and I don't know how he said it, but the effect of his message was that well, he was going to abandon his plan, which he had announced. He [had] told them that on January 1, which was the conventional day to make an announcement, at the beginning of the session, that he was going to buy time on the Texas State Network and announce that

he wasn't running again. He was retiring from politics, not just the district but forever. I think this occurred in December, because he keyed the session on buying time on January 1 to make this announcement, and I'm sure he wouldn't have been doing that in October. But he agreed to withdraw this precipitate withdrawal and think about it, but he also told them, "I'm not agreeing that I will run." He had until I think the end of May to announce.

But he groused a little bit about how everybody was making him run but they weren't in politics themselves and all like that. So John asked him, "What would make you happy?" I know this may sound strange, but for a man who conveyed such an image of strength and all like this as Johnson always did, you very frequently, like dealing with a child, would say, "Now what would make you happy?" I've done it myself a number of times. You could tell he's sulking and he's feeling sorry for himself. He said he just did need somebody with a good personality to meet people and to accompany him to social functions and represent him out front and all like this. So John said, "Well, I know just the person. Hal Woodward's brother, Warren, is here working with Pioneer Airlines. He was a Kappa Sig at the University, attended Rice and just a thousand per cent personality."

Do you know Woody?

G: Yes.

B: Well dressed. That was another stipulation. He had to be well dressed. Johnson had always thought Connally was extremely well dressed and this was very important to Johnson himself, being extremely fastidious about dress. So once again, we followed the pattern that just on the spot, without seeing Woodward at all--he had known Woody's uncle, who was a prominent state senator. The Woodward family was a prominent

political family and in fact Woodward was--I don't know quite what the relation was, but he was related to Jester. I know he and Jester's daughter who lives in Washington--Woody and Barbara Burris have always referred to each other as cousins. I don't know whether they're first cousins, but anyway, Johnson knew who the family was. So just sight unseen and strictly on John's word he said, "Well, hire him," and obviously began to feel better. He was going to get him another John Connally.

But he kept on sulking. It was clear he was still sulking. As Bolton told me the story, Johnson did something that was very characteristic of him in meetings. He stood up and he was walking around the room and his hands were always poked deep down in his pants pockets, and he was jiggling his keys and change. He never abandoned that response. I don't think it's a response to stress, but it's something. When he was thinking, that was the way he thought. He'd walk around the room looking up at the ceiling and jiggling the change in his pocket.

Again, John, being the most sensitive of the group to these nuances of mood, said, "Well, what else is eating on you? Is there something else you want?" It took a little coaxing, but he finally came out with it. There was something else he wanted. And he said, "As long as I have been in Washington, I have observed one thing. That the men who go far there, and there's never been an exception to it, they always have some little fellow in their office who sits back in a corner. He doesn't have to have any personality, doesn't have to know how to dress, usually they don't have their tie tied right, a button off their shirt"--typical Johnson, running on at this--"nicotine stains on their fingers, no coat, all like that. But they sit back in the corner, they don't meet any of the people that come in



the office. They read and they think and they come up with new ideas, and they make the fellow smart. I've never had one of those, and I want one."

Now what he was referring to, to clarify this, was a special kind of establishment thing. When he came here and Roosevelt seized upon him intuitively, and had him put on the Naval Affairs Committee of the House under [Carl] Vinson, to function there as Roosevelt's lieutenant, within short order you began to have the investment banker types, the Forrestal types, Harriman--I mean, not Harriman, but the guy from Brown Brothers. Who did you say? [Robert Lovett?]

G: Cyrus Vance.

B: No, no. Cy Vance was much, much later than this. I can't [remember]. Well, there were many of them. It was that type of guy, a good education, a little bit traveled in the world. We didn't have very many Americans prior to World War II who had been abroad except maybe to fight in France during World War I. This was something that was wholly lacking in our culture, and people with world views, you had them in the cotton business, but you didn't have much else, except in banking and Wall Street, the law firms. Well, these types--and they're just countless, names that were commonplace then-- they were beginning to come to Washington and taking dollar-a-year jobs, whatever, purely out of patriotic spirit. These were top of the breed, intelligent people and generally sort of aristocratic, old family types.

It was really a crucial crossover, because up until the approach of World War II these people were Republican. They remained Republican, but where their fathers, let's say, would have done nothing for Roosevelt--if the Japanese were invading the

Chesapeake Bay they wouldn't have lifted a finger to save Roosevelt--this slightly younger generation, in their forties, which to Johnson meant that they were old men, they were coming [to Washington], Forrestal being the most conspicuous example and alumni, although not necessarily the most important at the beginning. He came in at a junior level and over about a twelve-year period worked up to the status he finally achieved as secretary of defense. But these guys would come down here and, of course, as such men had always done, they had executive-branch type jobs. Government was so different then than it is today it's hard to imagine, but nearly every time they were creating something entirely new. But we had to study logistics, we had to study the transportation system, we had to study the resource system. Just a tremendous investment of planning that had never been done, had to be done to meet the onrushing needs that would soon be upon us after the fall of the Benelux countries to Hitler in 1940. These guys come down, set up an office, doing something for the White House or for whoever was secretary of war, I forget who that was prior to [Henry] Stimson, or maybe for the army, maybe for the navy. Most of them were kind of oriented to the navy.

Well, Roosevelt was playing these people. He was using them in skillful ways and one of his agents, in fact his premier agent for how to do things on the Hill, at least in the House, was Lyndon Johnson. So Johnson was being brought into the world of these way upper crust, establishment, aristocratic types. They had respect for him, at least all the evidence I ever saw, which was some years later, they had great respect for him because he was a master of Congress even then. Roosevelt had told them that he was, and they preferred to work with him, these types did, because they could deal in a very

straightforward way with him, whereas if you were dealing with the southern committee chairmen you had to cajole them and drink bourbon with them. They weren't just hell-for-leather, get-things-done types as young Johnson was. He was twenty-eight, twenty-nine, thirty, thirty-one years old in this period.

But anyway, Johnson did not at that point have the status to have them coming to his office on the Hill, so he was going to their offices. So he would go into their offices. Well, they've got a Brooks Brothers young man at the front desk with a three-piece suit. That three-piece suit, that caught Johnson's eye early on. I know in the late fifties, when he was majority leader, one of the assistants to Senator Joe Clark, who was a main line aristocrat from Philadelphia, used to just get livid because Johnson one way or another was suggesting, not ordering, but strongly suggesting that his staff wear three-piece suits. You know, "Where is your vest?" He was always trying to make them look like these people from his early-learning years. He would come in, and he'd be greeted by that type person, by a secretary, a woman secretary, which I forget whether at that point in time the designation of a woman in the office had changed from stenographer to secretary.

Secretary was a male term, like when--

G: --he had been secretary to [Richard] Kleberg.

B: Yes. That was the most distinguished position a young man could aspire to, was to be a secretary to a banker or some kind of a big figure. I guess by then women were secretaries. It was still even half and half in terms of reference when I came to Washington in 1948. Women were mostly stenographers. There were also a lot more male stenographers than there are now.

But anyway, he would meet and flirt and jolly up the young Brooks Brothers guy, taking his measure all the while. Finally he would get into the conference with the guy who was assistant secretary. Maybe he had no title at all, but just was in charge of some huge enterprise. He, Johnson, had come to accomplish something; he always had a purpose. Or he had come to have the guy tell him what purpose needed to be accomplished for Roosevelt. But at this point here would come this little guy from the corner and sit down on the other side of the desk next to the man he was working for. Johnson would just be working and persuading and pumping his arms and winning, and then this little fellow would be sitting there very inconspicuously putting a note down in front of his principal for whom he was working. All of a sudden the guy would suddenly start getting smart. He would have answers back to Johnson; the flow of the proceeding would change. I mean, I'm just envisioning this, but I'm not envisioning it. He's spoken about it enough--

G: LBJ did, talked about it?

B: Yes. I could finally see where I came from. I didn't know this for a long time. But that was this little fellow, and these little fellows had won lots of arguments over Lyndon Johnson, and so he wanted one for himself. And in an interesting sort of way, really that's what I became and continued to be. On the Hill I was never assigned [a specific job]. I never had a slot in the office where I had responsibility for anything as far as the ongoing work of the office was concerned. I didn't handle cases. I dictated very little mail. I would dictate the mail to very important people, I mean as perceived by Johnson.

Of course, nothing was said about this when I came to Washington, before I came to Washington, and in fact nothing ever happened about it until the following year in the Senate. Nobody ever mentioned speeches. Paul Bolton was writing the speeches, and it didn't occur to anybody that I might ever do that, which was very good. It was good it wasn't mentioned because I wouldn't have taken the job; I did not want to be a speech writer. But ultimately I had fitted into his life in such a way that I sometimes knew more what he wanted to say than he did.

Now that's not a grandiose statement, I think that's true in any good relationship between a public figure and a person who writes speeches, which is a distinction between the term speech writer. There are people who just write speeches and have no closeness at all to the person that they're writing for. Your best arrangements--and there have been a number of them; [Samuel] Rosenman was this way with Roosevelt and Ted Sorensen was with Kennedy--[are] when you are close enough to the individual that you are really in their mind and in their life, and you know more what they want to say than they do because they don't have time to stop and think about what they want to say. See, my speeches, it was true from the beginning and it was true to the end, one of the troubles that I had some trouble with myself was the fact that whatever I handed him is what he was going to say. He hardly looked at it.

Once in 1950 I was writing a speech for him just on my own initiative after the Chinese had crossed the Yalu, and he called me from the floor. I was on the committee staff; I was head of the Preparedness Committee staff. He called and said, "What are you doing? Want to come over and listen to the debate?" I said, "No, I'm writing you a

speech that I want you to see." So shortly a page showed up and said, "Senator Johnson would like to have whatever you've written." I had maybe four pages written. He knew that was very irritating. I would not let him read over my shoulder. If he tried to read over my shoulder I'd just get up and leave the typewriter. I did that at the White House some, and he did it just to irritate me. But I also would not let him see anything until it was finished. But he sent the page. He didn't ask, he sent the page, and so you know, the kid's there and I gave him my four pages. I could not tell you what the time period was, but shortly another page appeared just absolutely breathless and said, "I want the rest of the speech. Senator Johnson wants me to bring the rest of the speech." I said, "Like hell. I'm not through with it yet." He said, "Mister, you got to give it to me, because he's up on the floor reading what you sent over while ago." (Laughter) That speech got great national attention because, as you would expect, it was an abbreviated speech and it was more powerful because it was. I had to quit, I couldn't live with that.

But anyway, in the period immediately after I came here--I'm going to omit my introduction to him because that's two hours.

G: Is it really? Was it particularly significant?

B: Oh, yes. Spectacular, vivid.

G: Well, why don't we--?

B: No. I have to write it some day to do it justice. I can't just talk like this about it. But I've got plenty of vivid stuff.

He had me around. I irritated him, which is one thing that made that initial greeting significant. I finally told Paul I would come. See, this was in Austin. A few days

passed. Well, they wanted me to leave right then, and so I said, no, I had to give two weeks notice or something like that. And so time ran. Then there was a date in February of 1948 at which the planet Mars made its closest approach to Earth for what would be, say, a fifty-year cycle or something like this. The lead observatory in studying that close approach of Mars was the McDonald Observatory at Fort Davis, or in the Davis Mountains, and Dr. Gerard Kuiper, who's a Dutchman I think, who split time between the University of Chicago and the University of Texas, was the lead astronomer on that episode. So it had gone forth to the world that the astronomers that night were going to study what appeared to be canals on Mars. Dr. Kuiper himself wanted to study the lichens on Mars. He thought that there were green lichens as there are on Earth, which meant that the atmosphere could sustain some life form. Through the photographic processes and all they were going to try to determine--that didn't mean they were going to flash the word out that night. It would take several years to study the results. But anyway, they had the best photograph, best chance to observe from there. The observatory out in California and other observatories in the world, most of them were in areas that even then were feeling some effects of pollution and they couldn't get as clear a rendering of Mars as you could get from the mountains in Texas.

So INS, New York Bureau, who thought I wrote about such things well, checked in with my bureau chief and suggested that I go out there. Well, I wasn't going to miss that for the world. I love things like that. I mean, I don't know a thing in the world about science, but I like that sort of thing. So I called Bolton and said, "I've got to put it off for a week. I'm going to Fort Davis." He just kind of matter-of-factly acknowledged it. But

then of course he called up here and I sort of started downhill. See, by now we were getting into the third month of me negotiating.

So anyway, I was very low on the totem pole by the time I got here. He had declared to Jenkins and Mary Rather he didn't think he was going to like this boy. So maybe like on the, well, the first morning--I spoke about St. Patrick's Day--Woody and I walked to work from the Dodge Hotel where I had been placed. We walked across the Capitol plaza and here were men up on top of the Capitol and up on top of the office building. I was sort of at a [loss]. Well, I didn't understand what it was and Woody explained to me that these were Secret Service because Truman was coming up to speak, a St. Patrick's Day message which was aimed at the Northeast Catholics. It was just rhetoric beyond anything that a president ever spoke before, just rabble-rousing about Russia. Of course it was Truman, in my view, trying to win back the northeastern Catholic vote by being more anti-communist than anybody else.

But when we got to the office--we got to the office before eight o'clock, which was a practice I soon abandoned. Johnson always thought he was cursed with assistants, that Connally had started it and that the rest of them except for Woodward followed, who really didn't like to get out of bed until ten o'clock in the morning. John just didn't think there was anything that happened between the hours of six and ten that one couldn't better be in bed for and I was pretty much the same way, preferred to stay up all night and sleep in the morning.

G: As long as you worked late you were all right.



B: I was all right, but it just--Johnson himself stayed in bed rather late, nine o'clock not uncommonly. But he woke up. He ate in bed, he read the papers in bed, he started calling his friends. He'd wake up at five o'clock and he never fully appreciated why people were oftentimes so sour when he woke them up at six with a phone call. You had to get on with the work. But he rarely called me, for example, early in the morning. He called me at midnight, but he wouldn't call me early in the morning.

But anyway, Woody and I got to the office and there he was, Johnson, the Congressman, and he's on the phone. Well, we went about our business and he finally came in. He said, "I've been down here since seven. I've been trying to trade agricultural yearbooks for tickets to the speech today for you two boys. I got one ticket, but I can't get the second ticket." You know, trading yearbooks was an old sport on the Hill, because everybody had constituents who wanted the free yearbook and you got eighty of them, I think. Well, finally he got a second ticket, and he brought them in, presented one to Woody and one to me. They were tickets for the aisle. You sat in the aisle. I mean, on the step seat. I mean, the step was your seat. He said, "Now this is history, boys. Anytime the President of the United States speaks, that's history." So that was the way my day began.

He asked me after the speech what I thought of it. I said I thought it was pretty poor. Oh! I knew right then what toe I had stepped on. I had talked to the press. I had talked to David Botter of the *Dallas [Morning] News*, who was a very good friend of mine. He had introduced me--David was a Nieman fellow and brilliant guy, and he had known me at the university. He was on the faculty I think for a while, while I was there.

He was very much a patron of mine. He was glad I was here and ran around. I met all the heavy press between the time Truman spoke and the time I saw Johnson, and they were all saying this. None of us liked the speech. But when I said that to the Congressman he said, "But that was the President of the United States talking!" Just stood and saluted because it's the presidency, and you weren't supposed to think ugly things like that. Not because you're Democrat or Republican, but just the President has spoken, and that's it. Well, you can trace that feeling on out a number of years ahead.

But when he got back to the office that afternoon he called me back in. I had a feeling that he had called me in to lecture me a little bit about not having a smart aleck student-liberal attitude toward the President and all like that. So he started the conversation off, he said, "Have you had any conversations with your press friends?" I said, "Yes. Yes, I have, Congressman. As a matter of fact, I saw David Botter; he introduced me to this person, that person," I can't remember any of the names, but they were big-time columnists, *New York Times* writer, *New York Herald Tribune* writer. They were heavy. And so I told him what they said, and he was fascinated, instantly captivated I guess is a better word, that here he was getting this firsthand information of a sort that obviously nobody else in the office could bring him and that he had never gotten. You know, the little fellow in the corner was bringing stuff in. And he kind of got a funny look on his face, you know, looking at me. So he ended up not rebuking me in the slightest, but saying, "Now that is very good. I want you to see these fellows," and you know, went on at some length, like that. The next day he called me in and again--see, again, I didn't have a role in the office. Walter was handling a thousand things and Mary

[Rather], Woody, Glynn Stegall, Doris Seeliger and everybody else, but I was just kind of dallying around. He told me to read the newspapers very thoroughly, which I always did anyway.

G: The Texas papers?

B: No, no. No, the eastern papers. *Herald Tribune*, the *New York Times*, the two Washington papers.

G: The [*Baltimore*] *Sun*?

B: He had not yet picked up on the *Sun*. He did pick up on the *Sun* in the Senate and it was in some respects his favorite paper, as it is with a lot of newspapermen. Dean Reed here in the office who's been the bureau chief for Newhouse papers for twenty years, still comes to the office every day carrying the *Baltimore Sun*, because that's what as bureau chief he keyed on.

But he also--this would surprise a lot of people. It was obligatory beyond the pale, there was no violation of this. You had to read *Time*, *Newsweek*, and *U.S. News* cover to cover, because he did. I suppose he did it every week of his life from the time that he came to Washington forward. He was doing it at the Ranch after he left the presidency, and he always did it at the White House. But he stipulated to me that I was never to miss reading fully--I could omit the book reviews if I wanted to--the *New Republic* and the *Nation*, especially the *Nation*. He thought that woman Frieda somebody was a friend of his that owned it or was editor of it, and he just thought the *Nation* was the best thing for a young assistant to read and to pass things on to him. He read it some, but that was a pretty heavy dose of reading, all that stuff, and especially since I was taking it all very

seriously at that time and did read most of it and of course was fascinated to be up here with that many newspapers to read.

But after several days in the office--well, as a matter of fact, I had been here only a very few days when he went back to Texas. He was taking a sounding on the Senate race, at John's urging, but I didn't know that. He made a radio broadcast down there, statewide. Bolton wrote it. So I guess it was like maybe the third week I was here that the relationship formed, and what the relationship was built around was the fact that after he had talked to the other people in the office, and of course he barked at them and shouted at Mary, he picked at Walter--I mean at their work, and sometimes at them--difficult to please.

When I came, I did not like all this bellowing that he did at staff people, because I had had an editor in Austin, an ineffectual sort of man, who made up for it with a lot of shouting. It didn't bother me, if it was directed at me from this guy in Austin, but I thought, well, you're shooting yourself in the foot. You could get a lot more out of people if you would do it another way. The same was true of the Congressman. But he never did that to me. Bill Moyers told a reporter after President Johnson died--a guy told me that Bill said, "Busby was the one that was never yelled at." There were very few instances in which he ever raised his voice to me, and I do not know why. It would have been pointless if he had, because I would have been gone. But it was just some chemistry thing, I don't know what that was.

Anyway, when he came back from Texas the Marshall Plan was up. A close student of chronology would catch me here on my chronology, because he may not have

gone back to Texas as quickly. But the Marshall Plan came under debate--the day I arrived here, as I noted from your outline, he was voting on the rent control bill, on the sixteenth. I don't remember when the Marshall Plan came, whether it was March 27 or April 6. Do you have it there?

G: Yes. Let's see. Debate the twenty-third. Radio speech in Austin the twenty-fifth of March, so that's the one.

B: Right. And he came back to Washington to vote on the Marshall Plan.

G: He spoke on the Marshall Plan April 2, then went to New York, I think. It's in April sometime.

B: He made a fairly short statement before the House on the Marshall Plan. That was the first thing I ever wrote for him. I did not consider it a speech, I considered it a statement, which is a distinction that I don't know what I base it on, but I have that distinction in my mind. Some things are speeches and some things are statements, although they both look alike.

But prior to the April 2 thing, he called me into the office and he said, "Tell me about this announcement, this thing that happened when Coke Stevenson"--who had announced for Senate on January 1--"made that announcement. I've just heard about this. He changed the speech some way. Do you know about that?" I said, "Well, yes, sir, I was there in the news room." He said, "Well, tell me about it." So I told him. I said Coke, who was a likeable West Texas type, no real grudge against anything. Not particularly easy going, but just a laconic rancher, and immensely well liked in the news room. He was sort of on the side of the angels at this point because the incumbent senator

was W. Lee O'Daniel, and anybody who could take on O'Daniel with the prospect of beating him was going to be liked by the press, doubly so, because O'Daniel was an embarrassment to the state. There was no thought at this time of Johnson being in the race.

So Coke came by in the middle of December. He courted the press--I shouldn't say courted, he just liked the press and they were his friends, and as sort of a special service to them he came by and surprised all of us. He said, "I know you've got Christmas coming up and I'm going to announce on January 1. I have finished my speech, so I'm bringing it by now so you boys can get it out of your system and have your stories ready on the first, and don't have to worry about it over the holidays." We all thought this was unusually considerate. So the speech lay around there on all our desks for the balance of the month, and then just before Christmas--maybe we had had the speech seven, eight, ten days--he came back. He called us all together, Coke did, and he said, "I got a little change that I think I need to make in my speech. It's going to be misunderstood by some people and no need to do that." So we all got our text and he told us to turn to such-and-such a page. On that page he was into expressing his opposition to foreign aid, to aiding Europe. As we no longer can comprehend, much of the feeling in this country prior to World War II and prior really to the sixties, or the fifties, I guess Korea is when it began to give way, was--and it had been historical throughout our history--that Europe was corrupt and that we should not intervene. We should let it destroy itself because it was a corrupt civilization, all that kind of a feeling. Much was a natural residue actually of the Europeans themselves who came here and put the wars and all that behind them, I

suppose. So Coke had said in his speech--it was a pretty clear statement of his view--"We need our resources in this country," words to this effect. We need our resources in this country to meet all the positive goals that he had outlined. He wasn't saying full employment because that was a liberal term, but the equivalent, create jobs and build factories and highways and all like that. But then he tagged that sentence, or tagged that paragraph, saying--whatever--"We must follow the counsel of the good book and not cast our pearls before swine." So he said, "We'll just take that sentence out. Forget that it ever was up here."

Well, of course, that's all we talked about, but under the gentlemen's code we did not write that he had taken that sentence out. But everybody in the state house and in state politics knew he had written it and that he had come and taken it out. So I related this story to the Congressman as he had wished me to. He may have known, but he made me tell the story and I told it well. He said, "Did he wish that?" I said, "Yes." He said, "Do you think a man like that ought to be the senator from Texas?" I wasn't making any Johnson equation, because I didn't want Johnson running for the Senate. I didn't think he stood a ghost of a chance. I said, "Well, he is an improvement over what we have now in O'Daniel. But no, I don't like that." He kept repeating that, "pearls before swine," I mean, the Marshall Plan's sole purpose was to cast the pearls before swine.

So he had me write this speech for him. Nothing, of course, was said about this. Then either that afternoon of the second or the third or some--it was an early April date, it may have been the sixth--I heard the bells ring, which meant that the vote was being recorded. The bell rang in our office, or in our corridor, so we knew that the vote was

coming on the Marshall Plan. He had been with Rayburn the night before and they had the votes and it was going to pass, although it wasn't all that comfortable, whereas at the beginning of the whole Marshall Plan thing, which had begun in previous years, it had been thought impossible, especially to get a Republican Congress, to pass the Marshall Plan. But anyway we were going to win it. So about ten or fifteen minutes after the bells rang for the vote he called the office and asked for me, which he rarely did. When I got on the phone he was laughing. He said, "Well, Buzz, I just cast my pearls before swine."

I have always felt that it was those five words or however many they included that ultimately decided him to make the race for the Senate. John was arguing in that general direction, but not on those words. But I was the one that was hearing this musing in his office before he went back to Texas. He had a thousand and one reasons why he shouldn't run and why he wouldn't win and all like that, but he kept coming back to that "pearls before swine" thing. It was kind of a code word between him and me. He used it to me more than once over at the White House. He'd wink about something and say "pearls before swine." It just was a very fixed thing. The more interesting thing to me was, it's not a characteristic way of expression for Coke. I'm sure that some one of his reactionary or, you know, less-up-with-it cronies had written those words in, that they were not Coke's words, I'm sure. But ultimately it was to cost him quite dearly.

But now that was one episode in which the meaning of that particular episode was me sitting in the office talking to him that way.



B: Well, he fell into a pattern. He'd come in, he'd shout around, he'd storm, he'd answer phone calls. When he was in the office it was just electric, it always was, throughout his career. Or it could be that way. Then suddenly there would be a calm and he would either call me directly or he would call Mary or he would call Walter and say, "Send Buzz in." I'd go in. He would make some pretense of a current reason, a reason of the moment, for me to be there. You know, "Have you read such-and-such?" or called so and so--?

(Interruption)

G: We're on again. There was a silence and he called you in.

B: Yes. He would kind of calm down, he called me in and he'd say, "Have you done such-and-such?" or "Have you seen so-and-so?" or "I told so-and-so that you would call him and get" something, some paper from him, something like that.

Then he would start gradually going back on his life, I mean back to the thirties. Now see, I felt as time passed that there were two periods in his life. One was the good times, which was prior to him entering the Senate or becoming Senate Leader, and then there was the rest of the time. The good times he came to associate with me because I was the youngest and the last of his boys to enter the good time period. And I barely got in under the wire.

But in the 1930s--see, I was eight years old, eight or nine years old, when Roosevelt became president. I had picked up on him at the Chicago convention. The most exciting day of my life was the Saturday of that convention. He had been nominated and I had understood from listening to the radio the night before, or during the

nomination, that he was competing with a man from Texas and my family was for the man from Texas and I was for this other fellow. Because I listened to the nominating speeches. Then on Saturday morning I tuned in and the convention had ended, or finished its nominating on Friday night.

My Lord, you cannot imagine the excitement that was on the radio in those days. You know, news, radio news was not structured like it is now. This Governor Roosevelt, who had been nominated for president--I didn't really know what a president was, but he had been nominated for president out there and he was defying history. Instead of waiting in Albany for a committee to come a month later from the convention and tell him he had been nominated--breaking all precedent, he was coming to accept the nomination of the convention hall himself. Not only was he doing that, he was flying. I don't know how long the flight from Albany to Chicago took. I would suspect four or five hours. But the way they were covering it--the networks were not on. You know, network broadcasts were intermittent. It wasn't just a standing service. You trembled with thrills when they would end a broadcast. The Blue Network, which was ABC today or NBC, the Columbia Broadcasting System--they were not yet CBS--they would end a program and they'd say, "This broadcast has been heard coast-to-coast." It was just incredible that you had been listening to something and everybody in California had been listening.

But Roosevelt was flying and they would interrupt music, anything, local program, to say that a farmer in Daytonville, Ohio had heard his plane going over. See, it was a stormy day, and he probably shouldn't have been flying. But they constantly were reporting [that] somebody somewhere had heard the plane, and that it would touch down

for refueling and then it would take off and then you'd get some more of these reports.

Well, I was glued to the thing, and then listened to him make the speech.

Then in 1933 his inauguration was on Saturday, and I once again listened to the inauguration from Washington and you know, "fear itself" type thing, I mean that speech, "Nothing to fear but fear itself." And right then--I hate to say this, because it's sort of incredible, but it was that day I said, "I'm going to go to Washington. I'm going to live in Washington and see presidents someday." I meant to. I mean, I meant to be a correspondent, eventually when I understood about newspapers. But that's what I meant to do. I certainly didn't expect it to turn out like it did. I just wanted to see them. I saw Roosevelt when he came to Texas in the thirties, and it fully renewed my determination.

Anyway, I was a bright kid and interested in public affairs and read the newspapers earlier than most kids did, and my father wanted me to read *U.S. News*, which was out in that period. It was pretty good reading because it was clear reading, but it was terribly biased against the New Deal. My two publications that I read every week were *Life* magazine, after it came on in 1937, and *Time*. Well, I knew Washington that way, you know, real groupie sort of approach I guess, of following everything that happened in Washington.

Around 1938-39--no, it was earlier than that, 1937 and 1938 I guess it was, 1936-1937 and the early part of 1938, when I was supposed to be in junior high school, I had two years of asthma and some other health problems which kept me out of school, I've lived off of that the rest of my life because I stayed at home; I kept up with my school work pretty well, I passed my tests at the end of each semester, but I read everything you

could read about Washington. I listened to every commentator. You know, commentators were new features then. You had Washington at one level, and you had the European situation, the war coming on at another. I was just juiced up above my eyebrows on this's stuff before I was a junior in high school.

So when Johnson discovered that if he were talking to me and he'd mention [Congressman Marion Anthony] Zioncheck, I knew who Zioncheck was. He was a congressman from the state of Washington who went through the damndest bunch of escapades up here that you could imagine. He went crazy, in the sense we used the term in those days, and he finally killed himself out in Washington. Warren Magnuson came as his successor. But there was a big celebrity deal about that. I knew the nuances about John Garner going home, saying that he was never going to come to Washington again and indeed never did. Ninety miles from Lyndon Johnson's birthplace. It still remains fascinating to me that the Roosevelt presidency, as such, began and ended with somebody on the national ticket or president or vice president, and that those two men came ninety miles apart.

G: It is an irony.

B: Anyway, I knew those kinds of nuances, I knew the slogans, I knew the minor characters on the New Deal stage here. The dancer woman that Eleanor Roosevelt had around. Not her supposed lover, but this dancer that she put into some job. There may have been something between them, I never did know. These things that I knew from my unusual and freakish circumstance, close study of the period, this was the stuff of Lyndon Johnson's life. He was here as a young man, he knew things a little bit better than I did--

well, he knew it all much better than I did--but there was a little bit of a gap in that the first year or two of his time here as congressional secretary, of course, Hoover was still president. But then later on, when he was NYA, then when he was a young congressman, he was right in the middle of all this, fascinated with all of it in a small-town boy sort of way, knew the significance of all these things, whether they were aberrations or what, knew everybody, a slogan. Every episode in those days seemed to produce some kind of a quotation. It was memorable because of some quotation that somebody had said. And I knew the quotations.

Well, this was rapport. Here was somebody he could [communicate with]. He thought he was giving up his political life, I think, or at least he was pondering it. But here was this little fellow from the corner in his office that he could sit with and he could just relive all this. And I was an understanding and appreciative witness and could add things to it. Well, whether I was in his office or I was in a car with him or I was on a trip with him, it was that. He wasn't just talking to me about history, he was talking about what we had to do in this country. That's what he talked with me specifically about the night that I first met him.

Anyway, this let another side of him out that was crying to get out. But he would do things. He was marvelous at one-man theater. He had to use it as a means of self-expression. He used it at the White House, he used it the first night I met him, and he used it repeatedly in this period.

G: Mimicry and stuff like that?

B: Acting out all the parts. One of the most dramatic things, theater--it wasn't one-man because he had me in the cast, too. But I came in one day. I have some recollection it was Saturday. Now Saturdays were disastrous because everybody else let their employees go at noon on the Hill. He let his employees go, but his boys, the men, they weren't employees; they were co-equal and obviously you were just dying to stay into the night on Saturday. It was hell on social life. And even on Sunday. He didn't think of you as an employee, you were a co-equal or better than that.

But anyway, he called me in, and Mary Rather or maybe Walter Jenkins came in with some letters. I had had a sense that he was building up to something, because he was sort of tall at his desk and he was being expansive about something in Congress. When they came in he barked at them severely and put in some foolish rule about knocking before they came in or something like that. I knew we weren't going to see anybody else coming in with letters because it was a shot across their bow, you know, "Don't interrupt me!"

What he was working up to was the following episode. It really needs to be videotaped instead of taped just with a voice. But he was telling me, "You're close to history." Interestingly that word, that phrase, appears all through my association with him. Not always to me, but it was what he wanted to be. He always wanted to be close to history, with no thought that he would ever be history. He even used that word once about Dallas, I mean that phrase. I had forgotten about that. But anyway, he wanted to tell you how close to history he had been. This was important; it was status.

Now the first thing that he told me--and this was not this afternoon--how close to history he was, was that when Roosevelt had made that March 3 inaugural address in 1933, he, Lyndon Johnson, had been at the Capitol and had heard it, which I again find to be fascinating. Interestingly, in telling the story, it came upon me when he was telling it and I struggled for years to get up the courage to prove he was wrong and I never did. As a characteristic, he told me that there was a great crowd. I think maybe there was a hundred thousand--I read just the other day a hundred thousand people, although I'm skeptical of that, on the plaza, the east side of the Capitol. He, Lyndon Johnson, young, inconsequential, congressional staff person, had managed to get as close as the steps of the Supreme Court Building, but he had stood there and he had heard this majestic voice, which he had last heard in Houston at the Democratic National Convention in 1928.

He had told me about that convention, how he had bribed a doorkeeper, another kid who was a doorkeeper, to let him work for him. He paid him, and he was the doorkeeper. He said he was standing at the door in Houston and this's great voice came. It had reached inside him and it set him to trembling, as nothing he had ever heard before did. I thought that was put on, and then later I talked to an old timer, one of the Roosevelt people, who told me, observed, "The boss," meaning Roosevelt, and he himself who had been there and all, said, "The reason Roosevelt won the nomination in 1933 was that speech in Houston, because he was the only speaker that the audience could hear."

We forget the difference between public address systems and non-public address system days, but Johnson was undoubtedly accurate in his recall that he had heard this voice, and like most of the crowd--this was the happy warrior speech--he had been moved

by it. He heard it again at the Capitol. Now I'm sure at the Capitol--I'm not positive, but I'm pretty sure that they had public address systems. I think that the old speaker phones show in the photographs. But I never believed that he was on the steps of the Supreme Court Building. If he was a congressional assistant, he was somewhere down close to the front. But he always liked to put himself in these humble little roles, that nobody knew he was there, but he was there. You know it's funny, considering it's been thirty-three years, I have never gone forward to confirm my suspicion that the Supreme Court Building was not there then. It may have been, I don't know.

G: I think I've seen a letter describing that event.

B: From him?

G: Either from him or one of his colleagues, someone like Arthur Perry or Bob Jackson. Anyway, I'll check on it.

B: It's interesting. But he placed himself there, and he was close to history. He had seen Roosevelt once riding up Pennsylvania Avenue to deliver a veto message, I think of the veterans' bonus. And oh, he was so impressed with the jaw and the set of the face, all that kind of stuff.

But anyhow, he told me on this episode in his office early in my association that he wanted to tell me about the time that he was closest to history. He said it was on the afternoon of April 12 that Roosevelt died that he had gone, as he had worked himself into the privilege, he was the only young guy that had the privilege, of going to the Speaker's office, Rayburn's office, with the afternoon--

G: Board of Education.



B: Some people call it Board of Education, but the members themselves never did that I know of. I think actually it was Garner who called it the Board of Education. By the time I got here at least that was dropped off. You just referred to it as 252, which was the extension on the telephone in that office.

Well, he had gone over there, or he was with Rayburn, and I don't remember who the other personnel were. It was around five o'clock. I suspect it was a little bit earlier than that in the afternoon. But he was sitting there. So in this mini-drama that I am trying to relate, he got up and went around the desk where I was on the other side and picked up a straight wood chair, the kind that they have many of on the Hill. He took it and put it back in a corner behind his desk. So he said, "You come and sit here." So I got up and sat there. I didn't know who I was but I was sitting there. So then he told me to get up and wait. My part wasn't ready to play yet. So he sat down in that chair. He was sitting there and he began to play himself. He was sitting there with a drink in his hand and he was nodding his head and saying, "Yes, Mr. Speaker," "Yes, Senator," "Yes, Mr. Chairman." So suddenly he jumps up out of the chair and goes back over to his desk, to the corner of his desk, and tells me to sit down in the chair, in his place. So I assume now that I'm him, I mean I am now young Congressman Johnson.

So the door opens, imaginary door. Who was it? Well, we know because Johnson stepped over, he was the person entering, but he stepped over to Speaker Rayburn's chair, approximately where it was, and he stood up and he said, "Hell, Harry, come in. You're late." And so then Johnson is back coming through the door and he is Harry Truman, the vice president. So Harry comes in, and he motioned me sort of in an aside, like he

couldn't speak loudly, said in a whisper, "Stand up! Stand up!" So I stood up. See, I'm Congressman Johnson standing up. Harry went around the room and he shook hands, and he shook hands with me, and he sat down next to me. I mean, he sat down in hi's chair and motioned me to sit down in my chair.

So there we are sitting there. The Speaker said, "Can I get you a drink?" And Harry said, "Hell, yes. Why do you think I came here?" and laughed heartily and went on talking like this. So he looked over and said, "Lyndon, what did you do today?" So then he played Lyndon and he told Harry something. You've got to understand, I'd been in Austin, Texas six weeks earlier and here I am going through something like this. So he answers for himself. He plays himself without making us change chairs. He and Harry are sitting there and so all of a sudden the Congressman with me, he put his arm out and he said, "Get up. Pull that chair over a little closer," and he edged it up and he kind of carefully measured it. His arm was sort of bent at the elbow, about elbow length away from me. He said, "That's right, that's fine right there." When I sat back down he reached out and put his hand on my arm and yes, that was right, it was the exact distance as he remembered it. This distance was important.

About this time he gets up and he jumps across the room and he's Speaker. "Harry, they say the White House is calling you." So he jumps back over; he's Truman. Truman says, "I wonder what they want with me." And he went over to the other side of the room, Johnson did playing Truman, picked up the phone, "Yes. Yes. Yes. Be right there." "Sam, the White House wants me, I got to go down there right now." "All right, Harry, see you tomorrow." He motioned for me to stand up, "Bye, Mr. Vice President."

He cautioned me that he didn't call people like vice presidents by their first name, it was Mr. Vice President, which is what he wanted all of us always to do. So Harry left.

Johnson came back over to me and he stood up, and he'd get so caught up in something like this and so emotional that you couldn't really say there were tears in his eyes, but his eyes were moist. I know I do that myself sometimes. He said, "Just think, son. I was right there. I was that distance away from him at the very moment that he became president of the United States. You can't get any closer to history than that." He did that; he did that same thing with me twice that year, it meant so much to him.

G: That's fascinating.

B: Well, you know, this was the role I fell into with him, one part of it. Now subsequently, of course, I went back to Texas when he had announced for the Senate. He called and asked me to leave that night to come back.

G: You drove one of his cars, didn't you?

B: Much of the time. Sometimes I flew in the helicopter with him.

G: No, I mean back to Texas.

B: No. I went back to Texas in my car. There were times I drove his car back.

G: While we're at this point of him talking about close occasions in history, did he ever talk about Huey Long?

B: Oh, yes.

G: Did he regard Huey Long as he regarded FDR, as sort of a hero?

B: Not sort of, he was his hero.

G: Really? Can you recall any particular stories?

B: Yes. Why don't you turn it off a minute, I want to go sign some letters.

[End of Tape 2 of 2 and Interview I]