

INTERVIEW I

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INTERVIEWEE: DONALD S. THOMAS
INTERVIEWER: Michael L. Gillette
PLACE: Casa Leonor, Acapulco, Mexico

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- G: Let's start briefly with your background. You're from Pagoda?
- T: Bogata, B-O-G-A-T-A, Red River County, Texas. I'm fifty-nine years old. I was born June 10, 1920.
- G: I understand that after law school you went to work with Everett Looney and Ed Clark in that law firm.
- T: Yes. When I was a freshman in law school--I don't know how much of this you want--one of my fellow students told me one day that there was a very interesting trial going on at the Travis County Courthouse. I went down there. It was the trial of Renne Allred, a brother of Governor Jimmie Allred, who was charged with conspiracy to commit perjury growing out of a "hot oil" case that had been tried over in East Texas. On one side, defending, was Everett Looney, who took the lead; John Cofer, another lawyer with a statewide reputation who lived in Austin and was from a distinguished legal family; and a fellow from up in the Wichita Falls area, [Bowie], not from Wichita Falls, named Paul Donald, who was an old-time country lawyer and a great orator. On the other side, the prosecution, Homer Thornberry was then the district attorney, and Pat Coon and Ben Woodall, two lawyers who distinguished themselves later in a practice at Dallas. I watched that trial and I was so interested in it that I cut class and watched it to the end.

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I had an operation in an effort to get into military service in January of 1942 and had post-operative thrombo-phlebitis, which rendered me 4-F. I went to law school when the enrollment at Texas one time was down to a low of about twenty-three students, in a summer session. When I graduated in the spring of 1944 there were only three lawyers in my class, one of whom was from Mississippi and another from New Mexico. At the same time there was a great shortage of lawyers due to drafting of lawyers in military service of the bar. Here I was with a relatively low average and very much in demand by a number of distinguished law firms. Among those who offered me a job was Everett Looney. I took that job mainly on account of my admiration for his trial skills and his reputation in the community.

G: Do you recall the time you met Lyndon Johnson?

T: I have a hard time recalling the first time I met him. I graduated from law school, as I said, in the spring of 1944 and immediately started handling the affairs of radio station KTBC. Pat Adelman was the general manager at that time. I remember one of the first incidences was when I was at the Spanish Village eating Mexican food and he and Ed Clark came in and joined us there. I'm sure that I had some. . . . We didn't have much law business in those days, a large part of it was--at that time we used to read the political speeches and more or less edit them for possible libel. I very well remember the first Christmas, the Christmas of 1944, when I was invited to the station Christmas party and received a hundred-dollar bonus, which was totally unexpected and well beyond my available Christmas money at that time. I remember that very well. I found him always to be very generous with me.

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G: So by December of 1944 you had established a pretty good working relationship?

T: A pretty close working relationship with him.

G: What was he like as a congressman during the 1940s?

T: Well, he was about the same as he was all of his life. He was very demanding of performance by anyone who was in a position to serve him. He was very prompt. He had rules that mail must be answered the same day it was received. I was amused that my wife's maiden aunt, who was not receiving postal service in San Marcos at her address, wrote the Congressman a letter asking for mail delivery to her home, which was very near town. His reply was delivered to her house. He was that way, always looking ahead. I think [he] probably had more vision, more foresight, more ability to predict the future than anyone I have ever known.

That's best exemplified I think by the fact that in 1938 he bought nineteen acres of land on Taylor Slough for three hundred dollars an acre. And in about 1945 or 1946 Everett Looney, Ed Clark, and Mayor Tom Miller bought the adjoining tract. As a matter of fact, Taylor Slough was the property line between the two. They bought theirs for three hundred dollars. So he had held his for some six or seven years and they got in at the same price he did. But as the area began to develop, Looney, Clark and Miller had an opportunity to sell their land--River Road is on their tract--for four hundred dollars an acre and they sold it. We held that nineteen acres, with a two-acre addition to it and then another probably eight-acre scrap that was left out of the subdivision of the Clark, Miller and Looney land. We held that land until it

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was sold for a million and a half dollars. That kind of exemplified his judgment about future events. He always knew that Austin was going to grow and the property values would increase there.

G: Was he persuasive?

T: Oh, my God! Of course, the most persuasive man that you ever saw. I did have the capacity to disagree with him. I know I commented to him when he became vice president, I said, "I don't like this new title." He said "Why?" And I said, "It's harder to say, 'Hell, no, Mr. Vice President,' than it is to say, 'Hell, no, Senator.'"

G: Could you disagree with him? Did he entertain these sorts of objections?

T: He was very, very amusing in that regard. We had many debates, and I think in many of those debates he probably started out agreeing with me but would not appear to do so. He would argue with me and take the other side and just make me defend my position totally. Then the next morning he'd come in and say to me, "Hey, I figured out what we ought to do," and then he'd advance the very idea that I'd advanced. But he was extremely persuasive and had a brilliant memory of numbers and all sorts of facts surrounding any transaction.

G: It has been reported that in arguing with someone he could do down a whole range of arguments until he hit one that really homed in on the person, and then he'd immediately focus on that one. He had some uncanny sense for knowing exactly what your weak point was. Is that true?

T: That's indeed true.

G: Let me ask you about Everett Looney.

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T: Okay.

G: What sort of man was he?

T: Well, Looney grew up as a poor boy in Ennis, Texas. His father was a barber. He started out in a law practice with Judge A. R. Stout, who is a very interesting individual who is still living. He visited me the other day. Stout said when Looney and he broke up the practice he said, "You know, Looney always talks about the fact that we had all of those nice books and that we used them and that we came down early in the morning and took a broom and swept out the office. When we dissolved the partnership Looney got the books and I got the broom."

Looney left there, and I guess went into the attorney general's office under Jimmie Allred. Governor Allred's staff as attorney general became prominent leaders of Texas, numbering among them Ralph Yarborough, Clark, Looney, I don't know; I don't immediately recall all of them, but a number of very successful lawyers came off that staff. Looney went there and he went there with the idea--he always had the principle that a law office ought to be like a supermarket, that you ought to be able to come in and ask for a service and get it immediately. He was a very hard boss, I will say. He had the idea, as an assistant attorney general, that his job was to do more work than anyone else in the office and thereby distinguish himself. And he did. He tried a number of very important cases including the Wharton County tax evaluation of the sulfur deposits there, which was a very famous case. Subsequently we tried a like case for Wharton and Montgomery Counties on oil reserves. He was just involved in a number of extremely important cases in the attorney general's office.

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Then subsequently after he left there he had a short stay in Houston, where he didn't partner with but officed with Earl Cox, who was a very prominent trial lawyer. He wrote a book on jury argument. Then he came to Austin and officed with Polk and Emmett Shelton until 1938, when Looney and Clark formed their partnership. In those days, for instance, he was the defender of Emma Tenayuca [Brooks], a communist leader in San Antonio, I think in the pecan-shelling wage argument, organizing the workers in the pecan-shelling business. There was a very highly publicized trial. He also defended Maury Maverick in San Antonio. He had a statewide reputation, and we had a number of big statewide cases that he handled.

As an individual he was extremely hard working, very demanding of those that worked with him, very able, very well liked, very much feared in the courtroom.

G: What were his politics?

T: His politics were Democratic, I think consistently throughout his life. He was, I would say, moderate.

G: How would you compare him with, say, Jimmie Allred?

T: Well, he was about of Jimmie Allred's stripe, a great worshiper of Jimmie Allred. As a matter of fact, after Jimmie Allred retired from the bench we handled several cases that were either forwarded to us by Governor Allred or in which he participated.

G: I wonder if he supported Lyndon Johnson in 1937, or Polk Shelton?

T: I don't know the answer to that, and I've wondered about it myself because I know that he was an early supporter of Congressman Johnson, and also a very close, dear friend of Polk Shelton's. I would rather imagine that he supported Polk, initially at least.

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- G: Did he ever talk about that race? Did he have any insights that he shared with you as to how Lyndon Johnson won?
- T: Just that he was a very vigorous campaigner and really walked the streets in a long stride.
- G: Was there anything that solidified their friendship that you're aware of?
- T: I think mutual respect basically. I think that was it. I think that each had a great deal of respect for the other.
- G: But there was nothing like public power or any sort of project for the district that might have occasioned their working together on something?
- T: Well, of course in those days in our law firm we were private power. The law firm was really founded on representation of the Central and Southwest Utility Group, and one of the first big matters that was handled by Looney and Clark as a law firm was the SEC integration proceeding under the Public Utility Holding Company Death Penalty Act. It was an extended trial. I would think that at least during that period of time when Looney was spending a lot of time in Washington and Philadelphia that they probably grew together very much.
- G: Lyndon Johnson was so enthusiastically in favor of public power, did he and Mr. Looney get into discussions about the correctness of that course?
- T: I don't [know]. They might have. That's entirely possible. It would have been before my time. See, I joined them in 1944. There might have been some brush between Central Power and Light Company and one of the river authorities early in the game. But there was no lasting controversy. The principal controversy in Travis County as between the two forms of power ownership was between Dan Moody and Senator Wirtz.

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G: Let's move ahead to 1948. I want to ask you to recount your recollections of the 1948 Senate race.

T: Well, my first recollection of the 1948 Senate race was a luncheon in the Driskill Hotel that was attended by the Congressman, John Connally, Charlie Herring, and perhaps Ed Syers. We had lunch on almost a daily basis, exclusive of the Congressman who, of course, wasn't here. The issue that day was whether or not he should run for the Senate. He'd received a great deal of discouragement from others who were there. I remember that my comment was that I thought it would be a hard race, but that if he didn't run at that time that I didn't think he would ever have a more favorable opportunity.

He started running in, of course, the same vigorous-type campaign that I'm sure others have described, in the helicopter. He landed in Bogata; he made a speech in Bogata about me. Some of them there thought I was at least going to be on the Supreme Court when he left. But he did campaign very vigorously. As we got into the second primary I think that he felt that he was gaining some, but I don't think he had any real hope of winning the race or even losing by a narrow margin. I think he was pretty much defeatist right at the end of that campaign. I think someone like Connally could probably describe that better than I can.

But at any rate, I was around the statewide headquarters. Charlie Herring had been a member of our firm up until the campaign started, and we had donated the services of Charlie Herring to the campaign. So I hung around there quite a bit and knew most of the people around and what generally was going on. The night of the election I was there in the statewide headquarters and there were very few people there, there

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was very little enthusiasm. We were there gathering returns up until, I would say approximately midnight when John and Charlie Herring and, I believe, Walter Jenkins and I went down to the PK Grill or somewhere and had some eggs. We got back and a county reported that had reversed its vote very substantially in our favor. Then another county or two came in. Suddenly John just reached over behind the desk and picked up the phone and got to our switchboard operator, Sarah Wade. [He] said, "Sarah, get me So-and-so in Lee County, So-and-so in Fayette County," and he named a number of counties and then hung up the phone. After he hung up the phone, he turned to Charlie and me and said, "We're going to win this race if they don't steal it from us. The only way to keep them from stealing it from us is for them not to know how many votes we need." So then he started getting these calls. He would say, "Have you reported? What is your vote? Hold it if you can, and I'll let you know." Then the next day, all the rest of the next day, gradually as the votes would come in for Governor [Coke] Stevenson, well, he would release a county and it stayed just a little bit ahead of him all along until the end.

The next thing I knew--and I don't remember whether it was on the following Monday or Tuesday; I'm inclined to think it was probably on Monday--I was in my office along about two or three o'clock in the afternoon. I was called on the intercom by Mr. Looney, who asked me to come into his office. I walked through our reception room. I noticed that an individual was sitting there, but I didn't recognize him. I walked into Looney's office and John Connally and Paul Bolton and Looney were there. Paul Bolton had what they call the broad [ticker?] tape,

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the newsprint deal, that had a story on it to the effect that the county committee, Democratic committee in Jim Wells County, had met and voted not to certify a vote from that [county] or to revoke their certification and not certify on account of the uncertainty about the results in that county.

No one in the room was aware of any such meeting. None of them knew what was going on. I was told to take John Connally's car and go immediately to Alice and check in with Ed Lloyd, which I did. I just got in the car and rode to my house, picked up some clothes, including a new suit, and went to Alice and checked in with Ed Lloyd. At the same time, Everett Looney and Senator Wirtz were staying in Austin. I went there and what I found out immediately was that--I hope that I'm entirely accurate, I think I am--a new county chairman had been elected. He was from a faction. That area was fairly evenly divided between those who followed Ed Lloyd's leadership--or you might say George Parr's, because they were close at that time--and those who followed Jake Floyd in an opposition party. This new county chairman was of the opposition party. They called them the old party and the new party, and the Lloyd party was the new party and the Floyd party was the old party, as I remember it.

Some of the people who were friendly to our side had related, I presume to Mr. Lloyd, that the county chairman had seen some of them on the streets and said, "We've got a new group working together now and we should get together and kind of get better acquainted, maybe map out some plans. We'd like for you to come over to my house tonight for a cup of coffee." So our people had gone to this man's house to have a

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cup of coffee and while they were there, this county chairman told them, "I have a gentleman I want you to meet." So he went into another room and came back leading T. Kellis Dibrell, who incidentally was an old and dear friend of mine. Kellis came out and made a speech to them in which he told them that we'd just gone through a long, disastrous war, and he had served his nation during that period of time and he had had plenty of time to contemplate what further service he could be to his country, just this sort of speech, you know, and that he had decided to wipe out corruption, that he was there because there had been a corrupt election. Whereupon our people had risen up and said, "Bullshit!" and walked out. Subsequent to their departure there apparently had been a vote from those who were hostile always to the Johnson candidacy, as reflected by that news release.

Well, my first assignment was to contact each of the precinct chairmen, to go around to each of them and find out whether or not they had attended this meeting, did they have any notice of the meeting. My basic approach was like a corporate board of directors at a meeting can't take substantive action unless there's been notification of all those [interested], in presence or at least invitation to all of those who might have an interest in it or a vote in it. I found out that none of these--certainly the rural chairmen--had had any knowledge of it at all. The deficiencies in that action were then reported to Looney and Wirtz. They sent us down the papers to file a lawsuit. Then we had a hearing on a temporary injunction and Dudley Tarlton of Corpus Christi and Phil Kazen of Laredo and I were there on the one side and I believe--I'm not sure--that perhaps F. L. Kuykendall might have been

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there on the other side and other lawyers that I don't remember. And I'm not sure about Mr. Kuykendall.

That pretty well ended that and I thought my job was finished. But then I got a new assignment. It was reported to me that there was a young Mexican-American, probably thirty-five-year-old working man, who had reported that there were some strange activities going on in the county on behalf of the Stevenson campaign. I was commissioned to go and see this man. This is the first one I saw. When I saw him I learned that he had gone into the Three Flowers Bar, which was a popular watering hole for the Mexican-Americans, and had been sitting at a counter drinking a beer when a well-dressed American came in and sat down beside him and ordered a beer, had a beer and then ultimately engaged him in conversation. Bought him a beer and invited him to come outside, he wanted to talk to him.

So they went out and got in the car and this well-dressed gringo told him that he was there investigating the election and that he wanted an affidavit from him that he had not voted. This Mexican-American replied that he had voted, that he had voted for Lyndon Johnson. He said, "No, you didn't vote." Then this Mexican-American said, "What do you think I am, stupid? I'm a graduate of high school and I know what's going on. I know that I voted. I voted for Lyndon Johnson. I don't understand you asking me to sign a paper saying I didn't vote when I did." And he became hostile to the American gringo, whereupon he was told, "Just forget it. Just don't tell anybody that I talked to you." The Mexican replied, "I'm not going to forget it. I'm going to tell my boss. I'm going to do that just as quick as I can." He was an employee

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of a man, as I recall, whose name was Ainsworth [?] and who I recall was in the farm implement business. It was through this man Ainsworth that the Ed Lloyd group had learned of the activities that were going on.

G: And they told you? Is that how you learned about it?

T: That's how I learned about it. I was commissioned to go and talk to those who were contacting voters on behalf of Coke Stevenson. Then we had a program of trying to ascertain those whom the other side had contacted. And before I leave it, let me say that I went to the county clerk's office and saw the poll lists and checked out this young man that had made that report. And he had voted. His vote was about midway of the unchallenged voters. I also had heard a complaint that there had been an alphabetical voting. I noted perhaps the first ten voters on the yellow tablet, to disprove that that had occurred to any remarkable extent. I remember that the first two voters, they were husband and wife, which is not uncommon, were Mr. and Mrs. Enriqueta Acero. The second was a pair of Barreras. I think that the third was probably a pair of Cantus. But after those first three families had voted there was no significant repetition of any letter of the alphabet.

G: Now I understand--while you're talking about the list--that the first several hundred names were not challenged.

T: That's correct. On the list that I made--I, of course, couldn't expect to contact every one that was challenged, because they were challenging two hundred votes. I noted perhaps that the first five of the challenged and the last ten or five maybe of those who were challenged.

G: How about the last unchallenged vote? Did you get to see when he had voted or anything like that?

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T: The one that I'd talked about that had the beer with the gringo, I did check his name on the list and he was in there. He had voted. Of course, I don't have any way of knowing whom he voted for, but he had voted within the first three hundred voters in the election.

Then I did a combination. I took affidavits from all of these people. I had assigned to me a policeman who was bilingual, a constable or some friend of Ed Lloyd's, who went with me and would communicate. And I speak a little bit of Spanish myself, but very little. So we did two things really. I tried to anticipate what the charges were going to be and how they could best be disproved from affidavits from the different ones. Also we followed the reports of those whom the other side had contacted. Now they were there in pretty good force. I know that Ranger Captain Frank Hamer was there. I know that T. Kellis Dibrell, an ex-FBI man, was there. Gardner, who was an ex-FBI man, was there. Wroe Owens was an ex-FBI man who was there. They had a pretty good bunch of people working the population around there.

G: Why do you think they got a lot of ex-FBI and Texas Ranger types?

T: Well, I really thought that that was basically a scare tactic or duress. When they were talking to the illiterate or lower-class Mexicans in the area, I think they went rather light on the "ex" and left the impression at least that they were FBI agents investigating the election.

So I started taking affidavits. I took I guess ten or twelve affidavits that were used in the convention in the floor fight on the issue. I can remember some of them. I can't remember them all and I wish I had a file, but I don't. I remember a few names, like Eugenio Solis, who I think was the last voter on the list. I remember my con-

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versation with him. I remember the story that he told me [was] that he was at his home when a friend of his came there and said he had some white men or gringos that wanted to talk to him. He went down and got in the car with his friend and with these two well-dressed white men. They drove off and they stopped and let his friend out and then took him down in front of the hotel in Alice and started talking to him. I don't remember whether they were--I know that he didn't speak any English at all. He had given them an affidavit. I asked him what was in the affidavit and he said, "I don't know." I said, "Well, did they ask you any questions?" He said, "No. They asked me to sign and I signed." I said, "Why did you sign?" He said, "I was nervous, I wanted to get out." I said, "You don't know what you signed, you don't know what your statement said?" He said, "No, I do not know." Since he was the last voter on the polling list, I assumed that they would perhaps try to prove either he had not voted at all or that he had not voted late in the day.

At any rate, since he was the last one I wanted to find out when he voted. The polls closed at seven. So I asked him when he voted. He said he didn't know. So I then started backing up. I asked him what time he got off from work; he told me around noon on Saturday. What did he do? He went and had a beer. I said, "What did you do next?" He said well, he went home. I just kind of pieced it all together and then he came back and voted on his way back to town. So it pretty well worked out. He certified there was no one else in there that he knew in the voting place. So I was pretty well satisfied that he was the last voter and that he had voted around seven o'clock.

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I remember another businessman there in town whose name I believe was Olvera. We knew that he had been contacted by the other side, and [I] went to him. He spoke good English and I asked him about the affidavit. He said, yes, he had given an affidavit that he hadn't voted. I asked him if he had voted. He told me yes, he had voted. I said, "Well, why did you sign that affidavit?" He said, "They came in and told me that this was a corrupt election and that somebody was about to steal a seat in the United States Senate, and as a public-spirited citizen they'd like my help, that they couldn't get into the ballot box, they couldn't challenge the election unless they had affidavits of irregularity." And [he said] that he had given them one. He did tell me that he had voted. He was in the unquestioned portion; he had voted very early in the game.

Golly, there was a number of them. The thing I remember best was the one I couldn't find. I heard they had an affidavit from Juan Garcia and I couldn't find Juan Garcia anywhere. I did find one Juan Garcia, but what I learned was that there was a second Juan Garcia who was a leader of a Mexican band that followed Mexican farm workers who had left on the Sunday after the election and had gone, I believe, to Longview or Tyler or somewhere up there. I assumed he was the one who had voted. I never did contact him.

But basically, as I told you prior to this recording, I always like to end this story with one little episode. When I arrived in Alice I had a new suit that I was real proud of. I was probably making about two hundred and fifty a month in those days and I went into Ed Lloyd's office in my new suit and he told me, "You're too conspicuous in that

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suit. No one here wears a suit. Do you have any khakis?" I said, "No." He said, "Well, you get some." So I started buying clothes while I was down there, and the combination of these two assignments kept me there I guess a better part of ten days or two weeks. I was buying clothes. On the last day that [I was there] I needed to buy a shirt; I went into the men's shop and bought a shirt. It was four ninety-five and I wanted to put it on in the shop. So I handed the clerk a five-dollar bill and asked him where I could put it on and he just told me, "Step in the back." I stepped in the back and put on the shirt and came back out and I saw Wroe Owens, who was a lawyer friend from Austin, a good friend of mine, leaning over the counter looking at shirts. The clerk said, "Here's your change," and I said, "Thank you." When I did, Wroe must have partially recognized the voice because his head started turning toward me. I had bought me a modified western hat to wear down there, too, to look a little less out of place. I pulled that hat down on the side of my head and ran out of the store--well, didn't run but walked out hoping that I hadn't been recognized.

About a week or so later I was up at the district clerk's office in Travis County and I saw Wroe there. I said, "Wroe, I guess I'll always be curious. Did you see me down there in that men's shop?" He said, "No. I didn't know you were down there." I said, "Yes, I was down there." He said, "Well, I'll be damned. You know what, that was the crookedest damn thing on both sides I ever saw." I said, "Wroe, you speak for your side." (Laughter)

G: Let me ask you this. Did any of the people you talked to, the voters, refuse to sign an affidavit that you had for them?

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T: No. No.

G: Did any of them give you any indication that there had been some irregularities on your side?

T: No. Now I'm going to say this. You know I can't certify to the truth of what they told me, because in the first place the biggest part of it was in Spanish, and I was communicating through an interpreter. But I would say that I know positively that I commanded that he correctly interpret from me. I don't believe that he was well enough trained [to do otherwise]. This was not a very well-educated man, this was a small police job of some kind, maybe a deputy constable, someone that was available that could go with me. I don't think he had enough imagination to have concocted the type of testimony that I took from those witnesses.

G: Do you think he himself could have represented a threat? I mean, was he uniformed?

T: No, no.

G: Was he armed?

T: Not at all.

G: Was he an Anglo as opposed to. . . ?

T: No, he was a Mexican-American.

G: Good.

T: I wish I could remember his name. I became very fond of him.

G: Were there any other LBJ men down there when you were there?

T: Not--well, let me say this. The papers to file the lawsuit were brought down by Mack DeGuerin, and someone else was with him and I don't remember who it was. They remained there through the court hearing, which

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was the next day. I mean, this was quick action in the courthouse, a temporary injunction hearing just almost immediately, just a day or two. But they didn't participate in any of the investigation of what was going on by the. . . . In the first place, this was of course a defensive-type effort that we were putting on during the time I was there. Some leaders from over in Kleberg County came over and wanted me to come over there and investigate irregularities that they thought had benefited Governor Stevenson. I know there were other counties where there were charges that fraud had been committed on behalf of Governor Stevenson. I don't have any knowledge.

G: Since you've looked at that list which has been so controversial, let me ask you to tell me about the list. What did it look like?

T: It was a regular polling list like you see when you go and vote, where the voters had signed their names. I saw no distinction between the questioned portion and the unquestioned portion. I will say that there was a slight variety in the pens that were used, or pencils, the writing instruments, but nothing more than you would normally expect. They furnish you pencils at a polling booth or as you sign in and some people will sign with their own. The thought never occurred to me that there was any similarity of the penmanship. I never heard that charge until very recently. So if that charge had been made before, it was lost on me. I didn't notice it and I just didn't hear anything about that sort of charge.

G: Did you learn anything about the voting patterns of that area when you were down there, the Parr machine or anything that sheds light on that election?

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T: Well, I learned that George Parr was the *patrón*, that he was one of them, that they loved him, that he was their security blanket, and that he had a wide and loyal following. He was a happy man with a big smile. At least in his relations with me he didn't wait five minutes, I don't think, to put me at ease on the fact that he had been to the federal penitentiary for tax fraud, a very candid man. I heard a story down there while I was there--because I asked some questions like you've been asking me of some of the people down there. They reported to me an episode where the bank examiners had come into the bank and had questioned certain loans. George Parr had just said, "You just stack those you don't like over here in this stack and I'll buy them." These were the loans that he had made to people who were destitute and in need of medical attention or [had] some emergency in their family. My observation, even in the business community--not just with the lower classes--was that he was a much loved individual.

G: Did he explain his position in that election, why he was opposing Coke Stevenson?

T: Not to me. I did hear subsequently that he had a dislike for Dick Kleberg, because he hadn't aided him in getting his pardon.

G: Did you keep in touch with the Austin office while you were there?

T: Very, very little. Things were moving rather fast. It wasn't long before they were all up in Dallas or Fort Worth, wherever the convention was. I know I was still down there. I know that it was reported to me--now, I can't certify to this--that with respect to this Eugenio Solis, that he had been offered a substantial sum of money to just attend, that they would fly him to the convention and just let him stand

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there while they read his affidavit that they had taken. I still don't know what was in the affidavit that they had taken. As a matter of fact, while that debate was going on I was driving madly out into the country trying to stay in radio range of a Houston station that was broadcasting the proceedings of the Democratic convention. I was still in Alice at that time.

G: Oh, I see. Now you know that recently a charge has been made that Lyndon Johnson himself went down to that Valley area during the period after election day.

T: No. Absolutely, positively did not. I want to finish what I started to say in terms of my first involvement, when I walked through the reception room and saw a man sitting there that I didn't recognize. [See page 9] When I came back out and walked by him and looked at him again I suddenly realized that that man sitting there, unshaven, slumped over, [was Lyndon Johnson]. The back of his hands were just blood red, because he had a characteristic of clawing the back of his hands. I was told that he had been sleepless and just a vegetable. He had absolutely nothing to do with the activities in Alice during this time. I always told him, "I know a hell of a lot more about what happened in 1948 than you'll ever know." He said, "I don't want to know." But he didn't have a dang thing to do with that.

I would say Looney was the field general pretty much. He was the only one I communicated with. I did report to him from time to time. I got no instructions from him. I just reported to him.

G: Did LBJ seem pretty dejected during this period? Do you think he thought he had lost?

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T: Oh well, I don't know what he thought. He had thought--of course, I didn't see much of him the last few days of the campaign because he was out over the state. But I do know that it was reported to us that he had given up, that he had come home and expected to lose. That was on that Saturday night. He wasn't at the state headquarters; I guess he was at the Ranch, I don't know where he was. But then when the thing went the way it did, well, he was just totally exhausted by it. Someone else could give you a better picture of it, but I have the impression that he was less able at that time to conduct his affairs than he ever was at any other time in his life.

G: There was also I think an indication that John Connally might have gone back down there.

T: No.

G: Did you ever see any evidence of that?

T: They couldn't have been there without me knowing it. After all, I wasn't the enemy, I was the man on the ground. The only one that came down was Mack DeGuerin and I can't remember who the other one was. I remember they spent the biggest part of their time in the hotel room waiting for the--see, part of this being undercover was I didn't stay downtown. I stayed way out on the fringe of town in a cheap motel. I was supposed to be unobserved.

G: Why was this?

T: Because we wanted to know what they were doing. They were the attackers. We wanted to know what they were doing. We didn't want them to know that we were there.

G: Anything in your conversation with Ed Lloyd that might tell us more about these counties or what was going on there?

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T: I'm going to say my conversation with Ed Lloyd [was not extensive]. I arrived there and reported to Ed Lloyd and Homer Dean. I was told to get out of that suit and to get into some work pants. I was given the names of the various county precinct chairmen. I was assigned--and I don't think right there at that spot and I don't remember where I got him--this man that drove me around to take me to find these various precinct chairmen, to introduce me to them. There was no daily report. I would get a report perhaps that So-and-so had been talked to. If my recollection is right it probably came from this interpreter of mine. I don't remember, certainly had no in-depth conversations with either Ed Lloyd or Homer Dean. I was doing my job and this was the kind of job that you do in preparing for trial of lawsuits. I'd always prepared all of Looney's cases for him, went out and found the witnesses, took their testimony or their statements. If you have an idea that there was some sort of a command post and someone saying, "You go see that guy," or, "You go see that guy," and, "You get this guy to say this, that, or the other," no, none of that happened.

G: No, I was just wondering if in talking to you about the situation down there he had any information that would shed light on the politics or the local set-up?

T: My best judgment is that I had very, very little contact with those men. I was down there doing a job that I was trained to do, experienced at doing, and that is going out talking to witnesses and taking testimony. That's basically what I was doing.

G: Well, now, what did you do with all of this material that you assembled? Was that used at the convention?

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T: That was used at the convention, as were the statements that they took. I don't know what kind of files they maintained, but I'm sure they had a statement from Eugenio Solis and we had a statement from Eugenio Solis.

G: Presumably the material would have gone all the way to Hugo Black when he--?

T: Well, I don't know. I really think that most of that was on strictly legal points.

G: Let me ask you a couple of general questions about the campaign, the organization. You had Everett Looney and Senator Wirtz and John Connally and Ed Clark and others. If you were drawing a diagram of the organization pattern there, who was in charge? Who specialized in what? Was there any sort of general breakdown of the generals in the campaign?

T: Well, I would say that you overestimate the role in the campaign that either Wirtz or Looney played. I would say that nominally, as I remember it, Claude Voyles [Wild?] was statewide chairman. Is that correct? There are two guys I get mixed up. One of them is Claude Voyles and I can't think of the other's name. But one of them was--I believe it was Claude Voyles, I'm pretty sure it was. He was maybe statewide chairman and Charlie Herring was district chairman. I don't know whether John had any title or not. But I would say that basically the state campaign or the state headquarters were pretty well manned and directed by John Connally. I think John was really the top man in that and maybe some of Ed Syers and Jake Pickle and that group.

G: Did it take a lot of persuasion to get then-Congressman Johnson to run in the first place? You mentioned that--

T: No. I think he wanted to run. I really think he thought just about what my comment was, and that was, "If you want to ever be in the Senate

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I think you'll never have a better chance than you have right now." That was my feeling then; I think that was his feeling. I think he understood he was taking on a hard race, but he wasn't satisfied to remain a congressman all of his life.

G: I saw some indication somewhere that during an early stage of that when he was trying to decide, and maybe at one moment leaning against it, that there was some talk that maybe John Connally would run.

T: I never heard that. I don't know how long he vacillated on that decision. As I remember it, it was very soon after we had that luncheon that he announced.

G: Throughout the campaign, particularly in the latter period, did you ever get any indication of Stevenson irregularities, particularly counties say in East Texas or--?

T: Oh, yes. We heard rumors that there were--well, I think maybe Gregg County was one of them that was very much in question. There was a lot of switching, just total switching of county votes where there just seemed to be an inordinate amount of that. There were rumors about irregularities for the benefit of Stevenson in a number of counties.

G: Can you recall in particular any of these or any particular rumors that sounded at the time, when you first heard them, like we're getting votes stolen from us in this particular area?

T: Well, I've always had a serious question about Gregg County, as I remember it. There was one county over there. And then Kleberg County, I don't think there was any question that there were some irregularities there. I think if you wanted to explore that, you'd just look at those late counties that reported, because they were, I'm sure, highly confi-

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dent they had their race won. At least as Mr. Stevenson's campaign was always described to me, he seemed to suffer from over-confidence, that his visits to various cities were pretty well confined to meeting with leaders in hotel rooms and that sort of thing, very little real outside hard campaigning.

G: President Johnson I think toward the end of the campaign rode on the train with President Truman for a brief time. Do you recall that?

T: I don't recall that. I have a hard time accepting that. You know in his first campaign for Congress there was the story--and that's before my time--about President Roosevelt having heard him or heard of him and taking him for a ride or something on his train. But I don't remember that, I don't remember him being on a train with Truman. As a matter of fact, I don't think Truman was that popular at that time. I remember when I had to pretty well apologize for voting for Truman.

G: As I understand it, the point of the thing was that LBJ was doing it in spite of the fact that [Truman wasn't popular].

T: Is that right? I don't know. If that happened I don't remember it.

G: Anything else on the campaign that you think is significant or interesting?

T: Not that I can recall.

G: What did you do in the campaign other than go down there? Did you [inaudible]?

T: Well, I basically did Charlie Herring's work over in the law shop and hung around there and went to lunch. For many years we went to lunch together almost on a daily basis, and we were together.

I remember little conflicts between John [Connally] and the President. I remember that John was staying at 1901 Dillman, and he got

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upset with the President about something pertaining to the campaign and unplugged his telephone and went on strike for a few days.

G: There was another occasion I guess where the President had to be flown to the Mayo Clinic I think with gallstones.

T: Something.

G: And didn't want it known to the press. Do you recall that disagreement with John Connally where Connally insisted that they announce it?

T: I don't remember that, no.

G: You didn't travel with the candidate at all, did you?

T: Not at all. Never.

G: You weren't with him when he went to Bogata?

T: No. He landed in that helicopter out there on the football field. All I know is we had a mentally retarded individual there at home that hung around town all the time and when they landed he went out there and he came running back to my mother just huffing and puffing saying, "Miss Lula, Miss Lula, Donald's going to be on the Supreme Court!" (Laughter)

G: Anything on the helicopter, the use of the helicopter, whose idea it was?

T: No, I don't have any knowledge of that.

G: Well, I surely do thank you. Do you think we've left out anything?

T: Not on these subjects, that I can think of. If I think of anything else, I'll tell you about it.

G: I appreciate it.

End of Tape 1 of 1 and Interview I

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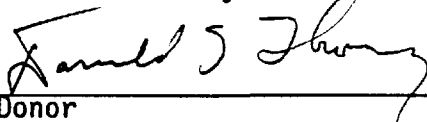
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DONALD S. THOMAS

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