THE NEW YORKER

PERSONAL HISTORY JANUARY 28, 2019 ISSUE

THE SECRETS OF LYNDON JOHNSON'S ARCHIVES

On a Presidential paper trail.

By Robert A. Caro

I. MR. HATHWAY

In 1959, when I went to work for *Newsday*, on Long Island, the paper had a managing editor named Alan Hathway, who was an old-time newspaperman from the nineteen-twenties. He was a character right out of "The Front Page," a broad-shouldered man with a big stomach that looked soft but wasn't. His head was shiny bald except for a monklike tonsure, and rather red—*very* red after he had started drinking for the day, which was at lunch. He wore brown shirts with white ties, and black shirts with yellow ties. We were never sure if he had actually graduated from, or even attended, college, but he had a deep prejudice against graduates of prestigious universities, and during his years at *Newsday* had never hired one, let alone one from Princeton, as I was. I was hired as a joke on

him while he was on vacation. He was so angry to find me there that during my first weeks on the job he would refuse to acknowledge my presence in his city room. I kept saying, "Hello, Mr. Hathway," or "Hi, Mr. Hathway," when he passed my desk. He'd never even nod. Ignoring me was easy for Mr. Hathway to do, because as the low man on the paper's reportorial totem pole I never worked on a story significant enough to require his involvement.

At the time, *Newsday* did not publish on Sundays, so as low man on the totem pole I worked Saturday afternoons and nights, because if a story came in then I could put the information in a memo and leave the actual writing to the real reporters who came in on Sunday.

Late one Saturday afternoon, a telephone on the city desk rang, and when I picked it up it was an official from the Federal Aviation Agency, calling from his office at what was then (because John F. Kennedy hadn't yet been assassinated) Idlewild Airport. *Newsday* had been doing a series of articles on Mitchel Field, a big Air Force base in the middle of Long Island's Nassau County that the military was giving up. Its twelve hundred acres were the last large open space in the county, so what happened to it was important. The F.A.A. was seeking to make it a civilian airport. *Newsday*, however, felt that it should be used instead for public purposes—in particular, for education, to allow Hofstra University to expand, and to create a campus for Nassau Community College, the only general-education public college on Long Island, which was then being housed in temporary quarters in the county courthouse in Mineola. The rooms there were already too crowded to accommodate the students, many of them from the large low-income community in nearby Hempstead. Public education for the poor: that was something worth fighting for.

I hadn't been working on any of the Mitchel Field stories. But on this Saturday suddenly this guy from the F.A.A. was on the phone, and he says something along the lines of "I really like what you guys are doing on Mitchel Field, and

I'm here alone in the F.A.A. offices, and if you send someone down here I know what files you should be looking at."

I was alone, the only person in the city room. This happened to be the day of the big *Newsday* annual summer picnic on the beach on Fire Island. Just about everyone else had gone, except me. None of them had a cell phone, of course, since there were no cell phones then. I called the editor who was my immediate superior, and then his superior, but wasn't able to reach them. When, after many calls, I finally did reach an editor, he told me to call the paper's great investigative reporter Bob Greene, but Greene wasn't reachable, either, and neither were the other reporters I was told to call. Eventually, the editor told me that I would have to go myself.

I will never forget that night. It was the first time I had ever gone through files. The official met me at the front door and led me to a room with a conference table in the middle, and, on the table, high stacks of file folders. And somehow, in a strange way, sitting there going through them, I felt at home. As I went through the memos and the letters and the minutes of meetings, I could see a pattern emerging, revealing the real reason that the agency wanted the field to become a civilian airport: executives of corporations with offices on Long Island, who seemed to be quite friendly with the F.A.A. officials, wanted to be able to fly in and out of Long Island on their company planes without the inconvenience of having to drive to Idlewild or LaGuardia. I kept looking for a piece of paper on which someone came right out and said that, but I didn't find one; everything I could find talked around that point. But between all the pieces of paper I found sentences and paragraphs that, taken together, made the point clear.

There are certain moments in your life when you suddenly understand something about yourself. I loved going through those files, making them yield their secrets to me. And here was a particular and fascinating secret: that

corporate executives were persuading a government agency to save them some driving time at the expense of a poor kid getting an education and a better chance in life. Each discovery I made that helped to prove that was a thrill. I don't know why raw files affect me that way. In part, perhaps, it's because they are closer to reality, to genuineness—not filtered, cleaned up, through press releases or, years later, in books. I worked all night, but I didn't notice the passing of time. When I finished and left the building on Sunday, the sun was coming up, and that was a surprise. I went back to the office, and before driving home I wrote a memo on what I had found.

I had previously worked at a newspaper in New Jersey, and my wife, Ina, and I hadn't yet moved to Long Island. Early on Monday morning, my day off, the phone rang, and it was Mr. Hathway's secretary, June Blom. Alan wanted to see me right away, she said. I said, "I'm in New Jersey."

"Well, he wants to see you just as soon as you can get here," June replied. I drove to *Newsday* that morning, sure every mile of the way that I was about to be fired.

I ran into June just as I entered the city room; motioning to Alan's office, she told me to go right in. Walking across the room, I saw, through the glass window, the big red head bent over something he was reading, and as I entered his office I saw that it was my memo.

He didn't look up. After a while, I said tentatively, "Mr. Hathway." I couldn't get the "Alan" out. He motioned for me to sit down, and went on reading. Finally, he raised his head. "I didn't know someone from Princeton could do digging like this," he said. "From now on, you do investigative work."

I responded with my usual savoir faire: "But I don't know anything about investigative reporting."

Alan looked at me for what I remember as a very long time. "Just remember," he

said. “Turn every page. Never assume anything. Turn every goddam page.” He turned to some other papers on his desk, and after a while I got up and left.

II. THE LIBRARY

In 1976, I flew to Austin, Texas, to begin research for a biography of President Lyndon Baines Johnson. Walking into the Johnson Library and Museum for the first time, I saw Johnson’s long black Presidential limousine. I asked the receptionist at the front desk where the Lyndon Johnson Papers were, and she said I would see them if I walked down to the end of the first row of exhibits and turned the corner.

So I did.

In front of me was a broad, tall marble staircase. At its top was a glass wall four stories high. Behind the glass, on each of the four stories, were rows of tall, red boxes—a hundred and seventy-five rows across, each row six boxes high—with, on the front of each box, a gold circle that was a replica, I was to learn, of the Presidential seal. As I climbed the stairs, there came into view more boxes, long lines of them stretching back into the gloom as far as I could see.

I took an elevator up to the library’s tenth floor, to be interviewed by an archivist and given a card admitting me to the library’s Reading Room, where researchers had their desks; the card was good for a year, and would have to be renewed at the end of that time. The archivist asked me if I thought I would need a renewal. I said probably.

I asked if I could be given a look at one of the floors of boxes, and, unfortunately for my peace of mind, my request was granted. It was like asking a doctor to be honest and give you all the bad news, and having him do just that. I started walking down an aisle between walls of boxes taller than me. It seemed like a long way to the end of the aisle.

There were about forty thousand boxes, the archivist told me; each had a capacity of eight hundred pages, but, she said, not all of them were completely filled, and some were overfilled. There were thirty-two million pages in all. I had known that doing research on a President would be a lot different from doing it on Robert Moses, the subject of my previous book, "The Power Broker," but I hadn't expected anything like this. I had a bad feeling: during all the years since Alan Hathway had given me that first piece of advice—"Turn every page. Never assume anything. Turn every goddam page"—I had never forgotten it; it was engraved in my mind. There would be no turning every page here.

But what pages to turn?

I get a sick feeling in my stomach even now as I remember how long it took to answer that question. I started by looking through the library's "Finding Aids," a version of a catalogue, in black looseleaf notebooks, which listed the titles of the file folders in each box. Just for Johnson's "House of Representatives Papers," the general files from his eleven years in that body, the time before he became a senator and then President, there were three hundred and forty-nine boxes. And those weren't the only boxes that contained letters, memoranda, reports, speech drafts, etc., that dealt with this period. There were, for example, the LBJA files, which included documents that Johnson's staff had, at various times, shifted from the general "House Papers" and put into other groupings—the library calls them "collections"—such as the "Selected Names" files, which contained correspondence and other material with "close associates." At least it wouldn't be me alone turning the pages. Working in the Reading Room with me would be Ina, whose thoroughness and perceptivity in doing research I had learned to trust.

The way things worked, you'd fill out a slip for the boxes you wanted, and in an hour or so an archivist would arrive in the Reading Room wheeling a cart with the boxes on it, and put them on a cart next to your desk, each one landing with

an impressively, and depressingly, heavy thud. There was room on the cart for only fifteen boxes, and I always requested more than fifteen, so that when I returned a box and a gap appeared on my cart it would be quickly filled.

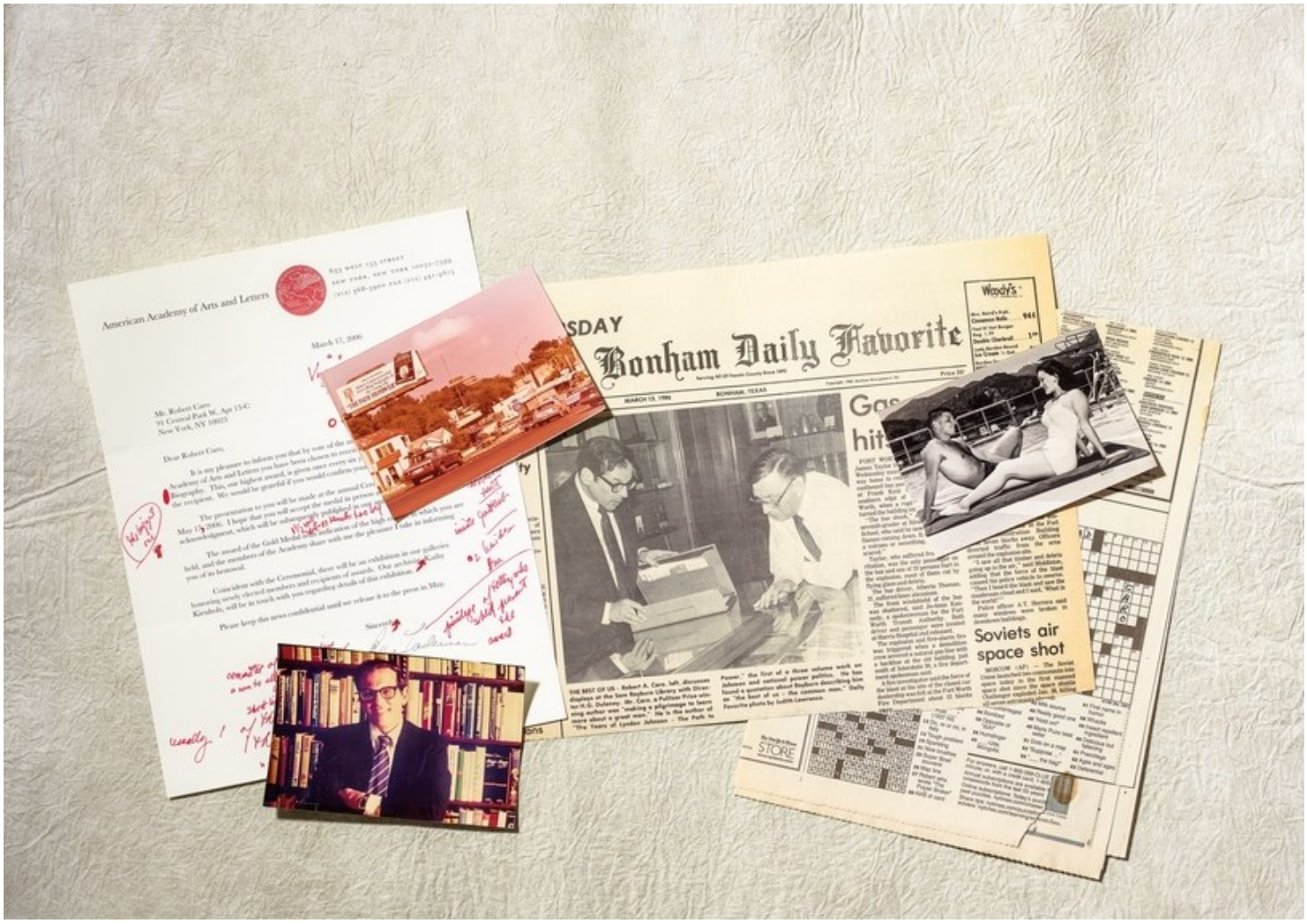
We requested a lot of boxes, looking through a lot of file folders that, from their description in the "Finding Aids," one would assume contained nothing of use to me—and the wisdom of Alan's advice was proved to me again and again. Someday, I hope to be able to leave behind me a record of at least a few of the scores and scores of times that that happened, some of which may be of interest, at any rate to fellow-historians; for now, I'll give just one example. I had decided that among the boxes in which I would at least glance at every piece of paper would be the ones in Johnson's general "House Papers" that contained the files from his first years in Congress, since I wanted to be able to paint a picture of what he had been like as a young legislator. And as I was doing this—reading or at least glancing at every letter and memo, turning every page—I began to get a feeling: something in those early years had changed.

For some time after Johnson's arrival in Congress, in May, 1937, his letters to committee chairmen and other senior congressmen had been in a tone befitting a new congressman with no power—the tone of a junior beseeching a favor from a senior, or asking, perhaps, for a few minutes of his time. But there were also letters and memos in the same boxes from senior congressmen in which *they* were doing the beseeching, asking for a few minutes of *his* time. What was the reason for the change? Was there a particular time at which it had occurred?

Going back over my notes, I put them in chronological order, and when I did it was easy to see that there had indeed been such a time: a single month, October, 1940. Before that month, Lyndon Johnson had been invariably, in his correspondence, the junior to the senior. After that month—and, it became clearer and clearer as I put more and more documents into order, after a single date, November 5, 1940, Election Day—the tone was frequently the opposite.

And it wasn't just with powerful congressmen. After that date, Johnson's files also contained letters written to him by mid-level congressmen, and by other congressmen as junior as he, in a supplicating tone, whereas there had been no such letters—not a single one that I could find—before that date. Obviously, the change had had something to do with the election. But what?

At that time, I was constantly flying back and forth between Austin and Washington. Papers don't die; people do, and I was giving first priority to interviewing the men and women who, during the nineteen-thirties, had been members of a circle of New Deal insiders to which the young congressman from Texas had been admitted.



A collection of letters, clippings, and ephemera, including photographs of Robert and Ina and a crossword puzzle featuring "CARO" as the answer to 27 Down.

Photograph by Jens Mortensen for The New Yorker

One member of this circle was Thomas G. Corcoran, a pixieish, ebullient, accordion-playing Irishman known as Tommy the Cork, who had been an aide to Franklin Roosevelt and had since become a legend in Washington as a political fixer and a fund-raiser nonpareil. I just *loved* interviewing Tommy the Cork. He was at that time in his late seventies, but if he came into the lobby of his K Street office building while I was waiting for the elevator, he would say, "See you upstairs, kid," as he opened the door to the stairwell. And often, when I reached the eleventh floor, where his office was situated, he would be standing there grinning at me when the elevator door opened. He was, in the best sense of the word (truly the best to an interviewer anxious to learn the innermost secrets of political maneuverings), totally amoral. He cared for nothing. Once, on a morning that we had an interview scheduled, I picked up the Washington *Post* over breakfast in my hotel room to see his name in big headlines and read a huge story about his role in a truly sordid Washington scandal. I expected to find a broken, or at least a dejected, man when I was ushered into his office. Instead, he gave me a big grin—he had the most infectious grin—and, when I didn't bring up the subject of the story but he could tell it was on my mind, he said, "It's just free advertising, kid, free advertising. Just as long as they spell my name right."

Tommy the Cork had once told me about one of his most effective fund-raising techniques. When the man he was asking for money wrote a check and handed it across the desk to him, Mr. Corcoran, no matter what the amount—no matter if it was more than he had hoped for—would look at it with an expression of disdain, drop it back on the man's desk, and, without saying a word, walk toward the door. He had never once, he told me—exaggerating, I'm sure, but how much?—he had never once been allowed to reach the door without the man calling him back, tearing up the check, and writing one for a larger amount. And now, when I asked Mr. Corcoran what had changed Lyndon Johnson's status in October, 1940, he said, "Money, kid, money." Then he added, "But you're never going to be able to write about that." I asked why not. "Because you're never

going to find anything in writing," he said.

For some time, I was afraid that Mr. Corcoran was right. From what I had already learned about Johnson's obsession with secrecy, I was prepared to believe that in this particularly sensitive area he had made sure that there was going to be nothing to find. And the Cork was right on another point, too: without something in writing—documentation, in other words—even if I discovered what had happened I wasn't going to be able to put it in my book. But the change in Johnson's status—the fact that during October, 1940, this young congressman had been elevated to a place of some significance in the House of Representatives—made me feel it was imperative that I find out and document what had happened in that month.

Alan's words were in my mind. I had been looking at only Lyndon Johnson's general "House Papers," but these boxes might not be the only ones that dealt with Johnson's early congressional career. There were also, for example, those LBJA files, containing letters and memos to and from "close associates." I hadn't even begun turning the pages in them.

Corcoran had said that the answer to my question was money, and if money was involved the place to start looking was Brown & Root, the Texas road-and-dam-building firm, whose principals, Herman and George Brown (Root had died years before), had been the secret but major financiers of Johnson's early career; by 1940, Brown & Root had already begun receiving federal contracts through Johnson's efforts. When it came to money, there were no closer associates than Herman and George. I didn't have much hope of finding anything in writing, but their files were files in which I should nonetheless have been turning every page.

I started doing that now. I requested Box 13 in the LBJA "Selected Names" collection and pulled out the file folders for Herman. There was a lot of

fascinating material in the files' two hundred and thirty-seven pages, but nothing on the 1940 change. George's correspondence was in Box 12. There were about two hundred and thirty pages in his file. I sat there turning the pages, every page, thinking that I was probably just wasting more days of my life. And then, suddenly, as I lifted yet another innocuous letter to put it aside, the next document was not a letter but a Western Union telegram form, turned brown during the decades since it had been sent—on October 19, 1940. It was addressed to Lyndon Johnson, and was signed "George Brown," and it said, in the capital letters Western Union used for its messages: "YOU WERE SUPPOSED TO HAVE CHECKS BY FRIDAY . . . HOPE THEY ARRIVED IN DUE FORM AND ON TIME."

It also named the people who were supposed to have sent the checks—six of Brown & Root's business associates. And Tommy Corcoran had been wrong: Lyndon Johnson *had* for once put something in writing. Attached to the telegram was a copy of his response to George. "ALL OF THE FOLKS YOU TALKED TO HAVE BEEN HEARD FROM," it said. "I AM NOT ACKNOWLEDGING THEIR LETTERS, SO BE SURE TO TELL ALL THESE FELLOWS THAT THEIR LETTERS HAVE BEEN RECEIVED . . . YOUR FRIEND, LYNDON B. JOHNSON." Johnson had added by hand, "The thing is exceeding my expectations. The Boss is listening to my suggestions, thanks to your encouragements."

So there was the proof that Johnson had received money from Brown & Root in October, 1940 (and that it had brought him into some sort of contact with "the Boss," Johnson's name for President Franklin Roosevelt). But how much had the six donors sent? Why hadn't Brown & Root sent the money itself? And, more important, what had happened to the money? How did Johnson use it? What was the mechanism by which it was distributed? There was no clue in the telegram, or in Johnson's reply. But the money had come from Texas, and George and Herman had friends who, I knew, had contributed, at the Browns' insistence, to Johnson's first campaigns. Most of the contributors, I had been told, were

oilmen—in Texas parlance, "big oilmen."

I started calling for the big oilmen's folders. And, sure enough, there was a letter, dated in October, from one of the biggest of the oilmen, Clint Murchison. Murchison dealt with senators or with the Speaker of the House, Sam Rayburn, the leader of the Texas delegation; he hardly knew the young congressman; in his letter to Johnson, he misspelled his name "Linden." But he was evidently following Brown & Root's lead. "We are enclosing herewith the check of the Aloco Oil Co. . . . for $5,000, payable to the Democratic Congressional Committee," his letter said. Another big oilman was Charles F. Roeser, of Fort Worth: the amount mentioned in the letter I found from him was again five thousand, the payee the same.

So the recipient was the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee, which had previously been nothing more than a moribund subsidiary of the Democratic National Committee. There were a lot of file folders in Boxes 6, 7, 8, and 9 of the Johnson House papers labelled "Democratic National Committee." Those boxes contained thirty-two hundred pages. Some of the folders had less than inviting titles. "General—Unarranged," for example, was a thick folder, bulging with papers that had been sloppily crammed into it. When I pulled it out, I remember asking myself if I really had to do "General—Unarranged." But Alan might possibly have been proud of me—and I wasn't very deep into the folder when I was certainly grateful to him. One of the six people George Brown said had sent checks was named Corwin. In "General—Unarranged," not in alphabetical order but just jammed in, was a note from J. O. Corwin, a Brown & Root subcontractor, saying, "I am enclosing herewith my check for $5,000, payable to the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee." Five thousand dollars. Had each of the six men mentioned in Brown's letter sent that amount?

The "Unarranged" file contained letter after letter with details I knew I could use. And in other folders I came across letters in which that same amount was

mentioned: for example, from E. S. Fentress, who was the partner of Johnson's patron, Charles Marsh. I knew that one of the biggest and the most politically astute of the oilmen was Sid Richardson. I looked under the name "Richardson" in file folder after file folder in different collections, without any luck. What was the name of that nephew of his whom Richardson, unmarried and childless, allowed to transact some of his business affairs? I had heard it somewhere. What *was* it? Bass, Perry Bass. I found that name and the donation—"Perry R. Bass, $5,000"—in yet another box in the House papers.

Letters from many big Texas oilmen of the nineteen-forties—who needed guarantees that Congress wouldn't take away the oil-depletion allowance, and that other, more arcane tax breaks conferred by the federal government wouldn't be touched—were scattered through those boxes. And all the contributions were for five thousand dollars. Of course, they *must* be. I suddenly remembered what I should have remembered earlier. Under federal law in 1940, the limit on an individual contribution was five thousand dollars. How could I have been so slow to get it? Well, I got it now. The Brown & Root contribution to the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee, funnelled through the company's business associates, had been thirty thousand dollars, a substantial amount in the politics of that era, and, in fact, more money than the committee had received from the D.N.C., its parent organization. And there were so many additional five-thousand-dollar contributions from Texas!

But there was a next question: how had this money resulted in such a great change in Lyndon Johnson's status in Congress? How had he transmuted those contributions into power for himself? He had had no title or formal position with the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee; he had tried to get one, I had learned from other files, but had been rebuffed.

I found the answer in those LBJA files. He had had George Brown instruct each of the Brown & Root contributors, and had had the other Texas contributors

instructed similarly, to enclose with their checks a letter stating, "I would like for this money to be expended in connection with the campaign of Democratic candidates for Congress as per the list attached." Johnson had, of course, compiled the list, and, while the checks received by the lucky candidates might have been issued by the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee, each candidate received a telegram from Johnson, saying that the check had been sent "AS RESULT MY VISIT TO CONGRESSIONAL COMMITTEE FEW MINUTES AGO."

Before the campaign was over—in that single month, October, 1940—Lyndon Johnson had raised from Texas, and had distributed to congressional candidates, campaign funds on a scale seldom if ever before given to Democratic congressional candidates from a single, central source. The documents in those boxes of Johnson's House papers made that clear.

As I turned the pages in those boxes, I found other documents. "General—Unarranged" contained another list. There were two typed columns on each of its thirteen pages, typed by either John Connally or Walter Jenkins; each of these Johnson assistants later told me that he had been the one who had typed them. In the left-hand column were the districts of congressmen who had asked the Congressional Committee for money. In the second column were the names of the congressmen and the amount that each had asked for—tiny amounts, in the terms of later eras—and what, in the congressman's own words, he needed it for. "MUST HAVE $250 BY THURSDAY NIGHT FOR LAST ISSUE ADVERTISING," for example. Or "$350 BY THURSDAY. HAVE SET UP MACHINERY TO REACH 11,000 ADDITIONAL VOTERS." Others wanted five hundred dollars "FOR WORKERS IN SPANISH AND ITALIAN DISTRICTS" or "$1,000 ON NOVEMBER 1 TO HIRE POLL WATCHERS," or wrote, "CHANCES BRIGHT . . . IF WE CAN GET RIGHT AWAY $14 FOR EACH OF FIVE COUNTY PAPERS AND $20 FOR TITUSVILLE HERALD."

And there was a third column on the page, or, rather, handwritten notations in the left-hand margin, notes dealing with each congressman's request. The

handwriting in that column was Lyndon Johnson's. If he was arranging for the candidate to be given part or all of what he'd asked for, he wrote, "OK—$500," or "OK—$200," or whatever the amount was he had decided to give. If he did not want the candidate to be given anything, he wrote, "None." And by some names he wrote, "None—Out." (What did "None—Out" mean? I later asked John Connally. "It meant he"—the candidate—"was *never* going to get *anything*," Connally said. "Lyndon Johnson never forgot, and he never forgave.")

Johnson had identified a source of financing for congressional races across the United States, a source that in the past had been used principally on behalf of Presidential or senatorial candidates: Texas money. Using the power of the mighty Speaker, Sam Rayburn, he had made sure the money came only through him. When, in 1940, officials of the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee attempted to go around him, to the source, writing directly to the oilmen to request contributions, the oilmen had asked Rayburn whom to send the money to, and then, following the Speaker's instructions, had replied not to the committee but to Lyndon Johnson, writing, in the words of Charles Roeser, "I HAVE DECIDED TO SEND MY CONTRIBUTION . . . TO YOU. . . . I AM . . . LEAVING IT UP TO . . . YOU, TO DECIDE IN WHAT DISTRICTS THESE FUNDS CAN BE BEST USED." And Johnson was not only deciding which candidates would get the money; he was making sure the candidates knew they were getting it from *him*. "I want to see you *win*," he said to them in his letters and telegrams. And here is some money to help. By the time the congressmen got back to Washington in November, after the elections, and talked to one another, the word was out. There was a lot of gratitude for what Johnson had done, Walter Jenkins said: "He was *the* hero."

Moreover, the congressmen were going to need money for future campaigns, and they had learned that a good way to get it—in some cases the only way—was through Lyndon Johnson. "Gratitude," I was to write, "is an emotion as ephemeral in Washington as elsewhere, but . . . not merely gratitude but an

emotion perhaps somewhat stronger and more enduring—self-interest—dictated that they be on good terms with him." In that single month, Lyndon Johnson, thirty-two years old, just three years in the House, had established himself as a congressman with a degree of influence over other congressmen, as a congressman who had gained his first toehold on the national power he was to wield for the next thirty years. For someone interested in the sources of political power, as I was, those boxes in the Johnson Library contained incontrovertible evidence of the use to which economic power could be put to create political power.

To my way of thinking, I had just one question left, and there was only one man who could answer it. I might know the answer, but knowing it wasn't proving it. Herman Brown had died before I started on my Johnson books. I had to talk to George.

I had known that wasn't going to be easy. George and Herman had been proud of their attitude toward interviewers; they had often boasted, with some exaggeration, that neither of them had ever given an interview, and that neither of them ever would. I had been trying to talk to George ever since I started on Lyndon Johnson, with no results, or indeed response. When I telephoned and left a message with his secretary, he never called back; when I wrote him letters, there was no reply. After I became friends with Brown & Root's longtime chief lobbyist, Frank (Posh) Oltorf, I asked Posh to intercede, and he did, several times—after which he told me quite firmly that Mr. Brown was never going to talk to me. And, if he didn't, I was going to have a hard time proving in my book *why* Brown & Root had given the money—or, indeed, why in the decades after 1940 it had given Lyndon Johnson such an immense amount of financial backing.

Sometimes a sudden thought does the job. One day, I found myself in the little Texas town of Burnet. In the courthouse square, among the weathered storefronts, there was a handsome new building bearing the legend "Herman

Brown Free Library."

All at once, something occurred to me. George had loved and idolized his older brother, who had really been more like a father to him. Since Herman's death, George had been building public monuments to him all over Texas, not only Herman Brown public libraries but a Herman Brown Hall for Mathematical Sciences, at Rice University.

There was a telephone booth nearby. From it I telephoned Posh, and asked him to call George one more time. Posh said that he wasn't going to do that. I'm only asking you to call one more time, I said, and I want you to say just one sentence: tell him that, no matter how many buildings he puts Herman Brown's name on, in a few years no one is going to know who Herman Brown *was* if he's not in a book.

I don't remember Posh's reply, but he evidently made the call. The next morning, very early, before I was awake, the phone rang, and it was Mr. Brown's secretary, asking what time would be convenient for me to meet with him.

At the meeting, I thought that Mr. Brown and I got along very well. When I was ushered into his office, I found myself with a seventy-nine-year-old man who was almost blind but still vigorous and clear of mind. After he and Herman had begun, in the nineteen-thirties, to build the Marshall Ford Dam, the biggest project on which Brown & Root had ever embarked, and had sunk much of the firm's money into it, they had found that, because of a quirk in the law, the dam was, in Brown's words, "illegal." "We had already built the cableway. That cost several hundred thousands of dollars, which we owed the banks. . . . We had put in a million and a half dollars," he explained to me. The federal government was supposed to appropriate the money for the dam in its 1937 session, but it had now been discovered that any appropriation wouldn't be legal. The Browns were facing bankruptcy. Johnson, new to Congress though he was, had worked out a

device to make the dam project legal. And the Browns had been grateful. ("Remember that I am *for* you, right or wrong, and it makes no difference if I think you are right or wrong. If you want it, I am for it 100%," George wrote him, in another letter that I found.) And Johnson had done more for the Browns, had seen to it that they received the biggest contract they had ever received: to build the Corpus Christi Naval Air Station. He'd then seen that they were given more contracts—contracts worth hundreds of millions of dollars—to build subchasers and destroyers for the Navy, this despite the fact that, as Mr. Brown told me, "We didn't know the stern from the aft—I mean the bow—of the boat."

At the end of our interview, which lasted an entire day, Mr. Brown said that he had enjoyed it, and would I like to meet again. I said I would, and we went to lunch at the Ramada Club. Afterward, he took me to see the legendary "8-F," Suite 8-F at Houston's Lamar Hotel, where the biggest of Texas's big oilmen and contractors met to map out the state's political future.

III. A SENSE OF PLACE

The importance of a sense of place is commonly accepted in the world of fiction; I wish that were also true for biography and history, for nonfiction in general, in fact.

In the case of Lyndon Johnson, two settings played a crucial role for me in grasping him and understanding his role in history, in understanding how he came to power and how he wielded power: the place he came from, the Texas Hill Country, and the place he went to when he was still a young man, Capitol Hill.

The first place was really hard for me to understand. I am a New Yorker. I had spent my whole life in the city's crowded streets and crowded halls, with theatres, concerts, lively conversation all the time; to some extent I comprehend that

world.

Looking back on my work on Johnson, I think I realized on my very first drive into the Hill Country—or *should* have realized—that I was entering a world I really didn't understand and wasn't prepared for. I still remember: you drove west from Austin, and about forty-one miles out you came to the top of a tall hill. As I came to the crest of that hill, suddenly there was something in front of me that made me pull over to the side of the road and get out of the car and stand there looking down. Because what I was seeing was something I had never seen before: emptiness—a vast emptiness. I later found out that it's a valley, the valley of the Pedernales River. It's about seventy-five miles long and fifteen miles across.

When I stood there looking down on it that first time, for a few minutes I didn't see a single sign of human life in that immense space. Then something happened—a cloud moved from in front of the sun perhaps, and suddenly in the middle of this emptiness the sun was glinting off a little huddle of houses. That was Johnson City. When Lyndon Johnson was growing up in that town, three hundred and twenty-three people lived there; when I arrived, there were only a few hundred more. As I stood on that hill, I realized that I was looking at something, was about to drive down into something, unlike anything I had ever seen before, in its emptiness, its loneliness, its isolation.

At that time, Ina and I were working in the Johnson Library. We worked from nine to five, when the library closed, and then I would hurry out to my car and drive to the Hill Country to interview one of the men or women who had grown up with Lyndon Johnson.

Johnson died at sixty-four. At the time I started my biography, he would have been only sixty-seven. So most of the people who went to high school or college with him were still alive, and, in fact, were still living in or around Johnson City.

If Truman Fawcett, one of his best friends in high school, had lived back then on the other side of the courthouse square, well, Truman Fawcett was still living on the other side of the courthouse square. Kitty Clyde Ross, Lyndon Johnson's first girlfriend (until her parents made her stop seeing him, because he was "a Johnson"), was Kitty Clyde Leonard now, but she was still in Johnson City, available to be talked to (and asked what it had been like to take the ride on Air Force One that Lyndon had given her when he became President).

I had thought I would have to write only a chapter or two on Johnson's youth, and wouldn't have to do much research for it. At the time I started, there were already seven biographies of Johnson in print, and they all related the same anecdotes, which portrayed young Lyndon as a sort of Horatio Alger hero of the Hill Country, smiling and popular, who had risen through ambition and hard work. Wonderful anecdotes, some of them. Poor boy making his way in the world. I thought that, thanks to those books, I already knew the basic story of his youth. Though I lacked enough detail or a sense of what the Hill Country was like, I thought I could provide that detail through some interviews, and that was all I would need to do.

I found the interviews unexpectedly difficult, however—very difficult, in fact. Some of the people who had known Lyndon lived on isolated ranches or farms. I would drive sixty or seventy miles on a highway and then ("Look for the cattle guard on the left") turn off onto an unpaved track that might go for fifteen or twenty miles. At the end of it would be a house, the only one for miles, and in it a couple (or a widow; there seemed to be a disproportionate number of widows in the Hill Country) who weren't accustomed to having long conversations with strangers.

The barrier was not simply a shyness that I could eventually break down. There was a kind of reticence, a holding back, in their conversations with me, a laconic quality. There was a real honorableness about them, too. They weren't going to

lie. If you asked them a question, they would always tell you the truth. But they also felt—quite deeply—that it was wrong to say anything derogatory about a man who had become President of the United States. I'd repeat the wonderful anecdotes that were in the other biographies, and the most someone might volunteer was "Well, that's not quite what happened." They wouldn't say what actually *had* happened, and were very chary about giving me any details. I began to sense a deep reluctance to tell me the whole story, or even the true story—to reveal to an outsider what Lyndon Johnson had really been like as a youth and a young man. Equally disturbing, the more I talked to them the more I realized that it wasn't just the young Lyndon Johnson I wasn't understanding; the same was true of the people to whom I was talking. I wasn't understanding them, either—their culture, their mores—and I didn't know how to break through.

Part of the problem, I came to realize, was that they had talked to too many people like me. During Johnson's Presidency, journalists from all over the United States, from every major magazine and newspaper (and a lot of minor ones), had come to the Hill Country, had spent three or four days there (or as much as a week), and had gone home to explain this remote place to the rest of America. Hill Country people had a name for them: "portable journalists." They basically thought I was a portable journalist, too.

I said to Ina, "I'm not understanding these people and therefore I'm not understanding Lyndon Johnson. We're going to have to move to the Hill Country and live there." Ina asked, "Why can't you do a biography of Napoleon?" But Ina is always Ina: loyal and true. She said, as she always says, "Sure." We rented a house on the edge of the Hill Country, where we lived for much of the next three years.

That changed everything. As soon as we moved there, as soon as the people of the Hill Country realized we were there to stay, their attitude toward us softened; they started to talk to me in a different way. I began to hear the details

they had not included in the anecdotes they had previously told me, and they told me anecdotes and stories that no one had even mentioned to me before—stories about a Lyndon Johnson very different from the young man who had previously been portrayed: about a very unusual young man, a very brilliant young man, a very ambitious, unscrupulous, and quite ruthless person, disliked and even despised, and, by people who knew him especially well, even beginning to be feared.

IV. SAM HOUSTON JOHNSON

Living in the Hill Country also allowed me to get to know Lyndon's younger brother, Sam Houston Johnson.

I had, of course, interviewed Sam Houston several times already, while we were still living in Austin. He had a reputation not only for a severe drinking problem but for bravado, braggadocio, for exaggeration that bordered on untruthfulness, and I had found the reputation fully justified. It didn't ameliorate my feelings for him that he played the archetypal Texan: big hat, big boots, a bottle of Tabasco sauce that he always carried in his pocket because food was never spicy enough for him; and, I felt, big—tall—stories. He told me the same stories about Lyndon that others had, but with fanciful details added, all to glorify his brother, but it seemed to me that every detail in his anecdotes that could be checked would, when I checked it, turn out to be either exaggerated or entirely false. Feeling that I had wasted enough time checking, I had decided to simply not use anything he told me.

I didn't see Sam Houston for perhaps a year.

During this interval, I heard that he had had a difficult operation for cancer, that he had to use a cane all the time now, and that he had stopped drinking. Then, one day, I was walking around the streets of Johnson City. I was there a lot, just chatting with people, trying to absorb the atmosphere; walking the sidewalks, a

few paved, some wooden, some just dust; saying "Howdy" to everyone I met; trying to remember that the pronoun was not "you" but "y'all." And there he was, limping toward me, shrunken, frail. We went to have a cup of coffee at Casparis' Café. (You ventured too far beyond coffee in that café at your peril. Lady Bird Johnson told me once, in a rare moment of acerbity, that when forced to eat there she always ordered eggs: "There isn't too much they can do to eggs.") I found the man sitting next to me at the counter now a changed man—quiet, calm, all the braggadocio gone. I decided to try interviewing him again.

By this time, I had interviewed Lyndon Johnson's sister Rebekah, and also three cleaning women who had, at one time or another, worked in the Johnson home. After talking to them, I felt that a key to Johnson's youth—to his character throughout his life, in fact, the character that had had such a profound impact on American history—was his complicated relationship with his father, Sam Ealy Johnson, whom he strikingly resembled, not only in appearance but in manner. It was a relationship that veered from idolization to hatred, and I didn't have a clear picture of it, or enough detail to make my readers see it. Here was someone who had seen it every day, including every evening, when Lyndon and his father sat down with the family for dinner. And I had thought of a device that I hoped might elicit from Sam Houston the true picture of that relationship; that might put him back, in his mind, into his childhood, that might make his memory of the relationship as clear to him as possible.

I persuaded the National Park Service to allow Sam Houston and me to go into the Johnson Boyhood Home, in Johnson City, which had been faithfully re-created to look as it had when Lyndon was growing up in it. And one evening, after it had officially closed for the day, and was empty, with the tourists and guides all gone, I took Sam Houston Johnson into the house in which he had been a boy.

I led him into the dining room. There was a long plank table, just like the one

around which the Johnsons had gathered for meals. At its head and foot were high-backed chairs, for the father and mother. When the Johnsons had dined there, Rebekah and her two sisters had sat on one side of the table, and Lyndon and Sam Houston had sat on the other.

I asked Sam Houston to sit in the same place he had sat as a boy. Despite his lameness, he threw a leg over one of the chairs, put his cane down next to it, and, pulling his other leg over, sat down, next to his father's old chair, as if he were a boy sitting there again.

I didn't sit down at the table. I sat instead behind Sam Houston, in a chair against the wall, and it was sitting there that I opened my notebook. I didn't want anyone at that table who was not one of the Johnsons of Johnson City.

It was about the same time as dinnertime in Johnson City long ago. Rays of the low evening sun came into the dining room and cast shadows, the same shadows the sun would have cast when Sam Houston sat there as a boy.

"Now, Sam Houston," I said, "I'd like you to tell me about those arguments that your father and Lyndon used to have at dinnertime."

At first, it was slow going, halting, just fragments of generalized memory, and I had to keep interjecting ("And then what?") to keep it going at all. But, once Sam Houston started remembering, the memories, strikingly different from others he had previously given, began coming clearer and faster, until finally no interjections were necessary, and there were no pauses: Sam Houston was re-creating family dinners at the Johnsons', saying, almost shouting, back and forth, what his father had shouted at his brother, and what his brother had shouted back: " 'You're just not college material, are you, goddammit? You're just a failure, Lyndon, and you're always going to be a failure . . .' And Lyndon would shout back, 'What are *you*? You're a bus inspector, that's what you are! . . .' 'Sam! Sam!' Mother would say . . . 'Lyndon! Lyndon!' "

And when, finally, after quite a long time, Sam Houston had stopped talking, and was sitting quietly, very quiet and still, so still that I felt he was in the grip of memory, memory as true as it could be after all these years, I said to him, "Now, Sam Houston, I want you to tell me again all those wonderful stories about Lyndon when you both were boys, the stories you told me before—just tell me them again with more details."

There was a long pause. I can still see the scene—see the little, stunted, crippled man sitting at the long plank table, see the shadows in the room, see myself, not wanting to move lest I break the spell, sitting there against the wall with my notebook, saying, "Tell me those wonderful stories again."

"I can't," Sam Houston said.

"Why not?" I asked.

"Because they never happened."

Then, in my memory without a pause from Sam Houston or a question from me, he simply started talking—my notes tell me he began by saying, "No one really understood what happened"—and related, incident after incident, anecdotes of Lyndon Johnson's youth, some of which I had heard before in shorter, incomplete, and softened versions and others that had never been mentioned to me, or, I felt, to anyone else. The shadows lengthened, the room grew darker. The voice went on.

By the time, a long time later, that it stopped, I had a different picture of Lyndon Johnson's youth—that terrible youth, that character-hardening youth—from the one that I, or history, had had before. And now, when I went back to the men and women who had been involved in the incidents, and, armed with the details Sam Houston had given me, asked again about these incidents, I got different responses than I had gotten before. Yes, that's what happened, they would say.

And often they would say, There's something else I remember. More details would come. The story at last would be coherent—and closer to the truth.

V. TRICKS OF THE TRADE

In interviews, silence is the weapon, silence and people's need to fill it—as long as the person isn't you, the interviewer. Two of fiction's greatest interviewers—Georges Simenon's Inspector Maigret and John le Carré's George Smiley—have little devices they use to keep themselves from talking and to let silence do its work. Maigret cleans his ever-present pipe, tapping it gently on his desk and then scraping it out until the witness breaks down and talks. Smiley takes off his eyeglasses and polishes them with the thick end of his necktie. As for me, I have less class. When I'm waiting for the person I'm interviewing to break a silence by giving me a piece of information I want, I write "SU" (for Shut Up!) in my notebook. If anyone were ever to look through my notebooks, he would find a lot of "SU"s.

VI. LADY BIRD JOHNSON

There was only one topic about which, during an interview, I didn't dare to ask a single question—or even dare to look at the person I was interviewing, who was Lady Bird Johnson. The topic was Alice Glass.

I had been intending to deal in only a few lines with the many women with whom Lyndon Johnson had had sex. This was less because of some ethical or moral conception of my responsibilities as an author than because, although these affairs were numerous, none of them seemed to mean anything to him personally or to have any connection with his political or governmental activities.

But, while turning pages in a folder filled largely with press releases, whose label, "Public Activities—Biographic Information—Naval Career," hinted very

strongly that turning pages in this folder would be a total waste of time, I came across an age-browned Western Union form that Johnson had received in Australia: "CHARLES BELIEVES YOU SHOULD FILE FOR SENATE," it said. "POLLS SHOW YOU LEADING. NO ONE ELSE SHARES HIS OPINION ENTHUSIASTICALLY. IF POSSIBLE, TELEPHONE. LOVE, ALICE MARSH."

I knew what the telegram was referring to because of another telegram, which I had found in the Roosevelt Papers, at Hyde Park. In 1942, Texas would hold an election for a U.S. senator, and Johnson, instead of running for reëlection to Congress, wanted to enter the Democratic primary, whose winner would almost certainly be elected in that then solidly Democratic state. President Roosevelt, who had given his backing to the state's former governor, James V. Allred, didn't want Johnson to run. Johnson, who ordinarily would not have even considered defying F.D.R.'s wishes, had at first agreed to support Allred, but in May, 1942, he was having second thoughts. Among the Roosevelt Papers was a copy of a telegram from the Presidential secretary Marvin McIntyre, warning Johnson very firmly to put those thoughts out of his mind. I knew who "Charles" was, of course. Charles Marsh was crucially important to Johnson's early career, not only as the publisher of the only district-wide daily newspaper in Johnson's congressional district but also as an immensely wealthy man with strong paternal feelings toward the young congressman. Trying to free Johnson from financial worries, he had already taken a step in that direction, by selling him a tract of land in Austin at a price far below its value. Alice Marsh must have been Charles's wife. But why, I wondered as I read the telegram, would she be writing Johnson in Australia with political advice—advice that, whether or not the telegram was the reason, he had followed? I called for the "Marsh, Charles" folder in the "Selected Names" collection, and in it, amid many communications from Marsh to Johnson, was one, in August, 1942, from Marsh's wife. "HOPE WE CAN HAVE THAT BIRTHDAY PARTY," it said.

About that time, two other things happened. For the first I might give myself a

little credit; the other was due to nothing but pure luck. Among the boxes for which Alan Hathway's stricture had proved repeatedly golden were twelve grouped under the heading "Pre-Presidential Confidential File," which, the library's description said, contained "material taken from other files because it dealt with potentially sensitive areas." Among the letters and memoranda in Box 10 of this file was a large manila envelope. On it someone had written, "To be opened only by LBJ or JBC." Next to it was what had been inside: a leather travelling portfolio containing four photographs of an elegant, attractive woman. I had no idea who she was; I had never seen another picture of that person—and, when I asked the archivists, none of them had, either. I couldn't ask "JBC," since at the time John Bowden Connally wasn't talking to me.

That was the first of the two things. The second, which came out of nowhere, occurred not long afterward. The telephone on the archivist's desk in the Reading Room rang, and it was the reception desk downstairs in the lobby. There were two women down there who wanted to talk to me. When I went down, one of the women said that they had read "The Power Broker," and, therefore, "we know you're going to find out about Alice." She said that she was Alice's sister. "I was her best friend," the other put in. The sister said, "We don't want her portrayed as just another bimbo. She was much, much more than that. We want to tell you about her." And the friend, Alice Hopkins, said, "Lyndon's relationship with her wasn't like anything else in his life."

Over coffee in the Villa Capri café, they told me about Alice, who was not, at the time of the photographs, Alice Marsh but still Alice Glass. Her sister, Mary Louise Glass, took out her wallet and showed me her photograph, which of course showed the woman in the leather travelling portfolio, and told me that if I wanted to find out more about her I should go to their home town, Marlin, Texas, and there talk particularly to Posh Oltorf, the Brown & Root lobbyist, who had been Alice's close platonic friend.

Over the next few weeks, Ina and I drove up to that sleepy little town in the middle of nowhere several times, and heard enough to know that Alice Glass was in truth not just another bimbo; that although, as I was to write, "Alice Glass was from a country town . . . she was never a country girl." She had come to Austin as a secretary to a state legislator; as one legislator recalled, "Austin had never seen anything like her," a woman a shade under six feet tall, with reddish-blond hair that, if she loosened it, fell to her waist, creamy-white skin, and classic features that prompted the famed photographer Arnold Genthe to call her the "most beautiful woman" he had ever seen. On the same night Charles Marsh met her, they became lovers, and within weeks he left his wife and children and took her East; and when, on a trip to England, she saw the majestic eighteenth-century manor house called Longlea, he built her a replica of it on a thousand-acre estate in the Virginia Hunt Country, where she led the Hazelmere Hunt ("The only thing Texas about Alice was her riding," a friend told me. "She could *really* ride"), and created a glittering salon of journalists and politicians—to which, in 1937, the new congressman from Texas was invited, and soon began coming on a regular basis.

At first, Alice's sister and her friend said, Johnson brought Lady Bird, but soon, they said, "he would leave her on weekends, weekend after weekend," and come to Longlea, where "sometimes Charles would be there, and sometimes Charles wouldn't be there." Lyndon and Alice had become lovers, and the affair lasted for years, right under the nose of a man vitally important to Lyndon's career.

I heard enough to ascertain that Johnson's long affair with Alice was indeed unlike any affair he had with any other woman. The advice that Alice gave him —always to wear custom-made shirts with French cuffs and cufflinks, to make his long, ungainly arms look elegant rather than awkward; always to be photographed from the left side, because that side of his face looked better; to wear Countess Mara neckties—he followed slavishly for the rest of his life.

But it was the advice she gave him about politics that made the affair interesting to me. On one occasion, during that first year, 1937, she came up with a solution to a problem that was threatening to end his congressional career almost before it began. Posh Oltorf and Ed Clark (George Brown's most trusted lawyer) told me that, late in 1937, Lyndon and Herman Brown, the fierce ruler of Brown & Root, were on a "collision course." Although Johnson had secured some installments of the financing for the dam that Brown & Root was building outside Austin, he was also, in order to create a federal low-income-housing project in Austin, arranging for the city to condemn rental houses owned by Herman that were making a good profit. Johnson was refusing to back down, and Herman had had enough of the young congressman. "He was going to turn on Lyndon," Posh told me, "and if Herman turned on you he would never turn back." Then Alice said to Charles Marsh, "Why don't you fix things up between them? Why don't you suggest that they compromise—give Herman the dam, and let Lyndon have the land?" The advice did indeed fix things up between them.

Moreover, Posh and Clark and (later) John Connally all told me, Alice had a political mind that made her advice on politics worth listening to, so much so that there were moments when her advice was influential in Lyndon Johnson's decisions—as it had been in 1942, when she sent the telegram to him about running for the Senate. That made the affair, to my thinking, significant enough to be included in my book. It was significant also because, as I was to write, it "juts out of the landscape" of Lyndon Johnson's life "as one of the few episodes in it and perhaps the only one that ran counter to his personal ambition"; he was, in the words of one observer, "taking one hell of a chance" with the man in his district who was perhaps most important to his continuation in office. It demonstrated as well his talent for secrecy; his fawning over Marsh didn't let up during the years he was sleeping with Marsh's mistress, and Marsh's support of him, both editorial and financial, and his fondness for him, never faltered.

Moreover, as I learned, Alice's feelings toward Lyndon provide insight into certain aspects of his career. She fell in love with him, her sister and her best friend (and Posh Oltorf and others) told me, because, deeply idealistic herself, she was entranced by his stories, told over the dinner table and around the swimming pool at Longlea, of how hard life in the Hill Country was, and how he was getting the dams built and the electricity brought to make that life easier. She considered Lyndon an idealist, too, an idealist who knew how to get things done. "She thought," Mary Louise Glass told me, "he was a young man who was going to save the world." But that impression endured only until he invited Alice out to the West Coast, in 1942, when she became disillusioned by the contrast between the grim battles being reported daily in the newspapers and Johnson's activities in Los Angeles, which included screenings, parties, and long sessions with a Hollywood photographer and a voice coach. Posh showed me (and gave me a copy of) a letter Alice had written him years later, jokingly suggesting that they write a book together on the true Lyndon Johnson: "I can write a very illuminating chapter on his military career in Los Angeles, with photographs, letters from voice teachers, and photographers."

The passion eventually faded from the relationship, although perhaps not completely; Alice finally married Charles Marsh, but divorced him, and married and divorced several times after that. "She never got over Lyndon," Alice Hopkins said. Even when Johnson was a senator, he would drive down to Longlea to see her. But, Posh told me, Vietnam was too much for her; she told Posh that she had burned love letters Johnson had written her, because she was ashamed of her friendship with the man she regarded as responsible for the escalation of the war.

One evening, Posh called me. "Bird knows you've been to Marlin," he said, in a panic-stricken voice. "So she knows you know about Alice."

At that time, I was interviewing Mrs. Johnson every few weeks in her office at

the Johnson Library, and I was scheduled to see her there that Saturday. On Friday, one of her secretaries came to my desk in the Reading Room. "Mrs. Johnson would like to see you at the ranch on Saturday," she said. "Come for lunch."

Mrs. Johnson and I sat in the dining room, she at the head of the table, I at her right hand. The stenographer's notebook in which I took notes was to the right of my plate, and after she began talking I didn't look up from it.

Without a word of preamble, she started talking about Alice Glass. She had known her slightly when she, Lady Bird, was a student at the University of Texas and Alice had been working in the capitol, she said. Even then, Lady Bird said, "she was quite an intellectual girl and, you felt, destined for more exciting things than being a legislator's secretary." Then, she said, when "we saw them again in Washington, she was even prettier, and just dressed so beautifully. She was very tall, and elegant—really beautiful, in a sort of Amazonian way."

I kept taking notes, my eyes down on my notebook. I found it impossible to look at Mrs. Johnson. She talked about Longlea. "My eyes were just out on stems," she said. "They would have interesting people from the world of art and literature and politics. It was the closest I ever came to a salon in my life. . . . There was a dinner table with ever so much crystal and silver." And she talked about the contrast between Alice and her, with nothing in her voice but admiration: "I remember Alice in a series of long and elegant dresses, and me in —well, much less elegant." She talked about how Alice had given Lyndon such good advice, about cufflinks, for example. "Lyndon always followed that." Lyndon followed religiously any advice Alice gave him, she said. There was no looking up. She kept returning to Alice's height and beauty. Once, she recalled, when Charles Marsh was talking about the threat the rising Adolf Hitler posed for the world, she, Lady Bird, had said, "Maybe Alice can help us fight him. She's so tall and blond she looks like a Valkyrie."

The admiration in her voice never wavered. I'm sure that I was too old to blush; I just, I am sure, *felt* as if I were blushing. The next week, we met in her office, for another long, immensely helpful interview, on other topics, during which I was able to look at her again.

VII. THE LAST VOLUME

I am constantly being asked why it takes me so long to finish my books. Well, it's the research that takes the time—the research and whatever it is in me that makes the research take so very much longer than I had planned. I'm currently working on the fifth and final book in "The Years of Lyndon Johnson," about the nineteen-sixties. I am also planning to write a full-scale memoir, describing in some detail my experiences in researching and writing my books about Robert Moses and Lyndon Johnson—my experiences in learning about these two men and their methods of acquiring and using power—and also the efforts that were made to keep me from learning about these men and their methods.

Which leads to a final question: Why am I publishing these random recollections toward a memoir while I'm still working on the last volume of the Johnson biography, when I haven't finished it, while I'm still—at the age of eighty-three—several years from finishing it? Why don't I just include this material in the longer, full-length memoir I'm hoping to write?

The answer is, I'm afraid, quite obvious, and, if I forget it for a few days, I am frequently reminded of it, by journalists who, in writing about me and my hope of finishing, often express their doubts in a sarcastic phrase: "Do the math." Well, I *can* do that math. I am well aware that I may never get to write the memoir, although I have so many thoughts about writing, so many anecdotes about research, that I would like to preserve for anyone interested enough to read them. I decided that, just in case, I'd put some of them down on paper

now. ♦

This article appears in the print edition of the January 28, 2019, issue, with the headline "Turn Every Page."

Robert A. Caro has won two Pulitzer Prizes, two National Book Awards, and three National Book Critics Circle Awards. His new book, "Working," will be published in April. *Read more »*