

Oral History Interview
with
ROBERTA BARROWS

Stenographer-typist, Hoover White House; Secretary to appointments secretaries of Presidents Roosevelt, Truman, and Eisenhower.

Washington, D.C.
June 11, 1987

by Niel M. Johnson, Harry S. Truman Library

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JOHNSON: I'm going to start out, Miss Barrows, by asking you if you would tell us when and where you were born and what your parents' names were.

BARROWS: I was born in Waynesville, Pulaski County, Missouri, on April 30, 1900. My mother was Louella Mitchell Barrows. She was born on a farm in adjoining Laclede County. My father's name was William Joseph Barrows, and he was born in Laclede County, in Lebanon, Missouri.

JOHNSON: So they're Missourians.

BARROWS: But that had nothing to do with Mr. Truman; he only knew me as a White House employee.

JOHNSON: Did you go to school there then?

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BARROWS: No. I came here when I was six years old.

JOHNSON: You came to Washington?

BARROWS: Washington, D.C.

My father came in 1901, with our Congressman whose name I do not recall. He first worked in the Census Bureau, and later in the Wilson administration he was deputy to the Postmaster General.

JOHNSON: So he was in the Census Bureau and then the Post Office.

BARROWS: Yes. And I lived on Capitol Hill, in a big three story house.

JOHNSON: Near the Capitol Building?

BARROWS: We were eight blocks from the Capitol Building.

JOHNSON: Do you remember the address?

BARROWS: 907 Massachusetts Avenue, N.E. I lived there until 1951.

JOHNSON: You lived in that same building until 1951, from the age of six?

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BARROWS: No. At first we rented, a few blocks away, but the house wasn't quite large enough, so we bought the Massachusetts Avenue house. I don't recall the year they bought it. I was still in grade school; I do remember that.

JOHNSON: So you went to elementary schools here?

BARROWS: I went to elementary school and high school, Central High School, which is now Cordozo. It was called Old Central High School, but it doesn't exist under that name. I went two years to Felix Mahoney's School of Fine and Applied Arts, which has gone, long since. Then my father died and I went to business school and learned to be a stenographer.

JOHNSON: What school was that?

BARROWS: I went to two. The first one was the Washington School for Secretaries, and the second one was the Temple. I think that's correct.

JOHNSON: Temple?

BARROWS: One of them is still in existence; I think the first one.

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JOHNSON: This was after you got your high school diploma?

BARROWS: Yes. I then went to art school. After father's death, I had to go to work. I did work first at Suffrage headquarters, where my mother was active. That was where the Supreme Court Building now stands. It was called the National Woman's Party, and was run by the women who had picketed the White House in the First World War. One of them happened to have been my French teacher. My mother used to go there but, of course, she didn't have the time to really do anything but fold envelopes and stuff them, that kind of thing. Women had the vote by then. At that time they had what they called the Bill of Rights, trying to get it through Congress. It was sponsored by, of all people, Senators [Kenneth D.] McKellar and Cordell Hull, both of Tennessee. When my father died I went to work for the National Woman's Party at a very small salary. I liked it.

JOHNSON: What year would this be?

BARROWS: 1922; that's my recollection.

JOHNSON: Your father died in 1922?

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BARROWS: In June of 1922. Then I went to business school.

JOHNSON: Then you went to business school, and lived with your mother?

BARROWS: Yes, I lived at home. I could walk up to Suffrage headquarters. It's too bad they razed that building. I'm positive that now they would not have been allowed to, because it was the old Capitol. When the British burned the Capitol, they [Americans] used that as the capitol building. And the Supreme Court met there. In my childhood, it consisted of three gray, slate-colored enormous mansions, which were boarding homes. Washington didn't have many apartments at that time. And then the National Woman's Party bought it, but I don't know when. I think in 1923 it was razed and the Supreme Court was built. But during the Civil War it was a Federal prison, and when Lincoln was assassinated, all of the culprits except Booth were quickly dumped into it. Even as a girl, when we'd go downstairs in the basement to get flags and things for big parades, you could still see the remains of the cells left from the Civil War.

JOHNSON: That was where those implicated in the assassination were held?

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BARROWS: Yes. Even before, during the Civil War, it was a Union prison, and only for officers, usually Confederate naval officers.

JOHNSON: Were you an only child?

BARROWS: No. My mother had five daughters and two sons. Only one son lived.

JOHNSON: So you are one of six...

BARROWS: I'm the baby.

JOHNSON: Oh, you're the youngest.

BARROWS: The only one left, the afterthought.

JOHNSON: Did any of your brothers go into Government, Federal service?

BARROWS: No, they did not. My oldest sister and my brother were married about a year before we came here. The rest of them came to Washington and were married here. When we moved here they were young too.

JOHNSON: You're the only survivor now.

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BARROWS: The last one died three years ago. They were all married; I'm the only single one.

JOHNSON: After your father died, you began work then as a...

BARROWS: I took the Civil Service exam after working for the National Woman's Party. I don't know why -- I didn't enjoy business school. I wanted to be an artist. It's just as well, I'm sure.

JOHNSON: But you were still able to do it as a hobby weren't you?

BARROWS: In other words, what happened to me was never my own doing. I was dragged, screaming as it were. So then I took the Civil Service Examination. I went to work in a small office called the Intelligence Unit of the Bureau of Internal Revenue. The Intelligence Unit was new then, and it was an investigatory unit. It was ridiculous; it not only investigated people's income tax, it investigated their personal morals. They also enforced the Prohibition Act. I was young enough to enjoy that too. I worked there for about six years during Mr. Coolidge's administration,

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and I traveled some. They'd take me on trips. That was before the FBI was put under Civil Service. Edgar Hoover -- I remember him when he was young -- was head of it. We interviewed

bootleggers when they'd catch them. It was all a big joke really. We'd take their deposition; they'd go to jail for a day or two and come out and start in again.

JOHNSON: So you had to type transcripts of those interviews -- you had to record and...

BARROWS: I took it in shorthand. I had taken speedwriting. I would go to Savannah. There in Savannah were the "rum runners," as they called them then, going by boat between the Carribean islands and Cuba, to Georgia, and Florida. I've forgotten how many trips I made down there. There was one chap, I've forgotten his name, Willie somebody.

JOHNSON: To take depositions?

BARROWS: Yes. He was the Al Capone of the South.

JOHNSON: Now what year did you start work for the Intelligence Unit?

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BARROWS: 1923.

JOHNSON: So you've had a long career with the Federal Government.

BARROWS: Yes, I really have.

JOHNSON: How long did that job last?

BARROWS: Well, that lasted about four years until I went over to the Board of Tax Appeals, as it was called then. It's now called the United States Tax Court. It was then downtown in the Earle Building.

JOHNSON: What year was that?

BARROWS: I don't know, in the late 1920s. A friend of mine told me of this wonderful place to work in which each judge had two law clerks; I think there were twelve judges. Each judge had a secretary, and then the law clerks shared a secretary. They paid good salaries, and in the summertime the judges -- most were men of wealth -- would go to their summer homes. Life was pretty soft. That's really why I went there.

JOHNSON: So you started working there then.

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BARROWS: Well, I knew the head judge.

JOHNSON: Talking about going to the summer homes and so on, what kind of...

BARROWS: I didn't get to that point. I never saw a summer home.

JOHNSON: What kind of vacations, and what kind of pay did they give in those days?

BARROWS: Let's see, I got about \$2,300 a year. I went in in February of 1929. I was in New York in '28 working for the Intelligence Unit taking depositions. I had my mother come up, and A1 Smith was the candidate against Hoover that year. Of course, we were for A1 Smith. I do remember where I was and what happened there. I had applied for the other job, and when I came home I got it. I went to work for the Tax Board in February of '29.

I loved the Tax Board. It was a court, but hadn't been named a court. In July the Chief Judge, who was an old friend from other days, called me into his office and said, "I have to tell you this; the White House, under Mr. Hoover, doesn't have enough help. Heretofore

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the White House only had male help, but the girls who came in with Hoover and have been with him for years in his career, are just about exhausted. They've sent out a man to the Civil Service and they've looked up records, and they looked at yours and they've told me you have to be released and sent over for an interview." I said, "Oh, please, couldn't you get someone else?" "No," he replied, "because you're the last girl we employed. I'll tell you, I'll promise you this, if you don't like it, stay three months and I'll make someone else go." Nobody wanted to go.

JOHNSON: No one wanted to go to the White House?

BARROWS: No, you have no idea. The White House was a nice place I'm sure, but no women worked there.

JOHNSON: Is that right?

BARROWS: Really.

JOHNSON: All male secretaries in there?

BARROWS: I think there was always a female social secretary on the distaff side, but never on the President's side in the West Wing.

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JOHNSON: This judge that you were working for, what was his name?

BARROWS: Benjamin Littleton.

JOHNSON: Littleton?

BARROWS: From Tennessee, a Republican.

JOHNSON: So now you're in with the Republicans.

BARROWS: East Tennessee. Politics made very little difference in the Government then, none at all. You know, if you read the papers they always say, "Washington, before World War II, was a little southern town." Well, I never lived in a little southern town to remember, but I guess it was. We were not impressed with the White House. You might come in from lunch and say, "Oh, I just saw the President and "Mrs. Whoseit' come out and take a ride," or something. "Oh, you did!" And that would be it. Mr. Coolidge took a walk every day after his nap. I can at least remember two instances when I was walking on F Street looking into windows at clothes, and bumped into Mr. Coolidge and the Secret Service.

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JOHNSON: Is that right?

BARROWS: Right with the crowd. Everybody paused.

JOHNSON: Did he have just one or two Secret Service men with him?

BARROWS: Yes. Two I think; I don't know.

JOHNSON: But you would literally bump into him on the sidewalk?

BARROWS: Everybody would stop and smile, and he'd bow. He liked to walk and he loved to look in store windows; I understand he selected his wife's clothes.

JOHNSON: Did you tour the White House? Did you ever tour the White House before you...

BARROWS: I suppose I must have; we always had a lot of visitors.

JOHNSON: So you did go up to the White House to work for Hoover then?

BARROWS: I went over and we interviewed in the lobby. I told the Civil Service scout that I preferred not to

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come if he could possibly find someone else. That was the Fourth of July weekend.

JOHNSON: In '29.

BARROWS: In '29, and I can remember how hopeful I was that I wouldn't have to go, after having rather begged off to the gentleman at the White House as politely as I could. But when I got to work the Monday after the holiday, I was called in again by the Chief Judge and he said, "You're it, you have to go. But I'll still give you my promise. I'll have you relieved in three months if you want to come back." He didn't blame me. So I went. I worked first in a room in the West Wing. I presume it would be called a basement, but the windows were level with the sidewalk -- very comfortable.

JOHNSON: In the West Wing.

BARROWS: Yes. At that time only this room and the file room were on that lower floor.

JOHNSON: When the President went from the living quarters to the oval office in the West Wing, would you see him go by?

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BARROWS: Not from that location.

JOHNSON: Okay. So who did you work for? Who was your immediate supervisor?

BARROWS: I'm trying to think. I guess whoever sent for me. I presume now we would all it a stenographic pool. Mr. Hoover had a press secretary for the first time. He had a legislative secretary, who was an ex-Congressman from the Middlewest, for the first time. And he had an all around, very close secretary, who ran the White House.

JOHNSON: Do you remember her name?

BARROWS: Him. These were all "hims." His name was Larry Richey. He really was a Italian, and the name had been anglicized I've been told. He had been with Mr. Hoover for many, many years in his career. Of course, Mr. Hoover was a very rich man. He had been with him in England where he had lived most of his adult business life. The Hoovers lived in England just out of London. And he, Mr. Richey, was the boss.

JOHNSON: What kind of correspondence did you handle, or

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did you handle correspondence?

BARROWS: Well, I took dictation from the first person to send for me; I wouldn't be sure. Oh, he had one other man, a speechwriter, French Strother. He had been Doubleday Publishers, and he was a Democrat. Oddly, enough, I believe he was from Missouri too.

JOHNSON: What kind of work did you have to do then?

BARROWS: Well, I can't remember exactly, mostly correspondence. You would be sent for. Also, that first summer, each girl was assigned a night, and mine was Thursday. You got off at 1 o'clock, and did what you pleased. Then you came back to the White House after dinner, and you went to the main mansion and you sat in what was then called the Social Room down in the basement. In the daylight it was the Social office where all the invitations and such were handled. You read a book; did anything you liked until the President went to bed. Luckily for most of us, the President retired fairly early. That was the main reason we were hired I think, as he often attended to his mail in the evenings.

JOHNSON: In other words, you started to work about what

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time in the morning?

BARROWS: At nine.

JOHNSON: At nine and then at 1 o'clock you left.

BARROWS: Now that was just one day a week.

JOHNSON: And then you'd come back about dinner time, and stay until he went to bed?

BARROWS: And stay until he went to bed; you were to be there if he called for you.

JOHNSON: And that was one day a week.

BARROWS: And my day was Thursday.

JOHNSON: What about the other days? What were the hours?

BARROWS: The odds were that you would be sent for sometime during the day by one of those upstairs secretaries, the gentlemen that I mentioned.

JOHNSON: But your regular working day was what hours?

BARROWS: Nine to 5:00.

JOHNSON: Did you type up speeches? Do you remember doing

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anything like that?

BARROWS: No, not then.

JOHNSON: This was all correspondence?

BARROWS: Yes. It was July, when the President sent for me the first time, on the evening shift. I think in all he never sent for anybody more than three times, and I happened to have been called twice. And it was an ordeal.

He had the reputation of being a charmer, but he hid it well. He was timid with women I understand.

JOHNSON: Did you take dictation?

BARROWS: Yes, shaking in every bone. He chewed a cigar – unlit -- and he never looked at you.

JOHNSON: Is that right?

BARROWS: And I never could hear him.

JOHNSON: And he's chomping on this cigar while he was talking, while he was dictating?

BARROWS: It was pretty awful. He was trying to put you at ease, I understand, and it was too bad.

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JOHNSON: Did you have to ask him once in a while to stop and...

BARROWS: I had to have help. I would go to the three girls who had come in with him and been with him for years. I presume when he dictated to any of them he wasn't self-conscious. I don't know.

JOHNSON: So he was kind of shy, you are saying?

BARROWS: Of women, shy of women. So I was told, because I wondered why anybody in the world would do that.

JOHNSON: So he dictated at least three or four letters to you?

BARROWS: At Christmas 1929, the girls who had come in with him, went home for Christmas. I was the only person there then that worked a great deal for the people upstairs, and they knew me. They were awfully nice to me. So they brought me upstairs, put me in Mr. Richey's outer room by myself. The President was right across the hall. They've remodeled the offices since. So I had to cover the President for Christmas. It was awful.

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JOHNSON: Wow. Now, are you talking about the Oval Office when you say office, or...

BARROWS: I was across the hall from the Oval Office. The Oval Office was in the middle. On the left was the Cabinet room, and on the right was the appointments secretary's office. There was a hall about 12 feet wide where I sat in one room, and back of that Mr. Richey, the boss, had his office. I mean that's where I landed at Christmas. So that was my beginning up the ladder...

JOHNSON: Did it have a room number?

BARROWS: Oh, no. Very informal.

JOHNSON: Down the hall was the Press Secretary's office?

BARROWS: I was about 12 feet from the President's door.

JOHNSON: About 12 feet is all. Right next to the Press Secretary's office?

BARROWS: No, next to the big boss, Mr. Richey's office. This was just for Christmastime. So I worked during the holiday for Mr. Richey, all I could. I liked him a lot,

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and he was quite dear to help me. I would stumble into the President's office when he rang, which was seldom, and somehow I got through it. From then on, I became better known, and they didn't send me back downstairs. Where did I go? I can't tell you exactly. I landed in the legislative secretary's office; his name was Walter Newton and he was awfully nice. He had what seemed to me then a very old secretary; I'm sure she must have been 40! She was very kind to me.

JOHNSON: What was her name?

BARROWS: Potter, Mrs. Potter, a widow, a newspaperman's widow. I believe they were from Minnesota. I stayed in that office. George Akerson was the Press Secretary; he was from Minneapolis. He sort of liked me and the first thing you know, he wanted me. There was a little rumpus, but I landed there. In the meantime, I got a little fed up with it all, and went back to Judge Littleton. And I said, "I want to come back. Can't you possibly, you promised." He said, "Well, just before you came in, Larry Richey phoned me and said I was not under any circumstances to release you." And he said, "We have to always oblige the White House."

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I told you, I was dragged screaming. It was pretty hard hours, and by this time things were getting near the Depression. Also, on Christmas Eve 1929 the West Wing burned down, the outer walls only remained.

JOHNSON: Oh, you remember a fire there. Do you remember the fire?

BARROWS: I remember that Christmas holiday, working for the President; oh I was loaded with "loot" -- they were so nice to me, candy, etc. I was being envied, but I was not happy. Before they sent me home in the White House car, I put my head in Mr. Newton's door, because I liked him a lot, to say "Happy Christmas." And I thought, "How can they stand this heat?" It was in that fireplace, that the fire started. Then, when I woke up the next morning, the papers were full of it. So we moved over to what is now called the EOB, but was then the State, War and Navy Building, occupied by those departments. There was a big beautiful office called General Pershing's quarters, which he occupied not at all, and it faced the burned-out White House office. That room was given the President, and we were allotted adjoining rooms; not the first day, however.

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JOHNSON: That would be after the fire?

BARROWS: After the fire we worked in the White House proper, on the second floor, for three days and fell over each other. It was awkward.

JOHNSON: You mean in the main quarters, not in the White House wings?

BARROWS: Right where the bedrooms are. The President had his office in a bedroom converted to a study.

JOHNSON: Oh, the study became the Oval Office, so to speak.

BARROWS: Well, his study in the living quarters.

JOHNSON: Yes.

BARROWS: We were in the corridors, and in the bedrooms; what a mess! Somehow they straightened things out. We worked in the State, War and Navy Building until the spring of 1930. About May or June, we moved back to the new West Wing. Bless their soul -- Congress had voted enough money for an air-conditioning system, the first one to be put in the White House, and it was delightful. So there we worked, in a new Executive

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office, or west wing.

JOHNSON: The first summer they had air-conditioning was the summer of 1930?

BARROWS: The first I had ever worked in. I don't know whether the movies had air-conditioning or not; I can't remember. But it was very nice, and just right, better than it is now, as a matter of fact.

JOHNSON: A lot happened between 1929 and '30 in your career.

BARROWS: Yes. I went back to work for Mr. Newton then, I think, because I was there when the Depression came in October 1930. Then there was a place where Camp David is now, and I with two of the President's girls, secretaries, used to go up there weekends. He wouldn't be there, but we would.

JOHNSON: Do you remember their names?

BARROWS: Yes. Only one is living now, though. I think she's living; her name is Eastman, and the other one's name was McGrath. They were girls from New York State who had been with Mr. Hoover in his Commerce days.

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JOHNSON: You used to go to what now is Camp David?

BARROWS: I believe it's the same place. It has the same entrance, a lovely place. Mr. Richey owned it jointly with a big Cadillac dealer here in Washington, a big Republican.

JOHNSON: So you got to go there once in a while then?

BARROWS: Yes. And then he, Mr. Richey, had another place at Indian Head, Maryland, where the Potomac flows into the Chesapeake Bay. The house was simple, a lodge. He had caretakers, so we went there [Indian Head site] sometimes. The girls had a car -- I didn't -- an old Ford, and we would go down to Indian Head. They were awfully nice women, near my age. They were so very nice and kind. I enjoyed it a lot. The swimming was excellent. There was a caretaker and his wife who had quarters there too. They had a little dog -- those two girls --- and they always took it with them, and Mr. Richey had a little dog, and they always took him. There were cats down there too. And there were tame deer up in the hills (at Camp David site). It was very pleasant.

JOHNSON: What was McGrath's first name?

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BARROWS: She was named Myra, and Miss Eastman's name was Dorothy. I think she's still living here in Washington.

JOHNSON: Were you supposed to be working 40-hour weeks? Was that the understanding?

BARROWS: We worked every day in the week, except Saturday afternoons. And so did the whole Government.

JOHNSON: They worked Saturday mornings in those days?

BARROWS: Yes.

JOHNSON: And so the Depression has hit...

BARROWS: The President would usually go in the summertime down to Rapidan, Virginia where he had a fishing lodge. That was, I think, near Chancellorsville, Virginia, near the battleground.

JOHNSON: I know of Rapidan.

BARROWS: I believe it's quite near the National Park. The battle was there. I've never been there. As I recall, he had a secretary. Although Miss McGrath did most of his work, he had another girl named Ann Shankey, who is dead.

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I'll tell you something very amusing.

JOHNSON: Okay.

BARROWS: How little politics mattered, because I told them I was for A1 Smith, of course. I thought it would help to get me back. Ann Shankey had been a girlfriend of Jim Farley; they came from the same town, when she was a young girl. She asked me if I knew him.

Jim Farley became Roosevelt's campaign manager. Ann said, "Oh, I used to be his girlfriend." Of course, she married someone else.

JOHNSON: Now, you're working still in the White House, in the depths of the Depression, in 1931, '32.

BARROWS: Then I went again to the Press Secretary, who had no secretary -- Mr. Akerson. He demanded that I come back to him. So I went back to him, but I don't know why because he never did any work. Mail would pile up.

JOHNSON: Didn't do the work very well, you say.

BARROWS: He didn't do any paperwork. I had to write his letters. I guess that was my fatal mistake.

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JOHNSON: You mean you had to write letters in reply to people who were writing in to the President. You had to ghostwrite letters?

BARROWS: That's when it began.

JOHNSON: So that's when you got your first experience with a Press Secretary?

BARROWS: That was my second experience with him.

JOHNSON: So you came back to him and that lasted how long?

BARROWS: Then he left. Went back to newspapering, and was replaced by the President with a new secretary whose name was Joslyn.

JOHNSON: His first name was?

BARROWS: The others called him Ted, a little man. He worked for a newspaper but I've forgotten by now what it was. The girl who had previously worked for the speechwriter went to work for him. In other words, she took the job I had held because the speechwriter went back to Doubleday. He resigned to write a book.

JOHNSON: Oh, I see.

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BARROWS: So we got a new speechwriter named George Hastings from New York. I was assigned to him. They built two rooms on the east side of the West Wing, against the office wall

looking east toward the White House, down the colonnade, and onto the Rose Garden. It was a lovely little office -- I was in one room; the speechwriter was in another.

JOHNSON: And this was right by the Oval Office then?

BARROWS: That's right: against it -- an extension.

JOHNSON: And by the Rose Garden?

BARROWS: This square is the building where the Oval office sits, and when the President went home for lunch or came in or out, or anywhere, he opened this door and went out on this lovely pillared porch. He came down here, and here I am, right here; here are our rooms. Here's the colonnade, here's the Rose Garden, and the President came this way when he went home for lunch. And every morning he came this same way. He had a dog; the only good thing about sitting out there was the dog. He had a lot of dogs, and I loved them.

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JOHNSON: Now were these temporary rooms, or were they permanent?

BARROWS: I don't know what they are now. I guess they were redone when Mrs. Roosevelt moved in.

JOHNSON: Okay, she probably revamped things.

BARROWS: During the Depression, an architect did them all over.

JOHNSON: The rooms?

BARROWS: They moved everything, the oval office, everything, and I don't know what happened to those two rooms.

JOHNSON: Oh, that's right, he rebuilt it and made it larger in '34, I believe.

BARROWS: So finally I'm in this room working for the speechwriter. Well, I worked for him maybe for six months.

JOHNSON: Now, he's a Hoover speechwriter.

BARROWS: Yes. Times were getting terrible; they cut our salaries to where I almost worked for nothing.

JOHNSON: What did they pay you? Do you remember what they paid you?

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BARROWS: Well, there was an 8 percent cut. That was for the payroll people. We were not on the White House payroll; they had no payroll of any size. Congress was very stingy with them.

So we were all paid by the places we had originally come from, been drafted from. I had been drafted from the Bureau -- I don't know what they called the Tax Board then. So salaries in those places were cut 16 percent. I can't imagine it, but luckily I lived at home and could manage.

JOHNSON: And you had to help pay the rent too didn't you?

BARROWS: Well, it helped. I had two sisters who were still at home. One had married and divorced, so she was home. And the other one was widowed. She had married a man in the First World War and he was a good bit older and he died. So there really were three women at home, four counting my mother, and we kept a maid so my mother wouldn't have to work. It was a ten-room house, and she was not young. Anyway, that's the way it was. The Depression got worse, and worse, and the President then began to go out on campaign trips. One time I went, by accident. One of the girls

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that usually went got sick at the last minute. I had to go home and get my toothbrush and so forth and hop on the train. It was just an overnight trip to Cleveland.

JOHNSON: This was in 1932?

BARROWS: In '32. Near the end of the campaign is my recollection. He drew terribly large crowds at the train.

JOHNSON: Huge crowds he got?

BARROWS: On that one trip, that one overnight trip.

JOHNSON: What was your job?

BARROWS: I helped. I really can't remember -- on the typewriter. There was one other girl. The other girl that had gotten sick -- I don't know what she would have done -- but I guess I did what she did. I don't recollect. At that time I didn't know what to expect from a Presidential campaign.

We got on the train in Washington, had dinner aboard the train and worked all night. I didn't like that very much, but I had to. Maybe we had an hour's sleep. Sometime that next day I got a nap, and that next night I remember the President made a speech in Cleveland, Ohio,

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from the back of the train. The crowd was tremendous. Everyone thought he would be defeated, and I thought, "Well, how can he be?" As I say, I really didn't know much about it.

JOHNSON: That was the only trip you went on in the '32 campaign?

BARROWS: The only trip, that's right. I had to work at night several times during that autumn of the '32 campaign, in the White House proper, with the speechwriters.

JOHNSON: In the mansion now, the living quarters?

BARROWS: In the mansion.

JOHNSON: What room did they use there?

BARROWS: Well, those rooms are changed with each administration. At that time it was a yellow room. Someone said it had something to do with treaties, but being in the living quarters I may be mistaken, I really don't know.

JOHNSON: Was it a yellow, a kind of a yellow room?

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BARROWS: No, it wasn't a yellow room, in a sense that you would call it that. It was a beautiful room. But I think it has long since been converted to something else, because in the Roosevelt years I worked a great deal in the living quarters, and I don't remember it existing. If I saw it again, it was something else.

JOHNSON: Did it make any difference to you then whether Hoover was defeated or not? Of course, he was defeated by Franklin Roosevelt.

BARROWS: At the time I had gotten awfully fond of the people. I really had; they were awfully nice. So it mattered.

JOHNSON: When the Roosevelts came in, then some of those had to leave, I suppose.

BARROWS: I got out before Roosevelt came in.

JOHNSON: You left too?

BARROWS: From what I read in the papers at least, it had been a very dirty campaign; it really had, even I knew that. They not only insinuated, but printed, that Roosevelt had not had polio, but VD, and had no hesitation about saying which one. And that's the kind

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of thing those old-time campaigns were full of. You know, we think this Gary Hart thing is dirty, but they were dirtier.

JOHNSON: It was old stuff.

BARROWS: It was my first experience with one, and I thought they were the limit.

JOHNSON: Well, the economic situation was so bad that Hoover apparently had no chance of winning.

BARROWS: Oh, you haven't any idea. You probably weren't even born.

JOHNSON: You saw bread lines and people selling apples and that sort of thing here?

BARROWS: It was terrible. The worst thing was when the veterans asked for a bonus.

JOHNSON: Oh yes, the bonus marchers.

BARROWS: From home I rode the street car, and I went right by the Capitol every day and they were always in the Capitol grounds resting in their uniforms -- from the First World War. They looked so tired and pitiful.

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I lived about six or eight blocks from their makeshift village in southeast Washington. At the foot of 11th Street, there's a bridge that goes across the Anacostia River, which is a branch of the Potomac. Over there the veterans had built their camp, and called it Hooverville.

JOHNSON: Yes, on the Anacostia Flats.

BARROWS: The night they burnt them out was terrible. They came up a hill by our place, I remember, and our front yard had a retaining wall, brick, and some of the women were pregnant. Most of the veterans had their wives with them. They were nice people. We gave them water. It was night. I don't remember that we fed anyone. I don't know that it turned the whole city against Hoover, but friends and neighbors who weren't politically any more conscious than I, were affected. It was a cruel thing to do. It should have been handled with some compassion.

JOHNSON: That didn't make Hoover look any better did it?

BARROWS: They were called Bolsheviks, and it was said they wanted to kill the President, and such nonsense. They didn't have enough strength to kill a mouse.

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BARROWS: There used to be an old gentleman -- I never saw him since I wouldn't be home -- he'd ring the bell. Mother said he was clean. He would ask if he could recite some poems, Shakespeare, and she'd give him a cup of coffee and a quarter and sit there and listen while that old gentleman sat in our parlor and recited. It was that bad. He thanked her. There was no feeling of having begged. People rang your doorbell at all hours and asked for a nickel, for a cup of coffee; it wasn't a dime, and it was a nickel.

JOHNSON: But then you left your job when the Roosevelts came in, just before they came in, in 1933?

BARROWS: The new President was inaugurated then on the 4th of March 1933. I told Mr. Richey I had read in the paper of the different people that were coming and they were bringing a tremendous staff, and I said, "They won't want any part of me," thinking I could go back to the Tax Court. But I couldn't. They had filled my job long since; four years had passed, and they

couldn't fire that girl, in all conscience. So they gave me a job in the Bureau of Internal Revenue, with the Assistant Commissioner, oh, a beautiful office. Of course, he was a Republican,

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and I knew nothing about Presidential appointments as against Civil Service.

JOHNSON: You were Civil Service though, weren't you?

BARROWS: Yes, I was, but I didn't know that the big shots weren't too. At least I may have known it, but it didn't sink in. I should have known it.

JOHNSON: Your job was safer than theirs.

BAAROWS: I can't imagine now not knowing that; it couldn't happen now. But anyway, I was there a week, and he disappeared. Someone else had been appointed, or would be appointed; they said he had resigned, knowing he had to. So there I sat with nothing to do, but nobody put me out, and they paid my salary for about a week. I think I was there about a week, a very uncomfortable period in my life, not knowing what would happen to me.

There were two gentlemen who had been at the White House since Presidents McKinley and Theodore Roosevelt. They were called Executive Clerks, and they knew all Government procedures and about how to handle things such as Congressional bills that came in from the

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Capitol. That was their job, taking back and forth the important bills and papers that the President worked on, and sent to Congress. They didn't change expression ever. They were very courtly, very dignified and quiet, and in their day had been very handsome men. We were all scared to death of them. One of them called me and said, "We would like to have you come back today." And I said, "I have been reading in the papers you're working Sundays. I don't want to." And he said, "No, no. In the first place, you shouldn't have left." I said, "Well, I really felt I should. Do they know you're asking me, because after all, they might not want me." He said, "Of course they know I'm asking you."

So I went back and went to lunch with two girls that had been at the White House since before I got there. They were the first girls employed there. When I came back from lunch they sent me up to the Appointments Secretary, and introduced me to Marvin McIntyre. He said, "I have an administrative assistant, but no secretary." So the administrative assistant and I worked back in the room where I had worked for Mr. Akerson.

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JOHNSON: So you are back by the Oval Office in the West Wing?

BARROWS: Working for Marvin McIntyre, who had Mr. Akerson's job.

He was a Kentuckian. He was a newspaperman and had been with Mr. Roosevelt when Roosevelt was Assistant Secretary of the Navy in the Wilson days. Steve Early was the Press

Secretary, but I had known him because he was a newspaperman when I worked for the Hoovers, and he would say, "Hello." Louis Howe had Mr. Richey's job. I suppose he had the job that would be compared now with Mr. [Donald] Regan's job. From then on you know the story.

JOHNSON: So you were working for McIntyre at this point.

BARROWS: I was. I worked for him and worked and worked. Our lobby was full of people, wall to wall, all day long, wanting jobs. There was no security, not even thought of. People I had gone to grade school with heard I worked there. I had no power whatsoever, but they'd hear it and they'd come, girls with dreadful clothing on, holes in their clothes. We all went broke giving people handouts. The whole staff went broke. Always,

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every day, you felt like you had to give people something.

JOHNSON: But these people were lining up where?

BARROWS: They weren't lining up, they were just pushing in. They had to know somebody to get in, of course.

JOHNSON: Into the White House.

BARROWS: The White House office, in the lobby of the Oval Office.

JOHNSON: And almost begging for something.

BARROWS: Begging for anything, a job. People with college degrees. In those days a college degree was not an everyday thing like they are now. It was really an experience.

JOHNSON: How long did you work for McIntyre?

BARROWS: Until he became quite ill with tuberculosis and had to take time off. That is when General [Edwin M.] Watson was appointed in his place.

JOHNSON: They called him "Pa" didn't they?

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BARROWS: I think it had something to do with his age or his class at West Point; that's my recollection, but I don't know the story.

JOHNSON: What kind of a person was Watson?

BARROWS: He was a great raconteur.

JOHNSON: Always had stories to tell.

BARROWS: The most wonderful stories I have ever heard, and in this thick, Southern accent you could cut with a knife. He was named Edwin Martin, and his people came from Martinsville. Martinsville, Virginia, is named for his great, great, great somebody, and they were in the tobacco business, chewing tobacco included. It came in a cannister, a tin, with a picture of a little boy on a shetland pony, which was General Watson when he was a little boy. It was called "Little Edwin" chewing tobacco. That's where their money came from.

JOHNSON: What was your title, job title at this point?

BARROWS: Well, at first I don't know. By the time General Watson came I think I had climbed to administrative assistant on paper, but we didn't get very much more

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money. I think I got \$2,300 a year.

JOHNSON: So you were assistant to Watson, who was the Appointments Secretary?

BARROWS: In 1934 Mrs. Roosevelt persuaded them to let the building be remodeled. The President's room was pushed from the middle of the Executive Office to the east wall of that building but retained its oval form.

JOHNSON: That's when they expanded wasn't it?

BARROWS: After a fashion -- just remodeled.

JOHNSON: So you were located then, after this renovation...

BARROWS: Outside the Oval Office, in the most beautiful room I ever saw in my life -- perfectly proportioned.

JOHNSON: To the west, or the east?

BARROWS: To the west. I don't know how to express it in feet. Oh, it was beautiful, French windows looking out on the back grounds and comfortable chairs around the wall.

JOHNSON: On the west side now of the West Wing?

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BARROWS: Actually it was east of where it had been. There was a small office, where the two executive clerks sat, west of that and next to it, and then a little office, about the same size, west of that, where the rest of the Appointments Secretary's help was. You see, when Mr. McIntyre was Appointments Secretary, I was in a little back room, and the administrative assistant sat in the big room. The administrative assistant left and became a lawyer on the outside of the Government. I took his place and had a desk against the window in the big room. Then there was an enormous desk they said had belonged to President Taft. It was the biggest desk I had ever seen in my life. It had two compartments on the far side that I could have climbed into, I think.

JOHNSON: Now you shared that room with others?

BARROWS: Just General Watson, at the "Taft" desk.

JOHNSON: How long did that last?

BARROWS: All through the Roosevelt time, and through Truman's.

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JOHNSON: Through the war, through World War II?

BARROWS: I worked there through the first part of Eisenhower's first administration and then I left. I had tuberculosis. After the war was over, in the '50s, somebody discovered a rib separator that simplified lung surgery. I had that operation, and never went back. I went to work for Doris Fleeson, whom I had known, a columnist. And I just worked part-time.

JOHNSON: Okay, during the war, you're still doing pretty much the same kind of work, only...

BARROWS: When Mr. Truman came in...

JOHNSON: Do you remember that day, April 12, 1945 when the President died?

BARROWS: Yes. I usually went to Warm Springs with Mr. Roosevelt, but my mother was terminally ill, and I couldn't go that last trip.

JOHNSON: You were home when you heard the news?

BARROWS I had just gotten home. Our neighbor called me and told me that her radio was on and the President had

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died. And the phone rang just as she said it, and I wondered how in the world I could tell my mother. But the phone rang and I didn't have to think of that for a minute. It was the White House and they said, "We're sending a car." So I had to tell her. She was a Missourian, and I can remember what she said. She said, "it would be an odd thing wouldn't it, for a Missourian to become President?"

JOHNSON: Had you known Truman?

BARROWS: Only as a Senator, as he'd come to call on President Roosevelt. He didn't come a great deal until he organized that Committee and became rather famous, you know. He became a prominent Senator. I imagine I saw him maybe three times a year. He didn't know I was from Missouri, and I sure didn't feel I was. I had never even gone to school in Missouri.

JOHNSON: But he did come and you did see him when he came to the White House?

BARROWS: Yes, and after he was Vice President I saw him. Three or four times, he claims he came, but I can't remember the visits at all.

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I never was in his part of Missouri. We came from the southern part. My people, my grandparents, were all from Tennessee. My great, great, grandparents were all from Ireland.

JOHNSON: I see. So you went back to work. Did it change your routines at all to work for...

BARROWS: I worked with Matt Connelly. Nothing changed. Going to Hyde Park on the funeral train, it was really like two trains. All of the Roosevelt people that were invited were in the front section, and in the back section were Mr. Truman and his entourage. I hardly knew him, by sight even. I didn't know any of them.

JOHNSON: When did you first meet Mr. Truman, personally? I suppose you finally did get a chance to...

BARROWS: I don't know. By that time the East Wing had been built, and Jimmy Byrnes had a big office over there during the war. I've forgotten his title, but it was important. Judge [Fred M.] Vinson had succeeded him, and had that job. He had resigned from the Congress to take it. Going up on the train, he asked me if I would go to work for him. He said, "I think

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that Truman outfit has a great many people." I said, "I'm sure of it, and I want to leave the White House anyway. I would like to leave." He said, "Don't leave. Come with me, and if I leave it, you leave." I said, "All right, thank you," and that was that.

I think we came back that evening, and the next day I went in to clean out my desk and be as quiet about it as possible. I didn't barge in. I went in the little back room, and I looked in the front room at my desk, and saw Mr. Connelly. I saw him for the first time. I suppose I really had seen him at the funeral, but wouldn't recognize him to speak to him. I didn't know him. Steve Early had left the White House to practice public relations some time before, but when the President died, he came right back to the White House to handle the whole affair. Steve and Mr. Connelly were talking. Steve looked up and saw me start back when I saw them there, and he said, "Come on in Roby." I said, "All right." I came in and he introduced me, and Mr. Connelly said, "Won't you sit down?" I sat down. "I just want to explain to you that we are not making any commitments." I said, "Well, I realize that. I've already made other arrangements.

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I would like to clean out my desk, if you don't mind." He said, "But I wanted to ask you if you'd be an exception and stay." Oh, I thought, what will I say. I didn't know what to do, I didn't want to stay. I really didn't. But I told him about Judge Vinson and so he picked up the phone and called the Judge. He wasn't Judge then. But two days later he was Secretary of the Treasury. I don't know how I missed that.

JOHNSON: So you stayed on in the same desk, the same room, instead of...

BARROWS: He was very sweet, very kind, and he said, "You'll have to tell me everything to do." I said, "Are you going to continue in the same fashion handling these appointments?" He said, "As far as I know, but we'll feel our way, and you tell us." As I remember, the following was the only radical change: Mr. Early had called the press in for a press conference in the morning. I don't know what time. Charlie Ross who took Mr. Early's place, as I recall, called them in for a press conference in the afternoon. That's the only change that I can think of. My afternoons were usually

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pretty quiet as far as people are concerned. The President caught up on his paperwork then; all Presidents did.

JOHNSON: In other words, Roosevelt had his press conferences in the morning, and Truman in the afternoon.

BARROWS: That changed later. I had nothing to prepare for Presidential press conferences. The things that I prepared were for the President's Press Secretary.

JOHNSON: But you were secretary to the Appointments Secretary.

BARROWS: That's right, but every afternoon by 3 o'clock I had to have information ready on legal sheets of next day's callers on the President. I made a copy for Mr. Ross; the President got the original; Mr. Connelly and I had ours, and I've forgotten who else, not very many people. They were highly classified at the time. These were the appointments list for the next day, but underneath the name I had to tell everything I knew about them. During the week as we made them, I had to scavenge around, either on the telephone or

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through files, if I didn't know. I had to know their background and what they were going to talk to the President about.

JOHNSON: Was this the same way under Roosevelt?

BARROWS: This is what I had done and it did not change. So the top sheet I gave to the President's personal secretary each night.

JOHNSON: On Rose Conway's desk?

BARROWS: On Rose Conway's desk. She gave it to the President. He had all the background that I could possibly give him.

JOHNSON: On that appointments sheet.

BARROWS: Mr. Ross' secretary came over at 3 o'clock or thereabouts, and took the first carbon copy which was attached to all the written information or correspondence from our files, wherever I could find a file, and she took it to him for his press conference the following day.

This was all the background material.

JOHNSON: Now who would she be?

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BARROWS: She would be the secretary to the Press Secretary.

JOHNSON: Do you remember who she was under Mr. Ross?

BARROWS: Under Mr. Ross, her name was Myrtle something, but I've forgotten her last name.

JOHNSON: Had she worked with Early?

BARROWS: No.

JOHNSON: Watson had died, by the way, hadn't he?

BARROWS: He died about a month before the President.

JOHNSON: You started with McIntyre, and then you worked for Watson. Did you stay with Watson then right up until about the end of the Roosevelt administration?

BARROWS: He died on the high seas on the way back from Yalta, in February, before Roosevelt died in April 1945.

JOHNSON: Oh yes, yes.

BARROWS: I had thought he shouldn't have gone. He had a very bad heart.

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JOHNSON: And of course the President wasn't feeling too well either at that point.

BARROWS: He died from a stroke.

JOHNSON: How did they compare as bosses, Matt Connelly and Pa Watson?

BARROWS: Well, you couldn't compare them.

JOHNSON: They were just entirely different characters?

BARROWS: They both were extremely amiable men. One was young, handsome; the other was in his 50s and portly, and had been extremely handsome. He was very handsome in uniform.

Both of them were very tall men, but Mr. Connelly was Irish and very witty. They had that in common.

JOHNSON: They both were good storytellers?

BARROWS: Yes, they really were. Their stories were miles apart. Well, their ages were miles apart.

JOHNSON: Well, I forget exactly what Connelly's background was, but...

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BARROWS: He went to Boston College I believe. He was an Irish Catholic, not a very good Catholic, not a very good Catholic at all. I remember his friends naming him Godfather to their infants. He'd have to go to a christening, and they claimed every time he went into Trinity Church, there were thunderstorms and lightning, scared them all to death. One of his jokes was that the babies were almost always struck by lightning.

JOHNSON: Yes.

BARROWS: Never went into church except for christenings.

JOHNSON: But he was an amiable boss, you say, easy to get along with?

BARROWS: I never saw him lose his temper. That could not be said of the General; he was quite apt to lose it and when he did, the place fell apart. He was one of those who very seldom did, but it was really bad, when he did. He never lost it with me, but I have seen it, and very regrettable sometimes. It hurt me to see him say things like that to people, but he could do it. I suppose it's the Army.

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JOHNSON: Did your workload change, to speak of, under Connelly?

BARROWS: Well, I had been through the war, and in the war we had fewer civilian appointments and a great, great many military appointments. At that time the Pentagon had opened, the State Department had its own building, and our allies -- General Sir John Dill for instance -- represented England with a staff. Australia had a General with a staff, and so did Canada and the whole United Kingdom. Of course, we had nobody from France because it was occupied, but we saw DeGaulle. He came, and we saw a great deal of the so-called French Ambassador.

JOHNSON: So your main job was to prepare that daily appointments list?

BARROWS: It wasn't my main job, but it was a...

JOHNSON: But a very important job.

BARROWS: It was a hard job.

JOHNSON: Yes, to get the background. What else did you do then besides...

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BARROWS: And the timing was hard because they would want it always before I could get it ready.

In the mornings we had two phones on each desk; one of Connelly's was private, and one of mine was private. I had direct lines to the Cabinet officers' secretaries. For instance, it helped -- remember when Dean Acheson was Secretary of State, and the Marshall plan in 1947 was being thought up and worked out, and the airlift to Berlin started and things like that. Truman came in at a terrible, terrible time. You have no idea how hard we worked. It was worse than the war in many respects, as far as our hours were concerned.

JOHNSON: You were under pressure, you felt, day after day?

BARROWS: Europe was in ashes, and Russia was all over the place. Nothing was happening that had been anticipated apparently, in spite of all the meetings at Teheran and at Yalta. It was just falling to pieces, and he, President Truman, with Mr. Acheson and others held it up. They literally did, and so did General Marshall.

JOHNSON: Did Matt Connelly take all these calls from people who wanted appointments, or did you take those calls first?

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BARROWS: I took about half, and he took about half. And the phone rang constantly.

JOHNSON: Did you have to make decisions whether they could come in, or did you just pass the information on?

BARROWS: I just had to keep them happy.

JOHNSON: And when they were turned down, you had to turn them down diplomatically?

BARROWS: That's why I got sick of my own voice.

JOHNSON: From turning people down and that sort of thing?

BARROWS: Well, not turning down, but keeping them in good humor -- "Yes Senator, I do know, Senator, indeed I do know." "I don't know at the moment just how soon we can return it, but Mr. Connelly will certainly do his best."

JOHNSON: Well, you were a buffer, you were kind of a buffer weren't you?

BARROWS: I really got sick of myself sometimes. You know.

JOHNSON: Yes. You constantly had to kind of adjust and

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tailor things I suppose to the situation. Did Matt Connelly compliment you then on the work you did? He certainly did, you know, in that interview.

BARROWS: Yes, he was always very good to me. Always. At that time I was getting along; I was older than Mr. Connelly.

JOHNSON: Did he have a problem with favors? You know, he ran into that problem after...

BARROWS: I had to go to Kansas City and be a witness, a character witness in his trial. They were so rude to me on the stand. I don't to this day know how a judge could let a district attorney talk to women, as he talked to me. I'm very poor at figures, so one of the girls in the office did Mr. Connelly's income tax. I didn't.

JOHNSON: This is for Matt Connelly's trial you're talking about?

BARROWS: Yes.

JOHNSON: And you're called up to be a character witness.

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BARROWS: Yes, made me very unhappy, but I did it.

JOHNSON: What did you tell the court, do you remember, basically?

BARROWS: I told them exactly the truth. I had never in my life asked anyone to give anyone a job, over his signature, nor did he. It was a White House flat rule; you could not write on a memorandum, say, to the Secretary of the Treasury, and say so and so and so and so are friends of mine, would you give him a job, or you must give him a job. You just said, "This is a case to receive such consideration as you feel it merits."

JOHNSON: Wasn't there something about a shoe company or something in St. Louis that was...

BARROWS: I think that he was supposed to have let Mr. [Harry J.] Schwimmer, a man from Kansas City -- I suppose he had worked in the Presidential, or Senatorial campaigns -- pay for some suits, suits of clothing. And later on Governor [Sherman] Adams got in the same bind you know, over a rug, I think, or a coat.

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JOHNSON: Do you think that was just mainly a political trial, or was it a genuine? I mean was there a real problem there, legally?

BARROWS: Schwimmer is supposed to have been given access then to the Bureau of Internal Revenue officials he wanted to see. He had tax trouble and I don't even know what business he was in. He was a pretty smooth worker as I recall. But whatever Mr. Connelly did, he had no idea that he was doing anything like that, I'm sure of that.

JOHNSON: You mean you are confident that his motives were clear and clean?

BARROWS: He was naive in some ways.

JOHNSON: Matt Connelly was a little naive?

BARROWS: He had a side to him that was a little naive.

JOHNSON: Too trusting, maybe, of certain people?

BARROWS: Trusting everyone. I think he was a poor judge of people. Of course, the President was plagued with a great many con artists from his own state. I suppose

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all Presidents are, I don't know.

JOHNSON: But you didn't get involved in that except as a witness at the trial.

BARROWS: Oh yes, I did. My hair was red and getting gray. Schwimmer had brought me a bottle -- evidently I was turning gray (he had black hair) -- a bottle of tablets that were supposed to help your hair. I think Mr. Reagan must use them.

JOHNSON: He kept trying to influence you.

BARROWS: And that made me so mad, I didn't even take them. It didn't do any good.

JOHNSON: Well, did any other ever try to...

BARROWS: Once in a while he would send me flowers, which I left at the office. I never took a flower home in my life. But he wasn't the only one.

JOHNSON: Okay, besides flowers, did you ever get favors which you thought might be trying to influence you?

BARROWS: No, at Christmas you would get presents like purses, candy, perfume, but they'd be Christmas presents.

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And, of course, I knew an awful lot of people at the Capitol at that time. My goodness!

JOHNSON: Oh, you must have.

BARROWS: I did.

JOHNSON: Did anyone try to take, you think, unfair advantage of your position?

BARROWS: No, but by implication that I lied about those memos, Mr. Connelly's memos and phone calls. Of course, I wouldn't know about phone calls to people in the Bureau of Internal Revenue. I don't remember the problem but would not have understood it had I known it, and I made it very plain.

JOHNSON: They tried to implicate you in that you say?

BARROWS: No. But when they got this other girl on the stand too, they twisted things she said. They sent him to prison -- took away his voting rights and things like that -- I thought it was so unjust, so terrible. He hadn't done a thing, not really.

JOHNSON: Did you know his family?

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BARROWS: He only had a little boy and a wife. A little boy that I guess now must be pretty well up in years.

JOHNSON: It would be hard on the family, of course. That trial had to be a hard experience.

BARROWS: Yes, but they were never brought into it in any way. She was a rather pretty girl, I thought, awfully nice.

JOHNSON: Would she come in once in a while to visit her husband?

BARROWS: Yes. She came in quite often. When those things happened -- appointments -- to prestigious jobs, I think family friends become very close, through all of that. It's inevitable I'm sure in human nature, I don't know.

JOHNSON: But as far as you could tell everything was being run on the straight and narrow?

BARROWS: Yes.

JOHNSON: And you were under instructions you say?

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BARROWS: I was under instructions and so far as I ever saw they were always carried out. In the very beginning when Mr. Truman came in, I think every member -- every living member -- of Battery D, including the chaplain came East.

JOHNSON: Father Tiernan.

BARROWS: Yes. Real tall, good looking. He was awfully nice. Everybody came East. There was one he gave a job to there in the White House, and ...

JOHNSON: Oh, McKim, Eddie McKim.

BARROWS: Yes. The next day he was gone.

JOHNSON: What was your experience with Edward McKim?

BARROWS: He fixed up a big office over there in the West Wing and borrowed pictures from the Corcoran Gallery of Art. On the day before he was supposed to take over, and I don't know what his duties would have been, he didn't come in. Once in a great while, later on, he would come to Washington, but not often. There were several of that ilk that hung around, but after

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about six months they were all gone. The President had a lot to learn, he really did, and he knew it.

JOHNSON: Did you ever talk to him personally, President Truman?

BARROWW: Yes, a lot.

JOHNSON: You did?

BARROWS: Oh yes.

JOHNSON: What kind of an impression did he make and what were the occasions? Do you remember any of the occasions?

BARROWS: Well, let's see, was it twelve years?

JOHNSON: He was there for almost eight years as President.

BARROWS: No, I mean Roosevelt.

JOHNSON: Oh, Roosevelt, yes, that would have been from '33 to '45, twelve years.

BARROWS: For twelve years we had had an immobilized man in the White House. His luncheon was brought over every

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day. You know these things -- I don't know if they still use them or not -- but hotels wheel them around for meals. It was brought over by servants, and his luncheon guests ate at his desk with him.

JOHNSON: In the Oval Office?

BARROWS: Yes. Almost always a man, but Miss [Frances] Perkins might sometimes come. He seldom ate alone; that was very rare. That went on so long you never thought much about it. I worked at night a good bit for Mr. Roosevelt, and I had dinner with him in his study. The same food carrier was wheeled up for dinner. He always fixed us a drink before dinner -- the awfulest martinis I've ever tasted. Well, you just got accustomed to it, and the press never took pictures of him getting off and on trains wearing his braces. Really, it was a sad sight.

JOHNSON: Right.

BARROWS: And he was a tremendous man. He was six feet six before he was stricken.

About the second day, the first working day, let's say, for President Truman, when things were fairly

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normal again, the door opened and out popped the President. He said, "Good morning," and I jumped to my feet and said, "Good morning, sir." And he went on through the room, to my horror, and to the next room, with no Secret Service, and out into the lobby. By that time the Secret Service I guess caught on, and they were after him. I don't know where he went. This happened, of course, several times a day, and several times the next day and I was a little bobbin, and made a little curtsy. I do remember that. That was my first contact. He always said, "Hello, how are you?" He finally came over and said, "Now, look, I know you respect the office of the President of the United States, but I cannot sit in that office by myself, between appointments, all day long. I want to know what is going on; I'm used to the Capitol. And you'll see me every day, in and out of other people's offices, so I want you from here on in not to rise." I replied, "I appreciate that; thank you, sir."

We had a telephone office then about as big as this room, telephones and operators, and the head operator had a desk where she did her paper work.

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Of course, these were the same operators as before. About the second or third day, one of the Secret Service men came in, which was not unusual. They'd be off duty, and they'd run in; maybe they'd dated some of the pretty girls, I don't know. He said, "Miss [Louise L.] Hachmeister, the President of the United States." She said, "Oh yeah!" And some girl looked around, and said, "It really is." So for about five seconds, the White House was cut off from the world. It was one of our great jokes. He wanted to see it. Oh, he was curious. He didn't have that long nose for nothing.

JOHNSON: We have a switchboard in our museum collection.

BARROWS: Have you now?

JOHNSON: Well, it was used at the Muehlebach Hotel for the President.

BARROWS: Oh, that's the traveling one?

JOHNSON: I guess.

BARROWS: That may be the one Roosevelt used. We took it with us, north, south, wherever we went.

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JOHNSON: You shared the same office then with Matt Connelly, this same room.

BARROWS: I was here and he was...

JOHNSON: Just to your right.

BARROWS: Yes, our desks were down at the end of the room against the wall, where a door opened into the oval office via a short passage. On one side of the passage was the President's toilet, and on the other side was that of the Appointments Secretary.

JOHNSON: You would see the President almost every time he came out of the Oval Office.

BARROWS: Unless he went the other way, to his right, to Rose Conway's room.

BARROWS: Of course, when he went home, he went the usual route by the Rose Garden, on his right.

JOHNSON: Okay, he'd go outside and along that colonnade you're talking about.

BARROWS: By an indoor swimming pool (gone now) and the gardener's room. That room where Mr. Connelly and

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sat was so lovely; it is three rooms now. I haven't been in the office since Lyndon Johnson was President. I just couldn't believe it. Why don't they use that EOB [Executive Office Building] and knock the inside down, and make it into a really nice place for the President.

JOHNSON: So you became more relaxed, after that first couple of days, I suppose. Did the President put you at ease?

BARROWS: Well, it took more than a couple of days. It was so different you can't imagine.

JOHNSON: Did he ever stop and talk to you about Missouri or ask about your family or anything like that?

BARROWS: Well, years later. I've forgotten how he knew it. After about three years, he called me "Miss Roberta." After about three months, Mr. Roosevelt called me "Robie."

JOHNSON: So "Robie" was your nickname during the Roosevelt years.

BARROWS: It really is Rob, but they called me Robie. I

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kind of felt like God had spoken when Mr. Truman called me "Miss Roberta."

JOHNSON: That was his way of greeting you.

BARROWS: He did awfully nice little things. Yes, we got to be very comfortable with each other. I remember the night when I realized the difference, and missing Mr. Roosevelt's easygoing attitude and the difference in the background, not that I was ever accustomed to the background of the Roosevelts. I was not; I am middleclass too. But one night in 1945 they called me at home -- it was on my birthday in April 1945, and I remember we had champagne, and I had had a bit -- and the phone rang. It was the White House and they said, "We're sending a car; the President's calling a press conference." We knew that Hitler had disappeared. They couldn't find anybody who was authorized to accept an unconditional surrender. I don't know why anybody couldn't, but apparently under the laws of countries you can't. It has to be a certain rank. They found Himmler but Himmler killed himself, right in front of them. They couldn't find Hitler, but they felt they had somebody, Admiral something.

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JOHNSON: It was Admiral Doenitz.

BARROWS: In the end, but this wasn't Admiral Doenitz. They didn't tell me that but they said, "There will be a press conference. They can't find the man who takes it (press conferences), so will you come down?" And I did. When I arrived there were several other people present, and, of course, the place was alive with newspapermen.

JOHNSON: What room was this?

BARROWS: My room. The newspapermen were out in the lobby. Oh I had taken the car and gone by and picked up an extra telephone operator; they wanted the board covered. She lived in my neighborhood. She said, "What do you think, peace?" And I said, "I hope so." I was wishing I hadn't had the champagne; I didn't know if I could take the press conference or not. But anyway, we got there and we waited and we waited and we waited, and finally they dismissed the press. They had to tell them they thought they had Doenitz, is that his name? But they didn't, they had somebody else. So it was a false alarm. The President came out then -- several

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Cabinet members had stayed behind -- and said to me, "Could you find enough tumblers? We're going to have a drink in my office. Do you mind looking through the offices?" I said, "No sir." So I went into the different offices and found enough drinking glasses and washed them. Then they told me I could go home. They, I suppose, had their bourbon. Now, in Roosevelt's day, he

would have said, "Oh, Missy Grace, Berta," or whoever was around, "let's have a drink. To heck with the Cabinet." He was not a man's man, and he wasn't a woman's man really.

JOHNSON: So you would drink with the President, with Roosevelt. The women would sit down and have a drink with him.

BARROWS: I never had a drink with Mr. Truman in my life. I remember after that unexpected victory in Kansas City, we were coming back on the train, and we were in the club car in the middle of the day coming through farm country. He and Mrs. Truman were taking a walk, saying hello to everybody. I didn't know it, and we were all having a drink. I remember how quickly we put our glasses on the floor, and stood up. And he said, "Oh, I caught you,

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caught you." As far as I know, that was the first time he ever saw me have a drink.

JOHNSON: You came out in the election of '48; you came out by train to Kansas City?

BARROWS: My mother died in '48 and I had not for some time gone anywhere. She had been bedfast for several years, and then she died in October 1948. So I went on the last trip.

JOHNSON: You were at Kiel Auditorium when he gave that last speech?

BARROWS: The very last trip. We went to New York City first. It has now gone out of style, but then the traditional Madison Square Garden speech in New York City rounded off the Democratic campaign. We went to Madison Square; the President spoke, and then took the train. It went through Hyde Park, and there were the same old porters. I said, "Would you ring my bell when we go through Hyde Park?" He said, "Yes ma'am," and he did. I woke up, and of course, I put the shake up. I couldn't see anything, but somehow I just thought, "Oh boy, there you lie up in the garden,

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and this is the end." I never will forget it.

JOHNSON: Did you have to work on that train? Did you have a job that you had to do?

BARROWS: They were very kind to me. They gave me a drawing room. A lot of people worked, but I didn't do very much.

JOHNSON: So you were able to relax.

BARROWS: It was sort of a treat. It was awfully nice. When we got to St. Louis, oh they had worked so hard on the speeches, and the final speech would be in St. Louis. When we got to St. Louis, we were in the station at dinner time. We were to get off right after dinner. Clark Clifford, I believe, told me, "Oh my God, the President has torn up his speech." And he had.

JOHNSON: But he came off very well, as I recall.

BARROWS: Oh, he made a wonderful speech. My spirits came up from then on.

JOHNSON: Were you out there in the audience?

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BARROWS: No. When I went with President Roosevelt, they took me everywhere. We sat behind him on the platform.

JOHNSON: You're talking about Roosevelt?

BARROWS: Yes, and also with President Truman.

JOHNSON: You sat behind him on the platform.

BARROWS: Yes, we always did. This expedites moving around a Presidential party. I'm in some of the old pictures. And then we went on to Kansas City. It was a deadly evening, oh deadly -- and that suite in the Muehlebach Hotel. I remember it had a Steinway Grand in it, painted birdseye blue. I don't know who decorated it. Matt Connelly said, "Can you play?" and I said not well enough to help. But the most unlikely girl in the crowd -- I didn't know her very well -- turned out to be quite talented. She started off with the Missouri Waltz. You have no idea. Everybody was so relieved not to have to talk. The President's sister was there. So the party went on, and I went to bed about 2 o'clock. And the telephone operator -- usually you have them in another room -- called out as I went by, "I'll call you if anything happens." I said, "Oh, you needn't bother." She called me about 4 a.m.

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JOHNSON: The President hadn't come back yet. He was still at Excelsior Springs wasn't he?

BARROWS: Yes. I got up. I hadn't taken off all my clothes, and I put on some top clothes. He came down about 6, I guess, received us all and shook hands, and we all cried. It was great.

JOHNSON: Did you get acquainted with his sister, Mary Jane that night?

BARROWS: Not really; she's awfully sweet. I always remember a remark she made. She's quite a little lady. She said, "You know, it doesn't look good for brother, but perhaps if he's going to have a Republican Congress, it's just as well."

JOHNSON: So she thought maybe he was going to lose, I suppose.

BARROWS: She was quite a dear.

JOHNSON: But how about you? What was your feeling about it? Did you think he was definitely going to lose, or were you one of those that felt he was going to win?

BARROWS: Oh, I don't know.

JOHNSON: Most everybody on the train thought he was going to lose.

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BARROWS: Well, all the girls did anyway. I don't mean everybody, since I don't know what they really thought. There wasn't any money. We had to really move that train on nickels and quarters, to get him out of the station. Nobody gave the Democrats anything, not a thing. Two people, Louis Johnson, and then, I think his name was Ned Bruce of that noted Maryland family. They were Republicans really, and he was the only Democrat among them. They'd come in, and we had a safe of which I had the combination. I had the combination, and I could never remember it. The chief clerk also had the combination. Sometimes they'd come in with a few hundred dollars. Imagine, a hundred, not millions, not thousands like now.

JOHNSON: Where was this safe?

BARROWS: In one of those big compartments in that enormous desk of President Taft's.

JOHNSON: Oh, in the White House.

BARROWS: Right there, Mr. Connelly's desk. Nobody was giving anything.

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JOHNSON: How about Edwin Pauley? Wasn't he a donor to the Democrats?

BARROWS: I don't remember; I suppose so. He had plenty of money. I don't know if he gave us any or not.

JOHNSON: The big businessmen were giving to the Republicans I suppose. Wasn't that the...

BARROWS: Well, the big businessmen almost always give to the Republicans, but of course, the PACs [Political Action Committees] have made a difference. I'm all for the PACs, myself.

JOHNSON: Who was holding down the fort at the White House? Connelly was on the train, and you were on the train.

BARROWS: Charlie Murphy was on the train.

JOHNSON: Oh yes.

BARROWS: He had helped the Truman Committee when the President was Senator. I liked him so much. He was on the train, and so was Clark Clifford. I suppose the military aide was.

JOHNSON: Of course, there wouldn't be any appointments

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back at the White House, so you wouldn't have to worry about that.

BARROWS: The White House is a very quiet place when the President's away, no matter where.

JOHNSON: Who would be sort of in charge back at the White House when these key people are out on the train?

BARROWS: At the White House itself, I presume the Presidential Secretary, who stays behind.

JOHNSON: Ross I suppose was out on the train.

BARROWS: Yes he was. Let's see, who would it be. I don't know.

JOHNSON: Possibly an assistant secretary, maybe like Eben Ayers. Did you know Eben Ayers, Assistant Press Secretary?

BARROWS: I knew him: I don't think anything was ever thought of it or said. The White House under the Democrats is pleasant, more pleasant, more relaxed. The Republicans are "up tight," I would say. I think that describes the officeholders a little bit. But don't you look at these

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TV contra hearings, and in the questioning, you kind of sense the difference? They're all polite and nice, I don't mean that; they're gentle with the witnesses, but there's a difference. I can tell it..

JOHNSON: Well, you worked under Hoover.

BARROWS: Well, that's true. I was never in any sense intimate with any of them.

JOHNSON: But you felt there was more of a relaxed atmosphere under the Democrats than under the Republicans?

BARROW: Oh, there's no question of it. Now I served over a great span of time, remember that.

JOHNSON: Sure.

BARROWS: And the contact between men and women changed. You have to remember that too.

JOHNSON: Okay, we've got the early days, and we've reached 1948. Do you remember any other incidents that kind of stand out in your mind during the Truman Administration?

BARROWS: Well, now I meant to look one incident up for you but I forgot. I can't now. One time he did a real

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sweet thing, I thought, a very thoughtful, kind gesture.

JOHNSON: You say one time he made a very kind gesture?

BARROWS: Well, he always did kind things. I don't know when it began, but it wasn't in effect (or I don't believe it was) at the very beginning of my years there. But later on, perhaps the war did it, the world became more dangerous, maybe that did it. All gifts sent to the President and his family were x-rayed. The office force grew, and we had spread over into EOB. I don't know which year.

JOHNSON: In the Truman years they started x-raying.

BARROWS: It spread in the Roosevelt years; began I guess with Mussolini and Hitler, and the Spanish war. Things got awfully hot. After the '36 campaign, the whole atmosphere of the White House was different, never the same. There was always this feeling in the air of danger, not just to us, but throughout the world.

JOHNSON: The extremists, yes.

BARROWS: Well, I guess it was everywhere in the world. The whole world changed, and so the President's gifts

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were all inspected carefully. We never saw them. If a package came in addressed in care of Mr. Connelly, we wouldn't get it until it was opened, or maybe not then. Maybe nobody ever got it. But one day I opened a letter and out fell a little package, about the size of a little pill box. I opened it -- it was from some John G. Citizen or somebody like that -- and in it were about, so tall, three little pearl knives like men used to carry.

JOHNSON: These were about 3/4 of an inch long?

BARROWS: An inch long. It was in the days when women wore charm bracelets, and they were about the size of those bangles. That's what they were for, for Margaret and Mrs. Truman, and if the President wanted one, one for him. They were the cutest things; I adored them. I put it on Mr. Connelly's desk to go in to the President; we didn't give him all the mail, but some. I said, "I almost stole this." He opened it, and said, "I don't blame you." And a day or two later, the President came out to me and he said, "Give me a penny." I thought, "A penny?" I said, "Would a car token do, I don't think I have a penny." "Well, I have to have a penny." So I finally found a penny, and gave it to him. He held

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out his hand, and in it was one of those little knives. I just love it. I've put it away and I never get it out. I had a charm bracelet like all the women you know.

JOHNSON: You have it stowed away, this little knife?

BARROWS: Yes. I thought that was very kind. Connelly evidently told him, you know.

JOHNSON: Now this is the one memento that you got from President Truman. Was it the only memento that you have from Mr. Truman?

BARROWS: Except our Christmas presents. I've forgotten what they were. I've been here 16 years I guess at this apartment. When I left Maryland, and the home that I shared with the sisters who were widowed -- it was a pretty good sized home -- I thought, "Well, I'm going to pack up all the White House things," and I did and labeled them. I was getting older -- I was approaching 70 -- and I thought, "If anything happens to me, at least if there's anything there that the Library doesn't have especially with the Roosevelt travels, which were extremely numerous, they are quite

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welcome to them." Otherwise my heirs may keep them, or sell them or do whatever they like with them.

JOHNSON: What were these items?

BARROWS: Pictures, travel schedules, etc.

JOHNSON: Where do you have them stowed away?

BARROWS: Oh, they're downstairs under lock and key. This girl who's coming tonight, her mother is my only niece, and she writes in her spare time children's stories. She's married and quite a good writer. She'd be the one to have them. My nephews too, could have them. They'd be interested, and are interested.

JOHNSON: When your mother died you moved out of the house.

BARROWS: No, not right away. We did the house over. It's an old house, Victorian. I hate to tell you what it sold for the other day.

JOHNSON: Wow, I can imagine.

BARROWS: Close to half a million dollars, three hundred and some thousand dollars. I got \$14,000, and my father

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gave \$7,500 for it. When they gentrified this part of town, they gentrified it.

JOHNSON: Where did you move to after you left that house?

BARROWS: We moved over here on Porter Street, not too far, about two blocks, where the subway is, and the house high up on the hill. But it seemed small to us. I had two widowed sisters then, and one died there. We had a wonderful back view; we're very fond of animals, and we had I guess one cat, sometimes had two.

JOHNSON: How did you get to work in those days?

BARROWS: I had a car, after the war. I had a car before the war, but it was a family car. I had my own car after the war.

JOHNSON: So you drove to work everyday.

BARROWS: Yes, they had a parking place for me, right there at the gate.

JOHNSON: At the gate.

BARROWS: Yes. I had a Plymouth. I got it from Bob Hinkley. He and his wife had a Plymouth dealership in one of

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the Utah cities; they're Mormons. He was a good friend of the President's. He was Under Secretary of Commerce for a while. By that time, he had bought ABC Broadcasting Company. He was a good friend of mine.

JOHNSON: Where did people park? Where did the personnel at the White House park in those days?

BARROWS: I parked on West Executive Avenue. It had been closed from the beginning of the war on each end. They put up barriers. I think the same is true on the east side. And they took part of the elipse, and I guess they still do.

JOHNSON: You had assigned parking places?

BARROWS: Yes. I never paid a great deal of attention, to tell you the truth, where people parked.

JOHNSON: How about November 1, 1950, when the attempted assassination took place? Were you, there? Were you around?

BARROWS: We had just come in from lunch.

JOHNSON: You and...

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BARROWS: And two -- the chief telephone operator and another woman that worked there -- I've forgotten who it was now. I think it was Bill Hassett's secretary. We walked right by the Blair House, as we usually did; we had gone up on 17th Street to a cafeteria.

I had long hair then. It was a windy day and it had blown, and there was a nice lavatory on the first floor. I never had time to go downstairs so they let me use it, although it was for the public. I took it over. I went in there and took my hair down -- it was in braids -- I took it down and all of a sudden the lights went out. I wadded it up real quick and ran out to see what had happened. That shooting had just taken place, and was still on, and the electrician who was mending wires somewhere got excited and blew something. That's all I knew at the time. We knew the President was safe; that's all we knew.

JOHNSON: Where were you in relation to the Blair House at this point?

BARROWS: In the Executive Office, cater-cornered and across the street, Pennsylvania Avenue.

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JOHNSON: So it was out of sight; Blair House was out of sight to you.

BARROWS: But one of the Executive Clerks walking back from lunch was right opposite. He threw himself on the ground. By that time the two Executive Clerks I spoke of had died of old age, and we had two younger ones. It was one of the younger ones. I don't think the older ones could have done that. He saw the whole business. I went to the funeral. That's one thing, Connelly would never do, go to a funeral.

JOHNSON: He didn't?

BARROWS: I even remember when his mother died, in Boston; he was shaken, and I could tell he didn't want to go home.

JOHNSON: But he did go to the funeral though?

BARROWS: Something about funerals frightened him; it was funny. He had a "hangup." Anyway, he said to me to take his car and represent him at the officer's funeral. I said, "I will not do that; you must go." But he wouldn't go. I said, "You can't do that, the President will kill you." That's the one time I argued with him.

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He said, "Well, I'm not going." I said, "You will either go or it will be empty."

JOHNSON: So you had to go. So you went and represented Matt Connelly?

BARROWS: Here I was in a six passenger car, or however large they are, all by myself. I felt like an idiot.

JOHNSON: You were treated...

BARROWS: Well, thank goodness, before it started, one of the administrative assistants who were supposed to be anonymous you know, came and said, "Are you going to be alone?" I said,

“Well, I really am.” He said, “Well, can I go with you?” And I said, “Please do.” We didn’t either one of us know the poor dead man.

JOHNSON: Leslie Coffelt, the guard.

BARROWS: But Connelly would not go to the funeral. That made twice. On the other occasion, I didn’t represent him; I just went because I like the person. The last of the elderly chief executive clerks died, and the President and Mrs. Truman also attended.

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JOHNSON: For whose funeral?

BARROWS: To Mr. Rudolph Forster's funeral; he was at the White House.

JOHNSON: Rudolph Forster?

BARROWS: Yes. He had been there I believe since McKinley. He really ran the place, a wonderful man. And they all went to the funeral, but Mr. Connelly.

JOHNSON: Was he the one that preceeded [Maurice J.] Latta?

BARROWS: They were there together.

JOHNSON: Did you know Latta pretty well?

BARROWS: Oh yes, indeed I did.

JOHNSON: What kind of a person was he?

BARROWS: I went to school with one of his sons, to high school. Both men were very gentle after you knew them. But it took a long time to know them; it took an awfully long time to know Mr. Forster. And when I did, we were very intimate, very good friends. Oddly enough, we read the same novels, the same books.

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For this you don't need your recorder on, because it's about Mr. Truman's family, about Mrs. Truman.

JOHNSON: Well, we'd like to have it, if we can. You can close it.

BARROWS: She was a great novel reader too; I didn't know that. I guess all women are, of our generation. Anyway, we had one great privilege at the White House. You can get books from the Congressional Library. I knew the man in charge of sending the books to the White House. I had known his mother; I knew him when he was a little boy. We were kids when our mothers went to suffrage headquarters together. They're from Georgia. I used to call Legare and give him a list of books I wanted. I'd read the book review on Sunday. One day he said to me, "I can't get so and

so's book for you; I guess Mrs. Truman has it." I said, "Mrs. Truman?" And he said, "Yes, she reads a good bit." I said, "Well, good for her." I was scared to death of Mrs. Truman.

About two weeks later, I got a call from Mrs. Truman. I got plenty of calls from Mrs. Truman, and they were sharp, about the appointments you know. "Don't

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tie the President up on a certain hour" -- that kind of thing. I was very leary, and wondered, "What have I done now?" She said, "Miss Barrows, Mr. Legare O'Bere down at the Library tells me that you and I have the same taste in books. Often, of course, I get them ahead of you, but I have left word with him that they are to be checked with you before they're put back on the stack, when I send them back." Wasn't that nice?

JOHNSON: So you did get phone calls from Bess Truman, and usually her request was to do what?

BARROWS: About once a month I would get them, "Miss Barrows, I see you have the President listed thus and so on Tuesday afternoon, June the something. He cannot do that because and so on, and after this, I wish when you make anything as late as, say, 2 or 3 in the afternoon, that you would check with me first."

JOHNSON: Check with her?

BARROWS: Not with her, but with her secretary. But I didn't because there were times I couldn't. If he wanted the Secretary of State to stay at 2 o'clock, he was going to stay.

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JOHNSON: Well sure. But she liked to have certain times reserved for herself and the President?

BARROWS: She was trying to stop, but the first year or two she kind of got on my neck. Now I didn't make the appointments anyway.

JOHNSON: But then it became less of a problem later on, you say.

BARROWS: She understood later that he was President, I guess. I don't know.

JOHNSON: Did you meet her personally? Did you ever get a chance to socialize at all with Mrs. Truman?

BARROWS: No, I guess not really. I liked her. I got to know her better, but I couldn't say I socialized with her.

JOHNSON: You knew her appointments secretary, Mrs. [Edith B.] Helm, wasn't it?

BARROWS: Oh she was a dear. She was a holdover from the Woodrow Wilson days.

JOHNSON: Is that right, way back.

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BARROWS: She and I served on the Inaugural Committee, the last one before President Roosevelt died. We were the only women on it.

JOHNSON: In January 1945.

BARROWS: They held the inauguration on the back porch of the White House, you know.

JOHNSON: Yes.

BARROWS: And they couldn't let one-thousandths of the people come, who wanted to. It was a fight!

JOHNSON: I'll bet.

BARROWS: The Chief of Police was on it. The Senate and the House -- oh there was one big fight. General Watson stuck me with it. I could have killed him.

JOHNSON: Did you have anything to do with the '49 inauguration, the big one in '49?

BARROWS: Oh no, no. No, it was cold that day.

JOHNSON: Yes. A big parade.

BARROWS: Were you there?

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JOHNSON: No, but I've sure seen lots of pictures of it. It was a tremendous parade.

BARROWS: That was great fun. My godchild was in high school, I guess, then. They gave me two tickets at the Capitol, and I had her come down. Mr. Connelly sent us down ahead of time in his car, and Pennsylvania Avenue had been roped off and all traffic stopped. She got a great kick out of it. So did I.

JOHNSON: What did you do when Truman left office?

BARROWS: I knew Eisenhower very well, and I stayed a while but I hated it.

JOHNSON: Who did you work for?

BARROWS: I worked for a man named Thomas Stephens.

JOHNSON: Well, I recall Hagerty was the Press Secretary.

BARROWS: I had the same job I had previously held. I liked Hagerty very much.

JOHNSON: But he wasn't his appointments secretary.

BARROWS: Thomas E. Stephens [Special Counsel and Appointments Secretary].

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He was supposed to have come in as Counsel. I'll tell how that happened. Senator Vandenberg's son [Arthur Vandenberg, Jr.] was supposed to be the appointment's secretary. I had already landed a job, I've forgotten what it was, maybe with Doris [Fleeson]. I don't remember. But one day when Mrs. Truman's mother died, while the family was in Independence, just before the changeover, Governor [Sherman] Adams, whom I only knew from his pictures, came through with young Mr. Vandenberg. I was the only person in my room; I guess Connelly went to Missouri with the Trumans. Anyway, he introduced himself and I spoke to him. I told him of course where everybody was, although I guess he knew. He said that what he wanted to see was the President's room, but he asked, "What goes on in this room?" I told him. He said, "How long have you been here?" I told him. And Mr. Vandenberg asked what I did, and I told him. He said, "Well, could we see the President's room?" And I said, "I'm sure you could. Why don't you just let me see first if there's anybody in the next room so you won't surprise them. That's the private secretary's room." There wasn't. So they went on and I didn't see anymore of them.

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About a week later, Mr. Connelly got a call from Vandenberg asking if he could come to see him, and he said, "Yes." Mr. Vandenberg was very unprepossessing. He came over to my desk and he said, "I want to ask you a favor." I thought, "Oh, God, he's going to ask me to stay." And he did. He said, "I know nothing whatsoever about this. I have never even been in the White House." I thought, "Well, what are you coming in at all for?" He said, "But you will stay?" I said, "Yes, I'll stay for a while." So then I went out of the room, and he talked to Matt Connelly. When I came back, Matt Connelly said, "He's a funny one, but I told him he would be lucky if you stayed," or something like that. Of course, he was a funny one. As you know, he didn't get it.

Tom Stephens was born in Ireland and he was great fun. He came in one day, and I didn't know him. Mr. Connelly brought him in and said, "Mr. Stephens is going to be the appointments secretary." Nothing was ever mentioned out loud about Mr. Vandenberg. He said, "Will you stay on a little while, at least to help me start?" I said, "of course, I will if you want me to."

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I liked him, and I did. But that was a very uncomfortable time.

JOHNSON: You say you liked Stephens?

BARROWS: Yes, I liked him a lot.

JOHNSON: But you didn't like the job with the Eisenhowers?

BARROWS: Well, it was different. I had known Eisenhower, I thought, quite well. You couldn't help but like him, but he was uncomfortable in his new role. You know most people who are uncomfortable in their jobs make other people uncomfortable. I don't know how to explain it.

JOHNSON: You mean Eisenhower was not able to put you at ease when you were there. You felt uncomfortable around him?

BARROWS: That's right. I think the staff people were uncomfortable who hadn't been with him in England, probably. He had no organization; they didn't know each other. They hated each other and they were jealous. He had a lot of Democrats with him. Remember the "Democrats for Eisenhower?"

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JOHNSON: Yes.

BARROWS: They were the nice people. I mean they were people with whom you felt comfortable.

JOHNSON: He apparently turned a lot of the responsibility over to Sherman Adams, didn't he?

BARROWS: He was chief cook and bottle washer, but he didn't have anything to do with appointments.

JOHNSON: What was your opinion or impression of Adams?

BARROWS: Well, he was a cold fish. Jim Hagerty, being a newspaperman and an Irishman, was awfully nice. I had known his father. I never had known him.

JOHNSON: How long did you work then for the Eisenhower people?

BARROWS: I worked for the first three years. Nelson Rockefeller came in; I had known him for a long time. I didn't want to be one of his girls. I say that quickly because when Roosevelt died, he was one of the first to offer me a job.

JOHNSON: Rockefeller was?

BARROWS: I was still young.

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JOHNSON: You mean in New York?

BARROWS: No, here. He headed a South American program of Roosevelt's. I remember he came in and put his arm around me the day they brought the body back. He said, "I want you to know that you have a job with me. Would you take it?" And I said, "Let me think about it." But...

JOHNSON: You got acquainted with a lot of important people.

BARROWS: Mr. Stephens and the chairman of the Republican National Committee, Mr. [Leonard] Hall -- a very nice man -- went on a trip. The understanding was that the man who was to fill in for Mr. Stephens was to take over the job, and he wanted to bring his own girl. Nelson Rockefeller had been after me twice. He was across the street in EOB [Executive Office Building], and he wanted me to come over there, so I went there. By that time I knew I had to have a lung operation. So I went over there and worked until he left, and then I had the operation.

JOHNSON: That would have been about 1957.

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BARROWS: In '57. I never went back.

JOHNSON: You didn't go back into Government. What did you do then after you recovered?

BARROWS: Went to work for Doris Fleeson.

I went down to the Capitol for lunch one day. Jimmy Roosevelt gave a luncheon; he was a Congressman. I had gone to Europe, after I was well enough. I've been everywhere in this country, but never to Europe. I came back and I went to this luncheon. One of those plays about Roosevelt was showing here, and Jimmy was giving a theater party. The luncheon was part of it.

I saw Doris Fleeson there. She was married to Truman's Secretary of the Navy. She divorced her first husband. She had just come back from her honeymoon abroad. At the end of the luncheon I gave her a lift home to Georgetown; it was on my way home. We had roomed together a lot on Presidential trains, and we knew each other quite well over the years. And we, I think, were the same age exactly. She was born the first of May and I on the 30th of April. Anyhow, she said, "What are you doing?" I said, "Well, I'm enjoying doing

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nothing. I just got back from Europe." She said, "Well, I'll give you a ring." And I said, "Fine."

So sure enough, in about three months I got a ring from Doris and she said, "My secretary's getting married for the second time. Can you help me out?" I said, "Well, I'll look around for you. What kind do you want?" She said, "No, I mean you." And I said, "Oh no, Doris, I really don't want to." She said, "Well, will you come for three months and while you're doing it, just come three days a week, half a day, would that be all right?" I said, "Well, in that three months we'll look for one." So I went and I stayed three years.

JOHNSON: Three years with Doris Fleeson.

You had met her during these press conferences at the White House?

BARROWS: No, I had met her on the train, on the campaign trips. If I happened to be the only girl -- once or twice I was -- on a trip, if Mr. Roosevelt didn't think he would be doing very much

work, his regular two girls, the New Yorkers, would go into New York and see shows and stick me with the whole thing.

JOHNSON: And that's how you met her then?

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BARROWS: We were all so poor, and the Government was so poor, they'd put me in her drawing room. We were the only two women on the train. At first it made her furious; we didn't know each other. Her newspaper paid for the double room. But one night, the first night, she liked the upper berth and it was all right with me -- I didn't care -- we were reading. She said, "What are you reading?" And I looked at the title, and I said, "What are you reading?" It was the same book.

JOHNSON: Is that right?

BARROWS: We became fast friends. I liked her husband too; also her first husband. He was great fun.

JOHNSON: These press conferences that they had in the Oval Office, did you have anything to do with them?

BARROWS: Not really; the Press Secretary handled them, those of the President, usually twice weekly, and his own, once each day and of course he was always available for questioning during the day. Presidential conferences (under the two Democratic Presidents, FDR and Truman) followed roughly this pattern. The fifty or more members of the press assembled in the lobby of the

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West Wing, outside out door, the President' reception room (where his visitors waited and Mr. Connelly and I were located). When doors were propped open they streamed through our room on into the Oval Office where they gathered around the President (he remained seated).

When the conference was concluded they left by the same route, usually on a run for telephones, etc. in their press room, off the lobby. I slipped in if I thought they would be particularly interesting.

In Hyde Park in the summers and at Warm Springs and Key West, they were, as far as I remember, not scheduled regularly and depended of course on world news.

JOHNSON: Yes.

BARROWS: I just despised summers up there [at Hyde Park]. We had nothing to do when off duty. I've often wondered why we didn't become alcoholics, but we didn't.

JOHNSON: This is during the Roosevelt trips?

BARROWS: Oh yes. Of course, at Warm Springs it was entirely different; it was lovely.

JOHNSON: You went to Warm Springs?

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BARROWS: I just missed the last trip. I have gone back there once, and I never want to go again. It changed.

JOHNSON: Did you ever go to Key West with the Truman people?

BARROWS: No, Mr. Truman didn't take women on trips.

JOHNSON: Oh, that's right; his wife was about the only one that ever went down there that was a woman. She went once I think.

BARROWS: It wasn't because of wives; the trips were just different.

JOHNSON: It was kind of a stag party down there or something, wasn't it?

BARROWS: Well, Mr. Truman was typical of the place he was born and the time he was born, and Mr. Roosevelt was the "eastern establishment." I don't think one's better than the other.

Have you read the book *The Six Wise Men*?

JOHNSON: I know about it. I haven't read it.

BARROWS: It's so good. It is 1947, Mr. Truman's time -- and the organization and the work that went into the Marshall

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plan, and the six men, and all of them I knew well. Oh, it's wonderful. It is just so readable; it's badly edited, but it's so good.

JOHNSON: I've heard good things about it. It rings true with you?

BARROWS: Oh, it is true. It's just as though they're all out of their graves. Wonderful men -- and when I listen to this "Contra" thing I think this can't be happening. It's the funny papers.

JOHNSON: Yes. Truman wouldn't let things go on in the basement of the White House, that he had no knowledge of, would he?

BARROWS: It couldn't go on. I mean it's arrested development isn't it? I mean it's like the kind of books kids read.

JOHNSON: It's hard to see progress in what's going on.

BARROWS: It's like a "sitcom" on TV. It's that incredible; people don't do things like that.

JOHNSON: There was just no conception of that happening,

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you're saying, in the Truman period?

BARROWS: It's just as though they stopped growing at 15, playing Boy Scouts, and cops and robbers. I don't think they could be evil; they don't seem to have sense enough.

JOHNSON: So things are quite different now from what they were in the White House when you were there.

BARROWS: It's so crowded. Really I don't know where they put all the people. I never heard of so many people. But then the world's changed, too, I have to remember that.

JOHNSON: How about Rose Conway? Did you have frequent contact with her?

BARROWS: Yes, I had daily contact with her. She hadn't been with Mrs. Truman very long when he became President, and she was a little timid, or I thought she was, and not friendly at all. It took a long, long time before she was ever friendly. I wouldn't say she was unfriendly, but I always had the feeling that it wouldn't take much to make her unfriendly. I was always very careful; I gave her a wide berth, but she was

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all right. I think she was a strange choice though. Did you know her?

JOHNSON: No, I didn't know her.

BARROWS: The girl, whose poor little dumb husband ended up in jail too, what was her name?

JOHNSON: Another secretary's husband?

BARROWS: Her name was Loretta Young, the same as the movie actress...

Merl Young, he was her husband. He worked in the RFC. They lived somewhere beyond me, across the Anacostia River. They used to take me home. I had no car then; it was before I got a car. They were awfully sweet young people, but not very bright.

JOHNSON: They got caught in the RFC "influence peddling" scandal.

BARROWS: You'd know if you were ever around them that they'd get caught in something. But that was the difference largely in the administrations. The people at the top were high calibre, but there were an awful lot of people that weren't.

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JOHNSON: What did you think of Harry Vaughan?

BARROWS: Well, I never knew what to think, and I still don't. I just don't know. Is he dead?

JOHNSON: Yes, he died sometime back. We have an interview with him.

BARROWS: I never knew what to think. He was very chummy with a very questionable man here in Washington at first, who had been connected with a murder, in the Police Department. Washington was a smaller city then. Nobody knew what to think. I liked him. You couldn't dislike him; he wouldn't let you.

JOHNSON: What would you consider to be the worst scandal of the Truman administration? You know, the scandals that he got saddled with in '51 and '52, the 5 percenters and so on, and the Bureau of Internal Revenue. Do you think the Bureau of Internal Revenue scandal was the worst?

BARROWS: I suppose so.

JOHNSON: Did you know Caudle or any of those people?

BARROWS: No, I didn't, but as to General Vaughan, personally he never quite jelled with me. I was always quite

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cautious; I never knew whether it was instinct or what.

JOHNSON: Was he friendly to you, though? Did he greet you each day when he saw you, General Vaughan?

BARROWS: Oh yes, he was always friendly. Always friendly. I think he thought the same about me, though. I think he had a feeling that I wasn't ever going to be too friendly.

JOHNSON: Well, you were from the Hoover and the Roosevelt periods, so that may have made a difference.

BARROWS: I guess he had an inferiority complex.

JOHNSON: Well, possibly.

BARROWS: We had that to contend with. I and anyone else that stayed, I knew we would have that and we did. It took a long time, a long time.

JOHNSON: But generally you were very favorable toward the people that were brought into the White House, it sounds like, in the Truman period. You felt pretty favorable toward them?

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BARROWS: Well, as a rule in those days, at least. I was lucky, as I say.

JOHNSON: But Matt Connelly, as far as you are concerned, are you saying that Matt Connelly was an honest person who was caught up in something that he really didn't intend to happen?

BARROWS: Such a little thing, as a suit of clothes. Good heavens!

And then Governor Adams, what was it?

JOHNSON: The vicuna coat.

Well, I appreciate the time you've given to this interview. It's been very interesting and informative.

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