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JAMES C. CAIN ORAL HISTORY, INTERVIEW I

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By Dr. James C. Cain

to the

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ACCESSION NUMBER 74-34

LYNDON BAINES JOHNSON LIBRARY
ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION

Narrator Dr. James Cain

Biographical information:

Personal physician to President Johnson, 1946-1973; member, National Advisory Heart Council, NIH; member, National Advisory Commission on Medical Manpower; consultant to Surgeon General, Department of the Army; consultant in medicine Mayo Clinic, 1948; head of section, gastroenterology and internal medicine, 1966-1970; died February 1, 1992.

Interviewer David G. McComb

Position or relationship to narrator UT Oral History Project

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General topic of interview:

President Johnson's health

INTERVIEWEE: DR. JAMES CAIN

INTERVIEWER: DAVID G. McCOMB

February 22, 1970

M: I need to identify the tape first of all. This is an interview with Dr. James Cain. I'm at his home on Cain's Mesa, which is north of Rochester, Minnesota.

C: Sorry you're not here to see the flag, the Texas flag, we usually have up on--

M: You usually fly a flag.

C: --flag off of the pole up there. My friends tease me about this, anyway.

M: That would have been a welcome sight. The date is Sunday, February 22, 1970, and my name is David McComb.

To start off, Dr. Cain, I'd like to ask you when you first met Lyndon Johnson?

C: When I knew you were going to interview me I thought about this. I'm really not sure. I've known the President only because of my wife, actually. I've said, if you want to get to be the President's doctor you marry the right woman. This all dates back actually to my becoming involved with the Wirtzes. As you probably know from other interviews, Lyndon's father and Senator Wirtz were in the Texas legislature. Lyndon's father died while he was still in school, I think. I may be a little hazy about this. But anyway he practically lived at least one year, or several years as far as I can remember, with the Wirtzes.

My earliest remembrance of the President was that I, while courting my wife, would go to their home and maybe be having dinner, and a phone call would come from Washington or anywhere in the country and Senator Wirtz would have to leave the dinner table. I can remember I had to give the blessing often because of this. We would take Senator Wirtz's steak, or whatever it was, and put it back in the oven until this 30-40-50 minute conversation was over. President Johnson has always been a great telephone man--even back in those days when I think he was with Mr. Kleberg.

M: In the early thirties, he was.

C: And was probably not even a congressman. Actually, perhaps my first--and I'm sure I met him at some of those occasions--the first real occasion I can remember meeting him was probably in 1940 I think. At that time I had been in Austin and we were thinking of coming up here. I was thinking of applying for a fellowship here at the Mayo Clinic.

Senator Wirtz suggested that I ought to go over and talk to the Congressman about this and have a visit with Lyndon about it. I went over and visited with him and we

had a nice long visit. He wanted to know why on earth I was goin' way up into that north country to get my education. I told him I thought it was the best place I knew to get a good education, and then I'd probably come back to Texas.

He said, "Well, a fellow's got to do what he thinks best." But we had a nice long visit, then, and we've really been close friends over many, many years.

At that time Lady Bird was staying at least part of the time in Austin. She and I were in school together. I didn't know her. We graduated from the University, I think, the same year. Actually I left a year early.

M: You got a B.A. in--

C: My B.A. in '34 actually, I believe it was. But I had three years at the University and then got a B.A. after one year down at the medical school and then my M.D. in '37.

M: You got that at Galveston?

C: At Galveston.

M: You got that in what, '37?

C: '37, right.

M: Then you married Senator Wirtz's daughter.

C: In '38.

M: In '38. And Lyndon Johnson, as I recall it, first ran for Congress in '37.

C: I think this was the way it was.

M: You were in effect courting at the time Lyndon Johnson was planning his campaign?

C: That's right. Lady Bird and Ida May and I--we used to take her out to Barton Springs with us. She'd be by herself and we'd go out each morning--well, they were married then; I'm sure they were married. But we were very close during those years. So I've known him over all these years.

Then with his first--he had an appendectomy earlier, I didn't know him then. I think that was in Texas. Then with his first illness--and I guess he was in the Navy for awhile, you recall, and had some chest trouble while he was in the Navy that he got over in the South Pacific area. Then President Roosevelt suggested--or rather insisted--that he leave the Navy and come back to the Congress, that they needed him there. I saw him somewhere along in there.

M: As a patient?

C: As a patient here.

M: You were already connected then with Mayo?

C: Yes. I was only a fellow then. I think this must have been in 1940, '41--somewhere along in there. This was all because of Mr. Wirtz that he came up here and because Mr. Wirtz knew he was here. I remember on that first visit, it was very interesting--it was July 4 up here, and we'd decided that we'd have a Texas picnic for some of our friends and took Lyndon out on this picnic with us. The odd thing was we had to have a fire and I'm not sure that it snowed, but it almost snowed. I believe it was at this time he said he thought Minnesota was really uninhabitable and why on earth did we plan to stay up here!

M: According to Who's Who you have an M.M. from the University of Minnesota. What is an M.M.?

C: It's not an M.M., it's an M.S. It's a Master's in Medicine, over and above an M.D. which we get in the graduate school?

M: You were connected then with the Mayo Clinic from what, 19--

C: From 1940--I came here as a Fellow--until the present time. I was gone from '41 through '46 in the Army at that time.

M: Then your connection with Lyndon Johnson as a patient came in the '40's.

C: In the '40's, yes. It first came when I was a Fellow here. He came up here and I saw him.

M: Excuse me. Did he come specifically to see you?

C: Oh, it wasn't to see me as a doctor. He came because I was here, I am sure, and because of our connections with the family. He may have even come up with Mr. Wirtz then.

Mr. Wirtz and Congressman Johnson, at that time, had been very, very close over the years. Mr. Wirtz did not have a son but as near to a son as he ever had was Lyndon. He felt that way about him and the only thing--well, the greatest thing I regret about Senator Wirtz's death is he didn't see Lyndon as President because he would have loved this.

You might be interested that Ida May and I have known Lyndon and Bird so well for so long, when he ran for Congress--I must have known him before that because I remember when he was running for Congress.

M: The first time?

C: The first time. We must have just started going together, and I remember we thought, well--or maybe it was his second one. Anyway, somewhere along in there I remember saying, "Well, goodness, I just can't imagine Lyndon as a Congressman, can you?" And we'd talk about this, and then later on when he got it we did say, "I don't know anybody who's any smarter than he, or anybody who will work harder at the job. But then the next time, well, he ran for Senator and won as that and we both kind of shook our heads and said, "Well, a congressman, yes, but not a senator." Then we said, "Oh, well he only won by--what was it--87 votes, or something like that," and said, "Well, nobody could work harder, he'll do a good job." Then he got to be Majority Leader, and we began to think well maybe there's something more to him than we really think. Then when he became Vice President we both said, "Well it just shows the great gulf that there is between a Vice President and a presidency." Then when he got to be President and won by that tremendous majority, well, we just admitted we didn't know what we were talking about.

M: He finally convinced you, huh?

C: Finally convinced ourselves. Along with that, and I know you want to talk about some earlier things, but while I'm thinking of it, I recall the first time I went to the White House--and this was about two or three weeks after he was President--I had wondered, "Well, now, will being President change him? Will he be a different person than he was before?" And to me, the President had always been President Roosevelt. I'm in that era, you know, and he was up on a pedestal, and I just couldn't imagine knowing or talking to the President.

I arrived on the second floor up in the White House and Lady Bird was there and she kind of came out and gave me a hug and a kiss and talking was rather loud. Lyndon was in his room down the hall and he heard us. He said, "Jim!" at the top of his voice.

I said "Oh my, it's just the same as it always was!" It made no difference being President so far as I could see.

M: Then to go back in time some, when did you first see him for a major illness?

C: I think the first major problem was after the war when he came back at that time and--well, I don't have any records here so I can't be specific about it. But perhaps the first major one was this episode where he had the ureteral stone.

M: In '48?

C: This was in '48. He had been here in between, I'm sure, but at that time he had just filed, I think, to run for the Senate.

M: In the midst of the campaign.

C: In the midst of the campaign and I think it was within the first week or maybe first few days that he had this attack while speaking and was taken to Dallas, as I recall. It was obvious what his problem was, that he had a kidney stone. There was no problem in the diagnosis--the question of what to do about it. The thought there was and the plan was that they would have to operate on this and do an open operation.

Senator Wirtz called me at that time and so did Lyndon, and they wanted to know could we do anything about it. This meant, actually, that the race was off if they did that because it would be at least three or four weeks before he could campaign, and he'd gotten into this campaign rather late. At that time I said, "Why don't you come on up here and at least let us see what we can do, if something can be done otherwise." Jacqueline Cochran, I believe it was, flew him up here.

Fortunately it was a stone that could be removed by manipulation through a cystoscope. This was done and within three or four days he was back campaigning again. You don't have many triumphs that happen and certainly not many with Presidents eventually, but at least we did get him back on his feet. But his main reason for coming was because I was up here and because Senator Wirtz knew me and because, well, you know your own--they'd been almost like members of our family over the years. All of our children called him Uncle Lyndon and his children visited with us many times. This is the kind of relationship it's been; this is the reason he was here.

M: Is it correct that the next major illness then is the actual kidney stone operation in '55?

C: I believe this is the next one. He had a kidney stone then and this particular one was at a point where it could not be removed by a cystoscope or by manipulation--non-surgical methods. And he came up and Doctor Culp here had to go in and remove this. He got over it very rapidly and got along quite well. But this was the next one. Was this in February or somewhere along in there? Am I wrong in that?

M: The information I have is January.

C: January, I think this would be right.

M: Right after the first of the year.

C: January, I think this would be right.

He was working awfully hard then, and he always has and pushes himself unmercifully. Again this is nothing new; he did this before he was in Congress. This is just the kind of a man he always was.

M: From what I've been able to tell about his personality, under such conditions of illness he would be very restless?

C: This is true and yet not true. For example, and I don't remember much about that particular phase of it--he was restless and wanted to get away--but Lyndon is a very interesting person. He knows he knows nothing about medicine and when the decision is made and when he came to me and asked my opinion about things, he might say "Are you sure?"

I'd say, "Yes," if I was sure.

This ended it, then "What do we do about it?" This type of thing. I think this is very interesting. It has always been to me, and I would not have expected it.

I remember when he developed trouble with his gallbladder, and had a gallbladder attack. This was when he was President of course. He had an attack, and I was called with Dr. Burkley who was at the White House at the time, and I think maybe Willis Hurst had seen him also, called me and asked me to come see him. I came and visited him. The diagnosis was pretty obvious. The X-rays were not as obvious. After I had a chance to visit with him, I sat down and I said, "Lyndon, you've got a gallbladder with stones in it. You've had an acute attack and I think this gallbladder's going to have to come out."

I remember very distinctly his conversation was, "Let's have Bird in here." Bird came in, and I said this again to her. And he, "Well, when are we going to take it out?" No questions other than that, no other problem.

I said, "Well, my advice would be, since you're getting better, that we give this about a month, three weeks, a month, to cool off a bit. Then we ought to get this out. I think keeping it would be more dangerous than taking it out. Your heart is doing well. You're in good shape. We ought to get this out."

They got together; they looked at their schedule; they had a party or two planned that they felt they couldn't very well miss with Congress; and they said, "Well, how about such and such a date?" this was three weeks off.

I said, "This looks good."

His next question was, "Who's going to do it?"

This is pretty much of a problem. I said, "Well, preferably I think it ought to be done out at Rochester."

He said, "I think this is out of the question because of the press problems and all the problems involved."

I said, "Well, this would be difficult, I can see."

His next question was, "Well, where should it be done here in Washington?"

Dr. Burkley was there--Admiral Burkley--and I said, "We have a suite all lined up that we've been working on for Presidents over the years, not specifically for you at all, but because we thought we should have something if a President should get sick, at Bethesda. I think it ought to be done there."

He said, "Who ought the surgeons to be?"

I said, "Let me arrange it. I will get surgeons."

He said, "You take care of it."

This was the entire situation on this. It was almost this brief and this simple, and yet--so the question I think has arisen, "Is he a good patient?" He is a tremendously good patient.

M: Once he's convinced--

C: Once he's convinced that this is the problem and he has confidence in the individual that he's talking with, this just takes care of it. So he has been a good patient. And he's followed directions almost to a tee--and I say "almost" because he has the problem that all of us have with weight, and his problem is tremendously difficult. Every dinner that he went to as President was a banquet and if he went out, they called in not only the famous cooks, but the best; and the food was always of the highest calorie. So he was constantly having that problem, but even at that he did very well.

M: He was able to fairly well control his weight?

C: He did a whole lot better than most people, and he would get it down. It bounced up and down but never got tremendously out of hand. He's a big man, 6 feet 5 and 3/4 inches tall. It is this type of thing.

M: Did he often call in his wife until such circumstances where--

C: He and Bird had always been very, very close and I think that this has been one of the very fine things that he's done. I remember on one of my first visits to him there I said--and I meant this in all sincerity--that the nicest thing that ever happened to our country was that he as President should marry Lady Bird. I know he felt that way. He used her as a--he talked things over with her from this standpoint very freely and she was very anxious, you know, about this.

M: Sure.

C: There was a question, incidentally, and this is--oh, I don't think there's anything confidential about this, particularly. Obviously, when he had his gallbladder out, you were worried, as you are about every patient who has an operation. And although we were very confident about our surgery, our diagnosis, we wanted to know--you have to

worry a little bit about things. Particularly in his case the question came up, what if we got in and we found a cancer of the pancreas. What should we do? The operation to remove the pancreas is a tremendous operation and a very dangerous operation. You can operate and not remove the pancreas and allow the patient another year of life perhaps, but not curative--perhaps remove the pancreas if there's cancer there and have them alive from now on.

M: Is this just a standard---

C: This is a standard type of thing, yes.

M: Anytime you open up you look at the pancreas?

C: Oh yes, yes, this is part of the exploration.

M: There was no particular suspicion.

C: No suspicion at all of it. This was just part of the thing; but in covering all of the possible things, I remember we talked to Bird about this. We said "Bird, what do you think we ought to do if we should find, which we don't think we will"--which incidentally we did not--"do you think we ought to go ahead and do the operation that will be curative, although it carries great risk, or a palliative operation to allow the President of the United States to live and function for another year or year and a half?"

Without a moment's hesitation, she said, "Do what's curative. This is what we want. I want him around for many, many years." But to me this is part of the, I think, interesting aspects and the type of people they are. This of course is what you'd tell the doctor in regard to your wife, I think.

M: Sure. Then at mid-year 1955 he had his famous heart attack.

C: Right.

M: Apparently he had been working hard. Is it possible that he was working too hard after his kidney stone operation?

C: No, I don't think we can blame it on that at all. I don't think there's any relationship with this. This had been over six months plus, and I don't think there's any relationship to this at all. He had worked hard, but he's the kind of man who would work hard anytime. As far as the working hard or this cause affects, I don't think so.

Lady Bird, after his heart attack, wanted to know if he should retire from the Senate. There was great talk and thought about this. The main thing she wanted--this didn't come from him; this came from her--was, do you think that his staying in the Senate will shorten his life in any way?" We both recognized that he could not do it in moderation. He has never done anything in moderation in his whole life, and the

question of whether he should just be a Senator or whether he should continue as--he was either Minority Leader or Majority, I've forgotten which it was then--and we thought about this some. There was no question in my mind that I remember telling her that I didn't think he should retire from politics at all, that I thought that if he were sitting on the porch at the LBJ Ranch whittling tooth picks he'd have to whittle more than anybody else in the country, and that this had been his life; it was what he knew; it was what he liked and that we had no evidence that continuing on working with a degree of moderation at that time would shorten his life a bit. We all agreed with this and I told Lyndon this, this type of thing, and I'm sure this is the advice Dr. Hurst gave him.

M: I guess you were called, phoned, when he had his heart attack.

C: As a matter of fact I remember it distinctly because I was in Texas at the time. I was at a play at the auditorium at Fair Park in Dallas. The play was "My Fair Lady", and I haven't seen all of it and have told him many times he owes me a ticket to "My Fair Lady." But I was there with my daughter and at the intermission my daughter said, "Daddy, you're being paged."

I told her, "Oh no, anywhere but here. Nobody even knows I'm in Texas."

She said, "You're being paged."

Sure enough it was Lady Bird. She called me and told me he had this attack and wanted to know what we should do about it. And I found out that he was--I think he was out at George Brown's house or somewhere. I've forgotten the details about that; it's all in the record anyway. I suggested certainly that we get in touch with a Doctor Gifford, Doug Gifford, who was a good friend of mine, who'd been here, who was at the Capitol at the time and Dr. Laurin Thompson that I knew who'd been out here in Washington. I would get one of our cardiologists from here and we would come immediately. So I called Howard Burchell from here--

M: How do you spell Burchell?

C: B-u-r-c-h-e-l-l. Howard Burchell. [I] called him and asked him if he could come right on over. I'm not sure whether they sent a plane for him or whether he went commercial, but I caught a plane out that night and went to Washington and incidentally found a young man, a young doctor there, Dr. Willis Hurst, who now is one of the outstanding cardiologists in the country. And I wanted Dr. Burchell there chiefly because cardiology is not my specialty.

M: What is your specialty?

C: I'm a gastroenterologist--an internist and gastroenterologist. I wanted Dr. Burchell primarily to sit down and visit with the cardiologists that were at Bethesda and be sure that they were of the highest caliber. He stayed there about two days and told me that we

couldn't be in better hands than Dr. Willis Hurst. This is kind of a concatenation of events that happened then. I stayed on about a week, I think.

M: By the time you got there, was he already in the hospital?

C: He was in the hospital and had been in I think 12 hours or so--something like that.

M: Was he in shock by the time you saw him?

C: No, no, he was not actually in shock at any time. He had been quite ill. His blood pressure was down, but he always had a relatively low blood pressure. But he was not in shock, had had a severe heart attack and was given superb care.

M: Your role then was sort of to coordinate the medical team?

C: My role was coordinating the medical team, as it has been with all of these things, and then to be sure that he had the best attention that was available.

The problem with Presidents or great men becoming ill is that "too many cooks spoil the soup." My problem was one if, somebody had to take the bull by the horns and say "This is the way we're going to do it." While actually at that time very interestingly, I had calls from at least 10 or 15 people of very prominent character calling me and saying "Doctor Cain, I'm so and so, I have the best cardiologist in the country,"--and they did incidentally--"I would like for my cardiologist to come and stay right there with Senator Johnson until we're sure he's out of danger." These included people suggesting Paul White and all of the big names that we could think of.

My role was to say, "Well, thank you very much,"--President Truman was one that expressed--"President Truman, this is very, very kind of you, and if there is any problem or things don't go just right, may I call you and we'll have him in. But we have excellent care now. Things are going well and thank you. The Senator, I know, would want to thank you," and so forth, but this was my role.

M: These people would call you offering their services.

C: Offering their services.

M: Out of sympathy then?

C: Out of sympathy and in order to try and help. Actually, they would usually have called Lady Bird first.

M: There's no element of somebody trying to get in on a famous patient?

C: Oh no, no, none of that at all. These were people that were well above that. People who admired him and who had been friends of his, all of whom were big names in the

category of President Truman. I've forgotten the names of the others, but it was this type of thing. Lady Bird had decided that she was going to funnel all of this through me, and she'd say, "You call my friend Jim Cain, who's making these decisions." This has been my role all along in this thing, you see, and this is kind of the way we do things here at the Mayo Clinic.

M: Then your role with Lyndon Johnson as President would be more of a coordinator of the team when there was a problem and an analyst in analyzing illness, but not as a surgeon.

C: Not as a surgeon, no, no, not at all. I think you have put it very well. Here at the Mayo Clinic we work it this way: you have one physician you go to who is your physician; he is a specialist but if the illness is not in his field, he calls in others that he knows are capable and highly competent, but then they come back to that particular one as more or less their physician. This was my role.

M: Was the recovery from the heart attack satisfactory?

C: Oh yes, extremely satisfactory. Very good.

M: And did the then Senator cooperate with you?

C: Very well, very well. Actually, I think most of this was directed by Willis Hurst, who deserves a tremendous amount of credit in working with him, helping him and encouraging him and coordinating his exercise program and having him keep his weight down and doing all the various things along that line. I'm sure Dr. Hurst will talk about this some.

M: Was the fact that he once had a heart attack always a consideration in the future examinations? Did you always watch his weight after this, and things like that?

C: This has to be a consideration in anyone who has a heart attack. The first few months you worry about it, the first few years, the first two or three years, and then after that it had gotten to where we felt his risk was not much greater than someone who had not had a heart attack. It was this type of thing. He made an excellent recovery.

M: He went down to his ranch as I recall during the recovery period. I also understand that with heart attack patients particularly, during the recovery period there is sometimes a time of depression. Did this occur with Lyndon Johnson?

C: I don't recall that it did to any great degree. I'm sure there was some. I'm sure that anyone who had been as active as he had and who found himself inactive would have been concerned. But as far as I know there was no great depression. You see, I was down at the Ranch, I think, only once during this particular time. Dr. Hurst visited him on a number of occasions. But he really did very well as far as I could see.

M: The next major illness is what, the gallbladder?

C: The next major illness was the gallbladder, yes. He was President then.

M: And the recovery from that was also satisfactory?

C: Excellent.

M: And then he had an operation for a hernia--

C: He had a hernia.

M: And throat combination.

C: The gallbladder operation was a difficult operation and I think it a real triumph for the surgeons because Dr. Culp and Dr. Hollenbeck, Dr. Macklerath were the surgeons.

M: Is Culp C-u-l-p?

C: Culp, yes, Ormond Culp--he's a urologist. He had a kidney stone also at that time that had not bothered greatly but that we knew was there. And kidney stones have been a problem over the years with him. He is a stone former. While fixing the gallbladder we decided at the same time we would try to see if we could get this kidney stone out because if you could do it in one sitting this was better and saving him some time. And both were done. It meant a slightly unusual type of operation and Dr. Culp says that type of operation will never catch on because it was a most difficult thing. But the stone was removed. He had no complications from it. But probably with regard to that and having to make a little bit of an unusual incision, we did get a small incisional hernia that is of no consequence except that it did mean that it had to be closed later on.

M: So this was the hernia operation.

C: The hernia operation, yes.

M: And he also had a throat problem.

C: He had a little polyp on one vocal cord. These little benign polyps of this type occur not infrequently in people who are singers or who do a lot of speaking and so forth. His proved to be of no consequence. Again, this is one of these things that you just can't ignore when it's there, and something had to be done. It proved to be a very simple one.

M: And again, you pulled together the medical team?

C: Yes.

M: Are there any peculiar problems that you run into as a physician when dealing with a prominent politician such as with the press or with security measures?

C: The press is always a problem, and the problem is trying to decide what is proper and what is right. Obviously an illness is nobody's business but the patient's. Yet Lyndon felt very strongly always and told me time and time again that I could talk to the press anytime I wanted to and discuss any part of it I wanted to with them. I'm perhaps the only person he ever gave carte blanche right to talk to the press. He said, "I don't want any secrets from them." He said, "I want everything aboveboard, everything known."

The problem is the press, being what they are, are a suspicious group. They felt you were trying to hide something from them or they would not understand what you were trying to tell them. When you would try to explain things and get these right--and I took great effort trying to do this, trying to have them understand exactly what we were saying. Unfortunately, medicine is not a science--two and two doesn't always equal four in medicine, and yet you do the best you can on it. This was a difficult thing with the press.

You had two problems. You had one problem of talking to the press, and explaining it adequately to them. You had another problem of not talking with them.

For example, and I think something of this kind might emphasize this. With President Johnson there was the question of a credibility gap that always-- One of my son-in-laws Jerry Snider, who incidentally now is a clerk in the Supreme Court--

M: Is that S-n-y-d-e-r.

C: S-n-i-d-e-r. But Jerry was critical of this credibility gap, just couldn't--he thought we weren't telling the people of the country enough. I said, "Well Jerry, let me just give you an idea. Let me ask you what you would do here. Now you're talking about credibility." I said, "I knew that the President was going to have an operation three weeks before. I knew the time. I was making all of the plans on it. Now what would I have done had the press come to me and said, 'Dr. Cain, how is the President's health?' Now I could have said, 'his health is good,' and I'd have been lying. I could have said, 'well, his health is good but incidentally we're going to have an operation in three weeks,' which would have opened up everything." And this was something Lyndon was very anxious not to have happen. He said, "I got a cold and the stock market dropped seven billion dollars. So you couldn't tell them this ahead of time." And I said, "What do I do under these circumstances? If I say 'no comment' to the press, this is waving a red flag. What do I do and how does the credibility gap enter into this? Now it's nobody's--well maybe it is somebody else's business but not at that particular time. This is a difficult problem." And I said, "All I could do was avoid the telephone and avoid the press." Fortunately there were no problems of just this type, but the problem was always one of saying "No Comment", and this didn't work out. My usual answer, and I think the proper answer, was that, "I would be delighted to talk to you about this but you'll have to get clearance from Bill Moyers. You get Bill Moyers, you talk to him about this, the Press Secretary. If he will call me, but he must call me and tell me to talk to you--I'll be glad to talk with you on this thing." This is the way we had it worked out and Bill and I had an

understanding. He could very well say "no comment," but my answer was always one which was right, "I'll be delighted to talk to you and give you the details about the President." And I would often say "Because his health is good," and it always was. Fortunately I could say that. But I had to avoid very carefully the press from this time.

M: Did you ever have a security problem?

C: I?

M: In treating your patient and keeping people out?

C: This has never been a problem. This isn't a problem here at the Mayo Clinic because we--if the President had been here it would have been a problem. But with senators and presidents of various organizations, we have them here all the time, and we have no problem at all. I don't talk to the press if I can avoid it because it's my right to. This just isn't something you do without permission.

It's a little bit different with the President of the United States because this becomes part of all of us. But it was never a great problem. I had, obviously, White House clearance. I had top secret security clearance all the time, this kind of thing.

M: It's sort of a political cliché that a presidential candidate or a President must continually prove his health to the public. That is, he must keep assuring the public that he is in good health. Now was this ever a factor in your role for Lyndon Johnson?

C: This was never much of a factor. We, Dr. Hurst and I, talked about this frequently and it was talked about I think before he ran for President--whether his health was one that would allow him to do so. We both felt that it was perfectly all right, and the heart did not become much of a problem after that. It was not discussed much. And health problems did not enter into it, into his candidate problems at all.

M: You never had to say to Lyndon Johnson, "Now, don't campaign too hard," or "don't work too hard"--when he was not coming up to an operation but in the normal run of things. You didn't have to restrict him?

C: Didn't have to restrict him at all.

M: More than normal.

C: Other than the normal restriction you'd put on anyone. Anyone running for it you would have said, "Look, you've got to get some rest; don't burn the candle at both ends," but this is what I tell everybody if they're doing it. But no abnormal restrictions.

M: This is perhaps a little bit trivial. But have you had anything to do with Lyndon Johnson's drinking soft drinks, for example, Fresca, and things like that?

C: I tried to a great deal because we were constantly worrying about his weight. This was always a way--he likes sweets, enjoys them. He is a very compulsive type of eater, as many of us are. An interesting little comment here which--I don't know whether I've ever told Lyndon this or not--but when we were talking prior to his second operation I was with Bill Moyers and Bill was kind of asking me questions. He said, "Now, let me talk over with you a bit what I think the press might ask you about this so you can at least be prepared for some of the questions they might ask and have thought a little bit about them ahead of time." We were meeting down in Dr. Burkley's office. It was right at noon and we were going to miss lunch, so they brought in a whole tray of sandwiches. The President came down and was listening to what I was saying. I think he wanted to find out how I felt about it, too. We were sitting around there; there were three or four of us. I ate a sandwich and the President was listening while we were talking. And the President actually--by actual count--ate seven of these little half sandwiches. Then later on that day I said, "Now Lyndon, you've just got to cut down on your weight; you've just got to watch how much you're eating." He was up ten pounds or so above what he ordinarily weighed.

He said, "Jim, I really don't eat much." He said, "For example I didn't have any lunch today." And he had just eaten seven sandwiches that I counted while he was doing it. But he didn't remember it at all. I mean it's this type of problem. And this is the problem with much of us, we'll eat a handful of peanuts and not realize we're doing it. But this was interesting.

M: What kind of exercise did you prescribe for him?

C: Walking, if we could; swimming if he would. We tried all kinds of exercises. He's a man that nearly has to do two things at once and exercises--just sitting down doing exercise and doing nothing else is so boring that it is just very difficult for him to do this kind of thing. Golf, if he could, but he really, until recently, hasn't had time to do any golfing or getting away.

M: Has your connection with Lyndon Johnson brought you onto national boards, such as this National Advisory Heart Council?

C: I don't think it had anything to do with that, that particular one. That one came through my brother Tom who is a lawyer in Dallas and knew a very nice young lady, Jim Akin, Mrs. Akin at that time--who is now Mrs. Boland, actually Congressman Boland's wife. Jim had a job in HEW, I think. Tom had mentioned me to her and I had met her once or twice. She had wondered if I would be interested in being on one of these councils, and I was interested in this type of thing to see how this work was done. But I don't believe Lyndon ever knew I had anything to do with that, I don't believe he was in on that.

I can think of only one thing that I have asked him for over the years which you might be interested in, and this was when he was Vice President. My son, I wanted him to get a job at Yellowstone National Park over the summer. He was in college and so I wrote to Lyndon and I said, "Lyndon, I wonder if you could get Jim a job." And we got

back a letter, or rather Jim did, from the Secretary of Interior saying, "Dear Mr. Cain, "--talking to my son--"we have checked you and find you eminently qualified to be a--" oh, what is the thing called out there--"to work in the forester service during the summer as a camper." And I thought I bet this is the first time the Secretary of Interior ever wrote a letter telling somebody they were eminently qualified--a young man.

Now he did put me on, I think, I thought he was my friend up until this time--this job as chairman of the National Advisory Committee to the Selective Service, for the selection of doctors, dentists, and allied medical personnel. He did put me on that.

M: Was this while he was President?

C: I believe this was shortly after he became President. The previous chairman has resigned and he asked me--Lyndon didn't ask me as a matter of fact but I am sure he did it. Someone in the office called me and asked me if I would be interested, or would be willing to take on this job, which was a very interesting job. Later on he did make me chairman of that. I've had a very interesting relationship from this standpoint, and I think this is part of history.

The President has a very difficult time, I think, in finding advisers. Advisers he can trust, advisers that he has confidence in, advisers that are not trying to feather their own nests or something. This is a real problem. I obviously was very interested in medical affairs and had been right along over the years. Every month or so, or every two or three months, or whenever I was in Washington--they were very kind to me, I always stayed at the White House when there, and had dinner or had as many meals as I could--well, I was just part of the family there--but I would usually write to him and give him my thoughts about what we ought to do about medical problems. It was part of my job, I thought, as adviser to the Selective Service and later also a member of the Health Resources Advisory Committee. It was the job of someone in this particular area. These are the two--I think the only two presidentially appointed committees that had to do with medicine. The others come through HEW and other areas, but these are directly appointed by the President.

I would write to him on almost any subject that I felt strongly upon and usually write him "Dear Lyndon" and was always amazed that sometimes I'd get a call from somebody saying "What about that 'Dear Lyndon' letter" that I found had gone to Secretary McNamara, Dean Rusk, and all over the place. And naturally I had been sending it to him as a personal thing, thinking that he would tear it up and get rid of the thing because I was telling him how happy I was with Luci and Lynda Bird and the boys they were going with. They were often very folksy, family letters, but would put in the last two or three paragraphs of something I thought we ought to do about some medical affairs.

M: Did he ever call you up specifically on medical problems--a Bill--or something like that to ask your advice?

- C: Oh, I don't know about that. Occasionally you would be in the room at night when you'd be visiting there and if something came across when he was doing his night reading, he would say, "What do you think about this"--this kind of thing. But I tried to stay out of these things as much as I could, and did not get involved in the politics of things. I didn't think this was my role; I didn't think this was right; I didn't think if I got involved in that way I could be his physician and his doctor. My role and the place I thought I could help was as a friend, and if he asked me something I would give him an answer on it. But it was seldom that I volunteered much and I'm sure I never asked him for anything because I was very careful not to do this.
- M: Did you have anything to do with this rather famous work routine he had of getting up fairly early and working through the day and then taking a nap in the afternoon and starting a whole other day and into the night reading?
- C: Oh, I don't know that I did. I encouraged him to take a nap, but my encouragement was more taking a nap than--if it hadn't been for the nap he would have worked on and done two days without it. So I did try to encourage him to get some rest that way. But again, this was just good sense.
- M: From a medical point of view, does the night reading routine make sense?
- C: It almost becomes essential, or at least it did to him. There would be a whole stack of things that he would have on his bed at night, maybe 50 or 100 items that if he didn't do them then they just stacked up and he had to do more the next day. It was just a matter of when you did them, and he's always been one that liked to get his work done immediately. Tomorrow doesn't exist with him. It's today, and I've never heard him tell anyone that "I would like to have a report on this next week." He'd say, "I'd like to have a report on it tomorrow." And this has just always been his way.
- M: From non-medical observers, there's often been the comment that Lyndon Johnson had tremendous recuperative powers; that, for example, he might go to the ranch for the weekend and come back thoroughly refreshed. Is this true, or is this just something--hero-worship?
- C: No, no I think this is true. People react in different ways, and he is one of these individuals that I think a week's vacation is too long for him actually. A weekend type of vacation is very restful.

A problem that I think might be of interest to you is that the President has very few people, or very few things, that he could talk about and relax with. And this, a president, any president, needs. He had two or three things that I think were outstanding. Luci's baby for instance. He could play with the baby and lose himself in this. He could take one of the dogs and play with the dog and lose himself in that. He could get on the telephone and call Dale Malachuk, who is a very fine person, his ranch foreman, and talk with him for an hour or so, almost going to sleep while in the chair when he was under the greatest of strain talking about the bull in the east corner or east section, or about

some of the things they were planning. But these were relaxations that he needed very, very much. Around almost anyone else, there was an interplay that had to be there and it was hard to relax. I think he'd do that to some extent around Ida May and me because he'd known us so long. We had nothing we wanted; we weren't involved in anything; we weren't involved in politics; we weren't trying to persuade him to do anything; and he needed something. These presidents need [something]. And I think most of them have had it.

M: But that's the way he relaxed.

C: That's the way he relaxed.

M: He didn't read books or go to movies and things like that?

C: He'd go to movies sometimes in the White House and enjoyed that--usually fall asleep after it had just started or something of that kind. But it was such a busy time that to relax--there were just so many pressing things, and then there was this night reading that had to be done. And everyone of these things required a decision. It wasn't any matter of reading it for information; it was a decision type thing in nearly every instance. These were difficult things. But he managed them beautifully, I thought. Health-wise I'm talking about primarily.

M: Now being a President's physician puts you in a peculiar spot. I'm curious to know whether this was a help to you or a hindrance to you, or how did it affect your life?

C: Actually it didn't affect my life at all I don't think, specifically. It is true that some of my patients say, "Oh, didn't I see your picture?" They were pleased perhaps to have the same doctor as the President. But as far as affecting my life, I don't think it got me any jobs particularly, because I wasn't looking for any jobs, and the jobs that I was looking for, other than these that we've mentioned, one of which might have, and this was more work than anything I could manage and didn't bring any great credit to me. The other things were a matter of just added work to the other things actually.

The President is a very kind person and a very thoughtful person. I would suppose that most of my phone calls from the President--and even when he was Senator, when he was Vice President, and when he was President, and even now--have to do with someone in his staff, maybe one of the cooks, or maybe someone working for him who is ill and not able to get a doctor in Washington at the moment, or not being sure of the doctor. He would call me and say, "Jim, so and so on my staff has got such and such a problem. I can't get a doctor for him. Who can we get to see him?" And I would make arrangements in Washington for him to see somebody in Washington. I would call the doctor there--or the proper doctor. But it's been more of this kind of thing. Well, now this has been a problem because this adds up to some considerable time, but--

M: But he was considerate of his staff--

C: Oh, tremendously, yes. Just last week he called me about one of his staff in Washington that had been with him. Wanted to be sure she was getting--this was a Negro lady incidentally.

M: Does he pay the bill on things like that?

C: No. I don't think he pays the bill. It's not that. I don't know what he does about the bill; I don't know about that. But it's chiefly a matter of being sure they're seeing the right doctor and that they're getting some good care.

M: Now I've come to the end of my questions. I've exhausted what I had to ask you. Is there anything that I should have asked you that I didn't, or are there any comments you wish to make?

C: I think you might have been interested--some nice things have come out of knowing him, you did--and I'd forgotten about that. For example, I was very anxious--and I think this ought to be maybe mentioned.

I felt that we had a real crisis in medical care in the country, and I thought we had a crisis in the scarcity of doctors. I had talked to him about this back when he was Vice President. We talked about it on a trip that I made with him around the world as Vice President. I might go into this in some detail if you have time. I went with him on this trip as the doctor on the trip. He invited me to go. And we went to Viet Nam; we went to Cambodia--maybe we didn't go to Cambodia--anyway we went to a number of the countries over there--India, and West Pakistan. And when we got to Greece where we stopped, he called me in. He said, "Jim, I know you've been leaving the party, going out and visiting some of the hospitals and some of the medical people here." He said, "I want you to give me a memorandum with regard to what you think the needs of some of these countries are over here medically." This was easy. I could have written this before I left home, before our leaving home. Then he said, "I also want you to tell me what you think the United States might do to help some of these underdeveloped countries." Medicine has always been one of his real interests--and medical care.

In doing this I came up with an idea that I thought was a good one, and he did too and that was that we ought to set up in these countries small dispensaries, built out of the material of the countries--like an adobe type of thing in India. We ought to send some of our Peace Corps students over there, give them maybe three months of training in our Navy or Army where we have a good training course for corpsmen, and we ought to send these people and let them man this dispensary. They could do it; they could show that they couldn't have running water but they could use the water just as the natives do--and flush toilets, but show them how they could have a sanitary toilet. At the same time they could train some of their people.

The President was very interested in this, and we really worked on it for awhile only to find that we were blocked on it chiefly because just as over here, these people would be practicing medicine without a license, and the doctors in these countries didn't

feel it was good. Anyway, this was part of one of my interests. We talked about these things off and on. I heckled him so much about this and the crisis of medical personnel that he finally decided to form the Presidential Commission on Medical Manpower, which I think is one of the fine things that came out.

M: You were on that Commission?

C: I was on this Commission; I was not chairman of it. I was chairman of one panel of it but I was on it. And we were interested in this, and it was things of this type and in this way that I might have been helpful in some way or played some role of interest to him. But the main problem was one of having so many things that were of great interest to him and of great interest to our country. Somebody had to get these things to him. This is the problem of presidents. And I think these are things that--

But he managed these well and, I think, did a great job for medicine. I think this is going to be one of the big pluses that history's going to show as far as his administration is concerned with things that happened in medicine.

M: Maybe on that note I should call the interview to an end. I thank you very much.

You were talking about your trip around the world.

C: Yes. On this trip around the world. One of the most interesting things to me that happened was--I think it was in Viet Nam, or it may have been in the second country, it may have been in the Philippines--it was in one of the countries--but we were there and I was with the Secretary of State or someone, because I tried to be near his car. But I was with someone high in representatives, and also with our assistant ambassador, or whatever he might be called. We were riding along. As we came to a crowd Lyndon stopped it and got out to shake hands with them, which he always did in Texas. The Ambassador sat there just rigid, almost frightened to death and said, "You just can't do that; you just don't do that in this country, he can't do that." So I got out and went up there. The State Department man sat right there in the car. The next time he stopped it we drove on about a half a mile further and he did it again. This time the State Department man looked out the window to see what was going on. The third time we stopped, he was out as quick as the President was out there shaking hands with all the population. But to me it was only one thing that this indicated and that was that these people are just like anybody else, they like to shake hands. And this foolishness of not getting out and greeting the people is something we've been sold, and it just isn't so. These people like to be treated as humans. The President recognized that and he likes this type thing. This has always been his forte.

M: Was there any medical worry about this?

C: No medical worry.

M: Picking up diseases or---

- C: No, no problems of that kind. You washed your hands carefully, etc.
- M: Watched what you ate, I suppose.
- C: Watched what you ate, but nothing more. But to me this was a very interesting concept and it was his way of doing things, of campaigning and this thing we mentioned a little bit earlier in the Taj Mahal when he gave out this rather famous Texas yell at the Taj Mahal--
- M: We might mention here--this is not on tape when you mentioned--you said everybody felt like doing it and you were talking about the acoustics--
- C: We were talking about the acoustics there, and it was a remarkable place. The acoustics were remarkable. Any good Texan would want to give a Texas yell there, and he did it. He is this type of normal, relaxed--he's this kind of a guy. To me this is part of his charm, yet this is the Texan in him. I think he's been criticized because of this in many areas, but frankly I was very pleased to see our Vice President able to be himself and to do what came naturally.
- M: And the camel driver was a natural kind of thing, too, wasn't it?
- C: The camel driver was entirely a natural thing. We were out with people shaking hands. This man came along. Lyndon was interested in the camel, and this man was quick in his replies and so forth, obviously a bright individual. And as with nearly everybody he used to say, "Come see us, come see me in Washington," and he took him up on it. I don't know any of the details about it, but I know this is the way it happened--I know it wasn't planned, I know it was an accidental thing because I happened to be there at the time, right with him at the time.